

1489 006-089

Early Private Schools.

The following paper written by Mrs. Carrie W. Clarke-Small was read at a recent meeting of the Research Club:

Although the first free public school established by law was not in Provincetown yet it is a fact that Cape Cod fisheries supported it. Goodwin in his "Pilgrims Republic" makes it quite plain in his chapter on Old Colony Schools, so we helped to maintain education even thus early.

In 1642 the General Court of Massachusetts "taking into consideration the great neglect of many parents and guardians in training up their children in learning and labor which may be profitable to the Commonwealth" ordered that the Selectmen of every town should take account of all parents and masters as to their children's education and employment.

Each Selectman was responsible for his district. He must see that the children in his section were taught religion, laws of the country, to read, write and some useful work. They could be taught at home or collectively. If the Selectmen neglected this duty they were brought before the court.

Later it was ordered that every township containing fifty households should appoint one of the town to teach the children, the wages to be paid by parents, masters or the inhabitants in general by way of supplies.

All of the early schools were under the control of the church. The minister often taught the younger children religion and reading from the Bible that being the only book in common. Sometimes the older boys learned Latin from him and casting accounts which was thought very advanced learning indeed.

Our forefathers knew the value of an education and did the best they could for the young people.

They had no pencils and paper in the first schools; for casting of sums and writing, bits of charcoal and fresh chips were used. Goose quill pens, home made ink and copy and cipher books of coarse brown unruled paper, having house paper covers, were in use during the Revolutionary period. Not until 1820 and 30 did lead pencils and slates become common. The first book used by the young children was the horn book. It was not really a book but a bit of printed paper three by four inches, having at the top the alphabet in capital and small letters, then a row of vow-

els, then a list of a b's, e b's and i b's, the benediction and the Lord's Prayer at the bottom. This was fastened on a thin piece of board having a handle through which a hole was bored to put a string in for hanging around the neck. The printed paper was covered with a sheet of horn and fastened down with a strip of metal to save from wear.

The family Bible and the primer stood side by side in most pioneer homes. From the later children learned the Creed, Ten Commandments Lord's Prayer, a few Psalms and simple instruction.

The New England Primer printed in the early history of Boston was used in all Dame Schools in New England until 1806.

Another common book was Watt's Speller and Peter Parley's geography. The following rule of Grammar was used in our private schools and learned by children of ten who probably to the day of their death never knew its meaning:

"Grammar consists of orthography, etymology, prosody and syntax"

The next schools of which we hear are the Dame Schools. These were kept by some widow or spinster at her home. The work was not hard and while the children recited their letters sing song after her, she sat and knit or spun.

Scholars were taught to make their manners. The girls dropped a courtesy and the boys bowed to the teacher as they came in or went out. These Dame Schools were an English institution and the description of it by the poet Crabbe as it existed across the Atlantic would well fit here.:

"—a deaf, poor patient widow sits  
And awes some thirty infants as she knits;  
Infants of humble, busy wives who pay  
Some trifling price for freedom through the day.  
At this good matron's hut the children meet,  
Who thus becomes the mother of the street  
Her room is small, they cannot widely stray,  
Her household high, they cannot run away.  
With band of yarn she keeps offenders in,  
And to her gown the sturdiest rogue can pin."

Provincetown, never backward in anything, was not behind in this and had many Dame Schools. The earliest which we are lead to believe ex-

isted are shrouded in mystery like all our early history, but from old inhabitants, old bills and handed down traditions we can gather quite a little knowledge of the later ones.

At the west end of the town during different years were kept a number of Dame Schools. We hear of Sarah Dyer's in the old Quinn house, Mrs. Lucy Nickerson's in the Nickerson neighborhood under Telegraph Hill, Miss Betsey Dyer's near Mechanic Street and Mrs. Mina Collins' near Court Street.

The most noted of all was Mrs. Conant's or Aunt Sallie's as everyone called the good dame. She must have taught many years for we knew of children who went to her in 1818 and others who went as late as 1860. Her house was back of the First National Bank. The children attending varied in age from three to twelve. Besides teaching the three Rs she taught sewing and sampler work.

The patchwork which the children made for her had to be sewed over and over. In the spring she hired two boys of the school to dig up her garden giving them each two cents. This money they spent across the street at Mr. Benj. Dyer's store, for peppermints drops which were passed among the children, thus she taught generosity. Wednesday was Festival Day. Each child was allowed to bring one penny with which they bought any kind of candy they wished and it was placed on a tray and passed at intervals around the room. On either side of her table she had a crib. If a little tot became sleepy she put it to bed. Children sat on the backless benches and recited standing, toeing the chalk line.

