

The one-room schoolhouses of *Lewis*

Words and pictures by Lee Manchester
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With the fall leaves coming into their full color, you may feel like taking a drive this weekend down the back roads of Essex County. If you do, we have a suggestion: Combine your “leaf

peeper” expedition with a driving tour of Lewis township’s seven surviving one-room schoolhouses.

Local historian Marilyn Cross documented all of Lewis’s old

“common school districts” more than a decade ago in her booklet, “Lewis Schools, 1814-1988.” To Cross’s research we’ve added a few details drawn from our own trip through Lewis last week and a couple of tours through the deed books in Essex County Clerk’s office in Elizabethtown.

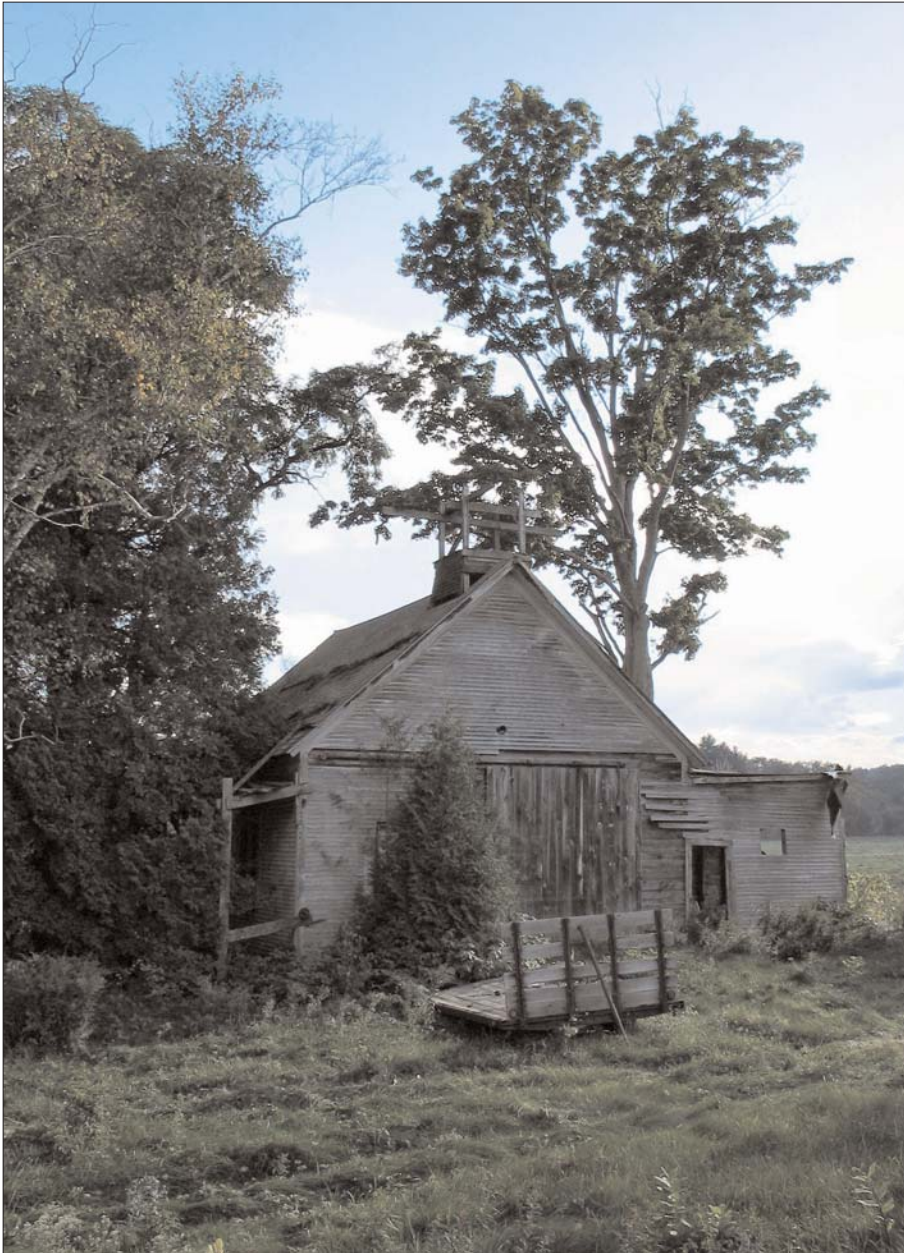
Travel directions

Before we get into the tour itself, let’s lay out the directions so you’ll know where you’re going. (A map of Essex County would come in handy just about now.)

