

25TH ANNUAL CSAA CONFERENCE



June 21-23, 2026 | Geneva, New York

Scandling Center

on the campus of

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

25TH ANNUAL CSAA CONFERENCE

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The Country School Association of America is a non-profit national organization dedicated to preserving memories of country schools and promoting scholarship about the early American educational experience. The organization provides interested individuals with an enthusiastic community focused on early American schooling, preservation, education, and curriculum. The CSAA prides itself on connecting research and practice for anyone passionate about our country schools.

www.countryschoolassociation.org

SUNDAY

9:00 am on **Check-in** (Scandling Center, 1st floor, 300 Pulteney St, Geneva, NY)

9:00-10:00 am **Campus Walking Tour** to Seneca Lake and historic Pulteney Park (about 1.5 miles)

11-11:45 am **Ranger-led Tour at the Women’s Rights National Historical Park** (136 Fall St., Seneca Falls, NY)
 Site of the first Women’s Rights Convention, July 19-20, 1848, which issued the “Declaration of Sentiments” calling for equal rights women and based on the Declaration of Independence.

Transportation on your own; 11 miles away.

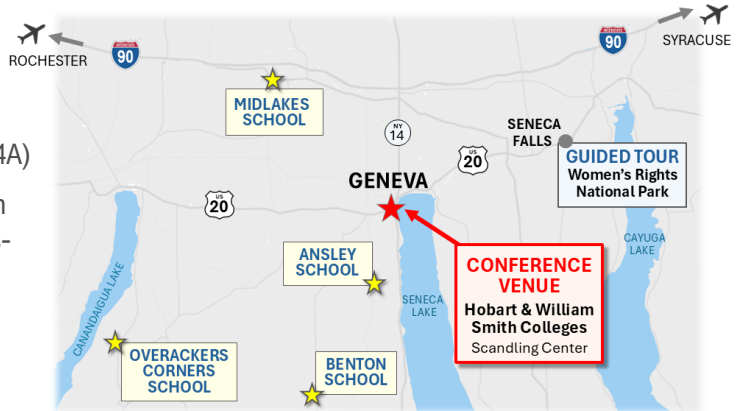
Lunch on your own; list of spots to grab a quick lunch available at check-in or scan QR code:

1:00-4:00 pm **“Open House” at 4 Area Schoolhouses** (all within easy driving distance from Geneva)

Scan QR code at right for a map more detailed information on each school



- ▶ **Ansley School** – 4921 County Road 6, Geneva, NY (park on Reed Road)
- ▶ **Benton School** – 2390 Baldwin Road, Penn Yan, NY (at the corner of NY Rt. 14A)
- ▶ **Midlakes School** – 1510 NY-488, Clifton Springs, NY (enter the Midlakes / Phelps-Clifton Springs School District campus and continue straight to schoolhouse)
- ▶ **Overackers Corner School** – 5658 Vine Valley Road, Rushville



ANSLEY



BENTON



MIDLAKES



OVERACKERS CORNERS

As pictured in the 1933 National Geographic – identical today!

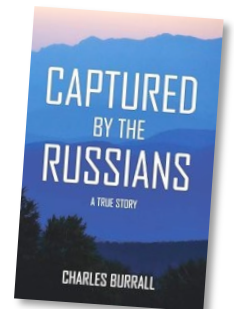
4:00-5:00 pm **Opening Reception** (Scandling Center, 1st floor)

5:00-6:00 pm **Dinner** (Scandling Center, Dining Area, 1st floor)

6:30-8:00 pm **Welcome & Keynote** (Scandling Center, Vandervort Room, 2nd floor)

▶ **From a One-Room School to Captured by the Russians**

Geneva native and author Charles Burrall will reflect upon the four years he was educated in Geneva’s last one-room schoolhouse, still in use in the early 1960s long after most other such schoolhouses in upstate New York had closed, and recount his experience taken hostage along with other crew members on a fishing boat by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the subject of his book *Captured by the Russians*. Mr. Burrall, who later became a beloved public school teacher elsewhere, credits the teacher in the one-room Glass Factory Bay School as the best one he ever had.



