

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Emma F. Brunson:
The First Woman Registered
as an Architect in Minnesota

Diane Trout-Oertel
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Fall 2017

Volume 52, Number 3

Onward Central, Onward Central: The 150-Year Legacy of St. Paul Central High School

Steven C. Trimble, page 3



St. Paul's Central High School as it was in the 1920s, left, and as it is today. As part of celebrating the high school's 150th anniversary, students entered the building through an arch of red and black balloons, the school colors. The Central mascot, the Minuteman, is shown in the patch on the right. The photo of the building in 1920 is courtesy of Steven C. Trimble; the photo of the students is courtesy of former Central teacher Jack Schlukebier; the patch is courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society; the other photos courtesy of John M. Lindley.

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RAMSEY COUNTY
History

Volume 52, Number 3

Fall 2017

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

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Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue brings us Steve Trimble’s thoughtful history of Central High School, St. Paul’s first and still-operating high school, which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. He traces the development of the school, which first graduated two students in 1870 with one giving a Latin oration! Over the years, Central has grown to a diverse and vigorous institution. Along the way, he highlights notable alumni such as Max Schulman, writer and creator of TV’s *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*; Jeanne Arth, Wimbledon champion; and Dave Winfield, member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. In Diane Trout-Ortel’s insightful examination of the work and life of Emma Brunson, we are treated to a profile of Minnesota’s first female registered architect. In the 1920s and ’30s, when most women were not employed outside the home and many were busy with domestic duties, Brunson designed and built a number of St. Paul homes. We are lucky that both of these authors have skillfully used primary documents and other records, a great resource for good local history. Trimble includes excerpts from Central’s literary magazine and student newspaper to set the tone and uncover stories of life at the school. And Trout-Ortel has interviewed the current owners of many of the houses that Brunson designed. Their accounts of the details of construction help us to understand what made them fall in love with their homes. Happy reading!

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

“Onward Central, Onward Central”: The 150-Year Legacy of St. Paul Central High School

Steven C. Trimble

Central High School . . . always drew a very, very diverse population. From the Black community of Rondo, the Jewish community of Highland, the rich community of Summit Avenue. . . . I think that’s what makes us strong. We really are a cross-section of society.¹

—Mary Mackbee

Mary Mackbee, longtime principal of Central High School, recently gave this description of Minnesota’s oldest high school. Over the years, the St. Paul institution has graduated eleven Rhodes Scholars—more than any other public school in the nation—and between 1995 and 2000 had more National Merit Scholar Finalists than any other school in the state.

After the close of the Civil War, St. Paul entered a slowly accelerating period of economic prosperity, rising immigration, and population growth that reached 12,000 in 1865. There was talk of starting a high school, but many residents felt the new institution was unnecessary. A letter from “Truth” printed in an 1864 newspaper said, “If any desire to have their children better educated than they can be in our present city schools, let them get up schools of their own or send abroad.”²

But two years later, the doors to St. Paul High School were opened in September. An 1866 report of the Board of Education simply said, “a High School Class was formed, under the conduct of J. W. F. Foster . . . which is to be regarded as the beginnings of a City School. For want of more convenient rooms, the class has been located temporarily at the Franklin School House.” Since most of the students wanted to head to college, the curriculum featured natural philosophy (an early form of natural science), math, Greek, Latin, history, and grammar.³

The High School was on the third floor of the Franklin School, located at Broadway and Tenth Streets. At the be-



Minnesota Historical Society

When Central High School opened in 1866, it used classrooms on the third floor of the Franklin School. Since then, Central has remained in continuous operation thereby maintaining its claim as the oldest high school in Minnesota.

ginning Mrs. Harriet Haynes from Maine was the lone teacher for more than a dozen students, although the principal may have also taught some classes. The 1866–67 school year began on the first Monday in September and consisted of thirty-eight weeks, divided into three terms. Classes were held from eight-thirty in the morning until one o’clock in the afternoon each weekday.

The first graduating class in 1870 consisted of Alan Warren and Fannie Haynes, the daughter of the first teacher. The two had to take an exam on the courses they had taken and they easily passed most of the questions, but they both fell three points short in Algebra. Alan and Fannie

weren’t willing to stay at Central and then, as Alan wrote later, the professor (teacher) gave them another algebra test “and that time he was careful to mark us above seventy.”

Warren was asked to be the valedictorian but “didn’t want to bother with it.” He agreed instead to deliver a Latin oration and Haynes took his place. “Our graduating exercises didn’t amount to much,” he continued. “I think that there were as many as six people present to hear my classmate read an essay and me deliver a Latin oration, and afterwards the Superintendent of Schools had given us lots of good advice, our diplomas were given to us and the class of 1870 was graduated.”⁴

B.F. Wright took over as principal in 1868. Along with the new leadership, there were now public examinations that had to be passed before students could enter St. Paul High School. “Up until this time, [there was] no regular course of study . . . but under Professor Wright it was thoroughly reconstructed and made available for any pupil desiring an advanced education,” a historian wrote. “The course of study is very thorough and complete, embracing generally the higher English branches as well as Latin, Greek, German, French, music, etc.”⁵

By 1869 there were 158 students crammed into three rooms at Franklin School; so in 1872 St. Paul High School moved to the Lindeke Building at Seventh and Jackson streets, where it occupied the entire second floor. A dry goods store and a “fish market” filled the first floor and, according to Alan Warren, “many humorous stories were told of the aroma that ascended to the second floor . . . especially in the warm weather.” In the second floor room “a teacher’s desk was covered with glass tubes that served as a laboratory.” Sometimes “pupils indulged in all sorts of pranks, putting mice in the tubes,

which popped out when the teacher went to perform an experiment.”⁶

In 1876 two students were chosen to roam the school halls as reporters. They wrote up their findings and then read them aloud to the assembled students. This publication was the precursor to *The World*, the school’s longtime literary magazine. Mary J. Newson was one of the reporters.

