The Improvement of District School Buildings

in New Hampshire

James L. Garvin

New Hampshire Historical Society

The schools that first appeared in the Colonial Era and continued to shape life in New Hampshire arose largely from legislation that laid a foundation for life in an agrarian society. In this historical analysis, James Garvin compares and contrasts laws that were passed from c. 1800 to c. 1920 to provide quality of public schooling throughout the state. Garvin's analysis is useful for anyone who wants to learn how ubiquitous institutions like school districts and school boards came into being. New Hampshire's efforts to improve education under a system of local school districts and one-room schoolhouses mirror similar initiatives in all the New England states and beyond.

—Eds.

Introduction

From the early years of the nineteenth century until after the Civil War, almost all public elementary education in New Hampshire was provided in one-room district schoolhouses that were located at sites that were convenient for the children of various neighborhoods. Under a series of New Hampshire laws passed in 1805, 1808, 1825, 1827, and later, the construction, repair, and staffing of the district schools were the responsibility of the individual school district to which each building belonged. These districts were required to choose their own clerks and keep their own records independently of the town selectmen or town clerk.

Since the 1600s, the basic political unit in New England has been the town, a chartered, self-governing entity that derived its powers from royal authority or, if incorporated after the Revolution, from the state legislature. In New Hampshire, as in most other New England states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, towns were governed by the town meeting, which was (and remains) the legislative body that approved expenditures, set tax rates, and approved ordinances. Towns were administered on an ongoing basis by an elected board of selectmen and by other elected officials who were responsible for tax collection, highway maintenance, verification of weights and measures, enforcement of the laws, and the like. After passage of a law in 1686, when New Hampshire consisted of only four towns, towns were specifically empowered to hire a town minister and a schoolmaster.[1] Prior to 1805, as authorized by this and later laws, local schools were directly managed by town government.

In 1805, a state "Act Empowering School-districts to Build and Repair School houses and Regulating Schools" introduced concepts such as "school districts," "rights of residents," "school

---

[1] "Bounds and Powers of Towns &c," June 8, 1686. *Laws of New Hampshire*, 1:115-16; "An Act for Maintenance & Suppley of the Ministrey [and Schools] within this Province," August 5, 1693, ibid., 560-61. New Hampshire towns continued to employ the minister of the town-established or "orthodox" church, usually Congregational, until passage of the "Toleration Act" in 1819. For the Toleration Act, see *Laws of New Hampshire,* 8:820-821, and Charles B. Kinney Jr., *Church and State: The Struggle for Separation in New Hampshire, 1630-1900* (New York: Columbia University Teachers College, 1955).

funding," etc., thus laying the groundwork for systems of schools. The statute also provided language that was repeated in general form in later laws. Of particular importance, the statute of 1805 divided each town into separate, self-funded school districts for the first time. The statute authorized the town meeting to create school districts and define their boundaries, authorized each school district to levy taxes to locate, build, furnish, and repair a schoolhouse under the supervision of a district committee, and required the election of a district clerk who was charged with keeping a record of all votes passed within the district. Significantly, the law provided that monies for these purposes be raised by taxes on "estates" within the district, and that the benefits of each district school be restricted to the residents of the district.[2]

In 1808, the legislature passed "An Act for the Better Regulation of Schools, and for Repealing Certain Laws now in force Respecting the Same."[3] While the law of 1805 had defined methods of locating, funding, and building schoolhouses, the law of 1808 defined the qualifications of teachers in those district schools and established procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching in each. In an age before the establishment of normal schools, the law provided that "that no person shall be deemed qualified to teach any such school, unless he or she procure a certificate from some able and reputable English grammar school master and learned minister of the gospel, or preceptor of some academy, or president, professor or tutor of some college, that he or she is well qualified to teach such school."

The statute of 1808 further required each town to appoint a committee of three or more persons charged with the annual inspection of schools in all the town districts in order to ensure that teaching was "conducive to the progress of literature, morality and religion." The principle of mandating a town committee charged with inspecting and evaluating district schools was elaborated in 1827 by a law that required each town to appoint a "superintending school committee" of three to five persons who would examine and evaluate teachers (and dismiss any teacher found to be unfit), inspect each district school in their town, recommend the best

---

[2] "An Act Empowering School-districts to Build and Repair School houses and Regulating Schools," December 28, 1805, *Laws of New Hampshire*, 7:4, 67-69.

