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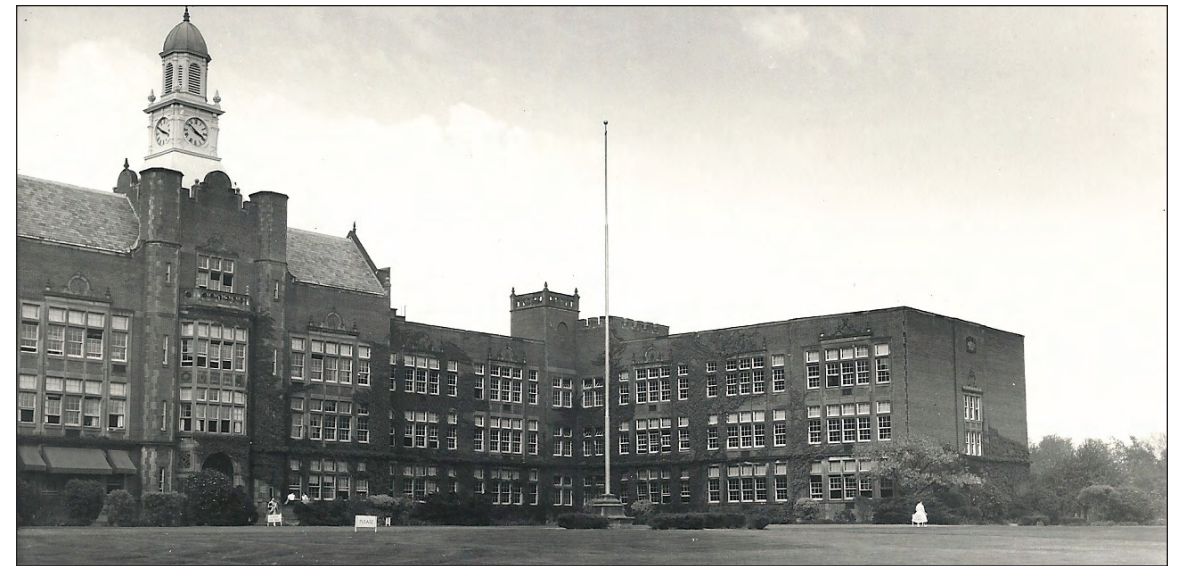


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Heights Schools Begin Their Second Century



The "Ivy League" look of the original Cleveland Heights High School.

By Eric Silverman

As the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District embarks on a review of its physical needs for the 21st century, it is a good time to take a look back at the buildings that have comprised the Heights School system over the past century. Since the completion of the 1970s renovations and construction of

four new schools, the District has not built a new building in 35 years—the longest period without new construction in its history. Before this hiatus, there was a near-constant cycle of building new schools, first in Cleveland Heights and then in University Heights.

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society, founded in 1983, is a state-chartered, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization.

Our Mission

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the diverse character and traditions of Cleveland Heights.

As a community-based historic organization, the Society encourages and facilitates greater knowledge, understanding and awareness of the heritage of Cleveland Heights.

Heights Schools Begin Their Second Century

At the dawn of the 20th Century, the township/city that would become Cleveland Heights was beginning its transformation from a farming community on the hinterlands of Cleveland to a “garden suburb” of homes for people looking to escape the city. Early districts such as Euclid Heights (top of Cedar Hill, west of Coventry), Euclid Golf (most streets east and west off Fairmount west of Coventry), Ambler Heights (Chestnut Hills District) and Mayfield Heights (bounded roughly by Coventry, Superior, Mayfield and Euclid Heights Blvd.) would soon be joined by numerous developments as Cleveland’s population sought larger home lots away from the noise and pollution of a swollen center city. The new Cleveland Heights was an ideal location for the wealthy and middle class to move to their version of a home in the country.

