



HIROSHIMA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL - The First Fifty Years

A preliminary attempt at a school history, April 2012

Like very many international schools, HIS was founded in the early 1960s by expatriate parents wanting an English language education for their young children. And like others, it has evolved and grown since those early days into a successful and professional school educating children from Early Childhood up to university entrance.

The parents whose vision and initiative launched what is now HIS were mostly from North America. Their reasons for being in Hiroshima varied. Some came as Christian missionaries. Others worked at the American Cultural Center. Still others came to work at the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (now known as the Radiation Effects Research Foundation). Their children were mostly home schooled or perhaps attended the US Marine base at Iwakuni. It was these families who decided that Hiroshima needed its own English-medium school.

A group of parents including Alayne van Dyck, who later taught in the school, recruited Eleanor Baldwin who, with her husband and young daughter, had moved to Kyoto from their native Canada in 1960. Mrs. Baldwin was a qualified teacher from Ontario and it was the curriculum of this Canadian province that students were to follow until the 1980s. She remained with the school until 1971 but her family's connection with HIS was to last far longer.

What was initially known as the Hiroshima American School opened in 1962 in two rooms belonging to the Baptist Church on the Peace Boulevard. It had perhaps a dozen students. Eleanor Baldwin taught a combined class of Grade 1, 2 & 3 and Evelyn Keehn taught Grades 4 to 6.

Eleanor Baldwin recalls, *"The whole program came together very quickly. The parents wanted their children to have schooling in English because so many of them were short time in Hiroshima and would be returning to the States for school and didn't want them to get behind."*



The First School



Edith Bradshaw arrived in 1963 and taught the lower Grades. A Mrs. Olson taught Music. Enrolment had risen to 19 and Eleanor Baldwin had assumed the title of Principal.



Evelyn Keehn and the older Grades, 1963-64

But two rooms shared with the Baptist Church Sunday School were no long-term solution to the needs of the young American School and in 1964, entering its third year, new premises were occupied in what had



been the Baptist Missionary residence in Ushita. The home looked onto a suburban park which, although not owned by the school, became an essential additional facility.

Walter McKibben succeeded Eleanor Baldwin as Principal and it was he who changed the name of the school from 'American' to 'International' in 1965. Like many of the school's students at that time, Walter subsequently moved to M.C. Perry School at Iwakuni where he remained for 39 years. (Who would have thought in the 1960s that forty years later HIS would be playing - and beating! - M.C. Perry at volleyball and basketball?)



One of the school's longest serving and most loved figures was Tomio Abe who taught Art from 1962 until well into the 1990s. He is fondly remembered by those whom he taught and by those he worked with. Jim Paffrath, Principal from 1973 to 1975 describes Abe-sensei as *"...a dream. He taught [my wife] and I most of what we know about Japanese history and tradition, and did it in an interesting and real way. [...] He had a way with kids that I have never seen before or since."* Charles Kite, who succeeded Jim as Principal, observes, *"[Abe-sensei] was as responsible as anyone in bringing Japanese culture into the lives of HIS teachers in that era."*



The Faculty in 1965-66 including Walter McKibben, back left and Abe-sensei, back right

