



**A History of the
Westside
Community Schools,
School District 66**



Chapter I

HOW SCHOOL DISTRICT 66 BEGAN AND WHY IT EXISTS TODAY

It was the end of the Roosevelt Era, Harry S. Truman became the 33rd President of the United States. Germany had surrendered, and World War II was over. Rationing ceased, and the Marshall Plan began its economic aid to the war-torn countries.

Omaha, Nebraska, in the fall and winter of 1946, was not much different from many communities throughout the land - the post war boom was underway. Babies were being born in record numbers; new home construction was setting a fast pace; industry was tooling up for peace-time production; business was expanding to meet the new needs of the people, and residents now had time to be concerned about other things on the homefront. One of these new concerns was the education of all these children.

School District 66's Heritage

Following World War II, the City of Omaha exploded westward. People were "leap frogging west," since the city limit was then J. E. George Blvd. There were three basic communities "out west" in those days, with homes and farmlands scattered around the Underwood-Peony Park area, the Loveland area and the Oakdale-Rockbrook area. Each of these areas had its own district rural school.

City people of Omaha were interested in suburbia--fresh air, plenty of space to raise children and dogs, homes where the grass could meet the road. Sub-divisions were made from these farmlands. To encourage people to move into the area, one of the early promotion drives of the Underwood Hills sub-division was, "Mr. Blanding's Dream House," built at 702 North 72nd Avenue, where people could buy chances to win the suburban home of their dreams. It was built among the cornfields, and was a replica of the famous house featured in the movie of the 1940's, "Mr. Blanding and His Dream House," starring Cary Grant.

Professional and business people were moving in and building homes alongside the acreages, dairies and truck farms; enrolling their children in the three Douglas County fine rural schools in the area.

"Seventy second and Dodge was just a quiet, rural intersection," said the Don Scheidt's, who have lived in the District 44 years. "The Sisters of Mercy had an old farmhouse and acreage on the northeast corner of 72nd and Dodge. There was also a filling station at 72nd and Dodge, owned by Morley Young. If the teachers could get out as far as the station, Morley would take them to school."

SCHOOL DISTRICT #46 was in the Underwood-Peony Park area. It opened as a rural school in 1876, and in 1925 the Underwood Community High School was added. The building was moved farther west on Cass Street. W. H. Post was

moderator, J. Tschida, director, C. C. Martin, treasurer. It was the only rural district in the unincorporated area with a high school and a four teacher elementary school -- beginners through eighth grade, all in one building. Margaret Kellogg, who taught the beginners and primary grades in 1927, said the beginners stayed all day.

Loretta Cutler, who taught the elementary grades in the 1930's, said "The Underwood area was a lovely neighborhood. Underwood School was well equipped. We had ample supplies, budget and materials. Underwood District 46 had lots of money. The property was highly valued. We had Malec's Peony Park, with beautiful peony gardens. We had the railroad and Cargill Grain Elevator. There were three big dairies in the district: Marius Christensen's Dairy, across from Underwood School, the Madsen Dairy further west, and the Jensen Dairy at 72nd and Dodge. The Liebenritts had extensive truck farms on West Dodge Road. Earl Schafer had a chicken farm on north 72nd Street. Acreages were plentiful.

"We were the richest rural district in the state. We were as good a school as you could find anywhere, with well qualified teachers. Mr. Vaughn Gaddis, advertising manager of the World Herald, was on the board for many years, and he did a good job of operating the policies in a business like way. The community had great pride in the school. The parents had pride; teachers and students had pride.

"These were 'old country people who settled in this big farmland area west of Omaha -- Austrians, Germans, and Scandinavians. Underwood Community School--District 46, was a closely knit district. The residents wanted the best for their children and expected the best. They were jealous of having anybody have things better than they did.

"The children really got a good eighth grade education -- passed the examinations with high marks. Besides the basics, we had music and art. Mrs. Gaddis and I taught ballroom dancing lessons after school for 10¢ a session. Young people came from all over the area for the lessons. Social graces were important too.

"The biggest event was when Underwood built a gymnasium. It was treated as sacred ground-- you had to take your shoes off to walk on it, if you weren't wearing gym shoes. Basketball was the big sport.

"The high school was good -- not as many courses as now, but for the students who went on to high school, they were well prepared for college. We had many who tuitioned in from Fairacres--W. Dale Clark's children--the Jack Cunningham's and others."

DISTRICT #65 was in the Loveland Area. A special meeting was held on April 1, 1932, to elect a school board. Their first tasks were to immediately secure a site for the new school building with plans and estimates, also work out details for a bond issue, so that the school could open September, 1932. It was important that the school be immediately adjacent to a paved highway, according to the residents, so it was located at 81st and Pacific Streets. It was a two room school, with an exterior appearance similar to the suburban homes in the area, and it had a community

room. It was moved that the school board, with Mr. T. F. Horton as director, be instructed to name the District #65 elementary school.

Mr. Archibald J. Love had a dairy farm west of the school site and owned property to 90th Street. It was known as Love-land. The Munroe's also had a dairy, where the ticket office of Westside High School's stadium now stands.

The names of Loveland School, West Pacific School, and Herbert Daniels School (the Daniels did so much work to get the school started), were suggested. It was named Loveland School.

The school had 35 pupils when it opened. There were two teachers with Life Certificates, who were paid \$100 per month -- a high salary in those days. Many professional and business people rapidly moved into the area because of this very fine school.

DISTRICT #31 was in the Oak Park area, named Oakdale School. This rural school was built in 1871, on the site where Charles Armburst now lives -- a one room school, with 40 pupils. Most of the older children didn't start school until December, after the corn was picked.

Oakdale was very special. "In those early days, there was no division between the people who owned the farms in the area, and the professional people who moved into the area," said Viola Wise Chatfield, who came to Oakdale in 1944. "There was a tremendous loyalty and spirit between the two groups -- we had a common goal -- our children's education. The monthly pot-luck supper, where all the people in the community came to the school house, was the social gathering nobody wanted to miss.

"The school prided itself in stressing the basic academic subjects. The parents demanded it. If we teachers wanted supplies, and could put up a good story why we needed them, we would get them.

"Teachers salaries were so low in the 1940's, we couldn't live on them. Mary Jamison took up the idea of a raise to Mr. Poley, our board director. We never heard one bit from anyone saying we didn't deserve more money.

"We had big eighth grade graduations. We would build bowers with lilacs and peonies. It was the biggest event you could imagine. We always had one of the professional people speak at the graduation ceremony."

The Merger of Districts 46,65 and to form School District 66

During the winter of 1943-44, enrollment in the Underwood High School dropped to an all-time low of 31 students. (In 1944-45, however it rose to 60, an increase of nearly 100%). Residents of the community were sending their youngsters to high schools outside of the district and paying tuition.

A movement got underway to close the high school, so that such tuition would be paid from the free high school tuition fund of Douglas County. Pressure came from every side to close shop entirely and contract to send all youngsters to the Omaha Public Schools. A group of residents in the community objected to this however, because they insisted that the small community aspect of the educational system was the primary reason for their

having moved into the territory, out of the city and away from the city-school program. This difference of opinion resulted, in January of 1944, in a special committee being invited to Underwood School from the State Department of Education and the University of Nebraska, for the purpose of surveying the needs and making recommendations for improvement. Four men from these departments conducted a very complete and detailed survey. They spent considerable time interviewing students, teachers, parents; and in visiting with pupils and teachers of seventh and eighth graders in districts bordering the Underwood District.

Among the recommendations made, was to employ a superintendent on a year-round basis, at a salary sufficient to permit giving full-time to the educational interest of the school and community. Mr. Allan R. Lichtenberger was employed. In the 1945 Board minutes, the following was recorded. "Little need to be said of his activities on behalf of the school and community. Mr. Lichtenberger has served continuously as vice-president of the Underwood Community Club since coming to our school; he has served as a member of the District Council of the Boy Scouts; he is a member of the Agricultural Committee of the Junior Chamber of Commerce; a faculty member of the University of Omaha School of Adult Education. He has continuously participated in all types of community and county activities, with full consent and encouragement of the Board of Education. Both he and his wife have taken their place in Underwood and Omaha graciously and effectively. The family has won the respect and confidence of parents as well as the pupils."

Dr. Harley Anderson was on the Underwood School Board at this time. Dr. Anderson said in a recent interview, that he moved his family out to 82nd and Howard in 1937 and built their home when there was no house for five miles.

In a letter written June 9, 1945 to the Underwood School Board, Wayne O. Reed, Superintendent of Public Instruction wrote, "Many educators in Nebraska are watching with a great deal of interest the development of the Underwood High School program. Hardly a day passes but some visitor to the Department mentions some phase of the pioneering school work that the Underwood community has made possible for its students. This is an achievement of which the board of education and members of the community can indeed be proud."

It was decided that during the winter of 1946, the school boards of District 46, 65, 31, and 19 would hold joint meetings for the purpose of discussing common educational problems in the suburban area immediately west of Omaha. These meetings culminated in the unanimous adoption of the following resolution: "That representative of School Districts 46, 65, 31, and 19 request the University of Nebraska Teachers College and the State Department of Education to make an educational survey in each of the respective districts for the purpose of determining recommendations in elementary education, and a centrally located community high school program for the four districts involved...and that the cost of the survey not exceed \$100 to any one district."

Members of this survey committee were Dr. Frank Sorenson, chairman, Dr. K. O. Brady, Dr. W. K. Beggs, Dr. Galen Saylor, all from the University of Nebraska, Dr. Leo Black and Mrs. Edith Grear from the State Department of Public Instruction and Glenn Pickrel, Superintendent-elect of the Louisville School.

The following recommendations were made: a) "That School Districts 19, 31, 46, and 65 join to form a new school district to provide both elementary and high school privileges for children in the new district under school law 79-104. b) That the present four school buildings continue to house children in the new district from kindergarten through sixth grade and that these buildings be refitted to accommodate a highly desirable elementary school program. c) That a new high school building be constructed in the vicinity of 90th and Pacific to house pupils from grades seven through twelve. d) That a high school program should be developed in considerable detail before the new building is planned. In this way, the new building can be made to fit the program rather than to have to build a program to fit the building. e) That the school site for the new high school be large enough to accommodate a full size outdoor athletic field, adequate playground space, and suitable landscaping."

