

One-Room Wonders: The Common Schools of Peacham

Peacham is unusual in having so many of its one-room schools—8 from 14 districts—still standing. Some are private homes now, one is incorporated into the Fire Department, and one stands empty and ready for adoption. These buildings inspired us to investigate this part of our history more carefully. We are fortunate to have records from three districts, plus town records concerning school attendance and financial support. The information presented below was compiled by Susan Chandler, PHA Board Vice-President, from these records, and presents a fuller picture than we have had before. It is, as is all history, an incomplete and evolving story, and we encourage visitors to help us add and correct our information!

Historical Background

Vermonters in general and Peacham villagers in particular have historically placed a great value on education; both the Vermont constitution and the town charter provided for schools. Peacham was not only the site of a robust set of common schools—schools for every child to attend from a very young age through teenage years—but also the site of the county grammar school, an upper level school for children from anywhere in Caledonia County.

Common schools started as very informal gatherings in private homes. These slowly developed into a more formal network of centrally administered and supervised schools, the one-room schools as we think of them today: children of all ages taught together by one person in one room. During its nearly 200-year history in Peacham, however, the nature of these one-room schools changed significantly. Early schools were governed by independent district boards. They were ungraded and no special training was required to be a teacher. 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 across all schools for teacher preparation and evaluation, attendance, curriculum, the school calendar, and buildings and materials.

In 1787, Vermont authorized towns to establish school districts. The earliest mention of schools in Peacham's Town Meeting occurred the same year; they recorded a tax of 30 bushels of wheat "to hire a school." We know there was an actual physical school by 1794, because the Town Meeting

was recorded as having been held in the "Centre School House." Townspeople could apply to selectmen to form a district, and the number and location of these districts tracked the ebb and flow of the town's 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 point of highest numbers was not necessarily the highpoint educationally. During the next 120 years there were many improvements in teacher preparation and support, curriculum, and facilities. When the last one-room schoolhouse closed after the 1968 school year, people were excited about the new consolidated Peacham School, but regretted the end of the intimate atmosphere provided by these "one-room wonders."

Peacham School Districts

PHA is fortunate to have two volumes of original District School Ledgers spanning from 1811 to 1871. These ledgers contain financial records for the various districts, and the records are an accounting of how town funding appropriated by the selectmen was to be divided among the schools. The budget records were dated for the third week in March, when town meeting day used to be held.

Each year, the school districts were listed and recorded, including a census of the number of students. Students included were between the ages of 4 and 18. There were totals provided for the number of Peacham school students, as well as the number of students who attended schools outside of Peacham. These records do not include the names of students. In 1861, student numbers were fractionalized (e.g. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$) and the following year, in 1862, the yearly census numbers were discontinued.

Over the course of the 60 year span, the name of the treasurer (trustee) overseeing the full school system was listed, such as Samuel Chandler, Thomas Eastman and Dr. John M. Martin. In each man's handwritten script allocations and receipts were shown for individual district school spending. Also included for each year was the name of a designated collector for each district, and the person receiving the funds had to sign in his own hand. It is unclear what the collector's responsibility was. It may have been for upkeep and management of each school. It is also unclear whether teacher salaries were included in the amount

provided to each collector. No individual teacher salaries appeared in the record, although salary payments to the treasurer were listed.

There were accounting lists of numerous payments for land leases, and a further study of this information by matching the names to land records, deeds and maps could reveal specific locations for school houses.

The school appropriations for each year vary considerably, and were not proportional to the number of students. The lowest amount allocated was in 1821 with \$142 for 501 students, down from the 1811 first recorded budget of \$180 for 487 students. By 1825 the budget was up to \$262 (477 students) and by 1832 the budget was \$409 (506 students).

School districts shown on the 1875 Beers map vary from the earlier districts listed in the record. Districts were originally larger, then split and fractionalized into smaller units when there was a need for additional schools. In some cases, separate districts were joined together when the student population decreased. The fractional districts shown on the 1875 Beers map do not appear to represent districts that are fractions linked with neighboring towns; rather they reflect the adding and subtracting of land from earlier Peacham districts.

