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THIS WEEK: Bryant School

BACKGROUND:

This article is copied from the *Capitol Building Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook*. It appeared in the *Des Moines Tribune* on September, 9, 1949. The scrapbook contains clippings from 1906 to 1970s and was compiled by the Iowa State Law Library.



To younger generations, this building on the northwest corner of the Statehouse grounds may be an eyesore. But many older Des Moines residents who knew it as Bryant school between 1867 and 1916 will have twinges of memory about their school days there, now that the landmark is to be torn down.

Des Moines Tribune Article - 9/9/49

By Lillian McLaughlin

The Bryant school building, soon to be torn down by action of the Iowa executive council, stands on the northwest corner of the statehouse grounds, a scarred and unsafe thing.

It was not always so.

When it was completed in 1867, “the new brick building was the largest and best-built schoolhouse in the western half of the state,” a history of Des Moines and Polk county says.

Most of the material, the history discloses, was hauled from Nevada, then the nearest shipping point.

East’s Ancestor.

Although it was a grade school, this building was also the fore-runner of East High school. “The first class graduated from East High was in 1871,” the history reads. “There was one member, Elizabeth Mathews.”

The building housed high school classes until “in 1877 the demand for a high school became so strong that a loan of \$30,000 was authorized for the erection of a commodious building at E. Twelfth and Lyon streets.”

Part of Webster.

This was the present Webster school, or part of it.

It later became crowded, too, so the high school freshman class had to be moved back to Bryant school (named in 1880 for the poet, William Cullen Bryant).

The assistant principal at the high school, the late May Goodrell, was in charge of the displaced class at Bryant. Miss Goodrell was graduated from high school at Bryant in 1877 and taught there from 1885 to 1890.

Principal at East.

She later became principal of the present East High school. Her name now is one to evoke affectionate memories in her former Bryant and East High pupils.

“She was wonderful,” said a gray-haired woman who once was a pupil of Miss Goodrell. “Anything the east side wanted they got Miss Goodrell behind it and it was done.”

The “best-built schoolhouse in the western half of the state,” also had one of the best play grounds, a former student recalls.

It was high, well drained, and cinder and gravel-packed.

School Bell.

There was a school bell, alumni remember, but there’s no record of what became of it. One former student believed it to be in the state historical building, but it is not catalogued there.

Many teachers of Bryant are remembered by their former pupils, and a number still are living, among them Mary Hast Shope, of 2229 E. Twenty-ninth st.

Mrs. Shope also went to school at Bryant and taught there six years. She recalls a popular elocution teacher, the late Nellie Chester Hopkins. One of the plays given there was “Merchant of Venice.”

“And I think I was in it,” laughed Mrs. Shope.

Another Principal.

Mrs. Shope also warmly remembers another principal, under whom she taught. She was the late Georgia Warrick, whom the students loved.

Bryant continued as a grade school until about 1916. That is the last year, at any rate, that the school board office has record of assigning teachers there.

Because from 1859 until 1907 East Des Moines was a school district separate from the west side, records of Bryant school in early days are nonexistent.

Sold to State.

In 1919, the building was sold to the state for \$30, 000, the school board office said. Since then it has been used for state office space. At present it houses the state fire marshal's office, the Iowa bureau of labor and the horticulture division of the department of agriculture.

It was condemned by a committee of architects and engineers in 1936, but plans to raze the building then were not carried out. The third floor of the building and the west wing have been closed for some years.