

Ricker Has Played Vital Part In Education And Culture Of Maine

School Has Survived Many Crises Since Doors Were First Opened In 1848

The educational institution of Ricker, for the 109 years during which it has been such a vital part of the community life of Houlton and Aroostook County, can look back over its illustrious history and take justifiable pride in the contributions it has made to the education and the culture of the State of Maine!

As this community takes stock of its assets and its resources in this Sesquicentennial year of its life, it must place a high valuation on the part this school has played in its progress and count Ricker among its richer blessings.

And this, not alone in the service that has been rendered to the youth of this area and elsewhere in Maine, but also in the prestige and influence for good that has been reflected on this town as the home of a revered and a respected school.

AWARE OF AN ASSET

Because of recent events which have been influential in relieving economic pressure on the school, we must infer that the townspeople and business men of Houlton are fully aware of the asset they possess in having Ricker in their community, and are determined to do their utmost to preserve it.

Most outstanding contribution was the result of the radio auction conducted by the Houlton Rotary Club by which it was possible to contribute \$8000 to the Ricker treasury. This accomplishment has prompted the observation that, when business and professional men will spend time and effort to raise funds to help maintain an institution of higher education in this community, the future of Ricker looks bright. By the same reasoning, these shrewd men must also realize the school's value.

It might be said of this and other performances for the same cause, that they indicate the same spirit which led to the establishment of the school in the beginning, still exists.

Long Time President



Fred L. Putnam

a town meeting. The Act of Incorporation as a town was accepted; a week later the first superintending school committee was elected in Houlton.

Prior to that time, the increase in the number of young people in

ately supported academies in this state of which Ricker is one of the oldest in Maine and the oldest in Aroostook County.

Out of these schools have come men and women whose influence and whose impact upon this state and this nation has been great. Ricker stands well at the head of the list as a school that has supplied its quota of useful citizens in all walks of life.

In the ten years just prior to 1847, there was considerable sectional and national excitement. In northern Maine the people had just gone through the brief but tense period of the bloodless Aroostook war that had finally been settled for all time by the ratification, on November 10, 1842, of the Webster-Ashburton treaty which firmly established the international boundary line between the United States and Canada.

Following this came the Mexican war which was to come to an end as the year 1847 drew nearer.

