

JTHS HISTORY

The history of JTHS Central is a part of the longer comprehensive history of the Joliet Township High Schools.

From the pages of history....It was the people of the Joliet area who first had the vision for this extraordinary school. Local architect, Frank Shaver Allen, designed the building and envisioned the structure as a "palace of learning and culture." It was built as a lasting monument to the progressive spirit of a wide-awake community.

The castle-like building at 201 E. Jefferson Street doesn't look like most high schools, but more like a museum with marble floors and arch-shaped doorways. Allen designed the exterior of the school in collegiate Gothic with Joliet limestone and Bedford stone trim for the windows and the doors. Marble was used for the halls, stairs and wainscoting. Even a Swiss woodcarver was brought to America to design the solid oak doors and entrances with the traditional Gothic arches.

It is a misconception to think that the Joliet area didn't have a high school until 1901. Joliet's first high school was established in 1880 when East and West side schools got together under Superintendent Colonel D.H. Darling. At that time, it was a school of 200 students and five faculty members.

In 1899, the Joliet Township High School District was established with boundaries beyond the city so it could broaden its tax base. Under the direction of Dr. J. Stanley Brown, the new public high school was built. Construction began in 1900 by the Adam Groth Company, a Joliet contractor, and the dedication ceremonies for Joliet Township High School were held on April 4, 1901. The opening of the new school was cause for a weeklong celebration. The high school featured the "new" electric lights as well as the gaslights of the era. According to the statement of construction costs that included the grounds, building and all equipment, the grand total was \$220,382.00. At the time, the building was characterized by Andrew S. Draper, President of the University of Illinois, as "the finest high school building in America."

On opening day, JTHS welcomed 235 students, however, the school's student population quickly grew and by 1915 there were more than 1,000 attending classes. Additions and extensions designed by architect D. H. Burnham and Company of Chicago were added in 1908, 1917, 1922, 1924, and 1931. On the proscenium arch above the stage of the 2,100 seat auditorium is the Diogenes quotation, "The Foundation of Every State is the Education of its Youth." This quote was suggested by Superintendent Dr. D. L. Smith in 1925 and has left its imprint on an entire community.

The high school building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 largely due to the efforts of historians Dorothy Crombie and Mary Tracy and with the assistance of the JTHS Archives Committee.

THE STEELMAN

They were "The Prison City Boys" before they were Steelmen! That's how the teams were known in the early years prior to the famed statue's arrival in 1935. The Steelman statue stands leaning forward into the future and is dear to the hearts of many alumni. It represents the school's spirit to all. The high school's famous sculpture was created by Louise Lentz Woodruff (1893-1966) for the Chicago World's Fair, "A Century of Progress," in 1933-34. At the fair, the magnificent statue was placed in front of the Hall of Science representing "Science Advancing Mankind." The eight bas-reliefs that accompanied the Steelman to the school represent astronomy, botany, chemistry, geology, mathematics, medicine, physics and zoology.

Woodruff was, indeed, herself a student at JTHS entering in 1906. Her dramatic statue of the The Steelman became the official mascot in 1935 when she presented the sculpture to her alma mater.

Vivian Long Ziech was a junior student in 1935 when she submitted the name in an all-school contest to name the statue. Her winning essay stated that the name should be the Steelman because "Joliet is a steel town and the JT teams play like men of steel." The golden anniversary of the Steelman was celebrated in 1985 with a limited edition calendar. Traditionally, the school celebrates the Steelman's birthday on October 10th each year.

THE PUDDLER

In 1965, Woodruff again presented a sculpture to the school, which she titled "The Steelman." It was a small bronze model of a steelworker holding a large dipper-like tool used in the conversion of pig iron to wrought iron. The process was called puddling. The students re-named the statue "The Puddler."

"*THE DOUGHBOY*" is a sculpture standing at the top of the stairs at the Herkimer Street entrance to the school. This familiar JT icon was presented to the school by Conrad M. Braun as a memorial to the 34 students and 6 faculty members who served in World War I. The statue entitled *The World Soldier* depicts a young doughboy in puttees.

Louis Joliet...Joliet's namesake. In 1907, the play "David Garrick" was presented by the high school alumni association to help raise money for a bust of Louis Joliet to be placed over the Jefferson Street entrance. The cast was mainly comprised of postgraduate students who were highly successful in raising the funds for the project. Today, the bust, created by local sculptor, William LaFaver, can still be seen above the original entrance to the high school.

THE TRADITION OF MISS J AND MR. J

The "J" staff of 1959 introduced a new idea hoping it would become a tradition. The yearbook staff proposed the selection of a Mr. J and Miss J. By participating in school events and actively supporting the school in its activities, seniors with a B average or more were eligible for candidacy. The winners were announced at the junior and senior prom. The first Miss J was Carol Levering and the first Mr. J was Duane Paul. Each year, since 1959, a senior girl and a senior boy have been selected Mr. J and Miss J, as ideal seniors.

