

North

Castle

History

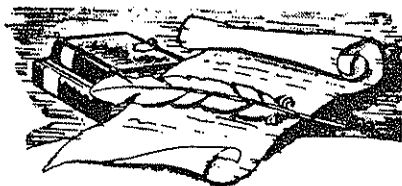


School District No. 4, Armonk, N.Y., and students, taken around 1920. Picture courtesy of Frances Mahoney Bambace.

The North Castle Historical Society

Bedford Road, Armonk, New York 10504

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Members and Friends,

Another year of substantial accomplishment has passed for our Society since the last issue of **North Castle History**. One need only to pass by Smith's Tavern to see the physical improvements made to the site: The entire west wall of the Tavern has been reconstructed, a slate walk installed, and the installation of drainage pipes and grading have eliminated problems caused by surface water run off.

Of great importance is the return of the historic Brundage Blacksmith Shop to the area. Its reconstruction in the field behind the Tavern, together with the cleaning and leveling of more than half an acre of tangled shrubs and trees, has added to the overall picture the Society is trying to create on its property.

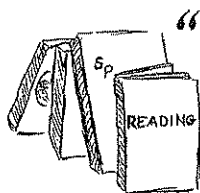
Plans are now underway to restore the Tavern's early kitchen and inn-keeper's bedroom as well as other improvements to the site.

These accomplishments and many others during the past year are the result of the cooperation and dedication of our members, our trustees, our benefactors and the North Castle community. To them I express sincere gratitude and a fervent hope of continued participation in the future.

Cordially,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read 'Orestes J. Mihaly, Sr.'.

Orestes J. Mihaly, Sr.



"MISS WEBSTER'S SCHOOL" **A Fond Remembrance** **of School District No. 4**

by the Honorable James D. Hopkins

Some sixty-five years ago, in September 1917, I began my elementary education in the one-room school in District No. 4, North Castle. Armonk was then divided into three school districts: Nos. 4, 5 and 6, each with its own schoolhouse and under the management of its own trustee. District No. 5 included most of the area known a century before as Mile Square; District No. 6 covered generally that part we now consider Whippoorwill; and District No. 4 lay to the east of District No. 5, along the edge of Byram Lake and beyond toward Route 22, taking in the territory of the present Yale Farms, the western side of Banksville Road, and a large portion of the present Windmill Farms.

My schooling at the time was not unique, for hundreds of pupils before me had enjoyed the same experience. It was an experience far different from the educational process of today, with advantages and disadvantages peculiar to the conditions. The prism of memory does not always reflect a true image, for it favors the pleasant in preference to the disagreeable, and so it is likely that if I err, it is on the side of the amenities of the past.

The schoolhouse was a rectangular building located perhaps 150 feet from Cox Avenue just north of its intersection with Route 22. It still stands there today, although not in the same position. Presently, it is situated with the long side of the rectangle parallel, and much closer, to the road. In my day as a child, the short side served as the front, and the yard between it and the road was our playground. Before it stood a flagpole, and it was the duty of two or three of us assigned by the teacher to raise the flag every school day it did not rain or snow. The plot was about half an acre of fairly level ground, roughly mowed once in the early summer. The grass was kept short the rest of the year by the busy feet of the children constantly running over it.

Within the schoolhouse there was but one room with a high ceiling and walls painted a vague cream-white color. One side was covered by a series of blackboards, low enough for the youngest child and high enough for the oldest. On the other side were three or four windows which usually afforded sufficient light throughout the room, except for dark days when those of us who sat next to the blackboards sometimes found it difficult to read. In the rear was a large stove, which we called the furnace, encircled on the sides and back by a metallic screen, and stoked with coal brought up from the cellar by a scuttle through a trap door. In the front of the room the teacher's table sat on a small platform raised six or seven inches off the floor. Over the table a large clock ticked audibly, the short brass pendulum swinging to and fro below it.

Each week it was wound by a huge key that the teacher hid securely in the drawer of her table.

Steps led from the yard to a double door which opened into a small foyer where there were doors on either side leading to the girls' and boys' cloakrooms. Against the rear wall of the foyer a water pail equipped with a faucet was poised on a shelf, and it was another assignment for one or two of us to keep it filled by carrying it to the nearby Donnelly home and pumping the water from the well outside. The schoolhouse was located nearly at the end of the plot furthest from the road, and in the rear corners were two privies, discreetly hidden by lattices, serving respectively the girls and the boys.

The furnishings of the school room were spartan: desks, carved with the initials of their occupants of the past, and accommodating two pupils who sat together, were arranged in rows so that those in front were lower in height to suit the smaller children; a globe on a pedestal stood near the teacher's platform; an ancient organ with yellowed keys and supplied with air from foot pedals stood against the wall near the windows, and an old bookcase, hand-made and clearly of the vintage of the early 19th century, was set close to the blackboards, crammed with books of varying age. The bookcase was enclosed by two solid doors secured by a wooden bar, and books could be removed only by permission of the teacher. But permission was always given, and because of the daily program, we had ample time to read. The few books of fiction were the staples like **Swiss Family Robinson** and **Robinson Crusoe** and the fairy tales of Grimm and Andersen. Most of the books described foreign countries or nature and wild animals. I particularly remember sets of books by Ernest Thomson Seton and John Muir. During the six years of my attendance, I was able to read most of them.

I had only one teacher during that time. Miss Lillian Webster was gray-haired, perhaps 65, with pince-nez glasses, and long-flowing dresses. She was inexhaustibly patient and devoted to her students whose number fluctuated between 25 and 35, age 6-16. Miss Webster taught all the subjects to all the classes. As the day progressed, each grade was called to the front of the room where they sat together and "recited," while the rest of us listened or read or studied, as we pleased. Sometimes we were told to go to the blackboards to spell, or do sums, or parse sentences, but mainly we responded to the teacher's questions sitting before her in a group in the front of the room.

Miss Webster had a brass bell on her table, and she would ring it to summon us at 9 a.m. when school began, at the end of the morning and afternoon recesses (15 minutes each at 10:30 a.m. and 2:15 p.m.) and at 1 p.m., after the lunch hour. Tardiness was not easily forgiven; at times Miss Webster would keep the offender after school which ended at 3:30 p.m. to make up the time lost. We studied the three "Rs" mostly, but there were, in the higher grades, such subjects as geography, history, physiology, and drawing. At the end of the year, the pupils in the 5th



Miss Lillian Webster. Picture courtesy of R.N. Lander.

grade and above were required to take state examinations; and in the 8th grade we had to pass the dreaded Regents examination in order to graduate. For the latter the students from both District No. 4 and District No. 6 repaired to the District No. 5 schoolhouse where we were under the watchful eyes of two teachers, since District No. 5 boasted two classrooms.

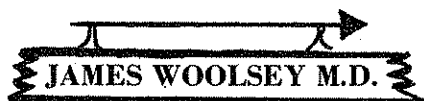
We always commenced the day by saluting the flag, repeating the Lord's Prayer, and singing a patriotic anthem, accompanied by Miss Webster on the organ. Sometimes she led us in a short series of simple exercises. There was no supervised recreation until my last two or three years, when our school, in company with the others in Armonk and vicinity, hired a physical education teacher who visited us twice a

week. Not only did this teacher take us outside to engage in more strenuous exercises, but she introduced us to team play. For the first time we learned about basketball, and it was through her encouragement that a wooden hoop and crude backboard were hung from the flagpole and supplied the target for both teams. She also helped us to lay out a small diamond in the yard, although it was palpably inadequate and home runs into the road were frequent.

Beyond this, we organized our games ourselves, separated naturally by age groups. However, there was one game called "Keeley" in which all the pupils played. We would divide into two teams, one on each side of the schoolhouse. A player on one team tossed a rubber ball over the roof, and if it were caught on the fly by a player on the other team, he ran around to the other side and touched as many of the opposing team as he could before they circled the school house. The game continued until one team had captured all the players on the opposing side. No one knew the origin of the game or its name; it had been handed down from generation to generation, apparently the invention of an ingenious pupil in the reaches of the past.

