

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, and the second appeared on page 21 of the April issue. We pick up the story as Dorothy describes the sports activities in the early days of Andover High School.

DW: We had sports after we had the new building. Of course there was no place in the building for sports, so we played basketball at the Town Hall. That, in those days, was heated by two big wood stoves, one in each corner. Some boy would be excused early in the afternoon to rush over and start the fires so that it would be warm by the time for practice.

We found before very long that we had to make guards of hen wire around the stoves, because every once in a while some youngster would plunge into the stove.

I remember that quite well because the Round sisters who lived up in Wilmot were two of our best girl athletes, and they wanted so badly to go to high school that their father moved – I think you would call it a lumber shack – down just beyond the bridge over the railroad track.

The two little girls lived there through the winter all week long by themselves, got their own meals, did their studying, and were perfectly safe, by the way. On the weekend they would go back home, get a supply of food, and come back, keep house.

What made me think of that, was that Ethelyn, who was really a very, very good athlete, apparently brushed up against the stove and didn't tell anybody about it. I didn't know what had

happened to her until we had a game with another school and I saw her putting on her uniform with her upper thigh all bandaged where she had burned it. She wouldn't tell anybody about it and played just the same.

She was a good enough athlete so that she was written up in an article in the *Laconia Evening Citizen* as an outstanding girl player. Ethelyn later moved to California and had her own family, and then she decided to go into the Marines.

When she wrote back to the high school – this was some time after I had been connected with it – she discovered she couldn't get her records because someone – and nobody knows to this day who – had either thrown away or mislaid or something all the scholastic records for the early years.

She contacted me to see what I knew about it. I could only vaguely remember the courses she had taken. I knew she was an excellent student. So I wrote a letter to that effect, and she was taken into the Marines on that basis and later became an officer.

Her sister Arlene was a nurse trained in Laconia. Once when I had occasion to be a patient in the hospital there, there was a rather painful application that was necessary every now and then, and Arlene would swab on this liquid and say, "That is for the C that you gave me in English."

But a good many of the youngsters sacrificed more than might be done now-a-days to get their high school education. They came from long distances by car, a lot of them came on foot, and some of the youngsters who took part in sports wouldn't get home until late at night. I really think they probably gained from it.

Sports In Andover

Andover had quite a reputation for activities in sports. We had some real sports fans. Charlie Smith, who lived with the Seavys, was a janitor at the elementary school, and whenever we won a game at the Town Hall, Charlie would scamper over to the elementary

school and ring the bell. So everyone all over town knew when we won – which wasn't terribly often, but enough so that people would listen for Charlie to ring the bell.

Charlie was the one that started calling me "Teach." For a long time, I would be greeted as I went to school by a good many people around the village. "Well, how are you doing, Teach?" It was a name I kind of liked.

The early students in Andover High School seemed to have a feeling for each other. Maybe because there were fewer of us. Geniever Smith, Dolly Phelps, Dimpie Smith, Doris Miller, the Rounds girls, the Whittemore girls, Jesse Debay and Florence Mackenzie and the Stone girls, were like a whole group of cousins. Everyone was interested in everyone else, and because I was not a great deal older than they were, I think sometimes I used to feel more like their big sister than their principal.

Some of the boys that were most active are names that are very familiar around here. There were the Buzzells, the Goves, Richard Powers, Leslie Ford, Eddie Ward, Bud Harding, Stu Mackenzie, the Currier boys, and I think right there we had probably as good a small town baseball team as anybody ever got together.

In those days, a married woman was not expected to teach school, and probably if I hadn't been living with Ella Carr, who, to say the least, had considerable influence on what went on in the school, I would not have taught as long as I did.

I married Austin Fenton in 1938, and there was no great problem about whether I should continue to teach. In the spring of 1940, when I became very obviously pregnant, there was still no great criticism of it, but I decided that that had better be my last year teaching.

I remember the last day of school the student council gave me a mahogany coffee table. I remember the little speech that went with it – that it had just one provision going with it. That was, that anytime that any of them came to my house, I was to be willing to give them a cup of coffee from my coffee table, and I have always done that.

If there is anyone out there with a computer and good typing skills who is inspired to help the Historical Society transcribe its growing library of interviews, the Society can provide a transcription machine and some good listening! Call Susan Norris at 735-5369 for details.

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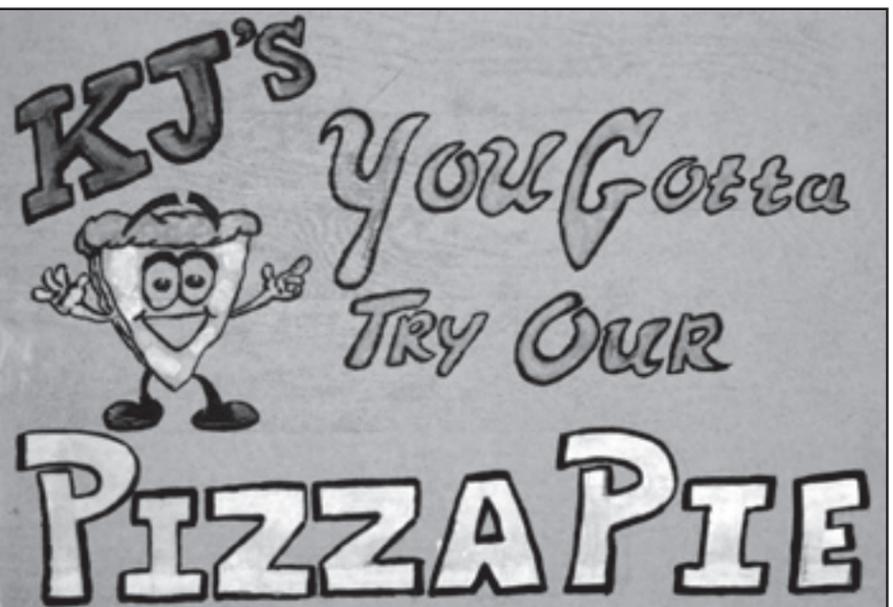
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