

'If you knew Susie, like I knew Susie...'

July 3, 1986

As the song writer noted:
"If you knew Susie like I knew Susie..."
you would appreciate what a dedicated educator she was.

We're speaking of "Susie" McFarlin — Miss Susan S. McFarlin — dean of Chelmsford's school of teachers.

Who was this outstanding woman whose name has been memorialized by a street (McFarlin Road), a school (the former McFarlin School on Wilson Street), a senior housing complex (McFarlin Manor), and a chapel (the Susan S. McFarlin Chapel of the First Parish Church)?

Born in Lowell in December, 1858, she lived in Dracut for a few years before her family moved to Chelmsford in 1864. After receiving her early education in the Chelmsford schools, she went on to graduate from the State Teachers College at Framingham. She taught in Littleton for a few months as a substitute before beginning what was to become a lifetime career educating the youth of her home town.

Superintendent of Schools Rev. J.J. Twiss (who was also the minister of the First Parish Church) hired the new graduate to be the one teacher at the school in East

The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



This schoolhouse, built in the early 1850's, had been enlarged about 20 years later to provide rooms for the high school. With the opening of the new high school on Billerica Road (now the Town Office Building) in 1917, the elementary grades expanded into the vacated rooms.

Miss McFarlin served as principal as well as teacher in later years. When the school on Wilson Street was opened in the fall of 1926, she continued as eighth-grade teacher and principal for three years until her retirement in 1929. She was then 70 years old and had been a member of the Chelmsford school system for 50 years.

Shortly after her retirement, the School Committee proposed that the school on Wilson Street be named in her honor.

It was in 1867 that the McFarlin family moved into the white house at 184 Riverneck Rd. and Miss McFarlin made this her

She is fondly remembered by her former pupils now living but her no-nonsense approach to education and her strict discipline were not always appreciated by her students.

When her pupils entered her room, they knew they were there for business and no fooling would be allowed. As principal, she was the school disciplinarian. If one of her students became unruly, she would take "the stick" from her desk drawer and apply it vigorously to the palm of the outstretched hand of the culprit. When other teachers were faced with a disciplinary problem, the recalcitrant would be sent to Miss McFarlin to ask for "the stick."

The report of the Superintendent of Schools in 1929 paid just tribute to this remarkable woman:

"From her first year's work (1879) to the year completed last June it has been the consensus of opinion of pupils and parents, of school committees and superintendents, of her fellow teachers and the general public that she continuously reached unusually high standards both in teaching and in administration. She was transferred to the Grammar School at the Center in 1893 and later was made principal of the school.

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