

Self-Guided Tour of the Log Schoolhouse

As you walk up to the entrance to the log schoolhouse, notice the two horse-head hitching posts, then touch the logs on either side of the doorway. You will be transported to the year 1837 when these logs were crafted from local hard woods. As you step into the school, you will see what the students, parents/guardians, and teacher saw in 1837. The wall by the door features artifacts from the French-Canadian families who lived here from 1848. Now walk in.

- Think of the experience from 1837 to 1848 in the one-room school:
 - 1) Children in the same classroom with their brothers and sisters, walked from home to school every day, and carried their lunches and books;
 - 2) The school term was based on the farming schedule, and older students were excused based on planting and harvesting times;
 - 3) The one room school was also the community's social gatherings;
 - 4) A teacher who often boarded with a local farm family, conveyed academic basics from first to eighth grades. The students of one grade level would be taught the subject content, and then the next grade level would be taught on a higher level the same material, and so on to the final grade level. As a student, one would be taught the content on one level; get a preview of the next level, and for the grade level below, get reinforcement of the content (a process of previewing, viewing, and reviewing content). **Why is/was this a valuable teaching technique?**
- Can you identify the purpose, use, and significance of all of the following items that you see in and outside the room?
 - Horse-head hitching posts,
 - clean up table, stool, bucket with ladle, towel and soap,
 - antique broom,
 - oil lamp and kerosene lamp,
 - ink bottles and quills,
 - abacus,
 - pot belly stove, a poker for the pot belly stove, and a bundle of logs to place by the pot belly stove,
 - the 26 star flag,
 - the bell,
 - a copy of the Declaration of Independence, and
 - Methodist Circuit Rider.
- Related questions:
 - 1) Were boys and girls separated in this school?
 - 2) Did this school foster community cooperation or individual achievement?
 - 3) What grades were taught in this school?
 - 4) Why do the students' tables go from low to high toward the back of the room?
 - 5) What was one other function of the log schoolhouse besides education?
 - 6) Why did several log schools open around 1837 in the Kankakee River Valley?
 - 7) Why did the Bourbonnais Grove log school close in 1848?
 - 8) Why did schools not resume in Bourbonnais Grove until 1860 for girls (taught by the Congregation of Notre Dame nuns) and 1865 for boys (taught by priests and brothers of the Viatorian Order)?
 - 9) Did your ancestors attend a school like this log schoolhouse, and do you feel a connection with them now?

Log Schoolhouse Artifacts/Publicity Donors

Laurie Cyr

Horse head hitching posts

Bert Jacobsen

Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan (1842)

The Wing-and-Wing or Le Feu-Follet; A Tale by J. Fennimore Cooper (1842)

Marbles

Mary Ann Lambert

Slate writing board

Jean Legris-Pekoc

Portraits of Joseph and Julie Lesage

Kathy Massullo

Walnut teacher's chair

Cindy McBarnes

Food basket and oil lamp

Vicky McBurnie

Abacus

Norma Meier

Red and white linen towel for clean-up table

Two wood frames for portraits of Joseph and Julie Lesage

A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language (1824)

Dobell's Schoolmaster's Assistant (1795)

Farmer's Almanac (1830)

The Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott: Life of Napoleon Bonaparte. Vol. 16. (1835)

A Portfolio of Youth by Robert Ramble (1835)

A General View of the World, Geographical, Historical, and Philosophical by the Rev. E. Bloomfield (1807)

James Paul

Printing of announcements/invitations and 11/15/22 program with artifact/publicity donors

Wicker basket for marbles

Ken Ponton

Teacher's desk, student tables, student benches, seven pegs for coats on back of door, clean up table, stool, bucket with ladle and two towels, two bars of lye soap, soap dish, antique broom, oil lamps, ink bottles, quills, a poker for the pot belly stove, kerosene lamp, two 26 star flags, a bell that came from a one-room schoolhouse, a copy of the Declaration of Independence, and a bundle of logs to place by the pot belly stove.