Despite the size of the yard, we often strayed outside its limits, lured by the fascination of the woods across the road. Over the years countless school children had trodden paths through the trees and tangled undergrowth where within a few feet of the road you were concealed from the schoolhouse and even your companions who had taken a different trail. It was ideal for all the games that our imagination could conceive, and in the good weather we would remain in this semi-wilderness for much of the noon hour, until the ringing of the school bell brought us back. The woods descended sharply to a small valley in which a narrow brook bubbled among cattails and swamp grass. We used to eat the water cress that flourished profusely along the borders of the brook, even though we had been solemnly cautioned by Miss Webster that it was difficult to distinguish it from blue flag which was poisonous.

We celebrated the usual holidays, singing carols of Christmas and Thanksgiving that Miss Webster played on the gently wheezing organ. Before Christmas each of us was assigned a poem or song to learn, and on the afternoon of the last day before the beginning of the holiday vacation we presented a program to our assembled parents and relatives and exchanged gifts with our classmates, chosen by pulling their names from a paper box. There were other holidays, too, such as Easter, when we enjoyed a short spring vacation, but the rest were celebrated only for the day and some during our school periods. One of the latter was Arbor Day which came in the early spring. Miss Webster would send a delegation of boys into the fields to find a sapling which could be transplanted, and they would dig a hole and put it in place in the yard, while the rest of us watched and Miss Webster explained the significance of the life of a tree in man's world. Another was Field Day



JAMES WOOLSEY M.D.

by Richard N. Lander

Second of a series on
doctors in North Castle

The Woolsey family are numbered among the early settlers of the Town of Bedford. They descend from George Woolsey (1610-1698), a native of Bristol, England, who came to Flushing in New Amsterdam in 1623 and moved from there to Jamaica, Long Island in 1664. His son Thomas (1655-1730) later removed to Bedford, and by his marriage to Ruth Bayliss, had five sons. His son Richard (1697-1781) resided in Bedford, married Sarah Fowler and had twelve children. Among his sons was Josiah Woolsey the grandfather of Dr. James Woolsey.

Josiah (1738-1779) married Mary Owen and had six children, among whom was Josiah Jr. (1774-1861) the father of Dr. Woolsey. He served as a private in Captain Marcus Moseman's company of the Second Regiment, Westchester County Militia, Colonel Thomas Thomas's regiment. This regiment saw service in the brigade of General George Clinton, General William Heath's division, and took part in the campaigns about Long Island, New York, and White Plains during 1776. Josiah was taken prisoner and held in the notorious Sugar House in New York, where he made his will and died October 1779.

Josiah Woolsey Jr. married Abigail Lyon (1773-1851) the daughter of Israel and Abigail (Husted) Lyon who lived south of Bedford Village on the Danbury Post Road (now Route 22) on the way to North Castle. Israel Lyon was a firm patriot and served in the same regiment with Josiah Woolsey Sr. He was also a member of the Committee of Safety for Westchester County and his was among the homes burned by the British on their retreat from the burning of Bedford, July 1779. Thus both of Dr. Woolsey's grandsires suffered, and one died for the cause of American independence.

Josiah Woolsey Jr. owned a farm on the Danbury Post Road southwest of the village of Bedford near the intersection of the road to Mt. Kisco (Route 172), not far from his father-in-law. Here, on August 7, 1798, Dr. James Woolsey was born, the first of six children.

Of his childhood and youth we can only surmise that he performed the usual chores of a farm boy and attended the district school. We do know that he was sent to and graduated from the Bedford Academy.

A mystery surrounds how and where he acquired his medical education. His "diploma," which was in existence some years ago (1941) and in the possession of his grand nephew Frank B. Littell of Scranton, Pennsylvania, cannot be found. This "diploma" or certificate was dated August 15, 1827. It was conferred exactly one week after his twenty ninth birthday. The author has diligently searched and has had assistance from the libraries of several nearby old medical schools and medical archive libraries, but James Woolsey cannot be found among

absences because of the weather, considering that many walked a mile or more to school.

Once or twice during the year we would be visited by Charles Cheney, the district superintendent of schools. He was elected by the school commissioners, who were unsalaried officers in each town elected by the people at the fall hustings. Mr. Cheney had his office in White Plains where he interviewed prospective teachers and generally advised the trustees of the districts. Theoretically, we were not supposed to know when he was coming, but I am sure that in some subtle way he conveyed a message to Miss Webster, for on the day of the visit she supervised the cleaning of the schoolroom, the washing of the blackboards, and the storage of our books in the desks. He would be introduced to us by Miss Webster and he would address us on the importance of learning, compliment Miss Webster on the appearance of the school, and tell us that we should pay attention to our studies and not get into mischief. He would then indulge in a few minutes' conversation with Miss Webster, and after perhaps one hour's time drive off in his Model T Ford, while we watched, entranced.

Miss Webster was, of course, responsible to the trustee, who hired her under a yearly contract. The trustee was elected by the residents at the annual meeting held in May. It was seldom that we saw the trustee at school, and this was true as well of my mother, who was elected trustee soon after the adoption of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Miss Webster was the center of our world, and she played several roles: she was, at appropriate times, our teacher, our parent, our protectress; and she was at other times the janitor, purchasing agent, nurse, and the general factotum of the school. Only now can I appreciate the depth of her devotion and patience in dealing with 30 refractory children of varying ages and backgrounds and the daily problems with the operation of the school that surely must have arisen. Through it all she persevered, an exemplar of a true teacher.

I do not recall that homework was ever assigned. We were expected to complete our work at school, and, indeed, there was ample time during the day. But I do recall the endless hours (it seemed to me) that we labored at the handwriting exercises taught under the Palmer Method. Dipping our pen in the inkwell, we crouched deep in concentration over the blue-lined paper, attempting to match the perfect lines and ovals in the book, and never quite succeeding; I recall, too, the spelling bees which were an almost daily occurrence. Miss Webster altered their routine sometimes by selecting teams and registering points for each word spelled correctly.

Although the educational process may not have been ideal, there were advantages to the one-room school. Because the classes recited in front of you, you could listen and absorb, consciously or unconsciously, the lessons taught in the grades ahead of you. You had time to read books from the little library, if you were inclined, even though I must

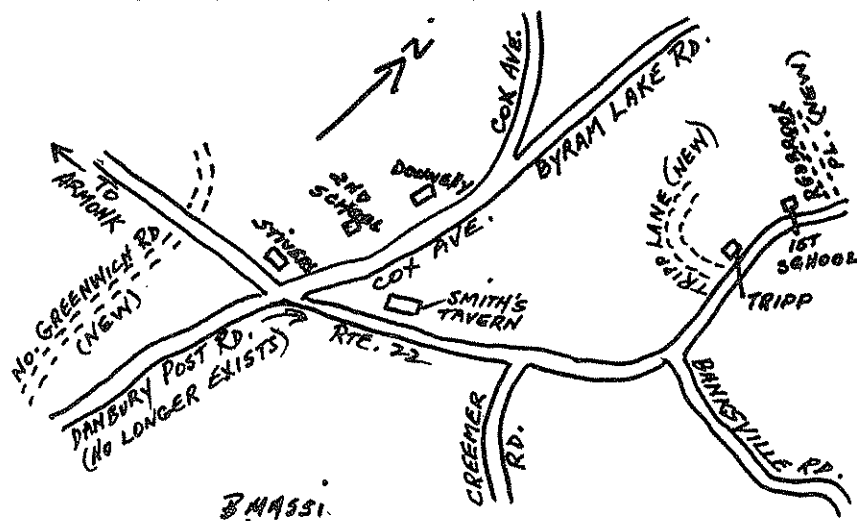
confess that the resources were soon exhausted. The older students, either voluntarily or under instructions from the teacher, acted as tutors to those in the lower classes. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, younger and older children mingled in the same environment, much as a family. Out of this intimacy came a sense of responsibility for the younger pupils by the older, and a sense of belonging by all.

I graduated in 1923, and a year later District No. 4, along with District No. 6, was swallowed up by the consolidation of the three districts in Armonk to be known as District No. 5. A site was acquired where the vacant Whippoorwill School now stands, and the front part of the present building was constructed, housing four class rooms. Harold C. Crittenden was appointed principal, and from this beginning the Byram Hills School District emerged many years later. Miss Webster retired and lived to a ripe old age with her sister, Mrs. Frederick Schmaling, on King Street in Connecticut.¹

The old schoolhouse was sold during the following years and moved forward to its present location on the same plot. It is presently on the property of the Armonk Veterinary Hospital. The Donnelly house was torn down and St. Patrick's Church now stands in its place. The paths in the woods across the street were swiftly lost in the inexorable undergrowth, and the one-room schoolhouse, which was so much a part of our lives, has been lost, except in the memories of those of us who were students there.

