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School district making history

BY ROY WILHELM

History is being made in the Fremont City School District.

This spring will mark the 50th anniversary of the first class to graduate from the Ross High School building on North Street.

It's safe to say that the parents of many of those approximately 330 students who will graduate this year were not yet alive when the "new" Ross High School was constructed. Some grandparents of members of the class of 2009 could have been in that class.

Students began attending classes in the new building in the fall of 1958, just about 50 years before school district voters opened the door for a new middle school to join the Ross building on the North Street site.

At the time that the North Street building was erected, there were six grade levels -- seventh through 12th -- in the Croghan Street building. The new Ross High greeted an enrollment of 875 students for the top three grades with the other three grade levels remaining at the Croghan Street building.

Interestingly, during the debate and discussion leading up to the building of the new Ross High School, there was plenty of concern about the amount of property being purchased.

In 1956, when the board of education eventually decided to purchase 88 acres of Dillon property there was plenty of doubt about the need for so much land.

To some, it was a waste of taxpayers' money.

Since then, however, the decision has been proven to be wise. The 88 acres reported were purchased for \$95,000. And, from bus garages to athletic facilities, the land has steadily been put to use.

With the construction of a new middle school on the land purchased for Ross High more than 50 years ago, the historic transformation of the school system will be complete.

And with that transfer of students and staff from Croghan Street to North Street apparently will come an end to formal education at that site.

The old building is for sale and likely will be demolished.

It's anyone's guess whether the property at Croghan Street and Park Avenue will someday house an apartment building or a park, a business center or a government complex.

But if its days as the home of a school are numbered, it will mark the end of a steady stream of education dating back nearly 200 years.

The first log school house in the district, a rough structure with oiled-paper windows, was constructed just west of Fort Stephenson (Now the site of Birchard Public Library) in 1816. The project was done at the encouragement of the Rev. Joseph Badger, an Indian missionary and teacher who frequented

the area.

That first school house was really a community project, with an estimated 20 families joining forces to construct the building and then contributing personally to the pay of the single teacher who taught all students during the 12 weeks of winter that they attended classes.

Next to the old schoolhouse were the graves of British officers who died in the assault on Fort Stephenson. They are remembered to this day by a plaque on the east side of the Middle School.

The very next year, 1817, the original building was replaced by a more "modern" structure, one with hewn logs and glass windows.

That building remained until it was intentionally burned down in 1834 because a cholera patient died there. During its nearly two decades of use, that school building had also served as a church and a courthouse.

A stone building replaced the one destroyed by the fire.

Then, in 1853, a brick building with four rooms was constructed to replace the stone structure. Located at the corner of Garrison Street and Park Avenue, the building's twin towers are well-known to those who have seen historic pictures of Fremont. It was, reportedly, the first building used solely as a high school.

Union School, as the twin-towered structure was known, was replaced about 1891 by Central School, which was replaced 16 years later by the first portion of what is now the Fremont Middle School.

The building was expanded and improved several times during the nearly century of use that followed.
