

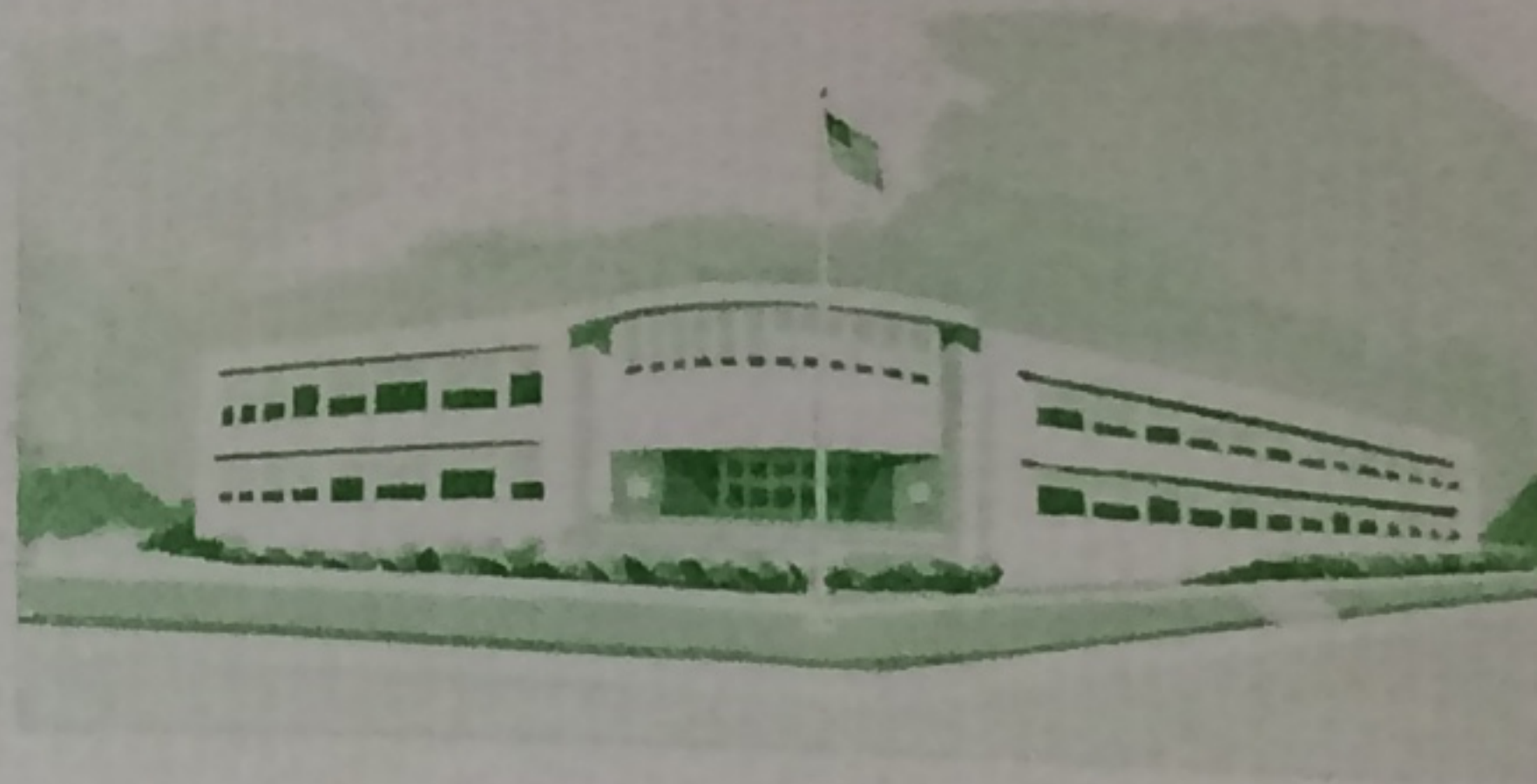
# UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

an interim report summarizing the  
most significant economic, social  
and physical aspects relative to  
current planning.

