

Westford Recollections - Tadmuck No. 1 (1874)

By Mrs. Charles S. Kennedy
Tadmuck No. 1 was built in 1874. All of the presently existing schools were built after 1869 - most of them in the 1870's. The one exception is the brick school in Forge Village, which is of an earlier vintage. Tadmuck is one of the two remaining schools that isn't occupied as a home - it is now the property of the Tadmuck Club. Mrs. William Taylor, who now lives in Stony Brook Schoolhouse No. 2, taught at Tadmuck-Center No. 1 from 1906-1908. On a bright September morning she arrived at the school very early, quite anticipating her new experience. To her surprise - I guess she never thought to inquire - she found that the well had been condemned, and there was no central heat. Nevertheless, in her green and blue plaid dress - with additional touches of red, yellow and white - all pleated to the ankles, her common sense brown shoes and tan stockings, she awaited the arrival of her first pupil. Suddenly, a little boy appeared, wearing a red velvet cap, with curls about his forehead, who proudly announced: "I'm Charles Whitney Miller, 5 years old and vaccinated." She knew then and there that this little boy knew just how to behave.

One mother evidently wanted a description of this teacher so one small boy replied that "she wore a rainbow dress and bean-juce colored shoes." Mrs. Taylor made \$10 a week for 38 weeks and paid \$5.00 for board and room in a home nearby. It cost her \$2.00 a week to go home, so the profits weren't very great. In order to get home to Fayville she took the Pine Ridge Station freight train, a passenger to Concord Junction and the electric car to Framingham. For years she had no Sunday dinner because she'd have to start back for Westford at 10 or 11 on Sunday, go to Boston Chestnut Hill subway to North Station where she would purchase a ticket for Westford, get the train for Lowell and then the train for Ayer, getting off at Westford. At Westford she got into what she called "the Black Maria," a side-seater horse-drawn vehicle with a door - a cross between a phaeton and a barge. The "Black Maria" carried Mrs. Taylor to her boarding house in the village.

She loved her job though and said there was a closeness with the children. I might add that this was a 2-room schoolhouse. Mrs. Taylor taught grades 1 through 4 downstairs and Mrs. Miller taught grades 5 through 8 upstairs.

At Christmas time Aaron Tuttle would take her in his pung down to the Depot where he chopped two trees, which were later decorated with popcorn and cranberries. The children - and she had 35 pupils - brought her numerous Christmas gifts. She could hardly carry them all home. One gift was a Schrafft's box all decorated with a round bow. She still uses this fancy little box for buttons. On the bottom of it is still the inscription: "To my teacher - from Austin" (Fletcher).

Miss Ruth Tuttle, Mr. Allister MacDougall, Austin and Eleanor Fletcher all went to school here. The Center children walked, but the Kimball Farm transported the children on a sleigh or barge; the horses poked and the children came into school crying because their hands and feet were so cold.

Sometimes the school itself was cold. One time the pupils brought plants to school, and had to take them home again as it was so bitter cold. In order to use the outhouse, which had two doors, one for boys and one for girls, you had to put on your coat and hat and run around the corner. This out-building is now to be found in John Sander's back yard. As noted before, they couldn't use the pump, so two students would volunteer to take a pail up to the Town Hall to use the pump there.

The school had two dressing rooms: one for boys and one for girls. The kitchen in the Tadmuck Clubhouse was the girls' dressing room. The lighting was so poor (no electricity) that on dark days singing or oral work was common.

Music and poetry were popular in schools and the Town Report of 1891 states that vocal music was added, putting us in line with Pepperell, Littleton and Concord. In literature, patriotic poems were assigned for memorizing - "Barbara Frietche," "Hail Columbia," "Paul Revere's Ride," and "Snowbound."

