

Craig Elementary School

Thank you to all the past and present contributors to this history, including: Richard Evans, Fred Jones, Gay Jackson, Sue Penny and Linda Reilly

The history of Craig School spans more than 100 years. It was on March 20, 1819 that Sebastian Pearse and John Plank, Commissioners of the Common Schools in Niskayuna, set up School District No. 2, which later became known as the Craig School District. Land was conveyed to the District by Archibald Craig and his son, James Craig, and it is believed that Craig School was named after this family. The first known Craig School was a one-room schoolhouse built at the top of Aqueduct Hill, on land purchased from William Brinkman and his wife in 1877. This building still stands, and is now a private home at 2798 Balltown Road. The schoolhouse had one teacher who instructed 20-30 pupils in grades one through six.

1914 – New school built

In 1914, the District voted to build a new school. Mr. Davis, who owned the land around the schoolhouse property and who was also a building contractor, agreed to sell the district about one-half acre of land for \$1, provided he was given the contract to build the new school. The District agreed to do this at a cost of no more than \$10,000. Forty to 60 students attended this school each year in the 1920s. The building is now painted white, and is owned by Schenectady International Inc.

Growth in the District continued, and in 1946 about 14 acres of farmland were purchased from

Edward J. Snell Quackenbush and his wife Anna. The cornerstone for the current Craig School's original six classrooms was set in 1948. Robert Helmer was named principal in September 1949. It was about 1951 when three additional classrooms were added to the school. In 1953, the school was enlarged with another wing of classrooms on the east side of the nine-classroom wing, joined by a main hallway, to form the present H-shaped Craig School. In the 1950s Craig School housed grades K-6, with grades seven and eight attending Van Antwerp School. In 1959 the sixth grade was moved to Van Antwerp to provide more space for K-5 students.

1970s

In 1977 Birchwood Elementary was closed due to declining enrollment in the district, and it appeared that Craig would be closed also, as it was the building that could most easily be sold. Parents and teachers made impassioned speeches at public hearings to save Craig School. The commitment of the Craig staff and community to keep the school open prevailed when, after reviewing revised enrollment projections, the District decided to keep Craig open and close Van Antwerp. Because of the decision to close Van Antwerp school in 1982, several sections of sixth-graders



Pictured above is an older version of Craig Elementary School, built in 1914, on Balltown Road.



Students and parents participate in cooperative games in 1991.

were relocated to Craig. By January 1985, after two-and-a-half years, an addition to Iroquois School enabled the sixth-graders to leave Craig, making it a K-5 school once again.

Changing teaching methods

Along with changes to the building, Craig School remains committed to changing and discovering new, innovative ways to serve the needs of students. The changes made in Craig’s recent history have moved instruction from an emphasis on isolated, discrete skills toward integrated, connected learning. In math, students use hands-on materials and solve real-life problems to help them better understand the concepts being taught and to make learning relevant to their lives. Connections are made between science and social studies, social studies and literature, and writing and technology. Students work together cooperatively to enhance learning at all levels, and to help prepare themselves for the world of work. Students now learn keyboarding and begin applying these skills both in the computer lab and the

classroom. A full-sized computer lab, which has greatly enhanced student and teacher technological proficiency, was built in 2001.

Emphasizing reading

In 1998, Craig School teachers examined best practices of exemplary schools and the most recent research to develop the Craig School Reading Framework, which guides the school in delivering high-quality language arts instruction. The 1,000 Book Kid Program began several years ago to foster a love of reading among our preschool population, as well as to promote

family involvement in the educational process. Reading Incentive Programs with Wild West, circus and space themes, along with Camp Craig Night and the Art and Science Fairs, have also advanced student learning and excitement, as well as parent involvement.

We Can

Craig has become known as a “We Can” school to capture the belief that by working together and doing one’s best, a student can become successful. In support of the “We Can” theme, the school developed a mission and vision statement in 2001 that serves to provide inspiration and direction: “We can . . . and will work together to do our best so every child can be successful.” Definitive measures continue to be taken to realize the mission and create an exemplary instructional program and positive school culture. Character



Craig fifth-graders Ethan Goldman (left) and Jesus Diaz help move soup cans the fifth-graders collected in this January 2001 photo. The cans went to the Schenectady Inner City Mission.

Education has become an integral aspect of Craig Elementary School that is incorporated into all aspects of the school. The school highlights various character attributes throughout the year and recognizes and celebrates demonstrations of the attributes being lived each day by students, staff and parents.

Working together

There continues to be an emphasis on Craig as a community of learners. Students and adults work together to elicit ever greater student learning, achievement and happiness. Teachers work as a team closely with one another and parents to enhance adult and student learning and effectiveness. Students are also given opportunities to support one another. Craig is a family-oriented school in which parents work closely with staff in countless ways to support learning. More than 100 volunteers work regularly at Craig, helping enhance programs in the library and the



It would be hard to walk into present-day Craig Elementary School without noticing all the brightly-painted murals decorating hallways. The murals were all created with the help of students, staff and parents. Above, a Craig student works on a mural with a jungle theme in this 2001 photo.

classroom, providing after-school enrichment programs, running the Craig School Publishing Company, and generally supporting the program as needed.

The original wing of the current Craig School is 55 years old. In those

years many memories have been created: a Naturalization Ceremony, the Craig School 50th Anniversary Celebration, the first grade Thanksgiving feasts, Family Fun Nights, holiday sing-alongs, and our Craig School Talent Show.

Old memories linger and new memories are always in the making. They are a fond testament to the oldest elementary school in the Niskayuna Central School District.

Craig Principals:

- Robert Helmer, 1949-1953
- Sanger Steel, 1953-1960
- Robert Estes, 1960-1964
- Raymond Pressman, 1964-1968
- Kathleen Cook, 1968-1977
- Edward Kowalski, 1977-1978
- Thomas Buckley, 1978-1988
- John O'Connor, 1988-1993
- Judith Goodman, 1993-1997
- Richard Evans, 1997-present



DARE Officer Gary Connor talks with Craig fifth-graders about drug and alcohol use in this 2000 photo.