

Madison Mirror

By Debbie Kmetz

This article appeared in the DCHS Newsletter as part of the *Records Center Highlights* series. The series features noteworthy pieces and little known treasures found in Dane County Historical Society's Otto Schroeder Records Center.



In June 1969, Madison's Central-University High School held its final commencement exercises, a ceremony that signaled the end of an era. Dane County's oldest public high school could trace its beginnings back to 1854. Throughout its history, the institution had various names: Madison High School, Central High School and, finally, Central-University High School. Many people today remember it simply as "Central," the high school whose home was the large, distinguished building on Wisconsin Avenue, only blocks away from the State Capitol. Collectively, Central's students experienced the Civil War, two World Wars and the Great Depression. But the school itself could not survive changing demographics and the burgeoning growth of Madison's outlying areas.

June 5, 1969 marked Central's last official day. Dane County Historical Society's records show that two weeks later, on June 19, 1969, Principal William Marsh donated a substantial amount of material to the historical society including copies of the school's yearbook, *Tychoberahn*; a complete run of the student newspaper, the *Madison Mirror*; programs for graduating exercises; a World War II service list; and an official pupil handbook.

These materials document a significant span of time. The subject of this article, the *Madison Mirror*, was published from 1924 through 1969. This set of newspapers offers researchers a chance to observe growth and change, make comparisons, and analyze the impact of larger events on the school.

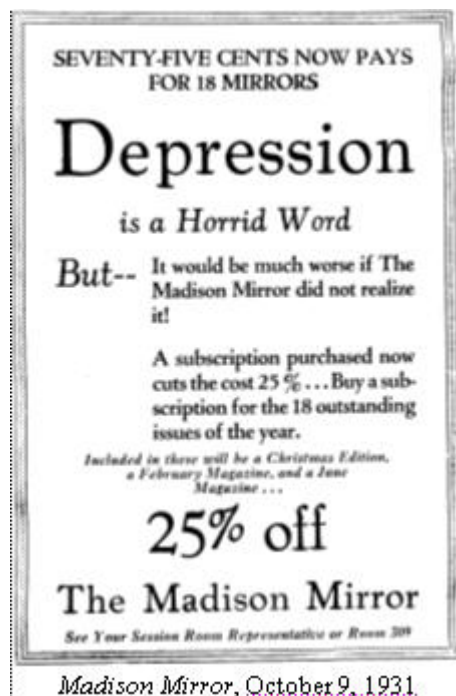


Madison Mirror, December 4, 1930

Originally printed and distributed as 4 to 16-page issues, the newspapers were later bound together into hard-cover volumes. A handwritten inscription on the opening page of the first volume reads, "Madison Central High School, To be kept in office vault." The first issue measures approximately 10" x 13" and is dated February 26, 1924. It is a handsome, professionally produced newspaper -- typeset and printed on a high quality paper that has not become too brittle over time.

The inaugural issue announced that the *Madison Mirror* would be published semi-monthly by the students of Central High School. The price: Five Cents. A column titled "Your Paper At Last" asked students to support the enterprise by contributing news, buying the paper and reading it. The editorial went on to explain that the newspaper did not want to seek advertising for financial support because local merchants were already contributing to the production of the yearbook. The newspaper's staff hoped to meet expenses by charging a nickel an issue.

These first pages present an interesting mix of material from news articles such as "Central High Basketeers Play Close Game with Varsity Preps" and "English Classes Design Books" to special columns. A feature titled "Bachelor's Buttons" announced its aim to publish one new joke every edition. A "Radio Column" by Al. Satterfield proposed to answer questions about the era's new technology. Readers were invited to write out their radio-related questions and drop them into a box in the school hallway. The first installment offered instructions on how to tune out interference from local broadcasting stations. The issue also featured "Alumni Notes;" an ad for the high school's vaudeville production; and the announcement that "Y.W.C.A. Clubs Welcome Girls."



SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS NOW PAYS
FOR 18 MIRRORS

Depression

is a Horrid Word

But-- It would be much worse if The
Madison Mirror did not realize
it!

A subscription purchased now
cuts the cost 25%... Buy a sub-
scription for the 18 outstanding
issues of the year.

*Included in these will be a Christmas Edition,
a February Magazine, and a June
Magazine...*

25% off

The Madison Mirror

See Your Session Room Representative or Room 209

Madison Mirror, October 9, 1931.