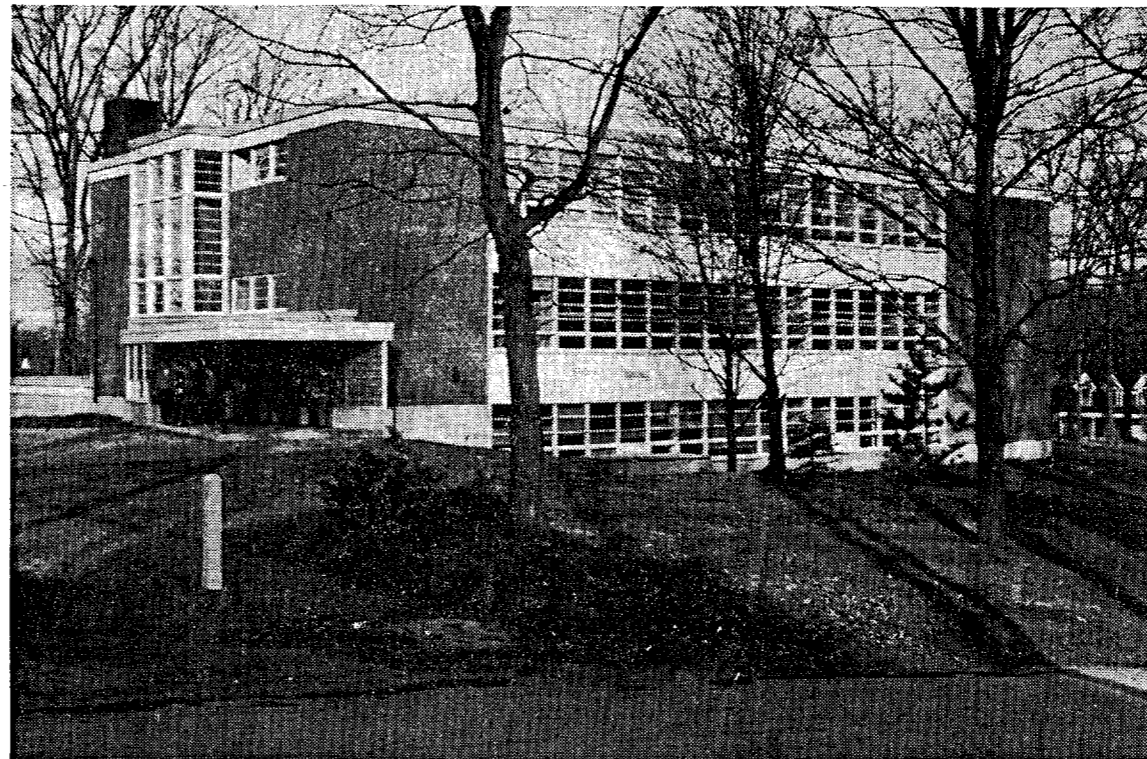
PRESSURE OF NEED

Whatever of influence these times may have had in directing the thinking of leading Houlton citizens toward the creation of a secondary school that would fill the gap between the lower grades and higher institutions of learning, is not known but the movement began more strongly to yield to the pressure of need in a growing town.

Midway through 1847 an organization was formed to establish, with the blessing of the Maine legislature, Houlton Academy. On June 14, the legislature having approved, Governor Dana signed an act creating the academy.

The original incorporators were eight in number. They were: Joseph Carr, Jr., teacher and lawyer; Leonard Pierce, Register of Probate; Zebulon Ingersoll, farmer and timberland owner, John Hodgdon, at that time president

New Wording Hall, On the Site of the Old



The new modern Wording Hall, which arose almost exactly on the spot occupied by its predecessor, was first opened for the use of students in the fall of 1946.

children except that they may be able to read and write intelligibly and acquire the rudiments of mathematics. This they feel will be secured during the period of their minority, even without effort, and beyond this they have no hope . . . The State has for years made appropriations to enable Agricultural Societies to offer rewards for agricultural improvements. A premium is awarded to him who exhibits a beautiful horse, a strong ox or a well-cultivated field; and may we offer no inducement to the exhibition of classic beauty, intellectual strength or mental culture."

SCHOOL GREW SLOWLY

Houlton Academy for the next 25 years grew slowly in size but

roads and completely halted trains and other means of transportation.

Having just come from Houlton where the plight of Houlton Academy was uppermost in the thoughts of the townspeople, the situation was fresh in the mind of Justice Dickerson and it was natural that he would report the matter to his friend. Because of their Colby College background, the idea was soon born that it might be possible to restore Houlton Academy to educational usefulness by making it a fitting school for the Waterville institution.

Dr. Ricker was not one to tarry with an idea once it seemed reasonable and practicable. No soon-

mission was granted and, although the exact date of the change is not indicated, the first diploma bearing the new name was issued to the graduating class of 1887. It was signed by the then principal, A. W. Thomas, who served in that capacity until 1901.

CORDIAL RELATIONSHIP

The relationship with Colby has been a cordial and rewarding one in the intervening years. There still remains a strong bond between the two schools although no actual financial obligation now exists between them.

Dr. Ricker's interest in the school that was named for him, continued to be unflagging and persistent. He recognized that the

Catherine Wording, would seek aid in carrying out her husband's wishes. And here, again we encounter the coincidental intervention of a heaven sent benefaction to Ricker at a time when it was in serious need.

Mrs. Wording approached Dr. Ricker with her problem and it was natural that the good doctor would think first of the little school he had done so much to rescue from its dire straits. His suggestion that the struggling young institute in Aroostook County needed aid met with a warm response and later in the same year of her husband's passing, Mrs. Wording sent word to the trustees of Ricker that she was prepared to give \$30,000 to the school to be used for the erection of a new classroom building. This was more than agreeable to the trustees of Colby College.

