

# THE HISTORY OF SOUTH PASADENA HIGH SCHOOL

Recollections from William F Peters '53

*The people of South Pasadena have earned the right to feel they have kept faith with the founders. "The colony settlers of Pasadena were a class of people who regard public schools not as an ornamental appendage, but as one of the prime necessities of a civilized community." These were the words written by Hiram A. Reid in his History of Pasadena, published in 1895. Millions of dollars have been invested in beautiful school buildings. The school system is known all over the United States for its excellence. Our citizenship feels that public schools are "a prime necessity of a civilized community." South Pasadena High School is an important part of the South Pasadena school system.*

In December, 1904 city officials elected to establish a high school. The following school year South Pasadena High School opened in the basement of Center St. School with thirty-two pupils. The faculty consisted of the Principal, Noble Harter, the Vice Principal, George O. Bush, and a part time art teacher, Miss Ada M.P. Chase. In 1906 classes moved to the upper floor of the Taylor Building on Mission Street, across from El Centro School.

After three unsuccessful attempts, school bonds were passed and a sum of sixty thousand dollars was provided for the purchase of six acres bounded by Fremont and Diamond Avenue, and by Bank and Rollin Streets. On Monday, April 8, 1907 the student body moved from the Taylor Building to the "large modern and beautiful building" on Fremont Avenue. At that time, the first floor was used as a gymnasium, bicycle rooms,



lunch rooms, and the home economics and shop rooms. The second floor contained the assembly rooms, offices, and six classrooms while the third floor was devoted entirely to the science, art and commercial departments. In 1907 a class of four girls and one boy graduated from the high school. From that time on, the High School began a period of growth and expansion.

The first additions to the Main Building which faced Fremont Avenue were the Home Economics and Shop Buildings completed in 1912. These structures stood along the north and south ends of the Main Building. Ten years later an auditorium and the gymnasium, which at that time was used by both boys and girls, were erected. In 1925 Roosevelt Field and the



In the aftermath of the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake, the Public Works Administration helped rebuild the high school. PWA work included the science building and the auditorium with its iconic Art Deco facade. The project was completed in April 1937 at a construction cost of \$113,528 and a project cost of \$126,378 - [livingnewdeal.org](http://livingnewdeal.org)

boys' tennis courts were put into usable condition, although the boys' gymnasium was not completed for another year. It was at this time that school athletics was defined and established as a school activity.

The campus was made complete in 1926 with the construction of the Academic Building which stood on Rollin Street facing Ramona Street. In 1931 the Administration Building of the School District was completed. This building is presently standing.

Following the earthquake of 1933 excavations for new buildings were started and two years later the original Home Economics building was replaced by a more modern Fine Arts building and the Shop building by a new Science and Home Economics building. Also with the rehabilitation program came the rebuilding of the auditorium which was severely damaged in the earthquake.

In 1940 the grandstands and the lighted fields were completed as a segment of the Public Works Administration's program to assist cities and school districts. Two years later in 1942, the second and third stories of the original main building were removed as steps were taken to provide safety to students in the event of earthquakes.

In 1950 the electorate of South Pasadena failed to pass construction bonds, which caused the City of San Marino to withdraw from the district and form a separate San Marino Unified School District. In 1954, however, the voters did pass a bond issue of \$1,654,000 in order to provide for reconstruction within the entire district and to purchase land adjacent to school properties. \$1,235,000 of this amount

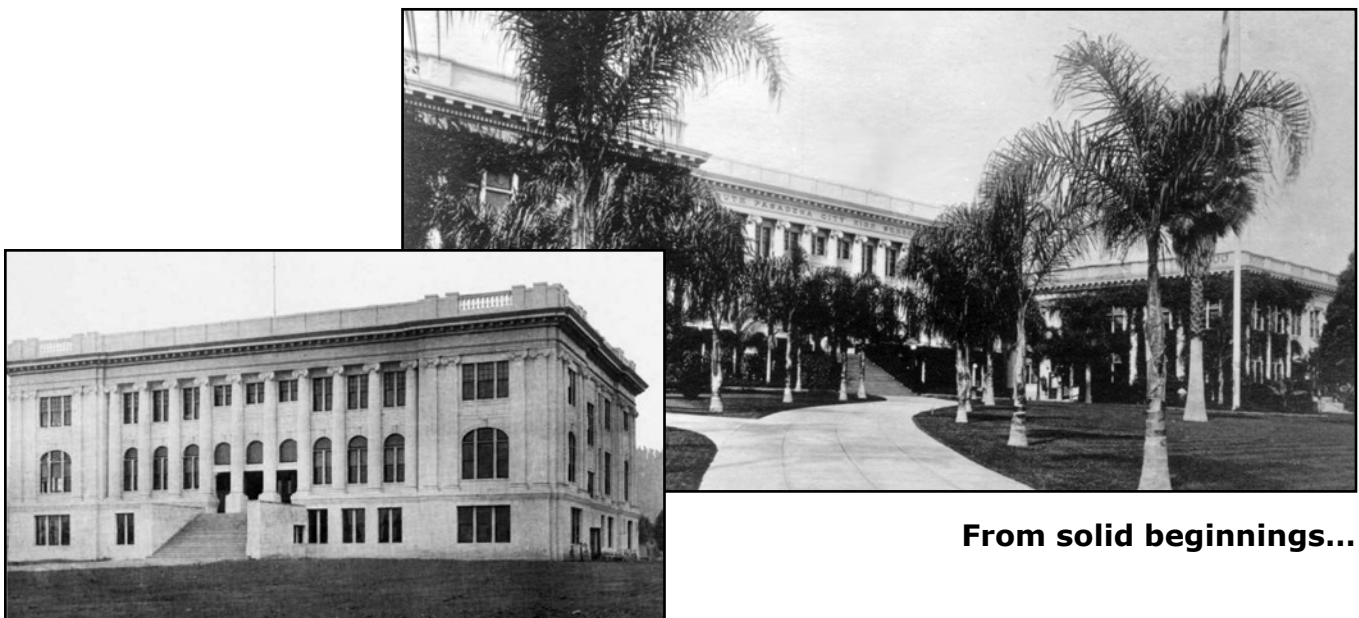
went to the High School to reconstruct nine buildings. It was at this time that the remains of the original main building of the High School were torn down since they did not meet earthquake requirements.

