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**America's One-Room Schools:
Sites of Regional Authority and Symbols of Local Autonomy, After 1850**

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Proposed Running Head: America's One-Room Schools: Regional Authority and Local
Autonomy

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Abstract

Before the nineteenth century's mandatory education laws, churches and towns created schools according to local needs. The one-room school was a product of local community and autonomy. Educational reformers sought to standardize schooling through guidelines for schoolhouse and playground design and standards for curriculum and attendance. These external reform movements provided the impetus for communities to reform or resist such impositions. America's social memory of the "little red schoolhouse" paints the picture of one-room schools as sites of conformity and innocence, but historical archaeology of specific schools reveals tensions encoded in these buildings, their documentary records, and associated artifact assemblages.

Keywords

One-Room Schools, Midwestern United States, Reform, Resistance

Introduction: One-Room Schools as Sites of Community Investment and Reform

The one-room schoolhouse was once a ubiquitous feature of the rural American landscape, and by the late nineteenth century schoolhouses had become one of the most common forms of public buildings, second only to houses of worship (Gibb and Beisaw 2000, p. 107). It has been estimated that at one time there were 90,000 one-room schools in the Midwest alone (Fuller 1994), and another source reported 65,000 such schools in Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, and Missouri (Swanson 1984). Many of these schoolhouses survive to the present day and are a relatively common site type for archaeological investigation. As Beisaw (2009) has noted, most are excavated in the course of compliance projects without an overarching research design, but some interpretations emphasize their significance as places for community gatherings in the past (Rotman 2009) and of community heritage in the present (Beisaw 2003, 2009).

The significance of one-room schoolhouses extends beyond their functional uses as places of education, sites for community gatherings, and locations of historical societies and museums. One-room schools are iconic emblems of America's rural past, are mythologized as material testaments to a simpler time, are conjured as symbols of "traditional values," and are focal points of community place making and identity (e.g., Rocheleau 2003; Zimmerman 2009). These popular characterizations have a strong historical basis as schools are the material remains of grass roots investment in the education of children, and deliberate constructions of shared community identity that developed through negotiations regarding the design, construction, maintenance, furnishing, and staffing of the school. A schoolhouse was created and maintained through local resources, time, and energy. Regardless of how they may be understood or

misunderstood in the present (Zimmerman 2009), one-room schools were foundational to many fledgling rural communities in America.

Not long after they were established (see below), schoolhouses became the subject of scrutiny by external forces, particularly state officials and organizations that wished to reform, regulate, and standardize education. These movements diminished local control over the physical and operational aspects of schools, but some communities resisted changes they felt were particularly unwarranted. Theobald (1995, p. 1), in his book on rural one-room schools, characterized rural education first and foremost as, “Having been marked by pervasive resistance to state sponsored schooling and school initiatives.” Historically, one-room schools were focal points of tensions between communities and state entities, and differing factions within communities themselves (Theobald 1995, pp. 51, 55-57, 62-62). Each community negotiated these tensions, creating unique local narratives and leaving behind structures of resistance and conformity ripe for archaeological investigation.

One-room schools provide mirrors of the general process of community decision-making, and as such are poignant sites of compliance and resistance. Because many were modified over decades of reform, they reflect both continuity and change in each community’s ideals and identities over approximately 150-years. Although twentieth century reform movements closed most one-room schools in Midwestern America, an area including the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin, (Figure 1) hundreds of these buildings have survived through active and passive preservation. Some have been renovated to serve as accessible monuments to traditional rural values, some stand as inaccessible monuments to a community’s rural past, and others have been renovated to serve new functions. The persistence of these structures is

symbolic of the Midwest's rural heritage, despite its move away from an economy based around autonomous agriculturalists.

An Historical Overview of One-Room Schools and Communities

In the nineteenth century, America was still predominantly a rural agrarian society, with 91% of Americans living in dispersed farm communities in 1830 (Kaestle 1983, p. 13). Rural schools differed notably in organization by region, and in the Midwest schools were organized and controlled by a small locality and financed by some combination of property taxes, fuel contributions, tuition payments, and state aid (Kaestle 1983, p. 13). The Public Land Ordinance of 1785 divided the Midwest into square townships of 36-square miles, with each square mile designated as a section. One section of each township, section 16, was set aside to support education (Fuller 1994, p.2), but the politics of exactly where to locate a schoolhouse and how much land, space, and resources would be allocated to the structure and grounds was often a contentious matter (Kaestle 1983, Fuller 1994).

