

A HISTORY OF GRAND HAVEN SCHOOLS

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On November 2, 1834, Rix Robinson was in residence at his log cabin, located near today's museum, waiting to greet the schooner Supply from Mackinac Island. Arriving at the Grand River on the sailing vessel that day were Rev. William Montaque Ferry, his wife Amanda White Ferry and their three young sons along with Pierre Duvernay, his wife Julia and their four children as well as 10 other workmen. The members of this intrepid band were to become Grand Haven's first permanent pioneer settlers.

In 1823, Rev. Ferry had established a missionary on Mackinac Island to teach the Indian children to read and write. Quite naturally education of their own children was a part of daily life that came with the Ferry's and Duvernay's when they founded Grand Haven.

In March 1835, the Ferry family moved into the settlement's first log home. It was located where the Kirby Grill now stands. When Mary A. White, Amanda's sister, came to Grand Haven in the summer of 1835 she became the Village's first teacher--the loft in the cabin the first class room. The sessions continued for a short time in another log house which was located behind the Ferry home on Lot 24, approximately 18 Water Street, that had recently been vacated by Hathaway sawmill men.

FIRST SCHOOL

The next year--1836--the first public building was erected on Lot 186, the east side of Second Street between Washington and Franklin--approximately 18 S. Second Street. It was a one room frame structure that served as a general meeting hall, the circuit court, church and school, with Mary A. White as Sunday School and day school teacher. It served as the first school for 15 years.

SECOND SCHOOL

As lumbering increased so did enrollment and soon more space was needed to house the students. In 1848 Timothy Eastman's home was purchased and remodeled as a school house. Located on Lot 70, the west side of First Street between Franklin and Clinton streets, it opened in 1851 as Grand Haven's second school. It was a two-story building with the lower grades on the first floor and the "high school"--so called--on the second floor.

Mary A. White continued to be the teacher for one year, assisted by her niece, Miss Amanda Ferry. Mary White left in 1852 to teach at the female seminary in Rockford, Illinois. Aunt Mary, as she was affectionately known, returned to Grand Haven in her retirement to keep house for her brother-in-law, Senator Thomas W. Ferry, who died October 14, 1897. Mary White died in 1901.

When Miss White left, Franklin Everett, the first male teacher, took charge of the school with assistance by his wife. The annual budget for operation of the Village school was \$1,200. The Everett's remained for the next eight years. The marvelous 650 page history "Memorials of the Grand River Valley," published in 1878, was authored by Franklin Everett.

UNION SCHOOL

As the Lumber Era began to evolve, Grand Haven and Mill Point, now Spring Lake, became boom towns.

Grand Haven purchased the entire block bounded by Sixth, Franklin, Seventh and Clinton streets for \$1,200 and set it aside for schools. Union School was built in 1860 near the northeast corner of Clinton and Sixth streets at a cost of \$10,000. Also known as the Clinton Street School and the White School, the two story white wood frame building had several rooms and housed all grades kindergarten through high school.

After the Civil War the school principals had the designation of "professor," a title that came with the job but did not necessarily mean they had achieved a full professorship on a university campus before coming to Grand Haven to be principal.

School hours were from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. classes started promptly as the doors were closed at 9:00 o'clock and those tardy were not admitted. Two half days absence in one week without proper excuse resulted in the student being expelled for a week.

A dozen school books were listed which the students were required to have. The texts covered the specific subjects of reading, spelling, penmanship, arithmetic, mental arithmetic, algebra, grammar, rhetoric, history, geography, Latin and philosophy. These texts covered all grade levels, some used in the lower grades and others in the high department. But the very first book on the list, and the one which was used on all the grade levels, was the Bible.

Because of lack of space, non-resident students were excluded from attendance.

CENTRAL SCHOOL I

As the population continued to increase Union School could no longer house all the students in town. On May 15, 1870 a contract was let to erect a new school at a cost of \$50,000. The original Central School was built on one of the most prominent rises in Grand Haven, the southeast corner of Franklin and Sixth streets. The large white brick structure was three stories tall and topped with a bell cupola which rose to a height of 125 feet making it was one of the most prominent buildings in the city. The exterior of the original Central School was brick and stone, but, like all similar structures of that time, the choicest woods were used for the floors, interior halls and class rooms, staircases, seats, cloakrooms and assembly halls and constructed by the best wood workers of the Lumber Era.

