A HISTORY OF THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE

ORONO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Early in 1948, Wayzata invited representatives from the Hill, Long Lake, Upper Crystal Bay, and Minnetonka Beach districts to join in a discussion of the possibility and feasibility of consolidation with District 144. It will be noted that Maple Plain, Armstrong, Stubbs Bay, Grove Center, Reiser, and Spurzem were not invited to participate in this discussion. Wayzata set April 15, 1948 as the deadline date for a statement from these outlying districts as to whether or not they were interested in consolidation. Because their decision was in the negative, the original five districts -- Long Lake, Stubbs Bay, Upper Crystal Bay, Minnetonka Beach, and Hill -- returned to their own group unit to consider the possibility of forming their own consolidation. This, therefore, gave rise to the so-called McGregor Report -- A Survey of Five Minnetonka School Districts, issued under the date of November, 1947. This committee's survey and report were financed by a $200.00 grant from each of the five participating school districts.

Among the many problems confronting this survey group were questions such as these:

> "Should these districts continue their present educational systems, or should they consolidate among themselves or with other districts?
>
> "Would there be enough pupils to justify the construction of a good Junior-Senior High School?"

The findings of this survey committee answered these and other such questions:

1. "A school program is necessary. The districts would not want to go on indefinitely with ungraded, elementary schools, teaching all grades in one room. The present buildings can be used for a few years, but they are not large enough to handle the present enrollment. The districts cannot expect to go on indefinitely sending high school pupils outside the district, because they are a growing expense to the other districts which do not have to take them. Every year more districts are refusing to accept non-resident high school pupils.

   "It follows that these Five Districts sooner or later will want to set up their own graded elementary and high school district, or consolidate with an existing one.

2. "Educationally, a school district is practical. The Five Districts have enough pupils for a graded elementary and high school district, and they can expect their area will increase still further in population.

3. "Financially, a separate school district would be lowest in taxes. It would cost the Five Districts less in taxes to build and operate their own schools than to merge with either of the two adjoining districts."

Probably an equally or more significant finding from this McGregor Report was the fact that these five districts constituted only 14.79 square miles of the 18 square mile area required to receive state aid for transportation. This deficiency was to be further accentuated by the withdrawal of the Minnetonka Beach unit from the survey group.

Upon the withdrawal of Minnetonka Beach, representatives of the Grove Center and the Reiser districts were contacted to get their feelings in the matter of a possible consolidation. Because the tenor of their response was so definitely in the affirmative, contact was next made with the people from Armstrong, Maple Plain, and Spurzem. Now at this same time Mound, like Wayzata, was also beginning to feel the pressure of being over-crowded and had expressed a recognition of the necessity of relief at an early future date. Thus simultaneous with Wayzata's contacting the five districts in the Lake Area, Mound was making similar overtures to her contingent districts in the Maple Plain area -- Armstrong, Greenwood, Lyndale, Maple Plain, Spurzem, and possibly other districts. After a period of consideration and discussion, Maple Plain, Armstrong, and Spurzem expressed attitudes that seemed to favor a new consolidation unit. This unanimity of feeling on the part of the constituents of the nine districts justified the presentation of a proposed consolidation to the Hennepin County School Survey Committee (commonly referred to as the "Nine-Man Committee"). That this proposed consolidation met with the committee's approval was evidenced by the receipt of a letter from the office of the County Superintendent, under the date of November 17, 1948. The letter read, in part:

"We have designated December 7th (1948) from 7 to 9 P. M. as the voting date for consolidation (reorganization) of the nine districts in proposed Area No. 11.

This proposal for consolidation made an educational survey -- The Creele Report -- the next logical step in our developmental process.

The voting on consolidation, however, was postponed until January 25, 1949, to allow the Hill District to complete its bond issue for its new grade school. In the meantime, on November 18, 1948, the residents of District No. 94 voted their district legally dissolved and forthwith attached to the Hill District. The ballots on the issue of consolidation totaled 818 in all, with 143 votes cast against the issue as compared with 673 votes cast favoring the issue, and with 2 blank votes.

Voting for consolidation was soon followed by voting for a school board for this newly created district. On February 21, 1949, the following persons were elected to serve as the first board members for this new "education-community":

Edmund B. Walsh, Long Lake	-	3 years
Emory H. White, Crystal Bay	-	3 years
Mrs. Clayton Bryant, Maple Plain	-	2 years
Herbert R. Ross, Stubbs Bay	-	2 years
Russell B. Johnson, Armstrong	-	1 year
Donald Willis, Grove Center	-	1 year

The first major item of business for this new board was that of choosing a man to direct the activities of the newly created district. After a period of interviewing many candidates, the board finally offered the position to Mr. Carlton W. Lytle, who at that time was principal at the Bremer School in Minneapolis. Although Mr. Lytle's responsibilities did not officially begin until July 1, 1949, yet shortly after his election in April, he began making his contributions to the district and its future welfare.