Mrs. Taylor began each day with the 23rd Psalm and Lord's Prayer, and stated that if she were still teaching today she would still do this. She commented that there was a flag inside the schoolroom, but that they didn't salute it in those days. The 1891 Town Report comments that Westford caught the enthusiasm of other places and placed a flag and flagpole outside the schoolhouse as well as setting apart the session of



The Tadmuck Club Building, in the Center, is another former Westford School Building that is still doing good service. (A Neville Photo)

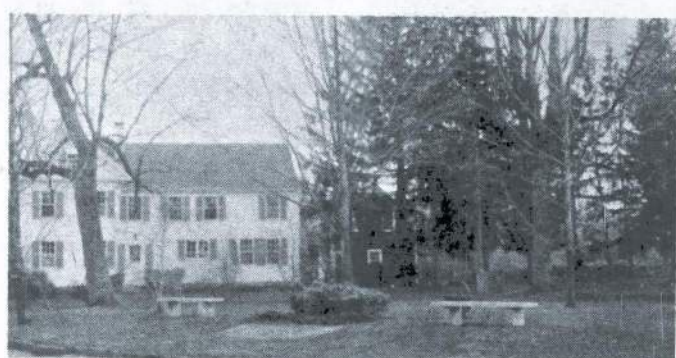


Westford Center Fire Station, was in time long since past, the Westford Academy. (A Neville Photo)



All that is left to mark the place where the original structure of Westford Academy is this step which has been placed on the exact spot of the school site on what is now the "green."

(A Neville Photo)



Where Westford Academy once stood is now the pretty park so familiar to us all. (A Neville Photo)

school preceding Memorial Day for patriotic services.

You might wonder what type of dress was worn at this time. Girls wore dresses below their knees and covered with aprons, white guimpes or blouses and high-buttoned shoes. The leggings buttoned over the knees and were fleece-lined. There was a strap over the instep and they were hard to get on. Little boys wore Russian blouses with wide belts. Hamburg and lace ruffles were common. There was a board fence around the school. At recess time a loose board became a good bat. All the school reports make note of fence repairs. Miss Tuttle said that they used to walk on top of the fence. At one time there was a tennis court in the schoolyard where lawn tennis was played.

The pupils loved excitement and the following is an eyewitness account of "The Day Progress Came to Westford."

The First Electric Car

The first electric car came to Westford Thursday, May 23rd, 1907. When Miss Harriet Miller, teacher in the upper room, grades 4 through 8 rang the bell to call the pupils in from morning recess, not a child was to be seen. Like the "Pied Piper of Hamelin" they had disappeared as if by magic. Going to the road and looking up the street to the Common and seeing the figures moving and hearing voices and laughter, the two teachers rushed up to see what was happening. There at the end of the car tracks, just opposite the Unitarian Church, stood this wonderful new electric car and many of the children had never seen one. They were in and out of the doors, feeling of the outside, and in every way possible demonstrating their joy and approval. What a reception!

The next Saturday, May 23rd, 1907 the first car left the Common at 7 a.m. and there was so much noise that even the

two school marms joined the happy group to see the first regular trip made to Lowell. Progress had come to Westford!

(related by Elizabeth Cushing Taylor)

The single desk and single chairs in schoolhouse Tadmuck No. 1 faced the street. Mrs. Taylor's desk is still in the building and has a lift top. There was some concern because there was no fire escape, but the building still stands, with a heart full of memories. Mrs. Taylor left Tadmuck No. 1 in 1908, the year the school closed and Frost School opened.

It might be of interest to note how the school became a clubhouse. It was purchased from the town by a military group which flourished here for many years - a Cavalry Association. The Legion was also allowed to use the building.

The Tadmuck Club, organized in 1905, had met for several years either in the library or the church building and in 1932 Mrs. William R. Taylor was delegated to approach Captain Monahan of the Spalding Light Cavalry Association to see if they might acquire the building. The Cavalry group were agreeable to the suggestion but imposed the following conditions on the Club:

The women were to prepare and serve the annual dinner each year, keep the grounds and building in good, habitable and presentable condition for thirty years, at which time grounds and building would become their property. In 1962, all conditions having been met, the deed was passed and the Tadmuck Club, Inc. became the owners. So much for recollections from Tadmuck No. 1. Next week look for schooldays and life at Stony Brook School No. 2.