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## Preservation group dedicates former one-room school at Bedford Corners

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Posted: Monday, July 14, 2014 12:24 pm

By Tom Donahue, Olean Times Herald | [0 comments](#)



Tom Donahue/Olean Times Herald

### Restored Schoolhouse

People gather outside the former one-room schoolhouse at Bedford Corners Sunday to celebrate restoration of the 150-year-old building and dedication of a flag pole and memorial brick walkway donated to the project by Portville Central School's Class of 1959.



**BEDFORD CORNERS** — More than 100 people crowded into the former one-room schoolhouse at Bedford Corners Sunday to celebrate the Portville Historical and Preservation Society's restoration of the 150-year-old building.

Cindy Keeley, society president, thanked a long list of volunteers who "worked so hard, day by day, and often late into the night," to recapture the building's past and ready it for day's festivities.

State Sen. Catharine Young (R-Olean), who helped secure a \$15,000 state grant toward the restoration project, was presented with a framed painting of the schoolhouse. She, too, applauded the all-volunteer workforce.

"They've been going 24/7 to meet the deadline for today's dedication and it really shows," she said.

"If these walls could talk...", Sen. Young continued. "You can almost hear the echoes of the children who went to school in this building."

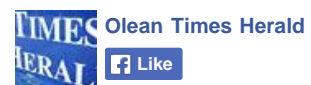
Echoes of the past weren't needed, however, because the gathering included a handful of residents who attended the school, where first- through eighth-graders shared the same room and the same teacher.

They told of fetching water in buckets from a nearby spring, how saying "ain't" meant you'd be left behind when the others went outside for recess, and how no one thought a five-mile walk to school was a hardship.

"It was a wonderful experience," said 87-year-old Estella Wood, one of 14 siblings who attended the school. "We



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had the most wonderful teacher, Amelia Reitz, who was strict, but she had a heart of gold.”

Mrs. Wood recalled how her older brother would give her piggy-back rides through the deep snow on their winter walks to school, and how Miss Reitz would start each cold winter day.

“She’d tell us all to please stand and we’d walk around the stove, rubbing our hands and stomping our feet until we were warmed up,” said Mrs. Wood.

The Bedford Corners school was one of 10 one-room schoolhouses that operated in the town of Portville prior to construction of a centralized Portville school. It is believed to be the last school integrated into the new system, and it closed for good in the early 1950s, said Ms. Keeley.

Sunday’s ceremony included dedication of a flag pole and memorial brick walkway donated to the site by members of Portville Central School’s Class of 1959. David Pupo, a member of the class, was instrumental in convincing his friend, the late Col. Charles Eshelman, to donate the school and neighboring properties to the local preservation group for creation of the Bedford Corners Historic District.

Located about 1½ miles north of the village of Portville, at the intersection of Route 305 and Deer Creek and Dodge Creek roads, the historic district includes the one-room school, an old cheese factory, and the former Eshelman home.

All three properties are part of the ongoing restoration effort.

The one-room school, the first building to be restored, will be put to use this fall.

“Our vision is for local schoolchildren to come here for four-hour sessions to learn about our history over the past 100 to 150 years and to get an understanding of just what it was like to go to school back then,” said Mr. Pupo.

For more information about the school and the Bedford Corners Historic District, visit the Portville Historical and Preservation Society’s website at [www.portvillehistory.org](http://www.portvillehistory.org)

(Contact reporter Tom Donahue at [tdonahue@oleantimesherald.com](mailto:tdonahue@oleantimesherald.com).)

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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

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