

Westford Recollections

Part IV

Too much cannot be said in favor of the Agricultural College, which has been the means of educating many young men in a scientific and practical knowledge of everything pertaining to the profession of farming, for it is a profession as worthy and dignified as any of the so-called learned professions. Prosperity in any business or undertaking is far reaching; and the prosperity of Westford, largely through the improved methods adopted on the farm have had much to do in enlarging the opportunities of the people. Successful farming has been the means of opening avenues to hundreds of opportunities undreamed of by their fathers.

In my early years in Westford what were the intellectual advantages? The town, as a whole, to say nothing of the center village, was fortunate in having a good proportion of educated. From circumstances beyond their control, that education may often have been narrow, and the opportunities for advancement were extremely limited. But the natural refinement and basic culture existed. As I knew the village better than the outlying sections, I can speak more truthfully of the village itself. An unusually large percentage were cultivated men and women. As I mentioned before, the Academy and Library were largely responsible for this fact. It is noticeable that in all towns where the Academy was established, the rate of intelligence was higher than in surrounding towns not fortunate in having that influential factor.

Westford Academy was highly favored in its early years in having at its head, from year to year, men of exceptional ability, if the records are true, and the influence of these men on the students who came under their teaching, and incidentally, on the citizens of the village was uplifting.

The first principal—preceptor, as he was then called—whom I remember, was Luther Shephard. I think he was succeeded by John D. Long, a young man, fresh from college. Mr Long was a man of enthusiasm and broad culture. On taking his place as head of the Academy, he immediately gained the respect and love of the students, and the institution was, during his principalship, at the peak of its prosperity. But the life and influence were not limited to his interest in the students alone. In a way, he became the instructor and inspirer of the whole people. The Debating Society, which he was interested in forming, reached to all parts, not only of the village, but to the outlying sections. Men and women, whose voices never before had been heard in public, were interested in the questions weekly considered, and took active part in the debates. I think the women took no part in debating, but they edited the "Literary Gatherer", varied in interest, depending on the ability of the editresses and also on that of the contributors.

Able principals followed Mr. Long, but no one succeeded to the high government positions in which he was honored. At the time of the Spanish War, he was secretary of the navy with Theodore Roosevelt, assistant secretary. He was also a governor of Massachusetts. During the campaign for his election, was heard everywhere, "We want but little, but we want that little Long."

To the end of his life he kept his interest in Westford and, especially, in the Academy.

A few words of Mr Whitman, who preceded the loved and honored Mr Frost. Mr Whitman may not have been a success as a disciplinarian, but he was a very able man in his specialty of biology. All who knew him must remember his

scientific interest in the study of birds and also know of his collection of many varieties. He would go out before dawn to look for migrating birds that were not native to his locality, but had rested in the neighborhood during the night. By going out before dawn, he often found birds that were native to places far distant. Later, as is probably known by his Westford friends, he became Professor of Biology in Chicago University. Thirty years ago when I was in Chicago, I spent a day at his home. He was then married and living near the University. He had kept up his interest in birds and at that time was endeavoring to trace the genealogy of the native dove. In his yard, and even in some of the rooms of his house, were cages in which were pigeons he had gathered through bird dealers from many parts of the country. Mr Robison, an extensive dealer in birds in San Francisco, told me that he had orders from Professor Whitman to send him any bird that came to him, that might in any way belong to the pigeon family, and he sent him several rare birds.

At Mr Whitman's home was a Japanese artist who painted the birds, and the paintings were such exact reproductions of the live birds that one could almost fancy a bird could coo to him. Mr Whitman told me that only a Japanese artist had the patience to do the work with the exactness required. The artist would take the bird to his studio, and study it in the most meticulous detail, and spend a whole month on his work before he called it finished. At that time, he had completed the painting of two birds. But sad to relate not long after, Professor Whitman died, and the work was never finished.

Of the work of Mr Frost in the Academy, I need not speak. Many of those now living were students of his, and knew him better than I, who have been away so many years. I am sure his influence for the good of the Academy, and the town, will be long felt. Perhaps few realize what a large number of professional men, of the past generation, were prepared for college in the Academy. Many years ago, I met a prominent lawyer who told me of his student days in Westford.

Of the assistants in the Academy—the preceptresses—there were, at least, three women who reached high positions. When I was very young, I heard the name of Margaret F Foley, an assistant at that time. She was an artist, and on leaving her position in the Academy, went to Italy where she continued her studies in sculpture and produced figures which were favorably noted in the Art world. If I mistake not, she died early in her career.

The second of the assistant teachers who make her mark in the world was Harriet B Rogers. Her work, under Alexander Bell, the inventor of the telephone, using his system of Visible Speech, was most successful in the Institute for Deaf Mutes of Northampton. She was specially fitted for the

work, having great patience and decision of character, and one whose speech was so clearly articulated that students, after a little study, could easily read her lips. Neither of the two women mentioned, however, gained the international recognition accorded Miss Nettie Stevens. Westford has special reason to be proud of her, as she was long a resident of the town.

After a few years engaged in teaching, she entered Leland Stanford University in California. Later, her success in biological work resulted in valuable scholarships which enabled her to continue her studies in laboratories in Italy and Germany. For a paper published by her in 1905, she was awarded a prize of one thousand dollars. At the time, the prize had been awarded only three times, and she was the second American to win it. Her entire life, not excepting the months of her summer vacations, was spent in research work in various laboratories.

Miss Stevens, however, was not the pioneer in the march of Westford women toward a college education. It was but a few years after the close of the Civil War, when Miss Ellen Swallow knocked at the doors of Vassar College and admitted. I think she was the first of Westfords young women to enter college. She was graduated with honor and soon after became an assistant chemist in Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Later, she married Professor Richards, and, if I am not mistaken, was awarded a full professorship and she did much valuable work.

Vassar, as all know, was strictly a woman's college, as it is today. The colleges for men had then not become sufficiently chivalric to allow women to enter their sacred portals. Later, however, the bars were removed from some of the doors, and women, one by one, entered. The University of Michigan was one of the first to say, Well, come in, if you insist. The first year after the invitation three young women accepted. The year following, about twenty were admitted, among them, another young woman from Westford, my sister Sarah Dix Hamlin. She was the first from Westford to enter a man's college.

Now, we know, all but a very few of the colleges and universities in the country, welcome women as cordially as they welcome men.

(With so many colleges so very recently having gone coeducational it seems that the above statement is even more appropriate today than 34 years ago when it was written.)

A large number of high school graduates, today, look forward to four years of college."