In the early days of the Cleveland Heights School District, there were just three buildings to serve the still-small population. Joining the Superior Schoolhouse at the intersection of Superior and Euclid Heights Boulevard were two small schools: Noble, located on Noble Road in the soon-to-be city’s northeast, and Roxboro, serving the western edge of the community (Figure 1). These two buildings—long since gone—begin a tradition of names used for multiple iterations of buildings at the same location. The first large school for the complete Cleveland Heights system was the original Heights High—the Lee Road School—which eventually became the School Board building. Featuring a proud Richardsonian archway over its front steps, the building was erected in 1902 with an addition built in 1905 (Figure 2).

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Figure 13. Taylor School demolition.

would be known for their “open classroom” design, a concept that would soon be ignored by teachers who would subdivide the open spaces into traditional classrooms. The exuberance of the 1970s was not only seen in the garishly bright colors used in interiors, but bronze colored replacement windows bolted to the exterior of buildings. A hodgepodge of additions and alterations to every building, while well intentioned, ignored the original designs of the buildings and intended symmetry for additions.

Dramatic declines in enrollment caused by the graduation of baby boomers, coupled with changing enrollment patterns, saw the closure of buildings just a few years after this massive construction project. Millikin was the first, closed in 1979. Controversy and ill feelings followed the closing of Taylor and Northwood in 1986. The same would occur when Coventry was closed in 2008.

By the 1980s, disdain for the 1970s renovations was palpable, and in the 1990s

the shortcomings of these renovations were systematically corrected, the beneficiary of a series of capital improvement issues. Paint and carpet that would not be dated within a few years were applied, and architecturally compatible windows added to Heights, Monticello and Roxboro Middle School, dramatically restoring their appearance.

The Second Century

The Heights Schools have seen buildings constructed in nearly every era of school construction,

from a “Golden-Age” in the teens and 20s, the post-war baby boom and the 1970s move towards designs no longer based on a school being a factory for learning. The District now faces the challenge of meeting the needs of its students with aging buildings and a finite resource base—a common issue in districts across the country. Keeping in mind the results of choices made in the past, the District must chart a path that will allow it to provide an ideal learning environment for students, given the funding options available. The key will be balancing current needs with an inventory of buildings from the last 90 years: a collection of structures whose designs and history range from the extraordinary to the mundane. Hopefully the District will be able to blend the best of the past with the promise of the future.

A 1987, second-generation Heights High graduate, Eric J. Silverman served on the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School Board for eight years, the CH-UH Library Board for seven years and is the President of the Cleveland Heights High School Alumni Foundation.

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less said about the 1970s addition and alterations to the building, the better. However, renovations to the 1,200 seat auditorium in the 1990s turned this worn area into quite possibly the most impressive public space in the community.

Après La Guerre

The hiatus caused by The Depression and WWII ended with additions and the construction of Northwood (1948), Belvoir (1949), Millikin (1953) and Wiley (1954). These buildings (Figure 12) display the post-war aesthetic that would dominate school design for decades to come, and exhibited the same layered building program seen in the pre-war buildings. For example, while Wiley appears to have been built all at once, it actually was constructed in phases completed in 1954, 1956 and 1957. The building of a

new Board of Education building next to Wiley in 1963 marked a change in the future of school buildings, with the venerable Lee Road School being demolished to make room for athletic facilities at Roosevelt. This would be a harbinger for five other schools and renovations to the entire system.

The "Modern" Era

In 1972, the citizens passed a \$19.5 million bond issue to build four new buildings and renovate schools system-wide. Many buildings were approaching fifty years in age and had been used heavily through constantly expanding enrollments and the baby boom.

