Ridge Historical Society
RECORD
BEVERLY HILLS, MORGAN PARK, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS & MT. GREENWOOD

Sutherland school namesake was a pioneer in education

By Carol Flynn and Linda Lamberty

In the United States, the public schools have been from the early days of the republic a vital part of the history of any community.

Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison, Franklin and others expressed their determination that schools must be established to teach citizenship in a democracy, [and] to enlighten public opinion.

The new form of government then demanded a new kind of school. People in a democracy must be taught not only how to vote but how to live in 'a government by the people and for the people.' The citizens of the new republic had come from Europe, where kings and queens ruled, where the common people never had a chance to vote. But in America, where it was the duty of every man twenty-one years of age to vote, it was a different matter.

And so, school houses sprang up in every community even the smallest, throughout the land, and schools became an integral part of the community.

Among the teachers who taught [in the early days on the Blue Island Ridge was] Bessie Huntington Sutherland.

- Excerpt from *The First Hundred Years 1835-1935 Historical Review of Blue Island, Illinois* by John H. Volp.

Elizabeth "Bessie" Bingle Huntington Sutherland was a respected and forward-thinking education leader in Chicago and Blue Island schools. She was born September 27, 1851, on the Ridge. Her parents were Samuel D. and Maria Robinson Huntington.

The Huntington and Robinson families were

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Miss Bessie B. Huntington (as she called herself) in 1883, the year she became principal of the Washington Heights School, later renamed the Barnard School. Image in RHS collection.

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Thursday 2 - 5 p.m.
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or by appointment

Look for the Ridge Historical Society on Facebook.

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essential members of the close-knit pioneer Ridge community, living on the more settled and populated southern end, the business district, which became today's city of Blue Island.

Bessie's father Samuel was a farmer and raised stock, became involved with the railroad, and served as Constable and Sheriff for a number of years. In 1852, the northern section, which became Washington Heights, Beverly Hills and Morgan Park, contained just 10 to 12 households spread across a wide expanse.

It is reported that around 1842, at the age of 14, Maria Robinson, who was to become Bessie's mother, was teaching in the Blue Island area for about $1 per week. No records of any school earlier than 1854 have been found, and by today's standards, the primitive conditions, inadequate resources and lack of teacher training can only be imagined. Now, today's education system in the U.S. is made up of a vast network of elementary and secondary schools supported by public funds that provide free education for children by community or district. But this system has been evolving for more than 400 years.

English colonists began to arrive in America in the early 1600s. At that time in Europe, formal education was the purview only of the nobility, the highest social classes and the very wealthy.

The members of the thirteen original colonies in America educated their offspring via the traditional English methods available to the 'common' people - home, church, and apprenticeships. Children learned the alphabet, numbers, prayers and domestic responsibilities. Religious education came from the Protestant, predominantly the Calvinist, church. At an early age, boys were apprenticed to learn a trade or craft.

But sweeping changes were on the horizon. There were three 'eras' that followed which influenced the development of the American public school system.

• The Age of Enlightenment during the 1700s – early 1800s led to a growing emphasis on liberty, democracy, and religious tolerance. The Industrial Revolution was also beginning, resulting in many new technologies and production methods. Centers of learning, book publishing, scientific and literary journals, debating societies, libraries and the like flourished. In America, the Founding Fathers argued that universal public education was the best way to turn the new nation's children into judicious citizens. Following the Revolution, public schools were rapidly established, although these schools remained poorly organized and under local control. Still, the U. S. population had one of the highest literacy rates of the time.

Schools were funded locally by taxation, and through land grants established by the Continental Congress. Early 'feminists' argued that women needed to

Washington Heights School was built in 1874-75 and burned down in 1890, right before the town was annexed to the City of Chicago. As part of the Chicago Public School system, the rebuilt school was renamed the Barnard School. From the RHS collection.

be educated in order to instill in their families and offspring the values of patriotism and civic duty. New schools opening for women incorporated such topics as philosophy and mathematics. Women's roles as educators were reinforced and extended during this time.

• The 'common school' era was championed by Horace Mann (1796-1859), a lawyer and legislator, who advocated common education content, teacher preparedness, and age-based grades. Earlier classrooms tended to mix together all age groups, and a teacher with little training might have had 100 or more students. Often the older children were instructed in a lesson, and then they taught the younger children. This model all but disappeared due to Mann's efforts. He introduced the idea of students progressing with their grade and 'graduating' when all courses the school had to offer were completed.

