

THE HISTORY OF LAUREL ELEMENTARY



We have tried to make your journey through the history of Laurel Elementary School as pleasant as possible - free from the burden of facts, names and dates. These you can find in other sources. Our aim has been to preserve some of the history of our school. We thank all who gave of their time, talents and memories to help us.



INTRODUCTION

The annals of history will, most probably, never make reference to the information recorded on the pages of this unpretentious booklet. But the years represented by the facts herein encompass two major wars, a depression, space flights and the growing pains of a small mill town developing into an explosive suburb of the nation's greatest metropolis. The memories are written to account for the history of a school. However, much more is related than that history per se; much more is said two 4-room schools which, than that of three 4-room schools which, combined, comprised the local school system. This is more than a record of the completion of the new school build-

ing in 1925 which became Laurel Elementary School, an important addition then and now to Laurel and to the area beyond. But you will want to read for yourself.

This small booklet, entitled THE HISTORY OF LAUREL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, has been compiled through the efforts of the Laurel Elementary School's Parent Teacher Association. Credit for this invaluable history is shared by Mrs. Ronald Jilinski, P.T.A. President; Mrs. John Bondaruk, Mrs. Obert Copper and by the members of their committee who have made hundreds of visits, conducted interviews, and written innumerable letters to anyone who they thought might shed light on the past history of the school.

If there are any errors or discrepancies in the dates or information, please be generous and lay it to the fact that memories fade after so many years.

I will be looking forward to receiving my copy. My warmest congratulations to all concerned.

Katharine L. Gough

KATHARINE L. GOUGH
Principal
Laurel Elementary School
(1926 - 1960)



GOLDEN DAYS

Elementary education in the Laurel area can be traced back to the late 1800's.

Reminiscences were so many, from so many the thought suddenly struck us that not only are the locations of the schools different but the entire town has changed so drastically we felt the need to familiarize ourselves with the area and times. Please follow us while we retrace steps into the past to the "Golden Days of Laurel."

Picture a small, quiet town where you were apt to be recognized by everyone on the street. A town nestled between two large cities but which chose the quieter aspects of life. Although Laurel was a mill town with the proverbial mill store, the town was almost completely surrounded by farms. Many of the children had to walk as far as three miles to school in all types of weather. There seemed to be very few idle hours in those days for recreation. Children were expected to chop wood and milk cows. Most of these chores had to be done prior to leaving for school in the morning.

In the early days of Laurel schools there were no telephones, radios, electricity, autos and no indoor plumbing. BRRR! Those cold winter mornings. Streets were unpaved and horses and carriages were one of the chief modes of transportation. Number one being of course, your own two feet.

During World War I (1914 - 1918) soldiers were bivouacked at Fort Meade and the Laurel Race Track. Some were camped in tents right in town. They were here to guard the railroad bridges and communication facilities. The war still brings back memories for



some of making blankets and collecting peach pits to be used in filters for gas masks. Some of the more fortunate soldiers were even entertained by the children with songs such as "Pack Up Your Troubles," "Sweet and Low"(remember that one) and of course "Over There."

The years after the war found the area unchanged, except for some of the interests. Rudolf Valentino was on the scene! Someone remembered a poor, unfortunate young lady who cried for days after losing his picture to the class stove.. Although the town of Laurel was proud of being on the B&O railroad line as early as 1835, the stage coach was in existence until 1915. The gradual invasion of automobiles brought about the paving of roads and then of course "progress."





SCHOOL No. 2

During the era of segregated education in Maryland, the negro children from the Laurel area attended school number 2 which had several locations during its history.

The first school was located on West Street in a frame building which is now a private residence. This school housed seven grades in one room with one teacher. When added space was required, an annex was built at the rear of the school. Still later the Board of Education rented a building which still stands at the corner of West and Eighth Street.

In 1930 the Laurel Grove School was constructed on Eighth Street. This two room frame building held fifty children. In 1959 a fire caused extensive damage to the school and it was completely remodeled, into the four room brick structure which still is used today. When the Board of Education closed the Laurel Grove School in 1962 the building housed the Laurel Cooperative Kindergarten. Today it provides public kindergarten facilities for one hundred children.

Those who attended the original school number 2 recall it as a center of community activity. Long before the days of Mother's Clubs or PTA, members of the community took part in the major social events of the school. Closing exercises and programs-- called concerts in those days were supported by the entire community. The school picnic was attended by the entire community who helped provide treats for the children.

