

History of

Hamilton's Schools 1729 to 1976

Up to 1702, Ipswich, of which the Hamlet parish (*now Hamilton*) was part, had only one school. In July 1702, permission was given to the inhabitants of the Chebacco parish, "to sett a school house upon some convenient place in the Common for ye Encourageing of learning among them." With this exception, there was no other school building in the whole township.⁷ (*The Massachusetts Bay Colony granted land grants to groups of settlers acting together as a parish.*)

18th Century

On Mar. 10, 1730, 19 "subscribers" in the Hamlet voted to build a one-room schoolhouse, in the town center.^{5, 113} It was on Farms Road (*now Cutler Road*) near the Congregational church.²

Later that year, Oct. 20, the Hamlet established its first public school program. The following month, a School Committee (*aka School Board*) hired Joseph Secomb (*b. 1706*) to teach reading and writing for 4 months (*a Primary School*).⁵ Committee members, appointed by the selectmen, included Captain Jonathan Whipple, Thomas Brown, Parker Dodge and Matthew Whipple. From the Hamlet's residents, the committee collected £100 Old Tenor* for the school's construction and initial operation.^{1, 2}

A primary school (*4-8 years*) only provided instruction in reading, writing and basic arithmetic. Grammar

school students (*9 and over*) were taught reading, writing and basic arithmetic, English grammar and also Latin and Greek, in preparation for college. Often, both schools were in the same schoolhouse.

Starting in 1738, Ipswich annually provided money for the Hamlet's school expenses.⁷ The amount distributed varied from year to year. On Mar. 4, 1740, Ipswich voted £150 O.T. for the use of a grammar and a primary school, and that the Chebacco and Hamlet parishes draw their part (*determined by taxable property in the parish*).⁵ ** Ipswich, in 1742, only gave £18 O.T. to the Chebacco parish, the same to the Hamlet parish. Further, Ipswich required each scholar to pay 3 pence a week.⁵

School expenses included: schoolhouse maintenance; heating, books, and the schoolmaster's salary. Individual scholars were not given books, pencils or writing paper. The Bible often was used for reading and a blackboard for writing.

* The Massachusetts shilling in the Bay Colony, initially worth 9 pence (*d*) sterling, steadily declined in value to silver coins. In 1704, Old Tenor (O.T.) notes were reintroduced at a value of 1 Massachusetts shilling = 9 d sterling. The value of these notes also declined. In 1737, the colony issued Middle Tenor notes, worth 3 times the O.T. notes. In 1741, the colony issued New Tenor notes worth 4 times the O.T. notes. In 1759, all previous issues were replaced by the Colonial issue, worth 10 times the O.T. notes.

** For a long period, the phrase, Grammar School, meant a place to prepare youth in Latin and Greek for college.⁵

The first mention of another school in the Hamlet, besides the one opened in 1730, is in 1738, when a school opened in the northern part of the parish. It was between what now are 874 and 894 Bay Rd.⁵ With the school's opening, the school, further down the road, near the meetinghouse, became the South School. It had been called the Center School.

In 1758, a school opened in the west part of the parish. The Hamlet allotted a proportion of the school money to the West School. Built on the north corner of Highland Street and Willowdale Road (*now Winthrop Street*), the school was in a sparsely populated section of the Hamlet.^{1, 5} A fourth school opened in 1768. Called the East School, it too was in a sparsely populated section of the Hamlet.⁵

The selectmen established school districts based on taxable property within a mile of a school. The 4 schools were assigned district numbers: District #1, the North School; District #2, the West School; District #3, the South School; and District #4, the East School. Each school had one schoolmaster, a name that was a carryover from the English school system.

All the boys of the district, except those whose age and attainments permitted them to attend the grammar school, went to this "deestriet school," from little tots 4 and 5 years old, to young men in their teens.⁷

Until 1769, girls were not eligible for the district school. Previously, it was an unheard-of thing for girls to be instructed by a schoolmaster. For girls, there were "dame schools," taught in private houses. School dames taught them to read and sew.^{4, 7}

There were two terms in the school year, winter (3 mo.) and summer (3 mo.). Men (*schoolmasters*) taught the winter term and women (*teachers*) taught the summer term. Since summer classes had fewer and generally younger students, it was felt women were suitable.

Beginning in 1757, the Hamlet required students to provide "one foot of wood or 2 shillings," and to provide for the schoolmaster's board and room. This was to be done within 4 days of entering school or they were not allowed to attend school.⁵

The schoolmasters and teachers lived in homes in their districts. Some instructors were Hamlet residents, but most of the winter schoolmasters came from other states, including as far away as Maine.

In each district, the taxpayers paid for the building of a schoolhouse, appointed the teachers, and drew from the town treasury for the support of the school an amount proportioned to the taxable property in the district. All the district's children were required to attend the district school.⁷

The district schoolhouses, though having slightly different facades, were similar one-room buildings, with windows on 3 sides. Two front doors opened into

a small vestibule, where there was a firewood closet. Boys entered the schoolhouse via one door and girls via the other. A large wood stove was at the center of the building. Nearby, was the schoolmaster's desk. On each side of the room, there were several rows of seats and desks, which were in graduated sizes, to fit the pupils. As the students grew, they moved back to a larger desk size. For the 4 and 5 year olds, there was a bench in front of both side rows. A backdoor led to an outhouse in the backyard, behind a trellis.⁸

Up to 1769, a parish School Committee supervised the Hamlet's school. That year, Ipswich voters approved the establishment of a town School Committee and a Prudential Committee for each of the town's parishes.² (*Prudential then had the meaning of near, proximate.*)

The Prudential Committee had charge of the maintenance of the schoolhouse in the parish, provided school maintenance and hired the teachers. Voters in each district annually held a meeting at which the Prudential Committee member, for the ensuing year, was chosen. The committee, which also had parents, determined, by bidding, who was to provide the firewood for the coming year.¹¹

At the end of each school term, the Prudential Committee visited the parish school. They asked students to read, provide written work and to perform work in arithmetic. Parents attended the final exercises and made their own evaluation of the work of the children and of the teacher. Their rating of the teacher was based on the performance of the children.²

The School Committee had 3 members chosen by the selectmen, from well-educated men of the parish. Often, the church pastor was a Committee member. The Committee examined the candidates for teachers, visited the schools, had general superintendence over them, including the textbooks and made an annual written report to the parish.²

In 1783, parents requested longer terms of the reading and writing schools. Ipswich voters approved one school to be kept the whole year in the Hamlet, as well as in the other parishes.⁷ The winter term was extended to 5 months.

A decade later, the Hamlet parish became an independent town. In 1793, under the leadership of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, and by Act of the legislature, the Hamlet became Town of Hamilton.¹

There were 4 schools in the new town. £36 O.T. was raised for their support.² In 1796, Hamilton switched to the dollar as its currency. The amount annually raised for the support of schools from 1796 to 1799 was \$150, which was equally divided between the school districts, regardless of the number of students in each district.

19th Century

As the 19th century began, Hamilton had 4 school districts: District #1, the North School; District #2, the West School; District #3, the South School; and District #4, the East School.

A change in the district schools came in November 1820. Joseph and Mary Patch conveyed, for \$3, to District No. 4 (*East*) land "on a road to be laid out." (*now School Street*) On the lot (78x40x45x40x45, 1,800 sq. ft.), the district built, in 1840, a new one-room schoolhouse.⁸ The building now is part of the residence at 45 School Street.¹ The previous East School may have been on Bridge Street.

Another change came in 1835. The town sold the West School on Highland Street to Colonel Francis T. Colby, who moved it to his estate on Farms Road (*now Cutler Road*)^{1,2} The town built a new one-room West School on same site.⁹²

A major problem for the Hamilton schools, as the 1800s began, was finding and keeping teachers. It was not unusual for a teacher to resign during a school term. Rapid replacement of teachers took precedent over their qualifications.

