

Chapter IX

FALL RIVER SCHOOLS
DISTRICT SCHOOLS – GRAMMAR SCHOOLS – FACTORY SCHOOLS
EVENING SCHOOLS – THE TRUANT SCHOOL

*District Schools*¹

We get a clearer view of activities in the school administration during the earlier years by studying some events which seem unusual.

While school districts were a part of the school system, a prudential committee was the district executive and the school committee were the executive town officers. Often their concurrent jurisdiction over the same subject matter resulted in miniature warfare. The district officer had charge of the maintenance of school buildings and furnishings, but the money which was raised for operating the school and paying the teachers was often appropriated by both. The town and the district each often raised parts of this fund and when the total appropriation was insufficient, it was sometimes supplemented by a district tax or by private benevolences. When the district raised money it had to be rated, apportioned and collected and that expense materially lessened the amount that was available for public use. In one instance, when chimney repairs were needed at an estimated cost of twenty-five dollars, the amount was reduced by collection charges to fifteen dollars and the teacher and prudential officer had to furnish manual labor or else close the school. It was difficult for the teacher to serve two masters; one who paid the wages and another who kept the school rooms heated and in repair, especially where the two officials were not in harmony. Job T. Wilson, the prudential committee in District No. 4 made complaint to the school committee and filed twenty written charges about his work with the school committee and when prompt action was not taken, he offered a dollar and a half to any scholar who would put the teacher out of the building. When the committee heard the charges, there

¹ See p. 48.

were apologies but the wound would not heal till the teacher was discharged.

Politics were rife as teachers applied for positions and promises made by one branch of the administration would not be kept by the other. There were charges of favoritism in distribution of appropriations. In one year, one district was granted \$1,438, another \$51, so it could keep the school open only six weeks.

The school in District No. 11 was closed due to the youth and inexperience of the teacher. The school on North Main Street opposite the Narragansett Mill site was described by the committee as inferior in appearance to the powder house and pig shelters. In 1846 there were many applicants to teach District No. 8 at \$20 a month and board. The school-house in District No. 12 was described as a "tight fit" for seventeen scholars, "when the teacher was added". The grammar school room on Anawan Street was described as the most perfect school room in Bristol County.

Grammar Schools

George H. Martin, former Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, in his historical sketch, "The Evolution of the Massachusetts Public Schools" states that originally, "Latin was the staple in grammar schools". This type of grammar school was instituted in England as early as 1440. It was introduced in New England in a few of the larger commercial towns and was the preparatory school for college. There is no evidence that Latin was ever taught in the grammar schools of this area. There could have been little demand for Latin instruction, for Orin Fowler, in his "History of Fall River"² published in 1862 writes, "so far as I can learn, only three or four persons, native of the town of Fall River have graduated in any college".

The title grammar school has been used for three types of schools in Fall River; the schools in populous sections which graduated pupils to the High School, the mixed graded schools in the suburbs and the one room district or country school, when such a school graduated one or more pupils. The schools in the last two categories, that have reflected the neighborhood personnel, by preparing many pupils for advanced work are the old District Schools, No. 6 and 10, the Lower New Boston School, the Steep Brook School and the Tucker Street School. "Those who go through the entire grammar school course" reports the committee in 1863 "will be qualified for the ordinary pursuits of industry and usefulness".

² If Fowler made the statement, it was made a long time before the history was published.

Definite records of grammar schools previous to 1834 are not available. The school report for 1843 is confusing. This report states that there were three schools in the village; two primary and one grammar and that Charles Aldrich taught a grammar school in District No. 1, David Spencer in District No. 2. A history of the Anawan Street Grammar School written in 1859 does not mention either of these masters.

Four central grammar schools of the past, the Anawan Street, the High Street, the Maple Street and the Morgan Street had great influence in training the early civic and industrial leaders of our city. A large percentage of these attended the old Maple Street School, under the principalship of George W. Locke.