In order to carry out the recommendations made by the State Survey Committee, the joint boards of education felt that it was essential to have competent legal advice before going ahead with such plans. Mr. Arthur Wells of the firm Wells, Martin and Lane, was retained for that purpose. The legal petition forms were drawn up under the Douglas County statutes that stated, "The County Superintendent has the discretionary power to create a new district from other organized districts on a petition signed by one half of the legal voters in each district affected. The County Superintendent shall not refuse to organize a new district when he shall be asked to do so by a petition from each school district affected signed by two third of all the legal voters in such district."

This history will not attempt to review all the meetings held by the joint boards during the winter months, but will pay tribute to the many citizens of the community who contributed their services in getting signatures to petitions and in other ways helped to bring about the final merger of the three school districts.

When asking Dr. Harley Anderson how one merges four school district into one, he said, "You work like the dickens--everybody works! You go out at night, knock on doors with the petition in hand and get enough people to say yes to the merger. It was not easy, but we had the workers."

"The Board of District 19 made it clear after the survey that they were not interested in the merger, and withdrew from the whole venture. This District was in the Old Mill area, and had only eight children in it. The farms in the district were owned by two bachelor brothers who weren't interested in having their property merged in with the other three districts. So, we had only three districts involved in the proposed merger. However, in 1955, a portion of District 19 was petitioned to be transferred to School District #66. The real opposition was with the truck garden owners and farmers in the three districts. Building a big high school district was not favorable to their interests. They resented giving up their farms and having city folks move in and tell them what to do."

At the time of the merger, Viola Wise Chatfield remembers a resident of Oakdale, Mr. Elsaker, who was extremely active in the school and had children attending it, giving a speech at one of the pot-luck suppers about the merger. "He didn't take sides and I will always remember what he

said--'Whatever we do in this community about the merger, let's not let Oakdale School lose its identity. Let us not be so absorbed that no one will forget that Oakdale School existed. We have had this school here since 1871!'"

Mr. Al Lichtenberger, who was the principal-superintendent of the Underwood Community School wrote in retrospect, "Petitions! We had one for each of the School Districts 31, 46, 65 and presented them with the required list of names to Douglas County Superintendent William J. Hauser, requesting a merger of these districts. He offered us three numbers from which a choice could be made for the new district. We said, "66 sounds fine," and it has sounded fine ever since. Can anyone imagine anything such as District 101?"

A letter was sent from the County Superintendent to the County Treasurer stating the fact of the creation of School District Number 66 and that it includes all the territory formerly in District 31, 46 and 65, and that the first meeting of the new School District 66 was held on March 30, 1947 and that the organization of the new district become effective on that date.

The present boards were dissolved, effective July 1, 1947, and a six member board was elected to operate both the elementary and high school as provided in Nebraska School Law 79-601. The first president of the Board of Education of School District #66 was Dr. Harley Anderson, H. A. Poley was secretary, Howard D Warren, treasurer, J. Remington Smith and L. V. Swenson, directors. Mr. Allan Lichtenberger became the first superintendent of School District 66. There were 17 teachers, 344 students, and 7 non-certified staff.

Legislative Enactment - LB 469

One of the real fears of the residents of the newly formed School District #66 was that they might get a good high school built and then as the City of Omaha grew to the west, the Omaha School District might take away from the school district certain parts which would seriously handicap the operation of School District 66 and the financing of its program. This had happened before to the area immediately east of 72nd Street and to the south of Dodge Street, which was in the Underwood District at the time bonds were issued for the Underwood High School and grade school buildings. When that little peninsula of residences were taken out of Underwood and put into the City of Omaha, the City School District took over the residences and taxed the property for Omaha school purposes. Those residences were required to continue paying the bond levy for the Underwood school building until all were retired, although the youngsters living in the area were required either to go to the city schools, or to pay special tuition if they went to Underwood, which many of them did. When Omaha took over that portion of the Underwood territory, the Omaha School Board, the Underwood School Board, and the County Superintendent should have jointly arrived at the proper figure for settling the unpaid amount due on bonds from the district so taken over, and that the Omaha School Board should have made settlement for same with the Underwood School Board. Some of the residents living in that particular area moved into the Underwood, Loveland or Oakdale Districts and they were fearful

that a similar experience might be repeated. Omaha high school (Benson & Central) were also becoming overcrowded and threatened to refuse tuition students.

With that in mind, Senator Henry Kosman, a resident of the Loveland District, introduced and succeeded in having passed into law, Legislative Bill 469, which provides that "any school district in an unincorporated area which maintains a high school, when its area or any part thereof is incorporated into a metropolitan city, remain as a separate and independent district, unless a majority of the legal voters in that district vote in favor of merging with the metropolitan school district."

This bill was introduced in the Nebraska State Legislature by Senator Henry Kosman and read for the first time on February 3, 1947. Delegations of residents from Underwood, Loveland and Oakdale made frequent trips to Lincoln in support of the bill. Their diligence paid off when the bill was signed by the governor in May, and became law in September 1947.

"Much credit must go to Charlie Hoff," says Dr. Harley Anderson, who was interviewed for this early history. Charles Hoff was on the Underwood School Board in 1946, and served as secretary to the Board when District 66 was formed.

"Charlie Hoff was a man with ideas--more than you could think of," said Dr. Anderson. "Without him and his dedication to our school district, his hard work and his ideas for quality education, I doubt if School District 66 would have its great tradition. He helped so much in the formation of School District 66. He even originated a trip with Supt. Al Lichtenberger for us to go to Wilmette and Winnetka school systems near Chicago, the best in the country, to get ideas for our new district school. When Senator Kosman was introducing LB 469 for passage in the state legislature, Charlie Hoff knew the ropes down there, and he met with the legislative committees to get the bill passed."

The Bond Issues of 1948 and 1949

At the annual meeting in June 1948, the Board of School District 66 was urged to get busy fast to draw plans for the new high school, also for an addition on to Loveland School and submit a bond issue to the voters. Loveland School was built to house 60 pupils. By changing part of the community room into a classroom, 90 pupils became the capacity -- but in 1948 there were more than 125 pupils attending Loveland, plus the seventh and eighth graders who were transported to Underwood School.

Mrs. Margaret Cozette tells this interesting story. In 1947, she visited the Loveland School as a parent and resident. She saw the little five-year olds in the combination room of beginners, first and second graders. They were in the back of the room doing busy work, so as not to disturb the older ones. She went over to see Superintendent Al Lichtenberger to tell him it was not right that these little ones were there all day with such a limited program. Mr. Lichtenberger asked her what she was going to do about it -- there wasn't any other room in the building, even if they had a kindergarten. She told him there was a large furnace room that she could fix up into a

little classroom and that she was qualified as a kindergarten teacher. So the superintendent told her to go ahead and do so and she could start the first kindergarten in District 66. Mrs. Van Amburgh helped her. They brought the dining room table from the Cozette home and cut it down in size for the children. They decorated the little room and put up curtains. In 1948, the first half-day session of kindergarten began at Loveland, and the other half day kindergarten children were transported to Loveland from Underwood, much to the delight of Margaret Kellogg, who taught a beginners, first and second grade class there.

Oakdale had three classrooms. The crowding there could be corrected to a large extent if the seventh and eighth graders would attend the new high school.

The Board employed John Latenzer as an architect to submit plans for the new high school, and for the addition onto Loveland School. The purchase of the sites for these two buildings would be done after the bond issue was passed.

Mr. Latenzer exhibited the plans for the ultimate 7-12 new high school. It was a very ornately designed building and looked like something as big as the first building to be built much later, of the University of Omaha on Dodge Street. The ultimate plans for the high school called for a building to house one thousand students. The plans were so drawn that certain eliminations could be made at present into the ultimate plans, so as to provide a suitable high school building for a student body of 350. It was decided by the Board that the initial bond issue should not be for more than that necessary to accommodate 350 students.

The Board voted then to consolidate into one bond issue the proposed addition, extending northwest from the present Loveland School, and the amount necessary to build a 7-12 high school. The principal cost of the bond issue was \$1,250,000.

The bond proposal was publized through the Oakdale and Loveland P.T.A. and the Underwood Improvement Club. Those in attendance were overwhelmingly in favor of it. The District, at that time, was paying tuition for forty high school students to the Omaha schools at a total cost of \$9,000 a year. The saving of tuition costs would offset the interest of the bonds. But the opposition stated that taxes would be doubled, an erroneous fact, however it scared lots of people who had indicated earlier that they were willing to pay the additional 10 mill levy.

The bond election, held on November 30, 1948, failed to pass. This caused many heartaches and much disappointment for those who knew the educational needs of children in the fast growing residential area of School District 66.

In spite of the failure of the bond issue, families continued to move out into the suburban area in great numbers. Teachers were getting classes so crowded and conditions became almost intolerable. Teachers had no place to go away from their classrooms, except to the boiler room. In those early days, the boiler room was the second office--lots of business was carried out there.

Teachers had to work so hard and salaries hardly compensated. Hank Ernst, who was the head custodian--engineer for the District schools, tells this story of the staff at Underwood High School and Grade School. "A group of teachers (Mary King, Margaret Kellogg, Dorothy Rice) came to me one frustrated day, and said they were going out on strike, and that they would do so only if I would go out with them. Their chief concern was if I would do it. I told them I'm always with the majority, but that I would at least have to get the furnace boiler going in the morning. I also told them that before we do not come to work, they should approach Supt. Lichtenberger about their feelings. They did that and I never heard anymore."

As Dr. Harley Anderson expressed in the interview for this history, "One of the best things that we did for the District was when we got Henry Ernst. We put an ad in the paper for a custodian for Underwood School, and Hank applied. He was recognized by school men and by professional school building maintenance men of this territory as being one of the best. Satisfying all students, teachers, and citizens of the community is no easy task. A school custodian wields a great influence for good or bad in the community."