Mann was also the developer of 'normal schools' for training teachers, so named for their purpose of establishing teaching standards or norms. Most of these schools evolved into state colleges, or were incorporated into university systems.

• The Progressive Era which extended from the 1890s to the 1930s was a period of social activism and political reform, which advocated major changes in educational philosophy. Rote learning was replaced with an emphasis on hands-on learning by doing; problem solving and critical thinking skills; and lifelong learning and social skills.

This era was notable for a dramatic expansion in the number of schools and students served. Many states began passing compulsory schooling laws. Secondary schools, or high schools, evolved from preparatory academies for colleges into core elements of the public school system. After 1910, vocational programs were also added, to train the technicians and skilled workers needed by the expanding industrial sector. The model for American secondary schools stressed flexible skills widely applicable across occupations and geographic areas, giving students options in their lives for dealing with the dynamic American economy.

Around 1854, a two-room schoolhouse was built in the village of Blue Island. This became Whittier School, one of the oldest schools in the Cook County district. It is probable that Bessie attended this little schoolhouse. As late as 1900, half the American school population still attended one- or two-room schoolhouses.

By the 1860s, Cook County schools lagged behind Chicago schools, especially in quality and competence of instructors. The Cook County Normal School was established in 1867. Bessie Sutherland graduated from this teacher preparation school in 1869. The school evolved into Chicago State University.

A 1912 'History of Education in Illinois' reports of Bessie's professional life: "She entered upon her lifework as a teacher in the Blue Island graded school, after which she

Local teachers posed for a group shot at Barnard School in June 1920. Bessie Sutherland is in the second row, fifth from left. From the RHS collection.

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Students in the library of the Sutherland School, circa 1930. Photo from Sutherland School archive.

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taught in the Hyde Park high school, the Washington Heights graded school and high school, and has been principal of the Alice L. Barnard School of Chicago since the year 1883, with three schools under her charge, nineteen teachers, and eight hundred pupils. She is a member of the National Education Association." This entry also reports that Bessie took additional special courses at the University of Chicago.

By 1891, following the death of both parents, Bessie was listed in the Chicago Directory as principal of the Washington Heights School, residing in a house on Prospect Ave. near 107th. This is the first noted documentation of her relocation to the northern part of the Ridge, where she spent the rest of her life.

Bessie Huntington started her career during the advent of common schools; however, it is likely she was strongly influenced as an educator by the Progressives, as Chicago was front and center in that movement. The most famous early practitioner of progressive education was Francis W. Parker; its best-known spokesperson was John Dewey. Parker became principal of the Cook County Normal School and founded the Francis Parker School which is still in operation today. Dewey, a psychologist, founded the University of Chicago Laboratory School in 1896, also still in existence. It can surely be assumed that during her career Bessie would have crossed paths with these notable reformers. It would have been an exciting time to be an educator in Chicago.

One anecdote about Bessie illustrates perhaps the quintessential example of the Progressive educator. When serving as the principal of Barnard School, she learned that a camel had escaped from a traveling show and was sighted roaming loose in local woods. She gathered the entire student body for an impromptu field trip to the woods to observe the camel and share a lesson on animals of the world.

In the early days, women teachers were not allowed to marry if they wished to retain their positions. According to a New York newspaper article of the late 1800s, "the matrimonial relation involves no duties hostile to those required of the teacher, but . . . implies that there may be an interruption of the duties demanded of the teacher, and hence danger that the schools may suffer. . . . Observation extending over a series of years [shows] that lady teachers lose a large degree of their usefulness as soon as they are married." Women did 'agitate' against this restriction but it was many years before it was lifted in most areas.

Bessie Huntington postponed marriage for a number of years. It was not until 1894 on her 43rd birthday that she married her beloved David Sutherland, 17 years her senior. David was in real estate, with considerable property holdings on the south and west sides of the Chicago area. David died in 1904. The couple did not have any children, but a favorite niece of Bessie's, along with the niece's spouse and their children, eventually lived with Bessie.

Bessie served as principal of the Barnard School for nearly 40 years. The

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Sutherland Exhibit runs through September

Students will soon be returning to school for the fall. What better time to visit the current exhibit at RHS, "Bessie" – Elizabeth Huntington Sutherland and the E. H. Sutherland School, which will run through September 2013. The exhibit features the life and times of this pioneering educator, a brief history of public education in the U. S., and the story of the Sutherland School at 101st and Leavitt Streets, named for Bessie. Some of the materials in the exhibit are on loan from Sutherland School; indeed, the idea for the exhibit evolved from a call to RHS from the school after some historic memorabilia was found on site. Other items, including period costumes and textbooks, are from the RHS collection or on loan from private collectors.

