

## **The History of Western Illinois University Laboratory School: “The School of Many Names”**

The Training School

The Academy

The Campus School

The Laboratory School

Western High

Whatever its name, the Western Illinois University Laboratory School was special, from its inception in 1899 as the Training School until its closure in 1973 as Western High. Its doors have been closed for more than three decades but its spirit lives on in the hearts of thousands of alumni, teachers, administrators, employees, and their families who to this day realize that they were blessed to have been a part of such a unique educational institution.

This history of our fascinating School of Many Names is written in the hope that its ongoing spirit will shine through.

### **Part I: The Early Years, 1899 - 1928**

#### ***The Birth of the Training School***

In 1899, the Illinois General Assembly enacted legislation that established Western Illinois State Normal School, a teachers school. After a pitched battle between various communities, it was decided to locate the “Normal School” in Macomb, a farming community in west central Illinois whose 5,000 citizens had donated 70 acres to the new school. The town had been founded in 1831 in the Military Tract of west-central Illinois and, as a result, the Normal School was sometimes referred to as the “Military Tract Normal School.” Since 1958, the school has been known as Wee 3eI8, tde26(e)12( 3eI10(27)-26(s)-Is o3lli6(e)li6(e)130(w)-28(n)-i6(e)1-36(e)-U0( a)-26(s)i6(e)

Its purpose was not just to be a school where faculty instructed student teachers how to teach children. The 1907 *Sequel*, the Normal School yearbook, elaborated: it was a “research laboratory” school where “advanced educational thought takes concrete form” and where the validity and efficiency of advanced teaching methods, developed in the Normal School, were

Old Main stood on the site of an abandoned brickyard, “on a sunny, sloping hill, ‘mong the gently rolling prairies,” according to the Normal School loyalty song. Built of stone and marble in a classic style, many believe it is still the most impressive and beautiful building on campus, especially when its Westminster chimes ring out the hour from its stately bell tower. Completed in 1902, its first floor was home to the Training School until 1938, when the New Training School Building (now known as Simpkins Hall) was first occupied. There were eight classrooms on the first floor which were also used by the Normal School students until the interior of the upper two floors was completed in 1906. Unfortunately, the first floor classrooms were built for young adults so the children could barely reach the chalk tray!

### ***The Academy***

In 1906, Normal School President Bayliss created the Academy. The Normal School classes that had been the equivalent of the eleventh and twelfth grades of high school became the “Academic” class while the ninth and tenth grades became the “Preparatory” class. The term “Western Academy,” however, was not used until 1910 when it appeared in the *Sequel*. Shortly thereafter, Western Academy referred to all four high school grades, although it was always considered part of the Training School.

### ***The First Administration/Faculty***

The first Training School Principal was Cora Hamilton. She also taught fourth, fifth and sixth grades. Edna Keith was the first teacher of first, second and third grades and Laura Hazle the first teacher of seventh and eighth grades. Both had extensive teaching experience and had been principals before coming to the Training School. Winifred Schwartz taught music and the students were required to sing the Normal School loyalty song every morning. Louis Burch taught manual arts and Nina Lamkin succeeded Alice Osden as the physical education teacher in 1906.

Hamilton was like a second mother to most of the Training School children. She could be strict, however, and was known to grab the ear of any youngster running in the hall or walking down the wrong side of the hall. Apparently the students had to march in a straight line everywhere they went in Old Main. Times have changed.

In 1906, President Bayliss hired Frederick Bonser as the first Director of the Training School. He left Western after a few years and was replaced by John McGilvrey, who soon became acting President of the Normal School after the untimely death of President Bayliss in 1911. Bonser would eventually become a noted educator and author after obtaining a doctorate from the well-respected Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City, where in later years many Training School faculty also earned their advanced degree.

In 1911, Walter Morgan was appointed as the new Director of the Training School. Soon thereafter, he was promoted to the Presidency of the Normal School. He held a masters degree

from the University of Chicago. President Morgan became nationally known in the field of education and was appointed by President Hoover as a cabinet level educational consultant. He had a profound influence on the Training School over the years.

