

A very special salute is being given this year to an old Westbrook landmark. Eighty years ago, in the winter of 1894, the present Forest Street School opened its doors to some 150 boys and girls. Administrators, teachers, parents, pupils, and friends will enjoy an Open House at the School on Wednesday evening, November 13 from 7:30 to 9:00 o'clock. All interested folks are invited to visit the school.

The new building on the corner of Main and Forest Streets looked much as it does today. It contained eight classrooms but only the four upper ones were furnished and occupied at the outset. Charles E. Cobb directed the school as teaching principal and three charter teachers were: Bertha Rice, Edith Bragdon, and Ina Allen.

Teachers in 1895 - 1896 which was the first full year in the new school were: Charles E. Cobb, Bertha Rice, Edith Bragdon, Annie Holmes, Helen Shenault, and Ethel Winslow.

In succeeding years fourteen principals and over a thousand teachers have been sharing in the education of four generations of doctors, lawyers, educators, industrialists, and homemakers who give due thanks to the school that started them on their way.

The fourteen principals are: Charles Cobb, John Tuttle, Frank Usher, Guy Sinclair, (supervising principal), Fannie Cragin, Milton Nelson, John Brush, Nelson Leland, Robert Gordon, Edward Beaudoin, John Gato, Coleman Rogers, Robert Hall, and our present one, Barbara Page.

I was interested in the circumstances that prompted the building of the school and think you may too. Pupils in the vicinity of the new school formerly attended a two room brick building near the site of the present school. (I have not located any student of this little school but Mrs. Arthur Spiller recalls an older brother, the late Raymond Davis, relating his experiences in the two room building and his temporary stay at Cumberland Hall. Mrs. Spiller served the city faithfully in the 1930's as a substitute teacher in Forest Street and other schools.) This Cumberland Mills Grammar School was

one of seven buildings that were part of the old school districts that existed previous to 1873. In that year these districts were abolished and the schools became the property and responsibility of the town. The enrollment in the Cumberland Mills School was rapidly increasing and the lower grade room was so crowded in 1893 that 40 pupils with a teacher moved to Brown's Hall which is now the Warren Library. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory so they next moved to a room over an unused stable. Conditions worsened and it was decided that the Grammar School at the East End must be relieved in some way. "In 1893 the school committee recommended the removal of the small grammar school building to be replaced by a larger structure. On approval by the city council additional land was acquired and a new building of eight rooms was built facing Forest Street at a cost of \$20,616." The property was owned by Mr. E. Newcome who lived in the house on Main Street occupied for many years by Dr. Frank Smith and now owned by Stephen Fournier. Mr. Newcombe owned a large tract in the area and a short street near the school bears his name.

The old building was demolished to make room for a larger school. Upon its completion in 1894 the City Report states: "The city can now boast of having one of the most modern and efficient buildings for school puposes in the state." During this construction the school was transferred to the Cumberland Hall. The hall was fitted with seats and furnishings and was made fairly comfortable. However, 140 pupils were seated in this room with two small ante rooms for recitation. These recitation rooms accommodated only half a class at one time. It was the best temporary home that could be had under the circumstances and all were grateful.

As mentioned before, only four of the rooms were used in the first year. In the second year the enrollment had increased and a primary grade room was transferred from the Warren School to make room for a Manual Training Program in that school. Two rooms were furnished and used on the first floor at Forest Street. The last two rooms which had been used for a teachers' room and a storeroom, were finished off in 1899 making all eight rooms being occupied.

Mrs. Percival Bachelder is the first student of the New School with whom I have talked. She recalls standing on the corner of Main and Forest Streets and watching a company of young men in blue uniforms marching away to war in parade formation. They were Company M, Maine National Guard who never did reach their war destination. Mrs. Bachelder believes they used the basement of the school as an Armory.

In September of 1898 Mrs. Bachelder entered the sixth grade as a pupil. There were then nine grades in the school, five primary grades downstairs and four grammar grades upstairs. Half of the third grade were taught with the second and half with the fourth. She attended the other grammar grades and recalls feeling very sophisticated in the ninth grade under the principal, Mr. Frank Usher, enjoying class officers, class pins, class colors, and a Motto, with Barrett Newcombe being class president and herself the secretary.

Mrs. Bachelder's children in turn attended the school. She now makes her home on Pine Street in Portland.

