

# Weakened Roof Joists Close Franklin School

By **ROGER AMSDEN**

Union Leader Correspondent

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**FRANKLIN** - Officials have been forced to close Bessie Rowell Elementary School because its roof joists apparently were weakened by the winter's heavy snow.

Officials said yesterday that the building will not be able to reopen this school year.

Superintendent of Schools Edgar Melanson said the 244 third and fourth-grade pupils at the 37 year old school will attend classes in the vacant St. Mary Elementary School starting Tuesday, when they return from vacation.

Melanson said the damage to the 2-by-14-inch wooden joists was discovered Tuesday when school custodians and the building supervisor removed ceiling tiles while trying to learn why several ceilings were sagging.

The Cracks are a ½ inch wide in places and run for several feet along the 26-foot joists, he said.

Crews from Meridian Construction of Laconia were called to the school late Tuesday to begin shoring up the roof in those rooms. The work continued yesterday as officials kept an eye on forecasts that called for a major snowstorm today.

Loran Belida, chief architect for the H.L. Turner Group Inc., an engineering firm that has been working with the school district to develop a long-range capital improvement program for building repairs *said the roof could have collapsed if the damage had gone unnoticed.*

The sagging tiles were first noticed by Gil Manning of the schools custodial staff last Wednesday. Building Supervisor Roger Hutchinson decided an inspection should be conducted during vacation, when the classrooms would be empty.

Belida said the roof, which is not steeply pitched, has ice dams in several locations and a pond of water in the center. That could have been a factor, he said, but he emphasized that the damage could be the result of an accumulation of problems over the years.

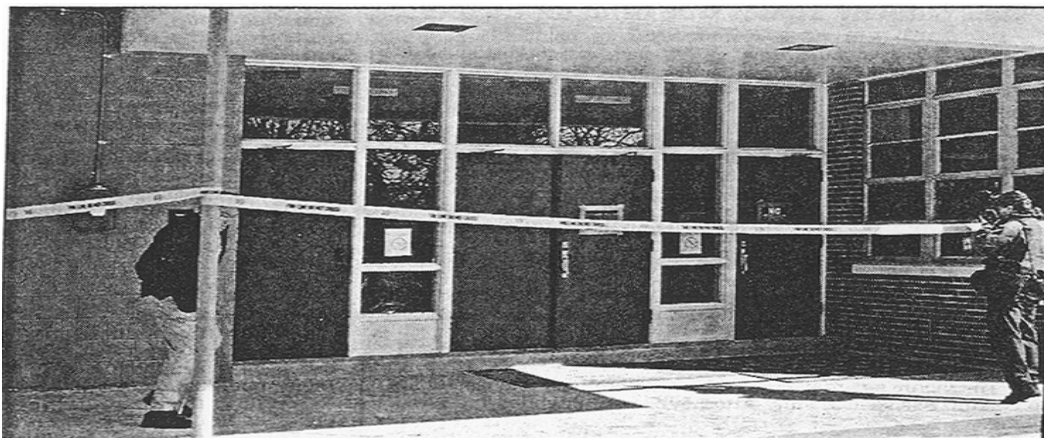
*Melanson said the practice of running snowblowers on them had been discontinued for some time because of the damage that resulted to the membrane, causing numerous leaks.*

Kathy Bateson, the district's business administrator, said the monthly rent for St. Mary Elementary School is \$14,166. That school closed two years ago because of declining enrollment, but the building was used for four months last year by the Winnisquam Regional School District, which rented the space when *Union School in Northfield was closed because of safety code violations.*

The Turner Group has recommended a \$6.6 million program of building improvements to the School Board, but repairs to the Rowell roof were not among those recommendations

Belida said recommendations were developed for readily apparent problems, not those that would not have come to light without a thorough structural analysis.

He said the type of construction was common 30 or 40 years ago, and Melanson said many school districts in the Northeast will no doubt be taking a close look at similar buildings to see if they are experiencing the same problems.



**LOCKED UP** — Yellow tape marks off the locked doors of Bessie Rowell Elementary School in Franklin yesterday. The school can't be used because its roof joists are cracked. Roger Amsden Photo