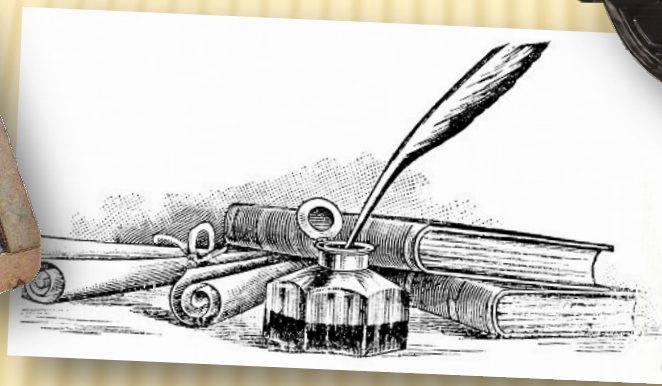


BIRMINGHAM'S FIRST SCHOOLS



A Passion for Education

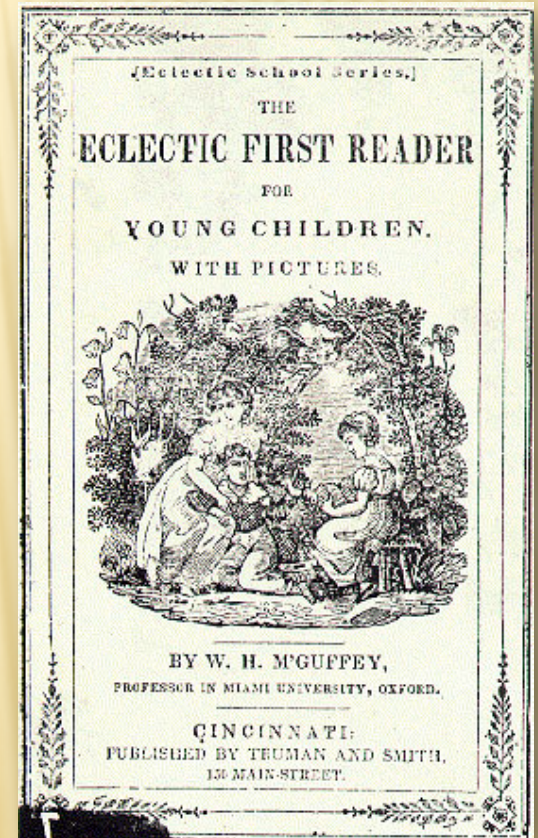
BIRMINGHAM'S PIONEERS & EDUCATION



A parade float in 1976 celebrated Birmingham's bicentennial with a log cabin and pioneers. (Image, Birmingham Museum Collection)

