

WILLIAMSBURG HIGH SCHOOL- HELEN E. JAMES SCHOOL
By David Bickford, Class of 1966

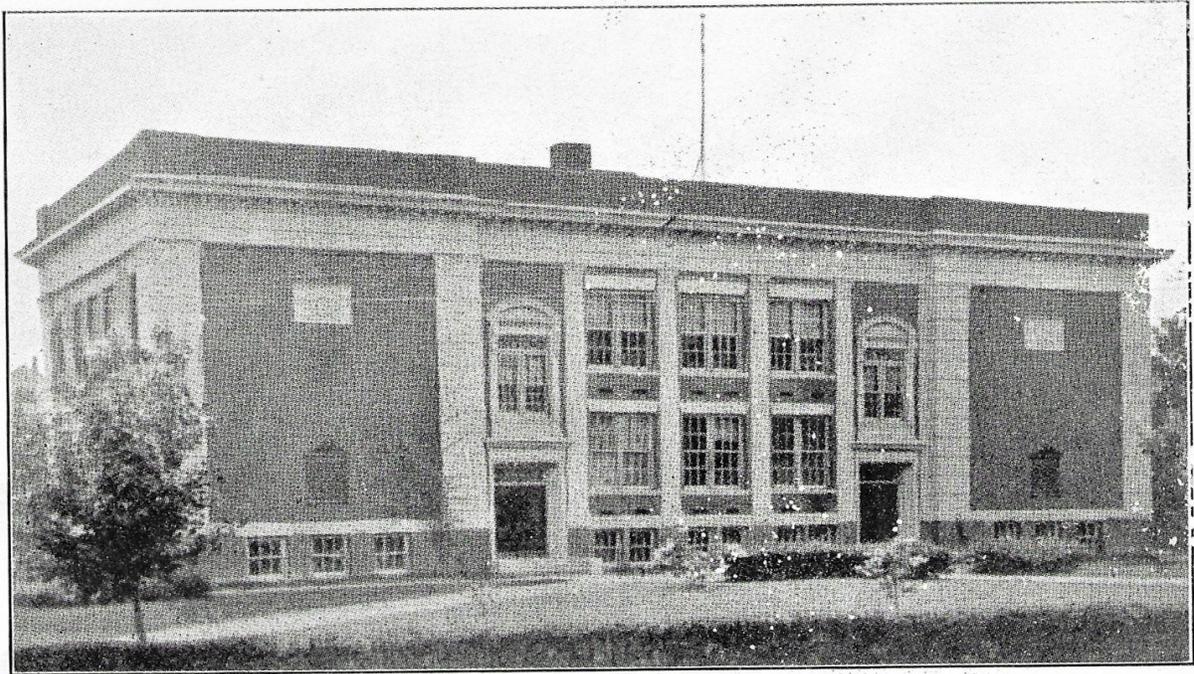
Classes for the original high school program in Williamsburg were conducted in the Williamsburg Center School, the building next to the Williamsburg General Store which now houses the Williamsburg Grange. In this building elementary grades were on the first floor and the high school on the top floor of the present Grange Hall. Reportedly in 1913 the high school curriculum changed from two years to four years, and a new teacher, Ms. Anne T. Dunphy was added to the faculty. Also in that year, construction began on a new school building at the corner of Route 9 and South Street. In September of 1914, the new school was completed and dedicated in a formal ceremony held on September 9, 1914. This building was named for Helen Field James whose generosity enabled the design and construction of the new school building in the center of town.



According to the 1946 history of the town and Ralmon Black's information, Helen Field was born in Conway, Mass in 1837. She was the daughter of a farmer named John Field and attended a local district school. She began working by teaching in the one room Nash Hill schoolhouse in Williamsburg while boarding with her cousins in that area. Reportedly Ms. Field was paid the sum of \$1.50 per week.

Ms Field had attended a girls' finishing school in Pittsfield while her older brother Marshall began his life's work in the Midwest, eventually becoming the owner of a department store called *Marshall Field* in the city of Chicago. In September of 1857 when she was twenty, Helen Field married Lyman James who came from a prominent family in Williamsburg. Mr. and Mrs. James lived on what is now called North Main Street and were some of the town's leading citizens. Lyman James reportedly inherited the James General Store across from the Williamsburg Congregational Church and operated it for many years, serving as Postmaster as well. He reportedly represented the town in the state Legislature in 1886. Lyman and Helen James had four children. Mrs. James was known throughout her life as a kind person who loved her town and sought to help others. Although she was known for her generosity, she was able to increase her financial gifts when her brother Marshall Field died in 1906, leaving an estate of approximately 155 million dollars.

