ROCHESTER SCHOOL WAYS

In "A Grass Roots History of Racine County" Mary Ela related the following: "Education has been one of Rochester's constant and major loyalties and involvements. A stone building, erected in the 1840's, on the southwest corner of State and Main Streets, was the setting for several educational ventures which deeply affected Rochester and Southeastern Wisconsin. It was built as a hotel to serve teamsters who stopped overnight in the village on their grain hauling journeys between Janesville and Racine. (It was no uncommon site to see 40 or 50 loads pass through together.)"

When transportation via Racine and Southern Railway and its Burlington route diminished the need for this third hotel in the village, it found other uses in three different eras of the community's development. For a time it housed "a select school" which attracted students from the same, Milwaukee, and neighboring areas. In 1866 it was purchased jointly by residents of Rochester and the Honey Creek Free Baptist Quarterly Conference.

Much history of this "select school" was obtained from Mrs. Donna Zabler of Burlington. Excerpts from her family journals, which belonged to her great grandfather, Alma Aldrich, follow.

SEPTEMBER 28, 1854: "Monday morning I went to Rochester to commence going to school. Father and Mr. Lincoln went with me and I secured (room and) board at Mrs. Wades."

OCTOBER 5, 1854: "Father started for Milwaukee, there being no school today, the schoolmaster having gone to Milwaukee to the State Fair. I came home."

NOVEMBER 2, 1854: "There was no school Tuesday as the election was held at the school house. We all had to write a composition that day."

DECEMBER 10, 1854: "I was at a party at Rochester Friday night and danced for the second time in my life."

FEBRUARY 14, 1855: "I went to Rochester in the morning and went to school. I settled for my tuition $14.25, my board was $13.00. There is a masqued ball in Burlington tonight!"

FEBRUARY 20, 1855: "School was kept till about 10 o'clock a.m. when it was dismissed for us to get ready to go to Honey Creek to the funeral of Miss Rosette Russel, one of the scholars (students) who died of Pulried Erysifilis and typhoid fever on Monday morning after an illness of little more than a week. I rode with W. Norton and was one of the bearers."

MAY 6, 1855: "My birthday, - 18 years old today!"

JUNE 8, 1855: "I was somewhat amused today, reading a letter that I wrote 9 years ago today, in Whitefield, N.H. which I intended to send to a friend in Keokuk, Iowa. I was 9 years, 1 month and 2 days old when I wrote it, but it is written in a good hand, but the spelling is bad."
JULY 4, 1855: Independence Day -- "At Rochester a ball at Peter Campbell's (now Chance's) the room is new and 30' X 62' and there were 206 tickets sold at $2.50 each. I joined and got supper also--50 cents--I didn't have the best of times, there were too many (people) there I did not know."

JULY 5, 1855: "I got back from the ball about 5:00 a.m. and then I plowed corn on the Kennedy place."

NOVEMBER 27, 1855: "I commenced going to school--Algebra, Arithmetic, Geography and Grammar."

DECEMBER 19, 1855: "Paid taxes--$40.68 this year."

JANUARY 1, 1856: "I hitched the horses to the sleigh and went to Burlington and then to Rochester to the ball and Oyster Supper. I was well pleased--130 couples and all agreeable!"

Mr. Aldrich's meticulous records have given us all a view into a slice of life in this area 136 years ago. Thank you Mrs. Donna Zabler for sharing this with us!

Continuing with "Grass Roots" is Ms. Ela's account of the following history of the Rochester Academy: "The Baptists, with wholehearted cooperation from the Rochester people, established Rochester Seminary, a secondary school which functioned significantly from 1867 to 1890, when uncertain attendance and lack of funds forced it to close.

In 1894 Wisconsin's Congregational Conference established Rochester Academy in this building they had purchased from the Baptists.

It was a great success in the terms of service to the area, and enthusiastic and loyal support of the community.

With teachers of distinction, and college preparatory work as well as general courses it flourished until 1910. Dependent upon tuition, gifts and the support of Wisconsin churches, its performance was effective.

In 1907 Rochester people and their neighbors subscribed $47,600 toward an endowment fund to keep the school alive, but in 1910 changes in Congregational Church procedures on a national level, and public high school procedures on a state level ended "the old academy" chapter in Rochester. The building was dismantled in the 1930's."

Today at the southwestern corner of State and Main Streets stands a private home, but if you watch carefully when passing, you can still see the academy's steps on the north side of the lot.