George Washington Locke was elected principal of the Osborn Street School in Fall River, Rhode Island, in March 1856 and was in active service as a teacher in Fall River for more than fifty years, during which time 2,106 pupils were graduated from his classes. He was born in Lexington, February 22, 1835. His colonial ancestors took part in the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill. He was graduated from the Bridgewater Normal School in November 1855. In May of 1871, he was made principal of the Maple Street School. He was a principal in the public evening schools for more than thirty years. He was very proficient in the teaching of arithmetic and most of his scholars excelled in this branch. He was an enthusiastic follower of his scholars in their after life. His enthusiasm in their advancements never waned. When he reached his seventy-seventh year in 1912, he presented his resignation to the school committee and it was regretfully accepted.

Twenty-one of the Fall River schools may be recognized as fully graded grammar schools for a part or all of their existence. A chronological list of these schools and their principals, gleaned from school reports follows. The school year does not correspond with the calendar year: consequently some of the dates recorded are approximate.

Anawan Street: 1834, Joseph F. Lindsey; 1836, John Brayton; 1840, a Mr. Anthony and a Mr. Boutelle; 1841, George G. Lyon; 1857, Guilford D. Bigelow; 1859, George W. Locke; 1868, Grammar pupils transferred to the Morgan Street (N. B. Borden) School.

High Street (Leontine Lincoln) School: 1845, Orin P. Gilbert; 1847, George B. Stone; 1849, William R. Gordon; 1869, William Reed; 1871, Daniel M. Fish; 1872, A. L. Harwood, Albion K. Slade; 1892, Candace Cook; 1899, George H. Sweet. 1926, pupils of the seventh and eighth grades transferred to the James M. Morton Junior High School.

June Street School: 1851, Albion K. Slade; 1855, Upper grade pupils, teachers and principal transferred to Maple Street (Westall) School.

Maple Street (Westall) School: 1855, Albion K. Slade; 1865, John Tetlow; 1865, Milton Hall; 1871, George W. Locke; (The grammar classes under Mr. Locke occupied the old High School [Foster Hooper building] while the new Westall School was under construction.) 1912, John R. Ferguson; 1914, Katherine C. V. Sullivan.³ 1926, seventh and eighth grade classes transferred to "Morton Junior High School".

Osborn Street (Osborn) School: 1864, William Nichols and Roscoe P. Owens; 1865, George W. Bronson. 1868, upper grade children transferred to Morgan Street (N. B. Borden) School.

Morgan Street (N. B. Borden) School: 1868, George W. Bronson; 1872, W. H. Merritt; 1874, Horace A. Benson; 1908, Orrin A. Gardner; 1914, Arthur B. Higney. 1920, changed to a girls' continuation school.

Borden School: 1874, Hortense Young; 1876, Ariadne Borden; 1882, Mrs. E. J. Coburn, Sub. Prin.; 1885, Susan P. H. Winslow; 1889, not a grammar school, George W. Bronson; 1896, George W. Bronson; 1905, Charles E. Reed; 1920, Arthur B. Higney; 1926, seventh and eighth grade pupils transferred to "Morton Junior High".

Davis School: 1874, George W. Bronson; 1878, Edwin S. Thayer; 1902, Norman S. Easton.⁴

Slade School: 1874, Mary A. Borden; 1885, Hannah R. Davis; 1889, Margaret J. Bury; 1922, Bertha E. Fogwell, acting principal; 1926, Bertha E. Fogwell. 1928; occupied new building.

Davenport School: 1886, Edward Gray; 1899, Charles J. McCreery; 1933, Elizabeth Bowers, acting principal. 1935, building destroyed by fire.

George B. Stone School: 1897, Charles J. McCreery; 1899, Norman S. Easton; 1902, Benjamin Cook, Sr. 1913, grammar pupils transferred.

Brayton Avenue School: 1899, Norman S. Easton, acting principal, and John A. Kerns; 1902, John R. Ferguson; 1906, George H. Read, who graduated the last eighth grade.

Fowler School: 1899, Candace Cook; 1920, Stella Baylies, acting principal; 1922, Stella Baylies.

Highland School: 1902, Orrin A. Gardner; 1908, William A. Hart; 1910, Arthur B. Higney; 1912, Genevieve H. Bliss. 1926, grammar pupils transferred.

