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A glimpse back at local education

The town of Windham published the school committee's third annual report in 1900, and it provides an interesting window on local education 100 years ago.



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The committee consisted of nine local leading citizens, including Emir Hamlin, Samuel Harvey, F.E. Guild, Allen B. Lincoln, George Hinman, Theodore Potvin, James Hillhouse, Charles Carpenter and John Weldon. They oversaw eight schools in the town, the high school, the Windham Street school, the Natchaug School, the Oaks School, the North Windham School, the Windham Center School, the South Windham School and the Warner District School.

The committee members mourned the fact that each year Windham lost its leading teachers because it could not afford to pay the salaries offered in neighboring towns and cities. However, they were proud that they had reduced costs from the 1898-99 academic year from \$32,665.04 to \$29,681.09 in 1899-1900. Apparently, the savings had occurred because the school buildings needed fewer repairs, and because the committee had dispensed with a "special teacher of music" and a "drawing teacher."

The report included a chart that outlined the Windham High School's four-year course of study. First year students gained

instruction in English grammar, ancient history, Latin, algebra, physical geography and botany.

In the second year, students focused upon paragraph structure, narration and exposition. They also had to study French, Greek, English history, Latin translation, geometry and elementary physics.

Third-year students worked upon essay construction and oration, German, Greek, Latin with a focus upon Cicero and Ovid, and geometry, trigonometry, book-keeping, zoology and advanced physics.

In the final year, Windham High's students studied literature, biography, German, Greek, civics, American history, Latin with a focus upon Virgil, geometry, advanced algebra, astronomy and physiology.

The school visitor, local attorney Samuel Harvey, presented his annual report and indicated how pleased he was with the advances in the teaching of spelling and reading.

However, there was room for improvement because when the vast majority of students read aloud in class, they lacked inflection and modulation in their voices, and it became difficult to follow their meaning.

Harvey's greatest criticism was aimed at the teachers in the Windham Street school. He believed that they spent far too much time in attempting to teach Greek and Roman history to chil-



The old Natchaug School, pictured above, was on the corner of Valley and Milk streets. It was featured in the 1900 school report.

dren under the age of 10. In his opinion, this was an "absolute waste of time" as the minds of such children were "not fitted to receive such instruction."

Harvey also criticized the high school, and suggested that the teachers should introduce a course in the theory and practice of elocution.

Moreover, he believed that the school's commercial course was inadequate, and that it should add typewriting and stenography.

The report's financial account revealed each teacher's salary, which averaged \$50 a month. The

janitor's wages averaged \$35 a month, and annual building repairs amounted to \$1,066.

The school paid local contractors such as Hillhouse and Taylor, Jeremiah O'Sullivan and Moriarty and Rafferty. School supplies amounted to \$868.11, and the school authorities paid the majority to stationary supplier W. J. Sweeney, and the Hall and Bill printing company.

The transportation of pupils cost the town \$1,511.35 to jitney

operators Frank Beckwith, George Potter and Fred Hoyt.

Fuel costs amounted to \$1,461 for coal and oil, and a fee of \$119 was paid to the Willimantic water works for the annual water rent. Other expenses included lesser payments for insurance, libraries, graduating costs, and the transportation of teachers.

In closing the report, Samuel Harvey praised all the schools for their management and discipline, where the principals had cultivated all that was "noble, good and true in boys and girls."

He noted that "the vices of cigarette smoking, petty lying were notably absent, and a healthy, moral tone pervades and animates the schools."