

JUDITH MARIA BURPEE

A Recollection of New London, New Hampshire



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Edited by James M. Perkins

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A. Bond." I kept this scrap of music many years as a choice memento of his kindness. Not long after this, Grandfather Colby helped me to the old fashioned melodeon, which was a pleasure to us all, 'tho I wished later I had never seen it, for it spoiled my fingering for the piano and was always a hindrance to my execution. Later an instrument called a "seraphine," was left at our house on trial for three months. The blowing done by the feet was so laborious that I wonder it did not do me real harm, and it probably would have finished me if I had kept it longer.¹⁸

THE SCHOOLHOUSE

During these years we attended the school at the Four Corners.¹⁹ I did not go regularly in the winter, for I was not very strong. We used to have merry times, going and returning in Captain Carr's pony sleigh, drawn by a span of grey horses. He carried all the children in the neighborhood, and there were plenty. He carried his own four or five, then came three or four at our house, two at the Herrick's. Amy Colby and Robert at Mr. Colby's, two or more at the Greenwood's over the store, Matt Bigelow among the number, two or three at the Seaman's, two at the Brown's, etc. One of our teachers will long be remembered by all his pupils. David H. Collins, a student from Hanover who taught several terms, and gained

¹⁸ A seraphine is a wind instrument, held in a piano-like case, with bellows pumped by foot. From 1835 to 1865, one of these was used at the First Baptist Church as accompaniment for the choir. A melodeon is a hand-held version of a seraphine.

¹⁹ The Four Corners, at the intersection of today's Main and Pleasant streets, became the center of New London after the post office was relocated there from Old Main Street in the mid-1800s. The Four Corners was a half mile from Maria's house.

the respect of all his scholars and their parents.²⁰ He boarded at our house, and we all enjoyed his presence. In the school house he was in his element; he was unusually successful in mathematics. He really made me know a little in Colburn's *Mental Arithmetic*. I regretted that I could not attend school all the time when he taught. I remember that I was going to visit the school one day in the winter, and I rode up with Father about ten o'clock. I think that the plan was made with Mother before he went to school, so I knew he would expect me, but when I reached the school house I could not get up courage to knock on the door, so walked home without making the promised visit. He laughed well at me on his return for my lack of courage. Even now it is a trial to face a schoolroom full of scholars as a visitor. The old red school house was full in those days. It drew all the scholars in town, and many from other towns. A part of the time an assistant was needed, and Susan Colby taught certain classes in the hall of the house now owned and occupied by Mrs. Micajah Morgan.²¹

Mr. Jonathan Everett, or "Uncle Jok," as we called him, owned the house and occupied a room on the second floor as a saddler's shop. This was at the north end of the building in the second story reached by a flight of stairs outside, and the scholars were obliged to pass through his shop to reach the hall. Drawing and

²⁰ David Haynes Collins, Esq., graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Dartmouth College in the class of 1835. Dartmouth students often taught school periodically to help pay for tuition. Mr. Collins died in June, 1843. A lawyer, he had been serving as Register of Probate for Grafton County until illness forced his resignation in the spring of 1842. He was remembered for his "high order of mental abilities."

²¹ The Everett/Morgan house was located directly across the street from the red school. Later the house served briefly as the town's first hospital before its 1926 renovation as the Tracy Memorial Building, a public library and community center.

painting were taught also, to the young ladies. Among the scholars there I remember especially Belinda Knowlton. She was more advanced in years than anyone else, and a little peculiar in manners, and I am afraid some of the scholars were inclined to make fun of her. At one time a list of words was given to her, to be introduced in a composition. She was unable to use them all, so added these lines at the close of her composition, to bring them all in:

Tall, straight, and beautiful too,
I think these lines will best apply to you.

Meaning Mr. Collins, who was very tall, at least, though not beautiful. He was too much pleased to keep it to himself and showed it to Mother, under promise of secrecy, who told us of it later when no harm could ensue. Before this, when I was so small that I sat on the little seats in front of the old school house, embroidery on lace and muslin, and making of samplers was taught in the school in the summer, together with drawing and all kinds of nee-

dlework, and beads which were wrought with chains, and bags, and purses. The little ones carried basted patchwork, and many a girl of nine or ten possessed a sampler of her own manufacture. The rewards of merit were little tickets painted by the teachers. Those more clearly remembered in this way were Susan Greeley and Susan Colby. We were happy children when we could carry home a ticket with our name printed neatly with pen and ink upon it.



Susan Colby (1839)

How I used to turn round and on my knees on my seat [to] watch the older girls with their beads, and envy them, and say to myself, "I'll do that when I am big enough," and then when unobserved hunt for any stray beads that might be dropped, because too small for the needle. Those bead chains were very pretty and the bags elaborate. Those were real accomplishments then, and blended well with more solid work, as a recreation.