Communities, not the government, began to organize an educational system by purchasing or erecting a building and hiring a schoolmaster. Where no dedicated school building existed, teachers held classes in their own homes in exchange for some form of payment, either cash or bartered goods. In 1765, the private home of teacher Jean Baptiste Roucoute became Michigan's first school-house when church trustees purchased it for that purpose (Reigle 1971, p. 154). Each state has its own first schoolhouse story or stories, as there is much disagreement about whether business arrangements like Roucoute's truly created a schoolhouse. But the church community that employed him was succeeding where the regional government was failing. The then Territory of Michigan attempted to establish a public school system in 1809, 1817, and 1827 but the only primary schools constructed there before 1835 were isolated community

efforts (Putnam 1904). When Michigan attained statehood (1837), the common school movement and a more formal state government worked together to create an education system with countless one-room primary schools overseen by local officials (Michigan State Historic Preservation Office 2003).

The earliest one-room schools, now referred to as pioneer schoolhouses, were distinctly different from the idyllic schoolhouse (Figure 2) that has become a popular icon in the American consciousness (Rocheleau 2003; Zimmerman 2009). Pioneer schools were usually simple log houses made by voluntary labor, but were notoriously lacking in light, even heat, and ventilation. In the mid to late nineteenth century, school buildings were improved as farming communities prospered, and population centers shifted. This period marked a transition between simple schools made of local materials and the frame or brick structures that survive into the present day (Grove 2000). Community leaders began constructing highly visible, one-of-a-kind, schoolhouses as material symbols of prosperity, reflecting the willingness of a town to improve their school. Fuller (1994, pp. 14-15) noted that most communities designed and built their own schools without plans or architects, and debated passionately about the nature of school facilities and educational practice. He noted that in agricultural communities, where fortunes were highly variable from year to year, the willingness to invest in educational facilities for children spoke greatly of shared collective values as seen through communal sacrifice and risk in investment.

In general, one-room schoolhouses served 12 to 30 families living on the six or seven one-square-mile sections of land that surrounded it. The schools were the building blocks for rural Midwestern communities; focal points for collective decision-making among residents that demanded the development of a local hierarchy (school boards) and encouraged democratic forms of governance and accountability (Fuller 1994, pp. 3-5). Decisions needed to be made

regarding where to construct their schools (which could be influenced by land donation) and how to furnish them, what subjects to teach and books to use in class and to stock in the school library, who the teachers would be and how funds would be spent (Reigel 1971). The decision whether to educate girls and non-white children was often a local one (Helton 2010). Essentially, communities were given the power to shape their schools and they exercised it to create unique institutions that changed along with them; school buildings grew with swelling populations and closed with shrinking ones. Some emphasized subjects important for future farmers and others made room for music instruction.

Creation of statewide educational systems attempted to reform the rural school by degrading this local autonomy. For example, French was the primary language taught at some Michigan schools before the state's 1850 constitution required lessons to be conducted in English (Putnam 1904, pp. 30-31). Many Michigan children didn't attend school before the 1871 enactment of compulsory education, which required all children between the ages of 8 and 14 to attend 12 weeks of public school per year (Putnam 1904, pp. 124). The 1871 law had little impact on attendance at the Blaess School, Washtenaw County, Michigan, where attendance rates dropped from 81% in 1870 to 51% in 1872 (Beisaw 2003b). The State Legislature of Indiana's 1852 compulsory education law was passed more than a decade before their school system was well organized. Inspections of the Wea View School in Tippacanoe County, Indiana, documented 80% attendance in 1868 and 45% attendance in 1870 (Rotman 2009). With local leaders running their community schools, resistance to mandatory education can be seen in these attendance records. The records include both the number of school-aged children in the district and the number in attendance for each period of inspection. Therefore, regardless of the reasons for non-compliance the local leaders chose not to enforce mandatory education.

Because local communities exercised such control over these schools, they varied widely in size, appearance, design, and amenities, but do bear the general “look” of the simple one-room schools that are commonly commemorated in American culture (Fuller 1994). Some communities invested in schools as a matter of pride in their local area, and created schools that exceeded the amenities of the basic one-room structure. For example, Illinois had one of the greatest densities of one-room schools in the nation, with as many as 242 operating in a single county in the mid-nineteenth century (Swanson 1984). As Fuller noted (1994, p. 17):

What made the difference in all these closely connected schoolhouses? In all likelihood, the appearance of each school was less a measure of the farmers’ prosperity than their pride in their community, their aspirations for their children’s advancement, and their interest in education. If they cared about these things, their schoolhouses were likely to have features that improved them and set them apart from plain schools.

While many of the changes to specific schools occurred at a community level, the impetus often came from outsider reformers who exerted increasing influence after 1870. Statewide educational boards were charged with standardizing education and they oversaw county-wide boards who made many of the decisions for their schools (Gibb and Beisaw 2001) and monitored their compliance through formal inspections. Onlookers from urban areas and government agencies began labeling one-room schools as an inferior mode of education, and they became emblematic of the “backward” nature of rural areas (Theobald 1995). By the early twentieth century, state educational boards were increasing their intervention and oversight into all schools -- both rural and urban -- and special commissions and bureaus often were founded specifically to regulate, inspect, and advise one-room schools (Theobald 1995).

