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Shack marks final days

by Joan T. Monahan

The end of a school year is always a gala occasion for students, perhaps a less joyous date for parents, facing a summer of child-entertainment. The emotions are definitely bittersweet this year, however, for both the students and parents at Shackamaxon School on Martine Avenue in Scotch Plains. June 19 marks the final day of Shackamaxon as a school year. Due to declining enrollments, the Board of Education decided to close Shack, and to reassign its students to McGinn and Coles School next year. It's

principal, Elliott Solomon, will assume a post in the school administration. The school was built in three sections. The first corridor facing Martine Ave. opened in 1951, followed by the multi-purpose room at left rear in 1953. A new addition was added in 1964. The final days have been marked with many special plans and festivities. The PTA Executive Board will host the parents of Shackamaxon at a Farewell Cocktail Party to be held at the Westwood in Garwood tonight at 8:00 p.m., and on Saturday, the student body

will gather for a festive picnic at Brookside Park, with PTA supplying the barbecue meats, beverages, desserts and paper goods, and parents contributing culinary talents in the way of salads. As their final contribution, the students themselves have authored and arranged printing for "Horizons," a literary magazine, which will be entered in the Columbia Press competition. Nostalgia runs rampant at

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Last days of Shackamaxon

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Shack these days. In a final message to the parents, printed in the PTA newsletter, Principal Elliott Solomon reminisced on a decade of Shack life. It's the "little things" that have left an indelible mark, he wrote: "the tear in a mother's eye as her daughter entered

kindergarten for the first time, the confident smile of a five-year old reading a primer story, the determined look of a fourth grader tackling long division, the unrestrained joy of a teaching commenting, 'they understood.'" Peggy Tan, editor of the newsletter, also looked back through the Shack years, as

she researched old PTA newsletters. Some things never change, she noted. Parents are still being warned not to drive in the bus loon, and the Halloween warnings haven't changed in 25 years, she noted. Back in the late 50s, parents were urged to encourage reading and to discourage over-attention to TV!

In 1962, when space was at

a premium, instrumental music was housed in a storeroom along with school supplies, speech testing was conducted in halls, and the nurse's office housed a duplicating machine. The teacher lounge doubled as tutoring center and remedial reading took place in a broom closet. Double sessions were the order of the day for a time in 1963. Now

less than 20 years later, the student-age population renders the school unneeded!

Highlights of the Shack PTA in recent years have been an annual Progressive Dinner and an Arbor Day Plant Sale. The Teachers' Luncheon became a tradition starting in 1974, and in 1975, and the school initiated the After-3 optional enrichment

program for its students, along with the Outdoor Spring Carnival.

Even in its closing year, the PTA did not lag in enthusiasm, supporting a Science Fair with 72 entries and the ambitious "Horizons" literary magazine.

In its final year, Shackamaxon, the smallest school in the district, had the largest PTA enrollment!

