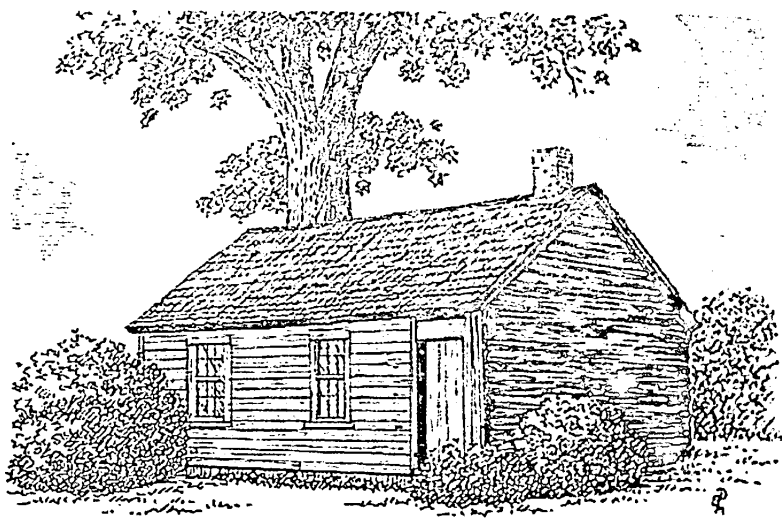


THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE

1805-2005



Little Red School House - Built 1805 - Totoket Historical Society - Northford, CT

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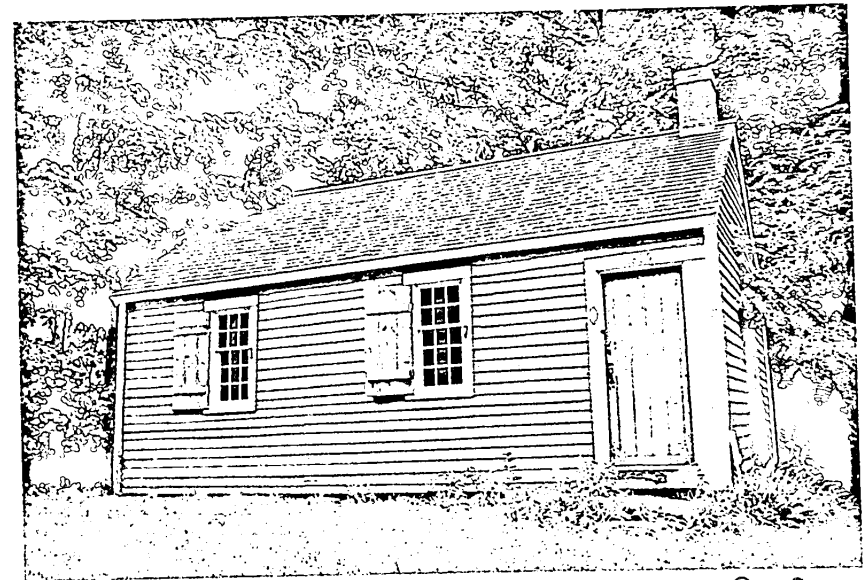
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THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE

By Jan Finch

A compilation of information about the Little Red School House and early education in Connecticut and North Branford

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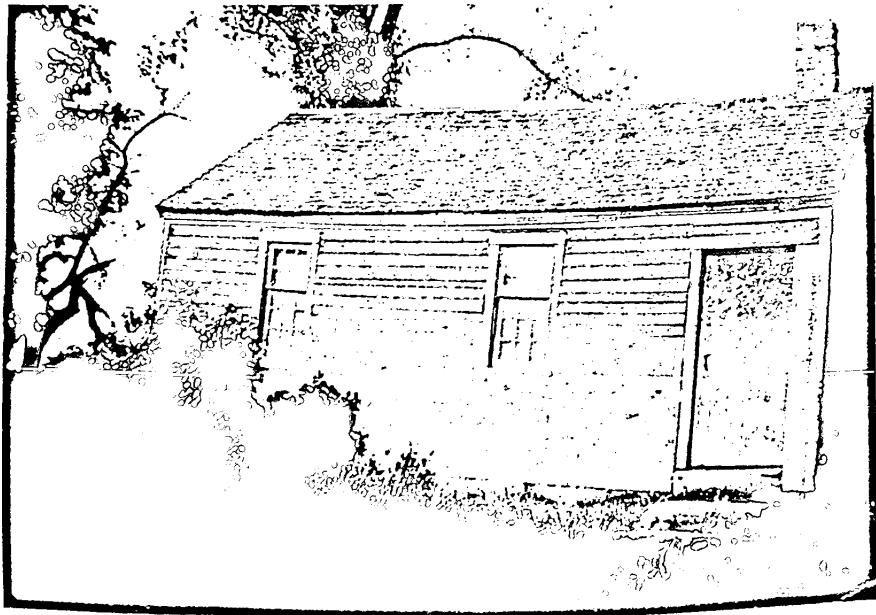
The Little Red School House
2005

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Published by the Totoket Historical Society
Post Office Box 563
North Branford, Connecticut 06471
October 2005

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The Little Red School House as it looked on Forest Road

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH BRANFORD

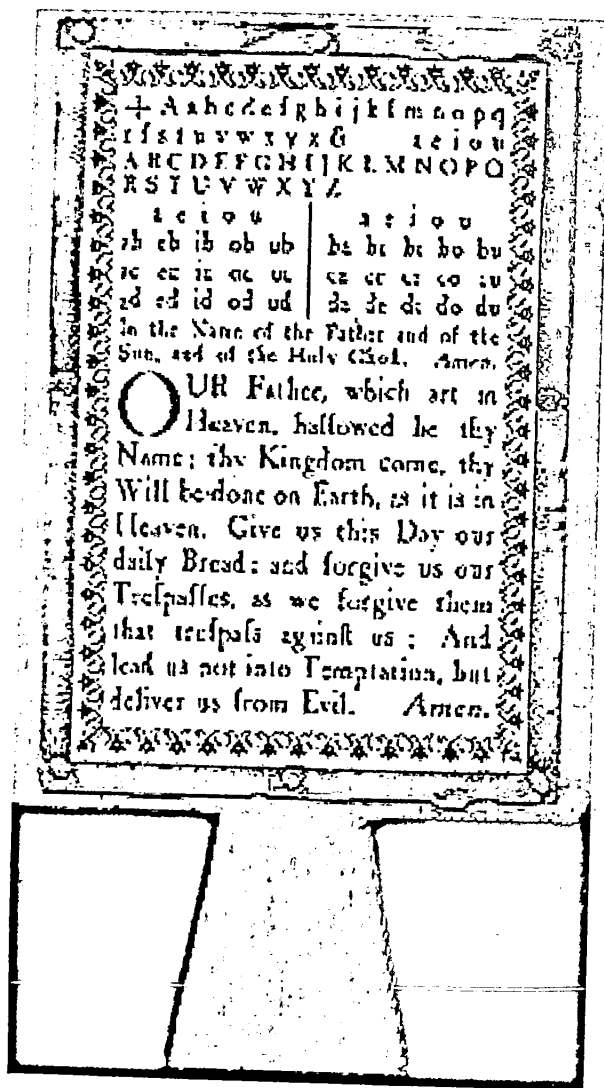
North Branford was originally part of Branford. This area was known as Totoket when, in 1644, the land was granted to a group of settlers from Wethersfield by the New Haven Colony. The settlers paid about 12 pounds and agreed to be under the jurisdiction of the Colony. They accepted the Fundamental Agreement drawn up by the New Haven Colony in 1643 which restricted voting and office holders to members of the approved church. This new settlement followed the early Puritan pattern, dominated by the church and minister. The Indian name of Totoket was gradually replaced with Brentwood (from Middlesex County in England) then to Branford.

