

Chapter 4

ROELAND PARK SCHOOLS

Almost from the time the Shawnee Indians were relocated to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, residents of the area that is now the City of Roeland Park had schools available. Eventually six schools were located within this area, with a seventh supporting the older children. These schools were:

- Roesland Elementary School, established about 1873
- St. Agnes School, established in 1947
- Roeland Park Elementary School, opened in 1951
- Skyline Elementary School, opened in 1953
- Old Mission Junior High School, opened in 1955
- Bishop Miede High School, opened in 1957
- Shawnee-Mission Rural High School, opened in 1922

The St. Agnes and Bishop Miede Schools are Roman Catholic parochial schools. The others are public schools, operated by School District No. 92, the Shawnee-Mission Rural High School and their successor, Unified School District No. 512.

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 92 SCHOOLS

School District No. 92 was at first a part of Prairie District No. 44. In 1873 District No. 44 was divided and the northern part was designated as Shawnee-Mission District No. 92. The new district was bounded on the North by the Johnson-Wyandotte county line, on the east by the Kansas-Missouri state line, on the south by a line generally along 58th Street, and on the west by Nall Avenue.

Roesland School

The original Roesland School was built on one acre of land donated for that purpose by Alexander Johnson, the son of the Rev. Thomas Johnson. Thomas Johnson was the founder of the Shawnee Indian Mission. The school building was built by Miles Standish, a resident of the district, and probably before the official division of the district. The date, 1872, was placed in large figures above the door. A map dated 1875 indicates this school may have been located in the vicinity of what is now St. Agnes Church.

The school house was a one-room building with a raised platform at the front of the room where the teacher's desk stood. It was heated by a stove in the center of the room. A small belfry held the bell that called the children to classes. Drinking water was carried from a spring at the Mission. The first teacher was probably a Miss Mitchell. In 1875 the enrollment was 51 pupils.

When the area that became the subdivisions of Shawnee Place, Westport Annex and Southridge began to grow, the school space became inadequate. An old brick building at the Mission, which had been the blacksmith shop in the time of the Indians, was being used as a post office and general store. This building was rented from the owner, Mr. Schleicher, and used for a year or two. After that, the United Brethren Church building was used. It was in Shawnee Place on Quapaw (Now Canterbury) Street between 47th and 48th.

In 1912, the eastern area of the district was split off and became District No. 93, the Westwood View School District. The new east boundary for District No. 92 became halfway between Mission Road and Belinder.

In 1912, it was voted that a new school house be built for District No. 92. It was to be on the north side of the Strang Line Right-of-way, between Washita and Wornall Avenue (Now Reinhardt and Buena Vista). The present location of Roesland School was selected and the land leased from the Roe Estate. Later the land was purchased by the District with additional land purchased in 1926 and in the late 1940s.

At the time the school was opened on September 12, 1914 only two rooms of the new school were finished. Two additional rooms were completed later that year. The building was heated by a stove in each classroom. Initially water was carried from a neighboring well. Later a deep well was drilled on the school grounds and water for school use pumped from it. Natural gas was used for lights. Sanitary facilities were privies located on the grounds.

By 1926 the population had so increased that it was necessary to provide more room at the school. The old building was not considered strong enough to bear another floor. So the school was torn down and all suitable material used in the new school building. Construction was begun in the summer of 1926 and by September an up-to-date building with eight classrooms and an auditorium was near enough to completion for the children to start school.

By 1933 there were more than 200 students enrolled at the school. In 1939 an addition was constructed and new equipment and refinishing were provided for the old building. Enrollment in 1939 was 215. By 1941 attendance was 312 students and four additional classrooms were authorized. They were completed in 1942. Attendance in 1942 was 376 and in 1943 had increased to 430.

The school was next expanded in 1948. However in a short time this space was inadequate and provisions were made for the construction of the Roeland Park School and later the Skyline School. In 1979 the Roesland School was again renovated by remodeling the two-story north wing and gymnasium. The older south wing was demolished and replaced with a new eleven-room addition.

Roeland Park School

By 1950 it was apparent that additional school rooms were needed in School District No. 92. To relieve the overcrowding in the Roesland School, a new school was authorized by the School District Board of Directors. The new school was named "The Roeland Park School." It was located on a tract of land between Juniper and Sherwood Streets, and 55th Terrace to 56th Street, all within the Roeland Park Subdivision.