*The talk is co-sponsored by the **Geneva Public Library** and **Historic Geneva**, the city’s historical society, and we will be joined by other alumni of the Glass Factory Bay School, now a residence south of the city, as well as by invited area residents.*

8:00-8:30 pm **CSAA Awards Ceremony**

MONDAY

7:00-8:00 am **Breakfast** (Dining Area, 1st floor)

8:15-8:30 am **Welcome & Announcements** (Vandervort Room, 2nd floor)

8:30-9:25 am **Plenary Session:**

▶ **Hidden But Not Forgotten: The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg's Bray School** – *Scott Merrifield*

This presentation will discuss the process of restoring a unique mid-18th century colonial Virginia building used as a school for enslaved children and the collaborative efforts of many that came together to tell its story. Through careful investigative work, clues to the building's original appearance were found, left behind from over 250 years of alterations and renovations, and guided the restoration efforts. With these architectural clues and extensive research, the was restored to its original appearance. An overview of the collective work of researchers, architectural historians, curators, and archaeologists will also be discussed, and how their research helped to share the story of the children and teacher of this school.

Scott Merrifield currently serves as the Architectural Preservation Technician at Colonial Williamsburg. From 2021 to 2025, he was involved in the relocation and restoration of the Bray School. Before his current role, he was an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Curatorial Intern at Colonial Williamsburg and helped work on two exhibits at the Dewitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum.

9:30-10:25 am **Concurrent Session I** (1st session listed in Vandervort A; 2nd in Vandervort B):

▶ **A. What's Old is New Again: Lessons from One-Room Schools in an Age of Digital False Promises** – *Dr. Veronica I. Ent*

This presentation explores how emerging research on attention, memory, and cognition challenges the over-use of digital tools in today's classrooms. Drawing on the practices of one-room schoolhouses, it highlights how reinforcement, recitation, and respect created conditions for deep and lasting learning. Participants will consider how reclaiming these time-tested approaches can strengthen student engagement and achievement in modern contexts. This will be an interactive session with discussion, demonstration and examples.

Dr. Veronica I. Ent serves as the Country School Association of America president. She is a professor in education at Saint Vincent College, Latrobe, Pennsylvania. In addition to her teaching, she manages and curates a mid-1850 restored schoolhouse located on her farm in western Pennsylvania, The Concord School. Her research interests are early and modern instructional technology, curriculum design, visual instruction, and teaching methodology. She received her Ed.D. in Instructional Design and Technology from the University of Pittsburgh. she taught as an elementary teacher for two years in Athens, Ohio and then later was employed as a high school librarian and media specialist for eight years at Greensburg Salem High School in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, prior to her career in higher education..

▶ **B. Remember the Ladies** – *Sarah Bent*

"Remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors."
—Abigail Adams in her March 31, 1776 letter to husband John Adams

The National Women's Hall of Fame in nearby Seneca Falls is the nation's first and foremost nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring the achievements of remarkable American women who changed the world. Because this museum will be closed during our conference, and as CSAA members we are also committed to honoring the past and inspiring the future, we have chosen 10 Hall of Fame honorees with connections to one-room schools and education to share with you. We hope this presentation and discussion will also inspire you to find ways to use your school space as a social and educational hub today as it was in the past, to honor those under served by history in your communities.

After a career as a Historic Site Interpreter and Supervisor in New Jersey, **Sarah Bent** retired to Ohio and works part time at the Ashland Public Library. She now enjoys gardening and quilting as well as devoting more time, energy, and professional experience to CSAA.

10:30-11 am **Break & Viewing Silent Auction Items**

MONDAY (continued; 11 am - 1 pm)

11:00-11:55 am **Concurrent Session II** (1st session listed in Vandervort A; 2nd in Vandervort B):

▶ **A. American Ingenuity Teaching Art in the late 19th – early 20th Centuries – Debbie Schaefer-Jacobs**

This image-rich presentation emphasizes specialized art teaching tools originating in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey and used in country schools from 1870-1930's. These include Chautauqua Industrial Art Desks conceived in the Finger Lakes, the Shepherd slate lap desk and rotating transparency desk, stencils, the development of the wax crayon, drawing copy books, and tracers. The images and research are from the national collections and museums as well as documentation from patents specifications, journals, and company archival documents.

