

Students Research History of Irvington High School Site

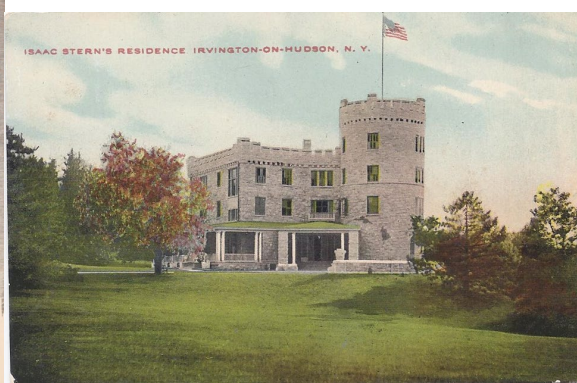
By Erik Weiselberg, Ph.D., Social Studies Teacher, Irvington High School

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During the senior internship period, several Irvington High School students researched the history of the HS-MS campus site, including one project on the history of the site and another project identifying the various memorial markers on the site. The students were advised on their projects by High School social studies teacher Erik Weiselberg, Ph.D, a.k.a. “Dr. W,” who is also the Irvington Village Historian and affiliated with the Irvington Historical Society.

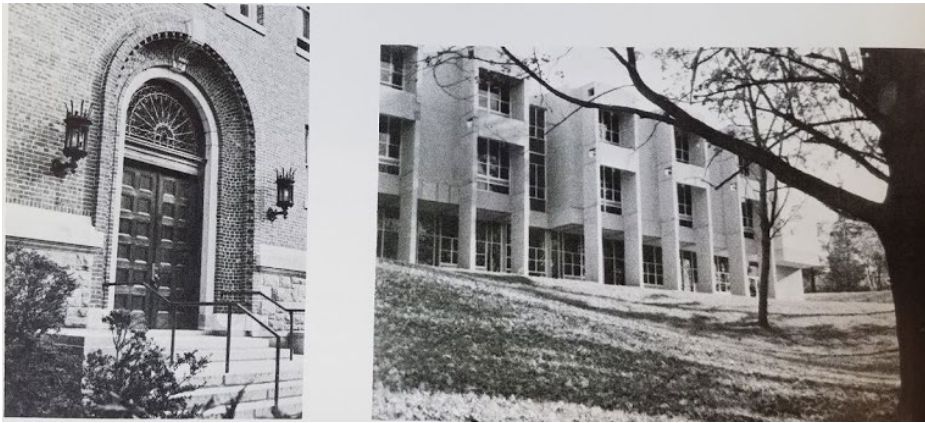
Seniors **Rasikh Shaukat** and **Jonathan Kroop** drew upon old newspaper articles, historic aerial photographs and other sources to compile a chronology of the High School-Middle School Campus. Shaukat noted, “We decided on researching the history of the school site because it is a site in Irvington that we have spent a lot of time in, but surprisingly don’t know all that much about.” After their research, they then created a digital file that when printed could be used as a tri-fold brochure for a walking tour of the campus.

The current Irvington High School building opened in 1965. The land was originally inhabited by the Weckquaesgeek, a Munsee-speaking band of Wappinger people closely related to the Lenape to the south. During the colonial and post-Revolutionary period the site was part of the Dutcher farm, until 1812 when it was sold to Justus Dearman. By 1871 August C. Richards owned the property and built the “Ridgeview” estate. Kroop noted, “I learned that the current high school lies on the former site of Cedar Lawn, the home of Isaac Stern, a founder of Stern’s Department Store.” In 1886 Stern purchased the property, transforming the existing structure into a castle and renaming it “Cedar Lawn.”



August C. Richard’s “Ridgeview” from 1871 (Left), replaced by department store mogul Isaac Stern’s “Cedar Lawn” in 1886 (Right).

The main residence was abandoned for many years before it burnt in a fire in 1963, and its remains were taken down to make space for the new high school, formerly located in the Main Street School building. The new High School was completed in 1965.



Main Street School (Left), formerly the location of the High School, until 1965 when the new building (Right) was completed.

In 2003, to accommodate expanding school enrollment, the science and music wings were built, as well as the cafeteria, which are shared with the new Middle School, which was formerly at the Main Street School. The improved track and field were dedicated on October 1, 2016.

The students' tour brochure informs participants about the site's history as well as the amazing individuals for whom many spaces on campus are named, including the Scott W. Mosenthal Library, Gina Maher Gym, Harold F. Meszaros Field and Peter K. Oley Track.

The students learned about the High School, but also the process of doing history. Kroop reported, "I also learned more about what it is like to conduct research. This project was beneficial to me as I was able to explore my interest in history, while also developing my research skills and learning more about an important part of our community."

Jabari Domingo, a junior, researched the history behind the many physical memorials on the HS-MS Campus grounds: markers and plaques dedicated to the memory of students, alumni, faculty and staff who have passed away. Several individuals commemorated in the memorials were custodial workers or faculty, but most were students or recent alumni, almost all male, who died due to some kind of accident or medical reason.