Again on May 26, 1949, the voters of District 11 went to the polls, this time voting on authorizing the newly elected school board to purchase a site for the proposed junior-senior high school. Of the 363 ballots cast, 2 were void, 52 opposed, and the balance (309 ballots) favored such authorization.

But no school board however capable and efficient can function without financial resources. Thus on October 18, the voters again went to the polls, this time voting 405 to 268 (with 3 void ballots) in favor of a $100,000.00 bond issue. These funds were for the completion of the new Hill School, for the purchase of the site for the new school and paying preliminary costs of the proposed new district high school, for making repairs and improvements in elementary school buildings, and for setting up a reserve for unforeseen contingencies. These bonds were sold to Shaughnessy and Company, Inc. of St. Paul, and C. S. Ashmun Company of Minneapolis. At this same polling, the voters approved 515 to 158 the sale of old school buildings no longer in use. These structures were later sold at public auction.

Approximately six months elapsed before the voters of District 11 were allowed to go to the polls to vote another and larger bond issue to finance the construction of the new junior-senior high school. Voting was delayed pending a high court decision as to whether or not the district as a unit could legally obligate itself for so great an amount that one of the districts within the consolidation unit would, because of an earlier bond issue, be obligated beyond its fifty percent valuation limit for school purposes. After the Minnesota Supreme Court filed its decision on February 17, 1950, District 11 proceeded to call an election to vote on issuing $765,000.00 in bonds for a new school building. This issue, which came before the voters on May 2, 1950, polled a total of 1,418 votes, with 908 voters favoring and 510 voters opposing the bond issuance. These bonds were sold to Paine, Webber, Jackson, and Curtiss, Kalman and Company, and Juran and Moody.

With the bond issue passed, the board was then ready to submit the architects' plans to prospective contractors and to await the receipt of their bids, to study, to accept and / or reject bids, and to go through innumerable details that are appreciated only by those who have been in similar positions of public responsibility. When the necessary preliminary details had been attended to, construction on the new structure was begun July 19, 1950. Many a time the interested passer-by was

amazed at the progress of construction that was made despite the fury blasts of our snowy "Winter of '50-'51".

Because it was felt that the name "Independent Consolidated School District Number 11" was a bit long and lacking in individuality, and because it might not, for instance, fit into a school yell gracefully, several of our civic organizations sponsored jointly a "Name the School" contest. Of the more than 750 entries, four persons submitted the winning name, but only to the first person to submit that name could the prize -- a new bicycle or $40.00 in cash -- be awarded. For her suggested name, ORONO JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL, Janet Anderson of Maple Plain received the $40.00 award plus an additional $5.00 offered by one of the school board members.

By the time the first bond issue was approved, the "cogs of learning" had already been in motion for about six weeks, for on Tuesday, September 6, 1949, elementary graded schools had been opened at Crystal Bay, Long Lake, Maple Plain, and Stubbs Bay; they were actively functioning as members of the new District No. 11 system. Each of these schools was conducting classes for the first six grades; all seventh and eighth students were being taught in the former Hill School building. Students who had formerly been attending the Armstrong, Grove Center, Reiser, and Spurzem Schools were being transported to their nearest elementary school or to the junior high school at Crystal Bay.

Gradually, but definitely, during these past two years numerous changes have been in evidence: many of the classrooms, hallways, and basement rooms have been redecorated; out-dated textbooks have been discarded and replaced, while other textbooks and reference materials have been added; new pieces of equipment - such as drinking fountains - have been installed; and many other important revisions and additions have come to pass. Because of these and other improvements, our elementary schools have now been accepted by the State Department of Education and are therefore placed on the state's list of approved graded schools.

We are now in the process of preparing for the fall opening of our new ORONO JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL. Our superintendent, Mr. Carlton W. Lytle, and our school board members have been untiring in their efforts to secure for us the best in supplies, equipment, and, most important, a first rate faculty. To these personalities we owe our gratitude and also our cooperation.

Thus far two other groups of capable and invaluable men have gone without mention, yet were it not for these persons our Orono Junior-Senior High School would still be but the dream of a group of visionaries. Yet because of their skill and workmanship, our dream is fast becoming a reality. We refer with gratitude and pride to our architects - Shifflet, Backstrom & Carter of Minneapolis - and to our general contractors - The Standard Construction Company - also of Minneapolis.

Tribute must be paid to our superintendent and to our board members of the present and of the past; together they have given so much of themselves to this great undertaking. Tribute must also be paid to the numberless, unnamed, public-spirited citizens who have seen the value of a strong school system as a means of benefiting today's student and of better equipping tomorrow's citizen.