

MARPLE NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



In 1914, Newtown Township had about 750 residents, while Marple Township was slightly larger with about 850 residents. Both communities were largely farming communities, running their separate school systems. Dr. John G. Thomas, Civil War veteran, the community's medical doctor and a long time (40 years) school board member, lobbied to have the two townships pool their resources to build a new high school that would be used by both townships. That meant both townships would have to work together, and work out the financial and operating details to make that type of joint school system work. Dr. Thomas made his home property along the West Chester Turnpike available for that purpose, and in 1914 the communities built the Marple-Newtown Joint high school on a 4 acre plot just over the township line of Media Line Road in Newtown Township. The first school (see cover page) was a two story stone building with eight rooms and a Faculty of three teachers and thirty one pupils. The first graduating class was eight students, in 1915.

In the initial publication of *The Tatler*, an alumni newsletter (circa 1933), the early students recognized Dr. Thomas and his contributions:

"In almost complete seclusion and retirement, the man to whom Marple Newtown High School owes its existence is living at Broomall ... Known and loved by the people, Dr. John G. Thomas holds an eminent position in the community. With the same gentleness and care that he tends the sick, he administers to the worried and needy. For the greater part of his life he has continually striven to better the community. ... To this man who has served so adequately his fellow man, and who has given his best to establish a successful educational system in this community, we, the Alumni, express our sincere gratitude."

Additions were made to the high school in 1935 and 1940 as the populations began to grow in both townships. The original stone building was destroyed in a suspicious fire (some say a student was smoking!) on April 9, 1956. By then, the suburbs were growing, and the community needed a much larger school. By 1958, a new senior high school was built at a cost of three million dollars on Media Line Road on 23 acres of land just a few blocks southwest of the previous high school. That building has been added to, updated and modernized



Original 1914 building with additions on either side.

several times since 1958. And the site of the original school on Dr. Thomas' property was in turns the Marple Newtown Junior High, and then the Gauntlett Center.

In 2014, we celebrate a very successful joint venture between Marple and Newtown townships that has lasted for 100 years. And if you pass by Marple Presbyterian Church cemetery on Sproul Road, remember to thank Dr. Thomas, whose gravestone is in the front row close to the original church building, still keeping an eye on the community.