Also, in more recent years, the week before prom known as Spring Festival week featured the naming of two students as the Steelman and the Steelwoman of the year.

THE HIGH SCHOOL BAND PROGRAM

Along with academics, JT perfected a music program, which by the late 1920s was known as the best in the nation.

The JTHS Band was organized in December of 1912 at the request of Mr. H.A. Stillman, then a member of the Joliet Township High School Board of Education. In 1913, A.R. McAllister, a manual training teacher who played the cornet, was asked to organize a band. Three Joliet Rotarians, who were also members of the school board, Al Oldhaver, Herb Spencer and Art Montzheimer, purchased the musical instruments and band uniforms from Rotarian George Wiswell's Music Store. Thus, the storied band legacy began in a manual training (industrial arts) room. Nail kegs were used for the band's chairs, but the dreams of the group were not so humble. By January, 1914, there were 18 boys in McAllister's band and the band made its first appearance in April at a basketball game. By 1917, it was recognized as the

finest high school band in the state. In 1924, the band was invited to St. Louis as the official band of the 40th district Rotary convention.

Under McAllister's baton, the band went on to win state championships in 1924, 1925, and 1926 followed by the national championships in 1926, 1927, and 1928. (They competed in the National Contest in 1926 in Fostoria, Ohio; the National Contest in 1927 at Council Bluffs, Iowa; in 1928 in Joliet.)

One of the greatest honors the Joliet band had ever received was at the third National Band Contest held in its hometown May 24, 25, and 26, 1928. The city was host to over 2,000 band boys and girls representing 20 states. One of the three prominent judges was John Philip Sousa, the "March King." Following the grande parade, it was announced that the Joliet band was the best marching band as well as the best band in all other competitive performances. The band had again won the national championship. Mr. Sousa, himself, presented the National Trophy to the band before a hometown crowd. And, since winning the national championship for the third consecutive time, the JTHS band acquired permanent possession of the Trophy. Later that summer, the band was personally invited by Sousa to join him in Chicago to play under his baton at the Auditorium Theater. Sousa's most famous march, "The Stars and Stripes Forever," is one of the most requested pieces to be performed by the high school band.

The band members were victorious taking national titles again in 1931, 1933, 1935, 1938, and 1940. The band was renowned for winning all regional contests up to 1964 at which time JT split into three campuses.

The band was the morale builder of the drafted boys as they left for service to their country in World War II and the Korean conflict. The band played at every send-off, no matter the time, the location, or the weather conditions.

In order to ease the strain confronting the band from the many requests it received for performances, McAllister, in 1936, combined the 130 musicians composing the organization and divided them into two smaller units, known as the Blue Band and the Gold Band. These were under the leadership of the senior student conductors and their assistants.

According to the 1943 yearbook... "A.R. McAllister is the man responsible for the many fine accomplishments of the band. He is recognized as one of the greatest bandmasters of his era."

Across the nation in September of 1944, thousands mourned McAllister's death at the age of 63. He had become nationally known among band directors as the "father of the high school band program."

Mr. Alex Zimmerman, head of the high school's music department and director of the choirs, replaced McAllister for the remainder of the school year. Bruce Houseknecht was then chosen Director of the Band in the fall of 1945. A position he held until his retirement in 1969 following the transition from JT to JT Central. His successor was Ted Lega who led the band for 33 years retiring in 2002. Mr. Mike Fiske became the fourth band director in its 90 years. The JT Central band continues its winning ways. The fifth band director now is Donald Stinson.

The Band has a record unequalled by any other school organization in the country. This can be proven by the many trophies and awards possessed by the champions. And the title of "Grand Champions" is one the band has grown accustomed to receiving. The band celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2012.

THE ORCHESTRA

Records show evidence of a student orchestra as early as 1905. The '05 picture appears in the 1951 golden anniversary yearbook. It is also said that a high school orchestra performed at the dedication ceremonies in 1901 thereby giving the orchestra the proud distinction of being the oldest organization at JTHS. However, there is not much written documentation about this first orchestra. Mr. Hiram A. Converse began his direction of the JTHS Orchestra in 1914. Fifteen musicians made up the organization: eight violins, two cornets, a flute, a clarinet, drums, a piano, and a string bass player. Rehearsals were held three times per week in a variety of locations including the "old" auditorium (which is now the present band/orchestra room,) classroom 229, the school's greenhouse or St. John's Lutheran Church.

Converse was not a full time director until 1925 at which time an orchestra room was equipped with an acoustically treated ceiling and lockers that are still in use. He entered the orchestra in its first state competition in 1927 at the Illinois State Normal University and won first place. In 1931, in Springfield, the orchestra won the state championship for the third consecutive time and was permanently awarded a very impressive silver and bronze trophy. This trophy may be seen in the trophy cases outside the main office. The orchestra also won high honors in 1932, 1933, and 1934. By 1942, the orchestra had been national champions seven times.