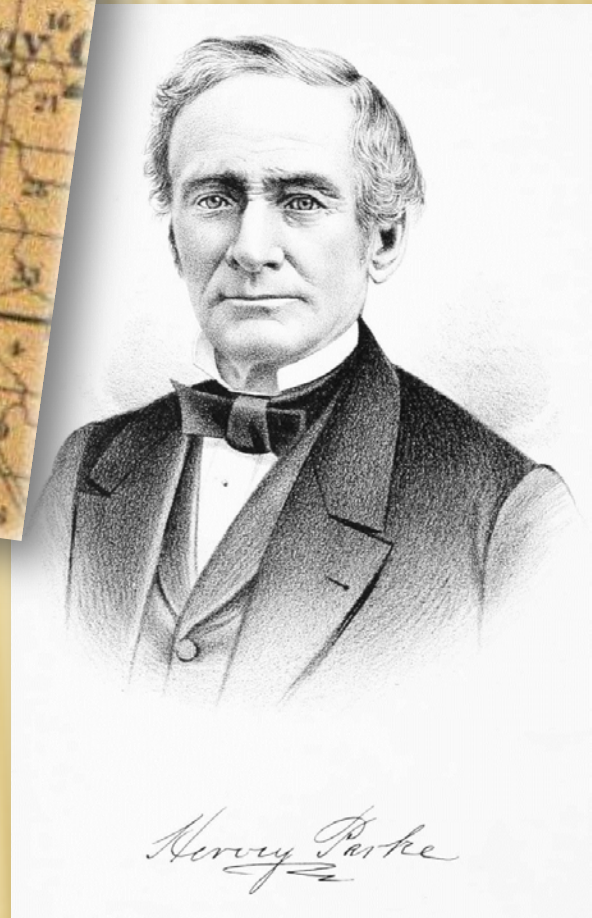
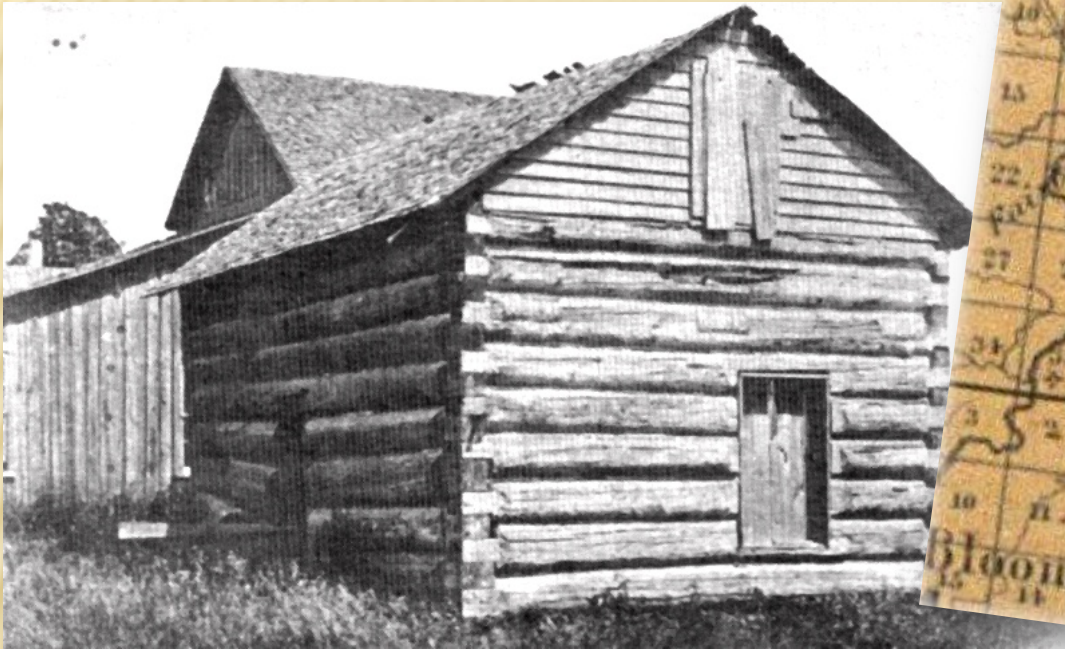
The earliest settlers in Oakland County were mostly from New York, Pennsylvania, and other eastern states. Though often from well-educated families, they often were not themselves very well-off. Coming to the Michigan territory in the 1820s gave them new opportunities to farm the land and start businesses.

Bringing their young families with them, one of the pioneers' first priorities after clearing the land and providing food was education. Settlers' children in a given area would gather together in a barn or other structure, share books, and begin rudimentary lessons. As soon as they could afford it, locals would pool funds to pay the meager salary of the frontier schoolteacher—room and board with a small stipend.



McGuffey Readers such as this were produced beginning in the 1830s and were immensely popular for early American education. (Image courtesy Wikipedia Commons)

