

Revisiting Delano School History

By Roberta House-Forshee, Oct. 6, 2026

Five years after Arenac County was officially established on April 21, 1883, community members of Whitney Township's Delano settlement met on Sept. 27, 1888, to organize its first school, a log cabin built in 1889 for \$50 about one mile West of Delano and Whitman roads.

The elected officers of Whitney Township's School District 2 included: Geo. W Peterson, director; Day Carthwright, moderator; and William Davis, assessor.

According to 1928 District 2 Primary Teacher Julis Daniels Dittenber's written account, at that time, the board approved a four-month school year for B-8 grades and the employment of one teacher for \$120 in wages.

In 1889, with the Census documenting 12 children ages 5-19 in Delano, the board agreed



to raise additional funds to improve the log building, including shingles for the gable ends. The board also approved an increase of teacher's wages to \$210 for an extended school year of seven months but refused to purchase textbooks for district students. For less than a decade, the log building served Delano until July 13, 1896, when the school board formally decided it was time to build a new schoolhouse and purchase an acre of land at Whitman and Delano roads "if" funds were available. The goal was to have the building completed by Nov. 1 and extend the school year to eight months over

two terms: Sept-December and February through May.

Two weeks later, the board held a special meeting regarding financing the new school through a bond issue instead of paying the cost of the project upfront. Twelve votes were cast on the motion to borrow the funds, but only four board members supported the idea, thus, borrowing money for a new school was a no-go for the Delano School.

A week later another special board meeting was held for the same purpose of bonding the school project. This time 28 votes were counted, but the motion still failed for lack of support.

The board wasn't giving up hope, though. On Aug. 31, 1896, a special meeting was again held about the bond. A total of 12 votes were counted with the majority, again, defeating the motion to borrow money for a new school and a second motion to move the current log schoolhouse from its location. Despite two defeated proposals on the agenda, the board agreed to change the site of the new school to Delano and Whitman roads.

It wasn't until Sept. 7, 1896, that the board finally presented a proposal that the community could get behind, which was a \$250 bond proposal for three years for a new school. A total of 13 votes were cast, and the motion carried.

One hurdle was past.

The following year on May 3, 1897, the board decided to contract the building of a new school and sell the log schoolhouse and existing lot and retain the furnishings and outbuildings. The building was sold to George Frey for \$20.25. Frey paid \$1 down for a nine-month, 7-percent loan.



By summer, the new frame school, measuring 24x34x12 and designed by Mr. Smith, had been built. Students attended five months of formal education a year with the first term held from September to November and the second term held from May to June. The grounds were also fenced with eight-foot posts with six-inch boards to keep school children off Mr. Delano's property.



In 1898, the old woodshed was moved to the Delano and Whitman property on the Southeast corner, and once again, the district, looked to raise funds for operations—\$91 for a bond and interest, \$250 for a teacher and \$25 for other expenses for the district that now enrolled 45 students.

Educational instruction and progress of the district continued throughout the decades with free textbooks for students approved for the first time in 1900, and in 1911, an expansion of the one-room schoolhouse to a two-room building, adding two additional grades, 9-10, and a second teacher for a 9-month school year for the 71 Delano students. Compensation for the teachers was \$60.

By 1944, Delano School went back to being a one-room schoolhouse, accommodating students only through grade eight. It continued to operate as a one-room school in Whitney Township until 1966 when the district was consolidated with the Au Gres-Sims School District. Joe Gingerich, Henry Wright and Bess Ellison were the last school board members at Delano.

The Delano School later housed the Arenac County Historical Society (ACHS), which was founded by former Delano School Teacher and local historian Calvin Ennes and former Delano School student, Zella Whitman Pendred. ACHS was incorporated in September 1970, and its museum was housed at the former Delano School until 1984 when exhibits were moved to 304 E. Michigan Ave in the City of Au Gres, in the former Au Gres Methodist Church, which was built in 1883 and deeded to ACHS in 1984.



In 2026, the Delano School is no longer a fixture at the corner of Delano and Whitman roads; however, the Delano Church, a white-framed building adorned with its belfry intact, still stands on the now private property—a simple reminder of the faith-centered culture of early Delano settlers.

Sources

ACHS history

[*ACHS. One Room Country Schools, Vol 4: Sims & Whitney Township.*](#) ACHS, 1922.

Zedar, Marilyn et al. *The Arenac County Centennial Cookbook*. Arenac County Independent, 1983.

Photo credits:

1897: [*ACHS. One Room Country Schools, Vol 4: Sims & Whitney Township.*](#) ACHS, 1922. (Photo restoration applied)

1912: ACHS collection (Photo restoration applied)

1965: ACHS collection (Photo restoration applied)

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