

Educating the Scholars of the Mad River Valley

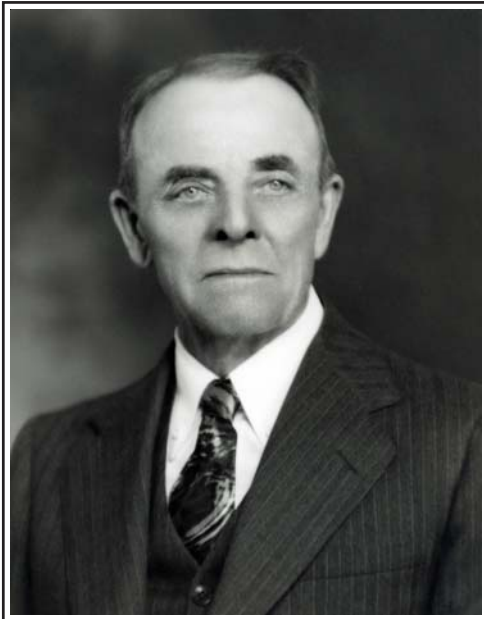
Written by Jan Pogue

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**Dedicated to Fletcher B. Joslin for his
love of local history and lifetime
dedication to the Valley.**

Educating the Scholars of the Mad River Valley



George W. Wallis

George W. Wallis was never meant to be a dairy farmer. His mind went toward numbers – the adding and subtracting that had been part of his lessons from textbooks like Robinson’s First Book in Arithmetic, the gold lettering of the black-clothed textbooks worn off by the hands of children passing it around one-room schoolhouses.

George’s father, Otis, made sure his only son got all the education the village of Waitsfield could give him. Like many of the pioneers who’d helped settle Vermont, Otis knew that being able to read, write and do “sums” – if only to be able to read the Bible and keep up with how much

he owed the local dry goods firm of Gleason & Hastings – was important. The first constitution of Vermont, adopted in 1777, provided that a school be established in every town, and most of the towns around Vermont designated land and organized some form of education almost as soon as there were enough families to furnish students.

If he’d been born a few years earlier, George would probably have gone to a neighbor’s house, where a room was set aside for learning. But George had been born in 1866 – born late to his father, who was already 42, and nine years after the birth of his only sister, Abbie. By then, there were already seven schools in Waitsfield, and more than two dozen more in the neighboring communities of Fayston, Moretown and Warren.

George walked the three-quarters of a mile to District No. 1 school, a simple building that was probably almost as cold inside as it was out. The

schoolhouses were crude structures, often built of logs or rough planking, and the native stone fireplaces were never big enough to heat the whole building. (In 1879, when George was thirteen and almost finished with his formal education, the school bought 6 3/4 cords of wood for \$7.76 from J.P. Carpenter. The next, perhaps colder, winter, the school needed ten cords from Carpenter.)

It took hard money to run that school – \$44.48, in the year George was five, just before he started school. To keep the costs of education down, teachers boarded with the families of their students, and Otis Wallis did his duty,



A typical farm family.

putting up teachers during the summer and winter terms during various years. (Summer was considered the “women’s school,” because women were hired to teach it; since the boys were working on the farm, the session was mostly very young children or girls.) Sometimes, Otis did a little work on the side to keep the school up; in 1879, he’d spent a day and a quarter shingling the schoolhouse, earning \$2.19 for his labor.

George was the fourth generation of Wallises to live in Waitsfield. Both his great-grandfather, Jonathan, and his grandfather, Joseph, had been farmers in the Valley. His father bought the old David Symonds farm right after the Civil War to run as a dairy. The farm included the house where George was born, a two-storied, Vermont style farmhouse with a four-foot-thick foundation. Otis was a successful dairy farmer and a good citizen. He was elected selectman in 1871-2, and served as one of the town auditors keeping an eye on the treasury.

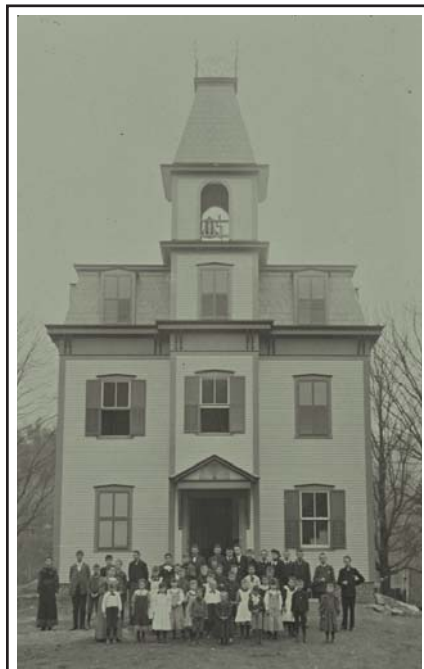
Otis’ insistence that George get as good an education as possible paid off – though, perhaps not the way Otis had intended. George finished his grammar schooling when he was twelve or thirteen. He then went on for

two years of “high school” at the village school in Waitsfield and two years at the Montpelier Seminary. Upon graduation from the Montpelier Seminary, George spent two years at the Albany Business College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Rather than taking over the farm from his now aging father, George, with his natural affinity for numbers, went to New York, the birth place of his mother, to pursue life as a banker. When his father summoned him back, asking him to take over the farm he could no longer keep up, George reluctantly agreed. He returned to Waitsfield within a few years of his father’s death in 1893; four months after Otis died, George married Adele Bragg of Warren. He and Adele had six sons – Harold, Everett, Clifford and their youngest, William Otis, named after his grandfather; two of their sons died in early childhood.

George was a restive farmer. His time out of Waitsfield had instilled a thirst for news and information, and he was insistent on educating both his boys and the children of Waitsfield. While his wife sat reading her Bible, George each evening read aloud all the periodicals and newspapers of the day to his children, so they would grow up with a broad perspective of what was going on in the world. He spent a year as a representative in the Vermont General Assembly and became active in the local school system, serving as chairman of the school board.

Ultimately, that restiveness and desire to offer better education to the community fueled a major event in the history of the Mad River Valley: he almost single handedly brought a four-year high school to Waitsfield in 1921, in the form of what is sometimes teasingly referred to as the “George Wallis Temple of Learning.”



Waitsfield Village School.

That four year curriculum, the only one within 20 to 30 miles of the Valley (then a full day or more of travel), completely changed the lives of hundreds of students forever by offering them a better education.

Education Becomes “Common and Universal”

George Wallis’ belief in education had roots all the way back to the Pilgrims and Plymouth Rock. Historians have found references as early as 1700 making it obligatory for “All Parents to teach their Children to read...Every Town having 50 House-holders shall provide a Schoolmaster to teach to write and read; if it have 100, it shall have a Grammar-School, the select men to see them paid.”

By the time the descendants of the Pilgrims made their way to what would later be Vermont – and were joined by other new immigrants – establishment



School children in the early days.

of schools was a natural part of frontier communities. In Samuel Williams’ *History of Vermont*, written in 1794 and often used as a textbook in the classrooms of the 1800s, “One of the first things the new settlers attend to is to procure a schoolmaster to instruct their children in the

arts of reading, writing and arithmetic, and where they are not able to procure or hire an instructor the parents attend to it themselves.”

Such an education, Williams wrote, “is common and universal in every part of the state, and nothing would be more dishonorable to the parents or children than to be without it.” Without the education “a child...is viewed as unfit for the common business of the towns...and in a state greatly inferior to his neighbors.”

Such dedication was admirable. Vermont pioneers struggled to clear the land, put roofs over their heads and fight a succession of wars and political conflicts. The land was claimed by both Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and the early leaders had to work to get recognition as a new state. Yet even before the first constitution in 1777 adopted a thorough plan of education from the primary school right through a university, schoolhouses were being built around Vermont. The new settlers of Bennington, for instance, voted a tax in 1763 to build a schoolhouse, and two years later there were already three schools in operation in the town.

The people gradually populating the Mad River Valley were not exceptions. Without a formal system of education, parents taught their children to read by using the Bible and the periodical publications, newspapers and political pamphlets that fell into their hands. They taught them simple math,

and they had them write out their lessons on rough pieces of rock or slate, to develop good penmanship.

When there were enough families to make up a classroom, parents pooled their resources and offered their homes as places of learning. Matt Bushnell Jones, writing in his 1909 *History of the Town of Waitsfield, Vermont*, names “Dea. Moses Fisk’s best bedroom” as doing duty as the district school room for several years. The same seemed to be true in Fayston, Warren and Moretown; a notation in the *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, published in five volumes between 1860 and 1891,



Very early Valley school (inside and out).