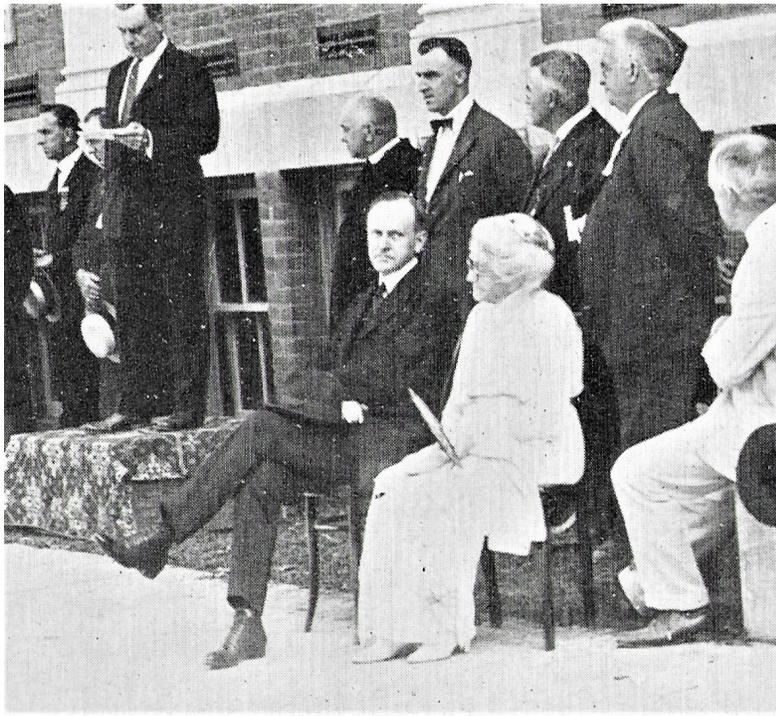
With her inheritance Mrs. James gave a generous amount to the Williamsburg Cemetery Association which still maintains Village Hill Cemetery. She also donated to the Williamsburg Congregational Church for the chapel and church spire and gave financial support to the Red Cross, the Visiting Nurses' Association and "foreign missions". She also financed the town firehouse and the school building which bore her name. She provided the funding for the watering trough that is located on the site of the former Helen E. James school. Ms. James also paid for construction of a sidewalk from Main Street to the Village Hill Cemetery and left money in trust for the maintenance of the school building. The program for the dedication of the new school building on September 4, 1914 lists a program of music, prayer, songs sung by pupils of the school, presentation of keys to the building by Helen James' son Philip (Lyman James Jr.) an address by Calvin Coolidge and additional remarks by Principal F.L. Boyden of Deerfield Academy.



PRESENTATION OF THE NEW SCHOOL BUILDING
TO THE
TOWN OF WILLIAMSBURG

FRIDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 4, 1914 AT 7:45 P.M.

Meeting called to order	Mr. Frank A. Brooks invited to the chair Mr. Lawrence Molloy, Selectman
Music	Orchestra
Prayer	Rev. Robert H. Life
Song	Miss Larkin and Pupils of the School
Presentation of Keys	Mr. Philip James
Acceptance for the Town	Mr. Wilbur M. Purrington
Address	Hon. Calvin Coolidge
Remarks and Felicitations	Principal F. L. Boyden, of Deerfield Academy
Music	Orchestra



During the town's 150th anniversary celebration in 1921, Mrs. James hosted Vice-President Calvin Coolidge and his family at her home when Mr. Coolidge came to give an address at the celebration. When Helen E. James School was initially completed, it only consisted of what many of us would know as the front portion of the building. This author assumes that this meant three classrooms on the second floor and three or four on the first floor with bathrooms and boiler room in the basement. The first graduating class consisted of five students. Early pictures show a

single story extension to the rear of the building. Fortunately, indoor plumbing had reportedly become a standard feature of the Williamsburg center schools in 1905. Some students of the mid to late 1930s studied to the sounds of construction as the new Spellman annex at the rear of the building was completed in 1938, adding 3-4 more classrooms on the second floor and an auditorium on the main floor. This project was of course driven by the increase in the school enrollment and was made possible by the money donated to the school by Ms. Elizabeth Spellman. The basement of the school may have been used for classes at that time.