Roosevelt fell to the wrecking ball, along with Coventry, Fairfax, Boulevard and Taylor (Figure 13), the four elementary schools replaced with the same design. Indicative of the 1970s, the new "Footprint" buildings

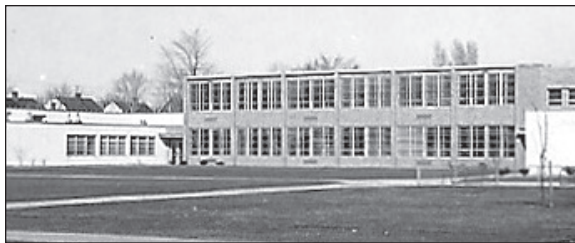


Figure 12: (Clockwise from upper left) Northwood, Belvoir (Gearity), Millikin and Wiley.



Figure 1: The original Noble and Roxboro Schools.

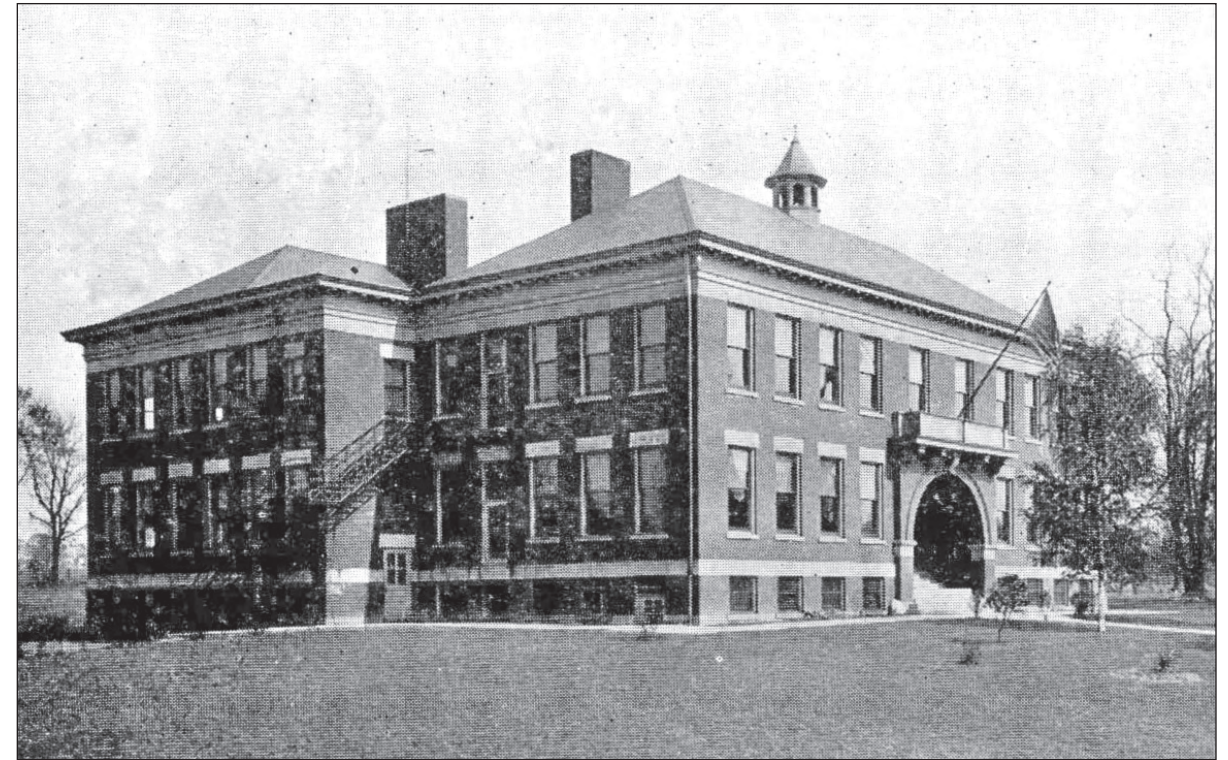


Figure 2. The Lee Road School

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At this time, Cleveland Heights was on the cusp of tremendous growth and its civic leaders planned accordingly with a series of buildings to be constructed over the next 20 years. These would be needed as the city's population saw tremendous growth. In 1910, Cleveland Heights had a population of 2,955, growing to 14,811 in 1922, and reaching 50,946 by 1930. A pre-Depression forecast noted that the city could reach 100,000 by 1940. In 1919 alone, 1,077 homes were built.

