Museum Notes

for the week of October 11– 17, 2026
by Kristen Parrott, curator

Dudley, Lepke, Clawson, Baker, Enterprise, Oak Ridge, Cliffside, Valleyview. Do you recognize these names?

They were all names of country schools located in the northwestern part of Vernon County. Our region was once dotted with little country schoolhouses. For about 100 years, from the 1860's to the 1960's, the country school was an important part of life in this rural area. Today almost all of the country schools have closed, but often the old buildings are still standing.

Our 6th annual country schoolhouse road tour will be held on Saturday, October 24. This year's tour covers northwestern Vernon County, including the schools named above plus many more. The self-guided driving tour will lead you past remaining schoolhouses, and past the sites of schools that are now gone.

Start your tour between 9AM and 1PM on October 24 at the historic Seas Branch School, located next to Westby Elementary School at 122 Nelson St. in Westby. For $10, you can pick up the guidebook and map, and then drive along a beautiful route full of fall colors through the Towns of Christiana, Coon, Hamburg, Bergen, Harmony, and Jefferson. The individual sites will be marked with little red schoolhouse signs, which will stay up until Sunday evening.

The Seas Branch School will be open for touring inside that Saturday. The schoolhouse was originally located east of Hwy. Y in the Town of Viroqua. It was near the village of Avalanche, along the Seas Branch of the West Fork of the Kickapoo River. The school was built in 1908 and operated until 1958. After it closed, the building was used for a time by the Seas Branch Smithies 4-H Club. Then in 1998, it was moved to the Westby Area Schools property and restored.

The tour will include about 20 schools. Check out our website at https://www.vernoncountyhistory.org/ or call us at 608-637-7396 for more information.