

**Reed City Area Public Schools  
Graduate Highlight December 2007**

**Emerson Brown  
RCHS Class of 1936**

written by Steven Westhoff, Superintendent

NO PICTURE AVAILABLE

Emerson Brown's smile is infectious. His sparkling eyes still gain the attention of fine ladies; his stories are informative and special; he is one of the surviving members of the RCHS class of 1936! Eight fine ladies and gentlemen gathered recently at Pere Marquette Catering for an impromptu class reunion. I was thrilled to meet each one of them; however, this highlight will be dedicated to Emerson. I'll cover the others in upcoming highlights.

Emerson's graduating class of 54 students was, at the time, the largest ever for Reed City, and he enjoyed every year of his education starting way back at the early age of 4 in kindergarten. He has fond memories of teachers Grace Witherell, Clara Keller, and Helen Costello who he considers outstanding educators. Emerson also shared that Francis Furman (Math and Science) was excellent and Gertrude Calkins, and Frances Osterout graced their English, Latin, and French classrooms. Superintendent Otto Olsen taught plane geometry and physical geography in high school "very much to my taste." R. M. Killey was president of the School Board at the time and, according to Emerson, "deserves much credit for the town's good schools."

After high school, Emerson spent "four very pleasant years" at Olivet College and graduated in 1941 with his provisional teaching certificate. An excellent athlete, Emerson earned five varsity letters during his collegiate days. Following college, he moved to Ionia to teach junior high for what Emerson termed "my first and last year of pedagogy."

In 1942, Emerson began work with the Civil Service Commission and traveled to all sorts of interesting places including Algiers, Morocco, Addis Ababa, and Cairo and to the Sinai Desert where in 1947 he served as director of a refugee camp. Toward the end of 1947 and into 1948, he returned to Reed City and managed the family business (Brown's Store) a soda-fountain teenager hangout.

This very busy man finally slowed down a little bit toward the end of 1948 and met the love of his life, Winifred Ruth Ryan, who he married in October of that year. This travel-bound couple took on several Foreign Service assignments spending time in West Germany, Bombay, Bonn, The Hague, Ottawa, and Washington. The Emersons

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had three children: David, Catherine, and Christopher. Emerson moved back to Reed City in 1999 and in his words “have been enjoying the local air and water ever since.”

When looking back, Emerson shared that his father and mother were the main influences in his life. He added, “the local school prepared me well – no teacher was less than good and some – as named – were outstanding.” Emerson truly values the education he received in Reed City and through reading and recommends that our students read John O’Hara’s *Appointment in Samarra*; Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*; and Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* (for its insight into Communism).

Reed City Area Public Schools is extremely proud of this 1936 graduate. I’m indeed fortunate to have met this fine gentlemen!