Known as “Prexy” behind his back, he was a stern disciplinarian. He required the Academy students to be in their assigned seat in the front of the study hall, which was directly across from his office, at all times when not in class. The college students sat in the back.

with a rubber hose. Cooper, who for some reason always wore red, was often at odds with Thompson. She was easy going and had a more humane attitude about teaching. She would tell her student teachers that “all the things children learn from books are as nothing compared to what they discover in the tones of your voice and the acts you perform.” Words for teachers and parents to live by these days as well.

### *The Practice Teachers*

The Training School faculty members were called “critic teachers” because they would critique the Normal School student teachers. Most Training School students thoroughly enjoyed their close association with the Normal School and its student teachers. The children never dared (at least in the early years) to pull any shenanigans on the faculty but the student teachers did not always receive the same level of respect. When the student teachers would “practice” their teaching methods, the youngsters sometimes had the upper hand. Consider this poem from the 1921 *Sequel* entitled “What the Training School Thinks of Practice Teachers”:

We're like the old woman who lived in a shoe,  
We have so many teachers we don't know what to do;  
We can't give 'em broth without any bread,  
We can't whip 'em soundly and put 'em to bed,  
We just have to stand 'em and do what they say,  
Though they want us to work when we'd lots rather play.  
They're a little afraid of us - we don't know why,  
And when we are naughty they look ready to cry.

the east side of campus and its paths were used by many Training School students walking to school. The first student theatrical production on campus, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, was performed at the outdoor theater in the Ravine in 1913 by Training School students.

### ***Early Extra-Curricular Activities***

Theatrical endeavors were always emphasized at the Training School, starting in 1904 with the first play, "Six Cups of Chocolate." In 1917, the Academy students created the Green Door Dramatic Club and wrote and performed many plays. The first was "The Melting Pot." The Club was so popular that it was eventually taken over by the college students. Undeterred, the Academy students formed a new theatrical organization called the Masquers in 1925. The first play was "Just Suppose." The most popular organization in school for years, it merged with the Thespians in 1963, who carried on the tradition of fine theater at Western High.

Other cultural organizations were in existence in the early years. In 1904, the Academy established the Amaturian Literary Society for tenth grade students. Soon thereafter the Lincoln Literary Society for ninth grade students was created, along with the Sherman Debating Club. All were under the tutelage of Mabel Corbin, the English teacher. Over the decades, literary societies

Erskine Jay, also coached the Academy track team and was Athletic Director of the Normal School. That same year, the Western Basketball Tournament for high school teams began, later becoming the Western High School Holiday Tournament. It is still held every year and is now known as the Western Macomb Holiday Tournament.

In 1920 the Academy fielded its first football team. It lost its first game, getting shut out by Table Grove, and the sport only lasted one year. A team was not reestablished until 1930 under the guidance of Coach Ralph Barclay.

Barclay had graduated from the Academy in 1922 and the Normal School (Teachers College) in 1925. He lettered in four sports all four years at the Academy and the College. He was the College's first star athlete as well as president of his class. Upon graduation he was hired as the Academy coach. During his tenure the Academy teams were known as the "Acads" and later the "Purple Preps," a moniker that lasted until 1938 when the new school opened and the nickname was changed to the "Cardinal and White," eventually shortened to "Cardinals."

In 1919, to stimulate interest in girls athletics, the Academy Athletic Association was organized for Academy girls to play competitive intramural sports. It later became the Girls Athletic Association. The creation and support of this trail blazing organization was yet another advanced educational concept emanating from this research laboratory school.

Cheerleading first began at the Academy in the 1920s. Over the years the cheerleading squads were instrumental in helping to promote the spirit of the Academy, Western High and the Comets of Western Jr. High. They won many competitions at the county and state level.

### ***The Normal School Become the Teachers College***

In 1921, the name of Western Illinois State Normal School was changed to Western Illinois State Teachers College. The change occurred because in 1917, the Normal School began to grant four-year degrees. In just 15 years it had transformed itself from a two-year limited degree school to a four-year Teachers College, a remarkable achievement indicative of a certain level of academic prestige for the fledgling school. As a result, its focus was no longer solely on preparing students to teach elementary school. By obtaining a four-year Bachelor of Arts in Education degree, graduates could teach high school. This change reemphasized the need for a separate building for the Training School, whose student body had grown to 89 girls and 79 boys by 1917. Unfortunately, a separate building was not in the cards for a while, despite President Morgan's efforts. It was not until 1928 that the Academy had its own, separate building, and the Training School (1 - 8) had to wait even longer to escape the confines of Old Main.