The great interest in owning land, thus increasing one's economic and social standing, led to the gradual settlement of North Branford (known as North Farms) after 1680. By 1750, this land in Branford's northern area was claimed by settlers for farms and woodlots.

In the the early 18th century, there were many aborted attempts to establish a separate society from Branford. In 1725 a separate Church Society called the Second and North Society (North Branford) was established and built its own Meeting House in North Branford center on the site of the present day North Branford Congregational Church. The basic reason for establishing a Second Society was to make attendance at church on Sundays more convenient by avoiding the long trip to Branford. However, the tax base of the new Society had to be sufficient in order to receive approval.

By 1743 enough people had moved to the northern part of North Farms to seek permission from the Second Society to establish a separate parish. There was much contention over this proposal and they were turned down, mainly because of the tax loss. The residents persisted, noting that their homes were long distances from the place of public worship and thus they were not able to attend worship of God on a steady basis. Opposing factions developed in Guilford, Wallingford and North Branford but by 1745 the General Assembly voted to allow the residents to "become a distinct Ecclesiastical Society with full power to form themselves into and embody in Church estate and with all other powers and priviledges which other Parishes within the Colony have." This became the Third Society of Branford, first called Paug, then Salem and finally Northford in 1850.

Residents of North Branford and Northford joined to petition the General Assembly to be incorporated as a separate town from Branford in 1799 but were turned down. Branford retained civil jurisdiction over these societies until 1831 when the General Assembly granted permission for the Second and Third Societies of Branford to become a new, distinct town to be known as North Branford as the First Society and Northford (Paug) as the Second Society.



The hornbook may not look like a book, but it is. Because paper was so expensive, hornbooks were made on a small, wooden paddle with one sheet of paper glued to it. A thin layer of cow's horn protected the paper and children could see through this to the alphabet, pairs of letters and usually a religious verse such as the Lord's Prayer. This was the first step in reading.

EARLY EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT

In education, as in other aspects of colonial life, the church was the predominant force and much teaching was of an ecclesiastical nature. The Puritan child's religious heritage as well as his introduction to education was through the Bible. Colonial leaders tried to enforce the need to read the "holy word" by use of the Code of 1650 which required each town with fifty families to hire a schoolmaster to teach students to read and write and allowed that public monies raised by taxes could be used for education. Towns of one hundred families were to open a "grammar schoole" to prepare students for more advanced learning. Children needed to be literate to attend these schools so parents had to take an active part in their child's preparation. These laws were modified in 1662 to make them applicable to New Haven after its inclusion in the Connecticut Colony. Other statutes passed in the 1700's gave financial responsibility to the local towns resulting in the town, not the church, becoming the most important unit affecting education.

Education of the young was always important to the early colonists and the New Haven Colony ruled that each town should provide a common school. Branford complied with this ruling and in 1679 laid out "forty acres of land.....and it shall bring to such School masters as shall teach school in the town successfully." This is the area in Branford where School Ground Road is now located.

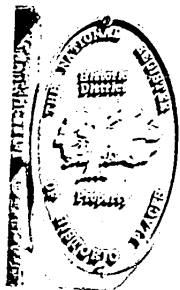
In 1717 the General Assembly required every parish, in towns with more than one parish, to have a school. The upkeep of the school was paid for with tuition from parents but the town covered the costs for anyone too poor to attend. In those towns without schoolhouses, the students would get their instruction at the teacher's home. If the teacher did not have a home, the families of the students would take turns boarding the teacher and the schooling would move from house to house.

Throughout the 18th century in Connecticut the school buildings were usually about 20 by 25 feet and would be used by anywhere from 4 or 5 to sixty pupils. There were backless benches facing the teacher. The children would recite one at a time while the rest of the class sat and read. Often the older students helped the younger ones. A hornbook was used as a text until about 1800. This was a small board with a handle and a single page containing the alphabet, syllables and the Lord's Prayer. The New England Primer was used from 1685 for one hundred years. This book (5 inches x 3 inches) consisted of the alphabet with pictures and rhymes such as "In Adam's fall, we sinned all", words to spell and prayers for morning and evening. Later editions included secular poems and stories. It was not until 1783 that a uniform attempt at spelling was made with Webster's 168-page American Speller. It was even

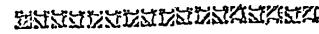
later, in 1788, that English arithmetic texts with pounds and pence were replaced by an American book, "A New and Complete System of Arithmetic Composed for the Use of Citizens of the United States" written by Nicholas Pike.

During the Colonial period, the Congregational Church was the established Church of Connecticut. It was dominant in all civilian affairs, particularly in schools. When the Constitution was ratified in 1788 it paved the way for separation of church and state. In 1797 North Branford took a step toward separation of state from church by keeping school records separate from church records. Formal separation took place in 1818 with Connecticut's new constitution which disestablished the Congregational Church and guaranteed the rights of conscience and recognition of complete equity before law for all Christian sects.

The State of Connecticut gave the world its first example of a government providing funds to support public education for every child within the state. It began, after the Revolutionary War, with a decision in 1793 to sell the 3.8 million acres of the Connecticut Western Reserve lands in Ohio for \$1.2 million dollars. Proceeds of the sale would go to a Fund to support ecclesiastical societies, churches, ministers and education. As it would be today, there were opponents who preferred to use the proceeds to reduce the public debt, build roads, support medicine or libraries and other equally useful purposes. There was contention for several years but, in 1796, an "Act Appropriating the Moneys which shall Arise on the Sale of the Western Lands Belonging to this State" was passed by both houses of the legislature and the proceeds of the sale were to go to a perpetual fund, the income of which was to go to the school societies in the State for the support of schools. Although the school societies, which had voting members of all churches in the district, could, upon a 2/3 majority vote, apply any part of its school share to the ministry, none ever did. Thus the proceeds of the land sales were diverted for the first time from the churches to the schools and the Connecticut School Fund was set up. Members of all religious denominations would derive equal benefit.