**report no. 1**

# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION



An interim report to the citizens of Upper Merion Township showing progress made by continuing efforts of planning, emphasizing those existing conditions having greatest influence upon planning decisions being made, as a part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Prepared By  
UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Under The  
Urban Planning Assistance Program  
Of The  
BUREAU OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
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URBAN RENEWAL ADMINISTRATION  
FEDERAL HOUSING AND HOME FINANCE AGENCY

Planning Consultant  
WHEELWRIGHT, STEVENSON & LANGRAN  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Consulting Engineer  
A. W. MARTIN, ASSOCIATES  
King of Prussia, Penna.



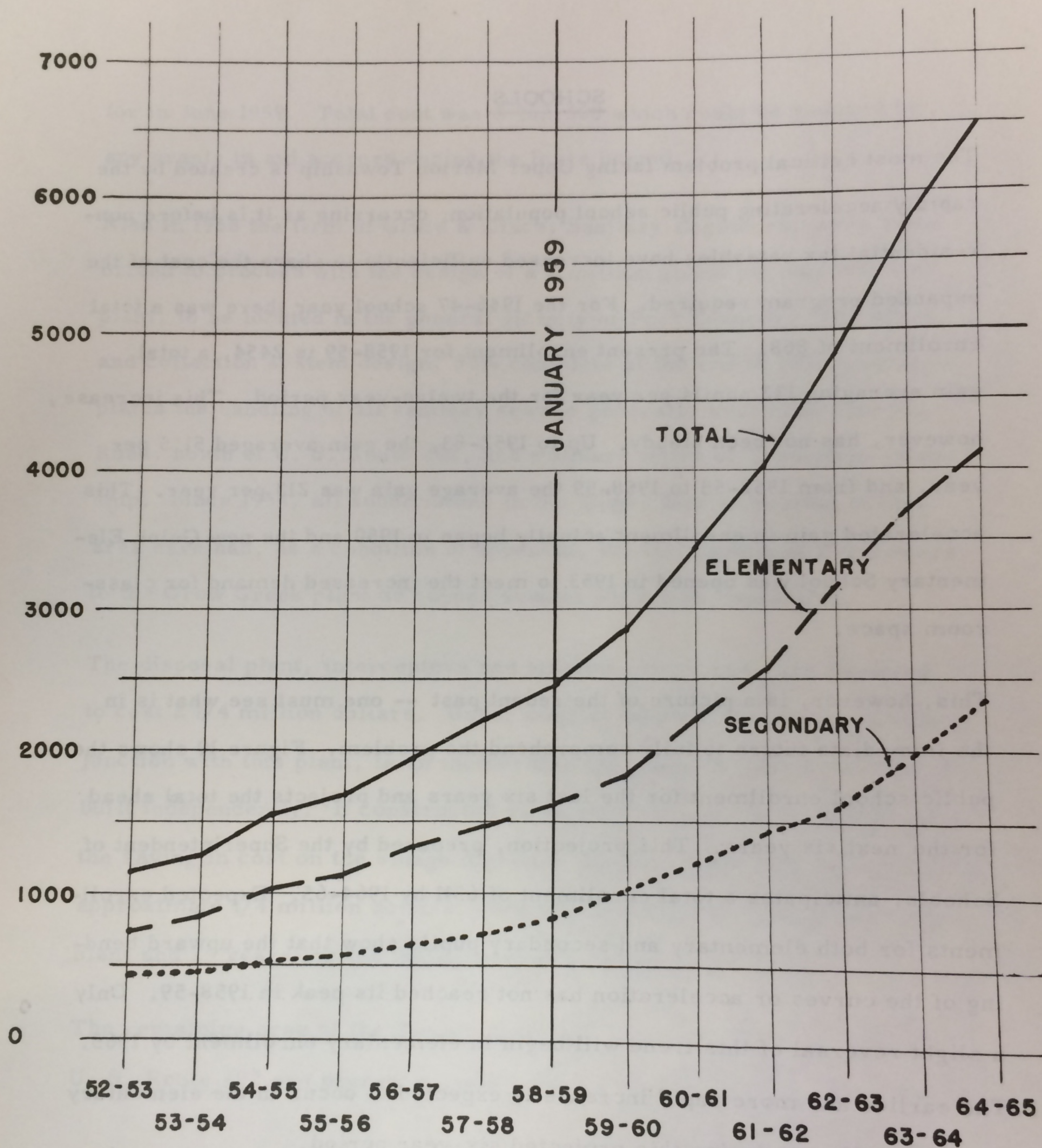
## SCHOOLS

The most critical problem facing Upper Merion Township is created by the rapidly accelerating public school population, occurring as it is before non-residential tax rateables have increased sufficiently to share the cost of the expanded program required. For the 1946-47 school year there was a total enrollment of 868. The present enrollment for 1958-59 is 2454, a total gain averaging 132 pupils per year for the twelve-year period. This increase, however, has not been steady. Up to 1952-53, the gain averaged 51.5 per year, and from 1952-53 to 1958-59 the average gain was 213 per year. This accelerated gain in enrollment actually began in 1950 and the new Gulph Elementary School was opened in 1953 to meet the increased demand for classroom space.

This, however, is a picture of the recent past -- one must see what is in the immediate future to fully comprehend the problem. Figure 10 shows the public school enrollment for the last six years and projects the total ahead for the next six years. This projection, prepared by the Superintendent of Schools, anticipates a total enrollment of 6511 by 1964-65. Expected enrollments for both elementary and secondary pupils show that the upward bending of the curves or acceleration has not reached its peak in 1958-59. Only a slight reversal of this trend will begin in elementary enrollment by 1965. The earlier and more rapid increase is expected to occur in the elementary school enrollment during this projected six-year period.

Over the period from 1945-46 to 1957-58, of the total school population of Upper Merion Township, approximately 70% of the children attended public





