



SOUTH EVERGREEN SCHOOL, FALL 2020

# South Evergreen Schoolhouse 2020

8780 LEONARD RD, COOPERSVILLE, MI 49404

## The Strength of Generations

This has been a wild year and sometimes it seems like nothing will ever be the same.

During 2020 there have been a lot of challenges and some sacrifices. And we wonder about the future before us.

If we imagine what might have been on the minds of the founders of South Evergreen School over 150 years ago when they began building the school, did they have similar thoughts?

The Civil War that tore apart our country had just recently ended. Friends and family members left home to fight a war against fellow citizens, some never returning and probably none returning unscathed.

Could the founders have been as jarred as we have this year, and did they wonder about the future of their children, even as they built a school that would prepare them for that future?

Would they have ever imagined the school would still be standing strong in the year 2020, after seeing so many

generations born and raised, having their own families and then passing along to the next generation?

The South Evergreen School has survived because of supporters like you and stands as a symbol of the lasting optimism its founders shared when they cut the first foundation logs on which the school still rests.

We've all been challenged this year and are adjusting to "the new normal", whatever that will be. Perhaps the school can help us remember that even though we currently live in trying times, change is ever-present, and life moves forward. Our hopes for a better world are the same hopes that led the school's founders to see a brighter future for their children and to build a foundation that supported these hopes.

**Thank you for your continued support of the South Evergreen School preservation project**

**We wish you and your family a safe and healthy future!**



South Evergreen School 1898, teacher Elizabeth Golden, her students and horse, Dick in photo

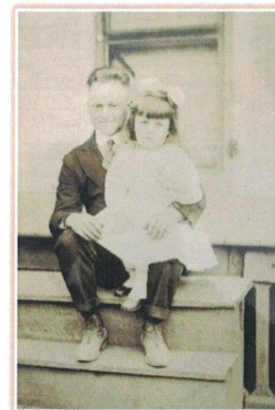


Photo taken around 1919 of So. Evergreen teacher, John Chestag with Frances Venema Fitzpatrick. Teachers typically boarded at Frances' home near the school where three generations of her family lived. Frances' mother, Minnie Baldus Venema Rankins bought the school after it closed in 1959. Frances inherited the

property at Minnie's passing. She sold it to her son, Joe Fitzpatrick in the 1970s. Joe lived in the school for a time and later sold it to Al Lemieux, who lived across the street at the time. Al sold the school to Polkton Township in 2015. All the owners retained the structure of the school throughout this time.



# Students Remember South Evergreen

In 2017, friends and neighbors attended a summer picnic with music, food and live auction. Student stories were also shared. Below are excerpts from a few.

I remember walking down Leonard Road, which was then a gravel road, to school approximately one mile, sometimes through snowbanks up to our knees. The year of 1936-37 we were snowed in for three weeks. The neighbors got together to go to Coopersville for groceries and coal for fuel. They used horses and sleigh to do this.

I remember the old hand pump at school where we got our refreshing cup of water. In winter, when temperatures were below freezing, we had to be careful about getting our hands frozen to the metal handle. I remember the old woodshed where they stored the hand-split wood for the stove. I remember the outdoor toilet. If you needed to use it, you had to ask permission by holding up your arm with one or two fingers designating the urgency.

In winter we had to wear long underwear tucked inside our long cotton stockings.



When we got beyond sight of our home, we would stop and roll up our underwear, leaving big bunches under our skirts by the knees. Of course, on our return trip, we had to roll them down again before we got home.

There were two great activities of the year – the Christmas program and the last day of school picnic. At the Christmas program we always got a decorated cardboard box of hard candy with a cloth ribbon handle and orange from Mr. Peck of the County Farm. The last day of school meant a feast unlike any we had ever seen with the potluck dinner tables piled high with homemade goodies.

## Schoolhouse Memories of Ann Spinner Sabo-Jonick

*Photo is of Christmas Program, early 1950s. Handmade stage is against the school's south wall with blackboards.*

### DONATE

Send your tax-deductible contribution to:  
Grand Haven Area Community Foundation  
South Harbor Drive, Grand Haven MI 49417

Note "So Evergreen School" on your check

Among my fondest memories are walks to South Evergreen School. Those were times of fun, laughter and bonding into friendships that lasted a lifetime.

