

Westford Town History: The Early Common Schools

BY MRS CHARLES S KENNEDY

The early common schools of Westford were at first kept in private houses and for only one term in the year - probably a few months. Later, two terms were held, but they were short. The town was early divided into school squadrons, of which there were four - the Centre; the South, corresponding to Parkerville, the West, corresponding to Forge Village, and the North, including the region about Long-sought for Pond. The Selectman seemed to have entire control of the schools, there were no school committees. The first notes of the town concerning schools appears on a record in 1733-34 when Joseph Underwood received 16 pounds for teaching. A record in Sept. 23, 1757 states: "It is agreed that the places for the school to be kept for the year ensuing shall be as follows, to wit at Mr Aaron Parker Jr's for the southeast part of town; -" The home of Aaron Parker Jr's is now the Chorney's home on the corner of Rte 225 and Griffin Road. It was originally red brick, but more recently painted yellow. This building is believed to be one of the four original buildings in Parkerville. The section of town most obviously derived its name from the Parker family.

An item of interest which I found in the town history, regarding this same Aaron Parker, Jr, was that in 1770 when the new First Parish Meetinghouse was built and it was voted to sell some part of the old building, it was sold to Aaron Parker, Jr for 20 pounds lawful money. The old meetinghouse was removed to South Chelmsford and used by the Baptists for worship services for many years. It was later moved to the farm of James Robbins to serve as a barn.

The present owners of the old school at the corner of Griffin Road have found three layers of old brick, a panelled wall and the original floor. Old hand-made nails are intact. The transom window, so typical of an old school, is found over the door. In the barn, one can still see the old one-seater.

The Chorney home ceased being a school and reverted back to a dwelling house when the Parkerville School No. 5 was

built in 1873. After the building was no longer used as a schoolhouse, the first occupant was a shoemaker Mr. Jarvis of Griffin Road, wishes he had listened more carefully to his mother's tales, but recalls her saying how her father would send her down to this brick building to have their shoes and boots repaired, and then go back in a day or two to pick them up. Following the shoemaker, a German tailor with a heavy accent occupied the house. Mr. Jarvis remembers the tailor describing a customer's order as: "He (v) wanted it vide like a sail." Still later a carpenter lived in the old brick school. Many a tale these old walls could tell.

The original Center Grammar School was held in the house beside the Edward Lamson house (facing Boston Road), which was torn down in the early 1960's. At the time it was taken down it was known as the Ben Prescott home. Mrs. Prescott says that at the time it was used as a school, the vestibule or entrance was on the side facing down Boston Road (or toward the John Legget's house). There were pegs or hooks in the vestibule with numbers beneath them burned into the woodwork. The student's desks faced Hildreth Street (or the side of the Lamson house). Miss May E. Day's father attended this school as a boy.

The town records of 1836 gave the school districts as numbering nine, but did not designate where they were located.

In 1868 the town voted \$1600 for schools, divided equally among the districts, and one-half according to the number of scholars - as by vote of the town. The number of scholars given was 533, hence if equally divided, this would only give each scholar the sum of \$3.00.

Rate of taxation was \$1.20 on \$1000.

Number of houses	.323
Number of horses	.223
Number of cows	.581

1870 saw the beginning of the building of the 10 district schoolhouses, all but one of which are standing. Most are homes - a few are clubhouses. Next week look for school days at Tadmuck No. 1.