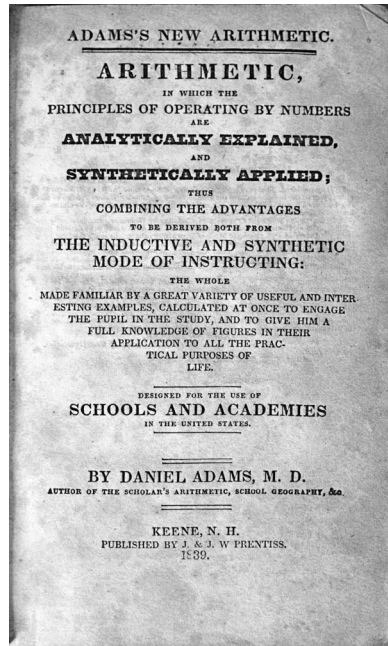
How many associations cluster around that old red school house! The water pail on the seat by the door, and the pleasure of passing the water around in the rusty dipper. The stove in the middle of the floor, with the long funnel, which would sometimes fall, and the room would be filled with smoke! The teachers loved, and the teachers hated! The long spelling classes up and down each side of the floor! Nahum has an unpleasant memory of the spelling class, which one would suppose would have proved a warning to him in his future career. We must have been quite small. He says that we stood up in the spelling class, and he spelled a word that I missed,

and took his place above me in the class, and that we were both barefoot, and that I put my heel on his toes and bore on as hard as I could. This is his remembrance and not mine, so you may take it for what it is worth.

What a racket when school was done! And what a noise at noon time, when in winter the scholars remained and ate their dinners there! What funny lunches they brought! The Carr children were famous for bringing pumpkin pies baked in square tins, and of course the pieces were cut in squares, and

one girl used to want to bite into my dinner of bread or pie, as the case might be, and I did not like it so well.

A pile of rocks down the hill a little distance, under a few scraggy apple trees, was quite a resort at recess, and we called it "the shady trees." Why, I cannot now see, for they were on the north side of the road, and the sun was never behind them, only at sunset. The grounds around the school house were barren of anything of interest. Not a tree or shrub anywhere near. The only interesting thing was a martin house in the bit of a corner, near the Corner, as it has always been called. They made noise enough to say the least.



Mathematics textbook, Keene, NH (1839)



Four Corners students (1889)

Of the children of my age, there were many. Mary Herrick, Mary Ann Everett, Duraxa Gates, Lois Sargent, Sarah Brown, and Susan Carr were those with whom I was more intimate. The boys were Henry Seamans, Jonathan Herrick, Nahum Greenwood, Otis Robinson, Storrs Bunker, and many more. There were many more boys in the winter schools. Among the earlier teachers, I remember Alonzo Gates, who sometimes carried me around in his arms, I suspect to keep me quiet and out of mischief. Wallie Flanders, Luther McCutchins, David H. Collins, Milton Wadleigh and later his brother Gilbert, with William H. H. Wood are some of the men teachers, while those who taught the summer schools were largely those of our own townspeople. Almira and Duraxa Everett, Susan Greeley, Susan Colby, Nancy Herrick, Judith Severance, Sarah Greeley, afterwards Flanders, Sophia Bailey, are some of their names. Some of them we loved, and I am sorry to say, some of them we did not love.

The school house was full in the winter terms, every seat being taken. My scholarship was not remarkable. I enjoyed our reading books and grammar and parsing, but arithmetic was my trial. Malte-Brun's *Geography* I enjoyed because it had pictures in it which I delighted to copy on any little scraps of paper I could find, or on my slate. Peter Pailey's was the first geography, and we all remember the verses in it, beginning, "The world is round and like a ball, / Seems swinging in the air."

The *Easy Lessons* we read, until familiar with all the stories. At last we were graduated into the *Rhetorical Reader* with rules for us really to know something about reading. Spelling was another study which gave me no trouble, and Mother used to drill us at home in that. In the later days of my going to district school, I could stand up the longest in the evening spelling schools when sides were chosen, and we were spelled down.

GIRL'S DRESSES

Our dresses in those days were as may be supposed, rather primitive in fashion and quite limited in quantity. In winter, home-made pressed flannel, of a wine color, so called, was usually worn by girls of my age, but once Sarah and I were made happy by dresses of a dark bottle green flannel, and I am afraid we were both a little stuck up when they were fresh, 'tho that was a rare feeling for us, for we usually felt so under dressed that we were very modest. Sarah especially, for she was born with a good deal of taste, in regard to dress, and was troubled by the fashion and material of her clothes. They were fearfully and wonderfully made sometimes, and at this distance I do not wonder at her rebellion against her fate in wearing