Equipment was gradually acquired in keeping with the fine new structure. Electric lights were installed in 1917 along with a telephone. The superintendent remarked in his yearly report that the teachers would enjoy the lights for working after the pupils had been dismissed. Two drinking fountains were installed in the basement in 1912. The principal expressed his thanks thus: "The drinking fountains installed last summer are fully appreciated by all. Everyone was pleased to know that the unsatisfactory drinking cup had disappeared." A piano was purchased in 1914, partly from school funds and partly by contributions from friends, or patrons, as they were called. The pupils could then march in and out of the building in orderly fashion to music. Today, there are almost as many pianos as classrooms, many of them having been donated. As would be expected, improvements must be continually made in keeping with advancements in method of teaching. The heating system was improved and floors were oiled. Great excitement prevailed among the pupils when stationary desk and chair units were ripped up and replaced by movable ones to facilitate working in small groups. It was then that Forest Street was termed as a truly modern school.

In ten short years crowded conditions arrived again to stay. In 1919 the principal reported five rooms as having 40 or more students and two having 45. Transferring groups of children to one place and another became a common policy. In 1921 part of the seventh grade was taught with the eighth and some of the sixth grade were transferred to another school. In 1925 teachers averaged 51 pupils as compared to Bridge Street with an average of 35. Forest Street had 98 more students than Bridge Street and one room and one teacher less. Some relief was had this year by sending some fifth grade boys and girls to Brown Street. In 1926 crowded conditions necessitated sending an overflow from grades seven and eight to the Superintendent's Office at the High School along with a few pupils from Bridge Street. The Superintendent had to find quarters in an office downtown. Parental objection to this transfer of students was always strong. At the opening of the school year in 1927 it was soon realized that the classes were too large for efficient work. Also, the room that housed the group at the High School was needed for other purposes. A solution was reached by dividing two rooms on the street floor by temporary partitions making four rooms from two. A lower grade could be housed in each of these four rooms and the fifth grade was moved from the second floor to the first leaving more space for crowded upper grades. The "temporary" partitions were not removed until 1955 when the seventh and eighth grades moved out to the new Junior High plan with three teachers. Crowded conditions continued. In 1933 there were 56 pupils in grade 6 and 54 in grade 7. Thus, in 1934 a one room addition was put on the school midway at the back of the ground floor to replace a small teachers' room. A group of sixth and seventh graders occupied the room the first few years. Thereafter, it was used for various groups that needed relief. From 1966 to 1969 it was used by small groups of primary children for specialized reading help.

In 1922 departmental teaching was tried out in grades five, six, seven, and eight. The principal found shortcomings in the plan and the fifth grade reverted to a contained classroom. However, departmentalization has been practiced by some groups from that date to

present. When grades seven and eight moved to Junior High in later years it was again practiced by the fifth along with the sixth. Lower grades even shared teachers at times to utilize the strong points of the teachers.

In 1923 grade names in all Westbrook schools were changed from one through nine to Sub Primary through eight, Forest Street included. The change was in name only with the curriculum remaining the same. The term Sub Primary was changed to Junior Primary in 1948 and remained so until it was moved to the Warren Church Auditorium along with the Pride's Corner group. It was then designated as a Kindergarten. Today all Kindergarten groups in the city are at the Warren Kindergarten Center, formerly the Warren School and the Rocky Hill Kindergarten Center, formerly the Rocky Hill School.

Mr. John Tuttle included this paragraph in his 1923 yearly report: "We have an attractive bookcase built in the hall and have purchased twenty-five books as the nucleus of a school library. Also about fifty books have been loaned us from the Memorial Library. Pupils of the eighth grade have been appointed to serve as librarians." This bookcase expanded into many, stacked with books suitable for any elementary school. School funds, city funds, and Federal Government funds were used to purchase books of both fiction and non fiction. Many gifts were also received. In 1952 Katherine Hurd, a fifth grade teacher voluntarily spent countless hours setting up a Dewey Decimal System of operating and supervising the use of the books. They were used for reference in school or were carried home for enjoyment. At the same time primary books were arranged on the shelves in the lower hall for the use of younger children. Only this year has a suitable room become available for a library. This is in a basement room that could be vacated by the transfer of pupils to the Congin School. Today there are approximately 2800 books in the library.

