

last reunion was 1965 for barbecue

OLD COMMERCIAL HIGH TO REORGANIZE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

All former Commercial High students are invited to the school's Alumni Reunion Dinner at the Radisson Inn Atlanta, I-285 & Chamblee-Dunwoody Road, Chamblee, Georgia at 6:30p.m., February 4, 1984, according to William Zachary Sr., Class of '43, Chairman of the Reunion Committee.

The cost will be \$15.00 per person or \$30.00 per couple. Those who have not already been contacted should call either Carolyn Embry at 321-3595, William Zachary Sr. at 373-8150, or Bruce Murphy at 987-0526.

The historic old school opened in 1909 as the English Commercial High School for girls out of the commercial department of old Girls High School. The commercial department at Girls High had been formed (1889) due to the farsighted vision of a teacher, Mrs. Hamilton Douglas.

In 1915 the school became coed, the first coed high school in the city, when the boys from the business department of Boys High joined forces with the already established school.

The school was always highly rated academically, and in 1923 Commercial High School became a member of the National Honor Society.

Students who attended Commercial High School could enter most of the colleges in Georgia. Though the school did not offer Latin, students could take French or Spanish. So students got good academics plus a commercial or home economics course if they went four years.

In the early days of the school Commercial High offered different courses. There was a two-year course, offering a certificate for those who needed to go to work as soon as possible. And there were the four year courses in the commercial field, one in which the young women specialized in the household arts with commercial subjects taking a minor place in their course of study.

In 1925 a post-graduate course in the business field was added for students graduating from other high schools and in need of business training. In 1926 a co-op course, in which students worked for two weeks and went to school for two weeks, was enacted.

Extra curricular activities were varied. Activities included sports, an orchestra, chorus, and a "bank." The highly organized "bank" was long a part of the life of Commercial High. The students ran the bank with officers, tellers -- everything needed for a bank to function. The bank offered concrete business experience.

The late Annie T. Wise, called the "mother" of the old high school, was the first principal of the institution, and the late Rosa Lee Fletcher, was the last principal for the school. In 1947 Commercial High School was closed in the face of a growing Atlanta population and the need for community schools to serve students more effectively.

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*A many of the graduates have settled in
DeKalb County, in fact Vivian E. Brooks*

*Boys High
Tech
Girls
Comm*

Commercial High Alumni Dinner: All former Commercial High students are invited to the school's Alumni reunion-dinner at Radisson Inn Atlanta, 285 Chamblee-Dunwoody Road, Chamblee, Georgia at 6:00 p.m., February 4, 1984. For reservations call either Carolyn Embry at 321-3595, William Zachary, Sr. at 373-8150, Bruce Murphy at 987-0526

HISTORY OF COMMERCIAL HIGH SCHOOL

Nearly a century ago, in 1889, a farsighted teacher in Atlanta's Girls' High School envisioned future Atlanta's commercial and industrial development. Mrs. Hamilton Douglas realized that the city's rapid growth in commerce would create a large job market for business office personnel.

Mrs. Douglas convinced the Board of Education of the value of equipping students with the necessary skills to enter this expanding job market, and as a result a commercial department was formed at Girls' High School. This new department represented the first effort by any U.S. public high school to teach commercial subjects to its students.

Mrs. Douglas became head of the department, a position she held for 4 years before being succeeded by Mrs. Annie T. Wise.

The crowded condition of Girls' High School prompted Miss Sergeant, the principal of Girls' High, and Mrs. Wise, her assistant, to appear before the Board of Education in 1910 to request that an additional building be rented to accommodate the commercial department.

Their request was granted, and the Deanery of St. Phillips Cathedral at 16 Washington Street was rented to house the students of the commercial department with Mrs. Wise as their principal. English-Commercial High was the name given to this new school by the Board of Education. At that time, the faculty consisted of five teachers.

The girls of English-Commercial High were happy in their new quarters. The building was heated with stoves and fireplaces, and the classes were made to fit the rooms. The living room of the former deanery served as classroom for approximately 47 students, and the bedrooms held approximately 22 students. Even the kitchen was used as a classroom. An abandoned Sunday School building served as the school auditorium. These buildings were connected by a covered runway much despised by the students but later appreciated when in 1928 it was condemned, requiring pupils to walk down from the fourth floor to the first, cross over, and then climb back up to the third floor.

