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By *Charles R. Nichols*

The story of formal education in Philmont begins in 1842. School District #19, Claverack & Ghent, encompassed Philmont, and school was held in a wooden building where the later brick buildings were erected.



Union Free School, Philmont, NY (circa 1882)

In 1843, the school census counted 39 children between the ages of 5-16 years. The library consisted of 8 books!

The board of education met once each year, and each year elected a president, other officers, and a librarian. The secretary didn't list the location of the meeting, as apparently everyone present knew where they were, except in two instances (1847 & 1849) which indicated 'Claverack Falls' and 'Factory Hill' - the first an uncommon nickname for Philmont, the second a bit more common.

Progress was a bit slow, but in 1850 they were looking into a 'Free School', hired a male teacher, voted for 32 weeks of school, set teachers pay to be \$3.50 a week, voted to spend \$8.00 to build a privy (wonder what they did between 1843 & 1850?), and proposed a total of \$146.00 budget for the year.

In 1851, \$7.00 was voted for a stove. Also that year School District #19 was combined with District #8, to become District #19.

1858 saw the board voting to allow the school house be used for evangelical meetings, and all other purposes of assembly. The Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist congregations were to use the building on alternate Sabbath evenings.

In 1859 the District number changed to #6, still Claverack & Ghent, and the next year a vote was taken to build a new school house for 20 students, 30' x 40' brick, slate roof, with belfry, not to exceed \$1,300.00.

By 1861, the building was done at a cost of \$1,084.59! The wood structure on the site was sold and moved across the street, about where the west end of the current 'Local 111' building is now located. This brick school building is NOT, however the one in the photo at the beginning of this article. More about that later. Next year they voted to hire a female teacher.

In 1867, there was a need to expand the school, so a 20' x 22' brick addition was constructed, for \$795.00. Sounds like inflation had set in.

Teacher's salary in 1873 jumped to \$376.03 for the year.

In 1880, the Sentinel was talking about the recently established Union School District, still #6, in Philmont, and the necessity of a new school. By 1882 the old brick building had been torn down, and the new brick school was completed, and is shown in the photo at the beginning of this article.

In 1893, the School Library was designated as the 'Philmont Public Library' with assurances from the State that a charter would be granted. The following year, the school designation was changed from the 'Union School' to 'Union Free School', still district #6, and included students from surrounding areas and hamlets.

The 1903-04 School Catalog indicates the school Principal was also the Librarian. The

combined school and public libraries had over 2000 books. Grades were 1st; 2nd; 3rd. & part of 4th; Part of 4th & 5th; 6th & 7th; Music; 8th, to graduate.

In 1904 the first (and only in his class) graduate from Philmont Union Free School was John S. White, who went to Chatham High School to finish his High School Education. John graduated from Albany Medical College, and practiced as a Medical Doctor in Malone, NY.

By 1908 the school showed a Principal. At that time, all school principals were known as 'Prof' - as in Prof Case, Prof Bonneau, a mark of respect. In addition to Principal, the school showed a Preceptress, grades 1-7 with 8 grade elementary subjects; 2-year academic work after which qualified pupils could continue High School work in any 'Regular High School' in the State.

In 1910 the addition on the right side of the 1882 building, and the connecting section were built. The photo below shows the final building.

The next year, the graduating class numbered 4, including Laura Boyne; Charles L. Nichols; William G. Simmons, and Kathryn Vosburg.

1912-13 sees ten faculty including Principal, Vice Principal, and 8 grade teachers.

A 1915 Alumni Bulletin says that this is the 1st. class graduating from the Philmont High School. One certificate that year shows a graduation for the 'Scientific' course of study, and shows both 'Union School' and Philmont Public School'. The course of study shows a 4-year High School course.



Union Free School, Philmont, NY (circa 1910)

Over the years commencement exercises have been held in many facilities with enough room for students, parents, and interested persons. The Empire Opera House, Richardson's Hall, later the Strand Theatre and Crusader Club are some examples.

In 1946 the Union Free School District #6, the official name for the Philmont High School, became Claverack Central School #2, and in 1952 the classes started in the new central School.

In 1953 the old Philmont High School was demolished. A Stewart's Shop now stands in its place. A bit over 100 years of school history gone!

A special thanks to Russ Robertson for his help in researching this article. His knowledge of district education was invaluable.

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