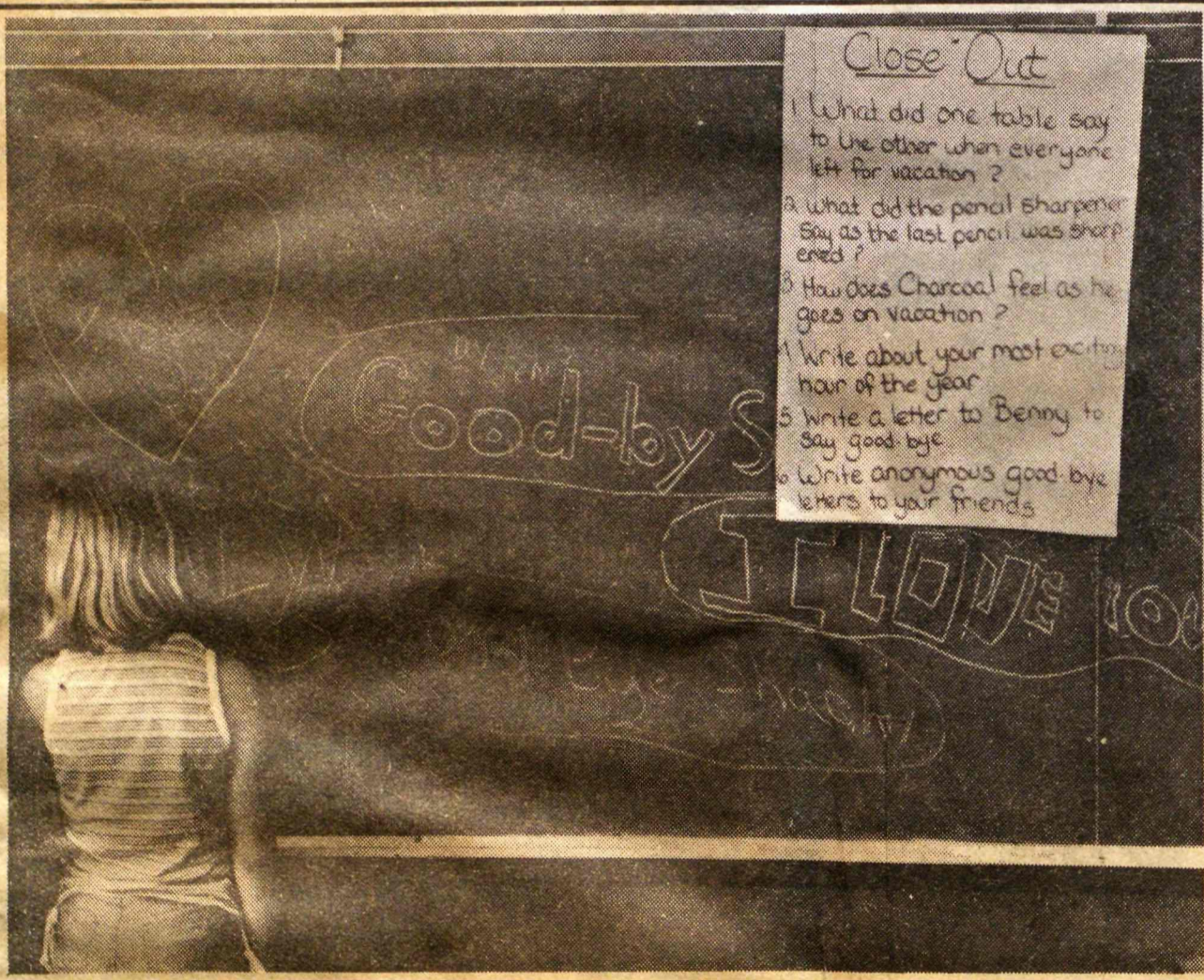
It's been a poignant spring at Shackamaxon, as its students took part in many a "last" - the final spring concert, the final newsletter, the last school pictures, talent show and arbor day planting.

What's the future for Shack? Nobody knows. It was offered for sale in a public auction last month. Although 22 prospective bidders picked up specifications nobody came through with a bid. The Board of Education will decide on the next approach toward sale of the school, which has housed so many local citizens through its 30-year history.

'Death' of school is emotionally trying - A1

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Close Out

1. What did one table say to the other when everyone left for vacation?
2. What did the pencil sharpener say as the last pencil was sharpened?
3. How does Charcoal feel as he goes on vacation?
4. Write about your most exciting hour of the year.
5. Write a letter to Benny to say good-bye.
6. Write anonymous good-bye letters to your friends.

Good-bye
I LOVE YOU

A student at Shackamaxon School adds her blackboard goodbye to the 30-year-old school. Last Friday the school joined three other Scotch Plains-Fanwood district schools that have closed.

Courier-News Photo by Vince Kremer

'Death' of school is emotional experience

By DIANE M. GOLDIE
Courier-News Staff Writer

The flag on the front lawn of Shackamaxon Elementary School flapped at half-staff Friday. It was not lowered because of the death of a student or teacher, but because of the death of the school, whose doors closed for good on Friday. Now Shackamaxon lives only in the memories of the students, teachers and staff who passed through its corridors over the last 30 years.

"It's so sad to think that there will never be any children in this building again after today," said school secretary Jean Uebele. "When that door closes today, this building will just be an empty shell - it will be hard to even drive by it."

