



## SCHOOLS

*by Laurence O. Thompson*

Committee members who laid out the "2 townships on the Ashuelot River above Northfield" in 1734 reserved Lot N. 28 for school purposes. There is no record of the erection of a schoolhouse at this time, although in 1743 a committee was chosen to "let out the school lot to be cleared and brought into grass and under good improvement." The settlement was abandoned in 1747, so not until after the resettlement could school affairs advance.

At the town meeting in 1764 "six pounds sterling" was voted to defray expenses. This is the first record of money appropriated by the town for education. Three years later, at the annual town meeting it was "Voted to pay unto Priscilla Ellis the sum of Three Pounds Thirteen Shillings and One Penny Lawful Money for her Service in keeping the School."

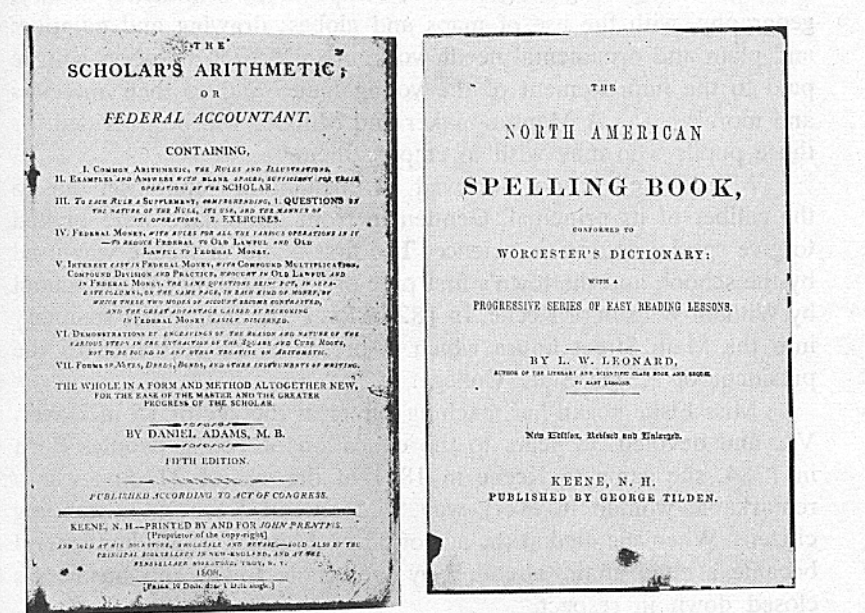
On October 29, 1770, the town was divided into four school districts, each of which was required to build a schoolhouse, and 15 pounds was raised for the four schools. The first school committees of which there is a record were chosen in 1774, two members in each district. By now the total number of districts was seven. In 1775 the management of the schools was assigned to the selectmen. By 1783 the town voted 60 pounds for schools, the districts to provide their own masters and regulate their own affairs.

Several private schools were established around this time. Mrs.

Ruth Kidder opened a school on May 1, 1791, by subscription. On September 5 another school was opened by Mrs. Kidder upon the same terms, except that "the school should be limited to 27 scholars." In March 1792 Mrs. Kidder reopened a school she had taught the previous year in the basement of "Watson's shop" which stood on the west side of Main Street, where the Cheshire National Bank now stands. The subscribers "promised Mrs. Ruth Kidder the sum of five shillings a week for her services and five shillings for her board, and to furnish the necessary wood."

Prior to 1793 Judge Daniel Newcomb, chief judge of the Inferior Court of Cheshire County, had realized the need for a better curriculum than that already existing and, at his own expense, he established a private grammar school. This school was to be kept by a man of liberal education and to be supported by the tuition of the scholars. The school carried on for a few years under several masters.

It can be said that up to 1800 the schools were primitive, poorly financed, and staffed by incompetent teachers. Sometimes school kept only a few weeks out of the entire year. Textbooks were crude or entirely lacking. The curriculum was limited to instruction in the "three R's"; schoolhouses were poorly heated and inadequately ventilated. However, the increase in the number of children eventually



necessitated the building of better schools, staffed by more competent teachers.

The early textbooks included the Testament, *New England Primer*, spelling books; later Morse's geography and Pike's arithmetic were added, and still later the *Scholar's Arithmetic* by Dr. Daniel Adams of Leominster, Mass., and afterwards of Keene, where he published his *Adams' New Arithmetic*. Hon. Salma Hale of Alstead and Keene wrote a grammar and a history of the United States. For the latter he received a prize of \$400 and a medal in 1822.

