

School Problems Are Nothing New

By John Rico

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THE NEVER ENDING SCHOOLS PROBLEMS The increasing costs of education, plus divergent opinions on curriculums, are a constant sore spot not only in Vacaville but throughout the United States.

But to say that these problems are new is a misstatement. Let's go back to the year 1884 in Vacaville, and briefly review the school problems of that era.

Here is what County Superintendent of Common Schools Calvin Webster had to say about the Vacaville situation:

"To the patrons of the district I remark the following: The trustees manifest much interest in the schools, judging from the able manner they have been conducted and the funds disposed of.

I found 70 pupils in Mr. Tilotson's one-room school - this is not right. It is not wise to place so many children in one room and under one teacher.

Vacaville needs a more commodious school building. In fact I consider another room and another teacher an absolute necessity."

In May, 1884, Vacaville voters were asked to express themselves on an \$8000 bond issue for a new school. Arguments pro and con resulted in a 65-38 defeat of the proposal. Determined proponents increased the amount of the issue to \$14,000 and two months later by a vote of 131 to 2 Vacaville was assured of a new two-story brick grade school building.

That successful school bond issue was to be the first in Vacaville, to be followed by 16 additional issues up to the present representing approval of \$7 million in funds for school construction.

High school classes were being held in several homes in the community, and in 1898 voters approved the first Vaca High at a cost of \$10,000.

The first high school graduation exercises held here were back in 1896 when Marion and Pearl Brazelton and Frank Marshall and Gertrude Jewett received their diplomas at ceremonies held in the Presbyterian Church. The Elmira High School graduating class

of the year had seven grads: Evangeline Wilson, Ruby Cripps, Joseph Silva, Maud Barnes, Maud Clark, Lulu Dally and Florence Ryder.

By comparison, the 1979 Vaca High graduating class totaled 425, with another 150 receiving diplomas at nearby Vanden.

Unification throughout the years has brought together under one board of trustees a system which now cares for nearly 9000 young boys and girls.

There are a few residents of Vacaville today who can well recall the days when they attended the one-room rural area schools. Yes, days of no running water, no inside toilets, inadequate playgrounds, and more important, days of disciplinary actions by the teacher.

These rural schools were strategically located to accommodate children, but at best it was necessary for most of the students to walk long distances or ride a horse to and from the school.

Far atop the Blue Ridge Mountains was Blue Mountain Joint. Families with children lived there and a school was necessary. There was Rhine, Alamo, Oakdale, Peaceful Glen, Pleasants Valley, Milzner, Allendale, Browns Valley, Pena, Elmira, Cooper, Grant, Lagoon, Wolfskill and Owen.

As a youngster, famed poet Edwin Markham was a student at Lagoon. By his own admission, he tells of running away from home during the summer of 1868.

One Vacaville resident can relate back before the turn of the century when she attended Alamo School. She is Bernice Chambers Peabody. She graduated from Vaca High with the class of 1901, and as far as is known is the oldest living Vaca High graduate. On September 9 she celebrated her 96th birthday.

Then there was Will C. Wood, who attended the Elmira area schools and went on to become a well known state banker and education leader. The Will C. Wood School honors his memory. Then there was botanist Willis Jepson, who died in 1946 after having earned a spot in "Who's Who In America" for his achievements. The Eugene Padan school honors the late principal who died in 1944. His ability to mold boys into men and girls into women, earned for him this perpetual honor.

Many of the older grade school students in our Yesteryear will remember Principal Tennant McDaniel back in 1917, now a resident of Vallejo. And the late Principal Eugene Stoddard of Old Vaca High; and Lemoine Williams and Harold Youngblood.

Today there are 15 separate school campuses to care for the educational needs of the Vacaville-Elmira area, covering more than 200 acres of ground. Despite criticisms of our schools, Vacaville voters back in June 1976 made available; \$3,600,000 for new construction, the largest single sum ever approved here for such purposes.

There is a keener interest in our schools than ever before. You could easily find yourself-embroiled in controversy if you dared to compare today's learning processes with those in the days of the one-room school.

Having enjoyed the privilege of attending both a one-room school and the downtown unified system, I would without hesitation give my preference to the present.

Much has been said today about Johnny not being able to read, but on the other side of the coin the old willow stick which came in handy as a teaching instrument in years past, is prohibited.

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