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Hillsborough High School: The First One Hundred Years

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In the beginning, Hillsborough High School was a department of the Tampa Graded School System which was organized in 1885. It began in a livery stable on Franklin Street with nineteen students and one teacher, Mr. B.C. Graham, who also served as the principal. The first four students graduated in 1886.

In October of the same year, the location of the school was moved to an eight room school building on Sixth Avenue. Here it remained for six years. While in this building, Mr. Graham taught the eighth grade and the high school together in the same room. A little later the high school department was moved to a room on the
In 1892, the high school department moved into an old primary school building and had two regular teachers. Soon afterwards the high school was permanently separated from the grade school. During its four years in this building the library had accumulated a nice collection and such chemical apparatus as needed for experiments in chemistry.

In 1897, by relocating the high school in an old Baptist church, students found themselves in nearly the center of Tampa's business community.

Both the School Board and the students wanted something they could call their own, and their wish was realized in the form of a lease. The students, however, were happy to learn that it was a short term lease, for the property which they had obtained consisted of four rooms on the upper floor of the Wright Building, the remainder of which was occupied by The Tampa Times office and on the first floor was the post office. The school remained in this location for two years. During the first year the high school occupied three rooms, but in the second year, four were needed. This showed an increase in enrollment and led to the addition of two new teachers and additional course requirements. It was in this atmosphere that the school newspaper, then called the Donnybrook, was established.

A school building was needed but there was no legal way of raising money for building purposes, except to save it from the general school fund. After the freeze of 1895, by careful management, money was saved and the first county high school was erected. At a contract price of $5,100 dollars, a well-planned, two-story wooden building with science laboratories, a library and an auditorium was built large enough to accommodate as many as 250 high school students.

**Funds Donated**

The school opened October 22, 1900 to 125 students. Chairs were used to seat the pupils since there were no desks. Furnishings and equipment were purchased by the faculty through money raised by donations and school entertainments.
As the town began to grow into a city, the enrollment increased and the need for a larger, more modern school building became apparent. Another era in this school’s history came to pass.

In 1908, land was purchased on Highland Avenue as a site for a new building. Construction was not begun until December 1910.

The cornerstone was laid February 17, 1911. In it are the names of all the enrolled students written on a parchment. The stone had been removed from the old Masonic Temple to be placed in the building.

The new building was completed on October 2, 1911, at a total cost of $60,000.

ENROLLMENT SWELLED

There were a total of fourteen teachers and 63 regular seniors. The school was ranked high with other high schools of the United States. It stood among the first of the Southern high schools. At this time, lunches were served at Ed’s Lunch Stand and students ate on the school grounds.

In 1925, cafeteria style of serving was introduced and has continued since.

Until 1925, Mr. E. L. Robinson was principal. He resigned his office to become county superintendent. Mr. F.J. Spaulding succeeded him.

LIBRARY, HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

... View in the Early Days.

-Photo HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION
HSS BIG TEN CHAMPIONS, 1942
...J. Crockett Farnell, extreme right, Head Coach; Dick Spoto, extreme left, Assistant.
-- photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION
The enrollment soon swelled beyond the capacity of the building, and it became apparent that yet another, larger school would be needed.

In 1925, land was purchased for a new high school building. The Gothic style of architecture was designed by a man named Dr. Strayer. At a faculty beach party he drew his version of the present school in the sand with a stick. The School Superintendent expressed satisfaction with his idea and was very impressed. Construction began in 1927 and was not completed until September of 1928. The total cost of building the school was $757,000 dollars.

**BUILDING TOO LARGE?**

Since Hillsborough had a reputation of outgrowing its buildings, this school was built extra-large with the idea that the students would not be able to outgrow it easily. It was originally built with fifty-six classrooms, a five hundred and ninety foot corridor, a spacious library which contained over eight thousand books, two large study halls, a school bank, a complete home economics unit which included a three room apartment, and a Gothic styled auditorium with a seating capacity of about twelve hundred. The campus alone covered a space of about twenty-three acres, and the building had a roof space of about three acres.

The building seemed too large for the expected enrollment of thirteen hundred. It was built to accommodate two thousand students.

On January, 28, 1927 the cornerstone was laid. In September the first classes were enrolled. It was dedicated in December of that year, and was one of the four largest high schools in the South.

When the school opened in 1928, Mr. F. J. Spaulding was principal. A fountain was purchased in his honor and placed in the middle courtyard. It was later moved to the side entrance of the auditorium in an area entitled Spaulding Court. The fountain was removed and replaced with a tree that was brought from Spain as a seed. It died and was replaced with a Florida palm.

**ENTER VIVIAN GAITHER**

In 1933, F.J. Spaulding resigned as principal to become full-time president of the University of Tampa. Mr. Vivian Gaither succeeded him and remained principal for thirty-three years. The football field was renamed in his honor but was changed back to Terrier Field with the opening of Gaither High School.