The earliest record of memorial markers uncovered so far was a newspaper article stating that in 1966 trees were planted in memory of each of three deceased students from different class years. Some of the markers on the grounds were probably placed right after the building and campus opened in 1965. Many of the markers are similar in appearance, consisting of a concrete pedestal with a nameplate, often of engraved copper that has turned green over many years, resting in front of a tree. Many of the memorials are old, worn down,

and sorely need attention. In some cases, the nameplates have fallen off of concrete pedestals, making it difficult to determine the identity of the person memorialized.



Memorial marker on the High School campus in memory of William Paul, Jr., (1948-1966), class of 1966.



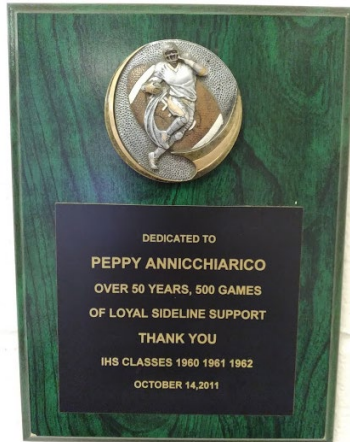
Memorial Marker and Tree Dedicated in Memory of Kevin F. Carney (1942-1960), placed in 1966.

One of the more interesting discoveries Domingo made was the memorial dedicated in 1966 to Kevin F. Carney (1942-1960), class of 1960. He was the son of Dr. Edward M. Carney, Jr., a dentist who served on the Board of Education. Kevin was a popular student. He was active in athletics at Irvington: the quarterback of the football team, as well as playing basketball, baseball, and tennis. His death was a peculiar and tragic story. While in his first semester at Ithaca College, rivals Cortland College had just pulled a prank on the Ithaca campus, and as part of a school tradition Kevin and his friends piled into a pickup truck to go to their campus and prank them back. Along the way the truck flipped over, and Kevin died in the accident. Kevin F. Carney's tragic death is unfortunately all too common amongst those memorialized by these markers: many of them were young men who had just gone off to college and met their end far too soon.

If the name "Carney" sounds familiar, it may be because Kevin was a nephew of Art Carney, who played Ed Norton on *The Honeymooners*, the popular sitcom from the 1950s. Some Irvington residents that Domingo interviewed still recall several times when Art Carney would drive down Main Street and wave to everyone.



Another interesting memorial is the giant rock dedicated to Harold F. Meszaros, next to the field that is named after him. Old photographs show that this rock, just like our beloved Rock on the main hill leading up to campus, was often painted by students. An Irvington graduate himself, Meszaros became a teacher of physical education, health and science, and he was the first Director Of Athletics at Irvington. Generally considered a popular figure during his tenure, his sudden death in 1977 sent shocks through the community, which is most likely why the field was named after him, and the Rock cleaned up and dedicated with a memorial plaque.



There are many memorials inside the building as well, including a plaque dedicated to Charlie “Peppy” Annicchiarico. Located just outside the Library entrance, it was presented by the IHS classes of 1960, 1961 and 1962. During the 1950s, Peppy came from out of town to cheer on his cousin who was on the Irvington Bulldogs football team. He became accepted as the “manager” of the football team by successive coaches, and played that role well into his 80s. For 50 years he didn’t miss a single game.

For the research, Domingo and Dr. Weiselberg consulted historical newspapers and old yearbooks, and interviewed staff members, many of whom are Irvington alumni. Domingo especially appreciated the stories that the teachers and alumni told about the individuals. When he heard the wonderful stories of the amazing lives that these people lived, and the enthusiasm of those who told the stories, he noted, “That’s the best part!”

Domingo’s research was just a first step in an ongoing effort, which includes conducting additional research on any memorials with “missing” nameplates, restoring those memorial markers with plaques in need of repair, and producing a polished version of an informative walking tour brochure.

Superintendent Dr. Kris Harrison is very enthusiastic about the results of the project so far and supportive of its potential in bringing value to the community as it continues. “I see the opportunity for the District to take a role in restoring and better maintaining the memorials moving forward,” he noted.

Domingo concluded his draft of a walking tour brochure with a heartfelt observation and a sincere request: “These were people who lived good lives, and it is important to remember them. We hope that this brochure has done its part to keep their memories alive and makes you more curious about the local history of Irvington.”

Updates on the ongoing efforts of the memorial research will be forthcoming. Community members with information about the individuals memorialized by markers on the HS-MS Campus, or about the circumstances and locations of any markers which may have

been placed in the past, are asked to email Dr. Erik Weiselberg at erik.weiselberg@irvingtonschoools.org.

In choosing to research and share their findings about the past, these students made good use of their Senior Internship time and have left the present community with invaluable references for the future.