

## **Seymour Smith and His Legacy**

A Brief History of the Pine Plains Schools  
Pine Plains, New York

Commemorative Booklet on the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Pine Plains Central School Building

“Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.”

*Marian Wright Edelman (1939-) American activist for the rights of children*

Dyan Wapnick  
May 2012

Who was Seymour Smith, and what made an ordinary farmer decide to leave his entire estate to a town he had not lived in for most of his adult life, for the purpose of establishing a school there?

Seymour Smith was one of twelve children, possibly the youngest, born to Peter Smith and the former Sarah Winans. His great-great grandfather Henry Smith had come from England about 1638 and in 1672 his great-grandfather David was one of “27 Proprietors” of Horse Neck, now Greenwich, Connecticut. Peter Smith and James Winans, Sarah’s father, left Horse Neck with their families and others in the mid-1700’s and settled in the Stanford/Pine Plains area. While James Winans was the first of that name in this locality, the Smith name was already established in Pine Plains, but Peter Smith was no relation to others here of that name. Seymour Smith was born here on August 7, 1779.

We don’t know very much about Seymour Smith’s early life. We assume he had some early formal schooling and that he helped out on the family farm as a child during the summer when he wasn’t in school, because that was typical for children of that time. According to Isaac Hunting who wrote a definitive history of Pine Plains in 1897, Seymour attended a district school and then finished his education in Poughkeepsie. Although small rural schools had existed for many years in Pine Plains, the district school system was established when the New York State Legislature passed the Act for the Encouragement of Schools on April 9, 1795. This would have been when Seymour was fifteen. Since the district schools only went up to age fifteen and Pine Plains did not have a secondary-level school then, it makes sense that Seymour had to go elsewhere if he wanted to continue his education.

The next thing we know about Seymour Smith is that he raised a company of volunteers in the War of 1812 for a year’s service, and was stationed on Staten Island. After the war, he returned to Pine Plains and leased a farm where he specialized in growing barley and wheat. After this lease expired he purchased a farm on the border of Germantown and Clermont, the first and only home he ever owned. According to Hunting, he gained a reputation for producing the best in everything he tried his hand at, winning more top prizes than any other exhibitor at the area agricultural societies. A portrait of a man who strived for excellence emerges; in fact, his motto was “Excelsior”.

Seymour tried his hand at sericulture, or silk farming, which is the rearing of silkworms for the production of raw silk. He was perhaps the only man in the region to do so. Whether he did this for speculation or as a hobby, we just don’t know. Besides farming, Seymour was the owner of a Hudson River boat landing in

Germantown, which he turned into a thriving business. He was also a Justice of the Peace in Clermont and the Clermont town supervisor from 1845 - 1846.

Seymour seems to have been a bit of an eccentric, however. The story goes that he would invite friends over to his barn, where he would lie in his open coffin and ask them to tell him how grand his funeral would be.

On November 26, 1863, Seymour passed away on his farm aged 84 years, a lifelong bachelor, and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Pine Plains in his parents' plot. A woman named Charlotte Finch, who died in 1857 aged 70 years, is buried in the same plot. We know from the 1850 federal census record that she was living in Seymour Smith's household at that time, and her epitaph on the grave monument speaks of her excelling in "domestic usefulness [sic]" so we would presume she was a live-in housekeeper. The Finches were another family that had come to Pine Plains from Horse Neck with the Winans and the Smiths, so it is probable that she and Seymour had known each other since childhood.

Seymour's will, dated March 12, 1861, states in part: "I bequeath my entire estate to the town of Pine Plains for the especial purpose of aiding said town in establishing an academy for the promotion of science and useful knowledge".

To understand Seymour Smith better, it may be helpful to explain a little about New York's education system during this time period. Although free public schools had been around under Dutch rule, the English abolished the Dutch system once they took over, and except for a few futile attempts to reinstate a free public school system it remained an elusive goal of education reform well into the nineteenth century. The responsibility of education largely fell upon the local communities. Church Sunday schools were very important in filling this role. Parochial schools funded by student tuition were also common, although some offered free education to children unable to pay; in the hamlet of Bethel in Pine Plains there was even a Quaker boarding school in the early 1800's. School was not compulsory and attendance was sporadic. Many children were taught by their parents at home, while the rich could afford to send their children to private schools or hire tutors. A teacher's salary was paid directly by the student's family, and sometimes this payment took the form of food or wood for the school fireplace in winter instead of money. There were no minimal educational requirements for teachers or curriculum standards. There were no high schools as we know them. Seymour Smith was largely a product of this system.

