

A BRIEF LOOK BACK AT THE LATIN SCHOOL

By Mrs. William J. Bowe

The precursors of the present Latin School of Chicago were two private schools started in 1888 and 1896. In 1888, the parents of ten boys employed Miss Mabel Vickery from Massachusetts to teach their children manners and the three Rs at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Elephalst W. Blatchford at 375 LaSalle Street. This new school proved very much of a moveable educational feast in the early years, as evidenced by its relocation in 1890 to the home of General and Mrs. A. C. McClurg. The General and his wife would no doubt be somewhat amazed at the tall highrise that presently stands where their home once did at 1440 Lake Shore Drive.

The second school was established in 1896 when Mrs. Cyrus M. McCormick and Mrs. Emmons Blaine started a second school for younger children in the home of a parent.

In 1899, the two schools were combined under the leadership of Miss Vickery and Mr. Robert P. Bates. Thus, the first Chicago Latin School opened its doors at 18-20 East Division Street.

Only three years later, it was decided that classes for the girls in grades 8 to 12 would be held separately, and for 11 years they were at 54 East Scott Street. This separate effort

proved extremely successful, and in 1912 a new building was constructed to house the girls school at 59 East Scott Street. In 1913, the school became the Chicago Latin School for Girls.

The decade the Scott Street building was built saw the United States enter World War I, pursuing Woodrow Wilson's enunciated goal of "the establishment of just democracies throughout the world." The Great War added quite an extra burden on the traditional concerns of parents at the Latin School. In addition to the usual, timeless worries (Were the children really learning in school? I can't believe they're doing that after school. Wouldn't you think they might appreciate what we are doing for them a bit more?), there were added the darker fears of children leaving the baseball field for Flanders Field. For some students, life in a protected scholastic environment was being replaced by a different life in the trenches. Back in the labs, science students were left to ponder what Einstein's new theory of Relativity was all about. $E=Mc^2$ was more complicated than it seemed and no one was foreseeing the dawn of the nuclear age just yet.

The decade of the 1920's saw changes in both parental and national concerns. The Great War was out, flapper fashions were in. The Warring Teens became the Roaring Twenties. Home life had its unique problems. Today's parents, who grapple with the question of their children smoking marijuana, can take some

historical solace from the fact that Latin parents of the 1920's worried not only about their children running afoul of Demon Rum and the prohibition laws after a prom--they were dealing themselves with the tension between public morality and private preference. Abroad, the marines were in Nicaragua and China, Stalin was ruthlessly executing the first Five Year Plan and Lindbergh was becoming an overnight national hero with his 3,600 mile solo flight across the Atlantic to LeBourget. If Latin School history students and their parents couldn't completely fathom the meaning of the Russian Revolution, the Dawes Plan or the Kellogg-Briand Pact, we can't really blame them in hindsight.

Centers of higher learning were rapidly growing in the 1920's, thanks both to the churches and state governments, and Latin graduates went on to many new schools. The 1920's also witnessed a burgeoning of scholarship programs as more and more needy students discovered that they didn't need to be Rhodes Scholars to pursue their studies beyond high school. The face of America was changing as well, with the rapid increase in the number of automobiles. To the cultural life of the nation were added motion pictures and radio. The country appeared prosperous and sure of itself.

During the decade, the Latin School for Boys came to be housed in a larger five-story structure erected at 1531 North

Dearborn on the edge of Lincoln Park, and George Northrop succeeded Robert Bates as headmaster. The Girls Latin School of Chicago had a change in status, being incorporated in 1929 and continuing under the successive managements of the Misses Vickery, Elizabeth Singleton and Annie Allen.

As the decade of the 1930's began, the stock market had crashed and Herbert Hoover was not very successfully trying to re-instill the confidence of the people in their country. When Roosevelt told the nation that it had nothing to fear but fear itself, the new headmaster of the Boys Latin School, James O. Wood, was dealing with the trying task of maintaining the solvency of his unique private institution. The student bodies of both Latin Schools continued to take advantage of the strengths of a city day school, however. The Adler Planetarium, the Shedd Aquarium, the Field Museum, the Art Institute and the Museum of Science and Industry all saw troops of Latin Schoolers pass through their portals. While the decade of the Great Depression produced national anti-heroes, such as Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde, others, like Amelia Earhart and Margaret Mitchell, were counterbalancing the scales.

