

Washington Historical Society Newsletter

www.WNHHS.org
 FALL 2024 EDITION

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our three museums continued to be the object of many visitors this summer and we were glad to focus on the history and locations of Washington's 10 school districts and the history behind each of their schoolhouses, most of which do not survive. Ellen Hofford, our board member, did a splendid job of putting together an exhibit at the Museum on these schoolhouses, and Bill Mulcahy, our intrepid webmaster, organized our search 'team' whose purpose was to locate, as close as is possible, the locations of the lost schoolhouses. We hope to have a 'treasure hunt' for all ages involving the schoolhouse locations in 2025. In addition students from the Washington Elementary School participated in a re-creation of a typical school day at the East Washington Schoolhouse last May, thanks to the great work of Marian Baker.

Our public programs for the coming year are in development as I write. But we have secured an in-person talk on Robert Frost's poetry and farming in New England for June. Pending are a program on the history of Camp Morgan by Alan Perry in the summer, talks on Augustus Saint-Gaudens and the Cornish Colony, Frank Lloyd Wright's NH architecture, New England's colonial meetinghouses, and possibly a presentation on genealogy. Many thanks to the New Hampshire Humanities to Go program for providing excellent programming.

Thank you as well to Jon Gibson, Mark Florence, and the Town for their continued support for keeping the grounds of our museums neat and tidy, and thanks to Jed Sampson's excellent paint work on the East Washington schoolhouse foyers. Members of our board have proactively made repairs that make our operations run smoothly.

I and the board thank all our members and donors for giving and allowing us another splendid year of discovering and savoring the history of our wonderful little town.

Blessings to all for a fine winter! We await the return of the spring with great anticipation.

Schoolhouse Sites Search

by Ellen Hofford

On this lovely October day amongst the hills draped in deciduous shawls of reds, oranges and golds with accents in evergreens, I remember three Summer “strolls” in search of schoolhouse sites here in Washington. During the eighteen and early nineteen hundreds there had been ten (and at one point eleven) staffed schoolhouses in the town of Washington! Thus, five of us volunteered to go look for the particular places of each. Of course, District Number 1 – Center School on the town green and District Number 5 by East Washington Fire Station we all know. But where was the District #7 Mills (Wilcox, Farnsworth, Russell) school house location? Smith Pond area (District #10) had a school building too. And what is left of the Penniman brick school (District #4), that held many a reunion over the years? I begin with these three and will share about the remaining five in the Spring Newsletter.

Bill Mulcahy, webmaster and Board member, gathered the maps and took the photos; Steve Yusko, WNHHS President, checked all the elevations with map and phone in hand; Marian Baker, WNHHS Secretary, looked for domesticated plant life and hoped to find old ink jars near the sites; Kimberley Stumpf weighed in with cogent questions and snapped phone pictures; and I was along for the treks to get my steps/miles in.

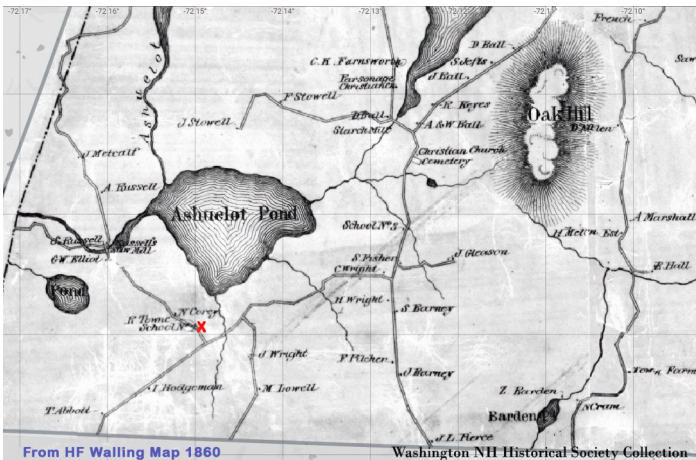
On July 10 the Smith Pond area was explored. The lane remains much the same with the same plants as a hundred and more years ago: ferns, flowering weeds, Day Lilies and shrubs, and included signs of raccoon and deer. Several possible locations for the building were discussed as the maps and land were compared. Finally, one spot was settled upon. Nevertheless, one wishes the old trees or stone walls could talk! History comes alive, though, in the photograph of the school with the teacher and students out front. Eventually, with the student body shrinking to just a few, the children walked to District #8 New Boston School (see the Spring 2025 issue).



Washington NH Historical Society Collection

On July 25 we five met at the Museum to look at the 1860, 1892, and 1976 maps showing the school sites, overlaying the present tax map to pinpoint the Wilcox, Farnsworth, Russell Mills School. The 1886 History offers lots of detail about the boundaries of each school district (later division) but not much about the schoolhouses. Ron and Grace Jager have told stories about all the various schools in town in their Portrait of a Hill Town which includes the 1976 map of the Washington School Districts as based upon the 1860 map.

