Harbor Heights History 1953-1978

This is just a slice of Peninsula School District history, but it is a slice I fondly remember while spending my first of 16 years of my educational career at Harbor Heights School. I've known that the history of the public schools on the Peninsula is long, however, I've recently been reminded how long when I came across the list of former schools compiled by a friend, Joan Bassett. Joan created the list of schools and added some fascinating information about the schools. That information can be found in "Peninsula Bank-Notes of October 1974. Subsequently, I went to the historical museum and found out about more schools which existed here on the Peninsula and stories about their teachers and students.

I have thought for years that more school history should be documented and given to the museum for future interested folks to peruse. I will credit Rosemary Ross and Joan Storkman for getting me re-interested and doing something about it. I will begin with my own recollections and of course as much fact as possible, of the years I spent working for the Peninsula School District at Harbor Heights School before moving on to Discovery Elementary School.

Harbor Heights was originally constructed in 1953 on a wonderful site atop the hill overlooking Gig Harbor Bay. It has had a proud tradition of educating the children of Gig Harbor for over 50 years. It began by serving the children of the Croatian fishing families and Scandinavian farming families as well as many other early pioneer families. The property has since been sold and is the home of the Gig Harbor City Hall. The "new" Harbor Heights School has been relocated on 36th Street.

The school population was growing in the early 50's and the existing schools, Rosedale, Crescent Valley and Lincoln were aging and small. The idea to consolidate those schools into one was presented to the community and approved. Harbor Heights was constructed as an eight room school with the funds available. It housed 250 children in grades 1-4. Lincoln remained open to house 5th graders while the 6th graders attended Harbor Intermediate (Goodman) School. Stan Dahl was assigned as the principal of the new school while the teaching staff came from < st1:place>Rosedale and Crescent Valley schools. The charter members of the teaching staff were: Evalyn Miller and Maria Hageness, grade one, Thelma Cummings and Hetty Wilkinson, grade two, Ruth Little and Mary Skrivanich, grade three, Jean Eaton and Joy Pratt, grade four, Charl Blackwood, grade five. Malcolm Martin came in 1955 to teach grade six. Rudy Moller and Roger Iverson came to teach grade six between 1956 and 1959.

The school population continued to grow so almost as soon as Harbor Heights was constructed, an addition was in the planning stages. Once again the community accepted a bond proposal and several more rooms were added to the building. At this time Lincoln School (now the site of the Latter Day Saints Church) closed and the 5th and 6th grades began attending Harbor Heights.

In those years funds were always scarce for the essentials such as books, paper, and other teaching supplies. Likewise, money for custodial supplies, maintenance items and transportation was scarce. Money for building schools may have been even easier to obtain than supplies as the sale of state timber harvests was the source for new schools and the timber industry was thriving. Also, the school lunch program came into existence about this time and it too flourished because government food surplus's were funneled to schools and other public institutions.

Stan, as principal and the teachers who worked with him did a great job of presenting an exemplary program with their knowledge of teaching, their creativity, and hard work with what we would consider today minimal resources.

Stan was a happy, jovial person with a good sense of humor and a strong work ethic. He made parents and their children feel proud and comfortable in their school. He had strong parent support through the PTA and volunteer help. The teachers respected his leadership and the school's overall personality was a bright spot in our community. I will have to say that one of Stan's strongest traits was his resourcefulness. He could get supplies for maintenance and custodial needs through surplus outlets or through people he just knew.

An example of Stan's resourcefulness was his experience with trying to get curtains for the gym windows. The gym was used not only for P.E. but also for plays and films. The sun shone glaringly through the windows which were about 25 feet above the floor. He requested money for curtains several times and was turned down each time. Not to be defeated in his quest for curtains, Stan asked the maintenance supervisor, Morrie Campbell to see if he could find some dark material at the Boeing surplus facility to use as curtains. Morrie came in several days later with a couple of large black parachutes. Stan brought his wife's sewing machine to school, began measuring and sewing together black parachute curtains. Morrie at the same time constructed the curtain rods, hung them and was ready for the curtains. Stan finished his sewing and he and Morrie hung the curtains on the east side of the gym. Wonderful! So, they moved to the west side, hung the curtains and they were four feet short of coming together. Instead of bringing the curtains down to sew on four more feet, Stan took the sewing machine up the ladder, placed it on the window sill and sewed on four more feet of parachute under very precarious conditions. The curtains remained in use until the building was sold and razed in the late 1990's.

