

Sunday, January 7, 1951

Santa Cruz Yesterdays

The Old Gault School

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)



Seabright avenue was still Railroad street when, in the fall of 1887, residents along it wanted a school. Forty youngsters in the neighborhood were going to the old Branciforte school, on the site of the present Santa Cruz hospital.

The region was out in the county but Santa Cruz school district was greater in area than the city. A tract 200 by 250 feet was bought for \$1050 from Calvin Gault, who had laid out the surrounding countryside in residence lots. A contract was given L. B. McCornick to erect a two-room building.

The structure he put up was the front part of the building pictured, with the little gables and the bell tower. The six windows on each

end were the latest extravagant word in lighting. McCornick's contract figure was \$2780.

School Opened In 1888

On January 9, 1888, young Alice Steinmetz, daughter of County Treasurer Charles Steinmetz, opened the school in one of the rooms. She is still a resident of Santa Cruz, Mrs. Alice B. Hobbs of 524-B Ocean View avenue. The second teacher was Nora Oliver of Soquel, who later became Mrs. Horatio V. Angel.

In 1907 two attached rooms, at the rear, were added.

The one-room building at the left, was a relic of the old Branciforte school. Two years after the present Branciforte building was erected in 1912 the one-room struc-

ture was still standing on the old Soquel avenue site, although the old two-story Branciforte building had been razed. The little building was moved to Gault to supplement its accommodations.

Another structure, not shown in the picture, was built in 1927 by the high school carpentry class under C. V. Stewart, which served as kindergarten room in the morning and as cafeteria at noon. In 1931 it was moved to the present Branciforte school grounds, where it still does service.

Faced Effey Street

The old Gault school faced Effey street. It was kept in use as the present building was erected, facing Seabright avenue, in 1931. out of a \$330,000 bond issue which also

financed the present Mission Hill and Laurel schools.

Edith Fikes, county superintendent of schools, began teaching at Gault in 1910, when its attendance was increased to take in six grades instead of four. She continued, as principal, until her appointment to her present position.

One of the stories of early days at Gault is of the ditches down either side of unpaved Seabright avenue. In heavy rains water from the whole area south of Soquel avenue drained deep and swift down them to the bay. On occasions a horse-drawn express wagon had to be sent to the school which, backed to the curb, afforded a bridge to the pupils who had to cross the street.