

**The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.**

**An article from the New Haven Register, Sunday, October 9, 1927**

**FAMOUS OLD NORTHFORD SCHOOL TO BE  
RESTORED**

A History of The Little Red Schoolhouse

Transcribed and Digitized

by

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From New Haven Register, Sunday October 9, 1927

## FAMOUS OLD NORTHFORD SCHOOL TO BE RESTORED

### Women's League Buys Little Red Building - County Landmark

For 125 years at least, possibly longer, a "little red school house" has stood on a knoloff the main travel-beaten highway, in the little village of Northford.

Built about 1800-1805, it proves to be oldest, typical, red painted school house in the County of New Haven and the fourth oldest in the State of Connecticut.

Unwilling to allow the building to pass out of Connecticut history, and anxious to restore it to its original old fashioned style, the Northford and North Branford League of Women Voters have purchased the building and are now working upon plans to preserve its historical value and its picturesque appearance.

On Tuesday an all-day meeting of the New Haven County League of Women Voters was held in the Northford Congregational Church, with the late afternoon devoted to a pilgrimage to the "Little Red Schoolhouse." At this time an opportunity was given for interested persons to help the project financially or pledge themselves to do so later on.

For the past 23 years the building has been abandoned, a subject for the ravages of changing weather and the destroying hand of unthinking youth, standing mutely as a cast-off relic of days gone by, its tottering timbers testifying to its old age.

Shutters gone, window frames sagging, its low narrow doorway at the corner of the building drooping to a slant and the door forlornly withdrawing from its support, it makes a pathetic picture for those who glance its way. Few travelers come this road. Only those persons who dwell in the neighborhood pass over the country highway. And they have seen the old red schoolhouse so after that they fail to see it now. It is only a part of the familiar scenery to them.

Not far removed from the state road over which skim speedy motor driven vehicles, but just far enough away to be hidden for a century, it remains a target for wanton hands.

And so this little band of 17 patriotic women have attempted to restore the building and make it a shrine, moving it two miles from its original birthplace to a site next door to the parsonage of the Northford Congregational Church.

It is a big undertaking. It requires an expenditure of much money. But it is worth the attempt.

### ITS HISTORY

Northford was settled probably as early as 1720, perhaps earlier. At first the people camped in this section during the summer, working their crops and returning to Branford for winter. For many years it was known by the Indian name of "Paug" and for a brief time it was called "Salem."

Soon after the machinery of the parish was gotten into operation arrangements were made for schools. At first and until 1752, the parish was comprised into a single school district.

A division was then affected, creating one district north and one south of the meeting house. Three years after, in 1755 a third district was organized, and still a fourth in 1769, those arrangements all being made, and common school education supervised not by the town, but by the Ecclesiastical Society. It is presumed that the fourth district school house built at this time was erected a few rods northeast of the present building.

North Branford has the record of a vote taken November 5, 1736, then the town voted "to build a school house near Edward Frisbee's on the country road." Several succeeding votes taken at intervals indicated that this part of Branford shared the interest of the old town in the cause of education.

#### MANY EDUCATED

A deep interest was taken in those primary schools, and although there have not been any academies or schools of higher order to which the youth of Northford might readily resort, the thirst for knowledge was so keen that many acquired an education in colleges and professional schools elsewhere.

Few parishes of the state, and perhaps none of equal population have given to the world so large a number of liberally educated men - so goodly a number of emigrant sons, who have served their generation in their varied fields of professional labor - as Northford, and of them have been graduated from Yale College.

From this village have set forth a member of the first faculty of Williams College, the founder of the first free school in a slave state, a translator of the Bible in the Arabic language, the father and mother of a well known Biblical commentator, one of the first women missionaries of the Sandwich Islands; a woman missionary among the Indians, a minister who preached for over 40 years in Taunton, Mass., a physician whose name stands over the door of the Yale Library, and one of the first women admitted to the Connecticut Bar, a member of the family of Wellesley College, a co-founder of a large charitable institution in Chicago, an engineer who rose high in his profession, a supervisor of music in the schools of Brooklyn, a captain in the United States Army in the Civil War; a woman missionary who teaches in Peking, China, a secretary to the faculty in the University of Rochester, a family of geniuses who gave to the world many basic inventions, a family of manufacturers whose enterprise has enriched this state, 31 men who offered their services in the Civil War. There have been four lawyers, 18 physicians, and 24 ministers and missionaries.