[3] "An Act for the Better Regulation of Schools, and for Repealing Certain Laws now in force Respecting the Same," December 22, 1808, *Laws of New Hampshire*, 7:771-73.

textbooks (ascertaining that the chosen books shall "never . . . favour any particular religious sect or tenet"), and submit a written annual report.[4]

The division of towns into self-governing and self-funded school districts was satisfactory during the period of rural New Hampshire's increasing prosperity and population growth in the first half of the nineteenth century, but became increasingly unworkable during the age of farm abandonment and rural depopulation following the Civil War. The principle of independent school districts remained in effect in New Hampshire until 1885, when the pervasive problem of farm abandonment threatened to end the traditional agricultural economy of much of New England. Rural depopulation caused a catastrophic loss of tax revenue and impoverished many sparsely populated school districts, greatly reducing the quality of schooling in these areas.

In 1885, New Hampshire state statutes eliminated self-governing local school districts, made each town a single school district (as had been the case before the statute of 1805), and authorized the creation of supervisory unions that would give a single superintendent oversight of the schools of several towns.[5] This signaled the beginning of an era of change in school governance that spelled the eventual end of the rural district schoolhouse.

This article is based on an investigation of legislation that affected the design of district schoolhouses in New Hampshire from c. 1800 to c. 1920 and on the examination of a number of surviving school buildings from the 1800s, most of which had been remodeled in the early 1900s in response to later requirements. Early in this period, district or one-room schoolhouses were notorious for their lack of consistent design, construction, and upkeep; indeed, many school buildings in poorer districts were regarded as shameful reflections on a society that seemed to place little value on the comfort and health of its children. This study examines key issues related to district school building conditions over time, some of which are mentioned only once in New Hampshire legislation, while others are repeated and elaborated. Legislation, books, and state-level recommendations may be seen as windows into community values and concerns that were held by New Hampshire residents during the rise of the district school in the 1800s and its decline in the early 1900s. By 1920, the use of district school buildings was beginning to be discontinued in favor of transporting rural students to consolidated and graded schoolhouses in

---

[4] "An Act for the Support and Regulation of Primary Schools," July 6, 1827, *Laws of New Hampshire*, 9:661-65.

[5] Chapter 43, Laws of 1885.

central locations, increasingly using motor vehicles as a means of transportation. This article does not analyze the development of consolidated schoolhouses, a subject that is considered as a separate chapter in educational history.[6]

Mediocre and Model Schoolhouses

Despite the provisions of the laws, and partly because of the widely varying resources of the independent and self-funded school districts, the condition of schoolhouses throughout New Hampshire, and New England in general, was generally very poor before the mid-1800s. The squalid and unhealthful condition of these buildings elicited a general, region-wide outpouring of condemnation and progressive literature, culminating in the 1840s in a widespread reform movement throughout New England.[7]

State government in New Hampshire began to take an official interest in schoolhouse architecture in the 1840s. Even before this time, critics had begun to draw attention to the shameful condition of some district schoolhouses in New England. In 1832, the American Institute of Instruction of Massachusetts announced a competition for the best "Essay on the Construction of School-Houses," awarding the prize to Connecticut educator and prolific author William A. Alcott, who indicted "the many dark, crowded, ill-looking and *sometimes* disorderly and filthy huts to be found in the country, called, or rather *mis*-called school-houses."[8] Alcott's essay touched upon the proper location, dimensions, furnishings, blackboards, heating, lighting, ventilation, cleanliness, and playgrounds of the schoolhouse. He concluded that "evidence is

---

[6] See, for example, Paul W. Bennett, "School Consolidation in Maritime Canada: The Education Legacy of Edgar L. Morphet and His Disciples," *Country School Journal* 5 (2017): 33-47.

[7] *[First] Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools to the Legislature of New Hampshire, June Session, 1847* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth Press, 1847). Commissioner of Common Schools Charles Haddock condemned "multitudes" of schoolhouses throughout New Hampshire that were "absolutely dangerous to health and morals." For an extended discussion of the common faults of nineteenth-century New England schoolhouses, see Catherine Fennelly, *Town Schooling in Early New England, 1790-1840* (Sturbridge, Massachusetts: Old Sturbridge Village, 1962).