This plaque designates the Little Red School House as an Historic District Property.



Good Boys at their Books.

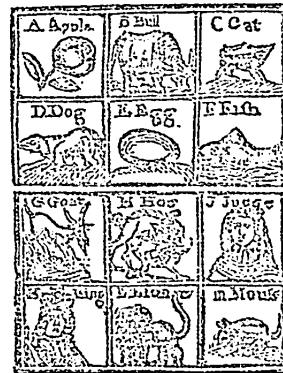
HE who ne'er learns his A, B, C,
Forever will a Blockhead be;
But he who to his Book's inclin'd,
Will soon a golden Treasure find.



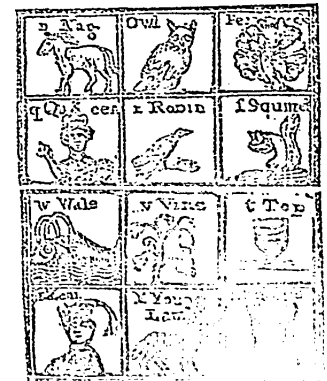
Children, like tender Trees do take the Sun,
And as they first are fashon'd always grow,
For what we learn in Youth, to that alone,
In Age we are by second Nature prone.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
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 nopqrstuv
 wxyz &
 Vowels.
 AEIOUY a e i o u y.
 Consonants.
 bcdfghjklmnopqrstvwxyz
 Double Letters.
 ff ff ff ff ff ff ff ff ff ff
 Italic Letters.
 Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Kk
 Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss
 Tt Vv Uu Ww Xx Yy Zz
 Italic Double Letters.
 ff ff ff ff ff ff ff ff ff ff

He that ne'er learns his A, B, C,
For ever will a Blockhead be ;



But he that learns these Letters fair
Shall have a Coach to take the Air.



Sample pages from the New England Primer, one of the early classrooms for reading. THS Collection

NORTH BRANFORD FIRST SCHOOL SOCIETY.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORT. * * Teachers use such books as they have ; none prescribed.

All the schools are provided with *blackboards*, no maps nor globes. Blackboards used to some extent.

School-houses just about decent, *almost comfortable*—need in my opinion to be torn down—out-buildings not the best. * *

In two districts, parents and others visit occasionally, in one scarcely at all.

One great defect in *our* schools is a want of uniformity in the books ; another, a very flat pronunciation ; and thirdly a lack of interest in the matter of education on the part of parents. My own experience in these matters is not sufficient to authorize me to make any suggestions in the premises.

BOOKS USED.—*Spelling*—Webster's. *Reading*—Olney's Easy Reader, National Preceptor, Reader's Manual, Lovell's Young Speaker. *Grammar*—Smith's. *Geography*—Mitchell's, Olney's. *Arithmetic*—Adam's, Olney's, Smith's.

Recd of J. R. Palma Treasurer of
1st School Society of North Branford
six dollars for six days spent in visiting
schools during the year ~~1849-50~~ from Sep.
1848 to Sep. 1849. Geo. J. Wood.
North Branford March 28, 1850

Visitor's Report for the North Branford First Society and receipt for payment to George Wood, Visitor.

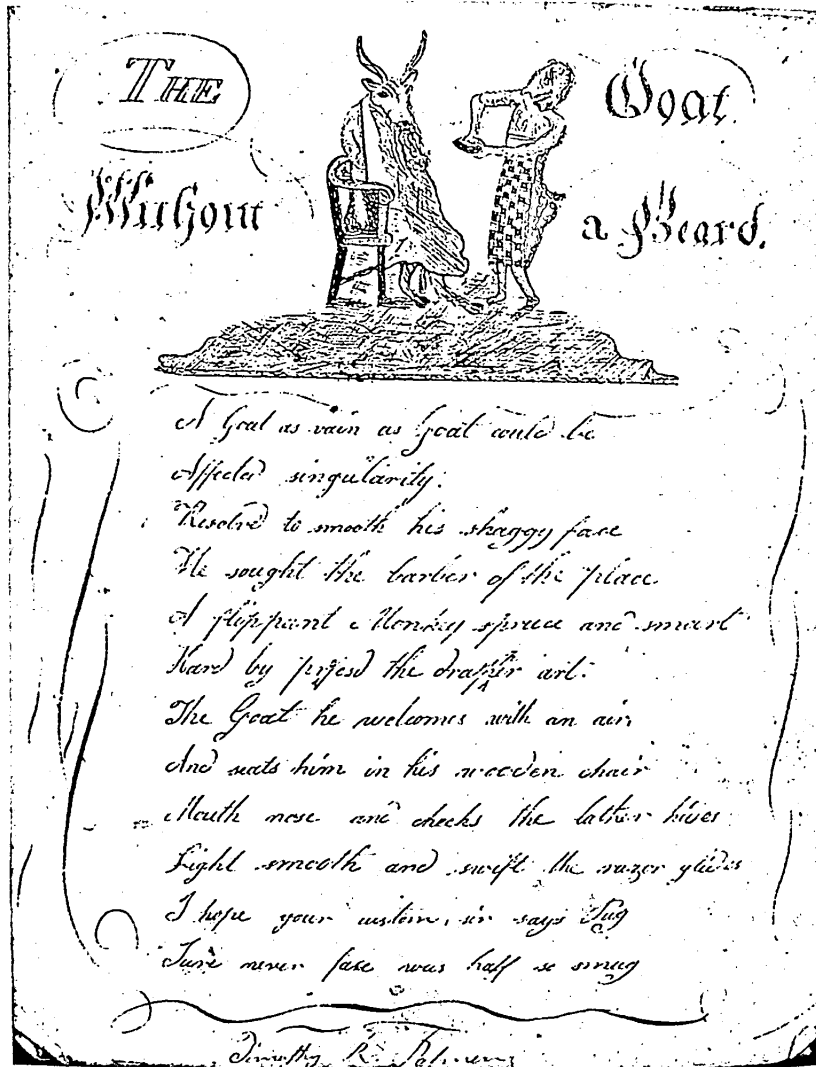
EARLY EDUCATION IN NORTH BRANFORD

The earliest public records of the Second Society are lost but at the annual meeting in 1731, for which records exist, a School Committee was elected so it is safe to assume that a school was provided in North Farms as early as 1725.

