

The History of the Heritage Center

On September 18, 1980 the Dundalk Eagle ran an article entitled “Sparrows Point High School opens Heritage Center.” On March 24, 1983, they ran the article “Sparrows Point High School Preserves Past.”

Early Beginnings

Between these two news articles, and several years prior to the first one, many things happened. Two SPSHS teachers, Mr. Stephen Ponzillo and Mr. Stephen Letnaunchyn, and Principal G. Wayne Burgemeister started writing letters in 1976 to gather artifacts and memorabilia from the “old” school when they learned it was going to be torn down. To anyone that graduated from the school in “the Point” that opened in 1921, we refer to it as the “old” school. The one now located in Edgemere is the “new” school, even though it is now 50 years old. Things started happening in that year when the letters began bringing in artifacts and mementos and a mini-museum was opened inside the library. These two teachers also solicited for donations from the time the high school started in 1908 when it was housed in the same building as the elementary school. They did an excellent job since we have the original blueprints for both schools and their additions in the Heritage Center. We also have letters that Rufus K. Wood wrote to Baltimore County to start a high school in the town of Sparrows Point. These letters date back to 1898.

Diamond Jubilee

When the school was about to celebrate its 75 years of existence, many alumni came together to have a celebration which they called the “Diamond Jubilee.” At that point in time the Sparrows Point High School Alumni Association was formed. With this celebration many more mementos were being collected by the alumni members. Social Studies Department Chairman, Mr. Donald Brubaker became the director of our mini-museum and collected and cataloged a lot of items.

The Years Following

Debbie Long, Class of 1956, took over from Mr. Brubaker and became the first curator when the name was changed to the Heritage Center. She had quite a few alumni members that helped her. To name a few: Carol Wolfkill Bayle, Class of 1957; Virginia (Ginny) Caralle, Class of 1952; and Kathleen Keitz Oleinacz, Class of 1951. In the spring of 2001, Debbie passed the keys to the new curator, Cecelia (Ceil) Nida Lesser, Class of 1947. All of Debbie’s helpers continued helping. But one person stood out and became Ceil’s assistant and that was Mary Lou McVey Tomczewski, Class of 1949. Another person has pitched in to help since then, and that is Dolores Powers Gintling, Class of 1947. As more items are donated, it gets more cramped in our little two-room museum, but we are grateful for the space we have and keep adjusting the items to make sure as much as possible is on display at all times.

Donations

We have high school donations dating back to 1916—the class ring of John Kirshner and items from Verrell McGee Anderson, Class of 1927. We have items and pictures from class reunions and the two bungalow reunions held at old Bay Shore Park. We also have a 1910 kindergarten picture of a former SPSHS teacher, Ms. Ruth Thorne. Plus, there are two handheld school bells from the original schools in “the Point.” The classes have given us their scrapbooks and prom mementos.

We collect not only school items, but items from the community such as the following: a milk bottle from the Sparrows Point Dairy; street signs (9th and F) from the former town; a license plate from the Sparrows Point Fire Department; a picture of the Number 26 street car affectionately known as the Red Rocket; three loving cups from the Public Athletic League for 1917 and 1920, YMCA and Steel Bowls. This list is just the tip of the iceberg. You can find the entire inventory list at myedgemere.com. We make it a rule not to turn down anything anyone wants to give us. Everything has a memory attached to it for someone.

Cecelia Nida Lesser, Heritage Center Curator Class of ‘47