

— FLORENCE BANKS TALKS ABOUT THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS —

Florence Banks talking with Scott Hill at her home at 46 Norfield Road in Weston, Conn. on December 19, 1975.

Before I went to Normal School, I taught a year up in Valley Forge. I boarded with Charles and Nettie Perry for two dollars a week, room and board. School started at nine in the morning and didn't get out until four. It was a long day. In the wintertime Charlie Perry used to walk over and escort me home. It was about a mile away and he didn't think it was safe for me to walk home alone when it was nearly dark. I don't know whether he was worried about people or animals — it might have been both. The foundry in there wasn't used in my day, neither was the water wheel or the general store. There still were a number of families living inter such as the Halls, Sosborns and Perrys. It has all been flooded. When the water in the reservoir is low, you can see the foundations of some of the houses and the stone walls. Teaching over there a good experience.

From there I went to Danbury State College, then known as the Danbury Normal School, for two years. I boarded up there throughout the school year but came home every weekend. To get back to Danbury either my father or my sister would drive me in a horse and wagon the five miles to Cannondale Station to meet the train. When I graduated, I could teach all the elementary grades. I got the job at the Middle District School and taught there for three years years before I went to Norwalk where I did most of my teaching. There were five schools in Weston: Norfield was the Middle District, Upper Parish on Godfrey Road, the Goodhill School on Goodhill Road, Lyons Plains and Valley Forge. There is a picture

of me and some of my pupils at Norfield that I gave the Weston Historical Society. The schools were used until the Hurlbutt School was built. After that the Norfield School was used by the fireman for their meetings. They had a place on one side for Weston's one fire truck.

I taught all grades. There were usually 15-18 students, sometimes only one or two to a grade. The older ones used to hear the little ones read for me at the same time, say, I had class in geography or science. The older ones helped out the younger children. They all had to buy their own textbooks so they kept them when they finished. We had Harper's Readers. There was a third reader and a fourth. They didn't go by grades exactly. It was just a step higher from the third to the fourth reader, then we went from the fourth to the fifth reader. Those who learned easily and were good readers could move faster than the others. I still have a slate I used when I was a little girl. We used a slate pencil to write on it and when we got through our lesson, we rubbed the slate off and were ready to apply another lesson.

Of course there were no school buses in those days. One girl was delicate and her mother brought her with a horse and wagon every day to school and came back and took her home. That was the only one. The others walked, some lived half to three quarters of an hour away. Some had bicycles. They brought their lunches in tin pails with the sandwiches wrapped in bread wrappings. We had an hour at noon. The mother of one of the poorer families brought lunch to them. Often times it would consist of cold potato sandwiches. They never had any fruit or other goodies. The children used to play under the horse sheds which are still standing on the church green. The boys climbed the rafters there and had a wonderful time. The boys always had to do a lot of fooling in school. The girls were more conscientious about their work. We never had homework. I did have some discipline problems.

We had a school board and we had school visitors — Irving Lockwood was one of them. Some used to fall asleep when they visited the school while hearing the lessons. They were supposed to be there to see the teachers were on their toes. Later we had a supervisor. Frank Knight was the first one.

Though I lived near, I had to stay during lunch hour to keep order. There was a pot belly stove in the middle of the floor. My father furnished the wood that he cut up in Devils Den. He drew it out with the horses and a pung sled. He dumped it outside on the ground so the children carried it in and piled it in the vestibule to dry out. We burned big logs in the stove, but in cold weather they didn't go through the night so we had to build a fire the next morning. I was my own janitor. I swept out and did everything. I was paid twenty-five dollars a month. It got up to forty before I left. I lived at home and didn't have to pay board, otherwise I never could have managed. Some of the teachers in the other school lived as far away as Norwalk so they had to board.



Middle School 1917, Florence Banks, Teacher