Across the United States, the rural school was a target of social reform (Steffes 2008) and women had some part of that movement at the State level (Weiler 1994). But at the local level, female primary school teachers were not considered serious professionals (Weiler 1994, p. 28) and their pay was well below that of their male counterparts. The majority of rural school teachers were women but they did not have much control over what was taught. Local school boards dictated both subjects and textbooks. Some saw the overabundance of female teachers as part of the “rural school problem.” Associations for male educators were created to further their interests (Weiler 1994, p. 29) but no similar organization took place among female educators. The consolidation and closure of rural schools allowed for greater state-level oversight to ease, if not solve, the rural school problem.

Rural Midwestern schools selectively participated in reform movements, as their local communities saw fit. Those that were furthest from the reach (or influence) of state governments or urban areas were able to resist reform until the consolidation movement came to them in the early twentieth century. The closure of community one-room schools coincided with a wave of building to create larger “consolidated schools.” This process intended to make rural schools competitive with urban ones through centralized education. There, students would find more teachers and equipment and a greater diversity in subjects taught. In Indiana, boys would receive manual training and girls would practice domestic science, although both would still learn agriculture, general science, music, and drawing (Rotman 2009). Indiana and Illinois consolidation occurred throughout the 1920s into the 1940s. In Michigan, most one-room schools were consolidated between 1943 and 1955. There, larger union or consolidated schools were often built on the site of an earlier school (Beisaw 2009, Michigan SHPO 2003), because the land was already in public hands. When left standing, closed schools sometimes found new

life as residences, outbuildings, and even corn-cribs (Figure 3). Sixty to 90 years after consolidation closed them, many one-room schoolhouses still stand empty and unused; an anachronism on the landscape and a testament to what these institutions continue to represent, local autonomy. Through archaeological investigation, we can see evidence of shifting community ideals, linkages between schools and local identity, and the legacy of educational reform memorialized across the Midwestern landscape.

Midwest Schools as Community Spaces

The archaeology of one-room schools began with Brenda Barrett and Vance Packard's study of the Camp Schoolhouse at Valley Forge in Pennsylvania (Barrett and Packard 1973). Like most early school studies (Bigelow and Nagel 1987; Catts et al. 1983; Comer 1996; Dickson 1977; Geidel and Bearegard 1997; Gibb and Beisaw 2000; Gradie 1983; Hartzler 1998; Schoen 1986), their report was mainly descriptive. The method and theory necessary to interpret schoolhouse sites developed, as historical archaeologists began studying institutions in a variety of forms. Together, two studies laid the foundation necessary for contextualizing one-room school archaeology as the archaeology of communities. These were Elizabeth Peña's (1992) work at Schoolhouse 12 in Jefferson County, New York, and Kyle Napton and Elizabeth Greathouse's (1997) work at the Altaville Schoolhouse in Calaveras County, California.

There may be no better site for community archaeology than a one-room school. In 2002, April Beisaw began working with the Saline Area Historical Society who had recently received a large grant to transport and preserve their one-room Blaess School. Initially, the community was unsure what an archaeological investigation would provide, other than some objects they could put in their new museum, alongside items donated from local family heirloom collections. It wasn't until the excavations uncovered a door-plate with a simple keyhole (Figure 4) that local

volunteers saw how artifacts could tell new stories of what they see as their past. Contemporary members of this tight-knit rural community could not imagine their ancestors had ever felt the need to lock the schoolhouse. Oral tradition recalled the school as a place where people would gather to play and socialize - that they couldn't come and go as they pleased challenged those memories. With one artifact, archaeological research with and within the community encouraged discussion about the selectivity of social memory.

What the Blaess community was looking for, archaeological evidence of their past non-educational uses of the property, was obscured by the rich architectural deposits (more than 3000 complete nails) and educational deposits (three stoneware inkwells, 49 slate pencils and 470 fragments of slate tablet) (Beisaw 2003b). Non-educational uses were more evident in Rotman's (2009) analysis of Indiana's Wea View School. There Rotman saw a deliberateness in the ceramic assemblage that she linked to community events, like May Day celebrations, which encouraged attendees to bring their best finery fit within community ideology. Sherds from a minimum of 72 vessels were recovered, 25 of which were refined and decorated. The variety of decorated wares was seen as an indicator of the numerous families that participated. Some of these ceramics were recovered from the girl's privy, reflecting gender norms for site cleanup. Additional evidence of the non-educational functions that community schools served included a punch cup, a cake knife, serving spoons, and munitions.

Decades of renovations complicate archaeological examination of the building's early history. School sites generally produce more architectural debris than educational artifacts, much of which was deposited when state education funds paid for required upgrades (Beisaw 2009). When entirely new school buildings were erected they were often on the same site as the original, disturbing the already thin deposits that non-residential activities create. When schools

closed they were usually stripped of useable furnishings that were moved to other schools or auctioned off. Therefore, archaeologists must consider other forms of materiality in order to understand how schools functioned as community spaces.

