

## ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: The Original Hawthorne School

Elmhurst Public School, built in 1888, was on Cottage Hill Avenue between Arthur and Virginia Streets. The new schoolhouse was a source of pride for Elmhurst residents. An article in *The Elmhurst News* on January 6, 1894 described it as follows:

*Elmhurst is proud of her Public School, and justly so, for it would be a credit to a city ten times its size...Delegations of citizens visited all of the modern school buildings in Cook County, the best architects were employed, and the present handsome structure is the result...The rooms are provided with the most approved furniture and the best appliances for illustrating school work. Organs have recently been purchased for each of the school rooms, and a large library, suitable for all ages, is another excellent feature of the school which is bearing good fruit.*

In the 1890s, Elmhurst High School was established. At first there were a few rooms in the Public School House dedicated to high school students, but eventually an addition was built to house these classes. The Elmhurst Public School name was changed to Hawthorne School in 1910 when the school board was planning a second school (Eugene Field) for the district.



*Elmhurst Public School, circa 1900. P73.1.4*

On Wednesday, December 12, 1917 a fire destroyed the schoolhouse and its contents.

Fortunately, the fire was in the evening so no students or teachers were in the building. Also, it had snowed earlier in the night, which helped contain the fire to the premises.

Even while the fire burned, there was an announcement that all of the students should come to the Elmhurst Community House the next day at which time they would be informed of arrangements. In one day, the superintendent and teachers had secured space, books, desks, and supplies for the displaced students:

The high school met at the Elmhurst Community House  
The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades had rooms at Elmhurst College  
The younger grades met at Field School

At a specially called school board meeting at 10:30 p.m. on the night of the fire, the board authorized the superintendent to make all necessary expenditures for the resumption of schoolwork. School books were secured on Thursday from local book dealers and by telephone orders to Chicago. A bus route with several pick-up points was developed to transport the displaced students to Field School. School Superintendent Eisenman reported that the ability to open school with the loss of but one day was due primarily to the hearty cooperation of his teaching corps and to the relentless efforts of the Boy Scouts.

It was not an automatic decision to rebuild Hawthorne on the same site. In fact, the school board was unanimous in its decision to build the replacement school close to the intersection of Kenmore and Adelia – stating that it was closer to the center of the student population. A Protest Committee formed and there were many meetings, studies, petitions and articles in the newspaper. A second issue that complicated matters was what to do about the high school – keep it with the elementary school, build a separate high school in a new location, or make it a community high school drawing students from a larger area. Ultimately, High School District 88 was organized to address the new community high school, and School District 46 decided to rebuild Hawthorne on its original site.



*Hawthorne School following the fire, 1917. M2012.1.43*

On May 9<sup>th</sup> 1918 the school board signed a contract with Perkins, Fellows & Hamilton, an architectural firm in Chicago with extensive experience with school buildings. The school board followed the advice of Mr. Perkins, constructing a one-story building, a popular style at the time due to lower construction cost, superior lighting and flexibility of space. On September 2, 1919 the newly rebuilt Hawthorne School opened.

The first recorded indication of overcrowding conditions at Hawthorne School appeared on August 13, 1923 when the Superintendent asked the board, “Shall we continue holding classes in the Hawthorne auditorium or can the Board suggest a better classroom?” The board could not, so the classes continued to meet in the auditorium.

It is important to note that Elmhurst’s population tripled in the decade 1920-1930, so the school’s growth and expansion reflected that of the community.

In June 1925 the school board instructed E. Norman Brydges, an Elmhurst resident and an architect, to prepare an estimated cost for an addition to Hawthorne consisting of four additional rooms of two stories with necessary corridors together with an estimate on revamping of the heating plant for the entire building and possible additions. On April 14, 1926, E. Norman Brydges was authorized to proceed with plans for the addition to Hawthorne.



*Newly-rebuilt Hawthorne School, circa 1920. M88.53.4*

The new addition opened in January 1927. It was designated as a location for all 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Elmhurst, thus becoming Elmhurst Intermediate School, or a junior high school. It served in this capacity until 1950 when Elmhurst Junior High (later renamed Sandburg Junior High) opened on East St. Charles Road.

Just three weeks after the addition opened, the superintendent reported to the school board, “We opened our new rooms in the Hawthorne School on January 24. There was no conflict in the new schedule and the work has been progressing very nicely, but we are overcrowded and if many more new students enroll, we shall again be forced to use our auditorium as a classroom. There are now over 45 students in each of the seventh grade rooms.”

In March 1927, two months after the first addition to Hawthorne School opened, the school board directed an architect to prepare plans and specifications for another addition. This early history of Hawthorne School shows a pattern of student growth and building additions that has continued through the years, with a groundbreaking ceremony for a major addition at Hawthorne School on February 16, 2007.



*Hawthorne School, 1966. M2012.1.44*

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