

Academy bills: Change with the times

By Gordon Seavey

Seventy-five years ago the town had control of the elementary schools, but the operation of the Academy was a quasi-managed system.

The trustees of the Academy owned the building, now the Roudenbush Community Center, and the School Committee ran the system — but not quite.

At the turn of the century, by law most communities were operating their own secondary school systems. Either the School Committee was reluctant here to take on full responsibility of a high school, or the trustees were making the transition from private to public secondary education as easy as possible.

A batch of old records tells something of the trustees' part in financing the system. The Academy building was still owned by them and they heated it, cleaned it and insured it.

Trustee George T. Day approved the payment of \$60 to Bertha H. Norris (the late Mrs. Arthur G. Hildreth) for teaching for the month of September, 1911. When William C. Roudenbush came to town in 1912 as principal, to serve for 25 years, he wrote in his memoirs that he, too, was paid in part by the trustees.

Mrs. John Perkins was paid \$12 for four weeks' work, "sweeping the school and reading rooms." Al Bicknell, a retired Civil War veteran, billed the trustees \$16.67 for janitor services in February. He asked an additional \$2.50 for cutting up two cords of wood to fire the furnace which had the rep-

pairing a basement door. This was somewhat of a bargain because his usual pay was figured at 32 cents an hour.

Dexter E. Coggeshall was principal at the time and authorized a payment of \$3 to Charles E. Woodhull of Boston to tune, clean, regulate action and douse the piano with camphor to ward off insects. Under the supervision of part-time music teacher Mary B. Raynes, the girls' glee club practiced around that piano for months in preparation for a graduation program.

Prudent investments

Unlike Lawrence Academy in Groton, which is still a private secondary school and founded a year later than Westford's academy, local trustees voted to gradually remove themselves from the education business in Westford.

They kept its funds, which had accumulated over the past century, and through prudent management, increased its portfolio

to make possible \$45,000 in prizes and scholarship funds to top honor graduates this past June.

Early treasurers invested the funds "prudently," as they would report.

One special item proved to be more than beneficial. When 856 shares of Standard Oil of Ohio were sold recently, the sale produced \$38,841 according to Treasurer A. Dana Fletcher. To the amazement of all, including retired Treasurer Alan W. Bell who could not recall when the original investment was made, the stock was carried on the books at only \$721.94 — a profit of \$38,119.061. With tongue in cheek, he mentioned that at least twice during his term in office brokers had recommended sale of the documents.

And best of all, being a tax-exempt institution, the trustees are not required to pay a capital gains tax.

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utation of often smoking.

The wood was supplied by Oscar R. Spalding, local lumber operator, at \$5.50 per cord; "trash," or dry pine slabs and sawmill trimmings used for kindling, was \$3.25 a cord. "Broken coal" was \$6.50 a ton.

One baseball — \$1.25

Wright & Fletcher furnished the oil-treated sawdust used to keep the dust down when sweeping for 20 cents a can, a large 7 ft. by 14 ft. flag for \$9 and a baseball for \$1.25 for the Academy baseball nine.

A few former students might remember that there was no hot water in the wash basins and the water bill for a quarter was only \$26. Charles O. Prescott, as treasurer of the private Westford Water Company, sent out the bills.

One year it was decided that the furnace needed cleaning and possible repairs before classes resumed in the fall. Brownell-Mason Co. sent two men to the school who spent six hours cleaning the furnace; cost was figured at 90 cents an hour. An additional \$1.84 was added to cover car fare from Fitchburg to Westford.

William Sutherland, local carpenter, charged 60 cents for two hours labor for re-