Posters on display at the RHS exhibit, "Bessie" – Elizabeth Huntington Sutherland and the E. H. Sutherland School, prepared by 8th graders at Sutherland, creatively cover the history of the school and its times from the 1920s through today. Photo by C. Flynn.

The exhibit is open to the public on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, from 2 to 5 p.m., or by special appointment. School groups are welcome with advance reservations.

Contact RHS at 773/881-1675 or ridgehistory@hotmail.com to make reservations or for more information.

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What do these numbers have in common? For us they reflect that here on the Ridge, men and women have served our nation in many ways. To paraphrase the banner hanging over the RHS door, 'History that Ridge Historical Society has been Saving for YOU since 1971.'

Twenty-two years ago the First Gulf War ended. Forty years ago the Vietnam War ended. Sixty years ago the Korean War treaty created the DMZ non-military zone. Sixty eight years ago World War II ended. Ninety-five years ago World War I ended. The Spanish American war ended 115 years ago. Our Civil War ended 148 years ago.

Our Volunteer Summer Collections Project period has concentrated on inventorying military uniforms and objects with interesting results: a gas mask from the trenches of WWI; a Military Academy uniform which passed through at least four different young men in the 1920s and 1930s; a Vietnam War uniform; a Red Cross uniform; a woman's Marine uniform from WWII; military maps of Korea; an ROTC uniform of unknown origin or era; and an American Legion uniform worn in parades down Longwood Drive in the 1930s.

We are also trying to 'research the story.' Who were these people of the Ridge? Do we have any photographs of them? When and where and why and how did they serve?

We only have two or three Collections Project periods each year. But we continue to find more items and soon we would like to inventory materials related to first responders and disasters, such as the Chicago Fire of 1871.

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Would you like to help inventory, attach labels, learn how to use our museum software, take photos of the items, and/or do history or genealogy research? Call 773-881-1675 or email RHS (ridgehistory@hotmail.com) to discuss how you can become involved.

The News Desk

By Edris Hoover, President

Baker's Subdivision, A Map, the Tribune and Other Acquisitions

A few weeks ago a phone call to RHS from Mr. Steve Baker resulted in a most pleasant meeting and the opportunity to acquire some very interesting historical material. Mr. Baker and his wife Betty live in Homewood and as it happens we share some friends and acquaintances. Mr. Baker stated that he had a map of early Beverly promoting real estate development. Would we like to see it? Indeed we did want to see it. Mr. Baker's ancestor was one of the developers of the area from 103rd to 107th Streets. This was known as Baker's Subdivision and shows up as such on early abstracts and title documents.

Along with the map came documents and pictures of the principle individuals in the story. We find that the map needs some attention by an expert conservator. The Bakers, after consultation with family, agreed that the map and documents should reside at RHS. So upon conservation the map will be scanned and the copy presented to the donors. As the documents are reviewed and processed, we will add another chapter to the story of Beverly Hills in the early days, with the documents to back it up. We are very grateful to the Bakers, first for keeping these treasures and then for realizing that they have a home at RHS.

And what was it that caught Mr. Baker's attention? During April, the Chicago Tribune ran a series of short profiles of local historical societies including RHS in the April 11, 2013 issue. Feature writer Kerri Reid interviewed me and made a very interesting piece from our long phone conversation. I was especially glad that she wrote about our mission to preserve the history of Beverly Hills, Morgan Park, Mt. Greenwood and Washington Heights, but also made this relevant by relating how we continue to draw on our archives to tell the story of the growth of our community into the strong and diverse corner of the city we are today.

Newspapers and a real estate scam

RHS has others to thank for some materials that have come into our possession recently. Roger Chicon of RJ Collectibles was instrumental in helping to obtain issues of the Weekly Review for May 3, July 5, November 1 and November 15, 1918 and March 12, 1920. These papers, which are in very good condition, are matchless sources for information about life on the Ridge during WW I. They add to our collection of early publishing and will be scanned so that they can be examined without damaging the originals.

We also received a very interesting brochure advertising homes for sale around 95th and Vanderpoel with pictures of 95th Street in the early days. This promotion was from the Trustees System Service Company. Quick research by Linda Lamberty, RHS Historian, revealed that the Trustees System "appears to be a scam." The brochure and relevant newspaper articles about the investigation are available at RHS. Linda will continue to explore the matter.