Many of these learned men and women claim the old "Little Red Schoolhouse" in the old "lower and district school" as the seat of their younger school days.

## THE BUILDING

The building is 16 feet wide, 24 feet long and about 12 feet high. It stands on a tract of land 45 feet frontage and 100 feet in depth. The interior has remained intact, except for the loss of a table and some of the desk boards, which have been stolen.

As the visitor enters the tiny vestibule, an inner door leads into the one room which constitutes the building. A continuous line of desks on two sides and one end of the room, with a backless long bench before them, enables one to imagine how the pupils of a hundred years ago learned their lessons. The desks were nothing more than a long plank slanted somewhat toward the child and built tight to the walls of the building. When the children sat on the benches before the desks they had their faces to the wall. When ready to recite they whirled about toward the center of the room where the teacher's desk graced the open end of the room. Similar benches for the little folk were placed about the iron wood stove set back in the center of the room. A blackboard lined the wall immediately back of the teacher's desk graced the open end of the room. The seats were hard and the desks were rude, but elaborately carved by the wielder of the versatile jackknife.

## FUEL PROVIDED

Wood for the stove was supplied by the parents and cut up and dragged to the school, thus paying in a measure for the benefits of education which the children were receiving.

The exact date of the erection of this schoolhouse has been the subject of much discussion and research work. Interested persons have traveled over the state, visiting many libraries and historical society headquarters, in an effort to prove this data. All attempts have failed beyond, or rather before, the year of 1805. It has been definitely established that the school was standing at that time.

The second oldest living pupil of this school, Judge John G. Phelan of Wallingford, declares the building was built about 1750 but records which would prove this, if there are any, cannot be found. The Branford records have been searched in vain. The schoolhouse stands so close to the road that it is probable no record was made of the land. In those days "school lands" were large tracts whose income went for school support.

Professor Clara E. Smith says that Mr. John Foote of District 4 (brother of Deacon Chas. Foote) was treasurer of the "Fund" for many years, exhibited papers in his house showing the schoolhouse was built in 1805.

The Goodyear Genealogy by Grace Goodyear Kirkman to be found in the Yale Library, Contains a picture of the "Little Red Schoolhouse" taken in 1893 and the statement that it was built in 1805. Mrs. Kirkman's father, Andrew Goodyear, was a pupil there. The date for this record was also furnished by John M. Foote.

## OLDEST PUPIL

The oldest living pupil, so far as known, is Kirtland Blakeslee, now of New London, O. He writes, "In regard to the little red schoolhouse, as I think of it, it brings many happy hours to my memory; the old fashioned desk, my back to the teacher, when studying, sitting beside Judge Phelan. I was between seven and ten years old. I think it was in 1853-4-5. I am now past 81, Deacon Charles Foote was the last teacher I went to there. I was 10 years old when I left Northford. I suppose it is one of the oldest school houses in the state. As to when it was built I know nothing. I know it was quite old when I went to school there."

Northford is a village of about 500 souls. It is peopled by the descendants of the first settlers. Such old family names as Captain Aarion Cook, Deacon Samuel Harrington, Samuel Barnes, John Baldwin, Ensign Josiah Rogers, Jr., Joseph Linsley, Issac Foote, Jr. Stephen Todd, Abel Munson, Merriam Munson, Abraham Bartholomew, Peter Tyler, Timothy Rose, Daniel Maltby, John Taintor, Samuel Goodsell, Joseph Elwell, and Enos Barnes were entered on the church enrollment with the constitution of the first church. Their descendants have carried on the work of the villages, their children entered the red schoolhouses of the various districts, for all school buildings were painted red in the olden days, and their children's children sat side by side, young and old, while taught the first rudiments of "learning."

#### LIMITED STUDYING

Back in 1800 children were allowed to go to school only in winter. Little folks just able to climb to a place on its benches mingled with youths 18 to 20 years of age. Often a young man would leave the school room for the marriage alter, and during the Civil War boys frequently left their benches for the seat of strife.

