

DURHAM ACADEMY

Recollections of Miles Talcott Merwin

1901

Nathan Parsons and I, in a boyish confidence, used to talk about our plans for life. He had decided to teach school but was afraid he could not pass the examination. One night he told me he was going to Hartford to John D. Post and was very anxious that I should go with him. I went and stayed three weeks and came home sick. Mr. Post wrote to father enquiring how I was getting along, and father in reply asked Mr. Post to come down to Durham. He came and made the acquaintance of Perez Sturtevant, Samuel Parsons, and Miles Merwin, Jr. The result was a bargain with Mr. Post to come to Durham and open a private school if a suitable building was provided. So far as I know, this arrangement was the cornerstone of the Durham Academy.

In volume 21, page 233 of the Town records is recorded a deed of a piece of land sold by Mr. Dennis Camp to Rev. David Smith, Rev. Charles L. Mills, Samuel Parsons, Miles Merwin, Jr., and Perez Sturtevant under an act of the legislature as trustees for a building for school purposes. The price was \$250. The date of the deed was April 29, 1843. Of this organization I cannot speak positively, as I have not been able to find the records of the company. I think it was a joint stock company with all the proper officers for such a company.

The value of the shares was fixed at \$100 per share. The house was built by Isaac and Luzerne Hull. I think the cost of the building was a little over \$2000. When the house was built, the basement was only the size of the present schoolroom, the earth under the entry not being removed except for an entrance to the basement at the northwest and southwest corner.

The stone for the basement was quarried at the house now owned by Mrs. Julia Crowell and Mrs. J. P. Strong.

After the Congregational Church was burned, this basement was used by the Congregational Society for religious worship. The basement being found too small, it was enlarged by digging out the space under the entry for a stand for the speaker and with a few other alterations, this basement was used for worship until the present north church was built.

The first teacher of Durham Academy was John D. Post, assisted by his brother, William. The first scholars were Wealthy Merwin, Charles and Sneretra Sturtevant, Joseph Parsons, Katharine and John Newton, and Caroline Merwin.

Mr. Post was a successful teacher for a time but a very irritable one and, when angry, could use his tongue in a way that was not very pleasant. He did not stay very long and after he left, his brother taught for several seasons. Both of these teachers paid a small rent for the use of the building.

I remember but very little about the school until Mr. Pitway came. At that time, I bought one and one-half shares from Perez Sturtevant and attended the annual meetings. The stockholders of the company when I became a member were S. S. Scranton, Dr. R. W. Mathewson, Francis Hubbard and Joseph Parsons. Mr. Scranton soon bought the stock owned by Mr. Parsons, which gave him a controlling interest.

The officers of the company at this time were S. S. Scranton, President, Dr. Mathewson, Clerk, and Francis Hubbard, Treasurer. The school rooms at this time were very much out of repair and at the annual meeting, it was voted to put the building in good repair and Mr. Scranton was chosen a committee to buy material and hire help to do the work. The cost was \$25 per share. A number of the stockholders did not feel able to pay and Mr. Scranton offered to pay one-half of the expense and take a mortgage on the building, and the rent was to be paid to him for interest on the loan and the surplus was to go to pay the principle. This did not prove very profitable for the stockholders, as the rent was not enough to pay the interest. Mr. Scranton foreclosed and took the building, the stockholders losing their stock and what they had paid for repairs.

Perhaps I ought to say something about the records of the company and its officers. S. S. Scranton was the last president and Dr. Mathewson the last clerk. I am very sure he kept the records of the company. When Mr. Scranton became the sole owner, the records belonged to him. When he sold to H. G. Newton, the records then became Mr. Newton's property.