

Chapter VII

FALL RIVER SCHOOLS – 1803 TO 1863

In 1803, when Fall River was incorporated as a town it contained two district Schools, both located west of the Watuppa Pond.

In 1804 and for several years after that, the town divided two hundred and fifty dollars among these districts in proportion to the number of inhabitants. District number 3 was organized and a schoolhouse was built there in 1807. The building was 19 by 20 feet, and cost two hundred and seventy-three dollars.

In 1813 thirty-one persons subscribed for, erected, and so became proprietors of, a private or company schoolhouse. Fifty shares were issued. The company purchased from Thomas Borden sixteen rods of land at the southwesterly corner of South Main and Broadway (Anawan Street). This was the first private school in Fall River. After the destruction of this school building in the fire of 1843, the present existing Anawan Street School house was built on the northerly side of Anawan Street. Now (in 1940) it is used by school executives as an Administration building. It is the oldest school building in Fall River.

In 1825, three hundred and ninety-five families were living in Fall River and the territory was then divided into nine school districts. By 1841 there were fourteen districts.

No. 1 Bounded westerly by Taunton River; southerly by Tiverton, northerly by Fall River Stream running to a point at easterly intersection of stream and Tiverton line.

No. 2 Bounded southerly and westerly by Fall River Stream; easterly by Main Street; northerly by south line of Judge Durfee farm.

No. 3 Bounded westerly by Main Street; southwesterly by Fall River Stream; southeasterly by Tiverton line; northeasterly by southerly line of said Durfee farm.

No. 4 Bounded westerly by Taunton River; northerly by Walnut Street as far as etc. Rodman farm; easterly by contemplated way known as Hanover Street, etc. to line of the Pond; thence southerly by said Pond to Tiverton line, etc.

No. 5 Bounded westerly by Taunton River; southerly by north line District No. 4; Hanover Street – Prospect Street – thence north to south line of Town Farm, etc.

No. 6 Westerly by Taunton River; southerly by north line District No. 5; easterly by a line, etc. across town farm; northerly by north line of Nathan or Bowen farm, etc.

No. 7 Westerly by Taunton River; southerly by north line District No. 6 easterly, etc. by line. On the southerly side of road leading from Steep Brook and head of pond; thence north to south line of Thomas Durfee farm; northerly by south line of said farm as it was.

No. 8 Westerly by Taunton River; southerly by south line of Thomas Durfee's farm, being northerly of line No. 7; easterly on a line at head of pond and running north to Freetown line and northerly by Freetown line.

No. 9 Westerly by easterly line of Districts 6 and 7; northerly by south line of District No. 8; easterly by the pond; southerly by southerly line of James Brightman farm, etc.

No. 10 Westerly by east line of Nos. 6 and 5; northerly by south line of No. 9; easterly by the pond; southerly by northerly line of No. 4.

No. 11 Westerly by the pond and Tiverton line; easterly by Proprietors way; southerly by Westport line, etc.

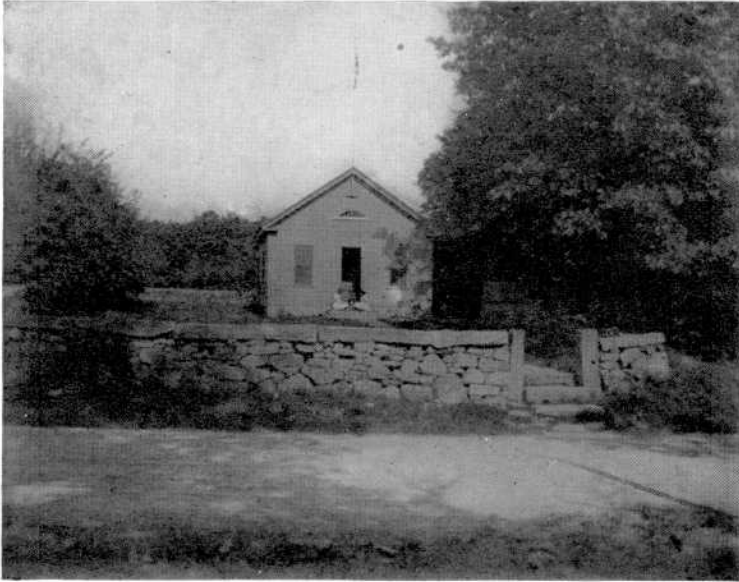
No. 12 Westerly by District 8 and 9; northerly by Freetown line; easterly by Proprietors Way; southerly by north line No. 11.

No. 13 Westerly by Proprietors Way; northerly and easterly by Freetown southerly by new road.

No. 14 Northerly by No. 13; easterly by Dartmouth line; southerly by Westport; westerly by Proprietors Way.

