

## The Howe School

Howe came to Billerica in the fall of 1816 having already proved himself a great physician. He was known to be conscientious, dedicated and inventive. He created many of his own medical tools and it was due to his ingenuity that many owed their lives. He was a prolific writer of articles and addresses on medicine and its practice and he was President of the Massachusetts Medical Society. He was known for his in-depth research into things he considered health issues. He was a century before the times when he began his research into tobacco use and its implications on your health and life expectancy. He had a curious mind and a love of knowledge.

Doctor Zadock Howe's impact on Billerica was more than just the many lives he treated or saved. His greatest impact was to the community as a whole. From the moment of his arrival Billerica and its residents immediately earned Howe's love and devotion. He quickly became involved in social, civic and religious affairs. He was a Mason and participated in their many local philanthropic causes and was an active member and participant at the First Parish Church.

With a deep rooted interest in education and learning he became one of the first trustees, and later the Secretary, of the Billerica Academy that opened in 1820. The Academy struggled financially for the next 15 - 20 years until it finally closed completely. Between then and 1852 the only chance at a secondary education for a student in Billerica was at a private school.

With first-hand knowledge of what happens to a school without a solid financial footing, Howe began his plan to assure that Billerica would have a school with certain permanency. In 1846 Howe purchased a one-acre lot from Ichabod Everett on Boston Road just north of the common. He chose this central location not only because it gave equal access but because it was his dream that the school built would be an ornament to the village.

Zadok Howe, Jr. died March 8, 1851. In his will, he set forth his very specific ideas for the educational institute and building he had in mind. He left instructions for a Board of Trustees to "build upon the Everett lot a suitable building for an academy for the education of youth to be kept and maintained upon said land forever." His will further states that the building should be made of brick and that the roof should be made of slate. Howe was determined and thorough in his planning. In a separate letter Howe made suggestions on where to look for guidance on building the best school structure to ensure the best education.

Howe suggested the names of the men for his building committee and Trustees. He wanted people with deep connections and love of the town. The list reads like a who's who in Billerica history. Names like Odiorne, Faulkner, Parker, Talbot, Foster, Whitman, and more. Many of these names and families still remain in town. Architect Daniel G. Bean of Lowell was chosen to design the Howe School. Greek revival architecture was popular during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Howe School is one of the finer examples of it. While many were built, not many remain with the features the Howe offers – two plus stories, constructed of brick with a

slate roof, decorative dentils, arched and hooded windows, and raised brick arch over the 3<sup>rd</sup> story (or attic) window.

Early educational reform recognized the importance of a building's architecture on the learning process. The Howe was intentionally designed as a school to accommodate students and teachers in such a way as to promote the best education possible. A lot of study and research went into which features, floor plans, and technologies would provide the best learning environment. They learned that to keep a child involved in studying they must have pure, fresh air all year long. To this end, features like large windows that opened were included and the "new" Frederick Emerson ventilation system that used two ventilators, an ejector and an injector, appears to have been installed. Even without the impact that Howe the doctor and Howe the school had on Billerica history, this structure alone is historically significant.

The Howe School opened in 1852 and has served Billerica well ever since. It was an academy planned for the education required for young people prepping for college. It was intended to be free and available to all but by 1872 it had grown so as to require a small tuition. In 1891 the State legislature deemed that all towns of a certain size must provide a free high school. The Howe could count for Billerica if it did away with the small tuition which it did. The direction of the school remained in the hands of the Trustees until 1897 at which time it became Howe High School. Although the Trustees were still active, the building became part of the Town of Billerica. Eventually, the Town required larger accommodations and Howe High School moved across the street. However, the "old" Howe School continued to serve the Town. It has been used as classroom space, held the Superintendent's offices, and even served as the Food Pantry.

Graduates of the Howe School came from Billerica and many other towns throughout the state. These students went on to become respected citizens and accomplished professionals. Billerica's alumni include the names of Kohlraush, Parker, Faulkner, Talbot, Page, Bowman and so many others that have left their impact. These students are the ancestors of many in our current population. However, even those new to town continue to benefit from the impact of Howe's belief that a good education is the foundation of a man and society. At the dedication of the Howe School on May 31, 1852, George Whitman implored those present, "May you and your successors exalt this seminary of learning to the highest rank."

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