

The Orford Historical Society Presents:
Exploring Orford's Early Schools

Sunday, October 16th, 2011



Halltown School, c. spring 1914.

Glass Plate Negative, OHS Collection.

Orford Congregational Church
Main Street (NH Route 10), Orford, New Hampshire
1:00 p.m.
Walking Tour to follow.

Important Dates

- 1761 Orford chartered; Governor Wentworth grants the township's land to the 63 original Proprietors with one lot reserved for a school.
- 1765 Permanent settlement of the town begins.
- 1770 Israel Morey donates a "barnlike structure" for Orford's first school and meetinghouse. Residents vote to "higher" a schoolmaster.
- 1785 A second schoolhouse built on northeast corner of "Orford Street" and the road to Wentworth (Route 25A).
- 1776-87 Orford begins to grow rapidly, with farms on Dame and Grimes hills, slopes of "Cuba Mountain" and at Quint Town.
- 1807 Authorized by a new State law, Orford divides the town into nine separate and independent school districts.
- 1800-40 Orford prospers. 1830 population reaches 1,896, nearly twice today's total. More school districts and one-room schoolhouses created in town.
- 1827 State legislature takes school matters out of hands of Select boards and gives responsibility to individual "Prudential Committees".
- 1832-33 Orford's "high-water mark" for separate school districts (16) and for largest number of students (660) – roughly a third of the total population. (In 2011, there is a total of 185 Orford students enrolled in Rivendell.
- 1851 Orford Academy, a private secondary school, enrolls male and female students from surrounding towns and states. By 1871, its doors close.
- 1885 In major shift away from "local control", new State law requires all town independent school districts to consolidate into one unified School District.
- 1898 New school building (today's Town Offices) opens in Orfordville, as – despite some local resistance -- one-room schools begin to close. Town buys Orford Academy building and first floor used as a primary school.
- 1902 Only five district schools remain in operation, while others are put up for sale. State requires compulsory education up to age 14, and a petitioned Warrant Article recommends adding a 10th Grade at the Orfordville School.
- 1919 N.H. legislature acknowledges State's responsibility to promote educational standards and creates Commissioner and State Board of Education.
- 1926 Start of Orford High School, staffed in part by "cadet" student teachers from Plymouth Normal School (later Plymouth State Teachers College).
- 1935 Last of Orford's one-room schoolhouses close their doors for good.
- 1950 Orford School District takes over full administration of Orford High School.
- 2000 Rivendell Interstate School District begins operations.

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"Exploring Orford's Early Schools"
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Helpful Tips for a Self-Guided Tour of Orford's Old School Sites

- A total of 21 sites around Orford have been marked with special signs, as shown on the Handout map.
- The numbers circled in blue on the signs correspond to the numbers on the map.
- Each sign contains information pertaining to that specific site and schoolhouse, and, if available, an old photograph.
- Please feel free to get out (with care) and read the signs, but remember and respect the fact that they are on private property.
- The sites are numbered in a sequence that makes logical sense to see all 21. But of course you do not need to follow this route. It is self-guided and you may visit as many or as few as you wish or have time for. The signs will remain up for a week in case you want to come back and see more.
- Volunteer docents will be located at the sites circled in red (Numbers 5, 11, 17 and 21) to provide added information and anecdotes about those schools. Please be sure to stop at these places. The docents will be on site until 4 p.m. on Sunday.
- **NOTE:** There is no safe place to stop at signpost Number 12 (former "Palmer Hollow School") on Route 25A just east of Orfordville. Please note the sign marker as you drive by. Information about this school is contained in the "Highlights and Directions" part of our Handout.

