

The Case for the Class of 1924



The AGAWAM MIRROR

*Cost of Reproduction a Gift
from Mr. Smith*

THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS
... AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL ...

*Photograph
by Bosworth*

7

The First Class to Graduate from Agawam High School

June 12, 1924

***Clifford Granger, School Committee Chairman
Benjamin Phelps, Principal/ Superintendent
Alfred St. John, Class President***



Compiled by Lawrence Scherpa (AHS '65)

March 2023

There was no class of 1923.

The Class of 1924 was the 1st class to graduate from Agawam High School.

The Class of 2023 will be the 100th class to graduate from Agawam High School.

Direct comments or questions to

Lawrence Scherpa

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The Case for the Class of 1924

There has been some discussion in town as to whether the first students to graduate from Agawam High School did so in 1923 or 1924.

The early 1920s were a long time ago as evidenced by the photo of the 1924 Ford Model T shown below.

Except for having captured the interest of a few old men, why does it matter?

It matters for the following reasons –

to ensure the accuracy of the historical record

and

to identify and honor the 1st and 100th class to graduate from Agawam High School.

Despite recent newspaper articles and official pronouncements to the contrary, this paper will offer clear, convincing, and conclusive

documented evidence that the class of 1924 was the first to graduate from Agawam High School.

Thus, more timely,

the Class of 2023 can be officially recognized as the 100th class to graduate from Agawam High School.



Making the Case for the Class of 1924 / Introduction

In the Spring of 2022, the Agawam High School Class of 2022 was officially recognized by school officials as the 100th class to graduate from Agawam High School.

This was the best decision school officials could make at the time given the limited evidence presented.

In light of the compelling and convincing evidence that will be presented on the following pages it is hoped that school officials will do the right thing and acknowledge

the Class of 1924 as the 1st to graduate from Agawam High School and the Class of 2023 as the 100th class to graduate.

The Class of 2022 will always have the distinction of graduating during the 100th anniversary of Agawam High School!



The AGAWAM MIRROR

*Cost of Reproduction a Gift
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**THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS
... AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL ...**

*Photograph
by Bosworth*

7

The students pictured above, were proud of the distinction that they would carry with them throughout their lives -- they were members of the 1st class to graduate from Agawam High School.

Specious claims of an earlier class, which wither under scrutiny,
should not be allowed to tarnish the distinction
of which this class was so proud!

(Individual students are identified in the last section of this paper)

Making the Case for the Class of 1924

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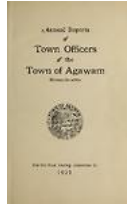
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Making the Case for the Class of 1924 / Preface

An Introduction to Clifford Granger and Benjamin Phelps

The first category of evidence is found in reports submitted by the School Committee, Clifford Granger Chairman and Benjamin Phelps, Superintendent/ Principal to the ***Annual Town Reports***.

Emphasis will be given reports that they wrote for publication in ***Annual Town Reports***

Their word would not have been question in their day...but with the passage of time, few, today, can appreciate the trust placed in the two by their contemporaries.

What weight should be given to the reports of these men today? Are their reports valid and reliable?

A brief overview of the lives and public service of two men follows so that their reports can better be evaluated.

Parallel Lives

Benjamin Phelps was born in West Suffield, Connecticut in 1878.

Clifford Granger was born three years later in the adjoining town of Agawam (Feeding Hills) Massachusetts in 1881.

Both attended and graduated from the Connecticut Literary Institute (Suffield Academy)
Whether they were friends or acquaintances at Suffield Academy is not known.

After graduation from Suffield Academy, Phelps graduated from Yale University in 1902.
Phelps went on to receive a Master's Degree from Columbia University in 1913.

After graduation from Suffield Academy, Granger graduated from Brown University.
By today's standards both were well educated men.
In their time, both were *very well educated* men.

Both men had a personal commitment to education.

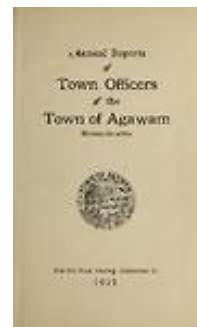
Upon graduation from Yale, Phelps began his teaching career in New Jersey.
Upon graduation from Brown, Granger began his teaching career in California.

Both men became school administrators.

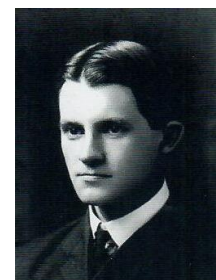
Phelps became a Principal and Superintendent in a variety of townships in New Jersey.
Granger became a Dean at Suffield Academy.

In 1913, the same year Phelps got his Master's degree from Columbia,
Granger returned to Agawam to take over the family farm.

In 1914 Granger was elected to the Agawam School Committee and
would serve on the School Committee for the rest of his life.



Benjamin Phelps



Clifford Granger

Making the Case for the Class of 1924 / Preface

An Introduction to Clifford Granger and Benjamin Phelps

Their lives intersected in 1920.

As Granger had returned to Agawam in 1913, Phelps returned to the area in 1920.

That year Phelps was hired by The School Committee, Clifford Granger Chairman, to serve as the 1st Principal of the new Agawam High School as well as simultaneously serve as Superintendent of Schools. Whether Granger remembered his old Suffield classmate is not known.

Phelps would remain as Superintendent for the rest of his life.

Both men died suddenly within days of each other.

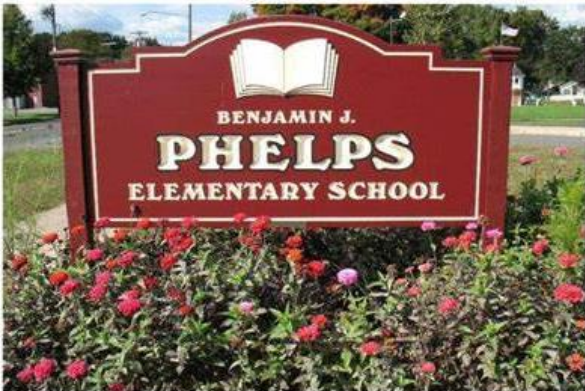
Phelps was killed in a truck accident on April 7, 1946

Granger, as Chairman of the School Committee, became “Interim” Superintendent.

Sadly, Granger died a few days later of a cerebral hemorrhage on April 16, 1946.

The two men, who became close friends, most responsible for guiding the Agawam Public Schools from 1920 – 1946 through the “Roaring 20s”, “The Great Depression” and the World War II era were suddenly gone.

The two elementary schools named in their honor,
Benjamin Phelps Elementary and the Clifford Granger Elementary
attest to the esteem in which they were held by the community.



Knowledge of their intellect, commitment and integrity

gives added gravitas to their reports which follow.

Sufficient Evidence

Phelps / Granger Quotes

All the evidence that is really necessary to establish the Class of 1924 as the first class can be found in the following two excerpts from the Annual Town Report of 1923 and the newspaper article on the following page

“In June of 1924 our first High School graduation exercise will be held.”

Agawam School Committee Report, Annual Town Report 1923, p.71

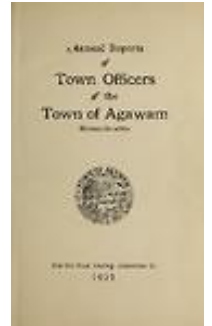
School Committee names attached to the report

Clifford M. Granger, School Board Chairman
Percival V. Hastings, Secretary
J. Arsene Roy, Purchasing Agent

***“Class of 1924: A class of about 25 will graduate in June.
This will be the first class to graduate from the Agawam High School.”***

Superintendent’s Report, Annual Town Report 1923, p.86

Superintendent / Principal Benjamin Phelps



Springfield Daily Republican

June 13, 1924

Page 6

AGAWAM

**AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES FIRST CLASS**

**Rev James Gordon Gilkey
of Springfield Makes Com-
mencement Address**

Agawam, June 12—The graduation of the first class from the high school was held tonight in the assembly hall. About 900 people present showed satisfaction with the work of the new high school. An orchestra composed of boys and girls of the school, under the leadership of Miss Clark, a teacher, played.

The address was made by Rev James Gordon Gilkey of Springfield on "New Americans for the New America." A prayer was offered by Rev John G. Dutton, pastor of the Congregational church. Superintendent Benjamin James Phelps presented the diplomas, and Clifford M. Granger, chairman of the school committee, gave out the diplomas. Rev Arthur Rudman pronounced the benediction.

The graduates were Norton Austin, Elsie Blish, Florence Blish, Dorothy E. Bodurtha, Marjorie Louise Fay, Alfred Gelstharp, Jr., Edmund A. Gosse-
lin, Louise Rose Hawley, Erna Hendrickson, Edward Allen Kellogg, Elizabeth Messenger Marsh, Alice G. Matteson, Helen T. McLaughlin, Caroline N. Novelli, Vera B. Pomeroy, Paul Arthur Rudman, Marion Agnes Scannell, Marlon May Seaver, Edith May Smith, Alfred St John, Elizabeth L. Tilden, Andrew G. Toussaint, Henry Joseph Twine, Gladys Wells, Medora Wilson, Rosaire Caron and Marie Rose Caron.

Sufficient Evidence

If you believe Clifford Granger, Benjamin Phelps, and the Springfield Newspapers
there is no need to read on.

For those who remain skeptical, the following pages provide additional
documented, substantive, and compelling evidence
in support of the Class of 1924 being the first to graduate from Agawam High School.

For the record, there are no contemporary records of a class of 1923.

There are no newspaper articles, class lists, class photos, reports in the Annual Town Reports
or references in the School newspaper, **The Mirror** or AHS Yearbooks.

The expression “Agawam High School Class of 1923” is not to be found in any contemporary account!
(the expression is a 21st century construct)

The reason for this is found on the following pages

Proving the obvious can be boring and redundant.

I will do my best to make this interesting,
but a warning,

the evidence will become redundant,
the evidence will become very redundant,
the evidence will become very, very redundant!

The redundancy, from a variety of sources, substantiates the fact that
the Class of 1924 was the first to graduate from Agawam High School

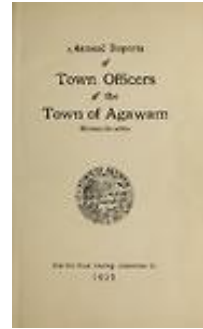
Section 2

Documented Evidence

Agawam Town Report 1921 – 1929

13 Citations

3 Contemporary Newspaper Accounts



Agawam High School Publications – Yearbooks

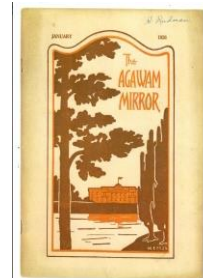
10 Citations

1 Newspaper Account



Agawam High School Publications – The Mirror

5 Citations

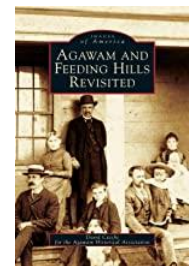


Agawam and Feeding Hills Revisited by David Cecchi

1 Citation

The Final Word / AHS '24 60th Reunion

2 Newspaper Accounts



Springfield Daily News

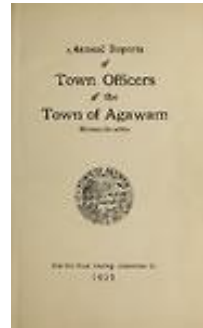
Documented Evidence/ Annual Town Reports

The first body of evidence to be presented is taken from

School Committee Reports and Superintendent Reports found in the
Annual Town Reports from 1921 to 1925.

