

HISTORY OF CENTRAL SCHOOL

In 1899, the borough spent \$600 on a lot on Maple Avenue chosen because it was “centrally” located. A four-room school, known as School #1, was constructed for \$3,400. Dedicated in 1900, the school started with 75 students and one teacher, and with Charles Carter as principal.

By 1903, two more classrooms had been added to accommodate 110 students and three teachers. Grades were divided in two: grades one through three, and four through eight. Early school commencement exercises were held in the Smith-Singer Building, and two portable classes were set up in 1923. With the number of children continuing to grow, a new school was proposed for the property south of School #1. In 1926, construction of the new “Central School” began and in 1929 this new structure became the first borough junior high school, with Margaret Burke as first principal.

From the initial two-story brick and cinderblock structure, the school was expanded in 1939, 1958 and 1961. The basement of the original building contained the gymnasium as well as the science and workshop rooms and the auditorium. At one time the offices of the Superintendent of Schools and the school district’s business offices were located there.

The first addition, in 1939, was followed by another wing on the north side of the building and, most recently, a new gymnasium. Central School served as the junior high school until 1939, when the present Junior High School (now part of the High School) was built as a federal Works Progress Administration project, following four bond issue defeats. Central School then became a grammar school for kindergarten through eighth grade.

The current parking lot was at one time a grove of oak trees, where no grass would ever grow. Teachers referred to this play area as the “dust bowl” because clouds of dust rose in the air as the children played and then persisted long after they were gone. The playground contained swings and a seesaw and was the site of many Maypole dances.

In 1939, School #1 was demolished. The original school bell was purchased by collectors Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Ackerman. When the Ackermans moved in 1962, the bell was donated to Central School. Paul Ritz, who was the principal at the time (and served from 1951-1975), had the bell mounted, a plaque made, and displayed in the Central School lobby, where it still stands today.

The third principal was Mae Hansen, who served from 1975 to 1978, followed by David Skinner, who retired in 1993; Ashley Silverman who retired in 2002; Scott Blake 2002-2006; Jacqueline Frangis 2006-2008; and Vito D’Alconzo Interim Principal 2008-2010. Andrew Matteo is the ninth and current principal. Today Central School consists of 18 classrooms as well as a gymnasium, auditorium, principal’s and nurse’s offices, faculty, art and resource rooms, a library, and three acres of property. Current enrollment is approximately 340 students.

Written by David Skinner and Maureen Barron, with brief inserts taken from Rock Road and the Crossings Beyond by Elliott Hempstead.