He felt the school and in fact the school district needed more young male and female teachers in the elementary schools. He would spend time at his alma mater, Pacific Lutheran College, talking to the professors to find the best young men and women to recruit and come to the Peninsula. Several of our excellent teachers can credit him with helping them find a way to this school district.

Stan was interested in many outside activities also. For instance, he acquired some rental homes in the Parkland area, where he spent most of his young life. He remodeled

and maintained them for an additional income. He also was interested in going into private business which is where I entered the scene and work experience with Stan.

I had begun teaching grade five at the district's newest School, Artondale in 1959 ,following a tour in the Marine Corps, college and marriage. I taught two years at Artondale and then requested a leave of absence for one year. I returned to college to complete my required 5th year of education which I included in a Master's program in School Administration. We returned to the Peninsula in1962 and I was placed at Harbor Heights to teach grade five and complete an Intern program under the tutelage of Stan Dahl.

Because all administrators seemed well established in this school district I began looking at other school districts which were advertising for principals. During the early spring of 1963 Stan came to me knowing I was beginning to interview with other districts and said, "Why don't you consider staying on with this district as I am retiring to go into the road striping business." I was surprised but immediately made an appointment with our superintendent, Harold Best. I applied for the position, was accepted and began a 15 year career as the new principal of Harbor Heights in September of 1963. I was 30 years old.

I will never forget my first year as the principal of Harbor Heights. The school at that time housed grades 1 through 6. There were 13 teachers, 10 of whom were veterans and 3 who were new to teaching. There was 1 custodian, 2 cooks and a ½ time secretary whose primary responsibility was to count the lunch program money. There was also a band teacher who came once or twice a week to teach 5th and 6th grade band. The county provided a visiting nurse who came once a month.

My office equipment and supplies consisted of a manual Royal ribbon typewriter, a telephone, an electric clock and bell system which was harder to set and learn about than some of my college classes. My desk and chair were oak and government surplus as were most of the teacher desks and chairs. My chair had coasters which I had to learn to balance without falling over backwards which actually happened to some school personnel who needed to make a call from the only private phone in the building.

The service area for Harbor Heights was huge. During those years, before 1970 when Purdy Elementary opened, the service area for Harbor Heights extended from the Kitsap County line along the waterfront including Pt. Richmond to the tip of the Gig Harbor sandspit. It also took in the roads all around Burley Lagoon and Wauna. The area included North Rosedale all along past Allen's Point, Rosedale Bay and follo wed Rosedale Street to Gig Harbor. Included also was all of Gig Harbor and south along Reid Road to the Narrows Bridge and then back to Gig Harbor following Highway 16. It crossed the highway to include the Midway area. I can remember several times taking sick children to their homes in Wauna and Goodman Drive almost to the county line. Our busses certainly put on many miles during their pick up and deliveries.

I was recently reminded about the size of our service area while having a conversation with Mrs. Beverly Johnson. The Johnson family had five boys and lived in Wauna. At

the time of this story only the two older boys were in school. One day they went to their bus stop but were too late and missed the bus. They returned home to tell their mother. Dad took their family's only car to work so mom said, "Well, you boys will have to walk to school." Harbor Heights was probably twelve miles from their home in Wauna. The boys took off walking and when they reached Purdy they asked someone to use their phone to call their mom and report where they were. She said, "Keep walking, you may get to school about the time to catch the bus home." They continued, however, she then called me at school to report what happened and where the boys were. I thought there are some dangerous stretches along the highway and the children would have to cross somewhere before Gig Harbor, so I went out and picked them up, took them to school and then called Mrs. Johnson. She thanked me while at the same time let me know that by walking all the way to school it would let them learn a good lesson about getting to the bus on time.

