Histories of Newark
1758 - 2008
Histories of Newark
1738 - 2008

This limited edition of one thousand copies is published through the Office of the Mayor of Newark, Delaware, and the Delaware Heritage Commission. Twelve deluxe copies numbered 1 through 12 are bound in leather with a slipcase and include printed ephemera relating to this project along with a British half-sterling minted in 1758 showing the profile of King George II on the front and the crowned shield cruciform and date on the back.

This is copy number .........
To Vance Funk, III
who was in the right place at the right time.

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Histories of Newark
1758 - 2008

SEVENTY-FIVE STORIES ABOUT
Newark, Delaware,
AND ITS CITIZENS

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Wallflowers Press
Newark, Delaware
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Preface

According to my Funk & Wagnalls Dictionary— I was never allowed to use a Webster’s Dictionary— a preface is a statement dealing primarily with the purpose and scope of the publication. This publication is not your typical anniversary book. It not only traces the history of the City of Newark, it also places a lot of emphasis on special events, buildings and persons within the city. The book is intended to provide a personality and reflect a sense of community here in our town. It has been a long time since the history of the City of Newark has been written and hopefully it will not be another one hundred years before the next one is published.

History has always been very important to me, especially since I come from a family who arrived in Philadelphia in 1717. My relatives were Quakers and quickly migrated to Lancaster, Pennsylvania only to be banished to the Shenandoah Valley because they took up arms during the Revolutionary War.

We citizens of Newark are extremely proud of our history, which began when King George II proclaimed Newark a marketplace in the colony of Delaware. Various folktales exist that attempt to explain how we came to be called Newark. I know of three: Newark was similar to a city in Great Britain known as Newark-on-the-Trent. The first formal recognition of Newark came in 1758 when King George II granted permission for a semi-annual fair and market. In 1852 Newark received an official town charter from the Delaware General Assembly. In 1887 the village of Christiana for business dealings and it was suggested that the crossroads near the White Clay Creek be named Newark. The third theory is that Newark refers to the New Covenant, reflecting the early religious faith of those who settled here in the time of the Great Awakening.

Newark in 1683. Hollingsworth’s son Henry inherited the New Wark homestead and purchased land in Maryland near the present-day city in 1712. Henry and his sons traveled through the town to the important port village of Christina for business dealings and it was suggested that the crossroads near the White Clay Creek be named Newark. The third theory is that New Ark refers to the New Covenant, reflecting the early religious faith of those who settled here in the time of the Great Awakening.

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Histories of Newark: An Introduction

Histories of Newark is a community history project drawn from the contributions of volunteer citizens and neighbors from all walks of life. More than two years ago, academics, weekend scholars, civic-minded boosters, and simple lovers of local history heeded Mayor Vance Funk’s call for residents to write a long-overdue update to the only “recent” history of Newark, Francis Cooch’s 1936 Little Known History of Newark, Delaware, and Its Environs. Led by Paul Bauernschmidt, Mayor Funk’s appointed project director, a group of volunteers met monthly to collect text and images for the new history, envisioned to be a cornerstone of the city’s 250th anniversary celebration in 2008. Many of these meetings ended with inevitably nostalgic “remember when” conversations, but the working group made progress by following Bauernschmidt’s plan to adapt a content outline based on Delaware: A Guide to the First State, which was a Depression-era Federal Writers Project conducted under the auspices of Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration. As with that 1938 publication, which was drawn from the research and writing of nearly one hundred Delawareans, this new history of Newark is drawn from the contributions of many, many citizens. Accordingly, the reader will notice a wide variance in scholarship, citation style, and voice from chapter to chapter, not to mention dated language and perspectives when historic sources are quoted.

The reader also will notice the unavoidable omission of any number of personal names, organizations, places, or events that have been part of Newark’s rich past. Discussing this problem, the working group unanimously agreed on a title for the collective project, Histories of Newark, i.e., the group realized that there can be no definitive History of Newark until all citizens have contributed their own stories. The spirit of the community, though, is captured in the creative design and citizen photography of Ray Nichols and Jill Cypher, proprietors of Wallflowers Press. In the tradition of Cooch’s Little Known History of Newark, which was printed in 1936 in Newark at Everett Johnson’s Press of Kells, Wallflowers Press is a fine printing and letterpress establishment flourishing in our city today.

