

NORTH HIGH SCHOOL, The Neighborhood Connection

By: Alan C. Iannacito (NHS Class of 1959)

The institution of North High School was 70 years old when the class of 1959 graduated from the building that we know as “North.” The original North High School was housed at Ashland School, a gothic red stone building that could inspire a Stephen King novel.



Ashland School 1888

L.C. McClure Historical Photo

North High School’s first graduating class began as grades 7 through 9 in 1883 at the Ashland School. A fourth year was added in 1889. Ashland was razed and is the site of the present Jose Valdez Elementary. Our school building, built in 1911, was already 48 years old when we graduated.

Designer David Dryden’s building [NHS] was feted as “. . . Denver’s best example of Beaux-Arts architecture.” ¹



North High School 2960 North Speer Boulevard, Denver, Colorado 80211

The first North Denver public schools became anchors in the initially lethargic Highland development. Highland platted soon after the founding of Denver-Auraria in 1859, trundled along in lower-low gear—almost a forgotten waif.

There was eventual development and growth resulting in the present day site—not so far removed from what we saw in 1959. But, different from what the media perceives as Highland today.

The site enjoyed the elevated view of the Platte valley and was thought to be devoid of acrimonious politics rampant in the original Denver-Auraria settlement.² The Highland concept took some time to catch on after the 1859 filing. Nothing was done to improve the site until several years later. It seemed that the Highland location was an afterthought and the paperwork, for some unexplained reason, went missing by the founders.

Highland, generally, “demarcated” by West 38th Avenue on the north, Zuni on the East, West 32nd Avenue on the South and Federal Boulevard on the West, was eventually annexed to Denver. An attached piece hangs on between North Speer Boulevard and 32nd Avenue. This is North High School’s territory. A once residential and business neighborhood across Speer, since razed, is Viking Park.

Northeast of and just bumping into the back of the school is Scottish Highland. Scottish Highland is a shy little neighborhood originally platted

as a suburb for the working classes of Denver. This quaint hood kept its original street names Argyle, Caithness and Dunkeld. It remains a transition neighborhood, unlike Highland proper, which has undergone drastic change over the years--scruffy to chic. Denver.com reports, that "the neighborhood, in all its picturesque glory, is on the up-and-up. Highland transitions to an island here and there of cozy restaurants, novelty stores and martini bars just outside the bustle of Downtown Denver."³

The overall neighborhood was kind to our High School. Commercial and residential life sustained our educational hub. One 1959 classmate recently remarked, "We got a good education at North High." Hindsight is always accurate even if we have lost some of the details.

The area schools gave the then suburban neighborhood respectability, permanence and resolve. The class of 1959 came from a jumble of idealists who didn't want to see their kids living through depression. They wanted us to succeed with a good liberal arts beginning. And, we did.

Significant about the students of North High School in 1959: We didn't just filter out of Highland and its surrounds. Many students came from the "West Side", south of Sloan's Lake, whose families were East European immigrants; victims of pogroms or German immigrants fleeing the Nazi regime. Classmates were a mix of first and second generation Irish, Italians, Germans,

Mexicans, Russians, and other emigrants from all parts of the world. Some of our 1959 classmates began their lives in internment camps. There were Spanish families that may have preceded us by two-hundred years. Many of our classmates descended from mothers and fathers who attended North High before them.

Our classmates benefited by the end of the Great Depression and World War II. We are the lucky ones whose parents suffered the deprivations of the 1930's and world unrest driven by inconceivable evil. The parents who survived the conflict wanted peaceful happy lives for their children. These were the parents who worked hard to ensure that their children would have good educations and brilliant futures.



We were the Cleavers

What they passed on to us was their work ethic and a hope that we would continue to pass onto our children the ideals and the pride of our country.

The adolescent mindset, still somewhat naïve, bought into Wally

Cleaver's idealistic assessment of his brother Beaver:

"He's a bit of a goof, not as goofy as he looks." He's not the brightest kid on the block, but he's not the dumbest either. Theodore "Beaver" Cleaver is pretty much your average, slightly hyperactive, but impossibly cute kid. Beaver's friendly, inquisitive nature gets him into a lot of trouble. He's pretty gullible, so he's often mixed up in some pretty kooky jams. (www.TVland.com)

Jams or jellies, Beaver or Elvis, we rooted from an ethnic pastiche of clones, colors and appetites—a cross section of the world at large.

North High School has, from its beginning, brought forth and nurtured illustrious as well as a less fortunate cast of characters. The school has grown and graduated accountants, acrobats, actors, artists, attorneys, auto mechanics, business owners, civil servants, computer scientists, doctors, engineers, farmers, firefighters, grocers, historians, judges, privates to generals, and police officers, ranchers, teachers, truck drivers, wildlife authorities, world leaders, writers, ad infinitum.