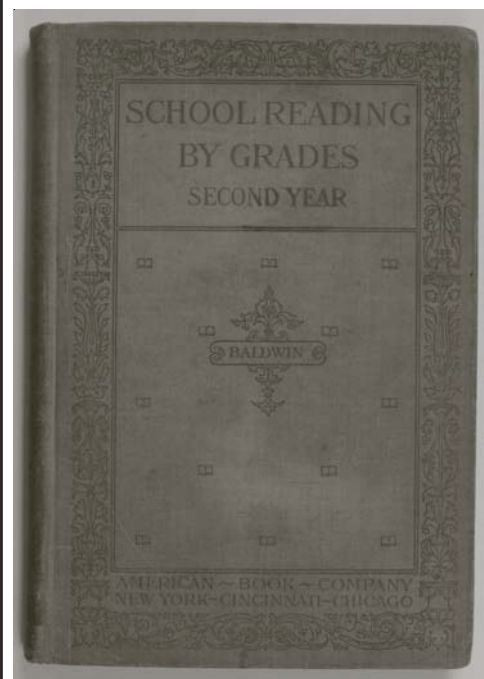
points out that the first formal school was built in Warren in 1805 but “we hardly think that the date is correct, as that is seven years after the town was organized,” implying that was much too late for the education-loving settlers.

Waitsfield took the formal step in 1797 of forming a five member committee – made up of Jared Skinner, Salma Rider, Benjamin Wait, Francis Dana and Aaron Minor – to divide the town into school districts “up to the mountain, the first district beginning at the Moretown line on the river...and (the last district) south to the Warren line.” A few weeks later, members of the newly named Northwest School District (later called District No. 1) voted to spend \$46.66 to build a school house 24 feet by 18 feet.

Then, the parents not only built the schools but hired the teachers, determined the curriculum and paid for the textbooks their children used.

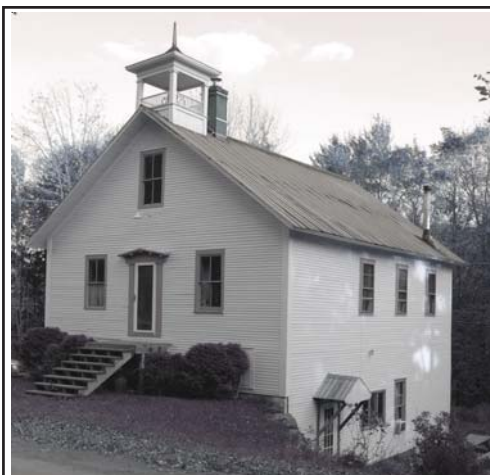
The school year was at first divided into two terms, winter (when the boys from the farms could be spared), starting close to Thanksgiving, and summer. The winter session, in which only men were employed as teachers, often went on “till the money raised be expended,” according to Waitsfield town records. If there was money and students, a teacher might also be hired to conduct a

fall term (which would later grow common), though it was a few weeks shorter than the winter session. Summer classes were both shorter and cheaper – the difficulty of providing wood to heat the schools, a burden that fell on those parents “according to their Number of Scholars,” was eliminated.



An early textbook dating back to 1897.

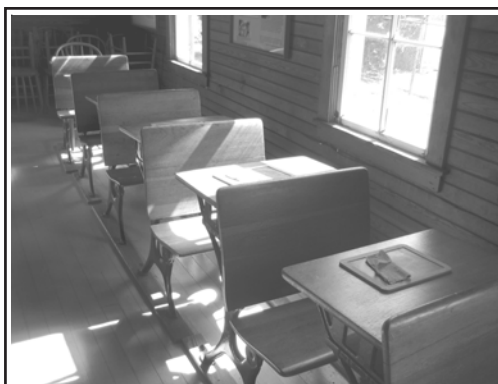
The schools were placed in the geographic center of the districts, with children sometimes walking miles each day to school or finding a family near the school willing to take them for the term. One year, as many as twenty-five children from Fayston regularly attended District No. 5 school in Waitsfield, since that school was actually closer than one of their own. The transportation problem lasted for decades; George Wallis, watching out the window of his home as his own children struggled up Gaylord Hill in the snow on their way to school, cursed each time a sleigh passed without picking them up.



*Two-room school at Fayston
District No. 4.*

School districts were sometimes rearranged in an attempt to better locate them. In 1813, for instance, Waitsfield's Southwest District, located not far from the foot of the Dugway in the valley of Mill Brook, District No. 5, was redefined to allow construction of a school more convenient for the children in the North who attended it. The new district, No. 6, was later called the Village District, and the first school there in 1816 burned down early in 1817.

The school built to replace it was carefully described in town records as "wood, and set on the old foundation, to be 20 X 24 ft. square, to be well lathed and plastered (cq), with a ceiling to the bottom of the windows, to be constructed in the same manner of the old house, with the same number of windows, to be built of good materials, and done



*Inside the classroom, the girls were
subjected to the pranks of the boys that
sat behind them.*

in a good workmanlike manner, the chimney to be built with stone in the mantle-tree, the remainder of brick of the same size at the bottom of the chamber floor, the whole to be laid in lime..." Having learned a thing or two from the fire, the school leaders also took the precaution of buying sheet iron to put before the fireplace.

As the communities grew, more and more schools were added:

- The first school district in Moretown was organized in what was then called the Haseltine neighborhood. By 1888, with a population of roughly 1,181 people recorded in the 1880 census, the town had eleven school districts and supported schools in each one, including one two-room school. A total of 226 children attended school, and the town spent \$1,571.31 on them. That year, U.P. Child was superintendent.
- With a population of about 638 in 1880, Fayston was divided into eight school districts in 1888, and kept a school in each district to teach the 170 "scholars," the word most often used to describe students. Superintendent J.B. Thompson oversaw the expenditure of \$1,078.78 on the schools.



Moretown District No. 8, Taplin School.



Fayston School No. 9 on Route 17.

- Waitsfield had a population of 938 recorded in the 1880 census, and by 1888 supported six schools to teach 218 students. That year, they spent \$1,946.20 on the schools, according to superintendent H.N. Bushnell.



Waitsfield District No. 4 School moved from original location across the road.

- And that same year, with a population of 951, Warren supported ten schools to educate 201 children, spending \$1,714.70 under superintendent E.W. Slayton's watchful eyes.



Warren District No. 2 School as it looks today.

Outside Toilets – the Road to Depravity?

From the beginning, everyone wanted education – but no one liked the cost.

Waitsfield's first teacher, Salah Smith, asked for ten bushels of wheat as payment for the job in 1797. The selectmen declined, voting to hire Smith only if he could "be obtained without engaging him Grain." Otherwise, they decided, they had another candidate in mind. (Apparently Smith didn't hold the tough negotiations against them: he served for three years as the town clerk during the first six years of the 1800s and as town treasurer for six years after that, inscribing town reports with a penmanship said to look like old copper plate engraving.)

Schools were built in the cheapest way possible, and were small, low-posted, ill-ventilated and often placed on pieces of land not particularly suited for them. One historian, who clearly fancied himself something of a wag, said you could always spot the schools: if, after you'd passed a series of farms on the most beautiful land, with substantial houses and well-kept barns, you came to a small, ramshackle, poorly located building, you'd found the school.



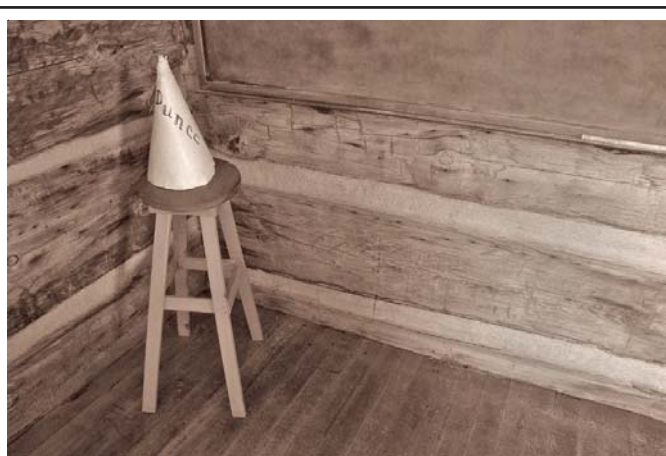
Students in front of Warren District No. 2 School.

