

Utopia's Early Education

The first schoolhouse in Utopia was constructed of logs in the 1840's. It had a simple interior layout of benches facing a box stove in the middle of the room, typical of many rural schools of the era. It was built on Lot 28, Concession 6 of Essa Township. Most of the students attending this school were young, as the older children were usually required at home to help with the chores. The earliest schoolmaster known of was a Mr. John Bowman who taught in 1859; the secretary for the school at this time was Mr. Eugene Smith, Utopia's original settler. The following year, Mr. E.A. Sparkling was the school's instructor with a salary of \$240 a year.

In 1867, another school was built in the Utopia area. Mr. John Fletcher constructed a frame schoolhouse on Lot 27, Concession 5 of Essa Township.

In February of 1872, there was an attempt to burn down the school at Utopia, so the school board decided that a lock should be put on the porch door, confident that this would ward off any intruders. Unfortunately, a few weeks later on February the 27th, the people of Utopia watched their schoolhouse rear into flames. It was not until fall that a new school was built. During the interim, school was held in a log house on Mr. Allen Miller's property on the south-east corner of the 6th line and 25th sideroad of Essa. Years later, a half acre of land was purchased to the north of the reconstructed school, enlarging the school grounds.