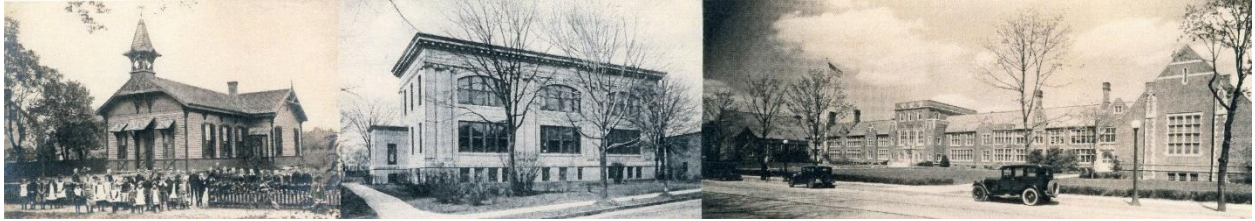


Beautiful Bronxville School— A Discovery through Photographs



L to R: Bronxville School, 1870-1906, 1906-1925, and 1925-Present.

There are many photographs of Bronxville School at the Bronxville History Center. A few are fairly well-known, but others—all but a few of the hundreds and hundreds at the History Center—are almost unknown. This article uses a few of these photographs, covering almost 150 years of Bronxville School’s history, to tell its story.

The first Bronxville School building, called the “little red schoolhouse” (1870-1906), was a one-room school. The challenge for the teacher was to simultaneously teach students of different ages and levels of educational achievement. Children in late nineteenth century Bronxville probably did not always start school at six or seven years old. They might start at eight, or even ten, and a ten-year-old might be on a level with a seven-year-old. The teacher had to educate all these students in the school’s one room.



Bronxville School interior, c. 1880s.

But, as this photograph of the interior of the little red schoolhouse shows, the single room was a very flexible space, with sliding partitions that could create two separate rooms if needed. There’s a piano at the right corner of the forward area in the

photograph; one can imagine a group of students gathered around the piano singing tunes of the day while other students studied arithmetic or reading.

The little red schoolhouse may have had about twenty students when it began operating in 1870. Two photographs from later periods show, respectively, thirty-five and forty-five students.



Bronxville School, interior, c. 1880s.

Another view of the interior of the little red schoolhouse shows a smaller room, with a globe, in the rear of the photograph. It could be a storeroom, or perhaps a place where students working on a geography lesson could study the globe.

The blackboard has multiplication tables written on it, some arithmetic calculations, and a list of vocabulary words, including a few stunners, like intuitively, vacuity, labyrinths, and efficacious. A floral drawing, to the left of the blackboard, has in its center some good advice for the students, "Work and Win."



Class photograph, 1897.

Bronxville School moved into its second building, called the "yellow brick school," in 1906. This was a grander and larger building, with separate classrooms and

teachers for grades one through eight. The education methods practiced in the yellow brick school were quite different from those in the little red schoolhouse. In a one-room school, children often worked on their own and perhaps in small groups too, and the teacher's attention was often elsewhere, allowing the children to educate themselves. In a graded school, students usually listened to lectures and memorized facts; their days were filled with drill and recitation.



Bronxville School, interior, 1915.

Students' desks in at least some classrooms were bolted to the floor, fixing the students in a row-and-file order aimed at the teacher, who did most of the talking as students listened and either memorized or day-dreamed.



A music lesson, probably, in the yellow brick school, 1912.

In this photograph, the children are sitting in circles, a teacher is at the piano, and perhaps the children will soon be singing. Education at the yellow brick school was apparently not all drill and recitation in bolted down desks.



Class photograph, October 30, 1916.

The children in this class photograph are not smiling. Perhaps that's because of their dreary days mostly spent listening to lectures and memorizing and regurgitating facts. It's also true, though, that photographs of Bronxville School students through the years suggest that the custom of always smiling for the photographer did not set in until after World War II.



Graduation photograph, Class of 1930.

By 1930, when this photograph was taken, Bronxville School had been in its new buildings on Pondfield Road, near Midland Avenue, for five years. Two separate buildings, one for the elementary school and another for the high school, were completed in 1925. A third, middle, building, linking the earlier two, was completed in 1930. This photograph may have been taken in the new, perhaps not quite finished, high school library.

Bronxville School's educational methods were greatly changed from what they had been in the days of the yellow brick school. The curriculum was greatly expanded and rote learning had been replaced by a child-centered approach in which students were encouraged to explore, experiment and think independently to discover the world in all its manifestations.



*Bronxville Elementary School's May Festival,
not dated (the first festival was in 1935).*

There was a new educational spirit at Bronxville School. Education was no longer oppressive, it was liberating and enabling. At least this was the school's intention, and it has probably mostly succeeded, despite the terrific societal pressures that have challenged educators over the decades.

Kindergarten was an important element in Bronxville School's commitment to child-centered education. Young children learned through playing, singing, drawing and other practical activities, and by engaging with one another.



*A kindergarten class, on a field trip,
sleighbing down Meadow Avenue. 1930s?*



Kindergarten kids on the monkey bars, c. 1950s.



Pet Show, 1946. Students bravely let snakes crawl over them.



The girls' cross country team, 1987.

Physical education at Bronxville School taught students to think critically about their physical and mental well-being so they could make choices leading to a healthy and fulfilling life.



Bronxville High School graduation, 2005. Courtesy the Bronxville Historical Conservancy Collection, Judith Watts, photographer, 2005.

Bronxville School's director of curriculum and education, recently wrote: "Preparing our students to lead, to engage the world, to innovate, and to think critically influences every aspect of our educational program."