This first issue established a general model that proved constant for the coming years. It focused primarily on issues of immediate concern to its readers: classes and activities. The newspaper also offered opportunities to students to hone their writing talents with regular columns. There would also be ample coverage of the arts, including articles about the school's theater productions and musicals. For many of the first 25 years, the newspaper featured student graphics, often woodcuts. The newspaper carried news of student and faculty travel, guest lectures, honors, and during World War II, updates on former students in service overseas. In 1926, the paper size increased to approximately 12" x 18" and the paper stock changed to a newsprint that has become very fragile with time.

Through the years, coverage of scholastics and athletics seems to appear in about equal measure. Scholastics could include news of academic clubs and teams, the National Honor Society and the honor roll as well as information about classes and special educational opportunities. One of the earliest photos in the newspaper depicts the debate team. In 1934, readers learned that the Milwaukee School of Engineering would present an evening demonstration on the "Wonders of Electricity" in the high school auditorium.

A 1924 front page article reports that, “Instead of fearing Latin, Miss Yeager’s lucky pupils look forward to it with pleasure.” Another 1925 article names some of the topics covered in a problems in democracy course including debates over the proposed child labor amendment and the general question of immigration. In 1968, an article titled “Negro History-Why?” explains that Central is the only city high school to offer a course focusing on Black history.

Central offered vocational as well as college preparatory courses. A 1929 front page article described the work of 15 boys taking a sheet metal course. An ad in 1926 asked students, “Do You Want a Low Priced Appetizing Meal? School Cafeteria, Vocational Building.”

The paper charted an ongoing football and basketball rivalry with Madison East High School, and the yearly Armistice Day football match was eagerly anticipated in the sports columns. There is much coverage of the various sports events associated with Central’s place in the Big Eight, All-City League. For many years, Central shared that league with Madison East, Madison West, Janesville, Kenosha, Beloit, Racine Horlick and Racine Park.

Over the years, new sports appear. Central’s first all school boxing tournament was held in 1933; by 1936 the paper reported that boxing was growing in popularity. Golf appears in the sports reporting in the 1960s. From the very beginning, the newspaper covers girls’ sports as well as boys’ sports.

Articles in the paper also offer information about student life outside of the classroom. A 1929 article titled, “Girls Work for Room and Board, Boys Do Odd Jobs,” reported that many Central students worked during their spare time. Boys’ odd jobs included washing windows and cutting lawns. They also worked in grocery, clothing, hardware and drug stores. Girls did housekeeping chores in exchange for room and board, reminding readers that some students boarded in the city in order to attend the high school. The article goes on to list summer jobs as surveyors’ assistants, street work, piece work at the French Battery Company and work in pea canneries.



Madison Mirror, March 9, 1934

In October 1930, advertisements appeared for the first time, including ads from local companies such as The Hub, M. and C. Shoe Store, B. Rubin’s New and Used Furniture, Brown’s Book Shop, the Majestic, Mosely’s Book Co., Smith’s Studio, Palace Drug Store and Wheeler Conservatory School of Dancing. That school year, 1930-31, also marked the first time since 1900 that the school did not publish the yearbook, the *Tychoberahn*. Instead, the *Madison Mirror* staff expanded their June issue to 16 pages, featuring photos of the February and June graduates, with a listing of their activities.

It is quite possible that the strain of the Great Depression took its toll. In fact, a hard-cover yearbook did not appear again until after World War II. Instead, from 1932 through 1945, the school published a soft-cover booklet titled either *Orange and Black* or *Mirror Magazine* that offered yearbook style reviews and photos. Meanwhile, since the more expensively produced *Tychoberahn* was no longer soliciting advertising, perhaps the *Madison Mirror* staff felt it was reasonable to ask local merchants for support on behalf of the paper.

The effects of the Depression can be seen in other ways as well. A 1933 article reported that, "300 Enjoy Selves at Central Dance -- Depression Prom Scene of Fun-Seekers Attired in Old, Worn-Out Garbs." The article goes on to say, "Approximately 300 Centralites, a good share of them dressed in keeping with the times, attended the Depression Prom Friday, March 10, in Central's compressed ball-room (gymnasium to you). Dance music furnished by the school orchestra helped everyone to forget the depression ..."



