

# History of the Basketball Gymnasiums for Ottawa Public High School 1908 – 1961

The first newspaper reports of basketball at Ottawa Public was in 1908 in games with Defiance. There is no mention of where these games were played, but during this era, basketball was played outside or in any building with a large room. Baskets were attached to a wall with no court markings and limited seating.

## GYMNASIUM #1 1914 - 1939

The Armory was dedicated on November 20, 1914 at the “Twelfth Annual Crow Banquet” and was described to be “the biggest occasion ever known to Ottawa”.

An article in the Putnam County Sentinel on July 4, 1913, described the construction of the Armory. “It will be a three-story, pressed brick building faced with sand stone and will be modeled like many of the old Norman Castles. The drill room, which will be on the second floor, will be 90 x 54 feet and will have a fine polished floor.” There are no actual dimensions of the basketball court, but it has been described by many to be similar in size to most courts of that era – short, narrow and limited seating.

In 1931, A newspaper article in the Leipsic Free Press described the Armory’s limitations when trying to persuade the Superintendents to move the Putnam County Tournament from the Armory to Leipsic’s new gym. “The armory has served its purpose well, but the interest in the tournament has grown to such an extent that a large number of persons who wish to attend are prevented from doing so on account of the limited space of the armory. Last year by actual count, only about 700 persons could be seated and that very uncomfortably and about 200 more crowded their way into the building making the entire capacity of the Armory about 1,000.”

The first newspaper account of a high school game at the Armory was on January 25, 1918, when Ottawa Public, coached by Tom Curtis, defeated Deshler 19-15.

An article on this particular game was in the Putnam County Sentinel and it gave a humorous description of this new game of basketball. “The ball – tisn’t anything like a baseball, that we know for sure – looked to us like a toy balloon you buy at the Putnam County Fair and any time a player got it he had both hands full instead of one and he’d bounce it up and down on the floor and then slam it at some other player

and all the time they were trying to work that ball to the end of the room where up on the wall a few feet was a receptacle they introduced to us as a basket. We were told that the object is to put the ball in that basket, and when they did put it in the basket the darn ball wouldn’t stay because there was a hole in the bottom, yet it counted so many points – and how that crowd would yell.”

This gym was used for 26 years, 1914-1939. The Armory hosted the Putnam County Tournament from 1922-1930. The floor dimensions were 40 x 64. There were bleachers on both sides and a balcony on one end. The seating capacity was 700.

## GYMNASIUM #2 1940 - 1961

This site was purchased and construction started in the fall of 1938 for a gymnasium to be used by Ottawa Public and Ottawa Saints Peter and Paul High Schools. This gym was known as the ‘Fourth Street Gym’. The Putnam County Sentinel stated that “The floor of the gymnasium is of hardwood, herring-bone type. It is spacious and of full regulation basketball size.”

“Before an enthusiastic crowd of approximately 900 rooters, the varsity teams of the two Ottawa high schools played their first home basketball games Friday evening. The game officially marked the opening of the local auditorium gymnasium as an athletic center.”

On the evening of November 17, 1939, three games were played. In game one, the Ottawa Public girls, coached by Merwin Hilty, lost to Blanchard 21-7. Game two was between the boys of Saints Peter and Paul, coached by Reverend Walter Junk, and Continental. Continental won 45-24. The third game was between the boys of Ottawa Public, coached by Merwin Hilty, and Blanchard. Ottawa Public blasted Blanchard 67-10.

This gym was used for 22 years, 1940-1961. The floor dimensions were 47 x 74. The original seating of this gym had chair seats, but these were later replaced with bleacher seats. After the renovation, it had bleacher seats on one side and a stage with bleachers on the other. It had a seating capacity of at least 700. This site is still in use as a practice and game gym for the junior high teams of Ottawa.