The initial building contained seven classrooms, office space and an auditorium that was also used as a cafeteria. Construction was to have been completed by the time school opened in the fall of 1951. However, this schedule was not achieved. To resolve the problem, children to be assigned to the new school were temporarily placed in the Roesland School and in the United Brethren Church at 51st and Cedar. By Christmas, 1951 construction was completed and classes commenced. Children in the northern part of the Roeland Park Subdivision were bussed to the school.

A second phase of construction was completed the following year. This added the south wing of the school with seven additional classrooms. An interesting concept was used in the construction of this school. Restrooms were provided for each room and the toilet and lavatory fixtures were scaled to the average size of the children who would be using the facilities.

In 1953, children from the northern parts of Roeland Park were transferred to the newly opened Skyline School.

By 1980, attendance at the Roeland Park School had dwindled to about 130 students. A similar decline was experienced in several of the older schools in School District No. 512. As a result, the Board of Education recommended the closing of several schools, among them the Roeland Park school.

Two objections were raised in connection with this recommendation. First, the title of the land on which the school is located was subject to possible reversionary procedures. This could have created a difficult legal problem as it was estimated that 20 to 30 prior owners might have some claim to the land.

The second objection, raised by residents in the Roeland Park School area and by members of the City of Roeland Park City Council was that reassignment of students from the Roeland Park School to the Rushton and Roesland School would be dangerous and could possibly increase the risk of personal injury.

To support their claim that the school should not be closed, a group of concerned parents, led by Thomas Harrington, surveyed the area and projected that by 1984 more than 190 students would be enrolled. As part of this survey, the number of women of child bearing age was built into the equation, a factor that had been ignored in prior studies by the District No. 512 board.

A decision was reached, and the Roeland Park School was not closed. In the fall of 1994, attendance at the school was 217, almost the designed capacity of 230.

Skyline School

As the area served by School District No. 92 grew, it became apparent that a third elementary school would be needed. Two options were presented to the School Board: a school in the southeast area of the district, somewhere on the Old Mission Golf Course grounds; or a tract of land near 48th Street and Rosewood Drive.

The selection of the site was put to a vote of the residents. William Dyer, then a member of the School Board, recalls that there were objections to the southeast location; and that the residents of the Roe Highlands area, north of 51st Street, were particularly interested in having the school in their area. According to Mr. Dyer, a meeting was called at the Roesland School in which nearly 900 school patrons attended. A town hall type of vote was taken and passed with 95 percent favoring the site upon which the Skyline School was eventually built. A contest was held among students of the District and the new school was named "The Skyline Elementary School." This was appropriate because of the view of the Kansas City, Missouri skyline which was visible to the northeast.

The Skyline School opened in 1953. By 1975, attendance had declined and the school was closed as an elementary school. It was then used as a special education school until 1982 when it was closed for good. In 1985, the City of Roeland Park acquired the school as a community center, the purpose of which continues to the present.

District No. 92 School Board

Prior to the establishment of Consolidated School District No. 512 in 1969, School District No. 92 was governed by a School Board, and administered by a Superintendent of Schools. Originally the School Board for District No. 92 consisted of three members. In the early 1950's a controversy arose over an administrative decision. The School Board split two-to-one over this decision. The general consensus of school district patrons was that the majority of the board was in error and should change its position. When this did not happen, a proposal was made that the School Board be expanded from three to five members.

At the time, meetings and elections for School District No. 92 were conducted on a town hall basis at the Roesland School. A meeting was called and the School Board was expanded

to five members. With the two new members favorable to the patron's position on the controversy, the original decision was reversed.

In 1968, it became apparent that District No. 92 would be consolidated into the new Unified District No. 512. Concerned that the schools located in Roeland Park would be discriminated against in the distribution of funds, the School Board and Superintendent of School District No. 92 proposed a bond issue for major improvements and expansion of the three elementary schools in the area. This plan was not favorably received by residents of the District. It was defeated by a vote of the people, one of the few times that an election related to schools failed to pass.

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 512 SCHOOLS

In addition to the three schools constructed by School District No. 92, two other public schools served the children of the City of Roeland Park. They were the Old Mission Junior High School and Shawnee Mission North High School.

