

Turning pages in Westford's history book

By Gordon B. Seavey

A century ago, care of the town's cemeteries was by subscription, that is, those who wished to have the family gravesite mowed once or twice a year, would pay one to two dollars. This was added to the \$200 the town allowed the three district caretakers for general expenses.

These commissioners would take care of the "burying ground" in their area. Old town reports showed listing of \$1 and \$2 from many families, who got their names printed in the town reports.

Early camera fans

Taking candid camera photos is made simple today, with good name brand pocket cameras selling in the \$135 range. They do everything but push the button.

An advertisement in the *Westford Wardman* dated Sept. 15, 1903, says: "Buy your boy a Brownie...he'll have great fun taking pictures. It's instructive, too."

A choice of \$1 or \$2 models was available at Hill's Drug in Ayer. Ayer could be reached by trolley from Forge or Graniteville, but most people found Donaldson's in Lowell not only had Brownies, but also processed the black and white film.

Hill's ad was addressed to boys. I'm certain girls can handle a camera just as well,

especially if they have a boyfriend.

Academy by custom

It was customary for all to join in a formal luncheon at the conclusion of graduation exercises of Westford Academy, each year adjourning to the lower floor of the town hall. This custom ended in 1905 at the time the state had mandated that all communities provide secondary education supported by the taxpayers.

The Academy then became Westford's high school, but carries to this day the origi-

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nal name. This was stipulated by the trustees in exchange for them turning over their endowment funds, and later the building (now Roudenbush Community Center) for a very nominal sum.

Name that school

The elementary schools in Westford Center, Forge Village and Graniteville, up until 1908, had no particular names. The School Committee therefore voted that year to name the one in the Center the William E. Frost School in honor of the late principal of the Academy. At Graniteville, for a distinguished citizen and benefactor to the area, Charles G. Sargent School, and at Forge Village, the Cameron, for Julian A. Cameron, associated with the Abbot Worsted Company and also benefactor particularly to that area.

The Sargent School, abandoned for several

years, has been undergoing extensive alterations and is the key unit to the \$2.3 million low-cost housing project under the direction of the Westford Housing Authority.

Built in 1884, the sturdy 4-room elementary school house cost a total of \$6,263. General contractor was W.C. Edwards who lived near the Westford/West Chelmsford line and later was to build the second Academy structure, now the Roudenbush Community Center.

Edwards charged \$1,150 for the foundation, furnishing all materials, and the structure above ground \$3,700. Land was purchased for \$450 from the C.G. Sargent estate and two furnaces cost \$285.

Of Common value

One of the most valuable small spots in Westford Center is the third of an acre of land across Boston Road at the head of the Common. It is the original site of Westford Academy where the students could use the Common as a playground.

Through the generosity of Allister F. MacDougall, who will be 97 this summer, the town now owns this pretty little spot, its corners marked by large granite posts. Mac had purchased the adjacent Jack C. Abbot home and the Academy land came with the deal. He then gave the site to the trustees who later, with his permission, turned it over to the town.

Gordon Seavey is a Westford resident and former owner/publisher of the Belmont Citizen.