Citation # 1

Agawam Town Report / 1921*
School Committee Report, p. 79



***“Your committee have decided
to offer no senior course in the high school the first year,
feeling that it would be poor for us both educationally and financially.***

***That of course means that those who are now classed as Juniors in other schools
will be allowed to remain another year for graduation.***

Clifford M. Granger, School Board Chairman (pictured at right)
Percival V. Hastings, Secretary
J. Arsene Roy, Purchasing Agent



Comment

This was submitted to the 1921 Annual Town Report as plans were being made by the School Committee to complete the construction, provisioning, and staffing of Agawam High School scheduled to open in September of 1922. This quote provides straight forward evidence from the School Committee, Clifford Granger – Chairman, that there were no plans to provide for a Senior Class during the 1922 – 1923 school year.

The report was submitted by policy makers not mere observers.

As well as being fiscally sound, it was a kind gesture by the School Committee to allow Agawam residents who had spent the previous three years as students in neighboring high schools to remain there for their final senior year.

One of the notable students who was affected by this decision was Agawam resident Edith Hull who graduated in 1923....from Technical High School. She would go on to become the noted Agawam historian Edith LaFrancis who will be discussed later in this paper.

School Committee Chairman Clifford Granger went on to serve a total of 32 years on the Agawam School Committee, many of those years as Committee Chairman. When he attached his name to this report, Granger was in his early 40s and had already served 8 years on the School Committee. He was an intelligent, responsible, mature man when this report was written.

Given his background of accomplishment and service, there is no reason to doubt the veracity Granger’s report

“no senior course in the high school the first year....”

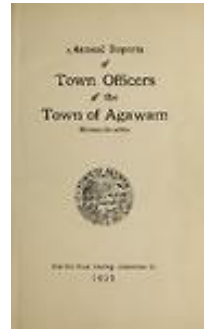
*(Annual Town Reports were published in December of the dated year, halfway through the school year.)

Documented Evidence / Annual Town Reports

Citations #2 and #3
Agawam Town Report / 1922

School Committee Report, p. 80

***“The situation [overcrowding] was handled satisfactorily in 1922 by the establishment of a special seventh grade at the high school.
But, with no graduating class in the Senior High this year
we will not have the room to accommodate another entire class in the Junior High Department.”***



School Committee Report, p. 82

“During the present school year (1922-1923) we have, as you know, no Seniors in our High School.

This coming year (1923 -1924) we must of course make provisions for such a class...”

Clifford M. Granger, School Board Chairman
Percival V. Hastings, Secretary
J. Arsene Roy, Purchasing Agent

Comment

The first part of the quote speaks to one of the major problems in the Agawam Schools – overcrowding.

With no senior class during the 1922-23 school year, AHS could accommodate an overflow class of 7th graders.

Anticipating a senior class in the 1923 – 24 school year the School Committee was acknowledging the fact that there would be no room to house an overflow of elementary students starting in 1923.

(Though opened in 1922, the High School needed a new addition only seven years later in 1929.)

The School Committee was also anticipating the need to hire additional staff to accommodate a senior class in 1923-24.
(Provisions for additional staff were made for such a class during the 1923 – 1924 school year.)

The School Committee’s report is unambiguous

“During the present school year (1922 – 1923) we have....no Seniors...”

Policy makers. not observers, attached their name to this report

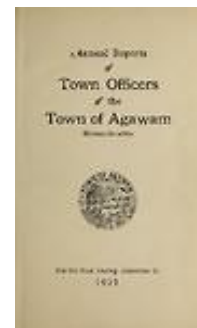
There is no reason to question the veracity of School Committee Chairman, Clifford Granger or any of the other School Committee Members whose names are attached to the report.

If the School Committee, Clifford Granger, Chairman, said there was no senior class...

there was no senior class in 1923.

Documented Evidence / Annual Town Reports

Citation #4 Annual Town Report / 1922
Superintendent's Report, p. 101



In order to grasp the importance of the charts presented below, additional information is required. Prior to 1922, the Agawam public schools offered 9 grades of study to its students. With the opening of the High School an additional 4 grades were added bring the total to 13.

As Superintendent Benjamin Phelps noted in his report in 1922

“According to the present organization of the Agawam Schools you have nominally 13 grades in your school system, but in reality you have a 12 grade system for the brighter pupils.” (ATR 1922, p. 109)

Directed to do so by the School Committee, Phelps developed a plan to reduce the number of grades 13 to 12. Phelps states ***“The best plan to adopt...may be termed the absorption plan. The point of attack of the absorption plan is the ninth grade.”*** (ATR 1922, p.109)

In fairness to students and teachers, the ***“absorption plan”*** was phased in over a period of years. The “old” ninth grade was not totally eliminated until 1929. (The logistics of how this was accomplished, year by year, can be explored by examining the Superintendent's reports from 1922 – 1929).

For this reason, AHS organizational charts prepared by the Superintendent and included in the annual Superintendent's report, prior to 1929 list 13 grades— with the exception of the 1922-23 school year.

An examination of the charts will provide further evidence of the fact that the first class to graduate was 1924.

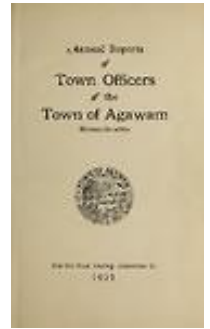
The following chart copied from page 101 of the 1922 Annual Town Report shows the enrollment of the high school for the 1922 – 23 school year. As noted, at that time there were “thirteen grades”. Senior year was grade 13.

ENROLLMENT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL			
Tenth Grade			49
Eleventh Grade			37
Twelfth Grade			33
Total			119
Total in Elementary Schools			1037
Total in Junior High School	173		
Total in Senior High School	119		
Attending Central High, Springfield	1		
“ Commercial “ “	2		
“ Technical “ “	2		
“ West Springfield High	5		
Total in High Schools			302
Attending Springfield Vocational School			10
Total in Public Schools			1349
Increase during the year in Public School pupils			104

Notice that no grade 13 is listed – ***there were no seniors according to the chart.***

According to the chart, 10 seniors were still attending High Schools in Springfield, and West Springfield. Those students were allowed to complete their studies and graduate from the schools they had attended for the previous 3 years. Agawam residents who were not seniors in 1922-23 in other schools returned to continue their education in the new Agawam High School as Juniors and Sophomores. Chart prepared by Benjamin Phelps.

Citation #5
Annual Town Report - 1923
Superintendent's Report, p.85



Contrast the chart on the previous page with a similar chart from the Annual Town Report one year later in 1923

ENROLLMENT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL		
Ten		46
Eleven		40
Twelve		32
Thirteen		26
Total		144
ENROLLMENT TABLE FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS		
Total in Elementary Schools		1057
Total in Junior High School	221	
Total in Senior High School	144	
Attending Technical High School, Springfield	1	
Attending West Springfield High School	1	
Total in Senior High School		367
Attending Springfield Vocational School		9
Total in Public Schools—Jan. 1, 1924		1433
Increase during the year in Public School pupils		84
II. HIGH SCHOOL		

Comment

Grade 13 (not charted in 1922), is clearly listed at the start of the school year in 1923 with 26 students – these would be the first students to graduate from Agawam High School in 1924.

Notice the great reduction in students attending high school outside of the system

Notice also the expression “Senior High School” to differentiate from the “Junior High School.”
(Both were housed in the same building until 1955)

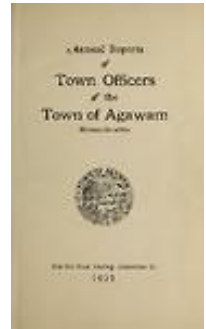
Thus the expression “Senior Chorus” would include a chorus of all high school students, not just Seniors.

Documented Evidence / Annual Town Reports

Citation #6

Agawam Town Report / 1923

School Committee Report, p.71



“In June of 1924 our first High School graduation exercise will be held.

Our Principal tells us that the class of 1924 is an exceptional class.”

Clifford Granger, J.A. Roy, Percival Hastings, Sydney Atwood, E.P. Lowell, Edna C. Doane
School Committee

Comment

No analysis necessary!

Citation #7

Annual Town Report 1923, p. 86

Superintendent's Report

“Class of 1924: A class of about 25 will graduate in June.

This will be the first class to graduate from the Agawam High School.”

This class being the foundation class is in every way worthy of the high position It occupies.”

Benjamin Phelps

Comment

No analysis necessary!

Documented Evidence / Annual Town Reports

Citation #8

Agawam Town Report 1924
Superintendent's Report, p. 96

"The honor of giving Agawam the first commencement fell to the class of 1924.

The class was equal to the occasion and gave Agawam, in full measure, a fitting return

for the investment in a new high school.

The class then joined the ranks of the 1st Alumni."

Benjamin Phelps

Comment

Phelps first two sentences are clear.

The third sentence is subject to interpretation and will be analyzed elsewhere in this report.

Citation #9

Annual Town Report 1924
Superintendent's Report, p.92

***"The organization and administration of a high school have a direct bearing upon
entrance certification to higher institutions of learning.***

In my last year's report (December 1923) a preliminary statement was made about this subject.

At that time Agawam was about to graduate the first class (June 1924)

and the question of the admission of graduates to college was in the foreground."

Benjamin Phelps

Comment

Another of Phelps' references to the Class of 1924 as being the first to graduate.

The college admissions among the members of the Class of 1924 was quite impressive including students admitted to Amherst College, Dartmouth College, Smith College, Mt. Holyoke College, Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Northeastern University.

This is documented in a *Springfield Daily News*, article dated September 20, 1924, p. 10.

The article is shown in the pages following this section.

Documented Evidence / Annual Town Reports

Citation #10 and Citation #11 Annual Town Report 1924
Superintendent's Report, p. 96 – 99

The pride that was felt by the town in their new high school is evident in the fact that three pages of the Superintendent's report are devoted to coverage of the first Agawam High School Commencement held in June of 1924. Included are

Agawam High School Class Day Program
Class Song of 1924
Agawam High School Graduation Program Class of 1924
Senior Class Roll

The Graduation Program and The Senior Class Roll 1924 shown below are taken from pages 98, 99 of the ATR 1924

AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION EXERCISES CLASS OF 1924		
Thursday Evening, June 12, 1924, at 8.15		
PROGRAM		
Commencement March	Orchestra	
Invocation	Rev. John G. Dutton	
Lost Chord (<i>Sullivan-Proctor</i>)		
I'll Sing Three Songs of Araby (<i>Clay-Wills</i>)	Glee Club	
Commencement Address, "New Americans for the New America"		
Rev. James Gordon Gilkey		
Poet and Peasant Overture (<i>Franz von Suppe</i>)	Orchestra	
Presentation of Class for Diplomas Supt. Benjamin J. Phelps		
Presentation of Diplomas		
Clifford M. Granger, Chairman of School Committee		
Charity (<i>Rossini</i>)	Glee Club	
Hungarian Dances Nos. 5 and 6 (<i>Joh. Brahms</i>)	Orchestra	
Narcissus (<i>Nevin</i>)		
Creole Swing Song (<i>Denza</i>)	Glee Club	
Violin obligato, Kenneth Dumas		
Benediction	Rev. Arthur Rudman	
Soldiers' Chorus (<i>Gounod</i>)	Orchestra	
SENIOR CLASS ROLL 1924		
Name		Course
Norton Austin		General
†Elise Blish		General
*Florence Blish		General
†Dorothy E. Bodurtha		General
Marjorie Louise Fay		General
*Alfred Gelstharp, Jr.		Classical
Edmond A. Gosselin		Commercial
*Louise Rose Hawley		Classical
*Elna Hendrickson		General
Everett Allen Kellogg		General
Elizabeth Messenger Marsh		General
Alice G. Matteson		General
†Helen C. McLaughlin		Commercial
†Caroline M. Novelli		Commercial
†Vera B. Pomeroy		General
Paul Arthur Rudman		Classical
†Marion Agnes Scannell		Commercial
Marion May Seaver		General
Edith Mae Smith		Commercial
Alfred St. John		Commercial
†Elizabeth L. Tilden		Commercial
Andrew G. Toussaint		General
Henry Joseph Twine		Commercial
Gladys Wells		Commercial
Medora Wilson		Commercial
* High honor pupil (Grade 90—95)		
† Honor pupil (Grade 85—90)		
Awarded Special Certificate in English: Rosaire Caron, Marie-Rose Caron.		