With snapshots of Newarkers running in a ribbon through the book, Histories of Newark stands as a wonderfully literate time capsule from our 250th anniversary. It will allow future readers to remember our beginnings, understand our landscapes, and gain an appreciation for the character of a large municipality that still cherishes neighborhood charm in traditions such as Community Day and Newark Nite. Contributors to this project tried to capture the essence of Main Street, Newark government, the city economy, the various civic, cultural and religious institutions, and even the ways of looking at the world that typify Delaware and the city of Newark.

We strongly hope that every reader will be encouraged to record the words, pictures and physical things that provide evidence of the past for the simple satisfaction that it will bring in the future.

One special story is worth noting. Jane Woolsey (above and far right with three colleagues from the Post House) received an anonymous letter in the mail (shown above) with a news clipping about our citizen photographs. If anyone ever wonders what small town America is about, it is in that letter. It is in Newark.

The citizen photos deserve a bit of an explanation. We were several months into the book before the idea came up. One of the things we wanted to bring to the book was humanity. We thought it would be great to have every family photo album available to make the story of Newark the story of its people. But that turns out to be nearly an impossibility. Also in a book like this, there is usually no room for the present. We’re filled 180 pages telling the story of the city’s first 250 years. In order to find a way to include the past and at the same time include something of the present, we came up with the citizen band. We set up a photo studio with a white seamless background. For six consecutive Fridays and Saturdays we invited townspeople, families, dogs, strollers, motorcycles, bicycles, skateboards, and objects to be included in a one-inch-high band that would run from the first page of the histories through the last. As best we could count there are 3,707 people included. This amounts to about one of every seven citizens. A few sneaked in more than once and we loved how they would bring new groups of friends each time.

This book is full of stories, both written and unwritten.

Sincerely,

L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin
Newark, Delaware
June 2007

The Citizen Photos

March 30 - June 2, 2007

We strongly hope that every reader will be encouraged to record the words, pictures and physical things that provide evidence of the past for the simple satisfaction that it will bring in the future.

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Jill Cypher & Ray Nichols
Wallflowers Press
November 2007
In 1893-1898

BEGINNINGS, 1893-1898

Originally called the Newark Public School, the institution that would become Newark High School has existed in four different incarnations at four different sites since 1869. This makes Newark one of the oldest continuously running public high schools in the state of Delaware. The first incarnation of what later became Newark High School was located on 83 East Main Street in downtown Newark. The building itself belonged to the United School District and was erected by the town in 1864 at the cost of $10,000. With no lights and heated by a steam boiler, the two-story, four-room school house was intended to provide the existing primary school with more “modern” facilities (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Newark, 1865). When the structure was built in the late nineteenth-century, a student who wished to pursue an education past the eighth grade would have had to move to nearby Wilmington or attend a private school, like the nearby Newark Academy, in order to accomplish that.

That quickly changed, however, when the district decided to begin “college preparation” courses on the second floor of the structure in the early 1890s. The first graduating class consisted of just nine students in 1893, nearly matching the amount of faculty members who taught there at the time—five (Newark Post, 2). Foreshadowing the continuous growth that would take place in the city during the twentieth century, the conditions began to get cramped at 83 East Main Street with nearly 185 students from first through twelfth grade crammed into such a limited amount of space. It was then decided in 1898 that the older, high school-aged students would move to a larger facility down the street, while the primary students would remain at 83 East Main Street.

NEWARK PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL, 1898-1925

The new incarnation, the Newark Public High School, opened its doors as a separate institution for the first time in 1898 at the recently vacated Academy of Newark Building at the corner of Main and Academy streets in Newark. The previous tenant, a private school called the Newark Academy, had closed the previous year due to financial troubles. The building itself was originally home to the similarly named Academy of Newark, a predecessor to the University of Delaware, and was constructed in 1843. Standing at two stories tall with a total of six classrooms, the Academy Building was larger than its predecessor. It also had the newest technology available at the time—electric lights—and by 1903 was home to the Town Library (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Newark, 1916).

The daily routine at the Newark Public High School, while at the Academy Building, started at 8:00 a.m. That start time was intended to allow for students from outlying areas of the town to walk or ride by horse and buggy to school, since there were no school buses and the area was still largely agrarian. According to Samuel Buckingham, a graduate of Newark in 1913, many students used the Sherwood Stables on Main Street to “park” their buggies (or sleighs during the winter months) during school hours (Buglass, 27). The instructional day ended at 4:00 p.m., but students involved in athletics would then report to the fields behind the University of Delaware’s Wolf Hall for practice since they had the only available sports fields in the area at the time. All sports games, most notably football (which won five straight county championships from 1920-1925), were also held behind Wolf Hall and were generally well attended by the local community. In fact, when Newark played big games that were sold out, students and community members would find ladders and climb over the brick walls at Wolf Hall in order to watch the contests (Buglass, 22).

