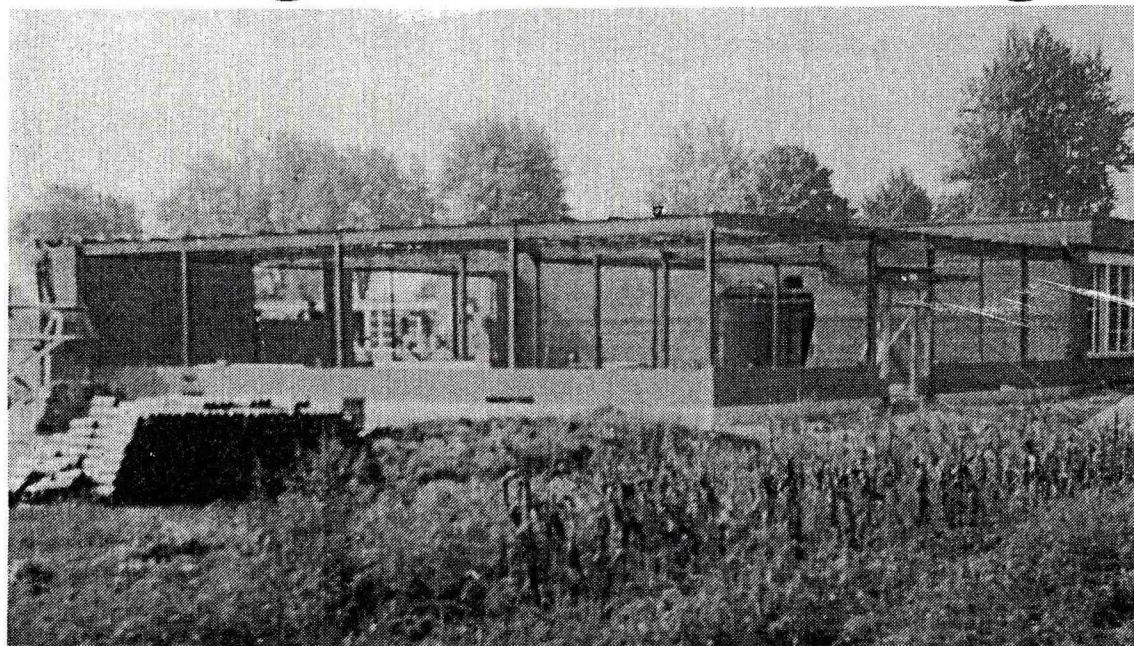


The West Elgin District High School

Construction of The West Elgin District High School began in May 1951, and was completed in September 1952. Prior to the erection of the new building, ~~there were~~ ^{operating} three schools independently in West Elgin: the Dutton High School and Continuation schools in Rodney and West Lorne. The original building contained six regular classrooms and in addition, a library classroom, general shop, home economics room, chemistry laboratory, agricultural laboratory, cafeteria and gymnasium-auditorium. It also housed the administration offices, teacher's rooms, washrooms, showers and dressing rooms. The school's steel and brick construction featured the latest in heating, ventilation and lighting. The original cafeteria seated 150 people and served hot meals for reasonable prices, at something like twenty cents a plate. Bev Lashbrook, from Rodney, remembers that the teachers would eat with the students in the cafeteria. Food fights were obviously a risky venture. Mr. Lashbrook also remembers his first day at the shiny new school and that it was a "humbling" experience compared to the Rodney Continuation School where he had just completed Grade 10. The school was originally designed to enrol 300 students, therefore, with increases in enrolments additions were made to the school throughout the decade.

THE SCHOOL BOARD

In 1946, a By-Law was passed by the Elgin County Council to establish the West Elgin High School District. The inaugural meeting of the new Board was held on January 8, 1947. The original Board Members were



This is a four-room, \$45,000 addition built on the north side of the school in 1955.

