

The Bricks

On the first day of school of September 1948, in a second-floor classroom of the Helen E. James School, the freshman class was told that this was the largest class that had entered Williamsburg High School in a very long time. There were about thirty-eight of us. We were born in the middle of the Great Depression, so the birth rate had dropped because of the economic situation making the previous classes smaller. During the next four years, our class count changed many times, until 1952 when we finally graduated as a class of nineteen.

Anne T. Dunphy was principal, and in 1952, only Robert Branch and Frances Grinnell remained from our freshman year, and Earl Tonet, Gerald Ritter, and Barbara Troisi were the “newer” members of the faculty. Miss Dunphy also taught Latin and acted as a counselor (which ‘Burgy didn’t have an official position). She presided over our last two nights at W.H.S. — “Class Night” and Commencement. On class night, Miss Dunphy assembled us in a classroom before we marched into the auditorium — which also served as a ballroom for the Junior-Senior Prom and other group activities. She explained to us that the town needed a new school building, and the school committee was needing encouragement to work for one. On the desk were nineteen bricks — one for each student to carry. She instructed us, when she gave the signal during the activities, to stand up in unison, walk in single file, and place our brick on a table in front of the school committee members. So that the audience would understand what we were doing, she taught us a simple ditty.

Scholastic and athletic awards were presented, the class will was read, a prophecy on the graduates and prophet were also read, and then Miss Dunphy gave the signal. We rose from our chairs and marching we sang:

“This is the class of fifty-two with bricks for you,
this is the class of fifty-two with bricks for you.....”

(Unfortunately I can't remember the rest, but it was sung that the bricks were for building the “new school.”)

The audience and school committee enjoyed a hardy laugh from our presentation.

Over the past sixty-plus-years, whenever I was able to get back to ‘Burgy, i would always manage to stop at the Anne T. Dunphy school. I would touch the nineteen bricks, and rub my finger over the middle one which had carved into it “1952.” I discovered during my last visit, the bricks had been removed during the renovating of ATD. Wondering, I wrote Stacy Jenkins, principal, and learned that the bricks had been removed during the construction, but that the “1952” brick had been saved. No one knew the significance of these bricks until my inquiry. Ms Jenkins said, “The mystery had been solved.” The school had been built much after our graduation year, so it might have stood for when a committee was formed to start the new school process. She said now the brick will have an explanation next it for people to remember its history. Unfortunately, the other eighteen bricks weren't saved.

Harry Pomeroy, 2015