

Westford Recollections

continued from page 1

The final days for the completion of the Academy building arrived in the Spring of 1794. On April 1 the following was reported: "That the Academy be painted with a shade or two of green deeper than Chelmsford Meeting House.

"That the blinds to the lower windows of the Academy colored green. That the shavings under the Academy be got out, that handsome doorstones be hewn and laid at the door and that the Academy be properly wharfed up with stone and gravel

"That the roof of said Academy be painted a chocolate color.

"That the said commtee shall also build a wood and necessary house."

Albert E. Davis of Westford was a student at the Academy. His handwritten diary dated Nov. 1857 tells us it was so cold and smokey in the classroom that it was difficult to study. In the spring term of 1859 he refers to his preparation of the salutatory address, at the encouragement of Mr. Long, preceptor. It is interesting to note that Mr. Long later became Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Also, Albert Davis graduated from Harvard and he, himself, became preceptor of Westford Academy. His diary offers a colorful account of the academic, religious and social life of this town and days at Harvard College during the years of 1857-1858.

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, Ida gives a graphic account of her schooldays and reflects some of the thinking of those days of 1893, the year in which she graduated.

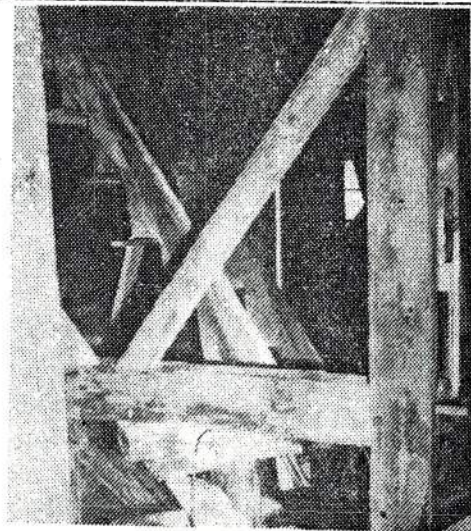
"The old Academy building - had two stories and a belfry with a fair-sized bell used for calling morning and afternoon sessions and classes between. We had our seats on the second floor, where Mr. Frost presided and heard his own classes. The lower grades were taught by the assistant, Miss Nettie Stevens.

"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! Some had very weak voices (up there, at least mine among them), and my heart went pit-a-pat. I think Martha Taylor was the only one not disturbed by this, but her father was a ready speaker who was fluent at all the Grange and agricultural meetings, so Martha inherited his ability and ease of speaking.

"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 challis, 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



Featured is the crude staircase which led to the bell tower in the original Westford Academy building. (A Seavey photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)

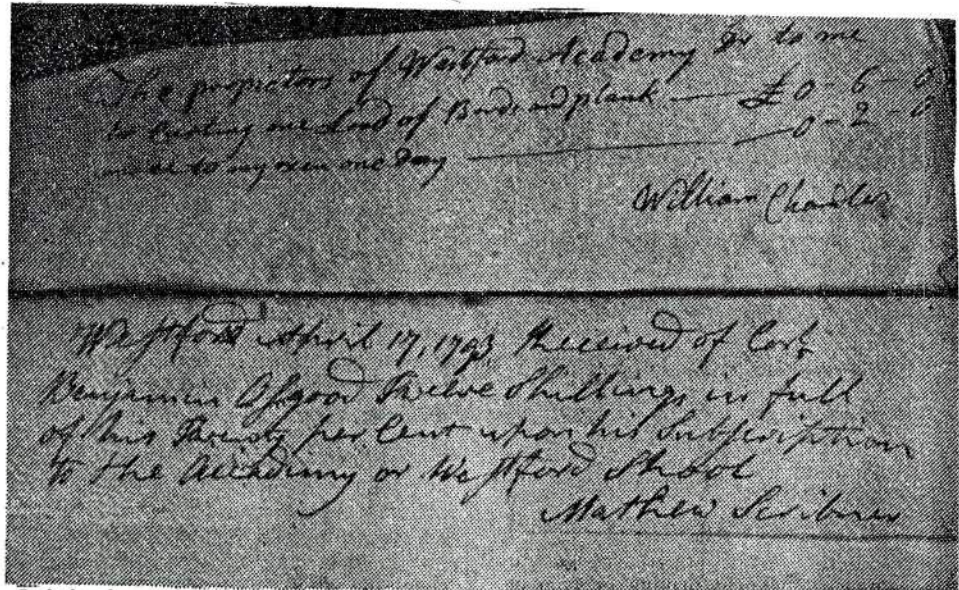
grand ball on the second floor of the Town Hall in the evening. About the only unhappiness I intentionally caused Mother was wanting to go to this ball. Martha's mother and father did not object to her dancing. The Congregational Church in Dunstable was quite set against it at that time, so Mother thought 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 cocoa 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 sidelines 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."