[8] William Andrus Alcott, *Essay on the Construction of School-Houses* . . . (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins, 1832): 6. The appendix to this nineteen-page essay includes specifications by the Rev. William C. Woodbridge, previously the first principal of Phillips Exeter Academy, for the proper size, layout, and ventilation of schoolrooms.

everywhere afforded, that in constructing and furnishing [schoolhouses], we too often consult our own convenience, rather than the comfort, welfare, or accommodation of our children."[9]

In 1846, the New Hampshire legislature passed a statute that had been introduced by Charles B. Haddock, professor of intellectual philosophy at Dartmouth College and a member of the legislature, establishing the position of State Commissioner of Common Schools. Professor Haddock was appointed the first commissioner. In his first annual report, published in 1847, Haddock placed strong emphasis on the defects of schoolhouses throughout the state, lamenting "the multitudes of [school]houses, in the State . . . inconveniently located, and awkwardly planned, . . and this in places, where private taste is adorning the town with ornaments of architecture and enriching the country with the fruits of rural industry."[10] He continued, "It is, however, encouraging to find, that a better feeling is coming to prevail on this subject. Many districts are rebuilding, and, in most instances, upon an improved plan. . . . If the architecture is neat, and the grounds tastefully laid out . . . not only will the house answer the essential purpose of health and comfort, but prove a material auxiliary in elevating the minds and correcting the habits of those who receive their education in it."[11]

Subsequent reports by the second Commissioner of Common Schools, Richard Sutton Rust, included drawings of model school buildings from throughout the state, or reproduced illustrations and text from the new and influential book *School Architecture*, written by Henry Barnard, Rhode Island's commissioner of public schools.[12] In July 1849, to encourage the improvement of district schoolhouses across New Hampshire, the legislature authorized the purchase and distribution of a copy of Barnard's volume to the town clerk in each town to encourage the improvement of schools.[13]

---

[9] Ibid. See also William A. Alcott, *A Historical Description of the First Public School in Hartford, Conn. . . .With a Particular Account of Its Methods of Instruction and Discipline, Accompanied by General Remarks on Common Schools* (Hartford, Connecticut: D. F. Robinson, 1832).
[10] *[First] Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools to the Legislature of New Hampshire*, 1847, 13-14.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Henry Barnard, *School Architecture; or, Contributions to the Improvement of School-houses in the United States* [first ed.] (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1848). Some of the material in *School Architecture* first appeared in Barnard's *School-house Architecture* (Hartford, Connecticut: Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1842); see Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *American Architectural Books* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1946).
[13] Chapter 905, *Laws of the State of New Hampshire Passed June Session 1849* (Concord, New Hampshire: John F. Brown, 1849), 426.

The efforts of commissioners Haddock and Rust in New Hampshire were parts of a New England-wide campaign of educational reform in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Commissioner Henry Barnard led these efforts in Rhode Island; Horace Mann pioneered reform in Massachusetts; and the influence of these two reformers in neighboring states was transformative. In both states, as in New Hampshire, sound design, construction, and furnishing of schoolhouses were defined as essential adjuncts to pedagogical reform.[14]

Many of the schoolhouse designs in Barnard's *School Architecture* were drawn by Rhode Island architect Thomas A. Tefft and followed the highly romantic and picturesque architectural concepts then being offered to a receptive American public by the architectural writer and horticulturist Andrew Jackson Downing in his influential book, *Cottage Residences* (1842).[15] Undoubtedly sensing that New Hampshire school district committees were not ready to build in the Romanesque, Gothic, or Italianate styles expressed in Tefft's designs, Commissioner Rust offered homelier models drawn from his own state. The perspective views and floor plans of two one-room schoolhouses that Rust illustrated in the third commissioner's report of 1849 (one building in Dublin and another in Greenland, New Hampshire), were intended to provide plain but tasteful templates for model school buildings (Figures 1-4). The floor plans of these buildings were provided with keys that explained each schoolroom fixture to committee members who were perhaps unaccustomed to interpreting architectural plans.[16]

These two model schoolhouses, as illustrated in the *Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools* of 1849, employed a gable end as the building's façade, placing the doors and windows on that front in a symmetrical manner. Treatment of the gable end as the building's façade allowed these structures to reflect in a basic way the general fashion of the then-prevalent Greek Revival architectural style, which endeavored to suggest, if not

---

[14] See, for example, Horace Mann, *Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education on the Subject of School Houses, Supplementary to His First Annual Report* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1838).
[15] David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852*, 2d ed. (Amherst, Massachusetts: Library of American Landscape History/University of Massachusetts Press, 2015); Leslie DeAngela Dees, "The Architectural Expression of School Reform" in *Thomas Alexander Tefft: American Architecture in Transition, 1845-1860* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, 1988).
[16] *Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools to the Legislature of New Hampshire, June Session, 1849* (Concord, New Hampshire: Butterfield and Hill, 1849).

replicate, the front of a Greek temple.[17] This was a convenient plan as well as a stylish one, inasmuch as it allowed the wide and well-lighted entry of a schoolhouse to be partitioned off from the schoolroom as a cloak room and a buffer against drafts from the door[s] of the building, as seen in the plan of the Greenland schoolhouse, which is a brick building that still stands in altered condition.

