

**Archive  
Lakeshore Museum Center  
Bluffton School Collection Finding Aid**

**Collection:** Bluffton School Collection

**Object ID Number:** 2012.036.001

**Location:** LMC Archive, Room 204 Shelves P 2 and P 3

**Dates:** 1885-2012

**Quantity:** 3 White Record Boxes (3 linear feet), 1 Oversize Folder

**Restrictions:** No Restrictions

**Abstract:** This collection contains materials from the Bluffton Elementary School from 1885 to 2012, and provides an overview of the school's development, organization, an understanding of the Bluffton Parent Teacher Organization, how the Bluffton School changed over time, and the various activities and events school children participated in during the years the elementary school served the Bluffton community. This collection contains a wide variety of archival materials including meeting minutes, correspondence, fiscal information, newsletters, photographs, awards and certificates, reports, yearbooks, and newspaper clippings.

**Historical Information:** Bluffton School was located on a peninsula between Muskegon Lake and Lake Michigan in the Bluffton community. The school first opened in 1876 as a two room school house with 56 students, and was surrounded by saw mills and small homes in a village of 400 people. Mr. John McGlew served as the first principal of Bluffton School. In 1889, Bluffton School fell under the jurisdiction of the Muskegon Board of Education when Bluffton was annexed to the City of Muskegon. Two teachers were assigned to the school, Cyrus Larkin and Agnes Johnson to teach first, second, and ungraded classes. Special teachers would cover classes on music, drawing, science, and penmanship when needed. A fire broke out at the school in 1891 and damaged the building.

In 1900, a tin plate mill opened nearby and with the influx of workers and their families enrollment increased at the school. A new addition was built and had room for 20 more students. To accommodate the growing number of students, another addition was built in 1901. Mr. H.L. Palmer was contracted to add two rooms, remove the last of the old building, dig a new basement, and install a new hot air furnace. By 1914, enrollment had decreased and only two of the three rooms were being used.

Enrollment once again increased and the school continued to grow. In 1923, 225 permanent residents signed a petition requesting the board construct a new school building. At that time, children from the Bluffton area had to be transported to Bunker School on streetcars to attend fifth and sixth grades. An addition had been built on the school to care for the needs of the present students, but by 1923 that space was inadequate. The Board decided to purchase

additional property to the north of the school for a playground area and built a one room addition at the back of the building.

In 1924, Johanna Robinson became the first supervisory principal for Bluffton School when she accepted the position. In her role, she aimed to develop an excitement for learning with students and a desire to explore. She worked with school staff to encourage students to continue to further their knowledge and their special interests. In the 1930s, Robinson served as a part-time principal at both Bluffton and Bunker Schools.

In 1934, another petition was signed and sent to the board for a new building but once again hopes for a new building were dashed. On a brighter note, Bluffton School made headlines in 1936 children went on strike after a substitute teacher assigned too many math problems and students formed a sit-down strike at the top of Pigeon Hill. A year later, a group of concerned citizens sent a list of twelve criticisms condemning the old Bluffton School building to the Board of Education. In the spring of 1937, the Board decided that as there was an increased need for park facilities, it offered to transfer to the City what was known as the old Froebel School site, to be used by the City for park purposes if the City transferred to the Board for future use a school building site on that portion of land between Wilcox Street, Beach Street, and the new paving which extended along the old railway.

In 1940, Mrs. Gladys Kison became the new principal. She served as a teaching principal and shared her time between Bluffton and Nims Schools. Bluffton School continued to serve the needs of local children although the building continued to be inadequate for the school's needs. In 1953, the people of Muskegon voted to create a pay-as-you-build program to build a new Bluffton School. Plans for the school were drafted by Arthur M. Hooker and Warren S. Holmes Company. Construction of the new building began in 1955, and was designed for six classrooms, a kindergarten room, library, and auditorium-gymnasium. The A.J. Alstrom Company was in charge of the construction. The new building cost \$300,000. On February 14, 1956 the children of Bluffton celebrated moving day and began the school day in the old building, and then they carried their books a block up the hill to the new classrooms. After they explored the new classrooms, the students met in Bluffton's first auditorium which featured a stage and also served as a gymnasium. The official dedication of the new building occurred on February 29, 1956 and James Lewis, vice president of the University of Michigan, was the main speaker. An Open House for the public was held on March 2, 1956.