The Town was very proud of its first graduating class!

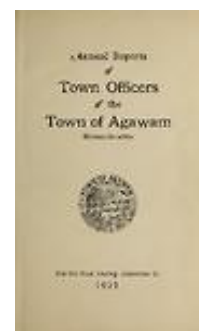
It is significant to note that the 1923 Annual Town Report makes no mention, whatsoever, of a class of 1923!

Documented Evidence / Annual Town Reports

Citation #12

Annual Town Report 1925 pages 94 and 95
Superintendent's Report

“Two classes have graduated from Agawam High School that of 1924 numbering 26 pupils and that of 1925 numbering 27. In all 53 students have received the high school diploma.”



Previous to 1924 Agawam pupils were attending three high schools in Springfield and the West Springfield High School. The following tables will show the number of Agawam graduates from the above schools for the years 1922 and 1923.

	<i>Year</i>	<i>Agawam Graduates</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Agawam Graduates</i>
<i>Central High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Technical High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Commercial High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>West Springfield High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>4</i>

These tables show that for the two years 1922 and 1923 Agawam high school pupils in the above mentioned schools received a total of 23 diplomas.”

Benjamin Phelps

The first sentence quoted above is clear providing yet more evidence that the Class of 1924 was the first. The second sentence establishes a data reference point.

There is no mention of an AHS class of 1923 by the Superintendent of Schools.

Agawam Graduates refers to Agawam resident students graduating from neighboring high schools.

With great pride Phelps goes on to note that, compared to '22- 23 totals, 130% more Agawam students are now graduating from Agawam High school since its founding.

Note the words he uses Agawam high school pupils meaning

Agawam residents who were students in neighboring high schools,

not Agawam High School pupils

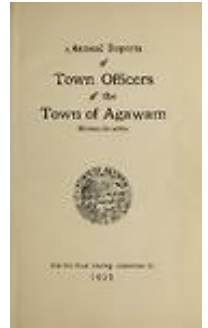
This difference in meaning will become significant later in this report.

Documented Evidence / Annual Town Reports

Citation #13

Annual Town Report 1929

Principal's Report, p.101



A portion of the Principal's report was entitled "Alumni" and reads as follows"

"The Alumni survey to date is not complete but some interesting facts are available.

Of the 137 who have graduated from the school beginning in 1924

47 are working in offices, 26 are in colleges, 20 are working in shops or stores,
15 are married, 9 are attending Normal School, 7 are teachers, 5 are nurses and 8 are not yet recorded."

F. Earl Williams – Principal



F. Earl Williams was Principal of Agawam High School

From 1928 – 1938

Contemporary newspaper articles submitted as evidence are on the following pages

Springfield Daily Republican, June 10, 1924, p.10

AGAWAM

FIRST HIGH GRADUATION

In Assembly Room of New High School—Attractive Program Arranged

Agawam, June 9—The first class to graduate from the Agawam High school will hold class-day exercises Tuesday night, at 8.15, in the assembly room of the new high school building. Admission to the class-day exercises is by ticket. An exhibition of the work which has been done in the domestic and manual arts departments of the public schools will be displayed in the basement during the evening. Officers of the class are: President, Alfred St John; vice-president, Marion Seaver; secretary, Gladys Wells; treasurer, Norton Austin.

Graduation exercises will be held Thursday night at 8.15 in the High school assembly hall. The principal features of the class-day program follow: Address of welcome, Alfred St John; class history, Elise Blish; oration, Alfred Gelstharp; class poem, Louise Hawley; prophecy, Vera Pomeroy; class will, Caroline Novelli; presentation of gift to school, Paul Rudman.

Springfield Daily Republican

June 13, 1924

Page 6

AGAWAM

AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES FIRST CLASS

Rev James Gordon Gilkey of Springfield Makes Com- mencement Address

Agawam, June 12—The graduation of the first class from the high school was held tonight in the assembly hall. About 900 people present showed satisfaction with the work of the new high school. An orchestra composed of boys and girls of the school, under the leadership of Miss Clark, a teacher, played.

The address was made by Rev James Gordon Gilkey of Springfield on "New Americans for the New America." A prayer was offered by Rev John G. Dutton, pastor of the Congregational church. Superintendent Benjamin James Phelps presented the diplomas, and Clifford M. Granger, chairman of the school committee, gave out the diplomas. Rev Arthur Rudman pronounced the benediction.

The graduates were Norton Austin, Elsie Blish, Florence Blish, Dorothy E. Bodurtha, Marjorie Louise Fay, Alfred Gelatharp, Jr., Edmund A. Gosselin, Louise Rose Hawley, Erna Hendrickson, Edward Allen Kellogg, Elizabeth Messenger Marsh, Alice G. Matteson, Helen T. McLaughlin, Caroline N. Novelli, Vera B. Pomeroy, Paul Arthur Rudman, Marion Agnes Scannell, Marion May Seaver, Edith May Smith, Alfred St John, Elizabeth L. Tilden, Andrew G. Toussaint, Henry Joseph Twine, Gladys Wells, Medora Wilson, Rosaire Caron and Marie Rose Caron.

Springfield Daily Republican

September 20, 1924, p.10

AGAWAM

**AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES CONTINUE AT
HIGHER INSTITUTIONS**

Agawam, Sept 20—The town of Agawam had its first high school graduation exercises last June. Several of the graduates are now entering higher school of learning. The following institutions have been elected by various members of the class: Westfield normal school, Florence Blish and Dorothy Bodurtha; Fitchburg normal school, Elizabeth Marsh; Springfield Library Training school, Elise Blish; Northeastern university, M. Charvat, Edmond Gosselin and Alfred St John; Amherst college, Alfred Gelstharp; Dartmouth college, Paul Rudman; Worcester Polytechnic institute, Andrew Toussaint; Mount Holyoke college, Louise Rosa Hawley.

This is by far the largest number of Agawam boys and girls who have in any one year entered higher schools of learning, and is conclusive evidence that the new high school is promoting a desire for more advanced intellectual training.

As noted earlier in this report, many members of the 1st class, the Class of 1924 were admitted into rather prestigious colleges!

Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Yearbooks



The first Agawam High School Yearbook was published in 1927.
By vote of the 1939 Student Council that year's and all future yearbooks would be entitled ***Sachem*** Yearbooks are available at the Agawam Public Library and on the library website.

Please note that early editions available on line did not have all pages scanned!

The citations below are found on pages in actual copies of the yearbooks.

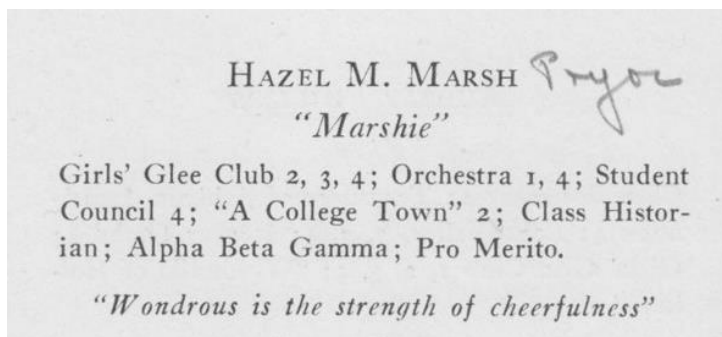
Not all yearbooks had numbered pages. Pages, if numbered, are included in citation.

Evidence for the class of 1924 is found in the following yearbooks 1927, 1928, 1929, 1931, 1944, 1945 and 1949

Citation #1 1927 Yearbook / Class History

"Then came graduation and we could picture ourselves marching up for our diplomas. That was three years ago and the day after tomorrow the deed actually takes place.

We enjoyed the first graduation because it was all so new to us and ours seemed far away."



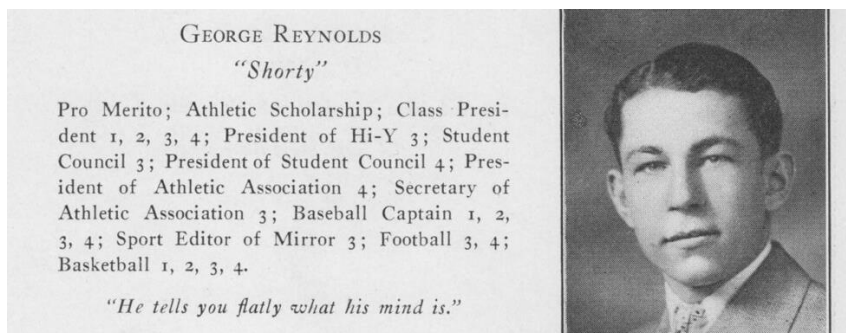
Hazel M. Marsh / Class Historian

"...three years ago... (1924).... 'We enjoyed the first graduation..."

Citation #2 1928 Yearbook / Address of Welcome

"Friends, Fathers and Mothers we have gathered here for our fifth commencement of this school."

George Reynolds / Class President, Student Council President



1928 was the fifth, 1924 was the first

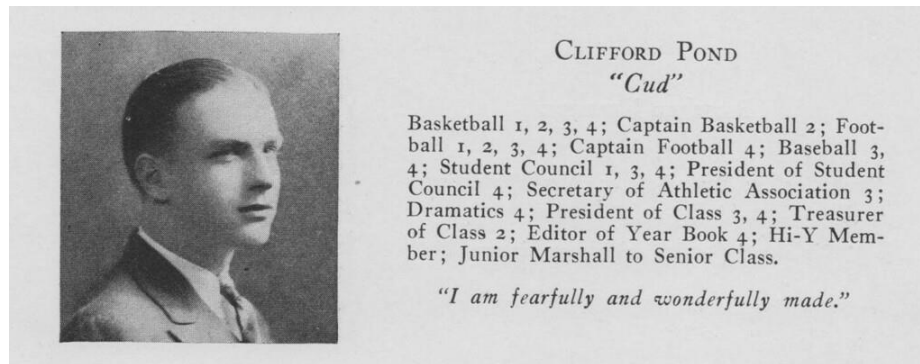
(George Reynolds would become the first AHS graduate to be appointed Superintendent of Schools – 1953

Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Yearbooks

Citation #3 1929 Yearbook / Welcome

‘Friends we are gathered here for the sixth commencement of this high school.’

Clifford Pond / Class President, President of Student Council

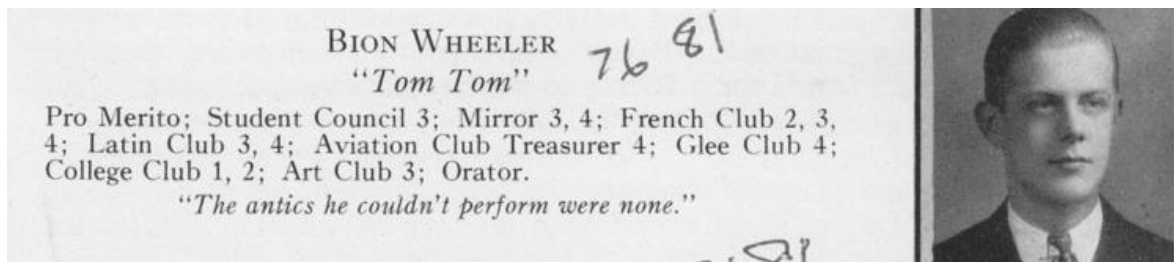


1929 is the sixth – 1924 is the first.

Citation #4 1931 Yearbook / The Oration, p.12

***“As the ninth year of the organization of this school draws to a close,
it is most fitting that we review its past achievements....”***

Bion Wheeler



Wheeler’s remarks refers to the origins of Agawam High School, the 1922-1923 school year.

