

ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS OF NORTHAMPTON

This article is based on the book, *A History of Northampton Township*, written by Virginia 'Ginny' Briggs Geyer. After moving into the township in 1964, Ginny became interested in preserving and celebrating Northampton Township's history and began what would be a lifelong passion for historical research and writing. Ginny was an active public servant, serving on the board of many Northampton historical groups for decades. She was a member of the 1972 Committee for the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Founding of Northampton Township, as well as a founding member of Northampton Township Historical Society and the Northampton Township Historical Commission.

Besides researching and writing *A History of Northampton Township* in 1972, Ginny also researched all the original land grants and patents from William Penn until the year 1800 in Northampton Township, publishing a map. In 1985, she was on the Northampton Township Historical Study Commission, which published, *The Winds of Change: A Pictorial History of Northampton Township*. Ginny passed away on January 11, 2016 leaving Northampton Township a legacy of invaluable historical records that represent decades of research, and the Northampton Township Historical Commission wants to take this time to honor her memory.



Forest Grove School, Class of Circa 1900.



Jacksonville School, Class of 1903.



Pleasant Plains School, Class of 1906. Teacher Ella Bennett.



Rocksville School, Circa 1910.

The earliest settlers of Northampton were mainly farmers that faced many hardships upon their arrival. Trees needed to be felled and crops planted; houses and barns built; animals cared for; crops picked, processed and preserved; and cloth woven and sewn. While they might have brought with them a high value for education, these pioneers required the labor of their children to make their farms succeed. These children would have received their education at home as time allowed. As populations increased and communities became more settled, churches were established and with them schools.

Early schooling in the Province of Pennsylvania was entrusted to religious and private organizations. In 1776, a law was enacted requiring that a school be located within each town. There was a paid teacher, and families were charged for each student. In 1790, a law was passed for the education of the poor without a fee. Early Northampton Township "School Bills," dating to the period from 1806 to 1828, indicate that the County covered the costs of the teachers for students unable to pay for lessons. In the winter the fee was 4 cents per day per student, and in summer it was 3 cents per day. This included "quills and ink."

Each semester lasted only a few months; quite often the school session was two months in the winter, taught by a man, and two months in the summer, taught by a woman. Children generally walked several miles to school. Most boys attended the winter session, then worked in the fields during the summer. The younger children and older girls attended school in the summer, helping with food preserving at home in the fall and sewing and weaving in the winter. They learned the 3Rs, including enough arithmetic to keep farm accounts and make change in the shops. It became increasingly important to be able to read. Church bulletins and newspapers become available, so one could keep abreast of the news and letters kept one connected to family and friends from elsewhere.

The first recorded property for a school in Northampton Township was in 1737. Robert Heaton, a miller by trade, sold for 10 shillings a 40 foot square tract of land fronting on the road "leading from the Falls to Philadelphia [present-day Bridgetown Pike] . . . for the convenience and to the intent that a meeting house for public worship and a school house for the education of the youth may be both erected." The school was built, but no further records of the meeting house were found. The schoolhouse known as the **Pleasantville School**, which now stands on this Bridgetown Pike property (present 5 Bridgetown Pike), was probably built in 1850, replacing the earlier school. The school closed in the early 1920s and the property was sold in 1924. As was the case with many of the township's one-room schools, it was later converted to a private residence.