

Historical look at Westford Academy

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
WESTFORD — Life for Westford Academy students a century ago was not what it is today, if one should make comparisons with the costs, the curriculum, the examinations and the qualifications for entering the school, which was then private, with today's system of secondary education.

An old catalogue, prepared for the entering class of 1878, showed candidates for admission were required to pass a satisfactory exam in reading, spelling, outlines of political geography, parse plain English prose, and "do" written arithmetic through common fractions.

The boys were listed separately as "gentlemen." The girls bore the salutation of "ladies." Students were recorded from their residences with the majority coming from Westford, Graniteville and Forge Village. Besides from contiguous towns, others came from Plymouth, N.H., Boston, Arlington, Winthrop and Burlington. At no time were there more than 50 students in the school.

Parents could choose from three courses, with the "classical" course heavy in Latin, Greek and English grammar, with arithmetic and algebra thrown in. Then there were the straight "English," and a combined "English and classical" courses.

CLASSES BEGAN for 13 weeks in late August with a two-week break at Thanksgiving. The winter term was 14 weeks, and the summer term, which ended July 1, concluded the school year. A "public examination" was held in the upper hall of the old Academy building now located on Boston Road and being remodelled into a town museum.

Most preceptors (principals) of the Academy in the early days were young graduates of Harvard College who came to this small school to gain a bit of experience and then move on after a year or two. But one principal, William E. Frost, a Bowdoin College graduate and native of Norway, Maine, assumed the principalship in 1872 and continued on for 32 years until his sudden death.

The only preceptress was Adelaide Baker, who served for nine years, then transferred to Lowell High School and wrote a French textbook.

Among the trustees of the Academy, old-timers will quickly recall several: Sherman D. Fletcher, George T. Day, John William P. Abbot, Charles G. Sargent and J. Henry Read.

THE CATALOGUE described the location of the Academy as "located in Westford Centre, eight miles from Lowell, on a height of land commanding an extensive prospect of beautiful natural scenery. The town is remarkably free from everything which can tempt the young to evil habits and neglect of studies; and is easy of access from all directions by railroad."

Tuition was \$6 per term, plus cost of books and supplies. "Opportunities are afforded in town for instruction in vocal and instrumental music," the catalogue states. Board, including room and washing, varied from \$4 to \$5 per week.

Today, Westford Academy is in its fourth building, a \$5 million complex located on Patten Road. It has a student enrollment of approximately 1,000, and is expected to graduate 250 seniors next June.