Perhaps in response to a concern about teacher qualifications, voters, in 1822, Hamilton voters approved a regulation prescribing requirements for teachers. Every person hired to teach was "to have a high moral character, be correct in his general behavior and deportment and possess correct understanding of education, correct pronunciation, be an effective teacher well versed in arithmetic, reading and punctuation."²

The prospective teacher was to be examined by the School Committee, and assisted by the church pastor. The regulation required teachers to enforce strict obedience of order, respectful behavior and diligent attention to the studies. Any disorderly scholar was to be discharged from school.²

The 1822 State regulation likely was more than the Prudential Committees could follow in the hiring of teachers. As a result, the School Committee assumed more authority in the management of the town's schools. This included the laying out the school land, the locating and erecting a schoolhouse, the finding a schoolmaster, the investigation crowded conditions, and the repairing the buildings.¹²

Further instruction in school and management came when the Massachusetts General Court passed, in 1827, the most comprehensive school act up to that time. The size of the School Committee was set at "not less than 5 persons." Hamilton continued to elect 3 members. With regard to the certification of teachers, the Act explicitly stated the School Committee might "satisfy themselves, by personal examination or otherwise, of their literary qualifications."⁴

A feature of the Act of 1827 was the requirement of towns to elect Prudential Committeemen: "each town in this Commonwealth, which is or may be divided into school districts, at their annual meeting aforesaid, shall, in addition to the committee aforesaid, choose a committee for each school district in said town, consisting of one person, who shall be a resident in the district for which he shall be chosen, and be called the Prudential Committee thereof, whose duty it shall be to keep the schoolhouse of such district in good order, at the expense of such district; and in case there be no schoolhouse, to provide a suitable place for the school of the district, at the expense thereof; to provide fuel, and all things necessary for the comfort of the scholars therein; to select and contract with a schoolteacher for his own district, and to give such information and assistance to the said School Committee ... to aid them in the discharge of the duties required of them by this act."⁴

There was a major problem of the 1827 law, in giving control of the district schools to Prudential Committees, not all children received the same quality of schooling. District committees did not use money the same way or have equal funds. Teacher qualifications differed. Schoolhouse maintenance was not the same. School terms were different.

School costs were the largest expense for the town. In 1833, to educate 205 scholars, the town raised \$400 for public and \$108 for private schools.² The State also provided some financial support for the schools. In 1850, Hamilton received \$32.64 from the Massachusetts School Fund.⁹⁵

The annual money for support of the 4 school districts was about 20% of the town's expenses. In 1847, "For Support of Schools," the town provided \$553.22. The School Committee member for each of the 4 districts received \$109.21. That year, the total town expenses were \$3,137.04.⁹³

The school district appropriation did not cover all of a district's expenses. The 1827 law allowed district residents to provide funds to meet the expenses above the town's appropriation.

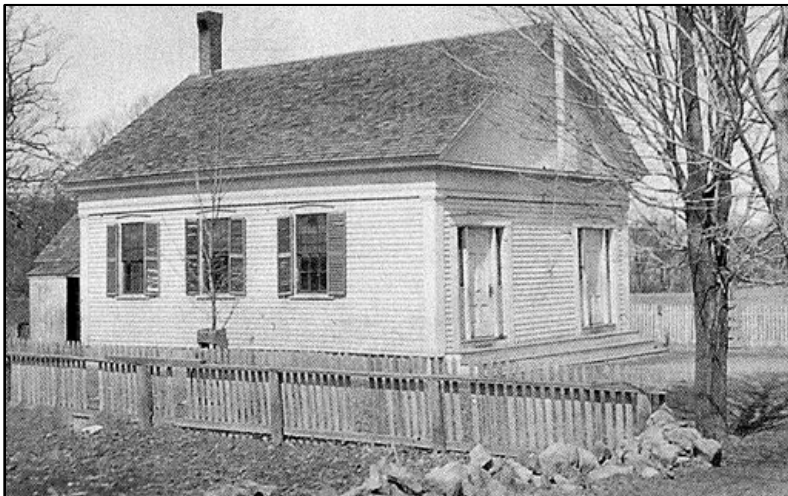
The 1827 State law required the School Committee to provide, at a town's annual meeting, a written report concerning schools. However, the first report by the Hamilton School Committee was not until 1848. At the town meeting, voters refused to act on the article for school appropriations, \$500, until the chairman of the School Committee made a report on the status of the schools.^{2, 15} (*Note: The earliest school report now available is for 1856.*)

Had there been annual reports, the differences in how children were being schooled in the districts might have been revealed. However, how much power did the School Committee have in changing district policies?

East School
Built 1840
Closed, 1928
Given to the East Methodist Episcopal Church, 1929



North School, 1883, was on Main Street, across from what now is the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School.



East School, 1910, was on School Street near where the B & M Railroad Essex Branch tracks crossed over. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

South School
Built 1856
Renamed 1891, Center School
Closed 1915
Sold 1928

North School
Built, 1849
Closed, 1918
Sold, 1928



South School, also called Center School, was on Main Street, between what now are 454 and 484 Bay Rd. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society.

Also at the May 1848 town meeting, voters approved the building of 4 new schools and required they be completed by the last day of October. However, at a special meeting held in June, the citizens voted to reconsider the action regarding the building of new schools. Nothing was done.¹⁴

At the July 1849 town meeting, voters denied the repair or building of a new schoolhouse in the north district. However, the next month, August 29, at a special town meeting, voters approved \$700 for building a new North School, on a lot across from what now is the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School.^{2, 16}

In 1855, the town voted \$600 for the support of the schools. At the start of the school year, there were 154 students between the ages of 5 and 15.¹⁷

Upset with how the town's schools were managed, it was not unusual for voters not to re-elect an entire School Committee. Such mass turnovers brought in new members with no experience.

The State legislature responded to this practice in 1857 by passing an act requiring School Committees to have 3 members, with one member elected each year for a 3-year term, rather than having all elected at each annual meeting.² Hamilton began this process in 1860.

A significant improvement in school operation occurred in 1855. Massachusetts became the first state to require vaccination for schoolchildren. At that time, only the smallpox vaccine was available. The first mention of vaccinations for Hamilton school children is in the 1893/94 School Committee Report: "shall not allow a child who has not been duly vaccinated, to be admitted or connected with the public schools."³¹

By the mid-1800s, the town allowed each district to decide whether to hire male or female teachers. Customarily only men were hired for winter terms.² Since more students attended the winter terms, and many of them were older boys, some up to 20, it was felt that women teachers could not maintain discipline.

At its location on School Street, the East school, in 1856, had 17 registered summer students; and 26 winter students. The average attendance was about 5 students less. The North school in, 1856, had 28 registered summer students; and 46 winter students. The average attendance was about 5 students less. The South school in, 1856, had 43 registered summer students; and 62 winter students. The average attendance was about 10 to 20 students less. The West school in, 1856, had 30 registered summer students; and 41 winter students. The average attendance was about 10 students less.

At the 1858 Annual Meeting, the town voted for the School Committee to select and contract with the teachers for the schools, and make other arrangements and regulations.⁹⁶ The practice had been to

employ male teachers for the winter and females for the summer; however, in 1858, the School Committee decided to employ female teachers through the year. Graduates of the Normal School** were hired.¹ Before the end of the winter term began, 3 of them resigned. The rule to hire only Normal School teachers was rescinded, and 3 more were selected, two of which were not educated at Normal Schools.⁹

The town also voted, in 1858, to have 3 school terms. The school terms for the 4 districts became the same. The first to begin the second Monday in May and continue 10 weeks; the second to begin the last Monday in September and continue 8 weeks; and the third to begin the first Monday after the annual Thanksgiving and continue 12 weeks.⁵⁶

For many years, voters chose to have the district Prudential Committees hire teachers, rather than the School Committee.

Massachusetts passed an act, to take effect in July 1859, giving the selection and contracting of teachers exclusively to town School Committees. However, in Hamilton, the selectmen extended to the Prudential Committees the privilege of nominating teachers for the winter in the same way as they had done for the summer schools. The Prudential Committees declined to do so. The School Committee selected the teachers after consultation with and by the consent of the Prudential Committees.¹⁸

Once again in 1860, the Prudential Committees chose and contracted teachers. The School Committee retained control of the conduct of the schools and the length of school years, the time of beginning and closing the same, the sex and wages of the teachers, to be determined in each district by the action of its committee.¹⁹

The town, at the 1862 Annual Meeting, gave the districts the power to appropriate money as they saw fit, and also to the Prudential Committees power to select and contract with the teachers for the schools.³⁶ These powers were renewed in subsequent years. 1869 was the last time Prudential Committee hired teachers.²³

Finally reacting to the School Committee's many calls for more money from the town voters approved, in 1861, \$800 for school expenses: this was the most to date. This allowed increases in teacher wages: females, \$20/mo. and males, \$35/mo.³⁹ However, the following year, 1862, the voters reduced the school budget to \$600,³⁶ where it stayed until 1869, when it went to \$900. Teacher wages were: females, \$24/mo. and males, \$50/mo.²¹

* The first successful small pox vaccine was developed, by Edward Jenner in 1798.

** Normal Schools were created to train high school graduates to be teachers. In 1839, the first Normal School was established in Massachusetts: it now is Framingham.