The two case studies are presented below go beyond standard artifact counts to discover the materiality of reform and resistance at school sites. The first illustrates how adjacent communities responded differently to reformers attempts to standardize school buildings and the subjects taught within them. The second provides greater detail on how one rural community responded to “improvement guides” distributed as part of state-wide reform. Both case studies highlight the maintenance of acceptable levels of local autonomy despite pressures to conform to a standardized education system.

Case #1: Differing Responses to Reform: Some Schools and Communities of Washtenaw County, Michigan

On September 29, 1851, the town of Pittsfield, Michigan, voted unanimously to erect their new district school on the farm of William Geddes (Wright 1996). Discussions about a new school had begun in 1847, when local history (as recorded by the town historical society) says that the existing frame building was no longer meeting their needs. But educational history (as recorded by State education records) reveals that 1847 is also when Michigan’s Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ira Mayhew, published a report on the poor condition of Michigan’s schools, calling them barns instead of “Temples of Science” (Mayhew 1848, 1850). Mayhew encouraged districts to consult Henry Barnard’s books (1848, 1851) on school architecture before constructing new schools. Completed in 1854, the new brick Geddes schoolhouse served the district until 1895, when a new frame school was constructed adjacent to the now old brick

one. The brick school was demolished, leaving little architectural remnants for evaluating Barnard and Mayhew's influence on the Pittsfield residents. That the third (1895) incarnation of the Geddes School coincides with state issued standards for schoolhouse construction suggests residents were abreast of educational reform movements. Additional state guidelines were released in 1914, which included specifications for school buildings and their lots as well as the types and quantities of furnishings and apparatus schools should contain. That the 1895 school served the district until 1957, when consolidation forced closure, suggests that residents didn't adopt every new educational guideline.

Construction of the 1854 brick Geddes School may have seemed necessary to maintain local pride given the widespread criticism of Michigan's schools, but no external force was pushing Pittsfield to make a change. When a county-level school superintendent was appointed in 1867, inspections revealed schools to be in better shape than expected but the lack of textbook standardization was a serious concern. An 1845 newspaper report on a Pittsfield school meeting provides a sense of how books were chosen; delegates from several school districts within the town met and created a list of their recommended textbooks. The 1845 list included two recommended arithmetic books and 13 other books and documents, including the Constitutions of the United States and of Michigan. They also recommended that each school have state and county maps, a dictionary, a blackboard, and a teacher's manual.

Creation of the county superintendent post was part of the movement to standardize education and implement recommendations stemming from national debate on pedagogy that included discussion on whether education was to prepare one for life through practical skills or was it to provide for moral and intellectual development. Every aspect of the school was seen as part of this decision, from wall hangings to gardens, fences, and sanitary facilities (e.g., Kern

1906, Foght 1918). In 1900 a curricula of agricultural training was advocated as a way to combat rural depopulation (Kern 1906). School inspector reports (Washtenaw County School District 1837-1931) provide a means of charting how the Geddes School fit into these larger issues of reform and pedagogy. In 1861 the school used books for spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, “mental arithmetics,” algebra, geography, and grammar but chose not to teach the recommended subjects of book keeping, geometry, “natural philosophy,” chemistry, and physiology. The 1875 report shows that most schools within the same district taught the same subjects but there was some variation. All eight schools taught reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and government, six taught United States history, three taught algebra, and one taught physiology. An act of resistance may be encoded in this 1875 report as the state-issued form asks whether a specific type of government is being taught but the inspector crossed out the phrase “science of” that preceded the word government.

The Science of Government, as published by Clinton Roosevelt (1841) outlined a “natural law” for government. Its content was anti-rural as can be exemplified by the following passage. “We in America, have no corn-laws, tithes, or hinderance to almost universal suffrage. Land, also, is almost as free as air, if we choose to settle in the great territories of the public; but natural evils then arise from isolation, sickness and death may visit us, and none to help be near” (Roosevelt 1841, p. 15). Joseph Alden’s textbook *The Science of Government* followed and it argued that society and its laws are outgrowths of God’s design (Judd 1918). Both Roosevelt and Alden wrote about how the school room fit into the larger scheme of government. Roosevelt dictates what should be taught and how. Refusing to teach *The Science of Government* was a rejection of a certain social order, that of the reform movement.

Approximately four miles west of the Geddes school, the frame Blaess School of Lodi, Michigan, was constructed in 1868 after an earlier frame schoolhouse burned unexpectedly (Beisaw 2003b). School inspector reports (Washtenaw County School District 1837-1931) document the different approaches to education implemented in Lodi and Pittsfield. None of Lodi's seven schools included coursework on government (and therefore did not object to the term "Science of Government") and only two included United States history. Lodi schools did offer book-keeping, geometry, and natural philosophy, which Pittsfield schools did not, but only one of these subjects was offered at each Lodi school. The 1861 reports for the nearby townships of Ann Arbor and City of Ann Arbor, eight miles north of Lodi, suggests that subjects varied mostly with the density of local development. While students in the City of Ann Arbor were taught all 13 subjects, township students were offered only five. Rural communities within Washtenaw County were more selective in what was taught at their schools while more urban communities provided instruction on all subjects deemed important by the state.

