

The background features a large, faded logo of a Native American figure, likely a warrior or chief, wearing a feathered headdress and holding a bow. A shield is visible on the figure's chest, containing the letters 'WP'.

# WPHS History And Urban Legends

## I Didn't Know That...

Excerpts from the Winter Park High School Yearbook Collection

Winter Park Public Library

www.wtpl.org

The Winter Park Graded School (constructed 1916) stood at the southeast corner of Park Avenue South and Lyman Avenue, once the site of Winter Park's first golf course. It replaced the original school that had been built in 1886 on Park Avenue North. A testimony to the

"Prairie School" architectural style in America, the three-story H-shaped building opened in January 1917 with an auditorium, ten classrooms, eight teachers, and 150 pupils in eleven grades. Due to a lack of equipment, Rollins College accepted eleventh and twelfth grade students without tuition, and a twelfth grade was added to the school



later. In 1926, additional classrooms were built, and a new cafeteria began serving lunch. (In 1929, lunch cost ten cents, with milk being an additional two cents.) 1935 saw the construction of a playground. A high school campus on Huntington Avenue opened in 1923, but Park Avenue Elementary School, as it was known, conducted high school classes until 1927.

In a 1989 article from *The Winter Park Outlook*, Frances J. Murrah describes her teaching experiences at the grammar school in the 1940's. She recalls weekly trips to the Winter Park Public Library on Interlachen Avenue, visits to the fire and train stations, and even stops at O'Brien's Drugstore for ice cream. Classes frequented neighboring Rollins College. "If we walked over the 'Walk of Fame' on campus," Murrah recalls, "we might bring back to class the names of one or two of Rollins' famous visitors to read about and find out why they were famous."

The property on Park Avenue was purchased in 1961 by Rollins and became the location of its continuing education program. The site was utilized for offices and classrooms until 1988, and the following year the aging



school was removed, despite much protest. The lot stood vacant until Rollins decided to develop the property itself in 1997. Today the 400 block of Park Avenue houses the Gap, Starbucks, a parking garage, and other modern wonders. A plaque erected there by Rollins commemorates the building, students, and staff of Park Avenue Elementary School.



The old Winter Park High School, built in the style of Mediterranean Revival, was completed in January 1923. A newspaper article at the time declared it one of “the most complete and architecturally perfect school buildings to be found anywhere in the state.” Classes

began in 1927, and the building served as a junior and senior high until 1969, when a new campus was built off Summerfield.



The Winter Park High School annual of 1923 measures only 3.25 inches in length and 5.25 inches in height and is bound by a single black ribbon. The yearbook is titled 'The Annuwinpa' - presumably short for 'The Annual Winter Park.' At this point, the high school was still part of the school building on Park Avenue. The text in the annual was handwritten, and five amateur black-and-white photos were pasted onto its pages. There were seven teachers who each taught multiple subjects, coached sports teams, and performed administrative roles.

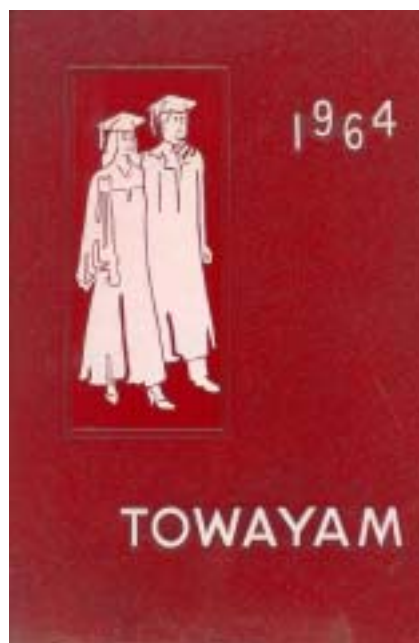


Winter Park High School graduated nine seniors in 1923. Florence Fry, one of these seniors, was designated the Honor Student and gave the valedictory speech at graduation. In the annual, there are only two other photos in addition to the three shown here - one of the school building and one of the teachers. 12 juniors, 14 sophomores, and 27 freshmen are listed on the Roll Call page. The Athletics page explains, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, that the basketball team “played hard-fought games, winning some, losing some. Yet we believed if the teams had had better backing from the school body they would have been considerably more successful.” There are accounts of a school-wide Field Meet and the efforts of the swimming team. Fleetwood Peeples, then in his first year as swimming coach at Rollins College, led the swim team. (Peeples [1898-1993] taught swimming until he was nearly 80 years old. A park near Rollins and the pool at Winter Park High School are named after him. A Society page in the annual tells of picnics had, and the book concludes with a page of jokes.



