

## Chapter 5: School Days

It wasn't long before the borough council saw that it must address another growing need --that for community schools.

Prior to 1892 children were educated in one-room school houses, like Patton Township's Brinton School located at the bottom of Haymaker Road. In 1892 a two-story wooden school was opened on 8<sup>th</sup> street, and operated until 1894 when the Pitcairn School Board was formed. The new school board immediately began school construction.

In 1896, Pitcairn School Number 1 was dedicated. This Gothic-style red-brick building had six classrooms and Professor Howard Welsh was the first principal. Eventually this building was to become Pitcairn's Borough Building. Graduates of the Pitcairn School often completed their education by traveling to Turtle Creek or Wilkinsburg for High School.



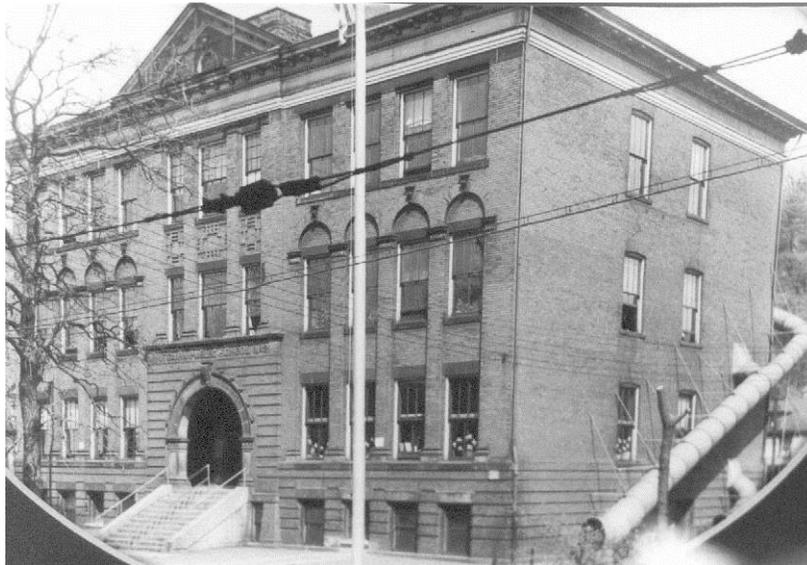
**23. Pitcairn's First School Built in the 1890s**

In 1906, Pitcairn Number 2 was built on Agatha Street. This three-story, red brick building containing 12 rooms was used as an elementary school. It was followed by a new school directly across the street -- Pitcairn Number 3. Built in 1916, it was the town's first High School. A large two-story building with 18 classrooms, it was the first fire-resistant school in the area

**Don Fails** came from a family of educators and taught for many years in the Pitcairn Schools. Mr. Fails remembered...

"In 1916 they built the building that later became Pitcairn Elementary School. It was one of the first fire-proofed school buildings in the country and was advertised as such. Prior to that, right across the street, a second building was built. It was noticed that it had tubes that came down the outsides of the building. They were for fire escapes. You climbed into those, you slid down to the bottom, and hopefully someone caught you.

The senior high school boys were asked to go over and be catchers in that process, particularly when the 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls were coming down. The teachers thought they were taking advantage of the situation."



**24. The 1916 School Had Outside Fire Escape Tubes**

Pitcairn High School students, known as the “Railroaders” took pride in their school. Throughout the years those who grew up in the Pitcairn schools gathered together to recall their school days.

**Bob Closson** (Class of 53) who later went on to found a successful printing business, recalled his schools days in the 40s and 50s.

“My first grade teacher was Grace Evans. Miss Evans was a short, robust woman.. She always wore a black dress. She had a kind face with a quick smile, but was always in command of her class. I had a bad stuttering affliction. After class when we were alone, she would sit by my desk and have me read to her. Little by little I gained enough confidence in myself that the speech defect disappeared. It was her experience and love of children that caused her to take the time to work with me.

The next teacher who impacted my life was Miss Hockenberry, my fourth grade teacher. Yes the lean, mean, teaching machine whose love of music and math I still remember. Oh yes., and I remember having to recite poetry in fifth grade poem. Mrs. Clinton was a big woman with a great desire to be in charge, and was she ever! To this day I can visualize her in front of the chalk board with the pointer in hand. No one dared talk back because that pointer would be coming down the aisle in your direction with Mrs. Clinton right behind it. But...we learned and we learned well.

And who could not remember the sixth grade dance? What a great event it was. The event of the year. This is the age when the hormones in the boys were starting to kick in and the girls were having a great time with it. Patsy Hill was my escort. I had an ill-fitted suit given to me by my uncle. I was really shy and it took all I could do to muster up enough courage to ask Patsy to go. She was my first crush. I don't remember if flowers were need for the dance, but I know I wouldn't have had the money for them. The dance was held in the gym that had been decorated for the occasion. I remember holding Patsy and trying to move my feet and listen to the music and smell the sweet smell of my favorite girl. My shyness increased as the years went on. I don't think I had another date throughout my school years. I still remember Patsy with fondness.



### 25. "High School Meant Having Great Friends"

High school meant having great friends and sharing some of the experiences that growing boys have. Memories...getting together at Grimm's Drug Store and slurping cokes...talking about girls and what we were going to do after graduation.

Pitcairn isn't a town I would have picked for a hometown if I had my druthers, but as hometown go it really wasn't bad. Memories of the town include whistles and noise from the railroad, dirt being blown around from all the steam locomotives and passing trains. It was a busy town during the war. Every person I knew spent a goodly part of the time down Broadway either shopping or having a beer at one of the many watering holes that we called beer joints.

I don't know why I hold such fondness for this town, but I do. I don't live so far away that I can't drive up and down the streets looking for someone I recognize. Most of what I remember is mine, and no one else is interested in having it shared with them. I think it's part of growing old."



**26. "I don't know why I hold such fondness for this town"**

But we must inevitably leave our schools behind as we grow up. Still, those memories linger as so much a part of our lives. **Shirley Mueller Dahlstrom**, an alumna of Pitcairn School who reflected on growing up in Pitcairn:

*"A couple of years ago, in Pitcairn for a meeting, I had occasion to park my car on Center Avenue near my Grandmother Mueller's house. I felt a wave of nostalgia just walking down that street...and that feeling of 'walking the streets of Pitcairn' continued to make me feel good. Looking back to my childhood I think of how good I felt going to school each day. Lunchrooms were unheard of, and we all walked home for lunch...Friendships grew in school...we were a happy bunch of kids who were part of a very unique community.*

*A few years ago at one of my class reunions we had a get-together the night before at the American Legion in Pitcairn. There was so much joy and happiness there that the room just glowed."*

In 1955, Monroeville and Pitcairn merged their schools to form a jointure. The new school board planned the construction of Gateway Senior High school which opened for the 1958-59 school year. The Monroeville-Pitcairn Joint Schools became the Gateway Union School District in 1960, and a final name change to Gateway School District occurred in July 1965 with the at-large elections of all school directors.

Sometime after the formation of the jointure with Monroeville schools in 1955, the Pitcairn High School building was re-designated as an elementary school of the newly formed Gateway School District. In 2011, the building was closed and then transferred to the community of Pitcairn. It would later emerge as a Charter School.



27. A Class at Pitcairn High