The new Central School opened for public inspection July 3, 1871. Grades K-4 continued at Union School while students in grades 5-12 attended the new school. At first the lower grades occupied the top floor at Central with upper grades on the lower floors. However, when one of the younger children was killed in a fall down the open stairwell, the order was reversed and the high school moved to the upper floors. The school was staffed with 16 teachers when the school opened.

The first class of three students graduated from central High School in 1876.

WARD SCHOOLS

As the lumber industry boomed, so did the local population. The population of Grand Haven in 1850 was 500; by 1860 it had grown to 1,359--more than double. In the same period the Spring Lake area blossomed from a hand-full to 743. By 1890 Grand Haven had mushroomed to a city of more than 5,000 while the census figure for Spring Lake was 2,256. This population boom made additional classroom space inescapable.

For convenience of municipal management, Grand Haven was divided into four regions or wards with Washington and Fourth streets as the dividing lines. In time each ward had a school. Although Central School was located in the northwest corner of the Fourth Ward, Central was considered the First Ward school.

The Second Ward, or Columbus Street School was built in 1881 on the south side of Columbus between First and Second streets. It was a single-story frame building for grades K-4. It was closed in the 1920's and razed in 1930 for development.

The Fourth Ward, or Beech Tree School was built in the next year 1882 at what is now Bolt Park, the northeast corner of Beechtree and Pennoyer. It was frame structure for grades K-6. As the population shifted, Beech Tree School was closed and a new three story, brick Fourth Ward School was built on the southwest corner of Pennoyer and Ferry. The vacated Beech Tree

School was moved across the street for use as a home, where it remains today at 1514 Pennoyer.

The Third Ward, or Jackson Street School opened in 1893 at 606 Jackson Street, present site of the George and Mary Lou Zysk home. The small structure had been built on the north side of Columbus where the the Flying Gulls sculpture now stands between the Loutit Library and Community Center and had been moved to Jackson Street in 1879 to make room for a new Methodist Church. On Jackson Street it was used as the first Christian School and when the Christian School moved to new facilities in 1893, the Grand Haven School system acquired the building for a public school.

These simple Ward Schools served the community well into the 20th century. However, with these at full enrollment, in 1900 there were still approximately 700 students in the Central-Union complex--well beyond its intended capacity.

Apparently home-work was part of the daily assignment in those early days. The following bit of lost-and-found news appeared in the Friday, January 5, 1900 Tribune: "A new school Algebra book was found in the local pool room last night. Owner can have by calling this office." What brave student dared claim that book?

CENTRAL I BURNS

Although the Central School exterior was resistant to flames, the interior was not, and fire was a constant threat. On March 5, 1901 at about 8:30 PM, the alarm sounded that there was a fire in Central School. The horse-drawn fire equipment reached the scene but blizzard conditions and frozen pipes hampered the fire fighter's efforts to get water to the fire. The structure was completely gutted.

CENTRAL SCHOOL II

In 1902, a second Central School was built in the same general location. However, Central School II was much larger. The three-story brick and stone structure, topped by a magnificent bell tower, occupied most of the block on the east side of Sixth Street between Franklin and Clinton streets. The old Union School was razed to make room. The new school was designed to house all grades K through 12, with the high school grades on the third floor.

With the construction of Central School II, the days of two of the Ward Schools were numbered. In 1913, the vacated Jackson Street School was torn down to make room for the present day home. The Columbus Street School ceased operation in the 1920's and was razed in 1930 to make room for other development.

But the Fourth Ward School remained. When a large addition was made in 1928, the name was changed to Ferry School--and although it has suffered two fires through the years, it remains today the oldest structure in the Grand Haven School system.

Until after WW II, Ferry Field, adjacent to the school, was the site of all outdoor athletic events, which included football, track, baseball and tennis. Basketball was played at the Armory gym until 1922.

