

# In The Gymnasium Avon: Where The School Board Meets

## Controversy Has the Town In an Uproar

By EVAN CRAWLEY

Avon is known as the little town with the big New York Central railroad yards.

It also is known for the battle between its school board and the high school principal.

The community is in an uproar over the fact that the high school principal-superintendent, John Garrard, was, in effect, fired by the school board. His contract for the 1963-64 school year, "was not renewed" for the first time in recent days, these things have happened:

A 16-YEAR-OLD Avon High School junior girl lost her date to the prom because she was not "on the right side" in the dispute.

A HOUSEWIFE burst into uncontrollable tears while describing the virtues of Principal Garrard to a reporter.

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS whose previous interest in the law was confined to traffic statutes are boning up on the legal intricacies of school administration to see what they can do to help their principal.

THE SCHOOL BOARD is transferring its regular meetings to the gymnasium to accommodate spectators.

TELEPHONE numbers of most school board members have been changed to withheld because of abusive calls coming at all hours of the day and night.

Although it is possible to get all shades of opinion in this dispute, it takes only a few minutes in town to grasp the general mood.

AVON SENTIMENT appears to be on the side of Principal-Superintendent Garrard, both within the student body and among adults. His supporters include even older persons who have no children in school and who wouldn't know Garrard if he walked in their front door.

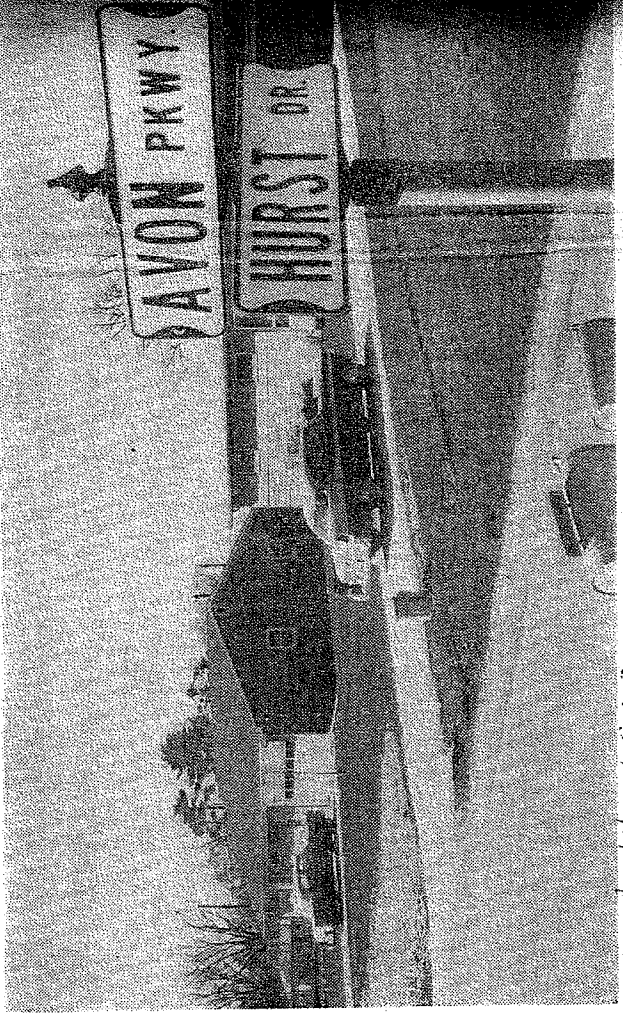
In a 31-home poll in Avon which covered both a subdivision of newer residents and an older neighborhood of near life-long residents, The Times found:

SEVENTEEN families stated they supported Garrard unreservedly and they did not believe the reasons cited by the school board for his dismissal.

TWO FAMILIES said they were neutral inasmuch as they were too new in town to be interested or else they had no children in school.

ONE FAMILY refused all comment on the matter.

ONE FAMILY said it would support the school board if its charges against Garrard were proven true,



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A quiet suburban corner at Avon Parkway and Hurst Dr., in Avon.

otherwise "we're 100 per cent with the principal."

NO FAMILIES had an unqualified opinion in favor of the school board.

Of the 17 families backing Garrard, six had no children in Washington Township schools yet were just as fervent in their support of Garrard as the mother who said she had five children in school.

WHO IS John Garrard, the man around whom the battle swirls?

He is a native of Montezuma, Ind., on the banks of the Wabash in Parke County. He served in the Air Corps in World War II and later was graduated from Indiana State Teachers College.

He came to Avon four years ago as principal and was made superintendent on top of his original post last year.

THE principal superintendent is a talkative intent man with an air of "let's get things-done-now-and-worry-later." In fact it is this attitude which the school board deplored, officially, in its charges against him.

These charges are by now well known. They consist mainly of accusations that Garrard spent money for equipment without the board's knowledge, and that his methods of hiring and firing personnel were at odds with those of the board.

Garrard defended his spending and personnel policy as both legal and known to the board.

One point of the board's charge, which Garrard did not deny, was that there was "a complete breakdown in communications between the board and Garrard."

Members of the school board are Adrian McClain, president; Neff Dykes, Raymond Harris, William Hornaday and Charles Schoen Sr. All but Dykes are long-time residents with deep roots in Avon.

IT IS THE deep-root idea which some residents think has a lot to do with the current dispute.

Avon has a large population of new residents in subdivisions. The subdivisions reach well out into the township and the number of persons living there almost matches the number who have lived in the area all their lives.

Last year, when a wishful residents voted in a referendum, Henricks Circuit Judge Richard Croover, a Republican, appointed the five members.

After the first flurry of civic interest, public contact with what the board was doing died. The board met virtually in secret—for the reason only that no one bothered to show up at its announced meetings.

Then the board, which since has admitted it had no idea of Garrard's popularity, acted to dismiss him. Three on the board have indicated that had they known the citizens' feeling toward the official, he might not have been relieved of his job.

The Garrard case is an example of how public apathy can lead to a violation of the public will, and how a supposed wrong cannot be righted without too much loss of face on the part of one of the opposing parties.

IT ALSO HAS been suggested that many citizens thought all along that the appointed board did not represent a true cross-section of Washington Twp.

Now, the school dispute has given the never-resident of the board, and Dykes, member, said he was convinced that board action was based on sound evidence.

"Garrard defended his board's reasons very well but the board stands on its feet," Dykes said. "Any further board action would bring on just the rebuttal and charges we go on for five years."

Except to retails published reasons for newing Garrard's conduct board members are reluctant to discuss the case.

Dykes said, "the whole fair is unfortunate. It is important to try to get town back to normal. Avon has been hurt badly."

THE CITIZENS' group knows that the original issue, to have Garrard retained as principal-superintendent, is a dead issue.

Garrard is leaving Avon, regardless of what happens. "If the school board resigns in a body tomorrow," he said, "I'm still leaving. Things have gone too far, too many things have been said. I am grateful for the citizens' and pupils' support on my behalf, but things can't be the same here now."

Garrard's pupils have refused to admit their principal is leaving. Their devotion is in some cases fanatic.

"Mr. Garrard cleaned up more Ron Martin, a leader both in the sign-petting campaign and in the brief pupil sit-down strike which first called attention to the dispute several weeks ago.

"Before Mr. Garrard came here there wasn't any discontent," young Martin said. "The bad kids ran the place and a good kid didn't have a chance. He straightened it

out in a hurry and made school out of it again."

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PAID BY R.E.H.

Patricia Jones

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