No mention is made of a graduating class in 1923.

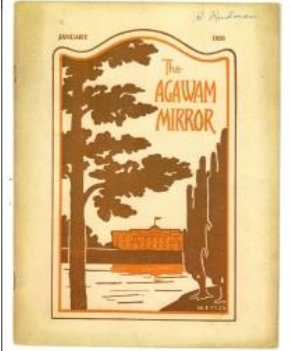
This point becomes significant later in the paper.

Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Yearbooks

Citation #5 1931 Yearbook / *The Agawam Mirror* Section, p.27

“The Agawam Mirror, our school magazine, to the class of ’31 seems to have existed for a long time, but members of the class of ’24 have recollections of the Agawam Mirror in the making; for it was that class that first published a number, a Christmas Issue.

The first attempt, a fourteen page pamphlet, had Andrew Toussaint ’24 as Editor in Chief and Alfred St. John as business manager.



The first issue of the Agawam Mirror was joyfully acclaimed by all of the students of the school.

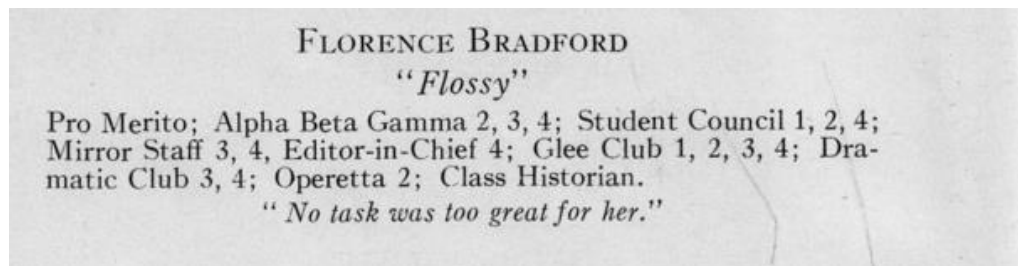
With an increase in funds, the Agawam Mirror staff of ’24 was able to make changes in the magazine.

Consequently on the October issue of the following year appeared a new cover designed by Hazel Madden ’25. The cover is still in use.

This issue was fittingly dedicated to the first graduating class of Agawam High School, the class of ’24.”

While the author of this article is not cited in the yearbook, the Editor in Chief of the Mirror was Florence Bradford who was also the Class Historian

She either wrote, or certainly reviewed this portion of the yearbook.



Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Yearbooks

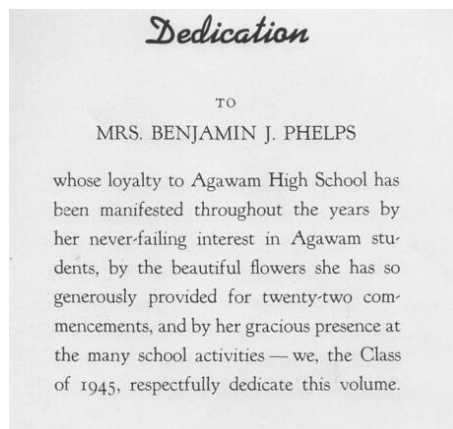
Citation # 6 / 1944 *Sachem* Yearbook Title Page



“-- twenty five members in the first graduating class June, 1924 --”

Citation #7 1945 *Sachem* yearbook / Dedication

The 1945 Yearbook was dedicated to Mrs. Benjamin Phelps



Twenty two Commencements brings us to 1924.

(Doris Govoni - AHS '45 *Sachem* Editor in Chief)

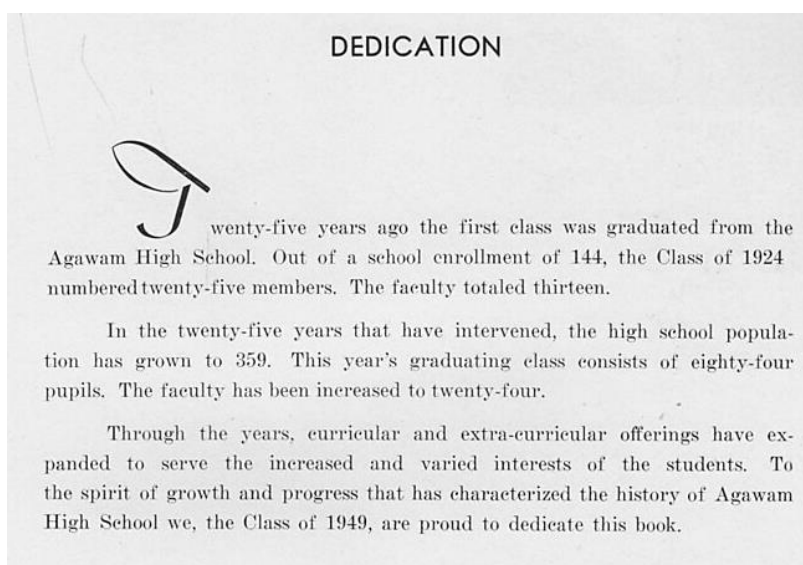
Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Yearbooks

Citation #8 Agawam High School Yearbook "Sachem" 1949 / cover

The Sachem staff of '49 celebrated the fact that 25 years had passed since the first class graduated from Agawam High School as evidenced by their "1949 Sachem" cover shown below. (The class of 1949 was actually the 26th to graduate.)



Citation #9 Agawam High School Yearbook / Dedication



The '49 yearbook's dedication identifies the Class of '24 as the first.

Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Yearbooks

Citation #10 The following photo of the Class of 1924 was included in the 1949 yearbook.

The picture of the Class of '24 clearly labeled as *the first graduating class*.



Sachem Staff 1949

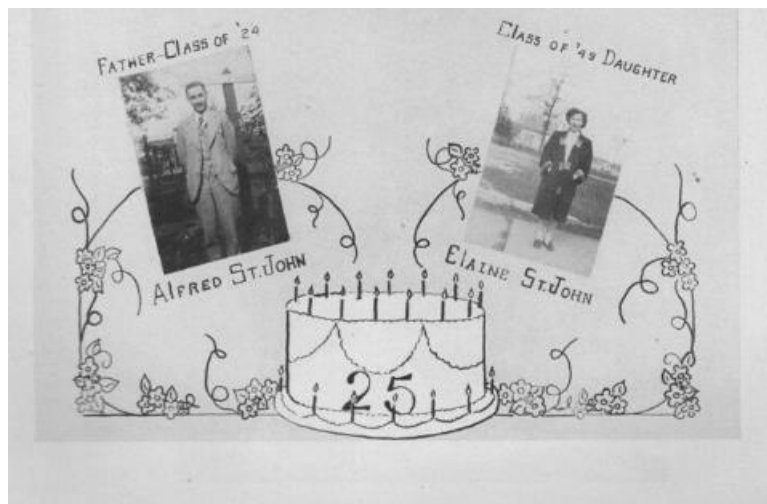
Steering Committee – Dorothy Cartello, Ann Charpentier, Marshall Keyes

Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Yearbooks

Citation #11 - Photo of Alfred St. John (AHS '24) and daughter Elaine St. John (AHS '49)

The yearbook also includes a photo of Alfred St. John AHS '24 and his daughter, *Sachem* Staff member, Elaine St. John AHS '49.

Alfred St. John was the President of the Class of 1924



It is significant to note that the Principal of Agawam High School in 1949 was Frederick Dacey and one of the *Sachem* advisors was Eleanor Smith.

Both were members of the faculty during the 1922 – 1923 school year.

They would have known if a class graduated prior to 1924 and corrected their students as plans for the '49 yearbook progressed.



No corrections were necessary.



Mr. Dacey's smile seems to say it all!

The newspaper article shown below reported on the 1949 Sachem yearbook dedication to the 1st class, the Class of 1924

Springfield Daily News - June 18, 1949

**ANNIVERSARY THEME
OF AHS YEARBOOK**

Agawam, June 18—The senior class of the Agawam High School this year dedicated the yearbook, "The Sachem," to the spirit of growth and progress of the Agawam High School. The class of 1949 is the 25th class to graduate from the school, the first commencement being held in June of 1924. The anniversary theme is stressed throughout the various departments of the year book.

The first class to graduate from the High School 25 years ago numbered 25 members. The High School enrollment at that time was 114 and there were 13 members of the faculty. The 1949 graduating class numbers 84. There are 369 pupils enrolled and the faculty has increased to 24 members.

The 1949 class motto is "Finished, Yet Beginning" and the class colors are maroon and white. The class song this year is dedicated to the Class of '49 with words by Winston Sharples and music by Marshall Kroyer.

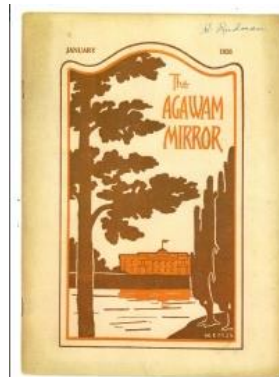
Robert N. Schneider designed the end-sheets of the 1949 yearbook featuring the class motto. Symbolical illustrations include the mortarboard and diploma against a background of the school building. On the opposite page is a globe with a ship of venture and experience shown laying its course by the T-square of the future.

The frontpiece was drawn by Robert Hannonkade and features the 25th anniversary theme. Highlighted among the illustrations is a picture of the first graduating class with cut-ins of Alfred St. Jean, the father, a member of the 1924 class and the daughter, Elaine St. Jean, a graduate of this June.

The traditional class will, class gifts and class prophecy are included together with pictures of the activities and personalities of the freshman, sophomores, junior and senior years.

Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Mirror

The Mirror started as a literary magazine by the class of 1924.
The first Editor in Chief was Andrew Toussaint (AHS '24)



As the years progressed, news stories, feature stories and a sports recap shared the pages with students' literary submissions. As the decades progressed, the Mirror became more of a student newspaper and less of a literary magazine.

During the 1920s and early 1930s, at most, four issues were published a year. Unlike yearbooks, finding individual copies of The Mirror is difficult. Through private donations, some individual copies are on file for inspection at the Agawam Public Library but the collection is far from complete.

Seventeen issues from December of 1925 through June of 1932, available at the Public Library, were researched for this section. The only complete volume of four issues was that of 1932.

Citation #1

In all the issues reviewed, there is a story labeled "Alumni". The purpose of the articles was to keep the student readers aware of what their former classmates were doing with their lives after graduation. This was an important article in the pre internet days. This article continued through the 1950s.

In no "Alumni" Mirror article reviewed is there any citation of a graduate prior to 1924.

Citation #2 Agawam Mirror, Volume 3, #3 April of 1927

The "Alumni" article found on page 14 of this issue is very informative.

"As the fifth year of Agawam High School nears its conclusion, it finds its 78 alumni in various places of work."
(24 Students are listed for 1924, 28 students are listed for 1925, and 25 students are listed for 1926.

Career updates are cited for each student.)

No class of 1923 is listed.

Citation #3 Agawam Mirror, Volume 2, #2 December of 1925 / Editorial

"The year of 1925 is drawing to a close. Before the curtain falls...lets inventory our three years at AHS. ... We are proud too of our athletic record – basketball, baseball and football. Sometimes our colors fell, then steadied, and then shot up again amid supporting cheers.

No shouts rang louder than those of the Alumni. They are loyal – every one

Let us record our loss two classes of seniors '24, ' 25.

Our profit – a loyal alumni: balance equilibrium."

