

# Live Oak School's roots run deep

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**LIVE OAK** — It is a school that once had a principal dubbed "Attila the Hun," held classes in a tent and served hot soup prepared by a woman who lived across the street.

This homey list of historical facts describes Live Oak School, in existence since 1872. The school's colorful, and often controversial history, was chronicled by alumnus Phil Reader in the book, "The First 100 Years: A History of Live Oak School."

Reader, who lives in Live Oak and does genealogical and historical research and record searching for a living, wrote the history for the Aug. 11 reunion of Live Oak School alumni. The book was published by Cliffside Publishing of Santa Cruz.

Many of the surnames of families that played a prominent role in the development of the school are familiar today as names of streets and places in Live Oak — Kinsley, Thompson, Corcoran.

Martin Kinsley was the father of the Live Oak School District. He not only circulated a petition requesting establishment of a school, but sold the land and served on the Board of Trustees for 20 years. A street off 17th Avenue is named for his family.

A school was desperately needed because many farm families with young children had moved into the area and the closest school was in Soquel.

"For the farmers along the road to Soquel Landing (now Capitola,) educating their children posed a special problem," Reader writes. "The nearest school was located in Soquel, which was almost an hour's ride on horseback across farmlands, through steep wooded arroyos, and over several creeks. A very dangerous journey at that time.

"The kids would have to leave home just after dawn and not return until late afternoon or early evening. A 6- or 7-

year-old child could not be expected to travel that distance alone and, of course, the older children were needed around the farm."

In the spring of 1872, Kinsley began riding from farm to farm to discuss starting a school. The farmers along Lower Soquel Road were all for it, but those along the main road to Soquel wanted to stay in the Soquel School District.

In August, the county Board of Supervisors voted to establish the school district.

Residents decided to call it Live Oak, the English translation of the name of the old Spanish rancho, Encinalito. The rancho was named after the most common native trees in the area.

Some \$600 was needed to build the first one-room schoolhouse. An election was held in September at Kinsley's home and voters passed the tax increase needed for construction funds.

Kinsley sold the district a half-acre of his land for \$50. The land was at the corner of what is now 17th Avenue and Capitola Road.

The first schoolhouse was a 20-by-46-foot, wood-frame building with large, rough-cut beams supporting a high roof. It had benches with enough room for 25 students, and was completed in the spring of 1873.

This building was used by the school district until the early 1960s, when it was demolished.

"The school's existence," Reader writes, "was the cohesive force which brought the newly emerged Live Oak community together for the first time and gave it definition."

Some may think that bilingual education is a modern phenomenon, but Live Oak School had bilingual classes from 1874-1876 when Eunice Wardwell taught. This attracted Spanish-speaking families to send their children to the school.

Starting at the turn of the century, subdivisions came to the Live Oak farmland and school enrollment increased.

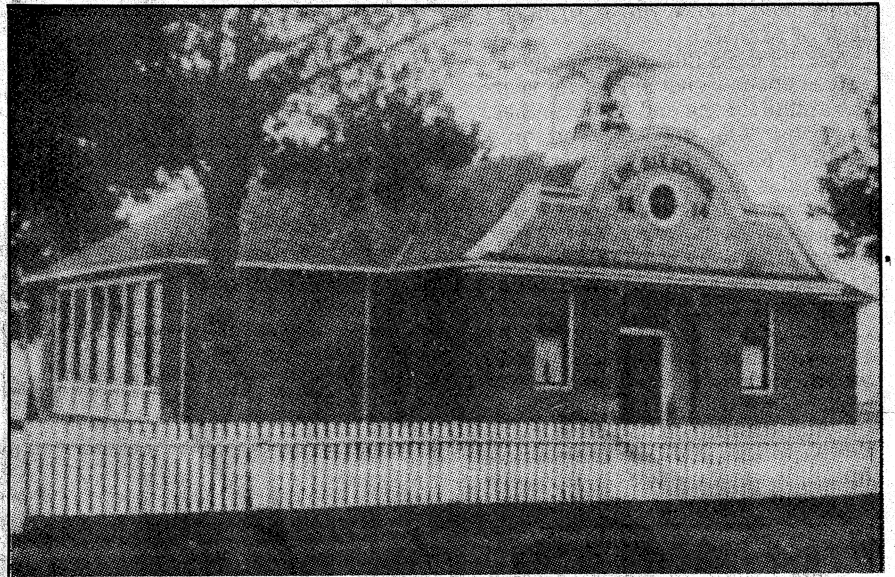
Most of the housing subdivisions were developed by two Santa Cruz Realtors, Frank and David Wilson. Most of them were carved from the 19th Century wheat farms that covered Live Oak.

