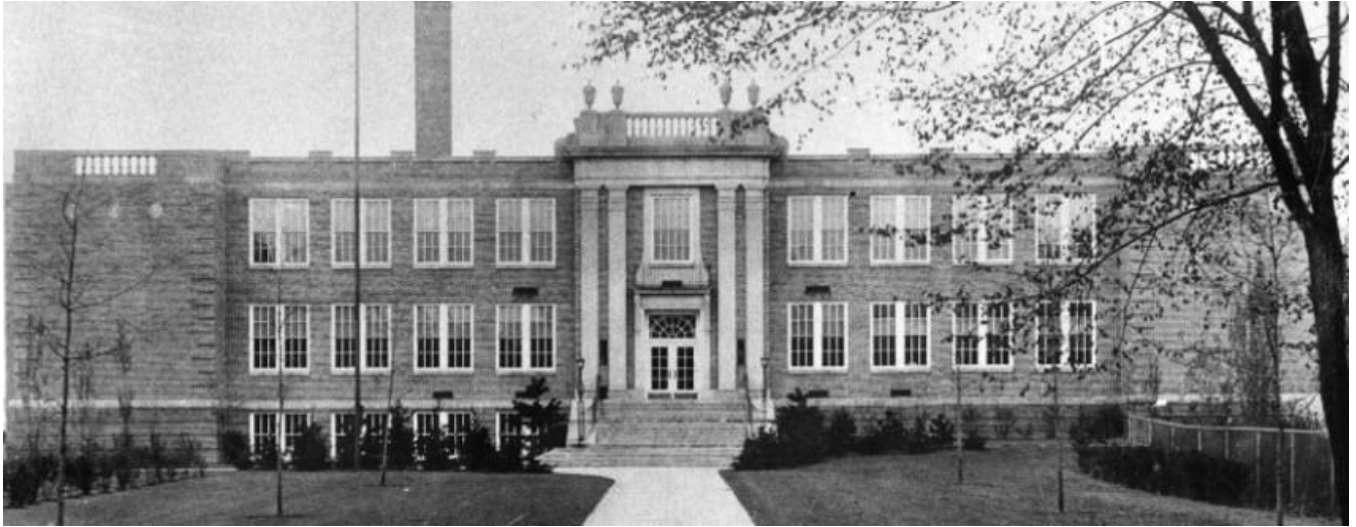


## From High School to Middle School. A Proposal to Save the 1927 School Property and Serve the Hudson Community



While commonly and affectionately referred to as Hudson High, the historic school at 77 North Oviatt Street, now Hudson Middle School, was considered at the time of its construction to be called “Memorial School.” The request came from that era’s World War I veterans and a grateful community, who years earlier had proposed to construct a building for its veterans and the community.

The origins of the Memorial School name, and the creation of the building itself, grew out of a movement in the 1920s to create a “Memorial Hall” to commemorate Hudson’s World War I veterans, many of whom were students or recent graduates when the United States entered the Great War in 1917. One WWI veteran in particular, Martha C. Clark (1879-1946), the only Hudson woman to serve in the war, was a schoolteacher here. At the age of 38, she decided to serve her country and joined the Red Cross as a nurse.

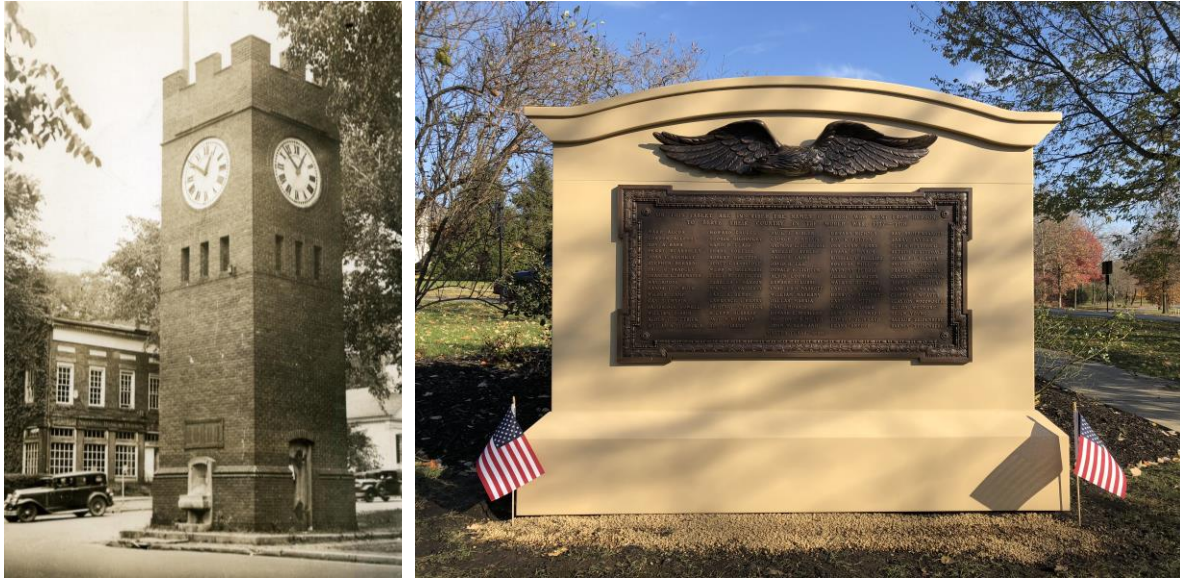
On May 30, 1919, as Hudson’s last remaining WWI veterans were arriving home from Europe, the community gathered for the annual “Decoration Day” (Memorial Day) exercises in Town Hall. After the ceremony closed with the singing of “America,” the audience went to the Village Green for the second part of the program: the unveiling and presentation of a bronze tablet that was placed on the west façade of the Clock Tower, facing Main Street. The tablet commemorated the services of the 81 men and women “who went from Hudson, to serve their country in the World War, 1917-1918.”