All common school education was arranged and supervised, not by the town, but by the Ecclesiastical Society. Each Ecclesiastical (Church) Society was responsible for providing schools for the children in their area and would elect a School Committee, usually three men. This School Committee was responsible for the schools - seeing to the maintenance of the local school, securing a schoolmaster for the year, determining a place to hold school and paying the salary of the schoolmaster. School funds came from the County and from the leasing of school land to farmers. If more money was needed, the parents were asked to contribute. School "Visitors" were also elected to make sure the teachers were teaching the right subjects and that the children were learning as expected. These "Visitors" would visit the schools in town and write up a report that was submitted to the State of Connecticut. In the early years, students only attended for three winter months. In 1841 four months were allowed and in 1855 two more months were added. According to an article in the New Haven Register, December 3, 1933 by Lauretta Plumley, during the nineteenth century there were two school terms. The summer term was from April through August and was usually taught by a young woman for the smaller boys and girls of the village. The winter term was in charge of a man and the older boys and girls would attend.

On June 30, 1854, the sum of \$188.72 was raised by taxation by the town of North Branford for support of the common schools, dictated by a statute of the State of Connecticut concerning education. One hundred fifty years later, the 2005-06 school budget for North Branford is \$24,779,161.00. In 1865 the Connecticut State Board of Education was organized and in 1868 the town taxes were increased enough to make schooling free for all. In 1870, public schools were in session for thirty weeks when there were 24 students or more.

There are no records of where the first school buildings were located in North Branford but the first classes were probably taught in a house. Through the 18th century, land was acquired and schoolhouses were built. North Branford maintained three schools after 1725. In 1752, Northford opened two schools, one south and one north of the meeting house. Later in 1755 and 1769, two more districts were set up. The first school building in North Branford was near the Meeting House. Records indicate that one school was built near Edward Frisbie's house about 1736 and that a grant of money was voted in 1760 to build a school north of Great Hill. By 1797 there were four schools in the Second Society (North Branford) and four in the Third Society (Northford).



"The Goat Without a Beard"
Sample of penmanship of Timothy R. Palmer. THS Collection.

There is an account of a division in the center district of North Branford in the early 1800's. A group seceded from the "red schoolhouse" and built a "white" schoolhouse because, it is said, the party of the red schoolhouse wanted to employ a teacher who was an Episcopalian and this was not to be tolerated in a society dominated by the Congregational church. The break was eventually healed and the red schoolhouse was torn down and the two factions united once more

In 1850 there were seven school districts. There were three schools in North Branford and four in Northford. Beech Corner School was the District 1 School which is now part of a residence. District 2 schoolhouse was built next to the Meeting House (the North Branford Congregational Church) and later moved across the street. Its replacement is now the front part of the Senior Center. The District 3 schoolhouse, known as the Mill Road or Totoket School, is now a residence. District 4 schoolhouse, the replacement for the abandoned Little Red School House, is now Natureworks. District 5 School was on Foote Hill Road and Village Street and District 6 School was on Old Post Road where William Douglas School was later built. The District 7 School was located on the west side of Middletown Avenue near Reeds Gap Road. The Little Red School House, which was the District 4 School, has been restored and is used as a museum by the Totoket Historical Society.

Education beyond the primary grades was not provided in North Branford during the 18th and 19th centuries but secondary and college education was available and eagerly pursued by young people from town. Schools also existed in houses at this time as there is a record of Mr. Joseph Bunnell, who lived in a house behind Atwater Library, teaching school in his house as late as 1780. The number attending college was unusually high. Many of them graduated from Yale. Few parishes in the state and perhaps none of equal population gave the world so many liberally educated people as Northford during this era.

The Puritan mentality may have had an influence on this extraordinary interest in higher education, as well as the proximity of Yale College. The Reverend Jonathan Maltby (1759-1856) listed 27 men from Northford who were graduated from Yale between 1768 and 1826. There were pastors at the Congregational churches who were Yale graduates and some of these ministers were known to have prepared young people for college – women as well as men. In Northford there was a private school called Brooks Academy where William Brooks taught some advanced subjects that were not available in the district schools to prepare boys and girls for secondary schools.

One Northford girl, Lucinda Foote, was so well tutored by Reverend Warham Williams that after her examination for Yale she was given a certificate by the President of Yale saying that she was fully prepared to enter Yale College if the rules had allowed ladies.

By 1892, 39 men from Northford represented the parish in the three leading professions of law, medicine and the ministry. From this town came: Noah Linsley, the founder of the first free school in a slave state; Eli Smith, a translator of the Bible into Syriac; Mrs. Dwight Baldwin, among the first female missionaries of the Sandwich Islands (Hawaiian Islands); Mrs. Epaphras Chapman, a missionary among the Indians; Jared Linsley, a physician whose name is attached to the Linsley Library, part of Sterling Library at Yale, and to Linsley-Chittenden Hall; Miss Mary Foote, the first woman admitted to the Connecticut Bar; Dr. Clara Smith, Dean of the Mathematics Department of Wellesley College; Edward Maltby, an engineer who rose high in his profession; James Halsey Linsley, a captain in the U.S. Army of the Civil War; Catherine Maltby Blaisdell who taught in Peking and 31 men who served in the Civil War. The Maltby Fowler family, including the father and six sons, gave the world many basic inventions such as the first four-wheel wagon in the state, machines for making buttons, pins, pocket combs, cigars and perforated tin ware. The Chapman Maltby family manufactured buttons, wooden spoons, axe handles, dried coconut and coconut dippers.

In 1911, the State Board of Education took over supervision of all public schools in the state. Because of lower enrollments, plans were made in 1919 to consolidate the Town's 7 one-room schoolhouses in the seven school districts. District 7 school was closed and its pupils went to District 6. A three room Center School was built in North Branford in 1919 followed by a four room William Douglas School in 1924 in Northford. Jerome Harrison School was built in 1929 in North Branford.

During the 1950's, rooms were added to Jerome Harrison and William Douglas schools. In North Branford, the Junior High School (now the North Branford Intermediate School) was built in 1957 and Cedar Lake Elementary School in 1958. Cedar Lake School was closed in 1978 and William Douglas School in 1982. William Douglas is now an Area Cooperative Education Services school. Stanley T. Williams School was built in Northford in 1959. In 1964 North Branford High School was built. This was 100 years after a vote was taken in 1864 at the Town Meeting to establish a high school that was followed 2 weeks later by a vote to rescind the previous vote. In 1971 the Northford Intermediate School was built (now Totoket Valley). This culminated twenty years of school building projects in town. Then in 1998, a new Jerome Harrison School replaced the original building.

