

The Fate of the One-Room School

By the turn of the twentieth century, many communities in Ohio, including Stow Township, had moved through several generations of one-room schools, beginning with log cabins and progressing to larger brick or frame structures. Stewart School likely stood out as one of the better one-room schools in the nation. Yet many schools lacked essentials like comfortable seating for all students, adequate ventilation, decent sanitation, and qualified teachers. As a result, educational reformers called for better-funded centralized schools in which students were divided into grades and attended classes only with others of the same age.



Stow Township Centralized School, which opened in 1907 at the northwest corner of Graham and Darrow Roads. (Image courtesy of Munroe Falls Historical Society)

In 1906, Stow Township residents voted on centralization, rejecting it, perhaps because they feared the possibility of additional taxes. They also may have worried about losing the small communities within Stow Township that had formed around one-room schools, which served as social gathering places when not being used for education. Yet on a second ballot, centralization passed. Stow Township Centralized School, at the northwest corner of Graham and Darrow Roads, opened in 1907. It offered elementary as well as high school education (unlike the one-room schools which only provided for schooling through the eighth grade). The one-room school in Munroe Falls did not participate in the consolidation, but remained separate until 1916, when it joined the Stow Township School District.



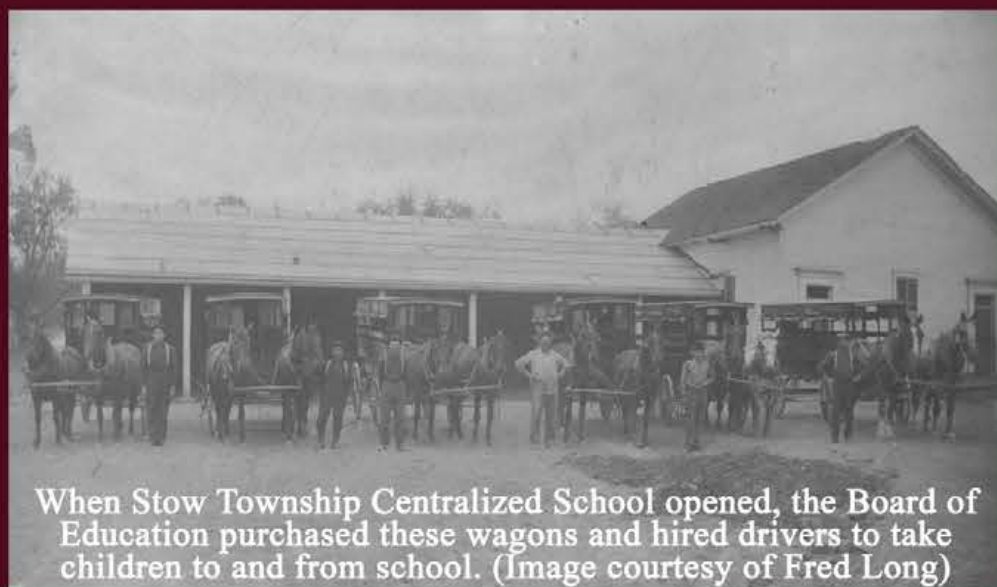
High school students in front of Stow Township Centralized School in 1908. Prior to the school's opening, they would have had to attend high school in Kent or Akron. (Image courtesy of Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library)

Previously, students had walked to their local one-room schoolhouse. But the opening of the centralized school made that difficult. The township bought horse-drawn wagons and hired drivers to bring students to school and take them home at the end of the day.

“Actually, it was just a wagon with windows that pushed out in it, and had curtains that rolled up. There were benches along each side of the wagon, and the kids sat with their backs to the sides. There was a door at the front and back. About twenty kids would fit into the wagon, which picked up students for all grades...At times the kids would jump off the wagon and run to grab nearby apples. Then they would run to jump back on...”

- Helen Chandler Wright, whose father drove a horse-drawn school wagon in Stow Township

Ohio's school districts adopted school centralization more enthusiastically than most Midwestern states. By the end of the World War I, a significant number of its one-room schools had closed. Some of the empty schoolhouses were torn down; some were sold and remodeled as residences, social halls, or churches. Although former one-room schools often remained integrated into the fabric of their communities, the experience of going to a one-room school became an increasingly distant memory.



When Stow Township Centralized School opened, the Board of Education purchased these wagons and hired drivers to take children to and from school. (Image courtesy of Fred Long)

School centralization was a controversial decision in Stow Township, as it was in many communities across the nation.

What were the benefits and disadvantages of one-room schools?
What were the benefits and disadvantages of centralization?