

Sidestepping 1893 W.A. Ball

By June W. Kennedy

The following is part of a series on the history of Westford Academy:

Ida Rachael Butterfield from Dunstable boarded in the Westford village so that she might attend Westford Academy. In "Dunstable Village", edited by Curtis H. Gates and copyrighted in 1973 by the Town of Dunstable, Ida gives a graphic account of her school-days and reflects some of the thinking of those days of 1893, the year in which she graduated.

"The old Academy building had two stories and a belfry with a fair-sized bell used for calling morning and afternoon sessions and classes between. We had our seats on the second floor, where Mr. Frost presided and heard his own classes. The lower grades were taught by the assistant, Miss Nettie Stevens.

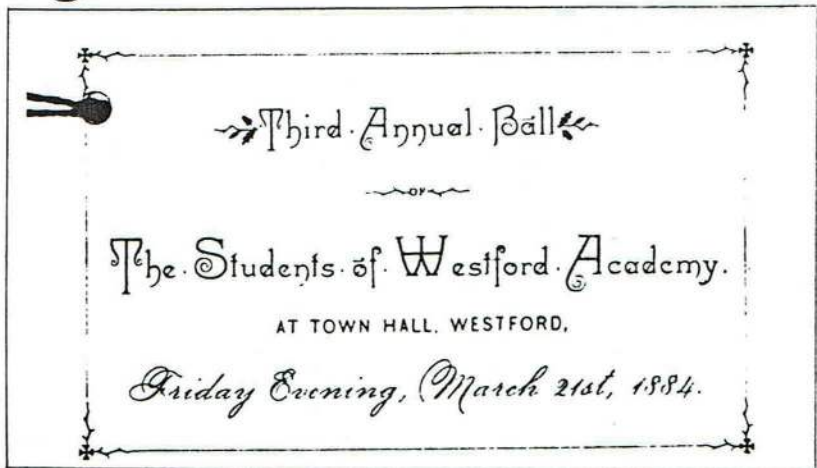
"Friday afternoon readings were held about once a month, when a certain number were chosen to go up on the platform and read or recite something from memory, and didn't I dread it when my turn came!

"There was no social life for our class. I believe the first time we ever met together was when we went to have our class picture taken. Martha and I were the only girls in our class, with Henry Parkhurst from Dunstable, Edward Fisher and George A. Drew from Westford and Fred Edwards and William Curran from West Chelmsford.

"The grandiose style of our graduation dresses for that small town school — white wool chalis, full length skirts, double ruffles at bottom and knees, enormous puffed sleeves and lace ruffle around the shoulders — was not very suitable for us, nor for any occasion I was likely to have again. Probably Martha might use hers at college, and of course I wanted to look in keeping with her. I did wear it to a couple of weddings.

"The graduation exercises were held in the Unitarian Church. Afterwards, a banquet was served in a big tent outside. The afternoon was left free, with the celebration ending with a grand ball on the second floor of the Town Hall in the evening. About the only unhappiness I intentionally caused Mother was wanting to go to this ball.

"Martha's mother and father did not object to her dancing. The Congregational Church in



AN INVITATION TO the third W.A. Ball in 1884 probably made its way to a select few. Nine years later, in 1893, seven seniors graduated. In that year, Dr. Nettie Stevens (in 1904 photo below) taught the lower Academy grades. (Courtesy June W. Kennedy)

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Dunstable was quite set against it at that time, so Mother thought it would cast reflections on her standing even to allow her daughter to dance that one night. I assured her I should not care to dance except that one night and would not be likely to go where I should care to again.

"Mother was much upset about it, but Father did not care, though he did not dance. The matter had been under discussion for some months, and for some reason I wanted to see Mother when Grace [sister] was not at home, so one of the boys was to take me over one night.

"It had snowed and drifted the last few days previously, but we started in a 'one-hoss open sleigh', not knowing how the roads were. In those days the back roads were not given much care — if people could just get through. When we had pushed through the snow to near the top of Scribner Hill, we just could not make it straight ahead, so we started the three sides of the rectangle trusting to make it that way. We did, and tipped over (my first experience of that kind), but no harm done.

"Mother was rather surprised to see us, but the horse was taken out and put in the barn, while we two were treated to good pumpkin pie and either co-

coa or cold milk (my favorite accompaniment to good pumpkin pie), and the warmth of the wood stove.

"I did not get the permission for which we went, but we had the ride and did not tip over going back.

"Miss O'Neil, then the assistant, had been giving me and one of the boys some sketchy lessons in dancing in the Academy after school, hoping for the best. The most I could expect was to sort of walk around with a partner, but it would not leave me conspicuous by sitting on the side lines as the only one that night.

"Father and Mother did not stay for the ball, but before they left, Miss O'Neil asked Mother if I might just dance once or twice; Mother thought it rather taking advantage of her but she gave her reluctant consent, so I walked around with one or two of the boys and Cousin Rick, who was a good dancer.

"But I do not remember that I was ever where I cared to dance again and am sure I never made the attempt. I guess Mother forgave me for wanting to be like the others."

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