The growth of North Branford from a strict ecclesiastical society in colonial times to a modern suburban community makes a fascinating study.

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE

The Little Red School House was built about 1805 to serve the children in District 4, the southern part of Northford. It is the oldest, typical, red -painted schoolhouse still standing in New Haven County and the fourth oldest in Connecticut. At that time, school was only held during the winter months and all arrangements regarding education were made and supervised by the Ecclesiastical Society, not the Town. Church disestablishment did not occur until 1818.

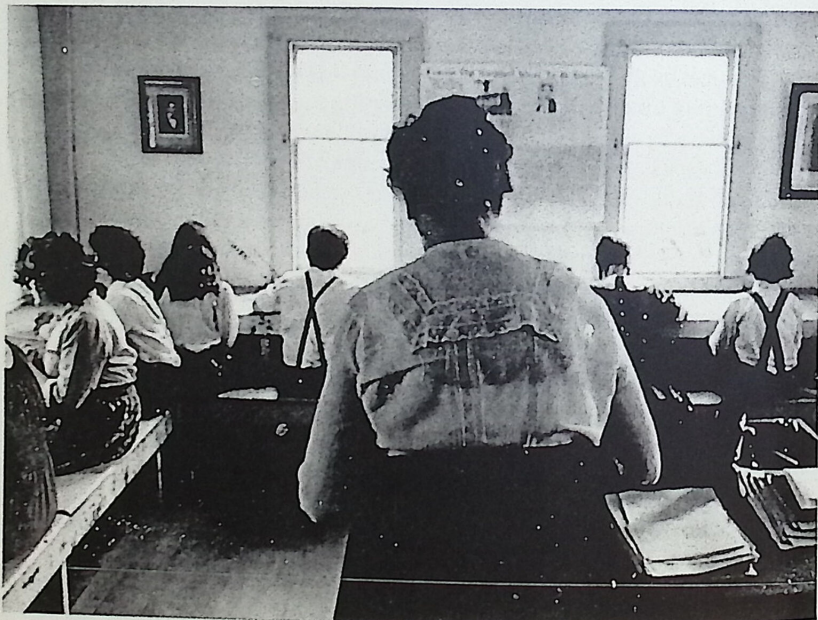
The Little Red School House is 24 feet long by 16 feet wide by 12 feet tall. As one enters the tiny, deep vestibule, where the children would store their coats and lunchboxes, an inner door leads into the one room. There is a continuous row of desks on two sides and along the end of the room with a long, backless bench for seats. Under some of the desks are shelves for books. The teacher's desk was placed in the center with the blackboard covering the wall at the end. Blackboards were new at this time, having first been used around 1800.

What makes this schoolhouse very unusual is the placement of desks. When the pupils sat on the benches, they faced the walls or windows. When ready to recite they would spin around and face the teacher. The benches are hard and the desks are nothing more than a long plank, slanted somewhat toward the child and built tightly to the three walls of the building. The desks are rough and carvings by pupils and their handy jackknives are still visible. Other desks and benches could be placed in the center facing the teacher's desk. A wood burning stove warmed the school. Wood for the stove was supplied by the parents and cut up and dragged to the school, thus paying in part for the benefits of education which the children were receiving. Sometimes an older boy would be assigned the task of starting the stove before school and keeping it going during the day.

Reading, writing and spelling received special attention. Students were expected to supply their own books. Instead of paper and pencil, they used a thin stone slate and a special slate pencil. Samples are in the Little Red School House. Later, when paper was available, pupils needed to supply their own paper and quills. Large feathers from turkeys and geese would be sharpened to form pens. The teachers wrote all the copies and made and mended the goose-quill pens. Students made their own copy books by sewing together sheets of paper and making a cover of wallpaper. Penmanship was very important and some of the writing samples were so well done that they were preserved and handed down through the families. Books used probably included Webster's Spelling Book, McGuffey's Readers or the Bible. Grammar was taught very little in the early days. Geography was taught by questions and answers and arithmetic was taught as far as the Rule of Three. To learn to cipher to the Rule of Three was a standard phrase in the 19th century and is found in Abraham

Lincoln's writings about his early education. It meant that arithmetic went as far as learning to solve problems with proportions. To cipher the rule of three for 3, 9 and 2 is to complete the phrase "3 is to 9 as 2 is to _____" with the answer being 6.

The Little Red School House could hold 25 to 30 pupils. The teacher was expected to be able to teach all grades and still keep order. The teachers "boarded around" on a rotating basis at the homes of their pupils. Pay for the teachers was \$14 a month for the men and \$5.25 for women. Grades 1 through 8 were all in one room and the ages of the students ranged from 4 to 20 years old. The older students helped the younger ones. It was not unusual for a student to leave to get married or, during the 1860's, to leave to join the army during the Civil War.



Inside of The Little Red School House during the Bicentennial Celebration in 1976 when Mrs. Carrie Doody re-enacted the role of the teacher and taught lessons to children from Northford.

Teachers at the Little Red School House

According to available records, Miss Phoebe Merwin, of Durham, was the first teacher known to have taught in this red schoolhouse of the Fourth District. It has been established that she taught there in 1850. This leaves an initial period of about 50 years that has been impossible to fill. Mrs. Eleanor Rogers, secretary of The Northford-North Branford League of Women Voters at the time of the purchase of the School House in 1927, did considerable research and wrote to and spoke with many former teachers and students who had attended the school. Most could not remember the order of teachers or the dates they taught. However, she was able to comprise a list of 43 men and women who taught at one time at the Little Red School House. For this list see the New Haven Register, October 9, 1927.

Another teacher was Henrietta Johnson of District 5 who taught in 1854 and was said to have been an excellent teacher. She later kept a "select school" and taught French at Claverack Institute on the Hudson. It is probable that Deacon Charles Foote of Northford District 4 taught several winters here around 1860. He was in charge of the school at the time of the start of the Civil War. His pupils are reported as saying he was an excellent teacher, but severe.

Captain James Halsey Linsley, a native of Northford who served in the Civil War for four years, also taught here around 1869. He was a graduate of New Britain Normal School and taught also in North Branford and Yalesville. He was the father of Mrs. Eleanor Rogers mentioned above.

Benjamin Page of North Branford, born in 1840, was the oldest living teacher in 1927. He started teaching in 1870 at the age of 17. He stated at that time that he remembered receiving \$14 for a month's teaching. He later moved to Meriden and became that city's mayor. Deacon Charles Page of North Branford, a brother of Benjamin, also taught in the school about this same time. He was Town Clerk of North Branford for 46 years and a member of the school board for 30 years. He studied for the ministry and preached in Northford. Florence Russell of North Branford, who taught in 1874-5, was an excellent teacher and an aunt of the Misses May and Effie Holabird of North Branford, members of the League of Women Voters. A little later, Horatio Warner, a lawyer who turned to teaching, came in and straightened out the school after there had been eight or nine teachers in one winter.

