

History of Parma Schools, Churches and Community

NOTE: All excerpts are quoted directly from the book:

"Parma, Ohio"

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Early records show that the first classes were held in the home of resident Samuel Freeman. Freeman was not only the first schoolteacher, but he also served as the first justice of the peace and first postmaster of the township. With Parma's population growth, trustees met on May 13, 1826, to form the first school district in Parma Township. The first schoolhouse was located on what is now the Parma Heights Cemetery on Pearl Road. It was used for schooling, meetings, elections and religious services until 1841. A plaque mounted on a boulder in the cemetery marks the location of where this school used to be. The township first started with two school districts and later split into nine. As time went on, many schools were built in the area to accommodate the growing number of children attending classes.

The Parma School District is the 2nd largest in Cuyahoga County and the 11th largest in Ohio. Made up of Parma, Parma Heights and Seven Hills, the district currently has 15 schools. This includes three high schools, three middle schools, eight elementary schools and one preschool.

Parma is also known for its many places of worship and has often been referred to as "A City of Churches." The first religious service was held in 1822 by Rev. Henry Hudson at the home of early settle Asa Emerson. The first church in Parma was the Free Will Baptist Church, which started around 1830 and was located in the southeast corner of the township. Featured here are some of the older churches that were started in Parma in the late 1800s to the 1930s.

What began as a small gathering of worshipers in 1822 has now led to Parma becoming home to over 50 churches, including a Byzantine cathedral and a Ukrainian Catholic Church, as well as one of the nation's largest Islamic mosques.

Interesting historical information taken from captions under photos from the book . . .

The first school house was built out of logs and sat on top of a hill in the Parma Heights Cemetery on Pearl Road. As the population grew, more schools were needed, and soon nine one-room buildings were added around town.

In the early 1900s teachers were paid \$30 per month at the time to teach. Teachers were offered an extra \$3 if they cleaned the schoolroom as well as kept the school fires burning.

Back in 1938, many children did not attend school during the months of May through November because there was a lot of work to be done on the farm during those times.

When **Pearl Road School** opened in 1921, it was the end of one-room schoolhouses in Parma. Winifred Stroud served as the school's first principal. Pearl Road School was one of a few schools built around this time that were located in such a way that they were to face the main road as well as be a reasonable distance from the road in order to avoid dust and noise.

Thoreau Park Elementary School was built in 1926 when Parma was a village. The school started with half-day sessions for grades kindergarten through sixth and shared the school with older grades until Schaaf Junior High School opened in 1928. After Schaaf opened, the primary grades went back to full-day classes. The first principals of Thoreau Park School were Mrs. McCreary and Mrs. Bardsalls. McCreary stayed on as principal and retired in 1944.

Schaaf Junior High School was built at a time when Parma was a village, and the increasing number of children caused the school to be opened in 1928. Schaaf Junior High was eventually sold to a church group who later sold it to the City of Parma. The city then sold the building to Constellation Charter School.

State Road School, located on State Road, was built in 1921 at the same time as Pearl Road School and Ridge Road School. The three schools were considered sister schools back then because they were designed very similarly to one another. They all had nearly the same exteriors as well as a red brick floor on the inside. Ridge Road School was located at Ridge Road and Day Drive and closed in 1962.

Parma Senior High School was built in 1953. It was originally designed for 2,000 students, but soon had over 4,000 students, which gave it the title of being the largest school in Ohio at one time. Parma Senior High was the first school built in Parma after 22 years.

Normandy High School is located on Pleasant Valley Road. It opened in 1968. The school system's third high school. Normandy started out with junior and senior grades and then added more grades in later years. The school is home to the Normandy Invaders.

Byers Field, 1950. In the early 1950's, a new football stadium for Parma Senior High was built at the site of a previous project abandoned in 1935. The field was reconditioned, with lights installed for nighttime football. The stadium, now called Byers Field, after Superintendent Carl Byers, is located at Ridge Road and Day Drive and is the second largest stadium in Cuyahoga County (the largest is Cleveland Browns stadium). Prior to being a stadium, the area was once an apple orchard.

Split sessions began in February 1977. Students of Parma's John Muir Elementary School (built in 1930) would board buses to be transferred to John Glenn Elementary School in Seven Hills, in order to conserve natural gas. At that time, Parma had to close 14 of their 30 schools. The transferred students had to endure split sessions at school until March of that year.

Cuyahoga Community College. The college opened in September of 1966 with 2,600 students enrolled. In October 1996, President Bill Clinton visited the campus and talked to a crowd of 15,000 people about education. Clinton had previously visited Cleveland and made sure to stop at Parma Pierogies restaurant before going on his way. Their 200-acre setting includes Veterans Memorial Garden, as well as many streams, ponds, and fountains. When Crile Hospital announced that it was closing its doors, speculation arose as to what would take its place. Many thought it might become a state park, veterans' cemetery, or even a mental hospital.

Parma City Hall. In 1924, Parma was incorporated as a village, and a new town hall was built. Previously, the former town hall had been in an old schoolhouse on Ridge and Bean Roads (Ridgewood Drive). This new hall was constructed on the east end of Ridge Road. (Courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection. On January 1, 1931, Parma was declared a city. The first city council meeting occurred on January 5, 1931. During the time of the Depression in the 1930s, Parma was not growing, and there was talk of annexation to Cleveland, but instead, a resolution was passed on January 15, 1931, to decrease the wage of every employee in Parma in order to recover some of the loss the city was experiencing.

Parma Community General Hospital, 1951. In 1957, a committee started a fund-raising drive to raise money for the proposed hospital. In August 1961, the hospital opened its doors. In 2000, Parma Community General Hospital was named one of the top 100 hospitals in the country by Healthcare Industries Association and the Health Network.

Holy Family Home. In 1956, the Holy Family Home was established by the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, New York, who cared for cancer patients. A prominent figure in the development of the home was Rose Hawthorne, daughter of writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. Holy Family Home has taken care of over 12,000 patients with cancer at no cost.