On May 10, 1949, another bond election was held. This time there were two separate proposals for consideration. Each one would be voted on separately. One was for the principal amount of \$100,000 for purchasing additional grounds and constructing an addition onto Loveland School, and furnishing the necessary furniture, apparatus and improvements to Loveland, Oakdale and Underwood.

The other proposal was for issuing bonds for the principal amount of \$25,000 to acquire a site for the new high school.

The first proposal passed, but the second one failed. Again the realization of the dream to build a new high school was crushed. "But a very important lesson was learned," said Charlie Hoff, "the public must be made to understand. A tightening of the belt, a refusal to be licked, a re-expression of confidence in the original philosophy of quality education for children and a developed awareness of critical educational needs resulted. This set-back was probably a blessing in disguise."

The turning point of School District #66 occurred at the annual School Board Meeting on Monday, June 13, 1949 at the Underwood School at 7:30 p.m., according to a ten year veteran member of the Board of Education, Mr. C. E. Clinton. There were three offices to be filled; two of them for 3 year terms, and one for a term of one year to fill an unexpired office term.

This was the only time in the history of District #66 that there was a planned opposition. The annual meeting was packed. According to the Charles Durhams' who were there, they even locked the doors so no one would leave--every vote was important.

The opposition represented, according to a flyer that was distributed to the voters in the district, many residents who thought three new members should be elected to serve with the continuing members. The three new men they favored were Thomas F. Homer, Carl W. Hansen, and Charles J. Malec. There was division and resentment in the district as reflected in the failure of the two bond issues.

Quoting the flyer, "This election is of more importance to the people of District #66 than the usual political election. Twice the people have voted down the extravagant ideas of the present Board. We need members who will consider the interest of all the taxpayers and keep them advised openly and honestly as to what is taking place. This is a reminder that we are keeping a close watch on all MILLION DOLLAR DREAMS."

The election of the three incumbents was so close; by a margin of not more than five to eight votes!

The annual meeting of the school board was discontinued in 1952, when District #66 was changed from a Class II to a Class III District. Future board members were elected at the regular city-county elections, usually held in April. However a Caucus of legal voters in School District #66 is held at least two weeks prior to the election for the purpose of nominating the candidates for the school board. In 1980, School District #66 was the only governmental subdivision in the state still using a caucus to nominate candidates. People of the District hang on to this grass roots approach to school government.

Mr. Al Lichtenberger resigned as superintendent in July 1949 to attend the University of Nebraska and complete the work of his doctorate degree. He was then employed in the Office of Education in the United State Department of Health, Education and Welfare in Washington, D.C. until his retirement.

Allan Lichtenberger wrote the following in 1981, "To have been the first superintendent of schools in District #66 is an honor I cherish. No, not all we tried was easy. We failed in some bond elections, but success came, eventually. Most of the credit belongs to the leadership that followed my tenure. When I have returned to School District #66, I have always had a feeling of coming home. It is that kind of community, rich in spirit, loyalty to the school system, a determination to perform exceedingly well. I have affection for School District #66."

Why School District #66 Exists Today

Legally, School District #66 exists under the provisions of the Legislative Bill 469, which amended the revised statutes of Nebraska School Law--Section 79-2701. LB 469 was passed by the Nebraska legislature and this law states the "any school district in an unincorporated area which maintains a high school shall, when its area or any part thereof is incorporated into a metropolitan city, remain as a separate and independent district unless a majority of the legal voters of the district vote in favor of merging with said metropolitan district."

In the 1947 School Report of District #66, the reasons for the District's existence is expressed so well by Charlie Hoff. These reasons are still true today.

"In fairness to Senator Henry Kosman, and to those people who may later find their property being taken into the city of Omaha but who still remain in our school district, we must keep District #66 in the top bracket of educational opportunities. Rest assured that each session of our state legislature will see an attempt by Omaha to throw out LB 469. Unless we

continue to prove that we are entirely capable and willing to support a program and facilities which are far above average, then LB 469 should be killed.

"Over the doors of the State Capitol Building, we have an inscription which reads: 'Salvation of the state is the watchfulness of the citizen.' We as parents, must constantly watch our schools. We must read and understand the reports that come from our schools and from our school board. We must demand that we get good reports from the superintendent and from the school board.

"One of the greatest duties we have, as parents and as citizens, is to be sure that there are always good members on the board of education. Take time to elect and nominate these persons carefully, then be prepared to actually draft them to service. Be sure that parents of school children have a strong voice in this selection. It is so easy in a community like ours, for people of means whose children are grown and have left home to move in and enjoy their comfortable homes with possibly little interest in a strong educational system -- even a preference for 'keeping their taxes down.'

"Push for the best staff, facilities and program -- push relentlessly, but sanely. Public institutions can never operate the same as private business. Pressure groups on both sides result in too much evolution, we know, yet it is the democratic process and it is much better than revolution. Always there is the attempt to find the greatest good for the greatest number. If we are determined and if we are vigilant these objectives will be realized."

School District #66 with its thirteen square miles geographically located in the City of Omaha, is in essence a very fragile school district. It exists by legislative law. Since 1947, the autonomy of District #66 has been challenged in the courts and in the legislature several times. The District #66 Board of Education and residents of the Westside Community have vigorously opposed consolidation with the Omaha Public Schools or any other school system.

In 1957, LB 174 was proposed for just such a merger. Mr. Clark A. Murdock, President of the Board, appointed Mrs. Margre Durham and Mr. C. E. Clinton, along with a Citizens Committee to oppose Legislative Bill 174.

Mr. Clinton said, "This was a big event 'defeating Harry Burke.' I can't tell you how many trips we made down to Lincoln with Bill Baird, our attorney. I give our senator then, Bill Moulton, the credit for this defeat. It was his very genuine aid that did it."

Mrs. Marge Durham recalls, "It was a real choosing of sides down there at the legislature. As long as Hank Kosman was senator, he was always our contact, and rallied on our behalf."

A year or so later, a petition drive for School District 66 to merge with the Omaha Public Schools was conducted by Mr. Clarence A. Haight, who had no children in school. Irvin Yaffe, who had just been elected to the Board, said, "We were able to get a counter drive started and get people's names off the petition--after a month or two, Mr. Haight gave up." Mr. Yaffe

testified at the legislature with Mr. William Baird, the school's attorney, and was successful in getting a petition bill passed, which would have ten percent of the population in favor before a petition could be circulated.

In 1973 and 1974, former State Senator David Stahmer introduced two bills, LB 300 and LB 973, which would eliminate the Westside Community Schools--District #66, the Millard and Ralston school systems and these schools would be merged with Omaha Public Schools into a massive new system, creating a confederation of school systems. Both bills were killed in committee.

Mr. Stahmer and his family then filed lawsuits in Lancaster County District Court, which challenged the constitutionality of the existence of School District 66 and other school districts. It was a long lasting suit. In 1976, the Lancaster County District Court dismissed the lawsuits. Mr. Stahmer then appealed to the Nebraska Supreme Court and in 1979 the Supreme Court upheld the action of the Lancaster District Court.

In 1979, the Omaha Public School Board of Education passed a motion to study the possibility of a merger of the Omaha, District 66, Millard and Ralston Districts. The School District 66 Board of Education opposed this study action, but did not go as far as to close the door of communication with the Omaha Board on other common concerns.

Dr. John Goldner, President of the District 66 Board of Education in 1982, warned the Westside Community Council that although some merger threats have come to naught, "they will not all be false alarms. There will be at least one more battle in the next five years. We may all need to board the buses and go to the Legislature again."

Board member Robert Berkshire said he regretted the amount of time and money that must be spent by all involved if the Omaha Board, or the Legislature, pursues the merger issue further. "We all need to get back to the business of education."

Board members, residents, staff and students have always strongly opposed the idea of merger for a variety of reasons. Many believe that a relatively small district offers better educational opportunities and promotes economic efficiency. "Everything in the educational literature I've read suggests that small is better in terms of school district size," says Board member, Dr. Elizabeth Dahl.

Others say that a smaller district makes communication among groups and individuals possible and allows more people to participate in decision making. In opposition to LB 300, the consolidation bill proposed in 1973, one resident said, "I feel that right now I have a democratic voice in the way the school system is run. If the bill passes and we become too large, I feel certain that this would be diminished." Another resident said, "School District 66 is very community oriented and is responsive to the needs of children. If we are grouped with other districts, I think we might lose touch with the community and the real needs of children."

These men were among the founders of the district, pictured delivering petition signatures for the merger of Districts 46, 65 and 31 to the County Superintendent.

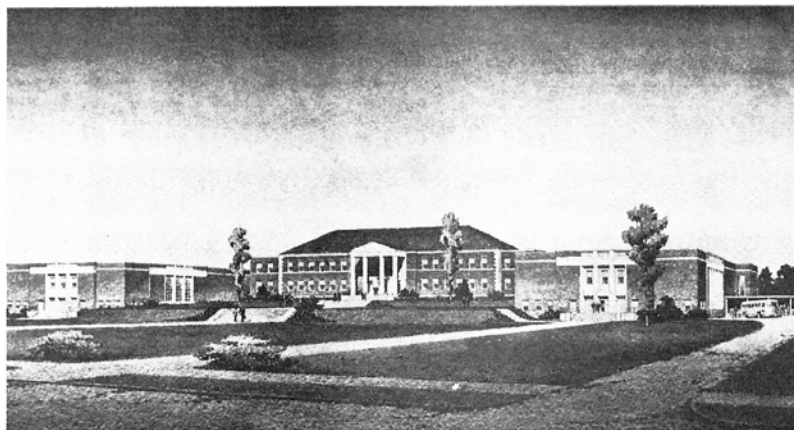


Handwritten text from a document, likely board minutes, mentioning dates like 1871 and names like L. Brown.

Board minutes from "School District No. 46" in 1871.



