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Dedicated to Superintendent M. E. Pearson

## PREFACE

"For fear old acquaintances be forgot and never brought to mind" the idea of writing a history of Wyandotte High School was conceived. This first history contains a story of the happenings of the school from its beginning in 1886-87 to the present time, 1931-32. This information was obtained almost entirely by word of mouth and letters from the old and young alumni. The memories of graduates were ransacked for facts and happenings of the school from its earliest stages to the present

I wish to express my appreciation of the help rendered by all the teachers, students, and graduates of Wyandotte High School, who have assisted in gathering the material which has made this history possible.

Miss Alta Marie Miller, Frank Leslie Schlagle, Miss Alta Haynes, Miss Eleanor Baptist, Mrs. H. F. Woestemeyer and James C. Malin have given especially valuable help in arranging the subject matter, verifying the

historical facts, and gathering the illustrations.

Ferne Vesecky

Kansas City, Kansas

[Annotation: In 1931-34, Ms. Vesecky wrote this history as one entire, undivided book. To aid in the viewing on the Internet, we have taken the liberty of splitting the history into chapters.]

## CHAPTER 1



Palmer Academy  
s.w. corner of 7<sup>th</sup> & Ann

The present Wyandotte High School is the direct descendant of the first High School of Kansas City, Kansas. Prior to the consolidation of Wyandotte, Kansas City, Armstrong and Armourdale into one city under the name of Kansas City in 1866 [Annotation: The correct date of the Consolidation Act is 1886.], the only institution of higher education for both sexes was the Wyandotte Academy,<sup>1</sup> (see picture at left) a pay school which was attended by many students from localities outside of the city and county. After the Consolidation Act there was a complete organization of

the schools in keeping with the change in municipal government.<sup>2</sup>

A wave of reform was sweeping the United States during the 80's. President Cleveland thought it time for the animosity of the Civil War to be laid aside.

The feeling of democracy permeated the whole country and became apparent in the new Kansas City and in the establishment of a free High School in 1866 to offer higher education to rich and poor alike. While in the midst of this tremendous task of uniting all these, Supt. John Ferguson and six members of the school board realized a shortage of teachers. In order to meet this need, Supt. Ferguson added a Normal course to the curriculum of the new High School, to be held in two of the eight rooms of the Riverview Grade School building at South Seventh Street and Pacific Avenue. Six rooms were devoted to the Riverview grades. This location was chosen because it was the geographical center of Kansas City, Kansas, but the fact that it was inconvenient to Wyandotte, from which 95 per cent of the students came, seemed not to have been considered at all.

One morning about the first of November, in 1886, thirty boys and girls started with lunch buckets in hand to that institution of equal opportunity, the free High School. The boys wore dark, tight-fitting suits, light shirts and large ties or bows. The girls were clad in fresh, tight-waisted, high-necked,

<sup>1</sup> This academy, which stood where the Carnegie Library now stands, was founded by Professor O. C. Palmer, in 1878. It grew rapidly and soon offered two courses of study, English and Classical, which branches out over a large field. The classes were held in this large, two-story brick structure. [Annotation: The Palmer Academy was built in 1878 and stood on the s.w. corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Ann (where the county courthouse stands in 2004). In 1882-83, it was called the "Wyandotte Academy." See the picture at the top left of this page. It served as a high school, but was a pay (or subscription) school for the higher grades. Huron Square was bounded on the north by Minnesota Avenue, on the east by 6<sup>th</sup> Street, on the west by 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and on the south by Ann Avenue. In Huron Square, the Central School was built in 1868. It housed all grades at that time and possibly served as the higher grades for those throughout the area at that time. We know that the first "free public high school" was begun in Riverview School (7<sup>th</sup> & Pacific) in 1882. In 1888, the board of education rented (later purchasing) the school at 7<sup>th</sup> and Ann where the public high school students were then housed until the KCKs High School being built at 9<sup>th</sup> and Minnesota in 1899. The present Wyandotte High School was built by the WPA in 1937 after a 1934 fire burned the KCKs High School. Therein lies the descendency. In 1902, Central School in Huron Square was razed for the building of the Carnegie Library, and the name of Central School was transferred to the building at 7<sup>th</sup> & Ann. The Carnegie Library was replaced in 1967/68 by the current Library and the KCKs Board of Education Office.]