Old Mission Junior High School

Old Mission Junior High School was constructed in 1955 with classes beginning that fall. Students in grades 7, 8 and 9 attended this school. The students came from both School District No. 92 and School District No. 93. Prior to its construction, students from the Roeland Park areas in grades 7 and 8 attended the Roesland School and students in grade 9 attended Shawnee-Mission Rural High School.

In 1980 the Board of Unified School District No. 512 revised the junior high school concept. In lieu thereof, the middle school concept was adopted. This resulted in students in grades 7 and 8 attending a middle school, and students in grades 9 through 12 attending a high school. As a result of this policy there were not enough students to justify the continued use of the Old Mission School. Students who had attended this school were transferred elsewhere.

The Old Mission school building was used during part of the 1992-1993 and 1993-1994 school year for students from the Prairie School, 67th and Mission Road, which had burned. In school year 1995-1996 the school was used for students from the Corinth School which was being reconstructed. In addition the Old Mission school building is used for office space for the music and art departments which serve all District No. 512 schools.

Shawnee Mission North High School

Although Shawnee Mission North High School is not located within the area of the City of Roeland Park, it was the secondary education facility attended by children from that area. Originally known as Shawnee Mission Rural High School, it became the nucleus for School District No. 512 which was organized effective July 1, 1969.

In September 1922, the first rural high school - known officially as Rural High School District No. 6 - opened its doors in Johnson County. The new district had an enrollment of 127 students in grades nine through twelve. It had a published budget of \$22,490. Thus began what became the Shawnee Mission Unified School District No. 512. By 1995, District No. 512 had an enrollment of more than 31,000 students and a published budget exceeding \$100 million.

It was a close call, relative to the establishment of Shawnee Mission Rural High School, as beginnings go. Records from the 1921 election indicated there were 1,049 votes for and 975 votes against the plan of organization. Also approved by a narrow margin was a \$150,000 bond issue for the purchase of a site and the construction and equipping of a school building.

That building today is the east unit of Shawnee Mission North High School, 7401 Johnson Drive. The interior was completely remodeled in 1951, and what is now the cafeteria was initially the gymnasium.

As the district grew, additional facilities were required. The auditorium and physical education unit were added in 1936. The vocational and shop units were added in 1941. In 1951, a complete renovation and further additions were made to the building.

The District was reorganized in 1953 to include junior high schools for grades 7, 8 and 9. In 1955, ninth graders from the Roeland Park area entered Old Mission Junior High School at 4901 Reinhardt Street. Soon thereafter, additional high schools were approved and opened in 1958, 1962 and 1966.

Unification of the many school districts in Northeast Johnson County was defeated by the electorate in 1964. In January 1969, the Kansas Legislature passed a bill providing for the establishment of one unified school district to include all the territory of any rural high school district in which there were located at least two cities of the first class. This resulted in School District No. 92 and others being merged with the high school district into Unified School District No. 512.

SAINT AGNES CATHOLIC DIOCESE SCHOOLS

Two schools located in the City of Roeland Park area are operated by the Saint Agnes Parish of the Roman Catholic Church. They are the St. Agnes Elementary School and the Bishop Miege High School.

St. Agnes School

St. Agnes School had its origins in the school established in 1923 on a tract of land on 47th Street between Booth and Adams Streets in Wyandotte County. That building, which also was the St. Agnes Church, soon had to be expanded. Funds for the expansion came from the sale of nine acres of land donated to the church by the Roe Sisters, Miss Isabella, Miss Margaret and Mrs. Ellen Roe Bryant. By 1927 there were 200 children receiving instruction.

In 1929, the Parish helped establish Bishop Ward High School in Kansas City, Kansas for use by the older children. This also relieved the overcrowding of the elementary school. Little happened during the Depression Years of the 1930s because of economic conditions, and during World War II because of lack of construction materials. However, when the growth of the area accelerated during and after World War II, it became evident that a more central location was necessary and a larger school was needed.

To meet the needs of the expanding St. Agnes Church and School, the Roe sisters again donated land. This time five acres on the corner of Mission Road and 53d Street was provided. The initial building was the church and the school continued at the 47th Street location.

On May 30, 1945, Mr. Jack Whitaker approached the new Pastor of St. Agnes, Father Herman J. Koch, and asked that a Catholic School be established "right here on this spot, not a mile away." To provide space, Miss Catherine Roe donated the five acres needed for the school.

