

EL TORO GRAMMAR SCHOOL

The El Toro Grammar School, originally on the corner of Olive Avenue and First Street, was built at a cost of \$2000 and dedicated on November 25, 1890.

The architectural style of the building is Victorian with certain details reflecting Queen Anne ornamentation. The building is in a "T" shape with separate side entrances to the girls' and boys' cloakrooms. A small library-study and teacher's office were located in the rear of the building. Behind the building were two outhouses and a small stable for the teacher's horse. The original interior of the building was finished with tongue and groove redwood paneling (including the ceiling) with wainscoting to the lower level of the windows.

Teachers called the children to school by ringing the school bell hung in the hat-like belfry structure, topped with a steeple and a flagpole. Attendance averaged fourteen to twenty-nine pupils. Absenteeism was common due to the need for the children in farm families to do chores at home.

Single teachers in El Toro usually boarded with local families. In 1901, the El Toro teacher was paid \$50 per month. Edna Nichols (Wisser) was the last teacher to teach in the original El Toro Schoolhouse during the 1913-1914 school year. When a new two-room brick schoolhouse was constructed, Miss Nichols became the first principal in 1914.

In 1915, the old schoolhouse was moved to El Toro Road and became St. Anthony's Catholic Church. When St. Nicholas Church opened near Leisure World in Laguna Hills in 1968, the building was abandoned, suffered vandalism, and threatened with destruction to make way for the widening of El Toro Road.

In 1976, the schoolhouse was donated to the County of Orange for restoration and preservation as part of the Heritage Hill Historical Park. The school has been furnished with antiques and artifacts typical of an 1890's schoolhouse. Heritage Hill docents and staff have developed a "Living History" program for school and youth groups visiting the school.