The Town house at the northeasterly corner of North Main Street and Wilson Road was altered over into a school house in 1826. There were then 12 public schools and 14 private schools in the city. In this same year Andrew Robeson established a schoolroom in his print works building on Central Street and employed a teacher for his juvenile employees. He allowed them to attend school one-third of each day. Mr. Joseph Luther opened a private school over the shoe store of Enoch French & Son.

In 1827, a system called the Lancastrian was tried, the older pupils taught the younger ones. In 1834 Nathaniel B. Borden opened a school on the west side of Second Street south of Pleasant Street and nearly opposite his home. It was called the Cradle of Liberty, also the Washington School House. By January of 1830, a singing school had been opened in Apollonian Hall in the north part of the village. In February of the same year Daniel Goss opened a private school in the basement of the Methodist Meeting House on Camden Street, south of Central Street. He taught Greek and Latin and charged tuition which varied from \$2.75 to \$4.00 a term. Later in the same year, J. S. Elliot opened a private school, as did a Mrs. Van Santford, who taught needlework and penmanship. Arnold Buffum began an "infant school" for children between two and seven years of age, "endeavoring gently to draw the tender mind to love of learning and virtue". There was a public school on the westerly side of Rock Street



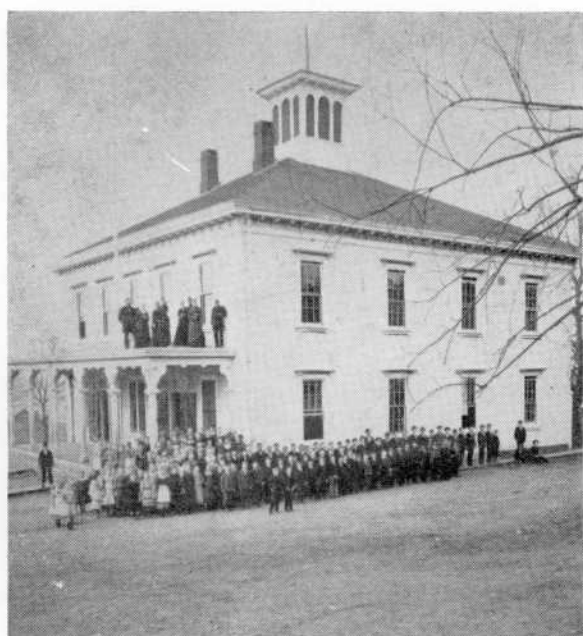
UPPER NEW BOSTON SCHOOL



THE NOONDAY RECESS
A Typical One Room Rural School



HIGH STREET GRAMMAR SCHOOL



MAPLE STREET GRAMMAR SCHOOL

between Cherry and Locust Streets. Samuel Rodman conveyed this lot in 1830 and the deed describes Cherry Street as Tasker Street. This was one of the public schools in District No. 2.

In 1831, a school census showed 1300 children under 18 years of age; and of these half did not attend school on account of the expense of books. Eight hundred children lived in the village.

In 1832 the Green School house was built at the northwesterly corner of Franklin and High Streets, facing Franklin. It was a two story building, built on a rock without cellar. Upon its dedication Pliny Earle¹ taught there. He had recently moved to Fall River and from a hall located in the Centennial Building, which was then standing between Main and Second Streets, on the southerly side of Pleasant Street, delivered a series of lectures on astronomy and other advanced subjects. His school was on the second floor of the Green schoolhouse. He advertised for students and taught several subjects of a High School grade.

The house on Franklin Street belonged to School District No. 2, and the district conveyed it on January 12, 1846 to Oliver Chace and Israel Buffinton. It was known as the Friends Meeting House until in December 1870, it was deeded to Israel Buffinton and James M. Davis. The school building was then turned around facing High Street and Mr. Davis built his house on the corner lot.

In 1833, Charles Pease opened a singing school in the vestry of Rev. Mr. Myer's meeting house.

Martha Lovell, then only sixteen years of age, taught a school in the Congregational Church vestry for which her sister paid twelve dollars a quarter. She is said to have had thirty-five scholars during mild weather. There was a school kept on Pine Street, west of Main, by Laura H. Lovell. It was then the most popular school of the town, and she taught it for twenty-four years. After that period the building was moved.

In 1834, there were four singing schools in Fall River. One was at the corner of South Main Street and Broadway (Anawan Street), another in the Washington Schoolhouse. The first dancing school was opened at Blake's Hotel in 1834.

In 1834, the State of Rhode Island authorized a lottery to raise school funds and this aided such of our schools as were then in Rhode Island.

¹ "Memoirs of Pliny Earle, M.D., with extracts from his diary and letters (1830-1892) and selections from his professional writings (1839-1891), edited with a general introduction, by F. B. Sanborn, of Concord. Damrell & Upham, Boston, 1898."