The 1878 graduation was held at the St. Paul Opera House and as the *St. Paul Globe* said, “it was evident that the High School is not a popular institution, as some assert, at least there was a great popular desire to witness the graduating exercises.” There was standing room only and a profusion of flowers. Siebert’s Orchestra played the overture, several students gave presentations, and the class history was read.⁷



In 1872 student attendance at Central had grown too great for the Franklin School and the high school relocated to the second floor of the Lindeke Building. Soon that space was insufficient and it moved again in 1883 to a newly constructed building. The high school relocated for a fourth time to Lexington Parkway after a new building was completed there in 1911. Aided first by additions and then by remodeling between 1977 and 1979, it has continued to remain on that site.

By 1879 the school was growing out of its quarters and the teaching staff had increased to eight. The school day now went from nine to twelve in the morning and one to four in the afternoon. A fifteen-minute recess was offered in the morning or afternoon. To make matters worse, an infestation of rats in the building caused numerous interruptions of classes and the School Board declared in 1879 that the site was “morally, socially and physically

unhealthful and the rooms were noisy, ill-ventilated and sunless.”⁸



Mary J. Newson (1858–1938), Class of 1877, whose father was a veteran newspaperman who had been stationed at Fort Snelling during the Civil War, became a teacher and returned to Central to teach English, a position she held for forty-six years. She often regaled students with stories from the early days of the school. One of her major contributions was the founding of the Central High Historical Society in 1908, which documented the stories of the school and its students by collecting letters, photographs, and stories.

The Saint Paul City Council proposed selling bonds for a new high school but the election that followed, this proposal failed by 500 votes. The Council tried again in the spring of 1881 and on the day before election, “the entire Junior and Senior classes skipped school and went out electioneering.” The bond proposal passed by 3,000 votes. “The principal vowed he would suspend them all, but when he found that half the school would have to go, he changed his mind.”⁹

Construction began immediately and in 1883 a twenty-seven room building at Tenth and Minnesota streets was completed. The first enrollment at the new school was 233 students. By 1885, St. Paul’s population had soared to just over 111,000 and the number of students continued to increase. Only five years after its

construction, St. Paul High School added a fourteen-room annex. New laboratories were added, but there was no money for an astronomical observatory. The Debate Society put on plays and successfully provided the money for what was believed to be at the time the only telescope found in a high school in the country.

The first African American student known to have graduated from St. Paul High School received her diploma in 1881. The local newspaper simply said, “Miss Minnie Farr delivered the salutatory in French, winning special commendation for her excellent pronunciation and fine presence, to which was added worthy comment for the distinction of being the first colored graduate of the school.”



Minnie T. Farr (1861–1905) went on to teach in the St. Paul elementary school system for many years before her early death. After earning a teaching licensure, Farr taught eighth graders at Madison School for nineteen years and was active in teachers’ organizations. She retired due to a long illness and died at the age of 42. Farr was among the first five graduates inducted into Central’s Hall of Fame.

In 1881, the School Board created a Manual Training School program for boys and girls. “Fitting up a room in the High School would involve no great expense,” the Board reported, “and would be the beginning of work in this

direction.” After a short time of sharing space, the manual school left and became Mechanic Arts High School. As a result, St. Paul High School was renamed Central High.¹⁰

As the years went by, graduations became more elaborate. In 1882 Miss Newson wrote, “Thirty or forty students received their diplomas from . . . the city’s pompous Board of Education.” The program consisted of “eight or ten original essays and orations delivered by the students.” The President of the Board then “made a long speech that no one heard save those in the front row on the stage. The evening ended with the bestowal of the diplomas . . . so again the old school sent out its quota of young men and women to show the generations how the world should be run.”¹¹

Another elaborate graduation took place in 1886, when “Miss Mary Colter, the class poet, recited her poem ‘Belief and Unbelief’ at the June commencement. In 1888, the year of Colter’s graduation, she was on the editorial board of *The World* and read a paper titled “At the Foot of Mount Parnassus” at the commencement.¹²

Mary Jane Colter (1869–1958), Class of 1888, came to St. Paul with her family in 1872. She graduated from Central and then taught drawing at Mechanic Arts High School for fifteen years. Hired to design an “Indian Building” at the Grand Canyon National Park in 1905, Colter then became one of the very few women architects in the United States. Four Grand Canyon structures that she designed are now protected in the Mary Jane Colter National Historic Landmark District at the Park.

Central, as it was now called, developed many traditions. According to *The Central High Times*, “The junior/senior prom is one of the oldest school customs. It began in the early 1880’s as an annual reception held by the juniors to honor the Seniors. All the desks and chairs in the assembly hall were removed and usually the reception took the form of a dance.” For many years, the President of

the senior class gave the “class knife” to a junior year President to symbolize the burying of the hatchet between the two classes.¹³

Less than two decades after the new school was built students felt there were problems. “The red brick temple of learning which we attend and are willing to believe has seen its best days,” one person wrote in *The World*. “With no elevators, we are learning to walk or rather run upstairs.” With 2,400 volumes on hand, they complained that the school needed a reading room and a librarian. “Right now the borrower is required to put their name on a book card and leave it where the book was located.”¹⁴

Students kept track of current issues. In 1890 a female student gave a talk favoring women’s suffrage and stated her belief that girls could do anything that boys could. A male student countered her view in *The World*. “One of the young members in a Woman suffrage speech delivered on the Assembly Hall stage, expressed her opinion to the effect that the girls should rival the boys in the physical department,” he wrote. “I would respectfully suggest that cooking or sewing would be more appropriate to their welfare than their heightened ambitions.”¹⁵

In addition to the gender issues, the topic of race was sometimes discussed. This time Nellie Griswold, Class of 1891, the only African American graduating that year, gave a talk on “The Race Problem” at the commencement ceremony. “I fail to see,” she told the audience, “whence the American derives that feeling of superiority which prompts him to refuse the Negro the panoply of citizenship equal to his own.” The European people took centuries to develop, she suggested, and the notable progress of Negro people in the United States “as we find him to-day in the United States has consumed but a single quarter of a century.”¹⁶

By 1892, the school had many activities and clubs. These included a Debating Society, Athletic Association, Ornithological Society, Mandolin, Banjo and Guitar Clubs, the High School World, Bicycle Club, the baseball nine, and the football eleven.