At one end of the single room was usually a large fireplace, often smoking from green wood just fetched from the nearby forest. As fuel-efficient Franklin Stoves became more common in the 1800s, schools replaced the fireplaces; Waitsfield's District No. 1 became the first school building with a stove in 1822 after a long wrangle and the appointment of numerous committees to study the feasibility of getting it.

In the early days of the schools, wood was supplied by the families of the students. Many of the families failed to take this responsibility seriously, and in the town records of Waitsfield you find a vote that "no schollar (cq) shall be admitted into school until his parents or master has delivered at the schoolhouse one-third cord of wood." If, as apparently happened often, the "schollar" failed to supply the wood, then the parents or master (in the case of apprenticed youth) were charged \$1 per cord to be "recovered...by an action of debt."

Eventually, the schools solved the wood problem by simply including the cost into the schools' budgets and paying parents to deliver it – though not before generations of children shivered in unheated schoolrooms.

The challenges of supplying heat and fuel have plagued school leaders right into the 21st century. Warren resident Rebecca Peatman remembers a pot-bellied stove with a tin jacket around it in her classroom at the East Warren Four Corners School during the 1930s and 1940s. Students had to keep the fire going in winter to warm the classroom – and, if the students behaved themselves, they could bring their chairs close to the stove to get warm. One of the punishments for not being good, she says, was cold feet; conversely, if you were really bad, you might get placed right next to the far-too-hot stove, sitting on a stool and wearing a dunce cap. Later, the Waitsfield High School boiler room would do double duty, providing both heat and a smoking spot for the boys, who would join janitor Walter Mann, grandfather of one of the students, in a friendly cigarette.



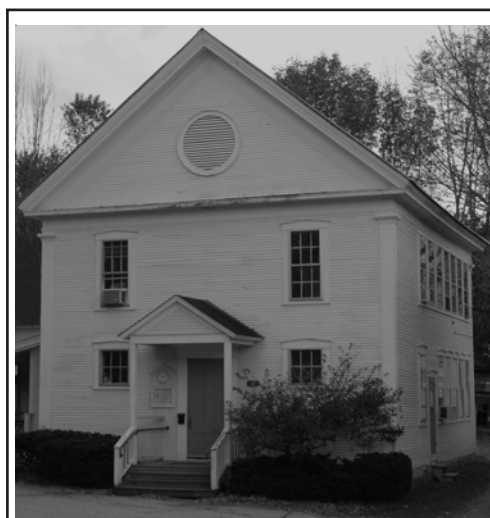
A dunce cap was worn by the scholar who had misbehaved or was slow in their work.

Even in 1951, Moretown leaders were talking about hot and cold – some of the rural one- and two-room schools, town records show, “are heated with wood burning heaters, (and) do not become sufficiently warm at the opening of school.” (Obviously, the cost of fuel is a huge budget line item in all schools today.)

Students had a lot of responsibilities in the schools that would seem strange today. Since there was no running water, children at the Down River School in Warren walked across a bridge each day to bring back a bucketful of water from a spring on the other side of the river. In most schools, the boys looked after the fires and the girls dusted the classroom. In 1821, Waitsfield school leaders apparently became convinced this wasn’t very efficient and bid at auction the job of keeping the schoolhouse clean. Capt. Phineas Rider,

one of the earliest settlers of Waitsfield who served as both a selectman and town treasurer, won the job for \$1.50 a term. Eventually, this became a natural part of the school budgets – young David Ralph Bisbee, at age 22 a contemporary of George Wallis and who later owned the old Rufus Child’s farm – both taught at School No. 4 and cleaned the schoolhouse, earning a substantial \$80 in 1887.

Keeping up these old, poorly constructed buildings was a constant challenge. Only when town leaders reluctantly recognized the buildings couldn’t be repaired did they agree to build new ones.



*Warren Village School
District No. 3.*

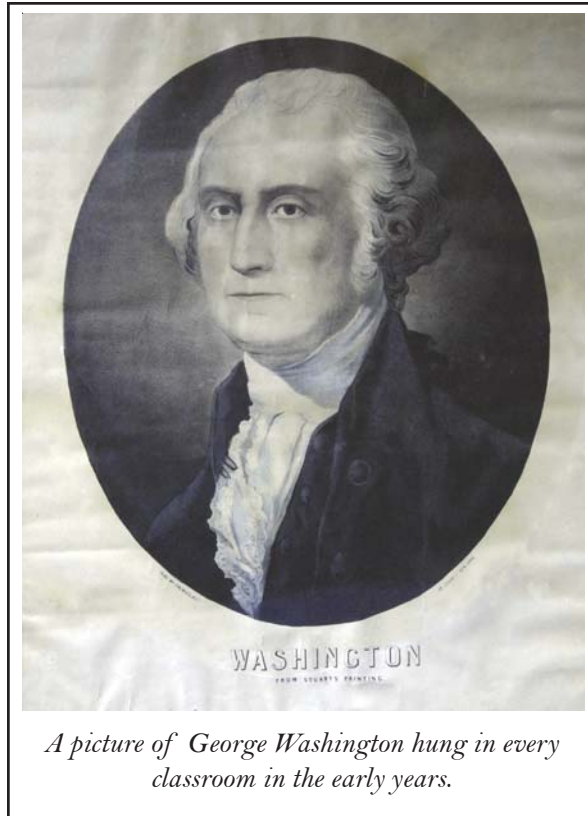
Warren town records from March 1898 show the careful thought that went into these “modern schools”: after describing the 26-foot by 38-foot schoolhouse with a substantial brick foundation they were recommending, the three-man school committee went on to suggest “the walls be covered around schoolroom with good wallpaper and plastered around schoolroom.” All this work, the committee said, should cost no more than \$750, and the building ready on or before the first day of November – six and a half months later. As evidenced by the

construction in the 1960s of the Harwood Union High School, which was still unfinished after a year of construction when the students began to attend it in September 1966, not all things got better over the next century.

Worry about the condition of the schools was constant. Waitsfield’s Village District (No. 6) school was in such a bad state in 1836 that the children attended school in “A. Rider’s shoop (cq)” during the winter term. When the town couldn’t agree to build a new school, the district voted “to repair the old schoolhouse in a cheap and convenient manner for the present winter.”

The matter of a new school house in the Village District wasn't settled for nearly ten years.

Fayston town records report in 1922 that "school buildings in the North and South ends are in very good condition, but the one at the Center is in



need of a new floor, new windows and painting, also it ought to be moved to a more favorable location." A few years earlier in Waitsfield, the state Board of Health condemned the water supply to one of its schools, and school directors were forced to spend \$487.25 to pipe in spring water. To keep costs down, building materials from dismantled schools were used until they rotted away; other times, old buildings were hauled in for use by the schools. Part of the Number Nine school in Fayston, which town resident Gussie Graves attended in the 1930s, was an old woodshed.

Even into the 1960s the school officials, still dealing with some of the rural one or two-room schools, expressed both worry and outrage over the condition of the schools. Wallace A. Martin, superintendent of schools in Warren, contrasted what he saw emerging at the new Sugarbush Ski Resort with the condition of his schools when he wrote these words into the town report of 1963: "When we look at the Warren School buildings and the Sugarbush buildings, we can wonder if we are talking about the same town...Our present buildings are old and shabby. They cannot be fixed so that they will look much better."

But nothing held the interest of school leaders more than the condition of the outdoor toilets found at every school. School leaders in every town talked about them in their annual reports to the town – often with extreme consternation. At Ms. Graves' school, the outside toilets were flooded every spring (which meant they didn't have to be mucked out) and were washed completely away in the flood of 1938. It literally was an act of the state to replace them, since the sites for the toilets had to be approved by the state Board of Health.

Martin W. Chaffee, superintendent of schools in Warren in 1918, went so far as to blame the outhouses for a certain degrading of education: "Many of the outhouses are not what they should be...Much depravity comes from poorly constructed and poorly located outhouses. Also, the pit should be so tight that flies cannot gain admittance."

Few could offer more than an "amen" to such sentiments.

The School Bell Rings

Life in the classrooms of old was, in many ways, just like school today: the school bell rang, students scrambled to find their seats, rolls were called, lessons given, fidgeting bodies were quieted by threats of discipline, and teachers made it home only after staying late to prepare for the next day.

