

A Brief History of West Junior High School

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History of the Building

The history of the school begins back in 1919 when it was just an old frog pond located in the back of Kalamazoo Elementary School. It was back in these years that junior highs were beginning to be built in the United States. West Junior High School was the first school of its type to be built in Lansing.

The school needed a name; just what would it be? At first it was decided to call the school Pattengill Junior High School. There was much disagreement with this, so it was settled that it would be called West Intermediate. A stone was cut with this name engraved upon it, and it was placed in the front of the building above the main entrance. A few years later people weren't satisfied with this name, they wanted it changed to West Junior High School. Therefore, the old stone was taken down, and on the back of it was carved West Junior High School. The stone was then replaced above the main entrance of the school. This is the name that has stayed with the school until the present time.

The first classes in the new school were from Lansing Central in the winter of 1921. The first principal was Mr. H.E. Gardner.

Enrollment continued to grow, and it was necessary for a new wing to be added. In 1924 the new wing was completed. It contained shower rooms, drying rooms, cafeteria and kitchen.

This new addition still wasn't enough to carry on the varied program. It wasn't until 1929 that another wing was added to the school which houses the library and auditorium.

The auditorium is one in which the school takes great pride. It seats approximately 1130 people. Backstage there two dressing rooms with fine lighting for the purposes of applying make-up.

Appearing on this stage have been well known people like Nino Martini, Doris Kenyon, Lowell Thomas, and Corneila Otis Skinner.

This last addition completed the final touch to the building as it stands today.

Courses

The teaching staff at West Junior High School is composed of sixty-four teachers in many varied fields. They are headed by Mr. H.E. Jacobson who is now principal.

Throughout its many years the school has tried to carry on a program of learning by doing.

In the early days of the school they established a West Junior Savings Bank. It was conducted in a business like manner and the students could deposit or withdraw money. At the end of each day the money would be taken to the Capital National Bank where it was deposited. The aims of this project were to promote thrift and have a short course in elementary banking.

Another project which the children learn a great deal from is the monthly publication of their school magazine "Junior Life."

The first issue of this magazine was distributed in December 1921, with the first editor-in-chief being Levon Horton.

At first the magazine was published four times a year and all the work was done by the Journalism Club. Later journalism classes were developed, and they are the ones that do all the news gathering and writing up of stories. Through out the years the magazine has changed so that today it has taken the form of a newspaper, and is published monthly. The publishing of this paper enables the students to have actual experience in the writing and setting up of facts and stories to be printed.

In May 1938 the manual training courses presented a real community project to the school. This project was an electric sign which hangs over the office door enabling visitors to see, upon entering the building, where the office was located. The plans and drawing for the sign were made by the drafting classes

under Mr. Wilson; the printing was done by Mr. Randalls' print shop classes; the woodwork classes under Mr. Slade contributed by doing the woodwork; to complete the sign Mr. Stanaway had his metal work classes do the metal work on the sign and the electric wiring. By this project the students learned while they were contributing something useful to the school.

In the girls field was set up a program in home economics. In the beginning classes the girls learn to plan, buy, prepare, and serve a simple breakfast and lunch. Also in this beginning course they learn the proper care for kitchen equipment, planning and giving small parties, and ways to improve their personal health.

If the girls elect to go on into advance home economics courses, they will learn about the color and line of clothes, how to sew, entertain, and keep a family in good health. In more advanced courses the girls will learn to plan, buy, prepare, and serve attractive dinners. The courses mentioned above try to give a girl fundamental and practical knowledge of sewing and cooking.

In 1939 another new course was offered called public safety. In this subject the students had pre-driving, training, home safety, fire prevention and control, and traffic and highway safety. The first is most unique. It is the study of the actual operation of a car. The possession of the front half of an Oldsmobile car is part of the equipment, enabling the students to actually operate the car. Each student has the opportunity to develop skill in coordinating the hand and foot movements necessary in driving. Since cars and driving are becoming more and more a part of our daily living, it is beneficial to give our future drivers the fundamental skills of driving.

West Junior, moreover, has a band and orchestra of which they can be very proud. It is one of the few junior high schools in the country that has both band and orchestra.

Every year the school puts on a spring instrumental concert. One concert which will be well remembered is the one in 1939. It was in this concert that the harp made its great and triumphant entrance. Lansing West Junior High School is the only other school besides on in Detroit that teaches harp. It was this junior high school which introduced harp to the Lansing community.

The school is also unique in that it has a special place for any child who just moves to Lansing and is unable to speak English. Such a child will attend this special class which was started about six years ago. In the class the children spend the whole day instead of traveling from one subject to another like the other students. In the class they all help and teach each other. The students stay in this class until they feel they are ready to leave and join the other students. The children themselves well determine what grade they should be in, thereupon that will be the class of which they will become a member. This class has been very successful as it is the only one in Lansing that a non-speaking English child can attend and get help.