FOOTNOTE:

1. Miss Webster's and Mrs. Schmaling's brother, Frank Webster, built the Log Cabin Restaurant on land that was part of his father's farm. It was located on Route 22 when it passed through the village of Armonk, almost opposite today's Armonk Garage. (An engineering firm is presently on the site.) It was a famous roadside stand, restaurant and nightspot where for many years famous bands and entertainers performed. Miss Webster's nephew, Webster Schmaling, enlarged the Log Cabin and operated it through the 1920's.





THE SCHOOL THAT ENDURED

The History of School District No. 4

by Richard N: Lander

Since the first publication of **North Castle History**, the history and reminiscences of two of our former school districts have appeared in our pages.¹ This article and its companion piece will embrace the story of School District No. 4 (originally No. 5).

With the passage of the **Act for the Establishment of Common Schools** by the State Legislature in 1812,² all towns in the State of New York were authorized to divide their towns into school districts and elect Commissioners of Common Schools and Inspectors of Common Schools. This became mandatory in each town in 1814. The Act provided that the Town Meeting elect three commissioners "*to superintend and manage the concerns of the schools in their respective towns.*" The law further stated that "*no person shall be employed as a teacher who shall not have received a Certificate signed by at least two of said inspectors importing he is duly qualified to teach a Common School and is of good moral character.*" The law goes on to state, "*as an impediment to bad men getting into the schools as teachers, it is made the duty of the Town Inspectors strictly to inquire into the moral and literary qualifications of those who may be candidates for the place of a teacher.*"

— No. Castle Complies With the Law —

In obedience to the new mandate, North Castle held a special town meeting on April 22, 1813, and the voters chose James Guion, Gilbert Purdy and James Hopkins commissioners of common schools. Also selected was a full roster of six inspectors: Abraham Miller, Thomas Tilly, John Griffin, Henry von Kleck, Guy B. Hobby, and Enos Hobby, Jr. Early school reports indicate that there were originally eight districts, and later as many as nine plus the separate neighborhood school on King Street. It was not until more than three years after the special town meeting that District No. 4(5) received a deed for its schoolhouse site, as follows:³

"This Indenture made the 30 day of October in the year of Our Lord One Thousand eight hundred and sixteen between John Tripp of the Town of North Castle County of Westchester and the State of New York of the first part, and James Hopkins, Samuel S. Sands and Guy B. Hobby Commissioners of Common Schools for the time being of the Town County and State aforesaid for the second part;

Witnesseth that the sd party of the first part have given and granted

and by these presents do freely and clearly give and grant unto sd party of the second part and their successors in office that certain piece or parcel of land lying and being in the sd Town of North Castle, County and State aforesaid in School district No. 5 [later No. 4] in Town of North Castle. Beginning by the poast Road that leads from Bedford to White plains running westerly by the land of Andrew Sniffin fourteen feet thence southerly by the land of John Tripp twenty two feet thence easterly by the land of sd Tripp fourteen feet to the sd poast Road thence northerly along sd poast Road twenty two feet to the first mentioned bounds, to have and to hold the above granted and described premises unto the sd party of the second part, to them and their successors in office for the purpose of setting a school house for the use of Common Schools in sd district, and when wanted no longer to be occupied for the use of a school house by said district, then the above described and granted premises to return to the party of the first part or his heirs or assigns, the sd John Tripp doth Covenant promise and agree to and with the said James Hopkins, Samuel S. Sands and Guy B. Hobby and their successors in office that he will warrant and defend the above described land and premises in the peaceable possession of James Hopkins, Samuel S. Sands and Guy B. Hobby and their successors in office and for no other purpose than to be occupied for a school house. Given under me my hand and seal the day and year first above written.

John Tripp [LS].⁴

This places the original school just north of the present Tripp Lane which leads to Byram Hills High School.

The entire text of this deed is given here as it seems to be the sole survivor of the original school district site deeds. Written in the hand of Capt. John Smith, the town clerk, and unrecorded, it gives the reader a vivid picture of the transactions of early nineteenth century North Castle. It is interesting to note the size of the lot, only 14 feet by 22 feet, just large enough to sit the schoolhouse. (Indeed, there is evidence that schoolhouse lots were pint-sized as the lands surrounding them were valuable farmlands.) The children must have played in the fields of the adjoining farmers Sniffin and Tripp or in the relatively traffic-free Post Road. A look at early school reports show it fairly close to the center of the district. A visit to the site today shows not a trace of where it had stood, and a new piece of stone wall has been built across the front of the lot adjoining the wood. However, on this site for the next fifty-five years the children of School District No. 4[5] received their education. There are but two sources to draw upon for a history of the district: scattered district reports from the trustees to the commissioners of common schools and the district minutes beginning 1845 and ending approximately 1922.⁵

— Progress Reports —

The oldest report, for the year 1828, gives a picture of its progress after approximately twelve years of operation. Trustees John T. Hopkins and Nathaniel Harris reported that the school was kept nine months and eight days during the year; the time the school was kept by a teacher "*duly appointed and approved in all respects according to law*" was eight days; the wages for the teacher totalled \$89.52, of which \$14.52 was "public money" sent to the district and the balance of \$75.00 raised within the district. The number of children taught in said district was 91 and the number of children in the district above 5 and under 16 years was 52. The trustees also reported that the inspectors had not visited the school during the year, perhaps the reason that a "*qualified teacher taught only eight days.*" The unusual number of 91 instructed and only 52 of school age is a mystery.

Ten years later, in 1838, the report is much better and shows the school was kept ten months and by a teacher qualified in all respects to teach the full term. Public money received was \$28.00, all of which had been applied to teachers wages, plus \$136.00 levied by the district; thus the teacher had received \$164.00 for the year. The number of scholars was sixty; the number of children residing in the district over 5 and under 16 years of age was 50. In 1843 a catalogue was made of the books in the school library and it shows fifty-five volumes, many of quite some sophistication for a district school. The books lean heavily to history, biography, natural sciences, philosophy, and morality: a sampling of the titles range from Irving's two volume **Life of Washington** to such numbers as **Poor Rich Man and Rich Poor Man** and **Live and Let Live**. William Brundage, who lived about a quarter of a mile below the school, was the librarian.

The report of 1846 is the most interesting and informative. It shows the school was kept by an approved teacher for eleven months; \$46.87 in public money was received and applied to teachers wages; \$225.00 was raised by district taxation and applied to the teacher, making a total salary of \$272.87; the library had received \$11.96, some of which had been used to purchase maps; sixty-seven volumes were in the school library; the number of children taught was 68, and the number in the district, 66. The trustees then go on to list the various books used by the scholars of the various grades: **Porter's Reader**, **Sander's Readers-First and Third series**, **Townes' Spelling Book**, **Webster's Spelling Book**, **Mitchell's Geography**, **Olneys' Geography**, **Smith's Geography**, **Daboll's Arithmetic**, **Smith's Arithmetic**, **Adams' and Emerson's Arithmetic**, **Smith's Grammar**, **Brown's Grammar**, **Comstock's Philosophy**, **Days' and Dane's Algebraic**, **Davis' Surveying and Geometry** and **Tytler's History**.

The names of two of the teachers of that era have survived: Samuel A. Rundle, probably a relation of the Rundle family south of the school,

and Nathaniel C. Husted of North Greenwich.

— The District Minutes —

Unfortunately, the early years (1816-1844) were either not recorded or the books lost, but the District Minute Book beginning 1845 is a most valuable record of school business. It shows that most of the early annual meetings were very routine and dealt basically with the election of the moderator of the meeting, the clerk, the trustee, the district collector, and the librarian. One important item that appears, year after year, is providing a supply of wood for the school stove. A sample entry follows:

"Nov. 8, 1847. Voted by the voice of the meeting that eight dollars be paid Isaac Tripp for two cords of rock oak wood, voted by the voice of the meeting that \$2.75 be paid to Charles Mosur for cutting two cords of wood."

By the year 1850 the district meeting voted \$150.00 for teachers wages and \$13.00 to be raised to purchase wood. As an afterthought, the meeting authorized \$10.00 to repair the schoolhouse. Time and again the minutes continue to authorize purchasing wood, cutting and splitting, minor repairs, and occasionally the purchase of maps, books or a bookcase.