Then, of course, there were the differences: big brothers and little sisters were in the same classroom, everyone shared the few textbooks, desks in the very earliest days were often rough wood planks attached by pegs to split logs, rooms were dark since windows were expensive, candles dripped, fireplaces or stoves



Every teacher had a hand school bell to call the students to class.

smoked, discipline might come at the end of a stick, and the teacher might trudge through twilight and deep snow to get back to a neighboring farm house where he was boarding for the session. And some students themselves might be boarding at a house closer to the school, working around the house or farm to pay their way.

A typical school fall term lasted nine weeks, and the winter one twelve. The winter term was the most heavily attended and generally started the first Monday in December. Often, children who might have walked miles would show up early that first day, waiting at the door when the teacher arrived. They were eager to get inside to find the best seats – preferably in the back. Once the fire was started, the teacher jangled or rang the school bell, starting class promptly at 9. After welcoming the students, the teacher would read from the Bible or lead the children in the Lord's Prayer. Occasionally, a hymn was sung, and, in later years, patriotic songs were used.

The teachers didn't have many textbooks, might barely have attended school themselves, and used teaching methods that one historian describes as "crude and unorthodox." Often, they weren't much older than some of their students – and, in fact, might be the older siblings of those same students. In 1924-25, the median age for rural schoolteachers in Vermont was 23.2 years old; by 1937-38, that had risen only to 28.3 years. They were badly paid – one teacher, applying for a job in one of the rural schools and asked his terms, wryly replied he thought he could cut the wood and teach the school for the ashes he could make.

In the early years of Waitsfield schools, a male teacher might receive \$10 a month for three month's work in the winter, and a woman less than \$1 a week.

Until around the Civil War, most teachers were men – women, the town leaders felt, not only shouldn't work, but they couldn't handle the discipline that would need to be meted out in a classroom. Then, with all the young men gone to war, teachers became almost exclusively women. By the time the 1900s came, schools were so desperate for teachers that they didn't care whether they hired men or women.



Teachers from the Waitsfield School in the 1934-1935 school year.

During most of the first half of the twentieth century, there was a shortage of teachers in Vermont that meant many compromises in quality. In one oral history of Fayston, a young girl applied for a teaching job just before her fifteenth birthday. According to the story, the school's superintendent asked her only three questions: first, if she thought she would like teaching; second, if her father had any pigs for sale; and third, how much he was selling them for. Then he hired her.

In the mid-nineteenth century, between two and three thousand locally controlled districts existed in the state, with an average enrollment of less than thirty students. Some of the towns in the Valley were, even as late as the 1960s, running large numbers of schools which often served very few students – but still demanded the same number of teachers: one per classroom. The numbers from the local school districts bore this out. In 1947 in the East Warren school, for instance, only six children attended the fall term.

In 1910, Vermont's Superintendent of Education wrote, "In the administration of the public school system, there are two stubborn and

unavoidable facts: first, the dearth of teachers; second, the dearth of trained teachers.” Again in 1918, the state superintendent lamented, “The scarcity of teachers presents a very grave problem.” Even just prior to World War II, the state superintendent was still complaining about the shortage of teachers – and the war certainly brought no relief.

Wanted: Teachers of “Sterling Worth”

The state didn’t need to tell the leaders of Moretown, Fayston, Waitsfield and Warren about shortages. “The teacher shortage is more acute than ever before,” one Warren superintendent wrote about the 1946-47 school year. He then went on to urge his town to set a \$1,500 minimum yearly wage for teachers to provide “strong incentive to young people” to take up teaching.

The difficulty of finding teachers was often complicated by how much the schools were willing to pay them, so much so that E.W. Slayton, Warren superintendent of schools, chastised the town in 1878 by saying, “Teachers should be engaged not on account of cheapness of wages but for their qualifications for instructor, for their “sterling worth” and all those who have anything to do with children and the youth of our land should be persons of good moral character.” Teachers were expected to be paragons, preachers, problem solvers – and be able to throw a good party at annual events like Memorial Day ceremonies, designed to bring the community together.



Town gathering, a celebration in the Valley.

Certainly, there were thousands of teachers who didn't live up to those descriptions. One study done by the State Board of Education in 1934 lamented, "Only those conversant with the conditions know the worthless work performed in some rural schools under the guise of teaching." Warren Superintendent Slayton, in his same 1878 missive to the town, criticized one teacher in District No. 3's two-room school as having "the elements of a good instructor but lacking the powers of governing properly." Another, he said, "taught a good school and she will with experience make a superior teacher."

Waitsfield, Warren, Fayston and Moretown were occasionally able to find those "superior" gems to put at the front of their classrooms. Matt Bushnell Jones, writing in his early Waitsfield history, recalls Sarah M. Thompson, "the little woman who for many years presided over the primary school in Waitsfield village."

Thompson started teaching when she was fifteen, and taught in Fayston, Gaysville, Cambridge, Northfield, and at a school in Iowa before she came to the lower classroom of the two-room village school in 1882, teaching the younger children. For twenty three years, until her death at age 60, she stayed in that classroom. Jones described her teaching methods "as her own, and within her little realm she was very autocratic, but no child who came beneath her sway ever failed to build a solid foundation for education."



Ella Carpenter Chapman

Those who attended Waitsfield schools in later years also remember – sometimes fondly, sometimes less fondly, but all with respect – a woman named Ella Carpenter Chapman who taught in the area school systems for forty-six years, teaching hundreds of children at the Waitsfield Village (District No. 6) school.

Students who had her, including Jack Smith, who went on to be an aeronautical engineer, remember that they learned more from her than from any other teacher in their lives.

Ella B. Carpenter was born in Warren in 1891, one of five sisters. When she was seventeen years old – and apparently with no formal training – she began teaching in Waitsfield District No. 3 School, earning \$198 for teaching both fall and winter terms, about \$9 a week. (Other, apparently more experienced teachers were earning a few dollars more in some of the other Waitsfield schools that year, including Agnes Treadway in School Number One, who earned \$110 for an eleven-week winter session.)

Later, she taught at Warren School Number Three and then for eleven years in the Lincoln school system, after she had married Frank C. Chapman of Starksboro, a butter maker in a creamery in Lincoln. Ella began working in the Waitsfield school system in 1924, teaching seventh and eighth grades. Her formal training was minimal; in later years, she took high school classes while she was teaching, probably to get her teaching certificate, and she spent one summer at the University of Vermont in 1944 to acquire her Educational Professional Standard (EPS).

Her style was strict and autocratic. She played favorites, and she never hesitated to use



Mrs. Chapman with her Seventh and Eighth Grade classes.

the razor strap, especially on the boys, taking them into a little room next to the classroom at the Waitsfield Village school. On the first day of school, she would always single out the biggest boys in class and make sure they knew who was boss. After the Pledge of Allegiance each morning, she read Psalms, repeating them enough that students with no other religious training learned them by heart.

She was also a demanding teacher who, as Waitsfield resident Sally Tremblay put it, “always challenged the students.” No one, Ella said, was going to fail her class.

She walked the classroom with her arms crossed over a book on her chest, insisting that the students sit sideways in their chairs at long tables, apparently to keep them from getting too comfortable. She taught them handwriting by the Palmer method, in which students copied a uniform style of cursive writing – and left-handers were usually made to use their right hands. Her method of teaching math was presented at an educational conference in Waterbury in 1945. (Although that method was apparently not well received at the conference, her students remembered it the rest of their lives – and often argued with later teachers who tried to impose a new way on either them or the students’ own children.)



She taught them Vermont history by having them create a notebook that contained facts about the state, using postcards as well as photos cut from magazines and even family pictures to describe the history, birds, geography, fossils and other unique aspects of Vermont. The work was so important to the students that some, like Jack Smith, have kept theirs for dozens of years. On Fridays, remembers Waitsfield resident Ruth Pestle, students did art, using compasses to make pinwheels and designs that they then colored.

She retired in 1957 (still only earning \$2,500), but remained a substitute teacher for a few more years. When she died in 1976, two of her former students were her pallbearers.

Persistent Problems

Education was taken seriously in the community, but problems existed. Truancy was clearly a huge issue, and one that caused school leaders a great deal of bitterness. Fayston superintendent Merle H. Willis in the 1923 town report chastised in capital letters parents who didn't make sure their children were in school: "Many cases of truancy are reported but no great improvement can be expected UNLESS PUBLIC SENTIMENT IN TOWN DEMANDS IT." Willis went on to list "the damage from truancy



No truancy today, everyone was here for picture day.

(in) forming of vicious habits of irresponsibility", and to note that the entire community suffered from "the direct financial loss to the tax payer as he is not getting the results from his money that he has a right to expect."

