

ELK GROVE CITIZEN  
HISTORY HAPPENED HERE  
The History of Our Schools, part 3  
EGUSD – ABOUT TO CELEBRATE ITS 50<sup>TH</sup>  
April 4, 2008  
by Elizabeth Pinkerton

This is the third in a series of articles covering the history of our schools in the Elk Grove Unified School District. In the first article I wrote about our very first schools: Mrs. Murphy's *kindergarten* of 1844; the Cosumnes River School whose roots go back to the gold days when there were seven little schools in those gold fields; the Elk Grove Elementary School that originated with the first official public school in Sacramento County (the San Joaquin School); and the 1858 Prairie School that predated the Franklin school by one year. One thing I neglected to mention is that the Carroll School on South Bruceville Road merged with Elk Grove Elementary after the fire of 1946 that forced the closing of Carroll. In the second article I wrote about these schools from the late 1800s: Sierra Enterprise that goes back to the 1859 Excelsior School; the Franklin School, also in 1859; Pleasant Grove of 1861; Dillard that began with the 1865 Davis School; Florin of 1887; and Elk Grove Union High School of 1893.

Today we take a big jump ahead, but we are going to bypass the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were some new school buildings during those years such as the new high school (on the present Joseph Kerr site) in 1922 and in 1923, the new Elk Grove Elementary in the brick building across from today's Joseph Kerr. And most of the schools I mentioned last week had new buildings constructed between 1900 and 1950. Some, such as Cosumnes River, were mergers of one room country schools.

But the BIG changes—all due to population growth—began to take place in the 1950s and that growth continued through the years. The first two new schools after World War II were the Anna Kirchgater School, built by the independent Elk Grove Elementary District and the Isabelle Jackson School, built by the independent Florin Elementary District. You can see where the post World War II impact was hitting the hardest—right down Stockton Road that we now call Highway 99, and that highway was also brand new in 1957.

**1957 - Anna Kirchgater Elementary School** is named for the legendary Anna Kirchgater, a long time teacher of Elk Grove Grammar School. Miss Kirchgater also taught at the country schools of Michigan Bar, Victory, and Jackson, and she finished her career at Pleasant Grove. She was renowned for her strict discipline and her no nonsense expectations for all students. The new school was built to ease the overcrowding at Elk Grove, and there were grandiose plans for housing what seemed like a huge enrollment of 300 students in the new school. The school continues today at its original site, and it has never lacked for students.

**1957 - Isabelle Jackson Elementary School** was built at a different site than where the present school by that name is located. Today we know of that building as William Daylor High School on Orange Avenue, south of Florin Road. Isabelle Jackson was the superintendent-principal of Florin School, and she was a truly remarkable woman. She was an active educator at Florin for 28 years, and her family members are still very active in the Elk Grove community. There was also

an earlier Jackson School, a building that still stands on Calvine Road at Short Road, but it is used as a dwelling. That school was named for members of the Jackson family that settled in the area around the little San Joaquin Cemetery on Highway 99. The Jackson School merged with the Elk Grove Union District in 1921. The new Isabelle Jackson School was constructed in 1985.

**1963 - Samuel Kennedy Elementary School** was the first school built by the Elk Grove Unified School District after the elementary schools of the area and Elk Grove High School unified into one district in 1959. Samuel Kennedy was a Florin community leader and a fruit grower who served on the Florin Board of Trustees for 25 years. The Kennedy family, related to the Jacksons, had come across the plains to California, as had many of the area's pioneer families. The school located north of Florin Road was in the midst of new housing developments, and the families welcomed having a school in their neighborhood.

**1963 - James McKee Elementary School** began with grades 1, 2, and 3 on double session to ease the overcrowding at Elk Grove Elementary. Kindergarten and grades 4, 5 and 6 were at Elk Grove. The school was at the edge of the Williamson Orchard, but today it is surrounded by houses, and even the fish hatchery that was near it is long gone. Dr. James McKee was Elk Grove's popular *horse and buggy* doctor of the turn of the century. He was one of the Elk Grove citizens who worked hard to get a high school in Elk Grove. Both James McKee and Samuel Kennedy schools were developed around a popular model that was considered to be very futuristic at the time. Six classrooms were designed to conveniently open to a large center area that could serve as a multi-purpose room.

**1963 - Jessie Baker School** is one of the most remarkable schools in the Elk Grove district, and it has the distinction of being a first in California education. It was the first public school for children with severe disabilities in the state of California. The primary force behind the school was another legend in Elk Grove, the gifted Jessie Baker who devoted her life to the education of *special* youngsters. In the past 50 plus years, Jessie Baker has continued to provide a unique and individualized education for its students.

**1964 - Joseph Kerr Middle School** began its scholarly life as a junior high school with grades 7, 8, and 9 and to ease the overcrowding of the high school. This was Elk Grove's first experiment with separate housing for kids in the middle who prior to this time had attended K-8 and 9-12 schools. Joseph Kerr Junior High School served the entire district for only one year, but it opened with more than 1,500 students who were bused in from all 320 square miles of Elk Grove Unified. The school was named for one of the founders of Elk Grove, Joseph Kerr, because of his vision of having a high school in Elk Grove and his willingness to donate the land for the school. Joseph Kerr Junior High School took over the campus of the old Elk Grove High School, and the students in grades 10-12 moved to their new school which is still next to Elk Grove Park. The very next year, the junior high schools were placed on double sessions.

**1965- James Rutter Middle School** opened in the fall of 1965 because there were too many students at the new Joseph Kerr Junior High. The new building in Florin was not ready until May of 1966, so the two schools functioned on double sessions for most of the 1965-66 school year. James Rutter students went to school in the morning, and Joseph Kerr students attended in the afternoon. The new school was named after James Rutter, a well known Florin fruit grower who was also active in the field of education. Mr. Rutter is credited with having planted the first Flame Tokay grapes in California at his Florin ranch. It is this grape that flourished in the hot and dry valley summers and resulted in the prominence of the Tokay as one of the finest table grapes of

California. The junior high schools continued with the three grades until Valley High School opened in 1977, and then, the 9<sup>th</sup> graders became part of the high schools once again.

To be continued....

NOTES:

Don't forget – The Elk Grove Hotel & Stagestop will be open tomorrow, April 5. They have a great exhibit, so don't miss seeing it.

- 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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