

# Wellsville Local Schools: A History

By Aaron Bunfill

The Wellsville Local School system has a long and elaborate history. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, numerous buildings were used to conduct classes for the students of Wellsville including log cabins and churches throughout the area as the village was being established. In the early 1850's, the state of Ohio passed a law making school attendance mandatory, which led to the construction of the Union High School building on 6<sup>th</sup> and Washington Streets. Numerous buildings about town were used to accommodate the primary and intermediate grade levels.

The Central High School building was constructed in 1875 under longtime superintendent James L. MacDonald. The building was a three-story structure located on 9<sup>th</sup> street where the former MacDonald Elementary School still stands. This building accommodated all students in grades one through twelve for a time.

As the population grew, so did the need for more adequate room for the young students of Wellsville. In the 1880's, plans were made for a West End building, which was later constructed on 18<sup>th</sup> street. It is presently the parking-lot and playground area beside Covenant Presbyterian Church. It was used for students in the elementary grades on that end of town. In the 1890's, an East End building was constructed. The school was later named McKinley School and resided on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Lisbon Street where McDonald's restaurant is presently located. Yet again, more room for Wellsville's elementary-aged pupils was needed in the first decade of the new century which led to the construction of an additional building in the West End in 1906 to coincide with the previously built structure. Both buildings came to be known as Garfield School. They were connected via an underground tunnel so that students and staff could easily access both structures despite weather conditions. The older structure contained four classrooms (two on each floor) and the newer structure contained six rooms, along with an addition in the back which housed the third grade classrooms for many years.

In 1917, as the population continued to grow in Wellsville, a new high school was constructed on Center Street. The Central School on 9<sup>th</sup> Street was renamed MacDonald School in honor of Superintendent James L. MacDonald and continued to accommodate students in grades one through eight. Garfield and McKinley housed students in the lower grades, but the junior high aged students were consolidated to MacDonald School.

Superintendent Seward E. Daw came to Wellsville in 1921, briefly after the new high school was opened. He would serve as superintendent for 40 years before a tragic automobile accident claimed his life in 1961. Known as "Dr. Daw", he was well known for authoring his own Speller along with an elementary reading series.

In the mid-late 1930's, a gymnasium addition was added to the high school along with additional classroom space for home economics and the growing music program. The gymnasium was constructed alongside the school and named Beacom Gymnasium after Bryron D. Beacom. At that time, the annex cost \$100,000 and was dedicated in 1939. It is of interest to note that the

former gymnasium which the school used prior to Beacom is the present day cafeteria in what is now Daw Elementary.

In the early 1950's, under the leadership of Daw and the school board, plans were made to modernize and reconfigure the Wellsville City Schools. In 1954, a new junior high was built adjoined to the high school building. It served students in grades seven and eight, along with special education students and was named Daw Junior High in honor of the superintendent. The old MacDonald building was then razed and a new K-6 building was built in its place, complete with a new gymnasium, twelve standard classrooms, and a kindergarten room. The building opened in the fall of 1956. A listing of teachers at that time are as follows: Kindergarten- Mrs. C. Wilson; 1<sup>st</sup> grade- Mrs. G. McIntosh and Mrs. W.J. MacDonald; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade- Mrs. M. Lloyd and Mrs. L. Dash; 3<sup>rd</sup> grade- Mrs. M. Somers and Mrs. M. H. Hepp; 4<sup>th</sup> grade- Miss R. Pierce and Mrs. I. Bennett; 5<sup>th</sup> grade- Mrs. R. Fisher and Mrs. R. Simpson; 6<sup>th</sup> grade- Miss H. Beaumont and Mrs. M. Merriman; music- Mrs. L. Lawton; principal- Mr. J. Mackov.

In 1959, the Hillcrest-Fairview School was absorbed into the City Schools. It was formerly a county school. This brought the city's elementary school count to four (Garfield, MacDonald, Fairview, and McKinley.) Also, there was the parochial school Immaculate Conception which served enrolled Catholic students through grade 8. It was located where the parish's parking-lot is presently.

During the late 1960's, McKinley School was closed. Immaculate Conception followed which helped lend support to again revitalize the schools. McKinley students were absorbed into MacDonald. A new levy was passed which funded construction of a new Garfield building on Lincoln Avenue (formerly the Harmon playground) and a new annex building for Fairview. The old Garfield buildings on 18<sup>th</sup> Street were razed. The new buildings opened in 1972. The Fairview teachers were at that time as follows: Kindergarten- Miss B. Thomas; 1<sup>st</sup> grade- Mrs. M. Swearingen; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade- Mrs. C. Glazer; 3<sup>rd</sup> grade- Mrs. A. McDole; 4<sup>th</sup> grade- Miss M. Beatty; 5<sup>th</sup> grade- Mrs. G. Baldwin; 6<sup>th</sup> grade- Mr. D. Fisher; and principal- Mr. C Wilfing. The Garfield teachers were: Kindergarten- Mrs. C. Wilson; 1<sup>st</sup> grade- Mrs. K. Little and Mrs. D. Nelson; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade- Miss J. Van Dyke and Mrs. N. Morris; 3<sup>rd</sup> grade- Mrs. C. Zelasko and Mrs. G. Grimm; 4<sup>th</sup> grade- Mrs. A. Mathess and Mr. D. Ewing; 5<sup>th</sup> grade- Mrs. L. Weekley and Mr. W. Cunningham; 6<sup>th</sup> grade- Mr. W. Watson and Miss D. Nelson; principal- Mr. S. Linger.

In the 1970's Wellsville had a strong reputation throughout the area due to its winning basketball team, under the coaching leadership of Mr. Robert Dawson. *The Big Orange Machine* became synonymous with the city and its successful winning streak. In the fall of 1994, the high school football team went down in history as the town's first undefeated team until their loss in the state play-offs at Massillon.

Another successful levy was passed in 1996 for the school district (now known as Wellsville Local Schools.) This led to the construction of a new high school which opened in 2001. This again led to a period of reconfiguration within the schools. The old high school/ junior high complex on Center Street became Daw Middle School for grades 5-8. For a few years, the district still housed grades K-4 at Garfield and MacDonald along with grades 1-4 at Fairview.

Fairview Elementary was closed in 2003 and its students absorbed into MacDonald Elementary. In 2005, the schools were reconfigured once more with the closing of MacDonald Elementary School on Center Street. All primary grades K-3 were moved to Garfield, Daw began to accommodate grades 4-8, and the new high school continued to serve students 9-12.

Recently, in 2014, junior high aged students in grades seven and eight from Daw Middle School were moved to the high school building. The high school became known as Wellsville Junior/Senior High School and Daw Middle School was changed to Daw Elementary.

The Wellsville Local Schools currently operates three schools which are Garfield Elementary, Daw Elementary, and Wellsville Junior/ Senior High School. The school district prides itself on obtaining high standards in all areas including academics, athletics, and the arts. Go Tigers!!