

## SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 12, TOWN OF KNOX

This rural school was built in the 1850's on the land of Abner VanBenschoten, who secured 118½ acres from Stephen Van Rensselaer on February 1, 1851 as recorded May 14, 1851, Volume III page 352 in the Albany Court House. A small plot of this land was then donated by the Van Benschoten family in order to erect a school which was known as the Van Benschoten School and later the Knox District No. 12 School. It was located on Quay Road, Town of Knox, approximately 2½ miles from Altamont. As the years progressed there were 21 such small district schools in the Town of Knox, Albany County.

In the 1800's, teachers lived with a family for a few weeks and moved about from family to family. Besides teaching, he or she often was responsible for helping in the home or, if it were a man, he might have to help cut wood for the stoves after his school hours. His or her salary could have been as low as \$2.00 per week. Even as late as the 1930's salaries were approximately \$25 per week for a college graduate or a three-year Normal School graduate.

Usually a man called a trustee, hired a teacher. There were no Boards of Education in the country areas. He paid the teacher a monthly salary and had to use the school funds wisely. After the teacher was paid each month, the amount of money left over from the taxes paid by the landowners and the State had to pay for the small amount of supplies which were needed. Some districts had very little. Districts having railroads passing through them were very fortunate, and Knox No. 12 was one of these.

On page 24 of the Knox Sesquicentennial publication, authored by Tenney and Howell, one finds that Ina Lendrum Beebe recalls her teacher, Simeon Stevens in the 1890's. Tenney and Howell report statistics for the year 1886 as a district having 22 children of school age--ten enrolled and an average attendance of four. It also contained the information that the school was valued at \$400, and its library contained 78 books during that period.

As time progressed various types of stoves were used; the outside of the school was usually painted red. Water for drinking and washing hands had to be carried down in a pail from the Van Benschoten well some distance away. The teacher and students were responsible for keeping the stove filled with wood, and later as the years crept on, coal was used for warmth. Someone was responsible to have the fire burning well by school time.

Children often walked at least a mile and sometimes five miles in order to get to school. Sometimes the roads were so bad with huge high snow banks that they would have to walk through the fields where it hadn't drifted as much. If the fathers were farmers taking their milk out to a central point for pick up, they might bring their children to school by sleigh and team of horses. There might be such a blizzard that no one ventured outside the house. They didn't have excellent snow plows and paved roads much before the 1940's in the country districts.

The teacher was responsible for instruction by using State Curriculum bulletins and preparing students for state tests. The superintendent occasionally would visit the school, have meetings with the teachers of his district possibly once a year. The teacher was responsible for the register containing the list of students attending and their aggregate attendance for the year. The trustee also worked under the superintendent.

Knox 12 was open for instruction with one teacher teaching grades 1-8, and later the 7th and 8th grades were sent to the Altamont High School, leaving the teacher with grades 1-6.

Each teacher was responsible for every subject, including health, music, art, physical education, good citizenship, fire prevention, an annual Christmas community program and keeping the school room clean. The teacher had to be present each day, as it was not easy to find a substitute.

For years a honey bees' hive was found in the back of the Knox 12 building. We don't believe a child was ever stung. Some years, honey would be removed from the clapboards. After the building was moved to the Altamont Fairgrounds, bees were still found around the building and boards had to be replaced. Reid Northrup claims he has exterminated the bees. The building was originally red, as all school buildings were when they were built. As the years progressed, it was painted white. Now, it has been repainted red, back to the original color.

During the 1930's and 1940's Cyrus Spadaro, Pat Spadaro's father, served as trustee. He made the school quite "modern" with moveable seats, improved the interior for warmth, built a large bulletin board, and everything was neatly painted. Even electricity was added and a radio purchased. Betty Allen Spadaro, teacher, recalls coming to school to find that the radio had been stolen. However, during the course of the day, the person who stole it was located and arrested.