The new building was to bear the name of her husband, and in 1888, Wording Hall was completed and officially dedicated and Mrs. Wording came all the way from Grand Forks, North Dakota for the event.

COLBY PRESIDENT SPEAKS

Moses Giddings of Bangor was chairman of the building committee and handed over the keys to the new building, following its dedication, to Principal Thomas. It was to be expected that the speech of dedication should be made by President G. D. B. Pepper of Colby College.

There were many other dignitaries here for the occasion in addition to those most interested and taking part. There was Hon. E. F. Webb and wife, of Waterville, Rev. Dr. H. S. Burrage, editor of Zion's Advocate, of Portland, Rev. J. S. Potter of Newton Theological Seminary, Judge Percival Bonney and wife of Portland; Hon. B. F. Sturtevant of Jamaica Plain, Mass., Capt. Wording and niece, Mrs. Musselman of Belfast; Dr. J. W.

Principal 20 Years



Roy M. Hayes

In his address of dedication, President Pepper of Colby called the occasion a "glad and grateful event". One in which Colby College "takes a profound interest because of our conviction of the great worth of the academy. This thought underlies our conviction and comes fitly to expression. The academy is an essential of our system of culture and hence, the educational institutions receiving it, have their value in Christian manhood . . . With praise and prayer, we dedicate to its high Christian purpose, this goodly structure. We do it in the name of her, here present today, who has erected it in loyal love to Christ and to her husband gone before her . . . May it incite others to like good deeds and may the blessing of Almighty God ever rest alike on her and upon this beloved academy."

LOCAL MEN PARTICIPATE

In the evening, following the dedication the graduating exercises were held and it was noted among those taking part, the names of Frank Allen Peabody,

## HOME, CHURCH, SCHOOL

It was said of pioneering Americans in the earlier days of this country, when they arrived at a place that was to be settled and become their new home, they first gave attention to the erection of a dwelling in which to live, then a church in which to worship and third, facilities by which their children could acquire learning.

The early settlers of Houlton followed this procedure. The first few families to arrive here and settle in 1807 and thus found the township, were beset with the usual hardships of such primitive conditions and the building of their homes was the first matter of business to which they had to address themselves.

The response to the need for religious services was met, by each denomination in the manner in which they were best able to solve their own church problems. A Christian community developed here normally as it must have in any young American village of the early 19th century.

There is little of documentary evidence from which to trace the pattern of early educational progress in Houlton. But, in view of the strong character of these early families and the heritage they have left, we must assume that the demand for learning by the young people of the town was met with the best means at the command of their elders.

## SUFFERED HARDSHIPS

During those early years the settlers of Houlton may have been expected to suffer hardships common to frontier people yet it is noteworthy that the lack of churches for worship and schools for the education of their children were causes of concern.

As early as 1809, we are told, the residents of Houlton were seeking educational facilities. Even then, two years after the actual founding it is reported they sought incorporation as a town. In view of the fact there was only a handful of families here at that time, we may believe this urgency was motivated by a desire to organize a regularly established school. This appeal, as well as one that was sent again eight years later was rejected.

It was not until 1831, while Andrew Jackson was president, that a petition was looked upon with favor and, on April 4 of that year, a warrant was issued to call

the town demanded that an elementary school be started.

## FIRST ORGANIZED SCHOOL

Joshua Kendall in his reminiscences on the Early History of Houlton, reports that the first evidence of an organized school was noted in 1815. In that year Samuel Kendall, Jr., taught a primary school for common branches in an apartment of a large house built by Dr. Samuel Rice. A man by the name of Carr, who was, by trade, a millwright and who came to Houlton from Kennebec in the fall of 1814, was also a vocalist who taught a school patronized by both youth and adults in that year.

It was some years after the incorporation of the town in 1831 that the first movement was started to establish the facilities here for secondary school education.