While academic pursuits and athletics have always been important, the school also created a community with social events as well. One lasting tradition that started at the Academy Building was the Junior-Senior Prom. The first documented prom was held at Wolf Hall in 1913. According to alumni from that year, the prom was (and still is) one of the “biggest events for the season” for not only the students and faculty, but also the community as a whole. In fact, the 1933 prom was attended not only by students but also many townsfolk who turned out to watch the students dance the night away to the tunes of the big band era (Buglass, 25).

One other major event in Newark High School’s history occurred at the Academy Building. While the school was located there, the only prolonged educational interruption in Newark High School’s history occurred. In October 1918, classes were suspended for three weeks due to the Spanish Flu (known today as the Influenza Pandemic of 1918). Due to the highly contagious manner of the virus combined with the grave situation occurring just to the north in Philadelphia (where the virus hit particularly hard), the district decided to put the safety of the students first. Of the 209 students and seven faculty members attending the school during the 1918-1919 school year, none are believed to have died—largely due to that decision (Newark Post, 4). By eliminating contact between students at school, the district essentially created a de facto quarantine that may have also saved
the city from heavy losses by eliminating one of the only daily meeting areas, which prevented possible carriers of the virus from spreading it.

TIME TO GROW AGAIN, 1920

As the school (and city) continued to grow, a report on Delaware schools conducted by Columbia University in 1920 ended up spurring the local community to build a more modern facility. The report listed various problems, calling the building an "inadequate fire trap" with "narrow halls," "inaccessible" outhouses and a basement "deep in mud and water" (Newark Pot, 3). The city in 1920 passed a bond issue to begin construction of a new facility at the corner of High Street (now known as Academy Street) and Lovett Avenue. The financial cost of the building, which at the end of construction was $147,312, was helped with a $112,000 donation by local philanthropist Pierce S. du Pont.

Once classes were moved to the new address in 1925, the Academy Building continued to serve the Newark community as an expanded town library. When the collection grew too large, it too left the Academy Building and the building was eventually sold to the University of Delaware. Today the Academy Building is home to the University’s Public Relations Office and has been on the National Register of Historical Places since 1976.

Du Pont also was a major benefactor in building a second school for high school level students in Newark—the Newark Colored School. That school was located a few blocks away on New London Road and was built for the growing African-American population of Newark for a cost of $26,212. Du Pont paid over 50% of the cost, about $13,000, making the Newark Colored School one of the most expensive one room school houses in the country, although it still paled in comparison to the facilities and faculty of the new “white” school (Public School Insurance Evaluation Records, 1941). The two populations would continue to be taught in separate facilities until the 1954 Brown v. the Board of Education ruling, which stated that “separate facilities are not equal” and the building was eventually sold to the University of Delaware. Today the Academy Building is home to the University’s Public Relations Office and has been on the National Register of Historical Places since 1976.

The Newark Colored School building is still used by the Newark Parks and Recreation Department today and is now called the George Wilson Center.

THIRTY YEARS ON HIGH STREET, 1925-1955

At the High Street address, the Newark Public High School simply became Newark High School. With plenty of land around the site, the school saw several expansions after its opening in 1925. An auditorium (with the stage doubling as the gym), as well as additional labs and classrooms were added to the facility in 1931 for an additional $211,316 (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Newark, 1931). That addition essentially doubled the size of the school which was not yet a decade old at that point. Manual Training classes were taught for the first time, although students in those classes would have to walk a block and a half to 81 Main Street (the Primary School had also moved to a new address at the corner of High Street and Delaware Avenue in the late 1920s).

In 1936, the school hosted a second bond issue in order to add a large cafeteria to the facility as well as additional classrooms and a greenhouse. After the 1932 additions, 81 Main Street became the district office for the Newark Public School District and in its later incarnation, the Christina School District, until 2004. Like the Academy Building, it has also been placed on the National Registry of Historical Places since 1982.