These model plans contrasted in many ways with the schoolhouse designs that had prevailed in New Hampshire before the mid-1800s. A simpler, smaller, and previously more commonplace schoolhouse plan utilized the long elevation of a school building as the front. Instead of placing the entrance in the center of this façade, these once-common buildings placed the door near the right or left end of the building, providing a long, narrow entry or vestibule that extended through the depth of the building inside the door, often lighted only by a transom sash over the door or by a small side window. These long hallways served as cloak rooms and probably were sometimes subdivided by partitions for firewood storage. They served the necessary function of buffering the heated schoolroom from the cold air and winds of winter. One good representative of a schoolhouse with such a plan is the preserved District No. 11 building at Jaffrey Center, New Hampshire (Figure 5). Another, displaying the now-rare hipped roof of the early 1800s, once stood in Dunbarton, New Hampshire (Figure 6).

The plan of the Dublin schoolhouse (Figure 2) provides a small diagram of a recommended type of school bench in an era before manufactured desks and chairs were commonplace. The Jaffrey building preserves such desks (Figure 7), as does a schoolhouse that was moved from Candia, New Hampshire, to Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts and restored in 1955.[18]

While the *Fourth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools* (1850) included a section providing "Plans and Descriptions of School-Houses, Recently erected in Rhode Island," from Barnard's *School Architecture*, New Hampshire school district officials were probably more interested in Barnard's illustrations of practical innovations such as iron-framed desks in various sizes to accommodate pupils of different ages and heights (Figure 8*)* and descriptions of approved blackboards, terrestrial globes, maps, and school library collections. In an age when

---

[17] The Greek Revival style became prevalent in New England around 1830 and continued as the dominant architectural style for most building types until the increasing influence of Andrew Jackson Downing's popular books began to inspire a taste for English Gothic and Italianate buildings around 1850.
[18] For pictures of the Candia schoolhouse as preserved at Old Sturbridge Village, see Catherine Fennelly, *Town Schooling in Early New England*, 24, 28.

fireplaces (Figure 9) were rapidly being supplanted by air-tight cast-iron stoves for warming houses and public buildings, Barnard's book introduced improved ventilating stoves (Figure 10), which brought fresh air from outside the building and warmed and circulated it throughout the classroom. The introduction of warmed fresh air was of intense interest in an age characterized by anxiety over the poisonous effects of "vitiated" air in overheated rooms filled with carbon dioxide, then called "carbonic acid."[19]

More Legislative Action for Schoolhouse Improvements

In 1867, the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction supplanted that of the New Hampshire Commissioner of Common Schools, but the Superintendent continued to submit annual reports to the legislature as had the Commissioner of Common Schools since 1847. The Laws of 1867, including the *Act Providing for a Superintendent of Public Instruction,* made the New Hampshire Governor and Executive Council the official Board of Education for the state and defined the Superintendent of Public Instruction as an employee of the Governor and Council. His duties were similar to those of the former Commissioner of Common Schools.[20]

New statewide legislation was passed in 1885. Returning to a principle that had been universal before the statute of 1805 had created independent, self-supporting school districts, the 1885 law stipulated that the construction, maintenance, and staffing of town schools were the responsibility of a single town-wide school district in each town, rather than of the separate neighborhood districts as before. Theoretically, this change equalized the availability of school funding throughout an entire town. Rather than returning the direct administration of the schools

---

[19] In his *Essay on the Construction of School-Houses* (1832), William Alcott devoted much attention to the problem of vitiated air, as did the Rev. William Woodbridge in a companion essay in the same publication. For more on this subject, see Gavin Townsend, "Airborne Toxins in the American House, 1865-1895," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24 (Spring 1989): 29-42.

