

Brooklands School Will Be Demolished this Summer

MAY 25, 2016 BY DEBORAH J. LARSEN LEAVE A COMMENT

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Requiem for Brooklands School

By Deborah J. Larsen

Eighty-eight years after it welcomed its first students, the old Brooklands School on Auburn Road sits boarded up and quietly awaits a date with the wrecking ball. Rochester Community Schools officials have determined that the building has reached the end of its useful life and have slated it for demolition this summer.

The school was born in controversy. In 1927, the voters of Avon Township School District #3 – a rural district serving the Brooklands area – knew they needed a new school. Scores of autoworkers settling into homes in the new Brooklands subdivisions had swelled enrollment, making their frame schoolhouse on the north side of Auburn Road completely inadequate.



Brooklands School 2016 – photo by Deborah J. Larsen

There was no Question that a New School was Necessary

A bitter feud erupted over the building's name. Since its founding in 1837, Avon District #3

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had been known as the Frank District in honor of pioneer settler Col. John Frank, on whose farm the original schoolhouse had been built. Frank himself had served as the first moderator of the school district, and had helped to build the schoolhouse.

While the new building was under construction in October 1927, the district's board voted to honor the new subdivisions by changing the school's name from Frank to Brooklands. A faction favoring the traditional name then unseated the officers of the school board, seeking to reverse the decision. An injunction and lawsuit followed, and after months of litigation and another change in school board personnel, those advocating the name of Brooklands prevailed and the school building was so christened.

Detroit architect Byron E. Mills, a specialist in school design, planned the Gothic Revival building. Vickie Larsen Kriewall, who attended Brooklands School from 1957 to 1964, remembers the spacious kindergarten room in the northeast corner of the building. "It was pretty big, and it had a big bay window and terrazzo floor. Even when I went back there years later as an adult, I still thought it was a really big room. It had double doors going into it."



Brooklands School ca1940 from the Ray Russell Postcard Collection, Rochester Hills Public Library

Kriewall also has fond memories of the school's central staircase. "It was double wide with a large wooden bannister, and every now and then someone got caught sliding down it. I was very good at sliding on it, and I never got caught."

Like the other rural schools that dotted the countryside in Avon Township, the Frank/Brooklands District served students through the eighth grade and then sent them off to high school in Rochester. In 1953, the Brooklands electors voted to consolidate their district with Rochester's, and Brooklands became an elementary school serving students through grade six.

Brooklands School was enlarged four times to keep pace with enrollment, but by 1991, the patchwork of additions was deemed unworkable for modern educational needs. An all-new Brooklands Elementary was built immediately behind the old school, and the final classes were held in the old building in June 1993. Old Brooklands was then repurposed to house the district's adult education department.

The End will be Bittersweet

Old Brooklands has bragging rights. It can boast that within its hallowed walls, the first

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students in the Rochester district to receive doses of the life-saving Salk polio vaccine were inoculated. Known as "Polio Pioneers," these children and other select groups across the nation were the first to test the vaccine in 1954. Carol Beens, then a Brooklands first-grader, bravely rolled up her sleeve to kick off the program in the Rochester district.

The school can also claim that a now world-famous alumnus once walked – or perhaps, raced – its halls. NASCAR champion Brad Keselowski attended old Brooklands in the early 1990s with the last classes of elementary students to use the building. "You never want to see pieces of your childhood go away and Brooklands Elementary school is one of those pieces for me," Keselowski said in a statement to Rochester Media. "My brothers and sisters went to that school, and my grandmother even worked there many years ago. I can still remember a lot about that school, from eating in the cafeteria to what the principal's office looked like! It's going to be sad to see it torn down but progress isn't always a bad thing. The memories that people have of that building from their childhood are what made it special."

Read About the [Brooklands School Dedication Plaque Missing](#)

About Deborah J. Larsen

Deborah J. Larsen is the assistant director and local history librarian at Mount Clemens Public Library. She is active in the Macomb County and Rochester-Avon historical societies, and writes on a wide range of local history topics.



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