The framers of the constitution of the state had given particular attention to the subject of education when the instrument was adopted. So sincere was the interest at that time that it is reported Gov. William King, the first governor of Maine, took pains to consult no less an authority than Thomas Jefferson for counsel on drafting that section of our state constitution which refers to education.

## CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENCE

Under the heading of "Literature" is Article 8. This article declares that "A general diffusion of the advantages of education being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, to promote this object, the legislature are authorized and it shall be their duty to require the several towns to make suitable provisions, at their own expense, for the support and maintenance of public schools; and it shall further be their duty to encourage and suitably endow from time to time, as the circumstances of the people may authorize, all academies, colleges and seminaries of learning within the state subject to the right of the legislature to alter, limit or restrain any powers vested in any such literary institutions as shall be necessary to promote the best interests thereof."

## PRIVATE SCHOOLS STARTED

Thus was the enabling act that was to inspire the development of education in Maine, made a part of its constitution and thus was the way prepared for the establishment of the some 50 odd priv-

of the Maine Senate, Jeremiah Trueworthy, a farmer; Shepard Cary, former member of Congress; Zenas P. Wentworth, lawyer, and Benjamin Staples, Clerk of Courts.

## PUBLIC SPIRITED CITIZENS

This was a distinguished group of public spirited citizens. They made a noteworthy contribution to their community by undertaking the establishment of a school that was to carve out such a distinguished record of public service over the next century or more. Their descendants among our citizens of today may well be proud of this work of their pioneer ancestors.

They were not long in acting. They met to organize on July 3, 1847, electing John Hodgdon president and Benjamin Staples, treasurer. Steps were taken promptly to have a school building and a two-story structure was erected to be ready for occupancy at the beginning of the school year in 1848. The site was at the then eastern extremity of the town on the Military Road.

The original building attests to the skill and thoroughness with which the pioneers wrought. It served the school until 1870 when it was replaced by a newer building. The first one was moved across Military street where it still stands today, opposite the north end of High Street.

## COURT ON SECOND FLOOR

The first floor of the building was reserved for the school proper while the second floor was used as a court room when the Supreme Judicial court convened in Aroostook County. It served this purpose for the ensuing 11 years.

Doors were opened in September, 1848, with Milton Welch as the first principal. Since the population of the town then stood at 1000 men, women and children the first student body of Houlton Academy probably included only a small number of pupils.

With the establishment of this school Houlton must have enjoyed an enviable position among communities of its size in Maine. Elsewhere throughout the state facilities for education were meager indeed in those days. This fact is evident from an excerpt from the text of the message of Governor Dana to the legislature in 1858.

Said the chief executive: "A large proportion of our population expect no education for their

25 years grew slowly in size but acquired dignity and stature in its role of ministering to the educational needs of the young people of Houlton. It early established its place in the community.

In 1873 the legislature of Maine, still concerned with the expansion of educational opportunities within the state, enacted into law a measure that would authorize towns to maintain free high schools, at their own expense, for not less than ten weeks in any one year. A small state subsidy was provided to assist in underwriting the cost for those towns who elected to adopt the plan.

Houlton was then confronted with the problem of carrying on Houlton Academy that had previously enjoyed the support of the wealthy families of the community, in the face of the competition caused by free high schools. Despite the fact that tuition in those early days was from 50 to 60 cents a week, at Houlton Academy, the adverse influence of the new law caused the closing of the school for a year.

## DOORS REOPENED

The benign providence that encouraged the early incorporators to start Houlton Academy was still at work because it can be nothing less than providential intervention of fate that was to come to the rescue of the school and permit it to reopen its doors and go on with its service.

It came about in a way to stimulate the conjecture that the venerable institution of learning that is now Ricker is not destined to have further interruptions in its distinguished history.

Houlton Academy was rescued by the fortuitous circumstance of a storm that marooned two Colby College classmates in the town of Danforth.