[20] *Act Providing for a Superintendent of Public Instruction,* Chapter 6, Laws of 1867 (June Session). This law defined the duties of the Superintendent of Public Instruction as similar to those of the former Commissioner of Common Schools. For a broad overview of New Hampshire legislation affecting education, school governance, and school buildings, see Everett S. Stackpole, *History of New Hampshire*, 5 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, [1916-17]), 3, 209-18; and George Gary Bush, *History of Education in New Hampshire*, United States Bureau of Education Circular of Education, No. 3, 1898 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898).

to town government, which had been the case before 1805, the statute of 1885 gave the town-wide school district governing authority over the schools.[21]

Unlike the early nineteenth century, which was a period of ever-expanding rural settlement and population growth, the late 1800s were a time of contraction and depopulation in rural New England. The abandoned farm, vacated as valueless, became the discouraging symbol of the end of the agricultural era in much of New England.[22] Tax revenues in towns and independent rural school districts began an inexorable decline, leaving many schools starved both for students and revenues to hire good teachers. The principle of transforming an entire town into a single school district was intended to permit towns to consolidate depopulated districts as well as to equalize funding for those reconstituted districts.[23]

The Superintendent of Public Instruction issued the sixtieth report on the public schools of New Hampshire in 1918.[24] This comprehensive communication included a list of standards for school buildings, classifying structures as "unsuitable," "passable," and "model" buildings, as described below. The list was separately sent in the form of a letter to every school board throughout the state.[25]

Based on these recommendations for new and remodeled school buildings, the report made special recommendations for rural schools, finding that of the 1,000 rural one-room schoolhouses then in New Hampshire, 500 were "unsuitable" for school use, 400 were "passable," and only 100 were "model buildings." Despite the schoolhouse reform efforts of more than half a century, the 1918 report condemned many of the schoolhouses then in use as "inflicting upon this generation poor eyesight, digestive disorders, and pulmonary defects, as results from poorly lighted, ill-ventilated and unsanitary schools." As this was written during World War I, part of this situation could be attributed to "the cessation of building construction during the war."[26]

---

[21] Chapter 43, Laws of 1885.
[22] Donna-Belle Garvin and James L. Garvin, *On the Road North of Boston: New Hampshire Taverns and Turnpikes, 1700-1900,* 2nd ed., (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2003), 179-83.
[23] Bush, *History of Education in New Hampshire*, 35-37.
[24] *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Being the Sixtieth Report upon the Public Schools of New Hampshire* (Concord, New Hampshire: Evans Printing Co., 1918), 207-208.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 203.

To begin to remedy these ills, the 1918 report recommended the distribution of several state publications. [27] It especially focused on the unsanitary condition of school outhouses, noting that "minimum requirements of decency were published by the State Board of Health and the Department of Public Instruction," listing principles of privy design and maintenance that would ensure wholesome facilities, and making every teacher "absolutely responsible" for their proper condition. [28]

The Superintendent's list of recommendations, as sent to school boards throughout New Hampshire in 1918, stated that each town-wide school district "should designate one schoolhouse each year for complete renovation and secure an appropriation for this purpose." The Superintendent reasoned, "It is very much better to make satisfactory one building each year and to continue until all are fit than to make each year minor repairs in several buildings."[29] He explained that since many towns were abandoning district schools in sparsely inhabited rural areas and conveying students to the remaining one-room schoolhouses in more populated neighborhoods, it was to be expected that those surviving schoolhouses that remained in use the longest would show evidence of the improvements that were recommended in 1918 and immediately thereafter. The ten requirements for "model" school buildings, as stated in 1918, were:

1. Sufficient light [provided] entirely from curtained windows on the pupils' left or left and rear [sides] only.
2. Sufficient heat and ventilation. Where there is no furnace, this should be provided by a ventilating stove (Figure 10).
3. Floors of hard wood.
4. Adjustable chairs and desks or those of varied sizes. In small rooms, free tables and desks are recommended.
5. Slate or composition [black]boards.
6. Provision for manual training and domestic science.
7. Decent toilets with latticed connection to schoolroom.

---

[27] Departmental circulars No. 22, "The One-Room School House"; No. 60, "Model One-Room School"; and No. 11, "An Inexpensive Ventilating Stove."
[28] *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction* (1918), 205-207.
[29] Ibid., 207-208.

8. Separate cloak rooms.
9. Individual water supply.
10. Suitable flag and appurtenances.[30]

Notable among the other changes required by these rules was a specification for increasing the natural light in schoolrooms through the provision of enlarged windows that were to be provided with curtains. This specification usually resulted in the installation of a bank of windows on one side of any rural schoolhouse that remained in use after 1918. An illustration of this adaptation can be seen in the District No. 5 schoolhouse in South Newbury, NH (now a community center called "Friendship House") (Figures 10 and 11).

The legislature created a State Board of Education in 1919, superseding the former office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. The new Board of Education was empowered to create a Commissioner of Education and Deputy Commissioners, to combine existing state school districts into supervisory unions, and to appoint superintendents for each of those unions. From this time, local school buildings and school governance were under the control of supervisory unions rather than under local superintendence.[31]

In 1920, the Board of Education issued temporary rules for approving existing schoolhouses for continued use:

Regulations for Temporary Approval
of Schoolhouses
for School Year 1919-1920[32]

1. Lighting shall be principally from the pupils' left and rear and no windows shall be permitted in the front of any schoolroom. The ratio of window area to floor area shall be not less than one to five. Ceilings shall be white or light cream color, and curtains of a light tint shall be provided wherever needed. (Figure 12).

