

Roudenbush Community Center refurbished

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — The sturdy Victorian building which for 59 years was the second home of Westford Academy, and now the Roudenbush Community Center, is still the grand old lady, albeit primed with a new dress and a generous coating of paint and powder.

She won't be as cold and drafty as formerly for beneath her new stained cedar shingles she wears a garment unheard of when built in 1897, a thick layer of insulating cellulose.

Her many windows which now include storm sashes, have been reglazed and painted, and washed inside and out.

served for 25 years, was a gentle man, he nevertheless was a good disciplinarian and highly respected. Subsequent "whoopers" were treated with expedition.

Needless to say particularly on cold days, the building was drafty but the students were well prepared for the rigors of winter. Students who walked to school or rode in horse drawn "barges" and later Reo Speedwagons, were well dressed in preparation for the vicissitudes of Westford weather and the Academy's heating system.

Members of the Connell family living just over the town line in Dungsboro



The Roudenbush Community Center, formerly the second Westford Academy 1897-1956, has recently been refurbished. (Photo by Gordon Seavey)

All her fancy trimmings have been scraped and repainted. Workmen found several decayed boards, all of which have been replaced. The floor of the bell tower, which over the years, had rotted so much that a high wind on March 31, 1977, tipped the ornate steeple at a crazy angle, is all new.

Private funds righted the leaning tower at that time. The bell, a gift of a member of the Abbot family, remains in storage waiting for the opening of the Town Museum. Incidentally the fate of this museum is in limbo but a home is almost ready for same, the original Academy building erected in 1794.

To defy nature, screening has been placed in the tower louvres as an attempt to discourage pigeons while the bees found under the eaves were exterminated.

Old graduates will remember when the building had three classrooms, two on the first floor and a single room holding about sixty desks, on the upper floor, the gymnasium, such as it was, was in the attic. The basketball court was nowhere near legal size and because of the shape of the roof, players would bounce the ball off the sloping ceiling and hopefully into the hoop.

Three Classrooms

Now the building is divided into several additional rooms for the various projects and functions of the busy Community Center. It has made use of much of the basement previously used only for a locker room and toilets, one side for boys, the west side for girls, with separate entrances. Hot water was not available.

The old heating system was the best obtainable four generations ago, a coal burning hot air furnace. Whenever the janitor stoked the hungry fires, the sounds of the clanking doors, grates and nuggets of rolling anthracite coal penetrated all three classrooms. When dared, a student might open a gate in the basement and send up a whoop through the same system, causing another type of disturbance. Although Principal William C. Roudenbush, who

often walked to school if they hurried they could make the trip in an hour. When the farm horse was available they drove, stabling it in a nearby barn, of which there were and still are several in the vicinity of the school.

Project Cost \$38,000

Funds for the restoration and improvements came through the town's annual appropriation in May in the sum of \$36,500. In addition, the Roudenbush Associates gave \$1,100 through gifts and proceeds from their annual auction. The latter sum was used to insulate the area between the second floor and the attic. This is to conserve more energy and not to dim the sound of pounding feet and bouncing balls of basketball players who long ago took their play elsewhere.

The "William C. Roudenbush School" sign, which was placed in 1957 above the main entrance of the building when it was converted to other school purposes, has been removed.

Hidden behind the sign, workmen found a single white pine board about 16 inches in width upon which, in block letters leafed in gold on a black background, was the 22-foot long nameplate of the school when it was first opened. These two signs also are destined for a home in the town museum.

Mrs. Ellen Harde, chairman of the Community Center and who has much to do with the improvements, said that the committee chose to have the new letters denoting the building's purpose as the Roudenbush Community Center painted in maroon with gray shadings, the school's colors for nearly two centuries.

"For the first time in 83 years," she said, "the building should be really warm and at not too exorbitant a price for gas."

Located on Main Street, adjacent to the Whitney Playground and the William E. Frost School (named for another Academy principal) this rather ornate building on a sturdy base of cut Westford granite is once again a showplace of the community at large.