

# A Brief History of 1893 - Manchester High School - 1943

THE Manchester High School, at first known as the South Manchester High School, was established in the fall of 1893. According to the Ninth District report of the school year 1893-4, "A high school for this town has long been the desire of many of our people. During the past year, under the enterprise and good management of Principal Verplanck, the school has worked steadily forward in grade and developments. Additional room has been furnished and a four years' course of study commenced." On the opening day but one senior, Miss Gertrude L. Albiston, was registered. Knowing that there were several Manchester young people prepared in other schools, notably Hartford Public High School, Principal Verplanck conducted a personal search for senior students with the result that six seniors were finally enrolled. All were graduated the following April. This first class, in addition to Miss Albiston, consisted of Mary H. Gray, Mary J. Johnson, Alice M. Belcher, Agnes S. Henderson and Reuben F. Gray. The latter was elected valedictorian of the class. The first commencement was held in Cheney Hall. Diplomas were presented by Dr. O. B. Taylor, former secretary of the School Board. The class motto was "To be rather than to seem."

Altogether the first year there were fifty-two pupils in the high school, divided by classes as follows: seniors, six; juniors, three; sophomores, sixteen; and freshmen, twenty-seven. There were five teachers, Mr. Frederick A. Verplanck, Principal and instructor in the sciences, Mr. A. E. Peterson, instructor in Latin and Greek; Miss Anna B. Brockee, instructor in Mathematics and German; Miss Jeanne Charlius, instructor in French; and Miss Mary G. Peabody, instructor in Literature.

Pupils desiring admission to the school were required to apply to the principal for admission and had to pass examinations in reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, geography and United States History, for, says the report for that year "Scholars entering the High School should be proficient in these common branches so that nothing will hinder their work in the course of study laid out."

The first course of study was much the same as that of any other high school of that era. It should be recalled that high schools were established so that all children could participate in the kind of education formerly available only for the children of the well-to-do in private academies. Therefore, early high school courses of study aped those of the academies. In this respect Manchester High School was no different. The first offerings were essentially classical, consisting of English, Latin, Greek, French, German, History, Civics, Physics, Chemistry, Geology, Botany, Biology, Astronomy, Algebra, Geometry and Advanced Mathematics.

In two notable respects the first course of study of the Manchester High School differed from those of other high schools. At the very outset recognition was given to the fact that not all high school pupils went to college and two courses of study were offered, college and general, although there was little difference between them. Freshmen in the college course took Latin, Physics and Algebra while freshmen in the general course took English, Physics and Algebra. Some seniors took as many as six subjects, but it was not until 1896 that freshmen took four.

The second respect in which its early course of study differed from that of other schools lies in the early practice of giving special instruction, when needed, in individual cases. Thus records of certain subjects reappear from time to time throughout the early years. This recognition of individual needs and differences was clearly in advance of general recognition throughout the country, and this adaptation of the school to pupil needs has always been a cardinal principle of the school.

While there was no major change in the list of subjects offered until 1912, there were many minor changes through the early years. Greek was dropped in 1898 by a vote of the Ninth District Board but records of Greek students appear as late as 1906. The reports for 1896 indicate that music, sewing, and bookkeeping were taught in the High School. Choral work with the whole school organized for four-part singing was mentioned in the report for 1899. Drawing was definitely introduced in 1900 and gymnastics in 1901. The report for the year 1905-1906 records that mechanical drawing and domestic science were taught in the high school.

The first major change in the course of study occurred in 1911-1912 when stenography and typewriting were added to give the school a full-fledged commercial course. This trend to vocational offerings was again evidenced in 1916-1917, when the high school-trade school cooperative course was established. Two periods of physical education, one of gymnastics and one of swimming were introduced in 1917-1918.

A normal school preparatory course introduced in 1913 was later abandoned when the normal schools became teachers colleges, and the college preparatory course fitted pupils to enter nearly all types of institutions of higher learning.

A nurses' preparatory course was organized in 1935 in response to general revision of entrance requirements to nurses' training schools.

For the most part, curriculum developments in recent years have consisted of the revision of content within subject matter fields, in order to keep abreast of the times. Spanish, Pre-Flight Aeronautics, and Salesmanship are the most recent additions to the course of study.

