



District No. 60, or the Wilson School, was built in 1892

The early history of . . .

Spring Lake Park School District 16

Blaine • Spring Lake Park • Fridley

The following is a history of how School District 16 came to be. It is an early history of the school district as well as the Blaine, Spring Lake Park, and Fridley area.

Thank you to Mr. Robert Lindquist, an early school board chair, for providing much of this information. He, in turn, credits Edward Knalson and Ross Johnson, who had previously collaborated on this history. Mr. Knalson, now deceased, was superintendent of schools from 1955-76, and a former board member. Mr. Johnson is a former district administrator and board member.

The forerunner of School District 16 was organized in 1883

In 1883, Common School District No. 47 was organized and land was purchased near the present junction of Radisson Road (89th Avenue) and Highway 65, and a school was built. It was known variously as

the Bremer and the Gallagher School and was the forerunner of what was later known as the Blaine School. Before this school was built, children of the area attended school in Coon Rapids.

Enrollment of three school districts reaches 64

By 1923, District 47 enrollment reached 40 which necessitated dividing the students into two groups with one group attending in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

It was at this time that the citizens in the southern portion of the district organized Common School District No. 6 and built another school at 7817 Van Buren Street. (This school building ultimately became a private home.)

Common School District No. 60 was organized in 1892 with the construction of the Wilson School, also known as the Otte School. This first school burned in 1922 and was replaced with a one-room school that was used until 1954 when District 60 ceased to exist.

In 1934, the combined enrollment of the three school districts amounted to only 64 children in grades 1-8 (27 in

District 6, 25 in District 47, 12 in District 60).

Growth through 1940 continued to expand the need for schools, causing a two-room portable building to be erected in District 47 to alleviate crowding.

In 1948, with enrollment increased to 160, seventh and eighth graders were bused to Anoka and fifth and sixth graders were housed in the basement of the Spring Lake Park Baptist Church.

Blaine School, Woodcrest, and the Arsenal

In 1949, Blaine School was built at 1141 89th Avenue (then known as Greenwich Road). This building consisted of four classrooms and a library.

The District 6 enrollment had increased to 88 by 1948. Because of the lack of space, many students attended class in the Twin Cities Arms Plant in Arden Hills (commonly called the Arsenal). In 1950, District 6 constructed an eight-room school (Woodcrest) complete with a gym and office at 880 Osborne Road.

Early in 1954, there were approximately 910 students in grades 1-2 living in the area now encompassed by District 16 boundaries. High school-age

students attended Anoka, Columbia Heights, and Minneapolis Marshall high schools.

Elementary-age students attended school at five locations:

- Common School District No. 6, located near the site of what is now known as Woodcrest Elementary
- Common School District No. 47 school near the site of Blaine School (closed in 1979)
- Common School District No. 60 Wilson School located NE of the present Anoka county Airport (Xylite and 101st)
- in classrooms at the Twin City Arsenal
- in classrooms in Anoks

Three school districts merge in 1954

In mid-1954, these three school districts merged into Common School District No. 47, which later became officially identified as Spring Lake Park Independent School District 16.

Preceding the creation of School District 47 was a failed election to consolidate all five school districts in the area into one. The boards of three of these districts that approved consolidation voted to merge into one district by a process of annexation.

On June 4, 1954, the Anoka County Commissioners approved the merger, thus establishing School District No. 47 (the State of Minnesota renumbered the district to District 16 in 1957).

The school board of the new District 47 faced the following challenges:

- A rapidly growing community that assured continuation of rapid growth of enrollment and required number of classrooms
- Lack of a high school and lack of a site on which to build a high school
- Selecting a site on which to build a high school and then holding a public election to get approval to purchase the site
- Lack of funds needed to build a high school
- Gaining voter approval in elections to approve school district sale of bonds to obtain the funds for school construction
- Hiring principals and a superintendent
- Hiring teachers to staff the schools
- Insufficient taxable property in the district to provide enough taxes to meet operating revenue needs of the district and to support borrowing sufficient to fund construction of a high school.

Going door-to-door to make the district larger

Lightly settled as the area was, there was recognition of the coming growth of population and the need for a local high school.

Merging of the three districts into one brought the total land area of the new district to approximately 16 sections (16 square miles), which was not enough to qualify the district for

state transportation aid for the busing of students.

Under state law, the area had to be at least 18 sections. A map of the newly formed District 60's eastern border at this time would have shown a straight line. A current map of District 16 shows a strangely irregular eastern border.

This is the result of Kenneth Hall's (Treasurer of this early School Board, namesake of a current school) work in calling—door-to-door—on landowners in that area and convincing them to petition to the county to join the new school district.

This successful effort brought the school district area to a qualifying 18.18 sections.

Over the years this provided many hundreds of thousands of dollars of transportation aid from the state that would otherwise have been paid by local taxpayers.

The merged districts began life in 1954 with Blaine, Woodcrest, and Wilson Elementary Schools.

A \$450,000 bond was issued on April 15, 1955 to finance construction of a high school that was quickly begun on the present 40-acre site located on Central Avenue between 79th and 81st Avenues.

High school students moved into the uncompleted high school in December 1955. They had occupied Woodcrest Elementary since September 1955, with Woodcrest students sharing Blaine Elementary space in two shifts.

In July 1954, Blaine Elementary had twelve classrooms, a result of the original four rooms and library built in 1949-50, a four-



Damage from the May 6, 1965 tornado.

room addition in 1950, three rooms added in 1954, and the relocation of the old one-room school in 1951.