³ Elected first principal of the James M. Morton Junior High School in 1926.

⁴ Retired July 1, 1942. Succeeded by Frederick B. Wilcox.

Samuel Watson School: 1906, John R. Ferguson; 1912, John E. Robinson; 1932, Arthur B. Higney.⁵

William S. Greene School: 1909, John G. Ulmer; 1910, William A. Hart; 1912, Anna W. Braley. 1922, upper grade pupils transferred.

Robeson School: 1910, Harry Smalley. 1911, grammar pupils transferred to John J. McDonough School.

John J. McDonough School: 1911, Harry Smalley.⁶

William J. Wiley School: 1912, William T. Collins; 1913, Elizabeth T. Higney. 1926, seventh and eighth grade scholars transferred to the "Morton Junior High School".

Susan H. Wixon School: 1913, Jerome P. Fogwell; 1916, John E. Robinson; 1922, Anna W. Braley; 1927, Leah Sorel; 1933, George H. Sweet.⁷

Henry Lord School: 1915, Henry Miller. 1922, the school became a Junior High School.

Factory Schools

Labor conditions in the early days of Fall River were undoubtedly very bad but comparatively speaking, they could not be said to be so, for from far and near, from Canada, from England, Scotland and Ireland, people flocked here to better their living conditions, by seeking employment in our cotton mills. From an educational standpoint, it would seem that conditions could not be worse. Wages were so low that families could not exist without the help of their children, who were allowed and forced by conditions, at a very early age, to work long hours.

About 1857, a state law was enacted forbidding the employment of any child under the age of fifteen in any manufacturing establishment, unless "such child shall have attended school at least one term of eleven weeks next preceding the time of employment". There was no limit in this law as to the age when a child might begin work. In 1861, a similar law was passed which limited the age as twelve and under fifteen. It can be easily understood that these children could hardly find a proper place in an organized school system.

In 1862, schools were established for these children, which although not given an official name at that time, it was really the beginning of the

⁵ Died Oct. 18, 1941. Succeeded by Raymond W. J. Hobson.

⁶ Elected principal of James M. Morton Junior High School, Apr. 7, 1941. Succeeded by Andrew L. Duffy.

⁷ Retired July 1, 1941. Succeeded by Alvin A. Gaffney.

"Factory School" system. As years went by, more schools of this character were opened. When the mills were idle, these schools were well filled but as soon as they opened, they were practically deserted. The report of the School Committee said, "The law on the subject is wholly inoperative". Children, even those eight or nine years old, were not hired by the mills but worked with their parents or others on piece work. In 1865, children between five and fifteen were found attending these schools.

Superintendent Tewksbury seems to have immediately given this situation close attention. In 1867, for the first time, a truant officer was appointed, with the special purpose of enforcing the laws of the State. From this time on, the special schools were officially known as Factory Schools. There were eight hundred children who should under the law attend these schools. Superintendent Tewksbury proposed the plan, accepted by the School Committee, to accommodate one quarter of them at a time. The next year the Factory Schools were in good working order with the co-operation of all. Divisions were arranged for the children to come periodically from the mills. This system attracted wide attention and officials came from many communities to observe its operation. A new law allowing children to go to work at fourteen was enacted. The term of the Factory School was increased to twenty weeks. The attendance now dwindled to such an extent that plans could be made to care for the children at much less expense in the grades. The Factory Schools were abolished in 1877.

Evening Schools

At the annual town meeting in 1846, the sum of three hundred dollars was appropriated for the maintenance of an evening school, as required by state law. Charles Aldrich was the teacher assisted by a member of the school committee and some volunteer day school teachers. Arithmetic, writing, reading, spelling, grammar and geography were taught. Lectures on philosophy and astronomy by Mr. Lyons and Mr. Stone were delivered. The school was continued for five months, with an average attendance of about fifty-five. The school was crowded at the beginning but attendance dwindled as the weeks went by.