A map of Keene in 1800 indicates three schoolhouses; one on Main Street just north of the old Boston road, now Baker Street; another on the west side of Main Street, near where Spaulding Gymnasium is now located; the third on Prison Street, now Washington Street opposite the present Junior High School.

In 1801 the town "Voted that the grammar school master shall keep a school in each district in proportion to the value of each school district."

The first evening school in Keene was taught in the autumn of 1802 in the hall of "Well's Inn," previously Bullard's Coffee House.

On May 1, 1814, Miss Catherine Fiske opened a Young Ladies' Seminary, reported to be the first such boarding school in the state. According to the school's first advertisement, instruction was given in reading; writing; English grammar; composition; arithmetic; history; geography, with the use of maps and globes; drawing and painting; and plain and ornamental needlework. Also, "strict attention will be paid to the improvement of the young ladies and to their manners and morals . . . A Mantua-maker and Milliner will be provided for those pupils who may wish to employ them."

Miss Fiske's school achieved an outstanding reputation due to the caliber of its principal. Gentlemen from the village were invited to give special courses in science. The first piano in Keene was used by the school, and the town's first pipe organ was built for the school by William Willson of Keene. In 1824 Miss Fiske moved her seminary into the Main Street house which is presently the residence of the president of Keene State College.

Miss Fiske began her teaching career at the age of 15 in Dover, Vt., and devoted 38 years to the education of young people. Born in 1784, she came to Keene in 1811 at the age of 27. She was a remarkable woman in every way, and one of Keene's outstanding citizens. When she died at the age of 53 on May 19, 1837, her funeral became a civic affair, attended by the whole town, and businesses closed down in respect.

The school was continued several years by her staff under the management of Miss Eliza P. Withington, Miss Fiske's chief assistant. During the 31 years of the school's existence it was attended by more than 2,500 girls from all sections of the country.

Thomas Hardy came to Keene in 1816 to open a private school. He also taught an evening school, but after two years he left to take charge of the Chesterfield Academy.

In 1820 Nathaniel Sprague, at one time a partner in the Flint Glass Co. on Marlboro Street, and later an ordained minister, opened a private school in a brick building a little to the southwest of the site of the present Tilden School. The next year he was assisted by his sister Elizabeth, who had taught music and French at Miss Fiske's School. The building was then taken for the public school of that district, and Sprague transferred his classes to the hall over Dan Hough's store.

The town changed its bylaws relative to schools in 1824 and now chose a committee of five to examine the teachers, **in** addition to the seven visitors and inspectors (one principal visitor, the Rev. Zedekiah Smith Barstow, the village minister, and six others, all chosen at the annual town meeting). **In** 1827 this committee on examination of teachers advised the use of the following textbooks: *Lee's Spelling Book*, *Easy Lessons in Reading*, *History of the United States*, *English Reader*, the Scriptures, *Scientific Class Book*, Murray's and Putnam's grammars, Worcester's and Woodbridge's geographies, Adams' arithmetic, old and new, and Pike's arithmetic.

Also in 1827 a school was opened for instruction "in the several branches usually taught in our academies," which continued for several terms with up to 100 pupils. In December 1828 the Keene High School was established by the citizens of the three central districts of the town. Keene's first experiment in secondary education was housed in the east end of Wilder's building, presently the Ball Block at the head of Central Square. The top floor containing the room where the school first met was removed in 1939, but the building, dating from 1828, still stands. Edward Cushing Eells, a graduate of Middlebury College class of 1828, was the first teacher. Born at Middlebury, he later attended Andover Theological Seminary. He died at Orwell, Vt., in 1830.

Succeeding Eells was A. H. Bennett, who later became a lawyer at Winchester. Pupils desiring admission to the high school were examined by a committee made up of two local ministers and Phineas Fiske, a leading citizen. This school, however, did not continue long,

and it was 23 years before there was another public high school in Keene.

In 1832 concern was expressed by many parents that "their children received too much religious instruction in the schools, some of it, as they alleged, of a sectarian character; that teachers and others distributed religious tracts among the pupils and spent too much time in devotions and exhortations during school hours; and at the annual meeting this year the town voted its disapproval of those practices and directed that the teachers confine themselves to reading the Scriptures as prescribed by the committee, with one short prayer each day and instruction in those 'moral virtues which are the ornaments of human society.' The vote was recorded in full."