## **Part II: The Academy Building, 1928 - 1938**

### ***The Academy Building***





Society, for outstanding journalistic achievement, after Hoover in her honor.

Rayman Miller was from nearby Carthage. He taught industrial arts at the Academy starting in 1927. He held a masters degree from Columbia University.

Velna Sollars was associated with the Academy and College from 1930 to 1964, teaching business classes. She was known for holding typing contests with rewards to the winners.

Jeanette Terrill was associated with the Training School and College from 1931 to 1969, teaching science and running the audio-visual center in the Laboratory School.

Sara Kramer taught Academy girls physical education from 1928 through 1936 and also coached the college tennis and golf teams. She held a masters degree from Columbia University.

In the 1920s, Training School physical education classes were held in Morgan Gym, the College's new gymnasium which was named after President Morgan. Morgan Gym was also the site for practice and home games for the Academy basketball team, and the Academy baseball and track teams also used the College facilities. Coach Barclay's "Acads" basketball teams of the 1920s and 30s were usually mediocre but there was always a lot of excitement when the city basketball championship game was played against Macomb High.

Barclay coached Academy football when the team resumed play in 1930. It promptly lost nine games without scoring. Football was dropped for two years in the mid-1930s but in 1938 it was resurrected once again. From the first game in 1920 through 1941, the Academy won only nine of fifty-two football games. In fact, the Academy did not have a winning season in football until Barclay's last team in 1941. That losing tradition was soon to change.

The Depression years of the 1930s did not spare the Academy which suffered just like every other educational institution in the country. Despite the Depression, or perhaps because of it, the first Academy band was formed in 1936 by Dr. Clifford Julstrom. The band was soon winning awards for excellence at music competitions. Eventually Dr. Julstrom became Chair of the College's music department and conducted its orchestra.

### ***H. Waldo Horrabin***

In 1928, H. Waldo Horrabin graduated from the Normal School. He created such a favorable impression as a student that, upon graduation, he was hired to teach at the Academy where he had graduated in 1924. He taught chemistry at the Academy for 36 years. He became the Principal of the Laboratory School in 1952 and remained in that position until his retirement in 1968. He was associated with the School of Many Names as a student, teacher and administrator for half a century.

Mr. Horrabin was a masterful teacher who thoroughly enjoyed the classroom. In some

mysterious way he was able to make science interesting to almost all students. He loved being

retired in 1968, the *Epilogue* reflected that he would be “remembered by generations of students with pride, gratitude and affection,” a prediction that came true. To this day he still symbolizes all that was honorable about the Laboratory School.

### ***The Training School: 1928 - 1938***

When the Academy students moved into the new Academy building in 1928, the rest of the Training School (grades 1 - 8) remained in the Administrative Building with the College students. The Training School would remain there for another ten years.

In 1932, Katherine Thompson and Bessie Cooper were still the Principals of the Training School. Its faculty (grades 1 - 8) included Elizabeth Bennett, Blanch Breed, Myrtle Duncan, Emma Foster, Beulah Mitchell, Helen Pence, Marie Porter, Margaret Schannenk, and Elna Scott. Mitchell, Pence, Scott and Schannenk all held masters degrees and taught at the Training School for three decades. Mitchell taught sixth grade, Schannenk first grade and Scott (later known as Mrs. Nail) third grade.

Lauretta Robinson taught seventh grade and English from 1934 until 1961.

Olive Potter taught Training School physical education from 1929 through 1960. She held a masters degree from Columbia University.

In 1930, Cecile Evans, who also held a masters degree from Columbia University, became the first librarian of the Training School. She immediately staked out territory in Old Main for a Training School library that would be separate from the College library for the first time. She retired in 1962 after 33 years as librarian. A soft-spoken but determined woman, she was quite vocal about what books children should read. Rumor has it that she removed several *Hardy Boys* adventure books from the library, much to the dismay of many grade school boys, because that was all those boys would read.

The first kindergarten was actually a federal nursery located off-campus. In 1935, it became a part of the Training School, although it was still located off-campus until the new building opened in 1938. The first teacher was Helen Felber who, like so many of the other Training School faculty, had earned a masters degree from Columbia University.

