



Troop 688 Leader Rich T. Mills, left, and troop commissioner Rich G. Mills, unveil American flag at Alba Fourth of July celebration.

## A Patriotic Fourth Of July Alba School Celebration

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There's one celebration taking place around these parts today that truly embodies the spirit of the Fourth of July.

Today, for the 85th year in a row, residents of Alba Road in Ben Lomond and friends gathered in the Redwood-shaded yard of the old Alba Schoolhouse to catch up on neighborhood gossip, reminisce about old times and compliment each other on their favorite recipe brought to share with friends.

Residents haven't missed a year of celebrating in this manner since the little red schoolhouse was built in 1895.

The celebration in the schoolhouse yard is the kind that people across the United States had for years on our nation's birthday, but it's the kind of event that's almost been forgotten with commercialization, elaborate fireworks displays and large-scale parades on the modern Fourth.

Not only is the Alba Road gathering a peaceful, old-fashioned kind, but it's also for a cause that has to do with an important part of our country's history — the one-room schoolhouse.

The money raised by the 300 or so people that gather at the Alba School each year from the sale of food, beverages and locally-made handicrafts is used to maintain the quaint red school building.

Funds raised over the past several years were used to complete a new roof on the structure last year, explained Alba Road resident Julia Gotthold. The original roof was destroyed during the 1975 snowstorm when a large Redwood tree came crashing down through the school.

Money raised over the next few years will be used to restore the front steps and the interior of the school, Gotthold said.

Thanks to the residents, the school retains much of the flavor it had during its 45 years of operation. The school was closed in 1940 after more modern schools were constructed in the area.

Nevertheless, one can almost picture turn-of-the-century children with their books dangling from leather straps, upon entering the school. In the entryway, hooks line the wall where children used to hang their coats.

In the main room, long narrow windows let in a muted light. This light, along with the musty smell, enhances the feeling of the past.

Yellowed maps, left there when the school closed, in 1940 line the walls of the schoolroom. The 1926 edition of the map of the United States shows the western area "ceded by Mexico in 1848."

And the 1930-edition map of California contains information from the 1930 census. The city of Santa Cruz then had 14,395 people, Capitola a mere 500 and Watsonville 8,344 residents. The city of Scotts Valley didn't exist.

Alba School was built by the residents in the area after D.R. Guichard moved into the area in 1894 and wanted a nearby school for his 10 children.

Guichard figured there were enough children in his family and the neighboring Rossi family to populate a school.

He was able to convince the county superintendent of the need for a school and Alba School was opened for education by Aug. 12, 1895.

It remained in full operation until 1912, when it threatened to close due to lack of students. But then a family with 12 children moved to the area and the Alba School was revived. An addition to the school was added that year.

The school has been closed for 40 years, but it hasn't been forgotten by the community. It was dedicated as a community library by a former owner when it was closed as a school.

The school and a part of American history it embodies can be seen in the faces of those Alba Road residents each Fourth of July as the flag is raised in front of the schoolhouse and the school bell is rung.

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