St. Mark's Methodist Church was the scene of the annual Thanksgiving dinner which all helped to make one of the high spots of the year.



The children of school number 2 might have had as their motto, "idleness is wrong." Everyone worked during the summer vacation. Recollections of earning 75 cents per week for babysitting and the pride of being old enough to work should make some of us pause to wonder about the values we are giving our own children.

Opening exercises were an important part of the day at our early schools. At this school they included the pledge to the American Flag, the Lord's Prayer and selected Bible readings.





SCHOOL No. 3

School No. 3 also known as the "downtown school" was located on Laurel Avenue. The area at this time was mostly residential.

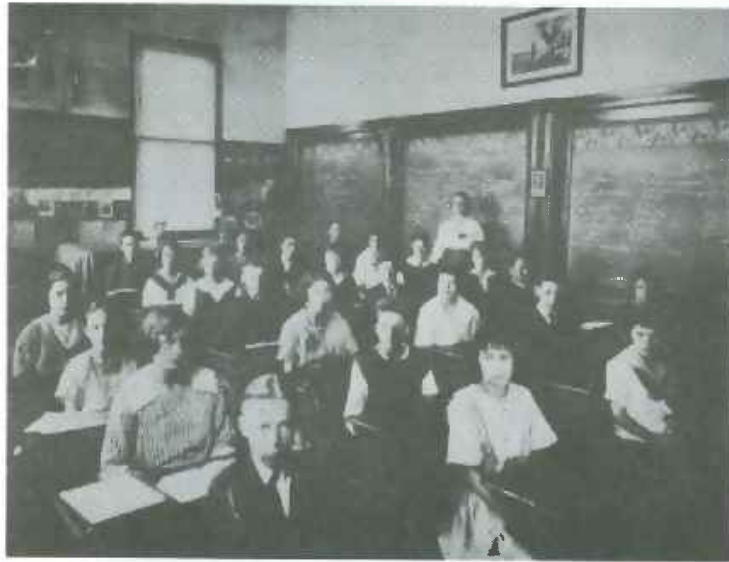
The downtown school had three class rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. As is true of all the elementary schools it had seven grades. One of the interesting features was the moveable blackboards on the second floor which could be raised into the ceiling to make room for school assemblies.

For the most part, school no. 3 was a good deal like school no. 1. Pot bellied stoves were used for heat, the school yard was divided in half by a fence and discipline was administered as necessary by the principal. Indoor plumbing was unheard of, but not undreamed of and many still remember the tall narrow building in the corner of the yard.

Desks were flat tops containing pencil slots with metal ink wells, for which the boys seemed to find delightful uses other than pens.

The principal, Mrs. Alice McCullough taught the seventh grade on the top floor and could have her room instantly quiet by the look in her eyes. Several alumni remember being summoned in from recess by the lowering of a window shade and marching into school to the music of "Wooden Soldiers." This dedicated teacher left a living legacy to the children of Laurel in the form of a playground on Montgomery and Eighth Street which bears her name.

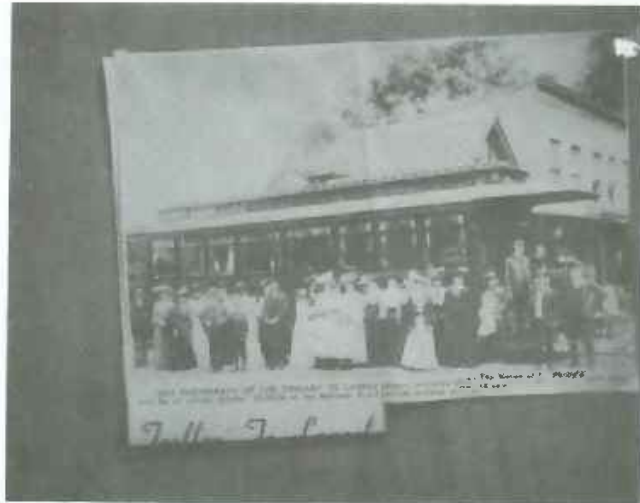
There were many teachers during the history of School number 3. Although, the pay was low, teaching attracted many young women. Most conformed with the image of a schoolteacher, but others were more daring, such as the young lady who created quite a stir by



bobbing her hair during the school term.

Students of this school in 1926, were transferred to the present Laurel Elementary, when both number 1 and number 2 schools were incorporated.





