

## **HISTORY**

*From "70 Years of Excellence: 1917-1987"*

### *E. Rivers School Cookbook*

At its January 1917 meeting, the Fulton County Board of Education passed resolutions to erect a schoolhouse at the intersection of Peachtree Road and Peachtree Battle Avenue on land donated for this specific purpose by Eretus Rivers, a developer of much of Buckhead's residential real estate. The new school was to be called Peachtree Heights School, and the Board appropriated \$20,000 in its 1917 budget for this project.

Peachtree Heights School began its first session in September 1917, with two teachers and approximately 60 students. There was no grass on the school site, no shrubbery, no equipment and no additional funding from the County. The Principal, Mrs. Lucy Ozmer, called the mothers together and out of necessity the Parent-Teacher Association was organized with Mrs. L.D.T. Quinby as the first President. By 1920, two additional teachers were added to the faculty.

In 1921, Mrs. Ozmer resigned and Miss Georgia Wilder was named Principal. During her tenure, the PTA, with money raised through benefits, rummage sales, and other means, installed the first playground equipment.

During the 1922-23 school year, another teacher was added, the first slate blackboards were placed in the classrooms, and in October, the Kindergarten opened its doors with the PTA donating the equipment, including a piano.

In 1923-24, the teaching staff increased by two. In addition to placing "ventilators" in all the classrooms, the PTA also planted flowering peach trees on the school lawn.

In 1924-25, the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade and Kindergarten shared the auditorium as a classroom with only a curtain dividing the two. Although an inconvenient way of teaching, both classes showed great consideration and displayed little disturbance. It was reportedly a very successful year for all. The lunch room was opened after Christmas of this term with the PTA again providing the equipment and the mothers supervising. Also during this school year, a May Day program was held on the playground with the entire school participating in games, drills, track games (for boys), and folk dances. Mary Noble was chosen Queen of the May Day celebration.

In 1925, with enrollment reaching 300 plus, Mrs. R.D. Osterhout was elected Principal, giving up her position as 7<sup>th</sup> Grade teacher. It was during this period that Mr. Rivers donated additional land for the large athletic field. At that time, the designated area was thick with pine and very large oak trees. County prisoners were brought in to clear out these trees and while doing so, one of them found an old cannon ball lodged in the trunk of an oak. A Civil War relic!

In May of 1926, the school was renamed for Eretus Rivers as a tribute to his splendid services on the Board of Education, to the community, and to this particular school. Telephones were installed for the first time in December of that year, and the name of the school's paper was changed from The Peachtree Heights Journal to The Rivers Overflow.

During Mrs. Osterhout's years of administration (1925-1945), the school staff grew from 7 teachers to 24. Following Mrs. Osterhout as Principal were Miss Alma Suttles (1946-1948) and Mrs. Margaret Brown (1948-1950).

In September 1948, the original stone school building burned to the ground from a fire accidentally caused by a janitor using a blow torch to rid the school of a wasp's nest. For the next year and a half, construction was underway according to plans drawn by Atlanta architects Stevens & Wilkinson, and school was temporarily held at The Temple and Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church. In January, 1950, the new (and present) school was formally dedicated at a banquet in the school cafeteria with 250 people in attendance.

The present school building was a pioneer of contemporary architecture in educational institutions. The April 1951 issue of Architectural Forum, at that time the prestige magazine for architects, featured E. Rivers School, noting that the "...well-known school building ingredients - concrete, brick, glass, block and a standard finger plan - can be combined in a fine piece of architecture." The article went on to state that E. Rivers was "the first modern (school) in the nation," moving away from traditional design.

In 1950, Miss Florence Willoughby was named Principal, and it was during her administration (1950-1970) that the school truly progressed into one of the leading institutions in the City. Because of her sincere belief that a child's security and well-being is strengthened by time spent with them, the door to her office was never closed. Students could come and go as they pleased, and she would always take time to respond to their needs, even if it meant interrupting an important meeting.

By 1953, E. Rivers had become a part of the Atlanta Public School System with approximately 1,100 students enrolled in Kindergarten through 7<sup>th</sup> Grade and 34 teachers, including music and art instructors, with language added the following year.

Always, Miss Willoughby approached situations with a calm, direct, positive attitude. When asked in 1970 to explain in federal court how E. Rivers received its money for an open-sided gymnasium, a piano, air conditioners, carpeting, music equipment, cafeteria and library equipment, and other items, Miss Willoughby eagerly answered that aside from funds given by the City to all schools, everything had been either donated or paid for through funds raised by the PTA and paper sales. Miss Willoughby further stated that any school can be excellent if it has "children eager to learn, warm friendly teachers with high standards, and cooperative parents who will work to improve things."

In 1970-71 through December 1975, Clyde Kimball, Jr. was E. Rivers Principal and was succeeded by Charles K. Arter in January 1976, following Mr. Kimball's death. Although Mr. Arter's term at E. Rivers was brief due to his early death at age 30 in January 1977, he left an impact on all who knew him. His enthusiasm was felt throughout the school. Occasionally, he would enter a classroom to ask if he could teach for a while, thus giving the teacher a well-deserved twenty-minute break.

As a memorial to Charles Arter, his family commissioned William M. McVey, a renowned Cleveland sculptor, to create a bronze lion to be placed on the E. Rivers grounds for all to see. Because of the weight of the piece and the location upon which it was to be placed (between the first and second wings), a crane had to be brought in to lift the lion over the school to carefully set it down onto the yard. On February 24, 1978, the lion was officially dedicated in a ceremony held at the school with students, faculty and staff, family members, Mr. McVey, representatives of the Atlanta School Board, principals from neighboring schools, and State House officials attending. The zestful spirit of Charles Arter will always be kept alive at E. Rivers through the children's playful times with this lion monument.

In March 1977, David E. York followed Mr. Arter as the next Principal at E. Rivers. In 1981, Mr. York resigned to become Principal at Sutton Middle School in Atlanta. Although Mr. York is no longer present on the staff at E. Rivers, he can be readily seen at many of the functions sponsored by the school. It's quite obvious that once you've experienced the family love at E. Rivers, it's ne'er forgotten!

R. Leonard Robertson assumed his duties as E. Rivers' 10<sup>th</sup> Principal in 1981. He followed in the footsteps of noted educators, filling the school with many significant and innovative ideas. He instilled in his boys and girls a sense of pride in themselves, in their school, and in their community. Year after year, he continued to bring to E. Rivers a level of energy that was overflowing with enthusiasm, creating tremendous school spirit in the teachers, the staff, the parents and, most of all, the children. The tradition of exciting education continues at the school today. Walk through the halls sometime...you'll feel it!