The staff gathers before the Old Underwood School. 1944-45



This is how Westside High might have looked.... This "dream plan" was drawn in 1948, but the bond issue for the high school didn't pass until 1951.

Chapter II

THE GROWTH YEARS 1950-1964

Twelve Years - Thirteen Schools

During a twelve year span of time from 1952-1964, District 66 added nine elementary schools to the original three; built three junior high schools, and a new high school. Under the dynamic and creative leadership of three superintendents, this unbelievable building program was undertaken.

Superintendent Glenn Pickrel built four schools: Westside High School 1952, Hillside Elementary 1955, Sunset Hills Elementary 1957, and Westgate Elementary 1957. Five bond issues were passed to build these schools and to buy more land for schools to be built in the future. The bond issues passed were: \$670,000 in 1950, \$300,000 in 1951, \$975,000 in 1953, \$287,000 in 1954, and \$7,500,000 in 1955.

Superintendent C. L. Retelsdorf was the first business manager of the District before becoming the superintendent. Both as business manager and superintendent he helped in the site selection and negotiations for purchasing the following schools: Sunset Hills, Westgate, Swanson, Rockbrook, Underwood Hills, Prairie Lane, Westbrook and Arbor Junior High Schools. Swanson School was built while he was superintendent.

Superintendent H. Vaughn Phelps built eight schools: Rockbrook Elementary 1960, Westbrook Junior High 1960, Paddock Road Elementary 1961, Underwood Hills Elementary 1961, Westbrook Elementary 1962, Arbor Elementary and Junior High 1962, Prairie Lane Elementary 1963, and Valley View Junior High 1964. One bond issue was passed to complete the building program; \$6,000,000 in 1961.

Additions to the schools were built during all three superintendencies; Westside High School's fifth addition being the olympic size swimming pool.

The only school named after a person was the Carl A. Swanson Elementary School. The estate of Carl A. Swanson, of Swanson Foods, gave the District an additional five acres to add onto the building site. It was used for a park and arboretum. Both Arbor Heights and Valley View Junior High School were named by a student contest held at the school. The selection of Arbor Heights was made by the Board from a list of five names submitted by junior high students. Bruce Moore, a seventh grader then, and now primary teacher and team leader at Underwood Hills Elementary School, entered the name selected and won a prize of five dollars.

Much credit goes to the Board of Education during these growth years, especially to those who were consistently willing to be re-elected and to

continue their hard work and dedication: A. Clark Murdock, C. E. Clinton, Jackson M. Barton, Margre Durham, Verne Moore, Jr., and Irvin Yaffe.

C. E. Clinton, who was treasurer of the Board all during the 50's says in recollection, "One of the things I did when I got on the Board was to put a stop to one particular payment made each month. They were paying \$10 a meeting to each board member. I told them if board members are not worth more than that, don't pay them anything. It was stopped. I also made a motion at 9:30 p.m. at every meeting, that the Board meeting adjourn. If you can't do business by then, there's something wrong."

Glenn Pickrel became superintendent of School District #66 in July 1949, and his was the job of reassessment and moving the district forward. It was his task to build a new public relations program, creating a better understanding of the problems facing the rapidly growing district. The basis of this was to continue improving the educational program, expanding the physical plant and hiring well-qualified faculty who were dedicated to developing the best and most creative educational program in the state. This he did.

When Glenn Pickrel was asked, what was the first benchmark of success in his superintendency, he replied, "I think the highlight of my first year as superintendent of School District #66 was the University of Nebraska Teachers College Study of our community. This study helped us solve the Underwood High School problem and to make the decision to hold another bond issue to build a new high school.

"I formed a Citizens Committee of twenty people in the District. Ten of these people were in favor of a new high school, ten were opposed, but favored sending students to Omaha Public Schools, either to Benson or Central and paying the tuition. The first meeting was scheduled at Loveland School. When I got there, a hundred people showed up. There were ten people for the new high school and 70-80 against it. It was the most raucous evening of my years as superintendent--never had another like it. However, out of the meeting, I was able to get another committee of ten citizens together, five for the new high school, five against it, to sit down with the professionals from Teachers College, University of Nebraska.

"The University of Nebraska made a comprehensive study of the community and printed a report under the direction of Dr. W. K. Beggs, Frank E. Sorenson and Merle A. Stoneman. They recommended that another bond issue be submitted to the voters for a new high school. When the Citizens Committee voted on this recommendation, nine voted for it and one against it. A farmer, named Mr. Carl Hansen, opposed it. He was the head of the Grain Exchange, and a forceful person.

"After the bond issue passed and the new high school was built," chuckled Glenn, "Carl would come up to the high school with groups of farmers from the Exchange so proud to show off the new school. You never knew when he was coming.

"When I came here as superintendent there was not much enthusiasm for a new high school. I really had to sell the Board on this, so my best source

was to get the University of Nebraska Teachers College to make a study on the real need for a new high school.

A Nostalgic Sketch by Jack Maxwell

Dr. Jack Maxwell, now Executive Director of the National Council of Teachers of English, has written this nostalgic sketch of his first year as teacher at Underwood High School in 1950 and the move to the new high school in 1952.

"That hot September day in 1950, I looked out of the second story classroom in Underwood High School, still perspiring from the exertions and tensions of teaching my first day of school. Glenn Pickrel had hired me out of the University of Nebraska that summer, but he hadn't told me that my predecessor had been released after the students locked her into a closet. That was rumor anyway, and it was enough to cause me to perspire all the more.

"Out on the practice field, a triangular piece on the last edge of the Papio Creek, the hulking figure of Louie Henderson looked twice as large with helmet and pads. He seemed to be paying closer attention to Coach Rene Hlavoc than he had to my directions during second period. And Marilyn Nelson and Eunice Sand looked decidedly more interested in the football practice than in my first foray into English grammar just after lunch. Helen Eklers had helped me find the stacks of the McCormick Mathers workbooks filled with really boring things to do but which, more to the point, kept the students busy while I managed to survive.

"Along the way, that year, we found interesting things to do. The school had acquired the first tape recorder I had ever seen, and someone had bought, from war surplus, an opaque projector. We learned to tape record plays (The Tale of Two Cities in flat adolescent tones and really spiffy sound effects) which we broadcast to the fourth grade down on the first floor. To interest the seniors, I showed them the fine photographs of the Globe Theatre projected by the combersome ex-Army machine.

"There were only twelve seniors who would graduate that year, and when spring came the subject of the Senior Dinner was discussed at great length. We went to the Hotel Fontenelle, all dressed up fancily and sat in a huge room feeling uncomfortable. I had arranged to have a young college acquaintance, a radio announcer with WOW, come to entertain us with magic jokes, and patter. He was really quite bad, and the students muttered not so softly 'We spent \$25 on him?' I grinned, hoping they wouldn't make me pay for my bad decision. (My teaching salary that year was \$2400 before taxes). The meeting ended dismally and the seniors straggled off, still muttering. I paused to speak briefly to the young entertainer and gave him the \$25. His name was Johnny Carson.

Another thing Glenn didn't tell me was that I would teach all the high school English (Mary King Conner took care of the 7th and 8th grade kids). I also taught speech, was school librarian, sponsored the newspaper, directed the annual skit night, sponsored the Key Club, the senior dance and took tickets at the football and basketball games and

"When I left school that last day in the spring of 1951, the signs of boom faced me across the street from Underwood, as what had been a cornfield was being torn asunder by bulldozers, and prefabricated homes were bolted together before our eyes. I would never be the same again. Small, rural Underwood High School would shortly move to the new Westside site, on September 1952. I went along, but the later memories were never quite as vivid as those of that first year."

The bond issue of \$670,000 passed on October 24, 1950 to buy a site and build a new high school. Now the dream could be realized. Ever since 1948 when the first efforts to build a new high school began, offers of sites were proposed to the Board for consideration. Gordon Roberts wanted to build his Roberts Dairy across from Underwood High School. If he could get the land, he could build a track and football field for free for the Underwood High School. Residents didn't want that. Also that same year, Mr. Hastings gave a detailed report on the Brandeis farm property, which was being put up for sale. Mrs. J. L. Brandeis, who owned the land in the Broadmoor area, said she would give the land to the school for \$1.00 for 99 years, if the new high school would be called the George Brandeis Memorial High School. People in the area didn't want to take that offer.

Mr. Charles Durham said, "Do you want to know how they located the site for the new high school? J. R. Smith, a Board member, was my neighbor. We were talking and William Hargleroad said to us, "Why don't they quit fighting and just put the high school on my farmland on Pacific Street, there is a big piece of it there? Smith said it sounded pretty good to him and he would bring it up to the Board. When the District was ready to buy a site for the high school, they bought the land from Bill Hargleroad."

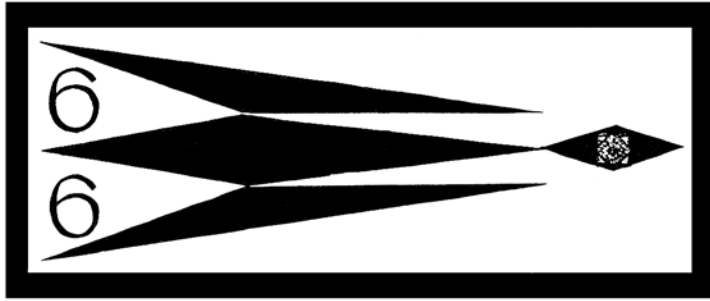
A Name for School District 66 and Its New High School

"When the high school was built in 1952, they didn't have a name for it at first," said former superintendent Glenn Pickrel, "just called it District 66's new high school."