A brief note appears in the minutes of 1859 correcting the clerk who described the district in the 1858 minutes as District No. 5 instead of No. 4. From this brief note we know the district numbers were changed by the town commissioners prior to October 1858.

— The Debate For a New Site —

From time to time throughout the old minutes books the residents of the district voted sums of money for repairs to the schoolhouse. These appropriations throughout the years probably did not total seventy-five dollars, the largest being ten dollars in 1850. At a special meeting held at the schoolhouse on November 7, 1866 the following resolution was adopted:

"Resolved that we the inhabitants of school district No. 4 in the Town of North Castle owing to the dilapidated state of the old school house deem it necessary to change the site of the present one to some suitable and central point in the said district and build a new house of suitable size to accommodate the children of the district."

The clerk's minutes record *"the above resolution passed unanimously."* Those present also passed a resolution appointing Samuel P. Smith, William S. Brown and Daniel J. Nash to assist Trustee Leemon B. Tripp,⁶ in procuring a site for the new schoolhouse and also in the construction of the building, whereupon the meeting was adjourned.

One wonders, if those present could have envisioned the trouble and

consternation this resolution would cause, would they have voted for it? But the sad condition of the house, only twenty-two feet by thirteen feet, could no longer accommodate the district.

At the next district meeting on October 8, 1867, the district voted to elect three trustees instead of the usual one, and William H. Creemer, William S. Brown and Leemon B. Tripp were elected for terms of three, two and one year respectively. Leemon B. Tripp offered the following resolution:

"Resolved that the site of the school house is changed to a plot of ground on the farm of James E. Stivers' opposite the tenant house of Samuel P. Smith where Patrice McGaughan now resides and that the Trustees be and are hereby authorized and directed to negotiate with James E. Stivers for not less than one half acre and not more than one acre of ground and that the said Trustees be further authorized and directed to locate the same by fixing the proper meets and bounds for the school house site, and report at the next school meeting."

This vote must have been considered very important as the clerk, Charles Ferris (also the teacher), records it name by name with ayes and nays. There were twenty-six present and the vote was twenty-one ayes, and five nays. With predictability, those living near the new site voted "no," among them Samuel P. Smith and Mr. Stivers.

The trustees did not wait until the next school meeting, but called a special meeting eight days later, October 16th. It becomes obvious that Leemon B. Tripp is the leader and guiding spirit in the campaign to change the location of the school, and he gave the following report to the meeting:

"James E. Stivers refusing to negotiate with us, we selected a plot of ground described as follows: Beginning at the south east corner of the lot on field of James E. Stivers adjoining the land of Job R. Carpenter at the highway leading from Stivers' corners to Carpenter's mills [Cox Ave.], by the division fence, and running westerly about fourteen rods to near a pair of bars, thence north 8 rods, thence easterly on a line parallel with the southerly line of said lot, to the aforesaid highway, being fourteen rods deep and eight rods from front and rear."

John S. Hobby then offered a resolution that the plot of ground selected by the trustees under the resolution passed at the regular annual meeting be the property as described in the report. A count vote was again taken and recorded; eleven votes were cast, ten for and one opposed. It is interesting to note that neither Messrs. Smith nor Stivers was present.

A second resolution was also passed. Although the record does not show who made it and the author assumes it was Leemon B. Tripp, as both of these motions appear to have been prepared and written out in advance:

"Resolved that the sum of one thousand dollars be levied and assessed

upon the taxable property of the district towards paying for a site and building a school house."

Another count vote: Ayes nine, none against, two persons, including the one dissenting vote of the prior resolution, having left the meeting.

Obviously Mr. Tripp again approached Mr. Stivers and met another refusal to sell. On October 23 another meeting was held and this resolution passed:

"Resolved that the Trustee be and is hereby authorized and directed to take such legal steps as are necessary to gain a title to the site for a school house selected by them and voted at the last meeting."

A second resolution was also adopted: *"Walter H. Mead and Jeremiah Palmer were appointed a building committee to assist the trustee in the construction of a school house."* This is the first meeting at which a stronger policy by the trustees and the residents begins to take place.

The district met again on November 16, 1867 and the trustee presented plans for a schoolhouse. In the absence of the Building Committee, they were submitted to the meeting for consideration, and after examination the meeting adopted the following resolution:

"Resolved that the plans submitted by the Trustee be and are hereby adopted with the following alterations, that the width be twenty feet instead of eighteen feet as shown on the plans, and the length of the building be thirty-eight feet instead of thirty-four feet according to the plans."

In the meantime, cooler heads and some degree of compromise for the site must have prevailed, for on November 20 the district met again. Originally a dissenter, Samuel P. Smith had returned as chairman. It was reported:

*"The Committee not being able to procure a suitable site for the house, it was resolved that the site of the school house be moved to the vicinity of the corner of the road near Charles Rundle's."*⁸

Nineteen persons were present and voted. However, the result of the vote was never recorded and the adjournment of the meeting to November 24 was evidently the only item agreed upon.

On the evening of the 24th the district met, pursuant to adjournment:

"Resolved that the school house site be fixed upon Charles Rundle's land on the West side of the main road opposite the road that leads to Middle Patent,"

This would have placed the school on Route 22 opposite Banksville Road. Eleven were present and voted. The tally showed eight yeas, and two nays (one of whom was Charles Rundle), and one abstention, John S. Hobby, whose home was across the road from the proposed site.

On the evening of the 27th of November they met again and drafted a resolution of construction that accurately describes the new house:

"Resolved that the school house be 34 feet long 20 feet wide with 10 feet posts and that the school house be built after the Gothic style of architecture and that it shall be sided with clap boards and that there should be three windows on each side of the door in front. The roof to be 2 feet cypress shingles and there shall be one window in each end of the loft and that there shall be blinds to each window below."

The resolution was carried.

A resolution was then offered and voted that the resolution be reconsidered that removed the site of the schoolhouse to Charles Rundle's corner, or rather that fixed the site of the schoolhouse in the vicinity of said corner. This meeting adjourned.

On December 11th they met again for by now new developments had occurred. Adolphus Reynolds, Coles D. Brundage and Leonard Smith had been added to the Site Committee. It was resolved and voted:

" . . . that the Committee examine a piece of land offered by Charles Rundle in place of the land voted at previous meeting, said piece of land offered by Charles Rundle being the northerly end of his land adjoining the land of Leemon B. Tripp. And also examine the piece of land that Leemon B. Tripp has offered in the north end of said Tripp's orchard adjoining the land of Hiram Finch, and to examine any piece of land offered for site for a school house in our district and Committee to report to this meeting at the next meeting."

They came together again four days later on December 15. Samuel P. Smith reported for the committee *"in favor of Charles Rundle's land on the corner by Middle Patent Road."* It was moved to adopt, but a motion to reconsider was moved and carried, *"the Committee not being able to agree in opinion in regard to which site."* Reading between the lines of the minutes kept by Daniel J. Nash, the clerk, passions were aroused and everybody pretty upset.

A resolution was then offered and voted fixing the site on the piece of land that Leemon B. Tripp had offered the district on the north side of his orchard adjoining the land of Hiram Finch.⁹ After the resolution was adopted by the meeting Mr. Leemon B. Tripp insisted on withdrawing his offer of a site as he had proposed and offered the district. Thereupon a resolution was offered and voted:

" . . . that the site for a school house for the school district be and is hereby fixed upon Cedar Island, a knoll of land rising out of the swamp extending on the east side of the highway [now Route 22], said island or knoll rising from the bogs nearly opposite the house of Andrew S. Nash.¹⁰ After some considerable debate as to the location of said school house site, of the necessity of building a solid causeway from the road to school house by filling in and also the healthfulness of the said site a motion to adjourn was in order and voted by a standing vote, the ayes having it."

One wonders how much sarcasm and perhaps bitterness prompted the Cedar Island swamp motion, for during the Christmas and New Year holiday tempers must have cooled and a lot of behind-the-scenes maneuvering taken place. On January 18, 1868, in the old schoolhouse, the meeting reconvened and the following motion was offered and lost:

"Resolved that the Trustee be and is hereby authorized and directed to contract with James E. Stivers for the lot selected by the district for \$500."

It became evident that the voters were now satisfied or resigned to the site; it was the price they objected to.