On this fateful winter of 1873 it came about that Rev. Joseph Ricker, D. D., secretary of the Maine Baptist Missionary convention was en route into Aroostook County by way of Washington County. At the same time Justice Jonathan G. Nickerson, of Belfast, had finished his term of Supreme Judicial Court in Houlton and was making his way to his next assignment.

## COLLEGE FRIENDS

The paths of these two college friends crossed in the town of Danforth, 36 miles south of Houlton and there the two were forced to remain for several days because of a storm that blocked all

supplies and practicable. No sooner had he finally gotten to Houlton than he got in touch with Hon. John B. Madigan, then chairman of the board of trustees, to whom he broached the plan that he and Justice Dickerson had conceived.

## CONTRIBUTED OWN FUNDS

However, Dr. Ricker was willing to go further and, after he had become convinced of the broad field for useful work that lay ahead of the institution, he contributed generously from his own means, to endow the institution, and to add land to its grounds so that it might expand and grow.

The good minister had known adversity in his quest for an education. It is said that, during his struggle to complete his course at Colby College, he had lived on 46 cents a week. His interest in making the same goal easier for others is as understandable as it is laudable.

The following year, in 1874, arrangements were completed with Colby, the agreement between the two schools being that the academy trustees would signify their willingness to give their property in trust to Colby College with the latter agreeing to make an endowment of \$25,000 to the school.

## A CRITICAL CHALLENGE

This was a critical challenge but one to which the community was equal. An attempt to raise funds was successful, so the record states. A statement at the time says: "The terms of the agreement of the trustees of Houlton Academy with the board of trustees of Colby University (as it was then known) namely, that the Baptists of Maine raise an endowment of \$25,000 for Houlton Academy have been most nobly met. At this time Dr. Joseph Ricker placed in the hands of the Colby trustees the sum of \$31,375.97".

This was a tremendous contribution that Dr. Ricker had made to preserve the educational facilities of Houlton Academy. It is only natural that the trustees would be profoundly grateful and search for some means of rewarding such a great service. A monetary reward being out of the question for obvious reasons, the trustees took a personal method of showing their appreciation.

They petitioned the legislature for permission to change the name of Houlton Academy to Ricker Classical Institute in honor of its benefactor. The per-

sistent. He recognized that the immediate problem of the school had been met but he also foresaw future problems that could only be solved by additional funds from other sources.