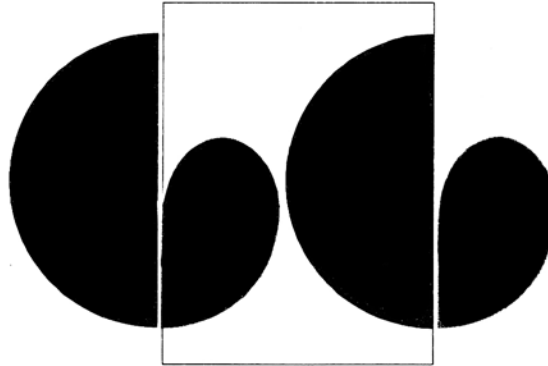
"The play, 'Westside Story' had just come out. I thought that Westside would be a good name for the district, but then when I considered it further, the name might not be more than 'east side, west side, all around the town. The community school idea was just becoming popular, and I thought a community type of name for the district would be an excellent one. I needed to do a lot of work in identifying the Oakdale School attendance area, and the Loveland School attendance area with the new high school, as well as making a community around District 66. Naming School District 66 The Westside Community Schools would really help to make the whole district a community and Westside could be the name of its high school."

The first emblem, or logo, for the District was designed in 1963 by staff member Donna Jorgenson. The large pieces of the emblem symbolizes home, school, and community. The small pieces at the right of the three arms represents a diamond, symbolizing the finest educational product produced by

the District, its students. Thus, the whole symbol, in essence, depicts the finest in education through the cooperation of home school and community.



The logo was used on all official letters and publications. A service pin was made using this symbol and given to the staff of School District 66 honoring their years of service, 5-10-20. A tiny jewel was placed on the small piece, with a diamond for twenty years of service. Later this logo was replaced by a bold symbol 66.



The Westside Community Schools' prestige began to grow. When the state of Nebraska formed the highest classification for school accreditation, known as the AA Accreditation, the first school district in the state to receive this was The Westside Community Schools, in December 1956. School District 66 has received the AA Accreditation ever since. This accreditation helped District 66 immeasurably. People wanted to move into the district because of the education their children would receive.

The school's prestigious AA Accreditation and reputation did much to increase the financial security of the community. The overwhelming passage of the bond issue in 1955 for seven million five hundred thousand dollars, was the beginning. The District didn't have the money then in assessed valuation for such an amount. It was passed on the condition that bonds couldn't be sold until the district had the assessed valuation. This necessitated a development of a Master Plan for projected sites for elementary, junior highs and perhaps a new site for the high school. This was a very well thought out master plan, locating the schools within walking distances, and even including a campus type high school (in the vicinity of where the Witherspoon mansion now stands) Gerald Koch, who was a teacher at Westside in 1955, remembers the envisioned plan for this campus high school, with a humanities center, science complex, industrial wing, and a commons

area. He thought it was a super idea, but it never materialized. The census projections were more favorable for building junior high schools around the District, and leaving the high school where it was.

The purchase of the Indian Hills Golf Course on Dodge Street, by private investors, really showed the residents of the community the potential for business and professional expansion in the area known as Westside. This projected a solid financial support for a growing school district and gave everyone in the district so much confidence in forging ahead.

Commercial enterprise was very important to the financial growth of the District, because at this time Nebraska was known as the "White Spot of the Nation." Nebraska invested less in state taxes than any other state. There was no state aid equalization fund. Ninety-five percent of the cost of supporting education was derived from the general property tax assessments from local school districts.

No Split Sessions

District 66 was a pioneer school system in the use of "Cottages" for housing students during this rapid growth period in the history of American education. Being first to use the cottage classroom concept was an innovative way of insuring parents that schools would not go to half day session in District 66 because of overcrowding. And they never did.

Sunset Hills Elementary School began in four "Cottages" leased on 93rd Street south of Pacific. They were used for almost two years, before the school was built. Life Magazine featured these "Classrooms in Cottages" in 1955, to show the nation that there was a way for schools to avoid split sessions. Students would have attended Loveland Elementary except for the overcrowding. Leo Daly, the architect of Sunset Hills School, incorporated the cottage idea in the design of the school. Each classroom has its own entrance door from the outside, and there are no long halls in the building.

Westgate Elementary School began with classes in seven cottages on Westgate Road. The students were originally from the Oakdale attendance area. Westridge Cottages were the beginning of Paddock Road Elementary School; the students were children living in the Westridge Addition of the Westgate School attendance area.

During the period of growth at Hillside Elementary School, seven cottages were purchased at 72nd and Seward Street in 1958 for kindergarten, first, second and third grades.

Temporary classrooms were used as early as 1953, when space was rented at the Countryside Village Shopping Center for fifth and sixth graders from Loveland and Underwood. Wooden saw-horses were brought out during recess to prevent cars from driving in the parking spaces, so the children could play on the concrete. Shortly afterwards, space was rented at St. Andrews Episcopal Church for Loveland's primary grades. Sixth graders from Loveland, at one time, had their classrooms at Westside High School.

Underwood School was so crowded in 1954, that there were two kindergartens going on at the same time in the gym. Each had a teacher and

30 children. One of these kindergartens went over to the new Hillside School, when it opened in March 1955. The District rented five classrooms in 1954 at Temple Israel Synagogue for the over-flow of Underwood students in grades four, five and six who would go to Hillside when it opened. Betty Penton Jantz, who taught fourth grade, said "the classrooms in the Temple were built to accommodate 15 students, we had 25. Rabbi Brooks invited the staff and students into the Temple to see what was there and he answered many questions."

Donald Stumpff, who was the principal of Underwood and Hillside, and now professor at Kearney State College, recalls, "I was so concerned about the conduct of our students in the Temple, but Rabbi Brooks assured me that our children were much better behaved than his students and he wanted to know our secret."

Arbor Heights Junior High School held seven 7th grade classes in an old Safeway Grocery Store building on Center Street until the annex was built connected by a walkway to the junior high building. "From grocery store to annex doesn't sound like a particularly desirable move, but what's in a name?" stated an article in the 1967 issue of the 66 Report. "It could just as easily have been called the Heights' Hideway or Don's Dell." It continued, however, to be called the annex to this day.

There was no administration building in District 66 during the 50's. After a succession of office moves from Underwood High School to Loveland to Westside High School, space was finally rented for the administrative office in the Countryside Village Shopping Center - next to Earl May Garden Store on the north side. In 1961 the District 66 Administrative Office moved to the old Underwood School. With extensive remodeling, Underwood School changed from a school for elementary youngsters to the office of Superintendent H. Vaughn Phelps, business manager Martin Dunklau, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Niels Wodder, and 23 members of the elementary curriculum staff. The move took place in installments with people and equipment coming from the Countryside Village office, temporary buildings at the Westside plant and offices in the high school proper. Classrooms and blackboards gave way to wood-paneled areas and busy switchboards. On the first floor next to the superintendent's office was a wood paneled room for Board meetings. The professional library was on the second floor next to the curriculum office. The Elementary Coordinator, Maria Laas was back in an office made from the classroom where she first started as a teacher in the District. The old gym was transformed into a storeroom containing supplies for all the district schools. Later temporaries were placed back of the administration building for the District's library headquarters.

Hiring the Staff - "Sign Here"

When Glenn Pickrel came to School District 66, Underwood High School had a teaching principal Mr. Bob Marks, a very small staff and a limited program. The elementary grades were also in the building and were combined grades; three grades to a teacher. The superintendent's office was also there. Oakdale and Loveland were schools with beginners to eighth grade. Each school had a teaching principal. Mrs. Frances Dinsmore at Loveland, and Mrs. Anna Post at Oakdale. The elementary teachers received instructional supervision from the Douglas County Superintendent's Office, and health services from Douglas County Health Department.

Mr. Pickrel hired the first full-time administrators in 1952; Houston Elley, principal of Westside High School and Maria Laas, supervising principal of the three elementary schools.

As the school district grew, more principals were added. "One of the best things I did was to hire Kenneth Hansen from North Platte," said Supt. Pickrel, "he was a junior high principal there, and Westside was a seventh through twelfth grade school. Ken had such a positive attitude toward education and I knew he could develop Westside into an excellent high school."

When Kenneth Hansen got a call from the University of Nebraska about Westside, he was not sure. Suburbia was a new concept to him; was this what he wanted and would he be interested in it--a school system outside of Omaha and not very stable? "After talking with Glenn and the Board, I was excited about the high professionalism of everyone," said Ken, "and I was impressed with the in-service program for the staff, as well as their connections with Teachers College at the University of Nebraska. It was all so unique and it challenged me. Westside High School seemed kind of small compared to North Platte, but it had lots of plans for growth and would be a very exciting place to work. I liked the idea of one high school in a school system."

When teachers were asked, what made them want to come to District 66, the answer, although stated in different personal ways, was always the same -- "academic freedom to teach students in a creative, innovative school system."

Jim Tangdall's motive states it so well. "The reason I came to Westside High School was the tremendous enthusiasm and 'esprit de corps' about the school district. There was such a positive attitude about education and the quality of the school system -- a family spirit. That has always been its strength. This excitement about a school, I had never seen before. It is unique to see a community so committed to developing a quality academic program for its students."

Three teachers came together from Papillion, Ruby Huebner, Delia Croissant and Wanda Wittmus in 1957. They were looking for a school system that would give them freedom and autonomy to teach the way they knew was best for kids and pay them better for it. After the superintendent heard them express opinions as to what quality education for kids was he said to all three--"Sign Here." Their biggest concern, after taking this drastic step of leaving Papillion, was to convince the superintendent that they all three had to teach in the same school, as they had access to one car and would drive out together. Their anxiety was put to rest, as transportation of teachers to the school was a problem the school always solved in some way (as well as where to live). All three were assigned to different schools and never missed a day.

Paul Nyholm tells this story when C. L. Retelsdorf was superintendent. "I went over to apply. The superintendent didn't even interview me, he just knew that I was student teaching under Dick Lane. He handed me a contract and said, "Sign Here." After I left, I didn't know what I would be making, embarrassed, I had to go back and find out."

As Superintendent Pickrel recalls, "We always wanted to get the best teachers we could find. When we interviewed teachers for jobs, I guess we would scare them a bit. If they weren't ready for the kind of teaching we expected, they wouldn't accept the position. Those that were excited and knew this was the kind of system they wanted to work in and be challenged with the opportunity, we would hire them. We wanted the good, creative, ambitious people who believed in kids and what they could learn. We got lots of good people, and I got to know them well."