The new auditorium was apparently used for plays, assemblies and events of that type. It was unlikely that it was suitable for use as what we know as a gym, although there was mention of physical exercise, probably of a more stationary type. After 1920 when the interior walls were protected by "beaverboard", the Town Hall was used for basketball games. By 1938 the faculty of the James school reportedly consisted of five full-time teachers. The school served not only Williamsburg and Haydenville students but also many students from Westhampton, Chesterfield and Goshen.



Standing: M. Damon, Miss Fisher, Coach, J. Black, M. Wells.
Seated: J. Merritt, M. Allaire, R. Merritt, M. Sylvester, N. Sheehan.

Girls Basketball Team- 1932



ANNE T. DUNPHY

Ms. Warner's article from 1939 gives much credit for the improvements in the Williamsburg High School system to Ms. Anne T. Dunphy whose work as teacher and eventually as principal led to increases in academic quality and achievement at WHS. Since 1915, according to the 1939 article, Williamsburg High School has been a "grade A state-aided high school, and it has been continuously granted certification privileges by the New England College Entrance Board". Ms. Warner also gives credit to Mr. E. P. Larkin, school principal for the first four years of its existence. From a 1914 graduating class of five students to the higher numbers of students graduating in later years, the school continued offering a broad range of educational opportunities to students from Williamsburg, Haydenville and the surrounding towns.

From the time of the late 19th century, Mr. E. W. Goodhue served as Superintendent of Schools until his death in 1918 when Lucius A. Merritt took over in this position. Mr. Merritt is credited for leading the Williamsburg school system for many years. Under his leadership the schools continued to offer a variety of extracurricular activities which included the forensic societies, athletic programs and the theater program which put on a class play each year. Reportedly the school at that time was known for the excellence of its debating team, led for many years by Mrs. Estella Warner. Other services reportedly offered in the early years of the Helen E. James School included the hiring of a school nurse and provision of hot lunches provided by "women of the town."



As more teachers were hired in the 1920s, the school was able to offer additional courses in mathematics and the sciences. According to Ms. Warner's article from 1939, the school won a prestigious medal for excellence in American History and students showed a high rate of college acceptances. In 1929 W.H.S. was honored with its first four year certification privilege.