LOG CABIN SCHOOLS

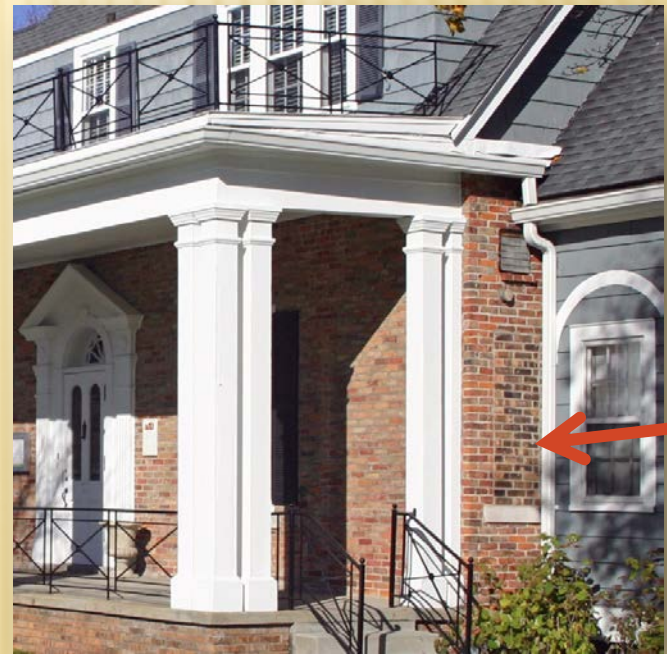
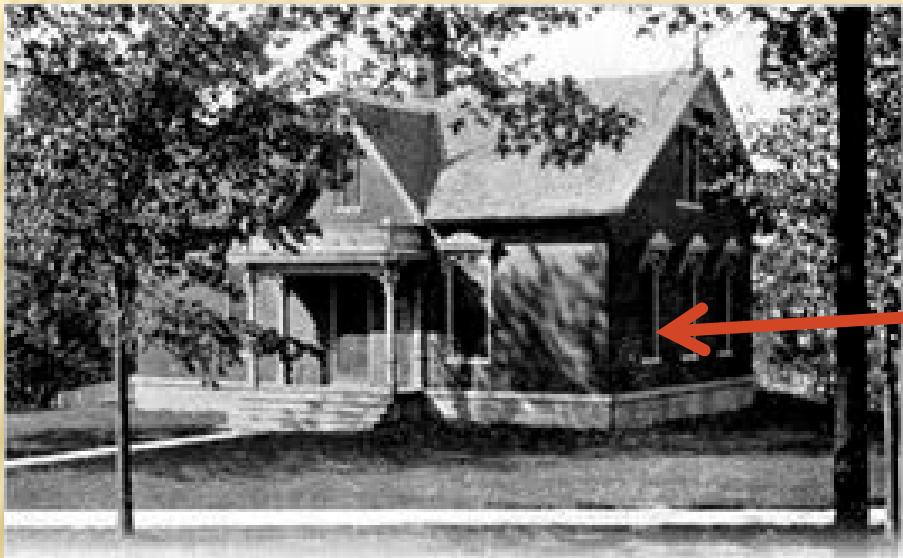


This simple log building was built in a manner similar to that used by Birmingham's first settlers. After becoming established, pioneers often built frame houses, but continued to use the sturdy log structures for various purposes. In Birmingham, the first schooling took place in log cabins on both **Ziba Swan's** land (near Quarton and Woodward) and on **John Hamilton's** land (abutting Woodward at Hamilton in downtown Birmingham).

Settlers valued education, although no public school system yet existed. While in a city, students would pay tuition, in the wilderness it was common to provide firewood in lieu of payment. The first teacher at Hamilton's school was **Hervey Parke**, who took the job in 1820-21 while waiting for the go-ahead to start surveying Oakland County, then part of the vast wilderness of territorial Michigan. Teachers commonly worked in exchange for room and board.

(Image of Montcalm County log cabin, www.migenweb.org/montcalm/photoalbum.html ; Image of Captain Hervey C. Parke, courtesy Findagrave.com.)

