

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

New Haven Register Article Commemorating the Dedication of the Restored Little Red Schoolhouse 1928

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Mrs. C. S. Johnson, President of the League of Women Voters presided. With her upon the platform were Mrs. Frances Rossiter of North Guilford, Judge John C Phalen of Wallingford, Reverend Roy Wilkerson of North Branford, and the Reverend Francis J Smith of Saint Andrews, Northford.

Blow the platform sat Mrs. Alden J. Hill of North Branford, chairman of the building committee whose strenuous efforts have resulted in the restoration of the schoolhouse, Mrs. Lyman Hoover, also of the building committee and Mrs. Eleanor Rogers, Secretary of the League.

On the other side were grouped, Miss Mary Bulkley, President of the State League. Miss Sally F. Gleaton, Field chairman. Mrs. Ward Church, President of the New Haven County League. Miss Elizabeth Farnham, President of the New Haven League and Mrs. Henry Townshend, Vice President. In the front seats of the church sat the former teachers and pupils, and behind them many sons and daughters and other relatives. A more interested and sympathetic audience is rarely seen.

The guests were welcomed by Doctor Clara E Smith of Wellesley College. Who gave also a biography of her relative Andrew Goodyear, a schoolboy of the Red School House who crossed the Great Plains to California before the gold rush in '49. Mrs. Eleanor Rogers, daughter of a former teacher, followed with a brief historical sketch including the names of all teachers, known.

The first out of town speaker was Mrs. Delia Linsley Viles of Westfield MA, who interested all with stories. of her experiences in "boarding "round" District 4 in 1860 when she was a girl of 16. Miss Frances Rossiter, 1878, gave a graphic account of the first hour of her first day, when it became necessary to have a very clear understanding as to who was who in the Little Red Schoolhouse. Some of the big boys had laid plans to put the new teacher out, which plans did not succeed. She spoke also of the "ciphering schools" and spelling matches held in the evening, when the building was lighted by tallow dips stuck into turnips or old bottles. Mrs. Florence Russell Andrews, 1874, told of having 45 pupils packed in the little building. 16 by 24 and of teaching everything from ABC to algebra and geometry. Mrs. Hattie Potter Wheeler recalled pleasant memories of her term in 1889.

Many teachers unable to be present sent letters or telegrams which were read by Mrs. Hoover. Benjamin Page of Meriden, now 87 years of age, described teaching a four-month winter school during the Civil War and contrasted the adverse conditions of those days with the advantages enjoyed by the children of today. Mrs. Ellen Foote Reid of Los Angeles a pupil in the 60s and teacher in the 70s send greetings to all and referred them to her letter of last winter published in the New Haven Register.

Then Mrs. Andrews, followed by the teachers and pupils led the way to the Red Schoolhouse. Unlocking the door, she rang the old school bell and took her place behind the old desk, calling in the boys and girls to sit upon the backless benches and attend school for a few minutes once more. A scripture reading from Proverbs, the roll call, a verse od Auld Lang Syne and school was out. Meanwhile the remainder of the assemblance waited outside. When the teachers and pupils

reappeared, a brief dedicatory exercise was led by the Reverend Roy Wilkerson and the Reverend Francis J. Smith with responses by all present. Thus ended the formal program of the day.

After inspecting objects of interest in the schoolhouse the visitors returned to the church parlors. There, tea was poured by Mrs. Beach and Miss Smith and a pleasant social hour was enjoyed by all. An exquisite painting of the Red Schoolhouse in its original setting is the work and gift of Mrs. D. C. Pratt of Stoney Creek and was admired by all present.

Mr. J. Gallagher of Hardwick Vermont sent a telegram of greetings and requests for the names of those pupils present. Mrs. Alvina Hoadley Dickie of Cammas, Washington, Mrs. Addie Hall Julian of West Hartford, Miss Emma G. Munson of Rockfall, Miss Anna Wicks Spencer of Guilford, Miss Grace A. Foote of New Haven and Mrs. Ella Lane Munger of North Madison all sent interesting letters, which will be preserved among the schoolhouse records. Mrs. Munger was the teacher who spent the night with her terrified flock in the schoolhouse during the Great Blizzard of 1888. With no supper, no wood to speak of and light but a dim Lantern, Miss Lane played games and told stories to cheer the children, while the wind howled and the drifts piled higher and higher around the trembling building. At length she put the children to bed on the hard benches. With books for pillows and a few slippery maps for bedding. Then sat through the long hours of that wild night comforting in her arms by turns, the cold and frightened little ones. The snow was 10 feet deep before the schoolhouse door in the morning and it was noon before the men of the neighborhood were able to dig paths and convey the children and the teacher to their homes.

After the teachers, Judge Phelen spoke for the pupils of long ago telling many amusing incidents of his schoolboy days in 1857-62. He also eulogized the memory of his excellent teacher, Deacon Charles Foote and told again the story of the pie Kirkland Blakesley did not get.

The two boys ,Kirkland Blakesley and Judge Phelen, arrived at the Foote home to procure milk just as the Foote family was at supper. Deacon Foote, who was noted for hospitality, said "Kirkland, will you have a piece of pie?" Kirkland diffidently replied "I don't care if I do, Deacon." Quick as a flash came the reply. "Well if you don't care Kirkland, I don't. John will you have a piece of pie?"

John, profiting by his chums experience and knowing how desirable Mrs. Foote mince pie was. Said "Yes, Sir," and was helped to pie.

A letter from Kirkland Blakesley, 82, of Greenwich, OH, was read. He is the last survivor of the Red Schoolhouse Boys who went to The Civil War. Bert Bartholomew of Meriden gave other reminiscences.

Tribute was paid to the memory of Mary Foote, a pupil who was first woman admitted to the bar in New Haven County. Hardly applause was given Mrs. Georgina Robinson Thorpe of North Haven the oldest living pupil as she rose for a minute to tell of standing at the teacher's knee to learn her ABCs 88 years ago this June.

Their followed brief addresses by Miss Bulkley, Miss Church, Miss Farnum and Mrs. Townsend. A verse of the Star Spangled Banner was sung while the audience stood.