



SOUTH EVERGREEN SCHOOL, FALL 2023

Celebration!

~

South Evergreen Schoolhouse 2023

8780 LEONARD RD, COOPERSVILLE, MI 49404

10 Years of Dedication and Achievement

10-Year Anniversary of Preservation Efforts

The full restoration of the South Evergreen One Room Schoolhouse in Polkton Township West of Eastmanville was on display for visitors during a celebration open house on Saturday October 14th, 2023.



10-year anniversary celebration

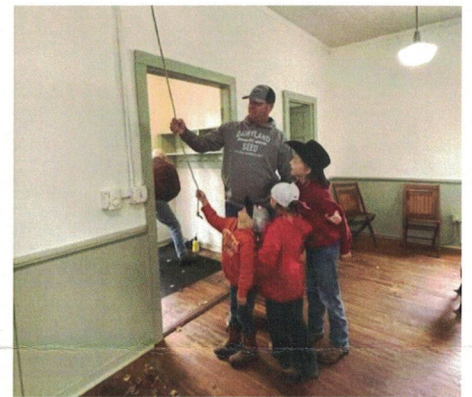
The cool and rainy fall day did not discourage visitors from attending to see the restored schoolhouse and partake in

hamburgers and hot dogs under the tent with a three-piece live band to brighten the mood.



The fully restored school ten years in the making is the result of the labor of many dedicated volunteers and the support of funds provided by many generous donors. The story of how the effort to restore the school began and details of the project was presented by a member of the schoolhouse committee who answered some questions from the

gathering. A presentation was made by a direct descendant of the two founders of the South Evergreen School.



Ringling the bell



Coopersville Historical Society member and former schoolhouse committee member, Rochelle Rollenhagen Reagen portraying the school's first teacher at the open house

The History of the South Evergreen Schoolhouse



South Evergreen School circa 1894

The South Evergreen School was founded by four of the pioneers that settled the area on the Grand River east of Eastmanville. Kevin Timmerman, who is a descendent of two of the founding pioneers shared at the October open house some of the history of the family and how the South Evergreen School came to be established.

Jacob Potts, Derial David Rice, Samuel Smith, and Nelson Chase Severance came together to establish a school for their family and neighbors. The area schools at this time consisted of one room schoolhouses for all children through the 8th grade within two miles of the building.



Derial Rice settled as a farmer with his family on the Grand River in 1855. The above photo shows the family cabin situated not far from the schoolhouse.

Jacob Potts who came to the area as a lumberman arrived at about the same time establishing his homestead also on the river near the rice farm. Jacob would marry Olive Severance the sister of Nelson Chase Severance who had settled on

adjoining property to the Potts and Rice families. The fourth founder Samuel Smith was married to Mahala Severance Nelson's daughter. In 1868 Derial Rice's son William would marry Florence Potts Jacob's daughter (Kevin's great grandparents are William and Florence Rice).

The establishment of the school was very much a family project. The building was built shortly after the civil war in the late 1860s. The formation and construction of the one room schools followed much the same pattern. The land, materials, and labor to establish the school was provided by the local families of the students that the schools served. Once the school building was completed a schoolteacher needed to be selected.

South Evergreen School's 1st Teacher

Fanny Wilson was the first schoolteacher at South Evergreen School. The family connection would continue to influence the school as Fanny was suggested as the teacher by her brother James Wilson, the son in law of Nelsen Severance. The curriculum of the school in the late 1860s was the three Rs: Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. Fannie would have supervised the students and led the class for each grade throughout the school day. Older students would have chores such as chopping wood and tending to the stove to support the teacher. The local parents would also support the teacher as well with such things as providing her with a place to stay if the weather was bad making it difficult for her to get home as one example. Fanny would only teach for two years as she became married, and the requirements of the day was for the teacher to be an unmarried woman. She would go on to raise her own family but tragically would pass away at the young age of 33.