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At present the High School offers seven different curricula, college preparatory, commercial (accounting, salesmanship, clerical, and secretarial), general scientific, pre-trade, home economics, nurses' preparatory and art. During the past year, a War Time Program for boys has been introduced. This includes five periods of physical education weekly and special pre-induction courses recommended by the War Department in radio, automotive mechanics and electricity.

For the first ten years of its life, the High School was located in the old Ninth District schoolhouse standing on the land now occupied by the Franklin, Recreation, and Barnard Buildings. One study and three recitation rooms were used by the high school. In 1904, it moved into what is now known as the Main Building. So slow was the early growth of the school, that it was not until the school year 1921-22 that all of this building was used exclusively by the high school. From that date the growth of the school was more rapid, and in 1925 the Franklin Building was taken over by the high school. These buildings proved sufficient to house the constantly growing school until the school year 1939-1940 when the top floor of the Barnard Building was given over to high school use.

From the date of its erection, in 1917, the School Recreation Building has been used increasingly for high school purposes. At present, it is used entirely until five o'clock in the afternoon, when it is taken over for community recreational purposes.

The Main Building houses the senior and junior home rooms, the Franklin Building houses the sophomores and college preparatory freshmen, and the Barnard Building the remainder of the freshman class. The Recreation Building houses the school library, the sewing, art, and physical education departments.

The steady growth of the school is indicated by the school population figures for each ten years of its existence, as follows: 1893—52; 1903—121; 1913—237; 1923—598; 1933—1300; 1943—1420. This represents a growth of 2700% in fifty years. In the same time the faculty has increased approximately 1000%.

Without the class of 1943, 4767 pupils have been graduated from the school. All together, including present enrollment, 10,627 pupils have attended the school.

It was early recognized that all work and no play is a poor rule and almost from the beginning attention was paid to the development of extracurricular activities. The first official notice is made in the Ninth District report for the year 1899. Mention is made of the "marked improvement in the choral work of the school." Concerning athletics, this report says "The athletics of the school have been managed very wisely." Mention is also made of "Boethia," the literary society of the school. Concerning this society, which was organized in 1896 and which for so many years played such an important part in the life of the school, this report says, "The Boethia should not be omitted in an account of the year's work. It is the literary society of the school, and as its name signifies, is an aid to the pupils in many ways, in giving them power to think upon a given

subject independently, in giving them power to express thought clearly and attractively, and that valuable accomplishment a knowledge of parliamentary practice. . . . It is the social center of the High School life. . . ." This organization which came into being in 1896 remained the center of extracurricular activities until 1924.

The report for the year 1904-1905 remarks, "The success of the school in athletics, taking into consideration its size, is somewhat remarkable." Mention is made of the basketball team and track team which for the past two years had defeated the New Britain High School in dual meets. In the year following the fire, when the high school adopted a double session plan in order to accommodate more lower grade pupils while new buildings were being built, Boethia was discontinued temporarily.

The high school principal's report for 1915-16 indicated four fields of "social activities"; (1) Literary: including a debating society and Boethia, (2) Publications: the Editorial Board which brought into being Somanhis Events, (3) Music: Boys' Glee Club and Girls' Glee Club, and (4) Athletics: Basketball, Baseball, and Tennis.

The war in 1917-18 did not seriously impair the extracurricular activities of the school. Athletic teams won a good proportion of their games and social activities were continued. The fact that it was a war year is indicated by the appearance of a new club called the Army and Navy Club. Red Cross activities are noted, as are they for the next year. The sale of thrift stamps was another feature of the war years.

Dramatic organizations first appeared in 1919-20, but it was not until 1926-27 that the dramatic club was called Sock and Buskin. In the same year the freshman-sophomore dramatic club, Paint and Powder, was organized. Although successful in their annual productions, the dramatic organizations staged their greatest triumph in 1942, when Sock and Buskin won first place in the New England Interscholastic Dramatic Contest.

Other present successful school organizations which came into being in 1926-27 are the Girls Leaders' Class, the French Club, and the Shorthand Club.

In 1924-25 the senior class made its first annual pilgrimage to Washington, D. C. These trips were abandoned during the early thirties. In recent years a Senior Class Picnic has been one of the highlights of the commencement season. These have been halted temporarily because of transportation difficulties.

There have been many other student organizations, some of a curricular and some of an extracurricular nature. Since the permanency of these activities depends entirely on pupil interest, not all exist over a long period of time.