District 1-Peacham Corner Student Census

Year	# Students
1811	131
1812	137
1814	143
1817	128
1820	104
1822	125
1824	107
1828	93
1829	90
1835	88
1836	94
1838	87
1847	68
1853	62
1856	63
1861	28 1/2

District 1 Peacham Corner (c.1794-1933)

District 1 was referred to as the Center District, also called the Central District. In 1868 the name was changed to the Corner District. This was the most populous district of the five established in 1800. The location of the first schoolhouse is not known. The second building, c. 1820, exists today as the Historical House on Church Street; it was

used as a school until a new schoolhouse was built in 1835. The third building opened in 1835 with 88 students; by 1859, it had only 51 students, and eventually closed in 1933.

This building is the west part of the current Fire Department.

District 2 –South Part

Year	# in Peacham	# Sent to Barnet
1811	80	
1812	76	
1814	43	
1817	33	
1820	45	
1822	33	
1824	29	
1828	26	10
1829	26	8
1835	23	5
1836	32	5
1838	26	6
1847	10	5
1853	12	Left blank in book
1856	13	7
1861	9 1/4	9

District 2 South Part (c. 1794-1937)

District 2 (originally called district 4 in 1800) was referred to as the “Southwestern District.” It was split in 1814, and became known as the “Southeast Division of the Southwestern District,” and “South District.” In 1868 the district became known as “South Part.” This district started in 1794, and had 80 students by 1810. In 1859 the number of students had declined to 17. The original school house was replaced in the 1880s, and was described by Peacham resident Lorna Quimby as “a small one-room school, with outside privy, woodstove for heat, and no running water. It also had a small library on one side of the hallway and a cloakroom. A room in the lean-to housed the drinking pail and wash basin.”

The building is currently used as a private residence.

District 3 –South Peacham

Year	# Students
1811	77
1812	71
1814	71
1817	69
1820	78
1822	58
1824	46
1828	71
1829	75
1835	59
1836	68
1838	58
1847	68
1853	62
1856	69
1861	34 1/2

District 3 South Peacham (By 1800-1968)

From 1811 to 1860, District No. 3 was referred to as “South-eastern District.” In 1861 the name was changed to “Water Street District. Referred to early on as the “log school-house,” a later frame building was one of the 5 constructed in the 1800 districting. As late as the 1930’s the school did not have electricity; kerosene lanterns were used. And even into the 1960’s there was an outhouse, with boys’ and girls’ entrances, and a primitive water supply which froze in the winter

This school burned in 1968 and was demolished.

District 4 East Hill

Year	# Students
1811	95
1812	75
1814	82
1817	80
1820	93
1822	87
1824	85
1828	79
1829	67
1835	75
1836	72
1838	74
1847	43

1853	52
1856	44
1861	16 /2

District 4 East Hill (By 1800-1940)

From 1811 to 1860, District No. 4 was referred to as “North-eastern District.” In 1861 the name was changed to “East District.” This location was often the first posting for new teachers, and they did not often choose to stay. A former student remembers having had five teachers in one year.

After the school closed, the building was taken down, moved, and used as a summer house in Ticklenaked Pond in Ryegate.

District 5- Penny Street

Year	# students
1811	59
1812	59
1814	61
1817	64
1820	54
1822	66
1824	52
1828	51
1829	48
1835	34
1836	34
1838	31
1847	23
1853	26
1856	21
1861	6 1/4

District 5 Penny Street (By 1800-1937)

District 5 was referred to as the “North District” from 1811 to 1861. In 1862 the record name changes to “Penny Street District.” It was missing from the yearly record from 1868 to 1870. In 1871, it was again listed with the district name “A.G. Bickfords.” This district was settled early in the town’s history, and its school was one of the more heavily attended with 75 scholars listed for 1810.

The earliest school building dates to the early 1800s. In 1828 a second structure was built, and it was replaced in 1860. Originally water had to be supplied from the next farm. A former student remembers it was so cold in the winter that ink froze in the inkwells.

The 1860 structure still stands. It is currently a summer residence.

District 6- Mack's Mountain

Year	# Students
1811	45
1812	53
1814	53
1817	41
1820	39
1822	39
1824	35
1828	32
1829	31
1835	35
1836	27
1838	25
1847	12
1853	10
1856	12
1861	10 3/4

District 6 Mack's Mountain (Dates uncertain)

District 6 was referred to as "Northwestern." In 1862 the name was changed to "Mountain District," and by 1869 the district was no longer listed by name although funding still is recorded to at least 1872. Students were likely sent to a neighboring school in Cabot after 1869. The school appears in 3 different locations along Mack Mountain Road during the 19th century. Some schools were physically moved into new locations as student population clusters in a district changed.

