

MHS Newsletter

The Marlow Historical Society's Mission is to preserve and illuminate Marlow's History

Fall 2015



*"Stone Pond School Children, Marlow, Mary W. Jones, Teacher--Fall Term 1903" [School # 7]
This photograph was donated to the society in 1993 by Wendy J. Otterson of Washington New Hampshire, who noted that her grandmother, Ora W. Powers, was in the center of the photo dressed in a striped outfit.*

"School Days, School Days....."

Who doesn't have vivid recollections of their early school years! It's something we all share, and those fellow pupils and teachers loom large in our memories--sometimes for good, and sometimes for ill. The educational history of any community is always important, and a key to understanding the people and their lives. We are therefore hosting a program entitled "New Hampshire's One Room Rural Schools: The Romance and the Reality", presented by acclaimed lecturer Steven H. Taylor. The program will take place on Sunday Sept. 20, at 3:00 PM, in Murray Hall.

The story of the one room schoolhouse in Marlow has been fairly well documented, and presented several times by the Society in programs over the past few decades, most recently in 1995. These programs drew from Elgin Jones' history, which provides much detail, and also from town reports, published each spring for town meeting.

Shortly after Marlow was founded in 1761, two 100 acre parcels and one 50 acre parcel were designated to be sold and / or leased to create a "Town School Fund". To this day we use interest from the fund to help support our school. The town also levied a "school tax" on property owners to fund Marlow's school districts. In 1772 the first school was held somewhere in town, for 6 months, and in 1785 the town created its first four districts. However, it wasn't until 1796 that the town built the first 4 schoolhouses in these districts. Eventually Marlow would come to have eight districts, each with its own one-room schoolhouse.

We know where all eight schools were located. District One was located near Gustin Pond; it closed in 1902. District Two was at the top of Marlow Hill; it closed in 1871. District Three was halfway down Sand Pond Road on Huntley land. It closed in 1920. District Four is our present day Town Office, and various schoolhouses near the center of the Village served these pupils until the current building was built in 1852. It was closed as a school in 1973, when our current elementary school, recently renamed (continued page 3)

September 20th Program at Murray Hall

You won't want to miss Steve Taylor's fine program entitled "New Hampshire's One-Room Rural Schools" on Sunday, September 20th at 3:00 p.m. in our own Murray Hall.

The rural one-room schoolhouse system, while much romanticised, actually has much in common with the public school system of the 21st century ("School Days"). It contended with problematic financing, teacher preparation and quality, curriculum, discipline, and a host of other concerns.

Steve will give a one hour talk, after which we will enjoy refreshments, and have a chance to share our own Marlow, or otherwise, memories of all things "school."

There is no charge, and members are very welcome to bring a snack to share with the community, as we gather for our annual elections to the Society Board, and this fascinating program!

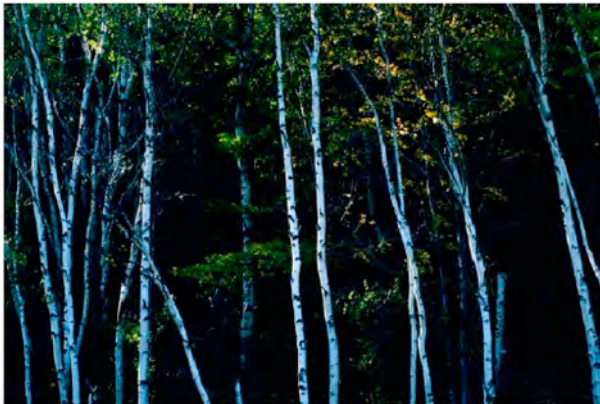
Please feel free to bring any school memorabilia you would like to share after the formal presentation. See you there! (Parking will be most comfortable around Jones Hall and the Church).

DID YOU KNOW....

.....That there was once a Marlow settlement in in the township of Stanstead, Quebec? Evidently the pioneer spirit of Marlow NH's first settlers lived on in younger generations. In 1799, John Gustin Jr., Elisha Miller, William Lanphier, John Gustin Sr., Josiah Gustin , and Abijah Mack of Marlow, traveled along the Connecticut River some 150 miles to Stanstead and decided to locate near the shores of Lake Memphremagog . They had brought apple seeds and planted three nurseries, which became fine orchards. They came back in the early 1800s as did other settlers and moved their families in: Caleb and Dexter White, Hosea White, Rufus Lanphier, Daniel Miller and Benjamin Bingham, Ira Miller, and Silas Mack They farmed, built a grist mill and a saw mill and the settlement reached great prosperity. For many years the Marlow School ranked among the highest in the Eastern Townships. Silas' brothers Asa and Franklin Mack were the last emigrants from Old Marlow NH to Stanstead. The settlement comprised an area of about four square miles.

Although " Marlow" is not on any map today, Gustins, Macks and Millers - names familiar to all of us in Marlow NH - are buried in Marlinton Cemetery, one of the oldest burying grounds in Stanstead Township.

