

Epsom's One Room Schools – Overview

Information on the one room schools in Epsom comes from various sources. References are made in the original town records about the establishing of the first school as well as mentioning several other early schoolhouses. These same records discuss early plans to establish and change districts with the forming of school committees. James Babb in his diary mentions visiting several early schools around 1820, giving the name of the teacher and the conditions surrounding the teaching. There is a pretty large void of information from this time through the civil war. Minutes of meetings of two schools have survived over the years, one for the old Center Hill School, and the other for the Marden school district. There are a few early teacher ledgers and superintendent reports. Town reports began giving annual school reports each year beginning in the late 1880's and continued for some time. Graduates, teachers, conditions and scholars were generally listed. Closer to 1900 are photos of some of the schools and the attending students. Other references to the history of Epsom School's were written by Rev. Jonathan Curtis; John Dolbeer in his History of Epsom; an old home day address by Mrs. J. W. Fowler; and more recently by George H. Yeaton and Phil Yeaton.

In the following weeks the early history of the schools will be the subject of many blogs, and will include information from all the above sources, and more. The information from the town reports do not contain much history, but by publishing the names of students, those descendants, or those researching family names or doing genealogy, may find the names useful in placing their time and place in Epsom.

Item three of the original charter incorporating the town of Epsom, states in part, that one hundred acres be set aside for the benefit of a school. It was 38 years before the job of erecting was completed by Ensign McGaffey. The schoolhouse was built on the schoolhouse lot '21 in length and 17 in breadth' and its building was put out to bid to be paid in wither land or money, and cost 312 old tenor for 'board shingle clapboard and stone'. There is no doubt the building was soon erected, as town minutes reference a meeting in April of 1766 being moved from the meetinghouse to the schoolhouse. The two buildings were across East Street from each other and the schoolhouse became as regular a meeting place as the meetinghouse for several years.

Mention of the school does not show up regularly in proprietor's minutes, though the town voted in 1776 and 1777, 20 pounds for school keeping; in 1778, no money was voted for either preaching or schooling. The money for schools in 1779 was 300 dollars. At this same time, the town was trying to engage its second minister to replace the Reverend Tuck, who was dismissed in 1774. There were regular meetings throughout the year, and in July of 1779, in order to try and engage Mr. Thurston as minister, a parsonage was to be built on the existing school lot, with the school being reserved a privilege 'of one half acre where it now stands.' All apparently subject to Mr. Thurston's accepting the call, which he did not. A warrant at the May 1780 town meeting was based on a complaint received by Ephraim Locke against the town for not keeping a stated school, with judgment given to the selectmen to raise what money would be needed to support the school during the upcoming season.

The appropriation asked for in 1781 for schools was one thousand pounds, but agreeable to a vote of the town, the schoolhouse which 'was formerly built by the proprietors of said Epsom' was put up for auction, though the record does not state the purchaser. How this may have been related to the complaint brought forth by Ephraim Locke is unknown. Though records never mention it, it is assumed a new school had been built, as one hundred silver dollars was voted on for the benefit of town school for the year 1782 and 1783. In January of 1784 the town finally settled on and had their second minister, the Reverend Ebenezer Hazeltine. The school received 45 pounds for the support of a school, and work began on a parsonage for the new minister.

About this same time (October 1780) a school was built near Capt. (Jeremiah) Prescott's, and the town, after the fact, was asked to take charge of it, which they refused. This is the first mention in the records of a second schoolhouse in the town.

There is little information on the early teachers who were in town, at least in the records. In 1899, in an old home day address by Mrs. J. W. (Ruhamah Locke) Fowler, she gives some insight: *James Gray is said to have been a school teacher before the Revolutionary war, and tradition tells of Master Sutton, Casey, Thomas D. Merrill, Master Batchelder, noted for the severity of his punishment.* She also gives the following: *Among some old papers have been found the following receipts: "Received 2 lbs. 8 shillings for 8 weeks' school keeping over the river in 1784, by me Joseph Goss, Epsom, March 8, 1785."*

For the next several years the town appropriated 45 pounds each year for schooling; 55 pounds in 1789 and 50 in 1790. Again records do not show any additional schools until 1792 when the town was asked 'to raise sixty five pounds for the purpose of building and repairing school houses and school keeping in Epsom and that the Selectmen being empowered to expend said money in schooling in such districts that have school houses and that those districts who have not school houses have till the 25th of June next to build and repair their school houses and then if not done, the Selectmen to build and repair such school houses out of the money raised as aforesaid and out of such districts proportion as needed to build and repair the school houses'. This obviously being in the plural indicates the town had grown and additional schoolhouses had been built in the areas where the population had grown. The next year the amount of money to support the schools was left to the judgement of the selectmen, and with the request to fix the schoolhouse still not complete, a warrant article was introduced in April of 1793 to complete the unfinished schoolhouses in town, but was voted not to raise any money for that purpose. Undaunted, that was not to the satisfaction of all the inhabitants, especially those in the western district, who wrote to the selectmen of the town of Epsom:

