

Then & Now - Princeton School History

1904 - 2023

To read about Princeton's Earlier Schools, [Click Here](#)

Voters appropriated \$10,000 in June 1904 to construct the **Princeton Center School** on Boylston Avenue.



In May 1905 an additional \$4,000 was raised so the structure could be built of wood rather than brick. A school barn at the cost of \$750 was built to accommodate the student horses used to bring students to school.

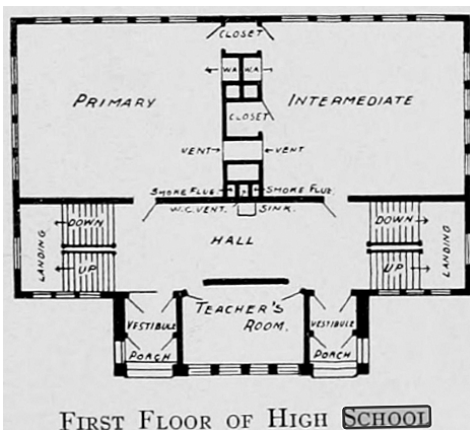
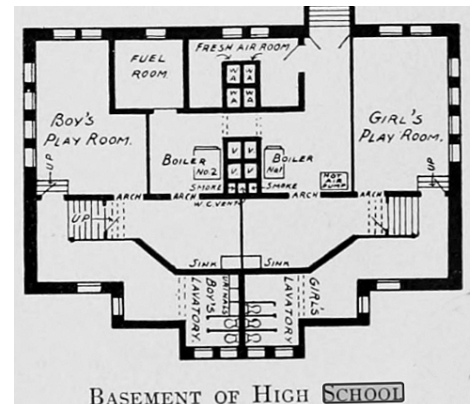
In the fall of 1906, the school was occupied for the first time. During the 1906-1907 school year about 74 pupils attended the new school. By 1907 a recommendation was made to enlarge the horse barn to

encourage pupils living farther away to stay in school throughout the school year.

The following was written by **W. Brooks II, 6-28-11**. He was born and raised at 50 Worcester Rd.:

What memories I have of this school go back to when it was just a four room school with two rooms up and two rooms down, with big stair cases at each end, which are not as big today as they seemed to this little 1st grader. There were two main entrances, separated by a make shift kitchen, where sandwiches and soups were prepared for our lunches that one person from each room helped serve.

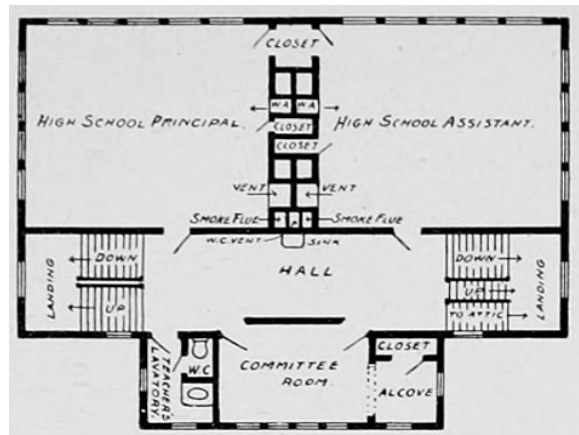
Incidentally, the Brooks Farm supplied the milk to be used, each day and quite often it was my responsibility to attend to the delivery of the can of milk to the kitchen. We were considered to be close enough to the school to not be allowed to ride the bus, but because we had the milk to bring, the bus driver would pick me up and the milk.



In regards to the school itself, there were three grades per room in the lower grades, which were in the rooms on the ground floor, and the higher grades were on the top floor. My teacher was a Mrs. Bullard, who taught the first, second and third grades. I have no recollection of how many students were in these first three grades, but what a job she must have had controlling them. Incidentally, she lived on Bullard Rd. down Rt. 62 just before where the present Thomas Prince school is. I also have recollections of a Miss Perkins,

whom I believe taught some of the upper grades. In back of the school was a flat roofed building, that was used in the late 1920's to store the town horse drawn hearse.