1) From Elizabethtown, take



Brainard's Forge Schoolhouse



French Schoolhouse

state Route 9 north to county Route 8 (Elizabethtown-Wadhams Road); turn RIGHT — go to the first intersection at Brainard's Forge Road — the Brainard's Forge Schoolhouse, now a private home, stands on the southeast corner.

2) At that same intersection, make a LEFT (north) onto Lee Bridge Road — at Steele Woods Road, turn RIGHT — at Lewis-Wadhams Road, turn RIGHT —

the French Schoolhouse is the building standing by itself directly across from where Alden Road T's into Lewis-Wadhams Road.

3) Turn around and come back on Lewis-Wadhams Road, past Steele Woods Road, to the intersection of Hyde Road (going RIGHT, or east) and Redmond Road (going STRAIGHT, or north) (Lewis-Wadhams Road continues, but veers to the LEFT). The Livingstone

Schoolhouse stands on the north-east corner of this intersection.

4) Go north on Redmond Road, which turns into Dixon Road before it T's into Stowersville Road, where you turn RIGHT — go under the freeway and take the first LEFT (north) onto Moss Road — the Stowersville School stands on the left side of the road just a short ways up, immediately after the Floyds' mailbox and tiny cow yard.

5) Continue on Moss Road, and follow it as it curves to the right and left again, becoming Crowningshield Road, until it T's into Deerhead-Reber Road, where you will turn LEFT (west) — pass under the freeway, and continue to the intersection with Route 9 — the former Deerhead Schoolhouse stands on the north-west corner.

6) Go north on Route 9 to the next intersection at Trout Pond Road (it may not be marked; look for a sign to a Jewish youth camp), turn LEFT — the former Wisley Schoolhouse is on your right, about half a mile up the road, immediately before the small bridge crossing the North Branch of the Boquet River.

7) Turn around, come back down Trout Pond Road, turn RIGHT (south) onto Route 9, and head to our last stop, past the Lewis-Wadhams Road and the Essex County landfill to the former Steele School, on your right, directly across from where the Ray Woods Road T's into Route 9. To return to Lake Placid, continue south on Route 9 into Elizabethtown.



Livingstone Schoolhouse, Lewis's "Little Red Schoolhouse"

1. Brainard's Forge School

The first stop on our tour is the Brainard's Forge Schoolhouse, today the home of John and Meredith King. Though refurbished as a family dwelling, the main building is still easily recognizable as a former one-room schoolhouse. A schoolbell still hangs in the belfry.

Though the Brainard's Forge Schoolhouse was located just over the township line, in Elizabethtown, it served many Lewis families for well over a century. Classes were probably held in this school district as early as 1822, but the property for the

Brainard's Forge Schoolhouse was given to the district on Sept. 8, 1827, by John and Jemima Daniels.

According to Marilyn Cross, classes ended at Brainard's Forge in 1948, but it was not until Nov. 22, 1949, that district voters made the decision final to close down the school. The building apparently sat vacant for more than 15 years until the central school district sold it in May 1965 to Hubert and Phyllis Karcher.

2. French Schoolhouse

Our next stop is another old schoolhouse that served Lewis

youngsters but was located just a few steps across the Lewis township line, this time in Essex township.

The French Schoolhouse, converted in later years for use as a barn, displays the same lines and the same belfry as the nearby Brainard's Forge School. It has lapsed into disuse and stands alone, forlorn-looking, tall trees demarking the former schoolyard from the surrounding fields of the Vernon Alden Pierce farm.

Pierce and wife Nancy Boyle Pierce acquired the French Schoolhouse building in November 1971 from Gertrude



Stowersville Schoolhouse

French, to whose family the property had reverted when the school was closed in 1947. The lot is described in the Pierce deed as "...about 1/3d acre heretofore conveyed by Daniel S. & Mary French, of Lewis, to Clayton Sayre, ... trustee of School District No. 7, town of Essex."

According to Marilyn Cross, the French School District was one of the first to serve Lewis township, starting instruction in 1814. The former schoolhouse at

the intersection of Alden Road was the last in a series that served the district, finally closing in February 1947.

