

The Academy's history

Education a century ago: an emphasis on low cost

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — The founders had stated that the object of Westford Academy was "to encourage the means of all useful science and literature" and "render the instruction of youth as free and little expensive as possible."

This statement was made on the occasion of the 90th year of the school, in its catalog for 1882. Some of the founding fathers' ideals are prevalent today — but there have been some changes over the past century.

There were eleven students in the Class of 1882; now there are 885 in all grades at Westford Academy.

Then there were three choices of studies for the student: college preparatory, English and classical, and just English. Now the choice is almost unlimited.

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE, a student had to concentrate on Latin and Greek, with some mathematics and grammar stirred in. Students who completed any one of the courses of study 'or a fair equivalent in amount, will receive suitable diplomas.' But those 'not desirous of graduating are not required to follow the courses of study.'

There was an average of 40 students in all grades and the fall term began late in August, the winter term ended in mid-March with two weeks' vacation, and the 'summer term' ended late in June.

Candidates for admission were required to pass exam in 'reading, spelling, the outlines of political geography, parsing plain English prose, and in written arithmetic through common fractions,' with special attention to be given to those who wish to 'fit for college.'

At the close of each term, a public examination of the various classes was held and the rank, deportment and attendance of each scholar were exhibited to parents and visitors.

AND, SINCE the Academy was a private school, there had to be a term fee, which was

\$8. This most modest sum, which would be a joy to any parent today, was made possible as the income from the invested funds was sufficient to meet the greater part of current expenses.

Today the taxpayer foots a bill of \$1,300 per year per student.

And if you were a boarding pupil — and some came from Chelmsford, Carlisle, Littleton and Billerica — townspeople offered board, including room plus washing, from \$4 to \$5 per week.

Should the parents decide that their offspring had musical talent, townspeople also provided instruction in vocal and instrumental music.

Pageant planned for Westford celebration

WESTFORD — As part of the town's observance of the bicentennial, the local committee had planned a pageant as part of its overall programming. However, it now finds itself without a director or directors to undertake this project.

When the town observed its own 200th anniversary in 1929, and elaborate pageant was produced in which scores of local people were in the cast. It was produced on the Whitney Playground in September of that year under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Lucius Charles Fairchild.

According to Committee Chairman Allister F. MacDougall, the general outline of the pageant is still available but he is seeking a copy of the original script, or any part of it. This would be helpful as background material to any new pageant written and performed, he said.