In 1784, the New York State Legislature created the Regents of The University of the State of New York, which is the oldest, continuous state education entity in America. The 1795 Act for the Encouragement of Schools was the first attempt by the state, upon the recommendation of the Board of Regents,

to establish a common (i.e. universally available), tax-supported, secular school system at the elementary level, the precursor to New York's public school system. Its stated purpose was for "encouraging and maintaining schools in the several cities and towns in this State, in which the children of the inhabitants residing in the State shall be instructed in the English language, or be taught English grammar, arithmetic, mathematics, and such other branches of knowledge as are most useful and necessary to complete a good English education." An "English" education was another term for a broad, practical course of study. The law called for \$50,000 to be annually appropriated for five years to the counties, first according to their representation in the Legislature and later according to the number of assemblymen, to the towns according to taxable population, and to the school districts according to the number of days' instruction, and a board of supervisors of each county, in turn, was required to raise by tax on each town an amount equal to half of that apportioned by the state. This money was to be applied by the school district towards the employment of properly qualified teachers. However, the purpose of the law, as its name indicated, was to *encourage* the establishment of school districts, not to force communities to comply.

For a short time, these district schools offered a free public education up to the age of fifteen. Most were housed in one-room structures and were ungraded. Although well-intentioned, this system could not financially sustain itself and it failed. The law was allowed to expire in 1800, and several attempts by the state to jump-start it over the next few years went nowhere. Without state funding, the local communities and the students themselves had to pick up the slack, as they had before.

The next major reform was the Common School Act of 1812. A significant difference between this and the 1795 law was that funding was to be supplemented by student tuition in the form of "rate bills" if the cost of instruction exceeded the total of what was collected in local tax plus the state aid. At first local authorities were only given the authority to establish common school districts, but an 1814 amendment to this law *required* them to do so, making it a mandatory system. According to the New York State Education Department, this law firmly established that common schools were "under state control, that funding was a joint state-local responsibility, and that the school districts were the primary administrative units, not the county or the town."

While this was a step in the right direction, the goal of reformers continued to be to come up with a viable state-wide system that provided elementary education totally financed by public funds. There were disagreements over the best way to accomplish this, as well as ongoing resistance from local communities who resented what they saw as the state's interference in their own affairs.

While the first half of the nineteenth century was marked by changes and reform in the area of primary level education, little had been done by the state in providing secondary education, as the common schools ended at age fifteen or the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, hence the term “eighth grade education”. Most boys left school then to work on the family farm or in the family business, or possibly apprentice in a trade; most girls married and took care of the home and children. There were private high schools for young men who wished to continue with their education, and who could afford to. These institutions, usually called academies or seminaries, offered a classical curriculum geared towards preparing boys for college. They charged tuition and were rarely found outside of larger cities. Most accepted non-locals by providing room and board as part of their total fee. The Regents monitored these schools and provided them modest amounts of aid from the state’s Literature Fund which had been created for this purpose. There were also small select schools here and there. One such school was run by Miss Sarah Allerton, the daughter of the local doctor, out of her home in Pine Plains for a few years until her death in 1859.

It wouldn’t be until the state constitution of 1894 was adopted that a free primary and secondary education was guaranteed to every child in New York.

After Seymour Smith aged out of the district school in 1795, Isaac Huntting says that he “finished his education by a short term in a Poughkeepsie school.” We can make several assumptions based on this statement. First, Seymour Smith was not entirely bereft of resources: private school, then as now, was very costly, and this was particularly true for boarding students. Second, he must have been a good student, or he would not have continued his education; his later reputation as a farmer would seem to corroborate this. Third, if he “finished” his education at this school in Poughkeepsie, he did not go on to college, and the fact that Huntting refers to it being a “short term” and does not bother to name the school Seymour attended seems to imply that Seymour did not even graduate from here.

