Celebrating Pinckney History



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Early School History

The land on which Pinckney School sits today was near or part of a land grant issued to Mr. A.B. Wade in 1854, shortly before the town of Lawrence was founded. The cabin he built was 10 feet by 12 feet in size, with a dirt floor, one door, and one window. It was built on the bank of the river to the east of the present day school. 304 Indiana is possibly the location of the Wade cabin. The only remaining remnant of the Wade homestead is a natural spring. The home standing at this location today was built in 1870 by Albert and S.T. Zimmerman and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Town Company bought the Wade land for $2500.

In the fall of 1854, neighbors met and decided to build a schoolhouse, the first in the Lawrence area. Together, they built a log cabin on the claim of Wm. Yates, 14 feet by 26 feet in size, with 4 windows (2 on each side), and a door. The first teacher hired, Robert Allen, was told “not to be afraid of threshing, and to lay it on them youngsters good and hard.” The school opened in December 1854, and had three months of school each winter, and sometimes three months in the summer.

In David Dary's Informal History of Lawrence, he speaks of a letter written by G.W.W. Yates, who describes a pioneer school on Reeder's float, two and one-half miles northwest of Lawrence. The letter states that the first teacher was Robert J. Allen and that classes began on May 10, 1855. There is some confusion as to the opening date.

The first petition of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society stated that one of their purposes would be to provide emigrants settling in Kansas Territory with the “advantages of education.” Only months after the founding of Lawrence, a temporary school was started. The first free school in Lawrence opened in 1856 in the rear of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company located at the corner of 8th and Massachusetts. Edward P. Fitch of Hopkinton, Mass. was the first teacher. Three and a half months of schooling were provided to twelve students.

In 1857 some students in our neighborhood moved from the Emigrant Aid Company to rooms in the basement of the nearly completed Unitarian Church on Ohio Street.

By 1869 more space was needed and bonds were issued totaling $1200 for the remodeling and refurbishing of the old Congregational Church at the corner of Louisiana and Pinckney streets. Two rooms were opened and in use by the fall of 1869.

1871

The schools and various temporary locations in Lawrence were very crowded and by 1871 class sizes had grown to 60 or more. The school superintendent felt this was too many. In the spring of that year he said, “More than 60 students should not be placed under the care of one instructor. A crowded classroom is unfavorable to the development of a healthful and vigorous physical and mental constitution.”

The next school year, 1871-1872, the four lots on Pinckney Street (we now know as Sixth Street) were purchased, and a fine two-room, two-story building was built at a cost of $6,000. In the early days of the school, Pinckney Street was a winding dirt road, named for Charles Coatesworth Pinckney, a hero of the Revolutionary War, who had helped write the U.S. Constitution. The red brick building was planned to be the wing of a larger building, 4 or 6 rooms total, as the town grew larger. The new school was located immediately south of present day Pinckney School.



The first Pinckney School was a two-story building, with two classrooms, one up and one down. It is pictured here at the back of a later addition. It was completed in 1872 and faced Pinckney Street (now Sixth Street). The entrance was located on the South side of the building.

The first building opened in the fall of 1872. Crowding caused the students in the lower grades to attend school for only half a day, some in the morning and the rest in the afternoon. 90 students attended class with two teachers, Miss Lottie Warren and Miss Emma Richards, who each earned $550 that year.

The following is a list of inventory items:

101 desk sittings	1 poker	No clocks
1 thermometer	4 dippers	No kerosene lamps
3 call bells	2 chairs	No globes
2 buckets, pails	2 teacher desks	No pictures on the walls
2 stoves (one upstairs and one downstairs)	6 maps	
	1 Webster's dictionary	

During the early years of Pinckney, students stayed in a grade until they were able to pass a district exam for their level. These tests were given twice a year. If all tests were passed, it took 10 years to graduate from high school. Schools closed for the year with an oral public examination.

Teachers were given rules to follow, too. In 1876, district rules and regulations required them to properly heat and ventilate their room by opening the windows from the top, to be sure students weren't allowed to sit in cold draughts, and at no time to raise the temperature of the room higher than 70 degrees.

In the same year, custodian's duties included keeping all paths to the school and outhouses clean and open in winter. Fires in the rooms were to be built so the rooms should be warm at least 30 minutes before the start of school.

1884

Pinckney continued as a two-room building until 1884. That year two new rooms were added to the front of the original building. This was done to help ease overcrowding, and because it was found that the old building was unsafe for use and in danger of being entirely destroyed by the wind unless protected by an addition, as the original plans had called for.

Because of overcrowding that year, it was decided that students would have to be 6 years old instead of 5 to attend school.



The addition on the front of the original structure was built in 1884.

