

The History of Titusville Schools

Our first school was made of logs. Just eight years after Jonathan Titus planned his village; this school was built near Trout Run. The settlers cut down trees, and together they put up this building. Many pupils had to walk as far as five miles to be taught here by a Mr. Wylie. Within the next six years, two other schools were built – north and west of the present city limits.

In 1834, the legislature of Pennsylvania passed a law to establish a free public school system. Although Titusville was just a small village, the people thought they should have a public school. Titus gave a lot near the southeast corner of Pine (Central Avenue) and Perry Streets. Joseph L. Chase, a merchant, and others contributed materials. A large, one room, frame building was erected in 1837. Over a hundred students were enrolled. There were two long sessions during the day. Night classes were held for the older pupils. Classes were held on Saturday and apparently the entire year.

This building continued in use for the next twenty-two- years. It was overcrowded for a number of those years. It was replaced in 1859 by a wooden building erected on the southeast corner of Main and Washington Streets. (Current site of Main Street Elementary School.) Almost from the beginning, this school was too small as more people were coming to Titusville because of the oil excitement. This one school had to accommodate a community which by 1865 had ten thousand people. It did not serve for long.

Here is what happened according to an account in The Titusville Morning Herald of January 11, 1866: “ANOT-HER FIRE — THE UNION SCHOOLHOUSE DESTROYED — About 9½ o’clock yesterday morning the town was again thrown into a state of excitement by an alarm of fire proceeding from the Union School at the corner of Main and Washington Streets. Before all the scholars had affected their escape the flames were discovered issuing from the roof and belfry and it was evident the building could not be saved. A large crowd soon collected and entered the building and removed the greater part of the furniture. But the desks and seats being screwed to the floor, most of them were broken and rendered worthless before being carried into the yard. The schoolbooks and apparatus were saved, nearly all the scholars taking charge of their own property and retiring in good order when the alarm was given.

Fortunately for surrounding dwellings, the schoolhouse occupied the center of a spacious square, and there being no wind, the fire did not extend to other property. Under different circumstances it would be painful to contemplate the probable extent of the conflagration. The fire engine was practically worth-less for want of hose, and not a drop of water was thrown upon the fire. Of the 600 feet of hose stretched from the millrace at the foot of Washington Street, several lengths burst, and the water could scarcely be forced to the pipe. And, further, there was not enough hose to reach within 100 feet of the burning building.

The fire was caused by a mischievous little boy in the elementary department lighting a match, and to avoid detection dropping it through a knothole in the floor near a partition. The spark ignited the rubbish underneath, and the flame ascended the partition wall to the attic. When discovered by the principal, Mr. Stewart, it had reached the belfry and was beyond ordinary means of control. But at any period within half an hour after the public alarm was given the building could have been saved from destruction by the Independent Fire Co. No. 2 if they had possessed the customary facilities.”

Provisions were made for classes to be held in different buildings in town until a new school could be built. It was decided to erect a two-story wooden building of eight rooms on the same lot. Because of inflation following the Civil War, this building with furniture cost \$18,000. The school treasury was just about out of money. One of the directors gave money and materials so that the building could be completed. The schoolhouse was ready for use late in 1866. It was immediately filled with students. At this time school was divided into three terms — fall, winter, and spring. This was the era when “children should be seen and not heard”. The School Board made a rule that there was to be no speaking in the halls, and that it would be strictly enforced (it did not apply to teachers).

Just ten years after the Drake Well or 1869, high school classes were organized. So that date marks the beginning of Titusville High School. In that year there were over a hundred more students enrolled in the Union School than there were seats. Rooms were rented downtown and from different churches. The average number of pupils per teacher at the time was seventy-one.

Because of increased demands for more and better school facilities, the School Board bought a lot on the northeast corner of Walnut and Drake Streets. Here, they built a two-story brick building. On October 26, the following inscription was chosen for the new school. “Public School — First Ward, Titusville, Pa. 1870”. This corner stone may be seen today in the north wall of the Colestock building (on the wall that faces the courtyard).

