



The following information is on the Illinois High School Glory Days. Mr. Kev Varney visited our Parish office in November 2010 and wrote the article. Please visit their website for additional information.

<http://leopardfan.tripod.com/id999.html>

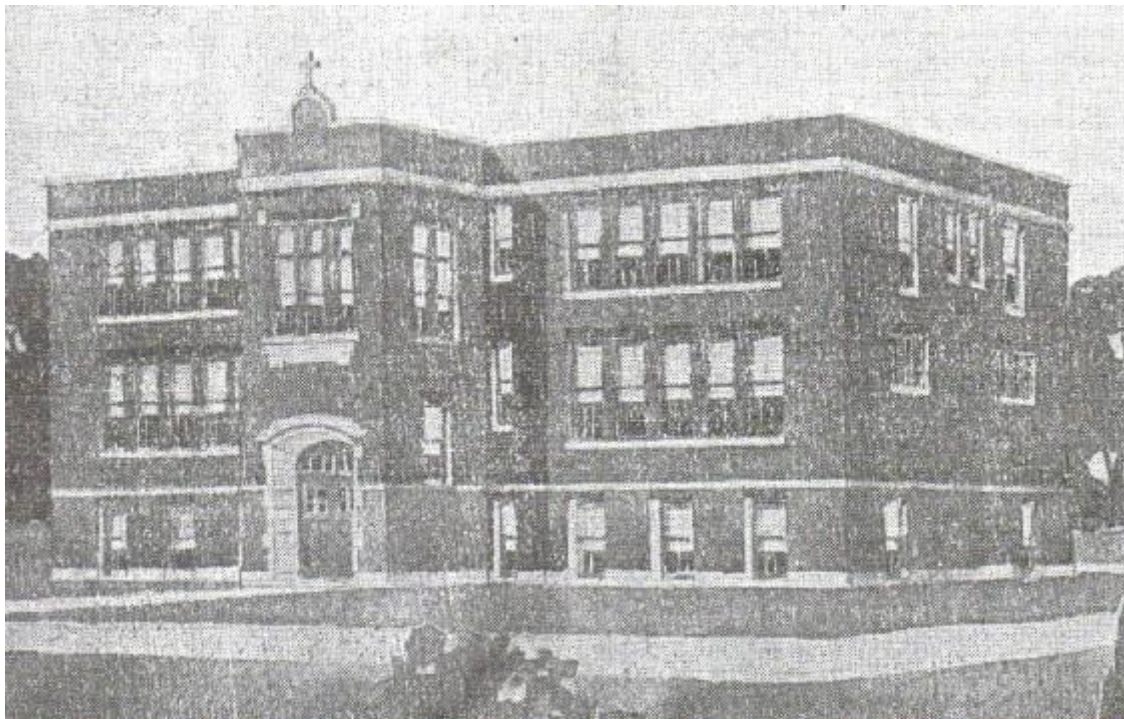
### **A BIG THANK YOU.....**

goes to Carol Sadlek from the St. Malachy Parish Office in Rantoul. With her help, the information and photos on this page would not be possible to help us tell the story of Donovan Memorial High School.

If you have more information about Donovan Memorial High School, then we would like to hear from you. Please contact us by clicking [here](#) (email: [veemonster1@aol.com](mailto:veemonster1@aol.com)) or send a letter via USPS to the following address:

**Illinois High School Glory Days, 6439 North Neva, Chicago, IL 60631**

*Rantoul Donovan Memorial High School*



*courtesy of St. Malachy's Parish, Rantoul*

### **The History of Rantoul Donovan Memorial High School**

**Rantoul** (population 12,400) is located in east-central Illinois in Champaign County, about 15 miles north of Champaign-Urbana. Interstate 57 passes to the west of the city, while it also can be accessed by US Routes 45 & 136. The Illinois Central Railroad also passes thru Rantoul, and plays an important role in its history.

