

School move ends 200 years on Croghan

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The long-awaited move from the old Croghan Street building to the brand new Fremont Middle School apparently brings to an end nearly 200 years of education-related history.

The land surrounded by Croghan, Park, Garrison and High streets has been the site of an educational facility almost continuously since 1816.

It was in that year that the first school house was erected in what is now Fremont.

Constructed of rough, unhewn logs cut from surrounding trees, that first local school house was built through the volunteer efforts of early settlers who apparently realized that education was important even in a time when daily life was a struggle against the wilderness.

That first building had no glass windows. Oiled paper covered the openings and the students' chairs were simple, primitive structures.

Interestingly, adjacent to the school house on the site just west of Fort Stephenson were the graves of British officers and soldiers killed in the unsuccessful attempt to take the fort from Col. George Croghan and his men in 1813. I understand that a plaque in their memory remains in the possession of school officials and, given reported agreements between the two countries, probably should continue to mark the spot after the ownership of the property has changed.

The pioneers apparently recognized the shortcomings of that first school building, because it was replaced just one year later by a more substantial structure.

Meek's "Twentieth Century History of Sandusky County," points out the progress, saying the new school was "erected on the same site, fronting east, and built of hewn logs, with some such improvements as glass windows, a row of desks around the walls, and a blazing fireplace at the eastern extremity."

The new school building lasted much longer than the first, but not very long, serving the students of the area until 1834 when it was intentionally burned down.

It was that year that a cholera epidemic hit the city. The impact of the dreaded disease and its rapid spread was devastating. The suffering and mortality rate reportedly were great and many residents fled the city or locked up their homes to prevent contamination.

The school house, however, was feared to have been contaminated because a cholera patient died there so the building was burned down.

It was replaced by a one-room stone building which eventually became a two-room school.

That building served area students until a new brick school was erected on the same general site in 1852-53. Union School, at the corner of what was then Main Street (now Park Avenue) and Garrison Street, was the first in the district to be used solely as a high school. That was made possible by the fact that by that time other schools had been constructed elsewhere in the community or were in operation using already existing facilities.

Despite the fact that the first "high school" was opened in 1853, its first graduate -- Eliza Bushnell -- isn't recorded until 1867.

So, maybe, the recognition of the importance of education was somewhat different than today's attitude.

Union School is familiar to area history buffs who have seen pictures of the building featuring twin bell towers.

But, that school also lasted a relatively short time, being replaced by the Central School in 1891. The new school cost \$16,000 to build. With the rapid growth of

the Fremont area population, the school building was soon deemed too small to meet the needs of the district.

As a result, a "modern" secondary school was constructed facing Croghan Street in 1909.

That is the basic building that served secondary students in Fremont for the next 102 years. Through that century of service, the building underwent many changes, being enlarged and remodeled several times.

In 1930, the high school was named in honor of W.W. Ross, who had served as superintendent of the district for 42 years, beginning in 1864. During his tenure, Ross had the honor of signing the diploma of the first high school graduate, but it's interesting to note that during his 42 years of service only 578 students reportedly graduated from Fremont High School, a number not too far removed from some single graduating classes of 40 years ago.

Nearly 30 years after gaining the name Ross, the high school was relocated on North Street with the first class graduating from that school in 1959.

At that time, the Croghan Street building became solely a junior high school and eventually was turned into a middle school, which it continued to be until closing as the students moved from downtown to the North Street campus.