

Curriculum, discipline tough at turn-of-century Academy

By June W. Kennedy

As the fall term at Westford Academy began in September of 1905, there were 24 new scholars: 10 boys and 14 girls. From May Day's notes, one finds that German was new to the curriculum.

"First period had German. Arthur Hildreth and I take it. There is only one Grammar for the three of us. It is one Miss Thompson used at college. Today I sat in the chair and Miss Thompson stood behind us. Pronounced alphabet and some words.

"Mr. Perkins said we weren't going through the four books in Caesar, but only three because we could get more out of it. I am going to read the fourth book outside because I want to go to college."

Ruth Johnson, a 1919 graduate of the Academy, recalled: "When we got to high school, we used to walk all the way up from Chamberlain's Corner. In high school you know they'd be dances or something and we'd walk back again at night in the moonlight.

"Isn't it strange how much less fear there was in those days. I don't think we had any, for there was nothing to be afraid of then. Yes, I'd even walk by the cemetery [Fairview]. I'm used to that cemetery, for that's where my husband and I did part of our courting. He worked there for the Greig's 'til he was 18 or 20, so when I came home from school he'd be waiting for me out there on the stonewall.

"All of my children have graduated from the Academy and three of my grandchildren have graduated. Not many families can boast that today.

"There were four in my class. Exercises [commencement] were held in the Town Hall in the afternoon, I think. I walked up to my graduation; I had to be early. On my way up, Mr. Mark Jenkins who ran the blacksmith shop at Chamberlain's — he came out and handed me a bouquet of moss roses. I'll never forget that. I was so pleased and they were so beautiful. It's sometimes the little things that one remembers, I think.

"My first year of high school, Mr. Roudenbush took us on a trip to Boston to historical places. The English teacher took us down [to Boston] one time to see 'MacBeth'.

'... a fellow by the name of Theodore Park, he was a wise guy. ...Miss Young got after him for what he'd done. He just looked at her and he could wiggle his ears just like a horse. She turned red and sent him to Mr. Roudenbush. He never came to class or school again.

Austin Fletcher

probably by train from the depot.

"We did have a basketball team, the girls did the first year I was there. Miss Moreland was the coach. But that was the last year, because they had no other teacher that was coach material, so we didn't have a team after that.

"Gym suits had bloomers with a long blouse with a sailor-like tie. I remember we played Littleton. Edith Lawrence was the most wonderful English teacher. There wasn't anyone like Mr. Roudenbush."

Declamations seem to have been an integral part of the curriculum at the Academy. May Day frequently referred to these recitations. From her April 13, 1906 diary:

"I declaimed, 'Bruce and the Spider'. One place I nearly missed, but didn't.

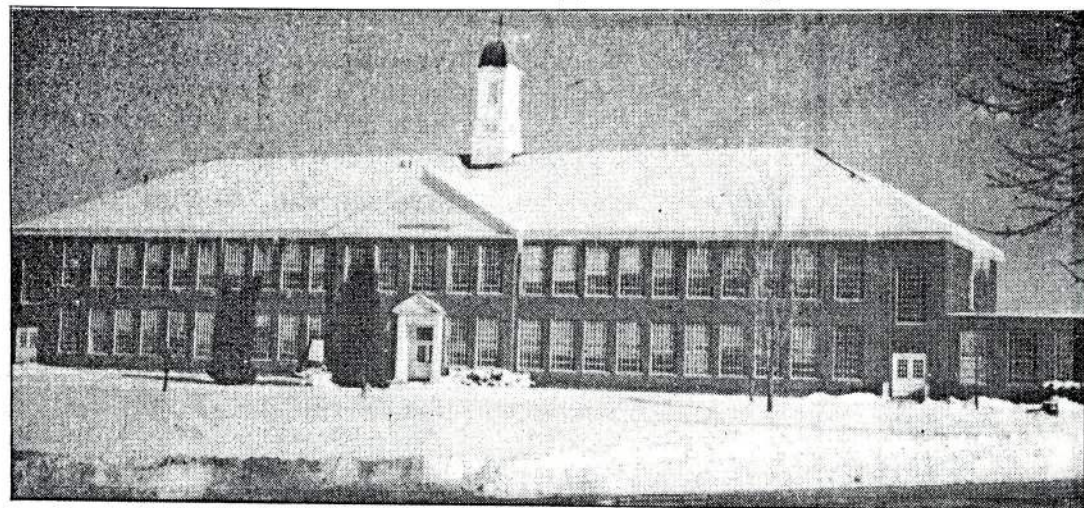
"Happy New Year. School begins today," May recorded in her diary dated Jan. 1, 1905. Other holidays received attention, as in May Day's diary entry of Feb. 12, 1906:

"We got out at noon because it was Lincoln's birthday. Had the Gettysburg speech. Mr. Perkins read the Governor's Proclamation and the Emancipation Proclamation and 'My Captain' by Walt Whitman."

April 19, 1906: "No school today because it is the anniversary of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Hooked and churned."