One thing that didn't change in the first decade of the new century was the schoolhouse. It became dilapidated and overcrowded.

During the 1912-1913 school year, there were 55 students. One of the classes had to meet in a tent. The Grand Jury issued a scathing attack on the school conditions.

In August 1913, a bond measure passed and the district built a two-room, brick school house featuring indoor plumbing. The fight over the bond measure bought about formation of the Live Oak PTA.

Another successful bond election in September 1922 raised enough money to



By 1914 the schoolhouse was made out of brick.



Deliah Payton's first grade class poses for pictures in 1921.

build two more classrooms.

It was at this time the school board hired principal Benjamin Brous. "His teaching style was somewhat 'strict,' to say the least, and many a mischievous lad felt the sting of his misguided fury," Reader writes. "To this very day, there are many solid citizens of Live Oak who cringe at the sound of his name."

Brous only lasted a year, with a new school board forcing him out "and Live Oak's own Attila the Hun was sent packing for Fresno with the cheers of many young miscreant ringing in his ears," Reader states.

The '20s brought "modernization." Food service and transportation were added.

The food services started in 1923 when the Home Department of the Live Oak Farm Center started serving hot lunches. The work horse behind this project was Minnie Tefertiller, who "is remembered to this very day for the hot soup she prepared in the kitchen of her home across the street from the school," Reader writes.

The school got its first transportation in 1924 when William Ross drove a 490 Chevrolet Touring car around the district carrying children to and from school. In 1928, a bus was purchased.

Even during the Depression, the number of students continued to climb, but there were no building additions in the 1930s. In 1941, a three-room Quonset hut was added to the campus, and it stayed until 1959.

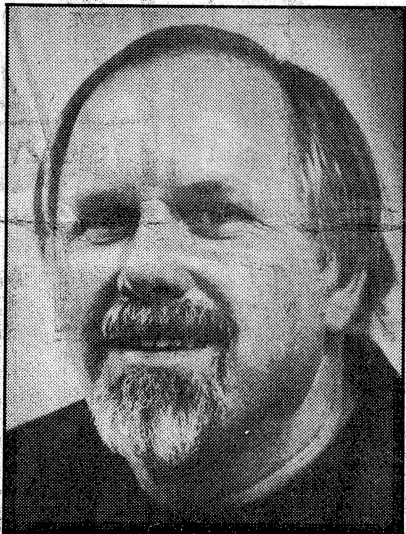
The Baby Boom hit Live Oak school hard. In 1942, the school had 225 students. By 1953, there were 600.

In 1947, a \$75,000 bond measure was passed to build a new school and buy an additional acre. Another bond measure was approved in 1949, adding three new wings and 13 classrooms for a total of 24.

In 1955, things were so crowded at the school that double sessions were initiated. In 1958, a bond measure passed to build a second school, Del Mar Middle School on 17th Avenue.

Under superintendent Herb Cartwright, who served from 1953-1971, the district expanded from one school to three as Live Oak discarded its rural roots to become a middle-class suburb.

From 1953-1963, enrollment doubled to 1,235 children. Even today, growth continues in the school district. The district has indicated plans for a fourth school, but financial constraints have caused this plan to be delayed.



Phil Reader

Wrote history of school