Following 35 years of service to the Joliet Township High School Orchestra, Converse retired. A spring concert was held on March 19, 1948, which was his final public appearance as the JT director.

Mr. Peter Labella, Jr. was named the orchestra director in the fall of 1948. He was a graduate of the Eastman School of Music. Under Mr. Labella's leadership, the JT orchestra received superior ratings in all contests entered during the years 1949, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1961.

In 1957, the JT orchestra was the only group of musicians to receive the Superior or Division I award at the state contest. In 1965, both the East and West campuses opened and Peter Labella assumed the directorial duties at all three campuses. Mr. Labella retired in the early 1980s. Mr. I.V. Foster directed the orchestra for a few years and Julie Ashcraft took over during the late '80s and early '90s. Kevin Carroll, a previous West band director took the helm from 1995-2000.

In 2000, the district hired Pamela (Burd) Breuning ('70 West) as the fulltime director and the orchestra continued winning accolades and competitions. Breuning retired in 2007. Today, Peter Lipari directs the award-winning JT Central orchestra.

THE CHOIRS

Since the opening of the school, there have been a number of vocal music groups such as the mixed chorus, senior chorus, junior chorus, sophomore chorus, freshman chorus, boy's chorus, girls' chorus, treble choir, a capella choir, and madrigals. Also, operettas have always been part of the extraordinary music program. Among the choir directors over the years were Isabelle Boyd, E.B. Brockett, Albert Hindle, Robert Howell, Roy Johnson, Paul Lester, Elizabeth Mosiman, Walter Rodby, and Alex Zimmerman. The choirs have consistently received high recognition and praise bringing many honors and awards to the high school. A choir program of the highest quality continues today under its present Director of Vocal Music, David Jones. The vocal music department performs for numerous school events and for the community as well.

The original two-story music room with the balcony has been divided into classrooms. The original room is a classroom on the second floor and the choir room is directly above it on the third floor.

Musical theater productions throughout the years are a part of the rich history of the high school's theater performances, which includes both the musicals and the dramas presented by talented students for over 108 years. As a tribute to the high school's theatrical reputation, the JTHS Archives Committee comprised of alumni and former faculty members formed a partnership with the Friends of Community Public Art to create a theater mural. Several Central students were costumed and photographed to provide a basis for the mural. The site of the mural is across from the auditorium doors at the top of the first staircase.

JT CENTRAL REMAINS SOMETHING WONDERFULLY OLD

In September of 1964, JTHS opened its doors to students for the first time as JT Central.

From the 1964-'65 "J" yearbook..."With all certainty, Joliet Central, in all her gothic beauty, remains something wonderfully old. She has bestowed upon her generations a lasting tradition – a tradition which is cherished. Now, in her 64th year of existence, she has serviced the community as an intellectual and cultural center. Many hearts are tied to her."

In the 1968-69 school year, a new school newspaper came into existence. The *Castle Crier* replaced the J-Hi Journal. Later, *The Crier* was re-named the *Blue Banner* in the early '70s. That lasted about a decade or so when the newspaper once again received another name in the mid-'80s, one by which it is known today, *The JTC Journal*. A new addition to student publications in the early '90s was the Literary Magazine, which includes everything from short stories to poetry.

Looking through a collection of 44 years of JT Central yearbooks, one will find references to the many clubs on campus, i.e., Biology Club, History Club, Key Club, Math Club, Spanish Club, Latin Club, French Club, German Club, Human Relations Club, Lettermen's Club, Physics Club, Earth Science Club, Speech Activities Club, Amateur Radio Club, Ballet Club, Art Club, Chess Club, Boosters Club, N.C.O.'s Club, Drama Club, Library Club, Los Latinos Club, Modern Dance Club, New Life Club, Outdoors Club, Photography Club, Sunrise/Sunset Reporters. Campus organizations have included the Drill Team, The Rifle Team, Future Teachers of America, Future Nurses of America, Future Farmers of America, Tri-Hy-Y, Future Homemakers of America, Horticulture, National Thespians, ROTC, National Honor Society, ETIA (Ethnic Teens in Action), and Student Council. Many of the Organizations and clubs still exist on campus today.

The ROTC was organized in 1917 at the peak of WWI and was the idea of three Joliet high school students after visiting the ROTC program at Wendell Philips High School in Chicago. Through the years, the high school's ROTC cadets have received ratings of excellence along with many other honors rendering themselves invaluable to the school and to the community. Cadet-sponsored activities over the years have included military balls, dinner dances, Christmas fundraising campaigns for the Salvation Army and other campaigns to benefit the needy families in the community. JT Central cadets continue to serve the community and country.