We headed out to King Street and parked near the entrance to Jeffs Road. Across from that entrance is an old house with schoolhouse-like features/aspects. We wondered out loud if perchance that had been the Ball-Farnsworth schoolhouse that was moved about and sold to Sumner Ball in 1933 for 50 cents. Trekking along Jeffs Road we noticed that it was well kept by someone: Washington Snow Riders? Loggers? ATV trail keepers? Even new culverts and drainage in wet spots. Then we came to the riprap...not along the sides of the road, as in our town roads, but it seems the road is made of riprap!... for a vehicle, but not meant for walking-hiking! After climbing a rather long tall hill of stones, we meandered down Russell Mill Pond Road, munching on raspberries that Marian found, enjoyed the day lilies at the foot of an oak tree along the lane, and searched for a level spot with the correct elevation. Then we found



the site, well probably two sites, because this schoolhouse had also been moved at one point. Our question was whether that move was due to dampness, as this back road needed the riprap to hold it in place or to bring it closer to the majority of the scholars. The present lane is lower than the original one judging by the stone walls...The section of the 1860 Town map that covers the roads we explored is included with this “Mills school” search.

Penniman School site was explored on August 8 with John Brighton, who graciously offered to meet with us, shared photos and information and then led us down Old Marlow Road from his house to the foundation of the Old Brick School (as it was known). [My husband Jim and I came to town in 1966 and with our sons took the old lane off Farnsworth Hill Road to see the Penniman School. The well-built structure still had its window casings and door frame, as well as an attached woodshed, but the roof was sadly sagging.] To quote Portrait of a Hill Town: “The brick schoolhouse which was the centerpiece of this district, the area lying southwest of Washington Center on the Old Marlow Road, was built in 1827. It served as a school for over 60 years, then as a reunion spot for some decades; after 1930 it was maintained and /or used as a residence until recent decades. Vandalized and neglected since then, it is now (1976) merely a melancholy brick ruin on a remote wooded hillside beside an impassable road.” (Page 105)



In 1984 Phil Barker had asked the town if the Penniman School could be moved to the Green to be a museum for the newly formed (in 1982) Washington, New Hampshire Historical Society. The request was declined and eventually the remains of the schoolhouse were dismantled, some of the furniture donated for use in District #5 School building, and the foundation left for perpetuity. John explained to us that the original builders had carefully placed the bricks (chiseled to fit) on the not-so-even stone foundation to build a solid level structure. There were also courses of double brick (brick and block construction) with several layers (wythes) of brick and a header brick to hold them together.

One master craftsman in town, Fred Otterson used to say, when working on an older building: “What old dubber put this baaarn togetha?” Then he would proceed with lots of scribing of wood for a good carpenter’s fit. Photos of Penniman were on each reunion card invitation. However, this photo is of the inside of the Penniman School (during its vacant years), showing the old iron stove with someone beside it and some desks.

We five enjoyed the walking and searching trip we made each week to find the school building sites.

Did you know that the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance has an ongoing Historic Barn Assessment Grant program?

These small matching grants cover the cost of a professional assessment and help barn owners by providing “road maps” for repair or re-use. These \$400 grants or \$250 mini-grants coupled with a property-owner match of \$100 or \$250 respectively, go towards hiring a barn consultant to inspect the barn, determine its age and key construction features, assess what’s required to stabilize, repair, and reuse the structure. Grant recipients will receive a written report; that can be used as a valuable planning tool that identifies problems, proposes specific preservation strategies, and offers cost estimates for the needed repairs. Contact Beverly Thomas, Program Director, at (603) 224-2281 or bt@nhpreservation.org.

Message from the WHS Museum.

Please remember to check our website for the latest information on the ZOOM programs throughout the winter and any other “latest” information. Bill is doing a great job of keeping the site updated.

The town has had their committee on the Master Plan working on updating the 10-year plan and the Historical Society was asked for input. The board held a special meeting to go over it and found that we have done a great deal to fill the objectives of the plan and listed and reported back to the committee what we have done in the fields of education, entertainment, activities, and historic preservation.

Our buildings are tucked in for the winter and will look forward to another interesting season in the spring.

Thank you for your support and patronage. If you have any ideas for displays or anything, please let us know.

Washington Historical Society
PO Box 90
Washington, NH 03280

ANNUAL MEMEBERSHIP LEVELS have changed. If you are already a member, you will receive a notice to renew in the mail or via email. If you would like to join, you can join on-line and pay by credit card or visit the museum.

Donations can be made on-line using a credit card or by check to WNHHS, PO Box 90, Washington, NH 03280.

PLEASE NOTE: As a non-profit historical society, we qualify with many companies for matching grants provided the company you work for or are retired from, supports such benefits.

Please accept my donation of \$ _____ to help WNNHHS continue its work.

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