In the spring of 1837 the "Academy in Keene" was opened to the public by a committee of the First Congregational Church Society. A private institution charging tuition, its classes were held in a two-story brick building which had been erected with funds raised by subscription chiefly through the efforts of Rev. Barstow and William Lamson on land given by Abijah and Azel Wilder. The site is now occupied by the Winter Street parking lot.

The Academy was essentially a Congregational institution, deeded to 15 trustees, 5 of them ministers, and the board was to be self-perpetuating. The deed of the land was given "in consideration of the promises and the sum of one dollar." One of the promises was that "the said trustees shall not elect or employ any person as principal of said Academy who is not a professor of religion in an Orthodox Congregational or Presbyterian Church, and who does not hold in substance the faith now held and maintained by the First Congregational Society in Keene." Subscriptions came chiefly from members of the Congregational Church.

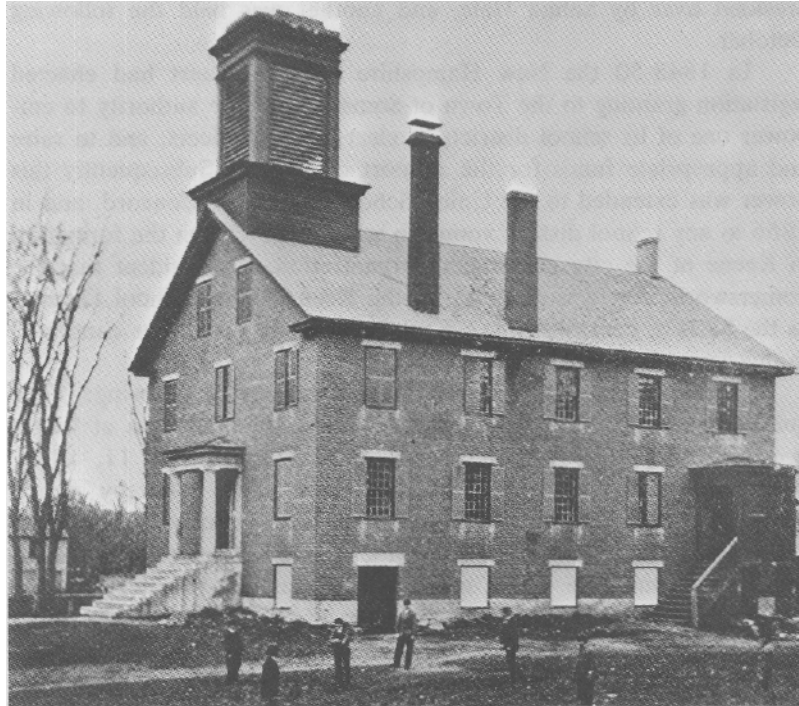
Breed Batcheller, grandson of the well-known Loyalist, and successful teacher of an academy in Boscawen, became the first principal. His assistants were Miss Sarah M. Leverett and Miss Mary M. Parker. (Two years later Batcheller married Miss Leverett and gave up his position.) The name of the school was changed to "Keene Academy," and instruction was given in vocal music and on the piano and organ, in addition to the regular academic subjects. There were about 200 pupils enrolled. Abijah Wilder built the brick house on the corner of Court and Summer Streets for a boarding house for the Academy. Eliphalet Briggs presented a set of globes which cost \$100; the bell Timothy Hale donated was later used at the high school.

In 1850 William Torrance became principal of the Academy.

The school was not a financial success and the trustees found it difficult to maintain a proper standard. In 1853, chiefly through the efforts of Torrance, the building was leased to the "Associated Districts" for a term of 10 years to serve as a high school, of which Torrance became the first principal. He was a successful and popular teacher and highly respected in social life. He died in February 1855, aged 39.

After two more principals who served short terms, A. J. Burbank, aided by his wife, took over the work of the school and remained until 1867, bringing order out of chaos and establishing a high school of much merit. There were then about 80 pupils.

As the school system grew and enrollments increased there developed a dual system: the Union School District, with its Board of Education, controlling the urban schools, and the Town District, comprised of 10 rural school districts under the administration of a school board of three members, each of the 10 rural districts controlled by



*Keene Academy when in use as the Keene High School*

a Prudential Committee, usually a single member. The rural districts and their locations were No. 2, South Keene; No. 3, Beech Hill; No. 4, North Beech Hill; No. 5, East Surry Road; No. 6, Four Corners; No. 7, Summit Road; No. 8, Westmoreland Road; No. 9, Hurricane Road; No. 10, West Keene; No. 11, Old Chesterfield Road. District No. 1, the urban district, included seven grammar schools, five "secondary schools," and six primary schools; usually more than one of these "schools" being housed in each building.