The only secondary school in Poughkeepsie at that time was the Dutchess County Academy. The first academy in the county, wealthy boys came here from all over. Founded in Fishkill in 1769, the school was moved to Poughkeepsie in 1791. It stood at the southwest corner of what are now Academy Street (named for the school) and Cannon Street until 1836, when it was again moved. Although the school charged for admission, it was partly supported by taxation and was under the supervision of the Board of Regents.

Here is what the Family Magazine of 1840 says about the Dutchess County Academy: “All the branches taught in the higher seminaries of learning, including the classics and the various sciences, form the course of study in this institution. In order that all the teaching may be practical and thorough, the Trustees have furnished a good Chymical [sic], Mechanical, Mathematical, and Philosophical apparatus, and provision is made for a Library. The Academy has ample arrangements for the accommodation of boarders, and the moral government of the institution is such as to make the parents well assured that their children are there receiving instruction in sound ethics as well as letters. The expenses for boarding scholars, including books, (except in the modern languages and drawing) are ninety dollars per term.... The Academic year consists of two terms of twenty-three weeks each, commencing respectively on the first Wednesday of May and November.”

Since the private secondary schools in those days functioned primarily as college preparatory institutions, it seems logical to assume that Seymour Smith planned to go to college. What may have happened to change his plans? While we don't know what the Dutchess County Academy cost in 1795, we know that in 1840 the cost was \$90 per term, which when adjusted for inflation would be over \$1900 today. This was long before there was such a thing as student loans, leaving little recourse for someone who did not have sufficient wealth of his own to further his education. It is conceivable that attending the academy became unaffordable for Seymour after only “a short term”, and whatever hopes he had for a career outside of farming came to an abrupt end.

In 1853 New York passed the Union Free School Act. This law allowed for one or more common school districts to consolidate for the purpose of organizing tax-supported public schools. The resulting school districts, called union free districts, could include an academic department for secondary level instruction. The original purpose of these union free high schools, however, was to allow children to extend and enrich their common school education, not for college preparation as the private academies were, although later on they did offer a college preparatory curriculum.

In 1864, rate bills were abolished in the union free districts, making the high schools truly free, at least for those within the district. Since the private academies could not compete with free high schools, most soon merged with the union districts or simply closed down. It is not known if Seymour Smith was aware of any of these promising developments in the state's education system as he considered his bequest.

It was at this time that Pine Plains, without any secondary school, found itself the recipient of Seymour Smith's generosity. An act of the state legislature authorized the town to accept the money to build a school. The original bequest was six thousand dollars, which would be worth about \$105,000 in today's money. So we know that Seymour Smith was comfortably well-off in his later life. As this was not totally sufficient to build and equip a school, the money was invested for thirteen years to accumulate interest.

The Seymour Smith Institute was incorporated in 1874 under the auspices of the Board of Regents. The following 12 men were elected to the Board of Trustees: Walter W. Husted, Frank Eno, Jonas Knickerbocker, Phoenix Deuel, John A. Herrick, William S. Eno, Henry Myers, John A. Thompson, Harmon W. Pulver, John Righter, Leander Smith, and Ury Hicks. Walter W. Husted was president of the board, Frank Eno, secretary, and John A. Thompson, treasurer. Frank Eno, a local lawyer from a prominent Pine Plains family, would serve on the school boards until centralization in 1931, for a total of 56 years.

In 1877 the school building was erected about where the bus driveway on the north side of Seymour Smith Intermediate Learning Center is today. Hezekiah Andrews of Hillsdale was the carpenter. Isaac Hunting describes it as follows: "The building is of wood, forty by sixty eight, two stories and a mansard, resting on a high basement wall of brick, making in all four stories, tastefully trimmed with mouldings [sic], scrolls, and brackets, is warmed throughout with steam, and has hot and cold water on every floor. All the rooms are commodious and pleasant and well arranged for the purposes designed. Forty boarding pupils can be accommodated."