Quill pens and a miscellaneous lot of books and slates brought by the children from their homes, constituted the equipment. Reading, writing, and spelling received special attention. The teachers wrote all the copies, and made and mended the goose-quill pens. Grammar was taught very little in the early days, Geography by questions and answers and arithmetic taught as far as the rule of three.

The Bible, Webster's Spelling Book and "Third Park" were the main text books at first. Later other studies were taken up as the text books became better known. Quite a unique collection of old readers, spellers, and various books now out of print, are being treasured by the ladies in charge of the restoration plan.

Fervid imagination and Yankee pride have combined to halo the "Little Red Schoolhouse" with a glory mingled with sentimental pathos. There have been in some of them teachers of power and inspiration, who would have taught just as well had they been paid according to their deserts, and if the schoolhouse had been less meagerly furnished. The wages of men teachers was \$14.00 per month and of women \$5.75.

#### INVESTIGATION AIDS

Investigations made by Governor Edwards were started in 1838 and as a result of the reports changes for the better rapidly followed. A bill for better supervision was passed, and in 1855 a vote was passed to enable a town to have a higher grade of schooling. In 1865 the State Board

of Education was organized and in 1868 the town tax was increased enough to make schools free.

In 1841 four months schooling was required, two months were added to this in 1855, and in 1870 it was voted that "public schools be maintained for at least 30 weeks in a year in every school district in which the number of pupils between four and 16 years was 24 or more."

All these matters directly concerned the "Little Red Schoolhouse" of our story. Many of the privations and hard struggles made for an education are vividly recalled by the pupils who attended the old school, who are now living, and especially by the oldest living teacher who presided over the studies of the children in the "Little Red School- house" 70 years ago.

### RECORD OF TEACHERS

The oldest living teacher is the Hon. Benjamin Page. He was born in North Branford in 1840 and first taught school in the old Tyle's Mills Schoolhouse. From there he went to the "fourth district" or "lower end" school in Northford. He was but 17 years old and he says he remembers quite well receiving the sum of \$14.00 for a month's teaching. He is now living in Meriden, senior member of the firm of Page & Pardee, and has served that city as its mayor. He recalls the names of several of his pupils of that day and time and is deeply interested in the plans for preserving the old school.

While Mr. Page is the oldest living teacher, such records and information as it has been possible to secure place Miss Phoebe Merwin, of Durham, as the first teacher known to have taught in the red schoolhouse of the fourth district. It has been established that she taught there in 1850. This leaves a period between the erection of the school and 50 years hence, which it is impossible to fill. However, a list of 43 men and women who spent some of their days teaching there has been obtained.

### MUCH RESEARCH

The names as presented are given consecutively only in a general way. They have been obtained from old pupils, and most of them cannot tell the order of the teachers or their probable dates. Mrs. Eleanor Rogers, secretary of the Northford and North Branford League of Women Voters, has been working for a considerable time upon this list and the results proves that much time and effort has been given. If anyone who reads this article should have additional information about the red schoolhouse, its teachers or pupils, she will be very glad to communicate with them.

Miss Phoebe Merwin taught for two years and was succeeded by Miss Jennette Foote, who was born in Northford in 1834, the daughter of Warham Williams Foote. Her brother, Walter S. Foote of New Haven, still living, was one of her pupils at the age of three years, but he remembers nothing about it except "sitting on a little bench."

About 1854 the school was taught by Henrietta Johnson of District 5, said to have been an excellent teacher. She was the daughter of Benjamin Johnson. In later years she kept a "select school" and taught French at Claverack Institute on the Hudson.

## SEVERE TEACHER

Mary Jane Elliott of Durham taught about 1857, and then came Deacon Charles Foote of Northford District 4. It is probable that he taught several winters there. He was in charge of the school at the time of the breaking out of the Civil War. His pupils all speak of him as an excellent teacher, but severe.

Melville Rose of North Branford taught in the 60's and so did Benjamin Page of Meriden, already mentioned in these columns.

Deacon Charles Page of North Branford, a brother of Benjamin also taught in the school about this same time. He was town clerk of North Branford for 46 years and a member of the school board for 30 years. He studied for the ministry and preached in Northford.