In the 1950s, aside from enjoying a new school building, students from Bluffton focused on giving and collected toys to give to the Salvation Army for needy children. They also took a tour of the *Muskegon Chronicle* building and learned about the process of printing.

In 1962, after 22 years of service, Principal Kison was transferred to Marquette School and was replaced by Jack Chapel who remained at Bluffton until 1965. Lawrence DeVoogd became the principal after Chapel and witnessed attendance grow to an all time high of 245 students. To accommodate the growing numbers, two classrooms were added to the north end of the building. In 1968 Joyce Lenenga replaced DeVoogd as principal and shared her time between Bluffton and Marsh School. Lenenga remained principal until 1971 when Lawrence Kozal took over and served as principal for two years. From 1973 to 1974 Wayne Bomgaars became the principal of

Bluffton until Harriet Oliver took the position in 1975. During Oliver's tenure, students received awards for their high marks on state tests and other academic achievements.

In 1982, Peter DeHorn took over as the principal of Bluffton and during his years at the school, teachers received awards for excellence in education, students participated in a special science program, fifth grade students participated in a disaster drill, and participated in a Muskegon Safety Belt Committee poster project.

In 1990, a nature trail was built in the woods that surrounded the school. Four years later Bluffton became one of the first elementary schools in west Michigan to be accredited by the State Board of Education. In 1996, there were 160 students, from kindergarten through the fifth grade, with six full-time teachers, a part-time principal, support staff, and six part-time teachers who taught art, music, physical education, speech therapy, special education, and compensatory education. After DeHorn stepped down as principal, the school had three different principals: Ms. Johnson, Mr. Johnson, and Ms. Benjamin.

From its beginning until it closed in 2012, Bluffton School's attendance area extended from the Muskegon Channel to Sherman Boulevard, about one and a half miles south of the school. The district extended eastward about two miles to Bunker Middle School that was located in Lakeside. The school's mission statement was: "we believe that all children can learn, and we are committed to teach them the necessary skills of communication and problem-solving. Students will learn to function in a cooperative environment that develops self-esteem and respect for others." The school was closed in 2012 due to the reorganization Muskegon Public Schools and budget cuts.

The Bluffton Parent Teacher Association, which became the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) was started in 1915 as a Mother's Club. It began as a way for mothers to play a prominent part in school activities and to meet and discuss current issues. There were 56 women who were members in the first year. The women bought milk for the school children, kitchen supplies, playground equipment, organized a school library, purchased clinical supplies, and paid for a free bed at the hospital. The Bluffton PTO joined the Michigan Congress PTA to work together for the interest in children's welfare. The first president was Mrs. Mary Thompson.

In the 1930s, the PTO worked to organize Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops, the Boys Safety Patrol and the Girls Service Squad, created a community garden, and worked to create a preschool clinic with a visiting doctor. During this time, as most families were struggling due to the Great Depression, the PTO sponsored many card parties and used the proceeds for child welfare.

In the 1950s, the PTO made sure to recognize the service of dedicated civil servants, such as the mailman for the Bluffton neighborhood, and the PTO was active in trying to raise funds for a new school building. They celebrated in 1956 when the new school was built. Mrs. John Wiersma served as the PTO president during that year; she was the granddaughter of Mary Thompson. To celebrate the school's history, the PTO gathered many of the first textbooks from the school and the old hand bell and developed displays that were placed around the school. In 1958, for a fall fundraiser the PTO organized a vaudeville show, "Old Time Review," which

featured a chalk talk, Charleston Girls, Gay Ninety Waltzers, choristers, and vignettes. In 1970, the PTO published the booklet *Sand In Their Shoes*, an historical account of the Bluffton Area.