The community was given its name when Robert Rantoul, a partner of Massachusetts statesman Daniel Webster, was commissioned to draft a charter for a railroad to travel throughout the state of

Illinois in 1850. Rantoul was persuasive in getting the bill passed by the Illinois General Assembly to incorporate the Illinois Central Railroad Company, which was the first land grant railroad of its kind in the United States passed on February 10, 1851.

Rantoul had its first Caucasian settler in 1848 when the first mayor of Urbana, Archa Campbell, built a cabin in a grove of trees about 12 miles east of the Middle Fork and 10 miles west of the Sangamon River in the area that was called Neipswah, which was an Indian name for "abundant in minks," a/k/a Minks Grove. The movement for the railroads came two years later when Webster was approached by a group of eastern men decided to invest in a railroad, and that's when Rantoul became involved. After the Illinois Central was completed from Chicago to West Urbana (now known as Champaign) in 1854, the name Rantoul was given to the rail station that served Minks Grove and later the village changed its name to match the train station in 1857.

It grew slowly from 184 in 1855 to 1280 within two years. Rantoul's population was around 1700 until the early 1940's when the community grew on account of the former Chanute Air Force Base, which opened in 1917. Airmen came and went as they were trained and went onto other bases to serve their country. From there, Rantoul grew to as much as 17,000 residents in the early 1990's before the base was closed in 1993. The Air Force reassigned its personnel to other bases, which has had an effect on the local economy even to this day.

The history of education in Rantoul goes back to 1859 when the first school district was formed. Parochial education was first founded in 1914 when Catherine Donovan, a member of St. Malachy's Church in Rantoul, deeded an 80-acre farm valued at \$20,000 to the parish thru the Catholic Bishop of Peoria, the Right Reverend Edmund M. Dunne when she passed away in 1912. Ms. Donovan had been deprived of an education as a young girl, and hoped that her gift of land would give others the chance to receive it at no cost.

Rev. Patrick Durbin was the pastor of St. Malachy's at the time, and got the ball rolling to purchase land for a Catholic school. When he left in 1912, Rev. W. J. Drummy stepped in and worked to make the school a reality, working tirelessly to ensure it would be debt-free and make it an institution that its parishioners could be proud of. A.F. Moratz of Bloomington was the architect of the school, while Wm. C.F. Kuhne of Rantoul was the contractor that built the three-story red brick edifice, dedicated by Bishop Dunne on September 2, 1914.

The building's first floor consisted of an auditorium for seating of 300, club room, kitchen and laundry facilities, along with a boiler and fuel room. On the second floor, four classrooms with wardrobe rooms occupied the space, while the third floor had a chapel, music room, dining rooms, a dormitory for boarding students and living space for the sisters, and a community room.

Donovan Memorial School was ready for classes six days later and welcomed 120 students in grade and high school. The Dominican Sisters of Springfield, IL were in charge of the school, which was accredited by the University of Illinois as an approved school for Donovan graduates to attend once they finished their high school studies without the requirement of a college entrance exam. Students not only took college-preparatory courses, but were also encouraged to try their hand at music and commercial classes as three sisters taught all courses that offered credits towards graduation.

The first high school graduates from Donovan started their high school careers at the school as sophomores in 1914, with four of them receiving their diplomas in 1917, and it also started an alumni association that met annually in June. Class sizes at Donovan Memorial were small in size (from four to 12) while the grade school continued to grow in size, even with the transient nature of those students whose parents were stationed at Chanute Air Force Base.

A total of 108 students received their high school diplomas from Donovan Memorial High School before it was closed in 1928 due to cost of programs (such as physical education) that were required for continued accreditation by the University of Illinois, overcrowding at the grade school level (185 students) with a waiting list of more wanting to attend the school. Remaining high school students either attended Rantoul Township High School or schools in their hometowns to finish their high school educations.

Donovan Memorial remained a grade school only until 1962 when the name was changed to St. Malachy to match the name of the church when a new building was erected, and it still serves Rantoul as a grade school. The original Donovan Memorial building was torn down around the same time, but the Dominican Sisters still aid today in educating the Catholic community in Rantoul.