## SCHOOL POPULATION

SIX YEAR PROJECTION

FIGURE 10



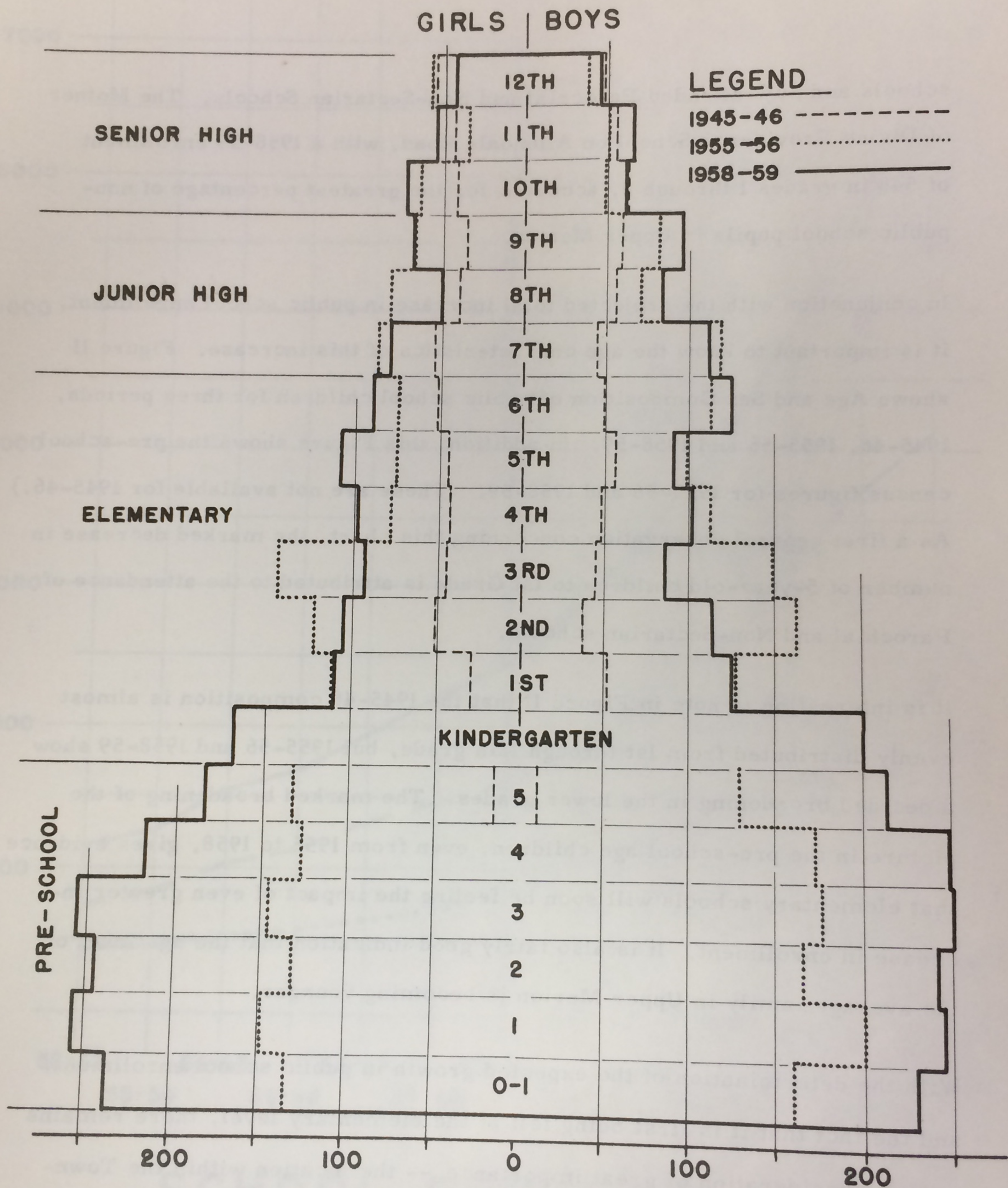
schools and 30% attended Parochial and Non-Sectarian Schools. The Mother of Divine Providence School on Allendale Road, with a 1958-59 enrollment of 548 in grades 1 through 8, accounts for the greatest percentage of non-public school pupils in Upper Merion.

In conjunction with the projected total increase in public school enrollment, it is important to know the age characteristics of this increase. Figure 11 shows Age and Sex Composition of public school children for three periods, 1945-46, 1955-56 and 1958-59. In addition, this Figure shows the pre-school census figures for 1955-56 and 1958-59. (These are not available for 1945-46.) As a first general observation concerning this chart, the marked decrease in number of 5-year-old children to 1st Grade is attributed to the attendance of Parochial and Non-Sectarian schools.

It is interesting to note in Figure 11 that the 1945-46 composition is almost evenly distributed from 1st through 12th grade, but 1955-56 and 1958-59 show a decided broadening in the lower grades. The marked broadening of the picture in the pre-school age children, even from 1955 to 1958, gives evidence that elementary schools will soon be feeling the impact of even greater increase in enrollment. It is also fairly good indication that the age level of the average family in Upper Merion is becoming younger.

With the determination of the expected growth in public school enrollment, and the fact that it is first being felt at the elementary level, there remains a third consideration of great importance -- the location within the Township where this growth is likely to occur. A review of subdivisions now being considered, available open land in conjunction with present zoning, and





