

MELROSE HIGH SCHOOL: OUR HISTORY

Since its humble beginnings in the late 1800's, Melrose has been the pride of the **Orange Mound neighborhood**. From its Park Avenue location to its present site, Melrose has been the school of choice for generations of Orange Mound families.

Melrose's history began in 1890 when district 18 School of Shelby County, Tennessee was established. Although the children were educated in a two-story framed, unheated building, the residents believed in family values and education; thus, the school became an important institution in the community. The school's name was later changed to Melrose - in honor of Dr. Melrose, a philanthropist and humanitarian who gave much of his service to school, civic, and community activities.



Melrose High School, 1938
(*Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 29, 1938)

Messick to the north in the Buntyn community was the school for whites, and Melrose in Orange Mound was the school for Blacks. Students attended Melrose in grades one through eight and Booker T. Washington for high school. When Mrs. Fannie M. Kneeland was appointed as the principal of the newly named Melrose School; she also served as the only teacher. As history records it, Melrose grew from a one teacher-principal school to a three-teacher school. In 1894, Melrose graduated its first class, which was comprised of five (5) girls.

When the area was annexed to the city in 1919, Melrose became part of the city school system. At the time, students were educated in an eleven-classroom, outmoded stucco structure. In 1929, a reporter from the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* visited the school and reported many conditions that needed remedy. "...ill-heated, ill-lighted, ill-kept, bad in itself, with 'temporary' additions that are even worse, because, though propped up on wooden pegs and roofed only with a species of paper, they have become practically permanent." The building, which was considered to be a firetrap, was three-quarters of a mile from the car lines, and the surroundings were muddy. There were no electric lights, and the janitor used a lantern. The 703 students were crowded, used the cloakrooms as extra classrooms.

William Alexander Lynk was principal, and the reporter gave high marks to Lynk and his faculty. Profits from the cafeteria had been used for books, three pianos, band instruments, a sewing machine, and two phonographs. A new building was badly needed.

In an effort to avoid a fire hazard to schoolchildren, city officials were able to obtain support and financing for a new building. Upon completion of the new building, it was reported that a merger would occur. The smaller Park Avenue School, which had been earlier built as a county school, would be discontinued and the children sent to Melrose School.

The new \$137,000 Melrose School building would have 24 classrooms, library, offices, a health department clinic, sanitary conveniences on each floor and provision for future classrooms and an auditorium. As reported in the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* (November 16, 1937), "It will be fireproof. It will be for 'Negroes'."

In 1938, Melrose and Park Avenue Schools merged when the new brick, steel, concrete, and fireproof building was constructed as a Public Works Administration Project. In 1940, additional land was purchased, giving the Board of Education a 300-foot frontage on Park Avenue from Dallas to Hanley, and a depth of 115 feet. The

physical plant was expanded to include 79 classrooms, a well-equipped library, two domestic science laboratories, one applied science laboratory, two soundproof music rooms, a shop building, a combination cafeteria-auditorium, and an 11.65-acre campus area. In 1944, Mr. J. W. Westbrooks joined the staff and organized football, boxing, and basketball teams. As the Orange Mound community grew, Melrose also evidenced a metamorphosis: It evolved into three (3) schools-in-one:

Melrose Elementary
serving students in grades 1-6

Melrose Junior High
serving students in grades 7-8

Melrose High
serving students in grades 9-12



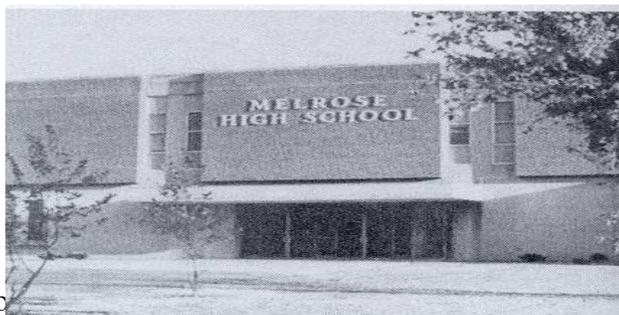
Melrose High School
(Former Location at Dallas Street & Park Avenue)

The first high school class graduated in 1946, and in 1948 a \$217,000 stadium was built. In 1949, Mr. Floyd M. Campbell was appointed principal of Melrose High School. He emphasized the “family” idea. As a result, a close relationship developed between the administration, teachers, students, and the community. The four “A’s” were stressed: Academics, Attendance, Attitude, and Athletics. Teachers were inspired to improve themselves professionally and many were promoted to positions of leadership in the Memphis City Schools system. Students grew rapidly in the development of character, scholarship, leadership, and service. Each year, a significant number of students were recognized for attending Melrose from grades 1 through 12. These graduates achieved the distinction of being inducted in the Melrose “12-Year Society.”

Serving more than 2,400 students, Melrose maintained its prominence in the Orange Mound community. The advent of the ‘60’s, however, marked compelling changes in society, education, and the community. In 1965, the elementary grades were dropped from Melrose. With the onslaught of civil rights/human rights litigation and educational reforms, black students were bused across town to white schools.

The “new” Melrose High School provided the best of three instructional designs:

- *General -A well-balanced program of studies which includes regular academic and vocational courses
- *College-Preparatory -A well-balanced program of studies with emphasis on enriched and/or AP courses
- *Vocational -A well-balanced program of studies that prepare students with entry level skills for employment



Melrose High School
(Current Location on Deadrick Avenue)

In 1969, Melvin Co... d grades 7 – 12. In 1972, Melrose High School moved to its present location on Deadrick Avenue. In 1979, LaVaughn Bridges was appointed as principal. In compliance with the “middle school” concept, the seventh and eighth grades were removed in 1995. Since that time, Melrose High School has served grades nine through twelve. In 1997, Melrose High School was cited by the Memphis Education Association as School of the Year. 1999, Melrose High School was designated as a Title I School. In 2004, Melrose High School was again cited by the Memphis Education Association as School of

the Year. The 2008-2009 school year marked the beginning of a new administration. Leroy McClain took over the helm as principal of Melrose High School.