

# Single Classroom, Built in 1768, Marks

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Specially Written for Our Towns

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood school system dates back to pre-Revolutionary War years, when "Scotsplains" first school house was built in 1768 on property where the Scotch Plains Baptist Church now stands.

The school was organized by local surveyor William Cole, who also served as its first teacher. The Scotch Plains Baptist School Society served as the original board of education.

The one-room wooden building, known as District No. 5, contained long wooden desks and back-less benches. First warmed by a single fireplace, it was later heated by a more modern pot stove in the center of the room.

In the early days of American independence, it was inconceivable that someone should be required to go to school, so attendance at school was voluntary — and sporadic.

Every three months, each pupil was required to pay \$1.875. Those funds were used to pay the teacher, who averaged a salary of approximately \$90 per year. Janitors were paid \$.125 per child, per term. If enough children did not come to the school to make opening worthwhile, the schoolmaster adjourned for the term.

There is some evidence that school closed during the Revolutionary War so residents could tend to the more pressing needs of the fight for independence.

A 1783 advertisement for a new teacher in the *New Jersey Journal* (reprinted in "Under the Blue Hills," by Marion Nicholl Rawson in 1974) read, "Wanted by the first of May a school master who can be well recommended for his ability in teaching the English language and good morals. Any such on (sic) application to Isaac Halsey in behalf of the employers of Scotch Plains will meet with generous encouragement."

As many as 100 children were registered by 1844, although only a few actually came to school on a regular basis. Pupils were taught reading, arithmetic, the alphabet, spelling, writing and grammar.

A second school was established on the south side of Scotch Plains in the early 1800s. The Jackson School Academy was located at the corner of Terrill and Cushing Roads and was open for seven months a year.

Although 63 students were registered, only 35 actually attended classes. The school operated until the mid-19th century and was torn down in 1910.

The following poem was written by a former Jackson School student, David Hand:

"How dear to this heart is the school of my childhood,  
When fond recollections present it to view!  
The blue pail and dipper, the slab seats we sat on,  
And the old hickory gad that we youngsters all knew;  
The teacher's big arm chair, the desks that stood by it,  
And the stove, and the wood box we all had to fill.  
O the little old school house!  
the storm-beaten school house!  
That old Jackson School House that stands o'er the Hill!"

Willow Grove School was built in 1814 in the neighborhood of the original Lambert's Mills. The original structure was replaced in 1870 by a new building which operated until 1904, when it was replaced by a two-room wooden building called School No. 2.

This facility was used until the late 1930s, when students transferred to LaGrande School in Fanwood (now an outpatient center for Children's Specialized Hospital of Mountainside).

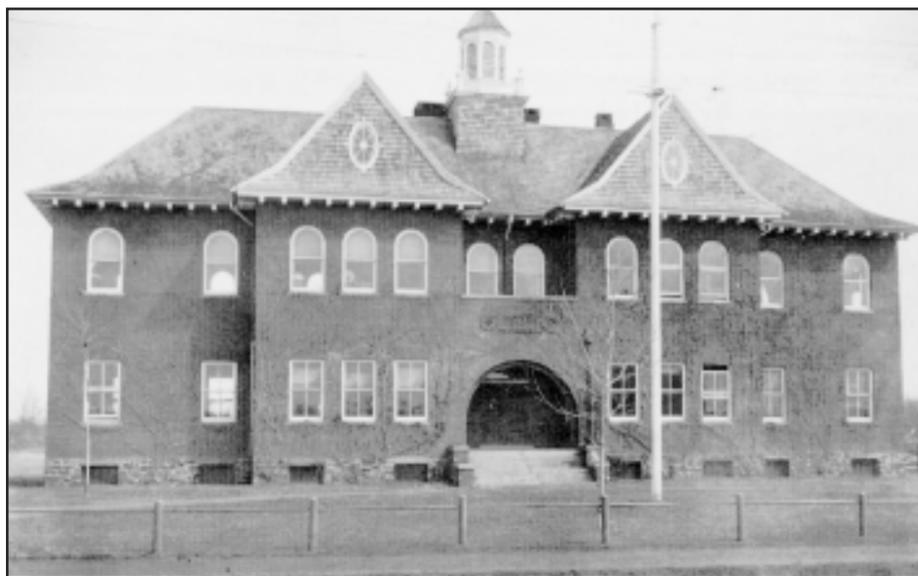
The Parish School House, District No. 14, was located at the corner of Grand Street and Union Avenue. The building was impressive for its day, containing both single and double desks. According to a school history prepared by School One's fifth-grade class of 1941-1942, "the teacher's desk was the best that could be made, but was not to cost more than \$13.50."

The school featured furnace heating, drinking water from a well and a plank sidewalk out front. The traditional curriculum was expanded to include history and geography.

When the school opened in November of 1871, the teacher's salary had grown to \$700 per year, with the assistant receiving \$350 annually. In 1874, the school boasted two teachers and one Principal.

Of the 107 children registered, only four came every day for the eight-month school year. Thirty-nine attended daily for four months; 12 for six months. The school was used until 1890, when the original School One was built on Park Avenue.

A high school curriculum appears to date back as far as 1873. Subjects included arithmetic, algebra, natural philosophy (general science), reading, grammar, composition, spelling and



Courtesy of Scotch Plains-Fanwood Historical Society

**SCHOOL DAYS...**The original School One building on Park Avenue in Scotch Plains in 1905. The building was lost to an arson fire in 1984. The "new" School One Elementary is located on Willow Avenue.

penmanship. All of these were compulsory, although bookkeeping was offered as an optional course.

In June of 1889, the town leaders convened to discuss the construction of a new school for Scotch Plains and Fanwood children. In his address to the group, Dr. J. Ackerman Coles acknowledged the desires of the people of Fanwood to have the new building constructed in a place "somewhat convenient to them."

The original School One was a grand structure designed by prominent architect Stanford White, famed for designing the original Madison Square Garden, as an adaptation of Romanesque architecture. It stood at the corner of Park Avenue and Westfield Road, with the grounds extending back to Forest Road.

The school — two stories, five rooms — was built in 1890 (the same year that school tuition was abolished) at a cost of \$18,000. The first floor housed three classrooms and the Principal's office. The second floor contained two classrooms and the auditorium.

With a capacity of 250 pupils, School One opened as an elementary school, with three teachers and one principal. At the time, the average teacher's salary was \$515 annually.

By 1909, School One had become too small to hold the growing student population, so two

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