School leaders were as busy as the home builders—erecting the first Heights High (later Roosevelt Junior High) on Lee Rd. in 1915; Fairfax in 1916; Coventry in 1917; the second Roxboro (Elementary) in 1919; Taylor and the second Noble in 1922; Boulevard in 1923; Roxboro Junior High and (the new) Cleveland Heights High in 1926; Oxford in 1928; Canterbury in 1929 and Monticello in 1930.

This era can be seen as a golden age of school design, with a review of *The Architectural Record* from this period displaying one beautiful building after another. Tudor, Gothic, Georgian: these buildings mixed historical styles with the latest in building technologies and mechanical systems. With the Great

Depression, growth came to a screeching halt and school design never recovered. Decrying post-WWII school design in a 1981 book, Tom Wolfe stated “Every child goes to school in a building that looks like a duplicating-machine replacement-parts wholesale distribution warehouse.”

But what great buildings the Heights Schools built in the Century's first three decades! While Roosevelt's design paled in comparison to many of Walker & Weeks'



Figure 3. Roosevelt Junior High on Lee Road (also the original Heights High School).

other designs in both Cleveland Heights and Cleveland, Roosevelt's neighbor Boulevard, designed by Warner, McCornack & Mitchell, was an expressive building, with minarets above its ornate stone-lined portico (Figures 3 and 4). Fairfax sported a dramatic front door like