May, 1906: "Miss Thompson gave me a chocolate she got in her May basket. Addie and Anna went to hand a May basket to

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THE THIRD WESTFORD Academy served the town's high school population from 1955- 1973, when the current Patten Road building was opened. Today the Depot Street building houses Abbot Middle School. Its library, ballfield and the school's first band instruments were donated by the Abbot family, owners of Abbot Worsted Mill.

(Courtesy June Kennedy)

Turn-of-the-century high school

□ ACADEMY

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Miss Newcomb."

"No school today. Washington's birthday."

In Jan., 1907 May reported: "It was 4 degrees when I started to school. Cold in Mr. Perkins room, 48 degrees when I got there. Some boys had overcoats on."

Frank Jarvis, who attended the Academy from 1920-1924, offered the following description: "At that time there were three women and one man who taught. The building was heated by hot air, yet it was still so cold during the winter months that the gym upstairs had to be closed.

"Baseball and basketball competitions were held, and scrub soccer was a favorite game.

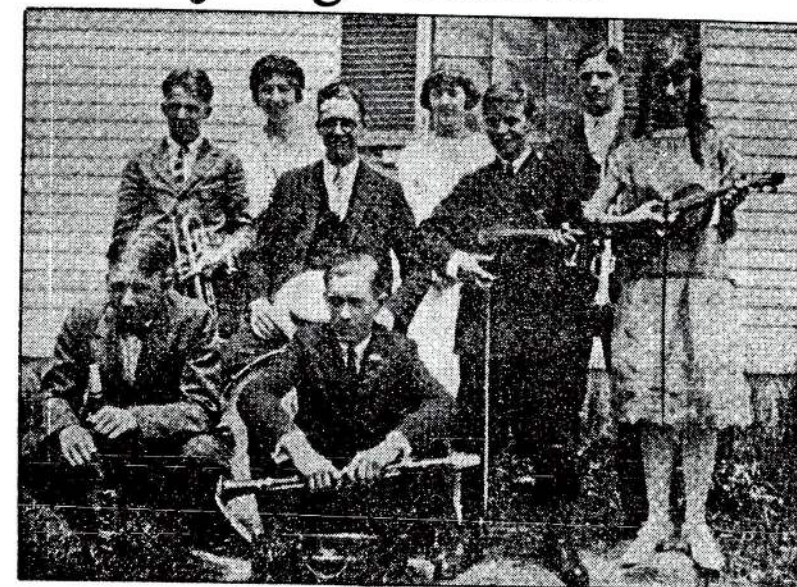
"In 1924, there were 15 or 16 graduates and the graduation ceremony was held upstairs in the Town Hall. The Senior Class had a play. In the spring the class took a two-day trip to the Mohawk Trail in five or six autos. They truly thought that they were worldwide travelers!"

Of oldtime discipline, Lincoln Street resident Austin Fletcher recalls: "I was in the bookkeeping class one time and a fellow by the name of Theodore Park, he was a wise guy. He did something; Miss Young got after him for what he'd done. He just looked at her and he could wiggle his ears just like a horse. He wiggled them! She turned red and sent him to Mr. Roudenbush. He never came to class or school again. Never saw anyone could wiggle his ears like that.

"Really had discipline then boy, I'm telling you. I remember a fellow running down the stairs and Mr. Roudenbush saw him. Go back upstairs, and when you come back down walk!" he commanded. A good teacher, but strict."

Outgrowing its classrooms

The second Academy building was renamed the William C. Roudenbush School after its principal of 25 years, when in



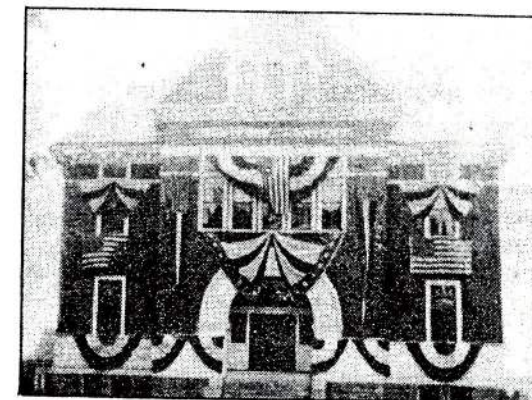
'Isn't it strange how much less fear there was in those days. I don't think we had any, for there was nothing to be afraid of then. Yes, I'd even walk by the cemetery [Fairview].'

May Day

1955 the third Westford Academy was erected.

While the second one served the town for a period of 58 years, the third building was able to accommodate the expanding high school enrollment for only an 18-year span. During these years the population of Westford had just about doubled.

Thus, it was, albeit with some opposition, the fourth and present Westford Academy structure on Patten Road was de-



THE ASSEMBLED GROUP of Westford Academy students (photo at top) did their best to make sweet music as the entire high school orchestra in 1924. Known as Roudenbush Community Center today, the Academy (above) was draped in bunting for the town's 200th anniversary in 1929. (Courtesy June Kennedy)

signed. In September of 1973 its doors were opened.

Recognition has been given two of the original subscribers of Westford Academy. The third high school building was renamed Abbot Middle School when the Patten Road Academy opened. The library of this school, the ball park and first band instruments and uniforms were gifts of the Abbot family of the Abbot Worsted Company.

The present Westford Academy library was named in honor of Zaccheus Wright.