

Reminiscence: Andover Girls High School

The following interview was conducted with Dorothy Whitney Fenton of Laconia by Bertha Fenton, her sister-in-law, for the Andover Historical Society's on-going Oral History project.

Dorothy taught in Andover's first high school in 1931, at which time it was called Andover Girls High School. This interview takes place in Bertha Fenton's home on May 25, 1985.

The first segment of this interview appeared on page 24 of the February issue of the Beacon. We pick up the story with Dorothy's second year in Andover and the beginning of Andover High.

DF: The second year that we were there [at Andover's girls' high school on the second floor of the old fire station], it was decided that, of course, with three years of high school we ought to offer a language. So a new teacher came, and we used two rooms, and we offered I think French and possibly Latin. So we had a faculty of two and a three-grade girls high school.

The Beginning Of Andover High School

Then the townspeople decided that they would build a new school and not pay tuition to Proctor but have the girls and boys both go to high school. So while they were in the process of building it, they started the new high school.

They hired Mr. Harlow, who had been teaching at Proctor, to be the principal, so that made a faculty of three. The Grange dining room became the new school room, and Mr. Harlow stayed over there. Rosman Allen and I stayed in the fire station. The children walked back and forth.

(I think I've neglected to say that we had one graduation while we were still a girl's high school, and that was on a beautiful June afternoon on Ella Carr's west terrace. I remember we were quite formal. We had the minister give a benediction, and some of the girls gave little talks, and we gave out the diplomas. After that we had girls and boys together, and the graduation exercises took place in the church. So I think just one group graduated from Ella Carr's terrace.)

Entering the new school was very exciting. For one thing, there were some chores that the boys use to do, pick up nails in the driveway. I remember Mr. Harlow use to give a little, I think, a dime for the boy who picked up the most nails during his lunch hour. Then we added new courses. We had domestic science and shop, and then we added to the faculty, of course.

The shop took place, or most of it did, in the little building just beyond the school. Kind of a little shed where they did all the mechanics and so forth. But the home economics was right in the same building.

It's a shame I don't remember the names of all the people but I do remem-

ber Georgie Corson coming to teach shop. He and Polly were right out of school and they were a delight for the whole community because they brought a lot of new ideas.

Sports And Field Trips

We tried to give the students all the activities they might have had in a big school. We had boys' and girls' basketball, boys' baseball. We put on plays. We had music. Some of those experiences were very, very interesting.

Basketball in those days was quite unconventional. For instance, when we played up in Canaan the girls had to change into their uniforms in one of the cells of the town jail. When we played in Penacook, they had to go behind the curtain on the stage of a theater there to change their clothes.

I remember once, we played at Weare, New Hampshire and the boys had trouble coming back because we had all traveled in private cars. They broke down somewhere over in Henniker and had to stay all night in a restaurant before they could get their car repaired.

Another time, I think it was Miss Allen who took her social studies group to Concord to see how government worked. She drove one car and a little girl from Danbury drove another and coming back they came to the bridge over the railroad tracks down in East Andover, and the girl went through the railing, down over the bank, and down onto the railroad tracks. Because Miss Allen was ahead of them she didn't know anything had happened.

Fortunately, a truck driver came by and helped – oh maybe scrape up the crew. Most of them were hurt quite badly and were taken to the hospital in Franklin. You know who had to go house to house late that afternoon and tell the parents that their little girls were in the hospital in Franklin. I did it. It wasn't very easy to do.

For about six weeks that winter, she and I went to Franklin two or three nights a week, and because they had all the girls together in one floor, we held

classes down there so that those girls wouldn't miss the studies that the children in the building were having.

The music programs were interesting. Most of the girls were more musical than I was and fortunately, Jane Stone had it – perfect pitch. She could always get us started on any song at any time, and we could stay on key if we stayed with Jane.

The trips that we took were far and wide. We had picnics, we climbed mountains, we visited other towns and other schools.

It was so informal. We never had to get a parents' permission slip signed. We never thought of it, and the parents didn't either. For some unknown reason they seemed to feel that if the school was going to do it, it was all right.

I sometimes think of how comfortable and how simple everything was in those days.

Social Life

BF: Did you have any social life in the school during this period of time?

DF: We tried to. It was a little bit difficult with the girls being so spread out around town.

I remember once we decided to have a dance and we invited the boys from the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp up in Wilmot to come to the

dance. They were a fine group of boys, well supervised and well behaved, but the dance got a very bad reputation.

We had borrowed a container from the Majestic Lunch Restaurant from which to serve punch. The first few people who had the punch were just fine, but those who were the late comers, maybe the more polite, began very soon to feel ill, and there were many trips outside the Town Hall to get rid of the sick feeling.

We thought we had poisoned the whole camp. We found out later that the container in which we made the punch had a ceramic lining inside a metal container. The lining was cracked, and the last people to drink the punch got a good dose of what possibly may have been lead poisoning. That took us quite a while to live down, although nobody ever accused us of doing it on purpose.

Watch for the final piece of this interview in a future issue of the Beacon.

While you're waiting, if you have a computer and good typing skills, please help the Historical Society transcribe its growing library of interviews. The Society can provide a transcription machine and some really good listening! Call Susan Norris at 735-5369 for details.

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