

Academy Trustees Relent As A Woman Is Placed On The Board

By Gordon B. Seavey

WESTFORD — After almost two centuries of entire domination by men, the trustees of Westford Academy finally have added a woman to its board.

She is Bette R. Hook of 125 Carlisle Road who has just retired as head of the Academy's history department after teaching here for 21 years. She replaces the late William E. Wright.

In addition to winding up her teaching duties, this has been a busy year for Mrs. Hook in addition to handily winning a post on the School Committee, her first try in politics.

A most popular teacher, the Academy students dedicated the 1976 year book in her name and backed her campaign for a post in town government. Those students who found themselves in her home room considered themselves especially fortunate. "These were my children, 150 of them each year," Mrs. Hook intimated.

She is married to Eric G. Hook, a retired electrical and air conditioning specialist. Her father, Charles R. Ross, lives in Leslie, Michigan.

The new trustee is a graduate of the University of Michigan, has a masters' in education at Fitchburg College, and attended the Naval Supply Corps School at Harvard University. She was a lieutenant in the WAVES for five years.

First Woman on Board

"After attempting for 25 years to elect a woman to our board," explains President H. Arnold Wilder, "just such a thing now has happened. Whether it had been the lack of openings, (the board's membership is limited to fifteen), or of qualified candidates, or just the long-standing tradition that kept our group 'all-male,' I cannot say, but now we have a charming woman to complete our numbers." She replaces the late William E. Wright.

The present-day duties of the trustees are much less than they were when the Academy first began to operate in 1792 with classes probably being held in the meetinghouse. A site had not yet been selected but the town voted that fall "to give liberty to the subscribers of the academy to Build a house on the Common if the Land can't be Bought of Miss Lady Keyes to set sd house on."

Miss Lady, who never did marry, apparently did not come to terms as the original site, a small triangle across from the head of the common, was purchased in 1793 from Levi Parker. Its boundaries are marked by three large granite (what else would last this long) posts and the original doorstep marks the approximate spot of the entrance to the two-story, almost square two-room building.

Private Donations

The Academy was founded and funded by 54 dedicated citizens, plus a contribution of 120 pounds by a vote of the town. Thus a total of 978 pounds finally was gathered to get the fledgling school off to a start.

Zaccheus Wright, who furnished the spark for the school and was the first president, was also the heaviest contributor although he had no children to educate.

Academies were rare in those days, says Historian Edwin R. Hodgman, and students came from surrounding towns. The original academy building, now being remodelled into a museum, is probably the oldest of its kind in the northeast. So says Allister F. MacDougall who over the years has captured and preserved most of the tangible history of venerable school.

It was the obligation of the early trustees to be the financial manager of the Academy in addition to taking on the educational functions such as selecting the preceptor (principal), his assistants and laying out the course of study. Most of the early principals, including the first one, Levi Hedge, came fresh out of Harvard College.

Town Takes Over

The system continued until the early 1900's, when the town

took over the secondary education for its inhabitants. By this time, the original building had been abandoned because it was inadequate, and the present William C. Roudenbush school built. This was sold at a minimal price to the town. During this transition, the school committee joined with the trustees in all deliberations.

The most important function of the trustees now is to oversee the investment of a sizeable amount of funds accumulated over the early years, the income from which is dispensed in the form of scholarships, loans, prizes and purchase of incidentals for use by current Academy students.

Treasurer Alan W. Bell reported this year that the current market value of these funds on March 31 was \$329,261. General funds were worth \$227,750, the Abbot legacy \$69,075, the Julian Fund (another Abbot contribution) \$13,341, the Stone Fund, \$14,144, and the Roudenbush Fund, \$4,076. Outstanding in student loans is \$18,620.



BETTE R. HOOK

More Funds Needed

With the rapid growth of the town, and subsequently the student enrollment of high school age, there is a greater demand on the funds for the traditional prizes, loans, scholarships and equipment. There has been a gross lack of new contributions and the trustees are anxious to meet the

increased need for these services. Outright contributions through gifts or inheritance are eagerly sought to be added to the investments, even though they have doubled in market value in the past fifteen years.

The early trustees usually were the most outstanding and best educated people in the area, some of them coming from surrounding towns. Many of the first trustees still carried their military titles, garnered during the Revolutionary War. Others were doctors, ministers, attorneys and representatives in the state house.

Here is the list of the original eleven: Captain John Abbot, Rev. Moses Adams, Rev. Caleb Blake, Col. Ebenezer Bridge, Hon. Jonathan Carver, Judge James Prescott, Jr., Dr. Charles Proctor, Rev. Ezra Ripley (who gave the land at the North Bridge in Concord for the battle monument), Atty. Sampson Tuttle, Gen. Joseph Bradley Varnum and Col. Zaccheus Wright.