From North Guilford, Miss Ella Lane, 1886-1889, was the teacher during the famous big blizzard of 1888. She and the children were forced to spend the night of the snowstorm in the schoolhouse. It is said that one of the boys crawled on his hands and knees to the nearest house to obtain a lantern so they

could have some light on that howling, stormy night. She later became Mrs. Myron Munger of North Madison. The Totoket Historical Society has, in its collection of oral history audio tapes, an eye-witness account of how the teacher and students spent the night of the 1888 blizzard in the old School House.

The last teacher in the old red schoolhouse was Grace A. Foote of Northford, District 4, a granddaughter of Deacon Charles Foote. She graduated from Wallingford High School and taught from 1902-04. In February of 1902, she moved from the old school building to the new white building beside it. She later graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1909 and moved to New Haven.



The Little Red School House, with pupils, at its original location on Forest Road

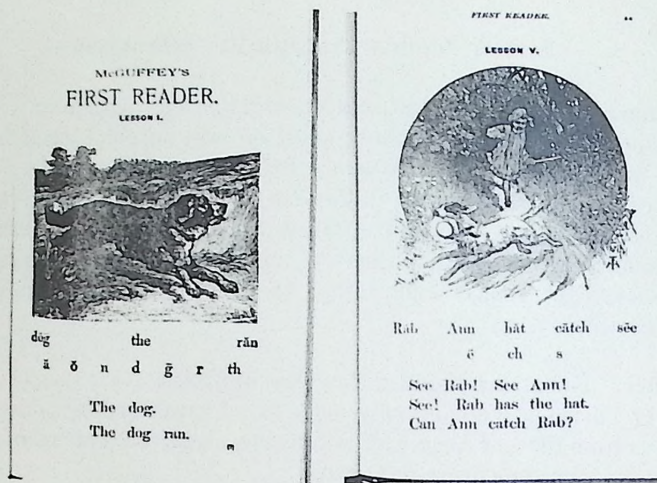
Former Pupils at the Little Red School House

Of some 500 pupils who probably attended this red schoolhouse, only a small fraction can be traced. An effort was made, after the purchase of the school by the League of Women Voters in 1927, to find former pupils. Some of the former students still living in Northford or North Branford at that time included: Mrs. Margaret Augur; Mrs. Isabelle Bunnell; Ellsworth Bunnell; George Bunnell; Robert Bunnell; Charles Ferguson; Mrs. Gertrude Salg; George Augur; Ethel Augur; Helen Augur; Joseph Augur; Mrs. Bessie Bunnell Wright and Mrs. Carrie Potwine.

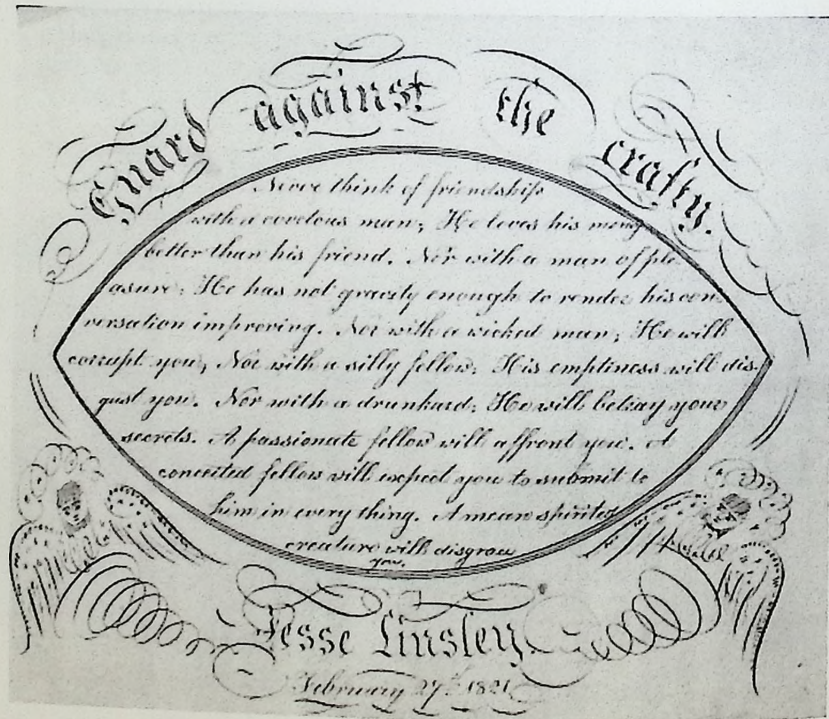
Walter S. Foote, then living in New Haven; Kirtland Blakeslee, in Ohio and John G. Phelan in Wallingford were the oldest former pupils to respond to the requests from Eleanor Rogers for information made over a period of one and one-half years preceding the re-dedication.

Mr. Phelan remembered Decatur Boardman, one of his oldest schoolmates, who enlisted with the "three months men" at the outbreak of the Civil War and came to visit the school in his new gray uniform and brilliant brass buttons. The next pupil of the old school to leave for the war was Philo Foote. He sat next to Mr. Phelan and was missed one day from class. He died in Washington a few months later and is buried in the old Northford Cemetery. Soon after Foote left, Jesse Butler went also and was killed by a rebel sharpshooter defending Washington. Next went Isaac Foote and Fred Foote, brothers who survived the war; and a boy called "Buffalo." In all there were 31 soldiers from Northford Village serving in the Civil War and 7 were killed.

Kirtland Blakeslee was the oldest respondent in 1927 when he wrote "In regard to the Little Red Schoolhouse, as I think of it, it brings many happy hours to my memory; the old fashioned desk, my back to the teacher when studying and sitting beside Judge Phelan. I was between seven and ten years old. I think it was in 1853-4-5. I am now past 81. Deacon Charles Foote was the last teacher I went to there. I was 10 years old when I left Northford. I suppose it is one of the oldest schoolhouses in the state. As to when it was built, I know nothing. I know it was quite old when I went to school there."



Sample Pages from McGuffey's "First Reader."



An example of penmanship and art, "Guard against the crafty," by Jesse Linsley.
THS Collection

HISTORY OF THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE

Originally The Little Red School House stood on a small hill two miles south of Northford Village on Forest Road (Route 22). The site is just to the south of Natureworks (a garden center) and across from Miller Road. It was used as a school for the Fourth District of North Branford from around 1805 to 1902 when it was replaced by a newer building. This newer building is now owned and used by Natureworks.

