

Columbus, Ohio - Educational Firsts

Columbus is known as a center for learning and research -- for good reason. We are home to several research institutes such as Battelle, Chemical Abstracts and OCLC. There are numerous institutes of higher learning in Columbus – The Ohio State University, Otterbein College, Ohio Dominican College, Capital University, Franklin University and Columbus State Community College and the College of Art and Design, to name a few. Yet, how many of us know that Columbus holds claim to two innovations in primary education? Columbus is the birthplace of the first junior high school in the nation, and one of the earliest kindergartens.

Friedrich Froebel, the German father of the kindergarten, stressed the importance of education in pre-school aged children. His concept of kindergarten was literally a children's garden where young minds would grow and flourish through constructive play and informal education. Several of Froebel's students came to America to set up kindergartens in the mid-1800s. Caroline Louisa Frankenberg came to Columbus in 1836 for just this purpose and established the "School for Active Instincts of Childhood and Youth." Perhaps the name of the school was too long or the concept too "new age" for the times, because the school did not last and Caroline returned to Germany in 1840. However, Miss Frankenberg persevered and returned in 1858 to open what was then called a kindergarten in a small cottage at the corner of Rich Street and Pearl Alley.

Two of Froebel's other students also claimed to have started the first kindergartens in the United States. Margaretha Meyer Schurz started a German speaking kindergarten in her home in 1856 in Watertown, Wisconsin and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody established an English speaking kindergarten in Boston, Massachusetts in 1868. By 1890, enrollment in kindergarten programs throughout the United States was 30,000 children.

Indianola Junior High School makes the record books as the indisputable first junior high school opened in the nation. On September 7, 1909 the present day Indianola Alternative Elementary School opened as a junior high at East 16th Avenue and Indianola Avenue. It was set up specifically to teach grades seven, eight, and nine. By 1920, all the Columbus Public Schools were using junior highs.

In 1980, when the junior highs were converted into middle schools, the students at Indianola Junior High, which had re-opened in 1929 on East 19th Avenue, nominated their school to the National Register of Historic Places. Because of its status as the first junior high school and its architectural significance, the school was put on the Register in June 1980.

Sources:

Citizen Journal, August 16, 1929, page 2

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