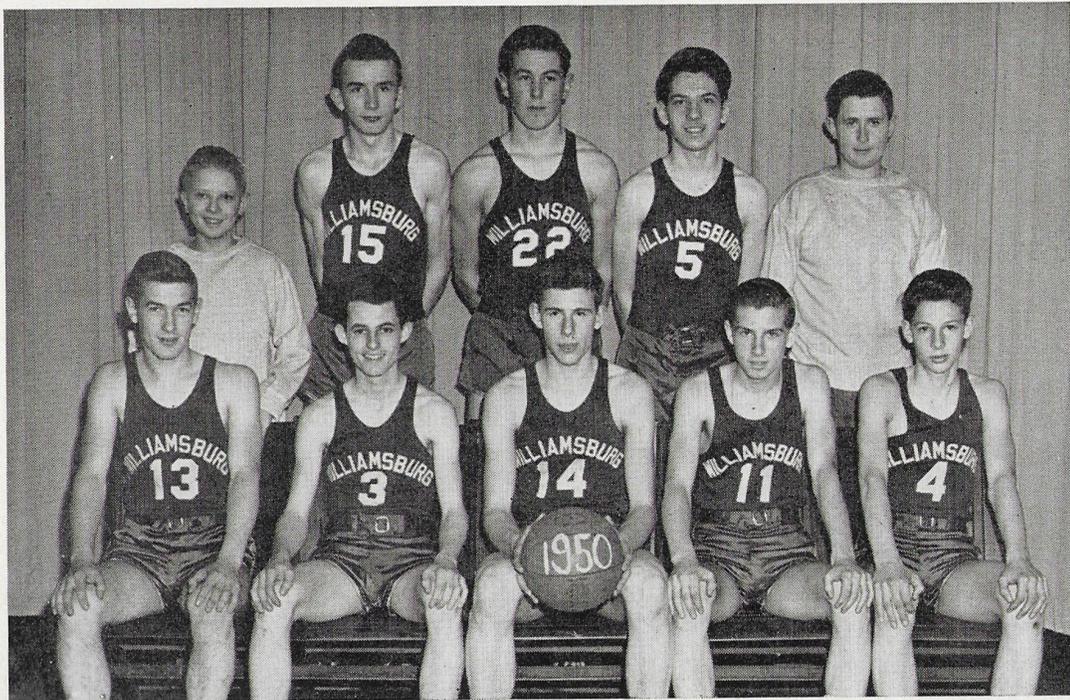
Ms. Estella Warner

The Williamsburg High School basketball teams won several championships over the years. The Girls Glee Club reportedly won a Massachusetts Song Contest in the event held in the eastern Mass. town of Haverhill. WHS orators reached state semi finals and finals during the 1930s. There were apparently several undefeated debate teams over a period of nine years. The Pro Merito Society has also been an important organization to recognize academic achievement. Over the years students were also involved in the school by being library aides, joining the *Tattler* staff, being elected to the Student Council, serving as Student Guides, participating in dramatics, joining the Science Club, and helping to organize the ever popular Latin Banquet. At some points in our history Driver Education was also offered at WHS.



Connie Packard and Mary Smart- early 50s

The sports programs offered at Williamsburg High School were somewhat limited by the size of the school. Therefore, unlike some larger schools, WHS did not have swimming, tennis or football teams. The athletic programs offered consisted of basketball for male and female students, a baseball team for the boys and softball team for the girls, a boys cross-country team and, at a later time, a golf team. The basketball programs were tremendously popular and followed by students and townspeople alike. It was when the Anne T .Dunphy school was completed in 1955 that the school finally had a full-sized gymnasium for games and practices with seats for spectators. Members of the "Frosty Kids" who had to shovel off the outdoor basketball court at the HEJ school before practice can tell stories about that experience.

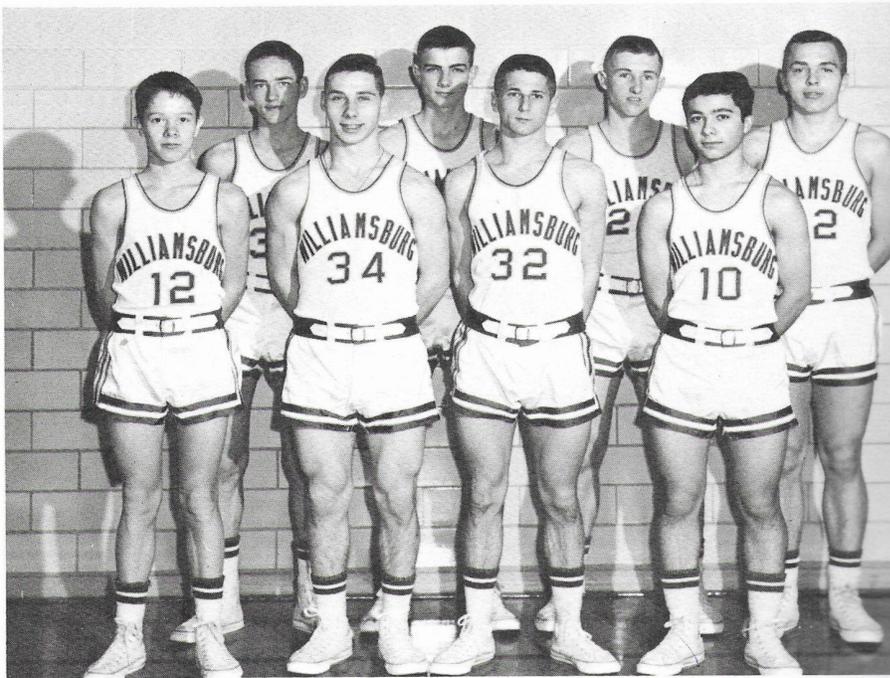


BOYS' BASKETBALL

First row, left to right: Herbert Nye, Frank Smith, Gilbert Sears, Bernard Bachand, Ramon Sears

Second row, left to right: Anthony Soltys, Peter Shumway, Eugene Penfield, James Johnson, William Hurley

There were a number of coaches who helped to mold the fine WHS sports teams. The late Edward Foster, himself a graduate of Williamsburg High School, served as coach of the boys' and girls basketball teams and the baseball team. Two other WHS graduates, Austin Snow and Evelyn (Rustemeyer) Kmit served as team coaches. Mrs. Kmit, Earl Tonet and David Grills served over many years to teach physical education classes and to coach WHS sports teams.