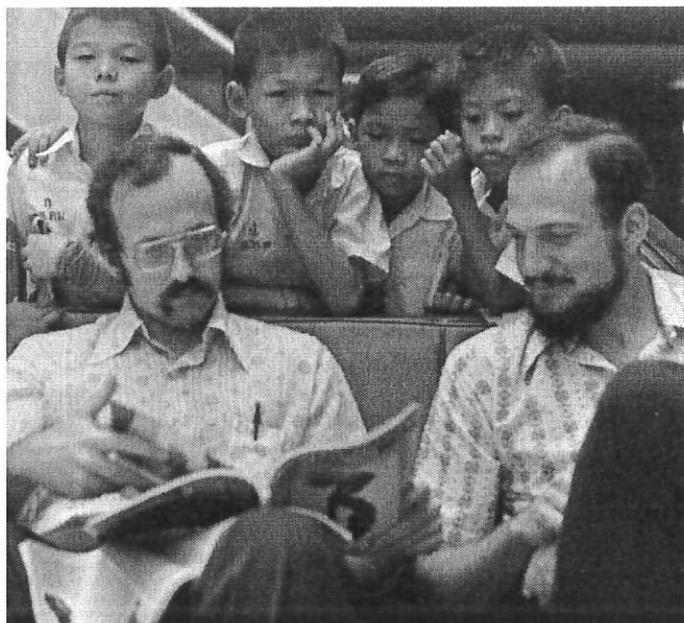
By 1967, with Eleanor Baldwin again Principal, the school was increasingly reliant on the support of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission. However, enrolment, never robust, had sunk to just twelve and a fascinating (but frustratingly soundless) film from the '67-'68 school year includes a scene in which, over lunch, Eleanor and members of the ABCC are discussing the future of the school. The film (which is now to be seen on the HIS website) was made by NHK and was shot mostly in and around the first Ushita school. The pretty teacher who appears to have caught the eye of the cameraman is Anita Combs.

Eleanor Baldwin, who played such a formative role in the school's early history left in 1971 and Jacqueline Pell succeeded her as Principal. In 1972 HIS was a founder member of the Japan Council of Overseas Schools (which later became the Japan Council of International Schools - JCIS) as the growing number of schools in Japan catering for expatriate populations began to identify common areas of interest.



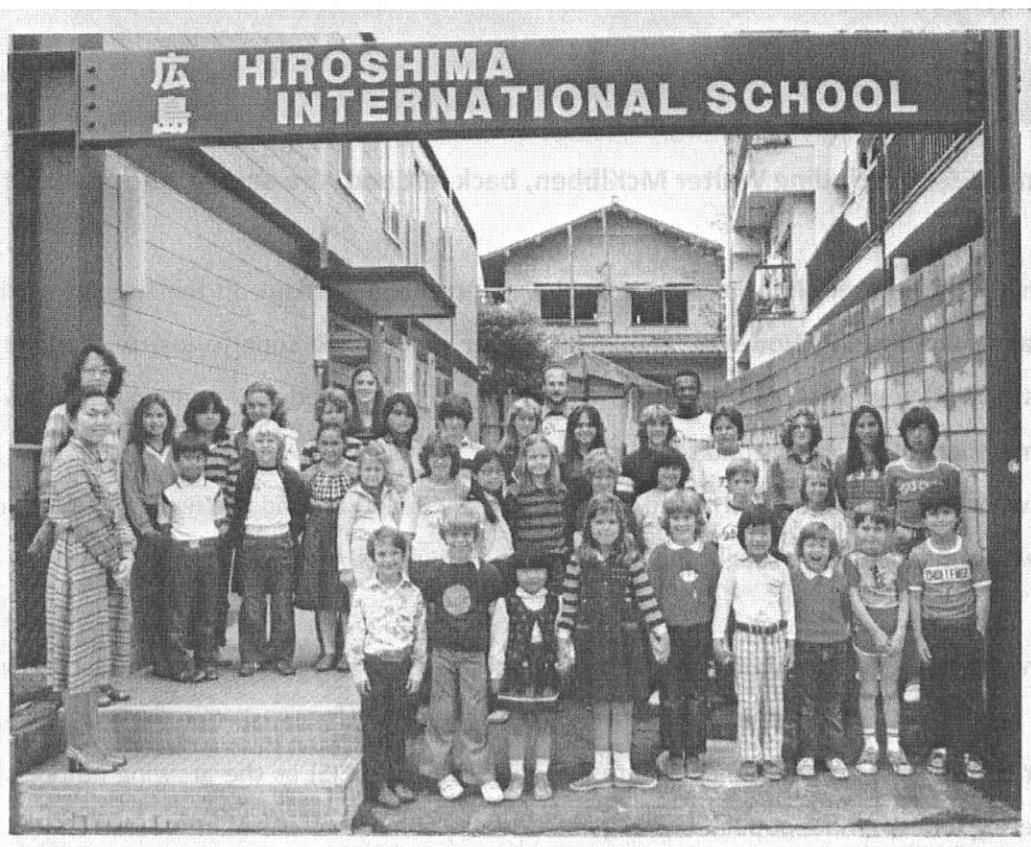
Jim Paffrath, accompanied by his wife, Christine, took over in 1973 and it was during his tenure that a Kindergarten class was opened for five year-olds. Jim remembers, perhaps too modestly, *"If I have any claim to history at the school, it was to get [it] on sound financial footing with real accounting so Chuck Kite, my successor, could build a new school."*

