

# Colon couple lives in former Lytle School



Gary and Sue Ann Hughes have lived in a former one-room schoolhouse since the mid 1990s. The former Lytle School is in the Colon Community Schools district. **By Jef Rietsma Oct 25, 2014**

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When Gary and Sue Ann Hughes started looking for a retirement house, their search took them all over the Colon area. Sue Ann was a bus driver for Colon Community Schools, so she had occasion to see a lot of the countryside. Around 1990, she happened across a stone house for sale on Wattles Road in Branch County's Matteson Township.

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Hughes quickly recapped in her mind the criteria she and her husband had established: Stone house? Check.

Rural setting? Check. Quiet road? Check. Close to Colon? Check. The wheels of fate were in motion.

"Gary and I never said we had to live in an old, one-room schoolhouse, but we both really liked the idea of a stone house,

so, we were very particular about what we'd consider," Hughes said. "He was driving truck at the time,

and I think I talked to him on the phone that night and told him when he's home over the weekend there's

a house I'd like us to go look at." The couple previously lived on Colon Road and was looking for a smaller house,

suitable for just the two of them. They liked what they saw and wound up pulling the trigger on the deal.

Though they aren't sure during what decade in the 1800s the former Lytle School was built, they know the Colon school district established its boundaries to

include the site in the 1880s. "Whether the school existed at that time or they built it after then, we don't know,"

Hughes said. "We are pretty certain it closed in the 1940s."

By all accounts, it was still the 1940s when it was converted into a residence she added. Hughes said Louis and

Mary Thrans were the original owners and resided in the house for roughly 30 years. The second owners,

whose name Hughes couldn't place, weren't originally from the area and lived there about 10 years before Hughes

and her husband bought it. "We finally got our stone house and, by coincidence, it happened to be a former one-room

schoolhouse," Hughes said. The only memento they own from its days as a schoolhouse is a copy of a photo from 1935.

Hughes said she and her husband managed to find a longtime resident who verified the names of the students in the photo.

Many of the surnames from that 80-year-old photo are still common in the area today: Van Vorst, Coats, Weinberg,

Teft and Miller, for example.

In all probability, the great-grandkids of the solemn-looking youngsters in the photo are of an age that they could very well be attending school in Colon currently. The residence is in the Colon school district and has a Colon phone number, but a Sherwood mailing address. The Hughes had an extensive amount of work done inside the house, adding a second floor to create the one and only bedroom in the house. Gary Hughes said the interior was stripped to the stone wall, affording them the chance to locate the old slate chalkboard. It was discovered on the southwest corner.

"But we had to take it down because we needed to put up insulation, we had to have all the wiring redone and all the plumbing redone," he said. "Other than that, there wasn't any great discovery inside, though I did find an Indian head penny one day out in the yard and I once found a token of some sort." As if on cue, while Gary Hughes was talking about the unattached shed in which the teacher's horse and buggy parked, he unearthed a piece of coal in an area adjacent to the structure. He said the building was also where coal for the pot-belly stove was stored. "Every once in a while, a piece of coal will turn up," he said. "You look at it and you ask yourself, 'How many years has that been sitting here?'"

He said they wanted to save the original hardwood floor. But, much like the roofline, it sagged and there was no choice but to have the floor – and roof – replaced. Passersby, what few there are, might not see at first glance the shell of a former schoolhouse. Gary said the north side of the house, which faces the roadway, collapsed while workers were rebuilding the cloak room. That explains the modern siding on that quadrant of the building. "We're pretty sure the original entrance was on the north side, but now that whole wall is gone," he said, gesturing toward a landscaped area in his yard featuring the collection of fieldstone that once served as a wall. Gary said he eventually built in the yard a monument out of field stone. Atop the monument is a bell that looks as

it could have once been a part of the former school. It's not, however. Their daughter, Centreville Elementary

Principal Becky Stauffer, found the bell. Its history is not known, but, the Hughes agree, is a nice complement to their retirement home. "It's neat to think about the history this building has seen, even though it may not look inside anything like it did in the 1800s," Sue Ann said. "It doesn't have the memories like our old house, where we raised our two kids, but it's comfortable and we like it."