

PARKROSE HISTORY

1885-1923

The Parkrose School District began in 1885 as a schoolhouse on Sandy and 122nd. District records begin in the summer of 1913 and do not refer to the name Parkrose, but to "the old school house on Buckley Avenue and Sandy Road." A. M. Pullen, pioneer descendant, was chairman of the Board of Directors of School District #3 in 1913, and the census records show 131 students were enrolled, ranging in age from the eleven four-year-olds to the four who were 19. Teachers Bessie Courtright, Sophia Shives, and Louise Rintoul were each paid \$80 per month, while S. A. Wold also acted as principal and earned \$10 more. Paul Jones, the janitor, earned \$35.

That same year, the district bonded for \$10,000 to construct and furnish a four-room building, Parkrose Elementary. It was better known as the Wygant School when Brainard and Reynolds roads were renamed and the school's address became 10624 NE Wygant.

A high school program was launched two years later. Acting at a special meeting held July 29, the school board "voted that the clerk of District #3 (Asenath Oates) notify the clerk of District #1 and the County Superintendent that school district #3 is prepared to have a full High School course, and that any students of District #3 entering any other district school do so at their own expense."

The high school program, however, meant additional costs for the district. A library was added to meet state requirements, and in 1919, it became necessary to expand the Wygant School. "It is not a question of High School or no High School," taxpayers were told prior to the bond election held Saturday, May 31, 1919. "It is a move toward the development of a modern, efficient, and adequate school for this District. It is necessary in order to provide adequate school facilities for the children who live in this district. The children of this community are entitled to the best schools that can be provided. Anything less is unpatriotic and un-American." The bond passed, 69-64, and the Wygant Building was expanded by adding a duplicate wing on the east end and a second story, which housed the high school and auditorium. That year Parkrose High School had its first graduate, Pearl Erickson.

Vi (Pullen) DeLashmitt, Class of '23, remembers the Wygant School, an easy walk across the street from her home on N.E. 108th. "All twelve grades were in one building," she says. "High school classes were upstairs on the second floor where the auditorium was. There was no gymnasium. P. E. activities were held outside.

1924-1945

By the 1924-25 school year, enrollment at the Wygant School had increased to 665 students. The school board, finding that "the overcrowded condition of the present school house makes it necessary that additional facilities be provided in the immediate future," again went to the voters for real estate and construction funds. A \$31,000 bond measure passed, 72-9, on March 21, and a new brick high school was built at 10629 N. E. Prescott, across the street from the site of the district's administration building today.

By 1928, the high school faculty numbered seven teachers and principal, R. W. Rose, who taught physics. Parkrose High, noted class valedictorian, Louise Lerch, had "the definite aim of assisting us to pursue successfully a course that would prepare us for our life work, whether it be earning a livelihood in a work-a-day world or studying in our institutions of higher learning."

The curriculum covered social studies (history, civics, commercial law, economics), mathematics, science (botany, chemistry, physics), home economics, industrial art, English, foreign languages (Latin and French), business (shorthand, bookkeeping, typing), music and physical education. Co-curricular activities included sports (football, baseball, boys and girls basketball), glee clubs, orchestra, drama, and debate.

The advent of the Thirties saw district enrollment at 795 students (639 in grades 1-8, 156 in grades 9-12). The district's budget, for the 1931-32 school year, was \$64,000.00. Sixty-one percent of that was allocated for instruction (a smaller percentage than is allocated in the current budget) and the remainder for administration, plant operation and maintenance, debt service, etc. But the district began feeling the effects of the Depression, and the cryptic minutes of the special school board meeting held on April 7, 1932, note that the board "voted to retain the teacher's salary schedule and cut 10% on that straight through."

The salary of grade school teacher Iva Shelton, for example, immediately dropped from \$150 per month (\$1,425 annually) to \$135 per month (\$1,282.50 annually). Her annual salary was further cut in 1935 to \$1,266.00 but teaching time was also reduced from 9.5 months to 9 months. Twelve years and a war later, Shelton had not regained her former income level. She was earning only \$1,380.00 annually in 1944-45, but the end of World War II signaled a pay hike. Her 1945-46 contract was for \$1950.00.

In the mid-Thirties, Theresa (Petri) Allison, Class of '41, began school at the brick building as a 7th grader. "The original building was a two-story structure with a central auditorium. A second floor balcony overlooked the auditorium below,

where students could be observed dancing at noon, oftentimes to music from a student-played piano." Students brought their own lunch, went home at noon, or ate at a nearby store because there was no cafeteria. A baseball field lay between the grade school and secondary school buildings, and there was a "cracker box" gymnasium available on Wygant for basketball. Football, however, was played in neighborhood fields, like Montavilla.