*From the sports pages...*Over 100 hundred years ago, football was only an inter-class activity. In 1902, the school board hired Coach Wilson S. Kline to build a JT team. Coach Kline selected 25 promising boys from the school and trained them in the sport. The first game in JT's football history was against Aurora played in Joliet. JT won 12-0.

Whether it is on the football field, the baseball field, the basketball court, the tennis courts, the golf course, on the track, at a wrestling match, or anywhere else, when the Central boys and girls compete in sports, they make their mark. The Steelmen have carried on the fighting spirit and have been supported by their fans since 1902.

Among the names secure in JT's coaching lore are Herm Walser, Doug Mills, Don Keinlen, Ray Klootwyk, Roger Swank, Mac McLaughlin, Frank Miller, Kenny Robbins, and Ken Parker. Parker, a JT graduate and a member of the University of Illinois' basketball "Whiz Kids" of the early 40s, coached basketball, football and track at JT from the early 50s to the early 60s.

The Ken Robbins Memorial Award was established in 1974 and given annually for both academic and football achievement. Coach Robbins lost his battle to cancer in 1972 at the age of 38.

In the fall of 1993, the campuses of JT Central and JT West shared a sports program as Steelmen when the teams were combined in 1992 due to District 204 budget constraints. The team mascot and colors had to be determined for each school. A compromise made the Steelman the official mascot as opposed to the Tiger and the colors of both campuses, blue, black, and gold were combined as the sports teams' colors. Even though the teams were combined as one beginning in 1992, each campus stayed true to their own mascots and colors. By the school year of 2010-2011, the cross town rivalry once again featured two separate teams known as the West Tigers and the Steelmen from Central.

JT Central offers a wide variety of sports for its students. Among the girls' sports are cross country, track and field, golf, basketball, volleyball, softball, tennis, badminton, swimming, bowling and gymnastics. Boys' sports include baseball, basketball, football, tennis, volleyball, golf, soccer, track and field, cross country, swimming, hockey and wrestling.

There are many achievements in the Central campus sports history among the Steelmen and the Steelwomen athletes. The teams have taken district, conference and regional titles as well as impressive individual honors. In addition, there are many sectional champs and state champions. The Central "men of the mat" qualified a number of times for state finals and brought home several state wrestling championships.

The cheerleaders always personify the "Steel Spirit." The Pom Pon Squad once known as the Steeljammers is now the Steelpaws. Both the cheerleading squads and the pom pons bring high recognition, awards, trophies and ribbons to JT Central for their exceptional routines.

Save Central

The cry of "Save Central"...The Campus Controversy...Will Joliet Central be closed?

From the district newsletter of the Joliet Township High Schools, "The Communique," dated October, 1981..."As a result of the decision made by the JTHS Board on October 13 to accept the report prepared by the consulting firm of Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Company, to close the Central campus as a school facility, the school board is now in the process of taking the steps needed in order to make the necessary transition for the 1982-83 school year. "

Note: It was to be determined that the assignment of students to East and West would be done on as equal a basis as possible, taking into account all factors necessary to a long-term solution to the enrollment concerns. According to the newsletter, the board would make every effort to see that the transition of students from Central to East and to West would be made as easy as possible.

Excerpts that appeared in the Joliet Herald News in the days and months following the school board's October vote to close Central....

- "Students demonstrate in an effort to keep school open...several hundred Central High School students wearing their blue and gold school colors demonstrated at the meeting for an hour preceding the school board meeting."
- "Keep our landmark."
- "Nearly all of Central's 2,047 students will be transferred to either East or West."
- "Save Central" movement begins!"
- "Central's closing dominates the 1981 high school board campaign. Three candidates pledged to keeping JT Central open in one of the largest write-in campaigns in Will County history."
- "Save Central" write-in candidates win the November election and Central closing could be reversed! What's next for Joliet high schools?"
- "At the November 10 school board meeting, three new members were seated. 615 petitions bearing 15,000 signatures were presented by Chris Dragatsis, Class of '48, asking the board to rescind the October 13 motion to close Central."
- "The vote taken after the three new members were seated was 4-3. Central to remain open. Board voted to keep three campuses."
- "The board must still figure out how to keep three schools operating in 1982-83."

One Final Note

The alumni and the students of JT Central honor the past as they anticipate the future. All can rejoice in the fact that its centennial year of 2001 was celebrated with a variety of outstanding activities from burying a time capsule a hundred years to the day that the high school was originally dedicated to the awarding of diplomas to veterans who left their classrooms to serve their country in WWII and the Korean War.

JTHS is a high school that has contributed to the success of so many graduates and looks forward to helping thousands more in the years to come. It is definitely no ordinary school. Tradition! Opportunity! Progress! "A Palace of Learning since 1901."