

**CLASSICAL AND ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOL  
(WORCESTER HIGH SCHOOL)**

**1845 – 1892**

**HAPPENINGS**

**FIFTIES AND SIXTIES**

**FIFTIES**

**Note: The decade began with a debate whether lands surrounding the town should be set aside for cultivation or be used to accommodate the growth of the town with housing and commercial ventures. The book goes through the debate person by person which is not necessary to reproduce here. A number of those affiliated with the high school took part in this debate.**

**Suffice it to say that it was decided to ‘kick the can down the road’ and deal with the issue parcel by parcel as needs arose. Worcester missed the opportunity to undertake some central planning that might have benefited future Worcesterites.**

**1853**

Mr. Whiton was from Yale, class of 1853, and appears to have come directly from college to this school. His scholarly attainments were noteworthy, but the school-boy of those times will tell first of the encounter Mr. W. had with a certain pupil who subsequently became famous as a judge in New York city. The boy was larger than the teacher, but lacked the latter’s pluck, agility and judgment. In some way, the contest progressed down to the coal-bin in the cellar, and, if I mistake not, did not terminate till the contestants reached the street. The lad, according to all accounts, got the worst of the encounter, a fact that so worked upon his feelings that a case for assault against Mr. Whiton was presented in the Police Court. Just what the result was I do not know, but I have learned that at it was, practically, a vindication of the teacher.

**1855**

...the committee was searching diligently for a principal and succeeded in finally getting Mr. Osgood Johnson, a Dartmouth man, class of 1852...he entered upon his duties February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1855 and had this flattering item concerning himself in the following report of the committee, who in view of his merit had advanced his salary from \$1300 to \$1500 per year, a princely sum. “We look upon his inauguration to the High School as one of the most auspicious events of the year and confidently predict for it, under his instruction, a standing superior to any classical institution in this region.” To a fine classical knowledge, Mr. J. added superior attainments in Hebrew...it had been his intention to enter the ministry, but throat troubles had warned him to seek other fields of labor.

## 1858

The year 1858 is noteworthy in our history as signalizing the formation of classes. Hitherto, pupils had entered and remained until they were ready to leave, and no attempt whatever was made at classification. Now, however, the following arrangement went into effect: those who entered in January were called Juniors, those who had been in the school one year became Middlers, while all others constituted the Senior class.

In February of this year, 1858, the Eucleia Debating Society was formed, the first organization of this kind, I believe, in the history of the school.

...November of this year saw the beginning of the *Thesaurus*, a high school paper which ran in 32 numbers until May, 3, 1866.

## 1859

Of course, old boys and girls will relate anecdotes of the games and tricks of their days – none free from such. One gentleman says that Mr. S. used to keep the mischievous boys on the platform with him; but occasionally, the boys would make mysterious errands from the building, as it subsequently appeared, to buy peppermints for the principal. One good lady, to this day, remembers, not with the utmost pleasure, Mr. Sprague's telling her, a brunette, that standing in the sunlight or shine for punishment, would not hurt her complexion. A certain restless, irrepressible fellow was told by the teacher to look at the clock and be able to tell him when the hour and minute hands would be together. Doubtless, this boy was a good algebraist, for he soon sprang to his feet saying, 'I have it, Mr. Sprague, it will be in just X minutes.

Following Misses G. and P. as assistant teachers, came Miss Saraah L. Greenleaf, a Worcester lady of particular interest to the school since she was one of its original "pillars" (A name applied to the two girls who were the first ever to take the college preparatory course in the school.)

But in 1859, there came a change "in the spirit of their dreams." In the report of this year are found hints of a disagreement between the teachers presiding over the upper and lower rooms. At the end of the summer term, all this trouble culminated in the resignation of the whole corps, save Mr. Sprague himself, who, it is recorded, was supported in the committee by a vote of eighteen to two. It would do no good now to rehearse all the troubles of that day; we have enough in our own time without getting warm over those of the past.