Seymour Smith Academy, 1908

The Institute opened on May 8, 1879. Although often called Seymour Smith Academy, that school would actually come about later. The principal was The Rev. Abraham Mattice, A.M., from Fort Plain, Montgomery County, New York, where he had been the principal of the Fort Plain Seminary. Since the student body was co-educational, there was also a preceptress in the person of a Mrs. Smeallie. Together with about twenty pupils that Rev. Mattice brought with him, there were around fifty pupils including his own children, and by the end of May the total enrollment had increased to fifty-eight, which remained about the average enrollment per year over the next seventeen years. There were five teachers the first year, including the principal and the preceptress.

The Institute's ideal of a true education was "the systematic development of the whole being --- physical, mental, moral and spiritual." The school was conducted on Christian (although non-sectarian) principles, and chapel exercises were held both morning and evening daily, which pupils were required to attend.

While many leading families of Dutchess and Columbia Counties sent their children here, others came from a considerable distance, even from Charleston, South Carolina. One might ask, why? In fact, the school gained a reputation for academic excellence: Rutgers College (now Rutgers University) in New Brunswick, New Jersey, accepted graduates of the Institute "without examination". The Institute promoted the natural beauty of the town and the remarkably healthy climate, "free from every form of malarial disease." It also touted the advantages of its location, "far removed from the temptations incident to large towns and cities."

A Regents diploma was awarded to students who completed a three-year course of academic study. While a traditional classical curriculum which included Latin and Greek was offered, the Institute also provided an English curriculum. Business courses like Bookkeeping and Commercial Arithmetic were also available. So, the curriculum was not strictly college preparatory, as had been the case with earlier academies. A separate Musical Department seems to have been very popular, and Hunting says some years upwards of forty pupils were enrolled, requiring the use of five pianos.

According to the student handbook, boarding students were required to furnish the following: two sheets, two pairs of pillow slips, one blanket and quilt, one silver fork and spoon, towels, napkins, toilet articles, and lamp. It was taken for granted that each pupil would also bring a Bible, overshoes, and umbrella.

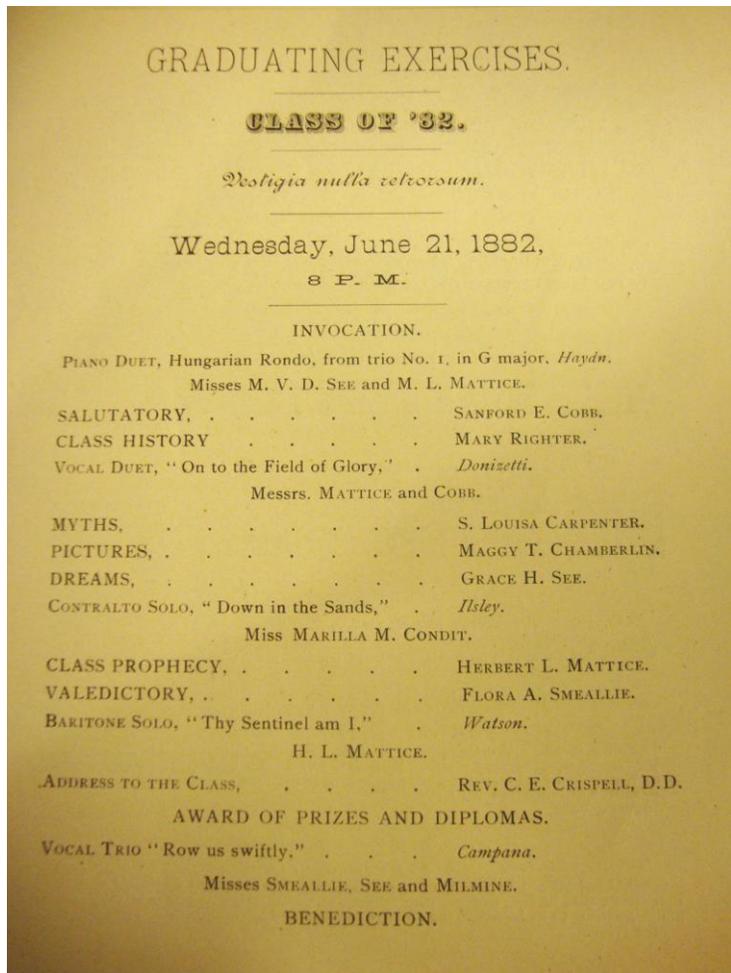
In its first year, the cost of room and board plus tuition was \$275.00 per year, which would be over \$6000 today. This did not include nominal costs like pew rental, library fee, and "extra washing". Day pupils paid different fees depending upon their course of study, the academic course being the most expensive at \$18.00 per term, around \$400 today. There were three thirteen-week terms per