Indeed, Charles (Chuck) Kite, Principal from 1975 to 1980, did build a new school on the site of the old. He recalls, *"The deal to buy the property in Ushita was pretty complicated. HIS didn't have much money in the bank (¥10 million if memory serves) and the Church was pushing us hard to buy or move. Ultimately, the property was bought and the building paid for by a [local entrepreneur] and the school rented it back from him."*



Jim Paffrath (left) and Chuck Kite (right) in 1975 in Thailand

For the 1978-79 school year, while the old building was demolished and the new one built, premises were rented in Yamane-cho, close to Hiroshima Station. If any photos of this year exist, they have not yet surfaced. But in 1979 the school was at last able to occupy its own purpose-built facility.



**Hiroshima
International
School
1979**



It was also while Chuck Kite was Principal (in 1976) that the school obtained *Kakushu Gakko* status. Thus, HIS began the 1979-1980 school year with official recognition and, at last, its own purpose-built premises. It was seventeen years old and growing up.

Walter Enloe became Principal in 1980. He and his family had come to Japan in 1961 when Walter was already too old to attend HIS but his younger sister, Mary, had been one of the school's very first students and Walter's own children subsequently attended the school in the 1980s. In fact, their story is not unique and at least two families can proudly claim an association with HIS that spans three generations.

It may be fairly argued that the school changed more under Walter Enloe than at any time before or since. He was Principal for eight years (longer than any other) and he laid both the legal and physical foundations for the school that exists today. A major reason for the developments of the 1980s was the small stake that the Ford Motor Co. acquired in 1979 in the Hiroshima-based car maker Mazda. In a short time, this investment grew to 33% and significant numbers of Ford personnel and their young families were descending on Hiroshima. Although only a few years old, the "new" school in Ushita was simply too small to accommodate the anticipated influx of Americans, Canadians, British, Australians, Germans, Mexicans, Argentineans and others who were being transferred to Japan by Ford and, increasingly, by other foreign firms moving into Hiroshima.

In 1984 Ford agreed to underwrite the cost of building a new school but sufficient land (and at an affordable price) was unavailable in Ushita or anywhere close to the centre of Hiroshima. Many possible sites were considered but in late 1985 attention turned to a new residential project being developed in Koyo to the north of the city. Early in 1986 a plot of 7,400 metres² (nearly two acres) was acquired and in April a ground-breaking ceremony was held. Just six months later, in October 1986, the new Hiroshima International School was opened.



The Koyo campus in 1986



The new school boasted space and facilities that had previously been unimaginable and that remain today comparable with many much larger Japanese international schools. In the same year, 1986, the school gained *Jun-Gakko Hojin* status from Hiroshima Prefecture and in 1985, in its final year in Ushita, Hiroshima International School had been formally accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). What had started as a two-room school with a dozen children was now confidently taking its place among the biggest, oldest and best international schools in the country.



The shining new school had been designed to accommodate 150 Elementary and Middle School students but it would be another two decades before student enrolment reached this level. In fact, student numbers fluctuated greatly throughout the 1980s and 1990s. From around 60 students when the Koyo campus opened in 1986, enrolment sometimes dipped to as low as 40 and seldom exceeded 70 until well into the current millennium. The Ford families and their children came - but never in the numbers that had been anticipated.



