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history*

INTRODUCTION

ARCHITECTURE

Geer School is typical of many Midwestern one-room schools built in the late nineteenth century. The vernacular and eclectic nature of the school house designs of the time can be seen in this building. The round arched doors and windows, rectangular plan and varying planes of brick and detailed corbeling are characteristics derived from the Italianate Style. The remaining simplified details of the roof form, eaves and cornices, etc., create an eclectic and totally native Midwestern architecture.

At the time, recommendations for one-room schoolhouse designs suggested rectangular plans of no more than 30' x 40' with three or four widely spaced windows located along the long sides of the building (ideally east and west) and an entrance located on the south side. Geer School is 28' x 40' with three windows located on the east and west sides. The high ceiling in the main room is well lit by the six high round top windows.

Much of the original functional and decorative aspects of the room (chalk boards, wainscoting, wood trim, etc.) remain intact. Most of the exterior decorative detailing remains except the modification of two windows used to create door openings.

SCHOOL HISTORY

Geer School stands at the corner of Plymouth and Gotfredson Roads in Superior Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan. The first district school was built of logs in 1829 and in the 1850's, a frame structure was constructed about a half mile south of the present site. For over a century, Geer School played an important role in both the educational and community life of the area.

In 1880, Mr. William Geer was elected school director. He contracted Mr. Joseph Warner of Ypsilanti to build a brick schoolhouse that met standard requirements: the building should be no smaller than 28' x 19', have ample light and be on a yard of at least one acre. It should contain coat rooms, toilets, wash basin, and a good water supply. Because William Geer was in charge of building the new school and the school district also included Mr. Geer's post office and general store, the new brick building was called Geer School.

Entrance to the main room was provided from two side-by-side entrances, one for girls and one for boys. They opened directly on to separate cloak rooms through which one had to pass to enter the school room. A large coal-wood furnace sat just inside the door surrounded by sheet metal. The children's desks were attached to the floor in rows with the smallest in the center for the beginners. Water was carried in a bucket from across the road. The woodshed and two outdoor toilets stood at the rear of the school.

Over the years, many improvements were made. A fire exit door was put in the east side of the building and a cement porch, steps and a sidewalk were built. The playground was paved and new play equipment added, and the yard was landscaped by donations from the community.

The new brick school averaged 35 students yearly between the ages of 7 and 21. The first music teacher was hired in 1945 with each family paying her one dollar per month for her services. During 1954, the 7th and 8th graders joined the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th graders at the Plymouth Schools as tuition students. In 1959, a petition was circulated to add a second room and hire a second teacher. Mr. Jerry Vetesse was contracted to build the addition and in September 1960, the new room was ready for the first class of beginners, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders.

In 1964, the Michigan State Legislature eliminated primary school districts and Geer became a part of Plymouth Schools. Since consolidation with Plymouth Canton Schools in 1965, the Geer community had stubbornly, consistently, repeatedly and successfully fought to keep the school open. At irregular intervals, Plymouth Canton Schools would consider closing Geer for budgetary reasons. Geer parents and supporters responded by volunteering their services for building maintenance and teachers aides.

However, in 1981-82, the school board maintained that Geer students could be integrated into existing classrooms in other schools. Geer School's last day, June 16, 1982, was commemorated by a final strawberry and ice cream social held outdoors for students, parents, school board members and administration.

GEER SCHOOL'S ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Good times were many at the red brick schoolhouse. It was the gathering place for the whole community. Quilts were quilted and then raffled, box socials were followed by dancing. Gifts were made and packed for the armed forces. A service flag was sewn. The first 4-H Club was organized here in 1949. Parent Teacher Organization meetings were always followed with bingo, bunco or euchre. Every fall, the school had a thanksgiving dinner in which the entire community participated.

On Sunday, September 21, 1980, the Geer Community celebrated the centennial of the little red schoolhouse by sponsoring an afternoon open house. Approximately 300 persons attended, among them were Geer descendants, former students and teachers and members of the community. In preparation for this day, the parents and teachers had installed an old fashioned bell and cupola. The current students and parents dressed in the fashion of the 1880's and some arrived on horseback or driving antique cars. The school bell was rung, the students sang and individuals read congratulatory messages. Refreshments were cake and ice cream.

In 1986, planning began to reopen Geer School. For over a century, it had served as the center of the rural community. The school building itself is a typical example of a one room design; many of these have been lost to deterioration or conversion to other uses.

A local committee has been working to raise money for the restoration of the school. Once restored, they hope to use Geer school as a unique school experience for 5th graders in the Plymouth Canton School District.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES

(section 2 of proposed ordinance)