Minnesota Historical Society

Nellie Griswold (1874–1969) married attorney William T. Francis in 1893. She was involved in many community and state causes and served as president of the Minnesota State Federation of Colored Women. She formed the Folk-Song Coterie, a group that studied the contribution of African Americans to music. In 1914 Francis founded the Everywoman Suffrage Club, which fought for women’s right to vote and later promoted social justice. She is one of the leaders included in the Women’s Suffrage Garden on the grounds of the Minnesota Capitol.

There were also unofficial “secret societies” at the school—the T. K. A. Society, Pi Delta Sigma Fraternity, The Friday Club, and the Boadiceans, which the senior girls formed. The group’s goals were “to make themselves a force in the school . . . in the debating society, for mutual help and advancement.” The group was named for a pre-Roman British “warrior queen.” After money for girls’ gym was needed, their society raised money by a series of lectures.¹⁷

Florence Rood, Class of 1892, was the secretary of the Debating Society. The annual of 1892 had a prophecy section that included her and foresaw her becoming “the author of the greatest work on Women’s Rights ever written.” While that never happened, she did make major contributions to education in Minnesota.¹⁸

Florence Rood (1894–1944) was a teacher, education leader, and activist. She helped organize Local #28 of the American Federation of Teachers in St. Paul in 1918 and became the national group's president. She was a prominent member of the Minnesota Farmer Labor Party. Rood led the fight to create a teacher's retirement fund in 1910. She left teaching in 1920 and managed the St. Paul Teacher's Retirement Association for two decades.

Descriptions of everyday student life are hard to find in the available records. Fortunately, a student named Polly Bullard kept a diary and in 1897 wrote that "Yesterday was Arbor Day, and we always celebrate it with appropriate exercises at school." The seniors each year "presented the school a shrub or little young tree and accompany it with speeches and recitations." Bullard was a member of the Literary Society and described one of their meetings when the members had a discussion of the differences between the St. Paul and Minneapolis libraries and had a reading of two selections from the works of Rudyard Kipling.¹⁹

Polly was also a member of the Boadicean Society. According to her, June 4th was "a red letter day" in their annals. "The '99 Boads gave a big spread" for graduating members. There was "an eating committee which . . . provided prizes, sandwiches, pickles, cake and candy jars full of pink and white sweet peas."²⁰

Ethel Hall was a close friend of Polly Bullard and they were both members of the new "Literary Academy," comprised of twenty students from all four grades chosen by the faculty. Eight students were chosen to read at the 1898 commencement and Ethel was one of them. Her historical work was called "In Freedom's Cause."²¹

Central's curriculum changed over time. In 1901 it included arithmetic, algebra, English grammar and analysis, Latin and physical geography in the first year. In the fourth year there was trigonometry,

rhetoric, Cicero (Latin), chemistry, geology, astronomy, mental philosophy and Greek, which was optional.²²



Lynn Kloeck and the Ramsey County Historical Society

Ethel C. Hall (1879–1959), Class of 1898, made many contributions to the city's history. She went to Mount Holyoke College and University of Minnesota, where she earned a degree in history. She taught for a time and then married Clarence H. Stewart in 1906 and raised a family. She was always involved in researching the past for different groups and her church. In 1949 she took the lead in founding the Ramsey County Historical Society and is credited with saving a pioneer farmstead in nearby Falcon Heights that is now the Gibbs Farm.

Academics, however, are not the only thing that defines a school's character. Sports have been important activities for many students. But, according to Miss Newson, "athletic activity was barred until about 1890 when the first Field Day was held."²³

Many of the featured events that day are rarely seen today at track meets. There was standing high jump, tug of war, a three-legged race, dumbbell raising, wheel barrow races, and wrestling.²⁴ Fairly soon some organized sports teams began operation. A baseball team was organized in 1880; football arrived six years later. Tennis and hockey came in 1891 and the track program started in 1896 and the Girls' Athletic Association was established in 1896.

Central organized a girls' basketball

team in 1901. The home games were played in the attic gymnasium of the old school and "at first everyone was admitted to games, but later boys were excluded on the basis of modesty." Central's team was always one of the strongest over the years and won the championship of the Twin Cities in 1909 by defeating Humboldt by a score of 30–1. After that year interscholastic games were banned and girls' basketball became a sport played between the school classes.²⁵

Student numbers continued to grow and the School Board decided it was time for a new high school. As the city was expanding westward, the Board felt that a downtown location was no longer ideal. Instead they selected a site at the corner of Lexington and Marshall Avenues and the city purchased the land in 1909.

The city hired renowned architect Clarence H. Johnston to design the new structure. He designed a splendid Collegiate Gothic brick building with a grand entrance and high tower facing Lexington. Inside there was a large assembly hall that could seat over a thousand, a new gymnasium, and a spacious lunch room on the third floor.

Clarence Johnston (1859–1936) was not only a prominent St. Paul architect, he was also a member of the Central class of 1872. He studied architecture in St. Paul as well at MIT, and attended the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He designed stately houses on Summit Avenue and elsewhere, and often worked on public buildings and produced plans for the University of Minnesota's Northrup Auditorium.

The School Board planned to name the new building Lexington High School, but alumni and others opposed the change. Then, just hours before the laying of the cornerstone, Mayor Herbert Keller, who was also a Central alumnus, called a special meeting in his office. Because the public schools in St. Paul were under the control of the city at this time, the mayor had considerable influence regarding educational policy and decisions.