Later, as student population grew, the Principal tried to use that building to practice basketball or for exercising the students during inclement weather. This need eventually led to the building of a gymnasium, with several class rooms above and a more modernized kitchen. The new gym was used to set up tables for the feeding and exercising of the students. It was here that I became a member of Princeton's first basketball team and later played on a Town team, The Merchants. Spectators would sit in a single row along each side of the floor, which lead to many collisions, between players and spectators. There was a balcony at each end, which also allowed for viewing the games. For a small town, the games were fairly well attended. Of course, there was little



Second Floor



**Loren Peoples Bill Brooks
Sitting On Window Sill 1936**

else to do, as there were no TV's. This new gym building was attached at the back to the original building and the old shed was torn down, which eventually led to the creation of a ball field. Which the Merchant team also used for the town's first baseball summer games. I was right fielder on that team and Clayton Rice was the Captain. What fun we had playing other town teams, using our own cars for transportation. At first all grades 9 thru 12 went to other towns for their high school classes. Later three high school classes were available brought back to town. I was able to take advantage of this, by going to Holden High for my senior year. When I graduated from 11th grade in Princeton, there were only 7 students in the class, 3 boys and 4 girls (Billy Bonkevich, Ralph Peoples, and I). I must explain that many of our fellow class mates, had dropped out to work on their family farms; could not see the need to go on; or could not arrange transportation to whatever school they wanted to attend.

Some of the fellows went on to Worcester Boys Trade, where they could get an education and learn a trade, at the same time. I was lucky to be able to get a ride to Holden to finish my high school year, then I decided to attend trade school and get four years of learning in their Auto Mechanic classes, which served me so well, during the past years. I was also lucky to arrange to ride with Drury brothers, who were also taking classes at Boys Trade.

While I was still in school in Princeton, my father became very ill and passed away in 1934. This led to many changes for my family, causing to my mother, 3 sisters and I to have to move a few times, because we could no longer run the farm and thus lost the farm to the bank.

In the 1920's the fourth year of high school was done away with and seniors were sent to Holden or Worcester to complete their high school experience.

In 1937 the town purchased several acres of land behind the school for a playground. This W.P.A. project stopped mid-way due to the hurricane of 1938. Additional land was donated by R.H. Hamilton and the playground and fields were completed in 1939.

The Adventure of Getting to Princeton's First Schools – From The Landmark – July 18, 1991

Nellie Chamberlain

"At first we went to school in an old wagon," recalls Nellie Gleason Chamberlain, "It was like an old cracker wagon, very boxy and closed in with a settee on each side. The town paid the driver who owned his own wagon and team."

Nellie attended the Center School on Boylston Avenue from Grade 1 to high school and graduated in 1927. "The roads were dirt then and sometimes there was mud up to the wagon hubs. It was a very bumpy ride," adds Chamberlain. "I remember horses dragging a V-shaped wooden plow to clear the roads. Sometimes we couldn't go to school because the snow was drifted so deep across old Brooks Station Road (Matthews Lane). Girls as well as men helped clear and shovel snow."

"Later we had a bus-like vehicle with a roof and open on the sides where the seats were. If it rained, the canvas sides dropped down," she says. "I remember on the last day of school the bus driver always treated us to ice cream from the stand on 196 Worcester Road"

In 1927, while she was in school, she married Chet Chamberlain. She continued to live at home on Brooks Station Road while Chet stayed at the Brooks Farm on Worcester Road, where he worked.

"They didn't want me to graduate," Nellie says. "In those days, it was considered unusual to be married while in high school. My mother went to the

school and insisted I was going to graduate with my class and get my diploma, which I did in 1927. We always had graduation and a class dance upstairs in the Town Hall," she adds.

"My husband used to check his trap lines before we went to school each day," Nellie recalls "I remember Miss Mirick telling him to go home because he smelled of skunk. I think he did it on purpose so he wouldn't have to stay in school."

Nellie grew up on Brooks Station Road and in 1933, her husband built a house on the corner of Ball Hill and Brooks Station, where she has lived ever since.



Bagg Hall 2nd Floor Graduation Stage 1900

Louise Hubbard



Schoolhouse Rd. Schoolhouse #6

Born in Princeton in 1898, Louise Hubbard attended this school before going to the Center School.

"There was a round potbelly stove for heat and the outhouses were out back," she recalls.

"When I went to school in the Center, I walked," she says. It was a 2-mile hike from her home on Ball Hill Road. During the winter, she walked on the road. The rest of the year, her father cut a path through the pasture and woods to Brooks Station Road.

"I didn't mind walking. It was kind of bad in cold, stormy weather but in those days, there was no way to know whether school was cancelled or not so you just went," she says. "In the winter, it was dark by the time I got home. I took a good hour for the trip so in the morning, I'd leave by 8. "All the high school kids were in one room," Louise remembers.