Two more meetings were held in February, both of which resulted in adjournment. On March 6, 1868 the voters met again and this time a motion was offered authorizing the trustee (Mr. Tripp) *"to pay Mr. Stivers the sum of \$500 for a site for a school house."* The motion was again lost. Meanwhile Mr. Tripp, whose patience must have been exhausted and who must have been constantly negotiating with Mr. Stivers, went down to White Plains, hired a lawyer, and began condemnation proceedings against Mr. Stivers.

On April 14, 1868 a proceeding¹¹ was begun by Mr. Tripp, the trustee, in county court by his attorney, Elisha P. Ferris, Esq. of White Plains. In his petition, Mr. Tripp alleges that at an annual meeting held on October 8, 1867 the voters authorized the purchase of the lot from Mr. Stivers. He further states that James E. Stivers is the sole owner of the land, of full age and sound mind, and his consent to sell the land for a schoolhouse site cannot be obtained as they cannot agree upon a reasonable price for said land.

On the same day as the petition was filed, Mr. Tripp's son, Charles, served the complaint on Mr. Stivers.

On May 18, 1868, the county judge appointed as appraisers Alsop H. Lockwood of Pound Ridge, Stephen Lyon of Bedford, and John Swinburne of White Plains. Upon the commencement of the proceeding Mr. Stivers reconsidered his actions, and the minutes of May 30, 1868 recite:

"The object of the meeting was to take in consideration the proposition offered by Mr. Stivers to the Trustee to sell the district a half acre of land in the north east corner of his land adjoining Job R. Carpenter for the sum of \$400.00, Mr. Stivers having subsequently reconsidered the above proposition and having refused to sell the district a site for a school house for any sum less than \$500, it is deemed inexpedient to take any action upon the subject of this meeting. The above report of the Trustee was adopted by meeting."

Evidently Mr. Tripp, having begun his court proceeding, was now content to let matters take their course, contemplating the price would probably be about \$400.00 anyway.

The commissioners in condemnation met at Mr. Stivers' house on June 16, 1868 and were sworn to their duties by Hanford White the local justice of the peace, and were attended by Mr. Ferris, attorney for the trustee, and Mr. Stivers. No testimony was taken and the commissioners walked over and viewed the proposed parcel. On June 30 they rendered their report, awarding \$527.00 for the schoolhouse site.

On July 13, 1868 the report was presented in open court at Bedford Court House, and the county judge, Hon. Robert Cochrane, signed an order awarding Mr. Stivers the \$527.00 and vesting title to the site in School District No. 4.

On September 26, 1868 at a special meeting held in the old schoolhouse, the district voters convened to award the contracts for the construction of the schoolhouse:

"Resolved that the contract for the construction of the building except for underpinning be let to John W. Sherwood, he being the lowest bidder for the sum of \$1,630.

Resolved that the contract for digging a [partial] cellar 10 feet wide across one end of the building and stoning the same and putting the foundation walls for the balance to sit on be awarded to Adolphus Reynolds for the sum of \$302.00. Cellar 8 x 17 feet in the clear. Underpinning to be 3 feet below ground, stone to be regularly laid in the trench. Wall to be 18 inches wide [here two lines are completely illegible]. All work and materials to be given and done in a workmanlike manner."

The annual district meeting was held October 17th. Mr. Tripp reported the cost of the court proceeding was \$45.00, which the district voted to pay. Also at the meeting another milestone was passed when the Meeting "voted to use coal for fire for the year instead of wood." One week later, on the 24th, the members of the district came together and voted to levy on the district the sum of \$1,000.00 for the purpose of buying a lot and building a schoolhouse.

At this point in the minutes there is an insert pasted in the record book with sealing wax wafers. It is an authorization from George W. Smith, the school commissioner of the Second District of Westchester County, to "levy \$1,600 or the amount the district may assess" and collect without consent for the purpose of building a schoolhouse and furnishing the same.

On the rear of this authorization is a private letter to the trustee written in a small hand. The letter is most interesting and gives great background into the struggle to build the school:

"I am pleased to know that you have taken off your coat and rolled up your sleeves to the work at hand. Though tribulations deep the way to glory is, and great glory to Leemon if he gives No. 4 a \$3,400 school house for the rotten shell that shelters good Mr. Ferris and the little immortals under his care. The children should be instructed to rise up and

call the man blessed who maketh their little feet to walk in pleasant places. And when he shall be laid away with many tears may the new building be a monument to his memory as enduring as the one now stricken in years and mossy by the accumulations of the ages. Let a marble tablet be erected in the wall bearing the inscription 'Erected Anno Domini 1868 Leemon B. Tripp — Trustee,' and the name shall be daguerrotyped upon the memory of the living, and all who in their turn in after years shall follow them to the house of learning. While the names of those who opposed the building will only be found upon wormeaten documents filed away in some pigeon hole in the County archives, evidence of having once lived in the world but no evidence of having been of any use while in it.

Three cheers for the New School House!

Your much abused Commissioner."



Leemon B. Tripp. From the original photo in possession of his great grandson Granger Tripp.

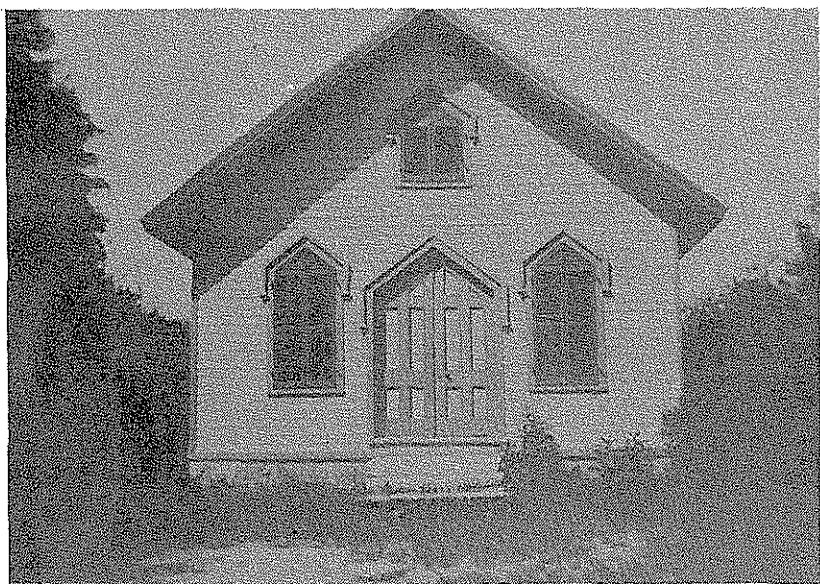
— Old Schoolhouse Sold —

At a meeting held on March 20, 1869 the trustee was authorized and directed to dispose of the old schoolhouse, *"and it shall be removed before the 10 of April next."* It was also voted to insure the new schoolhouse, furniture and school apparatus. Lastly, the trustee was authorized to offer Charles Rundle the benches and furniture (except the chairs, stove and pipe) of the old schoolhouse for the benefit of the Sunday school. On the third of April the district met again and authorized the trustee to accept \$15.00 for the old schoolhouse. The record does not show who bought the building, whether it was taken down or moved away. Its final end is lost to history. Thus passed *"mossy with the ages"* the 1816 school on the Post Road.

— The New School —

On October 12, 1869 the annual meeting was held in the new schoolhouse. The committee empowered to buy a new stove for the school reported the stove which they had procured to be used by the district *"three months on tryal"* had been put in use *"and we have come to the conclusions that the said stove does not answer and will not suit."* Debate ensued. A motion to keep the stove was made and defeated.

At the close of the meeting there was a financial report. This shows, among other items, Mr. Tripp advanced his personal money to pay Mr.



District No. 4 school, photographed around 1915 by Rebecca (Rodgers) Trimmer (1891-1977) who was a student there for several years. Mrs. Trimmer was the author's aunt. Photograph from the author's collection.

Stivers for the lot, which was repaid. Sherwood, the contractor, received \$1,727.09 for building the school (\$1,630.00 contract plus extras). For digging of the cellar and building the foundation Reynolds received \$302.00. New furniture for the schoolhouse, \$105.74. Probably most interesting is the Teaching Account, which shows "*good Mr. Ferris*" received \$16.00 per week for 38 weeks, 3½ days, from September 14, 1868 through July 2, 1869, \$608.00.

