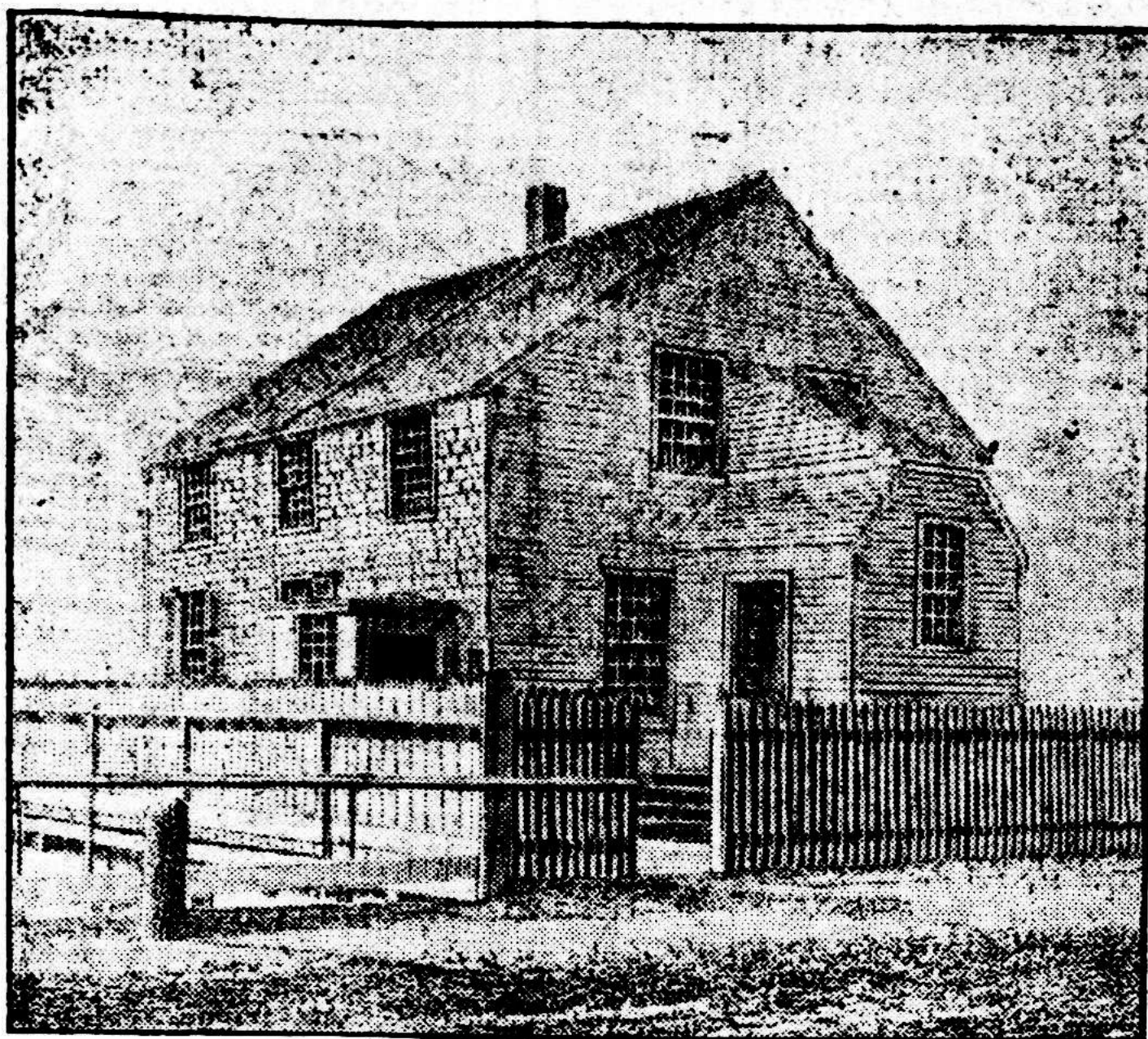


FIRST PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Boston Provided a Separate Building for Young Children in 1831, and Was Probably the First City to Take Such a Step—It Was Built on the Old Milldam Road at a Cost of \$468.



PRIMARY SCHOOL, MILLDAM, ERECTED 1831.

Boston built its first primary school building about 71 years ago, out on the old Milldam road, at the cost of \$468. This was probably the first of the kind built in the United States.

From that humble beginning Boston through the munificence of its public-spirited citizens, gradually advanced by successive steps of progress in primary school buildings until it now has some of the most beautiful primary school structures to be found in the world. Soon it will begin to erect new buildings at the cost of \$6000 per room.

Primary schools were started in 1818 when Boston was a town, but until 1831, there was no provision made for buildings for primary school purposes only. Boston then was a city. The young children were put into rooms in some of the older reading, writing and grammar schools, in private houses, or in places secured for that purpose.

The instructors were mostly women, who received a salary of \$200 to \$250 per year of 45 weeks, two sessions daily, and in the afternoons of June, July and August, "three hours after 2 o'clock." These schools kept the little people of those days out of the streets and out of mischief at home. Eventually they became the auxiliaries to the reading, writing and grammar schools of the period of 1818-1854.

About 10 years after the establishment these schools, which seem to have been original in Boston, agitation began among the members of the primary school committee relative to the erection of a building or buildings specially adapted for primary school purposes. The outcome of this agitation was the erection of a little two-storied building out on the Milldam road, sometimes called Lower Beacon st, or Western av, in 1831.