Her punishments were a liberal use of the pudding stick or banishment to the dark room. For keeping order she had a bamboo stick which reached across the room, and with this she flicked the inattentive without rising from her chair. She was born in 1788 and died in 1878. She was a remarkable teacher of her time. In 1845 a well educated lady by the name of Miss Stearns started a Dame School in a small house back of the Advocate Office.

"Marm" Stearns as she was familiarly called was known for her wonderful writing. One day of each week was spent in writing, the other days were for reading, spelling and work. Pupils remember that she had a withered arm which she had slung in a white kerchief, and that she always wore a big black alapaca apron which reached to the bottom of her dress. At the end of the term she

gave books of merits to deserving pupils. One such carefully cherished book is now in existence. Her pupils were about eight or ten years old. Some of the punishments which were used at this time we are told were rapping the knuckles with a rod, placing a key between the fingers and squeezing them, tapping the head with a thimble, placing a ruler in the mouth, and putting a pincher on the nose. Woe to the child who disobeyed Dame Stearns.

In an old house at the corner of Conwell and Bradford Streets was kept a Navigation School by Gamaliel Collins. We are told of one ambitious boy who cut a huge log which he carried on his back up to the school and throwing it down exclaimed, "There now, teach me all you know." This log was the payment for his tuition.

Writing and singing schools were common but the names of the teachers and where they taught have passed from the memory of our aged friends. Only a couple of the late ones can be recalled.

Under High Pole Hill once stood an old church having a board walk running from the main street to its door and a high fence along the side of the walk. In the vestry of this church was kept a writing school. Mr. Lyman, the teacher, obliged each pupil to write in his copy book, "This is a specimen of my hand writing before taking lessons of Mr Lyman," and at the end of the term each wrote, "This is a specimen of my hand writing after taking lessons of Mr. Lyman." Proud indeed was the young lady whose book was exhibited as having made the greatest improvement during the term.

Years later in the same neighborhood another writing school was kept by Mrs Annie Hutchinson. Once a week about twelve children sat around her dining room table and wrote from her copy. Several evenings she devoted to young ladies and gentlemen. Her charge was \$1.50 for twelve lessons which seems to us a very moderate price.

About 1800 there were a number of private schools established in buildings of their own, and bore the dignified name of Academies. In 1838 and 39 we know by old bills that Provincetown Academy existed and had for a preceptor J. B. Dods, and later N. Gunnison, that tuition was 25 cents a week and a charge of 6 cents for wood for eight weeks was made.

Children twelve years old attended. That same year two young married couples attended evening session

having to carry their own lights. In 1842 Union Academy had for its preceptor R. N. Oakman. The tuition for seven weeks and a half was \$2.00 and 10 cents extra for wood.

We have been told that children were obliged to furnish fire wood or pay a fine of four shillings if they attended the school from October to April, which was the length of the school year. Those who did not bring wood were seated in the coldest corner. We wonder if they had to toe the crack or line when reciting or if they threw spit balls as the children did in later years. Some of the other successful teachers in the Academies were Miss Bergea, Rev. Osborn Mryick and Zoeth Smith.

The Summer and Winter Schools must also be mentioned. During the hot weather some energetic young woman usually took charge of a dozen little children keeping them busy either working, learning lessons or playing, much after the style of our modern kindergarten. In old Adams' Hall one such school was kept by Miss Salome Atkins and another at the West End of the town by Mrs. Freeman.

Winter Schools were rather hard teaching; these were for boys who were obliged to work during the summer months and could only attend school during the cold weather. They were big strapping fellows anxious to learn but full of fun and mischief, and extremely hard to govern. Some of these private schools were taught by Mr. Seth Crocker, Mr. Charles P. Dyer and Mr. J. A. Crocker.

Later the winter schools came under town management and were free to all boys. It was in one of these that Ex-Governor Black taught as a young man.

In 1908 a modern kindergarten was started by Mrs. Ada Holmes Burke with fourteen children. Such a help and pleasure did it prove to the little folks of four and five that each year the number increased until her room was full of tiny tots who loved their kind devoted teacher so much that they could hardly wait for the carriage to call for them the next morning to take them back to school. Because of ill health Mrs. Burke was obliged, after several successful years, to give up her work.

This brings the list of private schools up to the present time and we can honestly say that the youth of our town has never been neglected.