

Brief Old Academy History

In 1802, Fairfield resident **Eunice Dennie Burr**, widow of patriot Thaddeus Burr, along with 42 others, founded the Fairfield Academy so that their sons could enter Yale to become ministers, merchants, and sea captains and their daughters could receive a classical education. They bought shares at a cost of \$5 each. The tuition for students, typically aged 10 to 16, was \$4.50 for 12-week session. The bell ringer's tuition was discounted. Students who brought in the most firewood were allowed to sit closer to the fireplaces. Boys and girls had separate recesses, stairs, and cloakrooms. During the time period portrayed here – the early 1840s – the school day lasted from 9:00AM until noon, then 1:00PM until sunset. There were 2-week vacations in April and October. Some students came from as far away as New York and boarded with citizens of the town. The Academy ceased to exist around 1884, and was repurposed. Slated for demolition in 1920, our DAR Chapter saved it and has had full use of it since

Curriculum

In the 1840s, as well as during other decades, the focus of the curriculum at the Fairfield Academy was the classics. Additionally, English, grammar, spelling, Latin and Greek, the sciences, history, geography, and the higher mathematics were taught. The studies at the Academy were to prepare the male students to enter Yale College to become ministers, merchants, and sea captains. Female students were groomed to be the educated wives of these men, and studied various kinds of needlework. Please note that, while there are quill pens available for writing, which was an important although tedious skill, slates were more frequently used during the school day. The quills were usually pulled from a goose. Only the teacher could sharpen pens and mend them with a penknife. Ink was a mixture of iron salt and an extract of tannin. In the 1850's children made their own ink from powders, berries, and dyes.

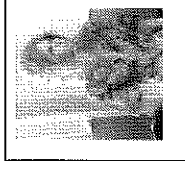
The Teacher

Joseph Augustine Benton is wearing a suit fashioned after those of the 1840s. He had the school about one year. While the valedictorian of his class (Yale, 1842), he was not a success as a teacher, being unable to control the boys. It was during the time that the boys, on a Saturday, gathered up the button balls from the great buttonwood tree that stood near the Academy by the corner of Mr. Jones' fence and, holding the balls by their long stems, hurled them through the rear windows, making a smooth, round hole. The trustees were very upset by this and one, Judge Sherman, read them the Statute Law of the State, inflicting fine and imprisonment on those guilty of such a crime. Seven years later, **Mr. Benton** founded the Pioneer Congregational Church in Sacramento, CA. He was also a Professor of Theology in the Pacific Seminary. He died in 1892. We have a photo of him on display, as well as a few of his books and sermons.

The Female Student

Our young lady is quite the scholar! At the age of 13, **Cecelia** is less interested in the feminine studies of needlework and more concerned with literature and the sciences. **Cecelia** believes that girls are every bit as smart as boys, and is not afraid to show it. Standing with the teacher, Mr. Benton, she is engaged in a bit of argument about grammar. Her wool dress is an actual dress made in the 1840s. As this is before the period of hoops and cages, her petticoat is a corded one. **Cecelia** is also wearing knee-length bloomers and a camisole, although she will probably start to wear a corset very soon. Black flats complete her outfit.

Her hair is of the period: parted down the middle with ringlets at each side and the rest pulled back in a bun. While not yet interested in boys, **Cecelia** has caught the eye of Ephraim, seated at the rear.



Our Young Female Student

We have named our 10-year-old student **Hattie** – short for **Harriet**. She is a bit of a mischief-maker! You may notice that she sports bangs: not a hairstyle that young girls or women wore during the 1840s. The story behind it is the following. One day, as she was doing her handiwork, she grew frustrated as her hair kept falling in front of her eyes. After a few attempts at pushing her locks back, she impulsively grabbed her scissors and snipped off the offending curls right above her eyebrows! Then she continued right on with her work with a soft giggle. Her mother was not pleased when she returned home from school that day! **Hattie** wears a bonnet often now, as it helps keep the rest of her hair under control. She enjoys learning to do cross-stitching, quilting, beading, and crocheting. **Hattie's** dress is representative of the 1840s. Ankle-length bloomers, a petticoat, and black Flats complete her outfit.



The Male Student

Our young man, named **Ephraim**, is near the end of his days as a student at the Fairfield Academy. At the age of 16, he is almost ready to move on to Yale College, to prepare to become a ship captain someday! At the Academy, he has been fairly successful in his academic pursuits, but is more interested in hands-on learning. Here, he is attempting to tie some knots while looking at the picture he has drawn, with a quill pen, of a variety of knots. **Ephraim** is also hoping to impress a certain young lady who, at the moment, is more interested in her studies than in boys! While dressed neatly, he is not as affluent as some of the other students in attendance, so wears simple clothing of the period. He is seated on the left side of the classroom with the other male students and, because of his large size, near the back of the room.



