

The History Corner

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Discussion about Closing the North Shore Elementary School

It has been over a century now since the first schoolhouse was built in our community. From those early beginnings until the present day at least 18 schools have provided educational opportunities to the children of Alden, Duluth, and Normanna Townships. Over that period, the schools of our community have not just served as centers for learning but have also been the focus of community activity and a force for community identity. Schools and churches, along with such events as dances, barn raisings, community baseball games, seasonal celebrations, and in more recent times, Scouts, 4-H and soccer are the type of things that have held us all together and have created for us a sense of community, a sense of place.

Sadly, we are now at a point in time when that may all change. Our last school, **North Shore Elementary**, is threatened with closure. To some people in our school district the closing of North Shore seems to be no big deal, after all its "just a school". Even if that were true, and it is not, the closing of our school, any school, should only be considered after careful reflection. We should not close schools that provide excellent learning environments simply because the decision to do so may be the most convenient one.

In 1974 when **Clover Valley High School** closed much more than just an educational institution was lost to our community. Yet as profound an impact as that closing had on us we soon realized that if we turned our focus towards North Shore Elementary we could still maintain a strong sense of community through the one school that continued to bind us together. Now, over a quarter century later we no longer have another school to turn to, there is no other place to redirect our energies. If we lose North Shore Elementary we will clearly lose much more than "just a school" we will lose our identity as a community and we will lose it forever.

David Smith, Professor of Anthropology at UMD, stated the following in his preface to **Roots in the Past-Seeds for the Future**, "In spite of all the many forces in modern life that cause community to wither away, the North Shore Elementary School still serves to unify the Clover Valley community. If the school were to close, I think it would be a social disaster of incalculable proportions. Closing the school could be the end of community and the end of something humanly very important".

We have faced hard times and difficult decisions in the past and, as a community, have gotten through them. We rebuilt our homes and farms after the Great Fire of 1918, we survived the depression by trading bushels of potatoes for sacks of herring, and we successfully fought off attempts to make our community a landfill site. Now we face a new challenge -- the closing of our school. For the sake of our children and the sake of our community we must do everything we can to make sure we do not allow that to happen.