As the United States became involved in World War II, male enrollment slipped in high school. The 1941-42 enrollment figures for Parkrose High showed 18 boys in the 12th grade compared with 38 girls. "We were still losing the masculine side of our class to the war," observes the senior class historian for the 1945 yearbook, "The Token. "Again, we lost many boys who left in January and February; some graduating early and some who had to leave for that well known reason of age."

The war affected the Parkrose schools in other ways as well. The architectural firm of Wolff and Phillips wrote the board on June 24, 1942 that "in order to comply with the Government orders for the conservation of critical materials, it will be necessary to construct both the temporary grade school and the addition to the high school in a manner inconsistent with the best standards of construction." The board protested to Congressman Homer Angell that the establishment of a containment camp for officers and men at the Portland airport would increase enrollment in the Parkrose schools while removing a sizable chunk from the tax rolls. "The withdrawal of so large a block of taxable property from our rolls has already decreased the amount that it is possible to bond ourselves since such bonds may not exceed five percent of the assessed valuation."

At another 1942 meeting, board member Loren Shisler "moved that the policy of not hiring married women as teachers be done away with for the existence of the emergency, and that special consideration be given women whose husbands were in the armed forces."

If the board gave special consideration to some at that time, it was denied to others. The board voted to expel the "recalcitrant" Robert and Wilfred Woodruff who followed their parents' lead and refused to salute the American Flag. In response to an appeal by the parents, Multnomah County Superintendent Roy Cannon stated that "the conscientious objection on the part of the parents of the Woodruff children is based on their interpretation of the Bible, and while Mr. And Mrs. Woodruff state they are willing to pledge allegiance and obedience to all laws of the United States, they qualify this by adding, "...that are consistent with God's law as set forth in the Bible." Cannon sustained the order of the school board.

1946-1980

During the war, the Parkrose School District experienced an 80% growth in grade school attendance, compared with the statewide growth rate of 6.4%, and by 1946 plans were drawn to build the first of three new schools, Prescott Elementary. In the meantime, 6th graders like Preston Butcher found themselves attending class at the brick high school.

As a sophomore in the fall of 1950, however, Butcher moved into the new high school building on Shaver Street. "It was fabulous," he recalls. "They even had vending machines with 5-cent Cokes that drew long lines of students." The school layout was configured like an H, with the connecting hallways running north and south. Classrooms and offices were located on the south wing; the cafeteria and gymnasium were on the north.

With the move to the new location, school colors were changed from purple and white to black and white because, explains Butcher, Dean of Students Marion K. Duley did not want colors that ran when uniforms were washed. Varsity football games were played on Duley Field on Prescott Street. Gresham High was the major rival.

During the Fifties and early Sixties, the school board's major concern was meeting the needs of an ever-increasing student population. It was a time of growth, building, and remodeling as the post-war baby boom hit the schools. Prescott Elementary was completed in 1947 and the new Parkrose High School in 1950. They were followed by: Knott Street Elementary, 1951; Sumner Elementary, 1954; Thompson Elementary, 1957; Parkrose Heights Junior High, 1957; Sacramento Elementary, 1960; Parkrose Middle School (Formerly Fremont), 1961; Shaver Elementary, 1963; and Russell Elementary, 1963.

Business teacher, Rhoda Mills, taught at Parkrose High from 1955-1978, and she remembers her first 10 years as the best. "It was a time when we knew everyone," recalls Mills, who also advised the Pep Club and Rally. "Later on the school got so large we didn't get to know everyone."

Math teacher, Eunice Burnett, also recalls the years following World War II when high school students went from very crowded conditions at the old brick school to the new building on Shaver, "so open and airy, with large windows and a beautiful view of surrounding farmland." Civil defense drills were commonplace then. Students were taught to hide under their desks for protection or lay on the floor in the hallways by their lockers. During one drill, she recalls, an anxious student kicked a water pipe loose in the physics lab, causing a small flood and large-scale student frenzy.

With the Sixties, Burnett says, came a changing school environment. New music and dances added a twist to parental concern, bomb scares evacuated classes, and, late in the decade, it became hip to rebel. Yet underneath the rebellious veneer lay critical social issues...the Vietnam War, the status of blacks, environmental concerns, and, recalls former Superintendent, Vic Cullen's, "the rebels were among our top kids." Controversy also enveloped the school board. Board members received a standing ovation on September 9, 1968, when, following hours of heated debate, they voted unanimously to accept 34 transfer students from Portland's black community.