COUNTY NORMAL

A State of Michigan Public Act of 1903 provided for a County Normal school system to prepare persons to teach in rural schools. Until that time an 8th grade graduate of a city, village or rural school who could pass a teacher's examination could teach in a rural school. County Normal opened September 10, 1906 in a room in Central School. The Normal system provided a one year training program for anyone who passed the entrance exam. Eleventh grade students who passed the entrance examination took their twelfth grade in the County Normal class room. On March 20, 1906 the Grand Haven Board of Education received a letter from the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Patrick Kelly, notifying the Board that Grand Haven qualified to establish a

Normal School. Julia Soule had taught high school at Central School from 1895 to 1904 and then left the area for a time. She was called back to help set up the County Normal School, which used a room in Central School as the class room.

After one year of County Normal training the graduate, who had to be at least 18 years old, received a certificate to teach in a rural school for the next school year. The certificate could then be renewed for another year.

County Normal operated from 1906 to 1920. Classes were held at Central School during the period 1906-13, moved to the Forth Ward (Ferry) School 1913-17 and the final three years of classes--1917-20- were held at Columbus Street School. It cost \$1,300 to operate the Normal School the first year; by 1919 expenditures were \$2,400. During its 15 years of operation, County Normal had 175 graduates--165 women and 10 men.

HIGH SCHOOL I

Enrollment at Central School continued to grow and in 1915 plans were initiated to build a high school for grades 9 through 12. However, WW I intervened. On February 20, 1922 the voters approved the bond money and construction began on Seventh Street directly behind Central School. The 1,200 seat auditorium was completed in May 1922 in time for a "Pep Rally" followed by, June commencement exercises for the 1922 graduating class, the last high school class to graduate from Central School. Doors opened for classes at the new high school September 5, 1922. Students from Spring Lake and Ferrysburg either walked to school or road the Interurban for a nickel. Students from the Nunica/Crockery Township schools had the option of attending Grand Haven or Coopersville high schools.

Stretching nearly the entire block along Seventh Street between Franklin and Clinton, the new high school was the pride of the community. Basketball games moved from the Armory to the new gym that seated 500 spectators. Football, track, baseball and tennis continued to be played at Ferry Field. During the 1920's and '30's, Grand Haven teams won seven state basketball championships, three state tennis championships and fielded two "mythical" state championships football teams.

HIGH SCHOOL II

In 1937-38 the Grand Haven Board of Education purchased the City landmark known as Green Hill. The 20 acres plot was bounded by Cutler and Grant streets and the Pere Marquette Railroad tracks. High school enrollment had reached 800 students in 1940, which resulted in the consideration of plans for a new high school at the Green Hill site. This thinking was brought to a halt with the outbreak of WW II.

Green Hill had acquired its name because of the lush stand of beach grass that flourished on its sandy slopes in the summer months. The local kids played sandlot ball on the flat land at the bottom during the summer and used the slopes for sliding in the winter. The site made for a natural amphitheater which, in the fall of 1945, became the home for Grand Haven High School football teams--today Buccaneer Stadium. However, until the new high school was opened in 1953, football players still used the Ferry School locker facilities and then walked up to Green Hill Field. Fans used the limited seating on wooden bleachers or sat on the hillside until concrete bleachers were installed in 1965.

Following the war enrollment continued to climb. On May 15, 1950 the voters of Grand Haven authorized a \$1.6 million bond issue for a new high school. Designed to house 800-900 students, the new high school at 900 Cutler Street opened for classes in the fall of 1953. With the opening of the new 10-12 high school, the old high school on Seventh Street became the junior high for 7th through 9th grades while Central School continued to house K-6.

The new high school had a 900-plus seat auditorium and stage but the stellar feature was Grand Haven's first indoor swimming pool. The first swimming team to enter interscholastic competition came in 1956.

The gym became the new home of the Buccaneer basketball team. The pull-out bleachers put the partisan crowd a scant few feet from the court and over the years the intimidated opponents dubbed it the "Pirate Pit." Ferry Field continued to be used as the baseball field until Sluka Field on Beechtree was completed in 1961. Tennis was also played at the Ferry School until the new courts were built at the Griffin Street Junior High in 1966.

Vocational Education, which included an auto shop, was part of the curriculum, at Grand Haven High School from 1968 until the new Intermediate Careerline Tech Center at US-31 and Port Sheldon Road opened in 1982.