J. Kearns, Earl Lemon, A.J. DeLong, D.E. Carroll, J.D. Fraser and G.L. Morton. In 1948, the district was enlarged to include Rodney and was represented by Dr. J. Whitteker. Later on, A. White, W.F. Rewbotham and E. Hayes joined the Board to replace the previous representatives of the County of Elgin, West Lorne and the West Lorne Public School Board respectively. The West Elgin High School Board continued until its dissolution with the implementation of centralization of all Boards across the province.

THE NEW SCHOOL

Operating three different schools in West Elgin was inefficient both financially and academically. Aside from operating costs, many students were attending schools outside of the district in order to obtain subjects not available in West Elgin Schools. The Board decided that one centralized

a student was offered all courses, would have to be built.

However, the decision did not come about so simply. Mr. Wilf Rewbotham, the only remaining veteran of the District Board, remembers the long hours and heated discussions about the new school over countless Board meetings. "It was a hell of a time and there was a lot of scrapping between Board Members", said Mr. Rewbotham in a recent interview. A lot of the friction was due to the debate over the school's location. Some of the members wished to continue the tradition of the Dutton High School while the majority thought it would be better to utilize West Lorne as a central location. The Board Members received a small salary for up to a maximum of twelve meetings per annum. Mr. Rewbotham estimates that at the time when the debates and discussions were very involved, they could easily have had up to fifty meetings in a year. It was a

many people today couldn't possibly appreciate. It would be difficult to convince the students of the school today about all the secret meetings on street corners in the dark, the pressurized, smoky Board rooms and the countless hours of planning it took to create the structure that our school is today. The school just always seemed to be there.

Mr. Rewbotham remembers clearly the trip to Toronto to present their new school initiative to the Department of Education. In May 1950, the Department of Education granted permission to erect the new school at West Lorne and construction began on the following May. Mr. C.H. Gillin, of London, was engaged as Architect to prepare the plans and the Huron Construction Company in Chatham was contracted for \$383 200. The completed project was worth about \$500 000. The school was opened officially on November 12, 1952, by the Honourable

Education, although classes had already begun in September.

ONE HAPPY FAMILY

When the building was completed, Mr. Rewbotham recalls that there was no animosity between the Board Members despite the months and months of bickering and that they all were "one happy family". Imagine what a tremendous sense of accomplishment they must have felt after their determination and resilience turned out the unparalleled nostalgic monument that still thrives in the community of West Elgin today! It was an "enjoyable experience", according to Mr. Rewbotham, who fondly recalls the Board and its close-knit relations with the staff and students of the school. The Board would often entertain the staff to dinner and vice-versa. The school was largely integrated within the community and was a proud piece of work in which everyone shared. Some of this was lost in the centralization and the establishment of the Elgin County Board of Education in St. Thomas. by Tyson O. Bree

Dedication

As the Editor it is my honour to compose a fitting dedication for this newspaper, and after much thought I have decided to dedicate this special 40th Anniversary Newspaper not only to all staff, students and board members, past and present, but especially to the memory of three very special men whom I have had the pleasure to meet and who have been an inspiration not only to me but to the many people whose lives have been enriched by theirs: Ray Lemon, Wilf Johnston and

The Spirit of the 50's

"The 50's were naive, innocent years. That's probably why people like to reflect back upon them." That is what a former student of W.E.D.H.S. feels is responsible for the nostalgia surrounding the decade of Elvis, Bill Halley and The Comets, the '54 Vette, the '57 Chevy, two-cent ice cream cones, "Silky Straight", and "B" movies like "The man with the Atom Brain".

One event that students of W.E.D.H.S. may recall is the "Bill Halley and The Comets" concert in the 50's at Rondeau Park; the band showed up in

pink suits, driving pink Caddy's. Anyone who was there will also recall the bass player splitting his pants. His enthusiasm had run so high that his clothing could no longer hold together.

When Elvis first came on the scene, he had a profound impact upon pop culture. With his gyrating hip movements and energetic performances, Elvis "the Pelvis" Presley shocked the world. Previously, teens were forced to endure the music of "Juliette" and Patty Page, the woman who brought us "How Much Is That Doggie?"