Warren's superintendent, Laura Goodspeed, sounded the same alarm in a 1908 town report in which she pointed out there had been 31 cases of truancy during the previous school year which "show how little interest some parents take in the education of their children." Displaying obvious knowledge of her community, she went on to point out, "At the same time that they (parents) were keeping their own children at home, they were so anxious that their neighbor's children should be well educated, that they reported them to the truant officer if absent from school for a single day."

The sugaring season added its own dilemma. Although the state didn't recognize this as a legitimate reason to miss school, students regularly skipped classes as soon as the sap started to run. Eventually, the schools began to declare formal, though



Students were needed to help in the sugaring operation.

completely unscheduled three-week vacations: when the sugaring started, the vacation began.

Illnesses caused constant concern. Whooping cough in Warren, measles in Waitsfield, bad tonsils in Fayston, influenza in Moretown – all took their toll and had to be addressed by the towns. In 1918, Waitsfield discussed at town meeting whether it would vote to pay for medical examinations in the schools; in 1921, the town hired Dr. Clarence H. Burr to conduct the medical exams. That year, the good doctor proudly reported the town was “practically free from contagious disease, only one case of chicken-pox being reported to this office. No town in the district equals this record.” Unfortunately, the record was broken the next year, when the Waitsfield schools had nineteen cases of measles. (Though chicken pox is rarely a life threatening disease, measles could cause serious complications. Children today receive vaccinations against both.)

A major concern, too, was the discipline handed out in the classroom. Discipline could be brutal. Since some of the students might be bigger or even older than the teacher, teachers were encouraged to use a stick or a razor strap to make the children behave. Such corporal punishment was routine – though sometimes not effective. One historian tells the story of

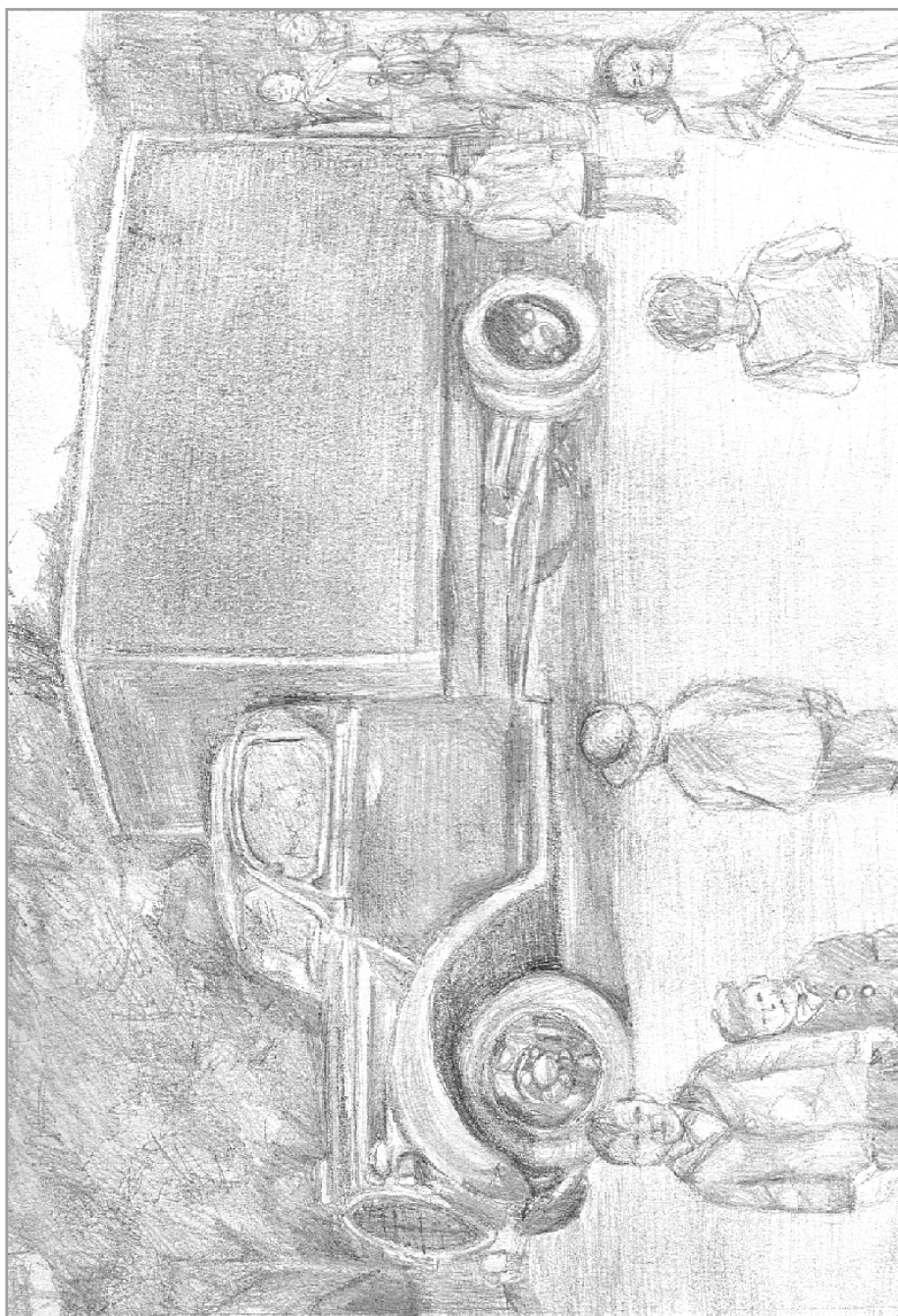
six strapping young farm boys who picked a female teacher up and carried her outside the school when she told them not to smoke inside; the boys were told not to return to school. There is no record of whether they were thrashed soundly by their parents once the word of their behavior got back to the farms.

And, then, of course, there was the vexing problem of transportation.

Some schools didn't supply transportation until very late in the 20th century. Waitsfield came up with an ingenious school transport system, an old Ford truck with an unheated box on the back with seats on the sides and down the middle that was called the Barge. Students in outlying areas paid a few dollars a month to take the cold, rough trip to school each day – and if they missed it, they had a long, cold walk home. Moretown in 1947 made an arrangement with a local taxi service when parents of Duxbury Corner offered to pay two-thirds of the cost to get their children to school. Fayston school transportation didn't begin until 1959, when George Armstrong started cramming five or six children from North Fayston into a four-wheel drive Jeep and taking them to school.

Transportation was often the crux of the decision to seek further education, once a student had finished the local schools that went through the eighth grade. Towns paid tuition to the two-year (later four-year) Waitsfield High School for students who had done well at the rural schools all over the Valley. The only thing the students had to do was to get there – but that “only” was sometimes the deciding factor between continuing on to school and ending education in the eighth grade. Eunice Buzzell made the long, arduous six-mile trip five days a week from her home on the Sugarbush Access Road to Waitsfield for two years, in order to get those last years of education. Later, she told her daughter, Eleanor, that the horse would fairly scamper to Waitsfield in the mornings but took his sweet time on the way home, after spending the day tied up in front of the house of her future husband, Alton Farr.

Yet nothing — not blizzards, not measles, not razor straps, not lack of transportation – ever stopped the good times.



The Barge

Fun and Games

They played fierce championship baseball and listened to the World Series in chemistry lab. Fayston had its own ball field and some good players, but the girls sewed their baseballs for them.

They played basketball against surrounding schools



WHS Championship Baseball Team of 1949.

where old grudges were strong, though the reasons long forgotten. The games in Waitsfield were first held in an old creamery until the town purchased the old Methodist Church. The Waitsfield team had a home court advantage – the church was heated by a wood furnace with a large floor grate exactly in center court. For games, it was topped with a wooden cover, which the home team avoided because it deadened the ball. On a really cold night, the furnace would be stoked, smoke would come rolling out of center court, and the game would be paused to remove the cover and let it cool down.

Before, after and during breaks from class, boys would crowd around a ping pong table in the Waitsfield High study hall for fiercely competitive games; if any of the boys got into trouble, the games were banned. The student pranks – one of the very reasons for the bans – were legendary. Fayston student Bob Vasseur and a crew of friends took the clapper out of the school bell and threw it into the river. Albert Turner brought a skunk to school and put it into the air handling system. One year students put a tractor on a neighbor's roof.