In September 1955, the student body moved into the new buildings, which included an administration building, three classroom buildings, a boys' gym, a girls' gym, a library, a cafeteria, and a custodians' building. Extensive landscaping was done and the school was further beautified by patios provided by senior class gifts.

The Roosevelt Field physical education and athletic facilities were greatly changed in 1959 with the completion of a new standard track and baseball field, and the rejuvenation of the football field. These fine improvements were financed with funds from the 1954 bond issue and required acquisition of added land south of the old field, as well as the closing of Rollin Street between Diamond and Meridian Avenue. Extensions were also made in 1959 to the girls' gym locker rooms. In 1960, two classrooms were added to the Rollin Street classroom building, including a language laboratory.

In the mid 1970s construction from passage of a bond issue resulted in the addition of the large science building that faces Fremont Avenue along with reconstruction of administration facilities damaged by fire in 1971. The swimming pool was added and opened for student use in 1978. That brought SPHS to a form that would remain for the next 20 years.

In 1980, Mary Ida Phair, long time Librarian, was preparing to retire but wanted to do something big



**From solid beginnings...**

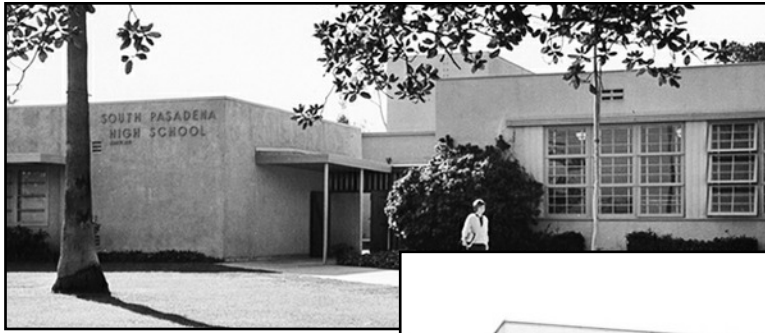


Photo by Lin Cariffe '62

**...changing over time, and  
finally entering a new era**



for the school before retirement. Her wish blossomed into the grandest reunion of all which occurred in 1982. Some 6,100 alumni, representing all graduating classes since the first class of 1907, gathered to celebrate the 75th year of graduating classes. As a result of this event, the Alumni Association was organized and has become a vital part of the history of South Pasadena High School.

Beginning in the Fall of 1984, the high school was changed to a four-year school, encompassing grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. The year 1984 changed the complexion of the high school campus, as teachers and students struggled to continue the school culture of high expectations and high achievement with a markedly different student body. The motto, "Scholarship, Leadership, Strength, Fair Play" gave inspiration to everyone in continuing to re-create the great things about South Pasadena High School. The Booster Club added a weight room, renovated the football/soccer fields, and added locker facilities to the gym. These are just three examples of South Pasadena's efforts to continue a successful march into the 21st century.

Thanks to the passage of a bond measure in 1995, South Pasadena High School has been treated to a \$20 million transformation. If you haven't yet visited the campus, you are invited to do so. NTD Architects were the designers, and they used the 1934 auditorium that is still in use as the basis for their Art Deco-inspired design. One of the first changes to the campus was the addition of a practice gym next to the main gym. The practice gym is graced with a large Tiger Seal facade, courtesy of artist Tony Sheets.

Phase I included renovation of the large building that faces Fremont Avenue, the library, administrative offices, the one story building (part of the original school) across from Holy Family, the Counseling and Career Center, and the transformation of the one-story Ramona Avenue building into a two-story, thirteen classroom building.

By the time school started in August of 2001, the completion of Phase I was nearly complete, but for the next few months, the campus was even more abbreviated than in the previous year. A huge tent was erected on the basketball courts for use as a lunch area, and we had a temporary school-hours-only closing of Diamond Avenue so the students could congregate there for brunch and lunch. The beloved Tiger Patio became a construction staging area prior to being re-landscaped and ready for student use once again.