It was standard practice to pay women teachers less than their male counterparts, even though, in the educational community, there was a general belief that, "females are better adapted to instruct than males."¹⁹ With there being many more female teachers available than male teachers, towns could pay the women less, a matter of supply and demand.

Not until 1947, when Massachusetts enacted a law, did women teachers, employed in the same grades and doing the same type of work with the same preparation and training as men teachers, receive the same rate of pay.⁹⁹

An 1863 law of the Commonwealth required instruction be given in good behavior, perhaps an indication that older boys were being disruptive. The School Committee supported the law, saying, "The heart should be educated aright, as well as the intellect; for the intellect will be employed for good or evil, according to the education of the heart. Our youth should be early taught to discriminate between right and wrong, to love the truth and always speak it, to be honest and upright in all their dealings; respectful and courteous in their manner."²⁰

Student behavior was not the only concern of the School Committee. In 1869, the Committee reported its concern for students thinking they did not need to stay in school once they were 15 or 16 years old.²¹

The Committee also expressed its concern for the uniformity of education in the 4 districts.²¹ The town voted, at the 1869 annual meeting, to discontinue the school districts. A year later, the State Legislature abolished the district system throughout the state.²²

By this significant change, the School Committee had sole authority for care of the school buildings; there was less friction in the employment of teachers; and the oversight of the schools by one committee eliminated the problem of determining what duties were assigned to either the School Committee or the Prudential Committees.²² Further, all districts received equal attention to teacher qualifications and student performance.

The 1869 State law also required "every person having, under his control, a child between the ages of 8 and 14 years, to annually, during the continuance of his control, send the child to some public school in the city or town in, which he resides, at least 12 weeks." There were fines for failure to do so.^{22, 21}

The School Committee commented: "There are a few parents and guardians in this town who are liable to prosecution under this statute; unless the evil is speedily remedied, it will be the duty of the proper officers to inquire into these cases and prosecute the offending parties. We sincerely hope, however, that a thoughtful regard for the best interests of themselves and their children will prevent any farther infraction of

the statute, and render unnecessary and impossible all action at law."²²

With the School Committee taking control of the districts, it had each district property appraised by outside residents and the districts compensated for the loss. The values established were: North, District, \$700; West, District, \$900; South (*Center*), District, \$1,375 and East, District, \$900.²²

The town, in 1870, appropriated, for the first time, \$1,000 for the support of the schools: an increase from \$900. From the State School Funds, the town received \$125.13. Each of the 4 schools received \$281.28.²²

The school budget still did not include money for books. In 1870, school books authorized by the School Committee for all students to purchase were: The Bible; Analytical Series of Readers, through the Fifth; Union Spellers; Guyot's Primary and Intermediate Geographies; Tower's Elementary and Kerl's Grammars; Quackenbos' History of the United States; Eaton's Primary, Intellectual, and Common Schools Arithmetics; and the Spencerian Writing Books. All the books were available at Austin A. Whipple's store on Main Street (*now the post office*).²²

State law allowed schools to buy schoolbooks for all who desired to obtain them, and have furnished them to the scholars at the wholesale prices.¹⁸

Further, the School Committee required, "The morning exercises of the school shall commence with the reading of the Bible, by every scholar able to read; and it is recommended that the reading be followed by some devotional service. There shall be a recess of not less than 5 nor more than 10 minutes each half day, for every pupil, the sexes to take their recesses separately."²²

The emphasis on religion as part of student education was reaffirmed by the School Committee, in its 1879 annual report: "Education being the corner stone of the arch upon which rests our institutions, and Christianity the key-stone of that arch, we have made it the imperative duty of every teacher to have a daily reading in the Bible, with such other devotional exercises as he or she may adopt."

Not all was going as well as the School Committee wanted. In 1873, the Committee, in its annual report, said, "we cannot expect much more to be attained by our schools under the present system of four ungraded schools, we ought not to be satisfied until we have a grammar school for the more advanced scholars, which shall be kept at least 36 weeks, leaving the others as primary schools to be kept for the entire year by teachers. ... we hope that, before long, the town will take the steps necessary for this improvement."⁹⁷ It took 20 years for this to happen.

There was another crucial problem. The Committee reported, in 1874, that in the hiring of male teachers for the winter schools, often, a teacher wrote, just before the term was to open, that he had received a much better offer, and could not teach in Hamilton. This teacher offered to send a friend. The School Committee, not wanting to hire an unknown teacher, requested it be allowed to appoint replacements who "lives among us, shall be preferred to those from distant places."²³

In 1879, a problem of low school attendance developed, at the West School. As a result of a new school having been built in Ipswich, near the Norwood isinglass factory in the district, a dozen Hamilton children enrolled at the Ipswich school. Ipswich asked for remuneration for the instruction of the Hamilton students. The Hamilton School Committee refused to pay stating it had not been informed by the students of their inability to attend school in their own district.³⁵

The refusal to compensate Ipswich may have been linked to the 1879 cutback voters approved that year: the budget for the schools was only \$800,³⁵

At the start of the 1881 school year, the School Committee proudly announced that "for the first time in the history of our schools, to our knowledge, female teachers have been employed, during the entire year, that are residents of our town."²⁴ The acceptance of women teachers during winter terms by older boys, was slow. Some absented themselves rather than submit to female government.¹⁹

School budget restraints were greatly pressured in 1884, when the State Legislature required, "The School Committee of every city and town shall purchase, at the expense of such city or town, text books and other school supplies used in the public schools; and said text books and supplies shall be loaned to the pupils of said public schools free of charge, subject to such rules and regulations as to care and custody as the School Committee may prescribe."²⁶



South School, 1907, opened with 4 rooms, in January 1898. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

In 1883, another school cost, necessitated by a State law, was the requirement for towns to appoint one or more truant officers to enforce the State's truancy laws. The law required a town's School Committee to annually publish a Truant Officer's Report.²⁵ The law became stricter in 1889, when truant officers, directed by the School Committee, were to prosecute any person liable to the penalty.²⁸

Apparently, truancy was not a problem in Hamilton. In 1889, the town voted to have the selectmen request the state to excuse Hamilton from appointing a truant officer. The state denied the request.²⁸

To comply with this law, Hamilton increased the school budget. For the fiscal year ending March 1887, the annual appropriation for schools was \$1,200. To this amount, the Massachusetts School Fund added \$207.59, and an additional \$242.89 came from dog licenses. Thus, the schools had \$1,650.48 for the winter and summer terms.²⁷

The School Committee commented that year: "while the appropriation for schools has been thus increased the number of scholars has diminished, and the interest among the citizens of the town does not seem to be as general as it was 50 or 60 years ago. This may be due in part to narrowing the number of those who have a direct responsibility for the management of the schools."²⁷

An annual flag raising ceremony at the schoolhouses began in 1890. Children, under the direction of the teachers, sang patriotic hymns. The School Committee commented that, "without doubt creating in the children a greater love for the flag and for what it symbolizes."²⁹

The School Committee, in 1890, also commented that the town's school buildings were crowded and that the school facilities needed to be greatly improved. Voters authorized the purchase of land to build a new South School near the Hamilton-Wenham depot, at a total cost of \$1,800.²⁹

The new building was erected, on a lot 100x113 ft. lot on Railroad Avenue. In 1894, the People's Union Society built a meetinghouse next to the school. In 1920, the Society became part of the Methodist fellowship.^{1, 30}

The Hamilton school system, during the final decade of the 19th century, experienced major changes in its operation and finances.

In 1894, separate primary and grammar classrooms were established in the South School. The School Committee reported the classes were doing better work than any of the other schools, and compared very favorably with some of the city schools visited by the committee. "This was not," the committee reported, "because they have superior teachers, but because the schools are distinct from each other, and where the grades are kept separate in different

rooms or schools, much better work can be done by both teachers and pupils and more successful results follow."³²

Early in 1894, Massachusetts passed an act requiring teachers to obtain Teacher's Certificate of Qualifications. In passing the act, the State commented that it was well known that "there are now in the schools many teachers who have no certificates attesting their qualifications for the positions they occupy. In the eyes of the law, such persons are not legally teachers."¹¹⁰

Certificates were issued to successful candidates and a State record kept. Thus, School committees could accept candidates having the State certificates in place of the personal examination of candidates.