FIRST ROW: A. Golash, K. Stone, W. Graves, R. Wilson. SECOND ROW: W. Messeck, West, R. Otis, R. Hillenbrand

1966



Standing — Faculty Mgr. Foster, K. Ozzolek, Coach Snow
 Sitting — M. Hobbs, R. Black, E. Rustemeyer (Capt.), R. Sylvester, E. Thayer, N. Nietz

Burgy Boys Have Winning Season—1965



FIRST ROW: Paul Howes, John Dufresne, Charles Norris, Robert Wilson, George Lavallo. SECOND ROW: Coach Earl Tonet, Anthony Seymour, James Brown, John Johndrow, Kenneth Stone, William Graves. THIRD ROW: John Bisbee, Robert Otis, Edward Lloyd, Wayne Beebe.

The James school served as the elementary school (grades 1-6) as well as the junior and senior high school for Williamsburg until the new Anne T. Dunphy school opened for classes in 1955. Increased enrollment within the town's schools came as a natural consequence of the post World War II "baby boom". The Helen E. James school continued to serve as the junior high school (middle school) and as the regional high school until 1971 when the Hampshire Regional Junior and Senior High School building was completed in Westhampton.

Over the years, there were many faculty members who worked as teachers within the Helen E. James school. Some of these members of the teaching staff who dedicated many years to teaching at the junior and senior high school in the early to mid twentieth century included Anne T. Dunphy, Estella Warner, Edward Foster, G. Vernon Warner, Olive Healey, Frances Grinnell, Earl Tonet, and Robert Branch.

During the period of time in the 1960s that I attended HEJ, I would add to the list of fine teachers the names of Eleanor Bart, Anne Sabo Belck, Hilda DeNood, David Grills, Margaret Halberstadt, Evelyn Kmit, Marjorie McKusick, Herbert Montebello, Gloria Narbin, Paul Knight, George Mercer, Edward Trzienski and Marie Packard at the high school level. My class' 7th and 8th grade teachers included Anna B. Curtis, Martha Dickerman, Jean Gromacki and Donald MacGregor. George Feiker, a town resident, was our guidance counselor during my high school years, and Francis Reddington served as superintendent..

Softball



FIRST ROW: Margaret Clark, Eileen Gromelski, Donna Thackeray, Susan Healy, Susan Otis, Marsha Skwira.
SECOND ROW: Sandra Pegg, Cheryl Tiley, Judith Connell, Dorothy Sylvester, Judith Banister, Gloria Rapalee,
Michele Reddington. THIRD ROW: Sidney Williston, Lianne Cone, Sally Howes, Madelyn Breen, Janis Donovan,
Gloria Bushee, Pam Donovan, Denise Bickford.

Our Captain

English dept.-mid 60s



Marie Packard, Susan Trowbridge, Margaret Halberstadt

Until her death, Mrs James took an interest in the school program in town and took part in some of the school functions. After her death, her daughter Grace Mirick (formerly Gillette), a Smith College graduate, attempted to fill many of her mother's roles in the town of Williamsburg. Reportedly, she and her husband were a common sight at alumni banquets and school graduation exercises. Mrs. Mirick reportedly passed away in September of 1936.



Mr. Robert Branch
Mathematics



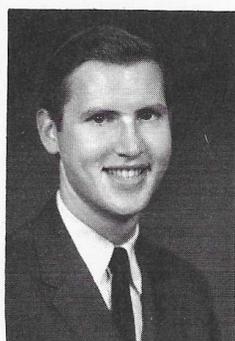
Mrs. Anna Curtis
English



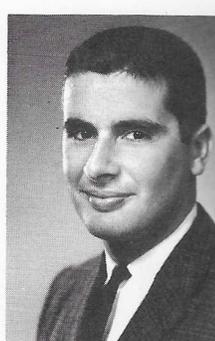
Mrs. Hilda DeNoor
French



Mr. George Feiker
Guidance Counselor



Mr. Ulrich Fontaine
German



Mr. David Grills
Physical Education

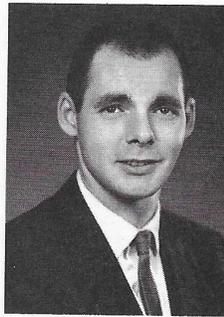
Some of the fine faculty who worked at WHS in the 1960s



