



SCOTCH PLAINS

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THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 1981

25 CENTS

## 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 a

Continued on page 16

16... THE TIMES, JUNE 18, 1981

## Last days of Shackamaxon

Continued from page 1

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 action 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.

# The Courier-News

A Gannett Newspaper Serving Central Jersey / Monday, June 22, 1981 / 722-8800 / 25 Cents

'Death' of school is emotionally trying - A1

showers and thunderstorms early tonight. Strong gusty winds and heavy rains near thunderstorms. Partial clearing late tonight. Partly sunny tomorrow. Visibility three to five miles in haze into tonight, locally one to two miles in showers, improvement to five miles or more late tonight and continuing tomorrow. Average wave heights two to four feet tonight.

### Temperatures

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Record this date:

'81: High 95, Low 68  
'80: High 96, Low 68

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A-10 Monday, June 22, 1981/THE COURIER-NEWS

## School closing emotional

Continued from Page One

during the final four-hour day. Children clapped erasers, cleaned desks, stacked books, rolled up flags, stripped bulletin boards, played a little kickball in the yard, finished up some school projects, presented teachers with gifts and raced around the one-story building securing precious autographs.

Teachers and other staff members stacked books, equipment and supplies that will be shipped to other district schools.

Although students in the district's eight other schools were also packing it in for the year Friday, the children and faculty at "Shack," as it is known in the community, knew they were doing it for keeps.

"It's sad the school is closing and we're not going to see our friends," Amy Graben said, taking a break from the fifth-grade classroom cleanup. Her friend Amy Detgen, whose father attended Shack, also was saddened by the school's closing.

Depending on their ages and addresses, the 340 children will move to Coles or McGinn elementary schools or Terrill Middle School, said Principal Elliott Solomon, who will become director of elementary education for the district.

"Shack is the best," said one young girl watching her classmates play kickball in the school yard.

"Yeah, Shack is better than any other school. It has a better school yard," a boy chimed 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,

they'll be all right."

For some children, the euphoria brought by the school year's last day seemed to overshadow feelings about the school's demise. But head custodian Rudy Baker was visibly shaken as he pushed carts piled with books and supplies through the halls.

"It's a sign that it's the end of neighborhood schools. It's like family here. This is very emotional ... let me get myself together," he said heading for another classroom to keep himself busy.

"I remember when there were about 600 kids here," said Baker, who has been employed in the school district for 21 years and at Shackamaxon for 14 of those years. "I used to have to squeeze into the classrooms when kids were here."

Solomon said parents, teachers, administrators and children have been preparing for the final day all year. "We have tried to make this a very special year for the kids with a science fair, literary magazine and other unique activities."

The school started a pen-pal program in which "Shack" students wrote to future classmates. The youngsters also spent a day visiting the schools they will attend in September.

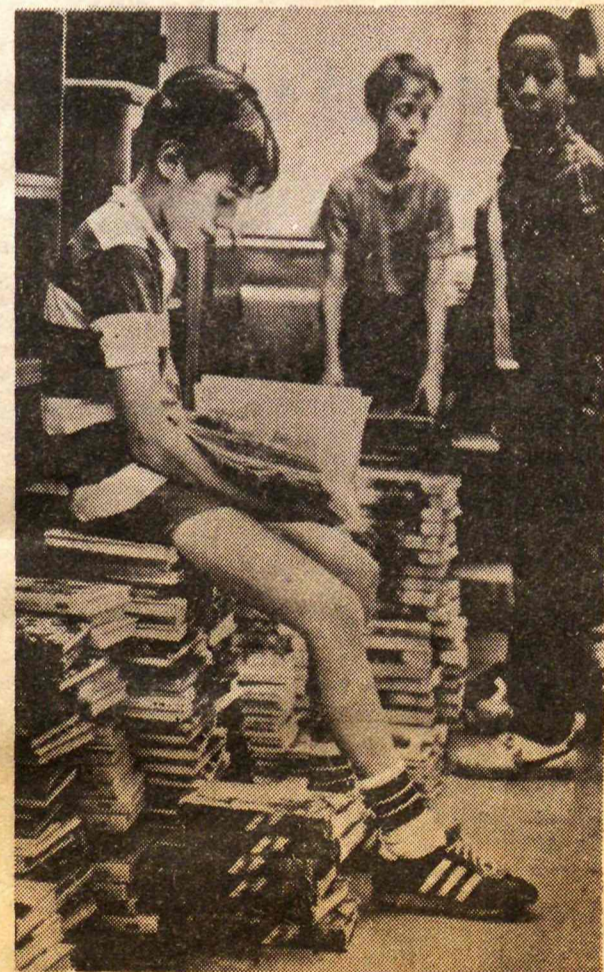
Perhaps because of their efforts, parents and faculty seem to feel the loss more than the children. There were some tears Thursday at a cocktail party the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) hosted. Solomon delivered a speech and teachers gave him a handmade quilt with patches representing each teacher's personality.

On Friday, Solomon brushed passed the quilt and a painting of Shackamaxon, also a PTA gift, that hung on his office wall in order to ring the final bell at 12:30 p.m.

"Well, this is the magic moment," Solomon announced over the public-address system. "We wish you well. Do the best you can at your new schools. We'll miss you very much. And we love you very much."

The bell rang. The children dashed into summertime. Teachers lingered, doing last-minute chores. And the halls were empty except for the words of former students scratched on a huge sheet of brown paper stretched along a corridor wall.

Squeezed next to a list of "The Most Renowned Couples in the Sixth Grade," an introspective student wrote: "It isn't ever the same. In time I'll change and you and the currents of our lives. But the image of this moment will never fade. And you are unforgettable."



Courier-News Photo By Vince Kremer  
Fifth-grader James Siffer takes a reading break from his book-stacking duties.

## ...s 4th to clos

the board advanced the closing date suggested by a year.

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

They go will be a geographic decision made to preserve neighborhood integrity in mind," Solomon said of Shackamaxon students. "We like to keep neighborhood schools."

Meanwhile, 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 a litigation as new owners tried to recycle them. LaGrande School, the owner of Active Acres Nursery in Scotch Plains, bought the LaGrande building for the last year. But until the school board gives her the go-ahead to the building's parking lot - which the board owns - the deal is in limbo.