Some have noted that many aspects of the educational philosophy emanating from the Teachers College at Columbia University in New York City were considered, refined and incorporated by Western Illinois State Teachers College into its Training School curriculum. This was due in part to the plethora of Training School faculty who had obtained advanced degrees in education from that highly-respected East Coast teachers training institution. Few if any public or private schools were so fortunate to have had so many faculty members and administrators who held advanced degrees, especially in education.

Throughout its existence, the faculty and administration of the School of Many Names were dedicated to its stated purpose of continually testing new educational theories and methods on students in a research laboratory setting. The College and Training School students benefitted from this enlightened approach to education and as a result, excelled in their chosen endeavors.

### **Part III: The New Training School Building, 1938 - 1968**

#### *The New Building*

## *Administration*

After relocating to the new building, the Training School continued its tradition of retaining highly-qualified faculty and administration. Dr. Simpkins remained the Director of the Training School until his retirement in 1946. He had been the Director since 1912. The new building was eventually named Simpkins Hall in his honor. Dr. John Roberts replaced Dr. Simpkins in 1946 and remained Director of the Laboratory School until 1961. He held a doctorate from the University of Illinois. Dr. Frederick Abel was Dean of the School of Education from 1963 until 1969, a position that was responsible for the entire Laboratory School. He held a doctorate from the University of Minnesota. He had replaced Rolf Larson, who was the first Dean of Education in 1959.

Dr. Kent Pease was the Academy Principal when the New Training School Building

The 1940s welcomed new teachers to the Academy/Western High who remained on the faculty for decades. All held masters degrees. Loren Taylor, who taught math from 1943 to 1971, had the dubious distinction for many years of being the study hall supervisor for the hour right after lunch, clearly hazardous duty. Paul Swain taught art from 1945 to 1971 and is remembered for his traveling art show, moving his art cart from classroom to classroom. Florence Hulett taught physical education from 1947 to 1960. Oren Gould taught music to generations of elementary and high school students from 1948 until Western High closed its doors in 1973.

In the 1950s, many new teachers also armed with masters degrees graced the fold of the Western High faculty. Some taught there until Western High closed and then were associated with the University in some capacity. Lois Mills became the Western High librarian in 1954.

second grade in 1957; Barbara Kowal (third grade 1957); Roy Grindstaff (fourth grade 1959); John Christofferson (fifth grade 1958); Helen Hoing (sixth grade 1951); Alberta Flynn (sixth grade 1958); and Dr. Maurice Kellogg (eighth grade, high school biology 1958).

Harry Mussatto, who also held a masters degree, taught junior high boys physical education beginning in 1951. He started the high school golf team in 1956 and his teams were very successful, never having a losing season even though they usually played against much larger schools. Mussatto was also very successful as coach of the University mens golf team which won several national championships. The new back nine at the WIU golf course is named in his memory.

In the 1960s, additional teachers were added to the K - 8 faculty, many of whom also stayed until the end. Of course, all held at least a masters degrees. They included Dorothy Burgard, who began teaching seventh grade and English in 1961; Jessie Lewis (first grade 1962); Betty Bloomfield Vugteveen (fourth grade 1963); Earl Sawyer (fifth grade 1963); Carolyn Colvin (physical education 1963); Vesta Reynolds (kindergarten 1964); Maryon Howell (third grade 1964); and Helen Johnson (first grade). Mary Graff, who had graduated from the Academy in 1933, replaced Miss Evans as the elementary school librarian in 1962 and remained in that position until 1974.

### *Changing Identities*

In the Fall of 1943, the Academy followed its nickname “Purple Preps” into obscurity, as it officially became a high school. “Western High” was born! Then in 1948, the Training School officially became known for the first time as the “Laboratory School.” It has been interesting over the years for alumni to try to explain what it meant to have been a student at a “research laboratory” school on a Teachers College campus. Mr. Horrabin was right when he wrote that “it is impossible for an outsider to really understand and appreciate the Laboratory School.”

### *A Changing Purpose*

There was a fundamental shift in the manner in which the College utilized the Training School after World War II. Until about 1947, the primary purpose of the Training School was, as its name implied, to provide an appropriate training ground for college students to practice teaching methods and prepare lesson plans. That purpose began to evolve after the war. In addition, until then the entire responsibility for all teaching experiences for the college students had been provided by the Training School. That placed an undue burden on the faculty and students of such a small school which had been unable to enhance its faculty, facilities, curriculum, etc. because of the Depression and subsequent war effort. That burden began to be lifted postwar.