<http://www.kckps.org/disthistory/closedbuildings/centralpublic.html>

<http://www.kckps.org/disthistory/closedbuildings/riverview.html>

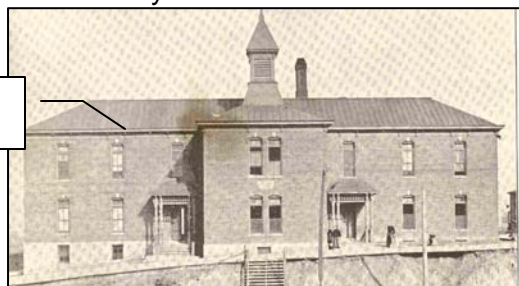
<http://www.kckps.org/disthistory/closedbuildings/centralschool.htm>

<http://www.kckps.org/disthistory/closedbuildings/kchighschool.html>

<http://www.kckps.org/disthistory/openbuildings/wyandotte.html> ]

<sup>2</sup> The entire enrollment in the city schools was then 3,643 pupils with 56 teachers.

Riverview,  
1886



long-sleeved, fancy or plain dresses, leaving only the toes of their high top shoes showing. Their hair was drawn back from the sides of their faces and tightly pinned in a knot, or tied by a bow ribbon at the back of their heads. Some wore short bangs over their foreheads, while others curled them up off their faces.

Many left Palmer's Academy to take advantage of this free education for eight months a year.

The students were real pioneers, since all of them were residents of Wyandotte; they boarded the "L" or "Dummy," as they called the elevated street car service, and rode as far as Riverview with the friendly, accommodating conductors. When the students reached Seventh Street and Central Avenue, it was necessary to put on a pair of boots and an extra pair of stockings, for the streets to the high school were newly graded and there were no walks. Later the girls patented a removable skirt. The cuts were very deep and the clay banks in some places were almost twenty feet high. There were days in the rainy weather that horses could not get through the mud. After a strenuous walk through this thick clay, the students reached the ladder-like plank steps which led up to the board side walk in front of the two-story brick Riverview grade school building, which was on an elevated bank about twenty feet above street level. They went in at one of the two doors with the grade school students, then up the stairs to their two classrooms. Here they hung their wraps on hooks and had to use corncobs to clean the mud and clay off their clothing. The janitors would then proceed to clean the floor with scoop shovels.

The school was fortunate in having as its head, Prof. John Wherrel,<sup>3</sup> principal of the Riverview and the Armstrong grade schools, who was given the position as principal of this newly-organized high school in addition to his other duties. Prin. Wherrel was stout, of average height, middle-aged, partly bald-headed, with a heavy beard and mustache. His sterling qualities made him loved by all. His appointment was a wise choice for he was an excellent teacher and had many advanced ideas on normal training. Prin. Wherrel not only gave his students a wide field of knowledge, but he gave them that vital inspiration that leads to success. He was fond of young people and took an interest in them, spending hours of his own time in helping them with their problems in life if they were really interested.

The school was conducted in an orderly, somewhat formal manner. The morning exercises were opened at 8 o'clock by reading a verse from the Bible, saying the Lord's Prayer, and sometimes singing a few church songs. Each student was given a number and roll call was taken by counting off, or by each student calling his number in succession.

The enrollment procedure was exacting in 1886. Upon enrolling,<sup>4</sup> each student was requested to bring a statement in writing from his parents or guardian designating the course he was to pursue and he was not allowed to select studies in different courses not to change from one course to another except by written request of the parents or guardian. Tuition<sup>5</sup> of \$2 was aid each month by students living outside of the city limits. The first year students were called sub-juniors. The second year pupils were classified as juniors, third year were called middle-year and the last year, seniors.

The four courses were offered in the high school were the English course of four years, the Latin and Scientific course of four years designed to prepare the student to enter any of the colleges or universities. Normal course of three years to prepare young ladies to teach in the grade schools of the city, and the Commercial Course of two years which prepared for accounting and business.

The classes were one hour in length and were conducted by Prin. Wherrell and one assistant, Eugene Rust, a Yale graduate. After completing the enrollment the students then went to their respective classes.

The events of the school were in distinct contrast to those of today. When noon came, the boys and girls took out their lunch buckets and ate their lunch, getting the drinking water from a hydrant on

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<sup>3</sup> He was formerly principal of a private normal school in Paola, Kansas, an excellent school which furnished many teachers for different states.

<sup>4</sup> Anyone not from the city schools of Kansas City, Kansas, was required to pass examinations given Monday and Tuesday preceding the opening of school. Students from schools in the city must pass 75% in general average and not below 50% in any one study.

<sup>5</sup> Nothing less than a month's tuition was accepted and nothing was refunded on account of sickness, non-attendance, etc. and tuition must be paid in advance.

the side of the school house. In the lunch period of about one hour no outside games could be played, for the campus consisted of unpleasant, yellow, natural clay. School was out for the day about one o'clock, after which the students went directly home, for there were no extra-curricular activities, athletics, contests, or plays.

