

## PIONEER SCHOOLS

Early settlers to Huntington County were concerned about the education of their children. Families who could afford to hire their own tutors and sometimes invited their neighbors to attend these 'private schools.' As early as the winter of 1834-35 the first school was held in a tavern kept by Jonathan Keller. By the next year a log school house was built in the area where the Public Service Building now stands. As more parents became interested in the education of their children, a private "subscription school" was opened. Families contributed what they could, mostly in the barter system, often trading room and board for the opportunity for their children to "get some learnin'."

Qualified teachers were hard to find in this untamed country. They were sometimes offered land in order to lure them to the area. Teachers were mostly men who were not strong enough to do the difficult manual labor of clearing land and farming. They often had very little formal education, and were noted for being stern taskmasters. Physical punishment was meted out generously and frequently. Teachers were often the target of some of the more mischievous students and they might find toads and snakes in their desks or be the target of snowballs in the winter.

The school term often did not last more than 60 days, since boys and girls had to help with farm work and gardening and could only go to school in the winter months after crops were harvested and before the spring plowing began. Most students who attended went for only five years. They were then thought to know enough to get along in the world and besides they were big enough to work

Early school buildings were very sparsely furnished and were often used for the Sunday preaching services. Sometimes the preacher was also the school master. Students sat on wooden benches and did their writing at a board attached to one wall. Candles furnished the only light on dark days and a wood stove usually sat in the middle of the room. The teacher usually had to arrive early in order to get the room a little warm. Books and paper were very scarce and too expensive so most learning took place by the teacher telling and the students listening and repeating back to the teacher what he had said. Since as many as eight grades could be housed in the same building, schools were called "loud" schools or "blab" schools and the younger children learned a lot by listening to the older children recite their lessons.

Recess offered some change from the stark reality of learning. Fox and geese, Dare Base, Blind Man's Bluff, and games using a ball made from strips of old cloth and a stick were favorites of the students. Students who did not learn their lessons in a timely matter were made to stay inside while the other children played outside. It was a very effective form of motivation for doing one's lessons well.

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At the end of the school term a special celebration was held. Parents would come and the whole community would enjoy a basket dinner. Students would be dressed in their best clothes and would "speak their piece," a specially learned recitation which had been carefully memorized for the occasion.. Awards of merit were presented by the teacher to recognize the students for their achievements during the school year. Games were played and contests held and students were glad that "school's out" for another year.

The log school at the Historic Forks of the Wabash Park was reconstructed from a two-story log house formerly located on the Dennis Farm north of Huntington. Many volunteers under the direction of Jack Oberholzer, Jim Taylor and Chuck Wohlford helped with the rebuilding after the Daybreak Kiwanas Club paid for the moving of the logs. Others from the Optimists Club and Metro Kiwanas Club and Retired Teachers were responsible for the chinking of the building. Leo Scher built the porches and many other volunteers from the community helped to rebuild and furnish the building as it is today--an accurate representation of what schools were like in 1840's here in Huntington County.