Throughout the 1980s and until the school closed in 2012, the PTO continued to support the school and numerous parents became involved in the school by assisting in classrooms, helping in the library, chaperoning field trips, organizing and operating the Book Fair, and participating in other special school events. The PTO also raised funds to provide computers in the classroom, new library books, science and math programs, provide an outdoor camp experience for fifth graders, and funding for the Project D.A.R.E.

**Scope and Contents:** This collection is organized into the following 18 series: Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), Reports/Plans, Correspondence, School Roster, Announcements/ Flyers, Newsletters, Yearbooks, Awards/ Certificates, Historical Library Materials, Newspaper Clippings, Founder's Day, Student Publications, Bluffton Community Crier, Miscellaneous, Class Pictures, Photographs, Photograph Albums, and Al Gore Video.

The Parent Teacher Organization series includes materials generated by the PTO, information about the organization, and the members of the organization. This series is divided into 9 sub-series which includes: by-laws; meeting minutes; fiscal materials containing bank statements, budget reports, receipts, deposit slips and check registers, the treasurer's report, and ledgers listing expenses; board members and officers which includes information about PTO officers, who served on the board, who served on committees, job descriptions of positions such as historian, ballots for elections, and a list of PTO members; informational booklets and handouts which include information about the organization, when meetings were held, and general guidelines aimed to help parents learn more about how the PTO served Bluffton School; songs and music including the official PTO song; national organization which includes a booklet, flyers, a radio broadcast, a magazine, and information about a summer reading program as well as guidelines for other PTO organizations; notes which contains materials about the carnival event preparation, a note sent to parents, lists and sign in sheets from activities, visitation statistics, and a bus schedule; and the scrapbook, also called the historian's book, which includes photographs, program booklets, directories, materials from the 29th Convention of the National PTO, list of National PTO officers, parties, materials from events such as Founder's Day, meeting information, awards and certificates, and a list of officers and chairmen.

The Reports and Plans series contains state and county reports, plans that affected Bluffton School, a school improvement plan published by Muskegon Public Schools, an accreditation report, MEAP results, Bluffton Annual Education reports, plans for the asbestos emergency response act, technology upgrades, and public schools report. The majority of the materials in this series are from the 1990s.

The Correspondence series includes all general letters, notes to parents, letters from the PTO to parents and teachers, letters from former teachers, information about current school events sent to parents such as parent/teacher conferences, information about special programs such as the school carnival and ice cream socials, memorandums, congratulatory letters and cards, award nominations, information about PTO sales, letters regarding donations and fundraisers and fiscal

concerns, and two letters from a French pen pal sent in 1942. The majority of the letters are from 1979 to 1999, although there are several letters from the 1930s and 1940s.

The School Roster series includes lists of children attending Bluffton as well as their parents' names and contact information, and information about the grade each child is in and the classroom number.

The Announcements/ Flyers series contains flyers and announcements advertising school events, special programs, and open houses. Programs include school carnivals, field days, snow carnival, Halloween programs, science fairs, and any other school event. The majority of the announcements and flyers in this series are from the 1980s.

The Newsletters series includes the *Bluffton Banner* and *Bluffton Bugle* published by the Bluffton School and unnamed general school newsletters, all contain general news of school events, field trips, special programs, notes from teachers, information about conferences, and school calendars. *The Bluffton Banner/ Bugle* are earlier newsletters from 1960 to 1970, and the general newsletter editions are from 1982 to 1996.

The Yearbooks series contains Bluffton School yearbooks with class pictures, student names, club listings, and other photographs from 1991 to 2012.

