

ELK GROVE CITIZEN

HISTORY HAPPENED HERE

The History of Our Schools, part 2

EGUSD – ABOUT TO CELEBRATE ITS 50TH

March 28, 2008

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As an early part of celebrating the coming 50th anniversary of the unification of Elk Grove Unification, I began this series last week to acknowledge the history of Elk Grove's schools. Last week's article covered started with our very first school which was Mrs. Murphy's kindergarten in 1844. I also summarized the rich gold history behind Cosumnes River Elementary (1849), the roots of Elk Grove Elementary (1854), and the first Prairie School of 1858. We continue today with the stories behind more schools.

Those 1850s were busy years around here with gold seekers, farmers getting started, and a variety of other pursuits in the early development of south Sacramento County. There were shifting patterns, and we have very little documentation of what was bringing folks into this area. But we do have a record of the schools and that tells us where families were living. Most activity took place along Upper and Lower Stockton Roads (today's Highway 99 and Franklin Boulevard), the Jackson Highway, Grant Line Road, and Bandeen Road, known now as Dillard Road. When you look at a map you can easily see those main areas of transportation. Florin came along later when the railroad came through, and Elk Grove High started, and that was pretty much what it was until later in the 20th century.

1859 - Sierra Enterprise School, like many others, came about from district mergers when schools closed because of declining enrollments when families moved from one place to another to find jobs. The first school in this northeast portion of the Elk Grove district was Excelsior School that was built in 1859 on busy Jackson Road and Excelsior Road during the gold days. Originally called Bailey's, the school was named Excelsior in 1863, and it merged with Enterprise School on Hedge Avenue in 1946. The Enterprise School goes back to 1865, and the Sierra School (also on Hedge) came into existence in 1912. That area's agriculture shifted to grapes and strawberries in the 20th century, and many immigrant families from Japan came there in those years. The little country schools were quite crowded prior to World War II, but that changed dramatically when the Japanese families were all sent to internment camps in 1942. Sierra and Enterprise joined together in 1950, and a new school was built at the present site in 1955. Although the original Sierra and Enterprise schools stood for many years along Hedge Avenue, one to the south of the present school and the other north, only Enterprise is there today, but it has been converted to other uses. The Sierra School was torn down in 1995, and unfortunately, hardly anyone remembers the Excelsior School.

1859 - Franklin School also dates back to 1859 when the district was formed. Over the years, Franklin absorbed all the little schools in the southwest part of the Elk Grove district: Point Pleasant (1866 to 1928), Goethe (a district formed in 1910 that never did build a school), Mokelumne (1861 to 1949), and Prairie/East Union (1856 to 1914). The school was organized as Franklin Academy, an ambitious plan to serve all the area's farm students including those of high school age. The name came from the Franklin House, a stage stop built by Andrew George whose mother's maiden name had been Franklin. He had not intended to name the town after her, for he preferred that the town was Georgetown after himself. But over the years the residents seemed to

like the name of Franklin, and when they wanted a post office, they found that there already was the town of Georgetown in the foothills. We continue to call the place Franklin today as it has been for many years.

1861 - Pleasant Grove School is the lone survivor of three sister schools: Union in 1861 that was between Grant Line Road and the Cosumnes River; Pleasant Grove, known first as Mt. Pleasant and then as San Joaquin #4 (1859 to 1863); and Reese, built in 1884. The present Pleasant Grove School was built in 1952 right next to the old cemetery on the quiet country road in the Sheldon area. The Reese School on Bradshaw merged with Pleasant Grove, so for a time it was referred to as Pleasant Grove-Reese (PGR for short). When the David Reese School in Florin opened in 1966, the name reverted back to Pleasant Grove. It is the original Reese School, now at its third site that you can see at Heritage Park in Elk Grove Park. The school was built on the Reese family ranch on Bradshaw Road (between Calvine and Gerber). After it closed, the building was moved to a ranch off Grant Line where it was used as a cookhouse. The school will be restored by the Elk Grove Historical Society. The Reese family was prominent in the development of Florin, particularly with the fruit industry. David Reese, one of the founders of the Florin Fruit Growers Association, was sheriff of Sacramento County in 1902. The present David Reese School opened in 1966.

1865 - C.W. Dillard School is the only Elk Grove school south of the Cosumnes River. It is the combination of three country schools dating back to 1865. The first school in what we now call the Wilton area was the Davis School that was created in 1865 and named for relatives of Jefferson Davis. The Lee School was built in 1872 and the original Dillard School in 1915. The present school was built in 1956 and named for C.W. Dillard who donated the land for the school. Davis school joined with Dillard in 1915, and when the Elk Grove district unified in 1959, the Lee School joined with Dillard.

1887 - Florin Elementary School was first located on McComber Lane just east of the railroad tracks. It was a one-room structure as were all the little schools of the area when they started. The present building that dates to 1951 is the fourth site of Florin School. The second school still stands on Florin Road where it has a multitude of uses over the years. In 1923 the Florin School had the unfortunate distinction of being one of only four segregated schools in California—one school for white children and one for Japanese children. A new brick building was built west of town, and the schools were referred to as the East School and the West School. The schools stayed segregated until 1939. The West school was destroyed by vandalism in the 1970s, but the East School lives on. The name of Florin comes from the railroad stop place designated as such by Judge E. B. Crocker who was impressed with the multitude of wild flowers in the area – thus the Spanish *Flor* for flower.

1893 - Elk Grove High School has the distinction of having been the first union high school and district in the state of California. Sixteen elementary districts voted to tax themselves for a high school, and they all remained as separate districts until the entire K-12 district unified in 1959. The high school opened its doors in 1893 at its first site on Main Street—today's Derr Street and Elk Grove Boulevard in Old Town. In 1922 a new brick building was constructed where the Joseph Kerr campus is today, a building that was torn down in the 1960s because it was not earthquake proof. In 1962 the high school moved to its present site as a three year senior high school with grades 7-9 at the junior high. The school went back to being a four year school in 1977 when Valley High School opened. Elk Grove High is the second oldest high school in Sacramento County—only Sacramento High is older. Until 1977, it was the only comprehensive high school in the district.

What you have read last week and this week is all there was until 1957 when the post World War growth began to make significant changes in south Sacramento County. Think of it—only seven elementary schools, most of them mergers of schools over the years—Cosumnes River, Elk Grove, Sierra Enterprise, Franklin/Prairie, Pleasant Grove, Dillard, and Florin. Along with Elk Grove Union High School, they were the only places of education for the families in the 320 square mile area of today's Elk Grove Unified School District from more than 100 years.

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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