A Short History of East Meadow Schools

Abridged from <u>East Meadow</u> by Scott M. Eckers (2016)

The East Meadow School District is among the oldest in New York State, and has been continuously educating students for over two hundred years. First conceived in 1812, and reorganized in 1814, Common School District #3 (this numerical designation continues today) of the Town of Hempstead was known as Brushy Plains and soon after, East Meadow. The original one-room schoolhouse was located at the northwest corner of Front Street and East Meadow Avenue. School funding was a mixture of state aid, local tax revenue, and tuition (which was eliminated in 1849). Throughout the 19th century, this small school educated the farm children of our rural hamlet – generally under 100 students per year.

The first schoolhouse was old and inadequate, and a new piece of property was purchased diagonally across the street in order to erect a new building. In 1868, the first of three schools was built on the property that now houses the East Meadow Public Library. It was overcrowded as soon as it was built, complicated further by a compulsory school attendance law in 1874. A two-room school was constructed in 1895. The 1868 school was taken by horse to the Schultze property, which would be the parking lot of the Post Office today. It was used through the 1960s as East Meadow Hall. The longest-serving teacher of that era was Miss Powers, who served from the 1880s through 1930.

Having over 100 students in only two classrooms, the 1895 frame building was replaced in 1911 by a modern four-room brick school. A small baby boom following the First World War and the development of East Meadow's early suburban streets (near Stuyvesant Avenue and Nostrand Avenue) resulted in a project to double the size of the Front Street School and install its first electric lights. Further development in the Roaring Twenties caused the district to construct its second school, Newbridge Road. These two schools, each with nine rooms, would serve East Meadow's 400-500 students in grades 1 to 8 until the Baby Boom generation of the 1950s.

The 1930s brought the Depression, but it also brought progressive ideas in education, and East Meadow was no exception. Instrumental music classes, physical education, and extracurricular activities were instituted in both schools. Both schools shared one principal, Mr. Frank Church.

An endearing custom at the Front Street School was to pick daisies every June and create large daisy chains to decorate the graduation ceremony. Having no high school of its own, East Meadow's students attended Hempstead High School for approximately 100 years. Overcrowding there forced East Meadow to change to a Union Free School District in 1948, which would allow it to eventually operate an "academic department" or high school grades.

Explosive population growth following World War II resulted in double sessions in 1948. The district purchased several lots for future schools but taxpayers were hesitant to spent so much money on new buildings. The first of the modern structures, all of which were designed by architect Frederick Wiedersum, was Prospect Avenue School (1950). Less than three months

later, a spectacular fire destroyed the Front Street School, displacing 635 students. Kindergarten classes, just recently instituted, were canceled for several years, and students were taught in triple sessions (three hours per day) in creative spaces such as gymnasia and political clubs. An addition to Prospect Avenue doubled its size one year after opening; the same with Meadow Lawn School (1951). Meadow Lawn, now McVey, was used as a combined elementary-junior high school for several years. Bowling Green opened in 1952 and was doubled one year later. Barnum Woods opened in 1954 (financed in part by the U.S. government because of Mitchel Manor Army housing) and was the first school in five years to have single-session classes, but only because grades four through six were temporarily housed at the new Woodland Junior High School when it opened the following year. Newbridge Road School was expanded as well.

The year 1955 was the climax of school construction in East Meadow with a total of six buildings opening: East Meadow High School in January; Salisbury, Parkway, and Meadowbrook Elementary Schools in April; and Woodland and Meadowbrook (later McCleary) Junior High Schools in September. W. Tresper Clarke Jr.-Sr. High School opened in 1957, the first in the county to offer a full program in technical trades. Peak enrollment in East Meadow schools was approximately 19,000 students in 1963. At the time, we were the largest district on Long Island and the third-largest in the state. The Baby Boom generation brought modern programs in guidance, special education, the arts, vocational and adult education.

Declining enrollment in the mid-1970s and early 1980s brought controversy over school closings. Salisbury, the most controversial, closed in 1973 and its students were absorbed into Bowling Green. Prospect and Newbridge closed in 1976. McCleary shuttered its doors in 1982. Salisbury is now home to our district offices, known as the Leon J. Campo Salisbury Center. Newbridge was converted to apartments. Prospect and McCleary were knocked down to make room for housing developments. New wings were later constructed at Woodland and Clarke to make way for new students from these homes.

East Meadow Union Free School District #3 continues to lead the way today with comprehensive educational programming for approximately 7,000 students. The district instituted full-day kindergarten in 2015 and is pursuing educational excellence for all children by advocating for appropriate legislation at the state level. East Meadow has many notable programs and has been named one of 2015's national "Best Communities for Music Education." Our scholars have the opportunity to take many college-level courses at the high school level and are routinely admitted to top universities. As we move into the future, we will continue to build upon our long history of providing for the community's needs.