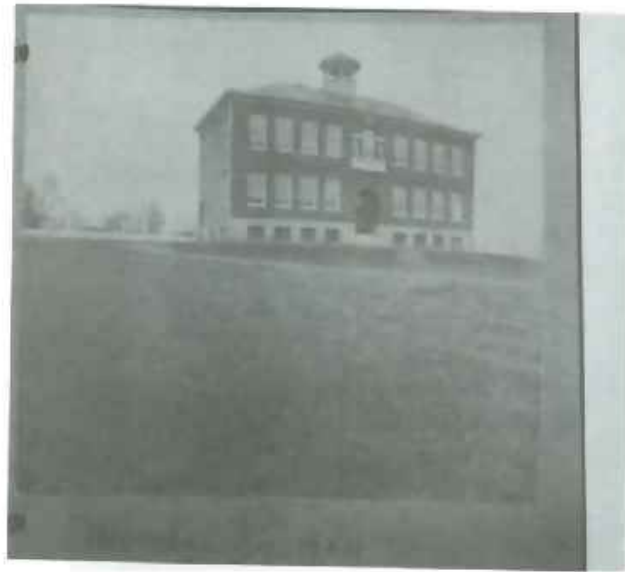
TIME OF CHANGE

In the "Golden Days of Laurel" we remember the quiet days of the area. As progress gradually moves into the community we will have to quicken our steps to move through the late 20's and 30's. This era finds Laurel still a pleasing, small town. A town with approximately 100 telephones and 10 automobiles. (The noisy conveyances of modern man that scared the children and caused the remaining horses to balk.)

Entertainment was either in the form of a church social, a movie, or family get together where someone would play the piano and everyone would join in singing. The songs seemed to reflect the feelings of the time; "Barney Google, Paddlin Madelin Home" and the "Shiek of Araby" reflected a happy high spirited era. The chilling fingers of the depression can be felt in the songs, "Button Up Your Overcoat" and "A Cup of Coffee, A Sandwhich and You." Indeed in the thirties you were lucky to have a cup of coffee and the residents of Laurel as well as the world over had to tighten their belts.

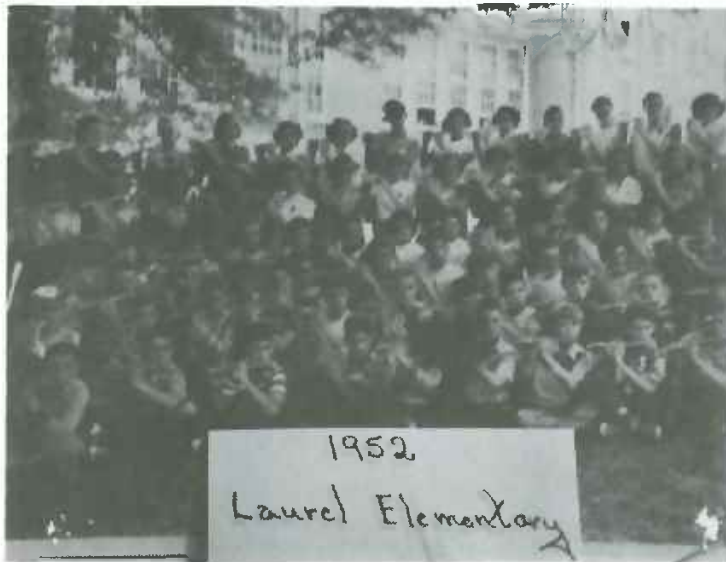
The radio was also an important part of the changing times. In 1920 Warren Harding's election to the presidency was announced from America's first professional station K.D.K.A. However, most of the children preferred such programs as "Terry and the Pirates, Jack Armstrong" and "The Lone Ranger." (Doesn't that one sound familiar.)

Movies on Saturday afternoon were a special treat for the children, especially when Hoot Gibson or Tom Mix starred in a good western.



Two bus companies had stops in Laurel. The Greyhound was the first to transport our residents and the Trailways was in hot pursuit in 1939. Progress was really galloping into the Laurel area.





AGE OF PROGRESS

The years of the 1940's and 1950's find a change in Laurel so vast, it is overwhelming.

World War I and the depression left the face of Laurel, unscarred. However, World War II erupted in 1941 and the city that was once a quiet town exploded and became a beehive of activity due to the extensive growth of Fort Meade.