“There is no more excuse for calling the new structure Lexington High School . . . simply because it fronts on Lexington,” the mayor surmised, “or the name suggests a memorial battle. . . . It would be an appropriate name if the traditions and standing of the old Central High School were not to be considered.” Central kept its traditional name.²⁶



Minnesota Historical Society

Herbert P. Keller (1875–1935), Central Class of 1891, was a St. Paul attorney who decided to enter politics. He was elected to the City Council in 1904 and was reelected for several terms. He became St. Paul’s mayor in 1910, then returned to private practice in 1914. When Keller returned to politics four years later, he was elected a Ramsey County Commissioner, a position he held until 1931. Keller Regional Park is named for him.

Class president Henry Moe lauded the new Central building in 1912. “Sturdy in architecture, beautiful in construction, commanding in position, adequate, complete—all that refers to our new high school and does not yet begin to do it justice,” he remarked. “No more do we wander about the dingy halls of our old school, instead we come to a magnificent structure—one of the finest high schools in the country.”²⁷

By 1916 the enrollment at Central High had reached 1,687 in a building built for 1,500. The crowding affected the use

of space in the building. As a report on schools said in 1916, the Central library facilities were used as a study hall and a lunchroom and remarked, “This is unfortunate indeed.” In addition four of the locker rooms were utilized as study rooms with the lockers removed to the corridors on all floors and to the basement.²⁸

A flag-raising tradition was begun in 1917 during World War I “to remind students of the dignity of the flag.” At 8:15 in the morning a bugle call was sounded and the flag was raised “during which time Central students for blocks around stop in respect to the ceremony.” The crew included four student buglers and two flag raisers. Central students joined with the city-wide Victory Boys’ and Girls’ Drive. They raised around a thousand dollars for the war effort in one week. Many Central students and alumni enlisted, some were injured and a few were killed.²⁹

By the 1920s some people were saying that the academics at Central were declining. Though Mrs. Walter Cannon, who attended the school in the 1890s, thought differently. She gave a talk at the school in 1924 comparing her school experiences with those of her audience. “When I was a student here, there were no such subjects as biology . . . thirty years ago found teachers drilling classical subjects into the pupils. Greece and Rome were the only places which were studied . . . to the fullest extent . . . Minnesota was the center of the universe . . . we knew nothing of the Balkans, nothing of Asia. Students are now looking differently, are looking more intelligently in general.”³⁰

In the 1920s there was a major discussion concerning Central’s secret societies. Many said they were undemocratic and the student council called for a vote in 1925. The results showed that 1,045 students believed they were a detriment and should be reorganized, while 715 believed they were no problem. The debate continued and a year later the school newspaper reported that the groups had agreed to regulation and had filed their constitutions and a list of their members with the school office.³¹

Central students were always interested in expressing opinions and suggesting what could be done to improve things



Minnesota Historical Society

The 1902 Central High girls’ basketball team. St. Paul Central High School

in their newspaper. They established a Student Council in 1921 so that “students [would] have a chance to see faults and the need for minor corrections about the school.”³² The school organized a student “traffic squad,” whose initial purpose was to regulate movement in the hallways and parking outside the building. Subsequently its role was expanded to focus on student behavior.

This student-run organization had the right to issue small punishments. Some of the infractions included putting books on the trophy cases, eating candy on the first floor or auditorium, pulling lockers out of line in the boys’ locker room, or using the wrong stairs. One boy’s penalty for blocking the exit from the girls’ gym door was to write the ordinance relating to this offense 150 times. One violator of the rules had to spend a week in the school office and another had to work with the janitor for a few days. Violators’ names were published in *The Times*.³³

During the Great Depression enrollment soared, possibly because the shortage of jobs made it less likely for students to drop out to go to work. In 1936 Central had 2,618 students, the largest number ever recorded at the time. As a result, the school system housed Central sophomores at a school annex at Oxford and Selby and added two portable units of two rooms each that were connected to the main building with a covered walkway.³⁴

Student clubs were an important part of the Central experience. They were started and later disappeared, depending on the level of student interest. Some of the groups that emerged in the 1920s and ’30s included the Aero Club, Archery Club,

Bird Club, Girl Rooters, International Club, Puzzle Club, Hi-Y, Jazz Band, Kamera Kraft Klub, Scribbler's Club, and a Fencing Team. The Radio Club helped participants make their own sets at a time when radios were expensive. The Rifle Club was very popular and even had a shooting range in the school basement.³⁵

Central students were excited in November 1931 when Hollywood movie star Richard Arlen visited the school, where he had been known as Sylvanus Mattimore. In an interview with *The Times*, he joked, "As I walked up Central's front steps, I was early to school for the first time." When asked if he was in theater at Central, he replied, "Well I joined the dramatic club, but Miss Austin kicked me out." He gave out autographs to a "throng of students" and told students they can "do their bit" going to one of the benefit movies—in which he starred—to "combat the local unemployment problems."³⁶



Minnesota Historical Society

Richard Arlen (born Sylvanus Richard Mattimore in St. Paul; 1899–1976), Central Class of 1919, was sixteen when he left school to serve in World War I. He joined the Canadian Air Force because the United States was not yet at war. In Europe he became a pilot and jockeyed planes but didn't see combat. He came back to Central to graduate, often wearing his aviation uniform.³⁷ He went to Hollywood in the early 1920s and soon became a busy actor. Arlen made around 250 movies and has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.



University of Minnesota

Max Shulman (1919–1988) earned a journalism degree from the University of Minnesota and became a well-known novelist, playwright, and humorist. He later wrote books which parodied college days and took a humorous look at wartime and postwar America. Shulman eventually worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter. He is probably best known for his creation of the television series, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, which ran from 1959 to 1963.

