

FAIRPORT HIGH SCHOOL on WEST AVENUE

“One of the finest high school buildings to be found in any town in the state” opened to Fairport students in September 1924. The state-of-the-art structure, designed by O.W. Harwood and B. Dryer, and located on West Avenue, had two stories and was built at a cost of less than \$300,000. The Fairport School District had been growing rapidly, expanding from a total student population of 500 in 1914 to over 1,000 just ten years later, so the new school meant that for the first time in several years, all students could attend full time.



The new Fairport High School had specific sites for its various courses of study. The basement provided six rooms for commercial courses such as typing, shop, mechanical drawing, and homemaking. The lunchroom was located there, as was the gym, which could accommodate about 600 for games and was also used for dances, Proms, and the Senior Ball. Dressing rooms, showers, and lockers for both boys and girls were part of the gym complex as well. The furnace room, coal bins, janitor’s office, and other storage rooms filled the remainder of the basement. The first floor housed the Superintendent’s office, the Board of Education room, the principal’s office, 8 rooms for grades 7 and 8, the library, toilets, and an auditorium that could seat 725. The second floor accommodated the high school students. It had 2 study rooms and 10 regular classrooms, including a biology lab and a chemistry/physics lab. The building was generally fireproof with reinforced concrete floors covered with maple. There was a master clock and bell system and, of course, each classroom had blackboards and bulletin boards. The two entrances (apparently the East for boys and the West for girls) led down to the gym and locker rooms, and up to the first floor library and junior high rooms. An east-west corridor connected the two sides and another staircase went from the basement to the second (senior high) floor.

Among those on the dais at the dedication of the building in December, 1924 were Superintendent H. Claude Hardy, featured speaker Herbert Weet, Superintendent of the Rochester City School District, Principal Minerva DeLand, librarian Helen DeLand, and Board of Education president Yale Parce who “pledge[d] to every boy and girl in this community that we believe in them and are willing to pay the price to help them become good citizens by being better prepared to meet the problems of life when they leave school.” The overflow crowd was entertained by “delightful music rendered by the excellent East High School Orchestra of Rochester...” Gifts from community groups and classes were presented, which included, among other things, bookcases, 10 flags, sets of books, ferns for each classroom, and a statue of the Winged Victory. Over 1500 people participated in the ensuing open house, reception, and dance.

A 1927 newspaper article pointed out that “Ever since the opening of the new school, a splendid gift of the people of Fairport to their children and youth, there has been a deep interest shown in all the affairs of the school. This interest has so affected the efforts of the pupils as to bring out the best that they have.” The best that year included three state scholarships, first prize at the Brockport Fair and the Rochester Exposition for the school exhibit, a basketball team that ranked among the best in the state, a football team that kept all opponents scoreless, and a “remarkable production of a modern American play.”

As a 1927 *Fairport Herald-Mail* article noted, the interest of the community in its high school has helped students to achieve their best over the years. This interest manifested itself in support for sports teams and encouragement to excel academically.

The state basketball tournament of 1927 dominated the attention of many in Fairport. Over 400 fans were taken by a special train to Buffalo for that tournament. In the quarterfinal game against Oswego the lead changed a number of times, but Fairport came away with the win. Fans welcomed the team back to town at 3 a.m. with a blast on the fire whistle and a parade of cars around the village. The next day the team faced Yonkers in the semifinal. While the score was tied several times, Fairport came up short and lost 25 to 22. Nevertheless, the team was welcomed home by an impromptu parade of over 200 automobiles, hundreds of fans, and a band which accompanied the team from the Fullamtown bridge along West Church Street, to Main Street to West Avenue and up to the doors of the school. A footnote to the championship games was the participation of a female cheerleader for Fairport. The paper notes that "every eye was focused on [Helen Hart]." The record shows a continuing line of championship teams, particularly football, throughout the 1930's and 40's. The 1939 undefeated team had most of its starting lineup chosen for either the Democrat & Chronicle or the Times-Union all-county teams. Congressman Joseph J. O'Brien presented all the members of the team with gold plated footballs at the end of the season.

Academically, Fairport students were outstanding in science, winning top prizes at the New York State Science Congress over a number of years. Students also won awards at the Scholastic Art Competition. Many were awarded scholarships at local colleges including the University of Rochester and Nazareth College.

It is not difficult to conclude, from the photos and articles about Fairport graduates, how many of them have stayed in their hometown to raise their own families. For example, the class of 1931 included mayor and businessman Albert Knapp and Fairport teacher Florence Stolt. As of their 50th reunion, the majority of the class of 1934 lived in Fairport. Those members included Ken Dennis, Robert Dudley, Gordon and Louise Seaman, as well as many others. A reunion photo of the classes of 1935 and 1936 showed Fairport residents Bob and Meriel Bach, Bob and Natalie Mabry, Dorothy Tracy, Milt McMahan, Dick and Peg Ryon, Ed and Eunice Skeates, Perry Stolt, and "Hawk" and Charlie DiRisio. In addition, the first principal of the West Avenue School was Minerva DeLand, also a Fairport graduate.

With the growth in the community and the centralization that took place in 1951, the Fairport School District was in need of more space by the late 1950's. In 1955 there were 600 students, grades 7-12, at West Avenue School, with a graduating class of 65. By 1959, there were 500 students in grades 9-12 with a graduating class of 74 students. The Class of 1960 would see the number of graduating seniors top 100. A new high school was needed and in 1959, Minerva DeLand High School, named after the retiring principal of the West Avenue School, was opened. West Avenue's Fairport High School was renamed Martha Brown Junior High School, after another long-time teacher, and housed grades 6-8. In 1965, when the new Martha Brown junior high school opened on Ayrault Road, the building was renamed the West Avenue School. The structure was sold in 1983 and developed as condominiums. The still-elegant building is now known as "Packett's Glen."