Signed C.W. ' 26 / Corinne Wright – Editor in Chief

Documented Evidence / Agawam High School Mirror

Citation #4 Agawam Mirror, Fall 1937, p.26

"Snooping around we found some interesting statistics about the last two graduating classes. In 1936 the class was made up of 77 students. ***Nevertheless, it is three times as large as the first class to graduate in 1924.***"

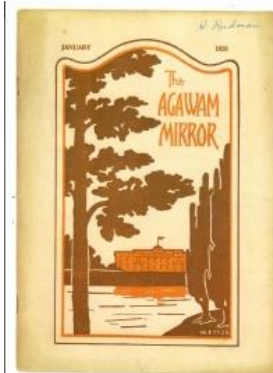
Shirley Abel AHS '38 Editor in Chief

Citation #5

The 1931 Yearbook provides a clue to one significant Mirror issue.

With an increase in funds, the Agawam Mirror staff of '24 was able to make changes in the magazine. Consequently on the October issue of the following year appeared a new cover designed by Hazel Madden '25 (shown at right)

This issue was fittingly dedicated to the first graduating class of Agawam High School, the class of '24.
(1931 Yearbook, p.27)



*Cost of Reproduction a Gift
from Mr. Smith*

THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS
... AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL ...

*Photograph
by Bosworth*

THE AGAWAM MIRROR

The photograph above appeared in that issue of the Mirror.

The photo is clearly labeled as coming from the pages of the Agawam Mirror.
The photo of the Class of 1924 is clearly labeled as "The First Graduating Class".

The benefactor, Mr. Smith, was the newly hired P.E. teacher who would become the legendary coach Harmon Smith.

A very proud Superintendent / Principal Benjamin Phelps is pictured with his first graduates.

Corinne Wright (AHS '26) was the Editor in Chief of this issue

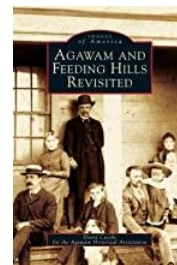
This Mirror staff who dedicated this issue to the class of 1924, knew from personal experience, that their classmates, the Class of 1924, were the first to graduate from Agawam High School.

Documented Evidence / Historian David Cecchi

A prominent historian to provide evidence for the class of 1924

is Agawam resident David Cecchi (AHS '82)

David Cecchi's credentials as a historian and historical preservationist are impressive:



He is currently the Chairman of the Agawam Historical Commission

He is a member of and is past President of The Agawam Historical Association.

He is a Trustee of the Captain Charles Leonard House.

He is the author of four books dealing with Agawam and local history.

He has won awards from Preservation Massachusetts, The Agawam St. Patrick's Day Committee, The Agawam Rotary Club, and the Eastern States Exposition

In his second volume on Agawam History entitled **Agawam and Feeding Hills Revisited**



This portrait of the second class to graduate from Agawam High School was taken in front of the building, looking west. In addition to his role as high school principal, Benjamin J. Phelps (back row center, wearing glasses) was appointed superintendent of schools in 1922, a position he held until his death in 1946. (Agawam Historical Association collection.)

Cecchi includes the following photo and caption on page 35

A photo of the class of 1925 cited as the second class to graduate from Agawam High School.

The class of 1925 is the second – the Class of 1924 is the first.

Section 3

Much Ado About Nothing - Specious Claims Examined

Bullets or Blanks?

1924 Annual Town Report – single sentence

Agawam, Massachusetts by Edith LaFrancis – sentence fragment

Commencement remarks by Harold Roos (1931) and Creighton Abrams (1932)

The “Phantom” Class of 1923

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

The very few proponents of an Agawam High School class prior to 1924 base their claims,
for the most part, on the following:

Benjamin Phelps "...first Alumni." comment in the 1924 Annual Town Report

Edith LaFrancis' reference in her book Agawam Massachusetts , A Town History

Class Presidents Harold Roos' (AHS '31) and Creighton Adams' (AHS '32) commencement comments.

For the "true believers" each represents a "smoking gun"
proving their claim.

The next section determines whether the "smoking guns" are shooting bullets or blanks.

Item #1 Agawam Benjamin Phelps' "...first alumni." comment
1924 Agawam Annual Town Report , p.96

***"The honor of giving Agawam the first commencement fell to the class of 1924.
The class was equal to the occasion and gave Agawam, in full measure, a fitting return
for the investment in a new high school.***

The class then joined the ranks of the 1st Alumni."



Comment

Upon first reading, Phelps' words do seem to be somewhat contradictory.

Why would a man of Phelps' intellect contradict himself in the space of three sentences in a public document.

Analysis of his words reveals no contradiction.

His first two sentences are quite clear and unambiguous.
He said what he meant - the first commencement fell to the class of 1924.
Had there been a previous class he would have said so.

The third sentence, subject to interpretation, has been offered as proof, by some, that there was a class prior to 1924.

Who, are the ***"...1st Alumni"*** to which he refers?

Phelps chose his words carefully. He refers to Alumni not Agawam High School Alumni.

***"Alumni", in this instance, refers to residents of Agawam who graduated
from neighboring high schools prior to the construction of Agawam High School.***

A report Phelps gave in the 1925 Annual Town Report (referenced earlier)
reinforces this interpretation which is shown on the next page.

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

Annual Town Report 1925 pages 94 and 95
Superintendent's Report

“Two classes have graduated from Agawam High School that of 1924 numbering 26 pupils and that of 1925 numbering 27. In all 53 students have received the high school diploma.”

Previous to 1924 Agawam pupils were attending three high schools in Springfield and the West Springfield High School. The following tables will show the number of Agawam graduates from the above schools for the years 1922 and 1923.

	<i>Year</i>	<i>Agawam Graduates</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Agawam Graduates</i>
<i>Central High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Technical High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Commercial High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>West Springfield High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>4</i>

These tables show that for the two years 1922 and 1923 Agawam high school pupils in the above mentioned schools received 23 diplomas.

The first sentence quoted above is clear providing yet more evidence that the Class of 1924 was the first.
The second sentence establishes a data reference point.

There is no mention of an AHS class of 1923 by the Superintendent of Schools.

In the chart, Agawam Graduates refers to Agawam resident students graduating from neighboring high schools.

With great pride Phelps goes on to note that, compared to '22- 23 totals, 130% more Agawam students are now graduating from Agawam High school since its founding.

Note the words he uses -- Agawam high school pupils -- meaning Agawam residents who were students in neighboring high schools, not Agawam High School pupils. Capitalization is the key to his meaning.

These were the “...first Alumni.” Phelps was referring to – Agawam residents who had graduated from neighboring high schools prior to the construction of Agawam High School.

There is no contradiction in his statements.

Phelps was not implying the existence of a class of AHS graduates prior to 1924.
That's why he said clearly said

“The honor of giving Agawam the first commencement fell to the class of 1924. “

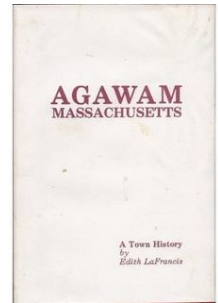
Bullets or blanks?
Blanks!

We will now turn our attention to one of those “1st Alumni” Edith LaFrancis

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

"1923. Twenty Five in the first high school graduating class."

Two prominent local historians, Edith LaFrancis and David Cecchi have expressed, what at first glance, appears to be contradictory positions. David Cecchi's position, already discussed, is clear --the first class was the Class of 1924. A superficial reading of Edith LaFrancis' quote seems to say that the first class graduated the prior year.



How can two of the most prominent local historians disagree on this basic point?

Or do they disagree?

Analysis reveals that they are, in fact, complementary.

We will de-code Edith LaFrancis' position first.

The following sentence fragment

"1923. Twenty-five in first high school graduating class."

Is found on page 335 of the book

Agawam Massachusetts, A Town History written by Edith LaFrancis

printed by the Pond- Ekberg Company, 1980

The copyright is held by the Town of Agawam

(Multiple copies can be found on the shelves of the Agawam Public Library)



This sentence fragment has been used as evidence for a class prior to 1924.

On first reading LaFrancis' comment seems clear and should withstand scrutiny. However, a contrary interpretation will be given for the reader to consider.

Edith (Hull) LaFrancis, born in 1905 was a lifelong resident of Agawam.

The following brief biography was found on the Agawam Historical Society website

Edith LaFrancis

"....Edith LaFrancis, born in 1905, made the "mile walk to Agawam Center School which she attended for the usual nine years, going on to graduate from Technical High School in Springfield in 1923.

Edith loved commercial and fine art and writing and was constantly involved in "projects".

After her father's death, she "took over as history keeper and continued where he left off, with articles and pictures for The Agawam Independent".

In 1980 the publication of her book; Agawam Massachusetts A Town History marked the definitive work about Agawam's history "...from the building of the first house in the meadow to the beginning of government under the Home Rule Charter of 1972."

A significant point in this biographical sketch is discussed on the following pages.

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

Agawam resident Edith (Hull) LaFrancis
graduated from high school in 1923from Technical High School in Springfield.



She was ‘***...in the ranks of the first Alumni***’, an Agawam resident who graduated from a neighboring High School referenced by Benjamin Phelps (discussed on the previous pages.)

She was one of the two students who graduated from Tech in 1923 that Phelps listed on the chart of “Agawam Graduates” in the 1925 edition of Annual Town Report.

(Her sister was the other graduate)

She also is listed among the graduates of Technical High School in
Springfield Republican News article, p.1, dated June 14, 1923.
(article continued from page 1 to page 8, Edith Hull listed on page 8)

The historical record is clear – Edith Hull LaFrancis was a Tech graduate class of 1923.
She was a “Tiger”, not a “Brownie”.

Why is this significant?

Edith Hull LaFrancis knew from direct personal knowledge that
there was no Agawam High School Class of 1923.

Had there been an Agawam High School class of 1923 she would have been in it!

(along with 9 other Agawam residents graduating from area high schools during the 1922-23 school year)

She was one of those students who in the words of
School Committee Chairman Clifford Granger (cited earlier)

***“Your committee have decided
to offer no senior course in the high school the first year,
feeling that it would be poor for us both educationally and financially.***

***That of course means that those who are now classed as Juniors in other schools
will be allowed to remain another year for graduation.”***

*(Editor’s note -- At this point in my research I was perplexed.
How could a historian of her stature who was personally impacted by these events get it so wrong?
I struggled to find an answer)*

*To interpret her words literally suggests that school officials, at the time, conspired, for some unknown motive, to
conceal the existence of the class from the public, the press and public documents. The 25 students mentioned vanished
from the annals of history without a trace – no list, no photos, no news articles, no mention in public documents.*

This of course makes no sense!

*Could it simply have been a typo or inadvertent error in the days before the internet?
This explanation was rejected as too convenient, and unfairly dismissive!*

*What else could account for these words, totally unsupported by the historical record,
from such a prominent and accomplished research historian who had personal knowledge of these events?*

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

*Is she in error or
perhaps the error is on the part of the casual reader misinterpreting her intent?*

*I had my "Eureka" moment a
"Rosetta Stone" was discovered -- all was revealed!
Read on.*

Edith LaFrancis left a clue to her intent.

*On page 332 and continuing on to page 336 she lists 45 dated "packets" of information about the public schools starting with 1881 and ending with 1978. Some "packets" are paragraphs, some single sentences, some sentence fragments.
Not all years in the time span are listed.*

She prefaces this information, on page 332 as follows

"Other school news in brief (from town reports)."

This comment is imbedded with the text on the page and quite easy to overlook and probably read by few,
but it is the key to understanding her meaning.

(Even when you know it is there it is easy to miss! For that reason, a portion of the page is shown below.)

332 AGAWAM, MASSACHUSETTS



Agawam Center school-and-town-hall with Primary building.

August 1, 1904, it was destroyed by fire. It was replaced immediately, the cost paid by taxation the following year.

Other school news in brief (from town reports):

1881. 9 school buildings and 455 students.

1883. The truancy law of Massachusetts was adopted in the town school system.

She is telling the reader the source of her information.

Does the information she reports for a given year match the year of the Annual Town Report?.

