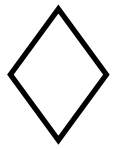


The General Store



School Days, School Days, Dear Old Golden Rule Days

As you begin a new year at school, I would like to tell you some stories about school days throughout Mendham's history. About seventy years ago, in the early 1950's, Mendham Township students attended schools in Brookside in a private home on West Main Street, in the Community Club, or in the Brookside Community Church. Overcrowding caused the opening of the Mendham Township Elementary School in 1954, housing grades K-8. Mendham High School, in the center of Mendham, was opened in 1970. Prior to that time, Mendham students attended West Morris Central, and prior to that, Morristown High School or private academies.

Now let's go back about 150 years to the last one-room schoolhouse in the Ralston area of Mendham, the Union School. The Union School was built in 1829 and was located on what was once known as the Schiff Boy Scout Reservation (today-Brookrace) The children all walked to their neighborhood school, sometimes two to three miles. The students were not grouped by age level but rather by their ability and desire to progress. They would sit with their classmates who were similar in this way, but since the enrollment was so low, this often meant they would have to sit alone. A school day would begin with a Bible reading, a song or hymn, and then the students would "get down to business to read, spell, and do number work." The teacher's job was to mold the youngsters into good citizens. Her salary was \$35 a month. On Friday afternoons, the young ladies would go to the school to take cooking and sewing lessons. The Union School closed its doors in 1928 amid much controversy as to where the Ralston students would attend school next, would it be Brookside or to Hilltop School?



The Washington Corner School House, now a private home.

Townpeople living in Ralston, the "Ralstonites", brought a petition before the Mendham Township School Board to urge the Board to allow those students from the Ralston section of town to continue attending the schools in Mendham Borough. Some of students from Ralston had been attending school in Mendham Borough even before the closing of this one-room schoolhouse. The community members felt that their wishes for what was best for their children should be considered not just the financial gains of sending all the children to Brookside. Most felt the Brookside School was too far away. Also, the Borough School offered classes in manual training and domestic science which many of the parents desired for their children. The school building

sold for \$500 and is presently a private residence.

The Union School was one of five one-room schoolhouses in Mendham (1829-1928), during the era of the "common schools." These were public schools established during the 19th century to provide free education for all students. One of the oldest schools was Homan or Mountain School for the children in the Mountain District of Mendham Township (1820-1844). This old stone school building still stands on Mountainside Road.

Another one-room schoolhouse, located on the corner of what today is Tempe Wick Road and Corey Lane., was the Washington

School Days, School Days, Dear Old Golden Rule Days (cont'd)



Miss Jessie Willett with her class at the Union School House, about 1903

School Days (Cont'd)

Corner School, opened in 1876. If you were a student in this school, you sat in a two-seater desk with iron legs. The teacher was also a janitress and was paid \$28 a month. The school's budget in 1883 was \$431.49. If there was any money left over at the end of the school year, it was given to the teacher as a bonus. Since there was little transportation at that time except strong legs, this school provided for Mendham's system of "exchange students" allowing the children to go to a school closest to their home. In May, 1906, the Township was incorporated and separated from Mendham Borough, each having their own school systems. Many youngsters chose to attend the Washington Corner School until it closed in 1913, at which time the students were transported to Brookside. The building still stands today as a private residence.

Prior to that time, those who attended school, mainly male students, went to private academies. Now we travel back 250 years ago. Education in the late 1700's was very closely connected with the church and the home.

Clergymen were the more highly educated, then lawyers, and physicians. Young people went to them for higher education and college preparation. There were no public schools. It was the responsibility of the parents to teach their children. In 1795, Dr. Henry Axtell, also the minister at the Hilltop Church, established the first academy in Mendham, a private school for boys only. There was only one teacher and one classroom, in a two-story, two room, brick building on the site where the Hilltop School stands today. On top was the cupola in which hung the school bell. The students entered the building into a hallway with hooks on the wall where they hung their outer garments, lunch pails, etc. You would find in the one classroom on the first floor blackboards, a teacher's desk, the chimney, student benches and desks. The second floor housed the public library when it was established in 1799. Only paying subscribers could obtain books. Unlike today, there were no computers, no calculators, no plumbing, no heat, no gymnasiums, no cafeteria, no busses, no auditorium, no television or telephone, no books, no papers. A bill was is-

sued, as noted in the book Our Mendham, by Ella Mockridge that looked like this:

To Tuition one and one-third quarters at	
	\$2.25 \$3.00
Incidental	_____ .04
Total	_____ \$3.04
School Fund	_____ \$1.47
Total	_____ \$4.51

These funds helped pay the retaining fee for the teacher. "It was the character of the teaching, not the equipment or the building that makes a school-aided of course by home and church." Many of Dr. Axtell's students went on to study at the theological school at Princeton. The goal of many of the private schools 250 years ago, just like it is today, was for intellectual achievement and admirable behavior.

So, as we all begin a new school year, think back on some of the stories of life in the Mendham Schools over the past 250 years. Continue to enjoy and explore history right here in Mendham at the Ralston General Store and Post Office Museum. We are hoping to reprint the book, Our Mendham by Ella Mockridge and offer it for sale next spring at the Museum.

AnneMarie Hornyak

President – Ralston Historical Association

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

Be sure not to miss our new colonial crafts workshops. Our next one will be held on Sunday, September 8th at the Museum at 2:00 PM. We will be making whirligigs, a colonial toy, designing cornhusk dolls, and playing the game, "Nine Men's Morris". On October 13th a needlepoint workshop is planned, and on October 20st come and hear some "true" ghost stories from the Mendham area, just in time for Halloween. Watch for the flyer for more details.

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313 Mendham Road West
Mendham, NJ 07945**



Ralston Historical Association

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Secretary—Cathy Nodoro
Treasurer—Jeff Purcell

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Visit our website: www.ralstonmuseum.org

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Please indicate your membership information

New Member ___ Renewal ___ Matching Gift ___

John Ralston Society (\$1,000.00 one time)

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The Ralston Historical Association is always looking for volunteers to help in a variety of ways. If interested, please include your name and phone number below or send an email to rjp543@verizon.net.

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