

Misery Bay School. Ontonagon County. On Misery Bay Road about a mile from the mouth of the River.



Located near the end of the Misery Bay Road stands the school. It is in Ontonagon County but arrangements were for Stanton to “care” for it.

Local resident, Chester Verran, shares he heard that the original school was across the Misery Bay road from its present location.

1992 Toivola Reunion document shares: First Misery Bay School was 1921-22 when picture was taken.

Some teachers who taught at the Misery Bay School: Anna Gullen and Mr. Pangborn in the early 1900’s, Esther Toppola 1912-1913, Helmi Hura 1913-1914, Martha Benstrom Hatfield 1914-1915, Nelma Cooper 1916-1917, Estelle Eskola Lahti 1917-1918, Mary Kujala Johnson 1918-1919, Hilda Hendrickson 1919-1920, Alton Garfell 1920-1922, Grace McLeod 1922-1923, Helga Carlson 1923-1924, Lempi Wertanen 1924-1926, Sylvia McUithey 1926-1927, Maude Burgett Penegore a few weeks in 1927, George Wright 1927-1928, Roland Strolle 1928-1929, Reynold Keranen 1929-1931, Alma Olson McKellor 1931-1932, Onni Kangas 1933-1939, Reino Ranta 1939-1940, Thomas Walton 1941-1943, Ingrid Wiitala 1943-1950, Helen Waarala 1950-1951, Julie Huhta 1951-1953.

Evelyn (Maki) Olson said her father, Nestor and fellow homesteader John Spiegel walked nearly 40 miles through the woods to the neighboring town of Ontonagon where the county seat was located to garner the monies needed to build the Misery Bay School in the early 1900’s.

The first Misery Bay School was built from logs in 1905, and located in the midst of the Erik and Elina Viitala, Daniel and Elsa Marsi, Anna and Nestor Maki, Andrew Lindgren and

Oscar Koivunniemi families homesteaded. Originally the School was located near the Marsi property, but was eventually moved to Reino Sipola's homestead.

By 1924, a new school was built for the Misery Bay area students. Anna and Matt Bari bought the old school house and moved it a mile and a half down the road to their property. It served as their home for a time, and eventually Dennis Grantz bought it and still owned it as of 1992.

Edward Spiegel recalled this during a 1992 interview: "I was a young lad when we moved to Toivola, and I went to school with Wilhart Johnson for two years at the Trasti or Perala School before we moved to Misery Bay area. I got my 8th grade education (1930) and that ended my school days. The roads to school were not always open then, so we had to brave all the storms in the winter. It seems to me those storms were worse than what we have in the area today. Even in the worst weather, some of the neighbor girls insisted on going. Many times, it was cold when we got in the school, and we'd gather around the stove to be warm"

Ingrid Suksi –Wiitala shares this in a 1992 interview: She grew up in Toivola area and later came back to teach at local schools. Her most pleasant memories are during World War 2 when she taught grades one through eight at Misery Bay School 1943-1950.

It is not hard for one to imagine Ingrid in her role as a teacher. Her kind, dignified manner is immediately apparent, as is her proper use of and obvious affection for the English language.

Her blue eyes and rich, soothing voice convey a depth of joy and appreciation as Ingrid related the highlight of her teaching career.

She was inspired by her own teacher Susie Manderfield and Mamie Eilertsen. "They were great teachers. Mamie was my 8th grade teacher and she influenced my father to allow me to continue my education." After passing a mandatory entrance exam, Ingrid began boarding in South Range, catch a train to attend High School in Painesdale. Ingrid completed training at NMU. When the Houghton County Commissioner saw my report from NMU he gave me my teaching certificate.

While teaching elementary school in Toivola from 1923-1926 she rode to work on a buckboard led by her father's balky horse. For weeks the animal's stubborn temperament plagued Ingrid and her 3 step siblings. Then one rainy morning Ingrid put up her umbrella and quite unexpectedly. The sound of it frightened the horse and he began moving immediately. After that all we had to do was up that umbrella, rain or shine and that horse would take us right to school.

In these times, the roads of Toivola also harbored the sight of resident Lynn Blum driving the horses drawn "school bus". These early busses would have provided a chilly ride for the children if not for the ingenuity of their parents. These resourcefully individuals built small cabs that were loaded on the back of the carriage and heated them with small stoves.

Ingrid's budding career was cut short when she wed Harold Wiitala and began a family. In the first half of the century only unmarried individuals were allowed to teach. However, World War 2 necessitated a number of alterations. Educators were in short supply. Ingrid asked to teach at the Misery Bay School and was always grateful for this opportunity. "The children, oh they had beautiful voices. They like to sing and were so willing to perform. We didn't have a piano one year, so I brought in a phonograph and taught them to sing 'O Holy Night' from a recording. They sang it acapella for the Christmas Program."

She began teaching at the Heikkinen School grades 1-3.

School Board Minutes:

1942. January 5. – Discussion on request of Bohemia Township (Ont. Co) to have Stanton take Bohemia students. Committee and meet with Ont. Co. School Commission.

1955 March. - Discussion on Bohemia School students coming to Heikkinen so add new room to H. School. Move Misery Bay school students to Heikkinen. Bohemia residents not in favor. Still discussing in Feb. 56.

1957 June - Bohemia sending their children to Heikkinen up to 7th grade. (Does this mean Misery Bay closes?)

Researched by Barb Koski Osma Plat Road Houghton MI 49931 in 2009.
Submitted 2011. Contact Webmaster with other information.