

Bulletin Board

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HISTORY OF THE SPACKENKILL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Many new residents in the district have asked questions about the background of our school system. To best answer them, this history has been prepared.

The Spackenkill School District, officially Union Free School District No. 2, Town of Poughkeepsie, was chartered by the New York State Legislature May 1, 1865.

It is one of a dwindling number of union free school districts still in existence in the state.

What is a Union Free School District? It is a form of public school administration authorized by the state since 1853 to provide education through the junior and senior high school level (which a Common School District can not do), to be financed entirely by tax money, and to be supervised by a board of education of from three to nine members.

The Spackenkill District, about five miles in diameter, is bounded on the north by the City of Poughkeepsie, on the east by the Arlington School District, on the south by the Wappingers District, and on the west by the Hudson River.

The name Spackenkill, according to a reliable source, stems from Spack's Creek. Spackenkill is a Dutch interpretation of the Indian name "speaking waters", which was given to a noisy stream running through Spackenkill Road, located just across the street from the present Croft Fire House.

The Early Years

It was on this present fire house site that the district's first school was built, around 1866 or 1867. The land was donated by William Davies "for religious and educational purposes."



This building, a traditional one room "little red schoolhouse", of Victorian style, was built of brick brought from Holland as ballast in sailing vessels. A number of the bricks are still in the possession of persons who have been associated with the school district.

Early records reveal the simplicity of life in the "red schoolhouse" which was governed by a school board that met once a year. The minutes of 1881-82 show the yearly expenditures to total \$414.23. Items listed in-

cluded: teacher's salary--\$336., cleaning and repairing the outdoor privy--\$8.73, coal--\$37.50, building fires--\$5., cleaning the schoolhouse--\$4., library books--\$15., and incidental expenses--\$8.

The following year suggests a colder winter as the fuel costs rose to \$45.95. With the additional, the cleaning bill increased to \$13.

In 1896 it cost \$89.71 to put a new roof on the schoolhouse.

A "truant officer" later called an "attendance supervisor" was included in the yearly budget in 1899. Rumor has it students would be enticed to the noisy creek's edge across the street from the school to snip and savor the wild water cress growing there.

Early reports say that many students were sent home because of wet clothes, probably from wading in the creek.

Inflation set in at this point. By 1895 yearly expenditures, which had hovered around \$400. for several years, reached nearly \$600.

With the turn of the century the teacher's salary was raised to \$400., a health officer joined the staff, and numerous audio-visual aids: maps, globe and a phonograph, were purchased.

The Spackenkill School first began to send its older pupils outside the district in 1912 to continue their education. Since then our students have used the facilities of all our neighboring

school districts: Poughkeepsie, Wappingers and Arlington.

Official minutes of Board of Education meetings reveal that from 1912 an occasional parent petitioned the school board to provide transportation for the children to high school. However, it was not until 1936 that the district finally approved.

In 1920, the one room schoolhouse had an enrollment of 55 pupils. Because of overcrowded conditions, plans were outlined for a new school (presently known as the Martha W. Lawrence School) in 1924.

A \$40,000 bond issue was passed to finance the project, and in early 1926 the first classes met in the building.

There were two classrooms, still part of the Lawrence building. As you went in the door there was an entry way. To the left was the auditorium, now used as the library, and to the right was the classroom, now used as the school office. Two new teachers were hired.

One was Mrs. Lionel (Martha W.) Lawrence, a Poughkeepsie teacher with two years' experience. She was hired as the principal-teacher, a position she would hold until 1949 when she stopped teaching. Mrs. Lawrence continued as the principal until 1958. Still a resident of the district, she is a frequent substitute teacher in the system. The school is named in her honor.