

McDuffee Town School District No. 9, Varick

The town of Varick was organized in 1830. District Schools of that date were very primitive. About 1820 there was a private school with few pupils, at what is now East Varick, conducted in a log house on the lot owned by the late Loring G. King.

It is probable that the first district schoolhouse was erected on the east end of the lot formerly owned by Joseph McDuffee. This building was used until 1849 or 1850. A new schoolhouse was then erected east of the bridge. This is the one now in use and has been occupied for nearly 57 years. [This is near Knapp's Winery today]

One of the first teachers in the new schoolhouse was William Burroughs who was followed by Aaron Phillips. Lady teachers were employed in the summer at wages ranging from two and a half to three dollars a week. The teachers "boarded around". Men teachers were employed for the winter terms and quite frequently someone who was a resident and who had attended the school and received most of his education in it. Some of the most efficient teachers were those whose attendance at school was practically limited to No. 9 or adjoining districts.

When it is remembered that the winter schools averaged from 50 to 75 in attendance, it can readily be seen that to successfully conduct such a school, required more than ordinary tact and ability. Among many excellent lady teachers, I would especially mention Lydia A. Thomas from Sheldrake. She possessed only a common school education, with perhaps a term or two at Ovid Academy. She taught nearly or quite continuously during the years 1856 and 1857. She could not have been more than 19 or 20 years old when she came, yet she taught four terms or more, including one winter term with 60 pupils, one-fourth of whom were young men and women. Miss Thomas, now Mrs. Runner, is living in Washington and is about 72 years old, and still actively attending to her household affairs. Miss Thomas boarded around the district event in the winter and this custom continued up to 1860 or just before the war. Many students who have gone out from McDuffee Town, taught and inspired by the thorough instruction and the example of such teachers have found profitable and honorable positions. Some of them had no other training than that received at No. 9.

The greatest interest taken by the residents of the district, in the prosperity and welfare of the school is, in a great measure, responsible for the high grade of the work done in the school.

[Excerpts taken from a School Reunion program on June 21, 1907 written by W.H.R. Roberts.]