3. Livingstone Schoolhouse

Our third stop is at Lewis's Little Red Schoolhouse, the Livingstone School, now the summer retreat of a couple with Lewis roots who live in Virginia. Probably the best preserved of Lewis's schoolhouse, Marilyn Cross wrote that "it is a pleasure

to drive past this school house and see a part of history in our town so well preserved."

According to Cross, classes were held in the Livingstone School district as early as 1814, though we were unable to determine the date when the present schoolhouse was built. The 1948 deed to the lot and building says only that "the same ... has been used for district school purposes for many years last past."

District voters officially closed the school on May 27, 1948. Two months later the central school board sold the property to Ivan and Judith Galamian, who 4 years earlier had founded the world-famous Meadowmount School of Music at the nearby Milholland estate.

The Galamians held on to the Little Red Schoolhouse for 36 years, selling it to Alberta Coonrod West in May 1984. The current owners, Curtis and Alice West, inherited it from Alberta in 1997.

4. Stowersville Schoolhouse

You'll know when you're almost to our next stop when you reach neighbor Carl Floyd's place. Floyd keeps a couple of dairy cows in the shade of the trees covering the former Stowersville Schoolhouse yard, next door. A hand-painted sign nailed to a tree behind Floyd's mailbox advertises "Nice Clean Smelt."

The common-school district served by the Stowersville School started operating in 1830, but in 1910 the old building on Stowersville Road was condemned, according to Marilyn



Deerhead Schoolhouse

Cross, and a new school was erected at the top of the hill on nearby Moss Road. The land for the new school had been given to the district by Merton and Inez Thrall in February 1907. According to Cross, the white school building originally had green trim, not the brown seen today.

Classes ceased at the Stowersville School in 1946. The building was owned by a series of local families until early 1996, when it was bought by a California man. Today the property is in decline, the yard overgrown, the building in need of some maintenance, but probably looking more as it did in the old schoolhouse days than any of the other six Lewis schoolhouses still standing.

5. Deerhead Schoolhouse

Our fifth stop, back out on Route 9, has sprouted extensions to the side and rear, and a double dormer has pushed the attic roof upward, but the old Deerhead Schoolhouse is still recognizable

within the private home into which it has metamorphosed.

According to Marilyn Cross, the Deerhead School district

started in 1814. The land where the present building stands was given to the district on Dec. 15, 1841, by Essex industrialists Harmon and Belden Noble, but the deed indicates that a schoolhouse was already there.

Though Cross says classes at the Deerhead School ended in 1948, the official vote to close the school was not taken until March 11, 1965. The following month the school board sold the property to Cecil and Alda Buse. It passed from them through the hands of Humberto and Amelia Tirado before being purchased in 1976 by Arthur and Blanche Cross. Blanche still holds the title to the house at Deerhead Corner.



Wisley Schoolhouse



Steele Schoolhouse

6. Wrisley Schoolhouse

Our next to the last stop is one of the most remote of the surviving Lewis schoolhouses: the Wrisley School — or, rather, the house that has been built over the last decade around the former Wrisley School.

Established in 1847, according to Cross, the Wrisley School had 54 students enrolled in 1882, but only 7 in 1910. Eight years later, in 1918, the school was closed and the remaining students were bussed to the Deerhead School.

A deed search of the property where the former schoolhouse still stands found no mention of the Wrisley School, but a 1993

photo in Cross's book shows the small building that now forms the front of the current house, clearly identified, standing by itself.

The current owner, a Ballston Lake woman who purchased the property in 1989, has built a substantial summer home on the Boquet River's North Branch from the tiny seed of the old Wrisley School, which can still be identified within the larger structure.

7. Steele Schoolhouse

Our final stop, back on Route 9 on the way back toward Elizabethtown, is the former Steele Schoolhouse, today a pri-

vate home with an addition to one side.

Established in 1840, according to Cross, by 1934 it had just two students, and the decision was made to bus them to E'town. The official vote closing the school did not come, however, until Aug. 31, 1939.

The building remained vacant until late in the summer of 1944, when it was bought by Edmund and Frances Burlow, whose home on the Cutting Road had recently burned. The Burlows later sold the Steele School building to Raymond and Helen MacDougal, from whom the current owner acquired it in 1994.