Central students responded to the economic struggles during the Great Depression. Each room provided a local family with a provision of food during the Thanksgiving holidays. The Girls' League launched a charity drive and gave thirty-five families enough food to feed 200 people. Central had been having some lunchtime dances for a year or two. Then, in 1930, they decided to have afternoon "sunlight dances" once a month, usually with some sort of theme. According to the *Cehisean*, "The purpose of the sunlight dances is to promote a better feeling of friendship among the students and between the students and faculty." In 1933, "following the advice of the nation's leading economists, the Student Council reduced its prices for a depression sunlight dance" and charged boys seventeen cents and girls nine cents to attend. To liven things up in December of 1938, the student council had a jitterbug contest at the sunlight dance.³⁸

Max Shulman, Class of 1936, was

raised in an immigrant Jewish family that lived on St. Paul's Selby Avenue. He was on the staff of *The World* during 1935–36 and contributed several literary pieces. He also had a humor column in *The Times* which he dubbed "Shulmania" and was also part of group that wrote a short history of Central High in 1934.³⁹

Because of continuing attendance growth, Central High School constructed an addition to the west side of the school in 1924 with more classrooms and a new gymnasium. Then, in 1939, a new athletic field with a quarter-mile track, seats of steel, and non-glare lighting was constructed on the north side. The adjacent stadium was built in the early 1940s by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and was renamed James Griffin Stadium in 1998.⁴⁰



St. Paul Central High School

James S. Griffin (1917–2002), Class of 1936, was raised in the Rondo neighborhood. He joined the St. Paul Police Department in 1941 and was the first African American police officer to reach the ranks of sergeant, captain, and deputy chief. He also served as a member of the St. Paul School Board, was on the board of directors of the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, and was very active with the local branch of the NAACP.

Griffin reminisced about the era in an oral history interview. "When I went to Central in the fall of 1932, we were the boom kids from World War I," Griffin

remembered. “The largest number of Black students that was ever at Central in my four years was thirty.” There were eight Black students who graduated and “out of the eight, five of them were on the honor roll. I wasn’t one of them! And five of those eight ended up college graduates. I was one of them.”⁴¹

H. Janabelle Taylor (1921–1988), Class of 1939, was one of the few African American students at Central around the same time as James Griffin. In the 1939 *Cehesian*, Janabelle is identified as Harriet Murphy. She was a member of the Girls’ League, the Girls’ Athletic Association, and the Honor Society. For her many years of work in the community, Central honored Janabelle by including her as one of its first inductees to the Hall of Fame.



St. Paul Central High School

Taylor went on to graduate from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Physical Education and had a long career at the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, where she had been very active in her youth. She retired from community service in 1982. Taylor was one of the first inductees in Central’s Hall of Fame.

Central students followed the rise of Fascism in Europe in the 1930s and many took a stand for peace. Rabbi Harry Margolis of Mount Zion Temple came to the school and spoke against war. An editorial in the school newspaper proclaimed that “war is no solution to world crisis” and said a “student poll denounces

war,” adding “the youth who do the fighting say stay out of the central European troubles.” The International Club sold peace buttons and there was a peace rally in the school auditorium sponsored by various classes and clubs that had skits and talks on “the history of the youth peace movement.”⁴²

The school support for neutrality vanished with the attack on Pearl Harbor. “Just one week ago today the United States was at peace when the enemy declared war in the ruthless way that has become typical,” wrote one student in *The Times*. “Once and for all this world must decide between dictatorship and oppression or democracy and security. The U.S. has failed in all peace efforts, but we are proud of those efforts.”⁴³

Central’s wartime activities reflected the new realities. There were first aid classes, the Student Council sold defense stamps, and there was a revival of the flag raising ceremony. An American history class discussed price controls, the German Club collected tinfoil from toothpaste and shaving cream containers, and the Girls League gathered magazines for the Red Cross. Students participated in a “patriotism” poster contest and the shop classes made 500 cribbage boards for the Red Cross. Nineteen young men and two women from Central enlisted and many of the school’s alumni died in the conflict.⁴⁴

Connie Price, who attended Central in the 1940s, was a very good student and while she recognized the academic excellence of the school, she and some other African American girls “wanted a social life as well as a good environment to be where there wasn’t all this racism, because the kids didn’t talk to us.” In addition, she said, “the white girls had their little sororities and little groups and naturally the guys weren’t going to pay any attention to us . . . so we were very lonely.” Along with a few others, she was permitted to leave and attend Marshall High, which had a larger number of African American students.⁴⁵

After World War II, the school focused on race and overcoming prejudice. In 1945, the library had an exhibition on intercultural issues and promoted “understanding and appreciation between



Minnesota Historical Society

In November 1946 Sara Ryder, left, an English teacher at Central High School, with two of her students, Ben Brattner, center, and Harvey McKay, walked the picket line in favor of better pay for teachers during the St. Paul public teachers’ strike.

groups who differ in race religion and nationality.” In March of that year three different “faith leaders” came to Central to probe “our prejudices and how to overcome them.” The 1946 graduation’s theme was “racial tolerance” and four students—Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, and Negro wrote essays in a 1947 school newspaper on their views of society.⁴⁶

Other students recollected social activities in the class of 1948 reunion booklet. One wrote “remember students rolling marbles down the assembly hall floor during study hall? . . . Or streetcar rides to school . . . the big bands, Cokes, French fries and socializing between class bells? Or will we ever forget autumn football games, the scent of burning leaves and a hint of crispness in the air. . . . The teachers’ strike [in 1946]. . . . Some parents brought hot coffee to our teachers as they marched through the snow carrying picket signs in front of the school.”⁴⁷

Starting in the 1940s, there was a surge of Jewish students and the school’s traditional holiday event became a Chanukkah Festival of Lights and a Christian Nativity celebration.⁴⁸ The school’s demographics show that in 1954, seventy-six of the eighty male Jewish seniors in the school system attended Central High. Things changed when Highland High School opened in 1964 and by 1968, out of 151 male Jewish seniors, 87 attended Highland while only five remained at Central.⁴⁹

Lawrence D. “Larry” Cohen, Class of 1951, was part of the steady enrollment of Jewish students at Central in the 1950s. He became the coeditor of *The Times* starting in the fall of 1950, wrote and edited articles and interviewed several prominent visitors, including Ralph Bunche.⁵⁰ After Highland Park High School opened in 1964, Jewish enrollment at Central declined significantly because many Jewish families moved to the Highland Park neighborhood and the student population at Central was divided between the two schools based on each student’s place of residence.