After Dr. Simpkins retired in 1946, significant changes began to be implemented under the leadership of President Morgan, the new Principal, Dr. Warren Covert, and the new Director

of the Laboratory School, Dr. John Roberts, including the name change to Laboratory School in 1948. The name change was not just symbolic, as the plan was to have this “research laboratory”





chorus regularly won intense competitions at the state level against much larger schools. The elementary school even had an orchestra which was extremely rare for any school, let alone one so small. Many high school musicians were selected to play with the College orchestra or sing with its chorus. These are more examples of the extraordinary opportunities offered to the Lab School students.

Another was the Spanish classes offered to students beginning in fourth grade. Pearl Castle and Nikki Mummert taught Spanish with a passion.

Dramatics continued to be very popular and successful. The Thespians, which had merged with the Masquers in 1963, continued the Western High tradition of producing many magnificent performances.

By 1938, the only remaining literary club at the Academy was the Rostrum which still held lively debates about the issues of the day. Soon thereafter debate and forensic teams were formed that were successful in competitions with other schools.

The first school newspaper was started in 1948, the first year of the Laboratory School. The *Spotlight* was written by Western High students and the senior English class was in charge of production.

In 1950, audio-visual education was established on campus. Its facilities were initially located in the Laboratory School whose students were the first to receive the benefit of this new teaching method. Many public schools borrowed the Laboratory School equipment and films.

In 1954, some Laboratory School classes were taught over closed circuit television from the science building on campus, another innovation.

Half-day summer school sessions were instituted for the upper elementary grades which provided the opportunity for academic advantage.

In 1959, the Laboratory School published its first yearbook, the *Epilogue*. Until then a section of the College yearbook, the *Sequel*, was devoted to the Laboratory School.

In 1963, the Biology Club initiated an annual event called the “Bio-Blast” to provide “new life” to student-faculty relations. The brainchild of Dr. Kellogg, the Club co-sponsored the annual intra-class basketball tournament and the student-faculty game.

In 1964, a chapter of the National Honor Society was formed to honor Western High students for scholastic achievement, leadership, service and character.

### ***Athletics***

Being relatively small did not prevent Western High's athletic teams from competing successfully against bigger schools. In fact, winning teams became a tradition at Western High but not until the World War II years. In 1941 under Coach Barclay, the Academy had its first winning season in football. His tenure as coach ended the next year when he became the College Athletic Director. Then in 1943, he left campus to teach pre-flight courses in the Navy where he eventually was promoted to Commander.

Jim Shultz was the football coach for the 1942-44 seasons when the Academy/Western High had winning teams, despite low enrollments during those war years.

The 1944-45 basketball Cardinals were also successful, winning 23 and losing only 4.

The war era teams may have been even more successful but some boys were reportedly distracted from athletic competition. As rumor has it, college men were so scarce on campus that many college coeds sought the companionship of the high school lads.

Homecoming was first celebrated at Western High in 1945, the first Fall after the war ended. Sponsored by the Student Council, homecoming activities reflected the spirit and pride of Western High. The first Pep Club was formed in 1946 and the next year, the stanzas of the new Western High loyalty song were first belted out. "We're loyal to you, Western High, we're red and we're white, Western High." There were parades around the Macomb square and bonfires until about 1962.

Who can forget the homecoming assemblies in the auditorium, when the King and Queen and their royal court were announced? Mr. Horrabin, Coach Sockler, the University President and the college athletic director, Ray Hanson, would always speak at the assembly. Coach Hanson, affectionately known as "Rock," never failed to arouse the spirit of those assembled with his trademark, wildly enthusiastic speech. The pep rally, the big game at Hanson Field and the homecoming dance in the gym were all eagerly anticipated.

More than 600 alumni attended the memorable All-School Reunion in 1999 to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Training School. Those that toured Simpkins Hall reminisced in the auditorium about the homecoming assemblies and great theater productions that were held there. The 1999 reunion dance was held in the gym which has recently been beautifully remodeled into the university's Recital Hall.