Also out of the mix are characters, con artists, lovable weirdos, and malcontents. We are a microcosm, a specimen of the U.S. education system of our era.

What we lacked in today's ease of in your face communications, and world access, didn't hinder us. We

only had to plod more diligently to finish projects.

We sweated the dreaded "term paper," or a five page report? We went to the library, learned the Dewey Decimal System and researched a subject? Today, we have either wheeled onto the information highway, or we are info-dinosaurs. North High School has a website, and Highland, Denver has its own Wikipedia.⁴ Our world has evolved with warp speed.

The comic hero Dick Tracy with his wrist-radio from the 1940's was a concept; some took it serious. Denver was still viewed by outsiders as a "cow town." Maybe we were. Colorado was named the "Centennial State" in 1976. The State of Colorado wasn't one-hundred years old. However, when our class graduated, The City of Denver celebrated its 1859-1959 one-hundredth year with fanfare.

To reflect on how fast the world turns but some aspects remain: in 1961, our 34th President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, gave his last message to the American people asking us to remain vigilant; to be forever wary of the forces of evil that would continue to daunt us. He was eerily prophetic in his accuracy.⁵



The class of 1959 had no idea what we were in for, but we had energy and drive. We knew that we could work hard and eventually earn as much as \$10,000 per year--fat cats. \$2000 plus would buy us a groovy Chevy or Ford. \$7000 bought a luxury car. Fifty years later that amount represents about ten-percent down on a foreign status symbol.

Back in 1959 we wanted cool rides and fin-tailed technology. We question now if the old stalwarts, General Motors and *Ford MoCo*, will survive the economic and "green evolution."



1959 Edsel Corsair Convertible

We were entertained by "Arthur Godfrey and His Friends," the CBS musical show complete with a strumming ukulele. Today, if your grandkids aren't watching "American Idol", texting friends with one hand, whizzing through their e-mail with the other hand while an Ipod® filters hi-hop through their gray matter, they're "idiots." And, the technology beat goes on.

Back in the day, we were horrified by the story of Anne Frank, and hopefully still are. North by Northwest was a real thriller—still is, and Ben Hur kept us on the edge of our seat. Today, a cattle prod may

or maybe not, bring us out of our complacent if not apathetic views of tragedy and horror. The inflaming of our senses, and attacks on decency have left us shockingly shockproof with load after load of media dross.

In 1959 we mourned the loss of Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper. We really felt it; some of us still do. How could such an awful thing happen? Today, mayhem and loss are "sound bites," a "blip" on the radar as every day, every hour, tragedy, like laundry, airs and hangs on CNN.

The world revolts and we recognize change. Hopefully the ideals that our parents taught us remain. Despite media blitz the majority still internalizes and seeks the same thing our parents instilled in us. Make your way, the best you can, with what you have and what you have been given, and do it with integrity.

Our audience has grown older, hopefully wiser, but always mindful that life matters even when predisposed to danger in the real world. And, it matters that we know where we've been; what holds us together as a community.

It matters what we have known each other—some since grade school and Jr. High. It matters what we have learned together, have respected one another, have laughed together, and have grieved together. It matters what we have given, and will continue to give. It matters that we have always cared for each other

even when we disagree—we've pulled together.

As diverse as we've lived, and uniquely contributed, we can say that we have made a difference, and that maybe our parents were right after all.

¹ Keith Chamberlain, North Denver Tribune, Sept. 2, 2004, P2.

² Jerome C. Smiley, Edit. History of Denver: With Outlines of the Earlier History of the Rocky Mountain Country. (Denver, Sun Times, 1901) 222-223.

³ <http://www.denver.com/highlands/>

⁴ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland-\(Denver\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland-(Denver))

⁵ Eisenhower's Farewell Address to the Nation, <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm>.



Randa Palser 1951



David E. Lewis 1950's



Glen Hinshaw on Patrol 1960's

COLORADO CONNECTION



Eddie Millett and Friends

You are encouraged to share, in two to four paragraphs, why you attended North High School in 1959. Alan Iannacito will continue this project after the 1959 50th Reunion. The attached contributions, to date, demonstrate what we are doing. The collection is sent to North High School to the Denver Public Library Western History Department and to The Colorado History Museum.

You can attach photos of yourself, your family, grandparents, or favorite place. It is your history, so contribute what you like.

I won't edit, but will check for spelling and photo placement. We would like the text in Arial 12 point, but I can change whatever you send.

If you prefer, I will interview you via phone or email. Deadline June 10, 2010.

Details: Alan C. Iannacito. Email alaniannacito@comcast.net or phone 303-972-9142 for information. Alan's Address is P.O. Box 620428, Littleton, Colorado 80162-0428.

Thank you for contributing.