Orford Historical Society Program "Exploring Orford's Early Schools"

Highlights & Directions for the Self-Guided Tour of Orford's Old School Sites (Use together with Handout map)

- Site #1** District 1 "Upper Street School" (opposite Cottonstone Farm). Also known as "Bickford School". This brick building, which replaced an 1811 schoolhouse, was in use from 1846 to sometime after 1904. It was later sold and since then has been in use as a private home.
- Site #2** District 2 "Mill District or Dublin School" (Archertown Road west of Townshed Road). Old town records show that this school had many students, but aside from an historic photograph of a handsome school building with bell tower, we don't know when it was built or what happened to it. Teaching started before 1860 and ended sometime after 1880.
- Site #3** Orford's first schoolhouse. This building stood behind today's Masonic Hall and was a barnlike structure given by Israel Morey in 1770 that also served as a meetinghouse for worship and town meetings. It may have been used as the town's school until the buildings described at Site #6-A and Site #4 came into use.
- Site #4** Old private Academy. In 1798 a private Academy was established at the south end of the town's West Common. After only two years, the Academy closed and its building, with bell tower, was turned over to the town and became our third schoolhouse. It burned in about 1850.
- Site #5** Orford Academy (located on western side of Rivendell School buildings;
Docent by car, approach via Rivendell West Campus driveway from Route 25A) Docent Carl Schmidt will explore the history of the private secondary Academy which opened in 1851 in this classic three-story brick building with nine teachers and 167 male and female students from Orford, surrounding towns, and Massachusetts. By 1871, the Academy closed. Acquired by the Town of Orford in 1898, the building was used as a primary school and became the home of Orford High School in 1926.
- Site #6-A** District 2 Orford's Second Schoolhouse. This schoolhouse was a frame structure constructed in 1785 on the north side of the current intersection of Routes 10 and 25A. In 1807, Orford was divided into nine school districts; this school was assigned to District 2. The building was in use for over 40 years before it disappeared.
- Site #6-B** District 14 "Orford Street School" (southeast corner of Main Street and Route 25A). This brick one-room schoolhouse was constructed in 1829 and the following year

became the school for a new District 14 which was carved out of District 2 to the north. Sometime after 1892 the building ceased to be used as a school and became a private dwelling.

Site #7 **District 3 "Lower Street" School** (0.2 mile south on west side of River Road). This district ran from Orford Street to Lyme. The site of the earliest schoolhouse is unknown; a replacement was built about 1845 on the site of an old tannery. The Sanborn family purchased the schoolhouse in the early 1900's, remodeled it and lived there before replacing it with the present-day structure.

Site #8 **District 12 "Sawyer Road School"** (around corner of Strawberry Hill Road at the start of Mud Turtle Pond Road). Not much is known about this school or schoolhouse. We do know that 15 students were enrolled in 1849 and that in 1868 the number had dropped to two. The school closed the next year and the building was sold in 1896-97 for fifty cents.

Site #9 **District 4 Mt. Cube Grange Building in Orfordville.** This building, the former Lodge of Orford's Grange association, was used as a "second classroom" during the late 1880s and 1890s to accommodate an increased number of students enrolled in the Orfordville School. Town Reports show it was rented for that purpose in the 1890s for \$30.00 per year from "Mr. Horton".

Site #10 **District 4 "Orfordville School".** A brick schoolhouse was built on this site in 1832 to replace the first schoolhouse for District 4, which was a log structure. In 1900, the brick building was conveyed to the Town for use as Town Offices and for the new Orford Free Library. In 1933, the building burned but was rebuilt on the site in the same year.

Site #11 **"Orfordville School".** Now the Town Offices building. (Docent Ted Cooley will talk about all the Orfordville schoolhouses.) This school building was built in 1898, amid some controversy, at a cost of \$2,000. The school began with two schoolrooms and the capability to expand. In 1900 the Town voted to finish the third room. It was renovated in 1957 to add a classroom and cafeteria on the second floor. Its last day as a school building was February 15, 1990.

Site #12 **District 11 "Palmer Hollow Schoolhouse" (Please, no stopping here.)**
A school building was erected here in 1825 on "the road to Wentworth" (now Route 25A) just east of the center of Orfordville. A new schoolhouse was built in 1860 at a cost of \$576.64 for house lot, grading of lot, and the building itself. According to *"Thanks to the Past"*, the school had 8 boys and 7 girls attending in 1887 and the teacher was Miss Etta W. Converse, who received \$15.00 a month salary. The school was no longer operating by 1888. The building was sold and used as a private home before being torn down.