**AGE AND SEX COMPOSITION**  
SCHOOL AND PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

**FIGURE 11**

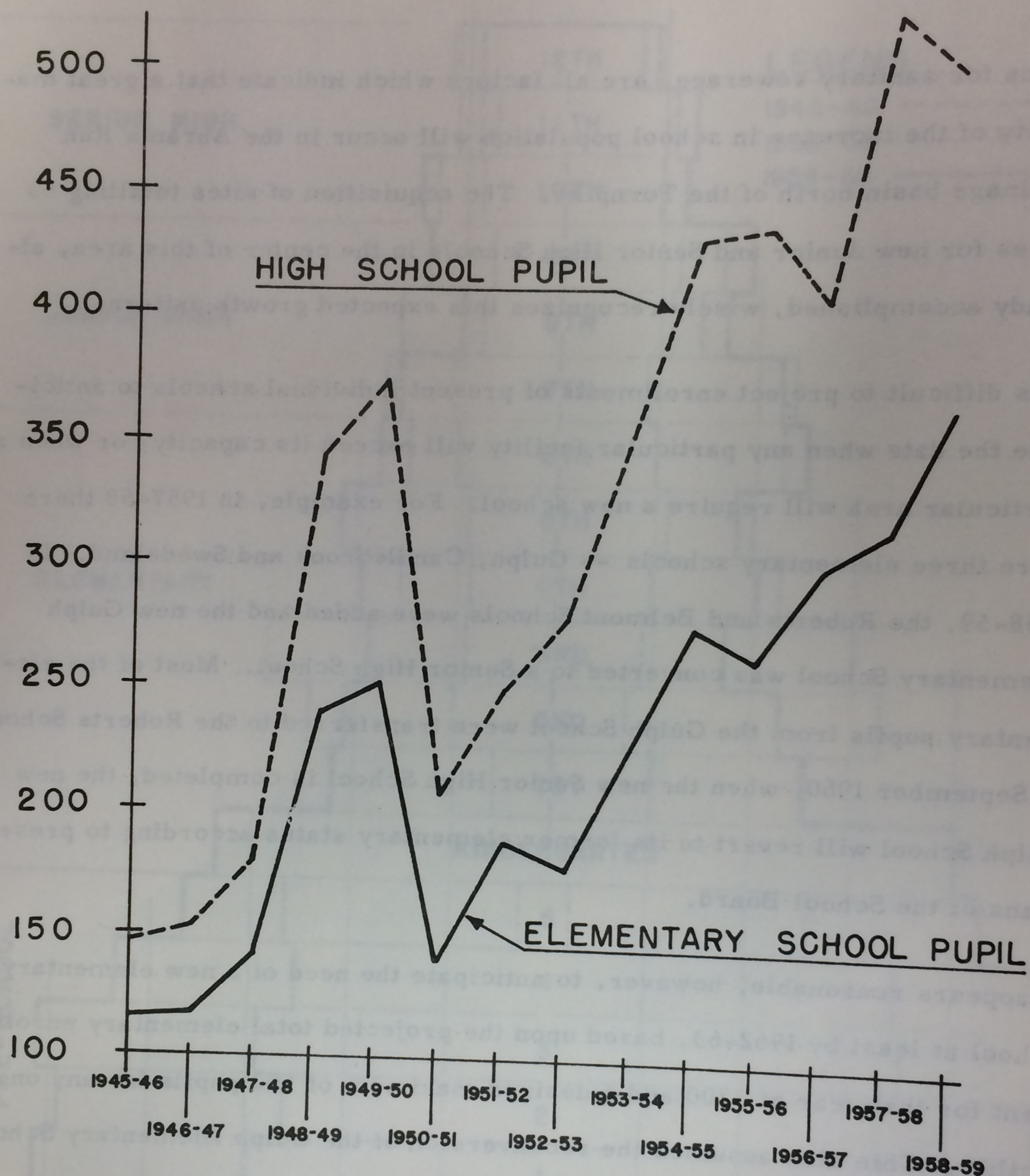


plans for sanitary sewerage, are all factors which indicate that a great majority of the increase in school population will occur in the Abrams Run drainage basin north of the Turnpike. The acquisition of sites totalling 53 acres for new Junior and Senior High Schools in the center of this area, already accomplished, wisely recognizes this expected growth pattern.

It is difficult to project enrollments of present individual schools to anticipate the date when any particular facility will exceed its capacity, or when a particular area will require a new school. For example, in 1957-58 there were three elementary schools -- Gulph, Candlebrook and Swedeland. In 1958-59, the Roberts and Belmont Schools were added and the new Gulph Elementary School was converted to a Senior High School. Most of the elementary pupils from the Gulph School were transferred to the Roberts School. In September 1960, when the new Senior High School is completed, the new Gulph School will revert to its former elementary status according to present plans of the School Board.