---

[30] Ibid.
[31] "An Act in Amendment of the Laws Relating to the Public Schools and Establishing a State Board of Education," approved March 28, 1919, Chapter 105, *Laws of the State of New Hampshire Passed in 1919* (Concord New Hampshire: Evans Printing Co., 1919), 155-66.
[32] *Annual Report of the Selectmen and Treasurer of the Town of Pembroke [New Hampshire], together with the reports of the Road Agents and Other Officers of the Town for the Fiscal Year Ending January 31, 1920.* These provisional rules were reprinted in the 1920 annual town reports of a number of communities whose school boards were faced with their implementation.

2. Equipment for heating must be adequate to furnish a minimum temperature of sixty-eight degrees, and some provision must be made for ventilation without direct draft on the pupils.

3. Floors must be in good condition and oiled or swept with some dust-laying compound. Walls must be in good repair and painted in some light color. Papered walls have only temporary approval.

4. Toilets must be decent and in sanitary condition. They must be located in buildings free from obscene markings and furnishing proper privacy. The [privy] vaults must be fly-proof and properly ventilated. The seats should be provided with covers and in the boys' toilet a double seat or urinal should be provided. Single toilets for both sexes will not be approved except for small schools, and then only if the entrance is from the schoolroom only.

5. Water for drinking must be provided in properly covered receptacles with faucet or bubbler. Facilities for washing the hands must also be provided. Common towels or drinking cups are prohibited by regulations of the State Board of Health.

6. Every schoolhouse must be provided, as required by law, with a flag and the proper means for displaying it.

7. This list of minimum requirements for temporary approval is intended to cover only such changes as are required to make schoolhouses decent and safe for children, and in many cases will be less than has already been done. Full regulations for the permanent approval of schoolhouses will be prepared and placed in the hands of school boards before the budgets for the next school year are made up. These regulations will require the adoption of a progressive plan of schoolhouse betterment.

8. It is the duty of all school boards to see that schoolhouses are properly cleaned and that they are kept in clean and sanitary condition by suitable janitor service. [Privy] vaults should be cleaned at least twice each year and some effective deodorant provided for constant use.

9. Proper care of school buildings is as essential to their approval as [is] their [proper] construction.

Conclusions

Much interest, generally nostalgic, has focused on the one-room schoolhouses of New Hampshire.[33] Many of these buildings, like the former District No. 5 schoolhouse in South Newbury, New Hampshire, have been preserved and converted into community meeting places. A number of others, like the District No. 11 schoolhouse in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, are maintained, restored, and interpreted as museum buildings by local historical societies. Others are occupied by fraternal organizations like the Grange, and a few serve as rural public library buildings. Many others across New Hampshire now serve as private dwellings.

As the preceding history makes clear, the building and improvement of rural schoolhouses occupied the people of New Hampshire for centuries. Each generation attempted to define proper standards for these simple buildings, seldom refraining from vehement and incessant criticisms of current conditions. Surviving district school buildings thus embody the tension between high aspirations and chronically limited resources. Their construction and later adaptation are a physical record of educational efforts and conditions that may be regarded as quaint from a modern perspective, but they represent earnest if humble efforts to improve the conditions under which children were educated. The passing of knowledge from one generation to another is a defining characteristic of the human species. These simple buildings are therefore documents of the most basic and essential of human impulses.

---

[33] For example, see Bruce D. Heald, *One-Room Schoolhouses of New Hampshire: Primers, Penmanship, and Potbelly Stoves* (Charleston, South Carolina: History Press, 2014).

Figure 1: Perspective of a schoolhouse (1841) in Dublin, NH, from the *Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools* (1849) 56.

