

Eagle Rock recalls days of little country school

By Nelda Thompson
and Ruth Haviland

Seventeen youngsters in high button shoes and pigtails, short pants and white collars, lace petticoats and pinafores set out for school back in the fall of 1884.

The school was new and swankly topped with a cupola from which came the first tones of a school bell clanging its message through the green hills and lemon groves, tomato patches and fields of wild poppies that carpeted what had been the old Verdugo rancho (recently become Agenicized). "Teacher" stood on the stoop of the high-roofed building that seemed suddenly so urban in this rustic domain. "Teachers in 1884 were seldom honored with a name, they were just "teacher", but history did tell us that the first little school "marm" to hand out slates was Miss Ada Hutchins.

Barefoot boys

It isn't mentioned whether the 17 came eagerly or if they were reticent to leave the old lazy-day haunts where a few American families had built their box-shaped houses of sturdy eastern wood-beginning of the end for the old adobe era.

During those early years of readin' writin' and rithmetic it must have been tough for Johnnie and Jane to tear themselves away from the little rivulets and ponds where there were tadpoles in the spring . . . and ox carts creaked their way into the fields and small arroyos to load up with plump vegetables which grew so well in Eagle Rock Valley. In fact, Eagle Rock was the salad basket of the

county at that time . . . and strawberries (wild and cultivated) lay red and tempting under the vines on the way to school.

Days of old Eagle Rock will be recalled in detail Tuesday evening at 7 at Eagle Rock Elementary School of 1967, the oldest school in this "neck of the woods" and the Parent Teachers Association has undertaken the vast historical stint of bringing the little old schoolhouse back to life.

Here comes PTA

Actually the PTA didn't get started until 1910 under the principalship of a Mrs. Kinney who presided over a four-room empire. Mrs. Robert Thompson was the very first PTA president.

Things were happening fast in Eagle Rock. As if the little schoolhouse had started a whole train of events, other marked signs of growing up were coming to Eagle Rock (once La Diedra Gordo . . . land of the "Big Rock" back in the Indian days).

Church bells followed the first school bell and in 1902 a chapel was built at the corner of what is now Colorado and Casper (now known as United Church).

A real cultural touch came to the area the following year when the ladies, buttoned their white kid gloves, tied their bonnet strings and went off to their first "meeting" at the Twentieth Century Club.

Wait for the 'Dinkey'

By 1906 there was a picturesque little trolley coming "al the way from Glendale" and rattling down Colorado Boulevard as the conductor called out the streets.

People were getting so prosperous that they needed a bank to take care of their earnings. The first

bank at the corner of Eagle Rock and Colorado Boulevards appeared in 1907. And, keeping pace, the town was growing like a colt. Eagle Rock issued its first newspaper, "The Sentinel" back in 1910 . . . the same year that PTA entered the picture, forming a partnership that has been long-lasting.

The final crown of distinction came to Eagle Rock in 1911. Mrs. Goss, PTA president of that year has a most important entry in her minutes stating that in 1911 Eagle Rock became a city (a sixth class city, but none the less it has achieved cityhood).

Suicide Bridge

During the 1912-1913 term of Mrs. T. W. Williams, folks no longer had to take the long way around to Pasadena. The Colorado Street bridge (later infamously known as Suicide Bridge) was constructed. Eagle Rock residents could now make their annual trek to the Rose Parade in much better time. And for many years the local community entered prize-winning floats in the parade. Youngsters from Eagle Rock Elementary (many of whom still live in the area) rode in their pony carts and floats down Colorado Boulevard.

That year they received their very own post office in Eagle Rock, with W. E. Bruce as postmaster. And . . . assuring Eagle Rock's continued academic growth, Occidental College moved from Highland Park to its new campus in Eagle Rock.

It was Mrs. Blanche Gardiner (who later became librarian of Eagle Rock library) who took over the PTA gavel in 1913-15 when war clouds were gathering over Europe. The library was opened in 1915 and Col-

orado Boulevard celebrated by turning on its "city lights" for the first time.