In 1947, Larry Kerker became the coach of Western High. Kerker, a former star athlete at the College, led the football team to its first undefeated season in the Fall of 1948 and duplicated the feat the next year. Many more undefeated football teams were to follow over the next 25 years.

Kerker was also very successful as the high school basketball coach. His 1948-49 team finished 20 and 7 and won the Holiday Tournament. By 1950, the new gym was completed.

Home to the Western High Cardinals, it also hosted physical education classes for the high school and grade school students.

The 1950-51 Redbirds were the first to play in the new gym. After losing the first game ever played on the “million dollar court,” as it was called, they rebounded to finish with a remarkable record of 28 wins and only 2 more losses, the best in school history although later teams came close. They beat Macomb High and advanced to the state “Sweet Sixteen” tournament, the only Western High team in history to reach that lofty goal. There was only one state basketball tournament in Illinois throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s and it included all schools regardless of size. It was extremely difficult for a small school such as Western High, with an enrollment of just 200, to successfully compete against the big schools in the state tournament. This made the accomplishment of the 1950-51 team even more remarkable.

Western High had other outstanding basketball teams in the 1950s, including the 1951-52 and 1955-56 seasons, Kerker’s last.

In 1959, Howard Hohman, who held a masters degree in education, became the head basketball coach. A diminutive man with a tremendous knowledge of the game, he was very successful. His 1961-62 team was 24 and 4. The following year the Redbirds equaled that record. The 1963-64 team lost only six games and the Redbirds of 1964-65 and 1966-67 were also successful, as they both won the conference championship and beat Macomb High.

The 1967-68 round ball team was guided by a new coach, Paul Sorensen, and was loaded with seniors. It finished 23 and 6, won its Holiday Tournament and also beat Macomb High. It was the last Western High team to play in the million-dollar gym and successfully ended that 18-year era by beating Plymouth High School.

Western High regularly beat Macomb High in basketball in the 1960s. Every generation of Western High student dearly loved to beat Macomb High, whether in sports, music, debate or any other competition.

### ***Harry Sockler***

Despite the success of Western High basketball, football was the undisputed king in Cardinal land. Western High had a well-deserved reputation for fielding incredibly successful football teams in the late 1940s, 1950s and 60s, primarily because of the winning magic of Coach Kerker and Coach Harry Sockler. Coach Sockler, who held a masters degree, also taught social sciences at Western High. He had joined the Teachers College faculty in 1950 and coached its junior varsity football team. In 1952, when Mr. Horrabin became Principal, Mr. Sockler became the Western High head football coach and a superb coach he was. He was a winner. In his 16 seasons at the helm, Western High won 114 games and lost only 12, an unheard of winning percentage. His Cardinals won 15 of 16 Lamoine Valley Conference championships from the Fall of 1952 through the 1967 campaign. Although some criticized his methods, no one could

dispute that he was a true champion who remains a legend to this day.

He made his players dress up and behave when traveling to a game, to teach them that people would judge them and their school by their appearance and behavior. He allowed no talking before a game, forcing his charges to concentrate on the part they would each play in "tonight's victory." He led his players to believe that no one could beat them if they were focused. If he did lose, there was hell to pay - Saturday and Sunday practices.

There were few weekend practices. The 1953 team was undefeated. The 1952, 1955 and 1956 teams lost just one game each and the 1954 team lost just two. The four teams from 1957 through 1960 were all undefeated, winning an incredible 35 games in a row, a school record as well as a state record for many years. The members of the Class of 1961 never experienced a loss in football all four years of high school. For a five-year period (from the second game of the 1955 season until the second game of the 1961 season), Western High won an incredible 48 of 49 games with the only loss, reportedly coming as a result of a blown call by an official.

In the 1960s Sockler had five undefeated teams, including the Cardinals of 1962, 1963, 1965, 1966 and 1967. He finished his career at Western High with a 24 game winning streak.

His success on the field culminated in the Fall of 1967, the last year of his Western High career. That Fall the Cardinals were laden with experienced seniors who had never lost a varsity, or any other, football game. Coach Sockler, however, did not plan to settle for just another undefeated season. Just before the start of the 1967 season, he publicly announced a new, seemingly insurmountable goal for the 1967 team of not allowing anyone to score a single point all season. Local pundits scoffed at his seeming arrogance but the inspired players and fans were up for the challenge. His incredible prediction came true as the 1967 Western High Cardinals were the only high school team in the entire state of Illinois to go undefeated, untied and unscored upon the entire season. They also broke the school scoring record set just the previous year by the 1966 team. Perhaps this was payback for the 1930 Academy team that did not score all season!