1908



About 1908 another addition of four rooms was added to the old school. Around this time, a steam-heated boiler replaced the stoves that had heated each room. There was still no electricity for lighting in 1912, but electric lights were in use by 1927.

If you had been in school around 1900, you would have worn knickers if you were a boy or a pinafore over your dress if you were a girl. In winter you would have worn long underwear, both boys and girls. You would have had to bring your own schoolbooks to class. These would have included a speller, reader, arithmetic, geography, and music book. You also would have brought a slate to write on and a sponge to erase it, as well as pens and pencils.

Popular recess games would have been marbles and mumbly-peg for boys and jacks for girls. Other popular games were spinning tops, walking on stilts, and roller-skating with clamp-on outdoor skates. For lunch you would have walked home, then returned after you had eaten.

When school started each day, the principal or janitor would stand out front and ring a bell. The students lined up in twos, on the walk in front of the building, and marched into school to music from a Victrola (a wind-up record player). As they reached a corner, they turned a square corner. Upstairs classes marched in their lines right up the stairs and into their rooms.

1927

When the name of the street was changed to Sixth Street, sometime between 1912 and 1927, it was a two-lane street not paved past the school. About the time World War II ended, the Pinckney PTA was opposing widening the street to four lanes; afraid the sounds of travel would endanger children and disturb them at work.

Enrollment at Pinckney was still growing in 1929, and it was decided that the red brick building that had housed students for well over 50 years needed to be replaced by a larger, more modern building. The new building was built directly behind the old one. When school closed in June of 1931, the old building was immediately torn down.

1931

During the summer of 1931, the new building was finished, and students started school in this building on Tuesday, September 8, 1931.



Here you see the new school construction behind the old. View is of the southeast corner of the new building.



That first day, students went to school from 9:00 to noon, with the afternoon off to buy their books for the first full day of school on Wednesday. Attendance that first week was 392 students, with a principal and 9 teachers on the staff. As one of its modern features, the new Pinckney was the first elementary school in Lawrence to have student desks that were not fastened to the floor.

Changes in this building have also been made over the years. Our present kindergarten and one first grade classrooms and the library above them were at one time a gymnasium. As enrollment kept growing, the original library and craft rooms were made into classrooms. Then, portable rooms were placed behind the school, the first in 1944, as enrollment grew to about 500. In 1951 rooms were rented in a church at 601 Maine to house 4 sections of kindergarten. It was in 1957 that our present gym was built, and the first one was made into three rooms and the library. Up until that time, any student staying at school for lunch ate in a basement lunchroom.

Carpeting was added to classrooms when the building became the location of the district's hearing impaired classroom, during the early 1980's.

1990

On February 1, 1991, the Pinckney Library was dedicated as the Langston Hughes Library for Children. Langston Hughes, the famous poet, entered the second grade at Pinckney in 1909. Mary J. Dillard was his teacher.



This picture was taken in 1875. Segregation was being practiced at Pinckney in 1909 when Langston entered second grade. His teacher was Mary Dillard, we believe she is pictured here with her class.

Pinckney students planned and executed a special Langston Hughes Day, which included the dedication of the library, and the placing of markers at two residential addresses where Langston lived with his grandmother Mary Langston—732 Alabama and 731 New York, the home of James W. Reed and his wife, Mary. The Pinckney children also placed headstones on the unmarked graves of Charles and Mary Langston, the grandparents of Langston Hughes, located at Oak Hill Cemetery. Arnold Rampersad, Langston's biographer, was on hand to do the ribbon cutting for the dedication of the library. Janet Reeder was the Pinckney Librarian at the time of the dedication.

In May of 1996 the gym was named the “Gary Freeman Gym.” Gary Freeman was the principal at Pinckney School from 1973 to 1996.

Renovation of the library took place during the summer of 1996, expanding into an adjacent classroom and a computer lab was added within the library. The same year, air conditioning was added and the necessity to add ductwork required that the ceilings be lowered. The beautiful high ceilings were lost and replaced with drop ceiling.

The Jesse Milan pre-school was dedicated in 1997 and a playground installed to the east of the building for these children. In 2003, all preschools in the district were moved to the East Heights building, which was closed the same year and students moved to other buildings.

In the spring of 1999, work began on a new addition that changed the orientation of the building by moving the administrative offices to the east side.

2000

Two new classrooms on the second floor were also added along with two new restrooms and an elevator to accommodate the inclusion educational model.

The gym stage was lost as part of this renovation. The old office spaces on the South side of the building were renovated and turned into a teacher workroom. The art room was moved from a classroom space into the old teacher workroom, which was renovated to fit the requirements of the art program. The kiln was moved from the basement into the original kitchen space.

