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Salem High School History

BY H. H. SHARP, CLASS OF '78

The legislative act authorizing the graded Public School system in Ohio was passed in 1849, but it was not until 1853 that Salem elected its first Board of Education.

Alfred Holbrook from the Lebanon, Ohio, Normal School was engaged as the first superintendent and took charge in 1854.

He was secured to install the graded system in Salem and was paid quite a high salary for that time—viz., \$1200.00 per year—said to be the highest salary paid to any Public School superintendent in Ohio in those days.

That he did his work well was attested by Mr. Reuben McMillan, his successor, who served as superintendent and principal for the High School from 1855 to 1861. Mr. McMillan's administration was a very successful one. He held the respect and confidence of his pupils and the citizens of Salem throughout his administration, so that it was with sincere regret that his resignation was accepted that he might accept a larger and more lucrative position as superintendent of the Youngstown schools.

Mr. McMillan was known throughout the state as one of "Ohio's greatest schoolmasters," and at one time was offered the superintendency of the Cleveland schools, which, however, he was obliged to decline owing to ill health.

Mr. Wm. D. Henkle, another prominent educator, was elected superintendent in 1864. He served continuously until 1875, with the exception of

two years spent as State Commissioner of Public Schools from 1869 to 1871. On retiring from school work he bought and edited the "Ohio Educational Monthly" in Salem until the time of his death in 1881.

Our Public High School was started in 1854 with Mr. Alfred Holbrook as principal by virtue of his position as superintendent, and one assistant teacher.

With such excellent superintendents and High School teachers as Reuben McMillan, W. D. Henkle, T. A. Suliot, T. C. Mendenhall, Rose Prunty Firestone, M. E. Stevens and Sarah A. Platt during the first twenty-five years of its existence (and during which time the average yearly number of High School pupils would probably not exceed fifty), it is little wonder that the present highly efficient institution with its 575 pupils and 25 teachers has been developed.

It was not until 1865, under the administration of Mr. Henkle, that the first Commencement was held. The date and place was June 15th, at 2 p.m. in Concert hall. There were but two graduates, Miss Anna Kuhn and Miss Lauretta Barnaby. The exercises were followed by an entertainment of music and tableaux for which an admission of twenty-five cents was charged.

The average number of graduates from 1865 to 1880 was between five and six, the classes ranging from two to eighteen members, which seems very small indeed when compared with the one hundred or more of the Class of 1925.

Salem has always had a reputation for supporting good schools even before the advent of the Public School system, and the early history of this system as outlined above has no doubt laid the foundation for our present excellent schools.

An Alumni Association was organized in June, 1882, at a meeting of the graduates called for the purpose, at which time officers were elected and by-laws adopted. James R. Carey was the first president. The first reunion and banquet was held in the old High School room in the Fourth street building on June 18th, 1883. This building was later declared unsafe and torn down in 1896.

The present Fourth street building was erected on the site of the old one and was first used in 1897. This building was discontinued as a High School on the completion of the present High School building in January, 1917.

Our Alumni reunions have been held each year on the evening following Commencement. Up to the Reunion held in 1902 the main object and spirit of the meetings was well expressed by a verse from the Alumni song written by W. W. Hole of the Class of '76—

"Tonight let Caesar fight without us,
Alone let Troy defend her walls.

Who wants the ancient shades about
us,

When live Alumni throng our halls?
No arcs or angles will we measure,
Though x and y be not involved;
This better problem have we solved—
The sum of U plus I is pleasure."

At the Reunion of 1902, a toast was given by Mrs. F. J. Mullins entitled, "Cui Bono" which started the members thinking.

Mrs. Mullins stressed the point that an alumni association numbering nearly four hundred members should have a constructive program for some good work, and while the good times were perfectly legitimate, the Association should stand for something more.

As a result of this advice by Mrs. Mullins a scholarship committee was appointed by President George Adams of the Class of '87 at the Reunion in 1903, "to devise ways and means for raising a suitable Scholarship Fund for the benefit of graduates of the Salem High School." A campaign for this purpose was started in 1904 among the Alumni membership for subscriptions to this fund.

In 1907 a thousand dollar bond was purchased and in 1908 the income from this bond—sixty dollars—was awarded as the first scholarship to Walter French. Since then nineteen scholarship prizes have been awarded—twenty in all—and a total of \$3,350 paid in the twenty awards.

Our Scholarship Fund is now slightly in excess of \$7,000. Two prizes have been awarded the past two years as first and second awards. The first was for \$250 and the second for \$100, but the latter is to be increased up to \$250 as the income, in the judgment of the scholarship committee, will warrant.

Due to the splendid donations to this fund by the recent classes, it has increased very satisfactorily. A thousand dollar legacy from the estate of Mrs. Rose Prunty Firestone received a few years ago, together with receipts from sundry benefit entertainments have helped to swell the fund to its present amount.

The scholarship idea is a popular one and well worth while and should receive the loyal support of our entire membership.

—H. H. SHARP,
Class of '78.