

## Bremer School, Minneapolis



THE WAXING AND WANING of Fredrika Bremer School, a castle-like structure on Lowry Avenue in North Minneapolis, mirrors the fortunes of the neighborhood it still anchors.

The 1880s was the decade of Minneapolis's greatest growth. Jobs were plentiful in the city's flour and lumber mills. The population jumped from 47,000 to 129,000, fueled by expanding railroads and the immigrants they carried. This increase led to the construction of 28 new schools, including Bremer. North Minneapolis was then a district of German and Scandinavian workingmen and their families. Naming the school for the Swedish novelist, traveler, and champion of women's rights (1801–65) was a nod to the city's growing Scandinavian population.

When Bremer opened in 1887 with about 70 students in grades one to three, some speculated it was too far from established neighborhoods to attract enough children. But the sawmills were moving north along the Mississippi River from St. Anthony Falls. New construction and neighborhood formation in North Minneapolis virtually paralleled the rise and fall of the sawmill and lumber business between 1880 and 1920. Bremer soon expanded.

The original two-story Chaska brick schoolhouse with limestone Romanesque details had eight rooms. In 1897 Bremer doubled, gaining four rooms in each wing on



*Fredrika Bremer School, 1214 Lowry Avenue North, Minneapolis, about 1915 (MHS COLLECTIONS)*

the east and west elevations. In 1909 eight more rooms and an auditorium were added. Construction of a two-story brick "industrial arts" section in 1916 was the last expansion.

Bremer's enrollment peaked in 1917 with 1,379 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Two years later the last sawmill in Minneapolis closed. Middle-school grades were soon dropped, but Bremer continued to serve the neighborhood into the 1970s. By the end of that decade, enrollment had declined citywide, and plans to close numerous schools, including Bremer, were announced.

Northside citizens and community groups rallied to save the building. That effort included getting Bremer, one of the city's few intact nineteenth-century schoolhouses, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

Bremer School closed in 1979. In 1984 its 1909 and 1916 additions were demolished and its two oldest sections were converted to condominiums, which are still operating. One of the first to buy a unit in Historic Bremer was a former student.

—LAURA WEBER

*Sources:* 1984 HABS documentation; newspaper clippings in folder "Schools: (Frederika [sic]) Bremer Elementary (1877- )," Minneapolis Collection, Minneapolis Central Library; Garneth O. Peterson and Carole Zellie, *North Minneapolis: Minneapolis Historic Context Study*, Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission and Minneapolis Planning Department, 1998.

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