- Site #13** **District 9 "Quinttown Schoolhouse"** (on left just after crossing Four Corners bridge). District 9 extended from Dame Hill south into Lyme and included a once-thriving settlement. A one-room schoolhouse was built at or near this site in 1807. Attendance once totaled 60 or more, but after 1894 the student population began to fall off and by 1900 the school was closed. Named for settler Benjamin Quint, the area's name can also be found written as Quint Town.
- Site #14** **District 8 "Dame Hill Schoolhouse"** This was a brick building that stood "north of the cemetery" at the top of Dame Hill Road. It was in use until 1898, when the Orfordville School building was constructed. The outlines of its foundation are still visible.
- Site #15** **District 10 "Halltown or Beantown School"** (intersection of Baker Road and Route 25A). Named for families in the area, the first school was in operation by 1819. In 1895, the school had only 13 students and it appears to have closed by 1900. However, in 1913 a new school building was erected. One of Orford's last one-room schoolhouses, it closed in 1935. After the District 15 School closed, this was sometimes referred to as the Mt. Cube School. Another interesting fact about this school is that the old Wentworth Road (now Route 25A) was moved, thus orienting the front door away from the road. You see the back of the building as you now drive by. It is now a private home.
- Site #16** **District 15 "Mt. Cube School"** (Route 25A opposite Mt. Cube Farm) In use by 1833, this school was located across from the junction of the old Wentworth and Grimes Hill roads. In 1849 there were 24 students enrolled for the school year. In 1880 there were nine students, five boys and 4 girls. By 1894 it was no longer used; the town sold the building in 1896-87 for \$30.
- Site #17** **District 7 "Davistown School"** (junction of East Cemetery Road and
Docent Route 25A) Docent Harry Pease will talk about the history of this site, including when he lived in the former schoolhouse from birth to age 18. This district's first school, which started in 1810, was located on the south side of Route 25A across from East Cemetery Road. The present building was built in 1903. As one of the town's last one-room schoolhouses, it continued to serve that function until the spring of 1935. Subsequently, it was used as an apple house and, during World War II, it served as the Mt. Cube Medical Defense Station. It has been a private home since 1951.
- Site #18** **District 16 "Union District School"** (Piermont Heights Road, opposite Town Road 107). The last-established of Orford's 16 separate school districts, it began in 1832. For the next decade, an average of 36 students was enrolled each year. In 1853-54, District 16 formally joined with neighboring District 13 in Piermont and was called the "Union District". The school was still in existence in 1892, but the fate of its building is unknown.
- Site #19** **District 13 "Baldwin's Corner School"** (Indian Pond Road just south of intersection with Archertown Road). This school district was established in 1829. We know that a

school, in what was a rented structure, was in operation in 1849 with eighteen students. In 1879 enrollment was four students and the school closed the next year. It may be that a school was again held here in a rented building in the early 1900s, which was attended by students from the Indian Pond District.

Site #20 **District 5 "Archertown School"** (on Archertown Road just west of intersection with Indian Pond Road). The school district was named for settler Josiah Archer in what was once a well-populated area of town. A brick schoolhouse on the old Mason Road (now Norris Road), which may have dated back to 1807, burned in 1841. It presumably was replaced by a schoolhouse at Site #20, which is understood to have still been in use in 1892. We recently located what appear to be the foundation stones of this old school building.

Site #21 **District 6 "Indian Pond School"** (at Indian Pond/Four Corners)
Docent Docent Emily Bryant will explain the evolution of this school site. We know, for example, that a school building was in use on this site by 1826 because a School Report states it needed repairs costing \$28.00. In 1829 it was replaced by a brick structure that burned in 1884. School was then held in a different location farther west on the old Grimes Hill Road for a time between 1884 until 1916, when the one-room schoolhouse you see here was built. It is now a private home.

Key References: *"Thanks to the Past - The Story of Orford, N.H."*, by Alice Doan Hodgson; Orford Annual Town and School Reports; historical collections of the Orford Historical Society, Orford Free and Social Libraries; Orford Town Office records; *"Orford History"*, by William R. Conant; *"Historical Schoolhouses of Lyme, New Hampshire"*, by Adair Mulligan; *"New Hampshire - An Illustrated History of the Granite State"*, by Ronald Jager and Grace Jager; personal interviews with Ruth Ladd Brown, Helen Huckins Marsh, Dorothy Baker Pierson, Horton Washburn, and Laura Washburn Verry.

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