One-Room Schoolhouses

The Northwest Ordinances of 1785 and 1787 set aside one section in every township for support of a community school. It was believed, even at that early date, schoolhouses "civilized" the community. Schoolhouses in the new community were built, at first, to be temporary and were usually log structures. The first school in the Rochester area was in Alexander Graham's log home as early as 1823. In 1825, a small plank schoolhouse was built in Stony Creek just east of the village; John Chapman was the first teacher.

In 1848 (after the plank school burned down), a one-room schoolhouse was built in Stony Creek on Washington Road. Other one-room schoolhouses in the area included the Avon, Brooklands, Hamlin, Christian Hill, Hubble, Ross, Brewster, Baldwin, Kline, Bigler, and Snell Schools. All were within walking distance of most of the children's homes and accommodated grades one through eight, which was typical for a rural schoolhouse. Students were usually taught penmanship, hygiene, reading, grammar, and geography and used textbooks or slates. Bathrooms were outside, light came from either grease lamps or candles, and children brought their lunches from home. Families expected a quality education from the eight small schoolhouses throughout Avon Township. Even with a rural education, school provided a chance for a better life or more opportunities. One-room schoolhouses were community schools and therefore helped develop a family-like atmosphere as well as social cohesion. Although conflicts were inevitable, especially when one teacher taught nearly thirty students of varying ages and also had to deal with community pressures, a strong sense of community usually helped resolve any major problems.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, schools in rural America were invariably one-room. The log structure schools were not able to meet the needs of students or teachers and by the 1880s they were replaced by newer frame, stone, or brick buildings and included wood burning stoves. These new one-room buildings were usually called, "little red schoolhouses." Gradually after World War II, one-room schoolhouses were abandoned or consolidated into larger schools because it was deemed to be more economically efficient. Another inducement for school consolidation was that it could provide a wider range in curricular offerings. By 1953, all 12 one-room schoolhouses were consolidated into the Rochester Community Schools. Today, the Stony Creek and Ross (located on Brewster and Tienken) schoolhouses remain. There are also a few of the little red schoolhouses left, such as Baldwin, Avon, Brewster, Hamlin, and Brooklands. Ironically, most educators today want a return to smaller class sizes.