We do not have a description, verified location or photograph of this school.

District 7- North Part

Year	# in Peacham	# Sent to Cabot
1811	Not yet listed	
1812	74	
1814	58	
1817	63	
1820	61	
1822	54	
1824	59	
1828	54	
1829	52	
1835	64	
1836	72	
1838	55	

1847	44	
1853	43	
1856	36	
1861		2

District 7 North Part near West Danville (1812-1931)

District No.7 was formed in 1812 and was named the "Gore District." This district was added following the addition of Deweysburg to Peacham. It originally did not include the Cow Hill area, which was a separate district.

In 1862 the name was changed to "Lang District", and in 1863-1865 it was referred to simply as "Lang's." In 1868, it was called "John Ways", and from 1869 to 1871 it was referred to as "Whitings." District 7 also sent students to Cabot in 1861. The Cow Hill portion of District 7 was the original District No. 10, and when it was combined into District No. 7 in 1861, the two remaining students from Cow Hill were sent to Cabot. The districts were named as fractional districts following 1861. The school was in use until 1931 and was a small one-room structure with various wooden outbuildings. It was later converted into a private residence with a second story and permanent foundation added. Maurice Chandler remembered this school having been moved up and down the Bayley Hazen Road, and was once located across from his sugarhouse, near the old road to the Woodard Cemetery.

The schoolhouse serves as a private residence today.

District #8- Green Bay

Year	# in Peacham
1811	Not yet listed
1812	Not listed
1814	38
1817	40
1820	28
1822	24
1824	No # listed
1828	19
1829	18
1835	17
1836	12
1838	16
1847	16
1853	25
1856	27
1861	31 1/2

District 8 Green Bay (1814-1952)

District 8 was formed in 1814. It was called "South Division of No.2." It was part of the original 1811 district No.2 which

was divided in 1814. In 1820 the district was simply called “By David Martons.” From 1822 to 1828, District 8 was referred to as the “Southwest Division of No.2”. In 1829, it was referred to as “Southwest.” In 1836 District 8 was given the name “West” until 1868. From 1868 to 1871 the district was listed simply as “Orin Martin’s” and “Orrin Martin’s.”

The Green Bay schoolhouse was also known as the Hand Schoolhouse, likely because the land was donated by a farmer named Hand around 1820. The current remaining schoolhouse was built around 1840 and had a divided outhouse (separate areas for boys and girls) with a covered walkway. It had three traditional windows on both sides, and the northwest windows were covered by blackboards in the 19th century; it was thought that light coming in from two different directions stained students’ eyes.

The schoolhouse serves as a private residence today.

District 9- East Peacham

Year	# in Peacham
1828	35
1829	42
1835	64
1836	58
1838	60
1847	51
1853	51
1856	35
1861	23 3/4

District 9 East Peacham (1828-1968)

District 9 was formed in 1826, but district school records list students beginning in 1828. It may have been part of District No.1 prior to this date, but the records are not clear. It was always called the “Hollow.” The original building was a simple 20 x 26-foot structure, and was replaced with the current existing building in 1858. It served as a schoolhouse for 100 years.

It was converted into a private residence.

District 10- Cow Hill Area

Year	# in Peacham	# to Cabot
1835	27	
1836	28	
1838	22	
1847	16	
1853	18	
1856	12	

1861	listed, no student #	2 students sent to Cabot under District # 7 which is combining w/#10
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District 10 Cow Hill Area (1835-1860)

District 10 was formed in 1835 and had a short life. It was named “Cow Hill” and was recorded with this name until 1860. It appears to be one half of the 1875 fractured District No.7, and it was added to “Gore District” No. 7 in 1861.

The map in People of Peacham shows the location of the school as a cellar hole along the road running between the two peaks of Cow Hill. No descriptions or photographs have been found for this school.

District 11- Peacham Pond and Separately, Rake Factory Area

Year	# in Peacham	To Barnet
1836	31	
1838	37	
1847	10	
1853	25	
1856	21	
1859	13	11
1860	No students listed	

District 11 Peacham Pond and Separately, Rake Factory Area (1836-1860)

District 11 was formed in 1836 and was called “Town Farm.” It was listed in the records until 1859 when it was no longer recorded. The 1875 Beers map shows District 11 as fractured and in the area of Onion River Pond (Peacham Pond) and in a small area of northeast Peacham where the Warden and Batchelder Rake Factory was located.

