



*One-Room Wonders:  
The Common Schools  
of Peacham*

**DOCENTS**

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Tickets and Creature Comforts  
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**Peacham's 21st Annual Ghost Walk**

**JULY 4, 2017, 2 P.M.**

**Peacham Cemetery**

*(Rain location: The Peacham Congregational Church)*

VERMONTERS IN GENERAL AND PEACHAM VILLAGERS IN PARTICULAR have historically placed a great value on education. Soon after settling in 1776, we have reports of schools being held in private homes, and we know from Town Meeting records that an independent school building was soon built. The number and location of school districts tracked the ebb and flow of the town population. The 1800 Town Meeting established 5 districts, spaced so no child had too far to walk to school; by 1847, there were 14, extending far up to the hill farms. After this date, as the population declined, schools were merged and closed. The last one-room schoolhouse closed after the 1968 school year.

During this nearly 200-year period, the nature of the one-room schools changed. Early schools were ungraded, with one teacher responsible for the education of children of all ages. Attendance was erratic, following the agricultural calendar and the needs of families to have children helping on the farms. The only texts were books children brought from home, often Bibles. Over the years, concerns about quality and consistency increased, and common standards were set for teacher preparation and evaluation, attendance, curriculum, the school calendar, and buildings and materials.

## HISTORIC GHOSTS

Ruth Skeele (January 17, 1778–September 25, 1860)

*Played by Jenny Mackenzie*

*Students played by Lila and Kate Mackenzie*



Ruth was the first female child born in Peacham; her parents, John and Phebe, came from Newbury to Peacham with the earliest 3 families of settlers in 1776. The first male child, Henry Elkins, was born in October 1776, and given a gift of “50 acres of good land... from the Proprietors he being the first man child in the Town.” No such notice was taken of Ruth’s birth.

Ruth never married. Teaching was one of the few professions open to single women, and Ruth ran a

“Dame’s School.” According to town memory, Ruth taught girls in the back room of the Buckminster house (where Gov. Mattock’s house was later built). The room had two windows, and seats for 10–12 pupils.

Girls were admitted to the Academy in 1803–5; Ruth’s students may have been academically able girls who wanted to continue their education.

Elsie Choate (November 27, 1880–March 16, 1959)

*Played by Ellen Bartlett*



Elsie Choate was the daughter of Charles Choate and his first wife, Alice Watts. The Choate Family began living in the Corner House in the village in the 1840’s and bought it in 1856. They owned it until Elsie died in 1959.

Elsie attended Wellesley College and returned to Peacham to teach at the Peacham Corner School (the building is now incorporated into fire department). We know she taught at least two years, 1913–1914. She never married.

Elsie did not remain a schoolteacher her entire life. In the twentieth century, Peacham enjoyed a modest reputation as a site for guesthouses offering clean, fresh air, beautiful views and wonderful home cooking. In 1931, with Alzina Esden, Elsie opened the well-regarded Choate Inn, which took in guests on and off for 20 years.



### ONE-ROOM SCHOOL ALUMNI/AE

Paul Chandler: East Peacham School

Lorna Quimby: South Part School

Allen Thresher, Sr.: South Peacham School, Green Bay School

Lois White: Green Bay School

*Dart Thalman, Moderator*