



This Issue:

Page 1

How Yarmouth High School Came to Be

Page 2

From the Chair Volunteer Search Finding History

Page 3

Yarmouth High School cont.

Page 4

In, Around, and Beyond the History Center

Page 5

Yarmouth High School cont.

Page 6

Yarmouth High School cont.

Page 7

Yarmouth High School cont.

Page 8

Thank you Business Members!

How Yarmouth High School Came To Be:

The Negotiations Between the Town and North Yarmouth Academy

By Zoe Williams
Yarmouth Historical Society
Summer Intern

If you've ever lived in Yarmouth, you definitely know Yarmouth High School—maybe you even went there. But not many people nowadays know the history behind the decision to construct a new high school. What are the differences between North Yarmouth Academy and YHS, and how did they come to be in the first place? These are the questions I asked when I began my internship at the Yarmouth Historical Society, a 6-week venture that allowed me to dive into the town's past and uncover the details that have been buried by decades, or even centuries, of history. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the History Center, and I'll forever be grateful for the opportunity along with everything I was fortunate enough to learn during my time here.

As a current YHS student myself, this topic was particularly interesting to me as I debated what part of Yarmouth's history I wanted to devote my research to. Having newfound access to decades of history regarding all things Yarmouth, I made it my goal to attempt to answer all the questions I had.

I can't deny that the history of education in Yarmouth is quite complex. In order to understand why and how certain schools were constructed and fought over, I had to first understand what the options were for students all those decades ago. Through William Rowe's book detailing Yarmouth's history,



Above: Yarmouth's high and grammar schools, c. 1900

along with various newspaper articles from the time, I learned that a grammar school was built in 1890 where the town hall currently resides. A decade later, the first Yarmouth High School was built right next to it, replacing many of the separate, one-room schoolhouses that operated here before. It's also worth noting that the first high school inevitably shut down in 1930, essentially forcing all high-school-age students to enroll in the Academy.

Yarmouth was growing rapidly at the turn of the century, but that growth seemed like nothing compared to the population boom that occurred in the 50s and 60s. After Central Maine Power paid over \$300,000 to the state treasury, taxes in Yarmouth had been lowered significantly, only adding to the charm the small town had to outsiders. Everyone knew the town was growing, especially from how schools became less and less equipped to handle the number of students flooding in. In a school report from 1955, the town iterated the overcrowding issues many of the town's school buildings faced. While the recommended number of students in that sized classroom was 20-25, there were few that were below 35, which alarmed the Department of Education. The town knew that their current plan of converting unused space from the old

Continued on Page 3



From the Chair

The leaves are starting to fall around town, and Halloween is just around the corner!

This presented the perfect opportunity for the History Center to recently host author Ron Romano to talk about his new book, *Stories From Maine Cemeteries: Lives Cut Short*. Chilling stories from the 1800's of secret lives, lightning strikes, and murder are detailed in his book, which also includes the background of some of the gravestones and monuments in our local cemeteries. You can find a link to the recording of Ron Romano's talk on our website, and autographed copies of his book in the History Center gift shop.

Yarmouth is lucky to have a strong sense of community, and this was seen recently with resident Art Bell's reenactment of the first reading of the Declaration of Independence here in Yarmouth in 1776. Our Executive Director, Katie Worthing, provided the background for this historic event. See page 4 for more on this event.

Showing in the Stonewall Gallery is a memorial watercolor exhibit honoring the work of local artist Peter Merrill. The exhibit has been organized by Peter's neighbors and friends who felt Peter's captivating watercolors highlighting Maine's coast and outdoors should be shared with the community. The show will continue through the month of October. Proceeds from the show go to the Yarmouth Historical Society and Peter's favorite animal rescue organizations. Enjoy the cooler weather, and I hope to see you soon at the Yarmouth History Center for the Annual Meeting at 7pm on October 28.