**Note: The most distinguishing feature of the decade of the 1850's at the Worcester High School was the considerable turnover of the teaching staff. As far as female teachers were concerned, most left to be married. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were expected to manage the household and raise a family and therefore could not hold down a teaching job at the same time. Female teachers at the Worcester High School with longevity were usually widows without a family to raise.**

**Many teachers came directly from college to teaching positions at the Worcester High School. After a few years, they left for more lucrative positions elsewhere. Others did not meet**

the standards of the Worcester High School and were dismissed in short order. The most interesting case of teacher turnover took place in 1859 (see above).

Given the above, the author filled pages for this decade describing the comings and goings of every teacher, what they taught and how well they taught and how they were perceived by their students. This information is meaningless to us and is therefore not included in this presentation.

## **Sixties**

**Note:** Since many of the school's male teachers went off to fight in the Union Army, the author took the opportunity to describe the comings and goings of the school's female teachers in more detail than previously was the case. Female teachers took on teaching subjects previously the province of the school's male teachers, for example, classical languages and culture. Constant turnover was still the order of the day. I have chosen not to cover these comings and goings in this presentation.

**Note:** This decade begins with a very confusing paragraph praising the Worcester Fire Department. I can only assume that there was a small fire in the building that the WFD handled expeditiously.

### **1861**

In 1861, April 30, came the first public graduating exercises of the school, when a class of eighteen received diplomas. Up to this time, each pupil stayed till the spirit of leaving overtook him.

### **1862**

It was the Fall of 1862 that Mr. Amos Whiting gave the first lessons in vocal music in the school.

