

THE ROGER WILLIAMS SCHOOL DISTRICT

By Mrs. Clara E. Clemence

The Roger Williams School District was a joint district between Foster and Gloucester. The school was planned "in the school room" according to a record held by Stanton Winsor whose grandfather, Stephen Winsor, donated the land so long as it should be used for a school. Mr. Winsor didn't know where the "room" was but he did know that the basement of the house in which he now lives once was used as a school room. His father, Ira Winsor, attended school there, but tuition was then required. The school was not public.

But a public school was erected on the Stephen Winsor land in 1849 and twenty or more pupils attended. The reason for the use of the name I could not ascertain. Mr. Winsor thought it was named for the founder of Rhode Island.

School was fairly continuous in the building until it was abandoned as a district in 1903. A few years later the building was sold, removed, and made into a barn, which still exists. It is in Scituate in a section known as the Wharf.

The key to the old building is held by Mrs. Charles Shippee of Gloucester. Her late husband was a trustee. It is said to be a large brass key with a piece of sole-leather attached on which is the number 17, the district number. And another part of the original outfit remains -- a wall "about four feet high, three feet at bottom and double to the top", around three sides of the lot. This was specified in the original contract. The land has now reverted to Stephen Winsor's descendent, Stanton Winsor.

An early teacher in the old school was Albert Williams, said to be a descendant of the founder of the State, and the last teacher was Miss Lillian Luther. Curtis Hopkins of Gloucester was once a teacher there. In this way he earned money to further his education.

The furniture was rather decrepit in his day. One of his pupils told me an amusing story of an accident Mr. Curtis had. It seems that he had a chair with no legs set upon a chair with no back. This combination served him well until, in an unguarded moment, the teacher undertook to lean back in his chair. The teacher went down; his feet went up; the desk went over; and the ink went in all directions. Like the sight of Mary's lamb, "It made the children laugh and play which was against the rule." A guest pupil dared to betake herself into the yard where she could laugh in safety.

And so, for fifty-four years the Roger Williams district school was run and then abandoned. Only the old wall remains, and over the wall there grows painted trillium and lady slippers, violets and wood enemie as it grew when the children of those school days vaulted the wall for such prizes as these in the wooded region about them.

Allen W. Hopkins of Springfield, Mass. sent me some data in regard to this Roger Williams No. 17 District School. Mr. Hopkins was a pupil here from April 1872 to April 1879. He recalls the following teachers and pupils:

TEACHERS

Mrs. Darleneda Sweet His first teacher.
 Henry W. Williams One of the best.
 Stanton A. Winsor
 Susan Slater Daughter of Aaron Slater.
 Eugene Himes, from East Killingly, Conn.
 Almeda M. Hopkins Married Frank Howland. Living (1946)
 Richard Stone A very fine teacher.
 Estella B. Walker Daughter of Esek and Jane. Married Stephen W. Tucker
 Sarah Smith Daughter of Henry and Lucy. Married George E. Hill.
 Estella A. Doane Daughter of Asa M. and Elizabeth A. Married Charles A.
 Hopkins

PUPILS AS RECALLED BY ALLEN W. HOPKINS 1872-1879

Mary
 Phebe Children of Jeremiah K. Bucklin
 William

Philip
 Charles Children of Willis A. Shippee
 Frederick
 Adelaide

Eva
 Flora Children of Allen Hopkins

Lucy
 Daughter of Welcome Shippee

Etta
 Clara
 Edgar Children of Otis Williams, Jr.
 Charles
 Cora
 Ruth

Susan
 Hannah Children of Aaron Slater

Allen W.
 Leonard W. Children of William Thomas Hopkins
 Ellen M.

George
 Frank Joseph Children of Olney and Betsey Potter

Byron
Angie

Sons of Stephen Williams
(This may have been a nickname)

Thomas C. Holloway
John T. Berry
Cora Bryant
Sarah Randall

Son of Thomas T. and Clarissa J.
Lived on Island Farm in family of Joseph Brown.
Daughter of Hiram and Martha.
Daughter of Rueben and Anna Eliza (Saunders)
Randall