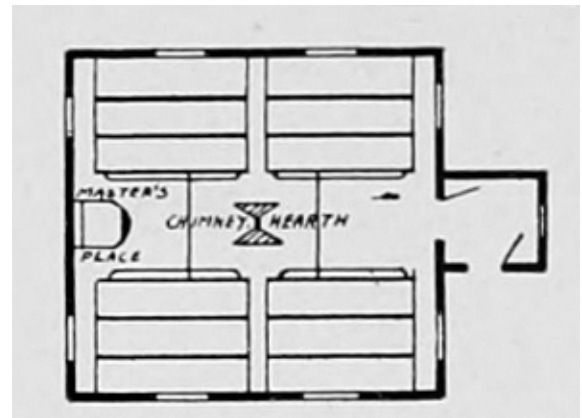
There were five girls in Louise's graduating class of 1916. "As far as I know, I'm the only one still living," she said.

"Graduation was upstairs in Town Hall. Some of the kids would always go out and pick mountain laurel to decorate the stage. Each of us had to give an essay for graduation.

"I remember it poured on Graduation Day," says Louise. "I was having a fit because I was getting my new dress all wet. We went to graduation in a two-seater horse and buggy. All we had was an umbrella."

After graduation, Louise attended Becker College in Worcester and worked in the city for 35 years, returning home on weekends. Her brother, Ken Hubbard, would pick her up at the train station on Brooks Station Road first in a horse-drawn wagon and later in the family car.

Louise now lives in the family home on Ball Hill Road.



Typical 1 Room School House Plan

Alexander "Buster" Simonatis



1 Rhodes Rd. Schoolhouse #8

Buster recalls walking to the number eight schoolhouse on Thompson Road at the corner of Rhodes Rd., when he was about five years old.

"As young as I was, I'll always remember the time the teacher went to the outhouse and the big boys tipped it over when she was inside," says Buster.

When the family moved to Goodnow Road and later to Hubbardston Road, Buster walked to his classes at the Princeton High School on Boylston Avenue. He graduated from the eleventh grade in 1932.

At that time Princeton offered only a three-year high school course. Students who wished to attend a fourth year of high school could choose where to attend.

Buster chose Holden. "It was the easiest year I ever

had in school. I breezed right through," he says. "We were all so well prepared, almost everyone from Princeton was on the honor roll.

Buster drove to Holden each day and worked at the grain store on Hubbardston Road after school. "The town gave us 10 cents a mile for transportation and paid our tuition," he says.

When Buster came home from the service in 1946, he bought the number four schoolhouse for \$1001. "I tore it apart, made two stories out of it, put in heat and sold it to Ed Forestiere."



198 Sterling Rd. Schoolhouse #4

In 1942 the first class in the history of the town to complete the four-year high school course graduated 12 pupils.

1947-49 High School Recollections by Eugene Counts Bridgewater, VA

"In 1947, to avoid getting into trouble in VA, his parents sent me to Princeton to live with his sister and her husband, Genevieve and Bill Brooks. During the school year 1947-8, there were 9 students in his class, but for his senior year there were only 3 students, Lurana Morris Sandstrom, Nancy Roberts Brickey, and himself. His other classmates had gone off to other schools or moved out of town for their senior year.

As June approached, the 3 of them were be sent Bagg Hall for graduation rehearsal. Their path was directly through woods along/on top of an old stonewall exiting at the west edge of the Boylston Cemetery. As he recounted, they would go slowly and stop at a big rock half-way, to talk and might even have a smoke.

A few days after one of these trips, he was called to the principal's office. Fred Hawkins was the principal at that time. Fred said to Gene, "I need your help figuring something out. A few days ago, I was going down the back staircase toward the gym, when I saw smoke rising from the area of that big rock, you wouldn't know anything about that would you?" Gene replied, "No Sir!". Fred then said, "Well, I guess the next time I see that, I'll have to call the volunteer fire department and that will make a lot of men lose time from work, including your brother-in-law at Hubbard's Garage."

The Center School housed students in the grades 1-12 until 1955. At that time, students in grades 1-8 stayed at the Center School while students in grade 9-15 attended to Wachusett Regional High School in Holden.

For three years, from 1966-1968, Princeton's seventh and eighth graders were bused to Holden Junior High School. When Thomas Prince School opened in September 1968 for grades 1-6, the Junior High students inherited the Center School for grades 7 and 8.

In 1991, the Center School closed when an addition built onto the Thomas Prince School was completed, which allowed the TPS to accommodate all students from K-8.