The school in 1986

Terry Donaldson succeeded Walter Enloe as Principal in 1988. A snapshot of the school in those days, the Board Meeting of 22nd September 1988, reveals that 49 students were enrolled and that there were three full-time teachers, two part-time teachers and a teaching Principal. Abe-sensei, who had been with the school from the start, still taught Art to Elementary classes and five or six Japanese staff, some full-time and some part-time, provided custodial and administrative support.



Board minutes and school records from the 1960s are virtually non-existent and they are sparse until the late 'eighties. But by the 1990s increasingly detailed records were being kept and they provide some fascinating and often eye-opening snippets. Did the school really pay ¥339,600 *each* for two Apple IIGS computers in May 1990?!

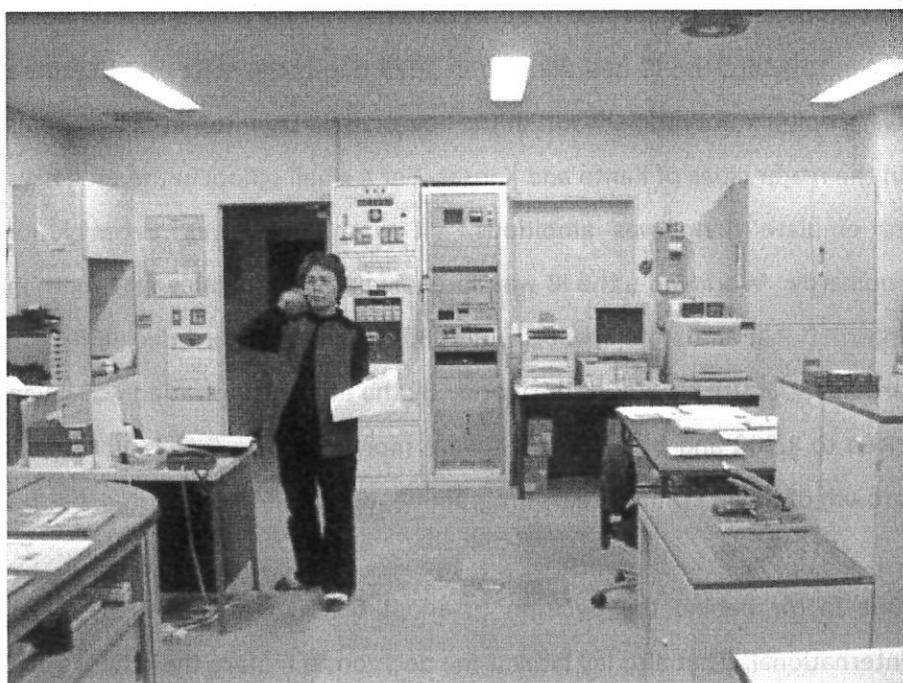
Just as students rotated in and out as their parents' careers brought them to Japan and then took them away again, teachers were also mostly transient. There were, however, a few striking exceptions. John



Rehlin joined the staff in the spring of 1985 and has stayed with the school in numerous capacities for more than a quarter of a century, teaching, coordinating, serving on the Board and providing the kind of institutional memory and continuity that international schools, by their nature, so often lack. But even his long service is surpassed by the extraordinary career of Tamako Miyagi who retired in 2011 after 34 years of teaching Japanese. Generations (literally!) of students who now live all over the world learned their *katakana* and *hiragana* (and much else) at the feet of Miyagi-sensei.

Miyagi-sensei 'graduates' in 2011

Someone else who joined the school when it was still in Ushita but remained on the staff until well into the new millennium is Sakae Nakai who, for nearly thirty years, ran the school office, helped staff who were new to Japan, ministered to sick children, welcomed parents, and kept a succession of Principals on the straight and narrow.