On Monday morning, January 7, 2002, students and staff gathered in the new "plaza" area to celebrate the opening of the first new buildings. The Tiger marching band played some upbeat tunes, the Girl Scouts led the flag ceremony, and the Madrigals harmonized for the National Anthem. Nature had the good sense to cooperate with an incredibly beautiful, crisp, blue-skied day that perfectly offset the "Peach Apricopia" palette of the new campus.

Next up on the construction front was the opening of the Practical Arts, Fine Arts, and Performing Arts classrooms, including a ninety-nine seat equity waiver theater. Spring of 2002 was the time for occupying those buildings and for taking back the Tiger Patio.

By Valentine's Day, eight classrooms in the (Fremont-facing) Science building were opened. With that, all that was left for modernization were the four classrooms in the middle of campus that are fondly called "The Goto Wing" (designated as such in honor of Mr. Goto's thirty-something years in the same room in that wing) and the Cafeteria, Student Bank, Student Activities Center building.

In the spring of 2002, in conjunction with Open House, a grand opening was held for all parents and community members to tour the facility, celebrate, and get to know the new South Pasadena High School.

In November, 2002, on the heels of this successful project, South Pasadena's voters turned out in solid numbers and overwhelmingly supported Measure M, a new bond for facilities construction. Over three-quarters of those voting gave their approval, signaling again the incredible support that the community gives its schools. With Measure M, the Middle School gained much more suitable conditions in which students can learn. Additionally, SPHS benefits from some additional changes, including three permanent classrooms, that could not be completed under the previous bond measure.

In time for the 2003 softball season, the field that had been the home to 50+ bungalows was

transformed into a new softball field (a first for the school). Solari Stadium and Roosevelt Field were upgraded with new seating and a lift for wheelchairs. A new snack stand, Booster store, home side restrooms, and storage area are included.

The campus is essentially complete and alumni are invited to visit. Look for the Tony Sheets friezes on the west side of the auditorium, as well as memorabilia from various classes that have been incorporated into the new campus, giving the campus a good blend of old and new.

Beginning with the Class of '27, the walkway from Fremont Avenue to Diamond Avenue in front of the auditorium contains stone blocks that commemorate each graduating class. Even among the new amenities, there is an abundance of the old spirit, tradition, and school pride that has sustained South Pasadena High School through its transformations.

Nothing has been said here of the rich academics, sports programs or traditions of South Pasadena High School. These activities are the heart of school life. You are encouraged to look further to your Alumni Association publications and this web site, [www.sphsaa.org](http://www.sphsaa.org), for more stories and information about life at South Pas High.

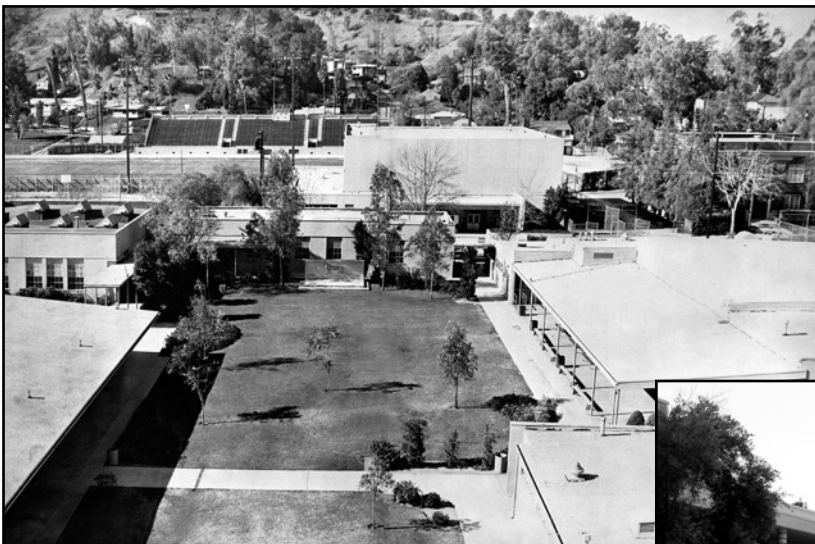


Photo by Lin Cariffe '62

**"The Quad" in middle years...**

**...and now updated**



*(Note: This history was originally assembled for publication in the All Years Directory which was published in 2005. Much of the wording was taken from what appears to be an English Class paper written by Teresa Thurman in 1981 entitled "The History of South Pasadena High School." The paper includes a rather complete bibliography of sources including interviews. Some of the material has appeared over the years in Student Handbooks which have been published at various times.*

*Additional comments and notes describing the changes since 1981 have been provided by Principal Janet L. Anderson '74.*

*Most of the pictures of the older buildings were scanned from various sources including a 1923 Copa de Oro and a 1953 Copa de Oro. The newer pictures were taken in 1961 and June of 2005.)*



The original auditorium building, restored by the PWA in 1934, remodeled in 2002, sporting the Tiger backdrop donated by the Class of '50, truly represents SPSHS for all time.