

THE EAST AVENUE or NORTHSIDE SCHOOL

Creating “Americans” out of a diverse and varied population has always been an important contribution of the public school. At the East Avenue School, Fairport’s immigrant children learned the language and customs of their new land that they then took home to their parents.

With the construction of the canal in 1825, many immigrants, mostly from Ireland, came to western New York. More Irish settlers arrived in the late 1850’s and 60’s to work as laborers on the New York Central Railroad. Those early arrivals lived in rooming houses and tenements built near the canal and the railroad on the north side of town. In the decades surrounding the turn of the 20th century, many Italian and Greek families settled on the north side of town where there were plentiful job opportunities with the railroad, the DeLand Chemical Company, and the Sanitary Can Company, among others.



Sixth grade class, early 20th century

Despite the growing population, up until the mid 1880’s the only school in the village of Fairport was located on East Church Street. North side children attended that school, the #8 school on the corner of Turk Hill and Whitney Roads, while others attended classes in a former drying shed off East Avenue.

In October, 1883, \$8,000 was appropriated for the building of a “handsome structure on East Avenue.” on land purchased from C.G.DeWitt. The two story building, opened in 1886, was a “commodious brick structure of four rooms, admirably lighted and heated.” The original building was later doubled in size.

The 1906-07 Fairport Public Schools directory lists four teachers and 133 students in grades one through six at the school. Stephanie Orford taught grades 7 and 8; Madge Vickery grades 5 and 6; Minerva Devereaux grades 3 and 4; and Mary Jerrells grades 1 and 2. First grade students studied reading from *Ward’s Primer and First Reader* and writing from *Natural Slant, Book 1*. Second grade saw the addition of the *American Word Book* for spelling. By the fourth grade, the curriculum also included language, arithmetic, geography, physiology, music, and drawing.

In 1921, Superintendent H. Claude Hardy concluded that they [the teachers] were a “fine lot...very much interested in their work and, on the whole, maintain high standards.” Although the attendance record for the East Avenue school surpassed that of the other schools, the students there scored relatively poorly on standardized tests which he claimed was “accounted for in the fact that one third of the children tested were Italians, many of whom have not yet a sufficient knowledge of English to do themselves justice in a test of this sort.”

When schools were centralized in 1951, most of the small district schools were closed, but the East Avenue school remained open, providing extra classroom space during the transition.

After purchasing the school building for \$5,000 in 1960, the Crosman Arms Company donated \$10,000 and the old school building to the village of Fairport to be used as a recreational facility, because, in company president Philip Hahn’s words, “We are indebted to the Fairport community for generating a good climate for doing business here. We want to show our appreciation for their kindness by guaranteeing good recreational facilities for youngsters and oldsters alike.”

In 1962, a refurbished Crosman Community Center opened to the public. There were areas for elementary, junior and senior high school young people as well as a room for senior citizens. There were

activity rooms, a library, and an all-purpose room in the basement. The building served as a community recreational facility until the opening of the Turk Hill Road complex in 1997.

Between 1997 and 2002, the building's future was in question. In that year the Baldwin Real Estate Corporation under the leadership of Fairport resident Bill Durdel purchased the structure, planning to turn it into a senior housing complex, and saving it from demolition. An addition was constructed and "The Crosman's" 21 apartments were ready for occupancy in late 2002. An integral part of Fairport's north side history had been saved.