SPRING LAKE HIGH SCHOOL

Until 1963 all Spring Lake students attended Grand Haven High School for the last three grades-- 10, 11 and 12. Spring Lake built a new high school in 1963 at 345 Hammond Street. During the transition period, students who had started in Grand Haven had the option of completing their matriculation at Grand Haven High or switching to Spring Lake. The first Spring Lake High School graduating class was in 1965.

MARY A. WHITE

In 1955, the Board of Education purchased a 10 acre site behind the hospital on the corner of Wisconsin and Ottawa streets for a new elementary school at 1400 Wisconsin. Abutting the dune and adjacent to Duncan Woods, the site was developed under the school-park agreement between the City and the schools.

Named for the Village and county's first teacher, Mary A. White elementary school was dedicated on January 12, 1959. The original building had seven classrooms, a library and gymnasium with a stage, but expansions in 1963 and 1990 increased it to its present size of 19 classrooms.

When the new Grand Haven High School opened in 1997 for grades 9-12 and the Middle School concept was adopted for grades 6-8, Mary A. White and Central schools were reorganized as sister schools, Central housing grades K-2, Mary A. White grades 3-5. In 2000 there were 194 students attending Mary A. Whites using about half of the available rooms.

A.W. ELLIOTT SCHOOL

In 1962, a neighborhood school with five class rooms was built at 601 Elliot--the northeast corner of Elliot and Sixth streets--to accommodate the young students in the north end. The school was named not for the street on which it was located but rather for Arthur W. Elliott, who had owned and operated the Peerless Glove Company next to the school on the corner of Seventh and Elliot streets.

It was discontinued as a grade school in 1976 and since then has been used as an Alternative Education high school for teenage students who choose it over the conventional classroom and adults working on their diploma or GED certificate.

CONSOLIDATION

At the turn of the century, the majority of schools in Michigan were rural one-room schools that taught only through the 8th grade--and each school constituted a school district run by an independent school board. As an example, until 1956, in Robinson Township there were seven rural schools, each designated as a school district. Grand Haven Township had six. The greatest number of school districts in the state was in 1910, when there were 7,333 individual districts.

Consolidation of these districts, although slow, came about for reasons of economy and by the encouragement of Michigan educators. Most boys in the rural schools needed no education past

the 8th grade because their future was the family farm where another hand was always needed. For those boys living in the city, after finishing the 8th grade going to work in a factory to help the family income usually won out. But for girls, other than house making their only opportunities were in teaching or nursing, both of which required at least a high school education.

Those living in Grand Haven, Spring Lake or Ferrysburg could continue living at home while attending high school, which made the decision to go on to school a much easier choice than for those living in the country. For those in the townships outside the urban areas-Grand Haven Township, Spring Lake Township, Robinson and Crockery--it meant rooming in Grand Haven during the week and going home on weekends. Unless there was a friend of the family to room with, it was an added expense that more often than not tipped the balance in favor of going to work on the farm.

In 1902, there were 17 students in the Grand Haven High School graduating class--13 girls but only four boys. Twenty years later, when Grand Haven opened its new high school, the 1922 enrollment of 361 students was a relatively even mix boys and girls. But of the 54 graduates in 1922, only two boys went on to college as opposed to 14 girls. This would change, but it took time. What kept the boys from attending high school were the same reasons few went on to college.

In 1930 there were still 6,200 school districts throughout the state. The process was speeded up considerably when the State passed legislation in 1955 mandating that all school districts that did not offer a K-12 program had to affiliate with one that did. By 1960 the number of Michigan school districts was down to 2,145; by 1998 there were just 559.

Until 1959, the School District of the City of Grand Haven was comprised primarily of the land area within the city proper. But there were 23 rural schools operating in Grand Haven's surrounding townships. During the years 1959 to 1965, ten separate school districts annexed to the Grand Haven School District. All were in Ottawa County with the exception of Little Black Lake, which was located on Pontaluna Road in Muskegon County. The order that these came into the Grand Haven system were Ferrysburg; Connell in Port Sheldon Township; Agnew, Peach Plains, Bignell, Pigeon Creek, Stone School and Rosy Mound, all six in Grand Haven Township; Robinson, which also included Clark School in Robinson Township and Little Black Lake. Spring Lake stayed with Grand Haven until 1963; the south half of Port Sheldon joined the West Ottawa School District; Nunica residents elected Coopersville.

