



1890 School Reports

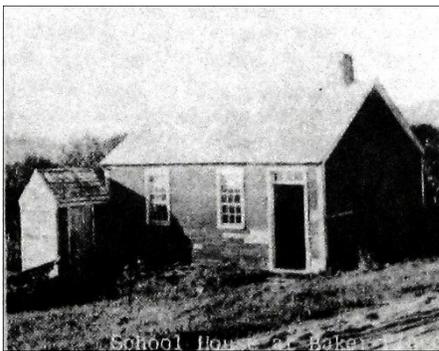
Dr. John G. Gehring and Horatio N. Upton

1890 Report of the Bethel School Committee issued in February 1891 as part of the annual town report

In taking up the work of the public schools for the past year, the present committee were careful to observe from the report of the previous committee what they considered, from their experience, to be the most vital needs of the schools, and we hereby heartily endorse their judgment as to the imperative demands made upon this community by the needs of its children.

1st.—**The condition of the school houses, as we found them, was, and still is deplorable.** The past committees have had but inadequate or no appropriations for their repairs, and the buildings, in fully half the districts, are nearly ruined for the lack of a few dollars expenditure at the proper time. The leaking roofs, unsafe floors, falling plastering, unsanitary outbuildings, — and in some cases no outbuildings at all,—testify to a lack of thought for the children of the community that but few of our thrifty farmers would be guilty of in connection with their choice stock.

Your committee has made, in their judgment, as wise an expenditure of the appropriation for the past year as the amount appropriated would permit, applying the sum of \$500 for twenty buildings, with reference to



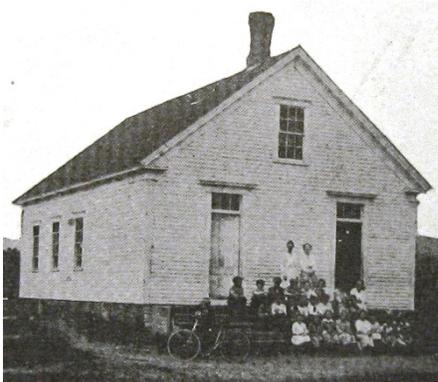
Typical of small district schools, this one is a Newry building which probably accommodated 8–12 pupils and the teacher's desk.

the greatest good for the greatest number of children, and where it was most urgently needed. The committee consider themselves bound to urge upon the community a greater condensation of its schools under fewer roofs, to the advantage of the scholars in point of tuition, and that of the buildings because of concentrated expenditure.

2d.—The first great need towards the improvement of our children's education has been met by our State law, whereby free and uniform text-books have been imposed upon all the school communities of our commonwealth. In selecting these text-books your committee have

exercised long and patient thought; have diligently compared many books from many publishers; have exercised not only their own best judgment but have availed themselves of the opinion and the experience of educators who have grown old and wise in the service of modern education. Other schools and other towns have been visited, and advice gladly received from those who have made common-school education a life study.

The last five years have marked an era in the text-book literature of our country that is worthy of the highest commendation. The large majority of the text-books for the common schools published at the present day, are ideals, in the point of their adaptation to the needs of the children of our generation, wherein so much more is demanded than has ever been before.



Much larger than the average district school, West Bethel School house—circa 1890. West Bethel's school population rivaled that of Bethel Hill village. Average attendance here was 24 students.

In selecting these new books, your committee feel that they have exercised a carefully weighed and matured judgment, one that has had in mind both the deficiencies of the past educational methods, as reflected in our children, and also the means of most efficiently and speedily installing them in the modern superior and more natural methods of instruction, with the least loss of time during the transitional period.

The nearer a method of instruction in any one subject, approaches a child's natural mental processes, (and the farther from artificial methods,) the more speedily does the child assimilate and make part of itself the knowledge gained. This law is the key note to all real and genuine education, and has been the foremost thought in the selection of these text books. Especially is this true with reference to the arithmetic chosen. In the State of Massachusetts over one hundred and thirty towns and cities are using these arithmetic's, and in our own state thirty-nine are using either one or both. Two of our largest cities, Portland and Augusta, are using these books. Augusta, our capitol, has introduced both books with most excellent results, and our State superintendent of instruction, Mr. Luce, in answer to a telegram sent him recently from Portland asking whether it was

true that he had declared Wentworth's Arithmetic the best, replied "I may have said so once, but Wheeler's Arithmetic is the best now."

With the endorsement of such high authority, and having seen the marvelous results obtained in public and private use by following out the methods of that natural-born arithmetical teacher, Warren Colburn, (as is taught in our lesser and greater arithmetic) it is with entire confidence in their future if not present appreciation, that your committee are wholly satisfied with the selections they have made.