The exact date of the erection of the Little Red School House has been the subject of much discussion and research. Interested persons have traveled around the state visiting many libraries and historical societies in an effort to find the true date. Nothing can be verified for before 1805 at which time it has been definitely established that the school was standing. The second oldest living student of this school in 1928, Judge John G. Phelan of Wallingford, declared that the building was built about 1750 but records which would prove this, if there are any, cannot be found. Nothing has been found in Branford's records. The schoolhouse stood so close to the road that it is probable that no record was made of the land. In those days "school lands" were large tracts whose income went for school support.

According to Professor Clara E. Smith, Mr. John Foote of District 4, treasurer of the (school) "Fund" for many years, exhibited papers in his house showing that the schoolhouse was built in 1805. The Goodyear Genealogy by Grace Goodyear Kirkman, in the Yale Library, contains a picture of the Little Red School House taken in 1893 and the statement that it was built in 1805. Mrs. Kirkman's father, Andrew Goodyear, was a pupil there.

The school served the central geographical area of the town and was and is part of Northford. When the newer schoolhouse was built, the Little Red School House was vacated. The old schoolhouse was rented out as a residence for a farm laborer for a short period and then was abandoned. For 23 years the building was subject to decay and destruction caused by weather and vandalism. Shutters were gone, beams were sagging and the door was drooping. It made a sad picture for travelers passing by but at that time Forest Road was a country road and not many noticed the old schoolhouse. Glass in the windows was repaired many times as were the chains and locks on the door. Damage continued and it seemed impossible to keep the historic building looking respectable.

The idea of preserving the schoolhouse had long been in the minds of several of the townswomen, particularly Miss Clara E. Smith and Mrs. Mary A. Miller. In 1924, at the suggestion of Mrs. J.J. Linsley, the Northford-North

Branford League of Women Voters took up the project to restore this historic building rather than let it pass out of Connecticut history.

Miss May Holabird was president of the League when they voted to purchase the School House for a sum not to exceed \$25. However, after many delays and much advice, the League found that it was necessary to incorporate before a deed could be obtained. Miss Holabird secured the incorporation, which took place on September 27, 1927, the first League of Women Voters in the country to be incorporated. The deed was received from the town of North Branford on October 3, 1927 and signed by the selectmen: Albert E. Harrison, North Branford; Jared Linsley, Northford and Patrick Nelligan, North Branford. The League officials taking part in the transaction were May V. Holabird, North Branford, secretary and Grace R. Johnson, Northford, treasurer. A record of the transfer can be found in Vol. 16, page 281 of the North Branford Land Records.

The Little Red School House was in very bad shape when this group of seventeen women undertook this preservation. The new owners of the building voted to move the building "as is" to a better, safer location. When the village residents learned of the desire of the League members to move the building, the Church Committee of the Congregational Church offered a site for the building. The church offered a site next door to its parsonage with 50 feet of frontage and 100 feet deep. Mr. C.S. Edwards offered the resolution regarding the site donation on July 17, 1927 but this was later rescinded and on August 21 another resolution was offered by Mrs. Clara M. Farnham. They voted to offer the Northford and North Branford League of Women Voters a site for the Red School House, 40 feet wide and 60 feet deep, in the northwest corner of their parsonage lot provided that the League restore the site and the School House on it within two years. The cost was estimated to be at least \$500. The task before the little group of League women was now to raise the money to move the building to the new site and then additional money to restore it to its original appearance, inside and out. "If at any time they are unable to keep up the property the title is to go to the Connecticut League of Women Voters. If they cease to keep up the property, the title reverts to the Northford Congregational Church."

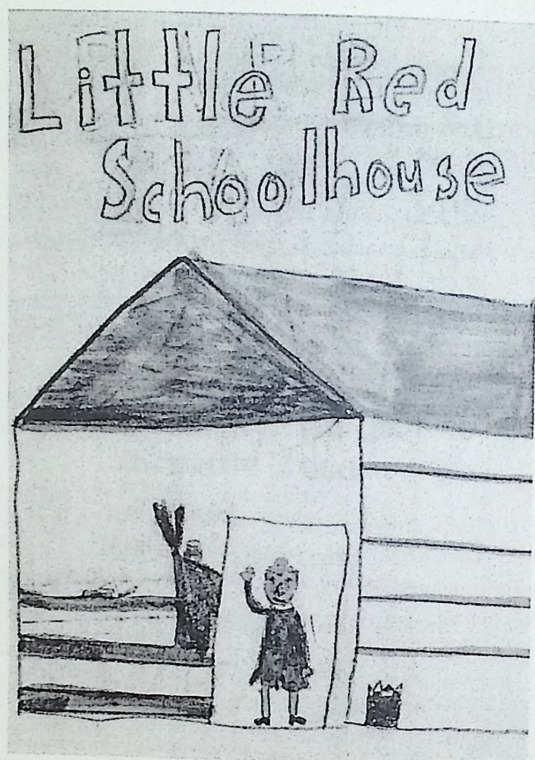
On October 4, 1927, after the purchase of The Little Red School House, the New Haven County League of Women Voters held an all-day meeting at the Northford Congregational Church. The late afternoon was devoted to a pilgrimage to the Little Red School House. At this time an opportunity was given for interested persons to help the project financially or pledge themselves to do so later on.

The Little Red School House was moved 2 miles up the road to its present site on Old Post Road next to the Parsonage and restored in 1928 at a cost of approximately \$1100.00. Expert movers were hired, three permits were secured and a telephone representative was required to accompany the move. Town officials also participated. Of course all of this took funds and other Leagues in New Haven County played a part as well as former pupils, teachers and friends from far and near. Mr. Joseph Bianchi of Northford was chosen to do the restoration.

A rededication of the Little Red School House was held on June 16, 1928. This dedication to the memory of old schools, former teachers and pupils was well attended by many distinguished guests, former teachers and pupils. They heard speeches by former teachers Mrs. Delia Linsley (1860), Mrs. Florence Russell Andrews (1874), Mrs. Frances Rossiter (1878) and Mrs. Hattie Potter Wheeler (1889). Former pupils G.L. Thorpe (1848), Judge John Phelan (1860) and Mr. Bertie Bartholomew (1860) also addressed the gathering. Mrs. Charles Johnson, President of the League, presided over the ceremony,

After five years of using the Little Red School House as a museum of early public education, the members of the League of Women Voters decided that the town needed a library. The idea of opening a free public library developed and in 1933 the League established the Northford Free Public Library in the Little Red School House, the town's first library. Electricity was installed and shelves were built on all the walls. League members served as librarians. The adults were delighted with the library as well as the children at William Douglas School who could walk from school to the library. In October, 1936, at the Annual Town Meeting, the Town voted to take over the management of the library and appointed a Board of Directors.