After war was declared on Germany in the spring of 1917, several boys of the school organized a military company and began drilling during lunch. The principal, Prof. Robinson, paid little attention thinking it would wear out. However, a few weeks passed and the enthusiasm of the boys had not lessened. Prof. Robinson took notice and requested Coach Freeman to instruct the boys in drill, at the same time lengthening lunch by twenty minutes to allow them time to drill.

Upon the opening of school the next year, a meeting of the boys was called and the company was reorganized. After a few weeks of drill, the School Board took notice of their work and secured a drillmaster to instruct them. Coach Freeman had since been commissioned by the Army. J.W. Dyke, formerly a lieutenant in the Florida
National Guard, was secured and they made rapid progress.

**R.O.T.C. FORMED**

In 1935, the U.S. Army took sponsorship of the corps and they then became the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (J.R.O.T.C.) This organization has been a source of constant pride and admiration since its establishment in this school. They have been outstanding both in this county and state, winning such an excess of awards that some of the recent awards must be given away due to lack of space.

The Drum and Fife Corps was organized in 1914 under the supervision of Dr. S. L. Lowry, and with the material aid of the Tampa Gasparilla Association and the County School Board. The first appearance of the corps was made during the 1915 Gasparilla Carnival after only six short weeks of practice. This corps was the forerunner of the present day marching band and the J.R.O.T.C. Drum and Bugle Corps.

The patio was renovated in 1950 so it could be used for dances and barbeques. The sacred "H" was dedicated in 1974 to Mr. Hamilton for his service to the school. Pride dictates that it may not be walked upon.

The music building was completed in 1952 and the display cases were added to the center hall.

**A SOUTH CAMPUS**

Statues could be seen throughout the first and third floors but they were later moved into the library. During the renovation of 1975, they were removed from the school with the intention of replacing them. They were never recovered and their whereabouts are unknown.

The renovation of the school was the end to the last link of the past. Years were swept away. The ceilings were lowered, and elevator installed and a new library built. The terrazzo floors were carpeted, the marble partitions in the restrooms were removed and replaced with wooden stalls. The carved and polished wood which lined the walls of the library were ripped out and replaced with plaster as it was transformed into biology rooms.

The addition of Memorial Junior High as a south campus insured a vocational education to some students.
In 1949 the clock in the tower was purchased in honor of those who lost their lives in World War II. A list of names of the Hillsborough students who were killed was placed on a plaque under the tower. Chimes are played at Christmas and on Memorial Day.

The Alma Mater, the "Red and Black," was written by a teacher and some students in 1923. The tune has since been revised.

THE 'BIG RED'

The Terrier Creed was written in 1954 entirely by the students. It was the only one of its kind in the South and it received much publicity. The idea for the creed was prompted by Mr. Hamilton.

The bronze terrier that stands guard over the trophy case was originally placed in the courtyard in 1955. Due to considerable torment, it was moved inside.

The beautiful stained-glass windows in the auditorium have been purchased by different groups. They were completed in 1963.

"Through these portals pass the greatest athletes in Florida."

(This sign was posted in the varsity dressing room.)

At Hillsborough, one of the strong points in both spirit and pride has always been in athletics. This began as early as 1906 with the formation of the 'Big Red' football team and cheering squad. By 1910 Hillsborough gained gridiron supremacy over the other state high school teams and clenched the state championship for the first time after a relentless battle with Rollins College. Those were the days when pads, helmets, and waterboys were obsolete.

The 'Big Red' team was a member of the Big Ten Conference and played against such opponents as the University of Florida and Stetson University.

In 1948 the Terriers won the Big Ten Conference title for the fourth time in seven years.

ALUMNUS DWIGHT GOODEN

The basketball team has also won its share of competitions. It, like the football team, was a member of the conference and has won the title as well. The gym they presently use was not built until 1936.

The baseball team has earned considerable respect and is still one of the three major sports of the school. Baseball did not exist from 1921-1926 since it could not support itself by gate receipts. This problem was a direct effect of the World War that was raging across Europe. Hillsborough had some of the best athletes and coaches in the state in 1931, in spite of the fact that they did not have adequate training rounds nor a field.

The baseball team owes much of its popularity to one of its most famous alumni, Dwight Gooden, who is a phenomenal rookie pitcher for the New York Mets...

Hillsborough has had many graduations in its past and all of them have been unique. From the first graduating seniors in 1886 to the class of 1985, there have been drastic changes. The first graduating class consisted of four seniors, three girls and one boy. The extent of their education is unknown. There was no formal ceremony.
The next year, five girls graduated with a formal ceremony at the old Tampa Bay Opera House. Each girl read her graduating speech by the light of oil lamps which hung along the walls.

Every year afterward there has been a graduation with the exception of years when there were no graduates due to yellow fever and course extensions.

Hillsborough has had an illustrious alumni due to the fact that it was the sole high school for a period of many years.

Graduations have been in various locations all over Tampa Bay.

After moving into the present school building, graduations were held on what is now the football field. When bad weather prevailed, the ceremonies were in the auditorium...