

Honeoye Central School: The Class of Fifty-three

Step by step the residents of Richmond Township set into motion a series of events that would culminate in the Honeoye Central graduating class of 1953. “We were very excited,” said Clara (Chittenden) Shepherd about the first day of school in September 1952. For this was to be the first senior class to begin their final year of high school in September in the new school building and to graduate the following June. The Class of ’52 had graduated from the new building, but they had attended classes there only from January onward.

The first step in this chain of events occurred in May 1947 when the community voted to centralize. This move brought together 25 rural school districts serving Richmond, Bristol, Canadice, and South Bristol into one organization called Honeoye Central School. Of the ten rural districts in Richmond at that time, four schools had closed as early as 1941. In the first year after centralization, all but one of the remaining schools closed their doors. District School # 2 (Allens Hill) was Richmond’s last rural district to close, remaining open through the 1951-52 school year.

Next, the school board faced the question of where to conduct classes in a centralized district. Some Richmond students attended classes in Hemlock, others were transported to Honeoye. The “old school” on Main Street, or the “stucco building” as it was sometimes called, was the Union School built in 1913. Its nine classrooms were rather inadequate to handle the sudden influx of more than three hundred students. Two grades – third and fourth – were conducted in the Congregational Church (today’s United Church of Christ). Other elementary grades held class in the old Grange building. Still, the stucco building was filled to capacity.

So, toward the end of 1949 came the third step: on December 30 that year the voters of the centralized district gave the go-ahead to a building proposal. A new school was to be erected on a 36-acre tract of land on Main Street near the corner of Allens Hill Road. Nine hundred thirty-four thousand dollars was raised by bond issue, and building began in April 1950. Eighteen months later, in September 1951, grades Kindergarten through sixth were able to occupy the elementary wing.

In January 1952 the high school and junior high classes moved into the new building. This was the fourth step for the Class of Fifty-three, as they were Juniors that year. According to the Class History in the 1953 edition of *The Log*, their Prom in May “was the first formal dance to be held in the new gymnasium.” (The History also included this tidbit: “Lois White reigned as queen.”)

Honeoye Central School was up and running on all cylinders by the fall of 1952. All ten of Richmond's district schools had closed. In addition, children from seven Canadice rural schools, six Bristol schools, and two South Bristol schools attended the central school. Six buses, covering 303 miles every day in two round trips, transported students to class. A faculty of twenty-five served the 395 students. Mr. Herman Frederick was principal and Mr. Russell May was Vice-Principal. Mr. May also taught high school Science and Math and served as the boys' basketball coach.

Sixteen seniors were enrolled at HCS in the fall of 1952. Three – Clark Affolter, Edith Blackmer, and Myron Blackmer – were cousins. Two – Claudette Baker and Shirley Ziegler – were half-sisters. All but one, Lois White, would go on to graduate the following June. The Senior Class advisor was Russell May, to whom the yearbook was dedicated: "... the person most deserving of this honor is a man whom all of us regard as one of our closest and most interested friends. Whatever was best for us has guided his actions. He has played an important part in our lives."

Sixty years later, asked to recall a favorite teacher, Clark Affolter named Mr. May. "Our class was like a big family, we were close," he said, and Mr. May played a large part in fostering that intimacy. "He was always there for us."

It was Mr. May and his wife who accompanied the students on their Senior Trip. On Friday morning, April 3, 1953, the sixteen seniors and their chaperones boarded the "milk train" in Canandaigua on their way to Washington, D.C. and New York City. They were gone a week.

"The first part of the week was beautiful," Clara Shepherd remembered. "While we were in Washington it felt like spring, with warm air and flowers blooming. But when we got to New York, the weather turned cold and rainy. I just wanted to go home by then!"

In Washington they visited the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the Treasury Building. While in New York City they saw the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and Radio City Music Hall. But for many of the students the most memorable part of the trip was the train ride.

Most had never been on a train before. "We were very excited to travel on a train," Shirley (Ziegler) Brignall said. She recalled that there were eleven train cars filled with students from area schools en route to Washington. The hotel that the Honeoye group stayed in housed more than nine hundred students. Mrs. Brignall also mentioned that the boys in her class amused themselves by dropping water balloons from the window of their Washington hotel room onto the sidewalk below.

Once returned to Honeoye, it was back to the serious business of studying; only two months remained until graduation. Senior year was quite meaningful for many of these students. Though close like a family, each had his or her own interests and strengths. The teachers of different subjects made an impression on different students. Ruth (Miller) Blackmer was inspired by Mr. Beach, the music teacher; Mrs. Rickard, the business teacher, and Miss Ketchum (Home Ec), were favorite teachers of Clara Shepherd.

George Hayton was among the many who named as his most memorable teacher Mrs. Louise McKee, who taught English and Social Studies. "She took an interest in her students," Mr. Hayton remembered. "I just wanted to get done with school. I wasn't a very good student. But Mrs. McKee encouraged me to take an interest in the class. I

began to do my homework and to get better grades. It was a lesson that I appreciated and it made a difference in my whole life.”

The graduation ceremony was held in the school auditorium on Monday evening, June 22, 1953. The day before a Baccalaureate service was held at the Congregational Church. There had been so much rain that June that Mill Creek overflowed its banks on Sunday and some students and their families had difficulty getting home from the church. The fifteen who graduated were Merle Ace, Clark Affolter (Valedictorian), Claudette Baker, Edith Blackmer, Myron Blackmer, Clara Chittenden, Richard Drake, Priscilla Fisher, Beverly Flood, George Hayton, Mary Lou Keene, Maria List, Ruth Miller, Ronald Ward, and Shirley Ziegler.

This group of students, once as close as family, are scattered now, spread out from Florida to Vancouver, and several are deceased. Each of them went on after graduation to various enterprises: into the Armed Forces, working as farmers and in other agriculturally related fields, into nursing and food service; most became parents, some worked in administration, and one (Priscilla Fisher Gascon) became a long-haul truck driver.