Jessie McGrath
Executive Chair, Board of Trustees

Yarmouth
Historical Society
**BOARD
OF TRUSTEES**

Chair
Jessie McGrath

Vice-Chair
Melina Roberts

Treasurer
Sarah Day

Secretary
Ann Miller

Martina Duncan
Mitch Feeney
Michael Gengras
Kendall Harnett

Kate Huntress
Caroline Knott
Betsy Langer
Ed Libby

Alison Moore
Stacey L. Pardales
Brittany Strout

Executive Director
Katherine G. Worthing

Development Director
Maura Goessling

**Administrative
Assistant**
Karen Asherman

**Museum
Assistant**
Grave Atwood

Yarmouth
Historical Society
118 East Elm
Street PO Box 107
Yarmouth, ME 04096
207-846-6259

Published quarterly for
Yarmouth Historical
Society members.



Seeking History Buff

The Cousins Island Cemetery association is looking for a volunteer to join their board. The group meets once a year in August to discuss budget, upkeep needs, and acknowledge new burials since the last meeting. Plenty of history to be a part of. If you're interested, contact the board president at nannettewirth@gmail.com.



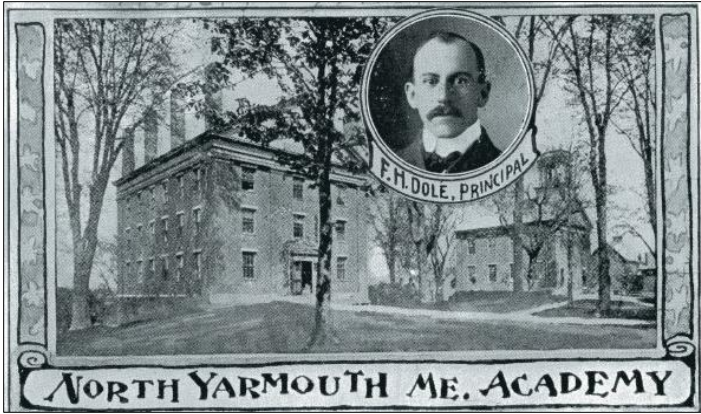
Finding Yourself In History!

It is rewarding to witness someone find themselves in the history that we have preserved. And how fun it is to discover that it does not have to be an artifact from centuries past to be recognized as worthy of preservation. The Society's collection of Clam Festival photographs is a perfect example. This year we were delighted to be present when Katie Labrie viewed our exhibit and found herself in a 1990s Clam Festival parade photograph of the Yarmouth Middle School Band.



Support our work with a gift to the Annual Fund

How Yarmouth High School Came To Be ...continued



Above: North Yarmouth Academy Postcard, c. 1900

Right: Curtis Building, North Yarmouth Academy c. 1940



high school wasn't going to work forever. Thus, they created their own School Building Committee in 1954 with the duty of hiring an architect and engineer with \$5,000 to draft up plans for a new school. In the end they planned to build a schoolhouse on a piece of town-owned property behind the library with 6 new classrooms. As for grades 9-12, once the old high school closed in the 30s (and later demolished in the 70s), they were almost completely the responsibility of the Academy.

Nort Yarmouth Academy, incorporated in 1814, is one of the oldest private schools in Maine. When it was built, Yarmouth was still known by its original name of North Yarmouth. Though its academics and reputation is well-known today, the academy struggled in the mid-20th century. It needed a new gym, didn't have the space for extra curricular activities, and above all, didn't have the funds to accommodate all of its students. One thing that was evidently clear to me in my research was NYA's commitment to offering the best education possible to all of its pupils. With this in mind, it made sense that when they were running out of options, they knew their best option was to reach out to the town. The following interactions culminated in a series of negotiations between the town and the academy where they struggled to come to an agreement on how secondary education should proceed in the town they share.