Figure 10: Roxboro and Monticello Middle Schools

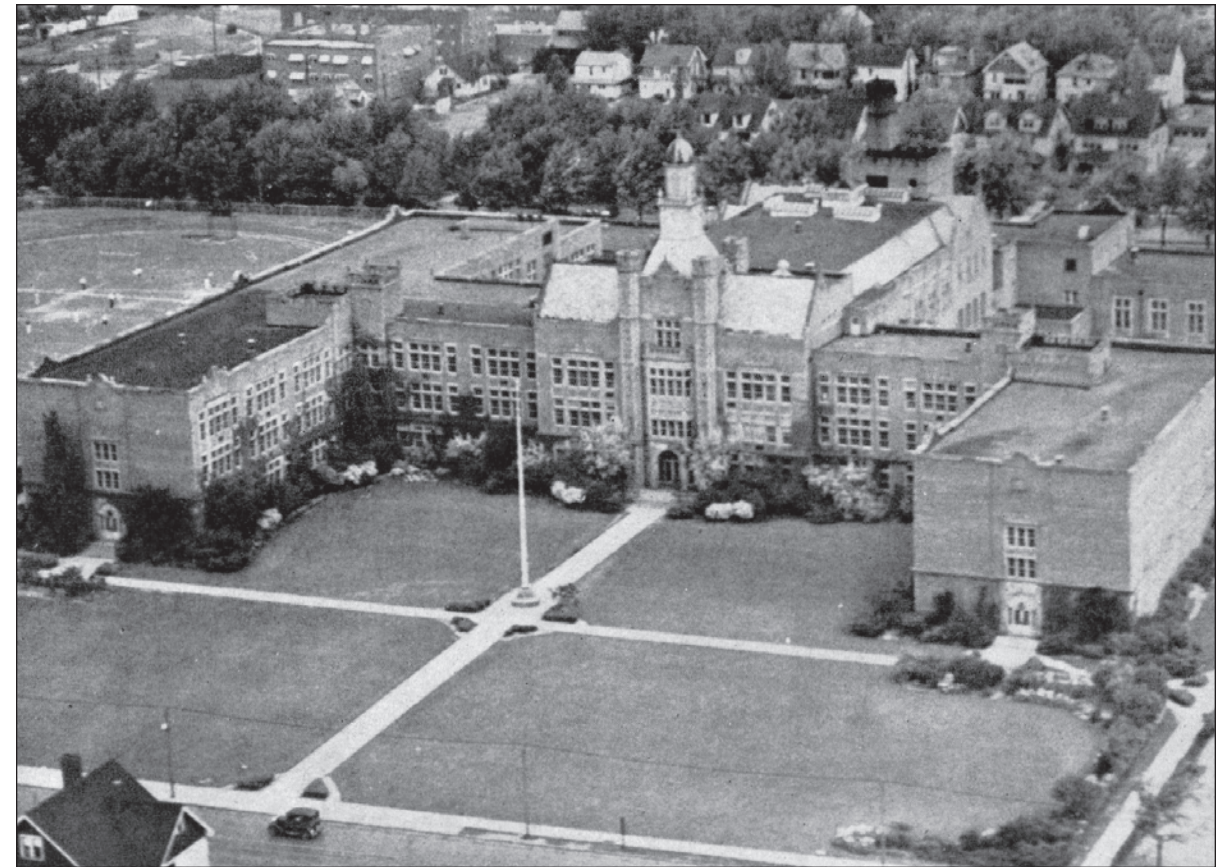


Figure 11. Aerial view of Heights High.

Heights Schools Begin Their Second Century



Figure 9. Noble, Oxford and Canterbury Elementary Schools.

Great Heights

Warner, McCornack & Mitchell's design for the new Heights High has persevered through multiple additions and alterations since 1926. Prior to the Sputnik-era addition along Cedar Road, Heights High's Tudor Gothic design gave Heights High the appearance of a college or New England prep school, especially with the growth of ivy over the years. Heights' 1930 addition on the building's west side matched the exact design of the building. And the

1948 Social Room and classroom wing on the east side of the building matched the rest of Heights, at least in its use of similar brick (Figure 11). While the addition of the Science Wing, South Gym, South Pool and new cafeteria eliminated the 1950s debate over a second high school, they unfortunately obstructed the front of the building—so much so that most casual passersby are unaware of Heights' grand main entrance. Perhaps the

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Temporary Schoolrooms

Given the student population's rapid growth, temporary trailers and added wings were a common part of life in the early Heights Schools. Photos, and even plat maps, frequently show temporary buildings at different schools. Photos taken over time show how many of the buildings grew, as these extensions had been planned for and often built just a year or two after a building was finished. This construction was so frequent, that from 1910 to 1960, practically the only years a new school, wing or addition was not being built were the years of the Depression and World War II. The photo above shows a Coventry School outbuilding along Washington Blvd. just east of the school.