Henry G. Newton of Durham, who later became a famous lawyer in New Haven, and a close friend of Benjamin Page of Meriden, also presided over the little school room.

Then followed in succession, Celestia Foote of Northford, district 4, daughter of Frederick Foote. All who knew her speak of her as a most beautiful woman. Next Mary Hall of Wallingford; Charlotte Barnes of Northford, district 5, daughter of Seneca Barnes; Ellen F. Tucker of Northford, district 7, daughter of Henry Tucker, an aunt of Mrs. Clara M. Harnham of Northford. Next a Mr. --- Bristol, who taught the Greek alphabet to John G. Phelan, now living in Wallingford.

## DAVENPORT DESCENDANT

Then came Eliza Bartholomew of Northford, district 4, daughter of Samuel Bartholomew, who was the grandmother of Representative Delevan W. Ives of Wallingford, and the mother of Mrs. L. M. Hubbard of that town. She was a descendant of John Davenport who settled New Haven. She married Delano Ives of Wallingford.

Next in line was Miss Ellen Foote of Northford, sister of Celestia. She is now living in Los Angeles, Cal. She was married to E. F. Reed.

Next we find Miss Delia Linsley of North Haven, daughter of Alfred Linsley, She now is Mrs. D. L. Viles and living in Auburndale, Mass. After her came Mary Frisbie of Wallingford, daughter of Sam Frisbie of Frisbie's Mills. \_Then Delia, Bertha or Matilda Todd of Northford, district 7, daughter of Thelus Todd; Jane Hart of Durham, a beautiful woman, who became Mrs. William E. Hall of East Wallingford; and Mary Page of North Branford, sister of Herbert Page of Totoket.

Next was Elizabeth Tyler of Northford, district 4, sister of Miss Emma Tyler now living at 1010 Quinnipiac Avenue, New Haven. The former became Mrs. Edward Pardee of Montowese.

Another member of the Page family, Martha, also taught at this school. She was a sister of Benjamin and Charles and became Mrs. T. A. Smith of Northford.

## CAPTAIN TEACHES

Captain James Malsey Linsley of Northford, district 5, taught school here about 1869. He was a graduate of New Britain Normal School in 1857 and taught also in North Branford, Yalesville and New Jersey. He served four years in the Civil War. He was the father of Mrs. Eleanor Rogers, referred to elsewhere in these columns.

Dwight M. Foote, father of Miss Grace Foote of New Haven, taught here too. He was a son of Deacon Charles Foote. He taught in the 70's it is thought. Sheldon B. Thorpe, who recently passed away in North Haven, a noted historian, was another of the teachers.

And, in summing it up, we find next in line a Mrs. Hopson of Reed's Gap; Mary Hart of Durham, daughter of Captain Hart; Florence Russell of North Branford who taught in 1874-5, an excellent teacher. She is now Mrs. Florence R. Andrews of East Haven and an aunt of the Misses May and Effie Holabird of North Branford, members of the league.

In quick succession come Miss Elizabeth Stent of Bare Plain, North Branford, who taught several terms; Carrie Foote, of Northford, a sister of Celestia and Ellen; W. W. Seaver of Vermont; a Mr. Gallagher, from Vermont; Frances and Ruth Rossiter, sisters of North Guilford; William Brooks of Northford, District 6, in 1876, a fine teacher. He afterward kept "select school" in Northford for many years.

Ellen Ives of East Wallingford and Lizzie Rogers of Branford proceeded Horatis Warner, a lawyer who turned to teaching, and came in and straightened out the school after there had been eight or nine teachers in one winter.

## THE BIG BLIZZARD

Alfred Stannard, who was said to have had an unusual method of discipline, was followed by Ella Lane of North Guilford, about '86-'89, who taught three years. She is now Mrs. Myron Munger of North Madison. She spent the night of the great blizzard of 1888 in the schoolhouse with the children. She says one of the pupils crawled on his hands and knees to the nearest house and obtained a lantern. This was the only light they had all that howling, storm ridden night. Following Mrs. Munger, there were three teachers in one year. Then came Hattie Potter; Adeline Hall of East Wallingford; Alvena Hoadley, married and residing in Oregon; Henrietta Denton of North Guilford, 1880-91.