Life in the schools was a major part of the community's social fabric. After cars became more common, parents and teachers would load them with children to take to away games, stopping on the way home at a diner or local restaurant for burgers, fries and a cola – if they were in dread-enemy

Waterbury, the stop was always at Donovan's. The games helped create community pride, and game nights were eagerly anticipated – particularly when the games were between the schools with heated rivalries.

Music had become part of the curriculum in Waitsfield in 1919 and in most of the rural schools in the years afterward. By the 1950s, (when WCVT's own Eleanor Farr Haskin taught music), there was great enthusiasm when each of the one-room schools of Moretown and Fayston went to the square dance festival in Northfield. The parents put together the costumes, and all ages danced. Leana Hill, a teacher at the Taplin School in Moretown, used her creative abilities about that same time to produce two operettas, the highlight of the spring season.

Much of the burden for these “cultural” experiences obviously fell on the teachers, as did many other things not strictly school related. The expectation that the teachers would oversee these opportunities was so great that sometimes Vermont teachers

were not even informed of them when hired. (One teacher, who had come from Massachusetts to teach in a rural Vermont school, recalled in the book, *The Teacher's Voice*, published in 1992, that during her first year in her Vermont school room, she had no idea she was supposed to hold a

Christmas program. She was about to leave to catch a train to visit her family when all the parents showed up at the school house.)



*Waitsfield High School Orchestra from 1937
displaying school pride.*

One such major event in the Waitsfield area was Memorial Day, initially called Decoration Day. Teachers for weeks planned services that included music and the recitation of poems, including the Gettysburg Address and one called *In Flanders Fields*:

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

Students who did well got to repeat their performances the next day at a town event that included a parade.

Teachers had other responsibilities as well. In Warren in 1931, teachers in the Village school gave a Halloween “entertainment” and raised \$4.75. The money was used to purchase first aid kits, a dust pan, thermometer and bird and flower books. In Waitsfield during World War II, Sally Tremblay remembers that the teachers took the students to pick milkweed pods for life jackets and knitted squares for soldier’s blankets. In Fayston, they handled the ration cards, and in Moretown they gathered up Red Cross donations.

A mother’s work might be never done, but a teacher’s work was constantly expanding.

A Changing Atmosphere

Consolidation of schools had been a topic for years in the schools. Warren school directors in 1923 put it very succinctly by noting in town records, “The tendency all over the country is toward consolidation, resulting in better teaching and increased interest among pupils.”

George Wallis’ push for a four-year high school in the 1920s in many ways began the change from the strictly rural school way of life to one that was more community wide. Before the Waitsfield four-year program, students with promise (and means) went to further flung high schools in Montpelier, Burlington, Waterbury, Barre and some of the other 84 high schools open in Vermont in 1920.



Moving the old Waitfield School to make room for the
"George Wallis Temple of Learning"

Wallis' fight for the four-year school took several years, and he was aided by state senator Walter Alonzo Jones. When it was finally implemented, the Waitsfield Village school was moved back to build a new two-story addition on the front to accommodate a true high school, in the modern sense. The school population immediately showed the wisdom of the decision,



The "George Wallis Temple of Learning".

growing from sixty-eight to ninety-seven in one year, with a faculty of five teachers.



Moretown Village District No. 4 School.

The one- and two-room schools began to be phased out altogether and were mostly gone by the early 1970s. By 1952, Moretown was actively looking for a way to divide one room schools into two, feeling it would be easier to get a teacher to teach in four grades rather than eight.

Warren built a new Village

school in 1972, with students transported not by old converted trucks but by new yellow school buses.

Hot lunches, which had been such a controversial topic in the 1940s that the Warren superintendent urged parents to go have a look at a successful program in a neighboring school system, became routine. They were first supplied by parents, then the schools themselves. During World War II, the schools even sought and obtained government surplus commodities to provide the hot lunches.

By 1951, Moretown Superintendent Fremont Fiske was applauding the parent's association of four of his schools for supporting hot lunches.

Textbooks were standardized, ending a century or more when schools within a few miles of each other might use completely different ones. And, where once parents had paid for textbooks, now they are supplied free. Teachers,

who'd once had little formal education, were required to get college degrees before they could enter classrooms. Corporal punishment was outlawed, and ping pong tables disappeared from study halls. Experimental methods of teaching were tried. (One particularly painful effort was tried in the 1960s when Waitsfield instituted an "open classroom" method, knocking down walls and reverting in many ways, back to the one room schools. The effort proved a dismal failure.)

All of these changes, however, paled against what would happen in the 1960s, when community pride collided with modern realities.

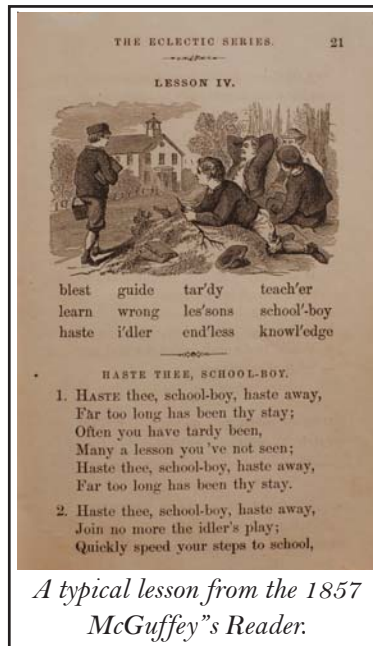
The Birth of Harwood Union

The colors were to be black and gold. It wasn't the first decision made about the new Harwood Union High School, but Principal Don Jamieson knew it was one of the most important.

Many of the students Jamieson assembled in the summer of 1966 were strangers to each other. They were from the towns of Duxbury, Warren,



Harwood Union High School.



Waitsfield, Moretown, Fayston and Waterbury. In normal times, they would have gone to either Waterbury High or Waitsfield High, the same schools where many of their own parents had attended. There, they would have become bitter competitors in sports and academics, honoring rivalries that went back forever.

Now, through an act of compromise that few could have envisioned a decade before, they were about to become members of the Harwood Union

graduating class of 1970 – the first class that would go all the way through the new regional high school. And, to help bring them together, Jamieson was asking them to make their first decisions as a class, to choose the school's colors, nickname and mascot.

In the early 1960s, Vermont was beginning to demand more, better and up to date facilities, curriculum and teachers in its schools. The progressive new attitude was placing new demands on the old Waitsfield High School, which still contained the original part of the building put up in the 1800s. At first, the parents and leaders of the Valley began to look at what Jamieson describes as “plans A, B and C.” About the time Plan C got passed along, people came to their senses – making over the gym and even doing extensive renovations to the old school would still leave them with a building that wouldn't serve their needs.



Harwood Highlander

About twelve miles away, the town of Waterbury was having its own problems. Their school, too, was old and in bad shape. Just like Waitsfield, they were being pressed to make improvements that would tax both their ingenuity and their budget. Just like Waitsfield, the cost of educating their students was about to go through the roof.

The discussions began quietly. School and town leaders knew both communities wanted their own schools. Emotions ran high at just the thought – not have their own high school? Go to school with their biggest rivals?

A few key leaders, among them Lloyd Squire, owner of the local radio station WDEV, began to see the sense of a regional high school and became great advocates. Squire “took off his coat and went to work,” according to Jamieson, and began to build a publicity campaign that included car caravans that went through all the towns. The vote came quickly and decisively – a majority of about six to one.

Within months, the building plans were in the works; within a year, the bond passed to build Harwood Union High School, named after Dr. Charles

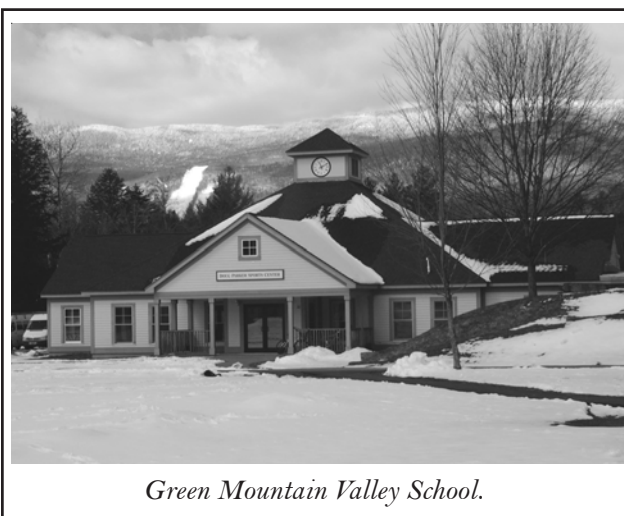
Harwood, a respected physician who had attended the birth of almost every student in the school. Within another year and a half, students from the seventh grade through the twelfth were moving into the school in the fall of 1966 – wearing black and gold and soon to sport senior rings with a Highlander on them.