The Princeton Center school building is still owned by the town, and is known simply as The Princeton Center. From 1991 through 2019, it was used for various activities that included The Council on Aging, private studios, The Princeton Historical Society, and The Princeton Arts Society. In 2019, it was found to be unsafe for occupancy, and it has remained closed.

Thomas Prince School Since 2000:

Over the past 2 decades the K-8 Thomas Prince School has evolved and adjusted their curriculum and approach with the times. This has happened in increments:

- During the late 2000's, because of the proximity of vernal pools and miles of **trails** in TPS' backyard, science teacher Joann Blum was instrumental in resurrecting nearby old trails in the woods into a Nature Trail. These trails made for an ideal place for environmental engineering. She and her Middle School students made the trails passable and created field guides for other grade level students to use while they explored the trail. Students in grades K-8 received the experience of learning and discovering in authentic habitats with teachers who had received training from the Audubon staff. Her 8th grades students were even trained to become tour guides for lower grade level students and parents.

- In the early 2010's, Princeton was experiencing decreasing enrollment, so the school adopted the States School Choice program, which allowed students from schools, which might be overcrowded, to transfer to Princeton to take advantage of its more personalized curriculum and smaller class size. As an outgrowth of this situation, the teachers and principal began to explore curriculum changes, one of which was called STEM. Teachers and staff were sent to WPI for hands-on workshops with professors.

- Soon thereafter, the school decided to start adding STEM activities to each grades' curriculum, and to also add an Arts component to each, therefore creating a curriculum known as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics). As a staff they believed that STEAM was what they wanted to provide for their students. With a fluctuating enrollment they had room/s to use for various "lessons" and to house an assortment of tools and materials for their STEAM lessons/projects.



May 11, 2015 EEA Secretary's Award ceremony at the Massachusetts State House Great Hall. Among those pictured are TPS Teacher Will Candler, SAGEE Chair Robin Organ, Secretary Beaton, DOER Commissioner Judith Judson, and TPS Student Representatives

- In 2015, the Thomas Prince School was honored to receive the Secretary's Award for Excellence in Energy and Environmental Education. At that time, some of the key people involved were Denise Prunier, Carrie Crowell St. Pierre and Joann Blum.

- Today, TPS school continues to evaluate and refine their STEAM curriculum at each grade level. Though they no longer take students from outside the school district, they do allow student s from withing Wachusett to transfer in.

- Most recently in late 2023, USNEWS ranked TPS #250 in Massachusetts Elementary Schools and #27 in Massachusetts Middle Schools. Schools are ranked on their performance on state-required tests, graduation, and how well they prepare their students for high school. Within the Wachusett Regional School District both their Elementary and Middle Schools are ranked #1.
Congratulations to the Thomas Prince School, their Staff, and parents!!!

The Wachusett Regional High School was founded in 1955 as the first regional high school in Massachusetts. WRHS educates children from five towns in Central Massachusetts: Holden, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, and Sterling. The school population in the 2022-23 school year 1,964.

Princeton Community Preschool was founded in 1990 and has operated continuously ever since. It is located in the center of town in the First Congregational Church.

Monty Tech, on November 2, 1965, voters in ten communities approved a referendum to form the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School District, including the cities of Fitchburg and Gardner, as well as the towns of Royalston, Winchendon, Ashburnham, Ashby, Barre, Phillipston, Hubbardston, and Lunenburg. By

the end of November, voters in Sterling and Westminster had also voted to join. Princeton joined in 1989, though some students attended earlier than that. In 1971, Monty Tech was approved for occupancy and opened its doors to about 600 students in September of that year. By October 1974, enrollment had increased to 990 students, with 26% female students. Thus far, Princeton has sent 170 student to Monty Tech, but not necessarily all have graduated.

Resources and Thank You:

- John Mollica Monty Tech School Committee Representative and Tammy Crockett Monty tech Business Manager.
- Oral and Written histories shared by:
 - William S. Brooks II, Nellie Chamberlain, Louise Hubbard, Alexander “Buster” Simonatis, Eugene Counts, Anita Cook, Louise Jordan
- Principal Alfred Ace Thompson (2023), and faculty/staff for their review & edits
- Interview re Schools with David Krashes 09-23-2021
- Phyllis Booth – The Landmark, Holden, MA - articles July 18, 1991
- Rick Bullock researched and created this document in 2023, and images were then added by William “Bud” Brooks.