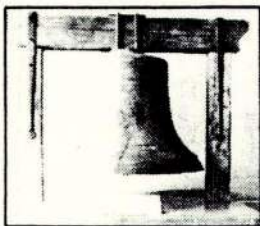


Farewell to first Academy

By June W. Kennedy

The first Westford Academy building was used for 103 years. Hattie Sargent was a member of the last class to graduate from it.

Although the paper has yellowed and the purple ribbon tied so lovingly about it has faded with the passing years, I quote in



THE ORIGINAL ACADEMY bell, cast by Paul Revere, now graces the main hall at the Patten Road school.

part from the original copy of her carefully penned "Graduation Essay on the Old Academy". Hattie delivered her essay on June 18, 1896, at the Unitarian Church, because graduation exercises were held there until 1907:

"What varied scenes the old Academy has looked upon. Could it speak, no doubt it would tell many tales of the busy life within its walls. It would tell of its sensations upon seeing the first pupils enter its portals and take their seats, and no doubt could give the individual history of each one while within its walls.

"Those first pupils, were they gay and happy boys and girls, having no cares except those caused by some difficulty in

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THE 1794 ACADEMY building is pictured on its original site at the head of the common, with the "necessary house" on its left, where it served students for 103 years. Today the building houses the town museum on Boston Road.

(Courtesy June Kennedy)

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their studies? Or were they mature, soberminded young men and women, slowly and painstakingly striving for an education? They may have been more mature and consequently more steadfast in their work than the pupils of the present day.

"Doubtless most of them were compelled to work hard out of school as well as in school. Many, like our poet Whittier, toiled faithfully during the summer at whatever work they might find, in order that during the winter term they might attend the Academy. These circumstances certainly had a great deal to do with their earnestness, with their desire to learn.

"They did not have as many advantages as the students of the present day. Their example ought to be an incentive to urge us on to better and more steadfast work. But not withstanding their maturity and earnestness, may there not have been one or two mad caps among them, whose antics convulsed the whole school.

"These old Academy walls have looked down upon many a price of mischief performed while the teacher's attention was turned elsewhere. They have doubtless looked down disapprovingly upon it; it was their duty to do so. But who can say that they did not enjoy the fun as well as the pupils.

"As soon as this first set of students leave, others take their

places and so on down through the years until the present day when we, as the last class, are leaving the old Academy forever. What its sensations were as we left it today, for the last time, with 'Auld Lang Syne' on our lips, will never be known. But we students know with what feelings of regret we leave its walls around which so many pleasant recollections cluster.

"There will never be a school which can fill in our hearts the place of our beloved Academy. Do you not, past and present pupils, have some tender feelings for this old building? Do you not love and respect its scarred desks, smokey walls, and thresholds worn down by the hurrying tread of so many generations? Have we not all wondered how many pairs of feet have made the indentations beneath so many of the desks on the boys side? Indentations which show that feet, if not brains, were busy.

"Besides all these familiar marks, how pleasant are the thoughts of the many friendships formed within the walls of this old building during the space of 104 years. Let us hope that these friendships were not merely school ties, but affections which last a lifetime. May our friendships formed here ever remain as true as they are now, when we are just standing upon life's threshold. May we, who have helped each other 'get out' our Latin and Greek, and have puzzled together over difficult problems, still be ready with

helping hand outstretched in the greater trials of life.

"Our old Westford Academy has done good service throughout these years of its life. Its work is not yet done. Although its outside form will be changed, yet its inner life will be the same under higher and better conditions. In speaking of it, naturally the thought comes to our minds, 'What would Westford be if Westford Academy had never been founded?' We can safely say that the intellectual and moral standards of the town would be several grades lower than they are at the present day.

"There is hardly a home in Westford into which the influence of the Academy has not penetrated. Compare this town with any other of its age, size and number of inhabitants, but which has no such high institutions as our school. Should we not find in the latter a lack of intellectuality, of higher understanding? Doubtless we should.

"We have good reason to be very grateful to those grand old ancestors of ours, who benefited us so greatly in establishing Westford Academy. Such has been the influence of the school in the past. It remains in the hands not only of the trustees, but more fully in those of teachers and students to preserve and increase it in the future. May they fulfill their duty faithfully."

June Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections, a series of historical vignettes and photos."