DEWITT SCHOOL

Many of the county's old one-room schools were converted to homes but most eventually fell into disrepair and were lost due to neglect. Through consolidation the Grand Haven School District had acquired several one room schools and had disposed of all of them except DeWitt.

The DeWitt one-room school, across from the DeWitt Centennial Farm at 17717 Taft Road, is located on an acre of land given to the neighborhood school district by the DeWitt and Bosch families in 1890 for purpose of building a much needed school. It was built in 1891 and served the students of the area until 1954 when the DeWitt School District became part of the Ferrysburg system. When Ferrysburg annexed to Grand Haven in 1959, DeWitt passed over as property of the Grand Haven School District.

DeWitt School was unusual because the exterior was still well preserved and much of the interior still intact. In 1976, the year of the country's Bicentennial, a group of volunteers restored DeWitt School to its original glory. Complete with the school bell and rope, desks with inkwells, black boards, a hanging globe, McGuffey Eclectic Readers, a potbellied stove and outdoor privies, it stands today as one of the finest examples of the turn-of-the-century one room country schools. DeWitt School is now maintained by Spring Lake Township, which acquired the historic structure from the Grand Haven School District in the early 1980's. It is available for special showings for school children and/or adults.

SCHOOL BUSING

When the rural system--one in which children walked to school--was supplanted by consolidation, school busing became a necessity. And as each rural district annexed to Grand Haven, the busing of students became the Grand Haven School District's responsibility. From 1959 to 1962, Grand Haven went from a single school district with no school buses to a consolidated district with a fleet of 26 buses, a crew of regular drivers and substitutes, a maintenance garage with a complete cadre of competent mechanics and a completely new office staff for routing and scheduling the buses. Soon the disenfranchised wanted on board. It was ruled the parochial schools--Catholic, Christian, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventist--should also have the right to use the public school buses. Next to be heard from were those in suburbia, or near suburbia. It was reasoned by those living in the remote corners of Grand Haven--such as out along Lake Michigan--that they had as far to walk to school as some of the rural students, those in Grand Haven Township just south of Robbins Road, for example. In the 1970's it became Grand Haven School District policy that city children as well as suburbia and Township students were eligible for free bus transportation.

In 1998 the Grand Haven Area Public School District had 6,106 students--and virtually all of them were bused by a fleet of 36 buses running routes that covered approximately 3,500 miles a day.

A few students still walked or rode their bikes to some of the nine elementary schools and two middle schools and some even went home for lunch. But most were bused to school, had lunch at school--took their own or paid \$1.65 for a hot lunch, which was supplied to all the elementary schools by the high school commissary--and were then bused home after school. Busing had become a big part of school business.

CENTRAL SCHOOL II BURNS

On Sunday, January 27, 1963, a fan belt had slipped in the Central School furnace room which resulted in a wooden pulley catching fire. The fire was extinguished by the school custodian, the problem, presumably, resolved. However, fire continued to smolder in the furnace duct-work through the night. In the predawn of January 28, 1963 the fire burst alive and the alarm was sounded. At 6:30 AM radio station WGHN first reported the fire at Central School as being small but that classes would be disrupted because the building would be without heat. But the fire continued to grow and soon the bright pink glow in the predawn sky could be seen throughout the city. As dawn broke the thick black smoke was visible for miles. Although the school was a total loss, Superintendent Ralph VanVolkinburg spoke for the entire community when he said the real blessing had been that no teacher, staff member or any of the 622 students had been in the building when the fire occurred.

CENTRAL SCHOOL III

Construction of Central School III began in the summer of 1964. Bricks, which had been recovered from the burned out ruins, were sold by the Central PTA for \$1/brick to raise funds for the school's new library. The \$300,000 school with seven classrooms, library and gymnasium was dedicated October 7, 1965.

On September 22, 1989, Central School was officially designated a Michigan Historic Site with the unveiling of a State Historical Marker, which commemorates 119 years of education on the same site.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL II

In February 1966, the new single-story, \$2 million Grand Haven Junior High School at 1400 S. Griffin Street was opened. It was complete with a 600-seat auditorium and stage, a library and a large cafeteria/lunch room. Later a swimming pool was added. The 25-yard, six-lane swimming pool with a separate diving well had been copied after the Michigan State's Jenison Gymnasium natatorium and became the new home for the Grand Haven swimming team. Tennis courts were

also part of the new facility. Thereafter all interscholastic tennis matches were held at the Jr. High, the old Ferry School courts thereafter used only for practice.