The Awards and Certificates series includes awards or certificates that the Bluffton School or students received for different achievements, or recognition in several different fields. The series contains MEAP recognition certificates from 1983 to 1995, a census certificate from 2010, a Northwestern University Midwest Academic Talent award from 2010, a certificate of approval from the state of Michigan for the care of children in 1989, a Fitness ACES 2009 certificate of participation, an Odyssey of the Mind participation certificate for 1998, a Boy Scouts charter for 1991, a certificate for Muth Excellence in Leadership Award for 1998, a MAISD art award booklet from 2007, a certificate of recognition for the Bluffton PTO from 1990, a certificate of appreciation of Bluffton School Staff 1988, a March of Dimes reading champions certificate from 1984/1985, a certificate of recognition for the Science Challenge from 1986, an American Red Cross fundraising certificate sponsored by Olive Garden, a certificate of recognition from the State Board for MEAP testing, a certificate of accreditation from 1993, and a United Way Gold Award for the years 1977 to 1989. There are two awards/certificates in the oversized folder, the Muth Award and the 1993 accreditation certificate.

The Historical Library Materials series contains essays, papers, and pamphlets about historical subjects that were available to students at the Bluffton School Library, and a Green Gold Michigan history coloring book that was given away to students.

The Newspaper Clippings series contains various newspaper article clippings from the 1950s to the 1980s that focus on school events, activities, and student achievements. The majority of the clippings were copied from the originals.

The Founder's Day series includes an information booklet about Founder's Day, also known as Memory Night, which celebrated an event in February 17, 1898 when mothers first met about the

welfare of children and thus started the Parent Teacher Association which later became the PTO. The series also includes a play, notes, and photographs from a 1954 Founder's Day celebration.

The Student Publications series contains poems, stories, and other publication written by Bluffton School students from 1988 to 2006.

The Bluffton Community Crier series contains the Bluffton community newsletter *The Bluffton Community Crier* that includes local news, personal news and resident events, organization meetings, and other community information. The newsletters in this series are from 1937 to 1940 although there are several issues missing. This series provides general information about events that occurred in Bluffton's early history and provides a snapshot of the community.

The Miscellaneous series contains several publications and brochures related to parent education and children's health, a list of lunchroom rules, initial partnership meeting information from McDonald's, Odyssey of the Mind 1998 program, a pamphlet "How to Find Rating as a Real Dad," fundraiser product sheets, Bunker honor roll 1984, a March 1984 calendar, school letterhead, two scrapbook dividers from 1954/5-1956, blank guest book pages from the 1956 new school dedication and open house, a list of adult education courses, 1956 dedication booklets, an invitation from 1942, a guide and brochure to the nature trail behind Bluffton School, a map of the neighborhood, Muskegon Public Schools 4th Grade curriculum booklet, Muskegon Community College flyer on a sexuality program for kids, and Margaret Drake Elliot's booklet *Little Things*. The materials in this series are a sample of the types of papers that the Bluffton School either produced or received and are in this series because they do not fit within other series.

The Class Pictures series includes photographs of each grade, kindergarten through fifth/ sixth grades, often with the name of each student, with photographs of the teachers, principal, and school staff. These photographs were given to each student to take home. The photographs are from 1969 to 2012.

The Photographs series contains numerous snapshots and professional photographs of Bluffton School students, teachers, events, and the exteriors of the school. This series is organized into the following sub-series: students, which includes students engaged in activities, attending school Halloween and other parties, and other special events; classroom/library/lunchroom which includes snapshots of students in the classroom and other school interiors either working on various projects, general classroom work, or in a special learning environment; outdoor activities includes snapshots of the playground, Snow Carnival, field days, images of the nature trail construction, field trips, and other images of students engaged in outdoor activities; staff which includes images of various staff members conducting class or in different school environments; school exterior includes views of the school from 1954 to the 1980s; sports/music/clubs includes snapshots of a few school teams, students who were in the Cub Scouts, and who played music; PTO which includes photographs of the PTO officers, a potluck, dinner from 1954 and 1955, Founder's Day 1954, and Memory Night in 1956; Al Gore Visit includes photographs from Al Gore's visit to Bluffton School on October 30, 2000; Class Pictures contains earlier photographs of the classes from Bluffton from the years between 1885

and 1971; and negatives/slides contains images from Camp Pendalouan from October 1966 and other images.

