

# History of

## Lilburn Middle School

Lilburn Middle School is located on the front of an 18-acre tract of land at 4994 Lawrenceville Highway, Lilburn. Countless additions, modifications, and changes have been made on the school site as it has changed from a grade school to a high school to an elementary school and to the present middle school.

The school was named after the town of Lilburn, which is believed to have been named after a railroad official by the name of Lilburn Trigg Myers. He was a general superintendent of the Seaboard Airline Railway system. Originally, Lilburn School was located on First Avenue in Old Town Lilburn. However, after a town fire in 1920, the boll weevil cotton crop destruction in the early 20s, and the Depression beginning in 1929, the town of Lilburn almost vanished economically. In the late 1920s/early 1930s, Richard C. Simonton worked as a teacher or administrator for Lilburn School. It is unclear in which capacity he served. He was a WWI veteran and known for wearing a bow tie. In 1933, he left the local school to serve as Superintendent of Gwinnett Schools, where he served two eight-year terms. In 1932, the school site was relocated from near the railroad to the present location.

The first building on the site was a little red brick building, which housed grades one through eight. Noted

### FAST FACTS

**Address:** 4994 Lawrenceville Highway  
Lilburn, GA 30047

The following have served as principals of Lilburn Middle School:

1970–82	Ronald W. Wheelers
1982–97	Mike Grzeskiewicz
1997–2000	Dr. Lynda Royal
2000–2002	Berry Simmons
2002–2004	Arthur Knight
2004–2007	James Rayford
2007–2008	Cecilia Garcia
2008–Nov. 2012	Dr. Gene Taylor
Nov. 2012–Present	Dr. Yvette Arthur

**School Colors:** Navy Blue, Columbia Blue, and White

**School Mascot:** Mustang

in the school history was the service of W. B. Thompson as principal, 1932–34; Buford E. Dalton in 1938–41. During the early World War II years of 1941–42, principal I. M. Wade was at Lilburn School. At that time, the fourth, fifth and sixth grades were located in the



basement of Liberty Baptist Church (now First Baptist, Lilburn).

This was the period, too, for construction of the white-cement block building with classrooms and an auditorium that served as the high school. It was not until the following administration of M. P. Campbell in 1942–43 that Lilburn had its first year for a four-year high school. Lonnie H. Johnston served as principal in 1943–45. Then, a man who signed himself simply ‘McCord’ served as principal of the school from September of 1945, until he left the school at Thanksgiving and never returned.

J. W. Bagwell (principal from 1945-57) came to the school just out of the Navy and still in uniform. Immediately, he involved students and parents in taking pride in the school. It was during Bagwell’s almost 12-year tenure at Lilburn that the school lunchroom program began, plumbing facilities improved, and landscaping improved. Through community efforts, \$50,000 was raised to construct a cement-block gymnasium. Local citizens constructed a canning plant, which was later remodeled for classrooms. In addition, patrons constructed a three-room cement-block classroom building, later used for a home economics department.

Mr. Bagwell, noted for his athletic achievements as a collegian, served as basketball coach. The school became recognized for its athletic and literary achievements in the county, region and state. The school colors were purple and gold with a ‘Tiger’ as mascot.

In 1953, the Gwinnett School Board voted 3-1 to close Lilburn High School and consolidate the county into one central high school to be located in Lawrenceville, effective September 1957. The state board approved the action in 1953, but due to a plea by patrons of Lilburn High School, they reversed their action in 1957.

The state Board of Education required that all Georgia high schools add the twelfth grade in 1953. Prior to 1953, some students in Lilburn attended school for 12 years on a volunteer basis. Lilburn High School’s first official 12-year graduating class of 1954 consisted of 18 members who published the first school yearbook, *The Seniorette*, and a school newspaper.

When Mr. Bagwell left Lilburn in 1957, Henry H. Boddie was principal until 1958. It was during this period that Lilburn discarded individual room heaters for central heat installation. The expanding community and enlarging school population necessitated a high school addition in the 1958-61 principalship of J. R. Livingston.

Four classrooms— one for a library and one for science— were built.

During the four years 1961–65, Avery A. Graves, an ordained minister, was principal and a second addition (six classrooms and enlarged cafeteria) was added. A new school office was added, the school grounds were paved, and a school intercom system was installed. An increased enrollment necessitated conversion of the cannery and auditorium into classrooms.

