

THE PULLING POINT SCHOOL HOUSE

Address by

MR. DAVID FLOYD

at the

First Methodist Episcopal Church,

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The Pulling Point School House

The warrant for a meeting of the voters of the Town of Chelsea held April 22, 1805, in the school house at "The Centre", as that part of Chelsea, now Revere, was then called, contained, among other articles, the following: "To see if the town will take any measures to build a school house for the Centre of the town, also to provide one for the Pulling Point district." From the excellent published history of Revere's public buildings prepared by the late Warren Fenno of that town, we quote:

"May 6, 1805, it was voted to build two school houses, one for the Centre of the town, to include Winnisimmet district, and one at Pulling Point."

A committee, consisting of Joseph Batchelder, John Sargent Tewksbury, William Cheever, Samuel Pratt, James Floyd, Jr., and Joseph Stowers, was appointed to build said school houses. Six hundred dollars was raised by taxation, and it was voted to hire on the town's credit what money might be wanted to complete said houses over the amount named.

June 13 of the same year the committee reported in favor of and the town voted to build a one story brick building on the site of the old school house at the Centre. The report favored building a one-story wooden building at Pullen Point, and the report also stated that Mr. John Sargent Tewksbury, the member of the Committee from this section of the town, would present the town with land on which to build a school house. The town voted to accept the gift and a vote of thanks was passed.

Mr. Fenno's account is about all that can be ascertained regarding the erection of the first school building in what is now the town of Winthrop. A deed was recorded the same year

by which Jonathan Belcher and four others conveyed to the town of Chelsea a parcel of land 24 x 24 feet on which to build a school house. This land adjoined land of James Pitts and must be a part of the present town hall lot. The building stood north of the old Burrill house and south-west of the town hall. No record has been found showing its dimensions or its cost. Mr. Lucius Floyd in a published article on "Young Winthrop" says it was "a building 20 x 25 feet, with seats and desks made of two-inch plank that extended the entire length of the room, so that the scholars tumbled rather than walked to their places."

During the autumn of 1805 the undertaking was completed, and we are here tonight, within a stone's throw of the spot where it stood for forty-two years, to take fitting notice of the 100th anniversary of the event. The little building was the most important structure erected up to that time at the "Point"; perhaps the most important, considering the many uses to which it was put, and the institutions which originated within its walls, that has ever been built inside the sea-washed boundaries of our town.

The question immediately arises: What were the educational privileges afforded the children of our little peninsula during the 170 years preceding the year 1805? A reply in detail cannot be given. We do know that most of the 15 Englishmen to whom all of our territory was allotted in 1637 were educated men and that they with others of Governor Winthrop's Company were, as Palfrey says: "Men of eminent capacity and sterling character, fit to be concerned in the founding of a state. In all its generations of worth and refinement, Boston has never seen an assembly more illustrious for generous qualities, or for manly culture, than when the magistrates of the young colony welcomed Cotton and his fellow voyagers at Winthrop's table."

We do know that the largest allotment of land was made to Governor John Winthrop, who was, as John Fiske says: "A man of remarkable strength and beauty of character, grave and modest, intelligent and scholarlike, intensely religious and endowed with a moral sensitiveness that was almost morbid, yet liberal withal in his opinions, and charitable in disposition."

We know that Captain William Pierce, who was allotted 100 acres, now known as Winthrop Highlands, on which he built the dwelling later sold by his widow and son to Deane Winthrop, was the author of the first book, an Almanac, printed in New England. Captain Pierce, in 1636, was a contributor with others of the "richer inhabitants" of Boston towards a fund for the "maintenance of a free school master, for the youth with us, Mr. Daniel Maude being now chosen thereunto." Gov. Winthrop, William Aspinwall, William Brenton, Ralph Hudson, and John Sanford were other original Pullen Point land owners who assisted liberally in establishing this first school of its kind in Boston.

We know that in 1640 a motion was made in the church in Boston "by such as have farms at Rumney Marsh, that our brother Oliver may be sent to instruct their servants, and be a help to them, because they cannot many times come thither, nor sometimes to Lynn, and sometimes nowhere at all." This referred to religious instruction. Probably during the early years in Rumney Marsh, as the territory now Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop was then called, little if anything was done in a public way for the education of children.