The decade of the 1940's began with the Second World War being brought to American soil at Pearl Harbor. Again, parents had to deal with the possibility of their new Latin graduates

catching a stray bullet in North Africa, Italy, France or the Pacific. The Classics continued to be a strong backbone of the curriculum, and students of French took new interest as newspapers plotted the progression of the front from Normandy to the Rhine. The splitting of the atom and the holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki forever changed the physics curriculum. Boys' sports continued with football games at Kersey, Coates, Reed Field at Addison and California, while girls field hockey was played on the great open field where 1300 Lake Shore Drive now stands.

While both Latin Schools had survived the Depression and maintained their financial viability in the 1940's, the logic of combining the faculties and physical plants of the Girls Latin School and Boys Latin School became unassailable in the 1950's. It was simply no longer possible to support two separate institutions without compromising the quality of education. The consolidation of the two schools in 1953 was the logical result of the growth of the near north community, the tendency to send boys east to the preparatory schools and the increased costs of maintaining high faculty standards for two Latin Schools.

In the consolidation, the Dearborn building, formerly the Boys School, became occupied by the Lower School (kindergarten through grade 6), and the Scott Street building became occupied by the Upper School (grades 7 through 12). The girls, like the Navy,

went into blue uniforms, and the boys moved into sweaters and coats. Dr. Mark Neville became the first headmaster of the "new" Latin School of Chicago, remaining at the helm until 1960, when Mr. John Mac D. Graham took charge.

The late 1950's saw the renovation of the buildings on the south half of the lot containing the Scott Street school and the conversion of those structures into new classrooms and science laboratories. As cats were being dissected in Mrs. Lambrakis' biology lab on Stone Street, the Federal Court of Appeals across the street was moving to the Dirksen Building in the Loop. No longer could social studies students go next door to hear distinguished lawyers argue cases on their way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In spite of the renovation, the aging facility at Scott Street could no longer keep up with the demands of a growing student body and the burden of increased maintenance costs. Thus, the 1960's brought the razing of the old girls school building on Scott Street and the construction of a unique and handsome new school on urban renewal property purchased from the City of Chicago at 59 West North Avenue. Designed by Harry Weese & Associates and staffed with a new headmaster, Dr. Edwin Van Gorder, the Latin School of Chicago completed the most important building project in its history. The demolition of the old girls school and

the construction on that site of yet another inevitable highrise was saddening to some, just as it had been saddening to see the boys' old playing field at Addison and California covered with bricks and mortar. Any second thoughts quickly faded, however, as the new school enriched immeasurably the educational experience of both students and parents.

Parents cheerfully bought bricks taken from the old girls building to help in early fundraising activities. These expensive bookends said a lot about the way people felt about Latin's new plans. Third-graders remained insulated from worrying about loans and sophomores didn't lie awake over taxes. That was and remains the province of parents, the Parents Councils, the Alumni Association and the Board of Trustees.

When the new school was formally dedicated in 1969, there were over 700 students, 60 teachers and a budget approaching \$1 million. The new school had a computer center, rooftop playgrounds and a swimming pool that would have made Esther Williams jealous. Students who crossed the street to look at the exhibits of the Chicago Historical Society were surprised to see that they were now studying on the site of the old Plaza Hotel, where President Cleveland had stayed during the World Columbian Exposition in 1893.

The decade of the 1970's saw the new school become the focal point not only for the upper grade students, but also for alumni and Latin School families. A veritable explosion of activity took place. Out of ubiquitous committees came classes, activities and services ranging from babysitting to horseback riding to preparing tax returns to raquetball and tennis. Traditional cooperation among families with children in the school now gave birth to Outreach programs in functional French, conversational Spanish, sewing, primitive art, lifesaving and flying. Nothing interesting was so obscure that experts couldn't be found to teach it to inquiring minds of all ages.

