



A bit of nostalgia...This gas and auto repair shop still stands on Main Street in Westford. The picture was taken in the early 1900's. A descendent of the original owner, Stan Whitney runs the garage and gas station at the present time.

## Final appeal for Westford museum funds

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD - Contributions needed to complete the reconstruction of the original Westford Academy building for a town museum are coming in slowly according to Mrs. Robert Shaw vice president of the Friends of the Museum.

It is hoped that the goal of \$4,700 will be reached within the next ten days. The money is needed to purchase additional materials and other work needed to complete the project.

The priceless structure, said to be one of the oldest secondary school buildings in the country, was built in 1794. It is a copy of an original Phillips Andover Academy structure, long since demolished.

The exterior of the building needs two coats of paint, the driveway has to be rebuilt and graded, the grounds landscaped, water brought into the basement, plus numerous other items.

The idea of reconstruction was started six years ago as a project of the town's Bicentennial Committee, then headed by Allister F. MacDougall. A member of the Class of 1909 and a past president of the Academy trustees, it was he who initiated the program.

A town museum would bring together under one roof for the first time many irreplaceable historical articles dated from early settlement days to the present.

Participating in the planning were members of the Historical Commission, a group appointed by the Selectmen. Their purpose was to restore the sturdy old building as near to its original conditions as possible.

### In Poor Condition

Problems immediately arose. First, the building had been abandoned for 13

years after students transferred in 1897 to a newer structure on Main Street, now the home of the Roudenbush Community Center. It had stood for over a century at the base of the Common, adjoining the estate of John C. Abbot.

After he had become the owner, he passed it over to Henry "Tricky" Keyes, a man of all trades, with the proviso that it be moved.

Keyes did just that in 1910. Using horses and a capstan, the heavy structure was moved about 400 yards to a small plot in the rear of the Congregational Church and Feeny's harness shop.

There it stood on pilings, a sorry abandoned spectacle, for several years.

During World War I, the town decided there was a need for a larger fire station in the Center. Taking over the old building in 1917 for this purpose, the building was lowered in place on a new foundation.

The edifice is of two stories, 32 x 44 feet. The face of the ground floor was torn out in order to install a battery of three overhead garage doors, the flooring was braced to hold the heavy fire trucks. Many of the supporting timbers for the upper floor were cut or entirely eliminated.

In use for 57 years, the building was again abandoned for a modern fire station next to the Town Hall.

### Authentic Details Lacking

The restoration committees then became involved with ideas and plans as to how the building could be reconstructed as near as possible to its original state.

The exterior of the building was pretty much as always. It was soon noted that the exterior, particularly the

entry-way and stairs to the upper floor, had suffered greatly from alterations for the fire trucks.

Also, it was very important to consider that the building had undergone several notable changes during the Victorian period, a century or so ago.

Windows of six-over-six panes of glass had been substituted for the earlier style of twelve-over-twelve. Windows in the rear had been boarded up and the old style random width pine boards laid horizontal for the wainscoting had been replaced by vertical "machined" match boards so common in that Victorian era.

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