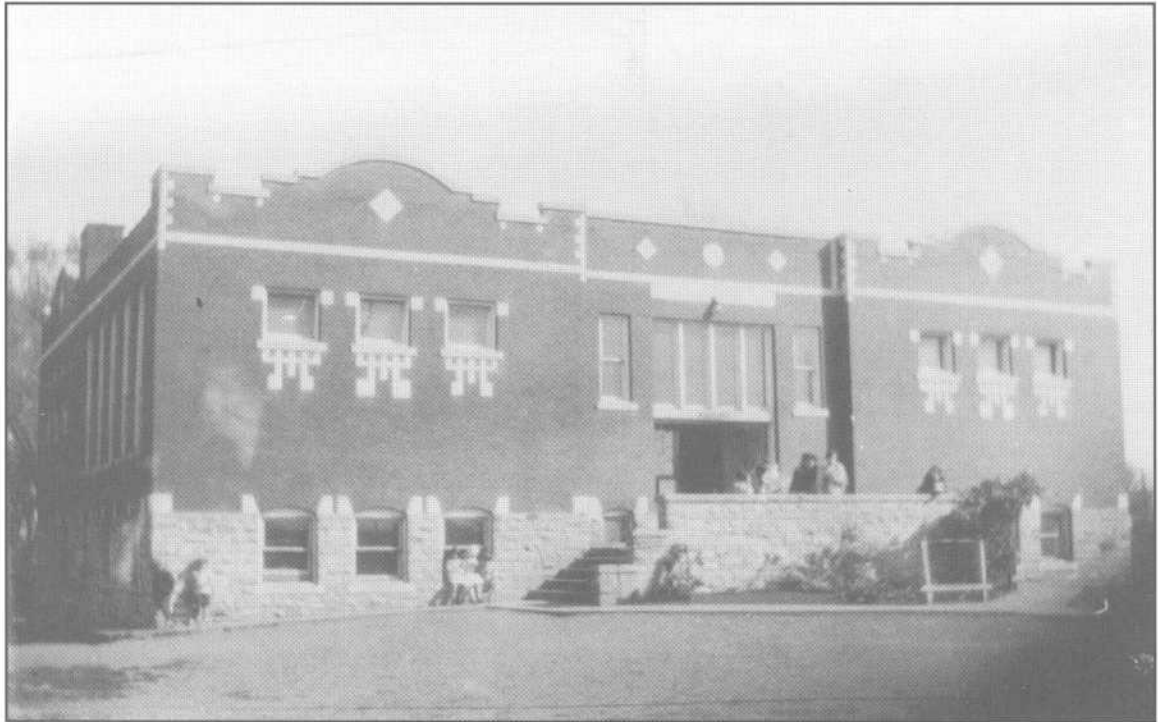
The new St. Agnes School contained 12 class rooms, a cafeteria, a library, a gymnasium and a bowling alley. The school was dedicated on September 1, 1947 by Bishop Donnelly. By 1955, the high school at St. Agnes School had reached its capacity of 375 students.

Bishop Miege High School

To solve the overcrowding in the St. Agnes School, a central high school was authorized. Bishop Miege High School was opened in September 1958. The mascot of the new school is a carry over from the days when the high school was St. Agnes - "ST AGS." Thirty-five years later the school initiated a program titled "Bishop Miege High School - Expanding the Tradition." The purpose of the program was to maintain the degree of excellence that the school has developed and to raise funds for facility maintenance, program enhancement, scholarships for needy students, and faculty endowment funds.