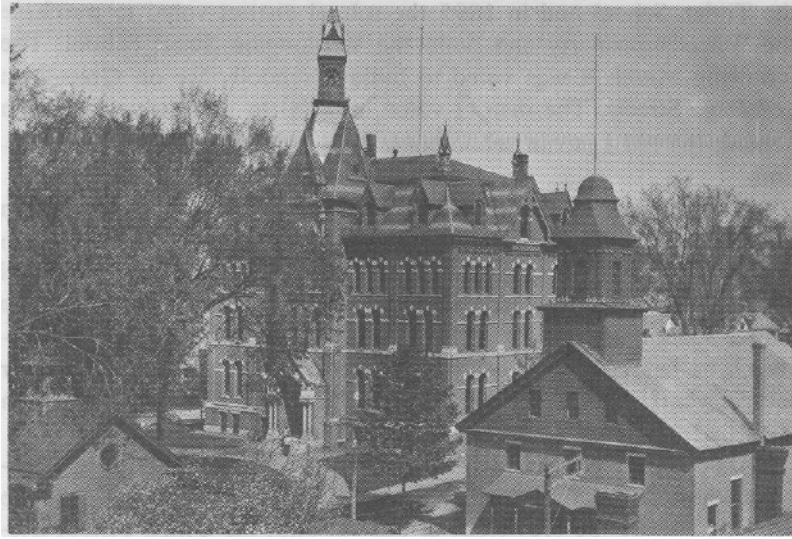
In 1866 the "Union School District of Keene" (formed in 1865) attempted without success to purchase from the trustees the building housing Keene Academy. The property was finally taken by law for school purposes, and the trustees were awarded \$6,100. This created some bitter feelings. The proceeds from this sale were invested by the trustees and over the years increased to a very substantial amount.

Teachers' institutes for the county were held in Keene more frequently than in any other place and the towns appropriated money for their support. In 1845 a four weeks' session was held in April, presided over by Salma Hale, and another was held the following October.

**In** 1848-50 the New Hampshire General Court had enacted legislation granting to the Town of Somersworth the authority to empower one of its school districts to elect district officers, and to raise and appropriate funds for the support of schools. Subsequently this power was extended to the Union School District of Concord, and in 1866 to any school district voting to adopt the Act. On the formation in Keene of the city government organization, it is evident that the Somersworth Act was adopted by the Keene Union School District, as the basis of control of the schools, a situation which has continued to the present time.

In the school report of 1875-76 appears the following: "The question that has agitated the District for many years has at length been settled by the following vote of the District May 11, 1875: 'Voted that the sum of \$50,000 be, and the same is hereby appropriated for the erection and completion of a High School building on the present High School lot [now the Winter Street parking area], and for the purchase of the necessary fixtures and furniture for the same. . . .' The plans and specifications of the house were made by S. S. Woodcock, of Boston."

The new high school was dedicated on December 4, 1876, and Franklin Hooper chosen principal. The building was 92' x 62', 5 stories, 128' to the top of the tower in which was hung the old Acad-



*The "new" high school, later Central Junior High  
(site of present Winter Street parking lot)*

emy bell (now preserved by the Historical Society of Cheshire County and set in a standard made from timbers of the old school).

On April 1, 1878, Keene High School Alumni Association was organized. The next year on March 11 women had their first opportunity to vote in school district affairs, and Mrs. Abby Bickford was elected a member of the Board of Education.

By 1885 there was need for a school superintendent, as the members of the board could not give the necessary time for the supervision of the growing school system.

On March 29, 1886, the first school meeting of the new town district was held at the West Keene schoolhouse. This same year the Elliot School was erected, and on August 30 the Parochial School opened, with about 300 pupils. In 1888 Keene was expending the most money per pupil for schooling of any town in the county.

Around 1890 a Normal Training course was established to prepare teachers for successful work in all grades. The course was open to high school graduates and others qualified by "scholarship or experience." At this same time free textbooks were first supplied to pupils.

Much attention continued to be paid to the erection of new school buildings. In 1892 money was appropriated for the erection of



the Tilden School and in 1895 the school district voted to purchase the Wheeler property and build the Washington Street School. The following March it was voted to build a schoolhouse on Greenlawn and Page Streets. The district voted in 1900 to build a new Lincoln School; the old Lincoln schoolhouse was ordered sold at public auction.