The teachers room held a couple of tables, chairs enough for 4 or 5 teachers, teaching supplies, a paper cutter, a new and electric ditto machine,(a step up from the crank machine used for many years prior), and a coffee pot.

Many of the teacher's supplies and textbooks were severely out of date. Many of the math, reading, language and social studies books had copyrights from the'30's and '40's. Fortunately that was about to change.

With the Russian spacecraft, Sputnik, successfully launched in 1959 a new emphasis on our country's education was beginning. Programs like the NDEA, (National Defense Education Act), NSF, (National Science Foundation), RIF, (Reading Is Fun), and others began bringing in Federal Funds to bolster and begin greater emphasis on math, science, reading, and social studies.

Because of the educational stir in our nation and the need to be accountable with the funds we were receiving, committees were developed to study the best ways to teach subjects and select materials. These were good times. The committees were made up of parents, teachers and administrators meeting regularly to study issues and deliver decisions to our school board for their approval. Several nationally noted educators came to our district to help with studies being done and offer suggestions. Teachers spent their summers taking courses to enhance their instruction. I recall Pat Stainbrook and Mary Skrivanich taking practically every reading improvement class ever o ffered at UPS and PLU.

We were fortunate to begin receiving additional monies for hiring teacher aides, playground supervisors as well as a full time secretary. We also in 1964 created the first elementary library in the district. We set aside a small storage room, probably 10'x10', put in shelves and on them we placed the few library books we had. We could also employ a library supervisor. We hired Rosemary Ross, a Gig Harbor native, an avid reader and one who had been employed by the Pierce County Library program. She stayed on in that position seeing a new library built at Harbor Heights and then moved on to Discovery Elementary School's library in 1978 to stay until she retired.

The later 60's also brought about other changes, namely social changes. Girls who when I began work at Harbor Heights wore modest dresses were now beginning to wear Levi's. I have to admit that their new attire was much more appropriate for PE and outside recess activities such as jump rope, swings, and running activities. A few girls with pierced ears and dangly earrings began showing up. We joked that they must be Gypsy children. The boys dressed about the same as they always had, however, hair lengths began to change. The Butch haircut was a thing of the past. The teacher's dress was a different story. Skirts became shorte r and some of the women teachers wore pant suits. Men abandoned neckties and sports coats for more casual wear. Once again I have to admit that the women's pant suits and men with more casual wear allowed them more freedom for PE, outside activities and sitting on the floor with student groups.

Most of the Harbor Heights children did well on their yearly achievement tests which of course pleased the students, the parents and staff. Our curriculum was strong in the basics and a few extras were added to enhance the children's experiences. Field trips were included as the budget allowed. Each teacher or grade had at least one or two yearly field trip experiences to such places as The Peninsula Gateway, The Minter Salmon Hatchery, The State Capitol, the Weyerhauser Lumber Mill in Enumclaw, several museums, and The Freedom Train, which was a traveling Smithsonian Museum exhibit stopping at Fort Lewis. National Scho ol Assemblies were also a school enhancement. We had visitors from the Space Administration, Indian Tribes, Classical music groups, singers from around the nation and world, police agencies, sports figures, medical experts and many more.

One of the greatest assets to our fifth grade curriculum was the inclusion of Outdoor Education. It was partially financed by the school district, but mostly by the parents of the fifth graders and fund raising activities by the teachers and children. The curriculum consisted of hands on activities which included reading, math, PE, science and a strong emphasis on social interaction with other children. This was a yearly highlight for the fifth graders. The staff planned yearlong for this activity. The adults included the fifth grade teachers, the PE teacher, music teacher, a nurse and perhaps some volunteers. Year upon year I can remember Jaime Storkman, Gary Huff, Budd Churchward, and Diana Bushnell being i nvolve d. I apologize for any names I have not included.

One subject that stands out as our greatest loss in the school district was the fifth grade band. Music, in my view, is essential in children's education. For many years the young fifth graders had the opportunity to learn clarinet, trumpet, coronet, drums, flute or saxophone. Then as they learned, they would move onto Middle School and High School culminating in a good musical experience as well as winning competitions in music around the state. It was a sad exclusion, lost because of budget priorities. A tone flute program was developed as a precursor to Middle and High School band but did not last for long.