The Town Farm was located near Fosters Pond in District 8, and District 11 may have had additional acreage extending out to this location. On the 1875 Beer’s map, the Town Farm can be seen just beyond the upper right corner of District 11, just outside the boundary line.

Bogart states that the district was split between District 6 and 8 in 1859. The district outline still appears on maps, but he believes the remaining students were sent to District 6 (Mack Mountain) and District 8 (Green Bay.) Additionally, based on the student census numbers, we can surmise that students living near Peacham Pond were likely sent to the New Discovery schoolhouse in Marshfield after 1859. No schoolhouse is listed after 1860.

The Rake Factory and Saw Mill area near Danville was obviously added to this district and may have originally been a separate district number. The small fractured district does not fit with the original description. The large num-

ber of students assigned to Barnet from District 11 in 1859 may reference the addition of the Rake Factory fractional district. School records show that payments for students continue thru 1872 for students sent to Barnet.

We do not have a description or photograph of school buildings in this district.

District 12- Ewells Hollow

Year	# in Peacham	To Barnet
1836	31	
1838	37	
1847	10	
1853	25	
1856	21	
1859	13	11

District 12 Present Day Ewells Hollow Area (1838-1963)

District 12 was formed in 1836 as "Mud Pond." From 1840 to 1860 it was listed as "Mill Pond", and from 1862-1868 it was listed as "Ewells." The original schoolhouse still stands on the Peacham Danville Road, and is located on a hill above Ewell's Hollow. It was built as a post and beam structure with Greek revival details, and a private privy with covered walkway. It has an unusually deep basement. It serves as a private residence today.

District 13- New Discovery Park in Groton State Forest

Year	# in Peacham
1846	7
1847	8
1848	8
1849	No # students
1850	7
1851	No # students
1852	4
1853	0

District 13 Present Day New Discovery Park in Groton State Forest (1847-1856)

District 13 is a bit of a mystery. It was formed in 1847 and was likely fractured off from a larger district adjacent to it. The district was formed with the name "Oregon," alternately spelled as "Orragon" and "Oragan." It was listed in the district school records from 1847 to 1856 when the record states "no returns." It likely meant no returning students. This was the area also called New Discovery. The payee for the school appropriation from 1846 to 1848 was listed as James M. Heath. Rootweb genealogical records show him to be born July 25, 1810 in Newbury VT, having a wife named Jane and 4 children. He is buried in the Groton

Village Cemetery. He "received the property from his father James who was listed on Lot 28, 3rd division of Peacham." In 1850 the payee was Willard Southwick. Currently there is no record for him, but the Southwick name appears in adjacent Marshfield records during the late 19th century. The final 1852 payee was listed as Elijah Rickard. Genealogical records (from on-line Rootweb sources) show this family name to also be spelled "Ricord." "P. Ricord" was listed on the Walling map, living on Little Osmore Pond in 1858. The school district remained listed in the record until 1859, but the student number and payee name were left blank. After 1859 the district was no longer written in the records.

Note: The question arises as to where the name "Oregon" came from.

In a 2004 article for the Oregon Historical Quarterly, it is cited that "the name first appears in a 1765 petition to King George III by Robert Rogers, a colonial military officer. Rogers refers to the Ouragon River, saying it is an Indian name for the famed, but yet-to-be-seen-by-Europeans river of the west that would come to be known as the Columbia River." Thomas Love and Smithsonian linguist Ives Goddard argue that Rogers chose the word based on exposure to either of the Algonquian words wauregan and olighin, both meaning "good and beautiful". The name could also be from the Connecticut-English pidgin word wauregan, meaning beautiful.

A possible explanation is that this area was considered remote and beautiful, and early colonists in Peacham used the Algonquin or Connecticut-English "slang" word to describe this isolated school district.

We do not have a description, verified location or photograph of this school.

District 14-Goss District

Year	# in Peacham
1847	10
1848	12
1856	8
1861	4

District 14 Goss District (1847-1863)

The last district was formed in 1847 with no name, and in 1848 was listed as "Gofs District" using old English script for the name. It continued until 1863, and in some years was simply listed as "Goss." The payee was listed as "Ashley Goss" and then "Albert Goss." This district may have been separated from the eastern edge of fractionalized District 7 or from the northern portion of district 4, and then merged back. We do not have a description, verified location or photograph of this school.

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