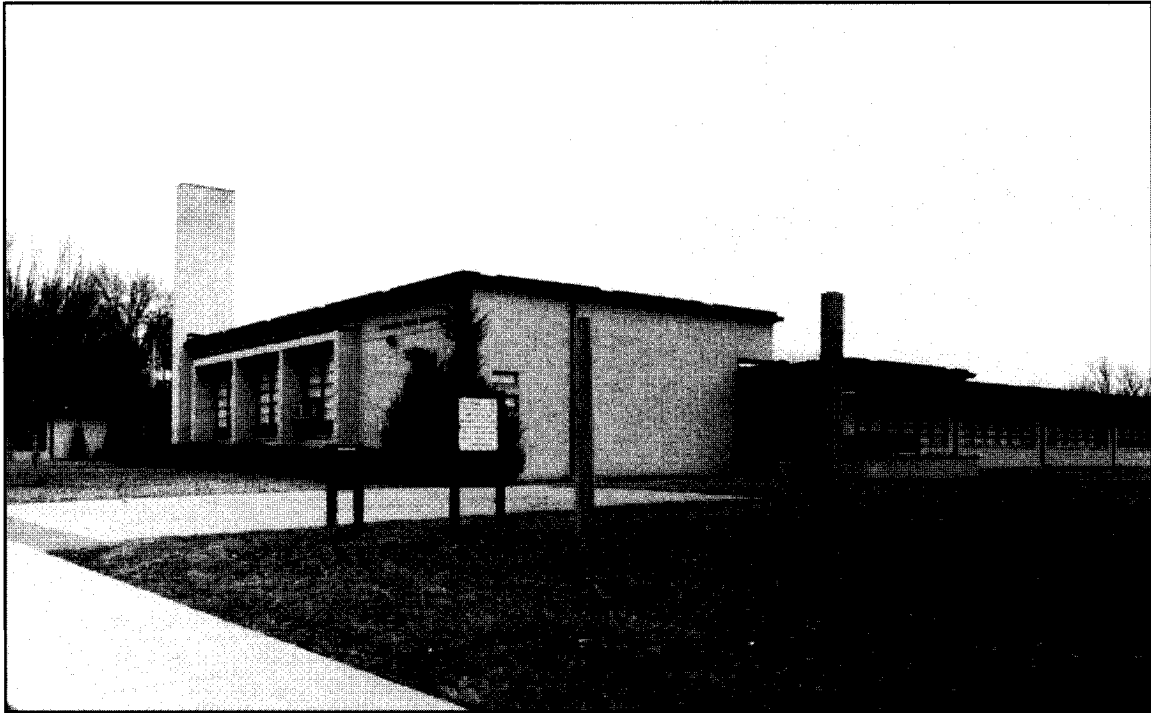
Top: The class of 1898 at the original District No. 92 school, located near the present location of St. Agnes Church. Bottom: The class of 1908 at the building leased from the Schleicher Family at the Shawnee Indian Mission site. Pictures courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society, were donated to the Society by Mrs. Florence Yulich.