The records of the town of Boston show that the first action taken towards a free school for Rumney Marsh was in March, 1701, when the inhabitants of that out-lying section, seeing how easily a vote was obtained for a school for the

"north end," made a similar request for themselves, which resulted in a vote authorizing the Selectmen to agree with a schoolmaster to teach the children to read, write, and cipher, provided there was a reasonable number of children to come to school. Nothing came of this vote for eight years, when the citizens stirred up the Selectmen with the result, that Rev. Thomas Cheever was engaged to attend the keeping of the school at his house four days each week for one year. His compensation was 20 pounds per year. He was a graduate of Harvard, a son of Master Cheever, Boston's famous early school teacher. In 1715 he became the first pastor of the Old Church in Chelsea, now the Revere Unitarian Society.

The Memorial History of Boston contains a fac simile of Master Cheever's "Account of ye scholars entered at ye School in Rumney Marsh for reading, writing, and cyphering for the last quarter ending Feb. 1714." There were 25 pupils coming from 14 homes and at least two Pullen Point families were represented, to wit: Joseph Belcher's and Widow Cole's.

In 1739 Rumney Marsh separated from Boston and became the Town of Chelsea. In May of that year a school of our section was first mentioned, ten pounds being voted to be laid out by the Selectmen in education the children living in those branches of the town called "the Rocks and Pullen Point." In 1740, 100 pounds was appropriated by Chelsea for schools.

1771, the town voted to have schools kept the whole of the year.

21 weeks and 5 days in the body of the town.

14 weeks and 1 day at Pullen Point.

16 weeks Winnisimmet.

In 1776 voted, to allow the people of Pullen Point their proportional part of the school money, they laying out the same in

schooling their children the present year.

The schools were held in private houses. Among the many papers collected and prized by the late Hermon B. Tewksbury is a single sheet containing the names of 23 scholars who attended school in the old Bill house still standing on Beal street. Fourteen of the number were from three Tewksbury families; one was a Belcher, son of Nathaniel; four were named Gleason; two were Seth Wood's children; one was a boy named Bowman and another Davidson. Some were taught reading and writing, others writing, and a few arithmetic. It is interesting to note that several of the names on this list also appear on the roll of seventeen men who four years previous, at the time of the Lexington Alarm, made up the Pulling Point Guard.

The schools continued to be held in the private dwellings up to the date of the event we commemorate tonight. Mr. Samuel Belcher who died in 1874 told me that he attended school in a dwelling which stood south of the old house, near Johnson Avenue, now owned by Mrs. Ellen V. Tewksbury.

In the early years the ministers had most to do with the schools; later, as in the period just referred to, the Selectmen had the matter in charge, but in 1797 school committeemen were first elected in Chelsea several years before the law required such a board. In 1805 the Pulling Point's member was Mr. William Tewksbury. Chelsea then had about 500 inhabitants, three-fourths of whom lived at the Centre (Revere), about a hundred at Pulling Point, and 25 at the Ferry, that is, Chelsea Ferry near the present Naval Hospital. The Point farmer who desired to take a load of hay to Boston in those days had to go along the beach north of Beachmont near Cherry Island and then through the present Crescent Beach district to the Salem turnpike, now Broadway. Then through Chelsea, Malden, Medford, Cambridge, and Brookline

and over the neck from Roxbury to Boston. Foot passengers and light loads made a shorter journey by way of the Chelsea ferry.

Boston was then a town of 25,000 souls, having a board of Selectmen of 9 members and a school committee consisting of the Selectmen and 12 others. Each of the public schools had a principal and a writing master. Stage coaches left the different taverns for the principal towns in New England, also for New York and Albany. Boston then had three discount banks.

Nineteen churches ministered to the spiritual needs of the town, of which but one was Methodist, it being the first church of that denomination in Boston and situated on Methodist Alley at the North End. Dr. Tuckerman had then spent 5 years of his quarter of a century as pastor of "the church in Chelsea", as the present Unitarian Church in Revere was then called.