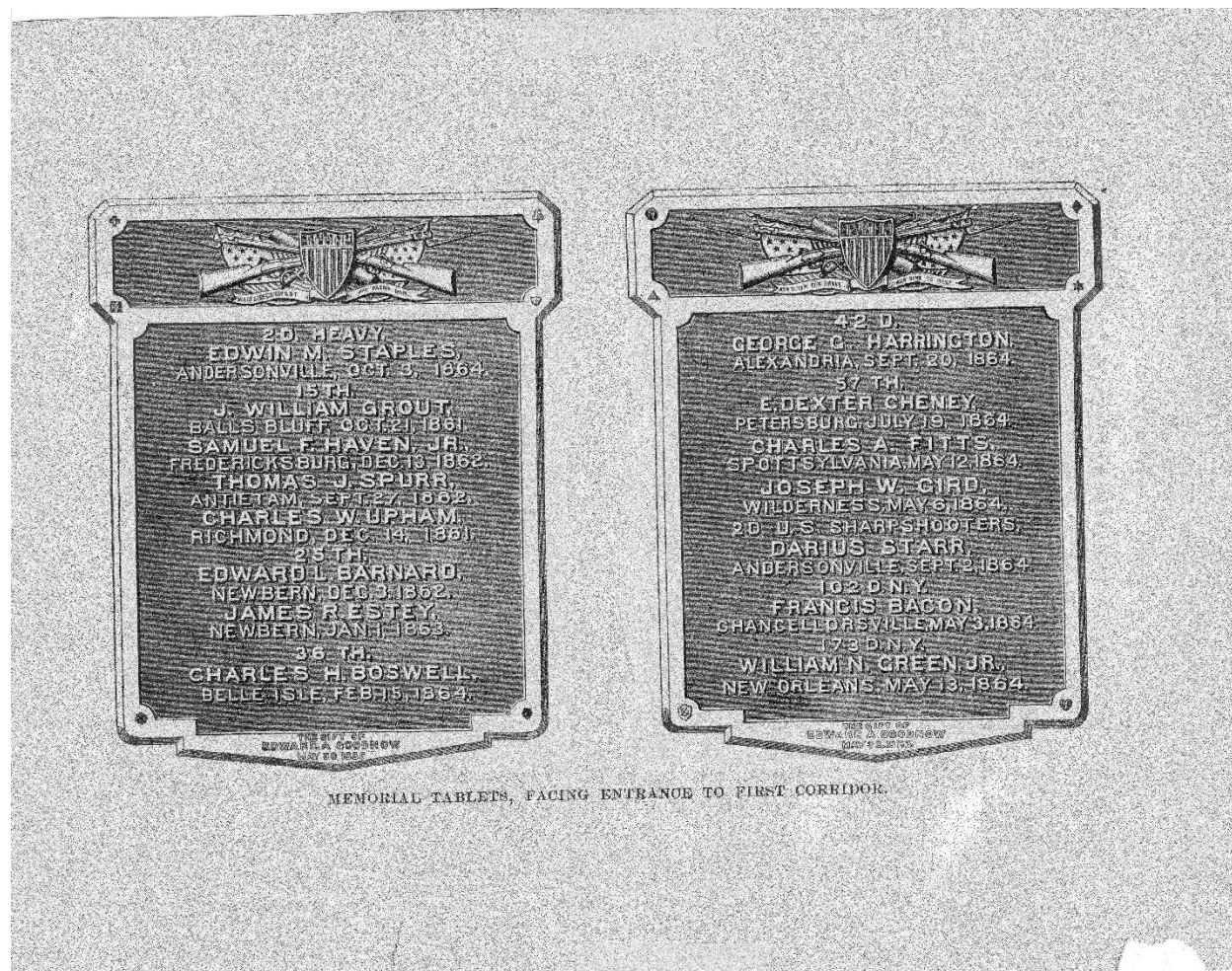
### **1864**

One of the most noteworthy changes wrought during this administration was the abolition of the two daily sessions of the school. Beginning with the winter term of '64, the school assembled at 9 o'clock and remained till 2 P.M. Afterward, the time was changed to 8:30 and 1 o'clock respectively, these hours obtaining every day in the week save Sunday. During these long sessions, there were two recesses, one of ten minutes, the other of half an hour. This change was brought about through a long petition presented to the school board containing the signatures of very many parents of the pupils. Doubtless, Mr. Greene's remarks to the children had much to do in securing these names. One of the arguments used was "Freshness of the intellect at early morning hours." True in theory, but too often false in the fact.

### **1860 – 1866**

Mr. Greene's six years of principalship came in one of the most trying periods of the Nation's history. It embraced the entire duration of the Rebellion, and many who, as boys, had owned his sway, passed from the school room to the tented field, there to fight and live or, in many cases, to

show how sweet it is to die for one's country. In organizations that the school maintained, it is very evident that the spirit of patriotism was ever present.



**Note:** As was mentioned previously, the school's male teachers fought in the "Rebellion" in large numbers. Many distinguished themselves on the battlefield and gained a mention from the author. A few fell in battle. Others from the Worcester High School community also made the supreme sacrifice and are mentioned on the tablets above.

These tablets moved from the 1845 building to the 1871 building (more on this building later), and the author believes that the plaques were again moved to the Irving Street building. I do not recall seeing these tablets during our time at Classical.

### Year Not Specified

No teacher, whatever his merit, can manage a school for any length of time without having his share of funny scenes. Were he disposed, a business man on Worcester's Main Street could tell a story about a certain boy who, taking his lunch leisurely during the recess, found an uneaten cookie in his hand when the signal for school sounded. Not caring to lose it, he crowded the same into his mouth and hurried to his recitation. Alas! He was the first called upon – cookies and Virgil did not agree – how could he recite? His cheeks stuck out like those of a ground

squirrel, and the utter ridiculousness of his situation finally so overcame him that with a loud explosion or laugh, the entire contents of his mouth were projected, **Boreas**-like, into the room. To add to the confusion, Miss S-o-e, of the weighty name, afterwards a distinguished singer, must needs fall off of her seat. As her avoirdupois was quite in keeping with her name, the concussion was awful. It was said that she had done this same thing before, it being her way of indicating appreciation of a joke.

**Note: Boreas is the Greek god of cold north wind storms and winter. Boreas is depicted as being very strong, with a violent temper to match. He was frequently shown as a winged old man or sometimes as a young man with shaggy hair and beard, holding a conch shell and wearing a billowing cloak.**