

# The passing years have changed ratio of boys to girls at Westford Academy

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — When the bells sound in Westford Academy, denoting the end of a period, the halls are full of passing students, each with his or her own personality — and each garbed in his or her idea of what to wear at school.

But for the girls, they seemed to be more dressed up than in months past. Their long hair-do's are being trimmed down more to shoulder length, and occasionally a neat bob is showing up. Levis and blue denims are fast disappearing. Even sloppy shoes have been discarded for the newer mode.

Why all this change, even though it may be slow coming?

PRINCIPAL JOSEPH F. LISI says it could be that the girls outnumber the boys by five to four. And there's competition between the sexes as there is in business.

Would the girls wish to go back 110 years at the Academy when boys outnumbered girls four to one? That must have been a great social advantage for the 22 girls who attended classes in 1866, with 63 "gentlemen" vying for the "ladies" favor.

The ladies had some things in their favor, and could acquire equal education in "all the higher branches of an English Education" plus French, German, Latin and Greek. But the little catalogue of 1866 said nothing about preparing the girls for college. It stated, "For young men intending to enter College, a course of study is prescribed, extending over two or three years."

The number of pupils attending the Academy changed from year to year. Albert E. Davis was principal, assisted by Alice J. Hardman, and perhaps it was their popularity that brought in many students from other communities. There was even representation from California, Maryland, New Hampshire, Ohio and Connecticut. These could have been scions of old Westford families.

THE YEAR 1866 was good one as the total of 85 pupils stacked up well as against an average of around 40 a generation later.

Being a private institution, each student was asked to pay \$5 tuition for each of the three terms. Board, including room and

washing, varied from \$4 to \$5 weekly. Tax-payers dug up more than \$1,300 per year, per pupil, now that the Academy has gone public.

Opportunities were "afforded in town for instruction in Vocal and Instrumental Music." A "Public Examination" of the various classes was held at the close of each term and the rank, deportment and attendance of each scholar was exhibited to parents and visitors.

The fall term began on Aug. 22 and the spring term terminated July 10 the next year, with two weeks of vacation between terms. Every Wednesday there were exercises in "Composition and Declamation."

A few oldtimers will remember some of the students the Class of 1866 inasmuch as they spent their entire lives in the town. Abiel J. Abbot was a mill president, Frank W. Banister was a farmer and one who carried the mail from Westford Depot to the Center three times daily; Sherman H. Fletcher was a grocer, selectman, postmaster and spent a term as state representative and George C. Moore was a mill owner in the Brookside area.

In its first 70 years the Academy, had 30 headmasters of which 25 were educated at Harvard College.