year. While this may not seem to be very affordable, to keep things in perspective it should be pointed out that The Hotchkiss School, a private boarding school founded in 1891 in nearby Lakeville, Connecticut to prepare young men for Yale, charged \$600.00 for tuition and board, or over \$14,000 today!

The first commencement exercises were held July 2, 1879 at the Methodist Church with eight graduates. Hunting reports that the church was crowded and that it was a new and interesting experience for the people of Pine Plains. The graduating class motto was, "We tend toward the Beautiful and the True."



**Graduating Class of 1882**  
 Front row (l-r): Maggy Chamberlain, Flora A. Smeallie, Grace See, Sanford Cobb.  
 Back Row (l-r): Mary Righter, Louisa Carpenter, Herbert Mattice.



Program from 1882 Commencement

The days of the academies were coming to an end, however, as the free high schools gradually replaced them. With its enrollments dwindling, after only seventeen years on March 1, 1896, Seymour Smith Institute closed its doors.

So, why *did* Seymour Smith leave his estate to Pine Plains for establishing a school? It would seem on the face of it that, in the absence of children or next of kin, he wanted to give something back to the town where he had spent his youth, and as pointed out, the children in rural communities like Pine Plains had less access to higher education. But Seymour's personal experience may have been the driving force behind the specific nature of his bequest. Although he became a successful farmer, it seems likely he always regretted not being able to continue his education and wanted to give the children of Pine Plains an opportunity that he himself had missed. This is pretty much the conclusion that historian James Hadden Smith came to, who says in his 1882 history of Dutchess County, "The advantages for an education were limited then. There were fewer authors and books than now, and it is a reasonable presumption that the difficulty and lack in this regard produced on the mind of Seymour an impression never to be effaced, and had some influence in determining the munificent bequest to his native town."

What, then, can be said about Seymour Smith's legacy to Pine Plains? Did the school that bore his name really make a difference? While we don't know whether Seymour would have approved of every detail of how his bequest was carried out, and the academies' days were already numbered before the school had even opened, the fact remains that the Institute was highly regarded and unique for a rural community at the time, and this would have certainly pleased him. According to Huntting, during the Institute's seventeen year existence a total of 1002 pupils had walked through its doors, with 82, or 8%, of those graduating, an average of five graduates per year. The largest graduating class was in 1889 with ten, and the least in 1894 with none. Huntting tells us that twenty-five or more were prepared for college during those seventeen years; of those alumni still living at the time of his writing, six were clergymen, six were physicians, and three were lawyers. An unknown but significant number became teachers. Data that we have from one year tells us that the number of students who attended from Pine Plains was nearly half the total number enrolled. These young men and women may not have had this opportunity if the Seymour Smith Institute had never existed. Perhaps Huntting said it best when he wrote, "its influence as an educator has been and is far-reaching and incalculable."

## Afterword

When the Institute closed in 1896, the district school located in the hamlet of Pine Plains, needing more space, leased the vacated academy building from the town for a term of 99 years and the nominal sum of \$1.00. The building was remodeled and the school moved in and was ready for classes by September. Around this time it was taken over by the Board of Regents and became a union free school. In 1899 an academic department was added and the school was certified as a high school, and a training class to prepare students for teaching in New York's common schools was also incorporated.