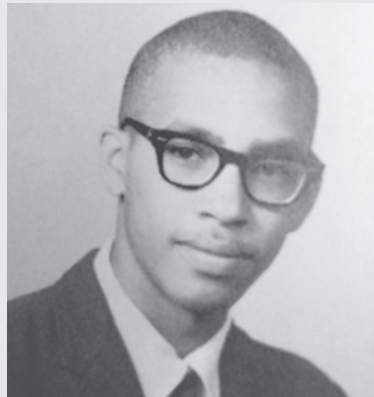
Minnesota Historical Society

After Central, Larry Cohen (1933–2016) graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School and later became involved in politics. He is noted as having reached three of the highest levels of City and County offices. He served as a Ramsey County Commissioner (1970–1972) and was elected St. Paul Mayor (1972–1976). Cohen became Chief Judge of Ramsey County District Court in 1988 and served until his retirement in 2002.

Jeanne Arth made student history in April 1952. *The Times* reported that “for her unusual efforts in tennis” she became “the first girl to win ‘Athlete of the Week’” at Central. At the time the sixteen-year-old was ranked fifth in national girls’ tennis rankings. When asked to tell her secret formula for winning, she responded always “get the last ball over.”⁵¹

Jeanne Arth (1935–), Class of 1952, never played tennis for Central because there was no girls’ team and she couldn’t join the boys’ team. She and her tennis partner won the women’s doubles title at U.S. Championship in 1958 and at Wimbledon, England in 1959. She then retired from competition and worked as a physical education teacher and a high school guidance counselor from the 1950s through the 1990s. Arth was inducted into the Minnesota Sports Hall of Fame in 1986.

Central added several accelerated classes to the curriculum in the 1960s and David Taylor was in some of the new programs. “I was one of the few Black children that were put into these advanced courses in math and science,” he said. In his junior year his history teacher took him aside and said he was one of the brightest students she had taught at Central and urged him to get an advanced degree in history at the University of Minnesota.⁵²



St. Paul Central High School

David Vassar Taylor (1945–), Class of 1963, did earn a Ph.D. at the University in 1977. He taught history and eventually became Dean of the General College at the University of Minnesota, a position he held for two decades. He then went to Morehouse College where he served as provost until his retirement. He has written extensively on African American history in journal articles and books, including *African Americans in Minnesota* (2002).

A young Dave Winfield was mentioned in an article in the 1968 *Cehisean*. He was on the Central High baseball’s B team. They “had a poor season.” However, “one of our most exciting games was our victory over Monroe, 5-1, in which David Winfield homered to give us the lead.” The photo caption of Winfield in uniform added, “Dave Winfield did most of the pitching for the year and proved to be a good batter also.”⁵³

Dave Winfield (1951–), Class of 1969, is the only athlete to be drafted by four different sports leagues, but he chose Major League Baseball. He started with the San Diego Padres and then with the New York Yankees, where he drove in more than 100 runs most seasons. He also won frequent Gold Glove Awards for his defensive work in right field. Winfield was with the Minnesota Twins when he got his 3,000th career hit in 1993. He entered the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2001.

There were some problems at Central in the 1960s. Societal tensions were rising after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. There was a riot on Selby Avenue in August 1968 and feelings ran high throughout as the fall term began in September. Hoping to diffuse some of the tensions, the school recruited “parent advisors” to be in the halls and other areas. Unfortunately, “following a name-calling incident between a white parent and a Black female student that turned physical,” one newspaper reported fifty or more African American students staged a walk-out. The students presented a list of grievances including inadequate science supplies, racist teachers, unfair expelling practices, lack of minority teachers, and ineffective instruction. Since it was lunch time and half the group came back within an hour, there was no disciplinary action.⁵⁴

Tensions heated up again in December 1968. Classes were dismissed after a sit-in by 400 of the school’s 1,500 students. The protesters didn’t go to first class and sat down in the first-floor corridor. Some members of the diverse group were singing folk songs. Students then entered

the auditorium, reiterated their earlier demands, and said they wanted “more of a voice” in school matters. As a response, a few students were suspended, but by January there was a new principal at Central who met with the students and agreed to implement many of their demands, including the hiring of a full-time social worker and an African American assistant principal.⁵⁵

Central continued trying to respond to the changing student demographics and to teach racial understanding. It created a school-wide observance of Brotherhood Week in 1974. Several departments including history, language, and home economics instituted seminars, documentaries, and movies in the evenings that addressed contentious topics. Throughout the week, students were served different ethnic foods ranging from First Americans, Mexican-Americans, Colonial Americans, Afro-American and Asians.⁵⁶

Central started the Quest Program in 1973, designed “for motivated and responsible students.” It was the first gifted and talented program approved by the Saint Paul Public Schools and started with around four dozen students. Teachers and students developed this alternative type of education to meet the needs of high potential students. There was one required humanities course and each student in Quest had an advisor and

a faculty member who could give independent studies. One student described the program as “a creative outlet in surroundings which often are devoid of creativity” and he said he relished the freedom to pursue his interests.⁵⁷

Another alternative program started in the 1970s was called “School Within A School” (SWS). It was developed to help students who were having personal problems that affected their performance in the classroom. The program, according to a newspaper, was “set up for people who do not like the regular class structure. Each student sets up their own schedule with a teacher based upon his own ability.” One of the students said it was “a place where you can get more help and better understanding of your work,” and, alluding to the fact it met in the school’s basement, it was “a place that has taught me more than upstairs”⁵⁸

Competitive girls’ sports also returned to Central in the ’70s. In 1976 Minnesota hosted the first Girls’ State Basketball Tournament. Central lost its first three games that year against tough teams, but then went on a fourteen-game winning streak and went to the state tourney. The team won the Class AA tournament when they defeated Benilde-St. Margaret’s 49 to 47 in front of a crowd of 10,054. It was a sweet victory, because they had

lost to their opponent earlier in the year by the same score.