The School Committee, in 1894, decided that the term of school should begin on the first Monday of September, and continues for 40 weeks of school, with the ordinary short vacations at Christmas, Thanksgiving, and in the spring. The State Board of Education soon followed this practice.³²

Chapter 436 of the Acts of 1894 provided that "any town in which a high school, or school of corresponding grade is not maintained shall pay for the tuition of any child who, with the parent or guardian, resides in said town, and attends the high school of another town or city, provided the parent or guardian of such child, before such attendance, obtains the approval of the School Committee of the town in which the child and parents or guardian reside."³²

Another potential 1894 plan, that would stress school cost restraints, was the School Committee said it was going to ask the town to move the North and Center schoolhouses to some intermediate point between their present locations. The Committee

wanted to combine the two schools and have a grammar and primary school. Many people in the area, upon hearing about the Committee's plan, informed the Committee that any attempt to carry out any such move would be strongly opposed: the Committee "would have a fight on their hands." The Committee acquiesced.³²

In 1896, an attempt was made to approve \$8,000 for a new high school in Hamilton, but the voters said a resounding no.³⁴ The school budget had reached \$2,500.³³ Just 2 years earlier, in 1894, the appropriation for schools, for the first time, was \$2,000.³²

With the town's population dramatically increasing during the 1890s (*about 70%*), school enrollment swelled. In 1896, 86 students attended school at the South School. The School Committee recommended the building of a new, 4-room schoolhouse. The Committee said the present schoolhouse could not be economically enlarged to meet all requirements and be made in compliance with state laws.³⁴

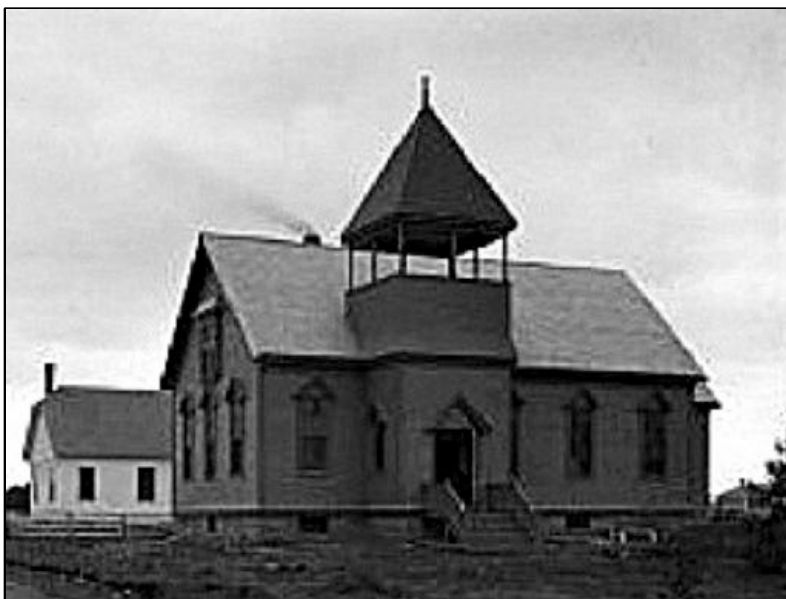
The next year, voters approved \$10,000 for erecting a new South School building. This also was the year in which a favorable vote was finally made to build an impressive town hall.³⁵

After carefully looking over all available lots in the South District, it was decided to purchase 3 lots adjacent to the old school lot, making one large lot of 45,000 sq. ft. The new, 4-room South School opened in January 1898.¹⁰¹ The basement had 2 rooms with sinks and toilets.

At the south end of the town hall, on the first floor, there was a large (930 sq. ft.) schoolroom. (*Now the town hall Memorial Meeting Room.*) "Suitable for a high-grade grammar school,"¹ it was included in the town hall to handle possible student overflows from the town's 4 district schools, an overflow that did not happen.¹

As the 19th century came to an end, the cost of transporting the town's many high school students to other towns was high. Seeking to prove that students could be less expensively transported to a local school, the School Committee provided carriage transportation for 5 ninth grade students from the East School to the South School. The cost was 25 or 50¢ a day, for each, which was more than the 6¢ they had been paying for B & M Railroad tickets.³⁷ The B & M Railroad Essex Branch, which ran from the Hamilton Depot to Essex, crossed School Street close by the East School.

The 19th century ended on a brief happy note. In 1899, the School Committee introduced music lessons to the schools: \$200 was budgeted for a teacher to visit each school once a week, *for a half hour.*³⁷



Center School, 1895, on Railroad Avenue, next to the Union Society meetinghouse, was previously the South School.
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

20th Century

The 20th century began with Hamilton having 259 students, between 5 and 15 years, attending school in 3 districts (*East, South/Center and West*). The school system had 11 teachers. The total school expense, in 1900, was \$6,360.³⁸ Fifty years earlier, the school expense was about \$500, for about 150 students.

With there no longer a need for the old South School building, on Main Street, the School Committee, in 1900, after briefly renting it, sold it for \$510.³⁷

In 1901, the Massachusetts General Court enacted a very comprehensive education law. A section of the law required towns to employ a superintendent of schools. However, the law allowed a town with total property valuation less than \$2.5 million to form a union, with similar size towns, to jointly hire the school superintendent. To comply, Hamilton joined a School Union District consisting of Ipswich, Essex, Wenham and Hamilton.⁴⁰ The Union hired Andrew S. Thomson, who served until 1905.⁴⁴

Voters, in 1902, did agree to unite with other towns to employ a superintendent of schools. The town warrant read, "to see if the town will vote to unite with Wenham, Essex, Topsfield, Salisbury, West Newbury or any of the above for the purpose of hiring a school superintendent."³²

In Hamilton, there was a definite need for an experienced school supervisor. As reported in 1902: "There is another problem which presents itself to the school authorities of the town: the impossibility of getting the East, West and Centre schools to do as much work as the South schools. This is not due to any failure on the part of the teachers. In the district schools the teachers have eight grades to hear each day, in nearly all their lessons. This makes the time spent with each individual class very short."⁴⁰

It was not just the small instruction time that bothered a growing number of residents. Many criticized the public schools for failing to give children adequate training for their life after school. Some children dropped out of school as soon as they reached the compulsory age of attendance (*14 years*). These children had no skills. The critics wanted schools to teach skills for different trades, including carpentry, masonry, plumbing and metalworking. Their efforts met no success.

A major concern of the School Committee was the education of high school age children. It was customary to run 9 grades below the high school. Ninth grade graduates went to Beverly High School, where they entered 9th grade. Thus, it took Hamilton pupils one year longer to go through the high school than it did Beverly pupils. Salem offered a 5-year high school course, but allowed pupils, who were well prepared, to finish the course in 4 years.⁴¹

The problem was complex. Should Hamilton send 8h grade students to Beverly, or do sufficient work in its ninth grade to enable pupils to complete the Salem High School course in 4 years? If Hamilton were to shorten its grammar course to 8 grades, many pupils would stop school at the end of that course: a year's schooling, which they very much needed, would be lost to them. Further, with only 8 years in school, many pupils would be too young to go out of town to school.⁴¹

In 1900, 28 students attended high schools in other towns: Salem, 5; Ipswich, 2; Beverly, 21. The total cost was \$505. The transportation cost was \$266.³⁸

The problem of where to send its high school students was temporarily settled in 1903. Hamilton continued having 9 grades, but made its 9th year's work correspond, as nearly as possible, to the work done in Beverly's 9th year. This allowed Hamilton pupils to enter the tenth grade at Beverly. The change also reduced Hamilton's student transportation cost.⁴¹

A new course of study began, in order to make the standard of Hamilton's grades equal to that in other towns. The School Superintendent said, "At the present time, colleges are demanding, for admission, a greater amount of work than formerly: this requires more of high schools, which, in turn, demand more of grammar schools."⁴¹

The School Committee, in 1903, alerted residents that school costs likely would significantly increase in the coming years. For the year 1904-5, the amount needed was expected to exceed \$9,000. (*The 1902 school cost was \$6,600.*)

Not only were costs increasing. Hamilton lost the \$250 annually received from the Massachusetts School Fund. The loss was due to the property valuation of the town exceeding the \$2.5 million limit established by the state's School Fund.^{41, 43}

While the number of students between 5 and 15 years entering the 1904 school year was steady, 255, the number of students attending high school increased. The cost for high school students was \$2,195, plus transportation. The town's total school cost was about \$9,683.⁸⁹

The Committee, for many years, had stated that it would be best for Hamilton to raise a few hundred dollars more by taxation, and keep their children at home by building and maintaining a high school in the center of the town. Voters disagreed.