With this meeting the district returned to its old routine of just the annual meeting. In 1870 they appointed a school Visitation Committee of six. In 1871 they authorized the trustee to dig a well at the schoolhouse "*if it was called for.*" 1877 saw the meeting engaged in great debate about the new state law entitled **An Act to Prevent Changes in Text Books**. Two meetings were held, and the trustee and a special committee visited the school to consult with the teacher regarding the present books. At the same meeting the committee reported the present texts, with a few additions, met all the requirements of the law. The resolution concludes by listing the texts in two columns in the minutes within a box drawn in red by the clerk.

In 1874 William H. Creemer had become the district clerk, and the minutes now take on that distinctive "Creemer flair" for setting down in meticulous detail what transpired at the meeting.

In 1878 the district had a long meeting regarding the relative merits of wood or coal to keep the school warm, and returned to wood. In 1879 the meeting authorized the schoolhouse to be repainted on the outside, two coats for \$40.00.

In the 1880 minutes there is a seven-line statement of business which tells all about the district affairs:

Paid Teachers Wages	\$300.00	
Painting	30.00	
Fuel 3½ cords wood	24.50	
Cutting " " "	7.00	
	<hr/>	
	\$361.50	
Money received x Trustee	116.67	(County Money)
Balance collected x Tax	<hr/>	
	\$244.83	

In 1881 the district received a handsome map of the United States and Mexico, the gift of Eli Seegar and the meeting passed a resolution of "*profound appreciation.*"

In 1882 the trustee was authorized to procure a new stove as the old one was in bad condition due to cracks in a number of places and "*emitting both smoke and sparks in the school room making it uncomfortable and unsafe to the occupants.*"

The reputation of the school must have been very good, for in 1883 the trustee asked for guidance "*as certain persons outside the school district were sending children to the school.*"

It was resolved by vote that the trustee admit no children from other

districts until otherwise instructed by vote of the district. However, in 1886 the district, upon application of Connecticut resident, Daniel Ryan, voted to admit his child or children, contingent upon his paying tuition at the rate of taxes on \$3,000.00 of assessed valuation as taxed in the district.

In 1887 the never-ending debate of coal or wood to heat the house was again held; this time coal won. Interesting things were always happening in the meeting, or at least Mr. Creemer made the most of them in his wonderful minutes. Mr. Allen Brundage, now the trustee, presented the school with a picture of **The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World**. The meeting immediately resolved that he, as the trustee, should have it framed and hung in the schoolhouse.

In his reminiscences Judge Hopkins speaks of the school organ. Its origins are not found in the minutes, but at the meeting of 1891 great concern was felt about its care, especially during the summer vacation, and after debate it was voted that *"the organ remain in the schoolhouse under the charge and care of the trustee, and he will attend that no damage occur to the instrument through mice or other vermin, dampness or other cause."*

At the meeting of 1893 a letter was read from James B. Lockwood, School Superintendent, that the schoolhouse was in need of *"one or more coats of paint and the closets [toilets] are in need of cleaning and repairing."* The next year's report shows these things were all done, including a new roof.

At the 1893 meeting, due to changes in the law, the teacher was to be the librarian. Mr. Creemer's minutes also show that the library catalogue listed 117 volumes, but by actual count there were 130 volumes. It is interesting to note that the district policy toward library books was quite liberal, and at almost any annual meeting the district authorized the purchase of a few volumes, including a set of encyclopedias purchased in 1884. By 1897 some of the leading citizens of the district, including Charles E. Brundage and A. Smith Hopkins, were purchasing books and presenting them to the school library.

In 1897 the *"Stars and Stripes were first flung to the breeze during the session of school hours,"* as a special committee reported they had erected a flag pole upon the school grounds.

In 1898 the long tenure of Mr. Creemer as the district clerk came to an end after having served for twenty-four years. Each year for the past decade he had been trying to give it up, making long speeches of protest and submitting, year after year, to unanimous reelection.

In 1898 the trustee was authorized to hire engineers Byrne and Darling to survey the property at a cost of \$39.60; why is not mentioned. A debate ensued whether or not a well should be driven on the school property. A vote was taken and the motion passed, and \$30.00 was appropriated for it. The well must have been put in, for the next year expenditures show labor, lumber, pump and pipe, \$26.95. In 1901 the in-

side of the schoolhouse was face-lifted with new desks and seats, at a cost of \$60.90, and carpenter work, paint, lath, nails, etc. at a cost of \$47.61.

By 1900 there was constant discussion in the district meeting regarding the teacher's salary, which was approximately \$300.00. Each year the wages painfully inched upward and by 1910 they had reached \$350.00 per year in a total district budget of \$659.69. Most of the yearly expenditures show minor repairs to the building and painting the classroom. In 1909 the first note of a teacher's pension plan can be seen in the treasurer's report, \$5.00 being expended for this purpose. In 1918 physical training made its appearance in the entire school supervisory district, and a \$600.00 fund was created among the various school districts. The share of District No. 4 was \$100.00; thus the travelling physical education teacher, of whom Judge Hopkins speaks, began to serve the students.

— Consolidation —

By 1920 district consolidation was beginning to be a topic of local discussion, and the following note is found in the minutes:

"A motion made, seconded and carried that the Trustee withhold his signature from any petition to have any part of another district transferred to this district."

The 1921 meeting was held as usual; expenses for the district, the last recorded, totalled \$1,658.24. Miss Webster's salary reached \$800.00 per year.

On June 24, 1921, a special meeting was held at the schoolhouse. A committee from School District No. 5 (Armonk) was in attendance. They were asked to *"state their proposition"* which was *"for districts 4 and 5 to combine and build a new school to include two years of high school work."* The committee could not give any figures as to cost or location. The meeting voted to adjourn until August 12, 1921.

On that day the meeting again met. Nine were present, but the committee from No. 5 did not attend. With none of the questions asked at the previous meeting being answered regarding consolidation (at least not on the record), the district voted 8 against, 1 for, and the meeting adjourned.

The last entry in the old minute book was the annual meeting of May 2, 1922. A budget of \$1,445.00 was adopted. Modern problems were beginning to arise such as a teacher's pension plan, and the fact that White Plains would take no more high school students. It was voted to run the school on daylight savings time. The meeting adjourned, and the old book ends.

What persuaded the people of District No. 4 to finally close is now lost to the record; perhaps it was modern methods of teaching, and the advent of physical education, teachers' pensions, and a host of prob-

lems today's citizens take for granted in running a school system. Perhaps when District No. 6 (Whippoorwill) agreed to consolidate, that tipped the balance to consolidation. But most likely it was the fact that like generations of other Americans, the elders of the district wished something better for their children. Whatever the reason, in 1923 North Castle District Nos. 4, 5 and 6 merged to form Common School District No. 5 of the Towns of North Castle and New Castle. The beginning of modern education in North Castle stems from this event.

School continued in the old school until December of 1924, as the new Whippoorwill School was not ready until that time. Miss Webster having retired, a temporary teacher, Miss Ann LeFevre, taught the last four months. And thus, when the children left for Christmas vacation in 1924, District No. 4 closed forever.

That District No. 4 was a good school can be seen from the fact that people who lived in the surrounding districts were always trying to get their children enrolled among its students. It is interesting to note the liberal tendencies of the district in its later years, even at a time when women still had no voting status: Mrs. Lorano S. Brundage was the trustee in 1898; Mrs. Augustus A. Knapp finished her late husband's term as collector in 1904; Kathryn Ryan Hopkins was the trustee from 1918-1921 and later served as a member of the new consolidated board in 1923; Miss Eva L. Brundage was the last district treasurer, 1918-1922.

In his article, Judge Hopkins speaks of the library. The minutes reveal that there was always a great desire for the students to read more than just their text books. They repeatedly note purchase of books by the Library Committee, librarians, and even gifts of books by individual citizens. Many local citizens served as district librarian, as teachers came and went in the early years with great rapidity.