Another generous gift came in answer to the question, "How do the Ridge, Lake Chicago and Lake Michigan relate?" Rich Kinczyk, Morgan Park resident, geologist and City of Chicago project manager for the Museum Campus, has assembled a collection of articles and the book *Underground Illinois* providing greater understanding of our geological past and how the Blue Island Ridge, Lake Chicago and the present Lake Michigan formed the steep hill, the sandy golf courses and the distinctive topography of our area. Thank you, Rich.

The Morgan Papers Project

Processing the Morgan Family papers has been the focus of a dedicated group who has met with Archivist Consultant Jane Kenamore each week since February. Each and every document, letter, picture, clipping, map and book which we so fortuitously acquired from the late Ann Morgan Moore Colgin is being carefully examined, placed in archival folders, provided with a description and filed in an organized context.

Tea party guests Cathy Majeske (left), her daughter Dawn Birmingham and granddaughter Lauren, and Linda Lamberty (standing) enjoyed savories in May 2013. Photo by C. Macola.

Sue Hendricks, Joe O'Connor, Linda Lamberty, Jane Nicoll and myself have gathered around the table each week on this project. To meet the terms of the ISHRAB grant, we needed to document 240 hours of volunteer time by June 30th. We met that goal, and then some!

Surely we have the opportunity to know so much more about the early owner of the Ridge and what a singular, visionary man he was. Why did he come to early Chicago from England in his mature years? What were his opinions and impressions of this unsettled area, of politics, of farming and crops, of roads, canals, land transfers and the growth and development of this city and state?

Programs and events

On April 21 our annual Spring Bonnet Tea was shared with 20 visitors who all wore their hats and sipped tea with petit fours and cucumber sandwiches. Once again we served scones from Beverly Bakery which are so anticipated along with the sweets and savories provided by volunteers. As they say, "A lovely time was had by all." And we thank our volunteers.

Linda Lamberty, a graduate of Sutherland School, attended their festival on May 11 and is curating the current RHS exhibit featuring the life of Elizabeth Huntington Sutherland as well as the history of the school, incorporating material from our archives and some items loaned by the school.

Office assistant

Leah Spolarich began work with RHS in May. Leah is a graduate of the University of Illinois and is pursuing an advanced degree in psychology counseling at the Chicago School of Psychology. She has had experience as a call center employee at U of I and in a one person office. Also she has deep connections to the neighborhood and can literally walk to work. She will be spending 12 hours per week, maintaining our email, bringing files and records up to date, and developing systems for reporting on the volunteer hours and our research logs. She has already tackled our newsletter mailing lists which helps us to spend our printing and postage money to better purpose.

Membership

I cannot leave this issue of the Record without saying thank you to all those who have become members for 2013. Membership is the most important way to be involved in RHS and to support our mission. Our goal this year is 300 members. We are only half-way there, so if you have not already done so, please use the envelope provided and sign up. We will welcome you and you will receive an invitation to a special members' event being planned for later in the year.

Thanks for listening.
Edris

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school started as the Washington Heights Public School in 1874, but by 1893, when Washington Heights was annexed to Chicago, the name had been changed to honor Alice L. Barnard, another Ridge native who was the first woman to be appointed principal of a Chicago public school. It is a fitting honor that in 1883, Bessie, the first woman to be named a principal of a Cook County school, was named principal there.

Bessie resigned as principal in 1923, died in 1924 and was buried in Mt. Greenwood Cemetery. In 1925 they named the new Sutherland School at 100th & Leavitt in her honor.

This "Lady Principal" left a lasting impression on the education community of the Ridge and many generations of students have benefitted from her dedication.

Mark your calendar for these exciting events

"Bessie" - Elizabeth Huntington Sutherland and the E. H. Sutherland School exhibit

THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2013

See page 5 for details. At RHS, 10621 S. Seeley; Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays from 2 to 5 pm or by appointment. Call 773/881-1675 or email ridgehistory@hotmail.om.

RHS Annual Garage and Better Book Sale

OCTOBER 11 – 13, 2013, AT RHS.

Hours: Friday and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Gently used items (no clothes) and books being accepted as donations. Contact RHS at 773/881-1675 to arrange drop-off.

Natural history of the Ridge

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2013, 2:30 P.M.

Richard Kinczyk, geologist and City of Chicago project manager for the Museum Campus, will give a presentation on the natural history of the Ridge area. More details to follow. The program will be followed by light refreshments. $5 per RHS member; $10 per non-member. At RHS, 10621 S. Seeley Ave.

Sutherland School is the subject of the current exhibit at RHS. The exhibit will run through September. Photo from RHS collection.