Reino, Arnold, Emil, Sigurd, Viena and little Margaret Tikkanen met the Zimmer kids, Bill, Laurence, Frances,



## School Days in the 1920s

by Paul Reid

*Photo is of South Evergreen teacher Esther Lillis and her students approximately 1909.*

Lillian, Clara, Irene and Mildred before coming to the driveway where the blended family of Hintz-Reid kids joined the group.

There were my stepsisters and stepbrother, Nina, Ruth, Dorothy, Esther and Jack Hintz, plus my sister Leonora Reid and myself.

There were no hot lunches in those days. Ours was usually sandwiches of homemade bread and butter, a cookie or piece of cake and always a small jar of fruit which came from the several hundred quarts of fruit our Ma canned and stored in the Michigan cellar of our farmhouse. We didn't appreciate it then but have since realized the task it must have been to prepare all those lunches day after day.

There were no snow day vacations. We walked in all sorts of weather. A snowstorm found the big kids making paths for the little ones. One such day we were excused from school an hour early. After reaching home I saw our teacher walking down the road in the storm. I told my mother who asked me to run after her and bring her to the house to get warm. She had walked a mile in that blizzard. While she was having a hot cup of coffee, I harnessed the horses and hitched them to the sleigh. I then took her the remaining two miles to the Inter-Urban that ran between Grand Rapids and Muskegon at that time.

I very much appreciated my school days in the little one-room country school called South Evergreen.



# Renovation Continues in 2021

Renovation work was temporarily paused in 2020 due to the pandemic but is expected to resume in 2021.

## Future Projects Based on Funding:

- Installation of new plumbing for bathrooms and sink
- Installation of new raised-style septic tank
- Painting of exterior windows
- Repair and re-shingle original outhouse
- Install original outhouse on permanent new concrete location
- Repair and refinish school's wood floors to match original look

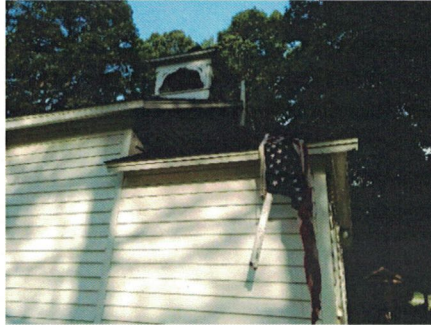
All donated desks, furniture, pictures and memorabilia will be moved to Polkton Township offices for safe storage during renovation.

## New Flagpole to be Installed in 2021

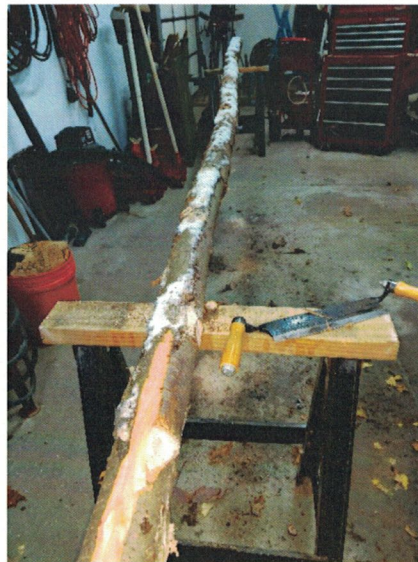


The original school flagpole was repaired by Jim Key over a period of several months in 2016. He and Jim Fitzpatrick repositioned it in place after the belfry was restored and reinstalled in 2017.

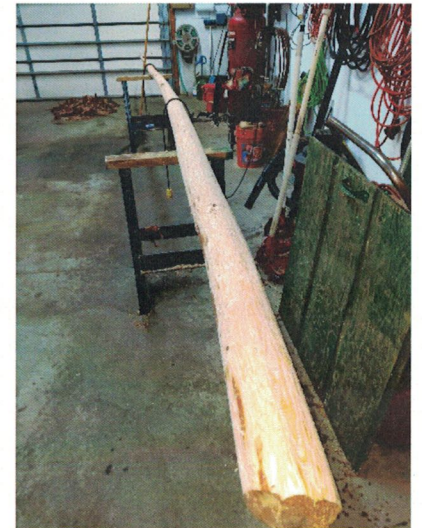
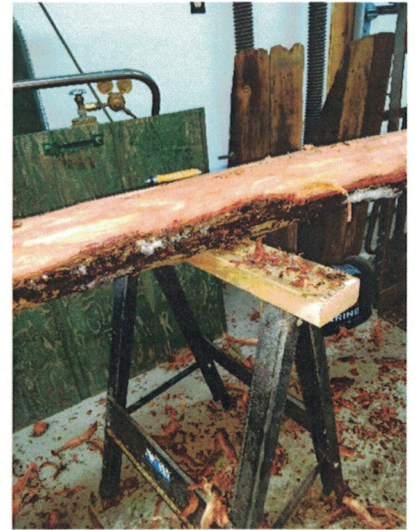
Unfortunately, a summer storm in 2019 tore the flagpole down, breaking it in to several irreparable pieces.