The Academy's Board of Trustees were the first to reach out with a memorandum on February 18, 1959, alerting the town of their grievances. Issues of insufficient funds, inability to expand their course offerings, and limitations regarding expansion of school grounds to accommodate the growing student body riddled the report. Among

their concerns did happen to be a potential solution. The Academy offered to the town that if they could furnish a community building for industrial arts, a gymnasium, a home economics suite, among other things, then they could be in charge of that programming, while the academy administered the academic portion of Yarmouth's secondary education. In addition to this, the tuition due the academy from the town would be figured on a cost-per-pupil basis rather than at the maximum upon which the State will pay subsidy, which was already considerably lower than the academy's actual cost per pupil. The town, in response, recommended the payment of the actual cost per student with the proviso that joint control be shared by the committee and the trustees, but this was rejected by the academy as they were "unwilling to violate the trust which had been placed in them by agreeing to such a plan."

After receiving the initial memorandum, the town considered three options:

1. Join surrounding schools and operate a joint high school under the Sinclair Act
2. Work out a cooperative agreement with NYA
3. Build a new and independent high school

From the town's perspective, there was one main problem with the Academy: they were a private institution serving a public function. The school was supported almost entirely by public funds from taxation, but the town was given no public representation in its administration. The town tried to remedy the situation by using Thornton Academy as an example of how joint control *could* work. Thornton was a school that had a large enough endowment to give the town a "bargain" in the tuition it charged and was able to provide for its own

Continued on Page 5

In, Around, and Beyond the History Center



History on Granite Street

The Center closed out the summer schedule by hosting its fourth neighborhood outreach event. This time we took local history to the Granite, Ledge, and outer East Main Street neighborhood. Our thanks to Kate Huntress and Scott Beatty for lending us their special corner of Yarmouth to host their neighbors and help us share some very local history. Many came to learn about the granite industry that once operated in the area and the lively railroad workers' encampment built there during the digging of the Maine Central Railroad's 'Sodom Cut.' It was great connecting with the old and new residents of the area and to have the opportunity to offer them a way to discover the history of the area and town.

Left: Attendees socialize at our neighborhood event

Inset: Culinary creation by Kate Huntress, vegetables never looked so lovely!

Folk on the Hill

Cole Phillips, a teacher at Freeport High School and local singer-songwriter from southern Maine, reached out to the History Center earlier this summer to ask about creating a concert series in the Old Meetinghouse on Hillside Street. Two concerts were scheduled, one in August where Cole shared the stage with singer-songwriter Mike Maurice and one in September, when Jackie Klock and Charlie Pike filled the Meetinghouse with their music. The Meetinghouse acoustics make the perfect venue to highlight the talent of these musicians. If you missed the concerts, stay tuned, the Old Meetinghouse Concert Series will return next season for more Folk on the Hill.

Commemorative Reading

On August 19, 2026, Reverend Diann Bailey of First Parish Church and Art Bell, former Yarmouth Historical Society Trustee and Maine State Representative, commemorated the first reading of the Declaration of Independence in Yarmouth by reading the document aloud to those gathered in front of Town Hall. The Declaration of Independence, signed in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, did not arrive in North Yarmouth (Yarmouth was a part of this larger town until the town split from North Yarmouth in 1849) until the second week in August of that year. In accordance with the decree issued by the Executive Council of Massachusetts requiring all towns in the Massachusetts Bay Colony to publicly read the document, Reverend Tristram Gilman complied and read the document to his congregation on August 19, 1776. The rest, as we know, is history. To learn more about this time in Ancient North Yarmouth visit Yarmouth Municipal Television's YouTube channel to hear the Declaration's reading and the Center's Executive Director Katie Worthing's introduction of Tristram Gilman and some background history to Yarmouth in the times before the Revolution.

Visit www.youtube.com/@yarmouthmunicipaltelevisio9833



Above Cole Phillips and friend perform at the Old Meetinghouse on the Hill.

Below: Art Bell and Rev. Diann Bailey read the Declaration of Independence.



How Yarmouth High School Came To Be ...*continued*

capital improvements. In Maine, schools that can't provide for themselves entirely usually inaugurated a form of joint control as authorized by state law; there were 12 of these schools in the state in 1959. As I'm sure you can guess, the Academy also wasn't thrilled with this idea, believing that it would lead to too much state control and the "watering down" of education, according to the written record of said negotiations.