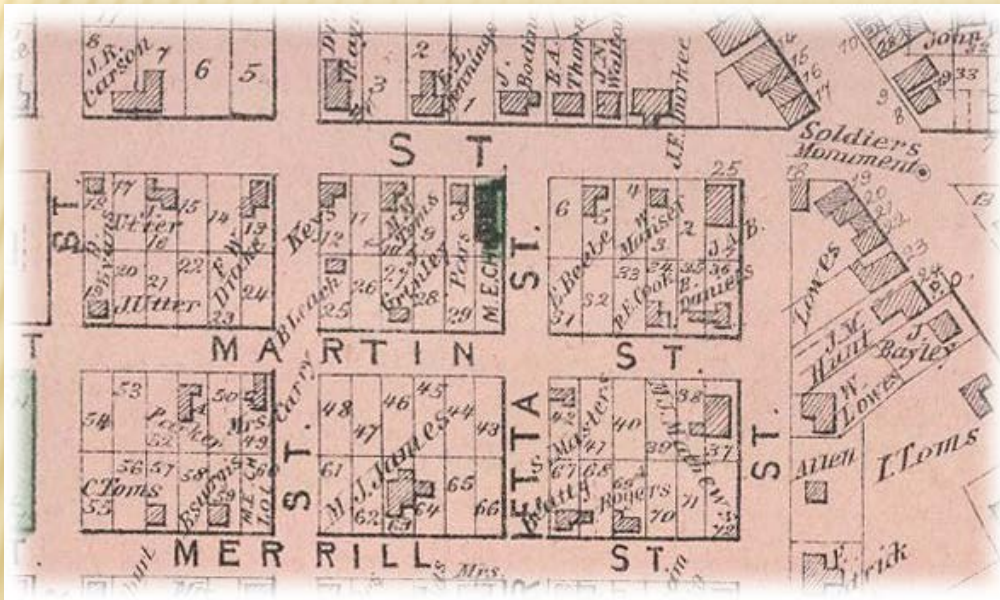
THE FIRST BIRMINGHAM BRICK SCHOOLHOUSE



Elijah Willits sold an acre of land to Fractional School District #1 of Troy and Bloomfield Townships, and a schoolhouse of local brick was built in 1856. It provided tuition-free education for lower grades. Student attendance was optional. Often called “the ‘Little’ or ‘Old’ Red Schoolhouse,” it was a comfortable building in what was then the current Gothic style. It operated for twelve years, and one of its later teachers was Birmingham’s **Martha Baldwin**.

When **Harry and Marion Allen** built the Allen House (now the Birmingham Museum) in 1928, the building was still standing. They tried to reuse it as part of their new house, but were only able to save a part of the wall. If you look carefully at the brick front of the Allen House at the east end of the large porch, you can make out the outlines of the school’s window openings that were bricked in for the new house, with the stone window sill still there. *Photos, Birmingham Museum.*

EARLY SECONDARY EDUCATION



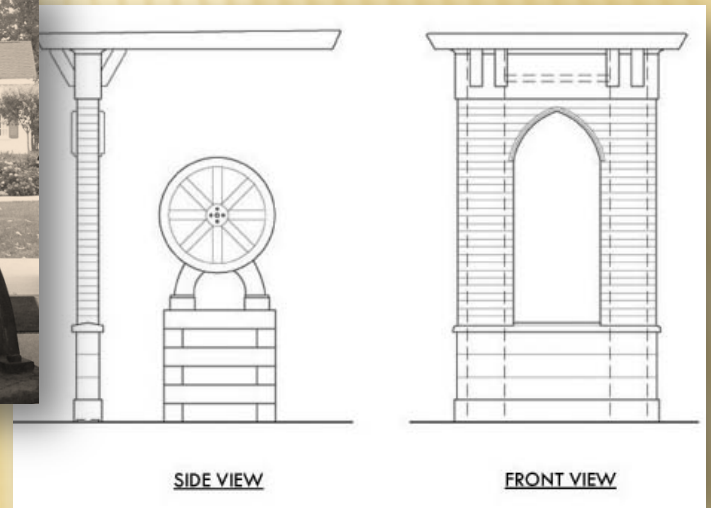
The Academy provided private secondary education to Birmingham students on the upper floor of a frame building owned by **Roswell T. Merrill** at Mill (Maple) and Pierce Streets. **Reverend Samuel Hill** taught class to older students who paid a fee. At the time, there was no compulsory education requirement in the State of Michigan. The only way for secondary students to pursue their education after the Red Schoolhouse was to find private schooling. When the Academy building burned in 1867, the community pushed to get a new, larger school built to serve all ages. This led to the building of the Union School (later Hill School).