PLAYGROUND

What was needed for the new Central School was playground space-space occupied by the then empty old high school/jr. high building. On November 1, 1966, the School Board awarded a contract to raze the Seventh Street facility to the Michigan Development Company of Muskegon. The Saturday, December 31, 1966 Tribune described how steel cables were wrapped around the doomed building and with a final tug laid 43 years of Grand Haven history into a pile of rubble and dust. As the newspaper reported: "It's progress, but razing the old Grand Haven High School ends an exciting era. For some--the young and the new in town--its progress. For others, the loss of the building will cloud already faded memories

GRIFFIN SCHOOL

A year after the new Jr. High opened, Griffin Elementary School was built next door at 1700 S. Griffin Street. When it was dedicated in September 1967 it had seven classrooms, a well equipped library and a gymnasium/stage that doubled as the lunch room Ten more rooms were added in January 1971 and an additional five during the 1989-90 school year. The 22 room school served more than 400 students.

With the advent of the Middle School concept in 1997, Griffin, along with all the elementary schools in the Grand Haven system, no longer had a 6th grade.

HIGH SCHOOL III AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

By the mid-1990's, the Cutler Street High School was over 40 years old and time had caught up it. In 1997, a new \$32 million Grand Haven High School was opened for grades 9-12 at the northwest corner of Ferris and US-31 in Grand Haven Township. It was the fifth building of the Grand Haven school system dedicated to the upper grades. The focal feature in the entrance hall of the new school was a Foucault Pendulum. With each swing the pendulum changes its position and makes a complete circle in 24 hours as the earth turns beneath it.

Nine tennis courts became the new home for the Buccaneer tennis team. Two years later a 25-yard by 33 1/3 yard pool was added and varsity meets were switched from the Jr. High. However, a football field was not part of the new facility and Buccaneer Stadium at Green Hill continued to be the site for varsity football games and track meets.

With the opening of the new high school, the Griffin Street Jr. High became the White Pines Middle School and the old high school on Cutler became the Lakeshore Middle School, both for grades 6-8. At the same time, all elementary schools shrunk by one grade-the 6th.

TODAY

Today---the Grand Haven School District--has a high school, two middle schools, five elementary schools within the city, two in Ferrysburg, two in Grand Haven Township and one in Robinson Township.

PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

Although not part of the Grand Haven School system, the story of area education would not be complete with mentioning the four parochial elementary schools.

St. Patrick's Church began an elementary in 1872 in conjunction with the church at 920 Fulton. After WW II, the decision was made to move the church school to the St. Mary's Church in Spring Lake and when it opened in 1954 the St. Patrick's school was closed.

The Grand Haven Christian School had its beginning in 1878 with eight students receiving their teachings at the old South Channel bridge. In 1880 classes were moved to what later became the Jackson Street School at 606 Jackson. When the County built its new Court House in 1893, the

Christian School bought the original two-story, frame Court House and moved it to 740 Columbus Street. A brick building at 800 Columbus replaced the old court house and the new school grew to fill eight class rooms on the two floors. Dutch was taught through the 4th grade. In 1948 the school purchased a five acre site on the southeast corner of Ferry and Grant streets for a new ten room school and gymnasium that was dedicated April 10, 1953.

St. John's Lutheran Church opened an elementary school in 1946. Classes were held in the church on the northwest corner of Franklin and Sixth until a new church and school were built at 525 Taylor in 1958.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church opened a small elementary school in 1966 at 16754 136th Avenue, the southeast corner of M-104 and 136th.

All parochial school children are bused to school by Grand Haven School District buses except the Seventh-Day Adventist students, who are carried by Spring Lake buses.

When the students complete the elementary grades in the parochial schools, they transfer to the high school of their choice-the public schools in Grand Haven and Spring Lake or the parochial high schools in Muskegon.

TRADITION

Grand Haven has a proud tradition of education that dates back 165 years. It is a tradition that continues to grow and inspire those who walk the hallowed halls.