Strict discipline was enforced and proper study habits were encouraged. Class examinations were given frequently throughout the term and if the student failed, his parents or guardian was notified at once. The pupils were expected to get most of their lessons at home. The daily lessons in several classes, except Latin and bookkeeping, were of such length that an average student could finish each lesson in one hour if he paid attention in class and concentrated. If a student came to school without his lessons or misbehaved in any way, his number was placed upon the black board the next morning, meaning that he was to see the principal after school. After being called upon the carpet and confessing, he was assigned a theme, the number of words being in proportion to the offense.

Winter faded away leaving the students older in knowledge and in years and bringing spring and a series of tests to qualify the pupils for promotion. In the English, the Latin and Scientific, and the Commercial courses, every student was required to pass in the subject when he finished it and he was examined on it again.

The demand for teachers increased and only one girl, Carrie (Asher) Carroll had enough credits to be graduated from the Normal course, since she had attended Palmer's academy for three preceding years. To meet this demand for teachers, ten girls were allowed to graduate with Miss (Asher) Carroll. These ten were Ollie (Calvin) Bougher, Birdie (Calvin) Beard, Libbie (Clark) Hobson, Mary A. Donnelly, Sallie (Lindsay) White, Mary A. Malone, Sophia A. (Wuest) Richart, Rose E. (Walker\* Moeller, and the last two, Carrie Drisco and Mollie (Hortsman) Sorter, were considered too young to teach. Miss Drisco was entered as a teacher the following year and was the only member of the first Normal class left in the Kansas City, Kansas schools in 1931.

These eleven girls have the distinction of being the first graduating class from the High School. The graduates in their white dresses each took their turn standing amid a beautiful array of flowers and delivering her oration and reading her essay to the audience in the Dunning's Opera House, Fourth street and State avenue. They were then presented their diplomas. A banquet was given to the class, and the principal after the commencement exercises, by the board of education<sup>6</sup> at the Chamber of Commerce rooms, at Sixth Street and Central Avenue. Thus, the first school year of 1886 – 7 closed and the first class was graduated from the new free high school.<sup>7</sup>

### **1887-88**

The second school year brought a large increase in the attendance, which was caused partly by the closing of the Palmer Academy. It was impossible for Prin. Wherrel, his assistant, Mr. Rush, having left, to teach this large group, so E. F. Taylor was hired as his first assistant, Eva McNally as second assistant, and Bridget Cushing as third assistant. Even these new additions did not prove sufficient, so

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<sup>6</sup> James Squires-President  
E. W. Towner-Vice-President  
Frank Merstetter-Treasurer  
J. W. Ferguson-Superintendent  
Joseph P. Roat-Clerk  
George E. Colby-Architect  
Benj. Franklin  
James Sweigart

J. P. Northrup  
G. H. Brown  
W. T. Mead  
E. G. Wright  
S. W. Day  
A. Gardner  
James Smith  
S. M. Gaston

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Palmer decided to go the Pacific Coast in the summer of 1887 and gave up his academy to some young fellow from the South who tried to enlist all of Prof. Palmer's former students. This surprised and disappointed the students who were planning to attend the academy. Believing that the young man was not learned in his profession, the remainder of the advanced students decided to join their friends at the new high school.

Prin. Wherrel's wife was installed as a teacher. The High School already occupied half of the Riverview building,<sup>8</sup> so Prin. Wherrel turned one of the rooms of his home into a classroom for Mrs. Wherrel.

Again in the fall of 1887 the obstacle of sticky Kansas clay was with the students, for Central Avenue was being excavated and a cut made through the banks for the future Grandview line. "One counted himself lucky if he reached Seventh street intact. Usually a rubber, overshoe, book, umbrella, glove, or tablet would be lost in the tussle with the sticky Kansas clay," says an early graduate.<sup>9</sup> But Miss Garlick (Mrs. Flora Helwig), Miss Anna Randalls, and Miss Adelaide Cornell (Mrs. Earnest Blaker), the three members in the last term of the earlier year of the Latin and Scientific course, were especially unfortunate, for after divesting themselves of their clay encased outer garments for one class, they had to don the unpleasant cold and wet wraps in the middle of the morning so as to attend their Virgil class at the home of Mrs. Wherrel. That meant crossing Seventh street through this sticky, muddy clay for her home was in the next block across Seventh street. The next term Mrs. Wherrel taught astronomy, which fortunately followed the Virgil class, so the students did not have to cross over through the mud again.

Chemistry experiments were not always found in high schools of the period. Chemistry was taught almost entirely by word of mouth, for there wasn't any apparatus, with the exception of some of Prin. Wherrel's own equipment which he used in the classes.

