



696 MEISNER ROAD, EAST CHINA, MI 48054

# RED BRICK SCHOOL

## HISTORY & TOUR



1872:

The present Red Brick School building dates from 1872. It stands on part of a land grant made to Andrew Wesbrook in 1837 before Michigan became a state. Harriet Comstock, heir of Andrew Wesbrook, donated the property where the Red Brick School stands. (Note: China Township records indicate there was a different school on this same site in 1843. Other accounts imply a school existed prior to 1835.) It was one of 3 mid-19<sup>th</sup> century schools in the township and is the only one remaining.

1954:

Officially known as “District 2”, the Red Brick School was in continuous use until 1954 when a new school was built on Meisner Road (East China Elementary) and the rural schools closed. The East China School District (E.C.S.D.) Administrative Offices now occupy that Meisner Road school. The vacated Red Brick School building was then used by E.C.S.D. as a maintenance workshop and storage building. During that time, a garage was attached to the east side of the building and a concrete floored room to the west.

1988:

The East China Township paid E.C.S.D. \$1.00 for the Red Brick Schoolhouse in 1988 and established a 5-member [Historical Commission](#) consisting of Walter Smith, Agnes Griffor, Betty Ann Conley, Fred Thomas, and Jenny Randolph. To preserve its oldest building as a living museum, East China Township funded the entire two year restoration to a post-Civil War period. While the garage was removed, the west wing was retained for the township museum. Renovations included: brick sandblasted and vinyl coated; electrical systems up-dated; wall paneling removed; damaged wood areas replaced; original wainscoting scraped by hand; basement walls sealed; original wooden floors leveled, sanded and coated with a scratch resistant finish; new drywall, doors and roof; indoor lavatory and handicap ramp; walls, wainscoting and ceilings painted using authentic colors recommended by Greenfield Village.

1990: Students were greeted once again by the ringing of the bell.

1991:

The Red Brick School was placed on the Michigan State Registry of Historic Sites and the marker was dedicated during a 1993 ceremony.

Peer into our [album](#) for a step back in time. The entry is typical of early schoolhouses. It served as a wind barrier since most schools had only one entrance. In the corner hangs the bell’s long rope, and each morning, the 8:45 toll warned students to hurry along! Shaker-influenced cloak rooms with separate entrances for boys and girls are on either side of the entry. Wooden pegs, similar to those used in 19th century schools, are set beneath shelves for lunches and books. Smocks and vests have been made for visiting students. At some time, the girls’ cloak room was converted into a bathroom. A section of its floor was removed and a chemical toilet installed. That floor section was replaced later and is evident today.

Students’ desks are of uniform size, although in a typical one-room school, the desks would have been of various heights to fit students ranging in age from 5-19 years old. Two students sat at each desk in order to share supplies and promote interaction. A platform raised the teacher above the students' desks and also provided insulating space above the cold floor. A foot warmer was often necessary. A long bench at the front

was used for recitations and reading groups. All interior carpentry work and desks were crafted by East China resident Ralph Nichols.

The front blackboards are slate while the blackboards on the east and west walls are of Michigan pine, painted black, milled 1" thick, 24" to 26" wide. Painted boards were common in early schools and these were discovered by the carpenter under wall paneling.

A large wood stove supplied the only heat. Children seated nearby would have been very warm while those seated further away would have been cold. Early schools did not have light fixtures and lessons were regulated by available sunlight. In order to provide sufficient light during fall and winter months, Red Brick School had 2 windows in each of the 4 walls. During renovation, 2 windows were replaced by the basement and museum doors. Those windows were then added to the east side making a total of 4 windows. Period fixtures were also installed in order to make it more useful during dark days and evenings.

Early photos show two outhouses behind the school, one for girls and one for boys. It was common to equip each with 2 differently sized holes to prevent smaller children from falling in. Catalog pages were used as toilet paper and wintry nature calls were very cold. Students were often required to shovel a path on their way out and return with a log or 2 from the wood pile. In keeping with earlier customs, Red Brick School has 2 toilets in its modern bathroom.

The small westerly room had an outside entry door through which wood was carried to the stove. The opening has been bricked over but can still be seen behind the museum door. Previous students remember the room being used as a chart class (kindergarten), tutorial, library and a recitation room for older children. Currently it is used as an office and houses vintage documents. Included are hand written teachers' contracts dating from 1863, school board minutes from the late 1800's, census records, and school site deeds. Review of this material is available by appointment. Many of these records were found stored below in the Michigan- style basement (not full height) complete with heavy, hand-hewn oak beams supporting the main room floor.

The museum area displays many vintage items: lunch pails; drinking utensils; writing tools; books; children's games; maps; photos; newspaper clippings; various styles of desks; teacher items (personal and professional); teacher contracts; report cards; hand bells; apples; local artifacts; and Recor family items. A variety of [souvenirs](#) are also available for purchase.

Want to learn more? The East China Historical Commission offers the use of the schoolhouse for your classroom visits, meetings, special events and weddings. See [Reservations and Waiver of Liability](#).

[www.eastchinatownship.org/brick.html](http://www.eastchinatownship.org/brick.html)