Passed in 1957, Maine's Sinclair Act was a landmark school district consolidation legislation. It encouraged rural, town-based school systems to merge into regional School Administrative Districts (SADs) to increase high school enrollment sizes and control rising education costs by paying a percentage of the building expenses. When considering this option, the town eventually came to the conclusion that the benefits that plan offered were outweighed by the disadvantages. For example, the act would require all the towns involved to be on a joint board, which could cause Yarmouth to run the risk of paying a disproportionate amount of the school budget because the state valuation of the involved towns is lumped together, meaning the amount a school would pay for the budget, new construction, and debt, is in the ratio of its valuation to that of the other towns. Yarmouth had a high valuation, so it'd receive the lowest state aid compared to other neighboring schools.

So, with the Sinclair Act off the table, the committee considered the academy's requests, but it didn't take them long to find flaws in the plan. First, there was little to no land available near the academy for the proposed community building they had suggested. Similarly, they thought that a divided high school operated by two separate administrations would be "impractical in the extreme" and would cause problems with transportation, time scheduling, and administration. The town also didn't want to have to staff a new building and pay the increased tuition when it wouldn't have a voice in how it was run. That paired with the reality of there being no guarantee of the permanence of such an arrangement only put them off of the possibility more. When an appointed subcommittee drafted their own report back to the trustees, they had their own list of demands: an executive committee with three elected trustees that would be able to approve and amend the academy budget with the consent of the other trustees, and a lasting agreement between the academy and the town in order to protect the interests of both parties. The town wanted to be able to work together; it would be optimal for everyone, they thought. With such an agreement, a new gym could be

erected, as well as new sports fields and other facilities on nearby land. In addition, the academy would be able to afford the best teachers available, the rights of the trustees would be protected, and there would be enough town representation so citizens would feel that it was their school and that they could take pride in it.

In July of 1959, however, the two parties reached a stalemate after the trustees, once again, rejected the town's proposal, deeming it "unacceptable". Without providing much detail, all we know is that NYA thought the committee didn't adequately address their memorandum and why it was reasonable to reject it.

Later that month, the board of trustees officially voted to convert to a strictly private college preparatory school. Despite the town's opposition to this claim, it is believed that the academy may have been under pressure to choose between being public or private.

So it seemed that with the academy's recent decision, the town's next option was building their own high school, a venture they dove head first into with plans, consultants, contractors, and more. Through the collaboration of many different parties and professionals, the plans for the buildings shifted often as they debated on the size of the school and what grades it should host. After officially making the decision after a vote in September, 1959, the town appointed an official school building committee. The town's original plan for the high school consisted of 12 classrooms, 2 laboratories, a 200-person capacity cafeteria, a combined gym and auditorium, and various suites and areas for home economics, industrial arts, and storage. The approximate size was expected to be 38,550 square feet, the cost coming out to \$15 per square foot. This put the estimated cost at \$580,000. In addition to this, a potential junior high school was expected to cost around \$120,000 if they decided to take that project on later.

But when it came to building an entire new school, they knew they would need some outside help, leading to their decision to hire Dr. Nickolaus L. Engelhardt to review the initial plan for the school and input his own recommendations. The report he produced was far from simple; while the town originally planned to build an institution for grades 9-12, the report suggested that they should accommodate elementary and secondary school pupils. Due to the overcrowding issues in the lower grades and the fact that the population growth wasn't expected to slow down anytime soon, help was needed in more than just the secondary grades. When it came to specific layout recommendations, Engelhardt suggested 7 classrooms for core

Continued on page 6

How Yarmouth High School Came To Be ...*continued*

subjects (800 square feet each), 2 laboratories for chemistry and biology, and 2 commercial education classrooms—matching pretty closely to what the town already intended to build. As for the junior high, or “Intermediate School,” they required 14 classrooms. To accommodate the construction, they estimated needing upward of 60 acres for buildings, parking, playing fields, etc. The committee may not have agreed with every suggestion from Engelhardt, but they did end up voting to include grades 5-12 in the schools, turning this construction into an even bigger deal for the entire community. Brown Construction Co. from Portland secured the contract for the High School after a competitive bidding process. It was this company that collaborated with the town to come up with the final building plans.