The Roesland School - c, 1925

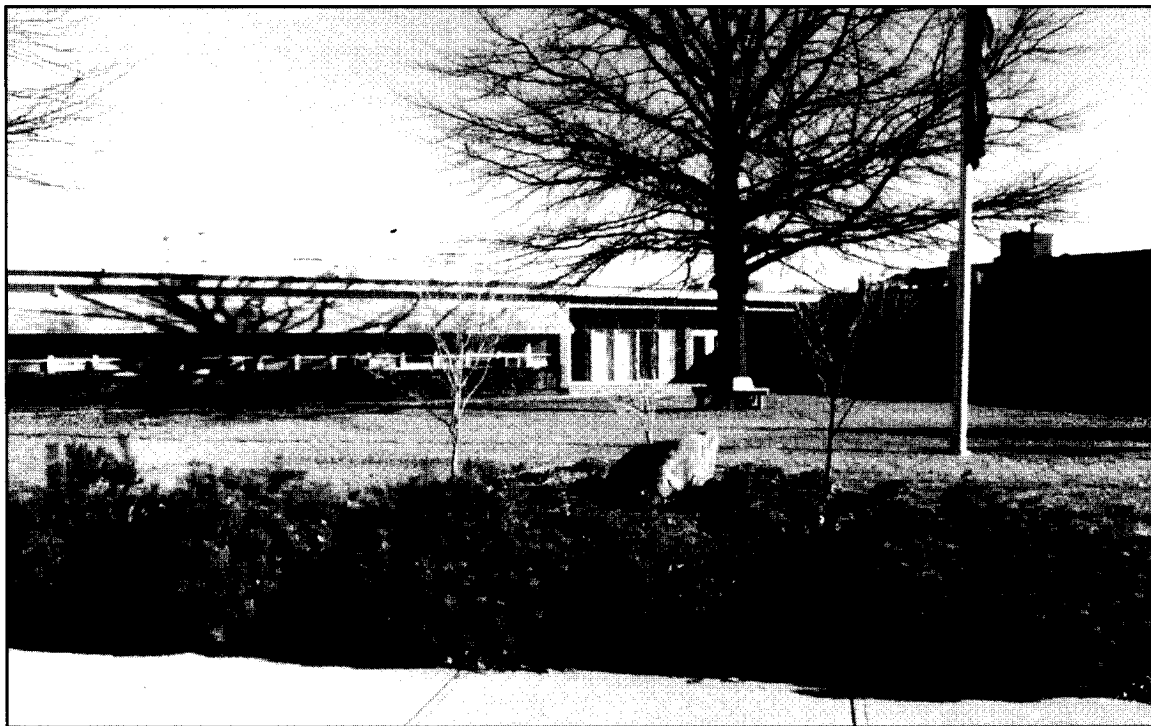


The Roesland School - 1995



The Roeland Park School

Constructed 1951



The Skyline School

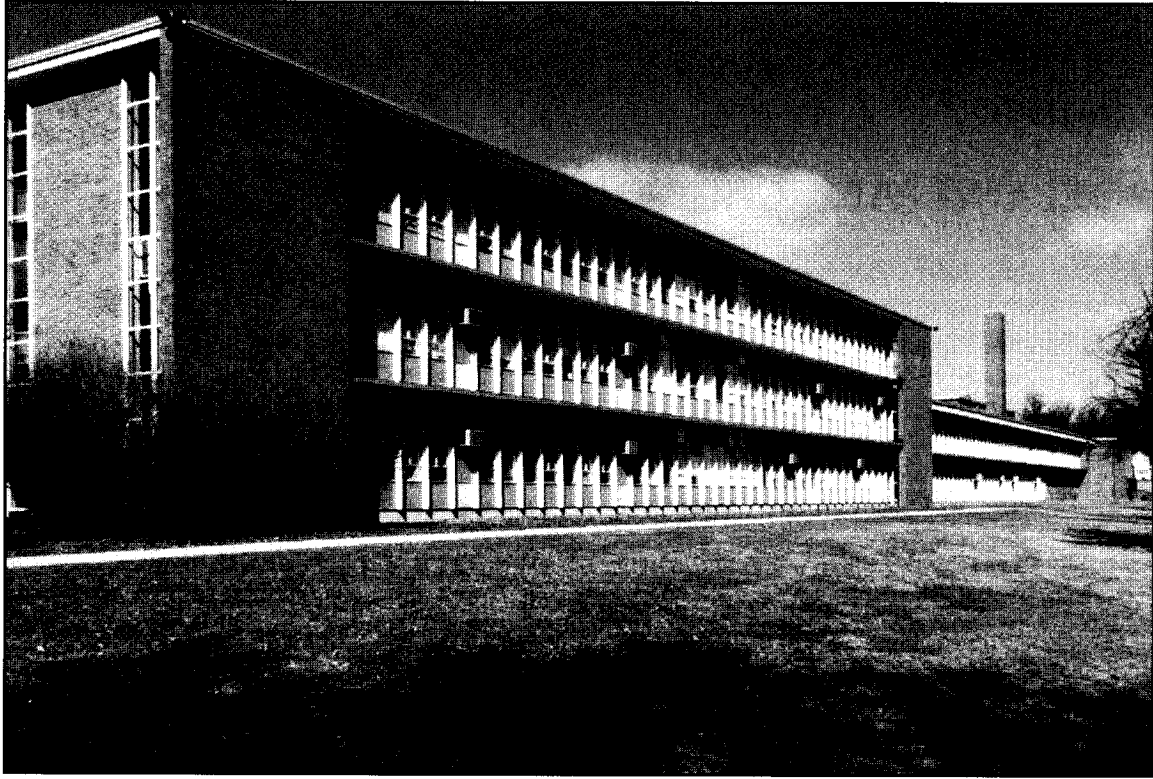
Constructed 1953. It was used as a special education facility from 1975 to 1982; and as the City of Roeland Park Community Center since 1985.



St. Agnes Catholic School
Constructed in 1948



Bishop Miege High School
Constructed 1958 by the St. Agnes Parish



Old Mission Junior High School - Constructed in 1955.

Its use as a Junior High or Middle School was discontinued in 1980. It now is used for special purposes and as offices for the music and art departments of District No 512.