And F'inders-Keepers was no longer just a committee under the Parents Council. It became an independent bazaar of clothing, furniture and everything else under the sun in its own facility at 2467 North Lincoln Avenue.

The present generation of Latin School families has learned again what earlier generations have learned: A united body of mothers and fathers, working together for their own and their children's benefit, creates bonds that make the whole of their collective endeavors much greater than the sum of their individual efforts. And Headmaster Wittman has learned, as earlier administrative leaders have learned: In the life of the school,

there is no substitute for active and involved parents, committed to institutional change in the changing world.

February 1, 1977.

HISTORY OF
THE PARENTS COUNCIL
of
THE LATIN SCHOOL
OF CHICAGO



HISTORY OF THE PARENTS COUNCIL OF THE LATIN SCHOOL OF CHICAGO

In the early days of the 1880's when the first Latin-to-be-parents were worrying about setting up a school for their children, other subjects must have alarmed and distracted them too, for example the assassination of President James A. Garfield and maybe of Czar Alexander II. They read the "Memoirs" of the bankrupt and dying General U. S. Grant. In the Sudan Gen. Gordon had been killed but the tide of battle was turned by Gen. Kitchener. Chicago saw the Haymarket Riots, Baltimore had the first city electric railway, Geronimo, the Apache, surrendered and Sherlock Holmes appeared on the troubled scene.

Nature was severe. Floods were followed by more floods; fires and blizzards marked the period. At Mayerling the Austrian Crown Prince was slain and in Brazil the last emperor on American soil was forced off his throne. Though the Sino-Japanese War, the 1899 Boer War and the Boxer Revolt were far away, the Cuban Revolution was not and our own Spanish-American War was looming. The Pullman strike was in progress and Dreyfus was on trial.

But on the credit side Edison presented the kinetograph, Roentgen the x-ray, Marconi the wireless and the Curie's radium. Other innovations were provided by Eugene Debs and Carrie Nation.

With the digging of the Panama Canal, Dr. Walter Reed redoubled his efforts to wipe out yellow fever. It was about time for President McKinley to be shot and the Wright Brothers to make history at Kitty Hawk. Then the Russo-Japanese war began, New York got a subway, San Francisco an earthquake and 602 died in the Iroquois Theater.

Was there ever a period when parents are not distracted from family hopes and plans by world-shaking events!

Background

Not only is the chronology of the Latin School of interest to alumni and students but the various steps in locating the schools in the early days reflect a responsible parent body with an intense interest in their community and a sincere and dedicated faculty. Students who have enjoyed this teaching and training have achieved standards above the levels of conformity. Their early constructive and critical thinking has not only strengthened their work in college but without doubt has contributed to their success as Chicagoans.

Cleveland was President, one John A. Roche had replaced Carter Harrison as Mayor, and the schools of the United States, young and struggling, were healthy and hopeful. Primary schools, both public and private, were springing up everywhere, in small towns and even at crossroads. A state provision called for one grade school to every square mile of populated countryside. Secondary schools were following suit. As the population grew the cities depended upon public funds and taxes. Many private ones in the East followed the European notions of teaching. Private money for graduate study was harder to come by and the few universities that got under way then had either the individual states to thank for their support or one of the churches or religious orders. Among the early leaders in this form of altruism were Carnegie and Rockefeller.

The Latin School is the descendant of two private schools started in 1888 and 1896. The first of these began with ten boys whose parents had brought Miss Mabel Vickery from Massachusetts to teach their sons in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Elephast Batchford at 315 LaSalle Street. Two years later they moved to the residence of General and Mrs. A. C. McClurg at 1444 Lake Shore Drive.

As this enterprise flourished Mrs. Cyrus M. McCormick and Mrs. Emmons Blaine in 1896 invited Miss Vickery to start another school for younger children in the home of a parent. By 1899 the two schools were combined by Miss Vickery and her coadjutor, Mr. Robert Bates, becoming the first Chicago Latin School which opened its doors at 18-20 East Division Street.