The University of Nebraska Teachers College did its part in opening the doors to District 66 for many of its promising prospective teachers. Bill Hoyt and Gerald Koch, for instance, never knew where this school was until they took administration or education courses and they always included the innovative ideas taking place at the Westside Community Schools -- also its strong athletic program.

Glenn Pickrel chose mostly superintendents from small Nebraska towns for the elementary principal positions. He needed their experience in raising bond issues and building community based schools. He hired Carl Ludington from Crawford, Nebraska Bill Dunn from Leigh, Nebraska and Bob Ackerman, who had a physical education major and was superintendent of the Omaha City Recreation Department. Superintendent H. Vaughn Phelps continued with this policy for some of the elementary schools, hiring Arnold Edmiston and Clifford Alexander, both former superintendents.

Bill Dunn explained it this way, "District 66 could match the salary we superintendents were making in the small towns. Glenn Pickrel knew that if we were successful there, we could be an even bigger success in 66, and Maria Laas, the elementary supervisor could take care of the curriculum. I was offered the job of principal a year before my wife and I came to District 66. Clara was teaching at Leigh, and there wasn't an opening for her at Westside until 1957. When Glenn called me for the job as principal of Sunset Hills School, I told him I would have to get my credentials in order before I could think of applying. He said, 'You don't need to, I know without looking at credentials that anyone who has been a superintendent of a small town for fourteen years must be doing 90% of the things right, or he wouldn't be there.' Of course, I got my credentials to him."

Superintendent Vaughn Phelps used Bill Dunn for three years as a recruiter for teachers. He would go to the college and universities interviewing teachers who were interested in teaching in District 66. "I recruited Rod and Peggy Johnson, Fran Carr and many others," said Bill, "Arnold Edmiston went with me the last year of recruitment because the job was too much for one person, especially when you got stuck in the North Dakota snowdrifts."

Bob Adams was hired as Assistant Superintendent in charge of personnel in 1963. In a tribute to Associate Superintendent Robert N. Adams, at his untimely death in January 25, 1976, the Board of Education of District 66 passed a resolution in his memory, which read in part..."He worked so tirelessly for the cause he believed in and loved so much. He has left a legacy of excellence to the Westside Community Schools, through the

outstanding staff that he recommended and the example that he personally established."

The staff did not only include administrators and teachers, but secretaries, custodians and cooks. A book could be written about Alice Gillogly, secretary to the principal of Westside High School for 22 years, and now serving part-time in community relations for the District, particularly in organizing class reunions and alumni events. Sooner or later, all students and Westside staff get to know Alice. Besides her secretarial duties, she unofficially served as a liaison between the students and their teachers; she was so intuitively sensitive to the feeling of both, and had such a sense of humor, no problem was left unsolved. Active and interested in all students, Alice could be found on the job almost anytime, day or evening, when activities were taking place at Westside. Alice said, "I was Mary's Little Lamb following the students around and showing them where to go. I never over-stepped my bounds with the professionals," Continuing, Alice reflected, "You wouldn't have stayed as long as I did on the job if you didn't love it--sure it was hard work and long hours. I've been so fortunate in that not only the kids, but their families have been so good to me; they are part of my family too." She laughingly remembers what Dr. Leon McGoogan told her, "If all the kids in District 66 that I brought into the world would remember him on Father's Day and me on Mother's Day, we would retire."

The first elementary school secretary in the district was Eileen Barber, who was hired for Hillside in 1955. She is still a resident of the district and recalls vividly the continuous growth of Hillside, reaching over one thousand students in 1960. She started the filing system for all those records, coded them with colored clips, to say nothing about the hundreds of textbooks she unpacked and sorted. But what she remembers most is when a little first grader came into the office, and she had to ask him his name. He looked up in surprise, "Don't you remember me from kindergarten, when you came to watch over our room when my teacher had to take Jimmy home when he was sick?" She felt so badly about not remembering him (as he did her). Afterwards she made every effort to know the names of the children.

There was the husband and wife team so loved at Oakdale, Tessie and Bob Gess. Tessie was head cook, Bob, custodian. Wilbur Fitzpatrick began a dual job as cook and custodian carpenter and later became Director of Food Services, serving 6,000 students school lunches one year. A. B. Brown, custodian at Loveland had as much interest in landscaping the grounds, and helping the safety patrol cross the children on busy Pacific Street, as he had in "pushing the broom." Severt Olson, custodian at Underwood labored with such dedication to keep the old building in shape. Bob Ackerman, principal of Underwood, told this seriously humorous story, "We always had open house after the first day that school opened in the fall, so parents could meet the teachers and see the classrooms in action. As you remember the rest rooms for the children at Underwood were so old and the stools needed painting. Mr. Olson said he had some green paint left over, so I told him to go ahead and use it. It was a very humid September day which made it hard for the paint to dry. The first grade teacher came up to my office very upset--'I have a room full of parents down there, and the children are coming in from the restroom with green bottoms! You've got to do something about this!'"

The School Buildings--Their Future

With typical foresight and eagerness to create the best learning environment, the District kept abreast of school building trends. Flexibility was the watchword in planning the schools. Buildings were constructed to lend themselves to change and innovation. Nine of the schools won awards from the American Association of School Administrators for design and functional planning.

Underwood Hills was built to facilitate team teaching, called "cooperative teaching." The walls dividing the classrooms, were built in movable units which had space in them for students to hang their coats. They proved, however, much too heavy for teachers to move easily when they wanted to open up the rooms. Prairie Lane had the largest classroom in the nation, 5,000 square feet of open space, which allowed four teachers to conduct multi-grade inter-age classes. There were also two teacher classrooms, and small individual classrooms for "self-contained" traditional teaching. All the elementary schools had a cafeteria, gymnasium-auditorium facility called the "multi-purpose" room, a library and outdoor playgrounds. Many of them also had an instrumental music room, speech therapy and health rooms, some did not have all of these. Each one had a teacher's lounge and work room. In the 1950's, pegboards were put up for bulletin boards, much to the disdain of the teachers, who had to use golf tees to mount their materials.

Westbrook Junior High was a building to accommodate 400 students. There were spacious commons areas, seven classrooms and a library, besides the special areas. Movable walls between classrooms permitted as many as ninety students to work together. Arbor Heights Junior High was built for 800 pupils. The wide commons area on the upper level allowed for flexibility. The seventh grade wing was self contained apart from the upper grades. The parabolic roof was built as a cost saving one, giving the building an unusual appearance. Valley View Junior High was built with five hexagonal "pods," self contained seventh grade and eighth grade core classrooms "wrapped around" the unique library. The hexagonal design permitted the opening of the classroom directly onto the library in the center of the school.

Westside High School was originally built for under 500 students, but it was so designed to facilitate building on additions. These additions have included an auditorium, Little Theater, gymnasium, instructional materials centers (IMC) for all departments, auto mechanics, shop, swimming pool and a guidance office.

More often than not, the school buildings, under construction, were never quite completed by the time the students returned to school in the fall. Teachers taught, and students received their schooling to the sound of drill hammers penetrating the air with their rhythmic rumble. But the end result was a school building so colorful and functional, not like the old. When Hillside was built, there were dirt roads instead of pavement all through the area.

Even though the Master Plan located the school buildings within a mile of their attendance area, no one visualized that there would always be a lack of sidewalks which meant the children had to walk in the streets, or ride the

bus if the distance was too far, or the traffic too dangerous for them to get to their school. Bus scheduling and the monitoring task to assure that students came and went according to bus time, or that their bus pass was an accurate indication that they lived more than a mile from the school building, was always the first item of business at many faculty meetings and took too much time of the agenda.

The original school buildings were solidly built and were landmarks on the educational scene. Cottages used as classrooms were sold and additions built on the original schools. Grover Street Cottages were the last ones to be sold in 1973. These cottages, used by the District, actually were sold for as much or more than they cost initially.

As time moved on and educational needs changed, renovation of schools was imperative for a conducive environment for learning. The first renovation of school buildings, outside of the frequent remodeling done at Westside High School, was Loveland School in 1973. It became the show piece of the District, the old was preserved, and the new concept of a more open education was incorporated.

The tornado on May 6, 1975 completely destroyed Westgate Elementary School. A miracle of sorts happened. In the midst of the rubble of the Westgate multi-purpose room laid a clock; it had stopped at 4:36 p.m. The tornado struck about an hour after school was dismissed, and all children had gone home. No matter what, quality of people could not be destroyed. The entire school and community rallied around and rebuilt the school in 82 days, with the new Westgate opening its doors in September. A storm shelter was included in the new design. A check of one million sixty-two thousand dollars from Home Insurance Company presented by Danforth Loring of Foster-Barker Insurance Co. covered most of the cost of replacement.

In 1975, Hillside was also renovated, Oakdale School in 1979, and the Carl A. Swanson School in 1981. The renovation of these schools cost as much or more than the original schools.

Saying goodbye to the old Underwood School building on Cass Street in 1973 was bittersweet. It had been a school for hundreds of children and served as the birthplace for countless plans and dreams by staff and administration. The day had come to move the Administration, Board and Curriculum offices into a new building designed by Stan Howe and Associates, called the ABC Building at 909 South 76 Street, and also to move the Districts' school supplies, stored in the old gym at Underwood School to the newly built Service Center and Central Processing Facility on 95th & J Street. After the move, the Underwood School building and land was sold to a restaurant enterprise.

As the moving vans pulled up to the doors of Underwood and staff members boxed up belongings and cleared out files, rainwater dripped from the leaking roof into buckets and onto desks. It was almost as if the building was crying itself out--as if it knew that this was its last day.

Curriculum and School Organization in the 50's

Westside High School was a six year school, with grades 7 through 12. There were seventh grades also at Oakdale, Underwood, Hillside and Westgate Elementary Schools. Grades kindergarten through seventh were taught in self-contained classrooms; grades eight through twelve were departmentalized.