These materials supported visual learning, inspired creativity, and fostered imaginations. Not coincidentally they were produced at the end of the industrial revolution and became popular in the age of great exhibitions such as the Centennial exhibition of 1876, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition/St Louis World's Fair where each new innovation is highlighted, and during the period when Milton Bradley convinces his company board to add a division that produces art supplies for the growing number of kindergartens in the country. Created for ordinary classroom teachers and the bonus home market, they were ideal for country schools where specialized art curriculum teachers weren't available.

Debbie Schaefer-Jacobs is curator of history of education and childhood material culture, "America on Stone: 19th Century Prints" exhibition and the domestic visual arts at the National Museum of American History. She began working with Smithsonian collections as a 1977 intern, is on the board of directors for the Country School Association of America, and is a frequent lecturer for the History of Education Society and Organization for Educational Historians. Debbie is also a contributing author to several publications, including Smithsonian Civil War, Inside the National Collection and The Promise of a Nation: Commemorating 250 Years of Patriotism, Resilience, and Aspirations from the National Collection.

▶ **B. Developing a Vibrant Youth Docent Program - Linda Jennings**

The best way to present history in a museum setting is to make history come alive through reenactment and involving visitors in activities. In a one-room schoolhouse, the presence of costumed "student" reenactors in particular can provide a valuable living history experience for the volunteers as well as the visitors. Specific topics to be covered:

- Recruiting children to be volunteers: Who are our youth docents and how did they come to us?
- Developing an initial and an ongoing training program, including a training manual: What is covered in a training session?
- Exploring all the opportunities in which to engage the youth docents: How can they be an active part of tours, events, and field trips?
- Listening to and seeing youth docents in action through slides and video clips: What exactly does a youth docent program look like in action?
- Sustaining the future and ensuring the continuance of museum goals by investing in our youth docents—they are our future: What are the opportunities and responsibilities of our adult volunteers in a youth docent program?

Linda Jennings taught elementary school for 40 years, retiring 10 years ago. She holds a B.A. in elementary education and an M.A. in elementary administration. In 2017, she began volunteering at the Pullen's Corner Schoolhouse, a restored but empty building. In the ensuing years she gathered school furniture, books, and artifacts to fill the inside of the school. With the help of a team of volunteers she has developed tours, events, school field trips, a volunteer training program, and youth docent program. She is currently the Education Director and a board member of Lincoln, Rhode Island's Great Road Heritage Campus, which includes Pullen's Corner Schoolhouse as well as the Hearthside House Museum, Moffett Mill, and Hannaway Blacksmith Shop.

12:00-1:00 pm **Lunch** (Dining Area, 1st floor)

MONDAY (continued; 1 - 3 pm)

1:00-1:55 pm **Concurrent Session III** (1st session listed in Vandervort A; 2nd in Vandervort B):

▶ **A. Death in the One-Room School – Larry Scheckel**

The one-room school in America was a warm and inviting place presided over by a caring teacher. That was the rule, but there were exceptions. We will explore five cases where outsiders intruded into the safe environs of the rural classroom, from the death of Inga Magnusson in rural Minnesota in December 1921 to the 2006 shootings that killed five school children at the Old Order Amish West Nickel Mines School in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Did three Kentucky school boys actually return to their school after hours and murder their teacher because they had been disciplined earlier in the day? What about that 1927 bombing in Lansing, Michigan? Poet Walt Whitman knew something about the dark side of the one-room school. He penned “Death in the School-Room.”

Larry Scheckel grew up on a family farm in the hill country of southwestern Wisconsin, one of nine children. He attended eight years of a one-room country school, four years of high school, off to the military for a spell, trained in electronics as a TV broadcast engineer, married, attended college, and started a teaching career. That career stretched over 38 years teaching physics and aerospace science at Tomah, Wisconsin. Larry has been named Tomah Teacher of the Year and Presidential Awardee. He and his wife, Ann, are both retired teachers and have published ten books.

