

Warren G. Harding Elementary School, Hammond, Indiana



This history of Harding School was prepared for a reunion of the members of the Harding class that began kindergarten in 1946. The reunion was to honor their kindergarten teacher, Miss Jean Jordan, who taught at Harding from 1935 until 1976, and who was still living at the time of the reunion in 1997.

Warren G. Harding School opened on January 4, 1927, in a frame building at 3107 Cleveland Street on 19.1 acres of land in the Hessville section of Hammond, Indiana. It replaced the temporary Gibson School founded in 1922.

Mr. A. O. Reed served as the first principal there and at Hessville School (originally located in the 2700 block of 169th Street, and now known as "The Little Red School House" in Hessville Park.) Harding School had six teachers and 188 children in kindergarten through grade 5.

In 1928 Miss Anabel Norton became the acting principal of the eight room school. It continued to grow and in 1930-31, a wing was added to the south end of the building. In 1933 a sixth grade class and a gym were added. In 1938 Miss Dorothy McLaughlin assumed the duties of principal, a position which she held until 1960.

The student body continued to grow to the point that in 1946 grades

3, 4, 5 and 6 were put on half day programs. The gym was divided into classrooms, and in September 1947 all the children returned to a full day schedule.

In 1948 the cornerstone was laid for the new brick building on the northeast corner of 165th Street and Parrish Avenue. When it opened, the brick building was fully occupied and the old frame building still housed two 5th grade classes, three 6th grade classes and two 7th grade classes.

On February 22, 1950, the Parrish School in Hessville burned, and those students were moved to Harding on March 1. No students were injured in the fire, but almost all the students lost their winter coats and school supplies. The students stayed at Harding until April 17, 1952, when they returned to their new school, Lee L. Caldwell School.

In 1953, three fourth grade classes from Porter School attended Harding in the frame building. Then, the Eastgate subdivision opened in 1954 and enrollment climbed. In 1955 the Porter children left Harding. In 1956 a thirteen room addition was begun to the brick building. In 1958 all the rooms were occupied in both the brick and frame buildings and two classes were being transported to Porter. In 1959 a three room portable was moved from Morton and placed by the frame building. When Miss McLaughlin died in 1960, Mr. Richard French was appointed principal of Harding. In 1961 a second addition to the brick building was begun. The plans for the building called for a gymnasium, a multipurpose room, and more needed classrooms. At that time, four classes were still being transported to Porter School.

In 1963 four classes were being transported to Porter and two to Jefferson. This was the year that ended mid-term classes in Hammond. In 1964, enrollment was still going up with five classes to Porter and three to Jefferson. In September 1964 twelve mobile units were moved onto the playground by the frame building. These were fully occupied.

In 1965, Harding students went to school for one half day until the end of October when Miller School opened. Then, 725 students were moved to Miller. When the new Morton High School opened in September 1967 at 169th Street and Grand Avenue, students from grades 6, 7, and 8 at Harding began attending the old Oliver P. Morton School at 7040 Marshall Avenue.

In the summer of 1967, the Harding mobile units and the portable were moved to various schools. The original frame school with its wooden floors, antiquated lighting, drafty windows, and other worn out or obsolete features, was razed. The lilac bushes were transplanted to the grounds around the brick building.

In 2007 a new elementary center was opened next to the old brick building; and, that old brick building that was constructed in three stages from 1948 to the early 1960s was demolished.