



SUN Staff Photo by Hunt

## A symbol for 180 years

A symbol of Westford Academy for 180 years is this bell, cast in 1792 by Paul Revere, and now installed in the new academy building on Patten Road. Beside the now-silent bell, which called

untold numbers of students to classes in years gone by, are Trustee Allister F. MacDougall who is shown telling of its history to Kathy Dawson, a junior, left, and Senior Robin LeGacy.

## Dedication today

# History prominent at new Westford Academy

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — The venerable bronze bell which first called students to classes when the original Westford Academy opened its doors 180 years ago, rings no more ... but it does occupy a prominent spot in the new Academy building, a memento of the past.

It will be viewed by hundreds when the \$5 million complex is opened to the public for its official dedication today.

The dedication ceremony will take place at 1 p.m. It will be followed by tours of the new facility and refreshments, from 1:30 to 4 p.m.

The bell, cast by Paul Revere in 1792, stands at the north entrance.

While Revere was known principally for his craftsmanship in silver and of course his midnight ride to Lexington on April 18, 1775), during the Revolutionary War he cast bronze cannon for the Colonial troops. He also made bells, many of which are still in use in the New England area, in churches and public buildings.

Many years later cracks appeared in the Westford Academy bell, causing it to lose the quality of its tone. It was then recast by Henry N. Hooper & Co. of Boston, successors to the Revere Foundry, in 1855.

Organized in 1792, Westford Academy first opened its doors to local and nearby students the next year. The Revere Bell was installed at that time in the tower of the building which stood for more than 120 years at the head of the

town common. The original granite doorstep, suitably engraved, now marks the triangular lot of land on which it stood, preserved and cared for by the Academy trustees.

AFTER A CENTURY of use, a larger building was needed, and the first academy building was abandoned in 1897 for what was finally to be known as the William C. Roudenbush School on Main Street.

The abandoned building, with its classrooms and the Revere bell now silent, stood until about 1910 when purchased by John C. Abbot, an officer of the Abbot Worsted Company.

As it was close by to his small estate, he had it moved to its present location on Boston Road, where it now is serving its final years as the Central Fire Station. Old-timers remember the building, which is about 45 feet deep and 32 feet wide, was moved in one piece by a pair of horses working on a capstan.

THE REVERE BELL did not go to the second academy building, but ended up in the Abbot flower garden where it stood for many years. Later, son Robert removed the bell to his home in Littleton on Fort Hill.

Were it not for the interest and knowledge of the history of the bronze piece by a Westford native, Allister F. MacDougall, the importance of the bell might have been lost forever. He purchased it in 1940 and kept it in storage until the third academy building, now known as the Abbot Middle

School, was built on Depot Street in 1968, and put it on display there. MacDougall served seven years as president of the Board of Trustees.

As originally installed, the bell was rung by a rope which passed over wooden pulleys down from the belfry to a small cupboard alongside the headmaster's desk on the second floor. With the exception of the rope, these objects are still intact.

Although the tongue is missing, the casting is still admired by those interested in the bronze piece in all its simplicity of design.