For the students of W.E.D.H.S., the Royal Theatre, or EMA as it is now known, provided evening and weekend entertainment. "Citizen Kane", westerns, Hitchcock's thrillers, and an abundance of "B" movies were popular; Brando, Montgomery Clift, and Grace Kelly were the stars of the decade.

Other activities that held the interest of the average 50's student were pool and going bowling. It was not uncommon to see the pool room uptown blue with smoke and crowded to capacity.

Saturday night was regarded as "the" night in the fifties, and students took full advantage of the fact that the stores in West Lorne stayed open until 10:30 p.m. on Saturday nights. The town would be crowded as the students who lived on farms borrowed the family car to go into town to catch a movie or play some pool. Should anyone have been reported for smoking uptown, they would have received the standard three-day suspension. Detentions in that day meant missing the bus home after school. The school population hovered around two hundred and forty, strictly governed by principals like Bill Mumford.

Bill Mumford, formerly in the military, was the principal of W.E.D.H.S. for several years. He was renowned for wearing grey trousers and a blue, double breasted blazer every day. He also wore his medals on special occasions.

Although the school rules were enforced, and teachers tried their hardest to ensure that a healthy learning environment was



School letter award winners in 1957? Who are these happy ladies?

maintained, a few things happened that will stick out in the minds of those who were there.

There was also the day when Mr. Wheeler, then an english teacher in his late fifties, gave some of his students a lecture that they weren't likely to forget. Mr. Wheeler, a dignified man, was leaning against a magazine rack in the library, lecturing his students on one of the finer points of literature. Unfortunately for Mr. Wheeler, who had his hands in his pockets, he leaned a little too heavily on the rack, and it toppled over, as did he. Instead of the expected response to the situation, Mr. Wheeler simply stood up, brushed himself off in the most dignified manner possible, and carried on with the lesson.

Some students may recall irritating the latin teacher of that era by bending down to tie shoelaces in unison with the rest of the class, something that was particularly effective.

The general atmosphere surrounding the teens of the fifties was more relaxed than today, although some students were assigned odd nicknames such as Ken "Froggie" Campbell, Bill "Windy" Robbins, and Alistar "Caribou"

Cameron. There was less of a gap between the students who were financially well-off and those who had little money. Teenage males around town generally wore bib overalls and plaid shirts. Girls generally wore penny loafers, and plaid pleated skirts. The school atmosphere, however, was generally more regimented, with rules stating that students were expected to walk in double file on the right side of the hallway. The world of the average student of W.E.D.H.S. was far more regional in the 50's. This was due in part to the lack of automobiles accessible to the students. On any given day, one might have found five or six automobiles in the student parking lot.

Television was also far less common than today. Ed Zelenak recalls that the summer before he enrolled in W.E.D.H.S., there were a mere five TVs in the entire town of West Lorne. This was in 1954.

The fifties was a decade that began with naivete, and finished with the people becoming exposed to rock-and-roll and fast cars. The uniqueness of this era, and the progress that occurred is what it will be remembered for.

by Lee McGough



The 19

Additions at West Elgin

Many of the former students of West Elgin District High School in the 1950's and '60's would scarcely recognize our building as it stands now. There have been numerous new additions made to the facility over the years in order to enlarge and update the school to compliment the growing enrolment and ever-changing technology. By the same token, those students who went to school here in the 1970's, '80's, and '90's would find it difficult to imagine our school as something smaller than our neighbouring West Elgin Senior Elementary School is today, except that they have air conditioning! Nearly everything has been renovated or altered drastically at some point in time over the decades, although there is a striking similarity between the lab benches found in the Science Department today and those seen in photographs from the 1950's.

Only two years after its official opening, plans were made for

the first addition to the east wing of the original school. The four rooms built were rooms 50, 52, 54 and 55. Rooms 52 and 54 are presently computer labs. This addition was completed in 1955 and cost approximately \$45 000.00. If one pays close attention to the floor tiles in the east wing you can still see where the original exit doors were located just after the present geography room.