Emma Munson of Northford, now living in Middlefield, a sister of Mrs. C. M. Farnham of Northford; Anna Wicks of North Guilford; Miss Meredith; Miss Blatchley; Miss Melburne, followed Miss Emma Hosler of Northford, district 7, taught two or three years, 1900-03, now Mrs. Harvey Harrison, East Orange, New Jersey; Evelyn Russell of North Branford and Mary Winter of the same place, also served as teachers. The last teacher in the old red schoolhouse was Grace A. Foote, of Northford, district 4, a granddaughter of Deacon Charles Foote. She graduated from the Wallingford High School and taught from 1902-04. In February of that year she moved from the old school building to the new white building beside it. She was graduated of Mount Holyoke in 1909 and now resides in New Haven.



## OLD PUPILS

Of some 500 pupils who probably attended this red school house, only a small fraction can be traced. At least 15 still reside in Northford.. These include Mrs. Margaret Augur, Mrs. Isabelle Bunnell, Miss Alice Tyler, Ellsworth Bunnell, George Bunnell, Robert Bunnell, Charles Ferguson, Mrs. Gertrude Salg, George Augur, Ethel Augur, Helen Augur, Joseph Augur, Mrs. Bessie Bunnell Wright, Mrs. Nettie Blakeslee Williams, and Mrs. Carrie Potwine.

Walter S. Foote, residing in New Haven, Kirtland Blakeslee in Ohio, and John G. Phelan of Wallingford, hold the candle for the oldest attendants. Mr. Phelan remembers Decatur Boardman, one of his oldest schoolmates, who enlisted in the "three months men" at the outbreak of the Civil War, and came to visit the school in his new gray uniform and brilliant brass buttons.

The next pupil of the old school to leave for the war was Phila Foote. He sat next to Mr. Phelan and was missed one day from class. He died in Washington a few months later and now lies in the old Northford Cemetery. Soon after Foote left, Jesse Butler went also and was killed by a rebel sharpshooter before the defenses at Washington. Next went Isaac Foote and Fred Foote, brothers who survived the war; and a boy called "Buffalo."

## WOMAN LAWYER

Bert Bartholomew, residing in Meriden, was another pupil in the old schoolhouse, and Mary Foote, a cousin of Grace, the first woman to be admitted to the bar in New Haven County, was still another student there.

Andrew Goodyear, Henry Davis, Myron Munger of North Madison, are three more, while Benjamin Page of Meriden, remembers several of the pupils who went to school when he taught. He speaks of Ellen Foote, who afterward became a teacher there; of Henderson Bunnell and of Lucy Merwin. Added to those already mentioned in the story we offer the following;

George Augur, still living; Joseph, Ethel, Helen Augur, children of George Augur, Sr., and Millard and John, his brothers. John Phipps Augur, Reuben, Angeline, Phebe, Rebecca, Joel and John Bradley Augur, children of Joel Augur, Sr.

Carrie Augur, now Mrs. Alling of New Haven; Frank, May, William R., Henry, children of Willis Bunnell, Ellsworth and George Bunnell, still living and Oliver, Jennie and Ella.

Ella Dowd, Juliette, Gedney, Charles, Peter, George and Nancy Gehey, still living. Charles Ferguson, still living, and Flora Foote Blakeslee, living in Clintonville.

Roxanna Foote, Charles Foote and their children, Elizabeth, Charles, Dwight, William, and Mary. John M. Foote, Serena and Edwin Foote, and the four children of Serena - Laura, Herbert, Scott and Sarah.

Alonzo Blakeslee and his children, Carrie Potwine, living in Northford, Hattie, Nettie, Williams, Northford, Jeff, Edward and Willie.

Andrew Goodyear, J. Boardman Smith, still living and Frederick Foote. The latter's two children Jeannette and Walter S. Foote, living in New Haven.

Warham Williams Foote and his children, Celestia, Ellen Foot Reed living in California and Carrie, Mathew Tyler and his children: Frank, living in New Haven, Elizabeth, Emma of New Haven and Effie Tyler, who taught the Quinnipiac Avenue School for over 40 years.