Display Case #1: What Was Studied

In this display case are some examples of period books, which are notably quite small in size and print. Considering that only the light coming in through the large windows was available to illuminate the classroom. A female teacher was hired in 1831 to teach needlework. Note the sampler from 1834 – it is not a finished product as it was done by an eleven year old girl. The beaded purse was typical of needlework of the time. It has a mourning theme – lamenting the death of George Washington. The wooden skate is for the pond behind the school. This is the same pond in which witches were dunked in the late 17th century. Skates were strapped onto the child's boot. A shinny stick is also displayed. Shinny is a game of "pond hockey" played on ice. Music was probably taught along with reading, writing, arithmetic, and Latin. Lessons were often by rote.

Display Case #2: Artifacts

Eunice Dennie Burr's bible and other belongings are displayed here. **BIBLE** - authorized King James Version printed in Cambridge, England in 1769. Once owned by Eunice Dennie Burr (1732-1805). The Bible is inscribed with her name. Eunice was first an Episcopalian but changed to the First Congregation Church when she married Thaddeus Burr in 1759. **EMBROIDERED CHAIR SEAT COVER** - made by Eunice – design is called "corded work." Probably used for a bedroom chair. **MUSKET BALL** - War of 1812 – taken from the Old Powder House behind Tomlinson School in 1863. **CANNON BALL 1776-1783** - Came from a house on Beach Road – fired during the Revolution but it was friendly fire being shot from Grover's Hill in Black Rock making a hole in the floor. **SILVER SHOE BUCKLES** - Made in England 1761-1795 - worn on men's shoes. **EYEGLASSES** – Several samples from several periods.

The Library

Morris W. Lyon, one of the Academy's esteemed teachers, created the first Fairfield Memorial Library on the first floor of the Old Academy on December 27, 1876. For a fee of \$1, according to the library by-laws, any patron could borrow one book at a time during library hours: Wednesday and Saturday evenings from 7 to 9. The library owned 677 volumes. We are continuing in this tradition by including a library in a corner of our schoolroom. This library includes books from the era of the Fairfield Academy, as well as reproduction books for both children and adults. Our hope is that the public will visit our library and peruse some of its texts during our many Open Houses throughout the year. Our CAR (Children of the American Revolution) Chapter will also access these resources.

The Architecture of the Academy

The Academy is a fine example of federal or neo classical architecture. It is listed by the Historic Buildings Survey of the Department of the Interior. The building was originally on the Old Post Road next to the town jail. Facing demolition in 1920, the Eunice Dennie Burr Chapter of the DAR, several of whose members had attended the Academy, was determined to save the building. After a spirited campaign, the Academy was restored, and a kitchen and lavatory were added. In 1958 when St. Paul's Church expanded, the Academy was moved to its present site. In 1976 the DAR created the 19th century schoolroom museum on the second floor and commissioned the desks. In 2014, the schoolroom museum was repainted and renovated to include four mannequins, in period dress, to help our Academy visitors better visualize an 1840s-era classroom and the learning and activities that took place within its four walls. Over 3,000 children tour the schoolroom each year.

Items Around the Room

The 15 star and 15 stripe flag in our classroom is the flag that inspired the Star Spangled Banner. The Eagle Map of the United States was made in 1833, when there were only 24 states; by 1845, there were 27. The world map was made in Philadelphia in 1846. President George Washington is the subject of the engraving at the front of the classroom. It was made in 1839 from a painting by a French painter. Washington's head was copied from a famous Gilbert Stuart painting in Boston Fine Arts Museum. The piano is from a slightly later period than depicted here. Music was probably taught along with the other subjects, most likely patriotic and Christian songs. The teacher's desk was made in the late 19th century and was from Dwight School, Greenfield Hill. This is the desk on which President Ronald Regan signed the Wildlife Refuge Bill on October 26, 1984 in the Fairfield Town Hall. A footstove is available for warmth; a candle douter, or do-outer, is on the mantle to put out the flame.

The Powder House Display

This is the only one in Connecticut, built in 1814 for the War of 1812-1815. A plaque put on the building in 1900 by our Chapter. The Powder House has been restored, at the instigation of the DAR. The most recent restoration project has been cited by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution with the Historic Preservation Award. Fairfield's DAR chapter placed first in Connecticut and New England and third nationally for the honor. (2010) The Historic Preservation Award is given to DAR chapters involved in preserving a historic site, landmark or property. The Eunice Dennie Burr chapter's entry, restoration of the "War of 1812 Powder House," was judged on historical significance, as well as the scope and impact the project will have on the educational benefits and opportunities. The DAR is applying to put the powder house on the state's historic registration for historic places so they can apply for national recognition in the future. (Located behind Tomlinson School on Unauowa Rd.)