Until the members of our community, who doubt the good results obtained from the patient drill in mental arithmetic, followed by the larger arithmetic which is but a practical continuation and application of the principles embodied in the former, have as thoroughly acquainted themselves with the present manner of teaching arithmetic in all good modern schools, as have your committee, and have as carefully compared these results with the notoriously imperfect and lamentable ones as obtained and presented in nearly every one of the schools in this township, we would respectfully suggest greater efforts for knowledge upon the subject and patient waiting for results that cannot be accomplished in one year, with our present background of unintelligent instruction that has been discarded years ago in more progressive schools and towns.

Your committee invite, and urge upon any citizen, desirous of knowing the actual status of arithmetical instruction as now taught in our schools, to visit them and by personal inspection find boys of sixteen who are studying percentage, unable to do the simplest sum of addition in common fractions — boys who profess to be so far advanced as to require the study of Algebra, who cannot do even elementary examples in common decimals or simple interest — children who use no natural reason in solving a problem, but who are at the mercy of a mechanical or memorized rule, and therefore find themselves in a mental haze just as soon as that rule is forgotten, a mental state which but illy (poorly) equips them for the practical problems of actual life. We feel convinced that every thoughtful person will be glad to know that there is a system in use wherein the pupil is led from principle to principle, so clearly, that the question of placing a problem under (into) a rule answers itself. To all intelligent and public spirited citizens we commend a careful inspection of our new text-books, inviting you to investigate into their merits, and to compare them with

others previously in use, feeling sure that they will win your full approval, based wholly upon their intrinsic merit.

3d.—The committee preceding the present one, suggested the need of grading in our schools as far as practicable. The urgent need of this can only be understood by those who see the loss of time that now prevails under the present ungraded system. Grading means simply, that the course of study covering a child's common school life, be outlined for it, in advance. It means that definite studies, covering definite periods of time, are to be entered upon within certain defined limits, proportioned to the child's age and abilities. Each succeeding year of the average child's school life, provided it has complied with the requirements of the preceding one, indicates that it is ready to enter a higher grade, to step upon a higher plane; and this process can be so accurately and wisely arranged for the child, that despite the frequent changing of teachers, its instruction and advancement can go on with the least possible loss to itself. With such a regulated (or graded course,) each new teacher can hope to take the child on farther than she found it, — and our children will not suffer so grievously as they must do under the present ungraded system.

Your committee is well aware that a perfect system of grading is hardly possible in the outlying districts,—great latitude must be allowed in individual cases—but in our village such a system is *wholly feasible*. Over one hundred children attend the two village schools alone, being nearly one-third of the entire number attending school in the town, and not a few of the neighboring districts would gladly avail themselves of the greater advantages of the graded schools in the village, when once the system had gotten under way. This change for the better *must come* sooner or later, it is inevitable. That it is a work that cannot be finished the same year as begun, that it is the work of some years, the experience of neighboring towns will testify. In one town eighteen miles from here, it has taken five years to thoroughly bring about this change, and the schools there are now a credit and honor to the community. *But the committee had the hearty support of the best public sentiment*. May it not be pertinent to ask the citizens of Bethel to question themselves upon this point? Our boys and girls are now sent out into the world of reality and hard experience but illy (poorly) equipped to take their chances with the children of other towns. Our year's school-term is at its best of only twenty-four weeks duration, as compared with thirty-eight and forty weeks elsewhere,

and our children are only half drilled in that knowledge which will be the chief factor in deciding for them whether they will be intelligent self-supporting citizens, or whether they are to be buffeted about and crowded under and to the rear by the young men and women with whom they will come into active competition who have had better advantages.

4th.—Last in presentation but first in importance, is the vital question of the teachers, without whose intelligent co-operation all the efforts on the part of the committee are useless. The small sum appropriated this year for school purposes, \$581 less than the preceding year, has discouraged many of our teachers by the poor wages and short school terms. Instances were frequent wherein the committee had hopefully secured the services of an intelligent teacher, and been disappointed, often at the shortest notice, by finding that the prospect of higher remuneration offered by other towns had caused them to decline teaching here.

Until more money is voted for teaching purposes, the town cannot expect to be supplied in all the districts with the best teachers. Nor can the town expect to have longer schools, after the utmost dollar appropriated for that purpose has been expended. Furthermore, our young and in many cases wholly inexperienced teachers, must come to this new field with teachable minds. If the teachers in our great schools, who have spent a quarter of a century in teaching, hold themselves in readiness to take the ever coming suggestions, that arise in the very nature of their work, our young men and women will be valuable, or otherwise, as teachers, in direct proportion as they steer clear of the rocks of self-conceit and shallow satisfaction, and like all successful teachers consider themselves as life-long *students* in the art of teaching.