St. Paul Central High School

Linda M. Roberts (1959–), class of 1977, who was the six-foot-tall center for Central in the history-making game, went on to star for the University of Minnesota women’s basketball team. She now works for the University’s Athletic Department and in the summers often holds girls’ basketball camps. In 2006, she became the fourth women’s basketball player and the first African American woman at the university to have her jersey retired because of her record-breaking career that included 1,413 rebounds.



Minnesota Historical Society

In the early 1950s at the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, three Central Students practiced what was called “Duck for Cover” under the watchful eye of an air raid supervisor, left, in the case of an air attack on the U.S.

In the 1970s and ’80s Homecoming Week featured dress-up activities. In 1980, Monday was Sweats Day, Tuesday featured Hat & Tie Day, which was extra popular because of the recently passed policy that banned hats in classes. Wednesday was called Twins Day where two students dressed alike. Next came Black & Red Day that honored Central’s colors, Friday wrapped things up with Punk & Funk Day before the big home football game.⁵⁹

In 1970, Minnesota set a 1976 deadline for desegregation of Central High School and a few other Twin Cities schools. This called for a reduction of the minority population of any school to no more than 30% of total enrollment. One of the ways Central proposed to meet the state regulation was to remodel Central or build a new



Minnesota Historical Society

This photo from 1959 shows just how crowded the hallways at Central High had become prior to the opening of the Highland Park High School in 1964. WCCO-TV photo by Siegfried.

school in its place. There was a great deal of debate over where a new educational facility might be constructed. In the end, the School Board decided to dramatically remodel the 1912 structure.

The late 1970s remodeling and expansion allowed for the introduction of special educational programs and made it the city's first "magnet" high school that would attract non-minority students from around the city. A number of educational programs were added to the curriculum, including dance, music recording, auto repair, and a wide range of foreign languages that were not available in many other schools. In addition to the new theater, another draw in the new building was a state-of-the-art recording studio. After several years of construction the new sections of the school were ready for occupancy on September 1, 1980.

On December 8, 1981, the newly renovated building had a grand opening. 1,500 people came to see the new Central and were treated to displays, demonstrations that included diving in the new swimming pool, and listening to music from steel drums made by students. On the fifth floor, for instance, the World Language

rooms provided samples of ethnic foods and had displays. Part of the program was a ceremonial passing of the keys.⁶⁰

Most Central Students seemed to like the new structure according to a newspaper article entitled "Students Praise New School." One of them said, "It's a lot better than when I started." Another student, however, liked the old "castle look," adding that, "Yeah, now it looks more like a hospital."⁶¹

Media reviews were mostly negative. One reporter said the building looked "more like a common parking ramp with no remaining character." Architectural critic Larry Millett was even harsher in his view, suggesting that it was "the nadir of modern school architecture in St. Paul, a building so resolutely grim and uninviting that it suggests that education can only be viewed as a form of incarceration."⁶²

Central started an International Baccalaureate (IB) program in 1988 that emphasized an international approach to learning by focusing on understanding ideas as global citizens, and through multiple perspectives and a variety of cultures. In the same year the social studies department added a new course on Black history "with

emphasis on the contributions of Black Americans from the beginning of our nation's history to the present.⁶³

Central High launched its Hall of Fame on May 19, 1989. The project was the work of students and teachers who wanted to honor "notable work" and start a new tradition of paying tribute to the contributions of graduates. The first inductees were Minnie Farr, Olive Forester Tiller, Otto Silha, Janabelle Taylor, Charles Schulz, Bernard Friel, and Robert Mikulak. There are now fifty-three members of the Hall of Fame, all of whom must have graduated at least twenty-five years prior to their being recognized in this way. Plaques on a wall on Central's first floor honor each of these notable alumni.

One of Central's first inductees to its Hall of Fame, Charles Shultz (1922–2000), Class of 1940, was the youngest student in his class but achieved great a success as a cartoonist. He took drawing classes at Central, but the yearbook staff rejected his drawings. His first paid cartoon of *Li'l Folks* appeared in a 1947 issue of the *Pioneer Press*. Schultz's work was subsequently picked up by United Features Syndicate, the rights to which they renamed *Peanuts*. Eventually his work was regularly published in 2,000 newspapers in sixty-nine countries.

The Vietnam War was responsible for a wave of Southeast Asian immigration to St. Paul and many of Asian children soon entered Central High School. There were several photos of Vietnamese and Hmong seniors in the 1982 *Cehisean*. The school added Vietnamese and Hmong interpreters to its staff. A Central Asian Culture Club was started to promote Asian awareness in the school and to aid students who needed help.⁶⁴

To promote greater awareness of diversity in 1990, a committee of eighteen students and teachers created the school's first international "Carnaval" celebration (using the old Spanish spelling) that featured ethnic food and music, handicrafts, and displays. The goal of the event was "so students and staff could know the ethnic diversity at Central." Twenty



Minnesota Historical Society

The varsity football team at Central in the early 1960s

different countries were represented, including Ivory Coast, Scandinavia, and Trinidad–Tobago.⁶⁵

The Arts program at Central flourished during the 1980s and '90s as a magnet program. One part of the wide-ranging offerings was the Touring Theater. As a 1990 *Times* article put it, “the Traveling Theater is a multi-cultural group of students and artists dedicated to creating original works that address the needs of special audiences in the community.” In 1989 their works included such topics as racism, chemical abuse, sexuality, the changing family, and global warming” and were often performed at other schools.⁶⁶

The strong music program at Central has also been a major success story. The Heiruspecs, a live hip-hop/rap band, was formed there in 1997 when its members were attending the school. They met while taking a studio recording arts program and still operate out of St. Paul. They have produced several albums including *A Tiger Dancing* and *Small Steps*. In 2010 the band members established a scholarship at Central for students pursuing higher education with artistic interests. They have an annual concert to fundraise for their scholarship.

