

WADLEIGH SCHOOL

By Ellen Knight¹

In 1901, Winchester got a new school, the first not built of wood but rather from more permanent materials, the Wadleigh Grammar School.



Above - The wooden Wadleigh School, numbered 8 on an 1886 map

Below - Students outside the old Wadleigh



It was built to replace an older school built in 1865 on the same site (now Chevalo Park). The old wooden school house originally had two classrooms and a recitation room, to which two more schoolrooms were added in 1882. The staff included one principal and three assistants.

To accommodate the growing number of students, in 1887 part of the Wyman School on the west side was also used for grammar-school children. Still the Wadleigh building was crowded—154 pupils in four rooms in 1887, increased to 250 by 1900. The Town had to rent rooms over the post office (then located on Main Street) to accommodate some of the students.

At the time, the town had many school building needs. It had just built a new Mystic School and wanted a new high school. The building committee in February 1900 recommended building a new grammar school before a new high school, since the former was more overcrowded, was expected to have more rapid growth, and would cost less.

Although the building committee suggested the possibility of three new buildings, in the north, west and center, so that grammar-school students could have easier access to their schools, Town Meeting that March chose the more economical option of a centralized school and voted to issue a bond for \$36,000 for a new building. In 1900, the school committee wrote of the one finished and two proposed new schools, “The buildings and their architecture and setting, and their convenience and wholesomeness and proper state of repair, are certainly of foundation importance. But this is because what goes on inside of them is of such supreme importance.

“Your committee is confident that the Grammar school education of our children will receive a

great stimulus when the new building is finished and the new master put in charge.”

Wadleigh was the first school house made of stone and brick. It was twice as large as the old building, with four classrooms on each of its two floors, plus a boys’ recreation room, manual training room and a cooking school in the basement, along with heating apparatus, coal bins, and bicycle rooms.



Edwin A. Wadleigh for whom the school was named in recognition of his years of service on the Winchester School Committee

Designed by architect George F. Newton (who later designed the new Baptist Church), the school was, the Building Committee declared, “unsurpassed in architectural beauty by any in the town.” The exterior was of mottled gray Roman bricks laid up with white mortar joint. Terra cotta and Indiana limestone were used for trim. Deer Island granite was used for the steps and grass course and basement window sills. The woodwork for the two entrances was quartered oak.

Inside, the building boasted maple floors, cypress doors, cast-iron staircases with slate treads, and built-in bookcases. Ventilation having been a concern, the building had tall windows reaching within six inches of the ceilings.

The school, the Building Committee also stated, had “all the modern improvements and conveniences, complete in every detail.” The building was so techno-logically up-to-date that each room had a telephone connection with the master’s room, and each had a dial and bell connected to an electric timer and a program clock in the master’s room. Further, each room had its own thermostat.

Outside there were two playgrounds, one each for boys and girls, who also had separate entrances.

When overcrowding again overtook the school system (despite the new high school which opened in 1904), the town built a junior high school (now the McCall Middle School) which opened in 1932. That same year the Wadleigh was closed. It reopened in 1936 to house the freshman class of the high school. It was also used as swing space when the high school was being renovated in the mid-1950s.

By the 1960s, a second junior high school was wanted, but the Wadleigh was not put back into

the school system. A new school, now the Lynch Elementary School, was built and opened in 1961. In June 1962, the once sorely needed and highly praised Wadleigh was demolished.



¹ This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on July 6, 2001. This article supersedes all previous articles.