

Battle of Baskets to End Bicentennial Year

By Gordon B. Seavey

WESTFORD — With the term for observing the nation's bicentennial fast approaching the end, three New England communities are busy preparing an unusual project

for the grand finale.

It will be an interchange of secondary school students in a series of pre-season basketball games here between Groton's Lawrence Academy, Westford Academy and tiny Hodgdon, Maine.

Why 32 students and two coaches would want to bus 347 miles to meet the localities in a game of sports does need some explanation. It has a very unusual historical background.

Education in the colonies after the Declaration of Independence centered mostly around the one-room rural school. Few received sufficient training ever to dream of entering Harvard, Yale, Brown or Dartmouth.

There was a vacuum in the secondary field until Phillips-Andover Academy was founded in 1778. Others were to follow rapidly Westford Academy and Groton (now Lawrence) Academy enrolled its first students in 1792 and 1793 respectively. The young people were required to pay tuition which in turn paid the preceptor's meagre salary. And of course there were buildings to erect and furnishings such as crude benches, desks and blackboards - and a pile of wood for the old stove.

State Aid

Money was tight in the period following the Revolution. To encourage the establishment in Massachusetts of these secondary schools, the General Court came forth with a plan. They gave away land in what was then known as the District of Maine.

Maine has a lot of land, 33,000 square miles, and a lot of timber. A whole township was divided between Groton and Westford in 1797, which meant 12 square miles in rich Arrostook County, to augment the coffers of the fledgling schools.

The Westford grant was described as in the southeast corner and on the border of New Brunswick, "beginning at a spruce tree four miles from the monument at the head of St. Croix River, running North 13 degrees east, three miles to a stake being the NW corner of said grant and the SW corner of said Groton Academy grant."

Westford's 11,520 acres was sold on June 7, 1802, to John Hodgdon of Weare, N.H. (near Manchester) and Nathaniel Ingersoll of New Gloucester, Cumberland County. The price was \$5,810 or fifty cents an acre. As it was sold partly on credit, it was some time before the proceeds were fully realized.

The Westford trustees signing the agreement were James Prescott, treasurer, Attorney Sampson Tuttle of Littleton and Rev. Hzekian Packard of Chelmsford.

This township eventually carried the name of Hodgdon, became incorporated in 1830

and now has a population of 1,000. It is just south of Houlton.

One of the sponsors working on the interchange of students is Charles W. Heath, vice-president of nearby Ricker College, a member of the Hodgdon Bicentennial group and a resident of Westford Hill Road.

Elaborate Plans

Hodgdon will field a girls' team of 17, coached by Roger Sherman, the boys', 15 Masterminded by Richard Nason, the boys' is well-seasoned, with eleven veterans, none of which is over six feet, however

Nason reports that his boys are "all fired up" about meeting the Bay State counterparts and are mindful that they were the runners-up last season in their class in the Maine tourney. They had an overall win of 19 games, losing only to Gould Academy in the finals.

Lawrence Hosting

Lawrence Academy will host the group on Friday, December 10, starting with supper at 5 followed by both teams playing in the evening.

Saturday the special bus will bring the teams to Westford where they will be greeted at noon by the local players. They will go to the various homes of the parents where they will have a chance to "settle down" prior to the first game, between the girls, at 5 o'clock. The boys will play at 6.30.

All will gather Sunday for a pancake breakfast. It will be served by the Boosters Club at the Academy at 9 to the visitors, the local players and coaches. The trustees and the Westford Bicentennial Committee will also be on hand. Principal Joseph Lisi is in charge of a brief concluding program.

Before leaving for the eight-hour journey back to Maine, a tour of Concord and Lexington is being planned.

The Hodgdon Bicentennial Committee has provided \$400 toward expenses and Westford

Academy trustees \$350.

Hodgdon High has an enrollment of only 250. Basketball is played the year around in that area, excepting for three weeks when the potato harvest starts mid-September. The Groton and Westford teams will start practice Monday following Thanksgiving. These games will not affect the regular schedules of the teams.

Someone remarked that this interchange looks as though "there'd be a lot of swappin' apples for potatoes" before the events wind down on Sunday noon and the guests head down East.