

A Brief History of Guilford Middle School by Diane Shields
written in 1987

Guilford Middle School is the product of a proud community that has always taken an active interest in the education of its young people. The community of New Garden has had a school since 1812, when "The Little Brick School House" was built. The Quaker settlers of the community established New Garden Boarding School in 1837. The name of the school was later changed to Guilford College, and in 1926, it became the first school in the area to be accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges.

In the late 1800's, three one-room frame schoolhouses called "field schools" were established to serve the community. They were called field schools because they were usually built on land donated by a local citizen. Staffed by a very capable teacher, the school "year" at each of these field schools lasted only four months.

One of the field schools in the New Garden community was Mud Hill School whose name was descriptive of its site on Old Oak Ridge Road. This structure stood until the early 1980's when it was torn down to make way for apartments and condominiums for the quickly growing community. Another field school in the area was Hill Top School, and a third, Friendship School, was located on what is now the Airport property.

Prior to 1885, the state had not established a "prescribed" salary schedule for teachers. On the average, the teachers at these three field schools were paid \$21.40 a month, and they often lived with a family in the community. Because school supplies were not furnished by the Guilford County Board of Education until after 1897, students supplied their own materials, and the boys were expected to chop wood to burn for heat.

In 1901, these three field schools and several other one and two teacher schools from surrounding communities consolidated to form the Guilford Graded School, led by Dr. Clement O.

Meredith as principal. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, educational opportunities were firmly established for young people who could now attend first grade through college in their own community.

Even though education seemed to be a top priority for the people of New Garden, there were several factors which affected students' attendance. When the U.S. entered World War 1, the severe shortage of manpower made enforcing compulsory attendance a problem. At this same time, an influenza epidemic hit the county and affected attendance at all schools.

Another obstacle to school attendance was poor pupil health. In the early 1900's, Superintendent Tom Foust met with the teachers and taught them how to screen the children for adenoid and tonsil problems. Other health problems which caused students to lose much time from school were hookworm, whooping cough, measles, and mumps.

Population growth, availability of better transportation, and the public's great concern for educational opportunities led to the completion in 1924 of a new brick building at the present site on College Road. The first principal at the new "union school" site was Sallie B. Newman. Guilford was called a union school because it housed grades 1 – 12. This original building continued to house grades 1 – 12 until 1941, when a small gym was built, and 1952 when an additional wing for the elementary school was added.

In 1949, the school board signed a contract for a new cafeteria at Guilford. The building included a small residence area where the principal lived for a short while. This building, though since enlarged, continues to serve as the cafeteria. The residence area is now used for home economics and special small reading classes.

The Guilford School was important to the community during an era of farm life schools. In addition to the traditional courses of English, math, history, and science, the curriculum of the 1940's included French, piano, Bible, typing, home economics, and agriculture. New Garden was still a rural

community in the 1940's and 1950's, so agriculture was an important aspect of the students' training. Among the clubs offered to the students during these years, Future Farmers of American and 4-H were indicative of their environment and were very popular.

Integration came to Guilford much the same way it came to other schools in the area. On September 2, 1955, a group of citizens from the Guilford College community presented their local school committee with a petition favoring the integration of their school. When school opened the following week, it was not without tension. Many residents of the community were opposed to the integration of Guilford and presented their own petition to the local committee. Past students can remember white parents waiting outside of the school most of the day. Though there were a few minor incidents, a small number of black children became students at Guilford.

The 1950's and 1960's not only brought integration to Guilford, but also the need for more space. The problem of overcrowding would remain with Guilford for more than twenty-five years.

Beside the additions mentioned earlier, several other buildings were added over the years. In the 1960's, a new wing was built near the elementary section. Today, this wing is the main section of the school and houses classrooms, offices, and the library.

In 1967, with an enrollment of over 1950, Principal Henry Walters eagerly awaited the building of a high school for the community. Guilford School, built for 800 students then had a population of 1950. Classrooms were set up wherever space could be found. In 1966, classrooms were created in the auditorium, and the Grange Hall, adjacent to the school property, was rented for band practice.

Finally, the Board of Education recognized the tremendous growth and educational needs of the community, and in 1968, the high school students moved to the new Western Guilford High School. This still left a large school population in grades 1 – 9 at the older facility.

With the influx of new businesses and new families to the community, Guilford School continued to be plagued by overcrowding. In 1972, grades 1 – 3 moved to the newly built Primary School; however, in the early 1970's kindergarten was added to the school bringing the enrollment back up over 1100 in kindergarten and grades 4 – 8. In the late 1970's, the kindergarten moved to the Primary School and the third grade moved back to Guilford "Middle" School. A new gym was constructed in 1975 that included music rooms for both the band and chorus. More additions and renovations were made in the 1980's and the original structure, built in 1924, was torn down in 1984.

In 1987, with an enrollment of almost 1400, overcrowding continues to be a restricting factor for Guilford Middle School. Now housing grades 3 – 8, Guilford Middle has added two mobile teaching units and faces the possibility of redistricting. Regardless of what may happen in the future, the most outstanding feature of Guilford Middle School still remains the interest of the ENTIRE community in the welfare of its youth.

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