Mrs. Marjorie
McKusick
Latin - Ancient History



Mr. George Mercer
Science



Mr. Herbert
Montebello
Social Studies



Gloria Narbin

Miss Gloria Narbin
English



Mrs. Marie Packard
English



Mr. Merrill Bisbee
Custodian



Mr. Earl Tonet
Vice-Principal
History



Mrs. Ann Graves
Secretary

As a first grader in the Helen E. James school, my classroom was on the South Street side of the building with Mrs. Eaton as our teacher. After a good start in this grade I was in the first second grade class to attend the brand new Anne T. Dunphy school behind the Grange Hall. My class did



Mrs. Eleanor Bart
Commercial Studies
World Geography



Mr. Joseph Bart
Science

not return to Helen E. James school until the seventh grade where we were joined by Haydenville classmates including Madelyn Breen, Ken Stone, Phil Lapan, John Johndrow, Norma Adair, Michelle McDonough and others. We were also joined by students



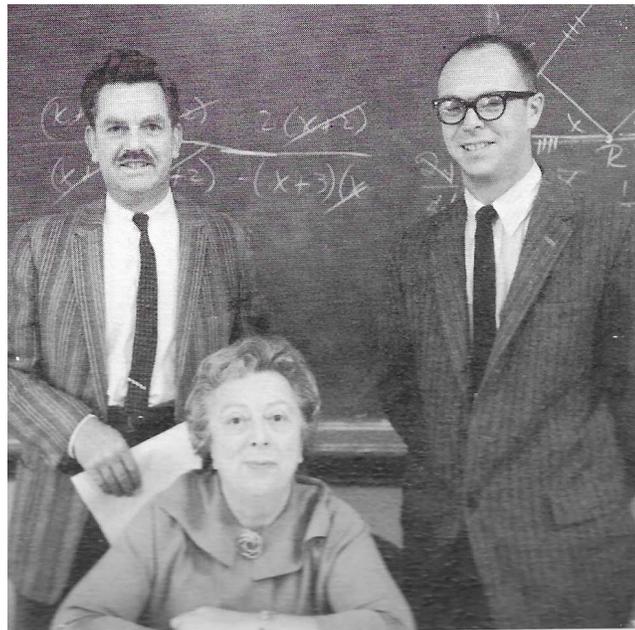
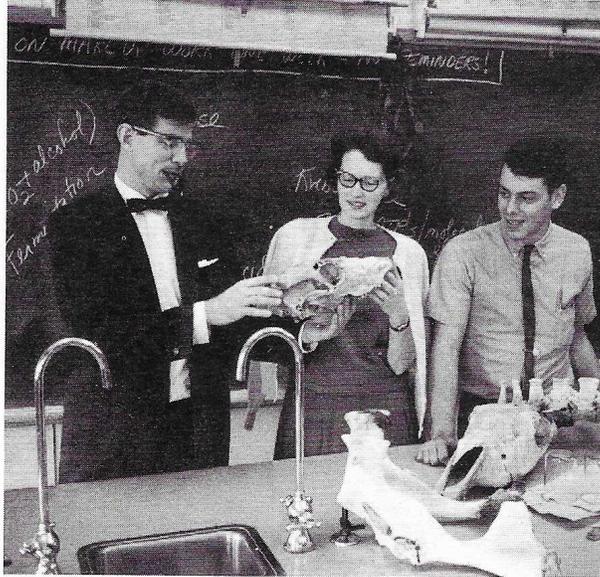
*Physical Ed. Dept.
1960s*

traveling from Westhampton. I had some new friends including Arthur Dodge and Dan Krug, and my horizons widened accordingly. My impressions of the HEJ building after 5 years in the new ATD facility was that it was pretty old and worn. We soon got used to the creaky floors, the cloakrooms with rows of hooks, the sounds of chalk writing on blackboards and the old bathrooms on the basement level. Mr. H. Merrill Bisbee was the custodian of the HEJ school throughout my time at the school. In seventh grade as well as in the eighth grade I feel we got a solid grounding in learning more about our language, the world beyond our borders, math skills that would help us to be more successful and the sciences which received much greater emphasis in the new world of the space age following the launching of the Russian satellite *Sputnik* on October 4, 1957. During these years the Anne T. Dunphy school was our site for hot lunches and for physical education classes, since the HEJ building offered neither of these. We were pleased to be trusted to travel between buildings for these activities..