Both the Geddes and Blaess Schools were closed by consolidation in the 1950s (an act of reform) and then sat unused for decades before being moved from their original sites to be converted into museums. Archaeological excavation of their original schoolyards produced very different artifact assemblages, mainly because the Blaess School was rebuilt on its original foundation after fire destroyed the earlier structure and the Geddes Schoolyard was heavily disturbed by the building of the newer school adjacent to the older one. These different site formation processes prevent quantitative comparisons of the artifact assemblages, like that carried out by Rotman (2009). Yet one artifact type encodes a difference between the Geddes and Blaess community identities. Blaess was part of a German heritage community and there excavations uncovered a bottle of Dr. August Koenig's Hamburger Tropfen (Hamburg drops), a

beef bouillon and alcohol mixture produced by German August Vogeler in Baltimore, Maryland (Pastron 1981, p. 327). The Geddes community is not associated with any specific heritage and excavations there uncovered a bottle of Dr. Kilmer's Swamp Root, a liquid whose secret recipe included horse urine, produced by New Yorker Willis Sharpe Kilmer in Binghamton, New York. The Geddes community was willing to adopt new ideas, in both education reform and patent medicine formulas, while the Blaess community held more tightly to their past. They rebuilt their school only when forced by fire and chose patent medicine that reflected a more traditional view on health.

Case #2: Reform Tensions and Community Decision Making: The Old Edgebrook Schoolhouse in Illinois

The State of Illinois began taking a very active interest in reforming one-room schools in the early twentieth century, as did many other states and municipalities (Steffes 2008). The Illinois Department of Public Instruction developed circulars or "improvement guides" in 1908, 1910, and 1912 that were designed specifically for one-room schools in the State (Illinois Department of Public Instruction 1908, 1910, 1912). These publications were made publicly available only after they had been sent to school officials and teachers to help prepare them for state inspections and evaluations. The 1912 report states that 60,000 copies of that year's circular were distributed, which points to the continued prevalence of one-room schools into the twentieth century (Illinois Department of Public Instruction 1912).

These circulars are divided into sections detailing ideal conditions for the schoolyard, building, furnishings, supervision, organization, and the teacher and *her* work (emphasis added).

Other topics covered are school governance, sample policies on matters of attendance and discipline, and physical plans and layouts for school buildings. Diagrams and photos for the layout of classrooms, and guides for the construction of heat, light, water, and ventilation systems were included. These reports are useful not only because they describe idealized material conditions of schoolrooms (Table 1), but by emphasizing essential areas of improvement, they also very telling about perceived deficits in many one-room schools.

Clearly, these standards represent ideals, and undoubtedly different schools met, exceeded, or failed to meet these standards in differing combinations. Communities could either strive for the rating of a “Standard School” meaning the minimum requirements of a quality school had been met, or go above and beyond to be rated as a “Superior School” which would have been the equivalent of meeting “best practices” in today’s parlance (Table 1).

These state standards reveal areas deemed critical for the successful education of students. First, there was a very real concern about the heating, ventilation, and lighting of schools as well as the cleanliness and maintenance of the buildings, grounds, and water supply. Schools needed to be hygienic places with the health of the children being actively considered in their design. Concern for overcrowding and providing appropriate sized desks and chairs for pupils was also paramount, as was having adequate space for students to engage in physical exercise and recreational activity during the school day. Health and safety were important, but concerns for the beauty of the school grounds and the attractiveness of the interior reflected a perception that a student’s environment would have a direct impact on their learning. Finally, it was ideal to have a school that established a degree of gender separation among students by being free of tight spaces where boys and girls could come into physical contact. Separate cloakrooms allowed girls to remove outerwear and adjust clothing away from boys and two

widely separated outhouses (Table 1) reduced concern over unsupervised encounters between young boys and girls. Most of all, these state standards attempted to remove the local character and oversight of rural schools and bring them more in line with urban educational institutions of the time (Steffe 2008).

The imposition of reform standards by the state was not easy for many communities. In 1923, the State Superintendent's Report notes that in some counties 50-75% of one-room schools were not in compliance with minimum state standards (Blair 1923). In 1946, the minimum wage for teachers (\$1,200.00 per year) was met only by schools surrounding Chicago, in Cook County (Hinton 1946). The reasons why communities did not or could not embrace or enact state reforms were undoubtedly complex and highly local, but they likely involved resistance to reform on both ideological and financial grounds. Given the abundant requirements to be a "superior school" and the many areas (tangible and intangible) where investment was required to have a successful "standard" school, communities needed to make choices. Comparing these historical ideals with archaeological evidence enables an assessment of how individual communities chose to devote resources to the construction, maintenance, and improvement of their school. In broader terms, these ideals offer the necessary baseline that can be used to interpret the unique expressions of community values, investment, and pride that one-room schools embodied.