In 1906, student population once again was on the rise.⁴⁵ There were 286 students between 5 and 15 years old (*27 more than in 1900*). Teachers' pay was slightly over \$4,300. The town's total school cost was about \$9,800. (*54% greater than the 1900 cost.*)⁴⁴

An increase in of students in grades 1-10 at the South School on Railroad Avenue (*about where there now is senior housing*) required a 4-room addition. It cost \$14,700.⁴⁵ The first 7 grades were on the first floor. Grades 8-10 were in two upper rooms. Two teachers instructed the 3 grades.⁴⁵ In 1909, the South School had 45 to 50 students in a single class with a single teacher.⁹⁰

A minor new school expense (\$37) in 1906 was for a doctor to examine every child for possible for defective eyesight and hearing. The Massachusetts legislature, in 1906, passed a law requiring these examinations. The examinations revealed a large number of children with defective eyesight and hearing and who were not aware of their condition. The school notified the parents of these children.⁶⁵

The increased emphasis on preparing children for college was not appreciated by all parents. In 1907, the School Superintendent said, "Our schools are criticized for being unpractical and in failing to give children adequate training for their after-school life. Many a child drops out of school as soon as the compulsory age of attendance is passed. These boys and girls go into the factories and shops as unskilled labor."⁴⁵

"If our schools offered an opportunity for these pupils to stay to learn a trade, they would enter the great mercantile enterprises as skilled workers. It is evident that the trend of modern education is toward industrial education and continuation of trade schools."⁴⁵

However, courses offered, as described by the Superintendent, were limited in scope: sewing classes, manual training, school gardens. "Our opportunity to fall into line with the march of progress is by inaugurating a business course in our high school and sewing classes in our grammar schools."⁴⁵

In 1910, Hamilton schools improved in many ways:

- The South School was the first school to have electric lights and a telephone.⁸ The other schools added electric lights in the following years.

- In July, two very-much needed rooms were added to the south school.⁴⁶

- A full 5-year course (*grades 8 to 12*) of study began for high school students.⁴⁶

- The school board tried unsuccessfully to withdraw from the Union School District and hire a full-time superintendent.⁴⁶ (*This change occurred in 1942.*)

- The School Committee appointed a committee to study building a high school. A year later, the Committee overwhelmingly voted to defer the high school building question to the next annual meeting.⁴⁶ The cost was seen as too high for voters to accept.

- In accordance with a State law, the School Committee appointed a school physician, who was to be available to teachers for advice concerning the health of pupils.⁴⁶

High school began in 1908. The high school was in the South School building, where it had two classrooms, a small laboratory in the basement, and two very small coatrooms.⁹⁰

The first graduating class was in 1911. Among the 16 graduates, there were two girls, Florence Scholler Perkins and Pearl McLaughlin.^{2, 39} For the fall of 1912, high school enrolment was nearly 70 pupils.⁹⁰

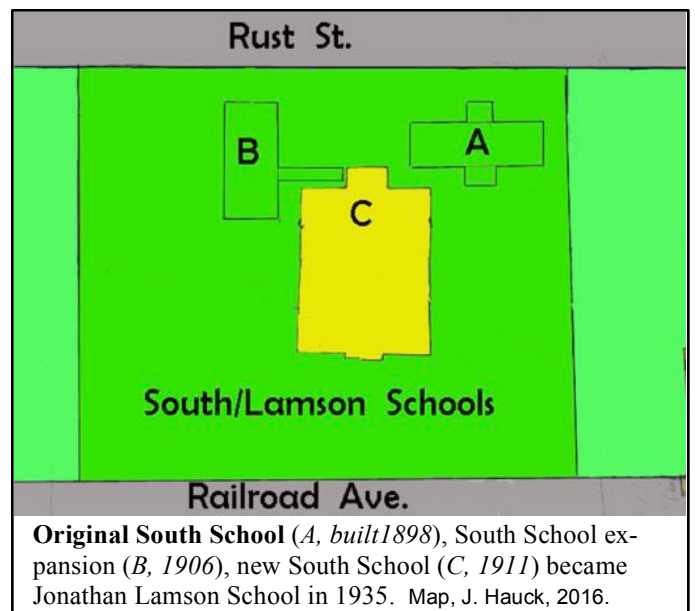
The Superintendent in 1911 cautioned the town about the crowded schools. Each teacher, he said, of a district school had the care and instruction of 5 to 7 grades. "It is almost impossible to find a teacher who is equally proficient in the work of all grades."⁹⁰

Some relief to the overcrowding came later in 1911, when the town built a new South School on the South School grounds. Pupils who gave up their rooms in the building for the high school moved to the new 2-room building, which also had a basement.⁹⁰

In 1914, Eldridge Smith, School Superintendent, voiced strong support for centralized grammar school, in spite of objections about transportation. In 1915, the School Superintendent also proposed having separate schools for elementary and grammar students. Having both primary and grammar grade students in the same schoolhouse ended in 1918.⁵¹

The School Committee, in 1915, once again expressed its concern about maintaining an adequate number of students at each district school. Two districts had a small number of children: the Center School and the West School. The latter had been closed in 1914 and was closed again in 1915. Students were transported to the South School.^{48, 49}

Beginning 1918, auto barges (*covered flatbed truck*), instead of horse-drawn wagons transported East Hamilton students from Essex Junction to the South School.⁵¹ In 1920, auto barges transported junior and senior high students and all pupils from the west district to and from the South School.⁵³



While school enrollment was declining in the Center and West Districts, it was steadily increasing in the East District. In 1918, the town erected a new building, at a cost of \$17,500. It replaced the nearby one-room schoolhouse.⁵¹

The new, two-room East School also had an assembly hall. The town transferred the school, "one of the finest school buildings to be found in New England,"⁵² to the School Committee unfurnished. The cost of desks and other necessary furniture and furnishings purchased by the Committee was \$374.⁵¹

In 1918, because of the small number of students and cost, the School Committee closed the North School. The children were sent to the Center School, bringing its enrollment to about 23 children.⁵¹

School expenses, by 1918, were about twice what they were in 1910 (\$12,336): the total school operating cost was about \$24,400 for 1918. Teaching expenses were about \$16,000.⁵⁰

During the 1919 summer vacation, the town renovated the interior of both the Center School and the North School. The latter, because of the increased number of pupils, was reopened in 1918.⁵²

(Surprisingly, there are no mentions of effects on the school system caused by WW1. 117 men served in the war.)

The School Committee, in 1920, described the crowded conditions at the town's schools: "We have four grades, aggregating over 100 pupils, in two rooms, with 3 teachers, and no recitation rooms except the much maligned chemistry laboratory and domestic science room, which are available to them only a portion of the time. Each grade below the junior high should be in a room by itself, with a teacher who can devote her entire time to that class, and in this way only can the best progress be made."⁵³

1921 was a very active year for the schools, but not very encouraging:

- The Adelaide Dodge Walsh School, on School Street, opened only 3 years before, was overcrowded. The School Committee transferred the fourth and fifth grades to the Center School, on Main Street.⁵⁴

- Several town meetings were held, but voters rejected each proposal for either a new building or an addition to the South School.²

- Despite the objections of the School Committee, voters approved reopening the West School, on Highland Street, for its 11 students.⁵⁴

- Voters rejected a proposal to send the high school students to Ipswich.²

- Some high school students were tuitioned to the Beverly Industrial School for trade instruction.²

- The time-consuming task of overseeing the schools was becoming too much for the School Committee. They requested the town increase its size from 3 to 6. Voters did not support their request.²

- The town allotted the dog tax toward school expenses. This continued until 1949, with the exception of 1938, when voters did not approve it.^{67, 61}

Dissatisfaction with the reluctance of townspeople to adequately financially support their schools was most clear in the School Superintendent's 1923 report. "The schools of Hamilton are not as good as they should be. The children are not getting a square deal. A child living in Hamilton should have just as good an opportunity to make the most of himself as the one living in Beverly. Bold and ignorant of the conditions would be the person who would say that a boy's opportunity in the schools of Hamilton is equal to that of a boy's in Beverly or is at all commensurate with the town's wealth and resources."¹⁰⁶

School district change came in 1925. School enrollment was concentrated in the South and East Schools, the two newest buildings. The School Committee reported, "The superior educational results of this policy have been so manifest that no one would think of returning to the old plan. The financial saving speak for themselves, and this notwithstanding the fact that the Committee has met the needed increases in teachers' salaries and made necessary additions to the equipment of the schools."⁵⁵

In 1928, the town sold the North School building and Main Street lot, the Center School building and lot on Main Street, and the West School building and lot on Highland Street.⁵⁶ In 1929, the town gave the old East School building to the East Hamilton Methodist Episcopal Church.⁹¹ In 1943, the church returned the property to the town, being unable to maintain it, as required, for religious purposes.¹⁰⁴

