



WESTERN HILLS UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL

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The History of Western Hills High School

On September 10, 1928, the formal opening of the high school for the western community of Cincinnati was established. On September 11, 1928, the first day of classes was held. Groundbreaking for the new buff brick stone-trimmed building in a modified tradition of Renaissance architecture was held on March 27, 1926, with the official dedication April 27, 1929, by the "Citizens Committee."

The \$1,145,000 beautiful school building was located on 28 ½ acres and it took two and a half years to construct. Approximately 1,500 students enrolled in the comprehensive high school grades seven to twelve. The Cincinnati Board of Education had seen the need for a high school on the west side as early as 1921, and the land was purchased on Ferguson Road for \$43,860 after a school bond levy was passed on November 2, 1924.

The school opened with a complete faculty of 65 teachers and rooms for every purpose:

- 22 classrooms
- Six industrial art rooms
- Two mechanical drawing rooms
- Three household arts rooms
- Three art rooms
- Five science labs
- Three lecture rooms
- Our commercial rooms
- One music room
- One band room
- A beautiful library
- Two study rooms
- Two lunch rooms and a kitchen
- A gymnasium
- "Plunge" and showers
- A 1,190-seat auditorium
- An advisors' room

- "West Night School" at Western Hills High School was initiated during the 1931-1932 school year; 24 faculty members founded the school. There were 63 seniors in the first class.

The first annual, the 1929 yearbook, was appropriately dedicated to the first principal, Benjamin H. Siehl, who started everything in grand style. Right from the get go we had a slogan ("Cooperation"), an impressive school seal, a meaningful school motto ("Lux et Veritas"), and the beautiful school color, maroon. Cream was added soon after. The Western Breeze Vol. 1, #1 was published January 16, 1929, and is still preserved at the school. It was published twice a month, was five cents per issue or 80 cents for a one-year subscription.

The first dance in the school was the "Senior Dance" and the first play produced was Hamlet. The faculty had a male quartet that performed at numerous functions; McFee, Dunkel, Mounk, and Von Schlichten.

There were 43 clubs in the new school including:

- French
- German
- Latin
- Spanish Clubs
- Senior Girl and Junior Girl Reserve
- HI-Y, Girls Scouts
- Campfire Girls
- The Western Breeze, not to exclude "Live Wires,"
- Travel Club
- Bird House Construction Club
- Bird Club
- Idle Hour Club
- The rookie high school was impressively well organized for classroom work and for extracurricular activities; three coaches sponsored "Maroon W."

Principal Benjamin H. Siehl, a cultured and scholarly man, realized the importance of the presence of fine art in public quarters and mustered funds to commission two well-known Cincinnati artists to paint murals in the main foyer and in the fourth-floor lunchroom. Six 7x10-foot vertical oil-painted murals were begun by Frances Wiley Flaig depicting early transportation on the walls around the front entrance foyer, and the evolution of transportation in southwest Ohio from the early barges through air travel.

The murals encompassed the years 1790 when Cincinnati was founded, through the year 1931, when the murals were completed. Thanks to Mr. Siehl's foresight and love of art, West High has art treasures the likes of which few schools in the country can boast. Edward Volkert was commissioned at the same time to paint the five pastoral panoramic 70-by-10-foot murals in the lunchroom during the Christmas

Western Hills High School and people representing different vocations.

Those two paintings were permanent memorials to commemorate the servicemen from Western Hills High School who made the supreme sacrifice during WWII. Mr. Siehl's contribution to the meaningful art décor of West Hi was completed in classic style.

Gus Beiser, Class of '30, composed the "Battle 'Fight' Song" for the football campaign of 1928, and fellow classmate Robert Trendler, Class of '30, composed the words and music to "The Victory Song" for the football season of 1929. The 1932 school year saw the emergence of our beloved Western Hills Alma Mater—the words of the inspirational poem by Mrs. B. H. (May Hoban) Siehl was put to music by Charles F. Stokes in the fifth year of our school's existence. It has been held warmly in the hearts of West High students for the last 70 years when another distinctive West High song entered our history. Roberta Baker, Class of '32, did the original drawing of the school seal, which remains constant to this day. Two wings were added to the building in 1938, and in the early '70s a \$2,000,000 vocational annex was opened to students.

The 21st century found Western Hills High School struggling to retain an image by which it had been recognized for most of the 20th century. In the new millennium, school has been six bells long with no study hall. The vocational school shut down after 30 years. The Dater building on Boudinot Avenue is now a Montessori school and the former Dater faculty and students moved into the first and second floors of the old vocational annex.

Dater High School is now a separate community high school (grades 7-12), but the students join Western Hills' athletic teams. Western Hills has continued the traditions of the Daisy Chain (an organization to honor top female students), the Aristo Paidh (a partner organization for top achieving young men), and the National Honor Society. The school newspaper, The Western Breeze, continues in publication. The Breeze is printed free for all students, and is also posted on the school website.

Beginning in 2009, Western Hills underwent a massive renovation. Nearly every fixture in the school was either restored or replaced. Central air conditioning was added, to the delight of students and staff alike. The murals were carefully cleaned and preserved. Original light fixtures both inside and outside the building were restored to their former beauty. New flooring, lockers and windows were installed, all in keeping with the architectural integrity of the building. The newly renovated and sparkling building opened to excited students and staff in 2011.

Celebrating the 92nd anniversary of Western Hills High School, the "Maroon and Cream" alumni of the last three generations of graduates are proud to be Mustangs, still enjoying the friendships and marriages that were made in West High's halls, and are appreciative of the comprehensive education we received in her classrooms from revered teachers that prepared us for life.

edited from:

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