The Old Edgebrook School on what is now Chicago's Northwest side was excavated in 2011 by DePaul University and offers an opportunity to compare these state standards with the excavated remains of an individual schoolhouse. This school operated into the 1920s, and therefore would have been reviewed using the standards in the state circulars. It is known historically that the extant school building replaced an earlier structure and that it was more

recently reused as a caretaker's cottage for the adjacent golf course (Baxter and Butler 2011) (see Figure 3).

Archaeological remains at the Old Edgebrook School suggest that the community transformed practices around health and hygiene for students (Baxter and Butler 2011). Modifications to the structure are some of those indicated for a superior school. The heat source for the building was moved into the basement of the structure and the windows were configured so that light would have come in from the south side. An abundance of coal waste and ash deposits were found in the lowest levels of the excavation units, suggesting that spent fuel from the heat stove was originally scattered around the schoolyard. This type of waste was not found in the more recent deposits associated with the school, suggesting an alternative means of disposal that kept waste out of the children's recreational space was adopted.

The structure also had two "good" entrances (amply large doors free from obstacles and in good repair), from the front and rear of the structure. The current lot did not allow for an investigation of outbuildings, but it is assumed the rear door led to the outhouse(s) and fuel storage areas (if they existed) and the front door was the official entrance and egress for students. A small vestibule was added to the front of the structure (see Figure 3) that later became a sunroom. The small size of the vestibule and lack of architectural partitioning suggest that concerns with gender separation was not enough of a worry to the local community to make separate cloakrooms as would be expected of a "superior school."

It also seems the residents of the community furnished the school with both essential items, such as writing implements and books and "non-essential" items such as a chalkboard pointer for the teacher and a small flag for the classroom. Writing implements, metal clasps from

books, the metal tip from a chalkboard pointer, and a decorative finial for a small flagpole were found during excavation.

Archaeological evidence from the Old Edgebrook School is indicative of community choices. This particular site did not allow for the evaluation of the schoolyard given the small area of the lot that remained for testing. However, artifacts and architectural evidence show that some aspects of the school conformed to “standard” ideals and others brought it closer to a “superior” standard. The community was selective in how it chose to invest resources and express their shared values through their local school.

Memorializing Rural School Communities

Because rural schools are sites of local autonomy, the ways in which closed schools are memorialized reflects long-standing community identities and ideals. Just as concerned residents had to collectively decide how to respond to educational reform movements advocated by outsiders, decisions on how to memorialize these sites must weigh practicality against local pride. Standards for building construction made one-room schools into sturdy structures that could serve many functions long after consolidation ended their educational purpose. But generic one-room school museums quickly become a redundant resource that few take the time to visit. In some places it seems that continued existence of the school’s exterior serves as a monument not to a school but to a community and its shared identity. Even the larger, and less easily preserved, consolidated schools can become symbols that maintain social memory.

As recovery of the Blaess School doorplate showed, social memory regarding community schools has been biased by fictional depictions of this iconic emblem of traditional values and historical archaeology can offer a critique of that social memory. Many community attempts to

create schoolhouse museums often reproduce myth while devaluing the community history these sites contain. As Beisaw noted (2009, p. 50)

...schools often become one-room-school museums, in which collections of furnishings and artifacts, uninformed by archaeology and site specific documents, produce a generic message of “school used to be different.” A posted facsimile printing of the state’s or school district’s rules and regulations supports this message. With variability and change unaddressed, even repudiated, these generic re-creations can hinder preservation of newly threatened schoolhouses, now redundant resources.

Generic recreations rely on assumptions about the difficulty and austerity of early pioneer and rural life, the ubiquitous presence of “traditional” values in early America, the homogeneity of rural communities, and a strong sense of national pride being commonplace in the American past (Zimmerman 2009).

When conducting community archaeology at the Old Edgebrook School, one goal of the project was to help provide the local historical society with information about “typical” one-room school museums, so that they could make their museum unique within the Chicago area. To do this, students from the 2011 DePaul University field school undertook a comparative analysis of one-room school museums. All students visited one of two one-room school museums in the Chicago suburbs: the Glenview Park District School or the one-room school at the Naper Settlement. Each student then evaluated the websites of 10 additional one-room school museums from across the United States. A total of 87 museums were evaluated and the results were amalgamated to look for patterns (Baxter and Butler 2011). In short, these museums were

remarkably similar in how they portrayed education and the material culture of one-room schools regardless of their geographic location (Figure 5).

