

No. 5 is last pristine example of quaint one-room learning

By June W. Kennedy

Parkerville Schoolhouse No. 5 was built at the corner of Carlisle Road and Route 225 in the year 1880. (It was set on the same site as the 1874 schoolhouse which was lost by fire.)

The Selectmen were authorized to procure a plan and specifications for the new building. Estimates were received from six builders. The contract was given to Jonathan Larcom of Chelmsford as his estimate was the lowest at \$1,039.

Schoolhouse No. 5 was a typical one-room, one-teacher school. Right in the middle of the floor stood the 2½ foot tall by 3½ foot long pot-bellied stove. The janitor or the big boys helped to start the fires. The school was heated with cordwood.

The town supplied the wood in four-foot lengths; men arrived with a bucksaw to saw it into two-foot lengths. Students were required to pile it in the shed.

At the Parkerville School, two pupils shared the same desk, a two-seater settee. Teacher's desk sat atop the raised platform between the front doors. The platform remains, as do the two outside doors which lead to the entry way where the coats and wraps were hung; one side for the boys and one side for the girls.

In fact, nothing has really changed. Jennie Seifer Richards, former student in this village school, remembered in her day how the students caught chewing gum had to put it on their noses and stand in the corner; those caught writing notes had to read them aloud.

Holiday recitations, with parents invited to hear their prodigies recite pieces they were supposed to have memorized, remained imprinted in the recollections of Frank Jarvis who attended Parkerville School from 1912-1920.

Students always looked forward to Christmas vacation for the ice skating. At that time, February or mid-winter vacations were unheard of. Christmas and April were the only weeks off from school. "We worked in those days," said Jarvis.

The only social life at school that he recalled were the Halloween parties. Because there was no electricity in the school, everyone brought a kerosene light or lantern. A good, shadowy setting for the event. Popular were the classic games of bobbing for apples and biting doughnuts on a string.

The parties were short, ending by 8:30 p.m. for all had to be home by 9 p.m. When parents said to be home by 9:00, they meant home by 9:00. There were, of course, no "trick or treats" then to prolong the merrymaking. And punishment

for all pranks was administered in the woodshed.

Small class size

"There were four in my grade," said Bernard Wilder, "just two girls and one other boy. The teacher came from Lowell Normal School. She sure had her hands full. But the teaching was almost private and really quite thorough. Playground equipment was nil.

"When the 7th and 8th graders started going up to Frost School, they walked to the Parkerville School where the bus picked them up and took them to the center. Some walked two miles from Carlisle Depot to the bus stop. There were fewer stops along the road than our children have today.

"The old Reo bus was a little different too, like an open truck with side curtains. About 12 kids or so sat along the sides facing each other. The driver carried cans of milk along or sheep or a cow on a bed of hay. On the afternoon run, one was apt to find things on the floor from a run of pigs or a cow. There were no graduation exercises; pupils went right on to the Academy."

An 1891 Town Report of No. 5 School states: "School is small and drags a little. Brighten up children and work fast. Enrolled 17; eight or nine came. Teacher: Flo Whitcomb."

Use after closing

Parkerville School No. 5 closed in 1928; the building remained vacant. In 1930, when the town wanted to sell it, the neighbors in Parker Village petitioned to use it for a clubhouse. For almost 60 years, an unwritten agreement has allowed use of the old school as a clubhouse as long as the villagers kept it in repair.

It was named the Nonset Club. Members have put in a furnace and kept the building painted. The town continues to own the schoolhouse and to insure it, but anyone has been welcome to use it. Weddings, anniversary parties, meetings and the Nonset Club Wednesday night card parties have kept the old school alive with activity.

Now, close to 60 years later, the Nonset Club members are few in number. In response to an inquiry from a party interested in purchasing the Nonset Club (Parkerville School No. 5) as a single-family residence, the Board of Selectmen is currently obtaining proposals for potential use.

History is repeating itself as local residents again are petitioning the town to preserve this 109-year old schoolhouse for educational and social activities.

It is the last pristine one-room district schoolhouse left in town.