The town’s records don’t spell out exactly how the estimated costs climbed to the degree it did, but it’s obvious that this decision, while great for the education system, drove up the price of construction vastly. With the suggestion of additional classrooms, facilities, acreage, and the potential underestimation in the early stages, the costs had almost doubled by the time the schools were built.

Financially, the town sold over \$1.38 million in serial bonds at 3.4% interest to pay for the construction of the junior and senior high school. Because demand or terms made the bonds attractive, they sold at a premium of \$10,350 above face value, meaning the town netted slightly more than the bond’s face amount. Additionally, because the bonds were delivered to the winning bidder between coupon dates, the town collected \$912.32 in accrued interest, which was applied to reduce the first interest payment due.

The most telling proof of the town’s decision, though, doesn’t come from the construction reports at all—it comes from the budget itself. In Yarmouth’s 1959 town report, tuition payments to North Yarmouth Academy made up 31.7% of the entire school budget, the single largest line item after instruction. That’s nearly a third of every dollar Yarmouth spent on education leaving town, with no say in how it was used. By 1961, the year Yarmouth High School opened its doors, that figure had already dropped to 12.4%. A year later, in 1962, it had collapsed to just 0.4%, where it remained in 1963. Meanwhile, the percentage of the budget going toward instruction moved in the opposite direction: 44.6% in 1959, up to 65.6% by the school’s



Above: Yarmouth High School under construction, winter 1961

Below: Yarmouth High School construction completed 1961

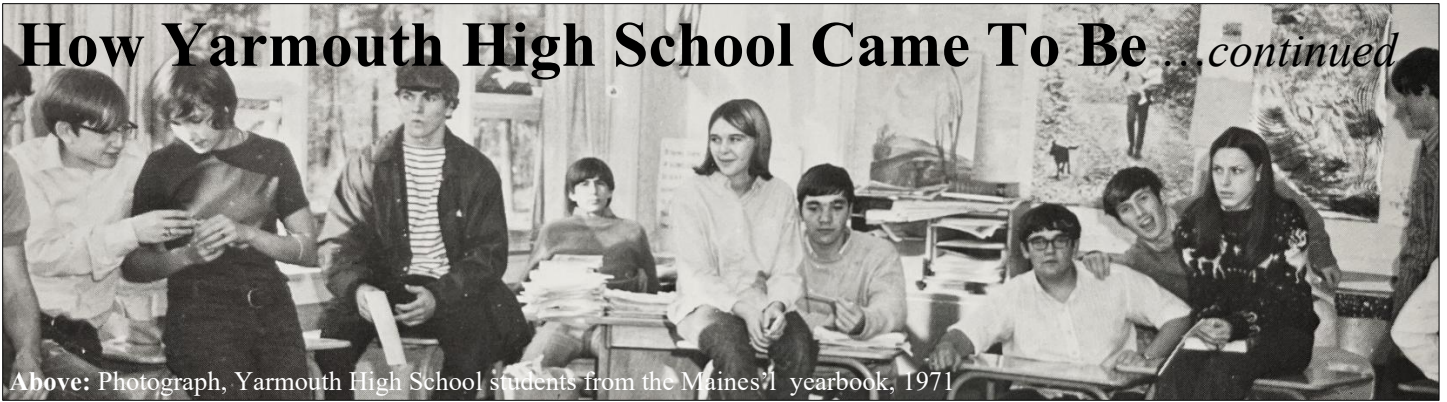


first year under the new principal’s report, 72.9% in 1962, and 75.5% by 1963. In other words, the same money the town had spent for decades sending its children elsewhere was now staying in Yarmouth and going directly into its own classrooms. It’s hard to find a cleaner illustration of exactly what the Study Committee had been arguing for back in 1959: that public money ought to fund a public school.

