

# Education Was Never Meant to Be Simple

By John Rico

Friday, February 16, 1979

OUR CHANGING SCHOOL TIMES - Judging from the number of Letters to the Editor appearing in this newspaper giving pro and con observations about our school system, and about some of the individuals responsible for the operation of these schools, it would seem as though the educational facilities in Vacaville were in a sorry mess.

Constructive criticism is an accepted facet of our daily lives when it comes to evaluating the capabilities of elected officials, school trustees included. But unfortunately, in digging deeper into some of this adverse criticism it goes far beyond what is best for the students, but rather seeks to discredit the capability of the man or woman who is attempting to do the job for which he or she was elected.

But it is encouraging to see the number of Letters. It reflects an invigorating spirit. With all of this publicity, it cannot be said that Vacaville residents are kept in the dark concerning the functions of our schools.

The affluence of society today is reflected in the moods of children going to school. They all "want to keep up with the Joneses," and proof of this can be found by taking a look at the automobile parking lots at our high schools. It has often been said: "You cannot judge the character of a man by the clothes he wears." This also holds true about school students and the trademark on their automobiles.

There is a continuing argument between parents and their offsprings about the comparisons in subject matters and learning capabilities, between yesterday and today. No one will argue that if there is the potential for learning within today's student, that he or she has the benefits of a wide range of extra-curricular activities which were not available to the parents.

The Vacaville area at one time, before unification of the elementary schools, and later the elementary and high schools, had 13 rural one room, one-teacher schools, scattered in every geographical section of the township.

You could go out on many of the rural roads and see the quaint little frame schoolhouses - Milzner, Pena, Peaceful Glen, Alamo, Browns Valley, Allendale, Lagoon, Cooper, Elmira, Oakdale, Pleasants Valley, Rhine and Blue Mountain Joint. Out of this entire list perhaps the most unique was Blue Mountain Joint, because it perched on top of the Blue Mountains, east of Vacaville, stradling the boundary line of

Solano and Napa County. The children attending the school resided in the immediate vicinity, but the teacher needed to get to and from his chores by horse and buggy, threading his way along the steep, meandering dirt road leading to that perch on the mountain.

I speak from personal experience in attending rural schools. With all eight grades in one room, the lower graders, learning to read "Little Red Riding Hood" became performers for the upperclassmen who snickered. But when the upperclassmen were told to recite Edwin Markham's "Man With the Hoe," it was quite boring for the younger children. But that's the way it was in those cramped quarters. Teachers in these schools, be they male or female, not only, dispensed their knowledge, but also served as custodian, truant officer, baby sitter and judge and jury. A slap across the face, or a ruler or strap administered to the buttock was routine, and in fact acceptable and desired by parents of unruly youngsters.

When I entered Vaca High in the Fall of 1923, frankly I had not the vaguest idea as to just what future course to follow. Should I set my sight on being a brain surgeon, a farmer, or perhaps a mechanic! My leanings were toward the latter.

The school enrollment was small enough so that Professor E. W. Stoddard or one of his seven teachers could give counsel to any boy or girl who was drifting aimlessly in their educational endeavors. But when Prof. Stoddard suggested Latin, I rebelled. Or I could take English from Grace Halsey; perhaps general science from Olga Hendershot. One of the subjects I accepted was general science because to me there was some common sense in learning how to rewind an electric motor. There were weaknesses in the program, especially when we were told to gather wild flowers, place them between pages of a book and leave them there to dry, I had the most beautiful blue lupine in the class, but do you know for the next 56 years I have never found any use for the knowledge I had gained by pressing blue lupines.

Young men and women of the community who: attended Vaca High around the turn of the century had as their professor T. J. Penfield. But for nearly 25 years to follow Professor Eugene Stoddard was absolute Master at Vaca High. And: every student who knew him held him in the: highest esteem.

Our ABC's have been replaced by IBM - this may be good, and again it may be bad. I see nothing wrong with teaching every young boy and girl the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic even though we will be surrounded by computers.

And an addendum to this article. In early Fall of 1924 I sheepishly walked into Professor Stoddard's office, and stuttered: "Mr. Stoddard, I have taken a job at the Reporter office and I will be leaving school." With his fatherly gesture he replied: "I think you will

be sorry.”

And believe it or not, although I found some measure of enjoyment in my new job, I would warn every boy and girl going to high school today - complete your four years of study, you will not regret it. But above all make full use of the privileges you are receiving.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/7150>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/7150/>