

## Wells River Graded School

**Site:** V16-2

**Municipality:** Newbury, VT

**Location:** Main Street (Route 5),  
Wells River

**Site Type:** School (former)

**Vt Survey No:** --

**UTMs:** (Zone 18) E: 736275. N:  
4892750

### ***National Register Nomination Information:***

#### **DESCRIPTION:**

Located in the village of Wells River on the east side of U.S. Route 5 approximately one-quarter of a mile south of the intersection of U.S. Route 5 and Vermont Route 302, the former Wells River Graded School is set approximately one hundred and fifteen feet back from the road on the brow of a small marshy ravine. The level grade in front of the school, presently used as a parking lot, drops away to the rear of the building exposing the rear half of the basement story. The grade continues to drop away behind the school into the marshy ravine which abuts directly on the west embankment of the main tracks of the Boston and Maine Railroad.

The school is a rectangular, one-story building with a full basement story and a full attic story behind a mansard roof. The building measures approximately 62 by 48 feet across the east and west, and the north and south elevations respectively and is oriented toward the road, U.S. Route 5, with its west (front) elevation facing the road. A one-story, mansard-roofed pavilion measuring approximately 10-1/2 feet across and supporting a pyramid-roofed cupola projecting approximately 10-1/2 feet from the center of the west (front) elevation.

The exterior walls of the building, including the basement walls and the foundation, are of brick load bearing construction laid in common American bond. The roof is of wood frame construction covered with slate on the mansard and a composite roofing material on the shallow, double hip roof above the mansard. The walls of the first story are visually separated from the basement by a rock-faced, granite water table with margined edges. While the brick construction of the basement story is left exposed on the north, east, and south elevations, on the west (front) elevation the brick is faced with margin-edged, rock-faced granite laid in a regular ashlar pattern. The granite facing returns the northwest and southwest corners of the building in the form of staggered quoins.

The outside corners of the building are detailed with justified brick quoins which visually support a continuous brick frieze. Between the quoins the frieze is supported by a row of individual brick corbels. All of the architectural detailing on the roof is constructed out of wood. The dentilated mansard roof cornice overhangs the walls approximately 1-1/2 feet and is supported by series of roof brackets constructed out of built-up components. The brackets are paired on the inside and outside corners of the building and beneath the outside edges of the dormers but occur individually beneath the outside edges of the chimney stacks. A continuous architrave molding connects the bottoms of the brackets and visually define the bottom of the brick frieze which is not covered but is allowed to read through.

A second roof cornice marks the break between the mansard and the hip roof directly above. The frieze board on this cornice and the corner boards on the mansard are decorated with applied edge moldings and circles.

The slate roofing on the mansard is grey in color with two decorative bands in red through the center. The lower band is cut in an imbricated pattern and the upper band in a diamond pattern.

The mansard is punctuated on each elevation by a series of dormers. Each dormer, whether with an individual window or with a pair of windows, has a gable roof with an enclosed pediment and a dentilated cornice. The pedimented gable on the dormer with paired windows is narrower than the width of the dormer and has extended, flattened ends. Each window opening is framed by a stilted flat arch with round corners supported by pilasters in a stylized Tuscan Order. Identical pilasters flank the sides of each dormer and support a frieze scroll beneath the dentilated cornice which steps out and around to accommodate the scroll. The bottoms of these side pilasters are visually supported by stylized buttresses.

The front (west) elevation of the school is 5-bays across with the projecting pavilion occupying the center bay. An entrance with double doors and a transom light is located on either side of the pavilion. The entrances are protected by a raised, wood frame, mansard-roofed porch supported by one square column and two matching pilasters, each mounted on a pedestal with a stylized cushion capital supporting a fluted block. Each porch is reached by a closed flight of four steps and has a solid wainscot railing of beaded tongue-and-groove. A gable-roofed canopy supported by iron pipes projects out from each entrance porch over the steps. The canopies are later additions of undocumented date.

Between each entrance and the outside corner of the building is a single window. A close-set pair of narrow windows is located in the front elevation of the pavilion. All of the lintels on this elevation are flat-arched and are constructed out of radiating granite voussoirs. The impost blocks are smooth-faced and extend up and out on an angle to double as voussoirs while the bottoms step down and in on an angle along the side of the window opening. The voussoirs directly over the window opening are rock-faced with margined edges and are flat across the top except for those above the pavilion windows which are segmentally arched.

