



Root District One-Room Schoolhouse History

One-Room Schoolhouses in Norwich 1781-1952

Vermont was the first state in the nation to authorize public education in its constitution. Education was a priority for the early residents, many of whom were friends with Eleazer Wheelock, founder of Dartmouth College. By 1781 Norwich built its first school and in 1785 divided the town into districts. By 1836 there were as many as 20 school districts in Norwich with 774 students being taught in these one-room schoolhouses, ranging in age from 4 - 17. Settlement patterns were more spread out than today; as areas in town were settled, districts were added. The districts were often named after the neighborhood hamlet or for large families in the district such as Cossingham, Bragg Hill, Beaver Meadow, Root and Sproat. The original 20 district schools were an anchor for neighborhoods at a time when neighborhood relations were of central importance for the sharing of work and celebrations.

Each district was responsible for hiring teachers, raising money to build schools, and maintaining standards. District boundaries were set so no child had to walk more than 2 miles to school, although district lines had to conform to geography. It was not uncommon for the school districts to be reorganized and renumbered based on population change or availability of teachers. The last schoolhouse to be closed was the Pompy School in 1952. (Excerpts were taken from one-room schoolhouse podcast tour. Read more at norwichhistory.com or listen to the podcast.)

The Story of the Three Root Schoolhouses



1860's Root Schoolhouse District #5

In the 1860's an earlier #5 District schoolhouse was located on Goodrich Four Corners closer to what is now Route 5 as shown on the the 1865 Beers Map. This earlier schoolhouse was reported in very poor condition. 1874 a report states 'there can never be a quiet, progressive school in this house, until the present desks are used for kindling wood, and more suitable ones put in their place.'

As there was an increased focus and funding on education in Vermont at the time, it is likely the Root District was encouraged to build a new building. A new Beaver Meadow School was completed in 1924 and it had achieved a new standard rating. The Root District was about to catch up. A new schoolhouse was built on a hill above Union Village Road.





1925 Root District Schoolhouse

The 1925 of the Root Schoolhouse was built on a hill above Union Village Road in the Historic District of Goodrich Four Corners.

It was in use until it burned in 1936. It was built on a hill above Union Village Road in the Historic District of Goodrich Four Corners.





1937

Root Schoolhouse

The present schoolhouse, known as “Root Schoolhouse”, was built in 1937 to replace the 1925 #5 Root District Schoolhouse which had burned the year before on the same spot above Union Village Road.



About the 1937 Root Schoolhouse

The present 1937 schoolhouse was a vast improvement over the earlier buildings. At the time, it was considered the only rural schoolhouse in Norwich to be in excellent condition, earning a “superior” rating from the state and additional praise from state education executives. Inside is one schoolroom with a large bank of windows on the east wall and a slate blackboard across the front. There is a recessed stage alcove. A small kitchen area at the front was most likely the original cloak room. There are two original toilet rooms at the rear with enameled metal train station-style toilet fixtures and tanks. The wooden seats are spring loaded to activate the flushing mechanism. Water came from a spring on the hillside behind the schoolhouse

The state requirements for achieving “standard” rating for a schoolhouse was a score of 150 out of 200 possible points with some items mandatory. One of the mandatory criteria was having natural light coming in only from the left or left and rear of the pupils. With no electricity, natural light was of utmost importance as the only other source of light would be kerosene lamps attached around the walls. Other criteria included: adequate heating and ventilating such as a jacketed stove, sanitary and well-appointed outhouses or toilets, and at least 16 linear feet of blackboards. By 1940 the addition of new desks and seats meant that the school qualified as superior.

A Day in the Life of the Schoolhouse

Former Root Schoolhouse students recall that the school day was from 9:00 - 4:00. Students walked as much as two miles to school although sometimes in winter a father might bring his children to school by sleigh. One student recalled having a toboggan which they all piled onto. If they missed the turn they ended up in the brook.

There was a 15-minute recess in the morning and then an hour for lunch. When hot lunches were mandated, the teacher would have to leave the classroom, go into the kitchen and pull together lunch. Often lunch was a simple soup, casserole, or pot of baked beans that just needed to be heated. There was no refrigerator. One student recalls that each student would have a little jar of milk and they would put it into the brook to keep it cool. Some students went home for lunch. needed to be heated. There was no refrigerator. One student recalls that each

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The Beginnings of a Community Center

Despite the new building's quality, the Root Schoolhouse was closed in the fall of 1945, when enrollment had dwindled to only four pupils and schoolhouses were consolidated at the larger brick school now known as the Marion Cross School in the village of Norwich.

A 1952 agreement between the Norwich School Board and the Root District Game Club, a small organization of families surrounding the schoolhouse, transformed the building into a community center and hunting clubhouse, carrying on a deep tradition of neighborliness. Today the Root Schoolhouse and the Beaver Meadow Schoolhouses are listed on the National Register for Historic Places because they retain so much of their original architectural details. As of 2019 the Root Schoolhouse is part of the Goodrich Four Corners Historic District designation.

Between 1952 and 2011 the schoolhouse was used as a community center. In 2011 the building was closed to public use due to its failing foundation walls.

Visit rootschoolhouse.org for more details on the schoolhouse restoration from 2015-2022.

