

# Beginning of Public School District

rooms were added, and grades were re-shuffled: primary and intermediate students occupied the first floor, with grammar and high school students housed on the second.

Around this time, however, the local Board of Education acknowledged the inability of the school to "achieve the results" of Plainfield High School for Scotch Plains' 15 to 18 high school-age youngsters.

It was decided that those who wished to pursue a high school education would continue their studies in Plainfield or Westfield as tuition students.

By 1917, the curriculum of School One had expanded to include physical education. Meanwhile, the Principal's office and auditorium had been converted into classrooms. The Principal was forced to conduct his business from the stage.

That year, eight rooms were built at a cost of \$47,800, increasing School One's capacity to 500 students.

By 1926, with the opening of the original Scotch Plains High School (now Park Middle School), School One had reverted to being an elementary school, which it remained until its closing in 1974. Named to the National Register of Historic Buildings, the school regrettably burned to the ground at the hands of an arsonist on January 17, 1984.

The experiences recorded by School One's Class of 1941-1942 on the golden anniversary of the opening of the original building, offer an interesting glimpse into the life of a student more than 50 years ago.

Upon opening, the high school enrolled 217 pupils, with nine full-time teachers and one Principal. The new facility offered three divisions of study to students: College Preparatory, Commercial and General.

By 1929, the school was called a senior high school, and held 398 students. The growing student population presented ongoing challenges. In September of 1930, its student population numbered 439; by September 1934, that number had jumped to 619.

In 1931, the course of study at the high school was approved by the State Department of Education, and the school was listed as an approved school of the Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges.

Two years later, the high school instituted split sessions, with seventh through ninth graders attending classes from 8 a.m. to 12:25 p.m., and tenth through 12th graders attending classes from 12:35 to 4:40 p.m.

This technique was used occasionally through the years until the opening of the present-day Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) on Westfield road in 1957. At that time, Park became a junior high school.

The population of the school district doubled between 1950 and 1957, necessitating the construction of Evergreen School and Shackamaxon School in 1951.

Shackamaxon (now incorporated into the Jewish Community Center on Martine Avenue) was immediately filled to capacity and was enlarged in 1954. It was closed due to declining enrollment in 1981, was leased for five years, then sold.

Even so, the student population had grown so large by the 1950s that the district had to resort to double sessions for grades six through 12.

Among other elementary schools that served the district was the Alexander Muir School, built in 1915 and located on Plainfield Avenue. It closed in 1974 as a school, but housed the Board of Education offices until 1982. It was sold in 1985.

LaGrande School, also known as School No. 4, was the only school ever to stand in the Borough of Fanwood. Built in 1922, it was closed in 1978 due to declining enrollment. It now serves as a branch of Children's Specialized Hospital of Mountainside.

Besides SPFHS, Park Middle School and Evergreen Elementary, those schools which serve the students of Scotch Plains and Fanwood today include Terrill Middle School, built in 1965; Howard B. Brunner School, built in 1961; J. Ackerman Coles School, built in 1963; the William J. McGinn School, built in 1967, and the "new" School One, built in 1972.

Through the years, the student population has fluctuated, skyrocketing to nearly 8,000 in 1970, and dropping below 5,000 by 1981. Today, students number approximately 4,300.

However, due to legislated changes in the ways classroom space may be used, the expansion of special education services and the desire to keep class size down, the district is scrambling to find the space it needs to give students a quality education.

The most recent attempts to keep class size down were modular classroom additions at Evergreen, Coles and School One. While things are not so tight that principals have begun working from the stages of their respective auditoriums, as in 1917, the space issue continues to present a formidable challenge.



Courtesy of Scotch Plains-Fanwood Historical Society  
**TIMES REMEMBERED...**Hannah Stiglitz's seventh-grade class is pictured outside Scotch Plains High School, now Park Middle School, in 1927. The high school, which opened a year earlier, enrolled grades 7 through 12.

For example, students could buy milk for five cents. Playground equipment included a sandbox with two see-saws; two baseball diamonds and an array of basketballs, soccer balls, baseballs and bats.

Reading was clearly the priority subject through sixth grade. Students noted, "Reading and arithmetic classes are divided into several groups according to how good we are in that subject." Installation of an automatic coal stoker in the mid 1930s was big news, as it saved the backs of the school janitors.

During World War I, girls in the seventh and eighth grades knitted items for the soldiers, while the younger students knitted wash rags.

The opening of the original Scotch Plains High School in 1926 eased the student enrollment crunch at School One, and enabled high school students to return to the township. It cost \$260,000 to purchase the land and build the school, which housed grades seven through 12 upon its opening. It held 12 classrooms, with each room designed to accommodate 30 students.

Because there were a few vacant classrooms in the new high school upon opening, "some citizens felt the board was overbuilding and that some rooms would never be filled." Despite these dire predictions, three additions were required at Park through the years: in 1939, 1961 and 1974.



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