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by
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Town of Merrimack NH

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SCHOOLS OF 1800

1800 - From the earliest days of Settlement, we find education was one of deep interest to the people of New England.

1753 - As early as 1753, this Town voted \$30 for Schools, which were to be kept in different places, to accommodate people in different parts of the Town. "Dame Schools," they were called. They were held at the home of the teacher or parent. The teacher could sit and knit while the pupil recited aloud from the "Horn Book."

1776 - In 1776, it was voted to divide the town into school districts #1 (being near the center), #2 (near the first known settled farm, Francis Bean's homestead being a part of the original "Usher" homestead). The schoolhouse stood on the right between the home of Francis Bean and the foot of Dicky Hill on the back road to Baboosic leading from their corner.

1776 - Teachers and students were required to spend 6 days in school. Holidays were unknown. Their salaries ranged from \$1.20 per week for a woman in summer to \$3 or \$4 per week for a man in winter. The teacher boarded around to the lowest bidder, or according to number of pupils, a person had in the home.

If we imagine ourselves in an early schoolroom first used, we would find ourselves in a log building, small paned windows, a huge fireplace, heavy plants for seats and desks, strongly built, with no thought for comfort. The aisles were inclined higher in back so the pupils could see over the heads of those in front. Sometimes instead of an incline, steps were used to reach the back seats. Later more comfortable frame or as in this Town particularly brick houses were built remembered as "The Little Red Schoolhouse." The fireplace and wide cracks disappeared, and stoves came into use.

1800 - Books and slates were supplied by the "Parents." Boys and girls often had to earn their own during vacation. The wood was supplied 1 foot or more for each pupil. If it was not forthcoming that pupil was obliged to sit farthest from the fire.

1820/1830 - The "Big Boys" cut and split the wood and tended the fire. The "Girls" kept the room clean using a green hemlock or birch broom for the purpose. The ashes were sold at auction at the annual school meeting, proceeds used for repairs.

Methods of discipline were severe. Their aim was thoroughness and with only

eight or ten weeks in a year, small wonder they could only teach the 3 R's. Book agents were few, books fewer; but books were treasured and appreciated. Throughout the early times down to the present many teachers have made good use of them and have exerted an untold influence upon our past generation.