A long-sought project came into being in 1931. The town bought land, at the corner of Linden and Union Streets, where it erected a high school building. Sewing, cooking, manual training, and lunchroom were in the basement; offices and a teachers' room were on the first floor; a study hall-library, science laboratory, and commercial rooms were on the second



Hamilton High School, built in 1931, on Linden Street, became, in 1965, the Hamilton Junior High School, and in 1974, the Hamilton-Wenham Junior High School. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society 1931.

floor; there were toilet facilities on each floor; regular classrooms on the first and second floors; and a large auditorium with a stage, at the back of the building.⁵⁷

Considering the country was in the midst of an economic depression, the high school was a major financial investment for Hamilton: about \$125. In its 1933 annual report, the School Committee wrote, "1933 has been one of the most trying periods in the history of public education. Educators are aware of the economic situation and of the fact that school systems had many frills attached to them during "boom" days, which have no place, in a system, during economic depression. Your School Committee has eliminated the "frills" and retained only the essential features of education."⁹⁸

For some townspeople, sports activities probably were seen as "frills." Yet, in September 1932, the State Department of Education issued a rule requiring all students to participate in a physical education program, as a part of the regular curriculum. The Hamilton athletic program, at the high school, was expanded to meet the requirements. Basketball for all high school grades began.⁵⁸

In 1933, the high school had 213 students, most of whom required transportation. Up to 1931, there were no state laws, rules or regulations pertaining to the operation of vehicles used for transportation of school children. A State-appointed commission made 13 recommendations. The Hamilton School Committee found that all the buses operated in Hamilton met the State standards.⁵⁷

The School Committee, in 1934, added a general course to the high school curriculum. The course was available to students not desiring to pursue the college course of mathematics, languages, and sciences; or the commercial course of stenography, typewriting and bookkeeping. Such students, desiring a general high school education, could select any subject offered that would be of most benefit to them.⁹⁴

Further involvement of the State in how towns ran their schools came in 1935. An Act of the Massachusetts General Court required teachers in the public schools to take the "Oath of Allegiance." All Hamilton's teachers complied.⁵⁹ The law was in response to political radicalism during the Great Depression.

Also that year, 1935, the town voted to rename the South School the Jonathan Lamson* School.⁵⁹ Thus, there no longer was any reference to school districts, i.e., East, West, North or South.

The 1930s saw a lot of interest in big band music. Not surprisingly, in 1937, plans began to organize a school band, at no expense to the school system. 10 pupils signed up and others wanted to join, when they could get instruments. A call went out to adults in own to give, loan, or rent instruments they had.⁶⁰

A band was not the only activity organized by students in the 1930s. On October 25, 1938, a large

majority of high school students (100 of 180) went on strike. They called for shorter hours and less homework. The School Committee met with the students' parents, who "vociferously supported the demands of the pupils. Specifically, the parents requested a single session school day, from 8.15 to 1.15 with a 20-minute recess. Following the meeting, the School Committee voted to change the high school to begin at 8.15 a. m. and to end at 1.30 p. m., with a twenty-minute lunch period; the Jonathan Lamson School to hold classes from 8.50 a. m. to 3 p. m., with an hour for lunch; the Adelaide Dodge Walsh School to begin at 8.15 a. m., and end at 1.40 p. m., with a one-hour lunch period."⁶¹

Another matter of dissatisfaction among parents was the failure of the schools to provide classes to educate children in the trades. A small number of Hamilton's high-school-age children attended trade schools in the region that were maintained principally for the youth within a community. These schools admitted only a few from other communities, if their quota for classes was not complete.

The School Committee regularly called for more support for education in trades, including carpentry, plumbing, masonry and electricians. In 1940, the Committee strongly requested for a county Independent industrial school, to meet the training requirements for industrial education, "as Essex County Agricultural and Home Making School filled the need for agricultural and home making education."⁶²

Despite the country being at war and the economy being very tight, the School Committee, in 1941, hired, at \$5,000, a full-time superintendent. The town withdrew from the School Union, which allowed the

School Superintendents

Name	Began	Ended	Comment
Andrew S. Thomson	1902	1910	Union
Henry G. Blount	1910	1914	Union
Eldridge Smith	1914	1915	Union
Edward P. Fitts	1915	1917	Union
Harvey A. Williams	1917	1922	Union
Arthur B. Lord	1922	1923	Union
<u>John D. Whittier</u>	1923	1941	Union
Raymond C. Wass	1941	1944	Town
Elwin F. Towne	1944	1950	Town
Milton C. Blanchard	1950	1952	Town
Douglas A. Chandler,	1952	1959	Town
John H. Lawson	1959	1961	Town
Hammond A. Young	1961	1974	Town
Fritz F. Lindquist	1974	1974	Town, interim
Dr. William B. Fischer	1974	1981	Town

* Jonathan Lamson, born in Hamilton, b. 1884., died 1974. Member of the Board of Selectmen for 12 yrs.

hiring.⁶³ The move ended 41 years of a joint School Superintendent, as part of a Union School District.

Offsetting the cost for the school superintendent was, in 1942, closing the Adelaide Dodge Walsh School. Enrollment had been declining steadily for several years. During the autumn, only 16 pupils were enrolled. The pupil cost of the school was \$146, compared to \$66 in the Jonathan Lamson School.⁶³

Generally, Union School Superintendents served for only a few years. The longest to serve was John D. Whittier of Burlington, VT: he was the Superintendent for 18 years. Also of note was Hammond A. Young, who was the Superintendent for 13 years of his 40 years in the service of public schools.⁶⁷

During WW2, many of those involved with the schools served as air raid wardens. Teachers and many of the older boys and girls helped man the Interceptor Command Post (*aircraft observers*) and The Report Center. School personnel managed 3 major rationing programs (*sugar, gasoline, and fuel oil*). School children collected paper and scrap metal.⁶³

Not surprisingly, in 1942, the school system had the largest teacher turnover in its history. There were 9 resignations, all of which were filled.⁶³

The war was not only affecting teachers: mothers of many children were working on war jobs. This resulted in a major increase of schools serving lunches. The Office of Price Administration began a program for making rationed foods available to schools.

In 1944, Public Law 367 provided \$50 million for school lunch programs. Hamilton adopted the Federal Lunch Program in 1944. The government reimbursed the schools 7¢ on each pupil lunch sold and 2¢ for each bottle of milk sold to a pupil. At the time, Hamilton school lunches cost 12¢ and milk 2¢. From the federal program, the high school cafeteria received \$1,632 and the Lamson School cafeteria \$1,864.⁶⁴

The School Committee, in 1945, added a "junior primary grade or kindergarten" at the Jonathan Lamson School. Taught by Mary W. Tyack, the half-day kindergarten accepted children, entering in September, who were at least 4 years on March 1st the preceding September.⁶⁵ The kindergarten quickly grew: in 1947, a teacher's assistant was hired. Because of the large kindergarten class (29), the 1948 1st grade was the largest first grade ever enrolled.⁶⁶

In 1947, voters approved an "Equal Pay for Teachers" law.⁶⁶ With existing budget restraints, it was necessary to drop one teacher and make other adjustments. To recover from these cutbacks and meet the needs of a larger student enrollment, the school budget increased the following years.¹⁰⁷

Following WW2, the town's population significantly increased. In 1949, to develop preliminary plans to meet the future increases in school enrollment, Hamilton created a School Building Committee.⁶⁷

Even though the Lamson School already needed to be expanded, the Committee was against new construction. Instead, the Committee recommended a special town meeting be held for voters to decide if they wanted to appoint a Regional School Planning Board. This Board would interact with similar committees from neighboring towns, including Hamilton, Wenham, Topsfield and Manchester.⁶⁷

Voters concurred with the Board's recommendation, but wanted only to join with Wenham in developing a regional school plan.⁴⁹ Wenham voters, in 1962, approved the creation of a joint committee, a Union Committee, to develop a school plan.⁷⁸

The idea seemed great, but what about the details? The two towns have a long history of distrusting the other with regard to how joint efforts are run and expenses shared.

How would operating and building expenses be shared? How binding would the agreement be? Which schools might be expanded? Where would new schools be built and who would own them?

Despite the steadily increasing school-age population the Union Committee moved ahead very slowly.

