

Records prove Academy oldest co-ed secondary school in state

By Gordon B. Seavey

Old grads of Westford Academy, founded in 1792, always have boasted that it's the third oldest secondary school in Massachusetts.

But...if one should insist what is the oldest co-educational in the commonwealth, it would be our local Academy.

Governor Dummer Academy rightly so has claimed it is the oldest academy in the state, named after a governor and founded in 1763. This is correct, but it is the oldest boys boarding school and only became co-ed in 1971.

Now we come to Phillips-Andover, that large prestigious prep school not so far away. It was founded in 1778 by Eliphalet Pearson with 13 boys in an old carpenter shop. Not until 1973 did it become co-ed when it merged with its sister school, Abbot Academy.

An act of the legislature passed Sept. 23, 1793, shows the incorporation of our academy. It says in part that "hereby is established in the Town of Westford...an academy by the name of Westford Academy for the purpose of promoting piety and virtue, and for the education of youth in such languages and such of the liberal arts and sciences as the Trustees shall direct."

And to prove the point that the Academy has always been co-educational, the general catalogue for 1792-1895 lists Sally Carver as an original student, entering in 1792. She kept a little red diary of her experiences. We don't know much more about this coed except that

she died in 1837. The Carvers are interred in the West Burying Ground on Route 225 and a large tombstone of the late 1800s now carries all the names of this early local family.

As we boast about our school, here are the names of some of the illustrious graduates or former

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trustees who became highly recognized over the years.

Although Paul Revere never got to the Old North Bridge in 1775, it is very possible that he did ride to Westford at a later date, for he enrolled his son John in 1799 who later attended Harvard and became a Boston physician. After I had given a historical talk to a group of elementary grade students, one of the questions put to me was "Did you go to school with Paul Revere's son?"

Henry F. Durant, who entered from Lowell in 1834, became a most successful lawyer. Impressed with the necessity of providing a college for women, he built and

equipped Wellesley College in 1875, costing a million.

Charles Sumner Hamlin, an assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury for four years, became a trustee in 1892. Loamm Baldwin, a student in 1795, became known as the father of civil engineering in the United States.

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Remember in school reading "Two Years Before the Mast"? It was written by Richard Henry Dana. He started in the Academy in 1824, went on to Harvard College (as many did) and became a well-read author.

Ralph Adams Cram, whose father was pastor of the First Parish Church, became noted architect who designed Princeton College and West Point.

Joel Abbot, a student in 1832, became a naval hero whose deeds are abbreviated on a bronze plaque on the Common. He performed great service during the Japan Expedition.

There are many other noted graduates of our Alma Mater but space is limited with this story. They received the best education this small town could provide.

Gordon Seavey is a graduate of the Class of 1922, one of the larger classes when the entire school body numbered about 60. He is a retired newspaper publisher and lives on Depot Street.