One of the locally famous students who attended the Academy was **Martha Baldwin**, who went on to become a teacher and principal herself. (1872 Beers map of Birmingham and c1871 image of Martha Baldwin, Birmingham Museum Collection.)

THE UNION (HILL) SCHOOL



Built at a cost of \$14,000 in 1869, the Union School was designed to accommodate primary and secondary students. The incorporation of the Village in 1864 allowed for the raising of tax revenue to build it. It stood at the corner of Chester and Merrill and served Birmingham and the surrounding communities well for many years.



A large bell was cast in 1902 and placed in a cupola (bell tower) atop the building to call the students to class and dismiss them, becoming a part of every school day for all students and faculty. But by 1912, the burgeoning population of Birmingham led to the need for a separate elementary school, and Barnum Elementary was built. After that, the Hill School was used only as a high school until 1917, when it became an elementary. The bronze bell was saved and has been reinstalled in its own special site at the museum. The outdoor structure was designed to suggest the original cupola.

THE BARNUM SCHOOL

In 1912, the increasing number of Birmingham's elementary students required a new building. The Barnum school was built at Frank and Purdy Streets, and Hill School was used for 7th-12th grades.

By 1942, Barnum became the junior high. The building became disused, changed hands, and was demolished in 2008. In its place is Barnum Park, which has the original school entry portal retained as a memorial.



A valuable part of architectural history was saved when this Flint Faience & Tile Company 1929 Storybook Tile Fireplace surround was rescued from the Barnum school demolition. It was installed as a permanent exhibit at the Birmingham Museum in 2012.

BALDWIN HIGH SCHOOL

The cornerstone of Baldwin High School was laid in 1916. The school opened in 1918. The venerable **Martha Baldwin** provided the means to build the school in her will (and dictated its name). It was located at Maple and Chester, where the current Chester Street parking deck is located.



Birmingham High School's Valedictorian for 1916 was Edna Taylor.
Birmingham Museum Collection.

The more things change, the more they stay the same...Baldwin High was sometimes called **Birmingham High School**, taking on that name because the **Hill School** had closed in 1917 (which was also known as Birmingham High) Baldwin High became an elementary school in 1952 when the new high school was built. First called Birmingham High School, it was then re-named **Seaholm High**. In 1974, Baldwin closed and the building was demolished. (Post card photo of Baldwin High School, c 1920s, Birmingham Museum Collection.)



BRIEF TIMELINE OF BIRMINGHAM SCHOOLS

Log cabin schools

Hamilton's land in downtown Birmingham; Swan's land at Woodward & Quarton

The Academy

was located at Pierce and Maple. The school closed in 1867 when the building burned to the ground.

Barnum School

built in 1912/13 at Frank and Purdy. In 1942, Barnum became the junior high. The school was demolished in 2008.

Seaholm High School

built in 1952 at Lincoln and Cranbrook. It was first known as **Birmingham High School**, but the name changed to Seaholm after Groves was built.

Dates when other schools were built or added to the school district

- Adams - 1921
- Pierce - 1924
- Quarton - 1928
- Franklin - 1945
- Bloomfield Village - 1946 (torn down in 1976)
- Walnut Lake - 1947
- Torrey - 1950
- Greenfield, Harlan, Meadow Lake, Midvale, Pembroke (1950s)
- Valley Woods - 1957 (torn down in 1975)
- Derby - 1958
- Beverly - 1962
- Westchester - 1962
- Berkshire Junior High - 1963
- Derby - 1976

1820s-
1850s

1856

1867, 1869

1912-13

1916-18

1952

1959

Red School house

built at Maple at Southfield of local red brick on a parcel from Elijah Willits' land

Union School/ Hill School

built Later renamed after Rev. Hill. was the administration building. It was demolished in 1969/1970. The site is currently home to the Baldwin House facility.

Baldwin High School

was built at Maple and Chester, the site of the current Chester Street parking deck. When Seaholm High was built, Baldwin became an elementary school. It closed in 1972/73 and was demolished in 1974.

Groves High School

built in 1959. It is located at 13 Mile and Evergreen. As the younger of the two high schools, it maintains a friendly rivalry.