Maine with its six counties was then and until 1820 a district of Massachusetts. Caleb Strong was Governor, and John Quincy Adams and Timothy Pickering represented Massachusetts in the United States Senate, which then had 34 members, there being but 17 states. Thomas Jefferson was President and Aaron Burr, Vice-President.

Then only one house stood on Noddles Island, as East Boston was called.

About a dozen houses accommodated the inhabitants of Pulling Point and Point Shirley. The manufacture of salt by condensation from sea water was then carried on at the last named section. Most of the residents of this part of the settlement were farmers.

The school committee a hundred years ago did not report to the town in writing and consequently no record exists of the teachers or scholars of those days. In 1833 a change was made in the school laws, and from that date district school meetings

were held in the old school house, called in the same manner as were the town meetings later on, and organized by the choice of a Moderator and Clerk. A Prudential Committee of three persons was chosen each year to have charge of the school house and the school. It was required that the warrant for the meeting be posted at the meeting house at least two Sabbaths before the meeting. This made it so certain that every one had been "warned", and such was the interest in school district affairs, that carriages never had to be provided to bring the lazy or indifferent to the meetings of the Chelsea Point school district. The meetings were held at six o'clock P. M.

The only list of teachers is one made up by the former scholars who are now living, and these names cover only the last 18 years of the old building's existence. They include: Lucy Tewksbury, Eliza Ann Belcher, Mary Floyd, John P. Bradlee, Frederick W. A. S. Brown, Stephen J. Hiler, Master Dix, Gilbert Haven, Hannah Haven, Marcus Ames, Eliza A. Coats, Master Lombard, Mrs. Dommit, Master Brooks, and Thos. M. Simonds. Most of those mentioned taught school a part of the year in order to get money to pay their way through college, most of them becoming clergymen.

Two of these teachers named were more closely connected with the people here for a long period than the others. The master for the year 1834 was Frederick William Augustus Steuben Brown. From Boston papers of July 1850, the year of his death, we learn that he was born in Newton in 1792. His father was an officer in the Revolutionary War and served under Baron Steuben, from respect to whom the boy was named. He spent several years at Deer Island, being employed in signaling the arrival of vessels to the lookout in Boston, and during his later years he was the

telegraph operator in the same service at the Merchant's Exchange, making him well-known to every merchant in Boston. In 1819 he published a small volume of poems addressed to the "Inhabitants of Fords, Georges, Gallops, Light House, and Deer Islands," in which he relates many incidents connected with the places mentioned. The poem entitled "Deer Island" begins as follows:

"Now, Tewksbury, shall thy honored name,
Adorn the muse's verse;
As sounded by the voice of fame,
The muse will now rehearse."

"A party from a neighboring town
Upon an holiday
Resolved to sail the harbor down
And fish the time away."

There are only forty verses, in which the poet describes a storm overturning the boat, and when the entire party were about to go down for the last time and each had prayed:

"Be merciful, Almighty Lord,
Be merciful to me.
Saw, bounding o'er the surging wave,
Brave Tewksbury and his son;
Resolved to share a common grave,
Or do the deed they've done."

All are saved, and then follow verses on gratitude, hope, the love of the beautiful in nature and allusions to happenings on Deer Island. The poem closes as follows:

"Point Shirley to forget, Oh Muse,
Indeed would be a fault
Which Sturgis never would excuse
Who manufactures salt."

"With him how many hours I've sat,
Oh, happy hours they were;
Engaged in friendly social chat
That eased the breast of care."

"To all, her tribute of respect
The muse would offer here;
And oft on Shirley will reflect
And drop affection's tear."

"Which though it may bedew the eye,
And often from it start,
Is yet the offspring of the sigh
That rises from the heart."

Mr. Samuel Sturgis referred to moved to Point Shirley from Boston in 1812 and engaged in salt making. Some verses addressed by Mr. Brown to Miss Hannah B. Sturgis, a daughter of Samuel, are to be read this evening by one of her great granddaughters. Miss Sturgis became Mrs. Hannah B. Floyd. Her name appears in yonder window as a life-long member of this church.

