

# Westford Academy trustees frugal in days of yore

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

**WESTFORD** — Because of necessity, the trustees of Westford Academy were prudent, if not frugal, in financial dealings many decades ago.

Prudent because they were not only handling the operation of a lightly endowed private secondary school but had certain investments which had to produce a needed income.

They were frugal when they voted themselves in 1871 that "at the annual meeting no elaborate dinner be hereafter provided for the trustees but a simple provision of plain food for those members of the board who live at an inconvenient distance." Bread and butter, and perhaps a cookie?

**BUT THEY WERE** prudent when a solicitor asked the trustees to invest Academy funds in Florida land. A Francis L. Capen, in 1870, offered to set out and maintain orange trees, harvest the fruit, and see that the trustees would get back in five of six years \$100,000 for investing \$1,000 in five acres.

The trustees replied that the "Academy has no funds that it can appropriate for the object stated."

Frugality (or was it the purchasing power of the dollar) was shown again in 1902 when it was voted that \$25 be appropriated for the purchase of a suitable memorial for Principal William E. Frost who has completed 130 years service to the Academy.

Since he was a much beloved teacher and citizen, some wonder why the trustees couldn't have made the sum at \$30, a dollar for each year of service. But when they were about to renew his contract for the first time in 1876, in exchange for a three-year contract (at \$1,800 per year), they offered to build him a new home. Costing \$3,000, he was allowed to pay for it in installments, with interest at 6 per cent on the balance. The "sinking" of a well was included in the deal.

**FROST HAD** been teaching for four years and according to old records had come during a period where there were difficulties of numerous sorts confronting the trustees. The choice was a good one as he served for 32 until his sudden death. The elementary school in the Center bears his name.

Among the problems facing the trustees back in 1871 included the resignation of the principal, his assistant and the superintendent.

The trustees needed money to enlarge the building, they wanted a say as to who should attend the school, they rescinded a vote which called on the superintendent to read his report in the presence of the students — and the building needed a new furnace.

But the students received a bonus. It was voted that "when a holiday, festival or other public occasion may occur in the course of any term, the preceptor may grant a recess, if it be deemed expedient or desirable."