When I began at Harbor Heights in 1963 the District's elementary schools were Evergreen, Vaughn, Artondale and Harbor Heights. By the 1970's the school population

continued to grow rapidly. In 1970 Purdy opened which was a blessing, however, the enrollment continued to grow so by 1975 we were beginning to think about the next school. We created a study group made up of teachers, parents, administrators. That committee created the educational specifications, (philosophy, building features, playground ideas) and delivered them to the School Board. Fo llowing the Board's acceptance, a bond issue was presented to the community and it passed. It was then decided to employ an architect to begin with the building plans. Because we were double shifting pupils at Purdy, Harbor Heights and Artondale we decided to create a new school and house the pupils in portable buildings on the site of Peninsula High School. This would be the sixth elementary school in the district. As an interim name it was titled Satellite #6. In the school we would house pupils from all three double shifting elementary schools from grades K through 4 until the ne w scho ol would open in 1981.

At this time I had been the principal of Harbor Heights for 15 years. I applied to the superintendent, Eugene Peters, for the position of principal of Satellite #6,(Later named Discovery) and was accepted. With that I will close this chapter of Harbor Heights history as I recall it from 1953 to 1978.

The names of the many teachers can be found with their pictures in the scrapbooks kept by the school's archivists. Pat Bujacich can be credited for her fine work in keeping up the scrapbooks through the 1960's and 70's.

The principals of the school cannot always be found in the photographic albums so I will list them and the dates they served at the school.

J. Stanley Dahl	September 1953-June 1963
Gary D. Williamson	September 1963-June 1978
David Southwick	September 1978-June 1986
Steve Aspden	September 1986-June 1989
David Trochim	September 1989-June 1995
Roy Okamoto	September 1995-Jan. 1996
Wendy Alexander	January 1996-June 1996
Nancy Grant	September 1996-June 1998
Leslie Rose	September 1998-Current

Those who taught at Harbor Heights during the years 1963 and 1978 were:

Teachers	Grades Taught	Years at School
Betsey Allen 1966-Till retirement	K	
Connie Anderson 1964-65	4	
Karen Attridge (Carlson) Discovery	6	1974-
Opal Bettis 1963-64	1	
Dianna Bushnell 1965-Till retirement	Sp Ed & gr 4	
Charlene Campbell 1968-74	6,5	
Lois Cassidy 1964-69	2	
Budd Churchward 1969-Till retirement	3,5	
Kathy Claiborne 1969-Discovery 78	4,K	
Thelma Cummings	2	1953? 1963-72
Gretchen Clarke (Kegebein) 1977-Discovery 78	1	
Jean Eaton 1963-Purdy 71	5	
Nancy Eaton 1967-Till retirement	1	
Susan Elston 1973-Discovery 78	3,K	
Myrtle Finholm 71	5,6	1963-
Ella Fosness 1963-76	3,4	
Linda Foster 1976-Discovery 78	Sp Ed,2	
Dan Franklin 1968-69	5	
Darlene Fuqua 1964-65	3	
Maria Hageness 1963-70	1	1953?
Toni Hara 1970-Present	K,2	
Trish Harter 1976-Discovery 78	K	

Linda Hibbard 3
1965-69
Susan Hostetter 1
1973-74
Gary Huff 4,5
1971-
Barbara James K
1966-70
Emma Javens 2
1966-68
Jerry Kennedy 5
1965-68
Mike Kent 6
1977-Overseas
Janice Knemeyer 5
1963-64
Susan Lampkin 3
1965-67
John Leverett 6,5
1963-73-Goodman
Evalyn Miller 1 1953?
1963-69
Joanne Miller (Saul) 2
1973- -Purdy
Flavia Moore 4
1975-
Mary Ann Palo K
1972-73
Roberta Palo 5
1975-76-Purdy
Diane Perkins (Gatto) 1
1971-73-Tacoma
Nancy Picinich 2
1969-Present
Ross Pomerink 6
1976- -Purdy
Joy Pratt (Darcy) 4 1953?
1963-75-School Board
Colleen Rayle K
1974-75
Joan Seifert 1
1970-71
Mary Skrivanich 3 1953? 1963-
Till retirement
Margaret Spadoni 1
1964-Deceased