Landmarks

The Daughters of the American Revolution in memory of General George Washington, 1732 – 1932, planted the big oak tree that used to be to the east of the building. This magnificent tree was struck by lighting in September of 2000 and some of its bark was stripped away. The tree died and was taken down during the 2001 – 2002 school year. In 2007, district carpenters Jeff Hart and Jack McCartney used the lumber from the tree and built two beautiful display cabinets, which are currently located just outside the gym door. Pinckney also kept a large ring from the tree and had the original plaque mounted on it. The ring was installed across the hall from the display cases.

In the 1994-95 school year, fourth grade students planted a tree at the southwest corner of the preschool playground in memory of Mei Mei Montgomery, their teacher who passed away during the school year. A scholarship was established through the school foundation in her name by friends and family and is presented each year to a graduating senior that has also been a Pinckney student.

A plaque found at the southwest corner of the building in a small grove of trees reads, “Playground Addition dedicated to the memory of Brendon R. Doerr, 1976 – 1986.” An automobile hit Brendon as he tried to cross Ninth Street.

Kathy Braun, a longtime custodian, came to Pinckney in October of 1983. She retired and moved from Lawrence in October of 2000. A Weeping Burch tree, purchased by Kathy, was planted in a quiet garden behind the building. The garden is located just outside the art room window.

In 2000 – 2001, a courtyard adjacent to the new entrance was created. Even before the construction of the school’s new addition was complete, plans were underway. Parents Amy Carlson and Holli Joyce were awarded a grant from the Lawrence Arts Commission. An area was devoted to a “press in” project, which included each and every Pinckney student as well as teachers and staff. These pieces surrounded a large planter, which housed plants from season to season for beauty and life. Bricks, which parents purchased the previous year to help fund the entire project, bordered this courtyard. Jacob Wilson approached the school to build two benches for sitting as his way to earn the title of Eagle Scout. Pinckney PTO purchased the material and Jacob designed, built and installed the benches, which now look onto the tiled area. Jacob is the son of Joe and Diana Wilson. Diana was a library clerk and title math para during her 10 years of employment at Pinckney. Unfortunately, the courtyard installation was

unable to survive the freezing and thawing of winter and the neighborhood skateboarders. It was dismantled in 2005. The benches, the planter and the bricks are all that survive today. Pinckney parents have planted and maintained the garden around this area as a welcoming space to the school.

A quiet garden just to the east of the playground was added in 2001 – 2002. This garden area houses an incredible tool shed that business partner architects Gould-Evans designed. They actually designed two different plans and let the students vote on their favorite! A committee of parents led by Lori Lange poured the pad. Teacher Mary Grant's son, Peter, completed construction of the shed. A painted map of the United States sits directly outside the quiet zone and is the product of parent and artist Susan McCarthy. The butterfly garden has been a continuing work in progress and Pinckney teachers, students and families have worked to maintain its beauty.

In 2006, Janet Reeder, Pinckney Library Media Specialist, initiated efforts to have the Pinckney building artwork appraised and restored. The teaching staff provided funds for the restoration. As part of our 75th birthday celebration (May 5, 2007), she also restored the old pictures of our building and assembled a hall of history near the gym. Mrs. Reeder also refurbished all of the old scrapbooks and added information donated by former students.

The Crow's Nest, an imaginative ship-like playground structure, was completed and dedicated in the fall of 2011 in memory of Sue Crow. Sue, a certified special education teacher, came to Pinckney in August 1997 and worked as a resource room paraprofessional until her death from cancer in April 2010. A beloved teacher and friend to students, families, and staff, she reached her goal of teaching until she was 70. Sue loved helping children both in the classroom and on the playground. The Crow's Nest has provided many delightful hours of creative play for students of all ages.

The Pinckney Tunnel was built in the 1950s as a safe passageway across Sixth Street. Hundreds of Pinckney students have used the underpass to walk to school through the decades. After many years of neglect, the tunnel had fallen into a state of disrepair and was dark, dirty and defaced by vandals. In 2011, a group of Pinckney parents renewed interest in reclaiming the space and cultivating collaborative relationships between the city and the school to improve the tunnel. After fundraising that ran the gamut of lemonade stands to a bluegrass concert, the Pinckney PTO with the financial support of the City of Lawrence, the Lawrence Schools Foundation, and the Old West and Pinckney neighborhood

associations, commissioned Van Go, a local social services program for at risk-youth, to create mural panels to line the walls. The 90-foot mural called “Tunnel Vision” was created by 21 young artists and colorfully progresses thematically from morning to night through nature and imagination. Dedicated on May 3, 2013, the mural and the upgraded lighting installed by the city transformed the Pinckney tunnel into a bright and cheerful space for students as they travel to and from school.

