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## School location change debated

*BY ROY WILHELM*

As a veteran of the newspaper business, I have too many examples of working hard on a story only to have a silly mistake jump out of the pages at you like a hungry tiger.

It happened to me last week when my column about the 1959 graduating class -- the first from the new building -- twice referred to the new Ross High School as the Front Street building. Obviously, Ross is on North Street.

But, while I feel silly about my mistake, the error reminded me that the switch from Croghan Street to North Street wasn't without some debate.

And one of those major issues was the location.

In 1956, there were three primary choices as the site for the new school.

Some board of education members favored the Michaels property on West Hayes Avenue; others favored purchasing the Ray Molder farm northeast of the city; and one board member, Dorwin Findley, supported purchasing both the Michaels and the Molder sites, arguing that land prices would only be going up and that the east side was likely to need a junior high building within a dozen years.

Even after it was determined that the Dillon property off North Street was the best purchase, there was debate about how much of the land was needed and how much the district should pay for the land.

In June of 1956, the board voted to offer \$800 per acre for a minimum of 30 acres and a maximum of 45 acres of the farm.

The board's resolution described the site as "Bounded on the south by North Street, on the east by the Fangboner Road, on the west by the land owned by the Kraut company and the north to be determined by the exact acreage purchased."

The asking price for the land was originally \$2,000 per acre, but some board members balked at that because some Dillon property had been sold for the Ohio Turnpike at the \$800 price suggested by the board.

Eventually, there was, as there usually is, a compromise. The board agreed to purchase all 84.5 acres for \$95,000 although there were many who questioned why the schools needed so much land. A look at the property today, including plans for the new middle school there, appears to support the decision as a wise one.

The debates over the location and amount of land were not the only questions that needed to be answered by the school officials.

Many undoubtedly remember that the Croghan Street building housed six grades at the time of the

construction of the new high school. Grades seven through twelve were included and many -- particularly parents of the younger children -- were eager to separate senior high school and junior high school students.

Among the suggestions for doing so was a plan to construct two junior high schools -- one on the east side and one on the west side -- and keep the high school students on Croghan Street.

Once it was decided to build a new high school, there was discussion over its design with the single floor plan winning out. The original plan had called for a two-story front with a shop and other wing being one story. The architects, however, urged the construction of a one-story building.

The building was funded through a \$2.9 million bond issue approved by the voters in November of 1955. Funds from the bond issue were used not only for a new high school, but also for improvements to the Croghan Street building, which was to become the junior high school, and expansion to the new Atkinson School, which was overcrowded despite having just been completed for use in 1952.

As costs for the new building rose, officials had to trim the project, including the elimination of a swimming pool -- a move that was finally rectified in 2006 when the new pool opened.

The total cost for the Ross project topped \$2.1 million, including a plumbing contract of \$230,200 to T.O. Murphy and an electrical contract for \$219,997 to Sabroske Electric, both Fremont firms. Another Fremont firm, Mosser Construction narrowly lost out on the general contract to Knowlton Inc. of Bellefontaine.

Ground was broken for the building in May of 1957 and classes began there in the fall of 1958.

Ohio Governor C. William O'Neill was the featured speaker at the dedication ceremony on Dec. 7, 1958.

The governor had been a student of Fremont Superintendent Allen E. Rupp when Rupp was a teacher and debate coach at Marietta High School.

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