An effect of the post-war marriage boom came in 1950. The town had to use the town hall meeting room for kindergarten children.⁶⁸

Another post-war development was many teenagers began to drive. In 1951, the Superintendent of Schools suggested the introduction of a course in Driver Education.⁶⁹ In 1953, the high school began a Driver Training Program. The school received, free, a car with dual controls. A school staff member took a course in Driver Training.⁷¹

Unable to wait any longer for the Union School Committee, Hamilton, in 1952, acquired land on Asbury Street, from Katherine Winthrop McKean, for building the 14-room Manasseh Cutler* Elementary School, at a cost of \$440,000. In addition, the high school on the corner of Union and Linden streets was expanded, at a cost of \$164,000.⁷⁰

The new Cutler elementary school allowed the Jonathan Lamson School, grades 1-6, to be closed in 1952. Students were transferred to Cutler.⁷⁰

In 1957, on the first floor, a library opened:⁷⁴ it closed in 1959.⁷⁶ The town demolished the building in 1961.¹¹¹ Three years later, 1964, a Housing for the Elderly complex opened.⁷⁹

In his 1955 report, the Superintendent of Schools commented, "Opening day in September seems to be a new record setting day, in terms of total enrollment. Figures for the past four years are interesting: 1952, 572; 1953, 679; 1954, 765; and now 1955, 872."⁷²

Not surprisingly, schoolroom expansions followed.

* Rev. Manasseh Cutler, local pastor, led the way in having the Ipswich Hamlet become a separate town, Hamilton

The School Committee began, in 1955, what it called "a novel program in school building whereby the town uses on a trial basis a 2-room addition to the Manasseh Cutler School before deciding whether or not to purchase it." The committee believed this experimentation proved to be successful. Voters agreed, in 1956, to purchase the 2-room unit, at a cost of \$45,000, and authorized the construction of another 2-room unit.⁷²

A section of the second and third grades moved into the new rooms.⁷² The addition brought the total number of classrooms to 18, as well as an all-purpose room used as a cafeteria.⁷³

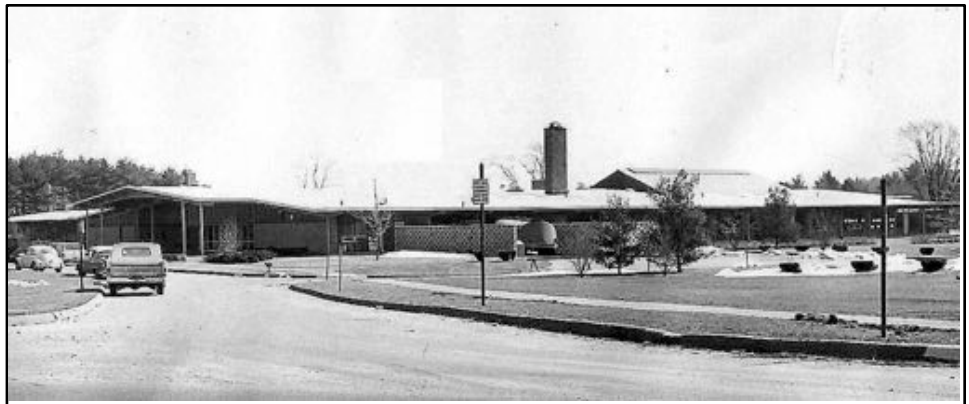
The informal instrumental music program, begun in 1937, was formalized in 1956. The schools began providing instrumental music classes. More than 100 pupils from grades 4 to 12 participated and over a 100 students received group lessons.⁷³ The Supervisor of Music at the time was Maude L. Thomas. She retired in 1963, after 45 years service.¹¹²

Another idea from the past was realized in 1957. It took 36 years, but finally, in 1957, the town voted to increase the School Committee size: it went from 3 to 5, thereby lessening the workload for the members.⁷⁴

The workload for students increased in 1958. The School Committee added a half hour to the school day, added 4 days to the school year; and adopted homework assignments for grades 4, 5, and 6.⁷⁵

Eight years after building the Cutler School, and after several studies and considerable debate, the town purchased land on Bay Road, and built, in 1960, the Winthrop School. Grades 4, 5 and 6 occupied the school, which opened with 12 classrooms, playroom, cafeteria, library, teachers' room and offices for the principal and school superintendent. The school cost slightly more than \$500,000.⁷⁶

1959 also saw the start of a summer school program for grades K to 12.⁷⁶ In 1960, courses offered were: reading and mathematics for primary grades,



Winthrop School. 1966, with 12 classrooms, cafeteria, library, teachers' room and offices, on Bay Road and across from Patton Park. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society.

intermediate grades and junior-high school grades; science enrichment for the junior-high school grades; dramatics and typing. The program ran for 5 weeks.⁷⁶

State regulations and state financial encouragement for regional schools were major factors in Hamilton and Wenham finally joining together in 1959, in establishing a regional high school district. The next year, 1960, Hamilton voters approved the building of a Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School. Two years later, 1962, the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School opened on the former Weldon estate on Bay Road.⁷⁸ In its first year, the school had 475 students in grades 9-12.^{76, 77}

The old high school building, in 1965, became the Junior High School. It opened at near-capacity, having 133 8th graders, 142 7th graders, and 121 6th graders, for a total of 396 students.⁸⁰

The junior high school was not the only building at near capacity. The School Superintendent, in 1966, reported that the school system had 675 students: an increase of more than 40%, since the 1962-63 school year.⁸¹ The Winthrop School, grades 4 to 6, was expanded that year, with the addition of 7 rooms, for a student population of 480.⁸¹

For the first time, the school budget, in 1966, exceeded a million dollars, \$1,037,000 (\$626,000 for Hamilton's schools and \$411,000 for the Hamilton-Wenham School District). The largest expense, \$657,000, was for teachers (Hamilton, \$402,000; District, \$255,000).⁸¹



Manasseh Cutler School. 1952, with 14 rooms, including cafeteria, auditorium and classrooms. Photo, Hamilton Annual Report

Also contributing to increased school costs was the operation of separate junior schools in Wenham and Hamilton. After considerable discussion, the two towns, in 1967, voted a change in the junior high schools, whereby grades 7 and 8 were to be added to the regional district, at such time as a junior high school could be built (*afforded*).⁸²

Hamilton's schools, in 1970, had 1,613 students: Cutler School, K-3, 526; Winthrop, 4-6, 525; and the Regional School District, 7-12, 562.

The expenditure for Hamilton's schools was \$855,000; and \$549,342 for the Hamilton-Wenham Regional Schools.⁸⁶ In 10 years, the cost had increased about \$975,000 and the number of students increased by 268.⁷⁷

School Budget to Town Budget

Year	Town Expenses	School Cost (%)
1900	34,369	6,709 (19.5)
1910	95,192	12,336 (13.0)
1920	183,142	38,313 (20.9)
1930	158,107	46,194 (29.2)
1940	161,324	48,393 (30.0)
1950	435,617	118,522 (27.2)
1960	1,447,437	427,530 (29.5)
1970	2,130,000	1,341,000 (63.0)

While many of the old ways of the education system changed in the 1900s, including district schools, and one teacher for several grades, the discipline of students may not have changed.

Then, in 1971, Massachusetts became the second state to abolish corporal punishment of students: this was 104 years after New Jersey was the first state to do so. (*Chap 71, section 37G Prohibits corporal punishment, but any member of school committee, teacher, or agent of school may use reasonable force to protect themselves, pupils, or other persons from an assault by a pupil.*) Good news for students.

General Law Title XII, Chapter 76, enacted in 1971, requires school committees to employ a Supervisor of Attendance, with the power to apprehend and take to school any truant child and to investigate all cases where a child fails to attend school.⁸⁴

The last truant officer listed in the town's annual reports was Irene Dankowski, in 1967.⁸² Hamilton replaced the Truant Officer with an Attendance Officer. In 1973, with the additions of several new state laws, the School Committee combined several budget items into one area, Student Services. Included were a core evaluation team, expanded special needs programs, counselors and an Attendance Officer.⁸⁶

Voters, in 1971, saw a good reason to hold back on capital expenditures: indications were for the school population to begin decreasing. Both towns defeated a bond proposal for a junior high school.⁸⁴

A school committee of Hamilton and Wenham residents, in 1974, proposed an amendment to the regional agreement calling for elementary schools, grades K thru 8, become part of the Regional School District.⁸⁷ Later that year, both towns accepted the amendment: 3 school systems became one school region, under one superintendent, who reported to and was responsible to one School Committee. Dr. William B. Fisher, was the first Superintendent of the Regional Hamilton-Wenham Schools. Previously, he was the regional high school principal.⁸⁷

A new factor contributing to increased costs was providing education for disadvantaged elementary and secondary children. In 1974, the State issued an updated version the 1972 Chapter 766 law related to the education of children with learning disabilities. The act required school districts to identify children having needs that interfered with their learning. The act required students be given a series of tests to determine reasons why the student was having difficulty. After the evaluation, the child received an educational plan that identified corrective steps to be taken and special help required.⁸⁷

In 1975, the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) required school systems to have programs for assisting children usually termed educationally disadvantaged, because of the gap between their potential and actual achievement. Massachusetts Chapter 766 served as the model ESEA. However, Massachusetts law set a higher standard for special education services: "maximum feasible benefit" as opposed to the federal standard of a "free and appropriate public education."