Analysis of a sample of entries establishes a clear pattern.

Year. Data

Year of Town Report. Data taken from that Town Report

Two samples are given on the following page

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

Two Samples

Year. Data

Year of Town Report. Data taken from that Town Report

1921 Annual Town Report, p. 89

"It is noteworthy that in my 21 years of service only seven different men have served on the school committee of Agawam." (Superintendent Walter E. Gushee)

Edith LaFrancis, Agawam Massachusetts, p. 344

1921. "Mr. Gushee reported than in 21 years only seven different had served on the school Committee.

(same content, similar wording)

1922 Annual Town Report, p. 85

"Agawam as the unit, not an Agawam of three villages is what we want to develop, and that is the spirit our High School pupils are developing day by day."

Edith LaFrancis, Agawam Massachusetts, p. 344

1922. Mr. Phelps said "Agawam as the unit, not an Agawam of three villages is what we want to develop, and that is the spirit our High School pupils are developing day by day."

(same content, identical wording)

More samples spanning 3 decades are listed in Appendix A for the skeptical,
but a clear pattern emerges --

the year she lists refers to the year of the Annual Town Report from which the information is taken.

With this understanding we now turn to the critical passage to which so much weight is given

Superintendent's Report, Annual Town Report 1923, p.86

***"Class of 1924: A class of about 25 will graduate in June.
This will be the first class to graduate from the Agawam High School."***

Edith La Francis, Agawam Massachusetts, p. 335

1923. Twenty-five in first High School graduating class.

(same content, similar wording)

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

Year. Data

Year of Town Report. Data taken from that Town Report

1923. Twenty-five in first High School graduating class.

She was reporting on what Benjamin Phelps said in the 1923 Annual Town report about a graduating class

Phelps makes it clear in the 1923 Town Report --

***Class of 1924: A class of about 25 will graduate in June. (1924)
This will be the first class to graduate from the Agawam High School.***

Understood in this way Edith LaFrancis is reporting on what is evident and had never been questioned up to the point when she wrote her book

the first class was the class of 1924.

There is no mention whatsoever about a graduating class in 1923 in the Town Report.

At no time does LaFrancis use the expression "Class of 1923"

The 25 who would be the first to graduate in 1924 began their school year as
Seniors in September of 1923

Read casually, the sentence fragment leads to misunderstanding.

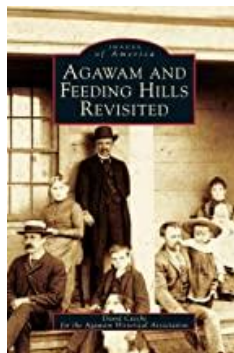
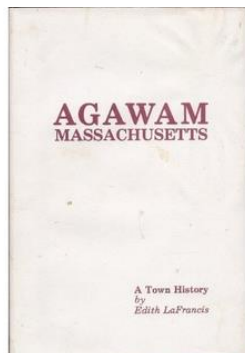
Understandably, most readers are casual readers.

The two prominent historians Edith LaFrancis and David Cecchi do not contradict each other,
they complement each other on this point.

Smoking gun – bullets or blanks?

Definitely a smoking gun --

firing bullets for the Class of 1924!



Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

Creighton Abrams

"The Smoking Gun"

For the few who advocate for a class of 1923, Senior Class President Creighton Abrams' opening sentence in his President's Address published on page 7 of the 1932 Yearbook is pivotal –

"the smoking gun" -- convincing evidence.

Abrams said

***"Parents, Friends of the Class of 1932:
We welcome you to the tenth Commencement exercises of Agawam High School."***

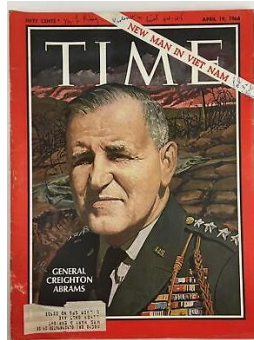
His remarks imply the existence of a Class of 1923.

Lets be clear.

Few Agawam High School graduates achieved as much in their four years of high school as Creighton Adams.

No Agawam High School graduate has played a more important role on the world stage as Creighton Abrams.

He was on the cover of Time magazine not once, but three times.



When Creighton Abrams speaks....we must listen!

With great humility and trepidation, on my part, an analysis of his words must be undertaken.

Is the "smoking gun" shooting bullets or blanks?

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks



The quote was not said by Four Star General, Army Chief of Staff, Creighton Abrams

The quote was said by Agawam High School Senior Creighton Adams,
a teenager, 3 months shy of his 18th birthday.

How much research would any high school senior put into an opening sentence that takes seconds to recite. Could he have imagined that over 90 years later historians would be analyzing every word of his introduction?

What was the basis for the reference to the “...tenth Commencement...”?
It could not have come from personal recollection.

Abrams was only 9 years old in June of 1923. His family had recently moved to Agawam and he was the oldest of three children. If there had been a graduation in 1923 (or 1924 for that matter) it is highly doubtful he would have been in attendance as no family was graduating.

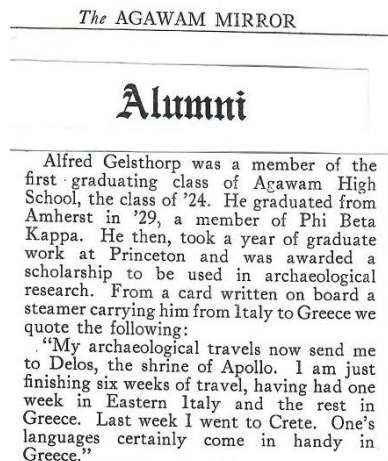
If he did do some research

The remarks were not based on newspaper accounts because
there are no newspaper accounts mentioning a graduating class in 1923.

The remarks were not based on Annual Town Reports,
because there is no reference whatsoever mentioning a class of 1923.

Had he looked at some early yearbooks he would have found that two previous class Presidents,
Reynolds and Pond, both make reference to the class of 1924 being the first.

In fact, the following reference to the Class of 1924 being the first
is found on page 21 in the June 1932 edition of the Agawam High School Mirror.



(It is an interesting story, I wonder
what ever became of Alfred Gelsthorp AHS ' 24?)

Creighton Abrams was the Editor in Chief of the Mirror when this article written.
The story clearly states the Class of 1924 to be the ...“first graduating class”.
If he didn’t write the story, as Editor in Chief, he certainly reviewed it.

Editor in Chief Creighton Abrams contradicts Class President Creighton Abrams

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

What prompted him to write what he did?

Abrams may very well have based his comments on the Farewell Address speech given by Class President Harold Roos at the 1931 Commencement published on page 13 of the 1931 yearbook.



Both Roos' and Abrams' introductory sentences are shown below.

"Friends and Parents, the class of 1931 bids you welcome to the ninth commencement of Agawam High School."

Harold Roos 1931

"Parents, Friends of the Class of 1932: We welcome you to the tenth Commencement exercises of Agawam High School."

Creighton Abrams 1932

As the probability is quite low that Abrams was not in attendance at a commencement in 1923, the probability was quite high that he was in attendance at the 1931 graduation to witness his older classmates and teammates receive their diplomas.

He certainly had access to the 1931 yearbook in which Roos' comments were published.

The similarity in their opening statements is obvious.

Abrams' introduction very well may have been based on the introduction of Roos.

For Abrams' comment to be accurate, Roos' comment has to be accurate.

We will now turn to what may have been the basis Harold Roos' reference to a "...***ninth commencement...***"

Had Roos chosen to research his opening sentence,

like Abrams he would have found no mention of a Class of 1923 in the historical record -- in newspaper accounts, Annual Town Reports, previous yearbooks or editions of the ***Mirror***.

Roos may have misconstrued a remark by classmate Bion Wheeler also published in the 1931 yearbook. (1931 Yearbook / The Oration, p.12)



"As the ninth year of the organization of this school draws to a close, it is most fitting that we review its past achievements..."

Bion Wheeler

As cited earlier, Wheeler's remarks refer to the origins of Agawam High School, the 1922-1923 school year.

No mention is made of a graduating class in 1923.

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

As noted earlier, Wheeler's "...*ninth year*...." reference was to the start of the school, not the first class. Roos may have just mistakenly assumed that a commencement was held every June since the school opened.

Of significance is the fact that Roos' remarks which are found on page 13 are contradicted on page 28 of his very own 1931 yearbook in a section entitled Agawam Mirror

This issue was fittingly dedicated to the first graduating class of Agawam High School, the class of '24.'

Whatever the basis (if any) for his comment
for Roos' comment to be correct

Superintendent Benjamin Phelps' reports have to be incorrect

School Committee Chairman Clifford Granger's reports have to be incorrect

Principal Earl Williams reports have to be incorrect

Mirror Editor in Chief Corrine Wright's (AHS 1926) work has to be incorrect

Class Historian Hazel Marsh's (AHS 1927) comments have to be incorrect

Class President George Reynold's (AHS 1928) comments have to be incorrect

Class President Clifford Pond's (AHS 1929) comments have to be incorrect

Mirror Editor in Chief Florence's Bradford's (AHS 1931) work has to be incorrect

Mirror Editor in Chief Creighton Abrams' (AHS 1932) work has to be incorrect

Mirror Editor in Chief Shirley Abel's (AHS 1938) work has to be incorrect

The work of the Sachem Staff of 1944 is incorrect

The work of Sachem Editor in Chief Doris Govoni (AHS 1945) has to be incorrect

The work of the 1949 Sachem Staff has to be incorrect

Three *Springfield Newspaper* articles published in 1924 and one published in 1949 are incorrect

Two *Agawam Advertiser* newspaper articles published in 1984 are incorrect

David Cecchi's reference on page 35 of his book Agawam and Feeding Hills Revisited is incorrect

For Creighton Abrams comment to be correct,

Harold Roos' comment has to be correct.

Roos' comment is incorrect.

Blanks.

Much Ado About Nothing / Bullets or Blanks

A few other points have been raised over the years in articles appearing in the Agawam Advertiser News attempting to prove a link to a class prior to 1924.

None withstand scrutiny.

"Auditorium not yet built"

It was suggested that one of the reasons why no graduation ceremony was held for a graduating class in 1923 is because the auditorium was not yet completed.

This is not the case, the new high school was dedicated on December 8, 1922.
A full program of events was held in the auditorium to mark the occasion.

Springfield Republican, December 9, p.6

"Senior Chorus"

As noted above, a new high school was dedicated on December 8, 1923.
In the program for that event a musical number is attributed to the "Senior Chorus"
A chorus consisting of high school seniors? No.

At that time Agawam High School was a Junior- Senior High School.

The Senior Chorus consisted of students from all of the Senior High School grades.
The Junior Chorus consisted of students from the Junior High School grades – not High School Juniors!

"West Side Demographics"

The following totals for all students graduating from West Springfield were initially reported follows:

* 1922 – 78	1923 – 64	1924 – 154
-------------	-----------	------------

The drop in in enrollment from 78 to 64 was attributed to an exodus of Agawam students to the new high school as evidence of an AHS class of 1923.

A review of the data, actually counting the number of students in the West side yearbooks, corrects the data as follows

* 1922 - 78	1923 - 92	1924 - 87
-------------	-----------	-----------

Enrollment in 1923 actually went up, the drop in 1924, though modest, could be attributed, in part, to the fact that 25 former West Side students graduated from Agawam High School in 1924.

In 1922	13 of the 78 who graduated from West Springfield High School were Agawam residents.
In 1923	4 of the 92 who graduated from West Springfield High were Agawam residents (6 additional Agawam students graduated from other area schools)
In 1924	1 of the 87 who graduated from West Springfield High was an Agawam resident. (see Appendix D for more information on the last Agawam "West Sider")

The number of Agawam residents graduating elsewhere each year over the two year period remains about the same (13 -10).