In the Ninth District Report for 1915-16 mention is made of the encouragement given to student government. A Student Council organized at that time functioned until 1933. That year the Council was reorganized with a new constitution and has since become a vital factor in the life of the school.

Manchester High School has always been active in athletics and has developed many

fine athletes and teams. The school was first represented in football in 1893-94, after which this sport was banned for a quarter of a century reappearing in the fall of 1923. Track and basketball, the sports in which Manchester High School has won its greatest fame date back to the early days of the school.

At that time much more emphasis was placed on intramural athletics and the oldest trophy cups dated March 26, 1898, represent the Class of 1900 as winner in an indoor track meet held in the corridors of the Ninth District Building. The first state championship was won in basketball in the year 1910-11 and the second, also in basketball, the following year.

Since 1927, the school has been a member of the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic League composed of teams from Bristol, Meriden, Middletown, and West Hartford. In the sixteen years of competition to date, Manchester High has won fifty-four league championships, as follows: Baseball—5, Tennis—2, Golf—3, Football—3, Swimming—12, Basketball—4, Soccer—5, Cross Country—8, and Track—12.

Since the two state championship teams in 1910-11 and 1911-12, the High School has won seven state championships in Baseball, Basketball, Indoor Track and Cross Country.

The most memorable year in sports history was 1937-38. In this year, athletic teams won six C.C.I.L. championships in Baseball, Golf, Swimming, Basketball, Cross Country and Track; three state championships in Basketball, Cross Country and Indoor Track and the New England Interscholastic Basketball championship. The Cross Country Team was second in the New England Interscholastic Cross Country meet and a Manchester boy, George Leary, was individual winner. Probably the greatest athlete developed in Manchester High School was Joseph McCluskey of national and international fame as a distance runner.

Music, both as a curricular and as an extracurricular activity has been emphasized throughout the history of the school. Choral work has been carried on since the nineties and instrumental work since 1905-16. At present the school supports an excellent A Cappella Choir and orchestra as well as music assemblies for the entire school.

It is difficult in a brief history of an educational institution to trace the development of the philosophy which has guided its destiny or to pay adequate tribute to the men and women who have contributed to its progress. Nor is it possible to dwell at length on the personal achievement of the men and women who have passed through its doors.

Ten years before the high school was established, a broad education philosophy was stated in a report of the Board of School Visitors for the Town of Manchester. According to this statement "A heritage so valuable as our system of common schools should be held in highest esteem by each succeeding generation. All that can be done should be done to promote its efficiency and secure its advantages." This policy has been followed through the years.

In the Ninth District report for 1896, it is stated "Our aim is to raise the school to that standard of excellency which shall gain for it the favor and confidence of the whole town . . . , modelling it not after the smaller and weaker institutions of this grade, but after the strongest and best." The record of the past fifty years demonstrates the tenacity with which this aim has been pursued not only by members of the faculty but by succeeding Boards of Education.

Few schools are so fortunate as to have the guidance of one man for nearly half a century and the rugged honesty of Frederick A. Verplanck, familiarly known as "Zip", the strength of his character and his devotion to the development of Manchester boys and girls are reflected in all its successes.

In fifty years Manchester High School has known but two superintendents, Mr. Verplanck and now Arthur H. Illing and nine principals, Mr. Verplanck, 1893-94; Mr. Arthur Peterson, 1894-1900; Mr. Harry C. Folsom, 1900-1904; Mr. Austin Savage, 1907-1915; Mr. John Backus, 1915-1917; Mr. Leland P. Knapp, 1917-1923; Mr. Clarence Quimby, 1923-1933; Mr. Arthur Illing, 1933-1935; and Mr. Edson M. Bailey, 1935-

Outstanding among the many men and women who have served on the faculty was Miss Harriet Condon who from 1900 until her retirement in 1934 worked incessantly to enrich and beautify the lives of her students.

It is only in times of war that fame and prominence come to young men and women. Thus, a school but fifty years old has few alumni who have gained national or statewide recognition. Indeed it is only a few who ever thus succeed. The measure of what this school may have contributed to any individual is not found in the outstanding successes of a few. It is found in the silent hopes and achievements of the many hundreds who have lived good and useful lives. Today throughout the world wherever men and women fight the good fight to keep our country free, Manchester High School alumni help carry the banner of freedom. To the same end others labor diligently on the home front. It is in their sacrifices and achievements that Manchester High School takes its greatest pride.