When the new school's second year began, 300 students were enrolled, many of whom could not be provided with seating space. The Board of Education rented additional quarters in the offices

of the Episcopal Diocese. By the end of the third year, these quarters were outgrown also, and larger space was provided on Crew Street in a wooden building that had been abandoned by a grammar school when its new quarters were completed. This building was so dark and dreary that practically all reading and writing had to be done by artificial light.

Within two more years, this structure could no longer hold the school's rapidly increasing student body. The Board of Education realized the dire need of a new school building site commensurate with the dignity and importance of their growing institute, and in 1915 rented a large building on Pryor Street. At this time, the school incorporated the business department of Boys' High, thereby establishing the only coeducational senior high school in Atlanta to be known as Commercial High.

Because of delays in the construction of the new building, school did not open until late in November. Consequently, Christmas Day was the only holiday observed that year, and the spring term did not end until the first of July.

The school continued to grow, requiring further additions. The Auditorium Annex was added in 1918.

Several years later, a store, formerly occupied by the Moncrief Furnace Company which was across the street from the school provided another annex. The students housed in this building were given a column in the school paper, The Co-Ed Leader, which they called "Smoke From the Furnace". In one issue the editor wrote, "We wonder what our fate will be when winter comes, if we have to depend on the Moncrief Furnace sign to keep us warm." Other additions to Commercial High included the abandoned residence that faced Central Avenue, which the students called the Million Dollar Annex, and the old brick house at 218 South Pryor which was known as Goodwin.

In 1923, the Board of Education organized junior high schools. Because their buildings were not complete, two of the junior high student bodies, Joe Brown and Hoke Smith, were housed temporarily in Commercial High which was also sharing its quarters with Central Night and an extension department of Emory University. In the December issue of the Co-Ed Leader, a letter appeared which read as follows:

"Dear Santa: Please bring me a schoolhouse all in one piece that I can use all by myself".

In 1929, work was begun on the New Annex on Central Avenue. A modern cafeteria was installed, and for the first time Commercial students were able to eat warm meals inside the building.

During Commercial High's first 5 years, the curriculum consisted of a 3-year course of study offering the subjects of penmanship, commercial geography, spelling, history, typewriting, stenography, bookkeeping, French, English, arithmetic, hygiene, music, and physical training. Each type of study was conducted on the departmental plan. Later domestic science (home economics) was added.

Because of the comprehensive nature of its curriculum, in 1923 Commercial High was placed on the accredited list of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, which enabled its graduates to enter any standard college in the Southeastern United States without preliminary examination.

In order to serve each student as an individual with unique talents, Commercial added many electives. The business department offered salesmanship, commercial law, filing, accounting and office practice; the English department added journalism and dramatics; the art department included interior decorating, art, and designing; students of mathematics learned to operate calculating machines;

The school paper, the Co-Ed Leader, was begun in 1921 and became a noted prizewinner. Three years after its first issue, it sprang from a three-column to a five-column paper. The next year it was awarded a silver loving cup at the convention of the Columbia Scholastic Press Association. In 1927 it was admitted to Quill and Scroll, an international honorary society for high school journalists, and it received awards from the All American Rating Society and the Central Inter-scholastic Association. The paper also won state prizes presented by the Georgia Scholastic Press Association and by the Atlanta Constitution.

The Bank, which was the first of its kind to be organized in the South, offered opportunity to learn the work of banking. The Glee Club and the school orchestra provided music for school entertainment and graduation exercises. The Dramatic Club presented many plays for the school and twice won first place in the state dramatic tournament.

The department clubs consisted of History, Spanish, French, Botany, Euclid, Geometry, Phoenix and other literary clubs, Business Practice, and Hooks and Crooks. The last organization was composed of superior students from the shorthand and typing departments.

From a solitary high school department, Commercial High grew into a comprehensive school with more than 1500 students.

The young men and women who took advantage of Commercial's offerings learned valuable skills which readied them for adulthood, enriched their lives, and helped many of them to become financially independent and influential members of the community. Surely, Commercial High School lived up to her aims: "Skill to make a living; education to make a life."

Excerptions from Graduation Speech by Leila Cathryn Stevens, Class of January 1935 and collaboration with Mr. Franklin M. Garrett, Atlanta Historian

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*unofficial historian of
City of Atlanta*