

## Westford Recollections

by June W. Kennedy

### Westford Academy Part II

The Academy building served as a school for 103 years. Hattie Sargent was a member of the last class to graduate from it in 1897. Although the paper has yellowed, and the purple ribbon tied so lovingly about it has faded with the passing years, I quote in part from the original copy of her carefully penned "Graduation Essay on the O. Academy." Graduation exercises were held at the Meeting House until 1907. Hattie delivered her essay on June 18, 1896, at the then Unitarian Church:

"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 their studies? Or were they mature, sober-minded 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. While 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 notwithstanding, 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 teachers' 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 (sic) 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 103 years. Let us hope that these friendships were not merely schoolties, but affections which last a life time. 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 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. And may we, the last class from the old Academy, as we just now go out into life's battles, lead such lives and do such deeds as shall reflect honor and glory upon it. And, as we close, let us all earnestly say, 'God Bless the Old Academy'."

Spoken by W. E. Frost, Principal of the Academy: "The next term of school commences in the New High School Building, which was erected by the trustees of the Old Academy Building. Whereby the Old Academy is to be used no more."

A few years later the empty building was bought for \$100 by a man called "Tricky" (Henry O.) Keyes, who, with a pair of horses and turntable, moved it to its present 1979 location, the site of the former center blacksmith and harness shops. It was moved with some inconvenience to the town for it remained in the middle of the road for several days. Horses and wagons had to go around the Common. Just a little bit of spite played a part in the maneuvering. "I like to play with the law," claimed Tricky.

The building remained on stilts for five or six years. In 1916, the town needed a fire station larger than the old wheelwright shop it had been using. It bought the old Academy which served as the Westford Center Fire Station until 1975.

From the 1790's until 1973 there have been four Academy buildings in Westford. All of them are standing and being used today. Around 1912, the Town of Westford started to become involved in secondary education. At that time the School Committee took administrative control of Westford Academy, renting the building from the Trustees. In the 1920's, complete control passed to the town when the building and grounds were acquired for \$3,000. The invested financial surplus now presents scholarships to graduates of Westford Academy, going onto higher education. In 1975 the Trustees voted \$12,000 in loans and scholarships. Under the terms of the fund, only Academy graduates may benefit; thus it is that our town's public high school will always be called Westford Academy.

This is article No. 27 in the continuing Westford Recollections - 250th Anniversary series.

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\*Columnist's correction - The caption beneath Schoolhouse No. 8 which appeared in Westford Recollections article No. 24 on May 17, 1979, should properly read: Long-sought-for School No. 8, built in 1885, was located on Tenney Road.



Westford Academy Scholars - February 23, 1897. This is the last class to graduate from the original Westford Academy building. Miss Hattie Sargent was among these 1897

graduates. (A MacDougall photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)



WESTFORD ACADEMY,

Westford, Mass.

#### GRADUATION EXERCISES

AT THE UNITARIAN CHURCH,

FRIDAY, JUNE 21, 1896,

at 9.00 o'clock a. m.

Courier-Examiner Co., Printers, Lowell.

Graduation exercises for Westford Academy were held at the then Unitarian Church until 1907. They were later held at the Town Hall. (A Smith photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)



The trustees of Westford Academy supervise various funds left to the institution over the years, and they expend the income from the trusts in the form of loans to students. Trustees for 1971 are featured here: Seated, left to right: Treasurer Alan W. Bell, President Gordon B. Seavey,

Secretary H. Arnold Wilder. Standing: Austin D. Fletcher, Maurice Huckins, Jr., Allister F. MacDougall, John A. Kimball, John B. Abbot (descendant of an original founder), Richard W. Hall, Norman E. Day and Dana Fletcher. (A Seavey photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)