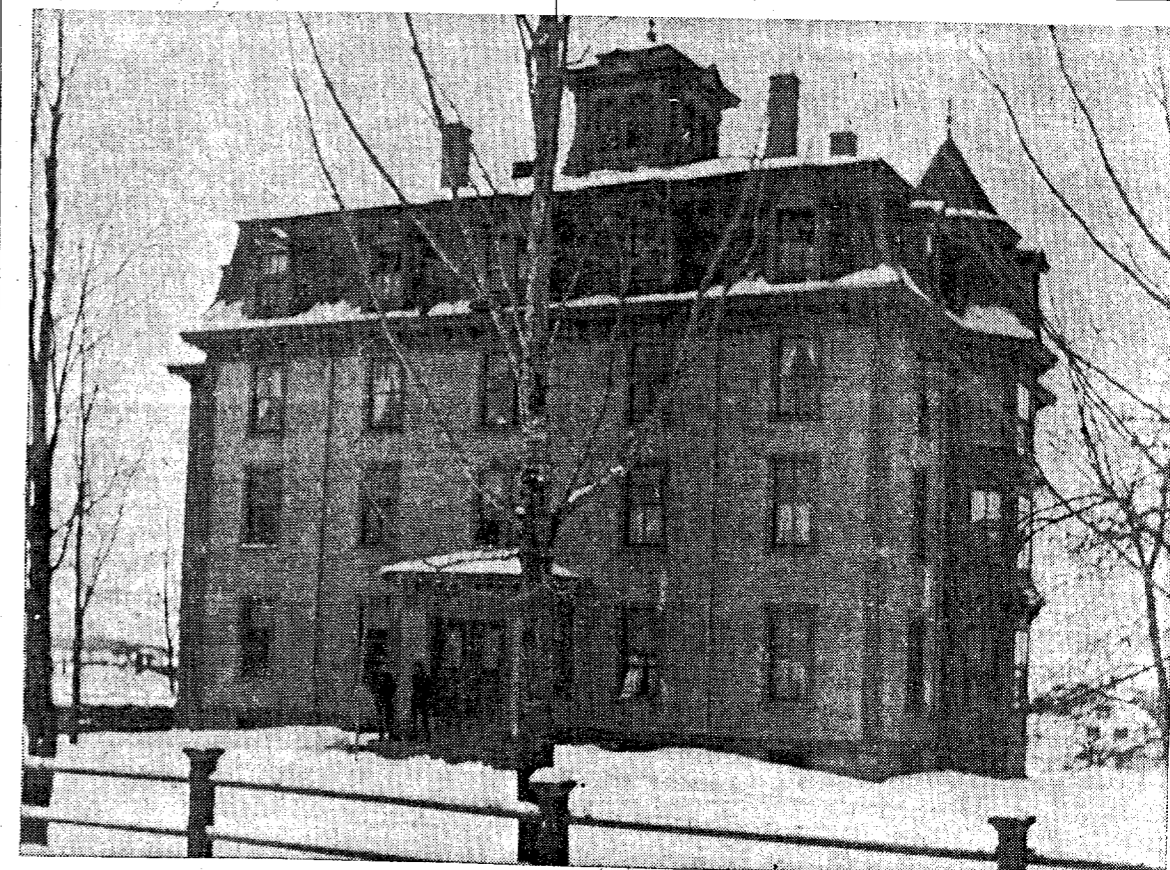
Musselman of Belfast; Dr. J. W. Beede and wife, of Lewiston, Rev. Sewall Brown and wife of Old Town, and others.

## ADDRESS OF WELCOME

Hon. John B. Madigan, then

names of Frank Allen Peabody who delivered an oration entitled "Common Laborers" and Charles Putnam Barnes whose oration bore the title, "The State of Maine".

## Its Service to Ricker Began In 1870



This picture of the present Ricker dormitory was taken near the turn of the century, yet the building looks exactly as it does today. This building was the second structure built to house Ricker students. It was moved back to its present site in 1887 to make room for the first Wording Hall. The building it replaced still stands opposite the entrance of High street, where it is used as an apartment house.

So he continued his efforts to interest others in becoming benefactors of Ricker. Another classmate of Dr. Ricker and Justice Dickerson at Colby had been a William E. Wording, a native of Castine who had migrated west to North Dakota where he had risen to a position of eminence as a lawyer and later as a judge. He died in 1886 while Ricker Classical Institute was meeting and surviving its gravest crisis up to that time.

## WISHED TO AID EDUCATION

During his lifetime Judge Wording had often expressed the wish that much of his property and worldly goods might be used to aid worthy educational institutions. Following his death, it was only natural that his widow, Mrs.

chairman of the board of trustees, gave the address of welcome. He made it clear that all denominations are interested in the success of this institution and rejoice in the advantages afforded the youth of our county in this and kindred schools. He declared that "Its work is as important as the university since it lays the foundation of education". He expressed regret at being obliged to give up the name of Houlton Academy but "judging from past management and the improvements and advancements constantly being made, Ricker Classical Institute is destined to take high rank as a fitting school."

In closing, Mr. Madigan pointed out that "The welfare and prosperity of schools go hand and hand with that of the people."

According to a report of the event written at the time, it was "the crowning joy of Mrs. Wording's life that she was able to erect this memorial, to see it completed and then, again, in the spring of 1889, to return to Houlton and see the fitted and finished building in use and make her last gift of Judge Wording's picture, his college diploma and other precious mementoes of her home and family".

The second building to house the classrooms of the school, which had been built in 1870, had been moved to the southern end of the campus where it still stands. For many years it was the only dormitory in connection with the school. There also were dining room facilities in the basement.