With the efforts of Clifford Vincent of Berne and Stuart Rombough, Altamont Fair manager, during 1966 the building was moved by truck under the direction of the Orsini Brothers. It came down the Township Road and placed on this site along with the building next to it. The "out-house" had storage for wood and possibly a tool or so, plus a "closet" for the boys and one for the girls.

During the gas rationing of World War II, the teachers of the rural districts were asked to volunteer to assist in filling out the forms.

Jennie May Meineker with her mother, Elsie Van Benschoten May, descendants of the Van Benschoten family, have helped to compile a list of former teachers, students and trustees. If you have any additions or corrections, the Altamont Fair would certainly appreciate your assistance.

#### Trustees

Jacob May  
Cyrus Spadaro

Charles Vinehout  
Vernon Vinehout

Teachers

John Appell  
Claude Armlin  
Eleanor Bachinski  
Dorcas Kingsley Ball  
Vilas Barton  
Vertie Bassler  
Pearl Blackman  
Dorothy Clarke  
Mary Fitzpatrick  
Evelyn Gage  
Mary Hanrahan  
Dora Hoag

Pearl May Kelley  
Alice Lester  
Anna Livingston  
Mary Mackey  
Agnes Monahan  
Libby Osborn  
Lois Osborn  
Margaret Preston  
Lillian Pond  
Sadie Romanelli  
Elmer Saddlemire

Katherine Simmons  
Lois Sitterly  
Vivian Smith  
Betty Allen Spadaro  
Miss Toomey  
Simeon Stevens  
Amy Thornton Swartz  
Corey Tennant  
Euretta Thornton  
Edith Tompkins  
Foster Warick

Students

Helen Bradt  
George Bradt  
Gladys Bradt  
Kenneth Bradt  
Marian Bradt  
Arthur Burns  
Helen Carlson  
Oscar Carlson  
Verberta Champion  
Ada Countryman  
Ida Countryman  
Kenneth Duell  
Blanche Finch  
Duane Finch  
Jennie May  
Pearl May  
Agnes Peterson  
Hattie Peterson  
Olga Peterson  
Oscar Peterson

Arthur Pisarski  
Judith Preston  
Mary Jean Preston  
Brown Pulliam  
Darcy Pulliam  
Faith Pulliam  
Joyce Pulliam  
Todd Pulliam  
Vall Pulliam  
Verity Pulliam  
Eugene Quennvillo  
Anthony Spadaro  
Cyrus Spadaro  
Frank Spadaro  
Helen Spadaro  
Joseph Spadaro  
Mary Spadaro  
Patrick Spadaro  
Peter Spadaro  
Rose Spadaro

Burdella Tabor  
Rose Tabor  
Kenneth Taylor  
Dorothy Van Benschoten  
Elsie Van Benschoten  
Pearl Van Benschoten  
Viola Van Benschoten  
Helen Van Buren  
Herman Van Buren  
Jesse Van Buren  
Ralph Van Buren  
Shirley Van Buren  
Viola Van Buren  
Beatrice Vinehout  
Elizabeth Vinehout  
Gladys Vinehout  
Harry Vinehout  
Marshall Vinehout



**LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE** — It's white in this photo, but it WAS red once, and it WILL BE red again, when Fairgoers see it at the Altamont Fair next week. For 100 years (or more) this was the one-room school for common school district No. 12 of the town of Knox -- now a part of the Berne-Knox Central school district. The building was moved several days ago to the Fairgrounds, where it will be a part of the large exhibit of "days long gone." In the photo, at left, is Mrs. Patrick Spadaro of Altamont, who (as Bettina Spadaro) taught school there from 1939 to 1944. Trustee of the district at that time was Cyrus Spadaro. At one time Jacob May, who has been a resident of Altamont for many years, served as district trustee. Peter Larson of Schenectady, in a note to the Enterprise, wrote: "I took a look at the school No. 12 the other day. I attended that school from 1897 to 1903."

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