Photo at right: Grave of John Gustin, Marlinton Cemetery, Stanstead Township, courtesy of " Find A Grave"



Another Marlow Mystery

Imagine someone writing a message on a 6" x 3" piece of birch bark in the year 1926. Where has it been for nearly a century? How did it come to be in our files, faded but nearly intact, waiting to be discovered by a pretty astonished researcher.

The message reads:

Dear Ruth: I received your nice letter. You are in high school; quite a young lady now and a comfort to your mother. I'm glad Mrs. White is able to be about. Hope it will be a nice day for the fair. Your mother must be more than busy working at the P.O. and her home duties. Presume Catherine enjoys school. The first term, is it not? Where is the new schoolhouse? Study hard and learn all you can. Education cannot be taken away from you.

We have had a lot of company and now I am busy canning. Presume your mother is to where she has spare time? This bark I got when we went to Bennington, Vermont four months ago.

*Yours with love,
Mrs. Phelps*

We suspect that Mrs. Phelps might be Agnes Grant Phelps, who in 1927 made possible the creation of the soldiers monument in front of Jones Hall. But who was Ruth? We don't know yet, but we will try to solve the mystery and let you all know.

(School Continued from page one) the J.D. Perkins Academy opened. District Five school was near the Gilsum town line - it also served pupils from Gilsum and Stoddard, and the final building was built in 1858 near the James Downing place, across from the present hydro-electric dam on the Ashuelot River. District Six centered on the area near the intersection of Baine and Whittemore Hill Road; it closed in 1897. District Seven was also on Marlow Hill, having been annexed from Number Two; it closed in 1913. According to town history, it was reincarnated as "Ann's Waffle Inn" in 1930, operated by Ann and Edgar Bessette. Apparently the building was still standing in 1969. The revised town history contains maps where you can see exactly where we believe each one of these schoolhouses was located.

According to town reports, students who lived too far to walk to some of the schoolhouses were transported by men who were compensated by the town. Teachers boarded with townfolk, who were also compensated for hosting instructors. Townspeople provided wood for the wood stoves, and the town paid various residents to repair the simple wooden structures as needed. Every penny was carefully reported to the public; even back in those days people were concerned about the "high cost of education," though we may smile at the sorts of expenditures that raised eyebrows. In 1896 the Board lamented that Marlow students used one pencil a week, which seemed terribly extravagant. To staunch the fiscal flow, the Board tried giving pupils only one pencil every 20 weeks, however parents complained bitterly at this measure. The Board also wanted to combine schools, consolidating several of the smaller schoolhouses that had under 15 students, but again, they met considerable resistance in the community. By 1924, though, we know that this consolidation did in fact take place, and all students met at the schoolhouse in the Village Center, # 4.

The School Board Reports for Annual Meeting show how seriously the Board took its responsibility. The Board was proud of Marlow students and of the hardworking teachers. In an 1897 report on spelling proficiency we read: "Blanche Friend with 1627 words missed only 2. Maud Weeks with 2075 spelled, missed 6, none in oral words during last term." Each year featured the "Roll of Honor", and starting in the early part of the 20th century, the Board carefully tracked each school's performance, as well as each teacher's success, via a detailed statistical chart published for the citizens of Marlow to review.

Marlow district schools sometimes housed pupils of all ages. For example, in 1889 we see school #7 had students from all grades lowest to high school. Of course, many students did not choose to complete high school in the 19th and early 20th century, so the high school classes were small - often around 20 students for the whole town, and it seems that by the end of the 19th century, the high school class was consolidated, often meeting at #4. Beginning early in the 20th century, Marlow high school students attended Vilas High School in Alstead, until Fall Mountain High School was opened in 1966, but then Marlow joined SAU 29 and starting in 1967 high school students began attending Keene High School.

In the 19th century it was often difficult to find competent teachers for the high school classes in Marlow. The Board noted that the spring of 1889 term taught by George B. Chandler of Bowdoin was an "almost phenomenal success," but this was the exception. Many high school teachers didn't stay long. The Board's note in the 1890 Town Report is typical: the fall term of the high school students was characterized by "a want of discipline," although five high school girls were on the roll of honor that year. In 1895 we read that the high school teacher was "incompetent to keep order." It was not unusual for a teacher to resign during the term, leaving the Board scrambling to find a replacement.

As with many rural areas, it was hard to keep students coming to class every day. In the 19th century, right up to the 1920's school was taught in terms: usually spring and fall, and winter only in the central schools, #4 usually. Students often did not attend all terms; there was no mandatory attendance policy to force parents to send their children to school, and of course they were often needed at home, or the winter weather proved too much of a challenge.

We can get a sense of the casual nature of attendance on the part of some Marlow scholars as the Board laments over spotty attendance, and parental attitudes in 1897 by showcasing the wonderful record of the Wright family, who apparently were paragons of diligence.

Note the record of the Wright children, living one and one half miles from school: for 30 weeks Minnie has had 1 absence, 3 tardinesses; Carrie, no absence except for sickness, 2 tardinesses; Charlie, 7 days absence; Georgie, less than 5 years of age, 3 days absence in 21 weeks attendance. If all our children showed such "grit" in getting to school what a roll we could furnish.