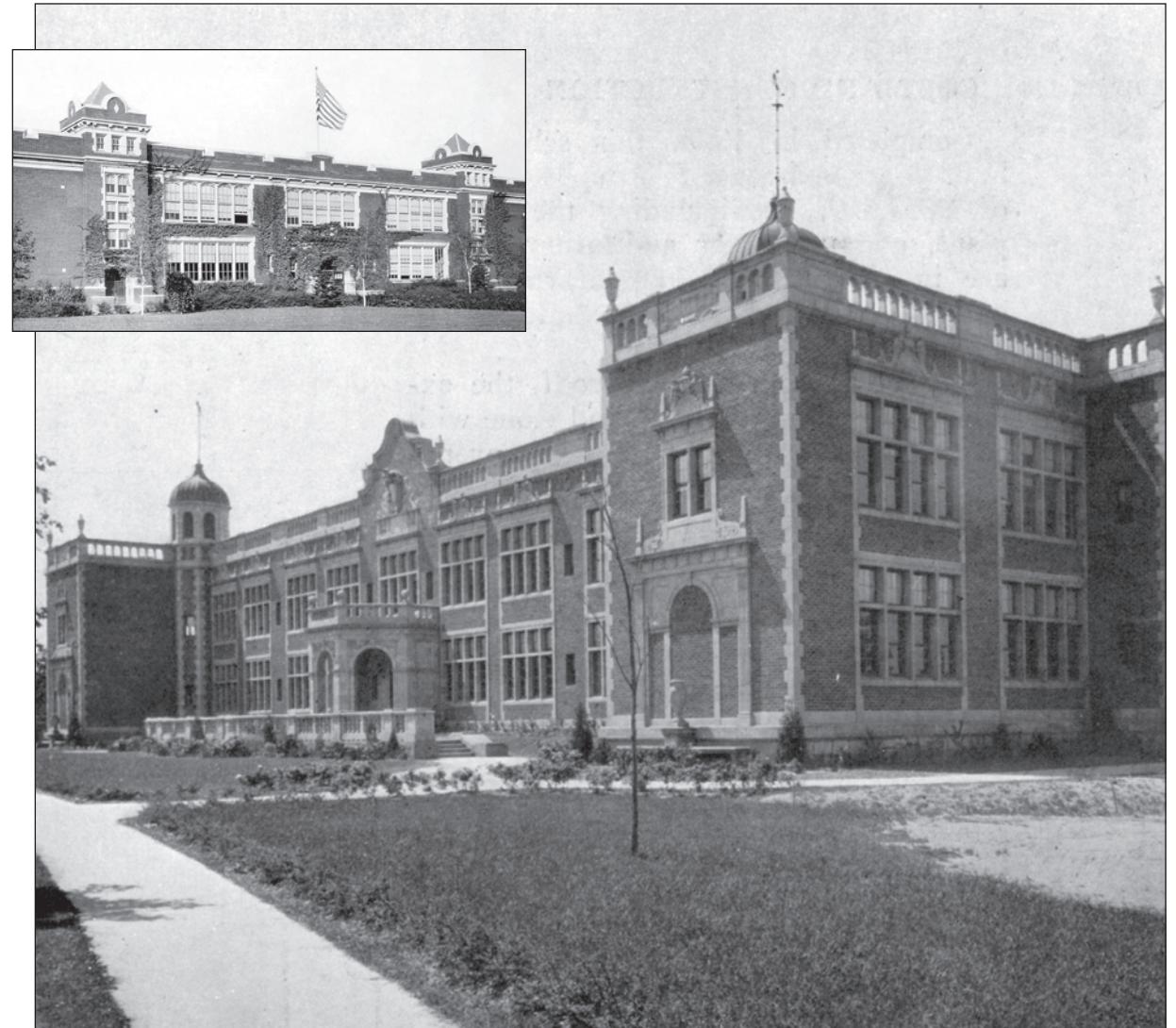


Figure 4. Boulevard Elementary School.

something from a Tudor castle, with peaked towers above its staircases (inset, above).

Architect Franz C. Warner designed five diverse buildings in Cleveland Heights. Coventry, built after an extensive neighborhood controversy (Figure 5, next page), anchored

the intersection with a prominent tower and detailed scrollwork over its front door (Figure 6, next page). Creative use of its awkward pie-shaped site allowed for a later addition along Euclid Heights Boulevard.

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Warner's design for Roxboro had three prominent arch windows below its mansard style roof (Figure 7). These wonderful windows would be covered by the 1970s addition. Warner's third building, Taylor, was a wonderful Tudor design with arrow loops flanking a front door that appeared to be designed to defend against invaders (Figure 8).

The second Noble School, designed by Warner, McCornack & Mitchell, displayed a more conservative design—similar to that seen in John H. Graham's Oxford and Canterbury Schools (Figure 9, page 8). While most of the buildings were built with symmetrical additions in mind as part of future building

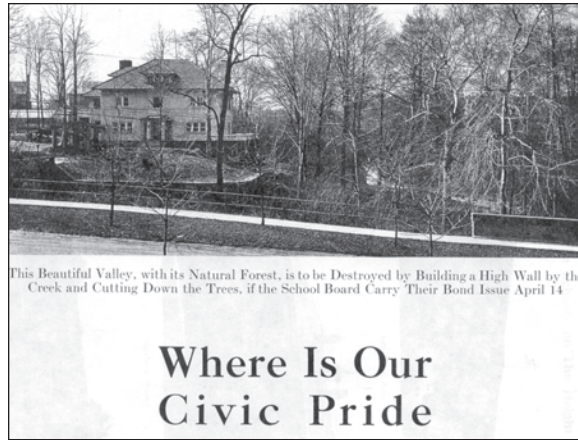


Figure 5. Poster protesting the construction of Coventry School (c. 1917).

