

## SCHOOL DAYS - BERGEN

The history of the schools in Bergen, is a lively one. Isolated pioneer families' children were taught in their homes by either the father or mother depending upon their individual education. Wherever a few children were close enough together a school was begun. Some schools also doubled as churches. The first building built as a schoolhouse was at Bergen corners on the west side of Lake Street across from Appletree Avenue. The first male teacher was Harvey Kelsey, a graduate of Yale college; and the first known female teacher was Chloe Wright, daughter of Deacon Benjamin Wright.

In 1943 there was a Commissions of Common Schools of the towns of Byron and Bergen. The school districts were as follows:

DISTRICT NUMBER 1 - was erected in 1840 and known as the North Bergen School and stood on North Bergen Road. Additions were added in the 1900's and it became the residence of John O'Connor family.

DISTRICT NUMBER 2 - was erected around 1840. Later it burned and a smaller school replaced the structure. It was located at the corner of Jerico Road and Townline Road.

DISTRICT NUMBER 3 - was located on Route 19 between Creamery Road and Sackett Road. Una Bodell Ashley was a teacher at one time. This school was used until around 1950.

DISTRICT NUMBER 4 - The old building was known as "Bergen South District School" which stood on the north side of Appletree Avenue. The new District 4 was always known as the "Red Schoolhouse." Its location was Creamery Road on the north side at the corner of West Sweden Road and was built in 1840.

DISTRICT NUMBER 5 - The building was erected at the same time as the other school buildings. It may have burned, or was torn down in the 1800's. It was replaced and became a residence.

DISTRICT NUMBER 6 - was the West Bergen School built on the west side of West Bergen Road, at the top of the hill south of Dublin Road. It remained on this site until 1950 when it was sold at auction for \$235. It was then moved to Tripp Road and Townline Road in Byron. It was used as a residence and was resold in 1976.

DISTRICT NUMBER 7 - was formed of the Town of Bergen and Riga in 1967. Two from Bergen and one from Riga. The school house in the Riga district was a frame structure and it was later purchased and moved to the Sheridan farm.

A handsome two-story building was erected with two wings and a bell tower in the center. It contained elementary grades and high school. It became the center of school life in the town. Additions were built as needed. The Union Free School of Bergen was organized in 1893. The school was admitted to the University of the State of New York in January of 1894. It became a Regent's Credit school. The structure burned to the ground in 1923.

A new brick school was built, District #7 in 1925. It was dedicated on December 16, 1925, and located on Rochester Street in Bergen. The district voted a bond issue of \$180,000 for the cost of the building. The taxpayers really got their money out of this building. It was open day and night. Many community meetings were held there, dances, minstrel shows, town organizational meetings, and all the usual school activities. A tennis court was built in 1936. The PTA was organized in 1949.

In 1950, a meeting was held to propose a Bergen-Chili-Churchville centralization. The proposal was rejected because Bergen would have unequal representation on the school board and Bergen was an agricultural area and it was felt that the agricultural program would be minimized because of the urban nature of the area comprised in the other two schools' districts. The Byron-Bergen centralization was held June 20, 1951. The ballot approved by a 7:1 margin, with 1,600 votes cast; Robert Dye became District Principal. Although the voters approved purchasing land to build a new school in 1953. Land was purchased on the first vote in September, 1953, the site being in the Town of Bergen, on the southeast corner of Route 262 and West Bergen Road; but it took four more votes and new state equalization rates before it was finally agreed to build the school. Later, because of increased enrollment, another wing was built on the Jr.-Sr. High School in 1963. The cornerstone was laid in 1967. The Elementary School, located on West Bergen Road, kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade was built in 1970. A welcomed addition to the school was the Olympic size swimming pool by Grant Gillam. All the children in the district now had an opportunity to learn how to swim. Byron-Bergen Schools are still a major source of community activity and are well supported by the members of the community.

Further reading on the history of the schools in the Town of Bergen is available at the Bergen Town Hall - History Archives.

Information Provided by the Bergen Historical Society.

The Bergen Historical Society held preserve the heritage of Bergen. New members are always welcome. Call Peggy Denton, Town Historian, at 494-1121.

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