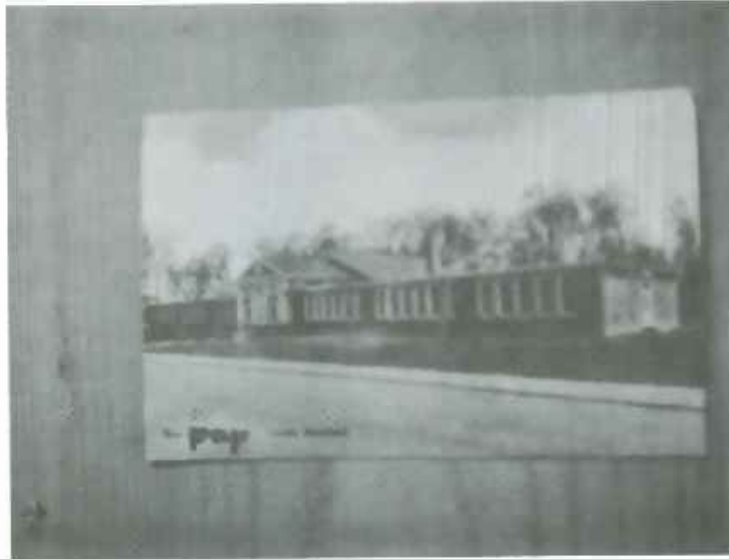
Our school children, as in World War I became busy to help our soldiers overseas by collecting old paper, and scrap iron and saving pennies to buy war bonds.

The radios and record players were blaring songs such as "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else But Me" and "The White Cliffs of Dover" while parents were busy trying to juggle the ration stamps.

Although the coming of the automobile into the area seemed to start the progressive change in Laurel, the rationing of gas and tires had no effect on the continual change.

In the 1940's an apartment was a precious commodity. There were few houses for rent or sale and apartment houses were miles away.

The years of the 50's and 60's saw a complete change in this situation. The National Security Agency was built in 1957 at Fort Meade and as a direct result the Laurel Area is virtually covered with apartments and PEOPLE.



LAUREL ELEMENTARY

The Laurel Elementary School is located on Montgomery and Fifth Street. It was built in 1926. During the early years the area around the school was quite different. There was a shirt factory just beyond the school (Park Avenue) and a blacksmith shop was located between Donaldson's Store, the Wee Wash and school. Children passing by could view the old anvil rusted wheels and it has been recalled that, just like the poem it was shaded by a tree on the side.

There was no cafeteria in the early days of the school. It was through the concern of Mrs. Gough, the principal and several mothers that originated what was probably to be the first "snack mobile." Mothers started to bring soup in large containers via wagons and fathers were set to the task of making benches and tables. Our first cafeteria was in the auditorium. During the same period Laurel and the entire country were experiencing a depression. A group of mothers, concerned that many children were not getting the proper nourishment, decided to raise money for milk. They actually begged money from local merchants, including tavernowners and held rummage sales, etc. Their project was so successful that they were able to provide free lunch as well as milk for many of the children.

The new Laurel Elementary was bulging at the seams almost from the beginning and several additions were made. The first in 1932. The second in 1939.

The school now has thirteen class rooms, a multipurpose room, teacher's room, cafeteria, store room, attic and office for the principal. No longer are pot bellied stoves used for heating,

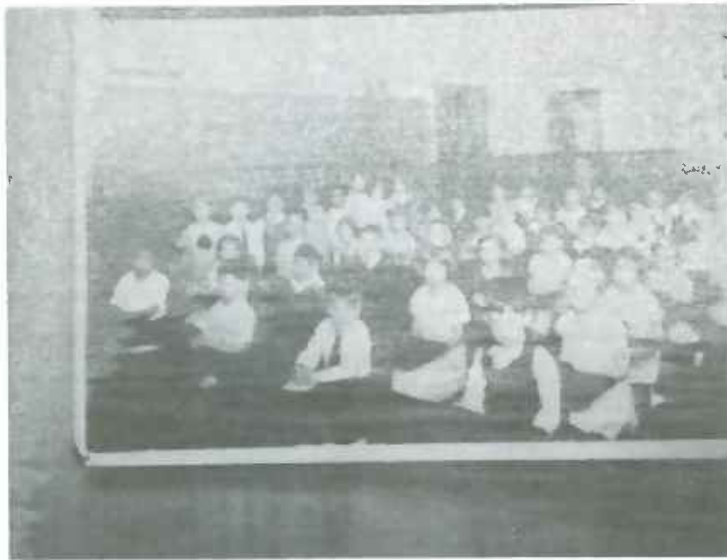


for indeed we have employed central heating methods. No longer are the little houses outside in use, we now boast six lavatories INSIDE.