▶ **B. Built for the Community, Saved for the Community – Wynne Klingel**

This presentation explores how one determined New York community recognized that there was still life left in a schoolhouse built to serve them. Spanning nearly 69 years, the story highlights the perseverance of hardworking individuals who refused to take “no” for an answer—not once, but twice. From the moment the land was designated for the Limerick Schoolhouse in Akron, New York (about 25 miles northeast of Buffalo), the building became a symbol of shared purpose. Lost records leave space to imagine the early days: families coming together to build not just a school, but a foundation for a growing community. When the children eventually left its classrooms, the schoolhouse did not fall silent. Instead, it adapted—continuing to serve the community. Over time, the building again faced uncertainty and despair, only to be rescued once more by those who believed in its value. This presentation traces the full journey of the schoolhouse: its creation, its evolution, its near loss, and its renewal—showcasing how community commitment can preserve history while inspiring future generations.

Wynne Klingel serves as Director of the Friends of Limerick, Inc. She has a bachelor’s degree in business management and worked 23 years for Honda of America, returning after retirement to help in the company’s retirement program. She has also been a 4-H advisor for 30 years.

2:00-2:55 pm **Concurrent Session IV** (1st session listed in Vandervort A; 2nd in Vandervort B):

▶ **A. Inviting 21st Century Visitors into the 19th Century – Alison Boissonnas**

Given the complexities that arise when present-day visitors, especially children of diverse backgrounds, go back in time at a 19th century one-room school, this presentation will consider how to create entertaining, age-appropriate, educational spaces that foster inquiry and creativity while still adhering to modern best practices for public history. Thoughtfully crafted, inclusive curricula that is careful not to romanticize or perpetuate exclusionary, offensive narratives have been shown to have many benefits. Socially, it is less likely to alienate visitors looking for a personal connection to history; academically, meaningful connections help students retain what they learn, and economically, such intentional engagement ensures that schools with a limited field trip budget keep such sites on the top of their list.

For the past six years, Alison Boissonnas has worked as a historical interpreter at the Rippleton Schoolhouse in Cazenovia, New York (which will be on our Tuesday tour), portraying the school teacher, Miss Mattie Buckland. Alison has her B.A. in History from Cornell University and has pursued graduate work in history at the University of Southern Maine and SUNY Empire State. She is passionate about sharing her love of history and narrative work with visitors of all ages. This presentation also serves as a project for Alison’s current graduate work in public history.

▶ **B. The Rapid Growth of Amish Schools in New York – Dr. Mark DeWalt**

The first Amish settlement in New York was founded in 1949 in Conewango County. Twenty-five years later (1994), a second settlement was established near Norfolk. By 1999 there were 15 communities of Amish in the state. Interestingly, in this century there has been a very rapid expansion of Amish communities in New

MONDAY (continued; 2 - 6:30 pm)

2:00-2:55 pm **Concurrent Session IV** (continued):

York to make a total of 45 by 2021. Each of these communities built and run their own parochial schools. This presentation will explore the number of schools, key demographics of the schools, and some interesting facts related to these schools. Photos of selected schools will be compared to Amish schools in other parts of the U.S. and Canada.

Dr. Mark Dewalt has been studying Amish and Old Order Mennonite education, family life, and culture for more than 50 years. More recently he has been conducting research into mortality rates and accident rates among the Amish. He published his first book, Amish Education in the United States and Canada in 2006. His most recent publications include "Prevalence of Accidents in Smaller Amish Settlements: 2015–2022," with Rachel Stein, and "Amish Mortality Rates in the Twenty-First Century," both published in The Journal of Plain Anabaptist Communities.

3:00-3:20 pm **Break & Last Chance to Bid on Silent Auction Items**

3:30-4:25 pm **Concurrent Session V** (1st session listed in Vandervort A; 2nd in Vandervort B):

A. Proud of Our Privies: The Schoolhouse Outhouse – Susan Fineman

Take a deep dive into the world of the country school outhouse, those heroic little structures "out back" that evoke disbelief, revulsion, and humor in museum visitors of all ages. Often a subject verging on the unmentionable, outhouses offer a very rich history in dealing with an unavoidable and "necessary" function. If we're fortunate enough to have an outhouse or two gracing the playgrounds of our preserved schoolhouses, they serve as a fascinating artifact, highlighting the rigors of 19th century life devoid of indoor plumbing. Curious visitors can't help taking a peek to imagine the logistics of a "two or a three-holer." Suspend your disbelief and take a whirlwind tour of these oft shabby structures and leave this presentation "privy" to the history, construction, and lore of the "backhouse," the "biffy"... the "throne room."