The first Superintendent of the Titusville Schools was elected in 1871. His name was Henry C. Bosley. He had been Principal of the Union School for two years prior to his election to the Superintendency.

During the next year, two more buildings were constructed – a two room wooden building south of Oil Creek and a brick one on the corner of Elm and Third Streets. The Elm Street School was opened in the fall of 1873. It would have been ready sooner, but a bad windstorm in July caused one of the walls to fall into the basement. Three years later, three rooms were added and one of the halls partitioned. This made ten rooms in this building. Crowded conditions still existed. One teacher at Elm Street had ninety-six pupils.

Right at a time when more classrooms were in need, the Elm Street building was completely gutted by fire on February 3, 1888. The fire had gained considerable headway before it was discovered about three o’clock that morning. It was finally brought under control after several hours of fighting in icy weather. According to The Titusville Herald “Horse-cart One tipped over at the corner of Spring and Franklin. The bit was out of the horse’s mouth and as he galloped ahead furiously, the cart turned so suddenly that it overturned with a crash and the fireman and driver were thrown to the ground with a fearful force. No one was injured but it was a close call.”

Since the walls of the building were good, the Board decided to rebuild. In 1889, a brick structure replaced the old wooden building on the South Side. This Fourth Ward school, including an extension built in 1904 took care of the increased enrollment. The building was abandoned in 1978, and later torn down. By 1893, the School District had four brick buildings – Drake Street, Elm, Fourth Ward, and the High School.

The location of the high school had been under discussion for years. Finally, it was decided to build it on Union Street. (This was northwest of the present medical building.) The old wooden building on Main and Washington Streets was used for grades one through eight.

Up to 1894, schools were not graded as today. Pupils would be passed from book to book rather than by grades. In this year, definite provisions were made to divide the primary into first, second and third grades; intermediate, fourth, fifth, and sixth and grammar school seventh and eighth. There were to be four years in high school. Five years later, a free kindergarten for children between the ages of three and six was started. On May 8, 1899, Colonel J. J. Carter, President of the Board, stated he would furnish at his own expense all the equipment for the first free public kindergarten in Titusville. This was set up in the fall at Elm Street. This was the first free public kindergarten in northwestern Pennsylvania, and one of the first in the state. That same year the Superintendent's office was moved from the City Hall to Main Street building. The next year kindergartens were started at Drake Street and Fourth Ward.

For the following ten years, there were improvements in the courses of study and in the buildings. However, the old wooden building at Main Street seemed beyond repair. Plans were made to build a modern high school on this site. This new building opened for classes on Tuesday morning, October 29, 1912. The old High School was re-named Union Street School. It was to be used for elementary classes.

Did you ever wonder why the present Junior High was called the Colestock Building? In 1930, the President of the Titusville Trust Company (now Integra) on behalf of Mrs. Daniel Colestock asked the Board of Education if they would accept a gift of a new and modern high school. Plans were immediately put into action. The Drake Street building was torn down; land adjacent to it on Walnut Street was obtained, Colestock High School, built by Mrs. Daniel Colestock and equipped by the Titusville School District, was opened for classes in the fall of 1931.

About ten years later, more land on Walnut Street was bought and a two-story brick building, called the "Annex" was constructed. (Today, this serves as a connecting link between the cafeteria and the Senior High wing.) This new high school wing was opened in 1957. More land was acquired, and the Junior High wing was ready in 1965. 1979 was the year of Construction and Renovation — suites of rooms for Guidance, Administration, Library, Art, Music, Business Education, and a Physics Laboratory in the High School. Included was a Lyceum for large group instruction. The new Natatorium addition provides the students and citizens of Titusville with one of the finest aquatics (water) facilities in the state. This pool is twenty-five meters long.

The Junior High School was organized in 1933 when the ninth grade was moved from Colestock High School to the Main Street building. Junior High met in this building until the fall of 1957 when it moved to the Colestock building. (High School wing was opened.) At that time, Main Street became an elementary school, and the Union Street building was closed.