It was decided by 1902 that classes for the girls in Grades 8-12 should be held separately, and for eleven years they were, at 54 East Scott Street. In 1913 the girls' section became the Chicago Latin School for Girls with its own building erected in 1912 at 59 East Scott Street. On Miss Vickery's retirement in 1929, a group of parents bought the school and incorporated it not-for-profit as the Girls Latin School of Chicago with Miss Eliabeth Singleton of Maine as Headmistress. She remained until 1945 when Miss Annie Allen from New York took over.

After 1913 the original Chicago Latin School had continued as a boys' school with Mr. Bates as Headmaster. His retirement in 1926 presented the question of how and where its functions might best be carried on. This was answered by incorporating the school and erecting for it a new building at 1531 North Dearborn Parkway. Mr. George Northrop held the position of headmaster until his retirement in 1933 when he was followed by Mr. James O. Wood. Both were New Englanders.

Olle School

The consolidation of the two schools in 1953 was the logical result of the growth of the Near North Chicago community, the tendency to send boys East to the preparatory schools of their parents and the increased costs of maintaining the high faculty standards required for two Latin high schools. The resulting single high school enjoyed a great many advantages and also made available considerable space for the rapidly expanding primary school. The Dearborn building was occupied by the Lower School (Kindergarten-Grade 6) and the Scott Street building by the Upper School (Grades 7-12). Dr. Mark Neville became the first headmaster of the Latin School of Chicago, remaining at the helm until 1960 when Mr. John MacD. Graham took charge.

The next nine years saw enormous growth and progress, and the school that welcomed Dr. Edwin Van Gorder in its new building at 59 W. North Blvd. was an institution of distinction and high regard in the Chicago community with some 500 families, 700 students and a backlog of 2000 devoted and grateful alumni. Designed by Harry Weese and Associates, the handsome new school at North and Clark Streets offers scholastic comfort and style and every structural asset in the educational repertoire. And all this is combined with a location across the street from the SW corner of Lincoln Park and all transportation advantages. Its neighbors, besides a bank and shopping center, include the Chicago Historical Society, the Academy of Sciences and the Zoo.

As was quite apparent from the beginning, the parents were always very close to their children and to the school. Their enthusiasm for attending all the school affairs and class meetings naturally grew until each class had a Mother and an assistant Mother. Finally by-laws were drawn in 1945 and the First President of the Parents' Club was Samuel A. Culbertson II. Col. William Spencer succeeded him and Mrs. Paul M. Holinger followed. By this time the merging of the two schools was pending.

In 1952 Mrs. Spencer Cone was President of the Parent Faculty Organization in the Girls School. This group had been founded by Mrs. Edward M. Dorr, its first president, who held that office for years. 1953-1954 was the first year for the combined Parents' Council of the joint schools. The presidents were:

- 1953-1954 Mrs. William J. Bowe
- 1954-1956 Mrs. Andrew McNally III
- 1956-1958 Mrs. Alfred Dowrie

- 1958-1960 Mrs. John T. Moss
- 1960-1962 Mrs. Edward Emery
- 1962-1964 Mrs. Barton Cameron
- 1964-1965 Mrs. Thomas R. Reeves
- 1965-1966 Mrs. Thomas A. Kelly
- 1966-1968 Mrs. William G. T. Hyer
- 1968-1970 Mrs. Herman T. Van Mell

Among the early benefactors, trustees, parents and friends were Edward Ryerson, Malcolm Boyle, Mrs. Augustus Maxwell, Kersey Coates Reed and others. A gift to the boys school by Mr. Reed of a large campus at California and Western Avenues with a playing field and field house was used for years for Athletic meets and Field Days, and added much to the property value and facilities of the school. The field was sold about 1959. Before this generous gift the boys went out to Lincoln Park for football and baseball while the girls concerned themselves with intensive field hockey and lacrosse both in the park and in the fenced in block on Lake Shore Drive now occupied by "1400".

The vision of generosity of the founding parents accounted in large measure for a calm and steady educational development without financial setbacks. But there had been bad financial years: 1893, 1907, 1921, and, most shattering of all, 1929. Some will remember that Depression, some not; new green coming up through blackened earth is not alarming, but others saw the fire. Latin buildings were getting old and the feet of some thousand students had taken a toll of stairs and floors. A field house, proper stage equipment, gym floors, exterior balcony removal, many improvements were needed and there were loans to worry about. Some holders of notes presented them to the school as paid gifts; tuition was raised.