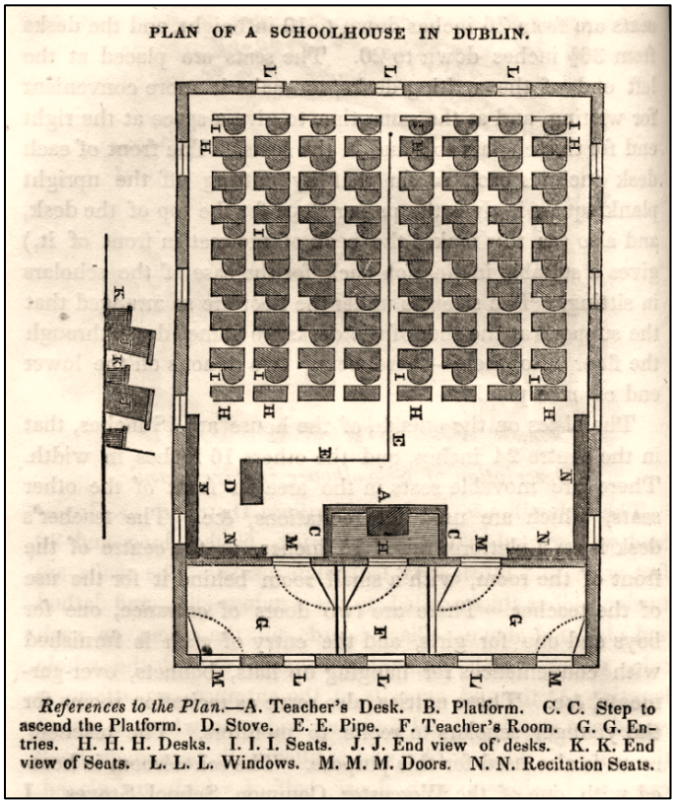

Figure 2: Plan of a Schoolhouse in Dublin, NH. The plan includes a list of "References to the Plan—The desks and seats shown to the left of the floor plan compare closely with those shown in Figure 7.

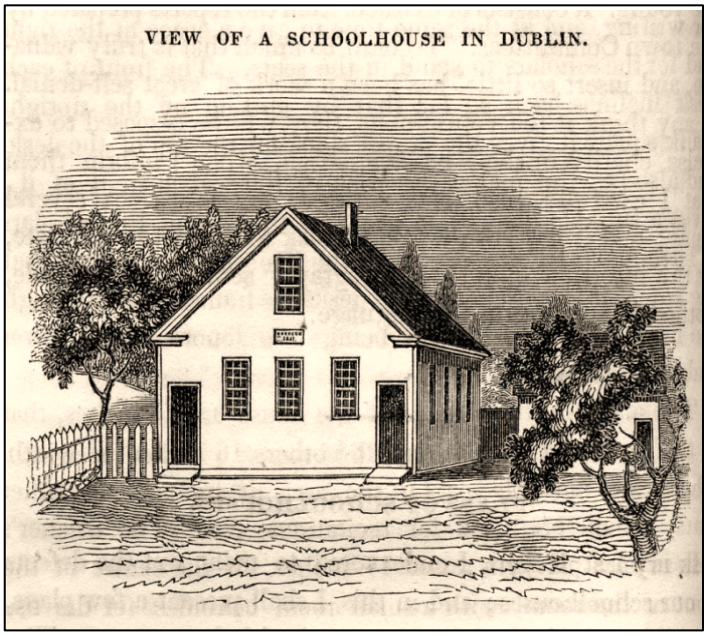

Figure 3: Perspective view of a brick schoolhouse (1847) in Greenland, NH, from the *Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools* (1849), 59.

Figure 4: Plan of a Schoolhouse in Greenlland, NH. The plan included an "*Eplanation*-A Passage to the Cellar. B. Bookcases and Cabinets. C. Closet. D., etc.