On July 13, 1903, the Board voted to establish two kindergarten schools, one at the Tilden and one at the Elliot building. Previous to this there were two private kindergartens which operated over a period of time. Miss Ellen R. Perry, who had been a successful teacher in the Union School District for many years, had opened a private kindergarten at her residence on Water Street, which she conducted for several years. Soon after Miss Perry opened her school Miss Ellen Hills had a private kindergarten school for several terms.

The Keene Normal School was established in 1909. The legislation authorizing the Normal School stated: "No money shall be expended under the provisions of this act until the Union School District . . . shall have agreed in writing . . . to cooperate . . . with the said Normal School in the maintenance of model and practice schools, for a term of years."

As of July 7, 1909, a contract was executed between the trustees of the State Normal Schools and the School Board of the Union School District of Keene, transferring to this "Board of Trustees the entire management and control of such schools as the Trustees shall from time to time" need "for the purposes of model and training schools." The trustees were to provide teachers, scholastic equipment (not including schoolroom furniture), fuel and lights, and janitor service; the school district to supply the buildings, pay water rates and repairs, and provide transportation of pupils and insurance.

The first contract was for a term of five years, then renewed for another five years. At first the Normal School used only the Elliot and Lincoln Schools, but was eventually assigned all of the grade schools.

The new high school, built 1912-13 on the Coolidge lot on Washington Street, cost approximately \$100,000. Grades 10-12 were housed in this building; grades 8 and 9 in the former high school, later known as the Central Junior High School.

The first principal of the new high school was W. Harry Watson, who had served for two years as an instructor in the high school and six years as principal before occupation of the new building. He resigned in 1914, and the next year was elected a member of the school



*Class in mental arithmetic - 1896*

board, a position he held for 20 years, the last three of which he served as chairman.

In 1914-15 the board secured a temporary lease of the Dinsmoor estate north of the high school property for practical arts and domestic science courses. One of the barns was altered and equipped for wood-working, with plans to add forges and machine shop equipment. The first floor of the house was equipped for cooking and sewing classes; the upstairs rooms were rented to women teachers at a nominal charge.

In 1916-17 the old Elliot School was rebuilt and expanded and renamed the Wheelock School in honor of Keene's well-known naturalist. Roosevelt School was built in 1922, and in 1923 the superintendent's report indicated the establishment of a new junior high school at Franklin, thus relieving congestion at Central Junior High.

In 1924 the high school purchased the Country Club grounds of 30 acres on Arch Street, with the club house, lockers, etc., for use by the high school as an athletic field (popularly known as Alumni Field). The next year the Board of Education purchased two tracts of land adjoining the high school to provide a gymnasium and additional classrooms and laboratories, as well as an office for the superintendent.

In 1929 the Great Depression began, and by 1933 its impact was felt on the schools. Salaries of teachers and other employees of the school district were reduced, and to provide employment for teachers and others, various federal projects were initiated. "As a part of the Emergency Educational Program of Federal Emergency Relief

Administration, classes for adults were held each night of the school week in the high school," with an enrollment of over 300, and employing as many as six instructors. A nursery school, sponsored by federal funds, enrolled 25 children, and employed two teachers and a nurse. A grant of \$12,000 was received from the CWA to pay for labor in the improvement of Alumni Field. The report of Headmaster Willis O. Smith states: "the entire field this side of the club house was levelled to grade, and the . . . baseball and football fields, the four new tennis courts, the fine quarter mile cinder track . . . were constructed."

The new Fuller School was opened in 1936.

The need for expansion of the high school facilities again began to be felt, and a comprehensive survey of the entire school system was conducted by staff members of the Boston University School of Education, directed by Dean Jesse B. Davis. The school district voted at its 1939 meeting to raise \$200,000 to construct and equip an addition to the senior high school, and \$35,000 to construct a new elementary school in the Cleveland district. These buildings were completed and occupied in the fall of 1940.