The window sills on this elevation are smooth-faced granite supported on corbeled granite blocks. The brick is recessed in the form of a double panel beneath each window opening. A smooth-faced granite date plaque bearing the raised inscription, "Erected 1874", is located above the paired windows on the pavilion.

The mansard roof on the front (west) elevation is punctuated by a single dormer window on either side of the pavilion and by a dormer with paired windows on the front elevation of the pavilion. The mansard on the pavilion maintains a continuous cornice line with the cornice on the main block of the building but projects approximately 12 feet above the height of the mansard on the main block. To visually accommodate the increased height, the pavilion dormer is mounted on a pedimented gable which breaks the line of the cymatium.

The mansard on the pavilion is surmounted by a slate-covered gable roof which is fenced off behind decorative cast and wrought iron fretwork. The ridge of the gable runs north and south and is decorated with a scroll-sawn ridge board. The gable roof supports the round-arched, paneled base of a square, open cupola with a slate-covered pyramid roof. The roof is mounted on stilted flat arches with

round corners supported by four square columns with capitals in a stylized Corinthian Order. A blind gables projects from each face of the roof.

The slate roofing on both the gable and the pyramid roofs is grey in color with decorative bands in red cut in imbricated and diamond patterns. In the imbricated band directly below the gablets on the pyramid roof the red color is limited to two circles on each face.

The north and south (side) elevations are mirror images of each other. Each elevation is four bays across, the three windows nearest the east (rear) elevation being closely grouped. On the basement story, a window is located directly underneath each window on the first story, except for an entrance with a single door and a transom light which takes the place of the window on the south elevation nearest the east (rear) elevation.

The granite water table forms the lintels of the basement windows. The sills of the basement windows and the lintels of the first floor windows are rock-faced granite with margined edges. The sills of the first floor windows are smooth-faced granite supported on corbeled granite blocks.

A single dormer window is located directly above the single window on each elevation nearest the west (front) elevation. A dormer with paired windows is centered above the group of three close-set windows on each elevation. A decoratively paneled and banded brick chimney stack with a corbeled cap and a stamped tin ventilator breaks through the slope of the mansard between the dormers. A second brick chimney stack of later date, also with a stamped tin ventilator, is located the dormer with the paired windows and the east (rear) corner.

The east (rear) elevation is four bays across with a single dormer located directly above each window on the first floor and a decoratively paneled and banded brick chimney stack with a corbeled cap located between the center dormers. The architectural detailing is identical to that on the north and south (side) elevations.

In plan, the first floor of the school consists of one large, almost square classroom in both the northeast and southeast corners. A separate stair hall with an open well, double flight stair is located in front of each classroom in the northwest and southwest corners. The entrances on the west (front) elevation open directly into these halls.

The wainscoting and the stair railing are narrow, beaded tongue-and-groove. The ceilings in the classrooms are covered in decorative stamped tin and are supported in the center by one square wood column similar in design to those supporting the entrance porches. The doors throughout the building are paneled with applied moldings. All of the windows, except for those on the basement story of the north and south elevations, are 4/4 double hung sash. A late nineteenth century spring-activated closer is attached to the right hand door of the entrance on the west elevation to the south of the projecting pavilion.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Wells River Graded School is significant as an outstanding example of French Second Empire style architecture. Architecturally, the school is one of

the best examples of the style extant in the State of Vermont and is one of two prominent public landmarks within the village of Wells River.

The school was erected in 1874 and cost \$15,000. The granite for the building was quarried and cut by Douglas Robins on his land on Blue Mountain, Ryegate, Vermont.

The names of the architect and the builder are not documented. Stylistically, however, there is a likely possibility that the architect was Lambert Packard, locally renowned architect working out of St. Johnsbury, Vermont. (For a preview of Lambert Packard's work, refer to the National Register nominations for the St. Johnsbury Main Street Historic District and for the Bradford Village Historic District.)

The school has recently been purchased by Eugene and Harold Puffer of Randolph, Vermont, and it is scheduled for adaptive reuse as a radio facility and a possible community activities center. National Register status will be instrumental in implementing the complete restoration and preservation of the building.

### **MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Material collected by Lillias Warren and located in the Baldwin Memorial Library, Wells River; Newbury, Vermont.

Material reviewed in a personal interview with Lillias Warren on 9 April 1976.

**FORM PREPARED BY:** Courtney Fisher, Preservationist, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Pavilion Building, Montpelier, VT 05602. Tel: 802-828-3226. Date: April 20, 1976.

**DATE ENTERED:** September 3, 1976.  
(Source 127)

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