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Neighborhood teen-agers watch as Sackett Elementary School burns.

Dreams perish in Sackett school fire

By David Beard

Fire destroyed part of a closed 93-year-old West Side school yesterday afternoon, sending a pall of gloom over a neighborhood that sought to turn the school into an athletic center.

More than 100 Cleveland fire fighters fought the blaze at Sackett Elementary School, 3449 Sackett Ave., as brown-orange smoke billowed over the Clark-Fulton neighborhood and the near West Side. Damage was estimated at \$100,000.

A number of former pupils, some who

attended the school more than 50 years ago, stood by and saw their memories turned to ashes.

The fire started less than two hours after arsonists torched an abandoned East Side junior high school.

Sackett, closed in 1978 because of declining enrollment, was recently named as the site for a West Side branch of the Boys Clubs of Cleveland Inc.

Neighborhood groups, who wanted an athletic center for area teen-agers, had worked two years for their dream.

"We're hoping it might be salvageable but I don't know," said community organizer Liz Hernandez, who trailed firemen for information on the burning building. "It does look good."

"I feel terrible," said Elving Otero, director of the Boys Club. "From all the reports we've gotten, it doesn't look like a good situation for us."

Otero will determine if the rest of the building, which includes classrooms and a gymnasium, can be saved.

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