Mary Lee Squires 2
1977-Deceased
Pat Stainbrook 3
1963-Till retirement
Jaime Storkman 5
1974-Discovery 78
Bob Swanson 6,5
1966-74
Dave Tarabochia 6
1977- -Key Peninsula
Bonnie Taylor 5
1976-Till retirement
Phyllis Tellari 2
1968-69
Phillip Wait (English Exchange) 6 1973-74-England
Larry Whitney 6
1966-73-Purdy
Hetty Wilkinson 2 1953?
1963-70
Cherie Williamson 2
1970- -Purdy

Special Education Teachers

Diana Bushnell
Janet Hine (Smith)
Linda Foster

Psychologists-Social Workers 1970s

Gale Livingstone
Kathy Bishop
Gisela Bertulis
Lyle Whitman
Jason Magit

Nurses

Marliss Swayze
Anne Biteman

Band

Bruce Brummond
Virg Kocher

Secretaries (Office Managers)

Nelda Langhelm 1953?
Marg Tarabochia 1963-77-Returned 9/78
Judy Delaney
1978-Discovery

Assistant Office Manager

Pat Bujacich
1978-Discovery

Teachers Aides

Barbara Carlson
Shirley Holman
Nancy Jerkovich
Anna Harkness
Jody Janovich
Debbie Hemley

Cooks

Hazel Pettis
Mildred Lofgren

Custodians

Elmer Wesserling
1953-1963
Harold Smith “Smitty”
1963-Till retirement
Ray Guthrie
Tom Hefner

Of all the personnel who worked at Harbor Heights over the years it is interesting how many have ties to early or pioneer families from the area. Below are listed those who come to mind.

Rosemary Land Ross, a Gig Harbor native, whose parents homesteaded on a farm in Rosedale.

Hetty Wilkinson whose family farmed off Rosedale Street and is now the site of Wilkinson Farm Park.

Mary Skrivanich, who married Martin, a direct descendant of a Croatian fishing family. Mary grew up on San Juan Island and I remember her telling me how when the family needed a doctors appointment they rowed their skiff to Victoria, BC.

Pat Bujacich, who married Jake, a direct descendant of a Croatian fishing family.

Nancy Jerkovich, daughter of Nick Jerkovich, also from a Croatian fishing family.

Jody Janovich, who also married into a Croatian fishing family.

Myrtle Finholm,a member of the pioneer Hunt family, married into the Finholm family who owned the first telephone company in Gig Harbor.

Ella Fosness, married into a pioneer family from the Cromwell area.

Nancy Picinich, married into a Croatian fishing family.

Marg Tarabochia, a Montana girl, married John, a descendant of a Croatian fishing family

Dave Tarabochia, son of Marg and John, is of Croatian descent.

Nelda Spadoni Langhelm, a daughter of the early Italian family who owned Spadoni Construction Company for many years in Gig Harbor.

Margaret Spadoni, who married Julius Spadoni, from the early Italian family and later became president of the Spadoni Construction Company.

Mary Lee Squires, daughter of Mary and Martin Skrivanich, a descendant of a Croatian family

Rudy Moller, a member of the early Moller family who settled along Sunrise Beach. The Mollers donated the property now known as Sunrise Beach Park.

THANK YOU

To the people who gave me the boost to follow my instincts that the rich history of the Public Schools on the Peninisula should be recorded before more of it has been lost. Those giving me the boost were Rosemary Ross and Joan Storkman. Also helping jog my fading memory were Mac and Norma Martin, Pat Bujacich, Dave Trochim, Steve Aspden, and Roy Okamoto. Further information came from Harbor Heights scrapbooks and photo albums, PTA archives and the Gig Harbor Historical Society.