



WESTFORD ACADEMY BASEBALL TEAM
...at turn of century

Westford common once hosted town's early baseball games

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Now a meticulously-kept lawn, tree-lined with a garden spot with benches in the center as a base for a new flag pole, Westford Common was not always such. Decades ago, it was the only athletic field at the center.

There, the academy team practiced and encountered its rivals. On a quiet evening, after haying, local youths met to play "scrub" ball, even though it may have been difficult to field two full-sized teams.

The population of the academy, including both sexes, was about 50 to 60 at the turn of the century, and

they came from all sections of the community. For a scheduled baseball game, it was often difficult to gather a full team of nine. Many a time, one man covered the entire outfield.

A faded photograph, taken about 75 years ago and presented to the academy recently, brought back memories to many oldtimers. Hard put to identify the squad, Allister F. MacDougall came up with a few names and some pertinent facts. He recalls the team played on the common, with home plate at the lower end near the World War I memorial. Second base was approximately where the flagpole stands and what used

to be the town bandstand.

OUTFIELD WAS beyond the Gay Nineties bandstand, but probably not too many home runs were hit as the baseball in those days, according to MacDougall, didn't have the "life" of the present article.

The coach was George W. "Billy" Goode, an ardent sportsman who had the reputation of being a great "lady's man" and whose greatest achievement other than the sporting field seemed to be writing paper novels, once a month, which sold for a dime.

One title, for example, was "Little Wild Sis, the Romance

of a Pretty Face!" His publishing office was at 83 Middle Street, Lowell.

The accompanying picture was taken on the steps of the J.V. Fletcher Library, which had just been dedicated in 1895. He wears a derby and a crewneck sweater, a must for a dandy of those days.

Bert Wall of Graniteville, with mustache and cap, was assistant coach and sits directly behind Goode. Bert was a foreman in the Abbot Worsted mills. J. Herbert Fletcher, afterwards a long-time grocer and postmaster, wearing a cap and plain shirt, is on Wall's right in the back row. Herb was one of the very few Democrats in town at that period.

BELOW THIS trio is Harry Hartford, with bat in hand. He was a better baseball player (always stealing bases and then arguing with the umpire or players on the opposing side) than a farmer. Later he umpired games for the Westford Athletic Association or the town team. Hartford Road, alongside the new Westford Academy complex on Patten Road, is named for his forebears.

Two others were identified by MacDougall. In the back row, extreme left, is Fred Defoe. Alongside him is Charles D. Colburn, wearing a bowtie on a white shirt. He had graduated in 1895 and was probably the coach.

Their uniforms and letters were homemade, their knickers and footwear of assorted descriptions and equipment meagre. Even though they were not known as the "Grey Ghosts" of today in their maroon and grey colors, it is said they had the fighting spirit that has been handed down through generations to the present academy athletes.