The highlight of the year was the final home game of the season, the homecoming game against the undefeated, high scoring Hamilton Cardinals who were a preseason co-favorite with Western High to win the conference. Coach Sockler and Mr. Horrabin shocked everyone when they both announced their retirement at the homecoming assembly the day of the game. The Cardinals needed no more inspiration, shutting out Hamilton on an extremely slippery Hanson Field which left the players covered with mud and unrecognizable by halftime.

### ***Horrabin and Sockler Retire***

After that memorable season, Coach Sockler retired at age 59 to his farm in Robinson, Illinois where he had coached before coming to Western. He was soon recruited by the local high school, however, to come out of retirement to coach its football team. Under his leadership, they had their best season in 22 years. Vintage Harry Sockler, a winner with a champion's heart.

Coach Sockler recently passed away at the age of 99 on his farm in Robinson, Illinois,



The new school was designed with substantial input from the Laboratory School administration, especially Mr. Horrabin, Dr. Abel, Dr. Hahn, and Dr. Knoblauch. They had a vision of making the new school exemplary in every possible respect. Mr. Horrabin has written that, in planning the new building, “a somewhat unique educational philosophy pervaded our thinking” which involved the concept of the “All Age School.” Kindergartners through seniors in high school would commingle in one building on one level, taught by one faculty, under one administration. High school students would serve as aides to the elementary school faculty and the elementary school students would be the subject of study and experimentation in certain high school classes. The administration believed that this unique concept would provide the optimum opportunity to develop integrated programs in which students of all ages would thrive. In a way, this concept was a modern day enhancement of the tried and true success of the one room country schoolhouse.

Many would argue that the Laboratory School had started out as an “All Age School” and, therefore, the “All Age School” concept of the 1960s was a return to the roots of the Training School, where first graders since 1902 walked the same halls of Old Main as students ten years older. The entire school had always been organized as a seamless program.

The new building was different, however, in that it was specifically constructed to be in physical harmony with the concept of the “All Age School.” This intention was primarily manifested by the fact that the entire building was just one level. That eliminated the natural hierarchy that had existed in Old Main and the Training School Building, which were multi-level.

The Laboratory School administration and the College Department of Education, led by Mr. Horrabin and Dr. Abel, had actually begun to theorize about and started out as an Ine



*Panoptes*, argued successfully for changes in the curriculum and fewer restrictions on students, such as open study hall and a “no-dress” code. Unlike most schools, the administration was not resistant to most of their demands, offering new courses in non-traditional areas such as consumer education, psychology, and acting. Classes in home economics, industrial arts and physical education became co-ed. The Laboratory School had once again lived up to its heritage of being one of the first to experiment with advanced curricular innovations, this time with substantial contributions from its progressive student body.

There was a corresponding change in educational philosophy at the Laboratory School in regard to the group *vis a vis* the individual. It began to place a premium on the attainment of individualized educational goals for each student. Junior high and senior high students could proceed at their own pace in math. High school students could take one class on a pass/fail basis. High school juniors and seniors could choose to take one independent study class in such non-traditional courses as guitar, song composition, photography, religion, philosophy, child care, and many other areas. Starting in 1970, the *Epilogue* no longer had group pictures.

The change in emphasis to the individual also pervaded the elementary grades which began to operate under the Individually Guided Education System. Under this system there were no grades or report cards. The Laboratory School was one of only a few elementary schools in the state of Illinois to operate under this innovative system, which was considered for Western High just before it was phased out in 1973.

Another significant innovation was “multi-age grouping.” Under this experimental program, two or three elementary grades were grouped together for certain classes which were taught by two or more teachers and a high school student aide. This allowed the faculty to teach to their strengths and interests, a benefit for all.

Special education classes were added in 1970 and that department soon successfully integrated its students into regular classes.

Not all Laboratory School traditions changed with the times. Students continued the traditions of academic excellence, of course, and continued to be very active and successful in chorus, band, orchestra, cheerleading, athletics, drama and debate. Qualified seniors were able to continue the tradition of taking some college classes.