The quality of the teaching must have been of a high order. Charles Ferris was the last teacher in the old school, and probably the first in the new. He was highly esteemed and was elected the district clerk from 1867-1869. Mr. Ferris was succeeded by a host of teachers, some whose first names are no longer remembered: Carrie P. Sniffin, Miss Kingsley, Miss Farnsworth, Sadie Dongin, and the excellent, well-remembered Grace Howitt, who went from District No. 4 over to District No. 5 in Armonk. But the last teacher, Miss Lillian Webster, must have been exceptional. Judge Hopkins speaks of her with happy remembrance. Mr. Harold C. Crittenden, principal of the new Whippoorwill School, in his writings, refers to District No. 4 as "*Miss Webster's school*" or the "*Webster school*,"¹² indicating that her presence made the school what it was. When we look back at the caliber of graduates, many of whom became our town's leading citizens, we realize what a great school it must have been.

With the building of the new school, District No. 4 became surplus property and the new consolidated board, Julius A. Raven, William

MacDonald and Kathryn R. Hopkins, decided to sell the building.¹³ It was sold at public auction on the front steps of the new Whippoorwill School on April 11, 1925 to Walter R. Wohlfeil of Armonk, for \$2,050.00, that being the highest sum bid.¹⁴

Mr. Wohlfeil moved the schoolhouse further front of the lot and remodeled it into a small and attractive house which may be seen to this day as the residence on the property of the Veterinary Hospital of Dr. Stanley Duberman on Cox Avenue. Thus passed from the local scene District No. 4 School, gone but not forgotten by many of our citizens who received their education within its time-hallowed walls.

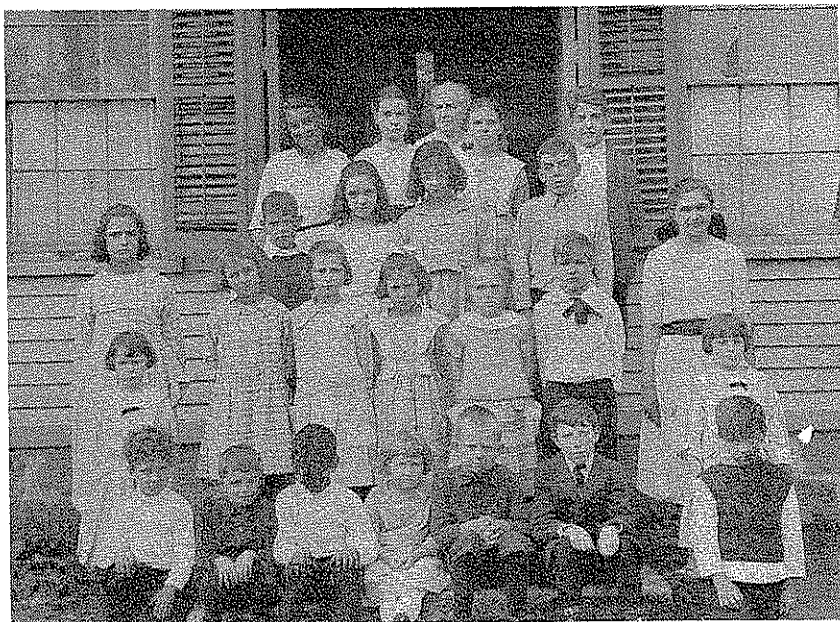
FOOTNOTES:

1. "To Middle Patent School — With Love," Doris Finch Watson, North Castle History Vol. 1, Spring 1974. "The Four Coman Hill Schools," Constance Quarrie and Supplement by Richard N. Lander, North Castle History, Vol. 5, Spring 1978.
2. For a modern explanation of the 1812 school law, see "Historical Records of New Castle," Francis Cook Lee, 1977; Chapter 4.
3. Copied from the original deed in possession of the author.
4. John Tripp (1771-1822), son of Daniel and Mary (Palmer) Tripp, resided on his father's farm on the Danbury Post Road (Route 22). Married Abigail Robbins; had 6 children, among whom was Leemon B. Tripp, donor of the first schoolhouse lot. It is interesting to note that the present Byram Hills High School is located on his farm.
5. Original school district reports in possession of the author. Original District No. 4 (5) minute book in possession of the author.
6. Leemon B. Tripp (1812-1872), son of John and Abigail (Robbins) Tripp, as a young man resided in Tarrytown, where he operated a lumber business. He moved to Rye Lake Valley, North Castle, and purchased his grandfather Samuel Robbin's farm. Lastly, he moved to North Castle and purchased Prospect Farm, his father's homestead. A pioneer Republican, elected Westchester County Treasurer 1855-1858, North Castle Supervisor 1860-1861, and County Sheriff, 1862-1865. Married twice, first to Emily Husted, and second to his distant cousin, Phebe Jane Tripp. Had six children. The new school was built through his initiative and perseverance.
7. James E. Stivers (1805-1870). A blacksmith and wheelwright, whose lot was condemned in order to erect the new schoolhouse. See North Castle History, Vol. 8, 1981, for much detail regarding him.
8. This site is approximately the southeast corner of Charles Rundle's farm (opposite from where Banksville Road comes into Route 22). The Charles Rundle house still stands and was, until recently, the residence of Mr. and Mrs. William Frank.
9. On the east side of the road, Route 22, a little north of the present Tripp Lane, on the opposite side of Route 22.
10. Opposite the house called Redbrooke, on the east side of Route 22. It is still boggy swampy open land.
11. School District No. 4, Town of North Castle, plaintiff V. James E. Stivers, def., County Court, Westchester County, Special Proceedings, Index #532.
12. Information for several portions of the ending of this article was taken from Byram Hills Central Schools 1961-65 "In the Beginning," Chapter 1, Armonk Schools 1923-1961 by Harold C. Crittenden.
13. At a special school district meeting held March 26, 1925, the inhabitants voted to sell all three surplus buildings: District Nos. 4, 5 and 6.
14. Liber 2572 of Deeds, page 59.

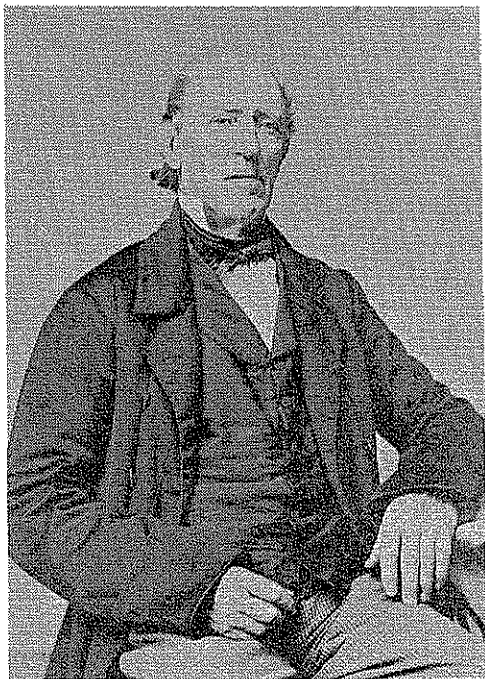


which was held at the end of the school year. Impromptu foot races and other athletic events were arranged by Miss Webster, who tried to classify the contestants according to age and size. She rewarded the winners with pencil boxes, which I am sure she purchased from her own funds.

For most of the year the schoolhouse was comfortable, but in the depths of winter it became miserably cold. The wind blew in through the crevices of the windows and doors, and the furnace, though its sides were fiery red, could not raise the temperature in the front of the room much above freezing. The water pail of course would be topped by a thick layer of ice. We did not remove our outer garments and stocking caps and woolen gloves, and we and Miss Webster, herself swathed in overcoat, gloves and scarf, sat huddled together on benches drawn close to the furnace. Even then, though we were fairly warm in front, our backs were chilled by freezing drafts entering from the windows. There would be no lessons on those days. Instead, Miss Webster would entertain us by reading aloud from a book from our little library, while our noses ran and our teeth chattered, and if the cold persisted, she dismissed us at noon. Nonetheless, as I look back, there were few



District No. 4, "Miss Webster's" school Spring, 1920. Top Row: Margaret Deal, Rose Donnelly Springer, Miss Lillian Webster, Mary Maryscuk, Stanley Waterbury. Third row: George Abrams, Kay Donnelly Griffen, Theresa Laurent, Wallace Remsen. Second row: Marge Bennett Dennison, Frances Mahoney Bambace, Ethel Bates Holmes, Rose Krouch Palamarcsuk, Julia Maryscuk, Pete Simmons, Ann Wesley. Standing on either end between the first and second rows: twins Rose and Anna Jones. First row (seated): Edgar Heustis, Tommy Maryscuk, Tony ?, Marguerite Hopkins Lewis, Amos Remsen, James Hopkins, Arthur (Chubby) Mahoney. Picture courtesy of Marguerite Hopkins Lewis.