Enrollment tells a similar story of growth, though it’s worth being precise about what was actually growing. In 1958, there were 192 Yarmouth high-schoolers total, 164 of them at NYA. That number crept up to 212 by 1959, and 219 by 1961—the year YHS opened. But Yarmouth High School’s own enrollment that first year was actually 232, with 197 students from Yarmouth itself and the remaining 35 coming from North Yarmouth and Pownal, towns that now sent their own high schoolers to the new school. By 1962, enrollment had climbed to 283 students; by 1963, it reached 288. Some of that growth reflects the town’s ongoing population boom, but some of it is simply YHS absorbing students who previously had other arrangements entirely. Either way, the school was serving

Continued on next page

How Yarmouth High School Came To Be ...*continued*



Above: Photograph, Yarmouth High School students from the *Maines* yearbook, 1971

more students than the Academy ever had at once, with a faculty-to-student ratio holding steady around 16.1 to 1 through 1962 and 1963, a number the town could point to as evidence that growth wasn't coming at the expense of quality.

The new school also moved quickly to prove itself academically. Yarmouth High School received its certificate of approval from the Maine Department of Education in November of 1961, just months after opening. Full state accreditation followed on April 16, 1963, less than two years after the school's very first class walked through the doors. For a school built from scratch in just two years, that timeline was a real milestone—proof that a brand-new public school could stand on its own academically, and reach the same standard NYA had spent a century and a half building toward. By 1963, 53% of students were enrolled in the college preparatory track, with 32% in general studies and 15% in business education—a course structure that, not coincidentally, mirrored almost exactly what NYA itself had proposed offering back in 1959: college prep, general academics, and commercial training, just now administered by the town instead of the Academy's board of trustees.

Not every part of the transition was seamless, though. In his 1961 report, Principal Daniel W. Center Jr. noted that some upperclassmen, many of whom had spent years attending NYA before the switch, "found it hard to adjust to the rules and procedures of a public school." Adjusting to a new school, new rules, and a new routine took time, regardless of how the decision had been made. A 2024 panel conducted at the Historical Society with Yarmouth citizens from 1955-1962 included personal accounts from the class of 1962, noting that many of the academy's previous attendees weren't necessarily thrilled at the idea of switching schools for their senior year. Despite certain students' preferences, there were no major rivalries or bad blood between the two institutions in the years following. Even today, whether it's sports or other academic

competitions, I've never experienced any ill will toward the Academy—if anything, most students at YHS don't know this history exists at all. I certainly didn't, until I started this internship.

It's strange to spend six weeks reading about the building you've spent three years walking through every day. Enclosed in the History Center is the reason my classes are the size they are, why the school offers the electives it does, why "public education" wasn't given in this town until relatively recently. None of that was obvious to me before this project, and I doubt it's obvious to most of the students who walk these halls now. But it was never inevitable. It took a town willing to spend more than it planned and argue longer than it wanted to, all to build a school of its own instead of just paying for someone else's. Over sixty years and one renovation later, Yarmouth High School consistently ranks among the top 20 public high schools in Maine, with a student-teacher ratio still well below the state average—and I'm one of the students still benefiting from a decision the town almost didn't make.

Biography:

Zoe Williams is a senior at Yarmouth High School who has called Yarmouth home for over eight years. At Yarmouth High, she takes pride in her leadership roles with the Playmakers, the Civil Rights Team, and the Clipper Chronicle, the school's student-run newspaper. Outside the classroom, she enjoys practicing her French. A writer, actor, musician, and history enthusiast at heart, she plans to study journalism in college and one day sees herself living in a big city. Her time at the History Center has been an especially rewarding experience; sifting through the town's archives and old records, she's uncovered fascinating tidbits about Yarmouth's past that she hadn't previously considered.



Right: Zoe Williams, Yarmouth Historical Society 2026 Summer Intern



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



Museum & Shop Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10am to 4pm

YARMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 107
Yarmouth, Maine 04096-0107

Non-Profit
Postage PAID
Permit No. 46
Yarmouth, ME