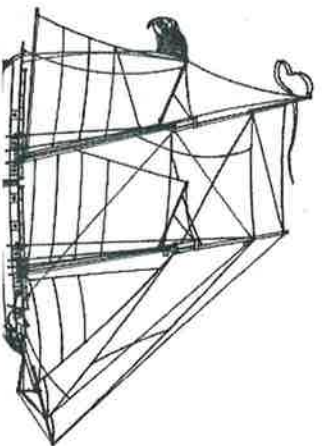


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Key West High School

By Elizabeth Ann Gardner

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Marion Percy Geiger came to Key West when there was no public high school, only the Roman Catholic high school at the convent and a Methodist high school called the Seminary or Ruth Hargrove Institute on United Street east of White Street. The Seminary housed kindergarten through 12th grades.

Mr. Geiger came as principal of the public elementary school called Sears School, housed in a three-story frame building in Free School Alley on the east side of Simonton Street, between Southard and Fleming Streets.

Through much hard work and personal sacrifice, Mr. Geiger built up a high school and in 1908, triumphantly presented his first graduate, the late Honorable Lance Lester Sr.

On July 4, 1909, the new Harris School was dedicated and the Sears building was torn down. Mr. Geiger became the first principal of the Harris School, which housed grades one through twelve.

In 1914-1915, under Superintendent Virgil Lowe, the Division Street School was built to take the place of the old frame building called Russell Hall which



Sears School Key West's first public school. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

had housed grades one through eight. The building was completed before May 4, which was the date for graduation of the class of 1915 from Harris School. Because the stage and auditorium of the new Division Street School were larger than those at Harris School, it was decided to hold the graduation exercises in the new school. There were 800 permanent seats and 200 more were placed at the back, along

the sides and in the aisles, so 1,000 tickets were given out and the new auditorium was filled to capacity for the first event to be held there.

In September 1915, after Mr. Geiger left Key West, Mr. Mackay became principal of Division Street School, housed grades one through twelve, and the high school was no longer located in the Harris School. In

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