Information presented at these museums tended to operate on two polarized scales: Very broad narratives about one-room schools based on information from a handful of secondary sources, and very particularistic oral histories from former teachers or students of the local school. The resulting interpretations of these one-room schools shared a variety of characteristics. First, one-room school museums tended to paint a very stagnant, ahistorical picture of rural education that blended together decades of history into a singular experience, rather than having an explanation of how one-room schools and American education changed over time. Particularly, museums tended to emphasize the “pioneer” and “community” aspects of early schools, with less attention to later histories that involved state and local standards, guidelines, and regulations. In terms of site history, this means that later buildings that were replacements of original pioneer structures were being misrepresented as sites of education from 30-40 years before their construction. These narratives of early pioneer days co-opted the oral histories of local residents who had attended the school, even though these alumni were students in the early twentieth century.

One-room school museums also presented schools as universally prosperous. There was always an abundance of books, maps, pictures, desks, and school supplies on display in one-room school museums. The narrative of these museums often emphasizes the struggle of early, pioneer life, but the material culture is incongruous with such a narrative and instead reflects contemporary community pride. Patriotic items, including the identical portrait of George Washington, were displayed prominently in nearly every school museum, emphasizing the place of one-room schools as American institutions (see Figure 5).

These general trends in museum presentation can be seen in specific cases as well. Many schoolhouse preservation efforts mislabel their structures by conflating dates of the district school with that of extant schoolhouses. For example the plaque on the Dewey School of Waterloo, Jackson County, Michigan, reads “1844 to 1963” yet this is not the 1844 building nor is it the site of that building (Beisaw 2009). The original log structure was located approximately one mile north. A brick building replaced it at that original site. The preserved brick structure is the first on its site and it was constructed in 1883. Local pride in the antiquity of their school system often takes precedent over historical accuracy, but not always. In 2002, former students of the Blaess School and descendants of former students were involved in the renovation project that would turn the relocated school into a museum. Before the archaeology project this community was unaware that the building they were restoring was not the original schoolhouse. When historical and archaeological data provided a more accurate timeline of their school a decision had to be made as to what date should be placed on its memorial plaque, the 1857 date of the original structure or the 1868 date of the replacement structure, the same one that they were restoring. Although the earlier date may have attracted more attention and tourism, the community chose to use the actual construction date of 1868.

While the Dewey, Blaess, Geddes, and Old Edgebrook Schools maintained their original character enough to allow their reuse as museums, many other rural schools found other uses or were demolished. A systematic survey of 26 Washtenaw County, Michigan, one-room school sites (Beisaw, Clements, and Ticknor 2003) found that eight had been demolished, 16 were altered to serve as residences or outbuildings, one was altered to serve as a day care facility, and only one was in a ruined state. That roughly 70% of these historic structures survive in some form is a testament to their sturdy construction; communities did not ignore regulations when it

came to the building maintenance even when they ignored other regulations. Inside the one ruined Washtenaw County school, the Schumacher-Bridgewater School, is both a piano and an oven (Figure 6), not standard items. Unfortunately the building was not safe enough for the investigation necessary to determine if these features date to the building's educational use.

Unlike the rural schoolhouses of southeastern Michigan, those of rural northwestern Ohio are more likely to stand empty than to be altered to serve another function. As in Michigan, few northwest Ohio schoolhouses are allowed to decay into a ruined state but schoolhouse museums are rare here; the structure itself seems to stand as a suitable memorial to the one-room school. Where the building no longer survives, memorials are common but the schools that are most explicitly memorialized seem to be the larger consolidated schools. These local consolidated schools were replaced by the larger regional consolidated schools that are still in operation. Large memorials mark the sites of two demolished Wyandot County consolidated schools: the Salem Township School and the Wharton High School. Two things make these consolidated memorials interesting. First, both contain the name and image of the school mascot, a tradition not upheld at one-room schools. Second, form and content of the memorials resemble that of tombstones found in local cemeteries (Figure 7). School memorialization in this region of Ohio seems to follow this logic; when a school building is left to decay slowly the gentle passage of time allows for forgetting to happen in a natural way but when a school building is formally demolished at its closure the communal grief sometimes manifests in a way similar to the grief of a human death. The loss of a mascot is the loss of one aspect of community identity. Where school closure is caused either by sudden depopulation or rapid growth, as occurs with economic shifts, there is no community left to grieve or memorialize the school.

This process of memorialization spurred by consolidation is currently unfolding in the town of Bettsville, Seneca County, Ohio (McCray 2014). The Bettsville school district is closing due to depopulation. Enrollment has dropped from the high of 350 to a low of 148 in the past 50 years. The remaining students will be sent to the neighboring Old Fort district. In order to keep the Bettsville community spirit, a display case of Bettsville Bobcat memorabilia will be installed in the Old Fort School. Comments to the online version of this news story show concern over the loss of Bobcat heritage as well as the loss of their beloved school buildings.

