

# New middle school offered 'unique open area'

By David Lias

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In 1966, when the "old" Vermillion High School on Church Street was razed as students began attending a brand new high school on East Main, school officials still had a problem.

It was struggling to find an appropriate home for its middle school students.

Beginning in the 1920s, when a new addition was built on to the "old" Vermillion High School, middle school students were housed in the older portion of that building.

At some point, however, that space evidently became inadequate.

In 1958, school administrators turned to the "old" Jolley elementary school which was emptied in 1954 when the present-day Jolley elementary school was constructed. According to the Aug. 28, 1958 *Plain Talk*, the old building was remodeled and included rooms for home economics and industrial arts.

The transfer of seventh and eighth grade students to this newly-remodeled space was designed to relieve "an overcrowded situation" in the "old" high school building, according to the *Plain Talk*.

This wasn't a permanent solution to housing middle school students in the Vermillion School District, however.

On February 10, 1970, a bond issue election to provide funding for the construction of a new middle school in Vermillion received record voter turnout. Over 1,700 patrons of the Vermillion School District cast ballots in the election, and approved the issuance of \$1.4 million in bonds to build the present Vermillion Middle School.

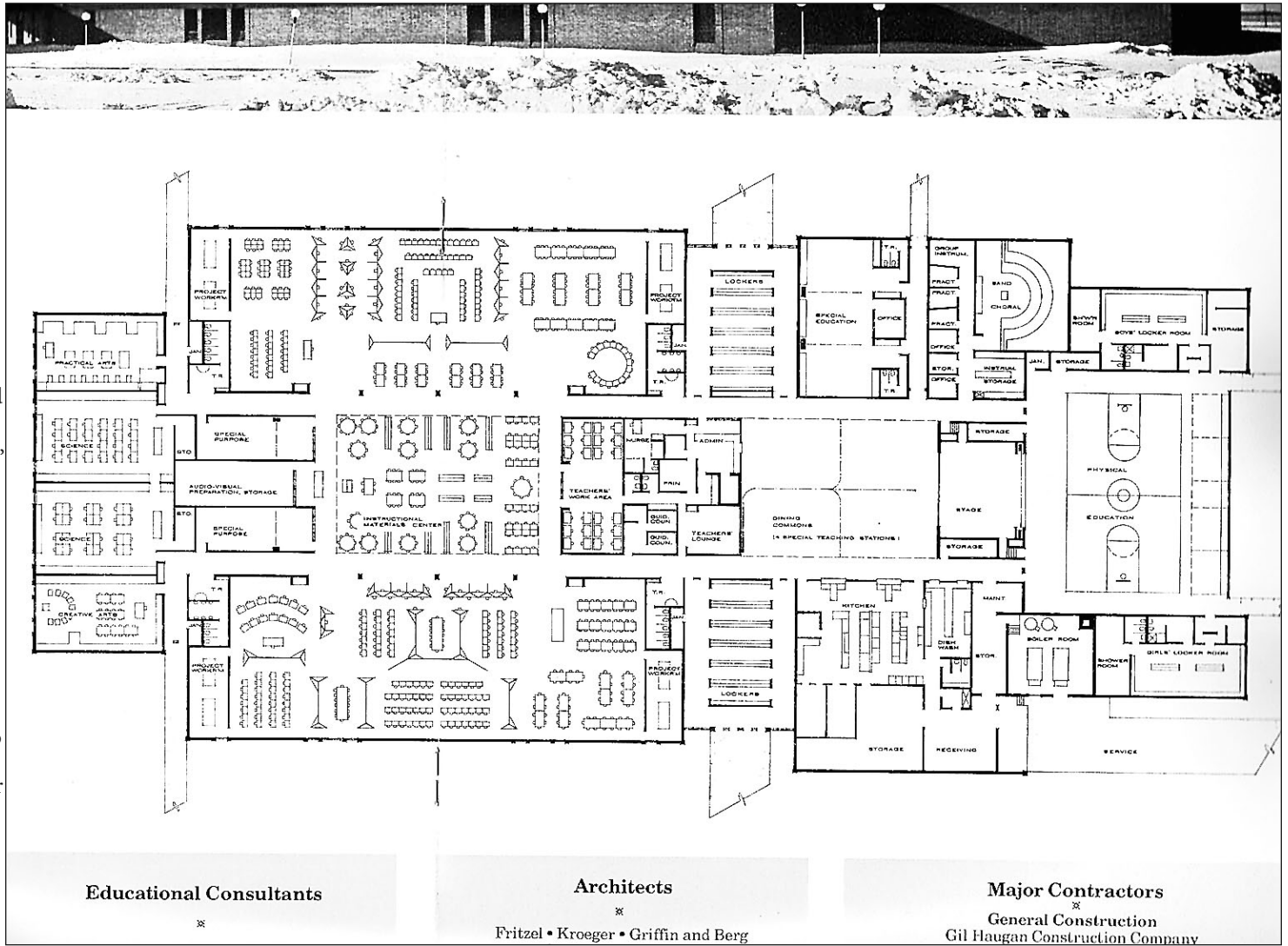
A total of 1,056 voters favored passage of the bond issue, while 658 voted no, according to the *Vermillion Plain Talk*.

At the time, the "new" high school building, which began holding classes in 1966, was often called the junior - senior high school. It evidently soon didn't have enough room to house all of the junior high and senior high grades.

The March 12, 1970 *Plain Talk* includes a report of a school board decision to house the seventh grade in the "new" Jolley School gymnasium while the middle school was being constructed.

It was an option met with opposition from some parents in the school district. The April 16, 1970 *Plain Talk* reported that at a school board meeting earlier that week, attended by a few parents, "serious opposition was voiced against housing the seventh grade in the Jolley School gymnasium. Board member Jim Jorgenson reported many calls and other contacts from parents opposing the plan because of the lack of facilities for Physical Education. But when asked if any of those opposed had offered alternative plans, Jorgenson replied that those who voiced opposition felt that it was the board's problem.

"The basis for the discussion among the parents shifted from the 'where' to the 'why.' Several raised questions about the value of the Team Teaching method, the reason for the move," the *Plain Talk* reported. One parent asked if this style of teaching didn't actually lead to a breakdown in discipline because of the freedom allowed a student. Another felt that the system was poor because of the lack of signs of accomplishment.



Students were greeted by what was perhaps one of the most uniquely-designed school buildings in Vermillion's history when the present-day Vermillion Middle School opened in the fall of 1972. The *Plain Talk* described the core area of the building as a "large Instructional Materials center, surrounded by 18 open classrooms and two science laboratories."

"The general sentiment of the board and those present was in favor of this teaching method and reported that in contacts with other schools and administrators it is becoming a widely accepted method," according to the *Plain Talk* report. After this discussion on teaching methods the board returned to the 'where' aspect of the question and finally decided to authorize Superintendent Ashbaugh to discuss renting space from local churches and then move the kindergarten and three Special Education classes from the old Jolley school into these rented quarters."

In August, 1970, the school board agreed to set Sept. 15, 1970 as the date to sell the bonds to pay for construction of the present middle school. The board planned to let bids for the building project later that month, with the goal of having the new building ready for occupancy for the 1972-73 school year.

What was constructed was perhaps one of the most uniquely-designed school buildings in Vermillion's history. It accommodated 800 students in grades five through eight. The *Plain Talk*

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