

### Elizabethtown High School Designed by Cassius Emlen Urban

In 1926 on South Poplar Street in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania the Poplar Street School was constructed as a combined junior and high school.<sup>1</sup> The school was designed by Lancaster architect Cassius Emlen Urban.<sup>2</sup> Urban designed the school in the Colonial Revival style; it is a two-story brick building.<sup>3</sup> In the mid-1950s an addition was built onto the side of the school.<sup>4</sup> The last class to officially graduate from the school was in 1957, but students would still walk there from other schools for classes.<sup>5</sup> Today the Poplar Street School is used as the GEARS community center.

The first documented teacher in Elizabethtown was George Paul Freyer; he came from Derry Township in 1789.<sup>6</sup> He taught in Elizabethtown until his death in 1821.<sup>7</sup> The main schools in Elizabethtown were the Mechanics Street, built in 1812, and Peach Alley, built in 1860, schoolhouses.<sup>8</sup> In 1873, due to too many students, construction began on a new school to replace the smaller schoolhouses.<sup>9</sup> In 1873 the Mechanics Street schoolhouse was demolished.<sup>10</sup> Construction on the “large, two-story brick building with four large classrooms” was completed in 1874.<sup>11</sup> In 1909 the new school was demolished and rebuilt with more classrooms and an auditorium at the same location of West High Street.<sup>12</sup> Two years later a fire destroyed the building, the school was then rebuilt again with four more classrooms added.<sup>13</sup> The Peach Alley schoolhouse was then reopened temporarily in 1923 since there was an increase in students, and many of the students wanted to go to school for twelve years as opposed to the original eight years.<sup>14</sup> The permanent solution to solve this problem was the decision to build the Poplar Street school; the school was officially dedicated in 1929.<sup>15</sup> Construction of the school cost the community \$122,000.<sup>16</sup> The Peach Alley schoolhouse is still standing, and is now the location of the Elizabethtown Historical Society.<sup>17</sup> In 1956, a new high school began to be built on East High Street.<sup>18</sup> It officially opened in 1957.<sup>19</sup> All of the older schools in Elizabethtown, including the Poplar Street school, were closed in 1973.<sup>20</sup>

The Poplar Street school became the location of the GEARS center in 2000.<sup>21</sup> GEARS is a result of the Elizabethtown Area Recreation Commission (EARC), and the Elizabethtown Area Community Services Authority (EACSA) merging together.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County. Our Present Past; An Update of Lancaster's Heritage. (Lancaster: The Trust, 1985), 168.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Poplar Street School Alumni. Conversation with Alumni. (27 October 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Forney. The Schools of Elizabethtown. (Elizabethtown Historical Society, 13 October 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Mike Schwartz. What is the GEARS story? An interview with Barry Acker (Elizabethtown Journal, 18 November 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The architect who designed the Poplar Street school, also designed many other buildings in Elizabethtown, including the Elizabethtown Moose Lodge, and the Alleghany House at the Masonic Village.<sup>23</sup> Elizabethtown has the third most buildings of any city designed by Urban after Lancaster city, and Hershey.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz. Cassius Emlen Urban (1863-1939) Was Elizabethtown's Architect. (Elizabethtown Historical Society, 23 October 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.