The school play area is segregated, but by class not sex or fence. Modern equipment is used to the child's best advantage by utilizing physical education instructors. A large multipurpose room is used by the students for physical education when weather won't permit outdoor activities. No longer can the entire school fit in one small room for assemblies. This room is also used for lectures and plays. In the not too distant past, the children saw a production of "Marie Mitchell" staged by one of the school's teachers, Mrs. Grace Melin. The same teacher now a prominent author, recently lectured the sixth graders on her early years of writing in an effort to encourage children to use their talents. This same room also serves as the library. It was started by the parents and PTA, who donated over 200 books. The parents were not only gifted cafeteria workers they were also resourceful in binding and cataloging of the books. These duties remained with the parents until 1967 when a trained librarian joined the school's staff.

However, the school has outgrown this multipurpose room for feeding the hungry hordes. A cafeteria in the last wing of the school is now used by the students. No longer need the mothers worry about the nutrition of the children. Delicious meals are prepared daily in large ovens and stoves under the auspicious of the Board of Education.

With the coming of progress to the area the safety of the children was of prime concern to parents and teachers. To make streets safer "Patrol Boys" were assigned the duties of crossing the



children. The sixth grade boys work long and hard to maintain a good Scholastic and behavior record in an effort to be chosen to wear the belt of the patrol boys.

The sixth grade girls are also given the opportunity to be rewarded for scholastic effort by being chosen to wear a GOLE badge (Girls of Laurel Elementary). The girl's duties are to help the teachers and the most sought after duty is that of "runner" for the principal. Many a mother who cannot get her daughter to clean her room marvels at the efficiency with which she cleans blackboards and empties waste baskets.

The look of the school as well as the surrounding area have changed. We no longer have the blacksmith shop next door or the shirt factory in back. No longer can children be read to by the small stream that ran through the school yard where play ground equipment is found today.

Next to the school is an automatic Wee Wash and private residences have been built on Park Avenue.

THE FACULTY
Laurel Elementary School





THE NEW LOOK

Through the pages of this booklet we have strolled, walked, and literally quickened our steps, to run through the years via memories.

The era of the 1960's finds this area so changed as to be a shock to the nervous system, especially after going back through the years of the "quiet days." Days free from the turmoil and din of turnpikes, expressways and jets breaking the sound barrier.

We reminisced about the 10 cars and 100 telephones of the 1920's. There are now between twelve and fifteen thousand phones and the number of cars is too numerous to count.

The main street shopping area is still used extensively although with the increase in housing developments and apartments have come numerous shopping centers.

The farm lands of the area have been obliterated and in their place are growing communities much like our own, who have large modern schools. Many children still huff and puff to school after walking as many as three and four blocks. (poor souls!)

We recalled how music reflected the times in the depression and war years, however, future generations may long wonder what sign of the times is reflected in, "Chitty-Chitty, Bang-Bang" and "Super-cala-fragil-istic-expi-ali-docious" as representative of the songs of the 1960's.

Our trip is finished and we join the rest of you in pondering the years ahead. What possible surprises can progress bring now?

ERA OF FIRSTS

Laurel Elementary has had so many firsts in education that we decided to devote a special section to them.

Departmental Teaching. This innovation also called team teaching, was started in the late 1920's. This system utilizes a teachers talents and likes. For example, two sixth grade teachers find that one prefers to teach reading, the other mathematics. They combine classes and utilize their abilities to the satisfaction of all. This system is widely used in education today.

Orientation of Seventh Graders. Laurel High School was the first high school in Prince George's County. Very few Laurel children had ever before been forced to face the frightening experience of making the transition from grade school to high school. This situation was first recognized by the principal, Mrs. Katharine Gough, who enlisted the help of the principal of the High School. Together they worked on the idea of setting a day aside when the seventh grade students would visit the high school and become familiar with the teachers, students and curriculum.

Orientation of First Graders. To overcome the fear and crying each new school year brings, prospective first graders were invited to school for a spring visit. They were shown around school and introduced to teachers. Their tour ended with a special treat in the cafeteria. Needless to say the entire climate of the opening day changed.

Audio Visual Materials. Laurel Elementary was the first school to use audio visual material. Two of our teachers traveled from Hyattsville each day and brought the necessary equipment from the county to be used and returned them when finished. Today we see our classrooms equipped with television, record players, tape recorders, etc. and are apt to forget that these were not always a part of our school.

Special Education. We were the first school to operate a successful program for children with learning disabilities. Mrs. Alice Middleton was the first to see the need and responded. Her class was a source of pride to the school and of immeasurable benefit to her students.

