

building was remodeled and in April 1983 opened as a community museum to tell the story of Oswego Township's rich heritage and history.

Restoration work on the building was substantially completed in 2002, and the heritage association and park district began partnering to open the building for more hours weekly.

In 2010 an intergovernmental agreement was concluded that transferred ownership of the building and grounds from the Oswego School District to the Oswegoland Park District. Also that year, an Illinois Public Museum Grant administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resource was secured to help protect the lower level archive storage area by installing architecturally correct gutters and downspouts to stop stormwater infiltration, make the grounds more accessible to the public through enhanced and expanded landscaping including benches and brick walkways, and enhancing the museum's handicap accessibility by upgrading the building's wheelchair and stair lifts. Work on the projects was completed in the summer and early autumn of 2011

With the park district's financial assistance, the Little White School Museum is now open to the public 20 hours each week, and hosts a wide variety of special exhibits and history-related programming for visitors of all ages, assuring the building's continuing status as a true Oswego Treasure.

The Little White School Museum's hours are Thursday through Monday from 12 noon to 4 p.m.

Have an Oswego history question? Call us at 630-554-2999 or email info@littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org, and we'll be happy to help.

The Oswegoland Heritage Association Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month. Annual dues are \$20, Friend; \$75, Sponsor; & \$150, Business/Institution. Lifetime Gold membership is available for \$1,000.

All donations to the heritage association are tax deductible.

For more, find us on Facebook; call the museum at 630-554-2999; visit our web site at www.littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org; e-mail info@littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org; or write the Oswegoland Heritage Association, Box 23, Oswego, IL 60543.

An Oswego Treasure:



The Little White School Museum



The Little White School/Methodist-Episcopal Church has been an Oswego landmark for more than 150 years. Several generations of Oswegoans attended church in the building, and then generations more attended classes as the structure was put to use as a community school building. Today, the Little White School Museum is a repository of the history and heritage of Oswego.

Methodism has a long history in the Oswego area, with the first Methodist meeting held in the home of Daniel Pearce, one of the township's earliest settlers. In 1833, the Rev. Steven R. Beggs, a Methodist-Episcopal circuit rider based in Plainfield, held the first meeting at the Pearce homestead, located on what is today Fox Bend Golf Course in Oswego. Until 1842, there was no formal Methodist church in Oswego. Rather, the village was visited quarterly by a circuit-riding preacher.

The Rev. Henry Bergen of the Rock Creek Congregational Church complained in 1842: "Oswego...But it is a rather dark spot from a religious point of

view. All they have is occasional Methodist preaching. The Methodist system and the fact that Oswego has been already too long neglected, sufficiently accounts for their backwardness in contributing to the support of the Gospel.”

Not until 1848 was construction begun on a church building, a structure that would one day become the Little White School Museum. From evidence uncovered during restoration, it is likely Oswego’s Methodists purchased a church building—near Plainfield perhaps—dismantled it, hauled it to Oswego, and erected it in the angle formed by the intersection of Polk and Jackson Streets a block from the Kendall County Courthouse (now the site of the Oswego Post Office, Village Green Park, and Oswego Community Bank). Oak timber sills were laid on a limestone foundation, and then the frame of hand-hewn oak and walnut timbers, each measuring 11x11 inches and some 35 feet long, was erected. Rafters, uprights, and sills were all pegged together in the same manner barns of the period were built. When the frame was completed, the roof was installed and clapboard siding was nailed on. Inside, the walls were plastered and wainscoting extended about four feet from the floor around the sanctuary’s perimeter. The original trim and windows were probably very plain. A pulpit platform was installed at the front of the room and hanging oil fixtures provided lighting. The woodwork was originally painted, with the wainscoting grained to resemble oak, and the rest probably painted a light green. The Oswego Methodist-Episcopal Church was completed in 1850 and formally dedicated in October of 1854.

Evidence that the building was dismantled and reassembled on its Oswego site was uncovered during restoration work by the Oswegoland Heritage Association. The evidence includes missing stringers in the timber frame, wainscoting that appears to have been reused, and floor joists that show evidence of having been used previously as either studs in a wall or as ceiling joists (the joists show evidence of having had plaster lath nailed to them, with the plaster marks and nail holes still clearly visible).

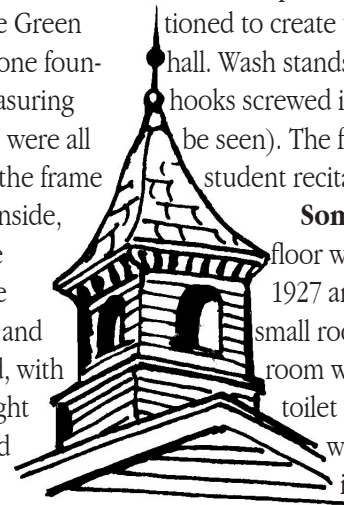
The building has undergone a number of renovations and reconstructions inside and out. About 1901, more elaborate trim was added to the doorways and windows. The old tongue and groove random-width floorboards were covered by newer flooring, probably in the 1920s. At various times, the entire building interior was wallpapered while it served as a church. The area behind the pulpit platform underwent a number of modifications, with ornate wallpaper (including red flocked and bright blue paper with gold accents) added over the years. The distinctive bell tower was added to the building, probably about 1901, when Terzah Minard, widow of the Rev. Henry Minard, a former pastor, donated the bell to the church. It

is believed the elegant diamond-patterned glue-chipped window glass was added at about this same time. Today, Rev. Minard’s bell hangs again in the bell tower, which was reconstructed using photos taken about 1902.

In 1913, the congregation dissolved, probably due to chronic financial problems—local newspapers carried endless stories about the Methodists’ efforts to raise money with special church dinners and other activities. Two years after the congregation dissolved, the Oswego Grade School District purchased the building. A concrete porch replaced the wooden front porch. The front entryway was partitioned to create two indoor toilets, one for girls and one for boys, and a small entry hall. Wash stands were installed in both rear corners of the main room, with coat hooks screwed into the wainscoting in the same area (the coat hook holes can still be seen). The former pulpit area held the teacher’s desk and was also used as a student recitation area.

Sometime in the 1920s, according to former students, the existing floor was installed on top of the original random-width floor. Between 1927 and 1929, former students reported, the toilets were removed to small rooms formed by walling off portions of the two rear corners of the room where the wash stands and coat hooks were located. The former toilet rooms were turned into closets for coats. In 1930, the main room was divided into two classrooms and another wall was built dividing the front entry area from the classroom area. Four years later, as a federal W.P.A. project, the building was raised and a basement was dug beneath it. The former restrooms in the front corners of the building were used as stairwells and restrooms were built in the basement directly beneath the front entryway. When entering the front door, the boys’ restrooms were located to the right and downstairs; the girls were located to the left. In 1936, a new entry hall and a third classroom were built on the back of the building.

The Little White School was used as classroom space until 1964, when it became a school district storage building. In 1975 following reports the historic structure was to be demolished and the property sold, the Oswegoland Heritage Association was established to save and restore the building. During more than 30 years of restoration work, most done by volunteers, the wooden shingle siding was removed and the clapboard siding repaired and painted, the bell tower and the wooden front porch were reconstructed complete with the original 1901 bell, and the interior was restored to its appearance during the church to school transition period, 1913-1915. In addition, the 1936-vintage classroom built on the rear of the



Bell Tower
Little White School Museum