*1922 West Springfield Yearbook unavailable for inspection



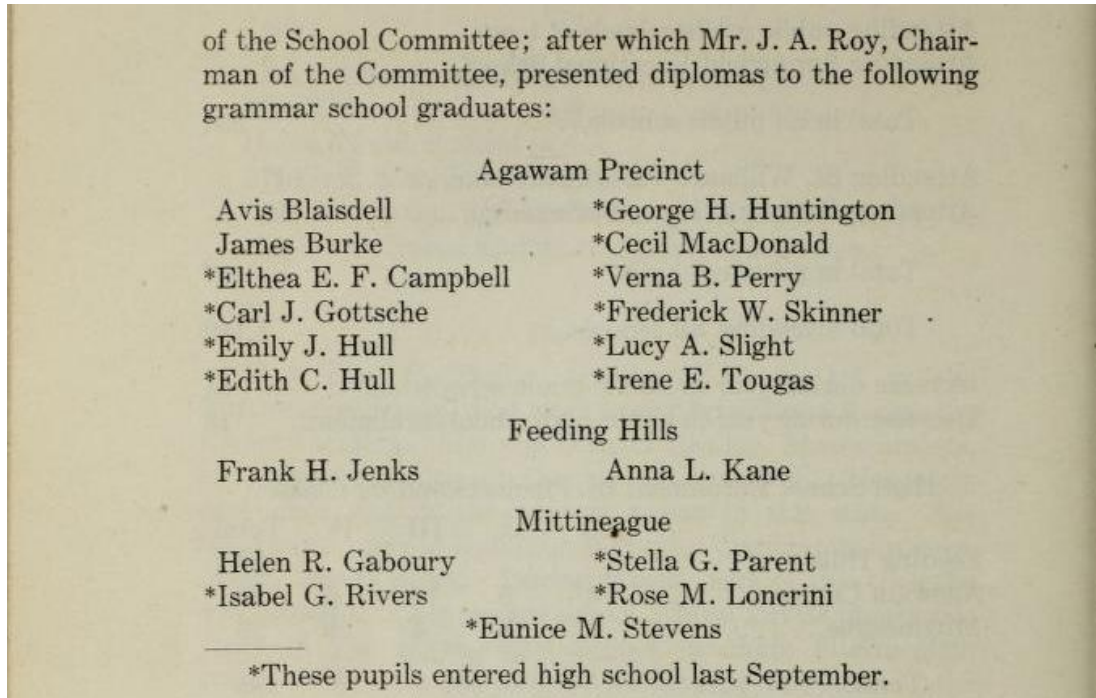
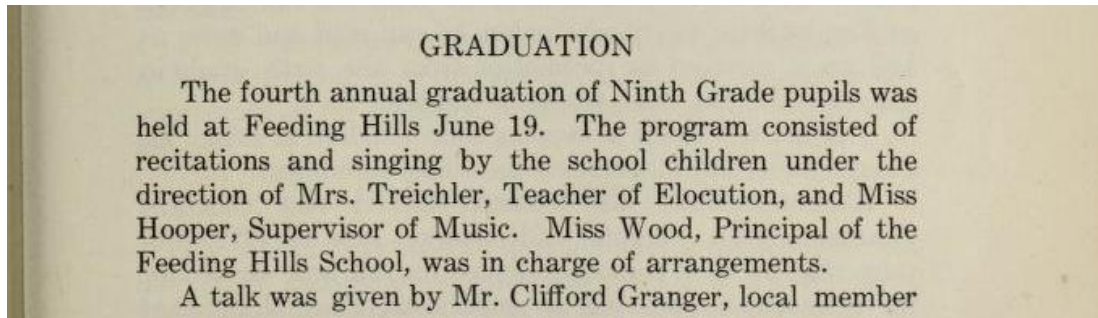
The “Phantom” Class of 1923 – New Evidence

The “Phantom” Class of 1923

If we accept the idea that there was a class of 1923,
who were the students that would comprise the class?

In the 1919 Agawam Town Report, p. 85 - 86 lists the

9th grade grammar school graduates as follows



Nineteen graduates in total – a small number even by Agawam standards.

Fourteen students were identified as continuing on to high school.

Did these 14 eventually become the nucleus of an AHS Class of 1923?

No!

The “Phantom” Class of 1923 – New Evidence

1919 Agawam Public Schools Ninth Grade Graduates
10 of whom graduated from area High Schools in 1923 as listed below

Avis Blaisdell –	1923 West Springfield graduate (moved to West Spfld.)
Elthea E.F. Campbell	1923 West Springfield graduate
Emily J. Hull	1923 Technical High School graduate
Edith C Hull	1923 Technical High School Graduate
George H. Huntington	1923 West Springfield Graduate (moved to West Spfld.)
Verna Perry	1923 West Springfield High School graduate
Fredrick W. Skinner	1923 Classical High School graduate
Lucy A. Slight	1923 West Springfield High School graduate
Frank H. Jenks	1923 Commerce High School graduate
Anna L. Kane	1923 West Springfield High School graduate

7 listed as enrolling in High School but no record of attendance or graduation

Stella G. Parent
Rose M. Loncrini
Eunice M. Stevens
Carl J. Gottsche
Cecil McDonald
Irene E. Tougas
Isabel G. Rivers

Helen R. Gaboury 2 listed as not enrolling in any High School

James Burke

Then, like now, enrollments change from year to year. Students move in, students move out.
Then, like now, because of choice or circumstance, some choose to discontinue their education.
(In 1920 44 Agawam ninth graders indicated they had entered high school....only 25 graduated in 1924--
roughly 40% attrition rate)

7 possible class members, **not** factoring in attrition, seems to be unrealistically low to constitute a class

The “Phantom” Class of 1923 – New Evidence

A chart posted in the 1925 Annual Town Report, already cited and recreated below

lists 10 Agawam residents who graduated from area high schools in 1923 as follows

	<i>Year</i>	<i>Agawam Graduates</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Agawam Graduates</i>
<i>Central High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Technical High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Commercial High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>West Springfield High School</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>4</i>
				<i>===</i>
				<i>10</i>

The identities of the graduates are listed on the previous page.

In addition to that list,
two Agawam residents – Paul James Sullivan and Bernard Ludwig also graduated from
Commerce High School in 1923. (Neither were in the 1919 APS 9th grade graduating class.)

An additional Agawam resident, Lucy Albro, graduated from Technical High School in January of 1924.

It does not seem realistic for the town to continue to pay for the tuition

for eleven students

if an AHS class of 1923 was being formed.

“The Phantom Class”

Because of the continuation of 1923 tuition payments,
unrealistically low numbers of potential students,
lack of artifacts consistent with a graduating class,
the complete lack of documentation in the press and public documents,
the withering of speculative evidence under scrutiny,
and public statements of school officials to the contrary...

***it is reasonable to conclude that
there was no AHS Class of 1923.***

The Case for the Class of 1924

The Final Word / 60th Reunion

The last evidence comes from the Class of 1924 themselves.

Below is a newspaper account from the **Agawam Advertiser News**,

May 23, 1984 Page. 31

60th Reunion Of AHS Class Of 1924

The first class to graduate from Agawam High School will have its 60th reunion at a luncheon at Storowton Tavern on June 15th. Fourteen members of the class of only 27 have been located and most of them expect to attend.

This class was sent to West Springfield High School for two years while the Agawam High School was built. These students then returned to Agawam to become the first graduating class.

Their classmates from West Springfield in 1924 have graciously included the Agawam graduates in their

reunion luncheon. Anyone who has not been contacted should immediately call Alfred St. John, 786-6449 or Florence Blish, 786-6172 as reservations must be made by June 1st.



There are two references to the class of 1924 being the first class in this article.

- More

The Final Word / The 60th Reunion

Multiple references to The Class of 1924 being the first class in the article!

Page 14

The Agawam Advertiser-News

June 21, 1984

60th Reunion For Agawam's Class of 1924



CLASS MEMBERS ON THE STEPS OF STORROWTON TAVERN: Back row, from left - Rhea St. John, Louise Wallace, Marion S. Cunningham, Gladys Bodurtha, and Marie-Rose Gregeau. Front row - Alfred St. John, Elise Bradway, Marjorie Ward, and Florence Blish. Advertiser News photo by Jack Devine.

First AHS Class Holds Reunion Luncheon

The first class to graduate from Agawam High School enjoyed its 60-year reunion with a luncheon at Storrowton Tavern on Friday, June 15th. Only seven of the original twenty-seven members attended, although seven others were contacted, but for physical or personal reasons, were absent.

Most members of this class attended two years of high school in West Springfield, then returned to the newly-built Agawam High School to become the first graduating class. As the 1924 class of West Springfield was celebrating also, they graciously welcomed their classmates of 1924 from Agawam. A perfect June day, an excellent meal, and talk of years gone by, made this a truly joyous occasion.

All were invited to the home of Dorothy (Leonard) Artin, chairwoman for West Springfield alumni, for more visiting. Letters from absent classmates were read, punch and cookies were served in a picture-book garden setting were some of the highlights at Mrs. Artin's home.

Those attending from Agawam were, class president, Alfred and Rhea (Duclos) St. John; Florence Blish, Elise (Blish) Bradway, Louise (Hawley) Wallace, Marion (Scannell) Cunningham, Gladys (Wells) Bodurtha and Marie-Rose (Caron) Gregeau. Miss Marjorie Ward was the day's guest. All agreed that such occasions should happen often as recent years have taken its toll of 1924 class members and their spouses.



MEMORIES OF YESTERYEAR - The Agawam High School Class of 1924. Back row, from left - Marjorie Fay Sommerman, Elizabeth (Tilden) Ekberg, Medora Wilson, Louise (Hawley) Wallace, Helen McLaughlin, Miss Nellie Button, class advisor; Benjamin Phelps, principal; Dorothy (Bodurtha) McGovern, Elna (Hendrickson) Clark, Marion (Scannell) Cunningham, Vera (Pomeroy) Kellogg, and Alice (Matteson) Wood. Middle row - Caroline (Novelli) Vancini, Florence Blish, Elise (Blish) Bradway, Norton Austin, Marion (Seaver) Rudman, Alfred St. John, Gladys (Wells) Bodurtha, Marie-Rose (Caron) Fregeau, Edith Smith, and Elizabeth (Marsh) Halladay. Front row - Edmond Gosselin, Henry Twine, Alfred Gelstharp, Paul Rudman, Rosaire Caron, Everett Kellogg, and Andrew Toussaint.

This is the only photo of the class that identifies individual class members.

Over the years, Class President Alfred St. John appeared in photos / articles in 1924, 1949, and 1984 (all seen in this paper) which all state that his was the first class.

It would be difficult to look anyone of them in the eye and deny that they were in the first class!

The Case for the Class of 1924

Appendix A

LaFrancis Data Entry Pattern Samples

Year. Data

Year of Town Report. Data taken from that Town Report

Correlation of date of Annual Town Report with Edith LaFrancis' entries in Agawam Massachusetts

An analysis of the examples below, along with the samples given in the main text reveals that LaFrancis dated information comes from the Annual Town Report of the same year.

Additional Samples

1929 Annual Town Report, p100

"The agriculture department, although still in its infancy, is already being ranked with the best in the state.....There are now 22 boys in the program." (Principal Earl Williams)

Edith LaFrancis, p. 335

1929. Agriculture Department now best in State and has 22 boys.

(same topic, similar wording)

1938 Annual Town Report, p. 107

"As most of you know, Suffield is to build a new high school of their own and hope to have it ready for September of 1939.. Consequently we will loose most of the Suffield students for whose tuition we have received around 3,500 per year."

La Francis, p.335

1938. Suffield is building a new high school and will not be sending students to Agawam High: have been receiving 3,5000 per year.