Your committee is actuated by the one motive of facilitating the best methods for the education of your children. It is dependent upon yourselves whether their best welfare is present or absent with you; whether your children shall have an equal chance for themselves with children elsewhere. The demands made upon your children at the present day are double and treble in quantity and quality than were made upon you, in your generation. To make the argument that what was good enough for you ought to be good enough for them, (and your committee has had this brought forth times enough to cause it to feel mortified over its constituency) is not compatible with the spirit of our present state of enlighten-

ment. We have scores of bright and intelligent children among us, capable of becoming strong men and women; but who will deny that their success or defeat will depend upon the way in which the foundations of their education are laid in these our common schools. It is for you, their parents, to decide, whether your children shall have a fair chance or whether they shall be hindered and crippled through after life by reason of their parents indifference.

The requisites are: 1st, good books; 2d, apt and intelligent teachers; 3d, the support of the better class of the community, who are willing to intelligently inquire into methods employed, rather than to denounce that which they have not taken the trouble to understand. These are the greatest and most urgent requirements for the true improvement of our schools. We have the books; we have some teachers who do themselves and us credit; and if the public will allow our schools the opportunity of testing the methods used so uniformly and with such success elsewhere,— we may hope there will be in time a change for the better in these schools which have hitherto been a standing reproach to the town of Bethel.

The following is a brief report of the schools in the several districts:

DISTRICT No. 3.

Summer and fall terms taught by Miss Cora Hastings. The school was small but good advancement was made in the several classes.

For the winter term we were so fortunate as to secure the services of Miss Edith A. Philbrook, a teacher of experience and ability; the only regret being that the term was necessarily so short.

DISTRICT No. 4.

The summer term was satisfactorily taught by Miss Bowker. Fall and winter terms by Miss Bertha Grover - one of our most capable and experienced teachers.

DISTRICT No. 5.

The first two terms were taught by Miss Florence Twitchell, in so satisfactory a manner that the district were disappointed in not securing her for the winter term. Miss Isabelle Day, in the winter term, carried on the work of the school room in a creditable manner.

DISTRICT No. 8.

Summer term was under the instruction of Miss Flora J. Wheeler. Miss Wheeler is one of our oldest teachers and is a success wherever she goes. Mr. Hutchins had charge of the fall term. He has taught several terms in this district and seems to hold the good will of both parents and scholars; he is very successful in his school work. Mr. Hutchins was secured for the winter and a profitable term was the result.

DISTRICT No. 10

Summer term taught by Miss Grace Grover. Miss Grover worked hard for the success of the school and thorough work was the result.

Miss Florence Abbott taught the fall term. This was Miss Abbott's first school and as such was highly commendable to her as a teacher. Miss Abbott continued the school with good success during the winter.

DISTRICT No. 11.

The summer term was taught by Miss Lizzie Grover. Miss Grover did thorough conscientious work and her record was wholly satisfactory.

Fall term by Miss Han B. Jewett. Winter term by Mr. Hiram Williams, a young teacher of sterling qualities whose good and thorough work have made a most desirable impression upon the school.

DISTRICT No. 13.

Summer term by Miss Edith Grover. Miss Grover displayed excellent abilities as a teacher, characterized by very faithful, and conscientious work. The marked improvement of the several classes during the few weeks, displayed the possibilities of genuine progress under faithful intelligent instruc-

tion. Fall term by Miss Grace Grover, the same good success attending her here as elsewhere. The school was in good working condition when we visited it at the close of the term. Winter term by Miss Addie Farwell. This term was unsuccessful, owing to the failure of the teacher to either understand or comply with the instructions of the committee, causing a misunderstanding on the part of the parents which, when ultimately rectified, was followed by Miss Farwell's resignation, thus depriving the already too short term, of its last week.

DISTRICT No. 14.

Summer term by Miss Alfretta Farwell. On account of outside influences the school failed to be a success. Fall term taught by Curtis E. Abbott. The pupils did thorough work and good satisfaction was given. We were so fortunate as to secure Mr. Abbott for the winter term, and marked advancement was the result of his labors.

DISTRICT No. 15.

Grammar Grade,—Summer term, taught by Miss Mary Abbott who kindly filled the vacancy that was made by the teacher previously engaged.

Fall and winter term, taught by Miss Maggie Libby. Miss Libby failed to meet the expectations of the committee by a lack of sympathy with the spirit of modern teaching, and by failing to appreciate the merits of modern text-books. The winter term suffered because the teacher did not exercise the necessary discipline, due in a measure however to the disadvantages arising from a mixture of the Grammar grade with that which should properly be placed in a High school. The term just closed but bears out the record of the reputation of the past winter schools, and calls for such a division of this upper grade, that boys at the age of fourteen and upwards shall have a class-room and teacher provided outside of this building.

Primary Grade,—Summer term, taught by Miss Martha Gibson who did earnest and satisfactory work.

