

Preliminary Report of the  
HEBRON HISTORIC DISTRICT AND PROPERTIES STUDY COMMITTEE  
regarding the establishment of the  
BURROWS HILL SCHOOLHOUSE  
as a  
LOCAL HISTORIC PROPERTY  
IN THE TOWN OF HEBRON, CONNECTICUT

Presented to  
Town of Hebron Planning and Zoning Commission  
Town of Hebron Board of Selectmen  
The Connecticut Historical Commission

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Hebron Historic District and Properties Study Committee

Virginia Peterson, Chairman  
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### Location, Historical Significance

The Burrows Hill Schoolhouse is located "in school districk V on a uncertain corner on Burrows Hill Road," according to an unidentified contributor to Hebron school records. The schoolhouse stands today on the southeast corner of the intersection of Burrows Hill Road and School House Road, 1.1 miles south of route 66 in Hebron. Just how long it has stood here is a matter of conjecture. Some local history enthusiasts say circa 1730; others say 1739 or even later. The building's post-and-beam and flared-post construction frame clearly date it to the 18th century. A plaque on the school claims 1725 as its date of origin, but there is no indication of a school house in this area on Isaac Pinney's 1744 map of Hebron.<sup>1</sup> There is no known documentation of the laying out of Burrows Hill Road as a town road, but surely there were lanes here before 1744, as Pinney's map shows a number of houses in the area.

Among the families in the immediate area in 1725, there were only four children of school age. By 1735, the number of children was at least 20, so it seems quite likely that the schoolhouse was built shortly after that time.<sup>2</sup> There is no controversy today that this precious gem is the oldest surviving one-room schoolhouse in Hebron.

Burrows Hill Schoolhouse is located between two hills. Atop the hill to the north is Prophet's Rock, which, in 1706, according to legend, enabled the wives of the Hebrons first two settlers (Shipman and Phelps), to join their husbands "in the wilderness."<sup>3</sup> The women, having reached the point where they expected to find their husbands, were tired after the long trek from Old Saybrook and dreadfully afraid of wolves. They climbed upon the rock for

safety and shouted so loudly the men, two or three miles away, heard their screams and came to their rescue.

Settlement in the area of the stream to the east of what is now Burrows Hill Road grew with astonishing speed, and within a few years many small industries flourished. When the town of Hebron incorporated in 1708, this area was its hub.<sup>3, 4</sup>

By the middle of the eighteenth century, cotton mills hummed and whirred;<sup>5</sup> a forge was producing axe heads, and a gun factory was casting cannon balls and bullets (soon to be needed to fend off *Redcoats*.) Also present were the ubiquitous blacksmith shops, a clock manufacturer, cabinet maker, and goldsmith.<sup>4, 5</sup>

At the foot of south hill an entrepreneur named Daniel Burrows built a large store. Hence the name *Burrows* for the road and the hill, the road, and the schoolhouse. Burrows was born in Groton, Connecticut, on October 28, 1766. Trained for the Methodist ministry, Burrows became a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1816, and served on the commission that established the boundary between Connecticut and Massachusetts. He later became a member of the 17th U. S. Congress.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Architectural Description and Significance**

The Burrows Hill Schoolhouse consists of one classroom with plastered walls and vaulted ceiling, and a vestibule of boardwall and matched board ceiling. Double corner posts indicate that the vestibule is an addition.

Entry is gained through a plank door in the center of the north gable end, thence to the classroom through a door to the right facing the back gable. The classroom is lighted by six eight-over-eight reproduction windows, two on each of the three exterior walls. Outside, whole-window plank blinds close to protect the glazed sashes.

The classroom is wainscoted to the window sill level and plastered

above. The barrel-vaulted or coved ceiling is also plastered. The classroom has three banks of stationary desk-benches and two recitation benches, one to the left and one to the right of the entrance.

The original and significant Greek Revival teacher's desk, which is in the left front corner of the classroom, is in excellent condition and was once sought by Old Sturbridge Village, but fortunately was kept in Hebron by interested citizens. This fine old lectern-type desk, according to former student Ed Smith, has enough room beneath it "for a naughty boy to crouch at the teacher's feet."

Over the years the Burrows Hill Schoolhouse has been modified to meet changing educational requirements and more current standards. Perhaps the most drastic remodeling occurred in the early 19th century, when a ceiling-to-roof chimney of brick presumably replaced a stone fireplace and chimney. The cast-iron stove now in the schoolroom center may have replaced previous models to provide warmth more efficiently to the teacher and pupils.

Currently, this little schoolhouse provides an accurate picture of elementary education in Hebron circa 1830. The school had 47 teachers between 1873 and 1909,<sup>6</sup> when it was closed permanently. The schoolhouse still stands because a handful of caring individuals preserved and protected it.<sup>6</sup> The Smiths, Wrights, Allyns, and Brinks, in particular, have made it possible for the current owner, The Hebron Historical Society, to pursue to goal of restoring the building as a living museum of mid-nineteenth century elementary school life.<sup>7</sup>

Upon the 1976 restoration of the schoolhouse, warnings on brown paper pinned to the classroom walls advised students "Look ahead or you will find yourself behind", "Sing not, hum not, wiggle not, speak not" and "Now is the time for improvement."<sup>8</sup>

The Burrows Hill School now stands *uncertainly* on a certain corner. Increasing village activity speeds traffic within three feet of the northwest corner, and the threat of collision damage makes it urgently necessary for

Hebron's citizens to relocate the schoolhouse a little to the east, where a half-acre plot was donated to the Town of Hebron for that purpose by Clifford Wright,<sup>9</sup> whose father attended the school. At a special Town Meeting on March 15, 1993, the Town voted to transfer the plot by quit-claim deed to the Hebron Historical Society,<sup>10</sup> which holds the deed to the schoolhouse and its tiny original plot.

#### Numbered References

1. Isaac Pinney map of Hebron, dated 1744.
2. Clifford Wright's unpublished notes on Burrows Hill area.
3. Hebron Tricentennial Commission booklet, items numbered 49 and 51.
4. *Our Town's Heritage*, by John Sibun, p. 15.
5. Della Hills Scrapbook, clipping from Norwich Record
6. Records of Kate Beach Allyn.
7. Hebron Land Records, Vol. 66 pg 159.
8. Unpublished notes of Helen and Harold Brinks.
9. Hebron Land Records, Vol. 150, page 461.
10. Minutes of Hebron Special Town Meeting, March 15, 1993.

#### Additional References

*Hartford Times*, December 8, 1944.

*Manchester Evening Herald*, June 21, 1976.

*History Homes & Buildings of Hebron*, unpublished manuscript by John Baron.

Unidentified newspaper clippings of articles on Burrows Hill School by Susan Pendleton.

Unpublished notes and clippings of Henrietta Green.

Unpublished notes and clippings of Richard Gale.