Central began offering Advanced Placement (AP) classes in 1994. Students who take the AP college-level courses have an opportunity to take an exams in various areas every May that are graded by the College Board, a national organization. Postsecondary institutions may then grant placement in upper-level college courses and/or course credit to students who score well on these tests.

In 2016 Central’s enrollment for all grades reflected the same demographic

distribution as the St. Paul schools as a whole. Some 38% of Central’s students were white; 35% were African American; 22% were Asian; 5% were Latino; and 1% were Native American.⁶⁷ The diverse student body has many choices for



Minnesota Historical Society

When the girls’ basketball team at Central won the Class AA tournament again in 1979, it celebrated enthusiastically.

extracurricular participation in clubs. In 2017 as before, they reflected the cur-

rent interests of young adults. These included Anime Club, Central Asian Culture Club, Central Black Student Union, Central Minority Education Program, Chinese Club, Classic Video Game Club, Gay-Straight Alliance, Hispanic Culture Club, Mountain Bike Club, Robotics, Russian Club, Science Olympiad, and SHE.⁶⁸

A ribbon-cutting on September 6, 2016, marked the beginning of a new school year and the start of Central’s celebration of its 150-year history. Mayor Chris Coleman attended this celebration and declared this was “Saint Paul Central High School Day.” Transforming Central completed a renovation of the landscape around the building complete with new plantings and a new eco-friendly plaza. There were various celebrations throughout 2016 and 2017. Central High alumni musicians gave performances. A Hall of Fame induction was held in the spring of 2017 and a grand finale concluded this event-filled year with a large group of students, faculty, staff, and alumni marching in the 2017 Grand Old Day Parade in June.⁶⁹

Now that the 150th anniversary events have ended, St. Paul Central may return to business as usual—if there is such a thing. Mary Mackbee has welcomed the new students who will be joining a club, trying out for one or more of the sports teams, and deciding what classes they want to take. There may be new problems to be solved, but there always have been.



St. Paul Central High School

The members of Central High’s South Asia Culture Club in 2000.

People might be looking forward to the 175th anniversary or even the school's bicentennial in 2066. In a few years, more talented graduates will be newly inducted to the Central High Hall of Fame. By the time that happens, the following three alumni from the 1990s will be eligible:

Nicholas R. "Nick" Swardson (1976–), Class of 1996, is an actor, stand-up comedian, screenwriter, and producer who started acting and performing comedy at the age of sixteen. After graduating from Central, he decided to pursue stand-up comedy rather than attend college. He has appeared in many movies and on television.

Jawed Karim (1979–), Class of 1997, is a Bangladeshi-American Internet entrepreneur with advanced degrees in computer science. In 2005 Karim and two other friends from PayPal, an Internet



St. Paul Central High School

Jawed Karim

company, cofounded the YouTube video sharing website.

Kabo Yang, Class of 1998, came to the United States with her Hmong family as a refugee from Laos in 1978. She graduated from Metropolitan State University in 2004 and later earned a Ph.D. in Human

and Organizational systems. In 2015 Yang became the Executive Director of the Minnesota Women's Consortium.

If this trio of notable alumni is selected for induction to Central's Hall of Fame sometime in the 2020s, then they may well attend the ceremony and along with current students and faculty sing the school song whose chorus begins "Onward Central, Onward Central."

Steve Trimble is a member of the RCHS Editorial Board and has contributed in many ways to this magazine. He dedicates this article to his two children who graduated from St. Paul Central High School: Meridel Trimble (1997) and Thomas Trimble (2000). He also thanks Paul Nelson and Heather MacLaughlin for proofreading and making suggestions that improved his manuscript.

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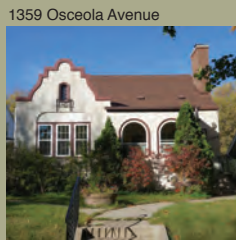
Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
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 Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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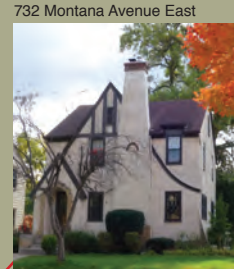
203 Montrose Place



1359 Osceola Avenue



726 Arlington Avenue East



732 Montana Avenue East



732 Arlington Avenue East



1847 Eleanor Avenue



640 Gotzian Street



1855 Pinehurst Avenue



1233 Edgumbe Road

Additional houses in St. Paul designed by Brunson include:

- 1 140 Stevens Street West
- 2 677 Delaware Avenue
- 3 846 Maryland Avenue East
- 4 842 Maryland Avenue East
- 5 673 Nebraska Avenue East
- 6 1212 Hawthorne Avenue East
- 7 1275 Van Buren Avenue



1435 Edgumbe Road

Emma F. Brunson was the first woman to be registered as an architect in Minnesota. This map shows the location of all the Brunson-designed houses in St. Paul that have been identified to date. Surviving records indicate that there are at least three other houses that she designed, but these records don't state where these houses were. As indicated in the chart on page 19, the house at 846 Maryland Avenue East was later demolished and another structure was built on that site. The photos shown here highlight 10 Brunson-designed houses discussed in Diane Trout-Oertel's article beginning on page 15.