Peggy, Brian, Ann, and Lew Rogers

Children's black boots

Village of Bourbonnais

Printing of log schoolhouse history document (1837-present)

- **This is the end of your log schoolhouse tour. Please help the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society spread the word about "teaching and preserving our local history" (by Jim Paul 11/15/22, revised 1/30/23).**

The following two-page historical pamphlet provides a brief history of the log schoolhouse.

Bourbonnais Grove's First Log Schoolhouse (1837-48) and French-Canadian Family Home (1848-2010)



- The Bourbonnais Grove log schoolhouse was built in 1837 by Solomon Yoder/Yeader under the supervision of Thomas Durham (1784-1854), a Virginia born Quaker and newly elected Will County Rock Village Precinct Commissioner. It was the second log cabin school in the Kankakee River Valley. This school was originally located halfway between Thomas and Margaret Durham's home (today's Perry Farmhouse) and Noel LeVasseur's trading post (today's ONU Larson Fine Arts Center) along what was later named South Main Street.
- Classes probably included ten or more male and female students, including the Durham's four sons and three daughters, and LeVasseur's son and daughter—who learned reading, writing, math, and geography.
- The first teachers were Solomon Yoder/Yeader and/or Joseph Boltonhouse, followed by Milton O. Clark (before 1844), Charles Starr (1844-45), and Joseph Jeffcoat (1847-48).
- In 1848, the log school closed, possibly due to a desire for classes to be moved closer to St. Leo's (soon to be renamed Maternity BVM Parish) or perhaps residual economic issues from the Panic of 1837.
- The first Methodist quarterly meeting was held at the schoolhouse in January 1842 (Reverend John Sinclair presiding the next year). Bourbonnais Grove then became part of the six-week Methodist circuit (Stephen R. Beggs, Levi Jenks, James Leckenby, [unknown first name] Chapin, David Lewis, and C. Lazenby were the circuit rider ministers).
- From 1848 to 2010, French-Canadian families made a home of the former log schoolhouse.
- In 1848, Bourbonnais Grove village blacksmith Joseph Lesage (1828-1920) purchased the school. Joseph was born in 1828 in St-Leon-le-Grand, Quebec Province. He married Domitilde Boucher in St-Leon-le-Grand in 1848 right before moving to Bourbonnais Grove. Joseph converted the log schoolhouse into a home with his blacksmith shop next door. Two weeks after giving birth to daughter named Domitilde in 1850, mother Domitilde mother died. In 1853, Joseph married Julie Fortier (1831-97). They had ten (10) children in the former schoolhouse: Joseph who became a priest, Elizabeth Martin, Alfred, Marie/Mary Letourneau, Marie Julie who became a nun, Isaac Gaspar, Dr. Philip Isaac, Sophie Eugenie, Marie Josephine, and Dr. Joseph Arthur Thomas Viateur.
- October 11, 1870, Domitilde Lesage (1850-1928), Joseph's oldest daughter, married Canadian-born Charles Henry Byron/Biron (1846-1912). In 1871, Domitilde and Charles were driven from their Chicago home by the Great Fire. Domitilde's father and stepmother (Joseph and Julie), invited the Chicago Fire refugee couple to live in the former log schoolhouse. The Byron/Biron family grew to ten children: Marie Josephine, Eugenie, (Sister Mary Melanie), Arthur, Joseph, Juliette Richer, Joseph Hermenegilde, Joseph George "Foxy", Marie Anne Corine (Sister Imelda de Jesus, and Joseph Eugenie. Charles--appointed village postmaster June 20, 1892—ran the post office and a small grocery store out of the home.
- Marie/Mary Lesage (1859-1934), daughter of Joseph and his second wife Julie, was born in the log schoolhouse. She later married Philippe Letourneau (1860-1932), son of George and Elodie Letourneau.
- By 1920, Alphonse "Mike" Marcotte (1888-1953), a painter, purchased the home. For a few years he lived there with his three brothers: Eli (1885-1930), Philip (1890-1957), Ralph Sr. (1897-1969).

