

Academy graduated nine a century ago

By Gordon B. Seavey

A senior at Westford Academy, about to graduate with 229 others in June, noted how the Academy, as well as the town, had grown in numbers over the years. Indeed it has

I turned to old records of the Academy, then a private school (there was no public secondary school until 1905) to see what graduation was like a century ago. This is what I found

The graduation Class of 1888 numbered nine, of whom two were boarding students from Dunstable. There was no class song, no special colors, no class officers, no guest speaker, no prizes and no scholarships. But the class did have a motto, "Graduatim"

Among the local dignitaries probably attending were Fred Eric A. Fisher, chairman of the school committee, and Selectmen George T. Day, Albert P. Richardson and Isaac W. Carlin. Rev. Edward A. Horton, su-

perintendent, conferred nine diplomas

As customary, the exercises were held in the Unitarian (First Parish United) Church where the tracker organ (skillfully played by Albert E. Prescott (who lived at Mille Fleurs on Main Street) furnished the music. Instead of the Academy band under the direction of Blair Bettencourt, as now. Everyone joined in the singing of "America"

Current topics

Each graduate had his or her own essay to read. Some were on current affairs. John C. "Jack" Abbot, who became treasurer and an important member of Abbot Worsted Company, chose to talk on postal reform, a topic which is much alive today. Incidentally, in later years the center post office was built on the site of his old home-stand at the Common.

Arthur D. Littlefield, who lived in Dunstable and later became a valued trustee of the school, selected "Shay's Rebellion"

And then Charles G. Sargent,

later a Graniteville industrialist, chose an apt subject, "Iron"

Always a popular theme, Florence Wilson's essay was on "The American Flag". These speeches, and others, were interspersed with a solo, "A Shining Angel", sung by the Rev. Leonard Luce's daughter, Miss Miranda.

Possibly the most studious essay given was "The Habit of Reading", by A. (Annie) Mabel Drew, who was the sole student in the English and Classical Course.

Miss Drew lived on the family farm on Boston Road (now the Emerson Real Estate office) and later taught school regularly or as a substitute. To her thoughtfulness, I have a complete set of town reports and several graduation programs which she had accumulated.

She was probably the one who would have been listed as valedictorian, but that honor, and that of salutatorian were not listed. Neither was the name of William E. Frost, who had been principal since 1872.

Many honors today

Many honors are bestowed on graduates today, including monetary awards. The Trustees this year, for example, distributed to worthy students \$47,000 from funds they supervise. And there are awards from a long list of organizations and individuals passed along to promising graduates.

The customary processional, "Pomp and Circumstance", was

absent from the 1888 Class program, but each young lady received a bouquet of flowers from proud parents or friends. There was no alumni association at that time but social hour and collation was served in the vestry.

Old catalogues show that during this period the number of students enrolled probably averaged 45, a far cry from the near thousand attending secondary schools here today. There were three terms in a school year and the tuition was \$6 per term. Board and room could be had for \$4 or \$5 a week and there were opportunities to have vocal and instrumental training.

Object of the founders in 1792, and Zaccheus Wright was given most of the credit, was "to encourage the means of all useful science and literature" and "render the instruction of youth as free and little expensive as possible."

And as a final note, location of the Academy was described as "in Westford Centre, eight miles from Lowell, on a height of land commanding an extensive prospect of beautiful natural scenery. The town is remarkably free from everything which can tempt the young to evil habits and neglect of studies and is easy of access from all directions by railroad."

Gordon Seavey is a graduate of Westford Academy in 1922 and a 50-year member of the Board of Trustees. He lives on Depot Street.