The city has provided generously in the past towards the support of evening schools but the result in regard to volunteer attendance has always been the same. One, but not the only reason for poor attendance has been that sessions were necessarily held in public school rooms fitted with furniture for children. In spite of all handicaps, many a citizen has learned to read and write in our evening schools.

There have been times in the past when laws have compelled large numbers of boys and girls, working in the mills, to attend evening school, until they reached a specified educational standard. Evening schools in several sections of the city were then crowded and many teachers employed. For example, a twelve room building, in the eastern section was at one time filled to capacity, with two teachers in each room.

An evening drawing school, for pupils over fifteen years of age was provided in 1870. This school was continued for many years. The teachers were selected from our most talented artists in their particular line. Among those who taught free hand drawing were Robert S. Dunning, Frank H. Miller, Bryant Chapin and Herbert Fish. William T. Henry and Philip D. Borden taught mechanical drawing and Albion Marble architecture.

The first evening high school opened in the Cataract Engine House, corner of Rock and Franklin Streets, in 1882. This school continued to teach academic high school subjects for many years. It grew in numbers and usefulness and was moved to the old high school building on June Street.

In more recent years, special classes were organized in civil service, Americanization, citizenship, and domestic arts. With the opening of the Technical High School, opportunities were offered for classes of women in home arts and nursing and for men in trade extension. In 1931, all city public evening schools⁸ were discontinued.

Truant School — Attendance Officers

A city ordinance was passed May 1, 1865 making the Alms House an "institution of instruction, house of reformation, or a suitable place for restraint, confinement and instruction over any minor convicted of being an habitual truant". The ordinance also ordered the appointment by the Mayor and Aldermen of three truant officers.

There was one truant officer employed in 1867; probably William (Pilkie) Read, father of Miss Julia A. Read. School attendance immediately showed improvement, for only three boys were sent to the Truant School by the Court that year. A second truant officer was appointed in 1875. Mr. Read was one of the two mentioned in the school report; John Brady was the other. It was not until 1882 that the ordinance of 1865 was fully complied with and a third officer, Alexander Dennis, was named.

⁸ Reopened in the fall of 1944.

The child labor laws continued to be ignored by many parents and were difficult of enforcement. The city was divided into three districts and each officer visited the schools in his district daily, receiving reports from the teachers of pupils who were suspected of being absent without good reason. The homes were immediately visited by the officers. This systematic arrangement bore very satisfactory results. The mills co-operated and the State inspector reported that in no city in the Commonwealth were factory children better cared for than in Fall River.

The Alms House was not a proper place for delinquents. School authorities realized this from the beginning and sought frequently without success, to establish a union school for the County. Finally permission was obtained in 1890, to send incorrigibles to the State School at Walpole, specially conditioned for the purpose. The Alms House was no longer used as a place of "confinement and instruction" for truants.

In 1890 there were four truant officers viz. A. J. Dennis, A. S. Palmer, John Brady and George T. Desjardins. Isaiah Lord who served the city many years was appointed in 1891. During the last forty years the following, at various times, have served this very important but little recognized department: Frank M. Milne, William Stewart, James D. Murphy, John F. Murphy, Alain Chaput, Frederick A. Gee, Henry Wade, Harry Boyer, Thomas C. Kelliher and Laura K. Dahill.

Later, the title of truant officer was changed to the more appropriate name of attendance officer. His duties are varied. He is not simply a truant chaser. The school committee of 1856, when they asked for the appointment of the first truant officer expressed the value of such an officer in these words: "The committee respectfully recommends to the City Government, the appointment of a Truant Commissioner, whose services, if faithfully performed, will, in addition to his legitimate duties, greatly aid the efforts of the Board, advance the cause of education, and do much to promote the good morals among the children, who are * * * * * misspending their time in the streets or with others of a similar character, in some less respectable place." In connection with their other duties attendance officers act as a "go between" for the Board of Health.

Juvenile delinquencies continue to be a serious problem. There has not been a proper co-ordination of effort between all parties concerned. The terms of probation are not kept, with the result, that the youth learn to have a disregard for law, and a criminal record begins.⁹

⁹ These conditions have been in a large measure corrected.