District enrollment peaked during the 1969-70 school year at 5,656 (1,403 at the senior high and no kindergarten students) but even in 1974 the senior high school still numbered 1,338 students in grades 10-12. Lisa Branch remembers the Seventies as an exciting time to be at Parkrose High. "The school was really big, and the opportunities for involvement were there. You could make of high school what you wanted." It was an era when Parkrose established itself as a powerhouse in basketball, soccer, and gymnastics, fielding league and state championship teams.

The Sixties and Seventies also saw renewed interest by educators in curriculum development and staff training. "Standards hadn't changed for 20 years," says Supt. Ron Zook, who came to the district as assistant superintendent in 1969. "Only 16 credits were required for graduation through the Fifties. In the Seventies, required credits increased to 21 and program development really took off." Curriculum goals and course objectives were carefully defined and an evaluation program added. Vocational education programs were upgraded; special education and kindergarten programs were started.

"We didn't do everything right, that's for sure," says Cullens. "We had some outlandish flops like modular scheduling at the middle school." Cullens, however, cites the passage of a tax base in 1980, and the subsequent stabilization of the district finances, as one of the major accomplishments of his 26-year tenure as superintendent.

Now in the late Eighties, the enrollment decline that began in the early Seventies has leveled off at 3,100 students (900 in the high school, grades 9-12). Three schools (Knott, Thompson, and Heights) have been closed, and the once-new high school, remodeled numerous times to accommodate enrollment growth, has noticeably aged. A task force I\composed of staff and citizens has proposed major remodeling, relocating the high school at the middle school (and shifting middle school students back to heights) or constructing a new high school.

New Challenges

Social change has again altered the landscape of American education in the Eighties. The Parkrose community, for example, is now more heterogeneous, family structures are more diverse and student needs are more complex. Social diseases, drugs, AIDS, and violence have added new stress to the school environment. Technology has radically altered both the workplace and the classroom, giving us sophisticated new tools to use and new skills to master and teach.

In the Eighties, then, staff and citizen groups have been mobilized to identify strengths and weaknesses in the schools, planning and evaluating responses to identified needs and charting new directions. "If Parkrose is going to move to the next plateau in education, one that demonstrates greater student growth, we will need to capitalize on some very fine things underway, as well as changing fundamentally the way we operate," said Supt. Zook at the conclusion of the 1987-88 school year. "We have moved ahead of most districts in defining our programs and training our staff. We are implementing a testing and evaluation program that tells both parents and staff how our students and district programs are doing. Now we need to clearly communicate learning expectations to our students and guarantee that they do, in fact, perform at high levels of mastery.

"We know that most students want to learn and are hurt by failure. Our job is to structure learning so that *all* students succeed. That's what we're here for."

Parkrose lies on the eastern fringe of Portland and dates to the turn of the century. Great shifts have occurred in the last decade, with areas ranging from blue-collar enclaves to exclusive executive areas. There are numbers of large apartments occupied by younger single dwellers, as well as many units occupied by working families and seniors. The area's largest shopping center (Lloyds Center) has recently undergone substantial modernization and is serviced by east-west and north-south freeways. An Interstate bridge was recently built, and in the process, large areas of marginal housing lying within the district were demolished. Some of those displaced left the area while others found similar housing nearby. Some moved to other low-rent dwellings, while some now reside in a new public housing project in the district. Motels and restaurants close to the International Airport, five minutes from the District's central office, have joined businesses in the area for many years.

The Parkrose community business core is undergoing a renaissance of sorts with an active business association attempting to upgrade the appearance of the area. A short distance to the east, a number of high-occupancy apartments house large families, single-parent families, and a substantial number of Asian immigrants, as well as other minority groups. The District has a long history of

Asian residents, among them Americans of Japanese descent. Many are people who returned to this area following their World War II internment. However, it is only in the last ten years that the percentage of Caucasians in the district has fallen below 98%.

Parkrose High School was built in 1949. It has been added to in 1956, 1966, 1972, and 1976. Construction started on the new Parkrose High School Community Center on July 1, 1995. Its first phase was completed on September 1, 1997. The enrollment in 1949 was 200 students, which peaked at 1700 in 1976. Since that time, enrollment has leveled off at 1000 students in four grades.