The first principal of the Pine Plains Union Free School was Dr. J. H. Forrester, who boarded at the school. Its official name became Seymour Smith Academy; the high school level by itself was called Pine Plains High School. The ground floor housed first through eighth grades. The high school, which was four years (as in those days high school was not graded), was on the second and part of the third floor. The teacher training class was on the third floor. It should be noted that the union free school did not immediately replace all of the district schools in the town of Pine Plains, and many children continued to attend their local "one room" schoolhouses (also called "rural" schools) through eighth grade for much of the first half of the twentieth century, some even after centralization in 1931.

According to Huntting, non-resident children (i.e. from outside of the union free school district) were able to obtain board at reasonable rates. However, the majority of students were local or able to commute. Students who commuted could drive, that is by *horse*, and were provided with free stabling accommodations; a rack for bicycles was also available. The school was also accessible from the north and east by train service of the Central New England Railroad, which began service in 1898, and quite a few students came from Ancram by this means. Tuition for non-residents was \$10.00 per year if they lived in the town of Pine Plains and \$20.00 per year if they lived outside the town. These rates were applicable at all levels. Instruction for district pupils was free. Later, the tuition fees for non-residents were dropped. We don't know if or when the school became a day school only, but the student handbooks of the late 1920's do not mention boarding except to say that the students in the teacher training class could board with families in the community.

The curriculum in the lower graded school included Reading, Writing, Spelling, Geography, Arithmetic, Elementary English, and Elementary United States History with Civics. Pupils who successfully completed the graded school were given a certificate issued by the University of the State of New York and allowed to advance to the high school. Since many children left school after the eighth grade, particular attention was paid toward making the graded curriculum as comprehensive as possible.



### 1920 - Miss Agnes Patchin's Room

l-r

Row 1: Rose Young, Margaret Hewitt, unknown, Nanette Peppe, Rhoda Menkler, Gladys Rifenburg, Augusta Morgan.

Row 2: Arnold Hart, unknown, unknown, Anna Frenzel, Elvina Thurst, Frederica Mowris.

Row 3: Cornelia Merchant, unknown, Earle Perkins, unknown, \_\_\_ Gregory, Edward Sadler, Russell Murphy.

Row 4: unknown, unknown, Mildred Wilson, Jennie Coons, Alice Miller, Mary Frazer.

Row 5: Marjorie Thompson, Laura Brandt, unknown, Lessel Kilmer, George Frenzel, Harold Brandt, Frederick Jordan?

The high school curriculum was similar to the one at the former Institute, and included the various mathematical and natural sciences, Latin, French, as well as English and History. New offerings were Music, Shop and Agriculture, Physical Education, and Home Economics; the academy was the only school in the county at that time giving a vocational agriculture course. Pupils could elect what subjects they wanted in order to pursue either a college preparatory or a practical course of study, upon successful completion of which they would be awarded either a Regents Classical Academic Diploma or a Regents Academic Diploma, respectively. Civics was required for both courses of study.

Students needed a high school diploma to enroll in the 1-year teacher training class, and then they needed to teach for two years in a rural school before they were eligible to teach at a graded school like the academy. The training class program ended after 1930 with the closing of the school.



**Teacher Training Class  
1909**

Jennie L. Andrus  
 Anna Bloss  
 John H. Cotter  
 Hannah M. Cummings  
 Lizzie W. Holsapple  
 Angie S. Keefer  
 Elizabeth Martin  
 Elizabeth E. Merrifield  
 Carrie E. Miller  
 Lloyd E. Moore  
 Georgina E. Reynolds  
 Alvina Shelley  
 Jessie M. Stickle  
 Nina M. Strever  
 M. Rebecca Tripp  
 Edith W. Vanderburg  
 Eva Vosburgh  
 Adelina B. Weaver

As listed in school syllabus and  
 announcement of 1925 - 1926.



**Boys' Basketball Team 1928-29**

Champions Eastern Section  
 Dutchess County League

Front Row (l-r): Harold Rosencrans; Harold Hamilton, Captain; Frederick "Fritz" Jordan.  
 Back Row (l-r): Vincent Wright; E.J. Alvut, Coach; Archie Roche.