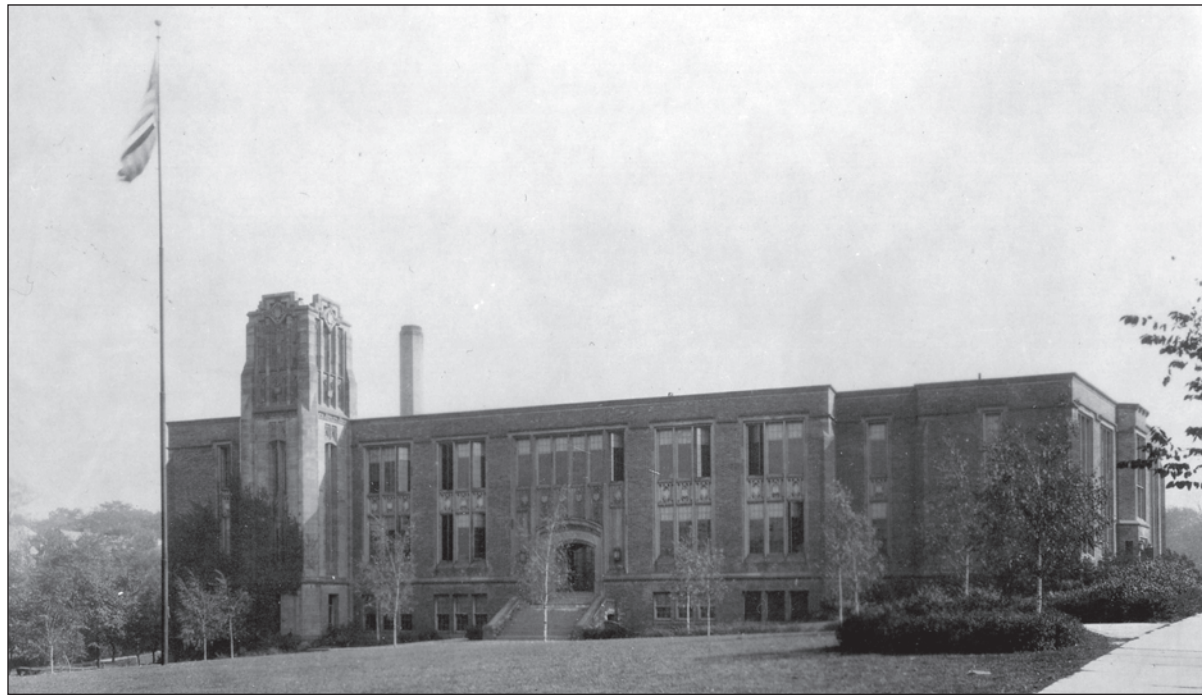


Figure 6. The original Coventry School.



Figure 7. The "new" Roxboro Elementary.



Figure 8. Taylor School, c., early 1950s.

programs, the asymmetry of Canterbury's design would be marred by future "eclectic" additions.

While Canterbury's design lacked other schools' architectural flourishes, Graham's designs for Roxboro and Monticello Junior Highs (Figure 10, page 9) gave the District two buildings whose clean lines, coupled with prominent entrances, means that

80 years after they were built, these buildings still epitomize academia. Monticello's arched entrance and Roxboro's Greek temple portico allow one to forgive later additions that mar these otherwise great buildings, as this new construction was kindly tucked behind the original buildings.

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