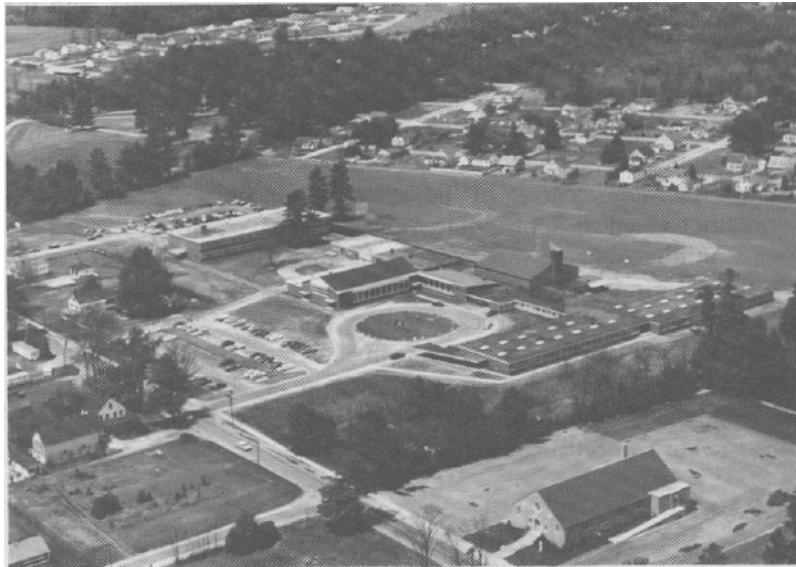
To supplement the appropriation of the district, the trustees of the Keene Academy Fund appropriated money for equipping and furnishing a library for the high school, to employ a librarian, and to purchase books and equipment.

In 1939, for the first time since 1879, the annual convention of the New Hampshire State Teachers' Association was held in Keene, with more than 2,000 teachers in attendance.

The 1940 report of the chairman of the school board recorded the receipt of the Fuller-Bartlett Fund, and quoted the article in the school district warrant which referred to it: "To see if the District will authorize the School Board to use the income 'to be expended for the promotion of higher education within the scope of its lawful corporate purposes' as provided in the will of Helen Bartlett Bridgman."

For a number of years a portion of this income was used to finance an "Educational Institute," thus bringing to students and general public outstanding programs, such as those of Cornelia Otis Skinner, Charles Laughton, Robert Frost, Father Hubbard (the Glacier Priest), the Chekhov Theatre Players, Burton Holmes, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, the Westminster Choir, and the Don Cossack Chorus. In 1952 a portion of the fund was used to finance a program of adult education. Still later, in 1962, an appropriation was made from the fund to provide scholarship aid for students.

In anticipation of the nation's involvement in World War II, there had been organized, under the National Defense Training Program, refresher and preemployment courses in machine shop practice. Two of these were held at the high school, a third at Keene Teachers College. Expenses for these courses were paid through federal funds. Later, teachers enrolled in courses for air raid wardens and first aid, while both teachers and students served as volunteers at observation posts and local report and warning centers. Pupils gathered and bundled newspapers, magazines, and waste paper, and collected scrap metal. Defense stamps and bonds were sold in the schools. Teachers



*Keene High School - 1960's*

were given the responsibility of issuing war ration books.

With the termination of the war in 1945, consideration was again given to problems which had been postponed for the past few years. A full-time position of director of Guidance and Placement was established, and Frank Glazier became the first appointee to the post. Study was given to the problem of increased school population, and a survey was conducted by the Center for Field Studies of Harvard University Graduate School of Education. **In** 1947 Mrs. Howard Kirk became the first woman school board chairman. Additions were made

to two existing schools, and in September 1953 the new Junior High School was completed. At the district meeting of 1953 it was voted to sell the former Central Junior High School lot and building, which was eventually purchased by the City of Keene, demolished, and the land converted to a parking lot.

Several of the elementary schools were still crowded. In 1956 there was constructed and occupied a six-room addition to the Symonds School and an eight-room addition at Franklin. In 1956, also, after only three years of occupancy, the facilities of the new Junior High School were again becoming inadequate, and plans were again discussed for another expansion at the secondary level. For the third time in 20 years the advice of an outside group was sought, and the Visiting Committee of the New England School Development Council was invited to confer with the school board and representatives of the school administration. At the annual meeting of 1959 it was voted to convert the junior high school to a senior high school. These facilities were occupied in September 1960. On April 9, 1964, the next step in the expansion program of the senior high school was taken when the district voted to appropriate \$855,000 for "classrooms, auxiliary rooms, utility rooms, a shop, offices, health room"; \$440,000 for the addition of a music room, lockers, and a gymnasium; "and \$45,000 for the purchase of properties adjoining the High School lot." These expanded facilities became available in September 1965.

By 1966 land had been purchased in the Maple Avenue area for location of additional elementary school facilities and of other construction as needed in the future.