

## EL TORO GRAMMAR SCHOOL BACKGROUND FACTS

One of the first needs of a new community in the 19th century was always a schoolhouse. El Toro was no exception. Shortly after the town's founding in 1888, land was deeded for a school on the corner of Olive Avenue and First Street. The property was deeded on August 25th, 1890. The El Toro Grammar School was then built at a Cost of \$2,000.00 and dedicated on November 25th, 1890.

Architectural style of the building is typical Victorian with certain details reflecting Queen Anne ornamentation such as the sunburst design and fish scale shingles on the portico or porch roof and the truncated roof railed in decorative wrought iron as a "Widow's Walk". Characteristic of one-room schoolhouses of the day, the building is in a "T" shape with separate side entrances for the girls and boys respectively to the Girl's and Boy's Cloakrooms. A small library-study and teacher's office were located to the rear of the building. The school never had indoor plumbing, rather two "two-holer" outhouses were built to the rear of the school. There also was 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 up to the lower level of the windows. The classroom had blackboards located all around its perimeter. Originally the schoolhouse had no interior lighting. As the school was also used as a community meeting hall until such a hall was built in 1902, people brought lanterns to use for lighting when meetings or events were held in the building after dark.

Teachers called the children to school by ringing the school bell hung in the rather unique hat-like belfry structure topped with a steeple and flagpole. In the early years school attendance averaged fourteen to twenty-nine children. Though total enrollment was higher, absenteeism was common due to the need for children in farm families to do chores at home. Photographs of El Toro School classes during the period show that the older pupils were usually girls, reflecting the fact that boys were frequently required to remain at home to do farm chores once they reached the ages of eleven or twelve.

Single teachers at El Toro usually boarded with local families. In 1901 the El Toro teacher was paid \$50.00 per month. Edna Nichols (Wisser), daughter of J. B. Nichols, Orange County Superintendent of Schools from 1903 through 1906, was the last teacher to teach in the original El Toro Schoolhouse. She taught in the 1913-1914 school year. By that time the community had outgrown the original school and a new two-room brick schoolhouse was constructed to take its place. Miss Nichols became the first principal of the new school in 1914.

Antoinette and John Gless bought the old schoolhouse and had it moved two blocks to El Toro Road in 1915 to be used by the newly formed El Toro Catholic Parish. St. Anthony's Catholic Church opened in this building in 1916, using the old school desks for seating. An altar was installed with statues of St. Anthony, St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. In later years pews and stained glass windows were bought for the church from churches which were razed in Tustin. St. Anthony's did not have enough parishioners to support a full-time priest. Priests from the Mission San Juan Capistrano usually led Sunday morning masses in El Toro. Most people today remember the school as St. Anthony's Church with a cross on the steeple where the flagpole was originally.

St. Anthony's parishioners continued to meet in the old school building until St. Nicholas Church

was opened near Leisure World in Laguna Hills in 1968. The property was subsequently sold to Charles Larkin and Gilbert Ramirez who planned to renovate the building for use as a tax or real estate office. It was found that it was too expensive to renovate the building in order to meet existing building and safety codes. Thus the building was left abandoned for some time during which it suffered vandalism and eventually was threatened with destruction to make way for the El Toro Road widening project. In 1976 the land was sold to the Jehovah's Witnesses for the construction of their new church and the schoolhouse was donated to the County of Orange for restoration and preservation as part of Heritage Hill Historical Park at the site of the old Serrano Adobe. The Saddleback Area Historical Society and other community groups helped raise money to defray the costs of moving the building.

At Heritage Hill the Schoolhouse was placed in a landscaped area next to St. George's Episcopal Mission, also moved from its original location. The interior of the building was renovated based on information available about the interior when the building was used as a school. The school has been furnished with antiques and artifacts typical of an 1890's schoolhouse. Continuing the practice of community and County government cooperation, the furnishings are a combination of donations from groups and individuals and museum acquisitions by County Park Staff. Heritage Hill Docents and Staff have developed a "Living History" program for school and youth groups visiting the school. The "Living History" program consists of a 90 minute presentation by docents costumed as "school marms" who lead children through typical school activities and learning exercises from the 19th century, such as recitations from McGuffey's Readers, spelling bees, etc. The El Toro Grammar School Living History Program, inaugurated in October of 1986, is the first such program officially sponsored by the Orange County Board of Supervisors and reflects the growing interest by County government and the community at large in re-discovering Orange County's colorful past.