Lottery tickets were sold at two dollars each, and there were 18,000 prizes. The total sum raised was \$68,000.

In 1841 when the census showed a total population of 7,000, the town appropriated \$4,500 for schools, and the State of Massachusetts appropriated \$324. There were fourteen school districts at that time, between which a sum of \$500 was divided, half between the districts and half in proportion to the number of children.

There were then three members on the school committee and the committee examined all applicants for teaching positions. In one year there were twenty-eight applicants and twenty-five were approved. Each member of the committee visited such of the schools as were assigned to him. In some of the grammar schools where algebra, geometry, surveying, navigation and philosophy were taught, the children were examined quarterly on each subject. Teachers were paid as much as \$3.50 a week, and when the committee, desiring to be liberal, recommended a salary increase, no action was taken.

Four of the fourteen school districts were located in the village and ten in the outlying suburbs. The total number of classes was twenty-five and there were twenty-five teachers. As there was a bell attached to only one of these school houses, the bell on the Pocasset Factory was rung for school purposes. This bell was clearly heard throughout the village.

After the "Great Fire" of 1843, a school was opened in the Episcopal Church on Main Street, and three other schools were held in the lecture room of the Unitarian Church at the southeasterly corner of Borden and Second Streets. These latter rooms were objectionable, due to dampness, because the basement had been used to store ice. Another temporary school was held at Firemen's hall in the Niagara Engine House on the southerly side of Pleasant Street; now (1940) occupied by Sanford's hardware store.

So many of the school reports of Fall River were destroyed in the City Hall fire of March 19, 1886, and because only single copies of some of these are available for study, more voluminous abstracts for the years from 1842 to 1855 are herein noted than would otherwise seem appropriate.

The school reports for 1842-3 note that there were then 1,943 school children between the ages of four and sixteen. The committee examined thirty-one persons who had applied to teach school and revised the code of "School Regulations". A principal change was that thereafter parents were allowed to grant permits for their wards to attend school when their seats had been forfeited by "non-attendance on 3½ days in any week". This

forfeiture rule had been deemed expedient because there were not enough seats to accommodate all the scholars.

The school in District No. 1 was small, due to the fire of 1843 and because of the withdrawal of Roman Catholic children to attend a school of their own.

At that time there were twenty-two schools, taught by twenty-five teachers and schools were taught in the fourteen districts into which the town was then divided, four in the village and ten outside. The schools in each district were in charge of prudential committees authorized by law and elected by voters in each district. Conflicts between school committees and prudential committees were often annoying.

Schools in District No. 2 were closed because of a lack of funds. There was then no school house in District No. 7 so that school sessions were held in an unfinished room in a dwelling house; there was inconvenience because only a thin partition separated the school room from the living quarters of the family.

In District No. 14 the teacher, Miss Canedy, was commended for her "admirable discipline". She had studied for a year at the Normal School at Lexington. The Normal School, at Lexington, established in 1839 was the first normal school in America. Two years later the school was moved to West Newton and later to Framingham.

Miss Lydian (Lydia Ann) Stowe, Edward S. Adams' mother, was a member of the first class there and graduated with her class. After graduation she taught for two years in Town Avenue School near Central Street. Mary Brayton, afterwards Mrs. Mary B. Durfee and later Mrs. Mary B. Young, graduated with the second class of this same school, and she also taught at first in the Town Avenue School and later in the Anawan Street School.

During one year the school committee held fifty meetings and for their services, which included school visitations and clerical work, they were paid sixty-nine dollars, which was divided among the three members.

The Anawan Street school house, originally built as a church in 1823, was sold to the School District in 1834, and destroyed in the great fire of 1843. After the fire a "fine new edifice" (now the old Anawan street school house) was erected. This and the "Third street school" (which was in Tiverton prior to 1862) are the only Fall River school buildings of this period which are now (1941) standing in their original location. As previously noted the Anawan Street school is now (1941) the School Administration building, and the Third Street school building located at the

northeasterly corner of Third and Wade Streets is now (1941) used by the John J. Doran Post Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The report for 1844 and 1845 consisted of a publication of the "Regulation of the General School Committee". Important among these are the provisions that the branches taught in the primary schools were spelling, reading, elementary arithmetic, geography and philosophy and in the grammar schools spelling, reading, writing, English grammar, composition, arithmetic, algebra, book-keeping, geography, history, geometry, astronomy, surveying, navigation, natural philosophy, chemistry and physiology. For these studies specific class books were named.

School hours were from 9 A. M. to 12 M. and in the afternoon from 2 P. M. to 5 P. M. in the summer and fall terms. The afternoon sessions were from 1:30 to 4:30 during the winter term.

