

MEMORIES OF THE "NEW DHS": SEPTEMBER 1959

By Barbara Wernecke Durkin

As most of us are aware, our dear old DHS will soon be razed and an entirely new structure will replace it. The Powers That Be deemed the old building too decrepit and outdated to be worthy of restoration. "Out with the old and in with the new" is their cry, and so we who were the first class to attend that brand new high school all three years (fifty years ago!) will soon have no physical plant to remind us of the way we were. We must rely on pictures and words to keep our memories alive.

Class member **Jason Wetzel**, now a historian for the Army, was the first to bring this to our attention. He wrote a few letters to folks he knew would take notice, and suddenly there was a wave of nostalgia and accompanying emotion among many of us who continue to care about our alma mater and what it meant to us. Here are some bits and pieces of the exchange of e-mails that resulted from the news of the razing:

John Malagrín: *It's like the definition of a church-- a church is not the building at which the worshippers congregate, but "the church" are the worshippers themselves, no matter where they congregate. In the same manner, while we will have fond memories of the old school building, the new one that takes its place will in no way diminish the memories and glory of the Class of 1962 because the Spirit of the Class of '62 will live on regardless of what type of school building sits where we once attended. So, what I am saying is that we have no reason to mourn. The tearing down of the old school building cannot wipe away the class of '62. As long as we live, the class of '62 lives on, and even beyond the time when all of us are gone. The Spirit of the Class of '62 is eternal.*

Jason Wetzel responds: *Since I am an avowed sentimentalist, historian, non-rational, illogical member of the Greatest Class, I view the world through green and gold colored glasses. A sense of place is very important to me. I cannot help but mourn the passing of my old friend, DHS. Yes, I am in a small minority who need to see and touch things of the past, in order to help connect to those people and memories of long ago. [But] this is all a moot point. DHS will be reduced to dust. We cannot change the tsunami of "modernization".*

To me, [just as] Baltimore has never been the same since the Baltimore Colts were stolen, Dundalk, for me, will never be the same without OUR Dundalk High School.

We asked for letters from the Class of '62, short memoirs of that special day when we first saw our new school. We'd like to share some of them with you today, and hope to continue to bring you more of these as they come trickling in.

Here's our first remembrance, by **Jason Wetzel**:

I remember in 1958, a slide presentation in the auditorium of the North Point Annex Junior High (the Old Sparrows Point High School) telling all of us how great and wonderful the new school would be. I remember riding my bike to see the new school as it was being built. There was a huge sea of mud with steel girders and construction equipment. Excitement was mounting. A new and great adventure awaited.

On the first day of school, the water in the drinking fountains was heated by the late summer sun to a point where one could brew tea. I remember how fresh, shiny, and bright our new school was. I can still smell the pencil sharpeners with their #2 pencil shavings. The fragrance of chalk dust, new books, and floor polish are in my memory still.

But what I remember most is not the bricks and mortar, but the kids and our laughter. The thunderous cheering at our games echoes to this day.

Ginny Beard Gray writes:

Entering the awesome halls of the brand new DHS as a sophomore that September of 1959, I was afraid I might get lost between classes in the maize of hallways. Sure enough, the third day of school I was sent from class to deliver a message to another teacher, only to become hopelessly lost. Fear took over. I was so rattled I couldn't even remember which class I was trying to get back to, much less the teacher's name. The office had to pull my schedule to send me back from whence I had come.

Barbara Wernecke Durkin says:

*Jackie Rainey and I took the famous Blue Bus from Inverness and then trudged up the hill to see the new school in August of '59. The building was surrounded by red clay dirt, and we were joking about how we were just exchanging one color of grime (we had gone to the Annex for three years and had been daily sprinkled with black dust!) for another. We couldn't believe how huge it seemed—overwhelming. As we pranced around in our white pleated skirts, crop tops and white sneakers, we felt awed and a bit scared, especially when we saw the girls' locker room and shower areas. Gads. Phys. Ed. would be **serious** here. And we knew without a doubt that we would never get to class on time in a building this immense.*

Roy Sparks adds:

As a student in tenth grade, it's not the school, but rather the special teacher I fondly remember, George Jones.

Many of my classmates will not even remember his name. Why? Mr. Jones was the "quiet" high school electronics teacher of Industrial Arts. So, you had to be a male and taking classes in the Industrial Arts wing-- that would be the southern part of the school.

I completed three years of electronic classes with Mr. Jones and continued studies in electronics at Baltimore Junior [now Community] College, then worked as an intern at two Westinghouse locations. I transferred to the University of Maryland at College Park and earned a teaching degree. I returned to DHS for one semester, six years after I left the school as an 18-year-old "kid" to be under the wing of George Jones to complete my student teaching assignment.

George Jones passed away in February of 2008 living at the Oak Crest community in Baltimore. He was a friend and mentor and will always be the one thing I especially remember about my first day of high school classes.

Here's a True Confession from **John Schroeder**:

The weekend before the new DHS opened was Labor Day weekend. (Remember, we always started school the Tuesday after Labor Day). That weekend my cousin Paul Taber (DHS class of '61) and I rode our bikes to the new school to make sure we could find it on Tuesday, September 8. I walked over to Admiral Blvd. that A.M. and Paul and I walked to the brand new school. I seem to remember it was kind of crazy with mud everywhere. I guess I wasn't very

impressed. I "hooked " school 16 days in the 1st 45 day grading period with my St. Helena hoodlum friends.

At the end of the 1st grading period basketball practice started. That gave me a reason to go to school. I have often thought that had it not been for basketball, who in the world knows where and how I would have ended up?

Here are some excerpts from **Bill Hellier's** long but wonderful letter:

What an interesting day to be asked to recollect, remembering that our first day at the brand new high school occurred fifty years ago! Getting up in the morning and hiking from Plainfield and German Hill Roads to school and then hiking back seemed like nothing at the time. Given my present love of the outdoors and my propensity to take five mile hikes to stay in shape for deer season, it still seems like a short stroll.

The first day was memorable, meeting my new classmates and teachers and learning where everything from the cafeteria to the locker room was. Then, as now, funding for schools was somewhat of a problem. We had to wait a while for our own track, football field, and separate auditorium. The view from some of the classrooms was terrific, being able to look at the Matheson Building and other features. By the way, I can still wear my Varsity sweater, with the big gold Ds and stars.

We loved receiving these letters full of memories, and would really enjoy seeing more of them. Please send yours to me at: bwdurkin@rochester.rr.com.