This is the second time in 12 years that Uebele has been forced to cut the cord with a school in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school system. She came to Shackamaxon three years ago when LaGrande Elementary School closed. Now she will move on to Terrill Middle School.

"There were stronger feelings when I left LaGrande," Uebele recalled. "It's sad when they close any school, but I'll see all the kids and parents at Terrill."

The school bustled with activity Friday

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School is district's 4th to close in 7 years

When Shackamaxon Elementary School closed its doors for good on Friday, it became the fourth school in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood district to shut down in seven years.

Shackamaxon will join the old School One, Muir School and LaGrande School in retirement. It will also take a prominent place on the Board of Education's growing and troublesome real-estate list.

As in many Central Jersey districts, declining enrollment and skyrocketing costs at each of these schools forced students and teachers to pack up their pencils and books and relocate.

Shackamaxon Principal Elliot Solomon said 540 students attended the school when he took charge in 1972. But enrollment dropped rapidly until it leveled off in the late 1970s. Since 1979, about 340 students have walked through the doors of the Scotch Plains school each September, he said.

The Board of Education voted in April 1980 to close the school after reviewing studies and recommendations from a consulting firm and a 16-member citizen panel.

However, the board advanced the closing date suggested by both groups by a year.

Children who attended Shackamaxon will be sent to Coles and McGinn elementary schools and Terrill Middle School. The entire school system in the district will be revamped so students are in elementary school only through fifth grade instead of sixth, and in middle school only through eighth grade.

"Where they go will be a geographic decision made with neighborhood integrity in mind," Solomon said of the Shackamaxon students. "We like to keep neighborhoods intact."

In the meantime, selling off a growing backlog of real estate has become something of a headache for the district. LaGrande School and the old School One became tangled in litigation as new owners tried to recycle them.

Patricia Ciasulli, the owner of Active Acres Nursery School in Scotch Plains, bought the LaGrande building for \$227,000 last year. But until the school board gives her a clear title to the building's parking lot - which the board claims it owns - the deal is in limbo.

Tax records show that the board owns the lot, but board President Leonia Relly said the board can't document its claim with deed papers.

The board is trying to locate the title through past owners. If that fails, a judge will settle the matter.

The picture is brighter for the old School One. The school board awaits Scotch Plains Planning Board approval being sought by a firm that hopes to build offices and garden apartments on the 2.28-acre site.

Makor Inc. of Union bought the school in 1977 for \$185,000 but failed in 1979 to get the Planning Board to approve a proposal to tear down the school and build 37 garden apartments.

Makor sued the board in state Superior Court, but lost because a judge ruled that Makor did not prove that the apartments "would inherently serve the public good."

Under the new plan, the front part of the school will be renovated as offices and the rear will be torn down to make way for 15 luxury apartments.

- Diane M. Goldie

chilled in. But one youngster cheerfully reminded them that Coles School has playground equipment made of old tires.

"I've been here a whole four years and I expected to go through the sixth grade here," said third-grader Jennifer Reid, pondering her career at the school. "Now they tell me I have to leave after three years. It will really be hard to adjust."

But most of the teachers feel their work with students, parents and administrators has succeeded in softening the transition.

"I started my career here fresh out of college," Camille Berkowicz said as she checked fruit and vegetable riddles for her first-grade class. "I feel like a seven-year phase of my life is over and the community is being split. But I still have to smile for the children."

Third-grade teacher Judy Dresel said she waited until Friday to take down the decorations in her classroom. "I dreaded this day; it's very hard," she said. "On Monday some kids were saying that it was the last week for them at the school, but one said it was actually the first day of a whole new experience. They'll adjust,

teachers gave him a patch representing his personality.

On Friday, Solomon quit and a painting of a PTA gift, that hung on the wall in order to ring the final bell.

"Well, this is the moment," Solomon announced over the intercom. "We wish you the best you can at your new school. We miss you very much. And we love you."

The bell rang. The children sang. Teachers lined up for last-minute chores. And the room was empty except for the words students scratched on a huge brown paper stretched along the wall.

Squeezed next to a list of "Renowned Couples in the Sixth Grade," an introspective student wrote: "It's the same. In time I'll change and the currents of our lives. But in this moment will never fade. And it's unforgettable."