

Academy diplomas graduate in size

By Gordon B. Seavey
Staff Correspondent

Eagerly grasped by over 200 seniors of Westford Academy at graduation time this June were neat folders containing a magic word . . . "Diploma." After four years of "grind," according to one girl, it was good to have in hand her diploma, certifying that she "has satisfactorily completed a Course of Study prescribed for Graduation"

The diploma itself is small, measuring 6 x 8 inches, half the size of a sheet of business stationery. Facing the document in the gold embossed folder is a sketch of the entrance of the school.

Principal Joseph F. Lisi, who has the knack of knowing each student by his or her name, signed first. Then it was Superintendent of Schools John A. Crisafulli, along with the chairman (now it's chairperson) of the School Committee.

I asked one senior, Rob O'Brien of Cold Spring Road who is heading for Clark University in a few weeks, what he did with his certificate. "I want to keep it in a safe place, but right now it is in the drawer of my desk," he said. Good enough for a start.

Real old grads will remember that their diploma was handed to them on the stage of the town hall by the superintendent, who also was in charge of the school system in another town, often in Littleton.

Commentary

The girls, dressed in white, including stockings and shoes, often were recipients of flower bouquets. Each diploma was rolled and tied with ribbons of the class colors.

As time goes on, things seem to become larger rather than smaller. But in the case of Academy diplomas, the opposite is a fact. A century ago, graduates received diplomas that were larger in area than this page of the *Eagle* which you are reading.

On exhibit at the Westford Museum is the diploma of Thomas Richmond Frost, a 1895 graduate and son of the then-principal William E. Frost, found recently in the attic of the Frost home.

This measures 21 x 17 inches, or a total of 357

square inches, five times larger than Rob's. It was a great accomplishment in those days to receive an education above the eighth grade, and invariably the diplomas of successful grads were framed and hung in the parlor for all to see.

Young Frost was a talented musician and played the organ for graduation exercises held in the First Parish Church. He later became a music instructor in Rio Grande College, Ohio, for two years and then moved on as professor of music at St. Katherine's, Bolivar, Tenn.

But what should interest us most today are the men who signed Tom's document. Signing for the trustees (the Academy then was private) was John D. Long, 32nd governor of Massachusetts and former secretary of the U.S. Navy, and Dr. Edward A. Horton, at one time superintendent of the town's public school system, later a noted clergyman and chaplain of the Massachusetts senate.

We do not have a record of how many diplomas were handed out in 1895, but the total Academy enrollment was 44.

Gordon Seavey, class of 1922, recalls his graduation but has no idea where his diploma might be.