Conclusion

Although America's social memory of the "little red schoolhouse" paints the picture of one-room schools as sites of conformity and innocence, historical archaeology of specific schools reveals the tensions encoded in these buildings, their documentary records, and associated artifact assemblages. Many communities established rural schools before regional authorities and experts on education could provide meaningful guidelines. Outsiders soon began to seek reform by criticizing local efforts. Inspectors documented compliance with new regulations regarding everything from building construction to placement of sanitary facilities and subjects taught. Rural communities were selective in their acceptance of reform. Decisions continued to be made on the local level until consolidation, the final solution to the "rural school problem," forced the closure of community schools and the established larger regional schools. Yet, community schools did not disappear from the landscape. Almost a century after many one-room schools saw their last student their persistence as reused structures or empty monuments can be seen as acts of resistance. Wherever vestiges of the original community remain, their schoolhouse serves as a reminder of their rural agrarian past.

One-room schools are highly resonant in the national imagination and in the identities of local communities. Contemporary museum interpretations present a homogenous one-room school experience regardless of when or where a school was operating. Extensive documentary records of reform, standardization, and evaluation suggest that local influences on education were irradiated in favor of statewide initiatives. Yet, at the same time, local communities continue to rally around one-room schools as salient symbols of a past that is uniquely theirs, and archaeological investigations illustrate the indelible contributions of community decision-making and community activities in the material record. Historical archaeology, then, also can play the role of reformer in the creation and presentation of historical narratives around one-room schools that engage local communities and provide evidence for site-specific narratives that situate one-room schools deeply in local history and collective memory.

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Table

Table 1: Summary of physical standards for one-room schools from the 1912 State of Illinois Circular (Illinois Department of Public Instruction 1912). These aspects of the circulars are highlighted here because they represent the areas where historical documents may be compared to archaeological evidence.

School Feature	Standard School	Superior School
Yards and Outbuildings	An ample playground	A playground of more than one-half an acre
	Good approaches to schoolhouse	Level, sodded ground surface on play area
	Two well-kept, widely separated outhouses	Trees and Shrubs
	Convenient fuel house	Well or cistern and sanitary drinking appliances
School Buildings	House well built, in good repair, and painted	Ample room for the number of pupils
	Good foundation	Two cloakrooms- one for boys and another for girls
	Well lighted	Clean tinted interior walls
	Good blackboards-some suitable for small children	Adjustable windows with shades
	Heated with a jacketed stove in the corner or a room heater and ventilator in the corner or a basement furnace that brings in clean air and removes foul air	Light from one side of the room or one side and the rear of the room
	Floor and interior clean and tidy	A furnace in the basement
		Multiple sizes of desks for pupils of all ages and sizes
		A separate library room
School Furnishings	Desks for students of all ages appropriately placed (diagrams provided)	Two chairs with the teacher's desk
	Good teacher's desk	More than 80 library books with at least 10 for each grade level
	Good book case	An encyclopedia
	Good collection of juvenile books	Writing and exam supplies
	Good maps, a globe, dictionary, and sanitary water supply	Two good pictures on the wall
		Measures and scales, a thermometer, crayons, erasers, a pointer, a coal hood, shovel, poker, broom, and floor brush
		Wash basin, mirror, and paper towels.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Map showing the locations of schools discussed and outlining the Midwestern United States as defined here.

Figure 2. The idyllic American one-room schoolhouse as exemplified by this school in Cedarville, Massachusetts. Image downloaded from Wikimedia Commons and licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license

(http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Little_Red_School_House,_Cedarville_MA.jpg)

Figure 3: The “Old Edgebrook Schoolhouse” during 2011 excavations. The schoolhouse was converted to a residence for the caretaker of the adjacent golf course in the 1930s, and served in that capacity until the 1990s when the home was abandoned. This image shows the original schoolhouse structure in the center with modern siding and an improved roof. The vestibule on the front of the structure was added to the school sometime in the early twentieth century. The wooden porch and stair is much more recent. The rear of the structure also has an addition that housed all the added plumbing for the home conversion, including the kitchen and the bathroom.

Figure 4: Doorplate recovered from the Blaess School. This single artifact helped the descendant community reassess the social memory of their schoolhouse.

Figure 5: Mauston Wisconsin's Boorman House replication of an Old One-Room School House. This one-room school museum scene is typical many such museums across the Midwest. Image downloaded from Wikimedia Commons and licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license

(http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mauston_Wisconsin%27s_Boorman_House_replication_of_an_Old_One-Room_School_House.JPG#filelinks)

Figure 6:Interior of the Schumacher-Bridgewater school. The piano and oven may represent the diversity of subjects taught or may be remnants of building reuse.

Figure 7: Front and back of the Wharton High School memorial resembles the front and back of the Frost Family memorial in a nearby cemetery. A flag flies above the school memorial.