

Sixty years haven't changed graduation

(Gordon B. Seavey writes frequently on the history of Northern Middlesex County.)

By GORDON B. HEEVEY

WESTFORD - Today's enrollment at Westford Academy is about 1,000; and when the Class of 1981 graduates in June, Principal Joseph F. Lisi expects that 225 seniors will parade on the school's athletic field to accept diplomas.

Sixty years ago, exercises were basically the same. The class gift, the speeches by the valedictorian and the salutatorian, various prizes and honors given out by the trustees, and a principal address from some visiting dignitary were in order. The ceremonies climaxed with a rush by parents and friends to congratulate the diploma recipients.

There were a couple of differences, though. Earlier graduation exercises were held in the old meetinghouse, just across the common from where the original academy building stood. Later, they were performed in the town hall, with veteran trustee chairman Herbert E. Fletcher handing out the diplomas.

But in 1919, only four students solemnly marched to the platform to the tune of "Pomp and Circumstance." This class consisted of one boy and three girls. Looking on was the remainder of the school population, about 55 in number, plus relatives and friends.

They listened to the class history, the "grinds," the prophecy and class will. The boy was dressed probably in his first pants suit (boys wore knickerbockers then). The girls, in long dresses, carried bouquets.

Those present joined in singing the class song, and then the graduates were welcomed by the Westford Academy Alumni Association in the lower hall for a luncheon and annual meeting.

Some of the students from the Brookside area arrived at school on trolley car, but this was the last year for this type of transportation as the bankrupt line folded that very year. Others drove wagons or rode on "barges" called Roo Speed Wagons. But most folks walked or had their own bikes.

Principal William C. Roudenbush,



Westford Academy population - 1919-20

Official school year picture of teachers and the entire student body was taken on the steps of the former Westford Academy (now the Roudenbush Community Center) on Main Street. The Class of 1922, the freshmen, are seated on the two

bottom steps. Principal William C. Roudenbush, who served in that capacity for 23 years, is pictured in the rear with teachers Edith Lawrence Hildreth and Katherine Ott on his left. The Alumni Association,

one of the few very active groups of its kind in this area, has a record of most of these students. Those still living are approximately 80 years old. Author Gordon B. Seavey, now 75, is seated on the front steps, third from left.

an admired disciplinarian and a good teacher, was in his seventh year as head of the school. He had two, sometimes three assistants. As some students left during the four-year Academy period, others took their place.

Well-remembered was Edith Lawrence Hildreth, who took charge while Roudenbush was on State Guard duty during the Boston Police

strike that fall. Other teachers were Carolyn Thorndike, Elizabeth Brown, Etta Crane, Mary Jane Connors and Libby Cohen. Dorothy Latham, a dynamic English teacher, coached the school plays.

For the first time, a girls' glee club was formed by recent graduate Pamela (Daisy) Precious. The group started in the fall to rehearse the musical program for graduation.

The largest class for many years, numbering 19, was the group to graduate in 1922. This time, there were 10 boys and nine girls. Money earned during the year which was used to finance a class trip consisting of a seafood dinner at Nantasket Beach, a brief stay at a Boston hotel and seats for a production of "The Ghost Train," starring E. E. Clyde.