(same topic, similar wording)

1941 Annual Town Report, p130 – 131

"There has been a great deal of discussion as to what shall be done with our school children in the case of an air raid warning....A First Aid class is being conducted at our high school...about twenty teachers are taking the course....

Edith LaFrancis, p.335

*1941 Much thought given to what to do with children in case of air raids. Teachers taking first aid courses.
(same topic, similar wording)*

The First Graduation – 1916

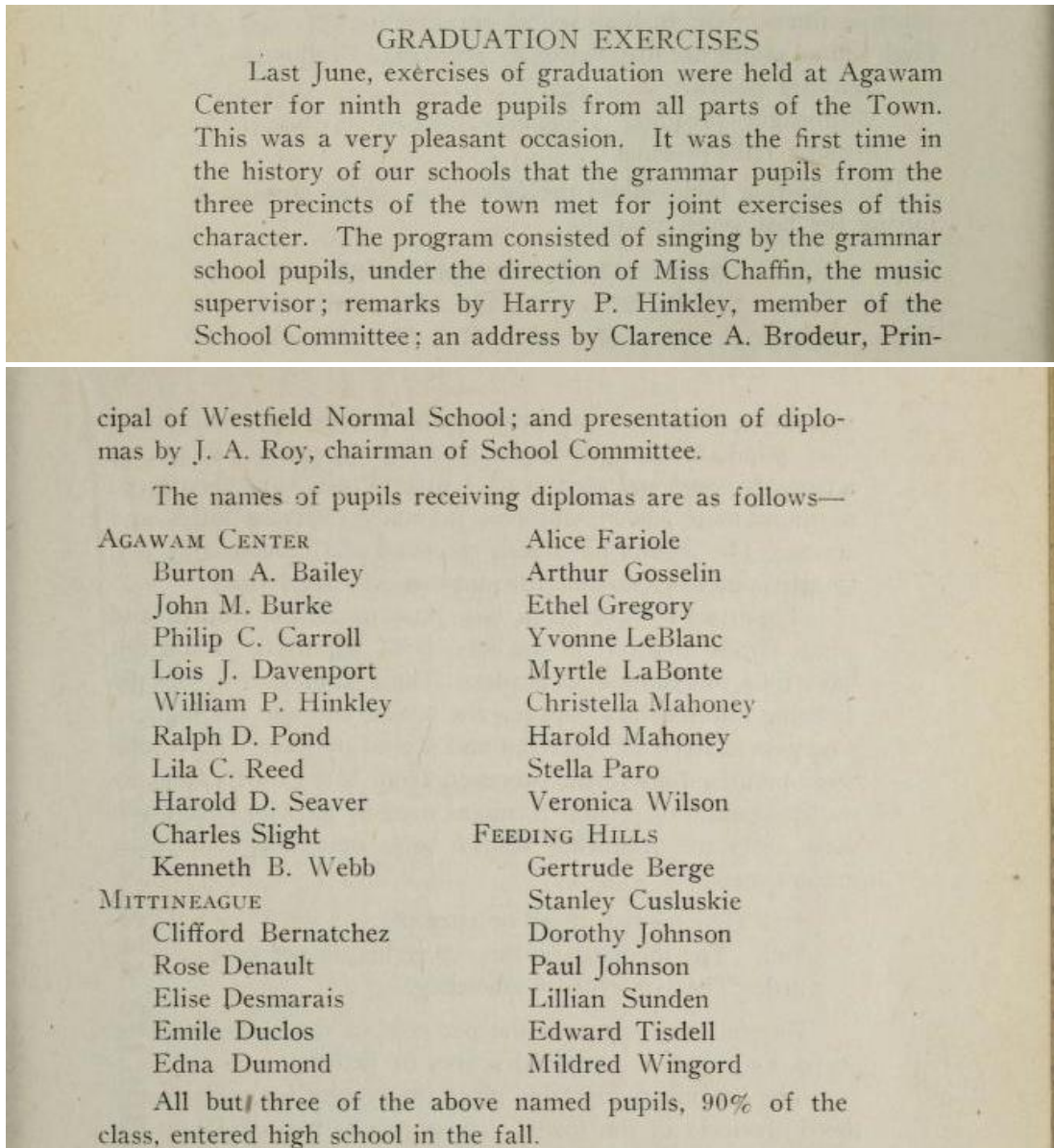
Appendix B

The first Agawam Public Schools graduation did not take place in 1923 or 1924.

The first graduation actually took place in 1916!

In 1916 the Agawam Public schools consisted of grades 1 – 9.

As reported in the 1916 Annual Town Report, pages 90-91



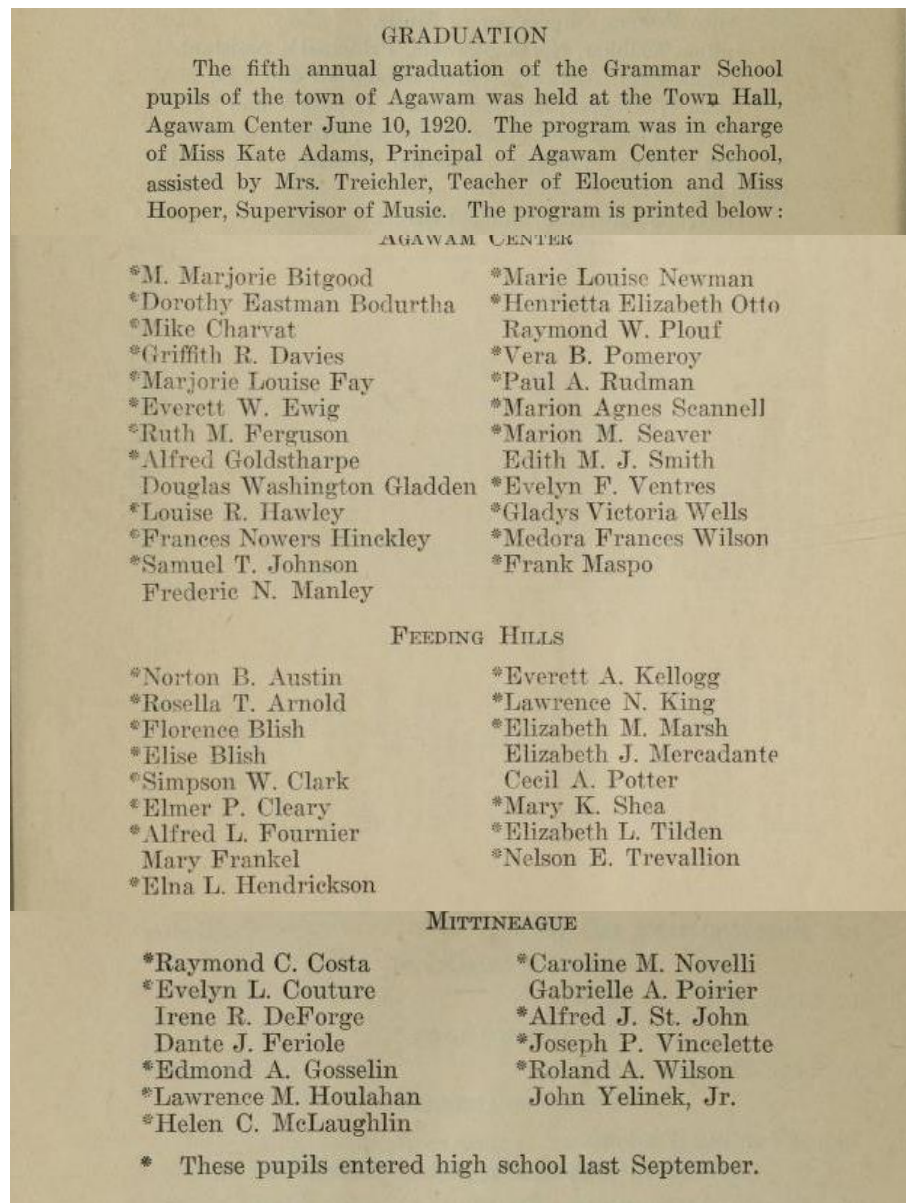
A graduation for ninth graders exiting the school system, but a graduation none the less,

and as reported... ***"It was first time in the history of the schools..."***

(Might these have been among the "first alumni" Benjamin Phelps was referring to in 1924?)

Annual Town Reports through 1920 had a section describing the graduation ceremonies and a listing of the “graduates”. School officials were proud to announce the high percentage of students who were going to continue their education in high school.

Most went to West Springfield High School, but some did attend high schools in Springfield. Below is the listing for the 9th grade graduating class of 1920 taken from the 1920 Annual Town Report (p 88-90)



After attending Freshman and Sophomore years at West Springfield, the students listed above, attended the new Agawam High School for their Junior and Senior year.

They would become the Class of 1924, the first to graduate from Agawam High School.

With the opening of the new Agawam High School in September of 1922, Agawam residents who had attended Freshman and Sophomore years at West Springfield and other area high schools were required to attend the new Agawam High School for their Junior and Senior Years.



With one exception.

One Agawam resident was allowed to continue his studies at West Springfield High School and graduate with his West Springfield classmates in 1924. His name was

Henley Granville Rouillard

HENLEY GRANVILLE ROUILLARD 666 Main St., Agawam

"Sampson"

Boys' Council, President of Agriculture
Department, Boys' Glee Club.

"In thy face I see the map of honor, truth, and loyalty"



Why?

There are some clues in his 1924 West Springfield Yearbook.
He had been a starter on the West Springfield football team as a Junior and Senior

THE WEST SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL, '24



Cowing, left end
Capt. Bagg, left tackle
Miner, left guard
Rouillard, center
Watson, left halfback

Mattioli, right end
Murphy, right tackle
Ferry, right guard
Kelley, fullback
Rapisarda or Brainard, right halfback

The Last* Agawam "West Sider" 1924

Rouillard was also heavily involved in the Agriculture program at West Springfield High School. He is listed as the President of the Agriculture Club and a member of the stock judging team.

THE WEST SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL, '24

Agriculture

President, Henley Rouillard
Vice-President, Everett Bagg

Secretary, Crossett Morgan
Treasurer, Edmund Otto

During the first two years of Agawam High there was no football team and no agriculture program.

The first AHS football team was not organized until the Fall of 1925.
The Agriculture program was not instituted until the 1930 school year.

Rather than deny him the unique opportunities that existed at WSHS that did not yet exist at AHS, the School Committees and Superintendents of both schools allowed him to complete his Junior and Senior year at WSHS.



Henry Rouillard went on to serve in the United States Army during World War II. He died in New Hampshire in 1999 at the age of 94.

This story is illustrative of how then, as now, the School Committee, Superintendent and Principal put the best interest of the student first.

*(Having typed over 20,000 student addresses into the Agawam High School Graduates Data Base I know that there was the occasional West Springfield address listed. I have also heard anecdotes of Agawam residents, who, for whatever reason, were allowed to attend and graduate from West Springfield High School.)

Rouillard is unique because, if he had attended Agawam High School he would have been in the AHS Class of 1924 – the first to graduate from Agawam High School.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to...

***the staff of the Agawam Public Library, particularly
Jerome Walczak, Cher Collins, and Maria Yacavone
for their friendly professional assistance.***

the West Springfield Public Library

the Springfield Public Library

the Springfield Museum Historical Archive

***Walter Willard (AHS '63) and the
the late Mike Marieb (AHS '61) who
introduced me to this topic
(thanks or blame?)***

***Agawam High School Class of 1924
(though we never met,
I feel I have come to know them)***

and

***my wife Marica (Cebrelli) Scherpa (AHS '69) for her love
and (almost) unlimited patience over the last 50 years!***



Larry Scherpa (AHS '65)

Congratulations!

The Class of 1924 –

The 1st Class to graduate from Agawam High School



The Class of 2022 –

The 100th Anniversary Class of Agawam High School

The Class of 2023

The 100th class to graduate from Agawam High School



