

History

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Building of WHS began in 1896

Part Two of Five

After a long struggle, the building of the new Windham High School went ahead in May 1896. The same team that had built the new town hall — local builder Jeremiah O'Sullivan and architect Charles Beardsley of Middletown — won the contract to build the new school. Construction took almost a full year. Its completed dimensions were 87 by 101 feet, with 70-foot-high, 16-foot-square towers. The walls consisted of half a million bricks. The trimmings were applied with Philadelphia pressed brick and Portland brownstone.

It was Beardsley's intention to design something special. He included two Romanesque Campanile towers with open stages and pyramidal roof. Eight Doric columns supported a recessed porch, with Munson granite steps, around the main entrance on Windham Street. Beardsley included 36 double and 24 single windows to ensure that the interior was well lit. On entering the building, there was a 15-foot-wide corridor, with the principal's office on the left and the library on the right. The principal's office consisted of a reception room and private office, each 12 by 17 feet. The faculty used the reception room for resting. The library was 22 by 22 feet.



Tom Beardsley

The corridor continued to the east, or back, entrance to the school on High Street. The student corridor was entered from Prospect Street, and went through to the south lawn. The student corridor gave access to the 48-by-78-foot main recital, or meeting, room, on the east side of the building, which had a seating capacity of 250. A double staircase gave access to the second floor, and to a 30-by-56-foot laboratory, and two 22-by-22-foot classrooms.

The third story, in the roof space, was vacant, but it was planned to build a gymnasium there. When the school was opened for inspection in April 1898, it was noted that there were six 12-by-14 trusses taking the strain of the roof, which was lined with gas pipes.

The building's heating system, particularly sophisticated for the period, was supplied by the American Blower Co. of New York City. Cold air was sucked

into the building by a large fan by means of a 6-by-8-foot shaft, onto a coil of steam pipes, and circulated around the building, supplying 30 cubic feet of fresh, warm air to each pupil. The coils were heated by steam supplied from two 40-horsepower boilers. The entire system was installed by Willimantic's renowned Vanderman Plumbing & Heating Co.

The basement also housed the boys' and girls' recreation rooms and lavatories. The boys had the luxury of five flush closets and a urinal. The girls had eight closets, all trimmed by Georgia pine. The drinking water came through Pasteur germ filters. The floor of the basement was Trinidad pitch. All other floors were built from maple, and the general finish of the interior rooms was made from cypress.

The school was equipped with 10 telephones, and electric push buttons provided communication between the rooms. A large gong was located in the student corridor, operated by the principal from his office. Each classroom was supplied with blackboards of Cleveland slate, and the roof tiled with Old Bangor black slate.

Opening ceremonies took place on April 3, 1897, in the school's recital room. Building committee Chairman Thomas J. Kelley reminded those present of the tremendous obstacles overcome to get to this point, and then handed the school keys to First Selectman William Potter.

Next Week: A history of the school that stood for only 16 years.

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