

Sholes School

History and Information

1. When was Sholes School built?

- 1872–the date shown on the round sign at the peak of the school front.
 - The round sign also shows the district number, #56
- According to an 1860 map of Kane County, there was a school on the farm of David Sholes, on Burlington Road near Plato Road.
 - The exact construction date of this building is not known.
 - The Elgin Historical Society has a picture of the school dated to 1872.

2. Why are there large windows only on the south side of the building?

- Opening only one wall to many windows eliminated the unequal shade and glare on the school desks.
- Note that the picture of the original building shows that there were only three windows on the south side of the building in 1872. There are now six and only a few high windows on the north and east walls of the room.

3. Why was it a good to have the strongest light over the left shoulders of the students?

- Keep in mind that all students were compelled to write with their right hands at the time.
- No student would strain his eyes by writing in his own shadow.
- The concept worked well on sunny days, although there was no cross ventilation. On cloudy days, the situation was reversed: the room was quite dark, but was able to remain somewhat warmer.

4. Who was Martha Campbell?

- The bronze plaque on the outside of the School at the doorway reads that Sholes School was given to the Kane County Forest Preserve in 1978 in memory of Martha Campbell.
- The framed picture in the entry hall further explains that Martha Campbell was a teacher who taught in the School 1913–1915, and was the mother of Ralph Campbell, the gentleman who donated the School to the Forest Preserve.

5.) Besides the picture and the bell, can you name any other things found in the entry hall or vestibule? Can you think of how some of them might have been used?

- Stone Crock
 - filled with fresh water daily, a chore delegated to two older pupils at the first recess. Fetching water was considered to be a privilege in the warm months but was not much fun in the winter. Water was pumped out of a well and carried into the school in a water bucket. Two tin cups sufficed for all the thirsty children.

- Wash-bench, pans, and home-made soap:
 - water had to be carried into the building for hand washing, too. There was no inside plumbing. Two outdoor privvies took care of other needs.
- Lunch pails:
 - some lunch pails were lard or syrup pails, placed on the shelves above the coat hooks unless there was danger of freezing. In that case, the lunches would be placed near the stove inside the school room. If they had become frozen on the way to school, the lunches would thaw out by lunch time if placed by the fire.
 - What might a farm child going to school 50-100 years ago have in the lunch pail?
 - Do you think the children drank milk at lunch time? Why/why not?
- Oil lamps or sconces:
 - the School had no electricity. The rural community didn't have many modern conveniences until well after the turn of the century. The lamps have been electrified now. They were given to the School by descendants of David Sholes.

6. Whose pictures are on the walls? Why are these two Presidents so honored? In what other ways do we honor them?

- Their pictures are on some of our coins and paper currency; states, cities, and schools are named in their honor, etc.
- Note also the 44 star flag on the wall. The 44th star was added in 1890 when Wyoming joined the Union.

7. Do you see any maps?

- There is a Kane County Pictorial map on the door. There are also maps in the wooden case above the blackboard on the north wall. Unfortunately, the maps in the case are hard to reach and are quite fragile. They are usually not displayed.

8. Why are there desks in so many sizes?

- All ages were in the same room with one teacher. The youngest students were five years old. The oldest were sometimes older than the teacher. Students in one-room schools were not divided into grades by age. While the teacher worked with one or two pupils at a time, she expected the others to work alone or to help one another.
- Eighteen students would be considered a very large group. Some came to school only when not needed on the farm. In 1883, the first Illinois School Attendance Law was enacted. Under its provisions, a pupil had to attend at least three months each year.
- Sholes School has 23 seats to accommodate the size of a modern day classroom.

9. Why do some of the desks have holes in the right hand corner?

- To hold the inkwells used by older students.

10. Why don't some of the smaller desks have holes?

- Children didn't use pen and ink until they were about eight years old. They learned to write script writing (cursive) by practicing on their slates. They learned script writing long before they started to print, but they also learned to read it before they wrote it. Interestingly, the smallest desk was a gift of the Divine family whose father, David Clyde Divine, the smallest child in the School, attended the School between 1890 and 1894.

11. For what did pupils use slates and slate pencils?

- Paper was scarce and very expensive, so most lessons were done on the slates which could be erased with an old sock or other small rag and used over and over again. The scarcity of paper was also the reason students recited their lessons out loud instead of writing them. However, after practicing on their slates, older children would write important things to remember in their copy books, using the straight pen dipped in the ink wells.

12. Who wrote the Readers that are in the Sholes School collection?

- The Primer through Fourth Reader were all written by William H. McGuffey, and the Fifth and Sixth Readers were the work of his brother Alexander. Many of the Readers were donated to the School by Robin's Bookstore while others were gifts made in the memory of someone who had been an enthusiastic supporter of Sholes School.

13. How was Sholes School heated?

- After trudging to school through drifts of snow in the cold winter, the students were grateful for a warm fire in the black iron stove. Besides preparing lessons for many different "grade levels," the teacher had to keep the one-room school neat and start the fire in the stove every morning. Sometimes, the teacher had to chop and stack the firewood, too.