The excerpts below, relating to El Toro Grammar School, were taken from Merton E. Hill's "One Hundred Years of Public Education in Orange County", 1957:

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The following year, on July 25, 1891, Superintendent Greeley reported that:

It is with pleasure that I testify to the increased educational interest among the patrons of our schools, as well as the teachers, in Orange County during the past year. The excellent structures found in nearly every district certify to this. A \$2000 building has been completed at El Toro. A \$2500 building at Chico. One nearly completed at Fairview. Tustin has voted \$7000 to complete an addition to their four-room building and Westminster has recently voted \$4000 to erect a new school building. An election has been called by the Board of Supervisors of Orange County to submit the question of establishing a County High School<sup>22</sup> this measure will probably carry by a large vote.

A large per cent of our teachers are graduates of our Normal Schools and the wisdom of this is shown in character of work done in the school room.. There were 36 graduates from the Grammar Grade schools this year and 11 from the Santa Ana High School.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> No punctuation.

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<sup>23</sup> Annual Report, June 30, 1891.

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El Toro. The El Toro district came into existence the first year of Orange County's formation, and had only three months of school during 1839-1390. The district had twenty-seven census children that year, and the school enrolled twenty-one pupils, with an average daily attendance of fourteen for the three months. Total valuation of school property at the end of the first year was \$500. By 1895 El Toro enrolled forty-six pupils and had an average daily attendance of twenty-nine. It cost \$860.80 to operate the school, and total school property valuation was set at \$2765. The school grew slowly, and by 1925 it enrolled only forty pupils; in 1935, seventy-five; in 1945, only twenty-one. The average daily attendance for 1950 was forty-one, and for 1955 it was fifty-nine. Bonded indebtedness has amounted to very little; in 1925 it had outstanding bonds of \$3000. These bonds were soon paid off and El Toro probably has not been bonded since.

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From the Annual Report of the Orange County Superintendent of Schools  
July 1, 1889, to June 30, 1890

District	Number of Census Children	Enrollment	A D. A.	Total Receipts	Total Expenditures	Bonded Indebtedness	Total Valuation of School Property	Number of Volumes in School Library	Number of Months School Was Maintained
Alamitos	41	47	32	\$ 953.57	\$ 843.30		\$ 1950	250	8
Aliso	13	19	9	720.71	580.90		670	80	8
Anaheim	514	321	236	9136.47	5997.56	\$ 6000	21400	1033	9 1/2
Bolsa Grande	115	114	70	1630.62	1566.44		3400	239	8
Centralia	63	45	24	1173.31	802.35	4000	4550	369	10
Chico*	17	12	9	2041.00	289.30	2000	365	264	1
Delhi	33	53	24	1123.41	861.23	400	1250	267	8 1/2
Diamond	38	53	26	1299.01	804.71		1390	273	8
El Modena	111	115	75	18 11. 38	1573.17	6000	7150	84	9 1/2
El Toro	27	21	14	2051.00		2000	500		3
Fairview	21	27	16	703.15	571.69		120	12	8
Fountain Valley**					427.50				
Fullerton	114	79	46	4016.95	2293.20	8000	7175	31	8 3/4
Garden Grove	121	118	74	3133.13	2147.30	800	3820	280	8 1/4
Laguna	31	25	15	779.91	618.80		1040	364	8
Laurelm									
Mountain View	100	99	63	2400.93	1532.40		4550	482	9 1/2
Newhope	62	80	50	2177.65	1463.22		3600	512	8
Newport	81	98	60	1914.61	1560.31		3600	309	8
Niguel*	22	23	16	1700.00	1673.13	1200	1570	17	7
Ocean View	67	61	.31	1032.08	761.20	1000	3500	164	8 1/2
Olive	106	100	42	1632.18	1533.24		3700	350	9
Orange	411	283	197	6811.71	5075.92	6000	9600	576	10
Orangethorpe	53	43	31	1333.07	778.99		3550	395	9
Peralta	34	22	14	730.10	672.10		1886	412	8 1/4
Placentia	107	49	34	1822.77	1494.58	500	4600	586	9
San Juan	153	80	56	2014.85	1261.30		3640	588	10 1/2
Santa Ana	969	965	697	20244.48	18938.74	27500	30015	699	10
Santiago	39	50	21	860.39	696.40		1450	245	8
Silverado	23	15	6	713.13	556.03		355	153	8
Tustin	265	203	144	3882.34	3372.13		7450	240	9
Trabuco	32	21	10	914.39	802.90		1375	244	8
Westminstcr	130	129	83	2142.48	1710.20		3000	280	8 1/2
Yorba	87	57	29	1468.08	923.46		1315	108	8
Totals	4011	3426	2255	\$85250.24	\$64303.96	\$65400	\$143536	8867	

\* New district

\*\* Lapsed

Hill, Merton E., One Hundred Years of Public Education in Orange County, 1957, P. 140.