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1878

## History of Schools in Gorham, Maine

Author unknown

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From its earliest history, the good old town of Gorham has been noted for its loyalty to education. The first school-house erected in Gorham was a wooden structure, about thirty feet square, situated on the old Parish lot; and was used for a church as well as for a school building. It was presided over by an Irishman who, we should judge, did not teach according to the methods of the present day. The school continued but a short time, the building being

sold to Mr. George Height who moved it to a spot near Mr. Johnson's house, on School Street, where it was used as a blacksmith's shop until about 1802. It was then moved to South Street and used as a carpenter's shop.

The next school opened in Gorham was in a little brick school-house situated on South Street opposite the present High School building. It was built about sixty years ago. The desks were long and very near together with only a partition between



The back seats were raised higher than the front ones, thus giving the boys a good chance to roll marbles towards the teacher's desk.

Among the early teachers, were Mr. Ashly, Mr. Rufus Folsom and Mr. Daniel C. Emery. In the two schools mentioned there were no blackboards, and all written work had to be performed with the quill pen, used in those days. Attendance was required the whole week, with the exception of Saturday afternoon.

As the school population increased it was thought advisable, by some of the prominent men of Gorham, that the facilities for educating the children should be increased. In 1802 a petition, headed by Hon. Stephen Longfellow, in favor of the establishment of an academy in Gorham, was presented to the Legislature of Massachusetts; Col. Lothrop Lewis being at that time Representative. He was active and persevering in his efforts to accom-



plish the objects of the petition. The act was passed by the House of Representatives March first, and by the Senate March fourth, and was approved by Gov. Strong March fifth 1803. The Trustees held their first meeting June first, 1803 at the house of Samuel Staples. Hon. William Gorham was chosen President, John P. Little Secretary and David Harding Treasurer of the Board. On June twenty-third 1803, the Legislature granted half a township

of land to Gorham Academy,  
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by the citizens of Gorham.  
In 1804 preparation was  
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wide, and two stories high  
with a cupola for a bell.  
Mr. Samuel Elder contracted  
to build the edifice. On the  
eighth of Sept. 1806 the  
dedication of the Academy  
and inauguration of the  
Preceptor took place. A large  
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the neighboring towns witnessed the proceedings. Mr. Reuben Nason was installed as the new Preceptor and delivered an address appropriate to the occasion. He proved to be an able teacher though somewhat severe. His method of instruction was very different from what would be followed now, and we are told that he would read the news paper during school hours and sometimes forget to take off his hat. On some of the very cold winter mornings he would



come into the school, pull off his boots, warm his feet by the fire and set the Latin class to reading Virgil. He having no book, the class imagined that if a mistake were made it would pass unnoticed, but this was far from being the case. His one mode of discipline was flogging, and he used the rawhide freely. The salary of Mr. Nason was six hundred dollars a year. The next Preceptor was Dr. Chas. Coffin of Brunswick. He introduced

new text books and made new regulations. At this time a separate "Female Department" was established with Miss Rhoda Parker as Preceptress at a salary of three hundred dollars a year. Dr. Coffin having taught a year resigned as he had an offer of one thousand dollars a year to teach in Portsmouth N. H. Mr. Amos Brown was the last Principal of the Academy. In 1833 an attempt was made to connect a manual labor department with the institution, but the project



was a failure. Another change was now made. It was decided to separate the male and Female Departments, and to erect a building for a female boarding school and increase the number of teachers. For this purpose more than twenty thousand dollars were subscribed.

In 1836, the large brick building, four stories high, was erected, and a number of Professors and lady Teachers were employed. There was a large attendance, several hundred being present every



year.

The new Seminary Building was dedicated Sept. 13, 1837, an address being delivered by Prof. Packard of Bowdoin College. In 1847 Mr. Brown resigned his Principalship and was succeeded by Edward P. Weston who was Principal of the Seminary until 1860. Mr. Webb then took his place and was the last of the Principals of Gorham Seminary. The High school building was erected soon after the war upon the lot

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of land always called the village common. The school was <sup>an</sup> ungraded District school until the year 1880 when Mr. Bryant became Principal and Miss Goodwin Assistant.

The first class was graduated under Mr. Curtis and was only six in number. From that time the number of scholars graduated has increased.

Among the improvements which have been made may be mentioned the introduction of steam for heating the building, the addition of



books to library and the grading of the school grounds. The first class that graduated gave an entertainment and the money received was spent in purchasing charts and encyclopedias which have been a great help to the scholars. Other entertainments were given while Mr. Davis and Mr. Sewall were in the school, by means of which useful school appliances were purchased.

The last building built for educational purposes in Gorham was the beau-



tiful Normal School building  
dedicated Dec. 26. 1878.

At 9 o'clock in the morning  
the new Normal School building  
was opened for public inspec-  
tion and was thronged  
with visitors. After the  
inspection of the building  
a procession was formed  
Col. H. Conser and Col.  
C. Harding acting as Marshals,  
and marched to the Con-  
gregational Church where  
at half past ten the  
exercises took place. The  
church was filled. After  
the organ voluntary prayer

was offered by Rev. H. S. Huntington, the prayer was followed by an organ response and there were several addresses. The first was an address by Hon. Frederick Robie, President of the Trustees of Gorham Seminary, another address was delivered by Gov. Connor. The choir sang and there were several pieces performed by the Gorham cornet band. After the exercises held at the church the dedication dinner was served at Ridlon Hall.



also Harding Hall. With this the day closed and it was agreed that a great work had been done for the benefit of education.

The schools in the past have done a good work and we can but hope that the future will be even more production of good than the past has been.



Transcription of History of Schools in Gorham, Maine  
Manuscript in Special Collections (MS 888 sc), Raymond H. Fogler Library, Orono, Maine

A handwritten history of schools in Gorham, Maine, probably written around 1878. Author unknown.

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