Extra-curricular activities began to flourish in the fall of 1887. The first extra-curricular activity to be initiated in the school was a debating society, which was well attended. A school paper was introduced into the school. It was limited in circulation to one copy, and all the material in it was written in long hand. The paper was read aloud to the assembly and was issued about once a week.

Football teams were formed by choosing up sides and was a sort of Rugby game. While the boys played football, the girls, after reaching home, doffed their overshoes, rubbers, and skirts in the ante-room. After allowing them to dry the whisk-broom was vigorously applied to the skirt, then several corncobs were worn out again in an attempt to remove the dried mud and clay that the whisk broom could not efface.

Time rolled on and soon graduation was near. Principal and Mrs. Wherrel gave a party at their home for the senior class just before graduation. This class of twelve was "distinguished" with only two boys, Charles I. Blood<sup>10</sup> and Vivian I. Reed,<sup>11</sup> so the junior class had to furnish enough escorts for the senior girls.

The big night finally came, that of Commencement Exercises. The girls dressed in beautiful white lace and silk dresses as did the girls of the preceding class. But at this "time bustles were just coming in and many of the girls rolled their own out of cloth."<sup>12</sup> After the strain of giving their orations and reading their essays, the girls separately posed for their photographs, among eight or ten baskets of flowers, which were presented to each one by their friends while the graduates were on the stage.

The last event of the year was an alumni banquet at the old Chelsea Park Pavilion, given by the girls of the '87 class, who had organized an Alumni Association. Sallie (Lindsay) White was the first president. The responses to the welcoming speech made by the president was given by Adelaide Marion (Cornell) Blaker, '88 and the activities of the class of 1888 came to a close.

See next page for 1886-87 Curriculum.

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<sup>8</sup>The classrooms were so crowded that the seniors had to sit two in a single seat when they studied in Prin. Wherrel's assembly room.

<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Adelaide Marion (Cornell) Blaker, '88, 616 Weber Avenue, Akron, Ohio.

<sup>10</sup> Charles I. Blood, night editor of the Kansas City Times.

<sup>11</sup> Mr. Reed died while still a young man. He was the star pupils of the classes and distinguished for his earnestness, dignity, fine character, and loyalty to friends.

<sup>12</sup> Charles I. Blood.

| year term   | CURRICULUM FOR STUDY FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL OF KANSAS CITY, KANSAS in 1886-87                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                         |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | English                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Latin & Scientific                                                                                                                                              | Normal Course                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Commercial                                                              |
| SUB-JUNIOR  | 1. Grammar & Composition<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. History of U.S.<br>4. Physiology<br>5. Grammar & Composition<br>6. *Algebra & Arithmetic<br>7. Civil Government<br>8. Physical Government<br>9. Physical Geography | 1. Latin & Eng. Composition<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. Physiology<br>4. Latin & English Composition<br>5. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>6. Physical Geography | 1. Grammar & Composition<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. History of U.S.<br>4. Physiology<br>5. Grammar & Composition<br>6. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>7. Civil Government<br>8. Physical Geography                                   | 1. Grammar & Composition<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. Book-keeping |
| JUNIOR      | 1. *Rhetoric & Elocution<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. English History<br>4. Natural Philosophy<br>5. *Rhetoric & Elocution<br>6. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>7. General History<br>8. Natural Philosophy                    | 1. Latin & Composition<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. Natural Philosophy<br>4. Latin & Composition<br>5. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>6. Natural Philosophy      | 1. *Rhetoric & Elocution<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. Principles & Practice of teaching<br>4. Natural Philosophy<br>5. *English Literature and Elocution<br>6. Geometry<br>7. Principles & Practice<br>8. Review Common Branches | 1. Commercial Law<br>2. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>3. Book-keeping        |
| MIDDLE YEAR | 1. *English Literature and Elocution<br>2. Geometry<br>3. General History<br>4. Chemistry<br>5. *English Literature and Elocution<br>6. Geometry<br>7. Political Economy<br>8. Geology                                        | 1. Latin<br>2. Geometry<br>3. Chemistry<br>4. Latin<br>5. Geometry<br>6. Geology                                                                                | 1. *English Literature and Elocution<br>2. Geometry<br>3. Principles & Practice<br>4. Review Common Branches                                                                                                                          |                                                                         |
| SENIOR      | 1. *English Literature and Grammar<br>2. Trigonometry<br>3. Logic<br>4. Botany<br>5. *English Literature and Grammar<br>6. *Arithmetic & Algebra<br>7. Mental Science<br>8. Astronomy                                         | 1. Latin<br>2. Trigonometry<br>3. English Grammar<br>4. Botany<br>5. Latin<br>6. *Arithmetic and Algebra<br>7. Astronomy                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                         |