

History of the Schools

From the very early years when John Conner first built his trading post by the Whitewater River, the people of Connersville and Fayette County have worked together to provide an education for the next generation. As early as 1815, a subscription school was operated in a cabin at the south end of what is known today as Eastern Avenue. In 1829, a large schoolhouse was built on the original public square at Fifth and Eastern. The Seminary School was operated by two men who later became prominent in government: Caleb B. Smith, the seminary clerk, who later served President Lincoln's cabinet, and Samuel W. Parker, the seminary principal who later served as a member of Congress. In 1855, the property was leased by the county and Fifth Street School was completed in 1858. This building was used for 45 years before being replaced in 1893, and the first class to graduate from Connersville held its commencement exercises there in 1878. The first high school graduating class was composed of nine students, and the faculty consisted of one teacher.

Eighth Street School was built on the northern boundary of the city in 1888 on the southeast corner of Eighth and Grand Avenue and operated for 82 years. The high school department was located there for several years until the Fifth Street School was replaced with a new building in 1893.

In the meantime, people in the area called Maplewood, north of the City of Connersville, built a school at Twentieth Street and Virginia Avenue in 1812, which remained there until 1963. Maplewood School became part of the Connersville system when Maplewood area was annexed in 1894.

The community of East Connersville built a large new elementary school on the east side of Fountain Street in 1898. The structure was torn down after the present Eastview School was built in 1957.

The high school department, which was commissioned as a high school offering a three-year course in 1878 and expanded to a four-year course in 1896, was shuttled back and forth to whatever building had enough space to accommodate the older students until it acquired a separate building of its

own in 1904. The new high school on Grand Avenue between Sixteenth and Seventeenth Street was built at a cost “no to exceed \$56, 000,” and the day it opened was a memorable one for the community.

In 1906 W. Otto Miessner, who headed the music program in Connersville, organized the first high school marching band in the United States. The following year, the Connersville band was asked to play in the program of the Indiana State Teachers’ Association in Indianapolis. Mr. Miessner taught piano, voice, and instrumental music and even composed music for the Silver-Burdett Company.

In the first few years of the new century, the Connersville city school system consisted of the new high school and three elementary buildings – newly annexed Maplewood, Eighth Street School, and Fifth Street School. Eastview was annexed in 1922.

Concurrently with the development of the schools in the city, the same pattern of development of educational services was taking place in the many small communities surrounding Connersville, Fayette County, which was formed in 1819, was originally divided into five townships. Over the years, Fayette County lost two townships and gained five making a total of nine townships which remain today; Columbia, Connersville, Fairview, Harrison, Jackson, Jennings, Orange, Posey, and Waterloo. Each one established educational facilities for the young people of the area beginning with classes which were conducted in homes. Then, log schoolhouses began to appear in the small villages followed by one-room frame schoolhouses. Shortly after the city of Connersville opened its first separate high school building in 1904, about 30 schools were in session in the county with high school courses being offered at Alquina, Bentonville, Everton, Fairview, Harrisburg, and Orange.

Jennings Township opened Alquina School in 1891. The present building was completed in 1956 with a new gymnasium added in 1976. The first school building to serve Jackson Township was built in 1839 in the village of Everton. The current Everton School, opened in 1980, is the fourth structure to serve the area. Columbia Township had an elementary school from the early days of the village until the school closed in 1971. Orange Township established a school in 1823. The present school was completed in 1958.

Harrison Township opened a school building in the village of Harrisburg in 1892. By 1917, Harrison Township was operating three school buildings: one in the village of Harrisburg, a building on the southeast corner of Thirtieth Street and Grand Avenue, and a rural district school. The present Grandview Elementary School was not opened until 1959. The school in Harrisburg was replaced with a brick building which housed the elementary and high school students in 1930. Fayette Central School has been enlarged and modernized three times and the gymnasium and stage are the only remaining parts of the original structure.

Posey Township operated a school building in the village of Bentonville beginning in the mid 1800's. In fact, Bentonville had the first high school building in the county outside of the city of Connersville. High school diplomas were given out as early as 1883. The high school was accredited in 1915 and commissioned as a four-year high school in 1923. The Bentonville School was closed in 1977, and the elementary students were transported to Fayette Central Elementary School.

Waterloo Township built several log schoolhouses in the area as early as 1815. The brick building which now serves as offices for East Central Special Services Cooperative was constructed in 1913. The building was enlarged and modernized several times throughout its history.

As the area grew, school buildings continued to be erected in the city and the county, and in 1924, a new high school building was dedicated at Nineteenth and Grand Avenue. Maize Elliott, a resident of Jackson Township and a graduate of Connersville High School became the first woman in the state of Indiana to be elected County Superintendent of Schools in 1933. With a degree from Indiana State Teachers College in Terre Haute, Miss Elliott supervised the new high school and the numerous school buildings throughout the county. A previous teacher at Waterloo, Alquina, and Everton, she held the post for eight years and "prided herself on visiting each of the many schools in the county at least once a week."

In the 1950's, the new high school and the junior high school underwent expansions. A large addition, including the Spartan Bowl, was constructed on the north side of the high school at Nineteenth

and Grand in 1958. The original high school at 1600 Grand Avenue was used to house the junior high students, and a large three-story wing was added to this building in 1953.

Frazee Elementary school was built on the site of the Frazee Children's Home on the west side of the city in 1955. Once the home of Andy Frazee, who was the founder of the first phone company in Connersville, the school has retained the name of the former resident of the property.

Consolidation came to Fayette County in 1964 when the state of Indiana was encouraging small communities to work together to provide educational services. There was considerable discussion and controversy due to the intense loyalty of the surrounding communities to their high schools and especially to their basketball teams. A new high school complex, which included an area vocational school, was opened by the new countywide school system in 1969. Each building of the complex is named after one of the townships in the county. With the opening of the new high school, the building at Nineteenth and Grand became the junior high school for the system.

Connersville and Fayette County have had a long history of providing excellent public education. From the first school built in 1829 to consolidation in 1969 and to the renovations in buildings and growth in technology that are going on today, the city and county have provided exceptional facilities and programs for young people in the area.

Throughout the 170 years of public education in Fayette County, the schools and the curriculum have changed with changes in society and career needs of the students. However, some educational needs have remained the same – the need for literacy, the need for mathematical reasoning, the need to think and solve problems. These have all been top priorities for the youth of Fayette County. As we enter the new millennium, we can only imagine the many changes that will be encountered: yet, through it all, these educational priorities will remain the same, and the Fayette County School Corporation will meet the challenge of preparing our young people for the future.