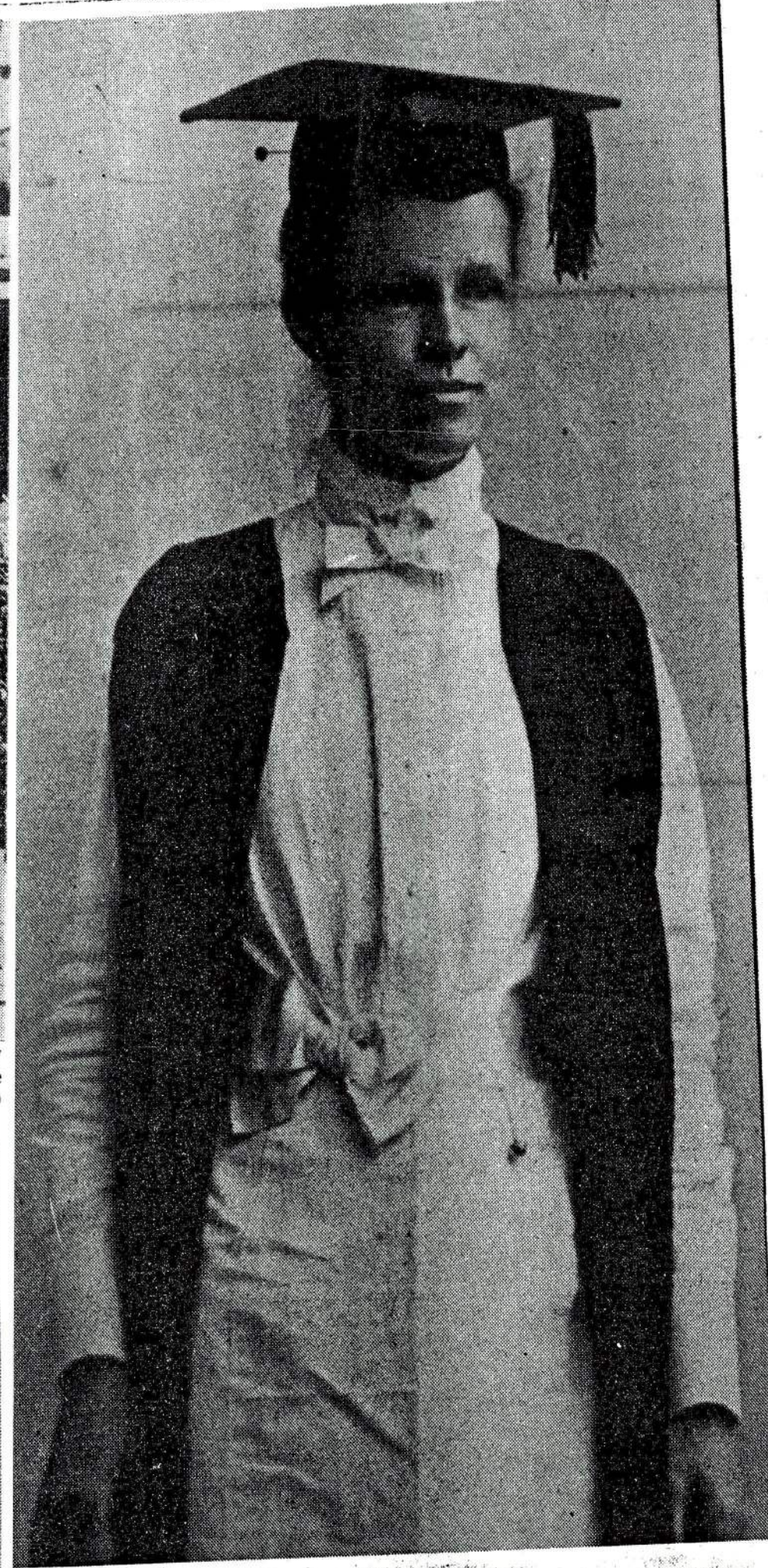
This is article No. 26 in the continuing WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS - 250th Anniversary Series.



Westford Academy was built facing the Common on the site now marked by the original front step and flanked by two granite benches. The land for the building was purchased in 1793. (A Seavey photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)



Original receipts for the construction of Westford Academy were found in 1967 in Harvard, Massachusetts, and kindly returned to Westford. (A MacDougall photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)



In 1893, when Ida Butterfield attended Westford Academy, Miss Nettie Stevens, assistant to Mr. Frost, taught the classes on the lower floor. Miss Stevens became a prominent geneticist and biologist and will be honored by the J. V. Fletcher Library in October.

*Please note that the captions for the two photos which appeared in WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS, article No. 25, were reversed.