

AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

School Days

by Spencer Grey

By the middle of the 19th century Chatham had 12 schools spread throughout neighborhoods in all parts of the town, owned by the members of each community who charged the pupils attending them four cents a day. The income from student fees paid for all the expenses of operating the school, including rent, teachers' salaries, teachers' room and board, cost of wood for the stoves, and any other expenses that were incurred. The town paid for about one-quarter of the total cost.

There were two terms, with the winter term beginning in early December and running for three months and the summer term beginning in early April and running for six months with a vacation in mid-term for a week or two. In 1847 the expenses for the winter term in District 3 indicate that the teacher was paid \$28 a month, Isaac Bea was paid \$2 a week for boarding the teacher (board for men was paid at \$2 a week, while women were allowed only \$1 a week), and Lumbert Nickerson was paid \$7.50 for one cord of wood. The schoolhouse rent was two and a half cents a week, and Mary Stetson was paid \$1 for cleaning the school throughout the term. During the winter term a male teacher was necessary, as some of the young men could be unruly, but during the summer term when only girls attended, a female teacher was hired. Not surprisingly, male teachers were paid more than female teachers, but perhaps that was because of the extra effort required for maintaining discipline when many of the students were young men.

Two of these schools that were built during the middle of the 19th century and still are much in evidence are the Old Village School, now a private residence, and the Atwood School, now the Doc Keene Scout Hall. The Atwood School, which opened in 1940, had two rooms on each floor. The youngest students had classes on the first floor and the older ones met in the two rooms on the second floor. The subjects taught included orthography, reading, writing, geography, English grammar, arithmetic, and United States history.

Boys were assigned the task on a rotating basis of lighting the wood fires in the early morning in the stove that stood in the northwest corner. Alongside the stove was a desk and chair for the boy who tended the fire. To keep the fire going throughout the day, boys served shifts, one in the morning and another in the afternoon, to keep the wood box filled and tend to the fire.

In addition to lighting and maintaining the fire, the boys went down to a spring by the Oyster Pond to get a pail of water before classes began in the morning, and the one who had the afternoon shift went down at noon to fetch another pail. Other necessities were accommodated by the privy attached to the rear of the building.

Students who lived nearby went home for lunch, but those from any distance brought their mid-day dinner. As Ernie Kendrick recalled, "Dinner we carried with us in a tin pail. Had a tin pail and hung it up in the entryway. The trouble was that if you had a nice piece of pie, somebody else got the pie before you did!" In 1869 the Village School was built at the cost of \$2,877.77 on land that had been bought for \$100 from Isaac Hardy. Although it was constructed 29 years after the Atwood School, it followed exactly the same design. As was the case in the other village schools, younger students had classes on the ground floor, while older students were taught in the two rooms on the second floor. Perhaps because there was not a spring nearby, water at this school was provided by a pump on a well in the schoolyard.

Heat was provided by a pot-bellied stove in the northwest corner of each floor with a stove pipe that crossed the room over head to the chimney in the southeast corner, thereby providing a kind of radiator. On cold days settees were placed around the stove, and when the boys came in from playing outside in the snow, they would place their shoes on the stove to dry them.

Eleanor Henderson, who attended the village school in 1917, recalled that before recess they would look out in the

yard and often see a pig, horse, or cow roaming around, as the fence in the barn yard was missing rails and the pig pen was not strong enough to contain the pigs.

Similar local schools were located in most of the other villages, including north Chatham, Chathamport, West Chatham, and South Chatham. But they all were closed after the central school was opened on Main Street in 1926.



BREAKTHROUGH
The Continuing Story Of Chatham's North Beach
by Timothy J. Wood
BREAKS HAPPEN
LEARN THE LATEST AT
WWW.CHATHAMNORTHBEACH.COM
DEFINITIVE BOOK ABOUT THE CHATHAM BREAKTHROUGH
120 PAGES • MORE THAN 25 PHOTOS AND MAPS
COLOR COVER
\$12.99 at local bookstores.
Also available by calling
The Cape Cod Chronicle at
508-945-2220, or order on-line at
www.chathamnorthbeach.com