Two notable additions to the school took place at the High Street address, one of which was the birth of the school newspaper, The Yellowjacket Buzz, in 1936. The Yellowjacket Buzz originally was produced monthly (by the 1940s it was published twice a month) and was sold for ten cents a copy. Originally starting as a supplement in The Buzz in 1941, the second notable addition to the school was the creation of the yearbook. The yearbook since that first year has always been referred to as The Buzz, which is “Newark” backwards. The paper-covered book was sixty pages long and contained advertisements from many local businesses to help keep the cost to students down (Buglass, 91). Both The Buzz and The Buzz yearbook are believed to be among the oldest continuously published student-run organizations in Delaware. Other firsts that started at High Street include the first (documented) senior class trip in 1938 (to Washington, D.C. via train), split lunches in 1939 and the creation of a marching band in 1942.

One of the biggest events of the year for the school and local community started while the school was located at High Street. That event surrounded a football game on Thanksgiving. Originally the D.I.A.A. championship game took place on Thanksgiving, and, given Newark’s football prowess during the 1920s, it became a Thanksgiving tradition for a game to take place. It appears that by the 1930s, an annual game was scheduled and played against whoever was Newark’s traditional rival at that particular time. Conrad, Elkton and Christiana high schools all fulfilled that role against Newark at various points during a thirty-three-year span from 1936 to 1969. During that period,
Newark called an impressive 29-4 record against those schools. Yearbooks from that era generally devoted an entire page to the game often using a victory in that game to at least legitimate a long-standing rivalry with other schools.

1950s ephemera of Newark High School from the papers of E. William Martin, the Newark architect who designed this and several other schools for a booming post-war population. Courtesy Newark Public Library

WORLD WAR II ERA

As with the influenza scare in 1918, Newark High School while at High Street saw another major change based on events occurring outside the city. When World War II arrived, many faculty members were either drafted or enlisted to fight in the military against the Axis Powers (Germany, Japan and Italy). In fact, several members of the Class of 1934 were called upon to actually teach classroom classes due to a shortage of available teachers that year (Newark Pot, 3). Several Newark students also joined their teachers in enlisting prior to their graduations in 1944 and 1945. They included Arthur Grible, William Lehman, Anthony Gaskiewicz, Ollie Salminen, Oliver Suddard, Eugene Campbell, Frank Lewis McCormick, Henry Hammond, Hugh McKinney, Herbert Murphy, Oscar Pickert and Thomas Runk Gribble, William Lehman, Anthony Gaskiewicz, Ollie Salminen, Oliver Suddard, Eugene Campbell, Frank Lewis McCormick, Henry Hammond, Hugh McKinney, Herbert Murphy, Oscar Pickert and Thomas Runk

Following the war, an influx of families to the city of Newark combined with a high birth rate (the “baby boom”) caused the student population to swell at a rate of nearly fifteen percent a year between 1945 and 1960—with the high school population (grades 10-12) climbing from 4,765 in 1955 to 5,833 in 1960 (New Ore Our School, 10). Despite additions being made at the High Street address as late as 1962, this spike in enrollment led to calls for a newer facility, which was completed in 1955. The High Street building was transformed into a middle school (called Central Middle School) following the move and continued to serve the Newark community until 1981. In 1983, it was sold to the University of Delaware, which rededicated the building in 1994 as Pearson Hall. Today, the original high school campus currently houses the Geography Department, the Communications and Media Department and ESL (UD’s student-run television network). The athletic fields were also paved over to form a large parking lot and the Manual Training building now serves as the University Registrar’s office.

With an increasing population, construction began in 1954 on the current incarnation of Newark High School. The designated site for the new building was to be along the newly extended portion of Delaware Avenue between South Chapel Street and Library Avenue. At a cost of $3,532,312, the facility at 750 East Delaware Avenue held its first session in 1955 and was fully completed in 1958. When construction was completed, it was to be an integrated school able to serve an ethnically mixed student population of around 1,000 students. Newark was one of the first schools in the state to accept integration without resistance when it arrived, avoiding the court orders other schools were forced to obey (Buglass, 130). Integration went into effect prior to the move during the 1954-1955 school year, as twenty-two African-American students enrolled for the first time. Of the 126 members of the Class of 1955, there were three African-Americans who shared the honor of being the first non-whites to graduate from Newark High School—Kenneth Hall, Ronald Hayman and Arthur Money (Krawen, 1955).

NEWARK HIGH SCHOOL, 1955

The opening of the school in September 1955 was to be a civic event. When the day arrived, however, the school only had one wing open and was deemed not quite ready for students. The official first day of classes at the new building took place in October 27, 1955, as the tenth through twelfth graders arrived at the High Street address for the final time, collected their books, and walked a half mile to the new school. While conditions were cramped as construction continued on the B and C wings of the building, students settled into a routine of split sessions (Dedication of Newark High School program, 6). It was not until September of 1957 that the entire facility, including sports fields (until then practices and games were held at the old building on High Street), were completed.

