

# Plans to restore former school into museum progressing well

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

*(Editor's Note: Gordon B. Seavey is a noted local historian and retired newsman who periodically writes on subjects of historic interest in the area.)*

**WESTFORD** — An early tabulation of returns for funds to complete restoration of the original Westford Academy building for a long-anticipated town museum are encouraging, reports Mrs. Robert Shaw Jr., secretary-treasurer of the newly-formed Friends of the Westford Museum (FOWM).

Response to the town-wide mailing last week indicates that there are many who finally wish to establish the museum as a going landmark in the community, she said, especially since a strong push is now needed to obtain a budgeted \$4,700 to ready the building for occupancy.

A surprise lift came recently when an anonymous donor pledged \$2,000 in matching funds to help attain the goal. With \$650 already received, an automatic \$1,300 is assured toward the target.

Even though the goal, set purposefully low, is reached, additional funds will be needed later to set up the museum with display cases, frames, tables and various furniture items; also for operating expenses.

**THREE GROUPS** are now working together in an effort to get the stalled project off the ground, including FOWM, who are spearheading the fund drive; the Westford Historical Commission, appointed by the selectmen to oversee renovation and restoration; and the Westford Historical Society.

With only a prime coat of paint existing over the ancient clapboards, one of the most costly items will be an exterior uplift. Then, too, the interior will need a couple of layers of paint.

A warning system, to alert against vandalism and to give early detection of fire, must be installed. Water has to be brought into the building.

Another expensive project will be regrading of the driveway, which is now being used for parking by unauthorized vehicles. The Westford Garden Club has offered to do the landscaping.

A ramp for the handicapped will be needed as well as more electrical work. The fire-proofed interior doors must be hung.

Said to be one of the oldest wooden secondary school structures in the country, the idea of restoring it to its former glory was the brainchild of Allister F. MacDougall, a graduate of the Academy 70 years ago and a past president of its board of trustees.



**FIRST WESTFORD ACADEMY**  
...on its original site

Lowell Sun  
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## Westford

**BUILT IN 1794**, two years after the founding of the school, the sturdy structure initially stood at the head of the Common. Here, local and boarding students attended at a minimal cost, to learn the "English, Latin and Greek languages, together with writing, arithmetic and the art of speaking ... and if desired, practical geometry, logic, geography, and music."

The entrance examination was that "no one should be admitted a member of the school unless able to read in the Bible readily without spelling."

When the activities of the Academy shifted in 1897 to a new and larger building on Main Street, now the Roudenbush Community Center, the edifice which had served so well for 103 years was boarded up.

A dozen years later, to improve the adjacent J. C. Abbot property, the building was moved by horse and capstan for "storage" to its present location on Boston Road, near the Common.

The ground floor was extensively remodelled in 1917 to make a new home for the Center's fire department, Hose No. 1, a union which lasted 57 years.

**PRIOR TO** the 1975 Bicentennial celebration, MacDougall's idea has gathered impetus. With a matching sum of \$7,000 from the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission with which to purchase materials, students from Nashoba Regional Vocational-Technical High School went to work at the delicate

task of restoring the building to what is believed to be its original design and specifications.

Local businesses and individuals donated some of the materials. The eight-ton doorstep, hand-tooled to duplicate the original, was naturally of famed Westford granite, donated by the H. E. Fletcher Company.

The Historical Society gave \$410, and \$2,300 was realized from the sale of the town's historical plaque, now a collector's item.

In spite of these and other donations, building and heating materials came high. For the past couple of years, the whole project became bogged down financially.

**FRIENDS OF** the Westford Museum organized this summer. In addition to Beth Shaw, Dr. David Watson and Dr. John A. Crisafulli, assistant superintendent of schools, are playing active roles. H. Arnold Wilder, long interested in the restoration, represents the Commission.

Tax deductible contributions are needed by the end of the month. They may be sent to the Friends, Box 2272, Westford. With a donation of \$25 or more, donors' names will be placed on an honor plaque.

Mrs. Shaw says membership in the Historical Society has also increased. Since this group will be responsible for the organization and operation of the museum, a large, working membership will be needed, she emphasized.

The FOWM secretary-treasurer also suggested that people who have worthwhile articles and historical documents or artifacts pertaining to the town's 250 years of existence might look into the ultimate value of offering them to the museum on completion of the structure.