

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.” — Nelson Mandela

School Hill — 1954

Students and Teachers who made their way to class the first day of school in September 1928 later remarked that they could not determine who smile was broader that day, Superintendent P. L. Bell’s or that of an honor guest, real estate developer Tom Leith. As promised, Brighton High School’s new building was completed in the last days of August, a dream-come-true for the two men. With the support of the community and a dedicated school board, they had seen the project they worked on tirelessly for almost two years become a reality.

The new school was a two-story red, face-brick building. Designed by Detroit architects Wilhelm and Moiby, it was located on Church Street just south of Main in Brighton Heights and commanded an outstanding view of the town to the west. A row of old, stately Spencer Road residences stood to the south and rolling green hills, the highest in Brighton, framed the building to the north and east. To complete the campus, Leith had donated a sizeable amount of vacant land adjoining the new building for an athletic field, a panoramic vista dotted by picturesque brick Tudor ranch houses within a decade.

The three hundred forty-one K through 12 students who began school that day discovered an educational plant as different as night and day from the overcrowded sixty-one year old Union School on Rickett Road. They must have thought they were in a large city school as they gawked at the long hallways, stairs to the second floor on either side of the building and so many classrooms they wondered if there were enough students to fill them. There was ample overhead lighting and expansive windows in each room, each one large and well furnished. For school assemblies and music and theater functions, there was a large gathering facility. Not far away was a study hall that could

accommodate ninety students. Commercial, manual training, domestic science and chemistry rooms had been included in the plans to facilitate every student’s educational needs. Like the newest schools in the nation, there was also a clinic, faculty room, exercise and shower room and individual student lockers.

With time, the 1928 rectangular brick building that I remembered as a child became outdated and over-crowded. Even before school consolidation in 1951, serious long term planning by local educational leaders for enlarging the high school and constructing a new “West Elementary School” had begun. Nationwide, baby boomers were already making it necessary for school districts to expand old facilities or build entirely new ones. Pedagogical theories had also changed dramatically by mid-century. Allowing children in primary and junior high grades to be educated in the same building as high school students, even in different areas, was no longer acceptable.



(Thank you to Paul Weber, former Brighton resident. The above is an excerpt from a chapter in Paul Weber’s book, “Remarkably Brighton, Still in Touch.” This book is available through Amazon and other booksellers.)