This was the first school attended by James T. Page, master of the Dwight grammar school, West Springfield st, who celebrated his 50th anniversary as master of that school last June. In an address at that time Mr Page spoke of this school, to which he was sent as a pupil when he was a small boy.

With the rush of every-day affairs the old school had been forgotten in the school history of Boston, and without the mention made by him of it further notice might not have been taken had it not been for an amusing report upon the school made by a committee in 1844, which has just come to light at the administration building on Mason st.

The school had been going three years when Mr Page became a member. According to him, the milldam road of 71 years ago was not like the proud, beautiful Beacon st of today. The little school stood on the south side of the milldam road, a little to the west of Parker st or the cross dam.

It stood on piles in the full basin of the Back Bay. When the front bay became full of water, this was received into the back bay. Parker st or the cross dam then met Beacon st at an obtuse angle.

Parker st no longer touches Beacon st. A part of old Parker st, now called Hemenway st, now stops at Boylston st. If continued in a straight line, it would pass through the Gov Ames house on Commonwealth av, and strike a point on Beacon st a little to the south of Hereford st. It is in that locality where the little schoolhouse stood.

At that time there were on the Milldam half a dozen mills, a ropewalk, grist and rolling mills, a machine shop and a foundry, which, together with a store owned by Danforth & Farrar, Peaseley's tavern, all made quite a neighborhood. Vessels would come up to the wharf and land goods there. It was for the children of the parents who lived out there and worked in those places that the schoolhouse was built. I remember it well, for I was a pupil there. Upstairs there used to be a church, and they used to hold meetings there.

When the school opened in 1831, its first teacher was Miss Grater, who received \$200 a year salary for teaching the 60 boys and girls the first rudiments of the English language. During its 35 years' existence it was attended by 3700 pupils. Its last teacher was Ruth M. Sanborn, who took charge of it Jan 2, 1851, and continued as its teacher until the school was closed in 1865, on account of improvements in that part of the city.

It was known as the "Milldam school,"

"primary school No 8 of district 9" and the "Western-av school." It was about a mile and a half from the state house and a few yards beyond Parker st of the cross dam. It was a little wooden structure perched upon piles four or five feet above the high water mark of the tide pond.

It was 25 feet square and two stories high. The lower floor was used for school purposes. The upper part at divers times was used by the Old South society as a missionary chapel. The school room on the lower floor was 18x25 feet. The three sides of the room were lighted each by two windows. Leading into this room was an entry 9x9 feet, having one window, and a door leading out to the plank walk over the water.

The early furniture of this was of a most primitive nature. There were no desks, or benches for writing, and no boxes or contrivances of any kind for keeping the books. There were only long forms without any backs.

About 25 years after the school was built more modern furniture was placed there, consisting of individual chairs and desks. In 1854 the school became a part of the Phillips district, and continued as a part of that district until 1865, when it became necessary to abolish it.

It became necessary in course of the history of this school to remove the school from its original place to a firmer place upon the ground nearby. The water would freeze on the piles, and the incoming tides, in winter, would lift the platform, and finally did lift the building off, so that it became necessary to move the building.

The first school proved to be a success for the next year, the primary school committee built a school similar in construction and cost, on the old Boston neck, and in 1835 one of the same kind in East Boston. This building was burned down in 1851. Its first teacher was Miss E. L. Pierce.

The first brick primary school built in Boston was in 1835 on North Margin st. It is still standing, and in fairly good condition. It is two stories high, and contains two rooms. It cost the city \$2,528.69 exclusive of the land. It was built to accommodate two primary schools, and was the first brick school house for exclusive primary courses built at the public expense in this country.

The following report from the subcommittee of the primary school committee in 1844, which has recently come to light, gives an idea how the schools were run at that time. Washington's birthday was not then a public holiday. To the Standing Committee of Primary Schools:

The Subcommittee requested to examine the Mill Dam School for the month of February respectfully report:

That they proceeded in the execution of the duty assigned them on Thursday, the 22d inst. The weather was remarkably pleasant, but they found it no small task to travel two or three miles through mud and water, and against a strong breeze. But who could fail to be patriotic on the birthday of the "Father of his country?" They would also express their gratitude to the Boston and Roxbury Mill Dam Corporation, who kindly remitted the usual toll for foot passengers as soon as the nature of their mission was made known to them. Though

Long and dreary was the road to pass, they arrived about 3 o'clock at the appointed place. From some intimations given them by previous visitors, they were somewhat prepared to find a want of order and discipline in this school. Your Committee feel bound to state that no irregularity of the kind came to their notice, but, on the contrary, a remarkable degree of stillness seemed to pervade the room and its vicinity. In one word, they saw NOTHING in the school with which to find fault. Perhaps it should in justice be stated that they found "NO SCHOOL," the teacher having dismissed for the afternoon on account of the illness of a relative in the City.

The Subcommittee had no alternative but to "homeward plod their weary way," and ask of the committee the acceptance of the will for the deed, and to request to be discharged from further action in the premises till the duty shall again be assigned them in regular order. Respectfully submitted,

Alvan Simonds,

for himself and

W. P. Jarvis.

Boston, Feb 26, 1844.