

ELK GROVE CITIZEN
HISTORY HAPPENED HERE
The History of Our Schools
EGUSD – ABOUT TO CELEBRATE ITS 50TH
March 21, 2008
by Elizabeth Pinkerton

With the 50th anniversary of our school district coming up in 2009, it is a good time to review the stories behind the schools. The names of our schools reflect the history of this area, and from them you can learn the stories of the people who created them.

The very first school in South Sacramento County was a private *kindergarten* established in the 1840s by Mrs. Martin Murphy in her home near the Cosumnes River and today's Highway 99. Next was the first Rhoads School at Sloughhouse that was built by Jared Sheldon. Then, in 1853 we had the distinction of having the first public school in Sacramento County. This was our very own San Joaquin School at the intersection of Grant Line Road and today's Highway 99, known first as the Monterey Trail and later as Upper Stockton Road.

Until 1893 when Elk Grove Union High School was built, there were only elementary districts—and even though most students did not, they could attend through grade 10. The new high school was called a *union* high school because it served students in grades 9-12 for the elementary districts of the area.

Nearly half a century ago the Elk Grove schools unified and all the schools came under one jurisdiction. The official date was July 1, 1959. Florin, Elk Grove, Pleasant Grove, Sierra Enterprise, Dillard, Franklin, and Cosumnes River joined Elk Grove High School as one unified school district. There were only 3,000 students in the new district at the time, and today there are more than 60,000!

The first superintendent of the new district was Dr. George Kibby. He was followed by Glenn Houde, and then, Robert Trigg, Dave Gordon, and now Dr. Steve Ladd. This is very unique in educational systems for a school district to have had only five superintendents in 49 years, but it likely one of the reasons why the district has been so successful.

The growth has continued since those first months of 1959, and in the past half century, there has been steady growth. Not long ago, district schools were enrolling as many as 3,000 students a year and new schools were being opened regularly. Today though, for the first time since unification, enrollment is not increasing. Most predications though are that that this is a temporary lull. We must remember that this is a district of 320 square miles, and there are still many acres of farmland in south Sacramento County.

The Elk Grove school district is rich in both cultural and linguistic diversity, and the schools represent the world with more than 70 different languages spoken by its students and their families who have come here from more than 90 countries. Included in the boundaries are the entire city of Elk Grove, portions of the cities of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento, and large chunks of Sacramento County.

The district is strong academically, and there has been extremely stable leadership at all levels from the Board of Education to district management and at school sites and with employee groups, parents, and the community. Elk Grove continues to be considered a leading district in the state of California and in the nation.

Here are the stories behind the names of Elk Grove's schools. The schools are listed from the oldest site to the newest.

1844 - Mrs. Murphy's kindergarten - (164 years ago year!)

Mrs. Murphy's school was somewhat of a *home school*. It was open for neighboring children as well as the Murphy children. Although it was not a formal school and it was not a public school, it was Elk Grove's first place of education. The Murphys lived north of the Cosumnes River and west of what is now

Highway 99. At the time that road was known as the Monterey Trail, and it led from New Helvetia (Sutter's Fort) to the Mexican capital of Monterey. The Murphy Ranch played a prominent role in the history of the early days of California. The *Incident at Murphy's Corral* was a defining moment in California history and one of the first steps in California breaking away from Mexico and becoming a state.

1849 - Cosumnes River Elementary School - (celebrating its 159th birthday this year!)

This is the smallest elementary school in Elk Grove Unified, but it must also be credited with being the oldest school because it stands near the site of the original Rhoads School. That school was built by Jared Dixon Sheldon near the Cosumnes River in the 1840s. It was replaced by the *new* Rhoads School in 1872, and that's the little school that sits today in Elk Grove Park. In the fast paced gold days when miners filled the banks of the Cosumnes, the miners also to it that their children had schools to attend. All of these schools were in the Sloughhouse-Rancho Murieta area which was where the gold was. Sebastopol, Katesville, and Live Oak ceased to exist after 1883, but Michigan Bar, Wilson, and Stone House operated until 1947 when they merged as the Cosumnes River Elementary School. The Rhoads School closed two years later when the new school was built. The Cosumnes name is believed to come from *kossum*, a Miwok Indian word for salmon.

1854 - Elk Grove Elementary School - (celebrating its 154th birthday this year!)

Elk Grove Elementary, now in north east Elk Grove, is in its fourth location. However, it can be credited with its connection to the first recorded public school in Sacramento County, the San Joaquin School built in 1854. The first school with the name of Elk Grove was built in the 1860s a short distance north of the intersection of the present Elk Grove Boulevard and Highway 99. That building stood on the Foulks Ranch where it was moved and used as a club house for many years. The second Elk Grove school has been a residence for many years. It is north of Wal-Mart on West Stockton Road. The third Elk Grove school, known to many as Elk Grove Grammar School, is the brick building that once housed the school district offices and is now Cosumnes Community Services District. That brick structure was built in 1921 to serve the children from four schools, Elk Grove, San Joaquin, Victory, and Jackson. The Elk Grove Elementary students moved to the present facility in 1992. The name of Elk Grove comes from the town and originally, the Elk Grove Hotel & Stage Stop of 1850. Yes, there was a grove of trees there (now Elk Grove Park), a tule elk were known to have roamed through the grove.

1858 - Prairie Elementary School - (celebrating its 150th birthday this year!)

The present day Prairie School, constructed in 1981, gets its name from the original Prairie School that served the community that grew up around the stage stop called Union House. The road upon which it was located is Franklin Boulevard today, but it was first known as the Monterey Trail, and later as Lower Stockton Road. The school was called East Union for its first four years, but in 1858 it was re-named Prairie. The school served the farm families of the area until 1914 when it merged with the Franklin district. The name is a reminder of the meadowlands and the vast acres of wildflowers that stretched all the way to the Sacramento River. Perhaps it made the first settlers remember the wide prairies they had crossed to get to California.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

- 1. History Happened Here, Book 1-River, Oaks, Gold.**
- 2. History Happened Here, Book 2-Fields, Farms, Schools**
- 3. Images of America-ELK GROVE**

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