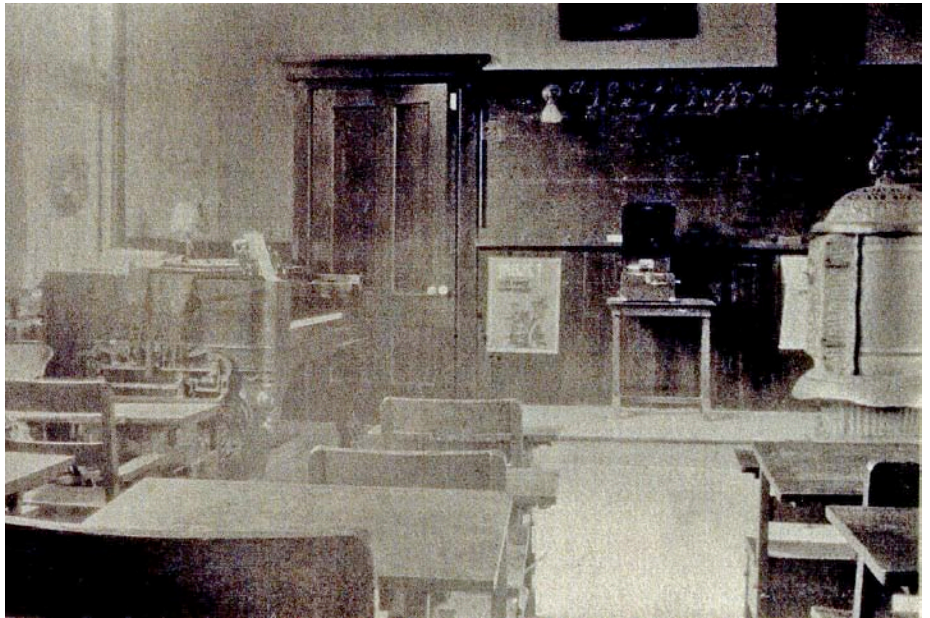


## Then & Now – Mechanics Hall 104 Main St., East Princeton

With the beginning of the chair industry in 1841, East Princeton was transformed from a rural farming community into a bustling village. New house construction and the opening of businesses served an ever-increasing population. Princeton had previously established 10 numbered school districts in 1799, and these district schools originally served a neighborhood of



*School Classroom*

dispersed farmsteads. East Princeton School was known as School District Three and

located on Beaman Road at the intersection of Routes 31 and 140. It was built in 1843, and it was a one-room school housing all grades, one through twelve.

In March 1852 the town elected a committee of three people, Jonas Brooks Jr., Harlow Skinner, and John Brooks, to ascertain the present condition of the school and report as to



*Mechanics Hall With Water Hand Pump in Front*

the expense of repairing or replacing the district school. At a town meeting in April 1852, it was voted to give District Three the sum of \$525.00, and the lumber from the old school house to build a new house for the District. The new building, whose

architect is unknown, was built in the Greek-Revival style, and had two classrooms downstairs, and a hall upstairs. The final cost was \$600.00 plus the materials from the old school.

By 1857, East Princeton had grown from a few dwellings to include as many as thirteen homes, a number of shops, three water-powered mills and a combined school and function hall called Mechanics Hall. School was held in the first floor classrooms for nearly 90 years. It was the last district school closed in Princeton in 1945.

School in the early days had a summer session, which started the first Monday in June and lasted until December. The winter session started the first Monday in December. The number of pupils of all ages in all schools was 303 in summer, with 10 teachers, and winter 437, also with 10 teachers, one for each district.

The new East Princeton school building, also known as Mechanics Hall, outshone the other nine district schools in Princeton in both size and design. As you can see, it was built in the Greek-Revival style, with a projecting pediment façade supported by four fluted Doric columns. Its size and architectural beauty made it a prominent focal point in the village, and the building remained the village center for many years.



*Residents Inside Mechanics Hall*

Blake mentions in his history of Princeton, that the Princeton Farmers Club, which had wide influence in social and agricultural interests during the 46 years of its existence, held lectures, agricultural talks and cattle shows here yearly. In 1882 The Princeton Farmers Club changed to The Princeton Farmers and Mechanics Association. The organization dissolved in 1896.

Although Mechanics Hall was built in 1852, you may notice that the date 1843 appears on the pediment. We surmise that this may have been intended to show the date of the former schoolhouse construction, from which lumber was used for this building.

Princeton resident Jeanette Sullivan, who attended school at Mechanics Hall in 1919,



recalls that at that time there was only one class with eight or nine children, including a few from Sterling. Jeanette also recalled a well in front of Mechanics Hall from which the children drank (see first page image). At the age of twenty, Jeanette herself was teaching school in Princeton.

Despite the loss of the chair industry once central to East Princeton, the village remained an active community. The East Princeton Village Improvement Society continued to hold functions, though on a smaller scale in Mechanics Hall. After the suppers were discontinued, the society held parties for the children, a tradition that continued until the

1980s. New organizations formed as well, including American Legion Post 334. In addition to hosting the legion, Mechanics Hall also served as a branch library. Norma Passage, who lived on the other side of town on Old Colony Road, served as librarian during the 1960s and eventually the head librarian at the Goodnow Library.



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