'Talking machine'

Modern "contraptions" were catching on and Eagle Rock Elementary purchased a phonograph which prompted the city fathers to shake their heads and ask, "What will they think of next?"

Mrs. Emma Sprankle led the PTA in 1915-1916 and in 1917 it was Mrs. Ralph Braddock who took over her office amid blessings and tragedy. America had gone to war and many of the boys who had so recently graduated from the little old schoolhouse were on their way to France. The admonition to "Keep the Home Fires Burning" was observed locally and Eagle Rock Elementary got its new school. A portion of this school is still incorporated in the present building.

During the years 1917-1919, Mrs. Alice Dirks Moore became PTA president. Mrs. Moore, one of the best known names in the community, is still an active part of the community to which she has been so devoted. She was a woman who got things done . . . started the first cafeteria and was instrumental in bringing organized youth groups to the area.

Growing fast

The new school had every room filled by 1919, showing the rapid growth of the area which now bloomed with homey bungalows and was literally drenched in the fragrance of orange and lemon blossoms. Mrs. Frank Lerchen had charge of PTA affairs during these years.

Came the roaring twenties and Mrs. Walter Dorrance took over the PTA gavel to be confronted with a new problem . . . moving

pictures; as debatable as the Sunset Strip is today. Parents feared the invasion of "moving pictures." A representative from United Artists Theatre came to the school and reassured the PTA that it would be a real asset to the community if they had a moving picture theatre.

Enrolled at the school at this time was a handsome little fellow who played the cello. He answered roll call to the name of Chares Hamer, now principal of Eagle Rock High.

There was some consternation about the high cost of living now. PTA dues were increased from 25 to 35 cents.

In 1922 the first "Harvest Home" festival was held, an event which now incorporates Halloween and fancy fun

Movie machine

By 1924 when Mrs. John Reiter was president, the PTA had 374 members and the room mother system was adopted. Motion pictures had won their point and this year a moving picture machine was purchased for the school.

By 1927 when Mrs. W. M. Young was president, enrollment had reached 880 with eight grades represented and the "new school" was bulging at the seams. The long discussed high school came a step nearer as a site for the location of Eagle Rock High was purchased.

It must have been a wet year because rainy days became a problem. The helpful Highland Park Police of that day volunteered their services to escort children home if they weren't "called for."

Eagle Rock Beautiful

In 1927-29 a now very famous woman by the name of Mrs. Valley Knudsen became president. Now associated with city beautification in many areas, Mrs. Knudsen proved that beauty begins at home. It was under her guidance that PTA purchased three diador trees, the forerunners of the "pine forest" that now distinguishes Eagle Rock Elementary.

Depression slowed plans and festivities at the local school as Mrs. William G. Bonelli assumed PTA leadership. PTA found its true purpose (child welfare) obliterating everything else. District feeding plans and clothing distribution for the many poor took precedence.

Under the leadership of

Mrs. Claude Brown (1931-32) Eagle Rock Elementary was not only helping its own needy but had taken two other schools under its wing.

Automobile traffic was beginning to clog the streets of the area at that time and the old pavilion (or merry go round as it was called back in 1921) had to yield to progress.

Big 'shakeup'

In 1933 all Southern California was shaken by a tremendous earthquake. Kids were given a week's holiday while all city schools were inspected. Eagle Rock's auditorium was deemed unsafe and PTA changed its meetings to the kindergarten building where work was carried on amid sand boxes and alphabet blocks.

Mothers' chorus

Mrs. L. H. Moulton was head of the PTA in 1933-35 and Mrs. A. D. Long was president in 1935-36. A fish pond located on the school ground was removed because of the safety factor. Mrs. Willa Huffman became principal and a mothers' chorus was formed.