### **FACTS ABOUT RANTOUL DONOVAN MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL**

Year opened: 1914  
Year closed: 1928  
School colors: each graduating class chose its own  
School song: unknown

#### **Donovan Class of 1921 (11 girls, 1 boy) Courtesy of St. Malachy's Parish**

Joseph Bermingham  
Mildred Brown  
Florence Cleary  
John Corbett  
Raymond Jackson  
Joseph Pilgrim  
Michael McCabe  
Loretta Walsh  
Francis Warner



#### **EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

It is our understanding that during the school's history, the lack of students prevented Donovan from fielding any athletic teams; however, they did have a newspaper and presented annual class plays. The students were serious in their studies with a number of them becoming teachers, secretaries, nurses, sisters, priests, civil servants, and railroad officials after graduation.

Below is the list of graduates from Donovan Memorial High School by class year:

#### **1917**

Camilla Burke (Sr. Mary Agnes)  
Cornelia Heimburger  
Marguerite Huguet  
Margaret Walsh

#### **1918**

P.A. Connor  
Bessie Corbett  
Harriet New  
Nora Gordon  
Florence Sharp  
Catherine Mooney  
Spencer McCabe

**1919**

Florence Burke  
Connie Cain  
Hilda Cassidy  
Alice Deany  
Raymond Deany  
Margaret Quinlan  
Theresa Walsh (Sr. M. Kathleen)

**1920**

Clara Brown  
Vera Cameron  
Adelaide Donovan  
Florence Irlle  
James McCabe  
Eleanor Sheahan  
Agnes Walsh  
Madeline Warner

**1921**

Joseph Bermingham  
Mildred Brown  
Florence Cleary  
John Corbett  
Raymond Jackson  
Joseph Pilgrim  
Michael McCabe  
Loretta Walsh  
Francis Warner

**1922**

Mary Birch  
Luen B. Bongartz  
Ethel Burke  
Marion Coady  
Madeline Connor (Sr. Mary Rosalie)  
Ruth Deany  
Marie Fiedler (St. Judith)  
Alta Head  
Anne McNally  
Mary McNally  
Joseph Sheahan  
Gertrude Walsh

**1923**

Mildred Fiedler  
Mary Glynn  
Francis Huguet  
Francis Jackson  
Harry Kaler  
Joe McCabe  
Louis Warner

**1924**

John Bermingham  
Genevieve Birch  
Mike Corbett  
John Donovan  
Esther Emming  
Catherine Head  
Edna Head  
Henry Maier  
Margaret Mangan  
Catherine McCabe

**1925**

Mary Bermingham  
Helen Connor  
Josephine Corbett  
Mary Fitton  
Alice Kirk  
Vincent Joyce  
Elizabeth Mangan  
Vincent McCabe  
Margaret McNamara  
Cletus Pilgrim

**1926**

Edward Bermingham  
Margaret Bermingham  
Ward Birch  
Jane Conway  
Edward Donaghue  
Maleta Fiedler  
Marcella Fiedler (Sr. Mary Joan)  
Joseph Jackson  
Katherine Kirk  
Paul Maier  
Lucille Scheurich  
Francis Walsh  
Gertrude Warner

**1927**

Maurice Brown  
Mary L. Conway  
Alice Fitton  
Jane Head  
Mary Leonard  
Thomas Walsh  
Magdalene Yeagle

**1928**

Bernice Bergschneider  
Florence Bermingham  
Mary C. Donaghue  
Catherine Forrestal  
Adele Kirk  
Wayne Kirk  
Viola C. Schultz  
Charles H. Quinlan  
Thomas H. Quinlan



**Class of 1924**

**John Bermingham  
Genevieve Birch  
Mike Corbett  
John Donovan  
Esther Emming  
Catherine Head  
Edna Head  
Henry Maier  
Margaret Mangan  
Catherine McCabe**



**Class of 1923**

**Mildred Fiedler  
Mary Glynn  
Francis Huguet  
Francis Jackson  
Harry Kaler  
Joe McCabe  
Louis Warner**