Saving South Evergreen Schoolhouse

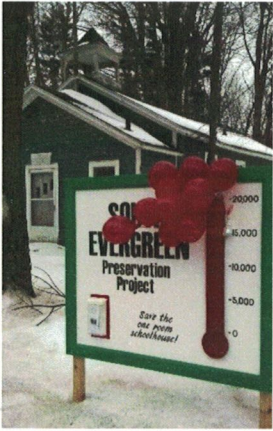


South Evergreen Schoolhouse 2014

The South Evergreen school would serve many generations of students during the 90+ years of operation ending in 1959. Sadly, many one-room schools when they closed would fall into disrepair, eventually to be demolished after years of neglect. The repurposing of schools as homes saved many including the South Evergreen School. The building was lightly remodeled by residents who lived there at various periods in the 1970s. The future of the building would rest with the knowledge some

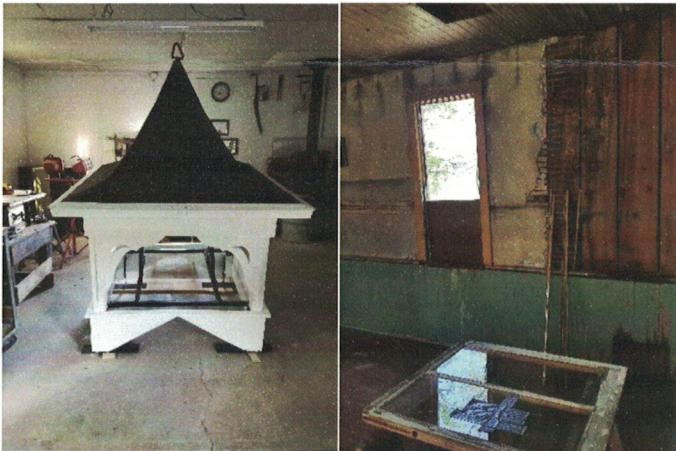
local residents had of its history and their desire to preserve the structure as it had survived for so long.

In the fall of 2013, a committee of those residents began an effort to raise the necessary funds to purchase the schoolhouse, restore and preserve it as a local landmark. It began with initial donations by committee members, alumni, teachers and neighbors and later grants from the Loutit Foundation of Grand Haven Area Community Foundation, the Coopersville Area Community Foundation, the Coopersville Area Youth Advisory Council, and the Michigan Twp. Participating Plan.



Reshingling roof - 2015

By 2015, enough funds had been raised to purchase the property and begin restoration by replacing the roof and removing some of the changes to the school by the previous residents.

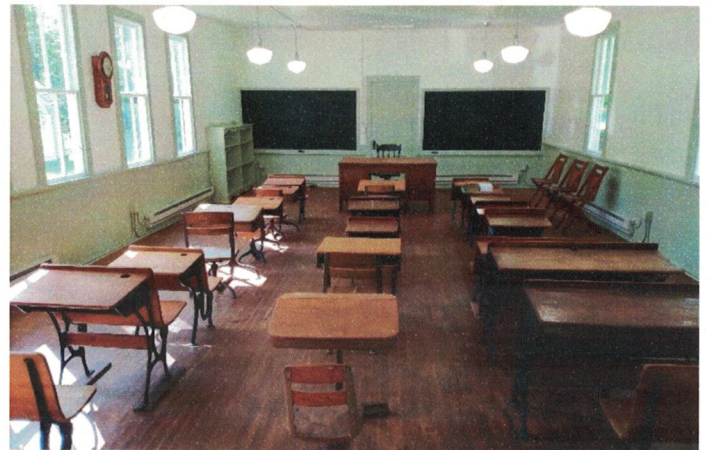


Over the next eight years dedicated volunteers organized the replacement of the electrical system, addition of electric heat, installation of all new plumbing, well and septic system, and restored the school's interior. The interior work included replastering and painting walls and ceiling. The old belfry was

removed and totally rebuilt with a donated school bell matching the original. The volunteers even managed to locate, return, and restore one of the school's original outhouses to the property. It now stands on the property next to the school.



The completed building stands as a reminder of a bygone era and is a proud example of the legacy of the pioneer founders and all the teachers and students through the generations that attended school there.



See more photos, history, and student stories:

www.southevergreenschoolhouse.com

What's Next?

In the imagination of the committee members, there has always been the idea of saving the school to be available to local residents to enjoy and remember a bygone day when their ancestors established a community where they farmed and raised their families. There has also been the goal of making the schoolhouse available to school children who could enjoy a "day at a one-room schoolhouse" to experience what school life in the mid-to-late 1800's was like.

The South Evergreen Schoolhouse Committee of Polkton Township will continue to provide maintenance and other support as needed to ensure the school will continue to be a historical landmark and a remembrance of the many people who built and endowed the community with their rich lives.

Donors, Volunteers and Contributors over 10 Years

The individuals and organizations that "Saved South Evergreen Schoolhouse"

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Thank you for your dedication to this project and your support!

The South Evergreen Schoolhouse Committee of Polkton Township

Jim Key, Jim Fitzpatrick, Kathy Walt, Leah Spinner

www.southevergreenschoolhouse.com - info@southevergreenschoolhouse.com