

HAMBURG HISTORY

A special section contributed by Mr. Daniel Barr on behalf of the Hamburg Historical Society



Hamburg School History (Part 2)

Hamburg High School was formed in 1905, 7 years prior to the construction of the high school building. The first graduation class held their commencement exercise on June 14th, 1906 and consisted of 4 students, Lesler B. Doland, Lester M. Drew, William A. Strait, and Harry E. Watt. Their graduation ceremony was held at the Baptist Church. The graduations were held at the church every year until the Gym was built, except for 1936 when the church was destroyed by fire. That graduation was held at Franklin High School.

The high school was built in 1911 and opened officially in 1912 with 76 students enrolled. Students came from Hamburg, Hardyston, Franklin, and Vernon. The building was built by Jonathon Dymock & Son. The Dymock home is now the present Weichert Realtors. Dymock built many of the beautiful Victorian homes still seen around town. Hamburg High School was the second high school in Sussex County, the first being Newton. Franklin wanted to build a high school, but the state decided our county was too small for a third high school, so when Franklin opened it was strictly a vocational school.

In the lobby of Hamburg School is an old iron school bell. That was the original bell that hung in the tower of the old white school building. That bell was rung every morning to call students to school. It was also rung to call students back from lunch or recess. It is believed that bell was replaced by a larger one around 1924. The original bell was placed in storage until brought out by Dr. Kane and displayed proudly in the lobby. The larger bell was dismantled at the time of the demolition of the white building in 1963 and was presented to the borough. It is now displayed in the council meeting room at the municipal building.

The gym was completed in 1940. Athletic events were held at various locations around town prior to the existence of our gym. A building on Card St., and the parish hall of the Church of the Good Shepard on Wallkill Ave. was used for events such as basketball games. The Idle Hour Theater on Main St. was the location for dances and proms. As mentioned earlier, graduations were held at the Baptist Church. In 1936, the year of the church fire, Gov. Harold G. Hoffman was the guest speaker. The class of 1940 was the first to graduate in our gym. In the 68 years since its construction, the gym has undergone some improvements, but has remained mostly unchanged. Many older residents will remember the original parquet floor which would buckle up in spots depending on the weather. When playing basketball you always had to be aware of where the humps were so you wouldn't stumble. The stage has remained the same over the years. Many graduations have been held on that stage over the years, including Kindergarten, 8th grade, high school, and now the Junior Police Academy. Plays and presentations are still a main stay of that stage. A student performing today is performing on the same stage as some of their parents and in some cases their grandparents. It is safe to say that the Hamburg Gymnasium has been one of the most important structures in our town's history.

There is still so much more to write about our historic school and its buildings, that I will continue it next month.