

HISTORY OF NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

In 1867, the United States government sent Company A of the 10th Division to the Indian dugouts on the banks of the Little Arkansas to protect the cattle drives from Texas to Westport Landing. As the Army arrived, a small settlement began at the forks of the Arkansas River.

Two years later, William Finn, a surveyor, began teaching the first school of fourteen students in a dugout at what is now Twelfth and Jackson Streets. North now covers the very ground where those children played. Therefore, it is most fitting that North's design should be patterned after the art of the Indian, who unwittingly was the cause of the dugout school house being built.

As the population of Wichita grew, a high school became needed. To fulfill this need, the first Wichita high school was organized. In 1922, Wichita High School East was built; and in 1929, North was built.

As the planning for North began, three sketches were submitted to the Board of Education. These plans were Romanesque, Gothic, and American. The Board unanimously chose the Modern American style of architecture.

Bruce Moore, a graduate of Wichita High School, constructed small-scale plaster models of figures in the Indian and pioneer theme to be used on the exterior of the building. Full-sized figures were developed and arranged to tell a story of pioneer days. The Indian chief, scout, hunter, and teepee represent the Indians in the story; the buffalo, eagle, plowman, sunflower, and state seal symbolize the early pioneers of Kansas.

The building was constructed on a fifteen acre plot of ground which gradually sloped toward the river. The plans called for a large U-shaped structure with the base 230 feet long. One wing was to be 133 feet and the other wing, 255 feet.

The total cost of \$2,385,000.00 consisted of grounds at \$135,000.00 and building at \$900,000.00, while the cost of school equipment was \$250,000.00.

The typical classroom was built to accommodate 33-35 students. The gym, 72 x 120 feet, was planned to seat 2,500 spectators. The pool was built 60 feet long and 25 feet in width with room for 200 spectators at swimming and diving contests. The non-profit cafeteria was built to accommodate 700 students. The original building was built for 1,500 students, but several recent additions have made it possible to accommodate over 2,000.

North began with an enrollment of 800 students with Mr. Gover Dotzour as the first principal and a total of 40 teachers. Mr. O.E. Bonecutter followed Mr. Dotzour as principal and in 1945, Mr. C. E. Strange was named principal of North. Mr. Strange retired in 1968 and Dr. John Gasper was appointed principal. The enrollment in 1968-69 was 2,457 students which was the largest number of students ever to be in attendance at North. There were 104 teachers and 38 clerks, custodians, and cooks on the staff in 1968-69.

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During the first year of North, 18 clubs were organized; the student council, North Star, bookstore, and many other organizations were begun. The seniors' visit to the Tower became a tradition, and the first annual, the Tower, was edited. Archie McVicar, the first senior class president started the custom of "passing the paddle", which consists of the senior class president passing the ceremonial paddle to the junior class in hope that they will be wisely guided by it.

It has been said that North is the only high school in the United States that teaches canoeing in gym classes. As a result of this, the students convene on the banks of the Little Arkansas River in late spring to hold their annual water festival. This water festival has been written up in several magazines and has received nation-wide attention.

Meade Island, the island in the middle of the Little Arkansas River, has also been a symbol of North and early Kansas. Until several years ago, there was an Indian ceremonial lodge on the north end of the island. This ceremonial lodge was built by the Wichita Indians in 1928 and was fashioned after Father Juan Padilla's church, the first church in America.

The Minisa Bridge has the same style of design as North. This is the result of an idea of Mrs. Ethel Parker, an English teacher at North. When the city decided to build a new bridge over the river, Mrs. Parker suggested that it be constructed in a design similar to North. The city readily agreed, and Minisa Bridge was constructed to harmonize with the architecture of North. The name "Minisa", which means "Red Water at Sunset", was given by a professor at Wichita University.

Because of the growth of North's student body several new sections have been added to the original building. In 1950, the auto mechanics shop was opened; in 1951 the girl's gymnasium was added; and with the opening of the 1957 fall term, the large three-story extension of the south wing was used for the first time. It has been necessary to utilize a number of annexes with the first one being built to house the journalism classes, in 1950-51 two annexes were added; three additional portables were opened in 1955-56; two portables were built for use in 1968-69; and three more portables were added to be ready for occupancy for the 1969-70 school year for a total of 11 annexes to the main building.

It is not merely the unusual architecture and beautiful landscaping that make students proud to attend North, but it is the strength of wisdom and dignity that the students have upheld at North. The history of North is important to the students of today, because in it students can find many guides for the present and future. From the example of the past, plans and preparations for the future can be made.

Bob Boyer 1954
Marsha Kifer 1964
(Revised 1969)