While the WWI Memorial bronze tablet would remain secured to the Clock Tower for over a decade, within a few years after being dedicated, a public restroom was constructed inside the Clock Tower. Veterans were outraged, noting that the “tablet is now attached to the outside of the toilet in the park” and argued that this “lack of recognition has been due to the lack of a practical method of remembering our soldiers, and not through any lack of patriotism among our citizens.”

On Feb. 4, 1925, a petition was filed with the Hudson Township Trustees by members of the newly formed American Legion, Lee-Bishop Post 464. They asked the township to issue bonds in the amount of \$70,000 for the construction of a “Memorial Building” to commemorate the service of the township’s soldiers, sailors and marines.

A month later on March 5, 1925, an article appeared in the *Hudson Herald*, co-signed by two Hudson WWI Veterans, Raymond L. Kilbourne (1891-1955) and William A. Ellsworth (1896-1960). They outlined a proposal for a “suitable memorial” to Hudson’s veterans. They envisioned a “Memorial Hall” that would serve as a type of community center, a “suitable meeting place for our societies and organizations, thus giving us not only a memorial to our soldiers, sailors and marines, but furnishing to our people a very useful and much needed building.” They described the various spaces and uses for the proposed “Memorial Hall” building, noting in particular that “the Memorial proposed

is a structure of value to the entire community, having a public assembly hall which will accommodate between five and six-hundred people.”



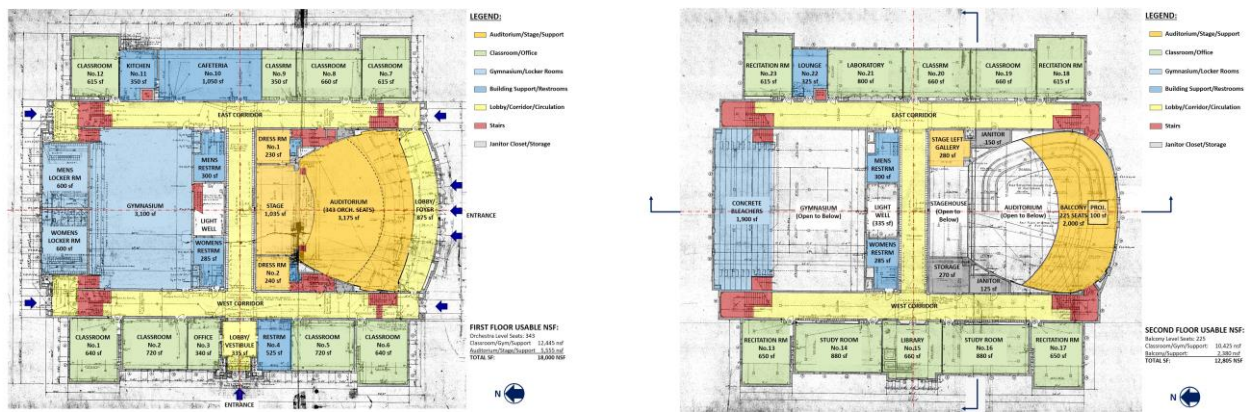
***Hudson's Clock Tower, ca. 1920s, with the original WWI Memorial bronze tablet. The restored tablet, right, was unveiled on Veterans Day, November 11, 2018***

A special election was held on March 16, 1925, with 489 votes cast (more than has been cast in the presidential election held the previous fall). The *Hudson Herald* noted that the Memorial Building proposition received strong opposition (150 for and 339 against the issue) “probably due to a letter sent out by the school board in which they said bonds for \$150,000 must be issued for a new school” and that a “communication from the board of public affairs stating that Hudson’s water supply would probably be condemned in the near future because of the location of wells.” The paper noted that “while Hudson would not fail to do honor to her soldiers, these two items of tax seemed to be about all the citizens were able to assume in the near future.”