The Photograph Albums contains three albums with photographs of students in theatrical plays, engaged in holiday activities for Christmas and Halloween, images of Snow Carnival and the spring Carnival, field days, science fair projects, special school events such as Pride Day, a picnic at Deer Park, spelling bees, images of staff retirement parties, and graduation. The three photograph albums are for the years 1983 to 1986, 1987 to 1989, and 1987.

The Al Gore Video series includes a videotape from Al Gore's visit to Bluffton school on October 30, 2000.

**Arrangement:** This collection was donated by Bluffton School after the school was closed in 2012. All of the materials in this collection were created by Bluffton School or the Bluffton School Parent Teacher Organization or were collected by the above two entities. There was no apparent order when this collection was donated and it was arranged into logical series and sub-series. There were several three ring notebook binders full of materials. The notebooks have been discarded to follow best preservation practices and the materials have been arranged into their corresponding series. A crocheted scrapbook cover from one of these notebooks is stored in the oversize folder.

## **Contents:**

### **Series 1: Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)**

*Sub-Series: By-Laws*

Dates: 1950, 1982, 1989

*Sub-Series: Meeting Minutes*

Dates: 1953, 1987-1999

*Sub-Series: Fiscal*

*File Unit: Bank Statements*

*File Unit: Budget*

Dates: 1953-1998

*File Unit: Receipts*

Dates: 1930-1996

*File Unit: Deposit Slips/ Check Registers*

Dates: 1987-2001

*File Unit: Treasurer's Report*

Dates: 1928-1997

*File Unit: Ledgers*  
Dates: 1951-2001

*Sub-Series: Board Members/ Officers*

*Sub-Series: Informational Booklets/ Handbook*  
Dates: 1941-1992

*Sub-Series: Songs/Music*

*Sub-Series: National Organization*  
Dates: 1934-1946

*Sub-Series: Notes*

*Sub-Series: Scrapbook/ Historian Book*  
Dates: 1946-1952

Location: Box 1

**Series 2: Reports/ Plans**  
Dates: 1986-1999  
Location: Box 1

**Series 3: Correspondence**  
Dates: 1929-1999  
Location: Box 1

**Series 4: School Roster**  
Dates: 1954-1988  
Location: Box 1

**Series 5: Announcements/ Flyers**  
Dates: 1980-1991  
Location: Box 1

**Series 6: Newsletters**

*Sub-Series: General*  
Dates: 1982-1996



*Sub-Series: Bluffton Banner/ Bugle*  
Dates: 1960-1970

Location: Box 2

**Series 7: Yearbooks**

Dates: 1991-2012

Location: Box 2

**Series 8: Awards/ Certificates**

Dates: 1977-2010

Location: Box 2, Oversize Folder

**Series 9: Historical Library Materials**

Location: Box 2

**Series 10: Newspaper Clippings**

Dates: 1954-1990s

Location: Box 2

**Series 11: Founders Day**

Location: Box 2

**Series 12: Student Publications**

Dates: 1988/1989, 2006

Location: Box 2

**Series 13: Bluffton Community Crier**

Dates: 1937-1940

Location: Box 2

**Series 14: Miscellaneous**

Dates: 1942-1998

Location: Box 2

**Series 15: Class Pictures**

Dates: 1969-2012

Location: Box 2

**Series 16: Photographs**

*Sub-Series: Students- Parties*

*Sub-Series: Classroom/Library/ School Interiors*

Dates: 1975-1990s

*Sub-Series: Outdoor Activities*

Dates: 1980s-1990s

*Sub-Series: Staff*

Dates: 1957-1996

*Sub-Series: School Exteriors*

Dates: 1954-1985

*Sub-Series: Sports/ Music/ Clubs*

Dates: 1968-1980s

*Sub-Series: Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)*

Dates: 1954-1956

*Sub-Series: Al Gore Visit*

Date: October 30, 2000

*Sub-Series: Class Pictures*

Dates: 1885-1971

*Sub-Series: Slides/Negatives*

Dates: 1966

Location: Box 2

**Series 17: Photograph Albums**

Dates: 1983-1989

Location: Box 3

**Series 18: Al Gore Video**

Date: October 30, 2000

Location: Box 3

