



History: Manlius Pebble Hill School

"Two Major Independent Secondary Schools - The Manlius School, at Manlius, and Pebble Hill School, at DeWitt - Have Become One" read The February 18, 1970 headline in the Syracuse Herald-Journal. This would bring about a major change for teachers, parents, but most importantly, for the 290 students at Manlius (grades eight through 12), and the 292 students at Pebble Hill (nursery school through 12). After over a year of consideration, the merger was made effective with the start of summer sessions late that June. It resulted in a 550-student, co-educational, non-military, day and boarding school using both campuses.

Talk of a potential merger began at The Manlius School in the 1960s, when the Board of Trustees explored ways to secure the future of the school. At that time, elimination of military programs and development of co-educational student bodies were trends in private education. In 1968, Lee Sedgwick, Dean of the Faculty, and Manlius faculty toured five private schools, some boarding and some day, seeking ways to strengthen the position of The Manlius School.

Concurrently, Manlius Board meeting minutes show that at the May 19, 1969 meeting of the Executive Committee, concern grew over the requirements of two major creditors regarding the security on the nearly \$600,000 they had advanced the school on a short term basis. The school also owed a substantial debt to CIT (Commercial Investment Trust), which had built a new dormitory on the Manlius campus and then leased it to the school. Finally, the Board was concerned about the status of the Centennial Development Campaign. The pledges were not coming in as high and as quickly as was needed to meet the costs of constructing new buildings.

At the same time, Pebble Hill was outgrowing its 25-acre campus. Under Richard Barter's leadership as Headmaster, the school had prospered and enrollment was up. However, Pebble Hill could not afford to build new buildings to meet the growing demand for additional classroom space. A site study projected that approximately \$1 million would be required to build the new academic buildings needed. The school did not have an endowment, and only a small and relatively young alumni body could be counted on for philanthropic support.

The merger was necessary for many reasons. There was a growing negative feeling regarding military schools at the time and enrollment was down at The Manlius School. The Manlius campus was incredibly expensive to maintain and the school was in debt. The Pebble Hill campus did not provide adequate space for its growing enrollment. In order for both schools to survive, the two Boards joined forces in 1970 and began work on a merger.

The Manlius and Pebble Hill Boards combined to form a single unit. Robert Kallet, a 1938 graduate of Manlius, became Board chairman, and Robert B. Simonton became president and chairman of the Executive Committee of Manlius Pebble Hill School. In the spring of 1970, the last Pebble Hill and Manlius seniors graduated on their respective campuses. Military representatives from Washington, DC traveled to Manlius to officially close The Manlius School at the end of the school year. Manlius Pebble Hill School opened in September 1970 with the Lower School operating on the Pebble Hill campus and the Upper School maintaining a day and boarding program on the Manlius campus.

But in 1973, rising costs and a decline in boarding enrollment again forced a major consolidation for the school. Long-range projections showed that over the next four years, the cost of operating two campuses would be impossible to meet. The financial state of the school was dire and the only feasible solution was to close the Manlius campus. The Board of Trustees hoped that closing the Manlius campus would allow MPH to pay down the existing debt and build the school back up again.

Plans were outlined to help some boarders find housing should they wish to complete their schooling at MPH. Through the kindness of some anonymous donors and the hard work of the MPH Board, the school was able to manage financially while awaiting the sale of the Manlius campus. Finally, in July of 1979, MPH announced that The Manlius School campus had been sold to a local developer - Verbeck Estates, Ltd., and Academy Street Associates. The purchase price was a little over \$800,000. This money allowed the school some freedom of the debt that had accrued.

Manlius Pebble Hill School is a wonderful school rich in tradition and values. Recent MPH graduates enjoy meeting alumni from Manlius and Pebble Hill at alumni events and realize that while they might have gone to a school with a different name, there is a bond among the three groups. The school merger in 1970 created an amazing institution that blended the best qualities of both Pebble Hill and The Manlius School for future and current students.

From "A Moment in Time: Remembering the Merger of Manlius and Pebble Hill" by Margaret Barclay