Madison Mirror, April 8, 1949

The repercussions of World War II were understandably even more pronounced. The issue published just two days before the attack on Pearl Harbor carried a story of students making small dolls for British children. However, by the time the next issue was printed, the war had drawn much closer to home. The newspaper carried a front page special announcement from the principal that read in part, "You as high school boys and girls will have to grow up more rapidly because of the war ..." The headlines for the lead article read, "High Schools Plan Defense Aid --

General Curricula of Central Changed to Aid Defense Program." In the following issue, students were urged to take Math, Electricity, and Commercial subjects. Another article declared that knitting needles were clicking for the Red Cross.

Later issues would report on more student-related activities such as the advanced typists receiving special training for defense jobs. There would also be significant coverage of Centralites serving in the armed forces. All too soon came news of graduates killed in the Pacific Theater. As the war continued, some Centralites wrote messages to the paper writing about life in the armed forces. The 1945 *Mirror Magazine* was dedicated to those who had died in the war. Its opening pages carried the names of the 42 former students on the "Gold Star Honor Roll."

Through the years, notices about tuberculosis appeared in the newspaper announcing T.B. tests and educating the students about the disease. A 1939 announcement identified T.B. as the leading cause of death among persons 15-45 years old. Not until the late 1950s did the tuberculosis coverage cease to appear.

The *Madison Mirror's* practice of printing advertising continued until the last school year, 1968-69. Though advertising's immediate purpose was to bring in revenue for the newspaper, the longer term effects included providing information about student life. Researchers using the newspaper today will find that in 1931, a student could buy a bowl of tomato soup and an open sandwich for 35 cents at Menges Pharmacy. In 1934, that same 35 cents could rent a radio for a day from Jimmie Jackson's on North Paterson Street.

The ads of the 1930s and 1940s tended to focus on consumer goods and recreation, a trend that continued

ATTENTION

All Girls Admitted FREE

MADISON ICE ARENA

1834 Commercial Ave. 249-9931

Madison's Only Indoor Heated Ice Skating Arena

Friday, Jan. 24 & Saturday, Jan. 25

with CLYDE COFFEE of WISM

8 - 10 P.M.

FREE RECORDS

Given Away At All Sessions

<small>16 yrs. & under ... 50¢</small>	SNACK BAR
<small>Adults \$1</small>	SKATE RENTAL

into the 1950s and 1960s. Ads for blue jeans start appearing in 1949, “denim Levi’s” for boys and girls. An ad in the January 24, 1964 issue reads, “Rock to the Sounds of the Beatles – the Group that Sold Over 3,000,000 Records in England.” There were also occasional ads announcing employment opportunities. In 1944, the American Exchange Bank began a series of ads called “Stepping Stones to Your Home” that offered information about the process of buying a house.

The newspaper periodically provided articles about the history of the high school itself. A 1925 article chronicled events from the school’s beginnings in 1854. A 1934 article offered intriguing information about the Madison Mirror’s nineteenth-century predecessors: a hand-printed paper by Clarence Slightam and *The Archon*, published from September 1894 to June 1895, and machine printed by Democrat Printing Co. of Madison.

Some of the newspaper’s most poignant coverage regards the closing of Central High School itself. A November 1965 article reported that “Most Students Want to Keep Central Open...” Accompanying the article was a photo of a poster that read, “Save Central High.” However, a few short months later, in February 1966 students learned that the Board of Education decided by a 6 -1 vote to close Central-University High School in June 1969.

During the next three years, the newspaper changed radically. No longer typeset, the copy now appears to be done on a typewriter. The paper size became smaller. An editorial in early 1967 reflected upon school spirit. As the end grew closer, more “lasts” appeared, including “Final Prom to Be May 24.” The closing editorial read, “After June 5th, 1969, Madison Central University High School will cease to exist. To many it will be forgotten, but to Central students, never. We will remember many events and activities ... Central would not be Central without its great variety of people. Even though this school is closing, it will never die...”

Madison Mirror, June 10, 1966

Principal Marsh looked to the future when he took the steps to preserve this run of the *Madison Mirror*. The newspapers document student life in the twentieth century, offering readers insight into a vital, diverse, cosmopolitan campus. They also provide researchers a steady and valuable 45-year record of information about education, social attitudes, Madison businesses and the effects of world and national events on Dane County students.

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