

History of Perrinville School

By Cynthia David, former 4th grader teacher

Re-typed January 2020 for the Livonia Historical Commission

Perrinville Elementary School was located on Ann Arbor Trail at Farmington Road.

Prior to the formation of Wayne County, where the school is located, on its western side, the region was inhabited by various tribes, notably the early Mound Builders, the Chippewa, the Huron, the Iroquoian, the Ottawa, and the Sac and Fox. Around 1800, the flat southern and southwestern parts of the county were wet prairies and marshes, rich with beaver for trappers and hay for early farmers. Today, there are approximately two thousand homes in this area near the school.

In 1827, the territorial council enacted a law creating the present system of township government. Nankin Township was created on October 29, 1829, from part of the original township of Bucklin, and included what is now the City of Livonia.

This area consists of present-day Warren, Wayne, Joy, and Inkster Roads. It was first settled by farmers from New York state. They arrived in what was to be called Nankin Township in 1825. They travelled by the Erie Canal to Buffalo, and from there aboard a steamboat to Detroit. This was the first of May 1825. They proceeded westward, as they followed the Rouge River, to the village of Dearborn. Taking the west branch, they penetrated the forest by the aid of an Indian Trail, into the township of Nankin. This trail, known then as Ann Arbor Road, followed the Detroit River, and then went up by the bank of the main Rouge, and finally turned west along the Middle Rouge. The western part of this road is identical to the present-day Ann Arbor Trail. It is this road that carried pioneers from Detroit to Ann Arbor. These first settlers were Marcus Swift and his family.

No one actually knows how Nankin got its name. It is believed, however, to be named after the province in China, along with neighboring Canton Township. It was named by Bill Cooper. The area where the school stood was nick-named "Pike's Peak", after a settler's trip out west.

The first school in Nankin Township was located on Ann Arbor Trail and Inkster Road. Miss Pauline Fullerton taught there prior to 1830. The settlers along the Middle Rouge were dissatisfied with conditions at this school and built a frame structure, 18' x 24', at a hamlet called Swartzburg, near Ann Arbor Trail and Wayne Roads. Children came from two and three miles around. In the year 1832, when Miss Abby Goodspeed was the teacher, the school had to be closed for a time due to the Black Hawk War.

The Swartzburg school seems to have been too far away, for in 1834, a couple of years after the Black Hawk War, a school was reestablished in the northwest corner of Marcus

Swift's property. This was considered a Perrinsville School. At this time, this was the central part of today's Garden City. This school was not well classified. Except for reading and spelling, the instruction was individual. Writing paper was unruled and there were no pencils.

When free public education came to Nankin Township is uncertain. In 1845, a second school was in operation called East Nankin. It was located at Ford and Inkster Roads and was mainly for the Irish who were moving into the area. Around the era of the Civil War, the East Nankin School had long since passed the log cabin state. Baseball was becoming fashionable and a team known as the Mudhawks was formed. This team often played the Perrinsville team. These were still, of course, country schools but it should be pointed out that prior to the ninetieth century, the curriculum was by no means confined to the three R's. A little Latin and some algebra were taught in the eight grade.

"All of the citizens in the community were farmers and homes were framed with large, square timbers, clapboarded on the outside and lath and plastered on the inside."

Logs were taken to Perrinsville which was the shopping center for over fifty years. "It had two wagon shops, each employing a dozen men, a carding shop, a general store, a smithy, a post office, and of course a mill." This mill was run by Abraham Perrin, a founder of the village, and his brother, Isaac. The mill owner kept half of the lumber for his fee.

The grist mill for this scattered community was located at Pike's Peak, or Nankin Mills.

This mill is located across the street from the present day Perrinsville School and was built before the Civil War. Henry Ford caught frogs in the mill pond to take to Henry Ford Jr. Before being converted into a museum, however the mill was purchased by Henry Ford in the 1920's, and used as engraving plant and later, a tool and die factory. The factory served as a source of electricity for the area. Henry Ford became interested in the community when called upon to come out and service a broken threshing machine in the area. He had a reputation in the Dearborn area for being a good mechanic. This spread to Nankin Mills.

Henry Ford had a sincere interest in the tiny community and decided they should have their own school rather than the one located at Cowan and Warren Roads. This school located at Cowan and Warren was called Perrinsville.

In 1937, Henry Ford had the original school which stood on the corner of Ann Arbor Trail and Farmington built. In September of 1938, it was dedicated by Henry Ford himself. The school was called Nankin Mills School and patterned after Perrinsville School.

Henry Ford paid all the taxes on the building. There was no school tax in that area until 1946 when the building was sold for one dollar to the newly formed Nankin Mills School District. Henry Ford also paid all major dental and medical bills of those who attended the school. He also paid the teachers' salaries. A majority of these students' fathers were employed at Ford's factory.

The school accommodated grades one through nine. Ford also furnished sewing machines for the girls' sewing class and cooking equipment. In the basement of the school was a workshop and machinery for the boys. An art teacher came once a week. Ford also employed a full-time janitor. Dances were held in the basement every Friday afternoon to teach dancing and etiquette.

World War II gave Nankin its biggest building boom up to that time. And, with it, came sewers and water, paved streets and lighting, and all types of community improvements.

In 1957, ground was broken for a new Nankin Mills School to be located at Ann Arbor Trail and Hubbard, about half a mile from the old school. Classes continued, however, at the old building. Two houses, located at Joy and Hubbard, also served as classrooms. These were called cottage schools and operated until the new Nankin Mills building was complete in 1958.

In 1958, Henry Ford's Nankin Mills School was converted into a Board of Education building for Nankin Mill School District. However, because of the rapidly expanding community, it reopened in late 1959 with an addition and was, once again, used for a school building. This time, it reopened under a new name, Perrinville. The "s" had been left out of Perrinsville by error.