A number of the inhabitants of the Western district in Epsom humbly shew; That we have been and still are desirous to promote public schools in said town for the instruction of our children and of late we have used every excitation in our power to have a suitable schoolhouse in the district completed for that design, but every such effort proves abortive owing (as we humbly conceive) to some among us who from their conduct seem to demonstrate a total disregard to the best interests of their families by depriving their children of the means of instruction thereby rendering them in a great degree useless members of society and by such conduct of theirs we being classed with them are debarred of that for our children which we esteem as inestimable

blessing.

This our grievance and in this situation we cannot rest easy, to see our numerous offspring which are instrumental of bringing into existence trained up like so many heathens or brutes, in a civilized world would, and for such neglect we cannot answer neither to God nor our consciences and for which they well have good reason to curse rather than bless us. We therefore seek to the town of Epsom for redress as we know no other remedy and pray that a meeting of said town may be warned as soon as may be that this grievance may be duly considered and some method adopted and put in execution, that shall remove the A pan out of the camp and give us speedy relief in finishing the schoolhouse already begun that a school may be had seasonably for the purpose aforesaid.

James Gray, Geo. Yewin, Simeon Towle, Samuel Bickford, Reuben Yewin, Thomas Bickford, Sylvanus Moses, Richard Rand, John Prescott, Jonathan Prescott Junr, Abraham Wallace.

It is not clear when the town started different districts, but the town met in August 1783 to act on the finishing of the western district schoolhouse and to 'finish and complete the schoolhouses in other districts in said town that are not yet done'. Again, the town voted to dismiss the article. The 1794 appropriation for town schools was 70 pounds, in 1796, three hundred dollars, in 1799, two hundred dollars.

The year 1804 was a pivotal one for Epsom Schools. The Western district, which in 1793 asked the selectmen for help in completing their schoolhouse, once again brought a grievance to the selectman, that being that the school was not centralized in the district. This, they said, prevented many of them from properly educating their children. Their hope was to be able to participate equally with the 'Eastern and Southern' district. Those signing would have resided near the present traffic circle, and on Goboro and Black Hall Road. They included William Rand, James Wood, Joseph Wood, Richard Rand, Richard Rand Jr., Sylvanus Moses, John Moses, Benjamin Towle, John Prescott, Joseph Marden Jr., Samuel Marden, David Howe, Joseph Saturley, Samuel Rand and Samuel Rand Jr.. The town chose a committee of James Gray, Benjamin Moody and Samuel Morrill, probably the first school committee to examine the situation. On March 12, 1805, three hundred and fifty dollars was voted for the support of schools, and an additional fifteen hundred for the building and repairing of school houses where necessary, with the residue to those where no buildings or repairs are necessary. The selectmen were also given the power and were directed to centralize the schoolhouses in the various districts.

It was not until 1808 when a warrant article was made to effect a division of the town into school districts, agreeable to an Act of the General Court passed in 1805. The result that the town would keep the districts in the same manner as they currently stood with six districts. According to the Dolbeer History of Epsom, they were as follows (with his descriptions based on the time of his writing before 1890):

District No. 1 contained all that is now comprised within its limits; also that portion of District No. 7 on the turnpike, below Warren Yeaton's, and from Yeaton's to Deerfield line.

District No. 2 contained all on the turnpike from the east side of the New Orchard road to Chichester line, and all north of the turnpike; also from the shoe-factory to "Cyder Brook" (so

called), just south of the house of John Spurlin.

District No. 3 was composed of what is now Districts Nos. 3 and 9 (New Rye and the Mountain), and extended to the corner at Short Falls.

District No. 4 contained all on the west side of the Suncook River lying southerly of the turnpike, and from Short Falls bridge to the Mountain District, near the Short Falls post-office.

District No. 5 contained that portion of the "North Road" District northerly from the turnpike, and on the turnpike from the Northwood road to the milepost near Henry Knowles' house, and also what is now united with Pittsfield in forming No. 6.

District No. 6 was the New Orchard District, very nearly as it now exists.

In 1815, the second school lot, a lot set apart from where the original school sat, from which materials, such as wood to burn was used by the schools, was sold. The money from the sale, about twelve hundred dollars, was kept by the town as a school fund, with the interest from it being annually divided among the school districts, according to their valuation.

