

Westford Recollections: Parkerville No. 5

by

Mrs Charles S. Kennedy

The original brick school on Parkerville was closed in 1874 and a new schoolhouse built where the Nonset Club in Parkerville now stands. The Town Report for the year ending 1874 gives the cost of this new No 5 schoolhouse as \$2,205.44. However, after 5 or 6 years this schoolhouse burned, and school sessions were held across the road in the Wilder or Johnson farmhouse on the triangle. According to the 1880 records, George H. Elliot was paid \$33 for the use of a room for school purposes for 11 weeks.

The diningroom still has marks where the desks were placed. I found an account stating

Tables for use of the school - \$4.00

Time & expense for fitting up schoolroom (after fire) and blackboard - \$4.30

On January 17th of 1880 it was

voted to build another school on the same site as the one that burned. This, of course, is the present Nonset Club building. 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 - \$1,039.00

Alterations not included in the contract - \$3.00

Putting in seats - \$4.25

E A Stevens for drawing plans, writing specifications, etc. - \$11.60

Wright & Fletcher for paint and varnish for work not included in contract - \$5.73

W. F. Balch for grading around the schoolhouse - \$14.00

A G Whitcomb for school furniture - \$89.24

W W. Johnson for teaming the same - \$2.00

H H Wilder, stove pipe - \$11.08

Fielding & Co., chain & hooks for stove pipe - \$1.00

Express on stove pipe - \$.40

George B Hildreth for painting inside - \$2.00

Freight on school furniture - \$2.30

G T Day for varnishing seats - \$1.50

G T Day for making 5 copies of specifications - \$3.50

G T Day for time and expense in going to Boston to purchase furniture - \$3.50

Paid G T Day time spent in going to Chelmsford & Lowell, making contracts, & time looking after work on building - \$6.00

A R Richardson - \$6.00

J O Kidder, work in cellar, including cement and lime - \$9.37

TOTAL - \$1,215.47

Rec'd from Jonathan Larcom for doors & windows saved from old schoolhouse - \$35.50

Entire cost of building and furniture - \$1,179.97

(Note in the above account - W W Johnson for "teaming same" In those days "teaming" was the expression used to mean "transporting by team")

Schoolhouse No. 5 was a typical one-room, one-teacher school, originally having grades 1 through 8. There was a pot-bellied stove 2 1/2 feet tall and 3 1/2 feet long, which stood right in the middle of the floor. 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 and came with a bucksaw and sawed it into two-foot lengths. The students were required to pile it in the shed.

At the Parkerville School two pupils shared the same desk and sat on a little two-seater settee. The school had two outside doors or entries; an entry where coats were hung - one side for the boys and one side for the girls. The raised platform was directly between these two doors (and still is).

Mr Selfer, who had a clock shop in town, gave the clock to the school. He was an uncle of Mrs Sam Richards, Sr, formerly a student at the school. That clock still hangs on the wall. In fact, nothing has really been changed in this school. Originally there was a dug well in front, but it was condemned and the present pump was used for one year before the school closed in 1928.

In those days everyone walked to the neighborhood school. Mrs Frost, formerly of Old Rd., objected to her child's traveling alone so far and was granted permission to teach her child at home for a year. Mrs Frost, herself, had taught in a one-room school so perhaps that is why they were accommodated.

When the 7th and 8th graders began going to school uptown, they walked to Parkerville School, where the bus picked them up and took them to the center. There were fewer stops along the road than our children have today.

Mr Jarvis, who attended Parkerville School from 1912 to 1920, recalls the Thanksgiving, Christmas and Memorial Day Programs when the children recited pieces they were supposed to have memorized, and the proud parents came to hear their prodigies recite the works of such authors as William Cullen Bryant. The children always looked forward to Christmas vacation for ice-skating. At this time there were no February or mid-winter vacation. Christmas and April were the only weeks off from school - and Mr Jarvis said, "they worked in those days."

Being a farm boy, as many children in the area were (and the fact that he came from a small family) he had chores to do before and after school. On his way home from school he used to pass a home where there were numerous children in the family and he thought they were so lucky. He wanted to linger and play, but his father literally allowed him just a certain

number of minutes to come home from school!

There were no graduation ceremonies in the grammar schools at this time - the pupils went right on to the Academy.

The only social life at school that Mr Jarvis recalls in the years from 1912 to 1920 were Halloween parties. Because there was no electricity in the school, everyone brought a kerosene light or lantern. They could hardly see each other - a good setting for a Halloween party. They played the old games of biting doughnuts on a string, and bobbing for apples. The parties were short, ending by 8:30 for all had to be home by 9. When their parents said to be home by 9, they MEANT home by 9! There were, of course no "trick or treats" then. Neither were they allowed pranks, and if they did play pranks they paid for it in the woodshed!

Typical of all schools of that era, any pupils caught chewing gum in the Parkerville School had to put it on their noses and stand in the corner. Those caught writing notes had to read them.

The Parkerville School No 5 closed in 1927-28. After the school was discontinued as such, the building remained vacant and when, in 1930, the town wanted to sell it, the neighbors petitioned to use it for a clubhouse. There is still an unwritten agreement that the building may be used as a clubhouse as long as the neighbors keep it in repair. They have put in a furnace kept it painted, etc. Actually the town still owns the building and carries \$150.00 insurance on it. Weddings, anniversary parties and card parties are held here, and anyone is welcome to use the schoolhouse for such an occasion.

In an 1891 report of the No 5 School is the following:

"School is small and drags a little. Brighten up children and work fast. Enrolled 17, 8 or 9 came. Teacher Flo Whitcomb."

Next week - school days at Minot's Corner.