

Sept. 11, 2013

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM

. . . while dusting

Just before the start of our recent Sullivan County Fair, it became evident that a cherished building of memories is no more: the Estella School House. The property is presently owned by the township and hasn't been in use since the new building was put up at the four corners above Estella on Rte. 4007. Most people traveling thru Estella



going south on Rte 154 will simply glance up at plain mounded knoll with one small fir tree on its edge struggling to exist. The township supervisors found that the old school building was beyond repair, in that if you put your hand against an inside wall – the outside wall would bow out against your pressure and visa versa. For the sake of safety and the probability that it would fall down, the sad conclusion was reached to tear it down.

Going back in time, we found the following in the Estella School compiling: "Elkland Twp. found that a new school building was needed at Estella at the turn of the century or to be more exact in the year 1898. (This dissertation is about the second needed school house building, more on this history next week.)

"The School Board after much discussion decided to build the school house. Notice of this, with specifications as to size and material to be used was posted in several public places.

"Bids were received and when compared it was found that the low bid was \$350.00.

"This bid was made by a local contractor who owned a sawmill.

"In due course of time construction of the school house was started. Foundations, floor, walls, ceiling, roof, doors and windows were soon in place and the building was completed. Many of the local citizens inspected the building while it was being constructed. Among these was a lumberman who thought some of the lumber or boards used were a little on the shaky side. That it is not up to specifications. He so informed some of the school board. At a regular meeting of the Board, the contractor came for his pay. After a heated discussion, calling to attention the reported condition of some of the lumber used, it was decided that \$300.00 was all that should be paid. \$350.0 was the price of the bid. The contractor took the \$300.00 but with a glint in his eye saying to himself, no doubt, my turn may come yet.

"The aforementioned lumberman and his partner had been busy fall and winter in cutting logs. The logs were hauled along the banks of a certain creek in anticipation of the spring freshet (thaw) and the splash from a dam which was located up stream from the logs.

"The time came to float the logs down the stream. The lumberman spoke to (the) owner of (the) dam about letting splash out so the logs would float down stream.

"Now it happened that the owner of the splash dam was none other that the aforesaid contractor who built the school house. The contractor said he would have to have the \$50.00 which he lost on the school house.

"Unknown teller, writer or date told."

Sept. 18, 2013

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM ... while dusting

To continue on with the history of the Estella School; a 1959 article in the Sully, while interviewing Carl Driscoll the then County Superintendent, stated that 73 of the (then) existing one room school houses had been closed but that six were still in operation.

The original one room school in Estella served the first, second and third grades, and was being elected as an historic site by the school board following its function as a school house (merger to Laporte was looming). Then Mrs. Ralph Burgess was interviewed to say that the first Estella area school was located on the Beinlich farm and was made of logs. At the time of this writing in 1959 she states that the first school house was 88 to 90 years before, which would make it 1867 or 1869. Her recollections were that when she was attending the Estella School starting 64 years prior or 1895, it became necessary to build a second building because they were up to 72 students from grades first thru eighth. This division of grades was under the school board directors M.E. Wilcox, president, H.W. Osler, secretary and R.W. Wright, treasurer and the year 1896.

So, the school house building that was just recently torn down was actually that second building in 1898 that we spoke of in last week's article and was the high school portion of the two buildings. It makes one wonder about just how "shaky" the lumber was to have lasted one hundred and fifteen years.

Another note from this 1959 article captions that "one out of 79 such schools (referencing the Estella School) which once existed; still has outside toilets and no running water."

On to a 1981 article in the Sully; the writer doesn't give the date of demolition for the elementary building in Estella but does tell of the fate of the school bell. A project was taken on by the Elkland Grange No. 976 to sponsor the placement of the school bell on the lawn of the former Loyalsock Area High School. That building, now DarWay Nursing Home, was used until 1963 as a school. From information given then by Mrs. Esther Burgess Berry of Estella, from memoirs of her mother, Mrs. Ethel Birdsall Burgess, she references a souvenir card (which we have in the museum's compiling) from the 1895-96 school year with 62 students. And then goes on to state that the school was "constructed on a rock ledge originally between two intersecting public roads (today that'd be Rte. 154 and the Estella Spur), later another school building was built uphill from the old high school building and the lower grades from one through eight, were moved there and the high school came into being. In 1931, with the opening of the new high school in Estella (Loyalsock Area H.S./DarWay) the old high school housed grades 4, 5, and 6; and the neighboring school building housed grades 1, 2 and 3. Nelson Tomkins may have been the first teacher, although it is known that Moses Black also taught there many years. Mrs. Lois Morgan Norton was the last teacher in that building and is still teaching in the Laporte elementary school." A small sidebar - today Mrs. Norton is a spry 94 years young and although not teaching in the technical sense, is still conveying her knowledge and love to all those she's in contact with.

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