Some believe that the Massachusetts standard resulted in school systems identifying a higher percentage of special education students as compared to other states. Massachusetts, in 2002, amended Chapter 766, adopting the federal standard."

Hamilton's School Committee appointed a Director of Special Needs to develop a plan to meet Chapter 766 and that indicated what resources and staff would be required. The plan indicated that substantially more staff, money, and resources were needed than had previously been allotted.⁸⁷ In 1975, the Department of Pupil Personnel Services was combined with Special Education, Health Services, and Guidance under one department and with one budget: \$294,000. The State provided nearly \$90,000.⁸⁸

The new Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District included: 3 elementary schools (*K to 8*): Buker, in Wenham; Winthrop, in Hamilton; and Cutler, in Hamilton. There was a Junior High School, in Hamilton, and a High School, in Hamilton.⁸⁷ The Superintendent and staff were in the former Center School building on School Street, Wenham.

The School Committee, after conducting a public hearing on the consolidation, voted unanimously to combine the two junior high school programs at the Hamilton Junior High School.⁸⁷ In 1979, to accommodate the increased student population, 3 portable classrooms were moved from the Bessie Buker School, in Wenham, to behind the Hamilton junior high school, on Linden Street.¹⁰⁰

In 1974, 302 students enrolled in the 7th and 8th grades at the Hamilton Junior High School. Thus showing a level number of enrollments from the 315 in 1973 and the 308 of 1972.^{85, 86}

Regional Vocational School District

In 1972, voters approved an act passed by the 1972 General Court for the establishment of a regional vocational school district by the cities of Beverly, Gloucester, Salem and Peabody and the towns of Boxford, Danvers, Essex, Hamilton, Lynnfield, Manchester, Marblehead, Middleton, Rockport, Swampscott, Topsfield and Wenham, and the construction of a vocational regional school.⁸⁵

1973 was the first year of operations for the North Shore Regional Vocational District.⁸⁹ The Vocational District, in 1974, began an interim program providing a limited offering of half-day vocational courses to Hamilton high school students.⁸⁹

In 1975, a long-term lease of about 190,000 sq. ft. of space in the United Shoe Machinery (USM) company in Beverly.⁸⁹ The next year, 1976, Vocational District began for full-time students, offering 19 occupational, vocational and technical courses for students, who had completed the ninth, tenth or eleventh grade.⁸⁹

Students from Hamilton started in September 1976. They received their diploma from the vocational school, rather than, as in the past, from the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School.⁸⁹

USM allowed the vocational school to use existing equipment no longer vital to its operations. For example, the school's auto body shop was in a former USM paint shop, which had sophisticated ventilation and explosion-proofing equipment and two spray-painting assemblies. The school's culinary arts classroom was USM's large and well-equipped kitchen.⁸⁹

1976 - Upward and Onward?

The 1976 school year began with:⁸⁹

- High School, Hamilton, 779 students
- Buker School, Wenham, K-5, 290 students
- Cutler School, Hamilton, K-5, 408 students,
- Winthrop School, Hamilton, 350 students, K-5
- Junior High School, Hamilton, 308 students
- Junior High School, Wenham, 146 students
- The Hamilton-Wenham Regional School System had 2,319 students.
- The budget was \$4,229,538.

There were numerous forecasts in the 1976 school report, including by the Superintendent of Schools, for enrollment declines over the next 6 to 8 years.⁸⁹

In the 1950s, there were large and steady increases in Hamilton's population: 2,764 in 1950 and 5,488 in 1960, a 100% increase. With the town's growth, there came an even greater growth in the school population. In previous decades, annual school population increases typically were less than 1%. In the 1950s, annual

Teachers and Students

Year	Teachers	Students
1856	12	154
1860	12	124
1880	12	116
1890	12	158
1900	11	259
1910	17	347
1920	21	356
1930	20	388
1940	22	400
1950	26	452
1960	53	1,345
1970*	74	1,376

* High school students and teachers excluded.

school population increases were 10 to 14%. By 1960, the school population was more than 1,300.

The school population leveled during the 1960s, reaching slightly less than 1,400 in 1970.

In the next decade, the 1970s, Hamilton's school population declined. From 1970 to 1976, total enrollment in Hamilton's schools fell by nearly 300 students (1,376 to 1,066). Further losses were expected for the rest of the 1970s.

The 1970s also were marked by increased activity of the Massachusetts Teacher's Association (MTA). A teachers' union existed in Massachusetts since 1845. The first reference to a teachers' association in Hamilton's annual reports is in 1940: "At the invitation of Superintendent Starr King and the Beverly Teachers' Association, all teachers attended two full day Institutes at Beverly."¹⁰⁵

Town records do not indicate when negotiations were first held between the School Committee and the MTA. However, In 1972, the School Committee reported it "devoted many hours in contract negotiations with the Hamilton Teachers' Association, ... with respect to wages and other conditions of employment."⁸⁵

A year later, in October 1973, the Committee said, "After almost three years of continuous negotiations, a two-year contract was signed with the Hamilton Teachers' Association."⁸⁶

Few signs of the past remain

During the nearly 250 years of schools, in what now is Hamilton, the town built 11 schoolhouses. North, original school (1730), on Main St.; North 2 school, (1738), on Main St.; Center school 1 (1738), on Main St. next to meeting house; Center school 2 (1798), on Main St, south of town hall; South school 3 (1898), on Railroad Ave.; West school 1 (1758), on Highland St.; West school 2 (1835), on Highland St.; East school 1 (1768), on unknown street; East school 2 (1840), on School St.; East school 3 (1918), on School St.; and High/junior high school (1965), on Linden St.

It is amazing how long some school buildings existed: the first North School for over 110 years and its replacement for 76 years; the first West School for 93 years and its replacement for another 77 years. Children went to the same schoolhouses that their great, great grandparents attended.

The North and West districts had low student populations, therefore much less wear. Still, as evident from annual school reports, there were many repairs and upgrades to these one-room schoolhouses.

Hamilton Schools

School	Began	Closed	Comment
East 1	1768	1839	
Center 1	1730	1738	Became South School
North 1	1738	1849	Sold
South 1	1738	1890	Former Center School
West 1	1758	1835	Sold
West 2	1835	1928	Sold
East 2	1840	1918	
North 2	1849	1925	Sold in 1928
South 3	1881	1935	Became Jonathan Lamson School.
South 2	1890	1891	Renamed Center School
Center 2	1891	1928	Former South School
East 3	1918	1927	Became Adelaide Dodge Walsh School
Walsh	1918	1942	Became American Legion building
High	1931	1961	1965 became junior high school.
Lamson	1935	1952	1956 became library room; raised 1961
Cutler	1952		
Junior	1965		Former high school.

Nearly all the old schools no longer exist. However, a couple remain, both on School Street.

37 School St. - The American Legion Post 194 building previously was the Adelaide Dodge Walsh School. In its current condition (2015), the building closely resembles the school's appearance.

In 1945, the town gave the building to Post 194. It had been vacant since 1942.⁶⁵



37 School St., now American Legion Post 194 building, originally was an East School, built in 1918. Photo, J. Hauck, 2015

Originally, the Adelaide Dodge Walsh School was the East School. The name was changed in 1927. Adelaide Dodge Walsh, who served many years on the School Board, died in 1926.¹⁰²

Built in 1918, the 2-room East School, at the time called "one of the best in New England,"⁵² replaced a one-room East School, at what is now 45 School St.

45 School Street - The dwelling is a former one-room East School. Built in 1840, it last was a schoolhouse in 1917. The School Committee gave the school to the town in 1920. Nine years later, 1929, the town gave the East School to the East Hamilton Methodist Episcopal Church.⁹¹ In 1875, the Union Chapel, predecessor to the Methodist church, built a meetinghouse on a lot opposite the schoolhouse.¹

In 1943, the church returned the property and building to Hamilton, having not maintained the property for religious purposes, as required in the 1920 deed.¹⁰⁴ The town sold the property in 1949.¹⁰³



45 School St., now a private residence, part of it originally was an East School, built in 1840. Photo, J. Hauck, 2015

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