



THE CAMERON SCHOOL began as a two-room schoolhouse in 1871 (r) but, as seen in the file photo at left, has been expanded to meet the needs of a growing town.

(1903 photo courtesy June Kennedy)

## Old schools forge memories

By June W. Kennedy

The following is part of a series on Westford's early schools, written by resident June W. Kennedy, who authored "Westford Recollections", a book of historical vignettes and photos.

**L**ocated on the corner of Pleasant and Pine Streets, this little red brick schoolhouse served the area of Forge Village from 1851 until 1871.

Whether it originally had one or two rooms is not known. At present it is a two-story dwelling, the main part being old brick. The windows are not original; now "2 over 2" rather than small panes of glass. It is quite noticeable that six rows of brick have been inserted, making the whole window space seem smaller.

Upstairs are 8x8x8 oak beams held together with wooden pegs 6 to 8 inches long.

During the 1960s the interior received extensive interior remodeling. In the kitchen, on the side of school facing the old church, under all the layers of paper were found the blackboards — which weren't really slate, but rather a pressed wood with a black paper covering. Town records in some sections mention repairing slate boards, while others state painting the blackboards. Evidently both types were in use.

The foundation is granite; narrow stairs lead to the partial cellar. Small rocks seem to serve as a retaining wall. In amongst these rocks was discovered an old peach stone that had been hand carved into a basket — a craft of an earlier day.

Discovered, too, was a very narrow stairway that ran up in back of the fireplace — with a lavatory so small that only a child could have used it. Purely conjecture, but who knows, perhaps it was a hiding place, an underground railroad site; Westford was said to have harbored stowaways.

Then again, it may have been the entry to the loft of an early home that just happened to house the local school.

Although the late Alice Prescott Collins recalled that her father attended here and was taught by Olive Ann Prescott, great, great, great granddaughter of Col. John Robinson, no one had any stories to tell about days at the brick school in the village.

### Cameron School

In 1871 the town built a new school in Forge Village, the Cameron School. It began with two rooms. The Town Report for the spring of 1872 gives the amount of \$4,060.72 as having been appropriated to cover its cost.

In 1890 A.R. Choate of the Westford School Committee received a letter stating that on the 18th day of February John T. White, Inspector of Factories and Buildings, had inspected the District No. 3 school. The following report was made:

"You are hereby notified that there should be better means of ventilation in said building. Properly arranged ducts or flues should be applied of suitable size to carry off the foul air, and heat or mechanical power should be applied to secure a sufficient and uniform draught

in said flues. Changes should also be made in the method of heating by which the rooms would be supplied with pure, warm air, not overheated."

The town then spent \$564 to have a system of heating put in and ventilation installed by the Middlesex Machine Co., of Lowell, and both rooms were heated. The system was being introduced into the Lowell schools at this time.

Some of the citizens felt that a modification of the law would be more just to the smaller towns with their inadequate budgets. The Town Report of 1890 continues: "Nobody seems to know just what to do to remedy the defects, and as long as the 'Doctors disagree' the public cannot be expected to become very excited."

Consequently no further changes were made.

Alice Prescott Collins once recalled: "When I was a child in the early 1890s, I walked to the Forge School of two rooms — now eight rooms and called the Cameron School. Along the way I'd stop at Joe Bannister's place to deliver a pint of our home milk. This kind, elderly gentleman would always be waiting for me.

"At school in those days, an older boy would go down to the spring at the bottom of the hill by Stony Brook to get the pail of water. It was set down near the teacher's desk, with a tin dipper in it. Children vied with each other to 'pass the dipper'. Each child drank in turn, then it was returned to the pail. No water was wasted!"