

Cherry Lawn School: Former Local Boarding School, Founded by Immigrants, Ended by Fires

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Before Cherry Lawn Park became a park, it was the campus of a boarding school that was founded as the result of one tragedy and ended after a series of others.

Dr. Fred Goldfrank, a physician in New York, founded the school in 1915 after his daughter Beatrice was stricken with a severe case of polio, leaving her unable to walk. Goldfrank abandoned his medical practice and decided to found a school that catered to her and other children with similar special needs.

His home in Stamford served as the school's original campus, with his backyard the students' playground.

By 1919, the school population had quickly grown, so Cherry Lawn School moved to a new 28-acre campus in Darien, where the school had classes for grades 6 to 12.

In 1933, Goldfrank died. Boris and Christina Bogolovsky, a couple teaching at the school, became headmasters.

Before teaching, Boris Bogolovsky had served in the Russian Provisional Government, which had taken power in the February 1917 Russian Revolution. Christina Bogoslovsky was born in Sweden and came to the America for doctoral studies at Columbia University.

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Under the new headmasters, the school quickly grew, expanding its programs and facilities. The couple also moved Sweden's exhibition building at the 1939 New York World Fair to the campus, where it served as a dormitory.

The school's extracurricular offerings expanded to include numerous competitive and recreational sports, as well as a variety of clubs. At the same time, the school also began to cater to children without special needs.

Cherry Lawn began to encounter greater difficulties during World War II. Due to the wartime draft and labor needs in defense plants, many teachers left the school.

As a result, the headmasters had to hire many new teachers, some of whom were later found to be ill-suited for teaching. One was let go for telling inappropriate stories to children, while another was fired for bursting into a rage at his students.

Difficulties were exacerbated when Dr. Bogoslovsky left to work for the United Nations in San Francisco as a Russian translator, although he returned in 1959 as head of the school's science department.

After World War II, the school dropped grades 6-8. Cherry Lawn School returned to its normal mode of operation, though problems with the school's buildings became more frequent.

In 1961 one of the dormitories burned and caused \$70,000 worth of damage. On Dec. 8, 1966, a fire in a science laboratory caused by an accident with a Bunsen burner resulted in about \$20,000 in damage.

In 1968, a member of the maintenance staff set a fire on the stage in the gym, hoping to rescue the students from the school and be recognized as a hero. The plot backfired, killing him and damaging the gym, theater, the dining halls, and the dormitories.

After a fire in the infirmary in 1972 killed a custodian, the lengthening series of fires made it difficult for the school to get insurance. Parents became concerned about the safety of the school, causing a drop in enrollment.

So the last director of Cherry Lawn, Ludwig Christian Zuber, was forced to close the school down in 1972. The town government bought the school's property, converting the campus into Cherry Lawn Park. The Darien Historical Society has since compiled a detailed history of the school.