

Wandering

by Gordon B. Seavey *Academy Students, Arise... Dumbbell Training Needed*

Westford Academy students were in a minor revolt nearly a century ago. With the winter season about to start they found the doors barred to their gymnasium (such as it was) in the school building. This was in the second Academy building, now used as the Roudenbush Community Center, on Main Street.

Apparently the entire student body of 38 signed a two-page petition asking for a "suitable place where we may hold dumbbell drills."

According to an old record recently upturned, the polite request was made to the Trustees, passing over the head of Preceptor William E. Frost. Now, Frost was a beloved and sensible principal who probably would have quickly unlocked any door for them.

But in this case, the students apparently felt their request would carry more weight if presented to the Academy trustees, who were really in charge of the then private school.

Heading the petitioners apparently was John Adams Taylor, Class of 1901, who later became a college professor. His name was at the top of the column and his writing compares favorably with that of the handwritten document.

Here it is:

"We, the undersigned of Westford Academy, do most humbly beseech the attention of the honorable Trustees of Westford Academy to the following petition:

"There is, as you know, in our school building a room designated as a gymnasium, the door of which has always been locked so that none of us are ever allowed to enter. The reason is as yet unknown to us.

"It has seemed fitting to us to ask if you would grant us the use of this room for various purposes. We are anxious to have a place where we may hold dumbbell drills. In the coming winter we also desire a suitable place where we can spend our recreation time pleasantly and profitably.

"We hope that you will give this matter careful consideration and favor us with the use of this gymnasium."

It is not known the outcome of this request, but as a long-ago student myself, their request seemed most reasonable. The building

now is pretty much the same as when it was built in 1897, with the exception of a recent fine new gym. The basement locker rooms were dark and damp; the hallways and staircases greatly restricted for gatherings...and the tiny gym in the attic, all angles and narrow walls, definitely not suitable for much other than dumbbell drills.

Old grads will recognize today some of those whose 1900 petition seemed most reasonable. Taylor grew up in the Old Oaken Bucket farm, the well-house of which still stands at the junction of Lowell and Stony Brook Roads.

Archie Hartford later piloted the street car from North Chelmsford to Ayer, while his brother, Harry, stayed on the farm---and played baseball.

William "Bill" Wright became an apple grower and his sister, Edith, a long-time teacher in the local grade schools. Edwin H. Gould stayed on the family farm on Gould Road, where his daughter, Bernice Picking now lives. He ran a busy sawmill.

Edward T. Hanley was Jack Abbot's (of Abbot Worsted fame) right hand man, was overseer of the band and the motion picture theatre. His son, Dan, is an investment counselor and has just moved his offices from Lowell to Chelmsford Center.

The Tallant family, of which there were many, was represented by Laura and Bessie. Adeline Parfitt Eliassen is a descendant.

And we must not forget Eva and Maud Connell. They lived with ten brothers and sisters, many of whom attended the Academy, on a farm near Scribner Hill and over the town line in Tyngsboro. Their home was five miles from Westford Center and they mainly walked that distance, rain or shine, to get a high school education.

A younger brother, Leo, tells us they would drive the family horse (when available) to the Center and leave it for the school day in the Seavey barn. Otherwise, the Connell students walked, sometimes playing baseball along the dusty or

muddy route.

Leo likes to tell the story that on rainy days, his father wouldn't let the children drive the horse to school. "He didn't want to get the horse wet!"

But with all the problems of getting an education behind them, the Connell family did well. As for numbers now in town, just scan the newly released directory the Roudenbush Associates have just issued. You will find a whole column of Connells listed, and among them, of course, are our town counsel and also police chief.

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