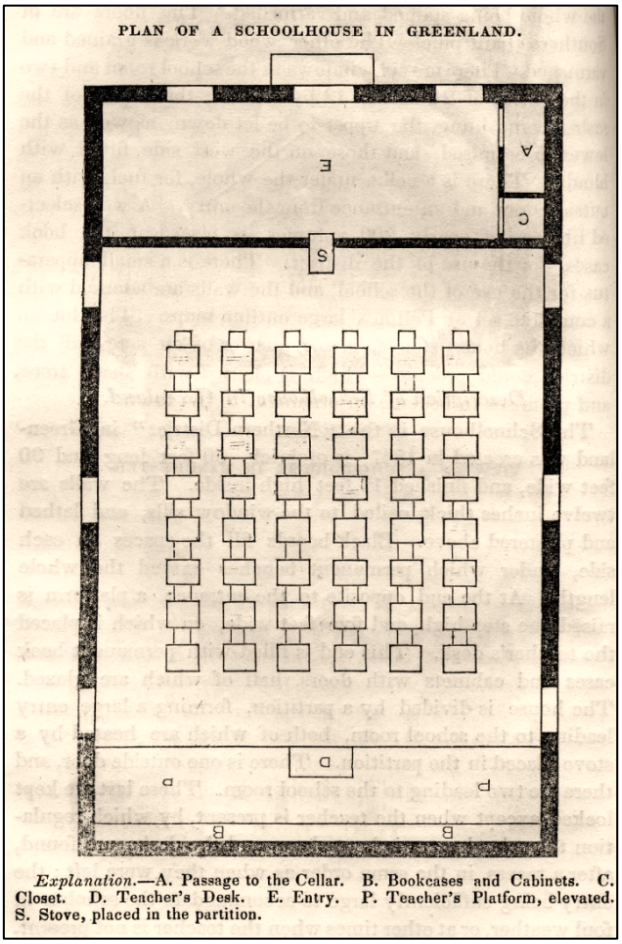

Figure 5: District No. 11 Schoolhouse in Jaffrey, NH., built in 1822 and now restored. During the early 1800s, a number of small schoolhouses of this common type were built with then-fashionable hipped roofs rather than the gable roof seen in the Jaffrey example. These asymmetrical buildings have an entry or cloak room behind the door, with an interior door opening into the classroom. Photograph courtesy of Jaffrey Center, NH.

Figure 6: Stark Schoolhouse, Dunbarton, NH was an example of a small schoolhouse with a hipped roof, characteristic of the early 1800s. Photograph courtesy of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

Figure 7: Interior, District No. 11 Schoolhouse in Jaffrey, NH (1822), showing characteristic wooden benches and seats fixed to the floor of the room. Many schoolhouses of the early 1800 had slanted floors which provided a modest amphitheater effect.

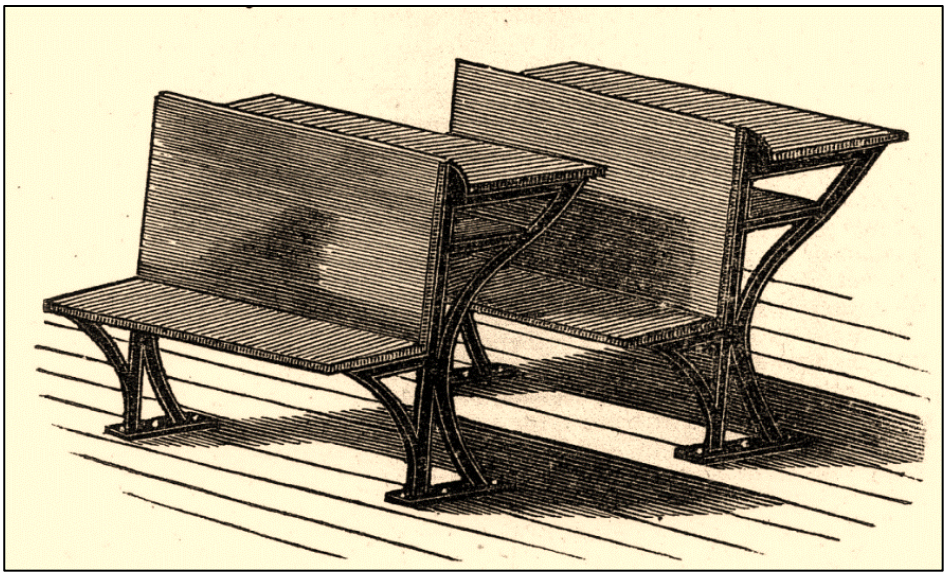

Figure 8: Iron-framed desks from Henry Barnard, *School Architecture* (1848), 205, as reproduced in the *Fourth Annual Report of the Commissioner of New Hampshire Common Schools* (1850)..[34]

[34] James L. Garvin, "Report on the Friendship House (Former District School No. 5), Village Road, South Newbury, NH," October 2, 2015. New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (State Historic Preservation Office), Concord, NH.

Figure 9: District No. 5 Schoolhouse (c. 1853), South Newbury, NH, in 1913. The symmetrical façade of this building resembles that of the "model" schoolhouse in Dublin, NH (Figure 1). The deeply projecting eaves were a common stylistic feature of many buildings in the 1850s.

Figure 10: Appearance of the remodeled District No. 5 Schoolhouse in 2015 shows the ample windows required by regulations after World War I.

James L. Garvin served for twenty-four years as State Architectural Historian with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources. Previously, he was curator of Strawbery Banke Museum in Portsmouth, NH, and of the New Hampshire Historical Society, where he is now a trustee. He is the author of *A Building History of Northern New England* and co-author of books on early New Hampshire taverns and travel, furniture, and hand tools. He earned a PhD in American Studies from Boston University in 1983.