During the period above, the school budget stayed between 450 and 500 dollars annually. Town records show that in 1819, John McClary, Jonathan Steele and John Batchelder were chosen as a school committee and that a committee be formed with one member from each district (except No. 5) to see if district Number 5 shall agree to an alteration. That committee of John Cate Jr., Samuel Morrill, Daniel Cilley, Richard Tripp and Hanover Dickey. The school committee for the town was expanded to five members in 1820, those being John McClary, Jonathan Steele, John Batchelder, Josiah Crosby and Thomas D. Merrill.

Again in 1821, a committee was formed to examine the possibility of altering the school districts, the members, Josiah Sanborn, Hanover Dickey and Winthrop Fowler, delivered their findings on February 19, 1825. The decision - *'that in our opinion many individuals are not well convened, and do not have their proportion of the benefit of the school in said town as it is now districted and that the time may come when an alteration will remedy such evil, but at present we consider it inexpedient to make any alteration'.*

The school committee for 1823 included William Han Jr., James Babb, Thomas D. Merrill, Jonathan Curtis Jr., and Michael McClary. The Rev. Jonathan Curtis published a short history of the town in 1823, reporting that the town was divided into seven districts with a total student population of about 500 scholars, in which about five hundred dollars is annually expended. From various reports, it appears that the schools included the Mountain District, Center District, Short Falls District, Cilley District and probably New Orchard Road, North Road.. It would appear that some of these Districts may have also been assigned the numbers 1-7.

The School District meeting for District 5 met at the home of Enoch Brown in February of 1823 to change the bounds of the district, which was on North Road. Members in attendance at the voluntary meeting were William Yeaton Jr., Edward Gove, Jonathan Page, Daniel Philbrick, John Babb, Daniel Philbrick 3rd, Stephen Johnson, Ebenezer Foss, Isaac L. Ham, Elijah Gove, Enoch Brown Jr., Ezra Allen, William Brown, Perkins Philbrick, David Philbrick, John Ham, John Yeaton Jr., Jesse Emerson and Samuel Prescott. Pretty good representation of the families in that area.

The school committee for 1824 included James Babb, Samuel Peabody and William Ham Jr.; in 1825, Moses P. Gray, William Ham and James Babb; in 1826, Jonathan Steele, Arthur Caverno, William Ham Jr., and James Babb.

In 1833 the Mountain District school burned and was rebuilt, and divided, adding the New Rye District, given the number 9. According to Dolbeer, the school in the Fowler District having been taken off District No. 4 to become District No. 8. This is how the districts stayed until 1841.

There are few records covering the schools in Epsom from about 1840 until town reports began to be published. Most of what has been found are individual teacher records and a few reports, plus two record books. One record book is for the Center Hill School, the other for the Marden District.

The New Hampshire State papers has an entry, whereby the school district No. 6 in Epsom was combined with a school district in Pittsfield and called the Republican School District. A pre-printed chart was filled out by the superintending school committee of Epsom for 1846, and listed the following:

District No. 1, Lucy A. Lord, teacher, first term 80 pupils, second term, 80 pupils
District No. 2, Henry F. Sanborn, teacher, first term 55 students. Nathaniel J. Pinkham, teacher, second term, 63 students
District No. 3, David Smith, teacher, first term 27 students. No second term.
District No. 4, Sarah D. Yeaton, teacher, first term 30 students. Tobias Foss, teacher, second term, 45 students.
District No. 5, Mary A. Heath, teacher, first term 14 students. John S. Cate, teacher, second term, 19 students.
District No. 6 with Chichester, first term 14 students
District No. 7, Mary A. Nealey, teacher, first term, 27 students. William Ham, teacher, second term, 27 students.
District No. 8, Mary S. Green, teacher, first term, 22 students, second term, 22 students.
District No. 9, Hannah M. Wells, teacher, 60 students. Jonathan C. Sanders, second term, 55 students.
District No. 10, united with Pittsfield, 3 students.

Recently FamilySearch.org added to their online collection, the transcribed copy of the old Epsom Town Books that is housed at the NH State Library. The images included school reports from 1826 to 1834. The earliest of these reports included the name and salaries of teachers, and the later reports are less detailed. Information on schools are also found in the Selectmen's account records from 1835 to 1867. These accounts give the amount allocated to each school district, and usually the name of the Prudential Committee chairman for the districts. Unlike the reports of 1826-1834, there is no break-down of the expenses of each district, nor the teachers. Some additional budget lines indicate a couple instances of new schools being built. As with the other data in this series, this is extracted raw data from town records.

In the records 1826-1834, those individuals paid 'as per account' are teachers. Schools ran at least two terms, sometimes three, which is why there will be sometimes more than one teacher listed if different teachers were used different terms.

