A look back at Ruskin history

When the doors were opened in September 1884, Ruskin was originally named the 12th District School. The building, designed by architect Peters & Burns, cost $45,000 to build. Seven elementary grades were taught, with up to 52 students per classroom. Half of each lesson was taught in German.

On Dec. 1, 1904, the school name was chosen by members of the 12th District to honor John Ruskin, an English humanitarian, reformer, and author who died in 1900. High school courses were taught on the second floor for a short time when Steele High School became overcrowded and Stivers High School was under construction.

During the 1913 flood, Ruskin housed refugees and became a distribution center for food and clothing. And during World War I, Ruskin third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students cut out blue and white patches that were quilted by the Mothers’ Club for Belgian relief. Through the Depression years, Ruskin assisted families needing shoes, clothing and food.

During World War II, Ruskin became a center for issuing ration books and selling bonds. Ruskin averaged $30,000 a year in bond sales, enough to purchase seven jeeps and to furnish a room in a Veteran’s Hospital. Also, a child care center was established for children whose mothers were working in factories.

The original 1884 school bell, which hung from a bell tower for nearly 80 years, was saved when the bell tower was torn down in 1961 for safety reasons.

Originally, the privilege of ringing the bell went each week to the seventh-grade student who received the highest weekly grading and she or he always took over the first seat in the row nearest the door of the class. The bell has been restored to its original glory and now is displayed in the new school lobby.

Early Ruskin graduates include:

• Judge Null M. Hodapp (developed Argonne Forest in 1925 which was one of four amusement parks serving the Dayton area. The area is now called Possum Creek MetroPark)
• William Prinz (past principal of Emerson School)
• William Chryst (worked with Col. Edward A. Deeds and Charles Kettering on automobile and engineering innovations)
• Milton Caniff (newspaper cartoonist known for comic strips such as Dickie Dare, Terry and the Pirates, Male Call, and Steve Canyon)

On Dec. 9, 1963, the original Ruskin School was destroyed by fire. Students attended other schools while Ruskin was reconstructed during the 1964-65 school year.

Ruskin was razed in 2005; the new building is constructed on the original site.

Memorabilia displayed on this page donated to DPS by former Ruskin Principal Merlin Eidemiller.