

District Schoolhouse No. 9: Where nostalgia was created

By June W. Kennedy

Situated on Groton Road near Gould Road, the Lyon School was characteristic in design — one room, two entry doors and a woodshed/out-house combination

Before the turn of the century, Lillian Wright was a schoolgirl there. She recalled an 8-day clock which hung on the wall, and said school was kept from 8 45 a.m. to 3 30 p.m. — with an hour for lunch and 15-minute recess both morning and afternoon

On pleasant days, lessons were held out in Gould's pasture across the way, where the children studied birds, wildflowers and read poetry

In the wintertime, during recess, the class coasted down the hill on their double-runner sleds. The natural surroundings were put to good use

"Teacher had her schoolbell. Our desks were screwed to the floor, the center top opened up. There were drawers on the side with a space for writing on the top. A special cabinet of books was always available to those who had finished their work," recalled Wright

More memories from District School No. 9 were shared by another former student, Mrs. Harry (Inez) Ingalls, who came to the Lyon School in 1884 right after her fifth birthday, starting in the April or spring term

Despite her 80 odd years, she recited a school piece she had once memorized from her grandmother's almanac

*"A Merry Merry Christmas
To crown the closing year
With peace and goodwill to
mortals*

*And words of holy cheer
What though the dreary
landscape*

*Be clothed in purest white
If bright the fire and cheerful
Light up our Christmas night*

"We trimmed with evergreens and made our own wreaths. The boys cut the boughs. There was good discipline at the school, for in a way it was like a big, close family

"On real hot days the teacher would let a boy go to the pump for a pail and pass the dipper around so everyone could have a sip," Ingalls said

"One year there were only

nine pupils at the school, so that when the boys wanted to play baseball, I had to play on the team. Some years I was the only girl in the school

"Because many of the students never went on to the Academy after the eighth grade, the teacher gave graduation presents to her students," Ingalls added

"The music teacher came around once a week with a pitch pipe. Dr. Sleeper, an old-time doctor in town, came to visit too. One of the teachers, I remember, had a boyfriend who would appear now and then. This made sport for the students," she said

It is interesting to note the school reports and see how they coincided with the pupils' recollections of having been visited and tested by the superintendent. The 1891 Town Report affirms that more than 180 visits to the schools were made by him so that he could keep watch of their progress

The superintendent frequently gave tests in arithmetic, geography and language. The form of a question might be different from the book form, or the teacher's form, and thus the child's ability to think was measured and mere routines were avoided

In this way the superintendent discovered which schools were keeping up to the required standards, and which were falling below it. Two or three schools gave an average of 90 percent or more of correct answers

The monthly exams and reports to the parents were considered helpful in keeping a closer connection between the schools, towns and parents

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The Lyon School closed down because there were so few pupils, and from then on, the children went to Graniteville. The schoolhouse became a clubhouse — the Fortnightly Club met every two weeks and put on skits and plays.

After it was set fire to a couple of times, the town must have forbidden its use as such

Bernice Gould Picking, present owner, said her Grandpa Gould bought the place, and by adding a wing on the Groton side, converted it into a duplex home for his farm and sawmill hands at Forest View Farm

And thus the closing of another memory book

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.