Besides all these many electives and special courses, they have the essential English, mathematics, languages, science and history.

When students graduate from West Junior High School they have a varied background and a good foundation for senior high school.

Clubs

Throughout the many years at West Junior, many clubs and groups have come and gone.

Some of the many clubs that have been organized at West Junior are Latin Club, Aviation Club, Radio Club, Stamp Club, Dramatic Club, Art Club, and Hi-Y.

The art department is usually responsible for one of the clubs. At one time it was sketching, another time clay-modeling, and still another time ceramics. The ceramics club was so well liked by so many members that they decided to make it into an elective class for the students, which it is today. West Junior is one of the few schools that teaches ceramics.

A group which helps to formulate some of the policies of the school is the Student Council. It is a democratic organization composed of members from each homeroom. The Student Council is a service organization to work for the welfare of West Junior students and to improve the school spirit, scholarship, and student citizenship.

The Hi-Y Club at West Junior is the oldest one in the United States. It was organized by Mr. H.E. Jacobson. It carries on the same activities that other Hi-Y's do, but it has not joined the YMCA of Lansing. The distinguished honor of being the first Hi-Y in the country is one of which West Junior is immensely proud. This organization has grown to be perhaps the largest and most popular boys' organization in the junior and senior high schools of the United States. Its policy of accepting to membership all boys who are interested--not restricting candidates to those who excel in one field or sport--has caused it to be well-received by students and staff alike. The West Junior Hi-Y is a very active and highly esteemed organization.

Today if the students want a club they must find enough fellow students who would be interested in the club. After finding enough to become members, to make the club worthwhile they must find a sponser. The club then becomes recognized by the school. Some of the clubs that have been organized to date are Bible Club, Girls Sports, and Hi-Y.

Sports

The modern tendencies in the school athletics all point toward athletics for the masses rather than for a few. If only a few are to be selected to take part in athletics, it is plainly evident that the stronger rather than the weaker pupils would be chosen. A school or any other community should be represented by the combined efforts of all rather than ~~by~~ the effort of a few.

School athletics should be a part of the general education program, and as such should be open to every pupil who is physically able and desires to participate. The best kind of physical development and recreation comes from well directed competitive play. Such play, in the nature of modern athletic games does much more than to furnish the needed exercise and diversion from work. It does much to train the mind to make rapid and accurate decisions, and to accustom the player with group activity that is so essential in other school and life activities.

Every modern junior high school is working out some form of intramural activity. These plans differ widely in detail, but all should make it possible for every pupil to compete several times each season with other pupils of nearly equal ability and training.

These plans grow out of a general feeling that organized play is as important as organized work. ~~As~~ a general rule the boy or girl who is good at organized play is equally good at organized work. The plan of advancement is the same--sustained effort toward a definite goal.

Whether you win a game or whether you lose is not the most important question, but the attitude that you have toward ~~your~~ opponents in either case usually determines the mental value of athletics. Much is said these days about being "a good loser."

This statement in no sense means that you should arrive at a state of mind in which you will be delighted to lose a game, but rather, that you shall still be reasonable, sensible, courteous, respectful, and observing. You should learn how to succeed from the success of your opponents.

The aim at West Junior is to have every boy and girl actively interested and if possible participating in athletics.

The school has worked out a system of intramural sports whereby the homerooms have been organized into two leagues, the Junior and Senior. The Junior League is composed of homerooms of 7B, 7A, and 8B. The Senior League is made up of homerooms of 8A, 9B, and 9A. The games take place during the noon hour which enables most students to participate. The winner of the Junior League plays the winner of the Senior League and the successful team is the champion.

West Junior also has varsity sports. In these they play and compete with the other junior high schools. Today they compete with other schools in track, swimming and basketball.

These teams have won many championships of which the school is most proud.

Swimming	Basketball	Track
1925	1934	1951
1926	1935	
1927	1936	
1930	1937	
1932	1939	
1933	1946	
1934	1947	
1935	1948	
1937	1949	
1938	1950	
	1952	

The teams have set good records as have the spectators in the past. Their sincere attempt is to keep this good record.

The preceeding material, then, should give the reader an idea of the over-all workings of this, the oldest junior high school in the city of Lansing. I have attempted in this paper to show something of the many and varied activities and programs of West Junior.

My material has been drawn from the files of the school. I cannot overlook the valuable information given to me by many of the older staff members. While records and written material are, of course, invaluable, the personal contact with these teachers has helped greatly to put true life and meaning into otherwise routine facts.

Bibliography

1. "Junior Life" , 1921 to present
2. Interviews
 - a. Mr. H.E.Jacobson, Principal
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