- Alphonse married the widow Clara (Benoit) Cyrier on September 21, 1922. They lived in the house with Clara's two daughters from her previous marriage, Dorothy and Marguerite. Alphonse and Clara soon had a daughter of their own, Anna Maria (b. July 24, 1923).
- The newlyweds Richard (1926-69) and Mary Ann (Lambert) Rivard (1927-2012) purchased the former schoolhouse in 1946, and did extensive remodeling to accommodate their growing family. They raised 10 children in the schoolhouse. The home served as a gas station in the 1940-60s.
- In 1970, Ralph "Red" Marcotte Jr. (1931-2011) and his wife Mary (1932-2019) purchased the home from Mary Ann (Lambert) Rivard. Red and Mary rented their home from 1971-74 to Sisters Theresa Galvin, Jeanette Cote, Marilyn Doucette, Madeline LaMarre, Pauline Lerch, Dianne Marinelli, Helen Kavanaugh, Anne Marie Levangie, Barbara Topazio, Patricia McCarthy, Jaculyn Hanrahan, and Mary Ann Hedda of Montreal-based Congregation of Notre Dame. From 1974 to 1997, Red and Mary lived and raised their nine children (Andre, Annette, Denise, Jacques, Joel, Michelle, Phil, Pierre, and Jon) in the home. By 1997, it was just Red, Mary, their oldest daughter Denise, with her daughter Anna, living in the former log schoolhouse. That year, the four family members moved to Kristina Drive. From August 1997 to October 1998, Red and Mary's son Andre and his wife Melissa with their two boys, rented the home. After they moved out, other renters lived in the home until 2010, when it was sold to the village.
- After Red's death, Mary retained ownership until 2010 when the Village of Bourbonnais purchased the Marcotte Home after it had fallen into disrepair. As Mary Marcotte was aware of the schoolhouse's historical significance, she sought help from Mayor Paul Schore to help preserve the structure. The home was demolished in December 2011. The logs of the former schoolhouse were surgically removed by historic preservationist Tim Kilby of Defiance, Missouri and Piggush-Simoneau Inc. of Bourbonnais. Kilby stated about 60% of the original structure remained. The logs were stored in a facility under the village water tower.
- The original logs were hand-split, rough, square and held together with wooden pegs.
- February 17, 2012, the Village of Bourbonnais began seeking money for reconstruction, restoration, landscaping, signage, and maintenance of the log school house, which would be on the Adrien M. Richard Heritage Preserve, northwest of the Letourneau Home/Museum.
- June 1, 2017, the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society approved the first *Fleur-de-Lis* Celebration Dinner for November 3, to raise funds for the restoration and publicize its presence in the community.
- A BGHS and Village of Bourbonnais Log Schoolhouse Steering Committee was formed April 4, 2018 to continue fundraising efforts for restoring the log schoolhouse. January 20, 2022, this committee was renamed the BGHS Log Schoolhouse Advisory Committee to oversee the log schoolhouse as a "permanent exhibit" of the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society.
- A major boost to fundraising came August 2, 2019 when the BGHS membership approved \$18,224 from a bequest of Frances Cooper Wertz (1915-2018).
- At the September 17, 2021 *Fleur-de-Lis* Celebration Dinner, Lisa Kahn, Co-Chair of the French Heritage Society (Chicago Chapter) and Village of Bourbonnais Mayor Paul Schore announced "great news" about pledges and grants that would make restoration of the schoolhouse a reality.
- The French Heritage Society awarded a grant of \$16,000.
- October 18, 2021, the Bourbonnais village board approved a bid of \$260,545 from PSI General Contractors of Kankakee to begin the project. November 2, 2021, ground was broken and foundation work began. After supplemental logs were acquired, the reconstruction continued, and an inauguration/dedication of the log schoolhouse was held on November 15, 2022 at 2:00 pm.

**Written by James Paul—based on his research, that of genealogist Norma Meier, local historian Vic Johnson, and with assistance of Denise Marcotte.*