

Whatever happened to ...Palmyra's one-room schools? *Part III*

≪≪ **The saga of School No. 7**

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Every day hundreds of passersby turn the corner at Lyon Rd. and North Creek Rd near East Palmyra where an old one-room cobblestone schoolhouse stands. Some glance at it, but most are accustomed to it's presence and merely catch it out of the corner of their eye, if at all. Others use it as a landmark when giving directions to someplace else. However, there is one man who truly loves the sturdy little building –its owner Glenn Young of Hydesville Rd.

Friday, May 9, 2003, with fifteen friends and family on hand, Glenn and his friend, 89-year old George Farrell of Newark raised a new flag on the brand new flagpole that Glenn made as part of his restoration of the building. Glenn believes George is the only known surviving student to have attended classes in the little schoolhouse, and felt it was important for him to be part of the ceremony.

According to McIntosh *History of Wayne County, New York 1789 – 1877*, Town of Palmyra (then known as Tolland) settlers established two schools in 1793. Both were built of logs. The location of one is marked by a blue historical marker on Maple Ave. in the village of Palmyra, and the other is in East Palmyra. The one at East Palmyra touted a huge chimney that was meant to serve two purposes. First, it did the usual chimney-chore of drawing smoke from the fireplace below. Secondly, it is said to let in light by which the children studied, which leads us to assume the building had no windows. The history book states the chimney was “large enough to pass a young elephant through.” That first log building also served as a meetinghouse until a church was erected in East Palmyra, but that is another story.

Glenn has a deed dated February 23, 1815 , for the property where the building stands. At that time it passed from John Hopkins to the Society of the Fourth School District of the Town of Palmyra, Ontario County, New York, for a total of \$20.50. The deed was witnessed by Stephen Sherman and Oliver Clark and was recorded on August 16, 1815 – 195 years ago. Although we know the year the stone school was built, we do not know the cost.

More than a century and a half has passed since the District No. 7 cobblestone school was carefully and patiently crafted from fieldstone and faced with smooth lake cobblestones. Although the exact date is not known at this time, we do know there was a change in the school district number from 4 to 7 some time before 1827

The East Palmyra Union Free School No. 2 opened in 1924, and the little stone school was closed. In 1929, the trustees of the new school, Willis J. Chittenden, William J. VanOostrand, Orié Tack, Jacob Tellier and John Scutt, signed ownership over to Jacob O'Meal, Jr. After he bought it, he widened the door by nearly six feet and replaced the wooden floor with concrete in order to store farm machinery there. He installed a pulley

system just below the ceiling to accommodate his corn sheller and other machines that were powered by a steam engine from outside. After he built his new shop nearby in 1946, O'Meal let the East Palmyra Fire Department use it to store their brand new fire truck until they could obtain a permanent location.

In 1955, with the intent of preserving it and using it as a retail outlet, Glenn agreed to buy it for \$3500. The deed was transferred and recorded in 1970. For two summers during the early 1960's, he used it for the storage and sale of house parts that he salvaged from other antique buildings. Finding that people were more interested in buying antique furniture and gadgets than authentic moldings, doors, fireplace fronts and windows, he discontinued the business.

Although the building has undergone only a few changes since it was built, time and "remuddling" have taken their toll. There are cracks in the walls; the chimney is gone and some of the face stones have fallen away. Also, because of leaks in the roof, there is considerable water damage to the ceiling inside. The outbuilding was taken down long ago and only one original maple tree remains on the property.

A Hydesville Rd. resident, Glenn is also known to many as the Colonial Carpenter and has been involved in a several-years-long project to restore the 1846 schoolhouse to its former appearance. More than five years ago, when he decided to go forward with his project in earnest, he found himself "fighting fight City Hall" to prove his ownership of a wedge of land on the west side about ten to twelve feet wide and thirty feet long on which part of the road was built.

Glenn maintains the property was stolen in order to widen the road, run a waterline and install an illegal hydrant only a few feet away from the structure. He explains that since the mid-1990's he has been battling with the Town of Palmyra over the property. In order for the town to run a waterline and use a portion of the property to build the road, an easement was required. He says the town, the county and the Wayne County Water Authority never sought any.

The corner of the property where the building stands was cut off to make turns from Lyon Rd onto North Creek Rd easier, especially for school buses. Glenn hired a lawyer and made it known to the town that he wants the property back the way it was originally. The town has agreed to move the hydrant, which he claims is too close for the fire department to hook up should the structure catch fire.

In the meantime, he began preserving the exterior of the schoolhouse. During the summer of 2002, Glenn, his son David and helper Heather Castillo replaced some broken roof boards and installed new pine shingles which they spent weeks making in his shop near Newark. They also made and installed and painted new pine fascia, returns and window trim. Using an old photo as a guide, he made a new flagpole and installed it in the original brackets.

Much work remains before the school will be restored to Glenn's satisfaction. He intends to have the cracks repaired, which will include replacing some cobblestones, and which he says few masons are prepared to do these days. He will also replace the chimney that once carried smoke from a pot-bellied stove inside, and rebuild the outhouse/woodshed structure that stood at the northeast corner of the building. He has plans to replace the double wooden barn doors with a suitable entry door with sidelights, remove the concrete floor and install a new wooden floor much like the original one.

“They won't be making another one of these (cobblestone) buildings anytime soon, so I want to keep it the best I can. I won't be able to put it back quite the way it was originally, but I think it'll look okay,” he said proudly.

Never again will the happy sounds of children playing, the scratching of chalk on the blackboards or the crackle of a wood fire surround the little cobblestone schoolhouse on the hill above East Palmyra. However, if Glenn Young has his way and the building is put back to near its original appearance, maybe – just maybe - passersby will slow down or pause for a moment to imagine what might have happened in the little one-room schoolhouse in the days of “used to be.”