

Scraping away the layers reveals Nashoba School No. 4, circa 1872

By June W. Kennedy

The following is part of a series on Westford schools by resident June W. Kennedy, author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.

Located on Concord Road behind the former Old Oaken 'Bucket' restaurant, this schoolhouse can be viewed from Route 495.

Built in 1872, it has been speculated that another schoolhouse had been on the site. There are two foundations, one of stone and one of granite, but both of different shapes.

Exterior and interior remodeling took place here during the 1960s. A full-length dormer was added at this time.

In the present dining room, beneath the wallpaper, an old blackboard and some initials on the wall were uncovered. The original plaster and ceilings were intact. A flagpole bracket was fastened to the front of the building.

Whereas these district schools were built in the 1870s, and for the most part went out of existence in the early 1900s, the following annual report will give an idea of conditions during their peak years.

The annual report of the School Committee for school years ending March 1, 1891:

Number of schoolhouses, 10; number of rooms occupied, 15; number of terms in school year, 3; number of pupils over age at years of age, 7; number of pupils under 5 years of age, 4."

The reports acknowledged that during the past three years the assessors reported there had been a considerable falling off in the number of children of school age and therefore a correspondingly smaller number of pupils in the schools. This was probably explained by the fact that many of those who had been in our schools for a few years had now become of that age when "necessity is laid on them" to do for themselves, and they had passed out of the schoolroom to

take their places among the world's wage earners, while newcomers had not yet supplied the vacancies.

"In some sections of town where a few years ago we had schools of 25 to 30, we now have scarcely that number — and the tendency seems likely to be downward for some time, unless there shall be a revival of 'ye ancients custom' of large families, or a new influx of population," the report says.

The following statistical table includes the teachers' wages per month and the number of pupils in the schools in 1891:

"Centre No. 1, \$32, 38 and 14 (2 rooms); Stony Brook No. 2, \$32, 28; Forge Village No. 3, \$32, 47 and 31 (2 rooms); Nashoba No. 4, \$32, 24; Parkerville No. 5, \$28, 16; Minot's Corner No. 6, \$28, 12; Nabnasset No. 7, \$28, 18; Long-Sought-For No. 8, \$28, 12; Lyon No. 9, \$28, 11; Graniteville No. 10, \$32, 42, 25, 26 and 19 (4 rooms)."

The average cost of schooling per pupil for the year 1891, including books was:

"Centre \$11.42; Minot's Corner, \$17.90; Nabnasset, \$13.28; Stony Brook, \$11.47; Forge Village \$9.28; Graniteville, \$11.09; Nashoba, \$13.34; Parkerville, \$18.70; Lyon, \$28.66; Long-Sought-For, \$22.42."

In July, 1893, a superintendent was hired to cover three towns: Westford, Littleton and Ayer. He classified pupils according to their advancement and made promotions. New textbooks had to meet with his approval. He also held teachers' meetings, all of which enabled Westford to keep on the same level as neighboring towns.

In order to boost attendance, this superintendent made a banner for "Best School in Attendance", and at the end of the first five months Parkerville sported it two months, Long-Sought-For, Lyon and Forge Village Grammar, one month each.

In 1888, under the "Employment of Children Act", no child

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School Committee report on schools, 1892

under 13 was to be employed while school was in session. Another law also required 30 weeks of school by all children between the ages of eight and 14. This helped attendance.

In 1892, the School Committee was not able to give a very satisfactory account of the Westford schools: "Two good teachers resigned because of low salary, and at the close of the spring term four more resigned, leaving nearly half of our schools with new teachers.

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However, in describing the Nashoba School, the report states: "This has been one of the happy schools — same teacher, Clara Smith, no sickness, and all is well."



Nashoba School. Nashoba School No. 4, built in 1872, is located on Concord Road and is visible from Route 495. For the year ending March, 1892, the School Report states: "Two good teachers resigned because of low salary, and at the close of the spring term, four more resigned, leaving nearly half of our schools with new teachers. One school was three weeks late in opening the winter term, and four others were closed for one or two weeks due to "La Grippe." A changeover of teachers and frequent interruptions impair the value of a school, the report says: "This has been one of the happy schools — same teacher, Clara Smith — no sickness, and all is well." Miss Smith's salary for the year ending March, 1892, was \$290. (A Day photo from June Kennedy's book "Westford Recollections 1729-1979," on sale at the "Book-tique" or from the author.)

(A Day photo from the "Westford Recollections. Series by June W. Kennedy)

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