### ***Athletics***

Western High continued its winning tradition in football under Coach Hepinstall in 1968. His Cardinals posted winning records each of his four seasons. The 1969 team was 8 and 1 and the 1971 team was undefeated, setting a new single season scoring record.

In the Fall of 1972, the final season of Western High football, Coach Mark Peterson’s Cardinals won six and lost only two. Unfortunately, one of those losses was to Carthage in the final football game ever played by a Western High football team.

Despite the fact that Western High lost its first football game in 1920 to Table Grove and its last to Carthage in 1973, over the years its teams were very successful. The Academy and Western High together won 199 football games while losing only 86, winning almost seven out of every ten games, a phenomenal record.

Macomb High and Western High varsity football teams never played each other. The Academy and Macomb High played one time, in 1920, and the Academy lost that football game.

The basketball teams under Coach Sorensen posted winning seasons in 1969-70, 1970-71 and 1971-72, winning the conference championship in 1972.

The 1970s athlete at Western High, while continuing the winning traditions in football and basketball, also excelled in what had become non-traditional sports as well. Members of the swim teams in the 1970s took advantage of the beautiful pool in the new building and ended up setting every school swim record. Track and field had been very popular at the Academy and during the early Western High years but interest waned in the 1960s. The Western High track and field teams of the 1970s resurrected the sport and ended up setting records in 12 of the 15 events. The other three records are held by members of the 1958 and 1968 teams.

Homecoming survived as a traditional event with some changes that were in harmony with the times. Beginning in 1970, a King and Queen were no longer named, only the royal court.

In 1972, the homecoming theme was "Across the Universe," the title of a song written by John Lennon of the Beatles. It contained the lyrics "Nothing's going to change my world." That prophesy turned out not to be, as fatal changes were in the wind. Within days of the 1972 homecoming, Western High received the final word that it would be forced to close its doors at the end of that academic year. Its non-graduating students would soon all be Macomb High Bombers.

## **Part V: The Final Days**

### ***The Closure***

Within months of the Laboratory School's move to the new building in the Fall of 1968, the Illinois Board of Higher Education began to consider its closure. With few exceptions, laboratory schools across the country were beginning to be phased out. The populous baby boom generation, a greater emphasis on higher education for everyone, and avoidance of the military service draft had caused university and college enrollments to skyrocket. The burgeoning enrollments coupled with rising inflation caused a myriad of problems leading to budgetary restraints that permeated universities and colleges at every level. Laboratory schools, which were



decision was particularly devastating to the Class of 1974, whose members were frustrated about

Who can blame those students who remained bitter about the transfer and were outspoken about it? They were shoe-horned into an unfamiliar building that was already home to students they barely knew. Those in the Class of 1974 in particular were justified in fearing that they would be deprived of the wonderful, memorable senior year that most high school students experience. They had to submit to the jurisdiction of a new administration and get used to unknown teachers in a year that was pivotal to their college hopes and dreams.

It was not just the transfer to a new school that caused all the bitterness, however, as students occasionally move and are expected to cope with transfer problems. The vanquished Cardinals had to transfer after their school had suddenly been deemed expendable, and its doors shut in their face. One member of the Class of 1974 indicated that they felt like refugees who were once again ripped from their homeland and forced to assimilate with a neighboring, rival tribe. Such feelings were difficult to overcome.

Dr. Abel attempted to heal the wounds by paraphrasing President John F. Kennedy, writing that the transferred students should “think not of what has been done to you, rather think and do what will prove best for humanity.”

### *And In The End*

The closure of Western Illinois University Laboratory School brought to an end a remarkable era. The “Tradition of Excellence in Academics, Music, Sports and the Performing Arts” achieved by our “research laboratory school” had been unceremoniously terminated. The Western Illinois University Laboratory School is no more. The experiment ended. There is no *alma mater* to which to return and observe the children. We can now only imagine how the implementation of the “advanced educational thought” that had been the hallmark of the School of Many Names since 1902 would have taken concrete form and affected current education.

The legacy of the Laboratory School, however, has continued unhindered. Perhaps Mr.

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By members of the Western High School Class of 1973, "The Last Class"  
Judy Sargent '73, Editor