In the fall of 2019, Jim Key began creating a replacement using a process similar to that of the original.



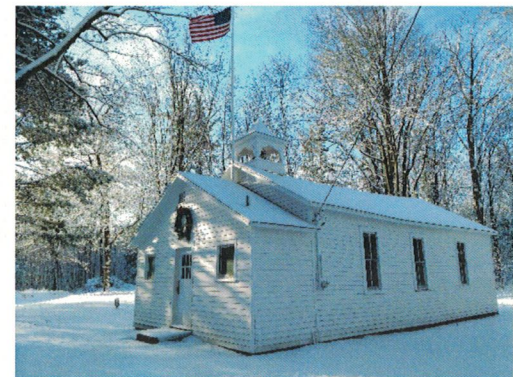
He cut the new flagpole from a hemlock tree on his property, stripped the bark off and stored it inside his garage for the winter to dry.



After drying, it was painted with two coats of epoxy paint.

The new flagpole is longer than the original one and will need to be cut to the proper length. It's heavier and will be challenging to install on the schoolhouse.

The re-installation of the flagpole is planned for early 2021.



*Photo of school with original flagpole, winter of 2017*



## Students Remember South Evergreen (cont. from page 2)



Excerpt from Nancy Hazekamp's schoolhouse stories she read at the summer picnic (see photo). She attended the school 1932-1940 and was also a teacher in 1959.

Going to South Evergreen School, which was about two and a half miles away from my home was a scary, cold trek in the winter. If the snow wasn't too deep, my brother, Howie, and our neighbor, George Smith would make a path for Sophie Smith and me to follow. It was down the sand road, follow the rail fence running west of the Zimmer brothers' barn to the edge of the woods, follow the edge of the woods, across the pasture to a small creek, climb the turnstile that the Zimmers had made for us, and then just a short distance down the road to the schoolhouse.

If there was smoke coming from the chimney, then we knew there was school. If there was no smoke, then it was turn around and go back home. Generally, it was up to the teacher to make a fire in the old pot belly stove in the middle of the room. If we did have to return home, we would sometimes return by the road, instead of cross-lots. It was longer, but we could stop at neighbors to get warm if we had to. Our favorite stops were the Zimmer brothers' and Cap and Jenny Smith.

Going to South Evergreen School was a lot of exercise, a lot of learning and many times, a lot of fun. The grades one through three could go home at two o'clock, but the big kids had to stay until four. We had the usual subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic, plus nature study, geography and agriculture in the upper grades. The teacher's desk was in front with the recitation bench just in front of that. You can be sure there was plenty of space on that bench between the boys and girls. As I remember, the number of students taught at South Evergreen School varied from 20 to 25, and that was for the whole school, kindergarten through eighth grade.

Social doings of the South Evergreen district were centered around the school, quilting bees, progressive games of pedro, square dancing and even the neighborhood threshing of the wheat and oats. The school Christmas program was the event of the winter. Students would memorize poems and put on plays to the best of their ability. A temporary stage was put up and sheets were the draw curtains. Moms and dads were seated up front with South Evergreen graduates standing in the back. These are wonderful memories of South Evergreen School.

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Schoolhouse  
2020

8780 Leonard Road  
Coopersville, MI 49404

Make a non-taxable donation to:

Grand Haven Area Community Foundation

One South Harbor Drive, Grand Haven, MI 49417

Volunteer:

Contact the committee at [info@southevergreenschool.com](mailto:info@southevergreenschool.com)

Website for stories, preservation updates, photos and more:

[www.southevergreenschool.com](http://www.southevergreenschool.com)

The South Evergreen Schoolhouse Committee of Polkton Township

**Thank you!**