The arrangement of the library by Mr. Tuttle reinforces a thought that I have had while reading school and city reports. During his 20 years as principal of Forest Street in interrupted terms from 1896-1898 and 1906-1924 I find suggestions for efficient teaching and safe and economical use of equipment that show great foresight. For example, he writes in one report that the repetition of grades and material by pupils is often worthless, a policy that

became evident many years later. His understanding of children and learning methods seems far reaching.

As the saying goes "Nothing is new under the sun". Westbrook boasts of its first elementary supervisor in 1948 when Miss Ruth Somers joined the staff. But records show that Mr. Guy V. Sinclair became supervising principal of Bridge Street, Forest Street, and Rocky Hill Schools in 1924, a position which he held until 1931. He had formerly been principal of the Bridge Street School and became Superintendent in 1931.

In 1956 a forward looking principal wanted to match the new schools. He took a step in modernizing the formal brick building. With help and funds from the Parent Teachers' Group he had a stage constructed in the third basement room and acquired a minimum of equipment so that groups could enjoy programs correlated with learning projects or for enjoyment at Holiday Seasons. Chairs had to be carried from classrooms for seating. In two years fire regulations banned the use of this room for the purpose and the stage was removed. In 1959 the room was equipped^{to} house a city wide Special Education Class. The small group worked here for three years and then was moved elsewhere so the room could be used to improve crowded conditions in the school. The Junior Primary occupied the room for most of the years until it moved out to the Warren Church. Part of the third grade group has used the room in the last few years.

Some children have had to carry lunches to the school since its beginning. At first, only a handful of boys and girls who walked a long distance, then a small group of bus riders, and finally almost half of the enrollment. Cold lunches had to be endured until 1968 when hot meals were able to be carried from the Junior High Cafeteria. They are certainly enjoyed. The lunches had to be eaten in classrooms causing some disruption in other activities. With the decreased enrollment an empty basement room can now be used for the purpose. The lunch hour is supervised by noon aides.

The specialized reading teacher retired in 1969 and was not replaced. The small room was then equipped as an office for the first non teaching principal. This left a small office on the upper

floor available for supervisors and specialists. A partition was erected for the clerk whom the school had been fortunate enough to have since 1967. The privacy was soon lost. Principal and clerk again had to share small quarters from 1971 to present, to allow a specialized reading program to be instituted once again in half the office space.

This September (1974) approximately 50 lucky students transferred to the beautiful Congin School. Two out of three basement rooms at Forest Street could now be discontinued as classrooms leaving only a third grade in the left front corner room. The second front room is now used as a cafeteria and the larger back room for a library. The school has almost completed a cycle. The physical plant more nearly resembles the original than at any time since its early years. With the exception of the one third grade basement room and the office addition, the classroom layout could be that of the early years. To be sure, modern necessities and advantages embellish the rooms on all sides. Interior decorating certainly creates a marked improvement in atmosphere and teaching methods have advanced. But the outward appearance of the brick landmark has changed little in the eighty years. It still stands on the corner often indicating to strangers that they have arrived at Cumberland Mills.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following persons and organizations for information contained in this report.

Marian V. Chick	<u>Development of the Westbrook School System</u>
Oliver Cobb	<u>Westbrook Schools, Past and Present</u>
Ernest Rowe	<u>Highlights of Westbrook History</u> published by the Westbrook Women's Club

Westbrook City Annual Reports

I want to thank the following people for taking time to reminisce about their experiences as pupils or teachers in the school in its early years. Much of the preceding information was gained from their willing cooperation.

Mrs. Percival A. Bachelder (Pearl Parker)
Pupil in Grades 6 - 9 in 1898 - 1902

Mrs. Lee Clarke (Millie Scribner)
Teacher of Grade 6 from 1913 - 1915

Mrs. Roy C. Jones (Edith Congdon)
Student teacher in Grade 4 for a term in 1909
with Mrs. Mary Byrne as supervisor.

Mrs. Fred Small (Laura Bragdon)
Pupil for seven years from 1897 on.

Mrs. Arthur Spiller (Nellie Davis)
Substitute teacher in the Westbrook Schools in the 1930's.

Mrs. Joseph Small (Tressa Warren)
Teacher of Grade 6 from 1908 - 1911

History Compiled by Marion McFarland
Teacher at Forest Street 1932 - 1972