

District #4

by Lynne Belluscio

A while ago, while I was at The Greens giving a talk, Mrs. Rooney gave me a written account of the school on Griswold Road, written by her husband, Robert Rooney. He and his sister Anne started school in 1923. Here are some excerpts from his account:

"The school was pretty primitive by comparison to today's buildings. There was no electricity or running water. Two children went daily to Clifford Davy's house for a pail of water for drinking and washing. That pail held about a half a pail of water by the time they arrived back at school.

The teacher took roller towels for drying hands, and drinking cups were made from a folded piece of paper. The john consisted of a three holer back of the entrance and was cleaned out twice a year by one of the local farmers ... one teacher taught all eight grades of about thirty pupils. She also did most of the custodial work, cleaning, oiling and polishing the wood floors twice a year, making the bulletin board, building the fires in the huge pot-bellied furnace which had a chrome railing around it on which hankies were draped when anyone had a cold, even chopping wood. She even went to the school on Sunday afternoons in severe weather to keep the



District # 4 1887-1888 M.V.O Shea, teacher.

fire going. For this she received \$5 per month in addition to her salary of \$70.

During Miss Burr's first year in the school (1927), she was paid nothing because the farmers had not sold any crops. Finally the School Superintendent Uphill intervened and the District had to borrow the money. The school trustees supplied the wood. Hazel Burr is the teacher I remember, although Leo (Robert's brother) remembers Ruth Roth who was the teacher during his first year at school. Miss Burr seated the oldest and tallest students in the rear of the room, and the

different grades were called up to a bench near her desk in the front of the room for formal teaching and recitation.

We had spelling bees and I won a dictionary and a chance to enter the county spelling bee in Batavia sponsored by the *Buffalo Evening News*. I had out spelled my peers in District #4 but didn't get very far in Batavia.

There was no school dress code in those days. The boys usually wore bib overalls and shirts. Some boys wore knickers, which were short pants that came below the knee with a fastening strap to keep them tight around the leg. We boys looked forward to the time when we could wear long pants, which we thought were more manly or grown up. None of the girls wore slacks. Sometimes the girls would wear heavy hose that was almost like tights, but with a skirt over them."

After I read the account, I was curious about the location of the school. I called David Frost and he looked on his district map and told me the school

would be located on the northeast corner of the first road west of the West Bergen Road - although neither of us could recall the name of the road. And neither of us remembered a house in that area.

Well I drove out that way and discovered that indeed the school is still there, on the corner of "School Road." I talked with the folks who live there and they have been trying to do research on the school. They showed me the original floor boards in their living room and a place where the school desks had been screwed to the floor. They had a folder with some additional information, including an account of the 100th Anniversary of the school in 1929.

From that article I learned that the school was built in 1829 for \$225 which included the stove. The 22 x 22 school was to be painted red on the outside and lead white on the inside. (Obviously this was long before anyone knew about the dangers of lead paint.) The summer school was taught by a "female" who received \$1.50 a week. The men who taught the winter term were paid \$17 a month. I will be doing a little more research on District #4 for the Historical Society's next newsletter and will include the complete account written by Robert Rooney.



This photograph was included with Mr. Rooney's account and includes the students at LeRoy District #4 School - 1929: Back row: Hub Brooks, Mary Brooks, Alfred Norbut, Kenneth Hagen, Grace Schilling, Anne Rooney. Middle row in back: (barely visible) Francis Shepard, Violet Brooks, Richard Clark, Robert Clark, Beatrice Clark. Middle row in front: Lester Murnan, Leo Rooney, David Keif, Clarence Shepard. Front row: Albert Brooks, Robert Waterman, Gloria Munt, Jack Reamer.