The whole community rallied together during this time, providing the labor for an addition to the gymnasium— saving over \$4,000. At this time, Lilburn served as a pilot school in the use of a math and science lab (the first, said one source, in this part of the country) for the use of filmstrips.

A student government was formed and many clubs were created for students under Graves’ administration. He also stressed the teaching of morals, the use of new teaching aids and concepts, team-teaching, and the use of audio-visuals. Lilburn acquired accreditation by the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges due to the highly qualified faculty and staff. A school counselor and secretary were added to the staff. The curriculum was also enlarged. In June of 1965, there were 268 high school students and 677 elementary students.

Not until W. M. Pickens came as principal in 1965 did the inevitable occur— enrollment passed the 1,000-student mark. In May 1966, enrollment was noted at 819 pupils in the elementary school, with 314 in the high school, making the combined figure 1,133.

The school year 1965–66 was a year characterized by transition and preparation of Lilburnites to bid farewell to Lilburn High after the 1966 graduation ceremony. Berkmar High School was under construction on Pleasant Hill Road (grades 8–12) and the Lilburn School site was scheduled to become an elementary school (grades 1–7) at the end of the school year.

In preparation for the transition, this was the first year for the elementary library, and the first year for an assistant principal. He was Vic Verdi, who was to become the administrator for the elementary school, which would make use of the present combined school plant the next year. This was the first year, too, for portable classrooms on campus as four large trailer classrooms were utilized.

The school site housed Lilburn Elementary School (grades 1–7) until December of 1970. Mr. Verdi served as principal during this time. A new facility was built on McDaniel Street for Lilburn Elementary School. Elementary items were moved during the Christmas

holidays, so Mr. Verdi, his staff and students in grades one through six reported to their new location on January 2, 1971.

Ronald W. Wheelles was appointed principal for Lilburn Middle School at the beginning of school year 1970 and served through 1982. As he took command, he served the first half of the year sharing facilities with Mr. Verdi and the elementary school. At midpoint, when the elementary school moved to its new facility, the eighth graders who had been housed at Berkmar were moved to the Lilburn Middle School site to join the seventh graders.

In 1972, a new building was constructed on the site to house Lilburn Middle School (grades 6–8). The building featured a large open media center in the middle of the school, surrounded by classrooms, restrooms and office space. It included a lab for art, industrial arts, home economics and band, and a mini-auditorium. The redbrick building (constructed in the 1930s), the white cement-block building (built in the 1940s), and the three-room cement-block structure and cannery (built in the 1950s) were all demolished. The curriculum was expanded to include a variety of exploratory classes – foreign languages, needlework, candle making, school beautification, and more. Field trips were taken extensively.

The student body selected the school colors of blue and gold, with the Warrior as the mascot, during 1970. The first yearbook and school newspaper, the *Pow Wow*, were published in the 1971–72 school year. Both publications won recognition for excellence within a few years.

School year 1974–75 was a year for double sessions. Enrollment rose to 2,100 students with 100 teachers. The morning-session students remained at Lilburn Middle during the next school year, while the faculty and students of the afternoon session moved to the new Trickum Middle School the next fall.

Enrollment for 1975–76 was 1,395. The following year, rezoning to create the new Sweetwater Middle School caused the Lilburn Middle School enrollment to drop to 709.

During the 1977–78 school year, Lilburn Middle School obtained accreditation by the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges.

From 1976–80, Lilburn Middle School facilities once again were shared to house overflow students from other schools. The fifth graders from Rockbridge Elementary School were housed for two years and the fifth graders from Camp Creek Elementary for one year.

Needless to say, the buildings at this school site were in need of a ‘face lift’ due to usage. Therefore, a county bond referendum provided funds to revitalize the building in the summer of 1979. New carpet and additional walls were installed in the 1972 structure. The eighth-grade wing (built in 1958 and 1962) was modernized to make it more energy efficient. The cafeteria was also improved and air-conditioned.

In 1980, a new redbrick gym was constructed. Community athletic groups now use the cement-block gymnasium erected in the 1940s by citizens.