In 1955 a kitchen and activity room were added. The total cost of the Blaine School construction from 1949-1955 was \$215,000.

Woodcrest Elementary School had eleven classrooms consisting of the original eight rooms, activity room, and kitchen built in 1950 and the three-room addition in 1953. The total cost of this building was \$174,000.

Wilson Elementary, from merged District 60, continued in use through 1955-56 despite having only one room.

Tornado severely damages district schools

Thursday, May 6, 1965 was, perhaps, the fledgling school district's most memorable day, when a devastating tornado struck the Spring Lake Park-Fridley area, essentially demolishing Woodcrest Elementary and heavily

damaging the ten-year-old junior-senior high school.

Unbelievably, students were back in their classes the following Monday with Woodcrest students attending at Blaine Elementary on a second-shift basis. Junior and senior high school students attended their damaged schools by using less-damaged areas.

This recovery stands as a great example of dedication of all involved, but especially the leadership ability of superintendent Edward Knalson.

The challenges of growth

Today, with our school district students numbering in the thousands and teachers numbering in the hundreds, we might look back on the growing pains of these tiny districts as being relatively minor. That would seriously underrate the problems they faced.

To the school boards of these times that were accustomed to one- and two-room schools having 15 or 20 students, only one or two teachers, and no administrators, the problems of

providing for growth were very challenging.

Furthermore, so far as forecasting growth was concerned, they were dealing with great uncertainty.

The result was that growth in enrollment was accommodated by the sorts of temporary provisions described earlier. School construction followed only after enrollment exceeded existing school capacity.

Lack of enough taxable property to provide a sufficient tax base was a major obstacle in selling enough bonds to finance the building of schools large enough to accommodate future enrollment growth.

Farms, farmsteads, and unusable land

To understand what it was like where these "old-timers" lived, try to picture the area as it was then - an area dominated by farms, farmsteads, and unusable land instead of suburban homes and business establishments.

Going northward on Central Avenue (Highway 65), just beyond Columbia Heights, all one encountered was countryside with a scattering of farmsteads and lone-standing houses.

Old Highway 65 skirted the east side of Moore Lake and was an extremely narrow two-lane concrete highway. There was no *new* Highway 65 at that time, no divided highway bisecting Moore Lake, no shopping center just north of Moore Lake as there is now.

Before this construction, following the route of what is now the four-lane divided Hwy 65, a traveler would either wade

or row a boat across Moore Lake and then trudge across farmland pastures.

Heading northward he would see few dwellings, but finally, upon passing Osborne Road, he might be able to see the one-room District 6 schoolhouse. Continuing towards the current County 10 (old US Hwy 10) lay the Osborne farmstead off to the east.

He would then rejoin the two-lane concrete Highway 65 in a rather barren area - no businesses anywhere except the Laddie Lake Inn, of which the original structure was a house.

Continuing north on Highway 65, the traveler would come across the one-room District 47 school at Radisson Road (89th Avenue) and 89th Avenue and the Bremer farmstead just east of the school.

Eventually he would come to the Radisson farm and on into a sparsely settled countryside. Not much changed along this route until the late 1930's and early 40's when suburban development accelerated with the appearance of additional scattered individual homes and small clusters of homes.

The area was lightly settled until the big boom after World War II and the rapid growth in suburban homes and businesses.

Fast-forward. **Additional construction projects**

The following is a chronology of school construction, additions, renovations that took place after the early history of the district on the preceding pages.

1958 high school gymnasium-auditorium

1960 junior high school addition (to high school building)

1963 senior & junior high library

1966 Woodcrest Elementary reconstruction

1966 Kenneth Hall Elementary

1966 high school addition

1967 Westwood Elementary

1967 high school addition

1970 Park Terrace Elementary

1973 Westwood Junior High

1973 swimming pool (high school)

1976 Fine Arts Center (high school)

1998 additions to middle school, high school; renovations and updating of all schools

2006 passage of referendum funding a major (\$96 million) building and renovation project to upgrade and expand all district facilities. This included funding for a new K-3 elementary school in Blaine (since named Northpoint Elementary) to open in the fall of 2008

School District 16 of 2007

In 2007, District 16 is made up of the following schools and student enrollments: grades 9-12 Spring Lake Park High School (1,035); grades 6-8 Westwood Middle School (1,277); grades 4-5 Westwood Intermediate (607); and three grades K-3 schools: Kenneth Hall Elementary (402), Park Terrace Elementary (462), and Woodcrest Elementary (493).

A new 700-capacity K-3 school, Northpoint Elementary, will open in the fall of 2008.

The district also has a comprehensive Learning Alternatives Community School

or area learning center (247), Online Distance Learning Program, and The Lighthouse Program for the highly gifted.

District 16 has a long and proud history. Its students now number over 4,500. They have won conference, state, national, and even world academic championships.

The staff is talented and committed. The community has always been supportive.

Alive and thriving school community

Today, the “farms and unuseable land” of District 16 are vibrant and thriving communities of 25,000 residents and home to the National Sports Center, Minnesota Medical Enterprise Park, Medtronic, Onan, Unity Hospital.

Anoka County Human Services Center, Northtown Shopping Center, The Village Shopping Mall, Aveda corporate headquarters, USA Cup—the largest youth soccer tournament in the world, 3M Championship, and dthe PGA tour’s world-class TPC of the Twin Cities golf course.