Dr. James Woolsey



Mrs. James (Rachel Pierce) Woolsey

the graduates in medicine. The conclusion is then reached that his diploma was granted after lengthy apprenticeship, perhaps accounting for age twenty nine when he received it. The **History of Bedford Academy** published in June 1877 mentions him among all the other lawyers, ministers and doctors of note who received their preparatory education there with these words: "Dr. James Woolsey practiced at North Castle where he died about a year ago."

The author now has to speculate as to the doctor or doctors with whom Dr. Woolsey may have studied. Perhaps he studied with a variety of preceptors. His lessons in surgery may have been learned under the tutelage of the well known Dr. Elisha Belcher (1757-1825) a surgeon whose skills were legendary in his day, and whose earliest training was received in the Continental Army. Dr. Belcher was the instructor of many of the local medical profession. Perhaps Dr. Woolsey finished his studies with Dr. Joshua W. Bowron of New Castle, or Dr. Walter Keeler (1778-1871) of Bedford. There is a possibility that his license to practice was issued by the Westchester County Medical Society, a practice of the time. Whatever James Woolsey's medical background was, he entered the practice of medicine in the summer of 1827.

His earliest residence after leaving his father's house is unknown although we know that he was in North Castle in 1828. He married Rachel Pierce, daughter of Thomas and Phebe (Weeks) Pierce. Mrs. Woolsey was a descendent of two of the oldest Quaker families of the Pleasantville-Chappaqua area. She was born in 1803 and evidently was active in the Quaker Meeting her entire life. They had no children.

Besides his medical practice the doctor seems to have taken a more than ordinary interest in those affairs that would better the condition of men, especially education and temperance. He was elected and re-elected for four years an Inspector of Common Schools for North Castle (1828-32). This position entailed several visits yearly to each of the seven school districts to check on the teacher, students, curriculum and conditions in general and to report to the three commissioners. If one checks the town records carefully only the most prominent or learned of the community's men were elected to this position by the town meeting.

He was also one of the founders of the Westchester County Temperance Society. This group, organized on August 13, 1829 at Bedford to promote the cause of abstinence from alcohol, was for nearly twenty years (1829-1848) exceedingly influential in the county. At one time the society had twenty seven local chapters and over five thousand members. For some years Dr. Woolsey represented North Castle on its Executive Committee. This connection brought him into contact with many of the leading citizens throughout the area.

Being a medical practitioner and because of his evident honesty and straightforwardness he wrote and witnessed many wills and sometimes acted as an executor for some neighbor or friend.

James and Rachel lived at several locations in North Castle and

evidently sometimes rented a small farm rather than owning it. The 1850 census shows them living south of Armonk on the road to White Plains. His occupation was given as physician and he owned \$3,500 of real estate. They later moved to Middle Patent for we find Rachel Woolsey purchasing from the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church (now Middle Patent Methodist) their parsonage farm on the Middle Patent road consisting of a house, barn, carriage house and ten acres. This was his last North Castle home for on June 28, 1880, 4 years after his death, we find his widow selling the property to her niece Elizabeth J. van Everen.

There is a possibility that the Woolsey's rented out this small North Castle farm and moved back to his father's farm on the Danbury Post Rd. two miles over the Bedford line which he took back by foreclosure in May of 1863 and did not sell until May of 1874.

When he was past middle age he apparently gave up his medical practice or operated on a limited basis. This comes from testimony at the hearing held May 8, 1855 regarding the estate of Ferris Lyon of North Castle who made the doctor one of his executors. When asked by the attorneys his occupation he replied "*Physician by profession, at present I follow farming. I quit the practice of medicine three years ago. I had practiced medicine for about twenty four years before I quit.*"

Dr. Woolsey seems to have always been a member of the Westchester County Medical Society and one year, 1834, served as an officer. In 1868 he was made an honorary member, an honor bestowed on only four others prior to that date, two of them having been the society's presidents.

His practice was evidently quite large and he seems to have geographically covered southern Bedford, Middle Patent, Chestnut Ridge, North Castle and Armonk. His nearest colleagues on the north in Bedford being Dr. Walter Keeler, on the east Dr. Hugh McKay (see Vol. 3, North Castle History), on the south in Round Hill Dr. Bartow White, and toward Mt. Kisco Dr. Joshua W. Bowron. What caused his early withdrawal from practice or limited work after 1852 is not known.

As they grew older he and his wife moved to Pleasantville, Town of Mt. Pleasant, possibly to be near her relatives. Here he died at age 78 on September 25, 1876. His widow survived him dying August 8, 1891 aged 87 years. They lie buried in a quiet corner with Rachel's family against the back wall in the cemetery of the Friends' Meeting House in Chappaqua. Her stone is lettered in Quaker style, his is not.

Upon beginning this article the author knew nothing about Dr. Woolsey except his name. But as his life story unfolded Dr. Woolsey emerged from the past as a man who helped others his entire life, treating the sick, improving the causes of education and temperance, and discharging many positions of trust for his friends and neighbors in nineteenth century North Castle.

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## 200 Residents Attend First Historical Society Meeting

1982 marks the 10th Anniversary of The North Castle Historical Society's Charter Meeting held Tuesday, February 29, 1972. The following account of that meeting has been taken from the North Castle News of March 8, 1972.

by Barbara S. Massi

Nearly 200 people squeezed into the Walter Weil Room of the North Castle Library Tuesday night, Feb. 29th and were enthusiastically transported back in time as 3 of the 25 founders of The North Castle Historical Society related some of the significant events that occurred in North Castle during the past 300 years.

Doris Finch Watson, acting vice president of the society, whose family has lived in the Banksville, Middle Patent area for 12 generations, spoke on the history of Banksville, Middle Patent and East Middle Patent. She described the Siwanoy Indians who came up from southern Connecticut to settle along the Mianus River, the first settlers who hunted and fished and then farmed the land, the shoemaking industry which flourished in North Castle in the middle 1800's, and potato farm-

ing which came into the area in the 1860's.

Joseph Miller, Town Clerk and lifelong resident of North White Plains, recounted some highlights in the history of that area: how the marshes and hills of North White Plains frustrated the British troops during the battle of White Plains, how the building of the railroad in 1830 brought an influx of developers and real estate speculators, and the construction of the Kensico Dam, which not only changed the terrain of North White Plains but affected the lives of its inhabitants as well. "Approximately one-half of the residents of North White Plains are descended from the workers on the dam," he said.

Richard Lander, Councilman and Town Historian, related the significance of Major John Andre's detainment at Sands Mills which was at the corner of High Street and Route 128. He described the growth and changes of the 3 original sections of Armonk until they finally settled into one town. The name Armonk, he said, is a derivative of the indian word Cohamong which means roughly "the fishing place between the hills." Mr. Lander said he occasionally stands in the center of Armonk, now surrounded by intersections, traffic lights and highways, and recalls a bed of petunias on a traffic island on Main Street many years ago. Amid the petunias was a sign which said simply, "Slow Down."

Later, a movie made in 1949 recaptured for the audience the Armonk scene of 23 years ago, and showed, among other townspeople, the late Chief John Hergenhan whose appearance on the screen was met by spontaneous applause that obviously stemmed from an appreciation of the chief's important place in the history of North Castle.

The need for a historical society became evident to Kenneth Mains, acting president of the Society, about 2 years ago when his daughter was working towards a scout merit badge on Indian Lore. While working on the project with her Mr. Mains had difficulty uncovering specific information pertaining to indians who lived in North Castle. Frustration turned into determination — to improve on existing information regarding the history of North Castle. Thus, after a year of discussion and legal preparation by 25 interested residents, the society has been granted a provisional charter by the State of New York, to promote, foster and encourage knowledge of the town and its environment, and to research, record and pass on all the information of historical value that can be uncovered about North Castle. After 3 years a permanent charter may be granted.

The charter meeting was held in order to establish a charter membership, and for the purpose, as required by law, of reading the charter publicly. By the end of the meeting the society boasted a membership of over 400 people.

The date for the first annual meeting of The North Castle Historical Society was chosen for its historical significance. It will be held on **Thursday, April 6, 1972**. The first town meeting in North Castle was held 236 years ago on **Thursday, April 6, 1736**.

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