It is during this period that we see more of what we associate with the public schools of today. A Board of Education replaced the Board of Trustees. A Parent-Teacher Association was organized during the 1925-26 school year. Athletics began to become an important part of the high school experience. The school was a member of the Dutchess County Athletic League and its basketball and baseball teams would meet other teams in the league. The boy's basketball teams of the 1928-29 seasons were Champions of the Eastern Section of the Dutchess County League. The high school students together with those from seventh and eighth grades were responsible for raising money for the teams.

The graduation rate of 1900 to 1928 shows that in some years close to 20 students completed their high school education here. Census records tell us that the population of the town averaged about 1300 during this period.



#### Girls' Championship Team 1926-1927

Front Row (l-r): Margaret Peper; Nannette Peppe; Helena Wheeler; Maude Roberts; Jennie Remsburger.

Back Row (l-r): Franklin Butts, Coach; Helen Cole; Elsie LaDue; Ruth Langdon, Captain; Della Brooks; Margaret Hewitt; Augusta Morgan.

In 1929, the Seymour Smith Academy was condemned by the State of New York, apparently in an effort to force the town into building a new school: the academy had been housing upwards of 250 students in a building intended for 100. A committee was formed to look into what could be done, and in the winter of 1930-1931, it was decided that the town would try to form a central school district. A petition was circulated to garner support for the central school district and 19 local school districts signed up. On June 26, 1931 it was put to the voters, and a significant majority (362 - 50) voted in favor of centralization.

Centralization was then still very new, and very controversial. When Pine Plains Central School District No. 1 was established in 1931 it was the first central school district in Dutchess County. For some time, most of the rural district schools in New York had been faced with declining enrollments and a decreasing tax base as populations shifted to metropolitan areas, and during the 1930's the Education Department began to push centralization as a means of remedying this (a process that was not considered complete until the 1960's). Certainly, better roads and transportation made centralization feasible: around 1930 the road

between Pine Plains and Washington Hollow (State Route 82) was straightened and paved. Of course, centralization meant the closing of the old rural schools, and many of them resisted at first. The Attlebury district school in the town of Stanford was one of the hold outs and did not centralize with Pine Plains until 1949.

Upon its inception, the Pine Plains Central School District served the towns of Pine Plains, Milan, Stanford, and Northeast in Dutchess County and Ancram, Gallatin, Livingston, and Clermont in Columbia County. According to Samuel Deuel, Board of Education President, at the time of centralization there were a total of 451 pupils in grades K -12, not including non-resident pupils. Today the district also includes the town of Clinton in Dutchess County, and there are approximately 1100 students.

On June 25, 1932 the Board of Education put a proposal to the voters of the district for a new, larger building to be erected on the site of the old academy, along with the purchase of additional land and the issuance of bonds to defray the cost. In the proposal, the Board (Samuel Deuel; Harry Barton; Allard Hawks; Henry Bruckert; and Harrison Simmons) had this to say about the site:

“We believe we have one of the finest school sites in New York State.... By using the present site, the purchase price of at least \$20,000 is saved by the District. We have beautiful shade trees, good roads, and sidewalks surrounding the site. The expense of providing these items has likewise been saved the District. A few years ago our school [Seymour Smith Academy] received a state prize of \$100 because of its natural beauty and ideal play grounds.”

The building was planned and designed by the firm of Knapp & Morris, School Architects exclusively, New York City. The Georgian Colonial style chosen was deemed suitable to the character of the site and its surroundings. In addition, it was to be built so that its center would be the focal point of a lovely tree-lined approach down Smith Street. The estimated cost of the new building, including equipment and architects fees, was \$298,000. Approximately 210 ft. long by 205 ft. deep, it was to have three levels, a combined auditorium-gymnasium, luncheon facilities, 24 classrooms, and other special rooms and office space.

The voters approved the proposal with 331 in favor, 81 opposed. Around this time, in order to make way for the new building, the old academy was torn down, which no doubt was cause for some sadness and reminiscing from former students and teachers. However, as Samuel Deuel noted in his dedication remarks for the new school, “If we had not had Seymour Smith there would not have been any Seymour Smith Academy, and if it had not been for the Seymour Smith Academy, we would not have had these beautiful school grounds.” In fact, one could say that Seymour Smith’s legacy continues down to the present day.