Obviously, the Board felt that many families in Marlow lacked the "grit" to make it through the schoolhouse door!

Marlow's problem finding and retaining qualified teachers was a statewide problem, and by 1919 the State Board of Education in Concord mandated a process to certify teachers and principals, and also mandated that towns provide free transportation for students as well as standardize the school calendar year. Prior to that time, little towns like Marlow struggled to find the right teachers, though they did have some who worked wonders. For example, Miss Amy E. Newton of Acworth taught both terms at #7, which was considered the most challenging school in 1889, and she did excellent work, "gaining good will of both parents and scholars and retaining it throughout the entire school year. At the closing examination it was evident that a marked improvement had been made." In the same year though, we read that "Miss Bertha Jones was "not the right person for this difficult school" (#3). They added that "Scholars [were] staying away purposely, and unnecessarily" and that by June they found "the teacher presiding the last day over empty seats." Sadly, the Board noted that "parents, scholars, or teacher [did not feel] any particular interest in the school." Earlier reports stated that "the parents of those pupils whose attendance is most irregular are the ones who express the greatest dissatisfaction with school management," and that "some parents....are so forgetful or ignorant of what constitutes right, that they even sustain their children in their opposition to the teacher's authority." It seems that some things never change.

Life in a one room classroom could be difficult, as Marlow teacher Lizzie M. Duffee found out; the 1890 School Board dryly commented on her teaching, remarking "We shall not report this school as an absolute failure, but we have nothing commendatory to say of it." Even so, for all the trials and tribulations, Marlow students did learn their lessons well, and moved on in life to contribute to their families, their community, their state, and their nation in many positive ways. It was the "grit" of the Marlow men and women who were committed to a quality education for their children that gave us the rich heritage we enjoy today. So, come out and explore the world of the rural, one room schoolhouse with us on September 20 and bring a friend!

*Murray Hall....Transformation Begun
Before and After Shots of our two "front rooms"*



*Top and Center Right: Vestibule
Bottom Right: the new Society Office*



Stevens Memorial

Leon and Lydia Stevens, gifted and charismatic actors of film, stage and television, moved to Marlow upon their retirement in 1989, and before long they became invaluable members of our community, and dear friends to many of us.

Leon and Lydia loved our town and were passionate about preserving its history. Under their leadership, the Historical Society launched the Preservation Fund Project (1996-98) which garnered nearly \$32,000. The money was allocated to the three historic buildings, Jones Hall, the Methodist Church, and the Odd Fellows Lodge, for important restoration work.

As Joe Feuer wrote on behalf of the Board of Selectmen: "Marlow is justifiably proud of these buildings in their unique setting. Yet it remained for you, in your tireless

energy, to provide the impetus and example to achieve their resurrection."

In 2006 the Stevens moved to Arizona, where Lydia passed away in May 7, 2008, and Leon in July 30 of this year. To fulfill Leon's last wishes, their devoted and long-time friends from Toronto Diana and Nick Reis and their son Simon brought their ashes here, before final burial in Farmington NH, Leon's hometown. On Friday August 21 the Historical Society held a remembrance gathering at Murray Hall.

In attendance were other special friends: Dr. Jim Robinson and his wife Ann from Keene; Mrs. Cecile Goff of Westmoreland; as well as Ronnie Gorges, Tracy Messer, Art and Pat Anderson, Joe and Maria Baril, and Bucky White. Also present were Liz Thayer, Susan Rock, Jacqui Fay, Tony Davis, and Bud Jackson.



Society Benefits from Generous Members

We are grateful to members and friends of the Marlow Historical Society for valuable donations to our museum.

From the Bayard Huntley estate, his stepdaughter Nancy Ferretti has donated a **hand painted souvenir plate, ordered from Austria by L. D. Tinker, to be sold at his store.** The plate depicts "a view of Main Street from the Iron Bridge, Marlow, NH", and it was likely created based upon a photograph taken some time before the 1916 fire that destroyed the buildings on the east side of Main Street. The photographer would have been standing on present-day Route 10 in front of the former James Burnap residence, now the Christmas Trees Inn. Looking towards Jones Hall, the building shown on the west side of Main Street adjoining the river was the former Nichols & Newton

store that was taken down during the 1980s. On the opposite side of the street stood the former residence of Edward Alonzo Fox that was destroyed by the 1916 fire. Today, one of the last remaining "Morrell's Cabins" is situated near the rear of the Fox residence. At one time, both ends of the iron bridge, which connected Main Street to Water Street (Route 10), were flanked by white picket fences to prevent traffic from driving into the river.

Jeannie Gorges Lake sent us a very special memento of the Marlow School. It is a tiny invitation, crafted of construction paper and tied with holiday twine. It reads: "*You're cordially invited to attend the Marlow Grammar School Christmas entertainment at seven thirty, in the Grange Hall - Dec. 18, 1930. Merry Xmas.*" Jeannie says that a friend of hers found it in an old book she was reading!

Photography by Ed Thomas