Miss Healy

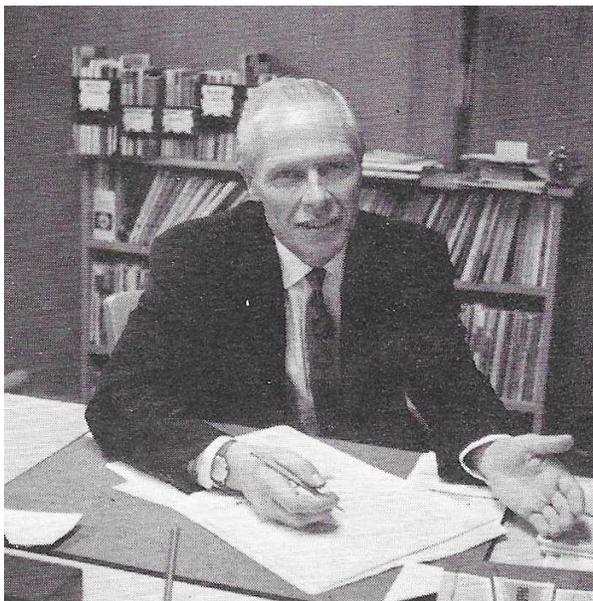
Science
Mr. George Mercer
Mrs. Anne Belck
Mr. Carlos Carranza



We literally “moved up” to the second floor for our high school program. At this level we met new students from Goshen, Chesterfield and, for our freshman year only, from Worthington. Our faculty was all different as well with some teachers concentrating on college preparation courses and others preparing students for a more business-oriented program (commercial course). In my freshman years

I took classes with Robert Branch (math), Edward Trycienski (science), Marjorie McKusick (Latin), Margaret Halberstadt (English) and Judith Forsberg (German). These challenges continued in the second (Sophomore) year with the addition of George Mercer for Biology, and Ulrich Fontaine as our new German teacher. In my junior year I was able to take the U.S. History course with Herbert Montebello and Chemistry with Anne Sabo Belck, herself a WHS graduate.

The final senior year offered Modern European History with Earl Tonet , Physics with Ms. Belck and English with Susan Trowbridge. That year I also took a typing class with Frances Grinnell. Little did we know that these keyboard skills would become more and more useful much later as the devices called computers were developed, introduced to the public and integrated into all our lives..





1952



First Row: Robert Smart, Allen Sylvester, Marshall Warner, Edward McColgan, Raymond Morin.
Second Row: Manager Roger LaCourse, Robert Smith, Coach Edward Foster, Russell Warner, Scorekeeper Ronald Beattie.

1946

I am firmly convinced that the years spent in the Williamsburg school system were years well-spent. I am very grateful for being taught by an excellent faculty in not only the new Anne T. Dunphy building but in the Helen E. James school building which was made possible by the generous and forward-thinking citizens of the town who valued education as a path to success in life. Although the Helen E. James school building has now been taken down to permit the construction of a much-needed public safety complex for Haydenville and Williamsburg, we have almost fifty years of our *Tattler* yearbooks (online, thanks to Meekins Library) to document the life and activities of Williamsburg High School: its students, faculty and physical structures. Most importantly all of us who attended this school system have literally hundreds of memories related to our educational journey through this fine school system that did so much to prepare us for our futures.