Ability grouping, for sectioning of students for instruction, was the major organizational plan from elementary through high school. Ability grouping was the practice of grouping students homogeneously - by similarities, usually in achievement and/or aptitude. Through ability grouping, each school had a program for the gifted and rapid learners, one for those achieving at grade level, and a program for those who were maturing slowly. Upon entering kindergarten, the sections were determined by the age of the child -- the younger, the more immature. This meant the younger ones attended in the mornings, the older in the afternoons. In the elementary schools, through grade seven, upon entering, and at each yearly promotion, the pupils were assigned to sections according to their maturity levels. The norms used were based on achievement test results, intelligence tests, pupil's record data, and teacher estimation of the pupil. This was continued in the eighth grade and on through high school.

Ability grouping promoted acceleration. Some students were taking algebra in the eighth grade. Bill Hoyt, a math teacher at Westside High School recalls, "Grouping according to ability was in when I came to Westside. The biggest thing I got to do was teach algebra to 8th grade students, who were considered top students in math. It was great working with those kids, and by the time they were ready for college, they could take advanced courses. This vertical acceleration was good for some kids, but it was harmful to others. We didn't know as much as we do today about individualizing and pacing student's progress. Some of these students would have been better off without such a rapid vertical acceleration."

In the accreditation report in 1956, when School District 66 received the AA Accreditation, the following comments about grouping were made, "While the plan of grouping according to ability and maturity levels is commendable and seems to fit the Westside Community Schools quite well, it needs to be somewhat less emphasized in the thinking of the faculty. Numerous teachers seemed too quick to explain which group was which. There was a hint of apology and suggestion of undue 'class consciousness.'" The teachers need to accept their groups and work with them on their levels and also continue to provide for individual pupils within the groups."

In 1954, Westside High School was accepted by the North Central Association. The establishment of department chairman was the first innovation done by principal Ken Hansen in 1957. The curriculum was basically college preparatory, with 60 percent of the students going on to college. The requirements for graduation were explicit; four years of

English, one year of math, one year of science, two years of social studies (one year being American History). The high school curriculum consisted of:

English - Speech, Debate
Math - General, Algebra, Geometry, Advanced Algebra
Social Studies - American History, World History,
Geography, Modern Problems
Science - General, Biology, Physics, Chemistry
Foreign Language - Latin, Spanish, French, German
Commercial - Typing, Shorthand, Office Practice
Industrial Arts - Shop, Home Economics
Art - Music, Physical Education, Driver Education

Westside High was one of the schools to receive a grant from the Ford Foundation for the Advancement of Education Research Study, known as the Lloyd Trump Plan. Tapes and tape recorders were used as a means of better utilization of staff for teaching of Spanish and spelling in seventh through ninth grades. Romaine Gibson was in charge of this research study from 1956-58.

Ethel Davison developed the library for Westside High School. She was greatly respected for the philosophy and objectives she carried out in purchasing the great books, periodicals and references. There was one library, and daily study hall periods. Jim Tangdall served as part-time counselor, until Karl Pecht became the first guidance counselor for Westside.

In 1959, a comparison was made in the SRA testing program among suburban schools, and Westside ranked in third place among the nine best schools in the group. Westside was accepted for membership on the College Entrance Examination Board on June 20, 1959; one of the first of fifty high schools in the United States.

In the elementary schools, the classroom teacher was responsible for the total curriculum. The unit method was used to incorporate all subject areas in a central theme, usually taken from the social studies or science curriculum. The units were very comprehensive and were enhanced by art and music. Shirley Wilgus Overton remembers creating an extravaganza of a unit on oceanography she taught in sixth grade at Hillside, "Our whole room was done like we were under water. We had every kind of stuffed fish hanging from the lights. One day the principal came into the room and a fish hit him right in the face. I was very embarrassed," said Shirley.

Reading, English, spelling and arithmetic were taught from grade level basal textbooks and workbooks. Teacher's manuals included the scope and sequence and served as the model for instruction. Teachers developed most of their "seat work" activities for reinforcing skills.

Spanish was added to the third grade curriculum in 1958, and continued on each following year through the seventh grade. The school day was lengthened 25 minutes for this addition to the elementary curriculum. The spanish teacher, Mary Clare Joyce, taught the class once a week, leaving materials, tapes and records for the classroom teacher to teach the other lessons.

There was one librarian for all the elementary schools. In 1958, Zoe Welsh set up the Dewey Decimal System for all these libraries. There were consultants in music, art and physical education who travelled to the schools. They taught the classes once or twice a week; the classroom teacher taught the rest. Instrumental music was also taught by special teachers twice a week at the same time vocal music was taught. Students who took instrumental music would attend these classes instead.

There were three "helping teachers," who were generalists. They were assigned to the elementary schools to help all teachers, especially the new ones.

In-service training for the staff of District 66 developed as part of the Westside Cooperative Study Project with the University of Nebraska Teachers College, which began in 1953. Dr. Galen Saylor was in charge of these staff training sessions. A year later, when department chairmen were assigned to the curricular areas at Westside High School, K-12 curriculum committees were formed, with the department heads as chairman, to develop the in-service program with the cooperation of the high school principal and the elementary supervisor. Often the schedule of curriculum meetings became so heavy that teachers did not have sufficient time for planning their own school work.

Much of the social life of the students centered around the school activities. There was a tremendous school spirit by participation at football and basketball games, the Pep Club, programs and class activities.

Principals of the Schools in District 66 1947--1982

All of the schools that now comprise School District 66 were either in existence or were built during the growth period ending in 1964. Below are the names of the principals who have served these schools, and the date each one began. The list of schools is in chronological order, according to the year the school was built.

Oakdale Elementary School - 1871

Anna Post - Teaching Principal, 1947
Donald R. Hoffmann - Teaching Principal, 1953
Rene Hlavac - also Westgate Cottages, 1954
Bob Ackerman - Also Underwood, 1957; Oakdale only 1958
Joan Gilliam, 1961
Clare Mahoney, 1962
William Dunn, 1967
Dennis Hansen, 1978
Francis Carr, 1981

Underwood Grade School, 1876 and High School, 1925

Bob Marks - 1947

Loveland Elementary School - 1932

Frances Dinsmore - Teaching Principal, 1947
Marjorie Mortensen - 1953, also Sunset Hills Cottages, 1955
Carl Ludington - Sunset Hills Cottages 1956, Loveland only 1957
Francis Carr - also Arbor Heights Elementary, 1973
Paul Nelson - 1979

Westside High School, 1952

Houston Elley - 1952
Kenneth Hansen - 1957
(Rene Hlavac principal of junior high grades at WHS)
Jim Tangdall - 1971

Underwood Elementary School, 1952

Marjorie Mortensen - Teaching Principal, 1952
Donald Stumpff - Principal, 1954
Bob Ackerman - also physical ed teacher, elementary schools, 1956
Paul Johnson - Teaching Principal, 1958
Philip Richards - Teaching Principal, 1960

Hillside Elementary School, 1955

Donald Stumpff - 1955 also Underwood, Hillside only 1956
Arnold Edmiston - 1959
Susan Betcke - filled out year 1974
Rodney Johnson - 1974
Robert Bruckner - 1980

Sunset Hills Elementary School, 1957

William Dunn - 1957
Rodney Johnson - 1967
David Ankenman - also Early Childhood 1974, & Prairie Lane, 1981

Westgate Elementary School , 1957

Robert Adams - 1957
Clifford Alexander - 1959 & Westridge Cottages, Westgate only 1961

Swanson Elementary School, 1959

Paul Johnson - 1959
Larry McMillen - 1972
Carolyn Law - 1980, also Early Childhood All Day Center 1981

Rockbrook Elementary School, 1960

Max McAuley - 1960
Evelyn Husband - 1967
Enid Humphrey - to fill out year 1973-74
Karl Hughes - 1974
Al Inzerello - 1979

Westbrook Junior High School, 1960

Ernest Horacek - 1960
Les Sladek - 1971

Paddock Road Elementary School, 1961

Corrine Nevins - 1961
Jack Welch - 1974

Underwood Hills Elementary School, 1961

Philip Richards - 1961
Enid Humphrey - 1963
David Ankenman - 1972, also Westbrook Elementary
Susan Betcke - 1974

Westbrook Elementary School, 1962

Evelyn Husband - Teacher Leader, 1962
David Ankenman - Teacher Leader 1968, Principal 1972
also Underwood Hills
Beverly Hurstad - Teacher Leader, 1974
Les Sladek - Westbrook Elementary & Junior High K-9 School, 1974

Arbor Heights Elementary and Junior High School, 1962

Donald Erickson - 1962
Beulah Goggins - Teacher Leader Elementary School, 1962
Rodney Johnson - Teacher Leader Elementary School, 1966
Dennis Hansen - Teacher Leader Elementary School, 1967
Francis Carr - Teacher Leader Elementary School, 1970
Arbor Elem. and Loveland Principal, 1973
Paul Nelson - Arbor Elem. and Loveland Principal, 1979
Carolyn Law - Teacher Leader, 1979
Connie Baxter - Teacher Leader, 1980
Arbor Heights Elementary and Junior High became K-9 School, 1980
under Donald Erickson as principal
Lee Perkins - 1981

Prairie Lane Elementary School, 1963

Mary Louise Hale - Teaching Principal, 1963
Full Time Principal, 1964
Paul Nelson - 1969
David Ankenman - 1981, also Sunset Hills

Valley View Junior High School, 1964

Nora Veerhusen - 1964
Curtis Olson - 1965
Lee Perkins - 1976
John Crook - 1981

Principals, Assistants and Teacher Leaders

Principals, teaching principals, and teacher leaders are listed for the schools which previously or currently comprise Westside Community Schools. Schools are listed alphabetically. The names of principals and assistants are listed chronologically, and the starting dates of their service are noted. Dual assignments are noted wherever known, but may be incomplete.