The children of Sidney Boardman, Grover, Estelle Boardman Foote, now of Stony Creek, and Amelia. The children of Ellsworth Bunnell, Florence Bunnell Crooks of Wallingford, Bessie Bunnell Wright of Northford and Leon, still living.

Mrs. Hattie Palmer Hubbard of New Haven, children of Dwight Foote, Albert and Grace now living in New Haven. The children of William Foote, Mary and Benjamin, now living.

Mrs. Isabelle Bunnell of Northford, Robert of the same place, W. LeRoy Bunnell of North Haven. Minnie Bartholomew Marker, of Branford, Bert Bartholomew of Meriden, John Davenport Bartholomew and Eliza Bartholomew.

John, Denine and Ellen Nevins; Margaret Augur of Northford; John, Jimmie, Craig, Clara, and Hannah Cummings, the latter still living.

John G. Phelan of Wallingford and two sisters and the Civil War volunteers already mentioned, Decatur Boardman, Jesse Butler, Isaac and Fred Foote.

Rose Oertel Foote, now of New Britain and Kirtland Blakeslee referred to before.. Horace, Betsey, Malachi, Alice, Ellen and Peter Tyler, the last three named still living. Lynde Foote, Olive and Lous Foote, Dennis, John, Patrick, Andrew and Daniel Dwyer, the first two still living. Axel Anderson and John Fay.

## MODERN HISTORY

As we have stated, the present location of the old school is two miles down a country road leading from the center of Northford. Circumstances over which there appears to be no control have made it impossible to keep the building looking respectable. Again and again glass in the windows have been replaced and locks and chains put on the door but soon both are destroyed.

So the new owners of the building have voted to move the building, "as is." Its journey will cover two miles. Expert movers will be employed, three permits must be secured and a telephone representative must accompany the job

The idea of preserving the schoolhouse had long been in the minds of several of the townswomen, particularly Miss Clara E. Smith, Mrs. Mary A. Miller. In 1924 at the suggestion of Mrs. J. J. Linsley the league took up the project.

The league voted Miss Holabird then president, would purchase the school at a price not to exceed \$25. After long delays and much advice it was found necessary to incorporate before a

deed could be obtained. Miss Holabird secured the incorporation which took place September 27, 1927, and the deed from the town on October 4, 1926.

#### PROPERTY TRANSFERRED

The deed was signed by the selectmen of the town of North Branford, namely, Albert E. Harrison, North Branford; Jared Linsley, Northford; Patrick Nelligan, North Branford. The league officials taking part in the transaction were May V. Holabird, North Branford, secretary; Grace R. Johnson, Northford, treasurer. A record of the transfer will be found in Vol. 16, Page 281 of North Branford Land Records.

Since that time a change of officers of the league has been made and at present the officials in charge of the project are president, Mrs. Charles Johnson; first vice, Mrs. Ruth Beers; second, Mrs. Helen K. Hoover; secretary, Mrs. Rogers and assistant Mrs. Myrtle Fabian; treasurer, Mrs. A. J. Hill, North Branford .

The league was organized December 6, 1921, as Northford League, and three years later re-organized as Northford and North Branford League.. Mrs. J. J. Linsley of Northford served as first president, from December 1921 to May 1924. Miss Holabird of North Branford from 1924 to 1926, and Mrs. Johnson for the past year. Other members of the league interested in the school project are; Mrs. Margaret Linde, Mrs. Margaret Keenan, Mrs. Ophelia Beach, Mrs. Lena Ferguson, Miss Clara Smith, Mrs. F. M. Griswold, Mrs. Charles Bates, Mrs. Merton Wright, of Northford; Mrs. Ruth Beers and Miss Effie Holabird, of North Branford.

#### SITE OFFERED

When the village residents learned of the desire of the league members to move the building, the Church Committee of the Congregational Church offered a site for the building. This is the northwest corner of the parsonage lot. The Church Committee of seven is composed of the following; A. LeRoy Harrison, chairman; Eleanor B. Rogers Clerk; Clara M. Farnham, treasurer; Pauline Ferguson, C. S. Edwards, Lena Ferguson and Jared Linsley.