For a time, Hudson’s high school students could attend Western Reserve Academy. However, in 1922, WRA became an all-boys institution, creating the need for the town to construct another school. Though early letters discussing plans for the new school indicate that it was not originally slated to be a high school with an auditorium, but something much more modest, it was perhaps the joint needs and vision of the school board and the veterans’ plans that brought about the establishment of the 1927 Building at 77 North Oviatt Street.

By all accounts, the new school building appeared to have been a culmination of years of contentious politics and diplomacy; land negotiations with WRA, who owned the property which was formerly part of James W. Ellsworth’s (1849-1925) estate, and brokering the trades with adjacent residential lots; the determination of the Board of Education, who took on such a grand project using only a bond issue and residual amounts in their building fund; and ultimately the residents of Hudson who would support the substantial bond issue/levy.

In January 1928, the *Hudson Herald* reported on the marvels of the new Hudson High School building. Special praise came for the auditorium, which was not quite completed by opening, “This auditorium will fill a long-felt need ... as there is not a suitable place for lectures or entertainments.” The paper praised the auditorium’s design, its acoustics and the beauty of the decorations (including Corinthian columns/pilasters). The report took great pride in noting that the booth in the gallery/balcony could hold two “picture machines.” The gymnasium was the largest of any school in the county and “if you step into the room when empty, it looks simply huge.” The Study Hall room on the second floor was “large enough to be used for any ordinary sized public gathering.” The building was a “hit!”



**The 1927 Building's First and Second Floor Plans, showing the original space uses.**

A crowd of approximately 1,000 people showed up at the formal public dedication of the Hudson High School building on Feb. 15, 1928. The dedication of the new 600-seat auditorium included an invocation, scripture reading and “prayer of dedication” by community religious leaders and recognition, presentations and speeches for/by school faculty, board members and Summit County officials. Representatives from Western Reserve Academy were also in attendance, with WRA’s headmaster providing a “Greeting from WRA” and gifted baskets of flowers that decorated the stage. The Hudson High School orchestra and girl’s chorus performed on the new grand stage. Toward the end of the evening, the crowd gathered in the new gymnasium where basketball games between the high school students and alumni were staged.

Two weeks later, the auditorium was completed and was opened, appropriately enough, with a patriotic operetta. About 600 people attended, and 235 students participated. There were costumes, a flag drill group, the school orchestra, a presentation on the history of the flag and more. The auditorium was unique, in that it had a separate entrance from the school, with doors and a narrow lobby or promenade flanking the south side of the building. Presumably, residents in walking distance could enter the lobby and auditorium off Elm Street, where a narrow open lot provided a direct connection, which remains today. The PTA soon began using the auditorium space for a public cinema/fundraiser. They began with the educational silent film “Covered Wagon,” followed by a popular Douglas Fairbanks flick. During that time period, the *Hudson Herald* regularly published a banner ad for first-run movies being screened in the auditorium.

Looking at newspaper articles in the years following the school’s dedication, it is clear that the 1927 building was a source of pride and a center of the community, serving as a symbol of unification. The building was constructed to be both inspiring and solid. Its wide-ranging amenities – gymnasium, large auditorium, spacious hallways, airy classrooms and high ceilings – welcomed the students and the community that surrounded it.

The structure was built to last and was the focal point of our community. Because of this, the building features a level of detail, craftsmanship and materials we rarely see today. And for many who passed through its doors, the building is engraved in Hudson’s collective consciousness.

**Editor’s Note:** This article/letter originally appeared in the Hudson Heritage Association’s (HHA) November Newsletter and is being reprinted here. Research work on the 1927 Building was done by HHA’s Board Member Joann Moore. The HHA was founded in 1962 to preserve the Western Reserve Community of Hudson and its historic character. For close to six decades, HHA has promoted civic awareness of Hudson’s rich history and fosters a responsible approach to preserving its unique architecture and Village Green. Visit [www.hudsonheritage.org](http://www.hudsonheritage.org)