

Famous Academy principal recalled

Namesake of community center

By Gordon B. Seavey
Contributing Writer

It was a memorable event for William C. Roudenbush, concluding a quarter of a century as principal of the Academy, for the final time to hand diplomas to graduates. On this occasion it was to the Class of 1937, 31 members in all.

The yearbook of the class, "The Clarion," was dedicated to their educational leader of the previous four years. In a graduation salute, Wesley Cavanaugh depicted the retiring principal as "the Horace Man of Westford Academy."

Remarking that Principal Roudenbush's tenure showed that he was a builder, nevertheless the class speaker said, "He would be best remembered for his attempts to help pupils get more from school than a mere scholastic education. He treats each student as an individual, to develop his or her character and personality."

Two courses

In his start-off year, 1912, as principal of the Academy, Roudenbush found himself a stranger as were his two women assistants. But things went well beneath his experienced hand.

There were two courses of study: the Academic and the English-Business. The former was designed for those who might wish to enter a college or normal school, the other for those who were likely to end their formal education with the Academy.

He added bookkeeping, stenography and typing to the business course. He continued to teach Latin and French among other subjects. At that time 16 students had planned to enroll in a school of higher learning and the other 35 decided on the English-Business course. For many years, the total enrollment averaged about 55-60 students.

Roudenbush was not one to sedate in the principal's chair. He was quick to accommodate the curriculum to changing conditions.

Outside activities began to blossom. An Academy Athletic Association was formed and the students became affiliated with the North Middlesex Interscholastic League. Several 4-H Clubs were organized, a school orchestra and girls glee club came under the instruction of Pamela "Daisy" Precious.

The top floor housed what some might imagine could be a gymnasium when the building

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was erected, but it was most inadequate. With an increasing enrollment, this was turned into three classrooms and a spacious gymnasium was attached to the rear of the building in 1929, which doubled as an assembly and study hall.

During his stay at the Academy for such a long period, Mr. and Mrs. Roudenbush had become active members of the community. Fortunately they chose to remain in town for 17

more years before retiring to Keene, N.H., where he died in 1967 at the age of 92.

Scoutmaster days

During his early years at the Academy, Roudenbush volunteered as a scoutmaster and the Westford boys were among the earliest members of the Boy Scouts of America. With Otis Day as an assistant scoutmaster, regular meetings for instruction and practice were held in the lower floor of the Town Hall. It was an outstanding troop in the Lowell district.

Mr. Roudenbush also served as a trustee of the J.V. Fletcher Library for 15 years and was treasurer of the Congregational Church for many years.

Although a modest man, his appreciation of the re-naming of his old Academy building the William C. Roudenbush Grammar School was evident. This was after the Academy students had moved to their third home on Depot Street in 1955.

He said, "I express my deepest appreciation of this honor, for it surely is such, and all the more valuable in that it was given me during my lifetime when I could behold a school building, where I had spent the final 25 years of my teaching career, bearing my name."

He also would have been pleased to know that after the town "abandoned" the building, it became the Roudenbush Community Center, now observing its 15th birthday. This center is a vital part of Westford, serving children and adults with a variety of functions including health services.

There are many former students of Mr. Roudenbush living today who remember him as a gentle, but firm, and kindly person, a true teacher and educator. He is buried in Fairview Cemetery alongside his beloved wife, Mai Rafter Roudenbush, who preceded him. The marker is a plain granite boulder with one word: Roudenbush.

He had no children to visit the gravesite, but flowers presumably from former students, appear mysteriously every Memorial Day.