Nakai-san in the School Office, 2003

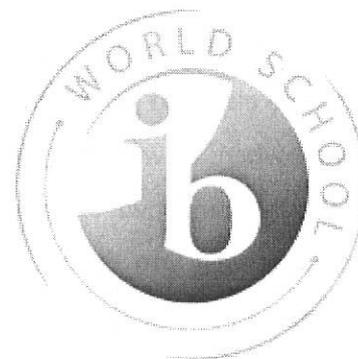


For twenty years the school had offered classes from Kindergarten through to Grade 8. But in 1995, the year that Eleanor Jones became Principal, a pre-school was opened and the following year a mixed class of Grades 9 and 10 was created. These developments increased the number of classes at HIS from five to seven: a pre-school class for three and four year-olds, a Kindergarten, what was called 'Primary' (Grades 1 & 2), 'Junior' (Grades 3 & 4), 'Intermediate' (Grades 5 & 6), 'Middle School' (Grades 7 & 8) and the new 'High School' class.

The school, since 1998 under the principalship of Paul Ketko, entered the year 2000 with 55 students: 13 in the pre-school, 7 in Kindergarten, 13 in Primary, 7 in each of Junior and Intermediate and 4 in each of Middle and High. There were seven class teachers, five subject specialists, two teacher assistants and two non-teaching staff.

The cultural roots of the school had always been in North America and since its foundation, all Principals had been from the USA or Canada. That, plus the crucial relationship with Ford, meant that by the late 1990s the curriculum was a blend of North American practices and standards. Most of the expatriate teaching staff were from North America too and the majority of foreign students carried US or Canadian passports. It was therefore a bold step when in February 2000 the Board of Directors, enthusiastically encouraged by the teaching faculty, decided to adopt the three programmes of the International Baccalaureate. Implicitly, this also meant growing the school up to Grade 12. This was certainly the biggest development in the school since its relocation to Koyo.

It may be argued that the decision of the Board and school administration to become an IB school was not only bold but visionary. The first school in Japan to adopt the IB had done so in 1979 but at the start of 2000 there were only six IB World schools in the country - all big international schools in the major cities of Kanto and Kansai. For a small school in the provinces to emulate them was ambitious. It wasn't, however, eccentric or foolhardy. Worldwide, the IB was spreading at a remarkable rate, both in international and state schools. In 2000, when the Board decided to adopt the IB Diploma, there were around 800 such schools in the world. By the time authorization was gained five years later, that figure had risen to 1,300 and by 2012 there were more than 2,300 IB Diploma schools in over 100 countries. The growth of the IB Primary Years Programme, which HIS also adopted, has been no less dramatic.



One factor behind the decision to adopt the IB was a wish to make the school more authentically international. That also lay behind the decision to replace the school's accreditation authority (WASC) with the Council of International Schools (CIS) in partnership with the New England Association of Schools and



Colleges (NEASC). HIS had been accredited by WASC since 1985 but in 2003 the WASC plaque came down and was replaced by those of CIS and NEASC. Also in 2003 Phil Armstrong became the first Principal in the history of the school not to hail from either the USA or Canada.



As in most international schools, some HIS parents enjoy the benefit of having their employer pay school fees while others pay out of their own pocket. At least since the arrival of Ford in Hiroshima, HIS families in the former category significantly outnumbered those in the latter. Parents who paid privately were a minority, often a small one. That changed dramatically in the summer of 2002. The school closed in June with 62% of students paid for directly by employers and 38% paying privately. When it reopened two months later the figures were 32% and 68% respectively. A decade later the figures were 12% and 88%. In just a few years in the first decade of the 21st century what had long been a school largely for transient expatriates rather abruptly became a school for privately-paying local families.



Hiroshima International School at 40 : October 2002

The same decade also saw unprecedented growth in student numbers. The school population doubled between 2000 and 2004, reaching the 100 mark for the first time in May 2004 and passing 150 (briefly) in January 2007. Much of this was organic growth but some, of course, was due to the opening of new Grades. The school had officially become an IB PYP and Diploma school in April 2005. The following August the school's first Grade 11 class opened, becoming Grade 12 in 2006 and graduating in 2007. With the option (at last) of completing their secondary education at HIS, fewer students were leaving at the end of Grade 6 or 8 to transfer elsewhere. In 2007 the previously combined "Middle School" class could be divided into discrete Grades (7 & 8) and, increasingly, Grades 9 and 10 could be separated.