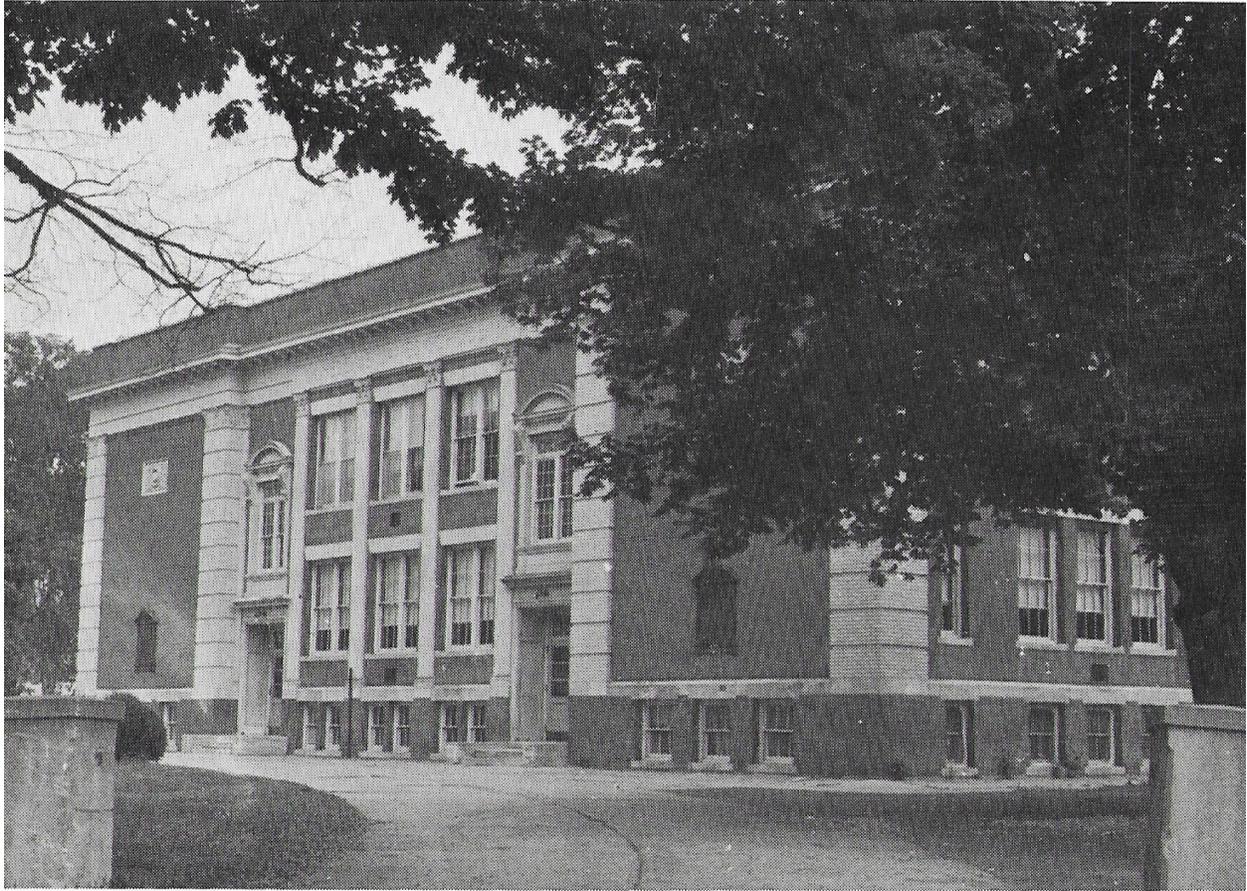


Varsity -- LEFT TO RIGHT; Linda Kellogg, Nancy Senecal, Sue Nutting, Sarah Curtis, MaryEllen Morin, Capt.; Linda Lavalle, Co-Capt.; Linda Sarafin, Elaine Sears.

Cross Country



FIRST ROW: Royl Schoonover, Bill Graves, Tim Barrus, Carl Eldred, Henry Thomas. SECOND ROW: Jim Gron, Steve Snow, Don Hutchins, John Campbell, Mick Donovan. THIRD ROW: Dale Hitchcock, Co-Manager; Hutchins, Jim Barrus, Earl Tonet, Coach; Dan Walsh, Dale Howes, Jon Kmit, Co-Manager.



I have used several sources for this material including, ``A History of Williamsburg in Massachusetts'', compiled by Phyllis Baker Deming and published in 1946 for the town's 175th anniversary. Additional source materials include an article by Estella Damon Warner printed in the 1939 edition of the Williamsburg High School's yearbook, "The Tattler", Ralmon Jon Black's article, Helen E. James, the Benevolent Angel of Williamsburgh and the Facebook posting by Daria d'Arienzo on September 8, 2022.