The 1941 Towayam is a textured maroon spiral notebook with silver stenciling on its cover. The WPHS chapter of the National Honor Society, was organized in 1934 and selected 10% of the seniors and 5% of the juniors each year to be members. A school handbook prepared by the Student Council in 1941 explains that membership in the National Honor Society was “purely honorary, since the group is too small to accomplish a great deal.”

The handbook features other guidelines, including a “Do’s and Don’ts” list that warns, “Do not eat in front of the school at any time.” The handbook also explains that “the first Winter Park High School Annual was published by the class of 1939. Before this there had been only an annual paper devoted to the seniors.” In 1940, the yearbook received the name “Towayam” which means “Beloved by All”.



In the 1941 Towayam, the seniors (61 total - the largest graduating class yet) were allotted headshots, a quote, and a list of their extracurricular activities throughout high school. A page of reminiscences mentions an April Fool’s Day joke in 1939 involving a proclamation of a Nazi organization. “What was meant to be fun soon turned into the F.B.I. and the F.B.I. turned a few people pale, and a few pale people turned over a new leaf.”

The record for the Wildcat football team in 1958 is an unimpressive one: 2 games cancelled, 1 tied, 4 lost, and 3 won (the best score being a 24-0 victory over Leesburg). The 1958 yearbook is dedicated to one of the coaches, Bill Orr, who graduated from Stetson College and taught Physical Education and Biology at Winter Park High School in addition to his work as football coach. Fellow coach Bill Gordon graduated from Rollins College and taught Science and Mathematics at Winter Park, where he served as head of the Mathematics Department. Gordon’s son, William R. Gordon II, graduated from Winter Park High School in 1980 and twenty years later returned... as the new principal! Now that is impressive!

In 1958, Winter Park High School saw the completion of a new auditorium and the graduation of 154 seniors.

The annual Coke Party each September was a trademark of the WPHS Student Council for many years. The Student Council was organized in 1939, and at the beginning of the 1956-1957 school year, the Student Council created "Howdy Week" to orient and welcome new students. The 1959 Howdy Week instituted a Howdy Doody Dance, and the 1960 Howdy Doody Dance featured a live band in place of the standard jukebox. Howdy Week continued well into the 1970's, growing to encompass the entire student body rather than just sophomores and new students.

The Winter Park High School Band was formed in 1939. The 1975 Towayam praises the Band as "one of the top marching units in the area." Despite their talent, however, the WPHS Band was not allowed to play for President Ford when he came to campaign in Orlando in 1976 or for President Carter at a 1980 political rally because of a board policy established in 1974 that forbade student groups from promoting a partisan political cause.

During homecoming week a group of seniors performs at the annual Powder Puff game, in which guy cheerleaders support the girl football players. Another highlight of homecoming week was Coach Larry Gergley's 200th game on October 6th, a 30-6 victory over Boone that made Winter Park #1 in the district. Gergley was the 15th coach in Florida high school history to achieve this milestone.

The Winter Park High School campus on Summerfield was built in 1969. The school's motto boasts of "Personal Excellence in a Caring Place." Today, this caring place is one of thirteen high schools in Orange County, a school district that is the 14th largest in the country and 4th largest in the state.

Winter Park High School achieved the highest average score on the 2001 FCAT for Orange County high schools, a score greater than the state average. The 2000-2001 school year saw 3200 students walk the school's halls, in contrast to an enrollment of 62 in 1922-1923.



The 1987-1988 school year marked Orange County's shift to a middle school system and was the first year that the campus on Huntington served as the Ninth Grade Center, welcoming the class of 1991.

Wildcat spirit is still alive and thriving, 114 years after the Winter Park educational system began in a small school on Park Avenue North.