

Academy principal Frost was major library backer

By Gordon B. Seavey

A dedicated teacher and principal of Westford Academy back nearly a century ago, William E. Frost was the spark that initiated an adequate library building.

As a result, we have had the J. V. Fletcher Library, a landmark opposite the Common, ever since 1896.

Last week work began on the addition of two wings at a cost of \$1.4 million. The facade of the present will still be the focal point of a complex which, when completed, will more than double the capacity of the present system, according to Ellen Rainville, library director.

Frost had two excellent associate members as Trustees of Westford Public Library. They were Kate S. Hamlin, already in the education field, and the preceptress of the academy, Margaret A. O'Neill, a graduate of Smith.

For three years they had preached that the time had come when a new library building was imperative. It was Frost and his two ladies who were the spark that made J.V. Fletcher Library a reality.

Frost served as principal of the Academy longer than any other person, starting in 1872 and continuing for 32 years until his death Nov. 30, 1904, while teaching a class. The community was in mourning for a long period.

Highly Respected

He was loved by his students, respected by all and probably did as much to upgrade

the town at the turn of the century as any other townspeople of that era. I was to be born a year later, but from what oldtimers recalled over the years, Frost was a real mover.

Born in Norway, Maine, he was graduated from Bowdoin College. He was an educator all his life. He gave the library to his home town in memory of his parents.

When Frost came to Westford, the public library was in a small room at the right of the entrance to the Town Hall. It was cramped quarters, even with the limited amount of books available.

Prior to this, the "Social Library" founded in Revolutionary times by Zaccheus Wright and other early believers in education amounted to but little more than exchanging books from household to household.

Reporting to the townspeople in 1893, the trustees said that the time had come when a new library building should be constructed without delay.

Frost was chairman of the committee and as stated above, was an innovator. He no doubt wrote: "The time has come when a new library building is an imperative necessity. The shelves are so nearly full that it is impossible to avoid confusion in classification... As each year improved methods of teaching requirements of the pupils in our schools more frequent consultation of books of reference with which the library is well supplied, the lack of accommodation for such work becomes more apparent.

"Moreover, our library, with the added riches of years, is already too valuable to remain longer in a wooden building."

Subtle Hint

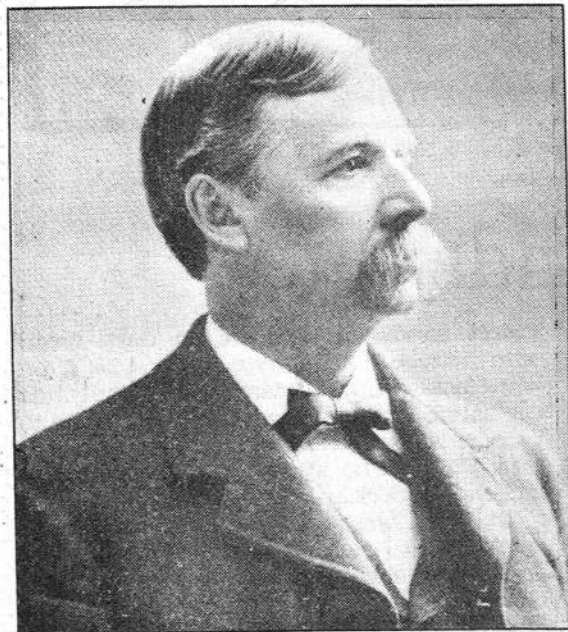
"It has been hoped that some generous son of Westford might find it in his heart to give such a building to the Town; but if that is not to be, Westford will doubtless, with her usual independence, soon provide for the better housing of her library and the greater convenience of its patrons."

By the next year, things were looking better for a modern library. A most choice site had become available when a disastrous fire consumed the Colonial home on the north side of the Common, owned by the estates of "Widow" Bancroft and Edward E. Wright.

Containing about three-fifths of an acre, it is bounded on the west by the First Parish Church, on the other side by an old store building then owned by Helen Leighton.

This ideal site also has a humorous historical background. It was here the fanatical Millerite sect held a meeting on the night of April 3, 1843, waiting for the skies to open when they would then ascend into Heaven

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William E. Frost