

Wanatah and Cass Township Schools

Early Cass Township Schools

Education was always very important to the people of Cass Township. In 1899, there were seven one-room schools located throughout the agricultural land in Cass Township. Another was built in the southern part of the township for students living in the area in the 1900's, making eight schools contrary to some existing historical accounts. All eight grades were taught. The teachers rode or drove horses to school and often boarded with families during the winter months. Many of the one-room schools were given several different names-- maybe after a teacher, location, or property owner. The following one-room schools, teacher, and location in Cass Township are:

North Morgan or Tilden (Section 2), District #1, brick, residence today, Eva Shurte and Mollie Henning, 1250 S and 750 W, built in 1890 by ML Pash

South Morgan (Section 12) District #4, Mary Shurte and Edith Wilson, 1400 S and 700 W

Smith or Thomaston (Section 26) District #5, frame, still exists, Marie Fudenski, 1600 S 700 W

Harris, Pleasant Grove, or Johnson (Section 17), brick, residence today, Grover Tilden and Blanch Long, 1050 W 1500 S

Center, Kuss, Rosenbaum (Section 21), District #3, brick, Eva Shurte, 1500 S 900 W

Peaches or Sitz (Section 29) brick, Roy Tuley and Ernest Scholz, 1700 S and 1050 W

Creamery (Section 21), Agnes Sullivan, 1600 S and 900 W

Newman (Section 33), wooden frame, Otto Waltman, 1700 S 900 W

According to the sale advertisement in the Wanatah Mirror in December, 1922, the schools listed above with a District number were offered for sale by L.J. Gross, trustee, and the school board.

In 1922, these schools were replaced with the Cass Township Consolidated Elementary School known as South Central, built on the northwest corner of 1600 S and 900 W. It

was a large red brick schoolhouse where all eight grades were taught by three teachers. It continued for 20 years until 1943. The students then began to be bused into the town of Wanatah to attend the red brick school which taught all twelve grades. Teachers were Wylda Phillips, John R. Rosenbaum, Leona Rosenbaum, Otto Newman, Maurile Adams, Frank Hall, E.P. Weaver, Martha Fisher, Clarissa Phegley, Edith Engel, Mary Sheviak, Helen Wilson Harris, and Ruth Howell. The abandoned school building was remodeled into a dance hall by Gust Zabel and was known as Zabel's Dance Land. The building was then used as a community center for many years. The building was converted to a locker plant by Henry Zabel. In November, 1956, it was completely destroyed by fire. It was eventually razed and a home now stands on that lot.

Schools in Wanatah

Wanatah was platted on September 7, 1865 along Hog Creek in LaPorte County, established in 1832.

The first school house building in Wanatah was just south of Salem Church. The second school house was built in 1870 in the west part of town and was known as Enterprise Hall. It was financed by a stock company of citizens and purchased in 1876 by the township. Enterprise Hall was used for church and public gatherings. It burned in 1877. (One account states the township considered buying it, but it burned in 1878.) It stood on the northwest corner of Washington and Cross Streets. After the Hall burned, classes were held in private homes for the rest of the term.

The third Wanatah School was built on the northeast corner of Cross and Main Streets. It burned to the ground in 1884. The fourth school building was then built in the same spot in 1885. In 1888 the first eighth grade class graduated from Wanatah School with 9 pupils. (One account states this was in 1883.) The high school was first a 2 year course. The first two year commencement was held in 1885 with 4 members. The last class under the two year course graduated in 1900. During the 1900-1901 school year, the eleventh grade was added. The regular four year course was given for the first time in 1903-1904. The school was commissioned with the first class graduating in 1904 under the four year program. It was remodeled in 1901 and more rooms and teachers were added. In February 1914, the State Board of Health officially condemned the building.

Construction began on a new red brick modern school in 1914, making it Wanatah's fifth school building. A bigger playground was needed, and the Christian Church that sat north of old school was purchased for \$2100 and moved to property one block west to a lot purchased for \$800 by the church. With the church gone, the new brick school was built on the north part of the block. There was a law that stated a school has to be a

certain number of feet away from a railroad track. The contract to construct the new school was awarded to W. Williams of Gary for \$23,479. Mr. Williams died of a heart attack midway through construction. In January, 1915 after Christmas vacation, the new school was ready for students. The old frame was sold at auction for \$385. Some of the wood was sold for lumber for new houses in LaCrosse.

The new school served Cass Township residents well. The first floor housed grades one thru six and the second floor grades 7 to 12. An elementary school was built in the southeast part of town in 1961 when the school became overcrowded. After that, it continued to house the high school and junior high students, until it was decommissioned as a high school in 1969. Cass township then paid transfer tuition for the high school students to attend their school of choice. Most chose to attend LaCrosse High School. With an agreement made with Dewey Township, their Junior High students, and for a while, kindergarten were bussed to Wanatah. That marked the beginning of the cooperation between the two school systems.

It then was used for junior high classes until 1982 when it was abandoned. Plans were made to tear the old Wanatah School down, but it was torched by arson on June 27, 1984. Ironically, the third Wanatah school burned one hundred years before in 1884.

Today a monument stands on the corner of Main and Cross Streets in Wanatah and ball diamonds now occupy the lot where the school(s) once graced the Town of Wanatah.

Wanatah Public School

In 1960, plans were made to construct an elementary school building in the southeast part of Wanatah under the leadership of Trustee Oliver J. Mitzner. Kindergarten through sixth grade would be taught in the new building. The building was dedicated in 1961.

The first class to hold commencement in the new building was 1962 although they attended only at the old school.

In 1981, an addition and renovation to the existing elementary school was constructed under Trustee LaVern E. Guse and Principal Herschel D. Eaton. The next fall the junior high students were moved from the old red brick school and it was abandoned. Cass Township Elementary School became Wanatah Public School and grades pre-Kindergarten through eighth continued to be taught there until the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

In 1998, more rooms were needed and a second addition and renovation was constructed under the guidance of Trustee Lavern Guse and Principal Richard Groff.

In 2014, two classrooms were added to the elementary side of the building. In 2015, the main office was updated with a conference room, three offices, a bigger main office, and larger nurses office. This construction was under the guidance of Superintendent Tim Somers and the Tri-Township School Board: Tim Guse, Daron Bruder, Robert Younggreen, Joyce Spoljaric, and Paul Malecki.

In 2021, five classrooms were added to the west side of the building for middle school and high school classes. This construction was under the guidance of Superintendent M. Kelly Shepherd and the Tri-Township School Board: Tim Guse, Daron Bruder, Aaron Rust, Melanie Mills, and Chad Howell.