Some of the faithful, dedicated librarians were Mrs. Eleanor Rogers, Mrs. Lucy Liebold, Miss Lauretta Plumley, Mrs. Martha Johnson and Mrs. Carrie Doody, all of whom served for many years despite very cold feet. Until the opening of Atwater Library in North Branford in 1943, The Little Red School House was the only public library in North Branford.



Dear Historical Society,
 I had a blast! It
 was the best day of
 my life! I liked the Little
 Red Schoolhouse the best. It
 looked like school was
 still going on yesterday.
 Also thank you for the
 wonderful trip because
 it was amazing.
 From
 Ellen

Thank you note and drawing by Ellen Weinheimer after visiting the Little Red School House with her school class.

In 1956, with the opening of the new Edward Smith Library in Northford, the Little Red School House was again empty. The Northford-North Branford League of Women Voters had dissolved and so, in accordance with the original agreement with the Northford Congregational Church, on November 12, 1957, ownership of the building was transferred from the Connecticut State League of Women Voters back to the Northford Congregational Church. On July 16, 1968 the Church leased the Little Red School House to the Totoket Historical Society for \$1.00 per year with the condition that the Historical Society maintain and insure the building.

The Totoket Historical Society now preserves the Little Red School House as a museum of early public education in a small town. It is open at stated times and by appointment. Primary classes in town visit the School House as part of their social studies instruction. During the Bicentennial Year, 1976, a typical school day was recreated. Students from the town schools participated in living through a day of the past. Mrs. Carrie Doody was their teacher and a videotape was made of the entire program. Unfortunately the video is lost.

As with any old building, repairs are a constant problem. In 1982, Richard Zirkelbach, a Northford carpenter, craftsman and member of the Society worked on restoring the building. Later Charles Kulenski, a Society member, replaced the clapboards on the end of the building. In 1996 an extensive restoration of the Little Red School House took place through a collaborative effort of the Rotary Club of North Branford, the Totoket Historical Society and a local Boy Scout, Sean Peschel, who was pursuing his Eagle Scout designation. The Rotary Club not only donated materials but much of their time. Many people took part in this town wide effort with money raised through tag sales, dances, dinners and other activities. Following Conservation Guidelines, the original character of the building was preserved.

In 1985 an application was made to the State Historic Preservation Office to list the Little Red School House in the National Register of Historic Places. The application was approved on August 29, 1985. The National Register is an official list of historic properties recognized by the Federal Government as worthy of preservation for their significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture.

In 2005, The Little Red School House celebrates its 200th birthday with a party to commemorate the past and celebrate the many students who attended this school and others like it all over the country.

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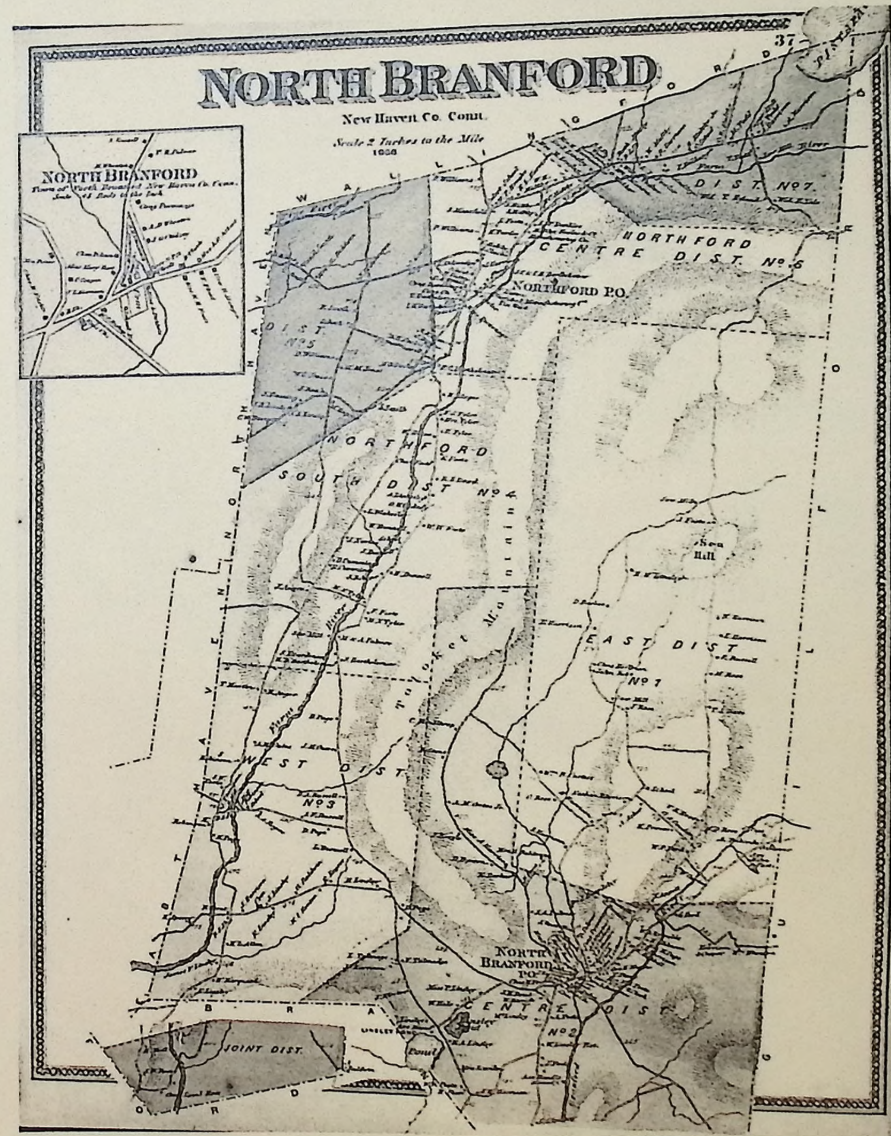
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 Totoket Historical Society

With special thanks to Janet Gregan, Richard Bigelow (photographs) and other members of the Totoket Historical Society for their help and incredible knowledge of the history of North Branford and the Little Red School House.



This map of North Branford and Northford, taken from the 1868 Beers *Atlas of New Haven County*, shows the town's two villages and seven school districts. The Little Red School House was in South District Number 4. This was mapped long before the New Haven Water Company acquired one-third of the town in 1925 and built the dam that created Lake Gaillard. THS



BARBER, M.M.