Master Brown presided in the old school house in 1834, and his name appears on the church records of that year as taking part in the business meetings and the subscription paper for building the church is in his handwriting.

The Boston Transcript of 1850 said: "Although Mr. Brown himself was a cripple from his cradle, yet when any reflection was cast on the fair fame of our country he would raise his withered arm and declare that 'though but half a man, that half should be sacrificed rather than her glory should be tarnished.' He was a devoted patriot, and an honest man, and a sincere Christian."

The other teacher referred to was Gilbert Haven, who was born in Malden, Sept. 19, 1821. In 1839 he attended Wilbraham Academy. The next year he was employed in the store of Nichols on Tremont St., Boston. In 1841 he became clerk in the carpet store of Tenny & Co., on the corner of Prince and Salem Streets. Here he had as fellow salesmen two young men who became well known citizens of Boston. One was John M. Clark, for 25 years Sheriff of Suffolk County, and the other was Eben D. Jordan, the senior partner of the great firm of Jordan and Marsh. These two gentlemen followed the career of their shopmate with interest and after his death placed a beautiful window in the People's Church in his memory.

In 1842 Gilbert Haven entered the College at Middleton, Conn. as a freshman. In the winter of 1844--5 he taught the Chelsea Point School, returning to College again in the spring.

While living here he used to walk to Boston every week, and sometimes oftener, to hear lectures by Emerson, Professor Bush, E. P. Whipple, Rufus Choate, Geo. S. Hillard and young John A. Andrew, the future war Governor.

He was greatly fascinated by Emerson and makes the following statement concerning his final lecture for that winter: "In spite of the terrible fierce and cold winds and snow that filled and froze the air, I determined to go to Boston and hear Emerson's last lecture, on "Goethe"; or the writer." His journal kept at the time of his Chelsea Point teaching contains very full reports of Emerson's lectures.

Young Haven went back to College and graduated. Soon after this he was offered a position in America Seminary, N. Y. at a salary of \$300 per year. He writes to his parents: "Now what shall I do? Shall I teach, preach, or talk law and politics? Shall I be president of a college, bishop, or president of the Country?" I need not tell the older people in this audience what Gilbert Haven did. They know of his preaching a few years; of his travels abroad and in America; of his being a chaplain in the army; of his editorship of Zion's Herald, which so attracted the attention of newspaper proprietors that he was offered a large sum a year to edit the New York Independent. They remember his election as Bishop in 1872 and his success in that difficult position. They recall his interest in the slaves and his speeches on public questions; they cherish the memory of his triumphant passing away at his Malden home in January, 1880. Let me advise those who

are too young to remember him to read his life by his friend George Prentice; his "Pilgrim's Wallet," giving an account of foreign travel; his story of the founding of the Mexican Mission; his sermons and addresses; and having read them remember that this man of such varied gifts and who accomplished so much in life once stood behind this desk and taught children of Pullen Point to read, write, and cipher, and to think of many things. Gilbert Haven attended the dedication of this church edifice in 1871 and had an important part in the exercises.

But the story of the old building and its far reaching influence has not been entirely told by a reference to its use as a school house. Like the first public building in most localities there were calls to use the room for other purposes than for teaching children, and one use to which the building was put resulted in the formation within its walls of the church under whose auspices we meet tonight. It is quite probable that there may have been occasional preaching in the building before the year 1817, but no record exists other than that written by Mr. Joseph Belcher, in which the early history of the Methodist Society in Chelsea is told by the man who knew the facts, and he makes it plain that the first preaching by a Methodist minister was in the year named. Rev. Daniel Fillmore then stationed at Boston preached first January 18, 1817. The record says the sermon was "well received, he preached three different Fridays, the preaching made a good impression and Mrs. Susan Burrill experienced religion." The next preaching was from Lynn the following summer by Rev. Joseph Marsh and A. Hines, on week days. The first preaching on the Sabbath was by the Rev. Mr. Moody of Monmouth, Maine, Jan. 18, 1818.