Mr. Edwards offered the resolution regarding the site donation July 17, but this was later rescinded, an on August 21 another was offered by Mrs. Clara M. Farnham. It will be seen that the State League of Women Voters are brought into this vote, which is as follows: Voted: "To offer the Northford and North Branford League of Women Voters a site for the Red Schoolhouse 40 feet front by 60 feet depth in the northwest corner of our parsonage lot providing they restore said site. This will cost at least \$500. Schoolhouse on it within two years from now." If at any time they are unable to keep up the property the title is to go to the Connecticut League of Women Voters. If they cease to keep up the property of the title reverts to the Northford Congregational Church." The task before the little band of league women now is to raise the money for the removal of the building to the new site, and then the money necessary to restore it to its original appearance, inside and out.

## Comments From The Acting School Visitor Concerning the Condition Of The District Four Schoolhouse

Before reading the above transcription, I became curious as to exactly when the Little Red Schoolhouse was abandoned and a new schoolhouse built. Bound volumes of North Branford Annual Reports, beginning in 1873, exist at the town Hall. Each of these early annual reports contains a report from "The Acting School Visitor," the individual responsible for evaluating the progress of the scholars, the performance of the teachers and the condition of the schools themselves. It was certainly known by the late 1880s that the District 4 School, The Little Red Schoolhouse, was in terrible condition, yet it took more than 15 years before the building was replaced. Below are some of the comments made by The Acting School Visitors during this period. The Little Red Schoolhouse was finally abandoned in 1904 when a new schoolhouse was built next to it. As far as I can tell there is nothing in the Annual Town Report disclosing the building of the new school.

Theodore Groom, Ph. D.  
For The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

J. L. Nott, Acting School Visitor  
1889:

"The building is in wretched condition and is certainly unfit to hold a school in during the winter months."

"The Fourth District ought to have a new building at once. The old one is unsafe from a sanitary point of view. The seats are of the old style, 'child killers,' there are cracks around the door, etc., etc., making the house an eye sore, generally"

1890:

"The building continues to be unfit for human habitation , notwithstanding the repeated protests of some parents, the teachers and the Acting Visitor. It seems to me to be a bad policy to allow a fund to accumulate while the school building is so wretchedly poor. Money for educational purposes *should be spent* and the comfort of scholars and their mental advancement is much better interest than the 4 per cent of any bank."

1891:

"The school building looks a little better on the outside and is more comfortable in regard to warmth, but the seats are still of the old back-breaking order. Mr. Bunnell has done what he could with the very limited means the District allow, but the need of a new house stares all intelligent people in the face."

1892:

“There have been no schools in the Fourth and Fifth Districts for lack of sufficient scholars.”

W. H. Roberts Acting School Visitor

1893:

“The school in the Fourth District was discontinued in for lack of pupils in 1892. It was opened for a winter term and part of the Spring term by Miss Emma G. Munson with seven or eight pupils.”

1894:

“The school in the Fourth District was taught most of the year by Miss Anna B. Wicks of North Guilford, whose first term was without interruption from sickness in the school. During the second term an epidemic caused the scholars to diminish so rapidly it was thought best to close the school for several weeks. After which time Miss Wicks reopened the school and taught as long as the public money held out which finished the second term.”

Dwight M. Foote Acting Visitor

1895:

“In accordance with the vote of your honorable body, no school was maintained in the Fourth District, all of the children who wished to attend being carried to the school in the Sixth District.”

1896:

“There has been no school in he Fourth and Fifth Districts, most of the children attending in the Sixth District. Those from the Fourth were carried at an expense of \$122.50 for the year.”

1897

1898

1899

No mention of District Four

Dwight M. Foote Acting Visitor

1900:

“Miss Maude Melbourne and Miss Emma Hosler in the Fourth District deserve praise for their faithful work.”

1901:

“Miss Emma Hosler, in the Fourth District has has the smallest school in town, but the attendance has been almost constant and wonderful progress has been made in Reading, arithmetic, and geography. Miss Hosler has shown much interest in her work, and the parents have seconded her in her endeavors.”

1902:

Mention of Miss Hosler’s good work

1903:

“The Schools in general have been in good condition throughout the year”

1904:

No specific mention of District Four

J. S. Pardee, Acting Visitor

1907;

“In District No. 4 the building which is comparatively new, has been kept in excellent condition. The school had a goodly number of pupils and very good results were produced.”