ARBOR HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Donald Erickson	1962	Principal
Beulah Goggins	1962	Teacher Leader
Rodney Johnson	1966	Teacher Leader
Dennis Hansen	1967	Teacher Leader
Francis Carr	1970	Teacher Leader
	1972	Principal, also Loveland
Paul Nelson	1979	Principal, also Loveland
Carolyn Law	1979	Teacher Leader
Connie Baxter	1980	Teacher Leader (was there more years)

ARBOR HEIGHTS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Donald Erickson	1962	Principal
William Haffey	1971	Assistant Principal
Lee Perkins	1981	Principal

HILLSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Donald Stumpff	1955	Also Principal Underwood; Hillside only, 1956
Arnold Edmiston	1959	Principal
Susan Betcke	1974	Acting Principal
Rodney Johnson	1974	Principal
Robert Bruckner	1980	Principal
Francis Carr	1994	Principal

LOVELAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Frances Dinsmore	1947	Teaching Principal
Marjorie Mortensen	1953	Also Sunset Hills Cottages, 1955
Maria Laas	1953	Supervising Principal; also Oakdale and Underwood
Carl Ludington	1956	Sunset Hills Cottages, 1956; Loveland only, 1957
Francis Carr	1972	Also Arbor Elementary
Paul Nelson	1979	Also Arbor Elementary
Bob Bruckner	1989	Also Prairie Lane
Rod Jones	1994	

OAKDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Anna Post	1947	Teaching Principal
Donald R. Hoffman	1953	Teaching Principal
Rene Hlavac	1954	Principal; also Westgate Cottages, 1954
Bob Ackerman	1957	Principal; also Underwood; Oakdale only, 1958
Joan Gilliam	1961	Acting Principal

Clare Mahoney	1962	Principal
William Dunn	1967	Principal
Dennis Hansen	1970	Principal
Francis Carr	1981	Principal
Bob Bruckner	1994	Principal

PADDOCK ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Corrine Nevins	1961	Principal
Jack Welch	1974	Principal
Carolyn Law	1983	Principal
Gary Ohm	1993	Principal

PRAIRIE LANE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mary Louise Hale	1963	Teacher Leader; Principal, 1964
Paul Nelson	1969	Principal
Francis Carr	1979	Principal
David Ankenman	1981	Principal, also Sunset Hills
Al Inzerello	1984	Principal, also Rockbrook
Jacque Estee	1984	Teacher Leader
Jim Otto	1986	Teacher Leader
Bob Bruckner	1989	Principal
Rod Jones	1989	Teacher Leader
Jim Stevens	1994	Principal
Sandy Irish	1996	Teacher Leader

ROCKBROOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Max McAuley	1960	Principal
Evelyn Husband	1967	Principal
Enid Humphrey	1973	Principal
Karl Hughes	1974	Principal
Al Inzerello	1979	Principal
Jim Otto	1989	Principal
Carolyn Law	1993	Principal

SUNSET HILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

William Dunn	1957	Principal
Rod Johnson	1967	Principal
David Ankenman	1974	Principal
Mary Drew	1981	Teacher Leader
Clifford Alexander	1984	Principal
Gary Ohm	1987	Teacher Leader
Jim Stevens	1993	Teacher Leader
Bob Bruckner	1994	Principal, also Oakdale
Sandy Irish	1994	Teacher Leader
Marla Fries	1996	Teacher Leader

CARL A. SWANSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Paul Johnson	1959	Principal
Larry McMillen	1972	Principal
Carolyn Law	1980	Principal

Dennis Hansen	1983	Principal
Jacque Estee	1986	Principal
Mary Drew	1993	Principal

UNDERWOOD GRADE SCHOOL and HIGH SCHOOL

Bob Marks	1947	Principal
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UNDERWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Marjorie Mortensen	1952	Teaching Principal
Donald Stumff	1954	Principal
Bob Ackerman	1956	Principal
Paul Johnson	1958	Teaching Principal
Philip Richards	1959	Teaching Principal

UNDERWOOD HILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Philip Richards	1961	Principal
Enid Humphrey	1963	Principal
David Ankenman	1972	Principal, also Westbrook Elementary
Susan Betcke	1974	Principal
Jack Welch	1983	Principal

VALLEY VIEW JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Nora Veerhusen	1964	Principal
Curtis Olson	1964	Assistant Principal
	1965	Principal
Ed Johnson	1972	Assistant Principal
John Crook	1974	Assistant Principal
Lee Perkins	1976	Principal
John Crook	1981	Principal

WESTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Robert Adams	1957	Principal
Clifford Alexander	1959	Principal, also Westridge Cottages; Westgate only, 1961
Mary Drew	1984	Principal
Jim Otto	1993	

WESTBROOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Evelyn Husband	1962	Teacher Leader
David Ankenman	1962	Teacher Leader
	1972	Principal, also Underwood Hills
Beverly Hurstad	1974	Teacher Leader
Les Sladek	1974	Principal

WESTBROOK JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Ernest Horacek	1960	Principal
Les Sladek	1971	Principal

WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

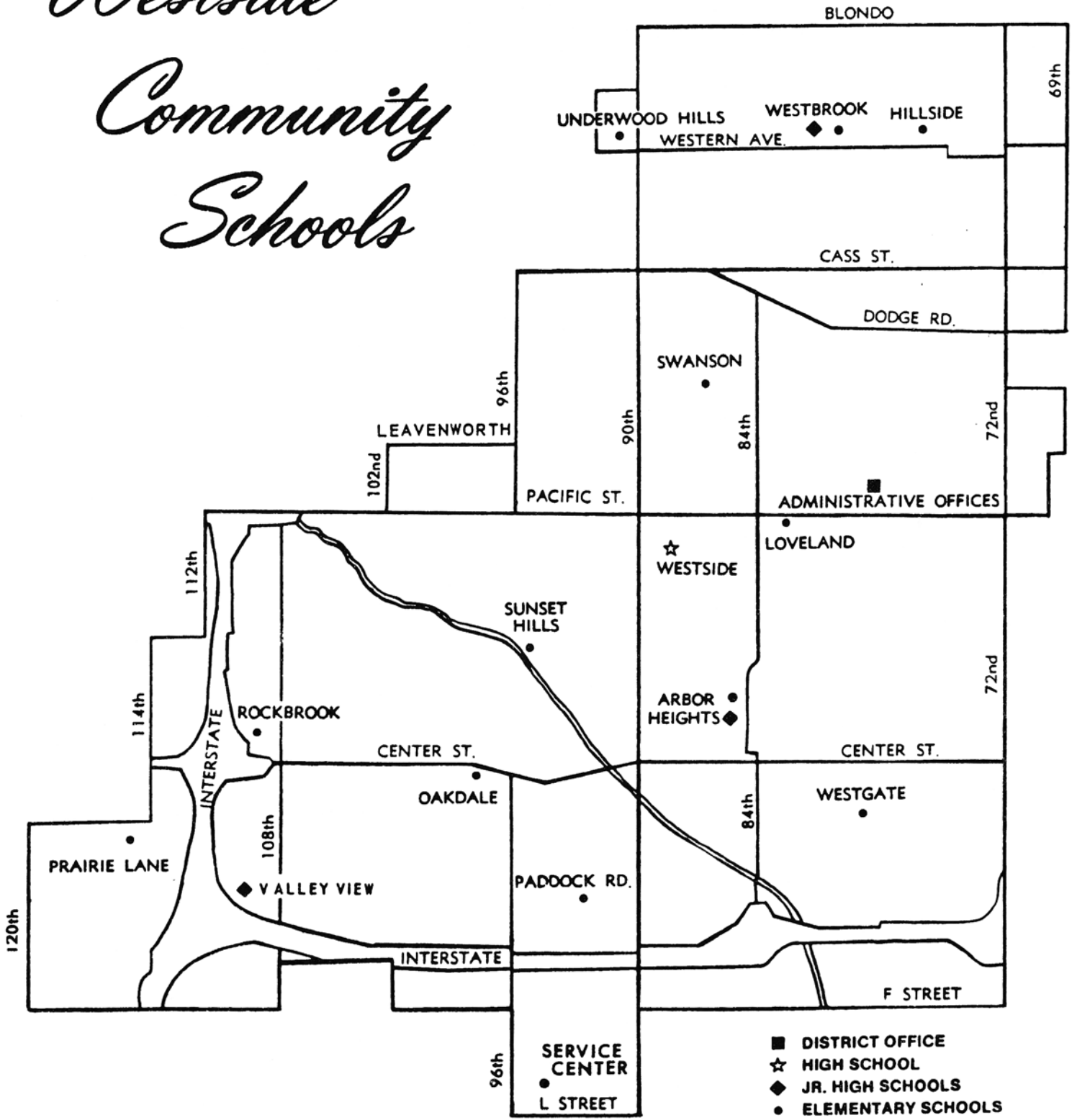
Houston Elley	1952	Principal
Mary Conner	1952	Assistant Principal
Rene Hlavac	1957	Junior High Principal
Kenneth Hansen	1957	Principal
Ralph Farrar	1960	Assistant Principal
Jim Tangdall	1967	Assistant Principal; Principal, 1971
Bill Hoyt	1967	Assistant Principal; Vice Principal, 1971
Lee Perkins	1969	Assistant Principal; Vice Principal, 1986
Jim Findley	1971	Assistant Principal; Vice Principal, 1976
	1984	Principal
Ron Houston	1976	Assistant Principal
Roger Herring	1985	Assistant Principal
John Crook	1986	Assistant Principal
Bill Schleifer	1988	Assistant Principal
Rozanne Warder	1988	Co-Director, Westside Alternative School
Al Inzerello	1989	Assistant Principal
Suzann Morin	1991	Director, Westside Alternative School
Robert Reznicek	1992	Assistant Principal
Pat Hutchings	1996	Assistant Principal

WESTSIDE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Les Sladek	1986	Principal
Bill Haffey	1986	Assistant Principal
Bill Krueger	1991	Principal
Sue Evanich	1991	Assistant Principal
	1996	Principal
Jim Stevens	1996	Assistant Principal



Westside Community Schools



50-Year History of District 66 Enrollment