1952 marked the beginning of a new period in the Titusville School System. This was the time of the first jointure — that is a joining of townships and communities outside the city limits of Titusville to form an area school system. With the coming of the jointure, the one-room schools were out-moded and new structures were built. Cherrytree School was opened on May 31, 1955, while Hydetown opened on January 31, 1956. Both elementary buildings were very modern and well equipped. By 1969, a merger was completed with the following as members of the Titusville Area School District: Allegheny, Cherrytree and Oil Creek Townships, and Pleasantville Borough in Venango County; Oil Creek and Rome Townships, Centerville and Hydetown Boroughs, and Titusville City in Crawford County; and Southwest Township in Warren County. This was the year when all sixth-grade students except for Hydetown and Cherrytree were bussed to Pleasantville. Since that time those students from Cherrytree, Hydetown, and

Main Street attend classes in the Junior High School until the new middle school was constructed in 1999.

When you move into Titusville from another school outside the district, your parents must enroll you in the proper grade. Registration for the elementary is done at the Administration Building at 221 North Washington Street. This is an important building as this is where the business of the school takes place. This large house was given to the district by the Scheide Family. It has been used as an Administration Building since 1959.

The Early Childhood Learning Center was opened for classes in the fall of 1991. This building is outstanding. It was specifically designed for the education of small children. It is one of the first in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This two-story structure includes Day Care, Early Intervention Program (from age three to age five), pre-kindergarten, developmental kindergarten, kindergarten, and pre-first. Over four hundred children are enrolled in these programs at the time.

During the mid-1990's, the school district conducted a strategic planning process. As a part of that process a building construction and remodeling plan was developed. The plan called for the construction of a new middle school, complete renovation of the high school and renovations and additions made to Main Street and Hydetown Elementary Schools. The primary purpose of these projects was to upgrade the infrastructure of the buildings to allow for our educational programs to keep pace with the technology needs going into the 21st century.

In 1999, the new Titusville Middle School was opened located at 415 Water Street in Titusville. After a long planning and preparation process the 6th – 8th grade educational program at the middle school was launched. The educational environment provided by this school is modeled after recommendations set forth by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in its "Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents (1989)." The current staff members and administrators continue to embrace and follow this philosophy. The Middle School consists of one building that houses grades six, seven, and eight. Each grade level consists of "teams" stationed in "houses" modeled after a space theme. These "houses" consist of "common areas" where meetings and various activities are held.

Immediately after the middle school opened extensive renovations began at the high school. These renovations were completed in 2001. The high school infrastructure was upgraded with new wiring for technology, remodeling and upgrades in all classrooms, hallways, library and auditorium and classrooms were relocated and organized by departments. The office area was remodeled which created a suite of office space for the general office and guidance department. The front entrance to the school was upgraded to address school safety issues and the cafeteria area was expanded. The exterior of the building received a facelift, with the removal of several windows to reduce energy costs.

The original Main Street Elementary School building was extensively renovated and expanded in 2002. An addition to the school provided the school an office suite and a gymnasium. Main Street School combines the classic architecture and strength of the original structure with state-of-the-art technology and systems of today.

Hydetown Elementary School remained essentially unchanged until 2001. At that time, a thorough renovation was completed that included a new main office, conference room, nurse's office, a combined art and music room, a spacious library and an expansive cafeteria. In addition to the new construction,

each classroom was renovated, and new spaces were created for the instruction of students with special needs, Speech, Title I, and tutoring.

In June of 2006, Cherrytree Elementary School was closed after much research and discussion with all stakeholders including administration, parents, teachers, school board and the general public. The decision was difficult but with declining enrollment projected to continue over the next several years, the cost savings that the district would realize made the decision easier. The building was ultimately sold to a private owner in 2007.

As a part of the 2008 District Strategic Plan the district embarked on a renovation project to address the infrastructure needs of Pleasantville Elementary in May of 2010. The plan called for the building to be upgraded to the standards equal to the other two elementary buildings in the district. A cafeteria area, new kitchen, new library and the remodeling and upgrades of all classrooms are scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2011.