From 1981 to the present, the school has housed sixth, seventh and eighth graders only. During this time, the student population has become more ethnically diverse. This new cultural flavor has led to an appreciation and knowledge of other ethnic experiences. Through the years, many innovative and creative techniques have been utilized to meet the needs of students.

From 1982–1997, Mike Grzeskiewicz served as principal of Lilburn Middle School. Gwinnett County was gradually becoming larger. High schools in the Lilburn and Norcross area were becoming overcrowded, specifically Berkmar High School and Norcross High School. Lilburn Middle students had attended Berkmar High School for many years. In 1986, a new high school was built to relieve Berkmar and Norcross High Schools. The school was named Meadowcreek High School and opened for the school year 1986-87. In the spring of 1986, eighth grade students from Lilburn Middle School voted on the high school name and school colors of navy, Columbia blue, and White. As they moved on to high school, Lilburn Middle students were split between Meadowcreek High School and Berkmar High School.

In the fall of 1990, Mr. Grzeskiewicz and students from the school’s Environmental Group planted daffodils in the rain to brighten the school entrance on Lawrenceville Highway. These flowers welcome spring for the people in Lilburn every February when they are in full bloom.

Growth continued in the Lilburn area and in the fall of 1993, the doors opened to a new two-story section, adding more classrooms, and a new cafeteria. There also were rooms for band, chorus, and orchestra classes. The old cafeteria was converted into classrooms, which currently house connections classes including one computer science class, health, study skills, and reading.

During the 1996–97 school year, construction began on the second addition to the school since the 1980 gym was built.

Dr. Lynda Royal became principal in the fall of 1997. The school opened that year with another two-story addition containing more classrooms. This addition now houses the sixth and seventh grade academies.

By 1997, all students attending Lilburn Middle were zoned to attend only Meadowcreek High School. During that same year, Dr. Royal, students, and teachers voted to change the Lilburn Middle mascot to match the mascot of their feeder high school. The mascot changed from the Warrior to the Mustang and the school colors changed to match those of Meadowcreek, as well.

Berry Simmons became principal of Lilburn Middle in 2000 and served for two years. Arthur Knight served as principal from fall of 2002 until fall of 2004. Enrollment during this time reached approximately 2,400 students. Louise Radloff Middle, built to relieve Lilburn's overcrowding, opened its doors in the fall of 2004. Lilburn Middle's population split and began the 2004–05 school year with approximately 1,300 students. Several months into the 2004–05 school year, James Rayford was named principal. He continues to serve students and inspire teachers.

#### SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Connie Davis, Lilburn Middle School Teacher  
(reviewed and updated Lilburn Middle School's History – 2006)

Helen Hazelrigs— Former Lilburn student (class of 1962)

Pat Johnson— Reporter for Gwinnett Daily News  
(many excerpts are from article written on May 22, 1966 about the opening of Berkmar High School and the last graduating class from Lilburn High)

Carol Kautz— Lilburn Middle Teacher (1970–99)

Marvin Nash-Worthy— Gwinnett Historian

Marcia Nolan— Lilburn Middle Teacher (1988–present)

Betty Still— attended Lilburn School 1<sup>st</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grades (class of 1954) and taught in the Lilburn School for 30 years (wrote the original history of Lilburn Middle School)

Hugh Wilkerson— City Resident

Sarah Williamson— Historian

*(For further information on Lilburn Middle School, see History of Lilburn Elementary School and History of Berkmar High School.)*

#### INTERESTING FACTS:

Richard C. Simonton was a teacher or administrator for Lilburn School in the early 1930s. Simonton Elementary School was named after him.

Rebecca Minor was a teacher who spent her entire teaching career at Lilburn. Minor Elementary School is named after her.

Lilburn Public Library began on the Lilburn School campus. It was housed in a three-classroom school building behind what is now a laundry mat. It was later moved to the cannery building located to the west of the old gym. It eventually moved to downtown Lilburn, near the current Calvin Hall Municipal Building. The current location is now off of Indian Trail in Lilburn.

On November 12, 1994, the 1954 graduating class of Lilburn High School sponsored a reunion for all graduates between the years of 1942–1966. A catered lunch began at 11:30 A.M. in the cafeteria and was followed by a program at 1:30 in the school gymnasium. The event was well attended. Buildings had changed, but many memories were alive and exchanged between classmates.