Parents' Council

Here the young and energetic Parents Councils came forward. Where the annual Card Party and Tea had been the rule, they now branched out into stronger money-making ventures with great success. The \$1000 it produced in the Gym grew to \$4000 and it had drawn the Latin mothers into a friendly, cohesive group, alert to new possibilities for helping the school. By the time the two schools were combined a number of real money-makers were well established. The annual Book Week held in the gym was sponsored by several of the book stores and did well. Interest was roused not only in selling and buying but there were stockpiles for Christmas, with plenty of time to read the books before they were passed on. All this while the usual committees were functioning: the Library, the Dance, Parent

Programs and so on. Now came a real concentration in the "Spring Festival". The whole school was organized, with Mrs. Edward Dorr as General Chairman, to make one large effort. Every class and committee contributed. Neighboring schools were invited. Shows, sales, services, hobbies, fortune-telling, all culminated in a banquet, catered by the Hilton and served by the parents. Faculty and students helped to make it a \$10,000-day.

Most important since and continuing through the years with the greatest enjoyment and success have been Latin Night at the Symphony and Latin Night at Lyric Opera. Benefits, too, they offered learning in another setting, giving not only the orchestra and the great literature of music but also theatre, history and languages and they presented voices and drama in an exciting new setting—a cheering thought that Mozart and Shakespeare could be so funny. Students went to "Butterfly", "Aida", the "Barber of Seville" and others; some attended rehearsals and a few even were "extras". Even the lower grades had been going to afternoon symphony concerts for years.

The Turn About Shop, ensconced in the small two-story building on Stone Street, acted as a clearing house for outgrown uniforms and still good athletic equipment. For some time the girls had presented a neat appearance in white blouses, navy pleated skirts and blazers with the school emblem. An impressive array of hockey sticks, galoshes, books, playing and Christmas cards and everything else usable made life simpler for the shopping mother. This welcome service lasted a number of years and was like a forerunner of the shops which now contribute so tangibly to the comfort of hospital patients and their families. Even the annual Dog Show sent in its share to help with the improvements and needs, each effort continuing through the years with increasing enjoyment and success.

Extracurricular doings

As the schools of the Capitol take advantage of the cultural and governmental opportunities of Washington, so Latin trained its children in using the advantages of Chicago. They attended the symphony concerts which the Mothers Committee managed from the Fourth Grade on and the performances of the Lyric Opera, as have been mentioned. They knew the Art Institute and the Museum of Science and Industry and took tours to banks and business establishments which reflected the scope and energy of the city. But Athletics were life itself and the school found itself winning and losing with all its friends in the Independent Schools League. On many a cold windy sideline in Lincoln Park stood students, parents and faculty, an enthu-

siastic part of the picture. The dancing groups of Burnique, Mayhew and Arthur Murray and even the class dances had difficulty competing with the white hot concern for the games.

Today

On the contemporary scene we find a city, not of two million, but of four; a school not of two hundred students, but of seven hundred. The neighborhood has so altered that the many handsome brownstone houses have given way to multi-family homes. The space the Potter Palmer house occupied, 1360-1380 Lake Shore Drive, now is called home by nine hundred families. The home of Abraham Lincoln's son, "Tad," at 74 East Scott, has disappeared from the scene. So have the homes of the McCormicks, Cranes, Ryersons, McClurgs, Palmers and Callners. But from these newer homes comes the current generation of Latin students to carry on a great tradition and live and study in the preparation for a full and generous life. And what of the great red brick Plaza Hotel, huge, new and practically out of town in 1893 where President Cleveland stayed when he visited the World's Columbian Exposition! Gone, of course, but in its place at Clark Street and North Avenue stands the great, new 1970 Latin School of Chicago! Now after ninety years of growth and service for the city we must think again of financial responsibilities. But now there are thousands of alumni and friends to make the burden lighter and help us to complete a great Century of Progress.

1970

by

Mrs. William J. Bowe