

## CELEBRATING BOCA RATON'S CENTENNIAL SCHOOL YEAR 1908 - 2008

The first students and their teacher assembled in one of George Long's packing houses in 1908. By December of that year, the one-room school, built by the citizens of Boca Raton, stood west of the FEC railroad tracks near the site of the present day police station. The events that led to Boca Raton's first school are recorded in one of Frank Chesebro's many diaries:

*The first school was taught in 1908 in a packing house. We had applied to the County School Board to build us a school house. They were hard up as usual same as they are now. They told us we could build the school house and they would furnish a teacher. Guess they thought that would put a quietus on us for a while. But we did and they did.*

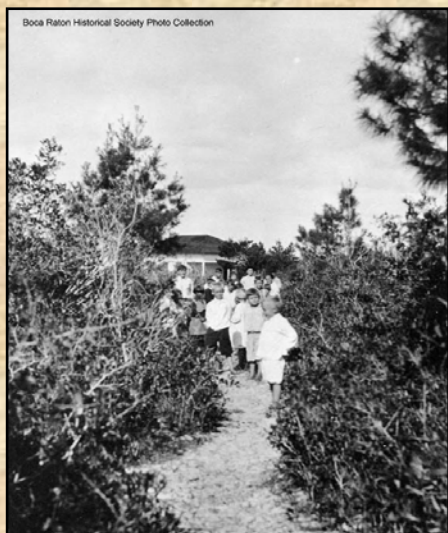
Boca Raton pioneer, Frank Chesebro, was referring to Dade County School Board, of course, because Palm Beach County was not formed until 1909.

The school initially included a few Japanese children from the Yamato colony with the Boca Raton white children. (Later the Yamato Colony had its own school with an American teacher.) The schoolhouse was used until 1920 when a new masonry structure was completed at the site of today's Boca Raton Elementary School.

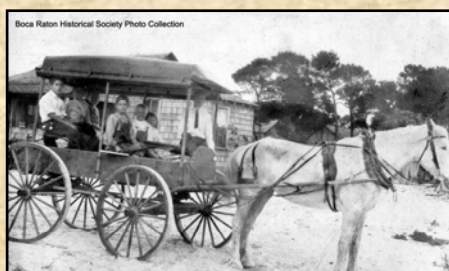


Boca Raton's First Schoolhouse, 1908  
(L - R) Hatty Long, Viola Purdom, Blanche Braley, Ernestine Purdom, George Long, Jr., Helen Long, Eula Purdom, and Professor Rhebinder.

Because of segregation, the school-aged children of Boca Raton's African American subdivision, Pearl City, had no school to attend. In ca. 1923 Alex Hughes petitioned the Board of Public Instruction (BPI) to provide a teacher for this population of Boca Raton. When Alex Hughes secured a teacher, Frank Chesebro moved the former 1908 schoolhouse up Dixie Highway. It took him eleven days, but he delivered the schoolhouse to Pearl City. The school sat on the south side of Eleventh Street and Dixie Highway. The original wood framed schoolhouse was used once again until it was replaced in the late 1930s by the BPI with a new school building that was eventually named Roadman School, located at 1250 N. Dixie Highway.

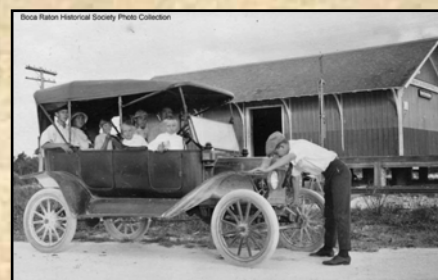


*Students on the path to school, the first schoolhouse can be seen in the background.*



*(L) Boca Raton's first school bus. The horse and wagon belonged to pioneer Frank Chesebro.*

*(R) When Frank Chesebro's Model-T was available, the school teacher, Laurence Gould, would use it as a school bus. (Boca Raton's FEC train station can be seen in the background.)*



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Return to the Boca Raton Historical Society website's homepage ([www.bocahistory.org](http://www.bocahistory.org)). Click **Boca Raton's History** to access BRHS's *Spanish River Papers*. Click the **spanish river** link for the following on-line publications: Vol. XI No.3: Spring 1983, Vol. III, No. 2 February, 1975, and Vol. VI, No.1 October, 1977.

**Education Department of the Boca Raton Historical Society & Museum, 2008**