For some time already, classes had been being held at Memorial Hall, the Odd Fellows Hall, the Sportsman's Building, and the Grange Hall, or as Samuel Deuel said in his dedication speech, "we were housing several hundred children in every available building in the village". So there was some urgency to getting the new school built. After some delays, ground was finally broken on the new building on October 18, 1932, and the cornerstone was laid on March 11, 1933 with an impressive Masonic ceremony. On November 18, 1933, the building was considered complete enough so that the school finally moved in. According to Samuel Deuel, the school population had increased during the prior two years to 619 students. In 1933, the name of the school was officially changed from Seymour Smith Academy to Pine Plains Central School.



Laying the Cornerstone March 11, 1933

As part of the dedication ceremonies on May 3, 1935, William Eno, son of the late Frank Eno, longtime secretary of the former schools, made a presentation of the Seymour Smith Academy tablet and picture of Seymour Smith to the Pine Plains Central School [this charcoal portrait, now in the school lobby, was relegated to the school basement at some point; when it was rediscovered in the 1970's, at first no one knew who it was]. Samuel Deuel gave a history of Seymour Smith Academy and Pine Plains Central School. The invocation was given by The Rev. C. M Moser of the First United Presbyterian Church of Pine Plains,

and the benediction was given by The Rev. George Langdon of the Church of the Regeneration in Pine Plains (Episcopal). The dedicatory address was given by Dr. Ray P. Snyder, Director, State Rural Education Division. Special guests included Frederick A. Slingerland, the last living trustee of the old academy and former pupil, and Myra Harris Jordan, who graduated from the old academy in 1885 and wore her beautiful white silk graduation dress, perfectly preserved, for the occasion.



## May Day Festivities 1942

May Queen: Mary Batistoni  
Attendant: Jane Freuenburg

The Pine Plains Central School District has since undergone several reconfigurations to respond to population needs and transportation issues. By 1950, the school needed more space and a \$130,000 addition was added to the south end, which provided six new classrooms. By 1960, with a student body of about 1000, more expansion was deemed necessary, and a ground floor addition between the east and west wings on the north side provided a modern kitchen and dining area (the cafeteria had been on the second floor), while additional classrooms were added to the first and second floors, at a total cost of \$350,000. This was still not enough space, and in 1964 the school had to start holding the elementary classes at various buildings around town as was done before the new school was built, however the high school remained in the school building. In September 1967, the school even went on a split session until March 1968.

In 1969 Cold Spring Elementary School was added to the school district on Homan Road in the town of Stanford for grades kindergarten through fifth. That same year, construction was begun on Stissing Mountain Junior-Senior High School on West Church Street in Pine Plains for grades seventh through twelfth. Once this was completed, the high school was relocated here from the Pine Plains Central School building, and the elementary students were able to move back in. The Pine Plains Central School building now became Seymour Smith Elementary School, once again incorporating the name of the town's benefactor. It may be hard to believe considering that it was 1970, but because of the years they had spent attending school in small rooms around the town, some had never been in such a large building before and had a difficult time adjusting.

The new configuration meant that children from Cold Spring Elementary School had to move to Seymour Smith Elementary School for sixth grade and then the following year to the Junior-Senior High School for seventh grade. This

situation was not remedied until 2002, when the building housing Stissing Mountain Junior-Senior High School was expanded allowing for separate space for two schools, Stissing Mountain Middle School for grades sixth through eighth, and Stissing Mountain High School for grades ninth through twelfth, and the relocation of grade six here from Seymour Smith Elementary School. In 2010, the school district was again reconfigured to respond to *decreasing* enrollment: Cold Spring Elementary School became Cold Spring Early Learning Center for grades kindergarten through second, and Seymour Smith Elementary School became Seymour Smith Intermediate Learning Center for grades third, fourth, and fifth.

In 2012, eighty years after the onset of construction of the Pine Plains Central School, extensive renovations, many for safety and some cosmetic, were completed on the building. To commemorate this work and to celebrate the history of the schools here, the Seymour Smith Intermediate Learning Center building was rededicated on May 15, 2012. The celebration included tours of the renovations and historical displays.

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