

Elk Grove Citizen
History Happened Here
By Elizabeth Pinkerton
October 3, 2008
Elk Grove Unified –The Beginning, part 4

Continued from last week

In the three previous articles about the beginning of Elk Grove Unified School District in the late 1950s, I included some of my memories of the Elk Grove of long ago. The Pinkerton family came here in 1962, three years after the unification of the school district, so we were not here at the beginning, but not much had changed in those three years. Although there had been growth, there were still just the nine K-8 schools (Elk Grove, Florin, Franklin, Dillard, Cosumnes River, Sierra Enterprise, Pleasant Grove, Isabelle Jackson, and Anna Kirchgater) and Elk Grove High School. The 7th and 8th graders from Anna Kirchgater attended Elk Grove Elementary, but I do not know if that began with unification or later. It is another indication of the overcrowding of schools along the old Stockton Road that became Highway 99.

I had finished the work for my bachelor's degree at Wisconsin State College in Superior, Wisconsin, and California recruiters had come to visit the campus. That is how we found out about job possibilities in the Sacramento area. (By the way, Superior is something I have in common with our governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, as he received his degree there too, later when the school was known as the University of Wisconsin, Superior.)

Up north along Lake Superior was very different from the Sacramento Valley, but we were ready to get away from snow and ice and try a different climate. It was hard to leave the Green Bay Packers, but we knew we could continue to be Packer Fans Forever!

In addition to my interview in Elk Grove that June of 1962, I also had an interview with the San Juan Unified School District that was building schools and trying to keep up with growth. The district was very interested in hiring teachers, and its salaries were better than those in Elk Grove. But, Tom and I decided that Elk Grove was where we wanted to be. We were very impressed with Principal Bob Fite at Pleasant Grove, and I was tempted to take the 5th grade that was open there. But I took the 7th grade job at Elk Grove Elementary, and the rest is..... history.... in a way.....!

The Pinkertons moved to Elk Grove in August—Tom and I, our kids (Mike, Pat, and Tim), and Tom's mother, Rossie. We rented a wonderful house on Amethyst Way and Garnet Court—one of the flat tops that are still there. The Elk Grove streets had such *California* sounding names for us country folks from Wisconsin, and the flat roofs looked like *Hollywood*. However, it was quite rural in a way because there was no door to door mail delivery. We had a mailbox on Elk Grove-Florin Road, and there were sheep in the field across the road.

Housing developments were in place on both sides of Elk Grove-Florin Road. What had been a plum orchard on the east, just past the high school football field (where the district office is today), had streets named after the plums. The walnut orchard east of EG-Florin Road had several streets of new houses, but the Williamson apple orchard west of the high school was still there.

As newcomers we had much to learn about the growing area of south Sacramento and Elk Grove in 1962, but we knew right from the beginning that we were here to stay. We had missed the first days of the unified school district three years earlier, so we had no idea of the controversies that had taken place at that time. There were plenty of changes taking place though, because between the time of my interview in June and returning in August, Elk Grove Elementary had a

new principal. Mr. Case, who had interviewed me, had been transferred to the high school to teach science, and the new principal was Raymond Henwood. Another big change was that in those first three years of unification from 1959 to 1962, the student enrollment in the district almost doubled – from 3,800 to over 5,000.

The Elk Grove Elementary School, often referred to at the time as Elk Grove Grammar School (as was written on the sign out in front), had grades from kindergarten through grade 8. Grades 9-12 were across the street, and that is where the students from Cosumnes River, Dillard, Franklin, Pleasant Grove, Sierra Enterprise, and Florin also attended. The principal of the high school for many years prior to unification had been Glen Beeman, but the new principal was Ken McDonald, and he stayed for two years. (I have no records of Mr. McDonald's years in Elk Grove or where he went when he left. Perhaps some readers will be able to tell us about him.) Donald Morrison, who had been a science teacher at Elk Grove HS, was named principal in 1962, and he remained in that position for the next six years.

In 1962, our son Mike, now a CPA in Elk Grove, entered the first grade at Elk Grove Elementary School, and Pat, now a math teacher in Idaho, started kindergarten. The primary grades were overcrowded as families were moving into the new houses on the east side of Highway 99 from Florin to Elk Grove. They often had small children, so the impact was greatest in the early grades.

When the new James McKee School opened in 1963, it was only for grades 1, 2, 3, and the school was on double sessions. There was only one building with six classrooms, but they were able to serve twelve classes by doubling up. The town kids went in the morning and the country kids in the afternoon. Samuel Kennedy Elementary in the north area also opened in 1963 to relieve the overcrowding at Florin and Isabelle Jackson schools.

The overcrowding was addressed again in 1964 when the new high school next to Elk Grove Park (*where it is now*) was ready. Actually, the school was not quite ready, as the move in date happened before the school was completed. The new school began as a senior high with the 9th graders who thought they were going to be high schoolers attending the new Joseph Kerr Junior High School on what had been the high school campus. All the 7th and 8th graders from the elementary schools were at the new junior high.

If unification had been controversial, which it clearly was, the junior high issue equaled it, and I suspect it may have even been greater. Elementary parents in the rural areas were very opposed to their young children having to ride buses into Elk Grove. Nor did they want their young 7th graders on the same campus with mature 9th graders. And, the 9th graders were not happy about missing out on a year of high school!

Plus, the school was huge with more than 1,400 students. I had to count the kids in the yearbook to make sure that number was correct. It was a huge amount of students to have at one school at that time. It was no wonder that parents had concerns about their kids.

The following year, 1965, the junior high opened on double session. The Joseph Kerr students attended in the afternoon, and the north area students who would be attending the new school of James Rutter Junior High in the Florin area were in the morning. They moved to their new site in the spring of 1966, and another new chapter in the unified school district began.

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