Language Experience Reading Program. This is an individualized program which permits children to learn to read by encouraging them to write their own stories. This program is new to our area and Mr. John O'Donnell is directly responsible for its success.

FUTURE IN EDUCATION



In 1939 at the New York World's Fair, the General Motors exhibit was billed as "The World of the Future." It consisted of the now famous trylon and perisphere which became the symbol of the fair. Inside the building were several exhibits predicting 25 years into the future to the world of 1964. Among some of the more interesting predictions were the statements that by 1964 planes would be able to carry passengers across the United States in less than 24 hours, at altitudes above 10,000 feet, traveling at speeds approaching

350 miles an hour.

These understatements of progress in today's world cause one to wonder what the future holds for education in the next decade. While changes in education are not as rapid as in the areas of technology, we are still facing a situation where knowledge is expanding at such a rapid rate, that we are having problems storing it, not to mention trying to retrieve it once it is stored.

This had direct bearing on the education of our children and the methods, materials and people involved in the teaching process. Since most of us were in elementary school the accumulated knowledge of the world has doubled and doubled again. It will probably double again by 1975. Gone are the days when it was sufficient for a child to learn certain "facts" in school and be able to recall them at the teachers command. Some schools have already installed computer banks with "dial access" retrieval systems. A child need only to dial the information needed to solve a given problem, hear a report, a historical character, etc. This frees the child to use the information as do adults in solving a problem. An author, a doctor, a teacher, a mechanic constantly uses reference sources in their work. The purpose of any educational system of the future will concentrate not on the collection of facts and information, but on the use and assimilation of such knowledge.

The role of the teacher in the school of tomorrow will change drastically also. No longer just a purveyor of knowledge, she will become concerned with behavior modification, guiding a student's learning behavior according to his ability, interests and needs. Much more instruction will be individualized. The teacher's role will be more of a diagnostician. No longer will the same lessons be taught to large classes of students by lecture methods. Teachers through use of programmed learning materials will tailor a child's learning to his specific needs.

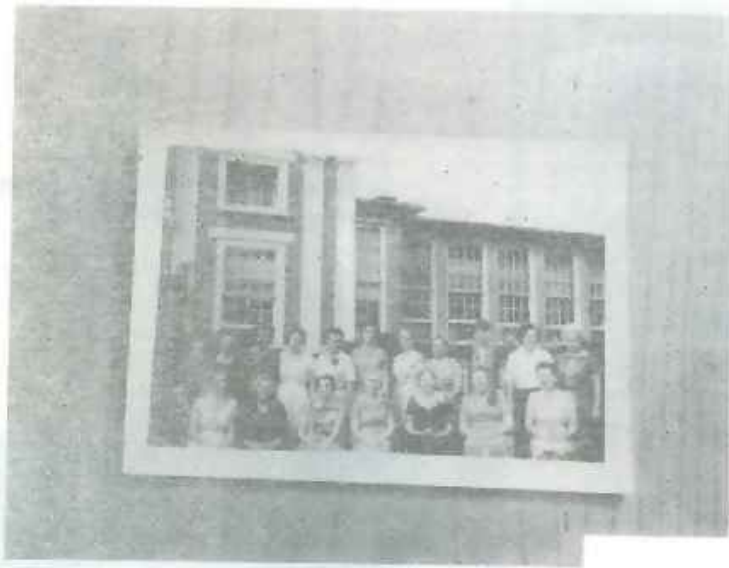
Desks will give way to individualized learning centers with students moving from center to center as material is completed and mastered.

These learning centers will contain single concept films, tapes, filmstrips, books and other reference materials all designed to provide references and necessary information, to guide the students' learning of concepts and operations needed in their education. The student will be expected to change his role in our schools of the 70's. Since much greater freedom of movement and communication with others will be necessitated, the child will develop greater independence in his learning. With independence goes responsibility. The entire emphasis of learning will switch from memorization for the collection of information of learning to think and read. Thinking skills will be developed to levels beyond recall and recognition. The ability to draw inference and critically analyze and creatively handle written and spoken material will be of prime consideration in educational program.

By applying the psychology, technology and organization skills we already have, we can in the 70's educate all children more effectively. We have the means, lets hope in the 1970's we make our goal the education of all students to the best of their, and our ability.



Mr. John O'Donnell
Principal
Laurel Elementary School



Faculty in 1960
Laurel Elementary School

Thanksgiving Play



First, second, third
grades. School no. 3



Class pictures from
the early 1900's.