In 1960-61 renovations began and additions were made to the north and south wings of the school. Two science rooms, 19 and 24, were added to the south wing and rooms 65, 67, 68, and 69 were added to the north wing. The cafeteria, originally located in the north wing, was enlarged to encompass most of what is our present library. So the school retained its original 'L' shape throughout the 1950's and '60's with only a few rooms tacked onto each wing.

The largest and most controversial addition to the

school began in 1969; these additions and renovations were worth twice the school's original value in 1952. The community was left to foot 75% of the bill as the Ministry grant barely covered the seemingly exorbitant costs. Sections were added to the present tech wing (the north wing) and also a section was added east of the south wing. These additions included a fancy, one of a kind, double-gym, six classrooms, teachers' dining room and student dressing rooms. The upstairs commercial department was also added at this time. The enrolment was up to approximately 550 students and some students had to be transferred to Glencoe because of unavailable space. This renovation permanently changed the original orientation.

In 1976, room 78, the welding shop, was added to the Tech Wing and the last addition made was in 1981 when the Music room was added to the original east wing.

Even now, as you read this article, fantastic changes are being made to the Tech Wing of our school. The old (it's all relative, really) electronics room is being converted to a computer centre. If you haven't yet seen the new weight room facility located in the not-so-portable portable by the school soccer field, do so at some time. Thanks goes to Mr. Baldwin and

Mr. Coran for initiating this facility.

West Elgin has adapted well to the changes in society throughout the decades of its existence. The new advances in computer and office technology, along with updated, superior athletic facilities and equipment

will allow West Elgin to readily meet the needs of future. With dedicated, innovative staff and enthusiastic students, our school will continue to foster a positive learning environment for generations to come. Now about that student parking lot....

by Tyson Bree

The 60's at W.E.S.S.

In the 1960's the series of West Elgin District High School Yearbooks were titled "Kaleidoscope", symbolizing the free spirit of the 60's. These contained pages and pages of memories and pictures.

The school went through many changes in appearance mainly in 1961 and 1969. What are now the English and Geography rooms, were built in the early 1960's. In the 1960's a new gym was built with a state of the art hardwood floor, to improve the athletic programs in the school. It was second only to the University of Western Ontario in quality and craftsmanship. The front circle was still only gravel and parking was only permitted for 10 minutes.

Adverse weather conditions prevented buses from travelling their routes. When it rained, the roads were too muddy to travel and during snow storms school could be cancelled for weeks.

In the early 1960's teachers were well respected. Typical courses studied were Botany, Zoology, Agriculture, Latin, Math and English. Girls were still streamlined in taking secretarial and business courses. Boys took University preparatory courses or agriculturally related courses. Towards the late 1960's students became more relaxed and individually minded.

Track and Field, Wrestling, Basketball, Football and Volleyball were popular sports. West Elgin District High School took pride in their sports and went on to win many trophies and awards. School spirit was immense in the 1960's and everyone belonged to some sort of club. Such clubs were the Camera Club, Home Ec Club, Geography Club, Glee Club, Library Club and even Cheerleaders. Dramatic productions were enthusiastically received by all students. One

example was the production "Clean and Pressed" in 1960 and 1961. Dances portrayed fads of the 60's also. Popular dances were "Platters of the Past" where they played songs by Elvis and Bobby Darin. Others were Square dance, Bingo

dance, Chicks Pick, Sadie Hawkins and Hallowe'en. Some prom themes to celebrate the end of the high school career were "Fanta Sea", "Canada's Centennial" and "The Great Gatsby."

One of the major school trips that students undertook was the Expo '67 trip to Montreal. The town of West Lorne waited eagerly to greet Prime Minister

Diefenbaker in 1967 as he toured the town making a short stop at the front of the school while campaigning.

The "Swinging" 60's imposed an ever-changing face on West Elgin District High School. Thanks to the spirit and vivaciousness of the staff and students, West Elgin contributed much to the history of West Lorne.



Hillbillies Bob Padfield and Wilf Johnston and company at a 1966 assembly.