

Academy project needs \$

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
WESTFORD — Work may have to halt on the reconstruction of the original Westford Academy building for a town museum unless a sizable sum

of money is produced immediately. This was the consensus of members of the Westford Historical Commission when it met this week for the first

time since the group took over the funding of the restoration project from the bicentennial committee as its term of office expired at the end of 1976. Until now, it has been the

duty of the commission to oversee the renovations and the bicentennial group to raise the funds for supplies and materials. Now that the latter has disbanded, some of the bills from suppliers have been neglected.

The original budget had been set at only \$20,000, which many felt too low for such an unusual undertaking. Nevertheless, the actual work went on under the supervision of instructor Robert A. Adam and students from the Nashoba Valley Technical School on sort of a hand-to-mouth basis.

Originally scheduled to have been completed last spring, renovation work has fallen behind for several explainable reasons. The principal delay has been the need to re-timber the supports of the second floor. When the building was remodeled half a century ago for a fire station, many supports were cut up or removed to permit three bays for fire trucks on the ground floor.

The pair of stairs leading to the second floor had been removed and there were delays due to the weather.

THE INITIAL sum gathered, (\$7,000), plus a matching amount from the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission has now been absorbed in purchasing materials. Labor is a student project at no cost.

The sturdy 183-year-old building stands as a silent monument to the early craftsmen who constructed things to last. Following designs of an early building at Phillips-Andover Academy, the oldest prep school in the country, the Westford building probably could rate now as the oldest of its kind in the country. The simplicity of its Colonial Georgian design is appealing.

When abandoned by the fire department two years ago on completion of a new central station next to the town hall, the idea of saving the old historical gem for a town museum struck a responsive chord with the townspeople.

Nurtured by the bicentennial committee, the project soon received sufficient funding for a start. Now the bank account is dangerously low, there are several sizable

bills soon to come along, and there is still much more work to do.

Materials for the heating system, supplied by the Cooke Oil Company at cost, amount to nearly \$1,000. To mention another large item is the plastering and interior finish of the sizable two-story building. More lumber and electrical fixtures are needed as well as paints and other supplies, including heating oil.

The commission has set a new budget of \$10,000 as being needed to finish the job, "without frills," according to Chairman Edward Chambers, Jr. A town-wide campaign is being launched this week for volunteer contributions in any amount from any source. Donations are tax deductible.

IT HAS BEEN suggested that individuals giving \$25 or over be termed "freshmen," those giving \$50 or over as "sophomores," and \$75 or over as "juniors." Donors of \$100 or more would be listed as "seniors" and entitled to a special diploma. Perhaps donors of \$200 or over would be deemed honorary preceptors or preceptresses.

The commission mentions that it will depend on how fast the donations come in as to how much more work can be completed and when the project can be finished.

Thomas Lafionatis, superintendent-director of Nashoba Tech, has promised full cooperation from his students and the various work departments they represent. He foresees completion by the end of the current school years.

At present, the outward appearance of the building is rather dismal, with much of the front covered with tarpaper. Inside, however, the work has been going on smoothly and with careful consideration of retaining the many colonial features of the original. Two sizable projects remain. Wainscoting must be installed along the walls and wide-board flooring put down.

Checks should be made out to the Westford Historical Commission and marked for town museum use. They should be mailed immediately to the treasurer, H. Arnold Wilder, 46 Lowell Rd., Westford 01886.



ORIGINAL WESTFORD ACADEMY
...renovations may be halted

Sun staff photo by Mike Pigeon