Susan Fineman is a retired teacher from the Lowell (Massachusetts) Public Schools where she taught for 31 years. Upon retirement she became involved with programming at the District #1 Schoolhouse, a restored 1841 one-room school in Nashua, New Hampshire, where she lives. She curates the Nashua schoolhouse and has served as a docent schoolmarm in the school's fourth grade living history program since 2005 hosting over 1,800 students each year. The editor of CSAA's "The Report Card," Susan has served on the CSAA Board of Directors since its official launch in 2006 and has presented at numerous CSAA annual conferences and to historical societies on a variety of country school topics. She also enjoys photographing schoolhouses across the United States.

B. Unique Ways to Utilize and Host Events at Historic One-Room Schools – Elizabeth Beckett and Maggie Beckett

This presentation focuses on the educational programs hosted at Mt. Gilead School in Kearney, Missouri, a two-room, two-story school built in 1879, replacing a log structure built in 1835. Historians believe it was the only area school to continuously hold classes during the Civil War, with teachers dismissing students to watch marching soldiers. The school now offers a unique field trip opportunity for students and adults—a four-hour program with students practicing penmanship, performing arithmetic problems using slates, and reading from McGuffey's readers. In addition, the program provides curriculum in both Missouri and American history.

Elizabeth Beckett has served since 1993 as the Director of Historic Sites for Clay County, Missouri, which includes Mt. Gilead School and three other properties. She holds B.S. and M.S. degrees. Elizabeth previously worked for the National Park Service at several locations including the Harry S Truman home in Independence, Missouri. Maggie Beckett graduated from University of Missouri in 2022 with a B.A. in Art and Art History. She has taught ceramics both in and out of the classroom, beginning in college and continuing today. After graduating, Maggie worked for Access Arts, an arts nonprofit in Columbia, Missouri. She later moved back to Kansas City to be closer to family and began working in Admissions at the Kansas City Art Institute. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in Education as she works toward becoming a teacher.

4:30-5:00 pm **Social Time / Networking**

5:00-6:00 pm **Dinner** (Dining Area, 1st floor)

6:00-6:30 pm **Pick up Silent Auction Items**

MONDAY (continued; 6:30 - 8:30 pm)

6:30-7:30 pm **CSAA Annual Meeting** (Vandervort Room, 2nd floor)

7:30-8:30 pm **Evening Entertainment / Presentation**

▶ **Proper School Marm Etiquette with Miss Gill and Miss Eubanks** – *Sarah Eubanks and Catherine Gill*

Two working marms in full historic costume present the trials and tribulations of the iconic 19th century American one-room schoolhouse teacher. This presentation explores classroom management, community expectations, and the emotional labor of teaching in a single-room setting, offering fresh insight into a foundational figure in American educational history. The presenters trace the professional challenges, gendered expectations, and community roles that defined the occupation, highlighting both the hardships and the agency of teachers who operated at the center of rural life. With personal narratives and historical materials, the session reconsiders a familiar icon through a more nuanced historical lens. Drawing on historical sources, it also explores the daily realities, social expectations, and quiet resilience required to manage a classroom that doubled as a community hub. This presentation blends scholarship with storytelling to illuminate the human side of a profession that helped shape American education.

Catherine Gill and Sarah Eubanks met while training for marm positions at the West Bay Common School Children's Museum in League City, Texas in 2003 and have worked there ever since. Both Catherine and Sarah are elementary school teachers. Catherine enjoys historic costuming and reenacting and recently portrayed Betsy Ross, aired on the national NBC-TV Today show.

TUESDAY

7:00-7:45 am **Breakfast** (Dining Area, 1st floor)

7:45 am-6 pm **Daylong Site Visits via Motorcoach to Restored Schoolhouses Ringing the Finger Lakes**

*A brochure describing the seven schools we'll visit will be handed out as you board the bus— BUT THERE MAY NOT BE ENOUGH TO GO AROUND SO BE SURE TO **BOARD EARLY!!***

WE DEPART PROMPTLY AT 8:00 AM!! DON'T MISS THE BUS!

You may park all day on campus. The conference concludes on our return.

Dinner on your own—enjoy one of Geneva's fine eateries.

Thank you for attending CSAA's 25th annual conference! We look forward to seeing you in Florida next year.

