

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge-1861

The Story of Jefferson Center

Jefferson Center, located at the northeast corner of Indian Hill and Drake Roads, is currently the administrative office of the Armstrong Chapel United Methodist Church. The Center has a rich local history. Originally a one room brick structure whose cornerstone reads 1857, it was named Jefferson School to honor the USA's third President. It served as a schoolhouse for local children for over 80 years. The oldest room has stone sills, lintels, and a gabled roof capped with a bell tower. In 1976 the Jefferson School was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its educational significance and period architecture representative of early nineteenth century schoolhouses.

The school was used from 1857 until the 1940s, providing elementary education, after which students attended high school "off the hill". Generations of Indian Hill families who went there acquired skills and received a strong educational foundation. As the number of Indian Hill area students grew, the building was enlarged to two rooms in the late 1890s, creating an L-shaped floor plan. The school was expanded again in 1926 with another wing which mirrored the original one room, producing the present day U-shaped configuration. Classmates became lifelong friends and many alumni attended annual homecomings at the school for decades.

When the Indian Hill School at Drake Road was built, the Board of Education sold Jefferson School to the Armstrong Chapel (1951). The "Armstrong Community Building" was used for Sunday School, meetings and suppers. A nursery school convened there in the early 50s, and then a youth center in the 60s. During the 1960s overflow classes from Drake and Concord Schools attended classes there.

When the new Armstrong Chapel Church was built in 1957, use of Old Jefferson diminished. By the late 1970s, it had become a storage facility, and the structure began to deteriorate. In 1980 Dr. Charles Pope, a congregant at the Armstrong Chapel Church and a Trustee of the Indian Hill Historical Society, found out that the school might be demolished. He contacted the President of the Board of the Indian Hill Historical Society, Ginny White, and she gathered several other Board members to look into the situation. With the support of Russell Ahlbrand, Jim Ewell, Andy Hauck, Jr., and Barbara Laco (all Trustees) and with the approval of the entire Board, a crusade to save the historic building ensued.

Consideration was given to moving the structure to Sharon Woods Village, which was not feasible because of the cost. Meetings were held with the leadership and membership of Armstrong Chapel Church. The Historical Society contemplated purchasing the building and leasing the ground from the church. Another idea was mothballing the exterior to prevent further deterioration. Task forces within the church also examined various possibilities.

From 1980-1985 Dr. Pope (who was dedicated to both the church and the IHHS) made annual reports to the Historical Society reviewing the status of Jefferson School. The quiet campaign to save the structure continued. The public and members of the church eventually saw the merits of saving the rural edifice.

Finally, in 1986 Dr. Pope informed the IHHS Board of Trustees that the Armstrong Chapel Church had decided to move their administrative office to the Jefferson School building. The church underwrote part of the cost of renovation. The Jefferson School Historical Fund was established in 1986 to help fund the additional cost. This was led by Armstrong Chapel members and former Jefferson School students, including Hanlin Bavely, William Brewer, Richard Engel, Robert Flerlage, Evelyn Grindstaff, Rick Koehler, Lorraine Ventress, and Ted and Ruth Wilkening.

Due to the efforts of local individuals and the IHHS, the building was preserved. Renovations were completed in the 1990s, and the building was renamed Jefferson Center. It has three minister's offices, two large conference rooms, and work areas for church committees and activities. The historic structure now stands as an inspiration to future generations.

