A Community That Saved a School  
by: Bill Sauers  

During the 1920s and ’30s Greece experienced an increase in population, especially in the Dewey-Stone area. Among that increase were very many Catholic families; so in 1926 St. Charles Borromeo School on Dewey Avenue opened with a planned enrollment of 250 students. By 1938, with some modifications, the school had eight rooms and an enrollment of 450 students.  

On Holy Thursday 1938, the school children were sent home early to start their Easter break. Later that afternoon, a fire alarm was turned in at 5:33 p.m. Barnard Fire Dept. was the first on the scene, soon joined by North Greece Fire Company along with Braddock’s Heights and the City of Rochester Hose Company 24. By midnight, the flames were out. All that remained of the 12-year-old school were the walls and portions of the roof. The adjacent church, however, was saved.  

The damage was estimated to be $22,000 and although insurance would cover most of the loss of the building, where would the money come from to pay for the books, supplies and furniture the children would need? Soon donations began to arrive.  

Their School” became their slogan. A campaign headquarters was set up in the Barnard School and over 250 volunteer workers started the task of raising the needed money for the school. Within 10 days $9,138 (more than $165,000 in today’s money) was raised with the expectation of more in weeks to come. According to the Greece Press “the campaign was the first of its kind ever conducted in the Town of Greece and caused widespread comment throughout Western New York.”  

The school was rebuilt and opened in time for the next school year with a formal dedication on Sunday, September 11th, 1938 with Bishop James Kearney officiating and Sheriff Albert Skinner cutting the ribbon.  

In the years to come, the school would grow to over 1,000 students, and St. Charles Borromeo Parish for a time would become the largest in the Rochester Diocese and eventually the oldest continuously run school building in the Town of Greece. The school closed in 2008.  

We should all be proud of those citizens who helped save that school. As one newspaper reported, “they were Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Republicans and Democrats.” They were true citizens of their community. Their story may have been forgotten over the years, yet the legacy of their generosity still stands today in our community. Now, we are left to wonder what will happen to that empty school building in the years to come.  

For a complete history of the St. Charles Borromeo Parish go to https://www.stcharlesgreece.org/about/history/  

NOTE: This is an edited version of a story that originally appeared in the Greece Post on Feb 21, 2008.