

Old Santa Cruz

● ● ● By Ernest Otto

In 1876, the schools were somewhat different from today. The large four-story schoolhouse about which we have been talking offered terms of five months for the first seven grades, starting with the high third which was known as A, the low third B; C and D were second reader and E, F, and G first reader. When a student in the primary grades was asked what his class was, he responded by saying the letter.

In the grammar school grades, the ranks ran from first through eighth grammar, and the high school was divided into three years, the junior, middle and senior classes, all one-year terms.

The first high school principal was Prof. W. W. Anderson, and the first primary teacher was Myrtle Burrows. When this writer first entered school, besides Miss Burrows there were Flora Kendall, second reader; Clara (Chittenden) Dake and Marion Murdock, third reader; Grace Murdock, fourth reader; Lora Alzina, Lucy (Owen) Chace, Pearl McCann, Annie Austin, Jessie Sprague and E. C. Newell in high school.

The writer does not recall a single Santa Cruz family with a member on the faculty when he entered school. The majority of the teachers were from the San Jose state normal school.

The school's daily routine started with the ringing of the bell in the tower at 8 a.m. as a reminder to the students who lived as much as two miles away to get started to school, and when the 9 a.m. bell rang, all were expected to be on the school grounds.

The boys formed a line on one side of the school by rooms and the girls on the other. The students were expected to remain in their lines until they reached their rooms, and if one got out of line, it usually meant a check.

One teacher would be standing at the top with a silver bell in her hands. She would strike it and the students reached their assigned rooms, the girls would go in by their doors and the boys by their's.

The bell in the tower was important other times of the day, too. It sounded at 10:45 a.m. following the recess; struck at noon to start the luncheon hour; rang at 12:45 p.m. to warn the children classes were nearing again and at 1 p.m. to bring them back to their rooms.

After the students were seated came the roll call both at the morning and afternoon sessions. Students were supposed to answer "present" but frequently a boy would answer "here."

The first 10 or 15 minutes of each morning were devoted to singing except in cases where the teacher was unable to sing. Singing also started the afternoon sessions and some teachers would allow singing at the close of the day for a reward.

The songs usually were printed on the blackboards by the teachers, and were taken from such songs as "Silver Carol," "Golden Wreath" and "Golden Robin." When the words were transcribed, the teachers advised the students to "learn the words by heart" and we usually did.

The students especially liked to sing "rounds" with different aisles being chosen for parts in the songs. The songbooks were full of what we called "tra-la-la" choruses. A later version had whistling choruses and the boys would whistle loud and shrill.

One of the favorite songs with the boys was the always popular "Where Have You Been, Billy Boy?". Others were "The Miser Lives for Gold Alone" and "The Rose That Blooms In the Wall."

The writer remembers one teacher who taught the class "In The Sweet Bye and Bye," and followed it with "Little Brown Jug."

A great hit he recalls was "After the Ball." Sometimes the four grammar school room doors—eight in all—were opened, and the students sang in unison the song, one of the most popular of the day, and whistled and hummed it as they left the school and wended their way homeward.

Some teachers called the "whispering" roll near the end of the day and pupils were supposed to report the number of times they had whispered during the day. And boys often could be heard saying on the grounds later: "You didn't whisper, you say—you dirty liar!"

The reader was McGuffey's. No reader ever earned the fame of McGuffey's. They ranged from the first to the fifth grade, and later the textbook was changed to Appleton's reader. Both firms published a sixth reader but it never was used in the local schools.

Most of the spelling lessons were from lists in the back of the readers. In the early grades, children were lined up along the walls and to get out of line meant a "check."

Students studied up to the

& Kellogg's after Swinton's had been discarded.

Arithmetic was "numbers" up to the third year. Starting in the grammar school, it was Robinson's, then Milne's. The primary school learned to write numbers. Fractions were studied in the high third. The following year came learning the multiplication tables to the tune of "Yankee Doodle."

Following that was compound numbers and then denominators in square and cube root.

The students also had mental arithmetic from the beginning.

Spencerian copybooks were used after we had learned the alphabet and learned to print. We got our first inkwells in the third reader and had a deluge of such proverbs as: "Be Not Weary Of Well Doing."

Geography teaching began when we got into the fourth reader, starting with Montieth's and then progressing to Harper's for the advanced course.

History was from the Barnes book, following Swinton's

The last year was our hardest course, or would have been voted so in any poll. That was etymology or word analysis and the derivation of words through digging into Latin, Greek and Anglo Saxon for word roots and the suffixes and prefixes. It was nearly impossible for some of us, but worse was yet to come with high school.