Fall and winter terms, taught by Miss Inez Stuart. Miss Stuart has unusually fine abilities for primary work, a branch of teaching that is alike the most

difficult and most important. It is upon the thoroughness with which the beginnings of a child's knowledge are laid, that the results of its after school years are shaped, and the children and parents were most fortunate in having the benefit of this faithful and progressive teacher.

DISTRICT No. 16

The summer term was very satisfactorily taught by Miss Jennie Gibson. The fall term, taught by Miss Alice Barker, did not yield good work, because of the lack of needed discipline. The winter term was wholly successful, being taught by Mr. Roscoe Clark who conducted the school with excellent discipline, and who brought to bear marked faithfulness and aptitude for the work.

DISTRICT No. 18.

Summer term, conducted by Mr. Hutchins, to the satisfaction alike of committee and pupils. Fall and winter terms, by Mr. Berto Bryant. This school is to be congratulated in having had the services of Mr. Bryant, who devoted faithful and telling work to the duties before him. It is much to be regretted that owing to sickness among the pupils the successful work of the fall term had to be discontinued, but the interruption was amply compensated for by the ably conducted work of the lengthened winter term.

DISTRICT No. 19.

Summer term, taught by Miss Minnie Coffin. Miss Coffin failed to maintain sufficient restraint in the school-room, and the work done was not as satisfactory as it would have been had the school been subject to better discipline.

Miss Vertie Cushman taught the fall term and met with good success. Miss Cushman is a good disciplinarian and a practical worker in the school-room. Winter term was taught by Mr. Fred B. Colby. Mr. Colby's work was done with a precision and clearness that comes from experience and a thorough knowledge of his subjects.

DISTRICT No. 21.

Summer term, taught by Miss Alice Barker. This was Miss Barker's first school.

Miss Maud Merrow taught the fall term. Some of the classes showed good progress, but in others there seemed to be a lack of interest. Winter term, taught by Miss Mary Hutchins with her usual good success.

DISTRICT No. 22.

Summer term, under the instruction of Miss Vertie Cushman. The school is small and the teacher finds it hard work to keep up a good degree of interest in the classes. Miss Cushman did very creditable work. Fall term, taught by Miss Amy Atherton. Too much work was attempted in most of the classes, for a short eight weeks term. Nevertheless some of the classes showed good improvement. The winter term taught by Miss Cushman, showed work creditable to both teacher and pupils.

DISTRICT No. 24.

The summer term was taught by Mr. Arthur Wiley, who applied himself earnestly to the work.

The fall term was well taught by Miss Ethel Walker, the scholars lacking neither patience nor carefulness on the part of their teacher.

Owing to the insufficient number of scholars, the winter term was postponed, this district being entitled to an extra term in connection with the coming one of this summer.

DISTRICT No. 25.

Miss Bessie Hardin taught the summer term. Lack of discipline combined with other things rendered the work of the term unsatisfactory. The fall term was well taught by Miss Isabelle Day. Miss Day is a progressive teacher who has had the great advantage of seeing modern methods in practical use. The winter term was ably taught by Miss Arvilla Grover, who brings to

her work experience and faithfulness, and whose services were very praiseworthy.

DISTRICT No. 26

Summer and fall terms: under the instruction of Miss Mary Hutchins. The work done was highly commendable. The teacher and scholars alike were much interested in their work and from their examination at the close of the term it was evident that thoroughness had been the air of the teacher. Winter term, taught by Mr. Angus Hebb. The school was visited at the commencement of the term only, and the impressions then received were highly favorable.

DISTRICT No. 27.

Miss Ida Hazelton conducted this school throughout the entire year, and the marked advantage to the school is very obvious. Miss Hazelton is a teacher of much experience, her work is characterized by great painstaking, and her efforts are directed towards giving the pupil an intelligent and comprehensive knowledge of the subject. Miss Hazelton is a very desirable acquisition to our staff of teachers.

DISTRICT No. 28.

There was no school in this district during the summer, the school being combined with that of District No. 24. The fall term was taught by Miss Lulu Hamlin, who did commendable and satisfactory work. The winter term was deferred, owing to the lateness of the season, the term of this ensuing summer to be of additional length to compensate for the deficiency.

DISTRICT No. 29.

Summer term taught by Miss Ruby Clark, who seemed to have a special aptitude for the work. Fall term was taught satisfactorily by Miss Arvilla Grover. Owing to sickness in the district the school was delayed until the last of January and is now being taught by Miss Bertha Grover.

DISTRICT No. 30.

Summer term was in care of Miss Inez Stuart and was excellent. The fall and winter terms have been taught by Miss Martha Gibson, another of our teachers who render telling, faithful work. Miss Gibson's school was conducted with marked fidelity to thoroughness, and a visit to her school was always a source of satisfaction to the committee. Her discipline was excellent and the school has made commendable progress.

J. G. GEHRING,

H. N. UPTON,

Supervising School Committee of Bethel