The growth of the City of Newark during the late 1950s and early 1960s quickly outpaced even the most radical projections. With the completion of I-95 to the south and east of town, Newark quickly became a suburban area bringing more students into its feeder pattern. In order to meet the demands of a growing community and to end overcrowding at Newark High School, the Newark Special School District began construction of a second high school (Christiana High School), which was completed in 1967. Even with the new high school, though the surging population forced a massive expansion to take place at Newark High. The school itself was expanded in 1970, adding what are referred to as the D and E wings (both three stories tall), a second cafeteria located in the
hormone, a newly expanded school library, an auditorium and a second gym (which was among the largest in the area at the time). The original school library was located in the current Main Office of the building, while the original gym is now referred to as the East Gym. This expansion also eliminated some overcrowding concerns at the middle school, as both Newark and Christiansa added ninth grade to their buildings, which now had a capacity (combined) to serve nearly 4,000 students.

STUDENT TRADITIONS

With these massive surges of population and changes to the school, many traditions evolved and changed. With the end of Thanksgiving Day football games in 1970, Homecoming became the premier sports game of the season. Homecoming had been an important tradition prior to 1970, largely surrounding the crowning of the Football Queen (later Homecoming Queen) and her attendants during halftime of the game. The earliest documented Football Queen was Peggy Borcherdt in 1955 (Krawen, 1956). As it became the game of the season, additional traditions were added to the festivities, such as the introduction of class floats 1969. Since the float competition between the classes began, the Senior class has won fifteen times—compared to the Junior class’s twelve wins, Sophomore class’s seven, and the Freshman class’s three (as of 2006). This competition has also transformed the school itself by igniting school spirit with spirited Pep Fests, the weeklong Spirit Week, Homecoming court elections (Class Princesses were added in 1984; King and Class Princes in 1986), a bonfire before the game (1989-1995), a Homecoming Dance (since 1988), and a Pep Fest auction (since 1998). These traditions at Newark High

School have only served to make this game the highlight of the fall season in the community. Many other, non-athletic activities have also held sway in recent school history. An annual Shakespeare Festival, known as the Elizabethan Rout, ran from 1937 to 1968. Started by teacher Donald Rittenhouse, the Rout was a “feast featuring music and entertainment in fifteenth-century period costumes” that occurred over several days in the month of December and was extremely well attended by faculty, students and alumni (Krawen, 1956). School musicals and plays have also provided students with a place to express their talents over the past fifty years with the first play, Pek and Poppapak, being performed in 1946. Students who want to perform but not in a structured format have had the Talent Show to showcase their abilities since 1928. Similarly, the staff has held a faculty Dodgeball Tournament since 2004 as a way of giving students a release from the constant grind of school life. Newark’s biggest fall dance for most of its recent history was the Sadie Hawkins Dance, which was held each November starting in 1969 thru 1981. It was from this dance that the Pep Fest adapted the tradition of holding a “Homeliest Girl” competition (between male seniors dressed as women). That odd tradition started in 1973 and continues today.

YELLOWJACKET SPORTS AND SPIRIT

One of the reasons for the high levels of school spirit was the plethora of athletic successes Newark has experienced since the creation of the Blue Hen Conference in 1970. As of the writing of this book, Newark has won a total of thirty-seven state titles—an average of one per year—which is the most of any public school in the state. The football team has won nine state titles, followed by the Girls Swim team with seven and the Girls Volleyball team with five. Several coaches are already in or destined for the Delaware Sports Museum and Hall of Fame, including Roman Casinski, Bob Hoffman (for whom the football stadium is named) and Butch Simpson (who holds the state record for most victories by a football coach).

Today, Newark remains one of the largest schools in the state of Delaware. It currently features four classroom wings on three floors (251 classrooms in all), five administrative centers, two cafeterias, two gyms, a telecommunication studio (which started cable-casting in 1972), a distance learning lab, a Wellness Center (since 1994), nearly 900 computers available for student use, a library (with 20,000 books), and a 700-seat auditorium. In many ways, the school in its various incarnations has represented a guide to the future for the generations of students passing through its halls. As the city has grown, the school has, as well. As the city has changed, so has the high school. Through it all, however, Newark High School has served our community well by representing and advancing the ideals of excellence under changing circumstances—a hallmark of this city during the twentieth century.

References

These Are Our Schools. Newark, Delaware: Newark Special School District, 1986.