

## OVERLOOKED ORLEANS

## Exploring the history of Holley High School

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After years of diligent work by the residents of Holley, the long-term preservation of the old Holley High School is finally secure. Historians commend those who undertake such noble work, as communities so often set aside the difficult task of investing in historic treasures, instead investing in new construction as a symbol of "progress."

The history of this particular structure dates back to 1930, but the story of the particular lot upon which it rests dates back to the 1840s. In 1847, the community selected Hiram Frisbee, Augustus Southworth and William Hatch as members of a committee tasked with gathering subscriptions to establish an academy. This industrious team procured the necessary resources — money, lumber, millwork, timber, lime, brick, building stone, plows, boots and shoes, teaming (horses), and labor — so that a two-story, brick building could be constructed on a \$300 lot of land donated by Frisbee.

The school operated for nearly three years as a private academy until its formal incorporation by the Board of Regents as the Holley Academy in 1850. At this time, the institution's assets totaled \$3,021.25 including the building, library, academic apparatus, and land; Augustus Southworth was selected as the first president of the organization's Board of Trustees. According to Isaac Signor, "For eighteen years this institution did most excellent work, but like many other academies was not financially a success."



Holley High School's history dates back further than the building's construction.

The apparent financial woes of the academy, combined with the increasing population of students in Holley, forced the community to explore alternate accommodations. The resulting decision established a Union Free district, combining this newly formed entity with the Holley Academy to form the Holley Union School and Academy. A Union Free district typically involved the combination of two or more common schools within a particular geographic area to form a district with boundaries that matched the limits of a village or city. The Board of Trustees for the Union School and Academy included George Pierce, Jeffrey Harwood, Edwin R. Armstrong, James Farnsworth, Nelson Hatch (son of William Hatch), and D. H. Parsons; Col. John Berry, Augustus Southworth, and Horatio Keys were selected as honorary members.

Armstrong wrote the following concerning the academic coursework offered at the institution:

"Young men who desire a collegiate course can here go through the preparatory studies for admission to any College in the land. Those

who are not able or desirous to enter College but with a thorough Academic education that will fit them for most any vocation in life can obtain it here. Young ladies who aim to secure a good knowledge of science and literature that will fit them for most any position which woman is permitted to occupy, need not go abroad to obtain it as we have a school here affording all the facilities for intellectual culture that may be found elsewhere."

Praising the institution and calling the community to support the school, Armstrong wrote:

"Good schools like good churches are paying institutions in any community, not only morally and intellectually, but even financially, for they enhance the value of real estate far more than the amount required to support them...If God has seen fit to give you money, and your poor neighbor children, contribute your money to educate your neighbor's children that they may thereby become intelligent citizens."

In 1882, the school constructed an addition at a cost of \$4,500 in order to support

an increase in attendance; seven years later, the school purchased the Coy House and lot on the corner of Wright and Main streets, converting two rooms for use as classrooms. According to Signor, the school employed eight teachers to instruct 350 students in 1894. A remodeling project was undertaken in 1896, and two years later, the institution formally changed its name to the Holley High School.

Recognizing the growing population of the community and the failure of the aging building, now four times its original size, residents made the decision to construct a new school by passing a \$260,000 capital budget project. Designed by the Rochester architect Carl C. Ade, the new building accommodated approximately 750-800 students, more than double the number attending the institution in 1894. M. Iupa & Maggio Company of Rochester was selected as the general contractor, bidding \$191,496 to complete the project. William C. Barber of Rochester was selected to complete the heating and ventilation work (\$35,527), the Reinagel Lighting Company of Buffalo was selected to complete the electric (\$12,020), and John Corcoran of Holley bid \$9,814 to complete the plumbing work. Overall, the project came in well under budget, costing taxpayers approximately \$.28 per square foot.

During this massive project, all grades below seven were relocated to three building on Geddes Street, while all other grades remained in the old building; the old academy building was eventually razed in 1930.