The building of Harwood ushered in a radical new era of education and cooperation in the valley. Gone forever were the days described by Matt Bushnell Jones in the *History of Waitsfield* in which generations of teachers inscribed their names on the inside of a hinged wooden teacher's desk. Instead, students now will form their memories and write their own histories in years to come.

The Valley's "Other" School

The Green Mountain Valley School, affectionately known as GMVS, was formed in 1973 to provide regular education and training for ski racers. It serves students from all over the world, and has an enrollment of about 85.

The school started as a winter term tutorial school by three Mad River Glen Ski Area coaches (Al Hobart, Bill Moore and John Schultz), a Vermont elementary school teacher (Ashley Caldwell) and (Jane Hobart), Al's wife. The school began with eleven students living at



Green Mountain Valley School.

Al and Jane's house and a nearby chalet. Students came for the winter, bringing their assignments from their home high schools.

Today GMVS is a full-time school with boarding, classroom and training facilities at its present site on Moulton Road above Waitsfield. Its alumni have been members of the U.S., Canadian and other national Ski Teams and have participated in many Olympic games.



WHS Graduating Class of 1912



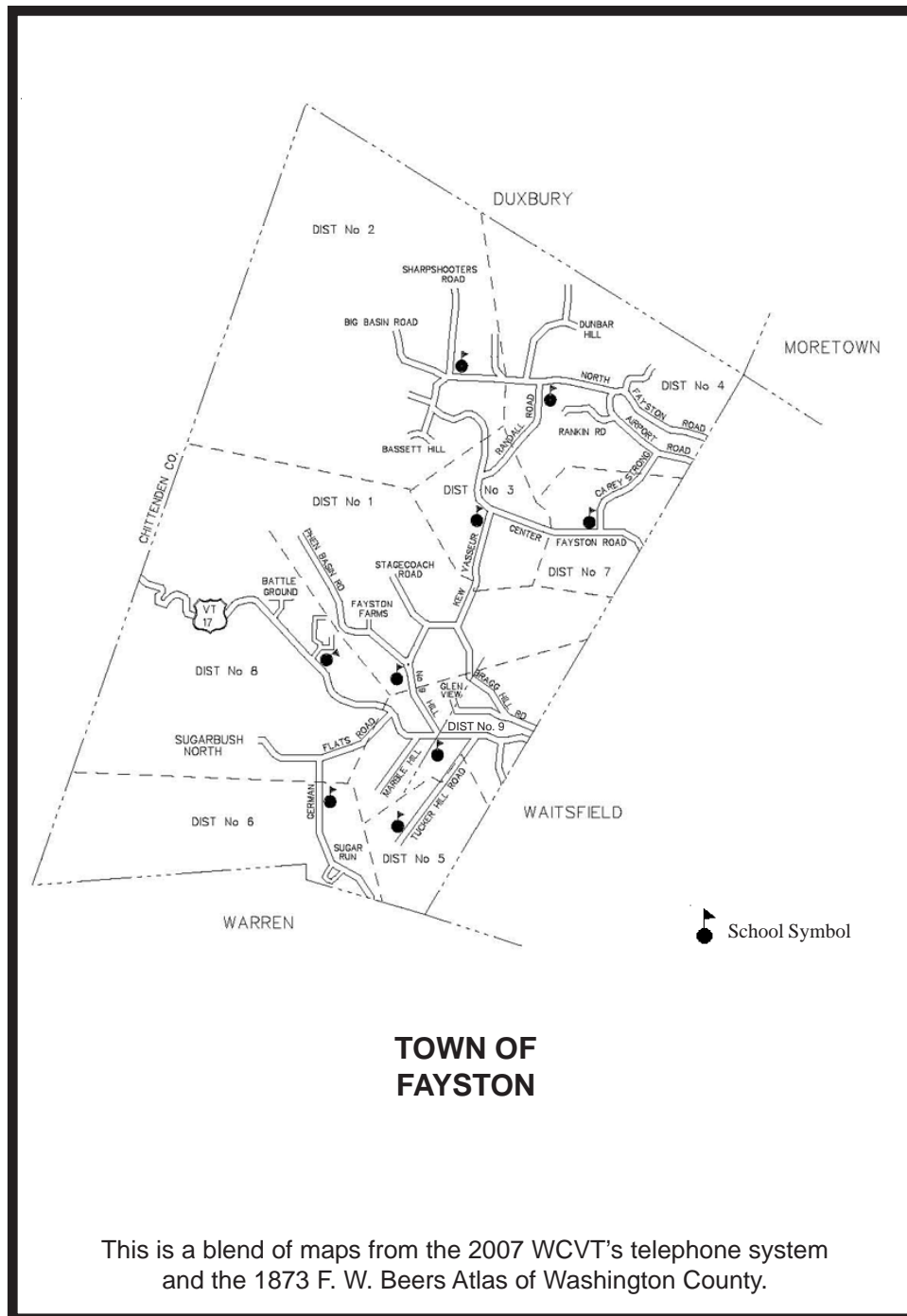
WHS Graduating Class of 1937

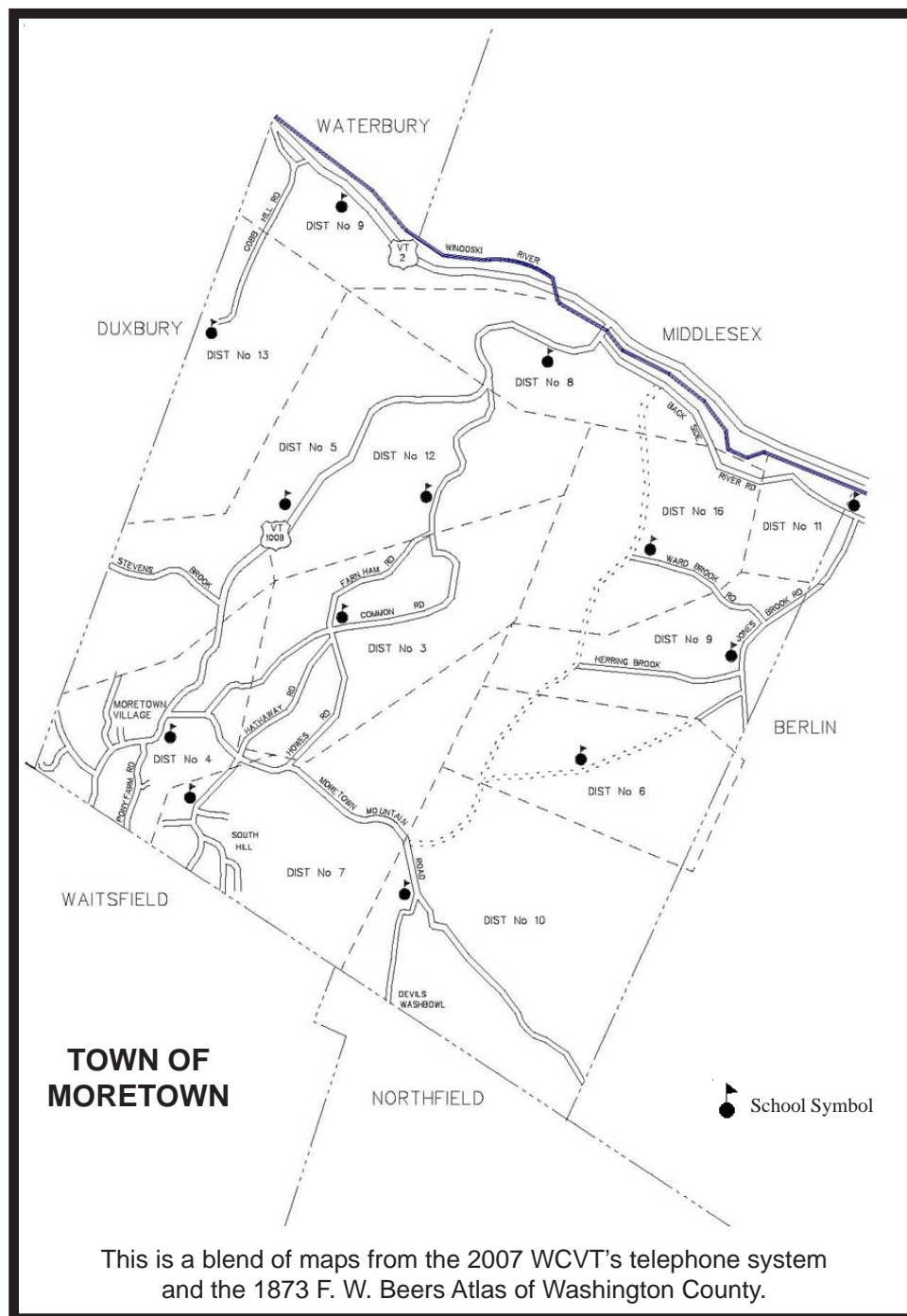


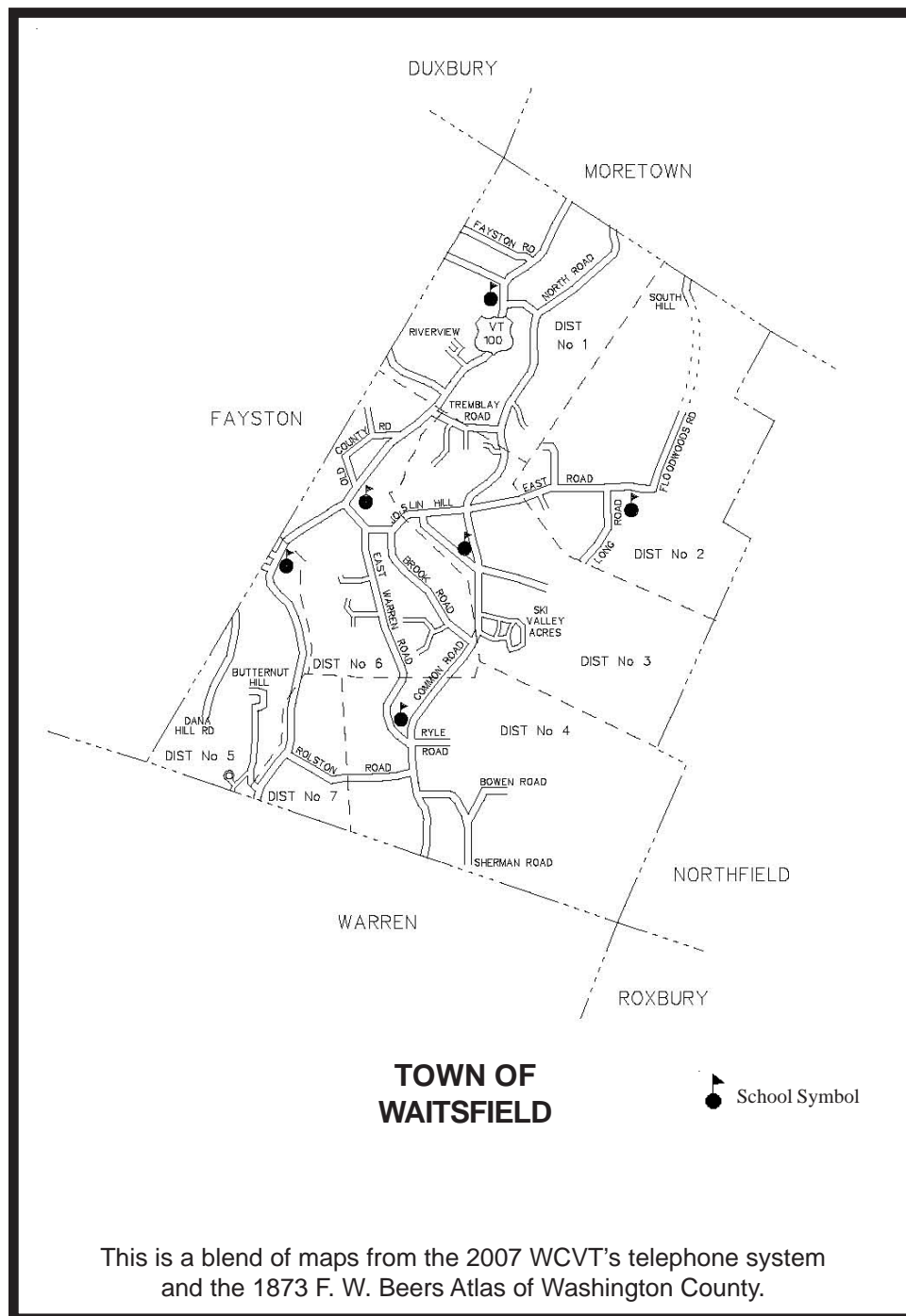
WHS Graduating Class of 1950

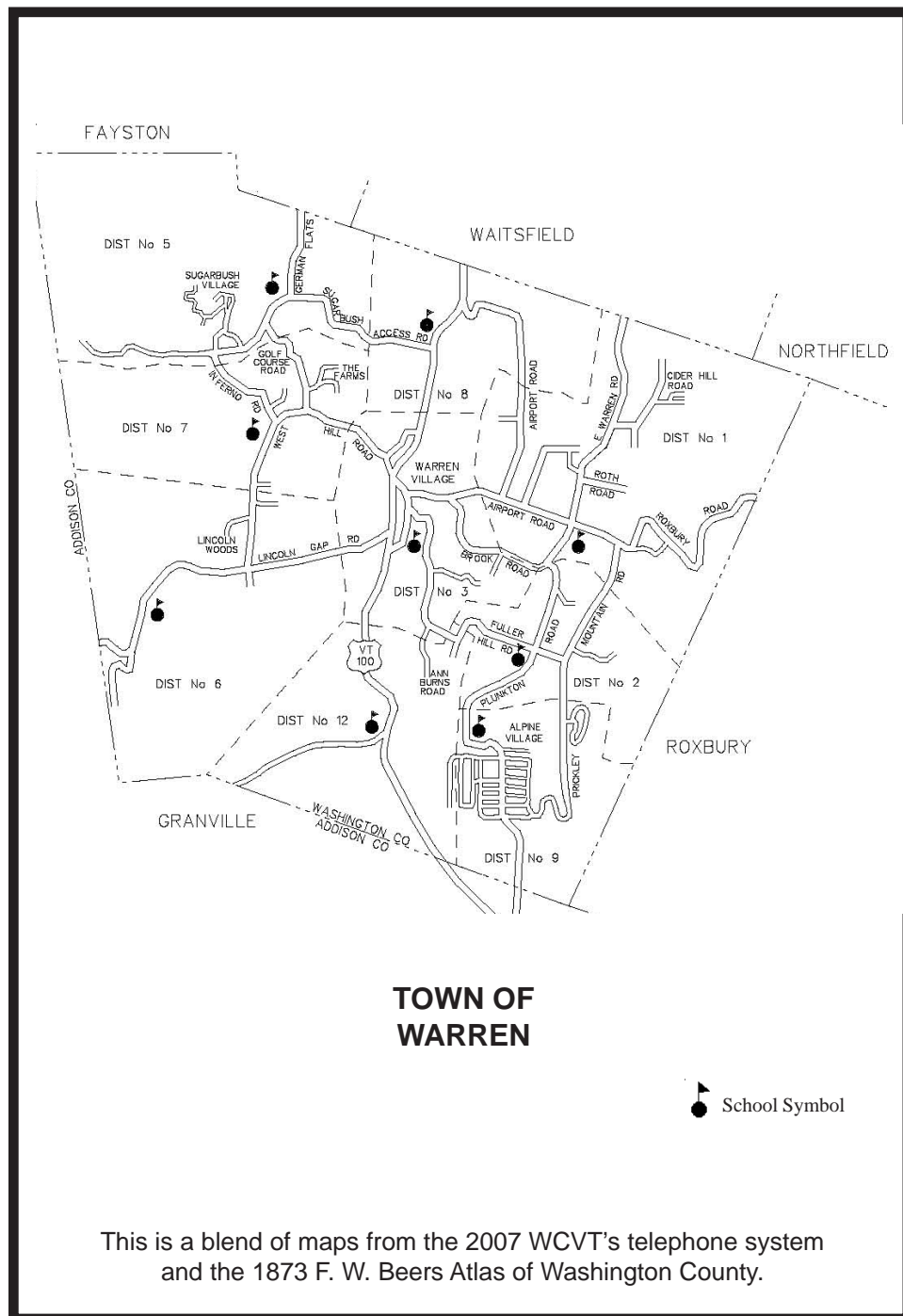


WHS Graduating Class of 1965









**Thank You
to all those who helped make this
history possible:**

**Ann Wallis Bull
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