School doors were required to be closed, and scholars who were tardy were not permitted to enter during a school session except in case of a severe storm.

Three vacations were provided for:

- 1 — two weeks following the last Wednesday in April.
- 2 — three weeks following the 3rd Wednesday in July.
- 3 — one week following the third Wednesday in November.

The report for 1845 included a school census. There were 2,727 pupils; available funds \$5,175 from the town and \$392 from the State.

District No. 1 then had two school houses "two noble houses on beautiful locations but no proper teaching apparatus". One was on Anawan Street and the other on Canal Street and four classes were in constant operation there.

District No. 2 had four school houses, viz: High Street, Bedford Street, Town Avenue and on No. Main Street at the Northeasterly corner of Prospect. The new grammar school was on High Street, with more scholars attending than could be seated.

District No. 6 had only one school room in a brick house "better adapted for pigs and hens than children".

District No. 7 had one house, and no equipment. It was too small and needed entire remodelling.

District No. 8 had only one very small and badly constructed house without even a blackboard as equipment.

District No. 9 and No. 10, same description as No. 8.

District No. 11 one house too small for comfort, convenience or health.

District No. 12 no school house, no school. It had been kept in a dwelling house.

District No. 13 one house ample in size, averaging an attendance of only five scholars during the year. It also had no blackboards and no other school equipment.

District No. 14 one house, very acceptable for present purposes but no blackboards, etc.

The Committee report for 1846 showed a school census of 2,611 with only 1,109 scholars attending school. The total appropriation was \$7,383 by the town and \$421 by the State. The committee recommended the abolition of Districts and the establishment of a High School. It was noted that upon division of the State appropriation among the districts, the teachers in District No. 1 each received only \$18.11. The employment of a teacher in penmanship for the village grammar school was recommended. It characterized the public schools as fully equal to most of the private schools and complained because parents preferred private or select schools "to the public schools with result that not over half of the children attended the public schools, and many had no schooling".

District No. 2 was the largest district, with 1,368 children. District No. 14 was the smallest, having only eight children. The school committee was criticized for paying \$30. a month to a male teacher to instruct scholars in the lowest grade when a competent faithful female teacher could "perform equally well" for \$16. In this same year the committee advertised in the newspapers for a teacher for district No. 8. She was to be examined at the office of Attorney Louis Lapham, and her compensation was to be \$20. a month and board.

A private school on Barbary Hill (Brady Street), with as many as one hundred pupils was taught by Mr. James Davis. He charged tuition of a dollar a month and he was dubbed "latherer" or "latherum" because he used the switch very freely.

Another private school was kept by Philip Harrington. He was known as the best penman in Fall River.

The report of 1847 showed a school census of 2,785; all but 145 lived in the village. The town appropriated \$7,500 for schools and the State gave \$455. Irregular attendance was again noted to be the greatest bar to school success.

In 1850 the June Street school-house, south of Locust Street was completed; also a new school-house for District No. 10. The School Committee complained that no Prudential Committee had been appointed for District No. 9, on account of which the school-house in that district bore "great marks of neglect and there was not even a chair for the teacher; that this house was pleasantly situated on the edge of a wood; that the school in District No. 12 was kept in a 7 x 13 foot room, in a private house and there was no road to the building. The construction of a more convenient house was desirable. District No. 13 had only three scholars. The committee recommended it be closed."

In 1853 the School Committee authorized the Prudential Committees of the several districts, except Districts Nos. one and two to hire teachers for their districts.

When Fall River was incorporated a city in 1854, there was a change in school administration. The school buildings came under the jurisdiction of the Board of Aldermen and were administered by a committee of "public instruction".

During the years of 1856 and 1857, the abolishment of the district system was uppermost in the public mind and much attention was given the subject in the school report for 1857.

The town of Fall River, Rhode Island, when the state boundary line was changed in 1861, became a part of the city of Fall River, Massachusetts. The last report of the School Committee of Fall River, Rhode Island, dated February 26, 1862 was signed by Elihu Grant, William Connell, Jr. and N. M. Buffinton. Six more school districts and ten schools (school rooms) came under the supervision of the local committee. These additional schools continued to be taught by their former teachers, except that an assistant teacher was named for the Third Street School. These schools had a summer enrollment of 725 and a winter enrollment of 737.

One wonders how the teachers were able to exist during this period of stress and high prices. The High School principal received an annual salary of \$1,080; the grammar principals, \$900 and the country and grade teachers from \$187.20 to \$247.50.

NOTES: The early history of the Anawan and High Street Grammar Schools is recorded in the annual report of the School Committee of 1859.

A list of textbooks and the rules of the committee were printed in the report for 1861-1862.