Preaching next by Isaac Jennison. Meeting full and solemn. It was soon after agreed by those that were friendly to organize a Methodist Society. Accordingly a meeting was held at the school house April 21, 1818, with John Sargent Tewksbury moderator. Bill Burrill, Joseph Belcher and Samuel Belcher were made a committee, and in the June following the Society was taken into the Malden Circuit and Rev. A. Hines was stationed on the circuit by the Conference. He preached every third Sabbath during the year and was paid \$53.85 therefor. The school house continued to be the meeting place for 16 years, the first church being erected in 1834 and dedicated November 19th of that year. The annual church business meetings were held however in the school house several years after the church building was erected. The following is a list of those who preached in the old school building in addition to those named: Mr. Stocker, Joseph Ireson, Mr. Stoddard, Aaron Wait, Lemuel Frost (father of Winthrop's former school teacher, L. P. Frost), John Adams, J. Haven, S. Ramsdell, Benj. R. Lewis, Thos. W. Brown, Benj. King, and James Blodgett.

And what shall I say of the scholars of the old school house? The easiest and yet the hardest topic to summarize. Statements can be made about a slow growing community that would not apply to a section which has been rapidly settled from various places. For 50 years before the town's incorporation the total population increased slowly. Most of the children who attended the old school were born here. Their mothers came from other places. The men who organized the school district in 1833 were the pupils of the old school house from 1805 and after. The men and women who built the church in 1834 were largely graduates from the same school building; the Anti-slavery Society, and the temperance

organization were made up of the same people. And so it was that these same people, with more experience and with larger means, in 1847 built a better school building entirely from their own resources. And was it strange that five years later they went to the State House and said to Governor Boutwell and the General Court: "We've learned how to conduct meetings of voters giving each one a voice in school matters; we have builded a school house, a church, and a bridge; the rest of the world will now know us, or we will now know the rest of the world, as you will."

And the wise men saw that the work of the old school house had accomplished much and the request was granted. And during the years since the building was moved away to old North Chelsea the former pupils have had much to do with the affairs of the town, one holding the office of moderator more than a hundred times, another town clerk and school committeeman for long terms, several others were selectmen, assessors and constables. Two from the old school have sat in the State House, several have served the nation in times of peace and marched to her defence when war threatened. One who is soon to speak to us has an unmatched record, in addition to other good services, as a post-master for 50 and more years. We do well to say to these men and women as has been said of those who have finished their earthly course, "Well done! well done!"

Chelsea Point School District

List of Scholars 26 Winter term

<u>Parent</u>	<u>Scholar</u>	<u>Residence</u>
Alpheus Wyman	George Wyman	Old Winthrop House
David Floyd	Lucius Floyd	" " "
Thomas Floyd	Almira Floyd	formerly on Revere St.
Bill Tewksbury	John Tewksbury	Hanley house, Readville
" "	Bill Tewksbury, Jr.	" " "
" "	Mary Tewksbury	" " "
Phillip Tewksbury	Thomas S. Tewksbury	" " "
" "	Phillip Tewksbury	" " "
" "	Abigail Tewksbury	" " "
" "	Sarah L. Tewksbury	" " "
" "	John S. Tewksbury	" " "
William Tewksbury	Augusta P. Tewksbury	Site of present residence
Joseph Burrill	Stephen Burrill)	(Home demolished
" "	Lemuel Burrill)	(
" "	Alfred Burrill)	(near Woodside
		(
Samuel Floyd	Samuel Floyd)	(House demolished
" "	Emeline Floyd)	(near old Elm
" "	Susannah S. Floyd)	(tree
Washington Tewksbury	Lorenzo C. Tewksbury	
Eben Burrill	Charles Burrill	Same residence
" "	Abigail B. Burrill	" "
Samuel Belcher	Samuel Belcher, Jr.	Samuel Belcher
" "	Mary Belcher	" "
" "	Caroline Belcher	" "
" "	Frederick W. Belcher	" "
" "	Harriet J. Belcher	" "