

1896: 15 seniors was too big a class for WA

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
Sun Correspondent

WESTFORD - The year 1897 was a busy one for the school committee, for not only was the new Academy building (now the Roudenbush Center) about to open in the fall, but there were many other matters of importance under discussion, such as consolidation of the grade schools in the outlying district and pupil transportation.

The original Academy Building at the head of the Common, as a home for education, was closed after the Class of 1896 graduated. Exercises, as usual, were held in the First Parish Church where an organ was available. There were eight boys and seven girls in the class.

Last spring the Academy, now on Patten Road, graduated 241. Principal Joseph Lisi anticipates some 235 will receive diplomas this June from the 102-year-old institution.

The week before the 1896 graduation, 18 youngsters performed for their parents and friends in eighth-grade exercises. When fall came, the new batch of eighth-graders would be entering the new Academy building for their lessons, as the schoolhouse on Boston Road (now the Tadmuck Club) was overcrowded.

The six-member school committee, in commenting upon the opening of the new school building, had this to say:

"The new Academy building has been completed, and the high school and eighth grade have been working (studying) there since September 1897.

"The change from the old building is a very marked one, and while those now attending in the new, commodious (three-room) building are congratulating themselves on the advance, let all recall the great results and advantage Westford has had for over 100 years in a high-grade school for her use - a lasting evidence of wisdom of early citizens and their interest in education."

Consolidate and save

The committee reported there was a growing demand for consolidation of schools, for economy and better education. At that time, the long-sought school had eight pupils in five grades; at Minot's Corner, 12 pupils in six grades.

And for pupil transportation, among the many reasons given were that wet feet and clothing and colds could be avoided. Also, there would be "no quarreling, improper language or improper conduct on the way to and from school."

There were 11 district elementary schools involved in a consolidation, but Committee-man Alfred Woodbury voted in the negative for both consolidation and transportation.

The committee did agree unanimously, however, when they asked that a cellar be dug at the Forge Village school and "the heater and fuel placed in it. The saving in fuel borrowed (stolen?) will pay the interest on cost of expenditure."

They sure were trying to keep expenses down, even in those days!