The opening of Grades 11 and 12 prompted the school to become a College Board SAT testing centre not only for our own students but also for others in Chugoku.

With student numbers booming, the decision was taken late in 2003 to open a satellite pre-school in the former HIS building in Ushita. The facility was also to be used as an extension of the school's successful English Language Programme (ELP). A teacher and class aide were recruited and two ELP staff hired. It opened in the summer of 2004 but the hoped-for numbers never materialised, not least because almost as soon as the facility opened, Ford decided no longer to pay the fees for children below Grade 1. In December 2005, after barely a year and a half, the pre-school was closed. The English classes alone could not sustain the facility and these too were discontinued in March 2007. The building that Chuck Kite had built in 1979 was later demolished and a small residential block now occupies the site where HIS used to be.

The addition of High School Grades at the Koyo campus necessitated the addition and renovation of facilities. In the summer of 2005 a two-storey building was erected at the west end of the playground. It comprised four classrooms on the ground floor (two were subsequently knocked into one) and a 100m² Art Room on the second storey. A second block of four new classrooms was added in 2007.



The Two Annexes, August 2007

Within the existing building what had been an Art/Science Room for many years was completely renovated in December 2006 and converted into a first-class Science laboratory suitable for IB Diploma classes. Staff numbers were, of course, growing too. At the start of the 2006-2007 school year there were 17 full-time teachers, one part-time teacher and two teacher assistants. The office staff numbered four. The school also employed a custodian / bus driver and a Principal - Peter MacKenzie in his first year at HIS.

In 2007 plans to implement the IB Middle Years Programme, the MYP, were shelved and, instead, authorisation to offer Cambridge University IGCSE courses was sought and gained.



The first IGCSE classes were taught in 2007 and the first examinations taken in 2009.



From the summer of 2006 until the spring of 2009 student numbers in Koyo remained steady between 140 and 150. But the school could not escape the chill economic winds that were suddenly blowing. Internationally, what 2008 will be remembered for is what in Japan became known as the "Lehman Shock". The school was certainly not unaffected by this but of more immediate concern was its own "Ford Shock". Late in 2008 Ford announced that it was selling the majority of its stake in Mazda. Inevitably, this meant a very significant and, in the event, pretty immediate drop in the number of Ford families needing the school's services. In November 2008 when the news broke, HIS had 146 students. Just twelve months later that number had dropped to 117. In January 2007 there had been 35 Ford children in the school. By August 2011 there were just three. A decade earlier the withdrawal of most Ford families would have been a crisis. In the context of the school in 2009-2010 it was a problem that needed to be managed - and was. Enrolment bottomed out in the summer of 2010 and subsequently started to recover.

The year 2011-2012 is the school's fiftieth. It finds Hiroshima International School regaining its equilibrium after the impact of Ford's departure, the worldwide recession of recent years and, of course, the trauma and tragedy of the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011. But it also finds the school with a great deal to celebrate. The complete overhaul of the school's curriculum has been successfully achieved and HIS is now an accredited, recognised and respected K-12 authentic international school. For seven years the IB PYP has been going from strength to strength. Five years of very impressive IB Diploma and three years of excellent IGCSE results confirm that the High School is now firmly established. Since 2007, two dozen Grade 12 students have graduated and entered universities in Europe, Australia, the USA, Canada, Korea and Japan. And in 2011 a student completed Grade 12, gained a fine IB Diploma, and entered a prestigious university in the USA. She had entered HIS when she was two years old and thus became the first student ever to have had her entire education at Hiroshima International School. She will surely be the first of many.



The generous contribution of HIS students, staff, parents and friends, past and present, is gratefully acknowledged in the preparation of this brief history.

April 2012