It appears reasonable, however, to anticipate the need of a new elementary school at least by 1962-63, based upon the projected total elementary enrollment for that year of 3200 and a desired maximum of 500 pupils for any one facility. This also assumes the reconversion of the Gulph Elementary School from High School to its original status. However, the Candlebrook, Belmont and Roberts Schools are so constructed that a new four-room wing could be added to each and such a move will probably precede, and postpone the need for, a new elementary school. In view of the residential development trend, any new elementary school, when required, should be located north of Valley Forge Road and some distance west of Henderson Road.





ESTIMATED COSTS PER  
SCHOOL PUPIL

FIGURE 12



Projected enrollment at the Junior High level indicates that there will be a need for additional space by 1962-63. However, with the present Junior High School rehabilitation to take place this year, making it useable for another ten years, and the flexibility afforded by absorption of some Junior High pupils in the new Senior High School for several years, it is conceivable that a new Junior High School will not be required before 1965-66.

Figure 12 indicates the trend in total costs per pupil for elementary and secondary schools. To approximate the total cost for each year, 10% was added to the tuition cost because the latter does not include capital improvements. The decided drop in per pupil costs seen in this Figure from 1950 to 1952 is attributed to the relatively sudden increase in enrollment occurring before additional teachers or class room facilities were added. Severe over-crowding resulted and in 1952 the School Board rented class room space in Bridgeport. With the new Gulph School opening in 1953, and additional teachers employed, the over-crowding was relieved and per pupil costs began to rise again, reflecting the lower and more desirable ratio of pupils per teacher. In the immediate future, per pupil costs are expected to remain fairly steady in secondary schools and to be lower in the elementary schools.

The largest single category of expense in the School Budget is "Instruction", made up of salaries for teachers, principals and supervisors, general supplies, text books and other items relating directly to teaching. As the school program is expanded, the cost rise in this and most of the other categories will be rather uniform maintaining some relationship to the increasing number of pupils. Thus, the tuition costs per pupil are not likely to show sporad-



ic yearly increases during the next six years.

The cost of the school building program, however, is a different matter. While teachers may be added a few at a time, supplies and text books added as needed, in pace with increasing enrollment, it is not practical to meet the demand for additional school plant facilities by adding one or two rooms at a time to existing structures, even if the school population were to remain distributed within the Township as in the past. Use of the Gulph Elementary School building for Senior High is, of course, only a temporary expedient.

The new Belmont and Roberts Schools alone increased annual payments for capital improvements by \$ 124,000, felt for the first time in 1958-59. Debt service, or the amount paid on interest and principal each year, for these two new schools and other existing obligations, amounted to \$ 273,150 in the 1958-59 Budget. The School Board's projection of the Rental and Bond schedules indicates that debt service will increase to approximately \$ 290,000 by 1959-60 with the purchase of the new Senior High School site. The new building itself will increase total debt service to approximately \$ 490,000 by 1962-63. By 1964-65, assuming a new Junior High School and an additional elementary school, debt service will reach a peak of approximately \$ 580,000.

It is clear that a good program of education costs a great amount of money. Total assessed valuations are increasing, but not sufficiently fast to avoid some increases in the school tax rate to pay for the facilities which must be added during the immediate future. The first rental on the new Senior High School will begin in 1959-60 causing a probable increase in the School tax



rate of 4 or 5 mills. This is expected to be the greatest impact to be felt for any year in the future and the tax rate will level-off, then even begin to show a decline thereafter. Toward the end of the projected six-year period, or by 1964-65, total assessed valuations are expected to reach \$ 60,000,000, thus a school tax rate of 39 mills as it is today would support a budget of \$ 2,340,000. From that time on, a much more favorable outlook is apparent with respect to per capita cost for public education.

Upper Merion Twp

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