While Mrs. Freeman Hall was president (1936-37) "welfare" lunches were served for 15 cents . . . but the menu was probably more elaborate when PTA celebrated Founders Day that year. Mrs. C. C. Noble, state president (who had served with Eagle Rock PTA back in 1910), was among the VIPS assembled on that day.

Men began to take notice of PTA in the year that followed. While Mrs. Connable Wills was president, some 69 men were among the ranks.

Back to the auditorium

By 1938 when Mrs. L. L. Penn was president, the auditorium was back in use after considerable renovation. A move toward cooperation among associations was made when joint meetings of other Eagle Rock PTAs (Rockdale, San Rafael and Dahlia Heights) was held in Thorne Hall at Occidental College.

Mrs. Ray Smallcomb took over the reins in 1939-41, a year that ended with chaos and international explosion . . . Pearl Harbor had been attacked and "life as usual" would not return to PTA (or to anyone) for many years. During the war years of 1942-43 with heartache and rationing and mounting casualties abroad, PTA continued on. With Mrs. John Schwartzlose as president, Eagle Rock PTA helped in

registration for rationing of gasoline, sugar, meat and shoes.

Mrs. Mary Yost took up the gavel in 1943-44. Victory gardens sprouted all over the school yards. Some 200 members became blood donors. Funds were scarce. Times were trying and it was days like this that proved PTA's diligence.

Peace returns

Mrs. Yost took a second term of office (1944-45) and was in office when the joyful news of "Cease Fire" broke in 1945. For three years the youngsters had been saving rags and papers that were no longer needed for the war effort. So funds were used to purchase a grand piano.

Six life memberships (a new high) were presented by the PTA under the regime of Mrs. Lavonne Tyler (1945-46). Some \$250 was contributed to the Tenth District welfare fund and more youth groups were sponsored.

When Mrs. Earl Goodwin served as president during 1946-47, membership had risen to 405 and when Mrs. Ralph Beal assumed the leadership 1947-48, "rugby" was introduced, with proceeds going to youth groups. Mrs. Ethel Leafgreen became principal at this time.

Mrs. Richard Quackenbush (1948-49) was at the head of the Association when the first open house was held and PTA manned a booth at the community carnival celebrating the widening of Colorado Boulevard. Mrs. Sylvia Bigen began teaching classes in parent education which are still being held today.

Mrs. Hugh Owen took over the role of prexy in 1951 when Harvest Home and May Day festivals were widened in scope and the Newsette got its name of "Eagle Rocket."

Post in Japan

Mrs. Roy Dennis became president in the years 1951-52 when Mrs. Georgia Isaacs was principal pro-tem while Mrs. Leafgreen was assigned to a post in Japan where she studied post-war education.

Mrs. Kenneth Kinnaird (1952-53) was the president who greeted Mrs. Leafgreen on her return.

Mrs. Irvan Parman (1954-55) was in charge as post war shock waves still engulfed the world politically and economically. The PTA women collected 60 pounds of old nylons which were

sent to war widows in Japan who unraveled and re-claimed the yarn.

Fathers reform

Mrs. B. M. Foster (1955-56) was in the president's chair as the first Fathers Night was held and it was such a tremendous success that it was repeated the following year when Mrs. E. J. Voss was prexy. This time the fathers and male teachers imitated Elvis Presley and "brought down the house."

New records were presented to the school under the regime of Mrs. James Murphy and Mrs. Edward Smith (who shared the years of 1958-59).

Mrs. Helen Perry (1959-60) headed a membership of 805, including the big consolidation deal which found San Rafael School closing its doors after condemnation of its building. Board members numbered some 80 persons with two schools represented.

Mrs. Courtney Shaw (1961-63) headed the PTA the year that Eagle Rock celebrated its 50th birthday. Members cooperated with civic dignitaries and combined merchants in putting on a festival that would have flabbergasted those early settlers who sent their 17 children to the little country school back in 1884.

New math

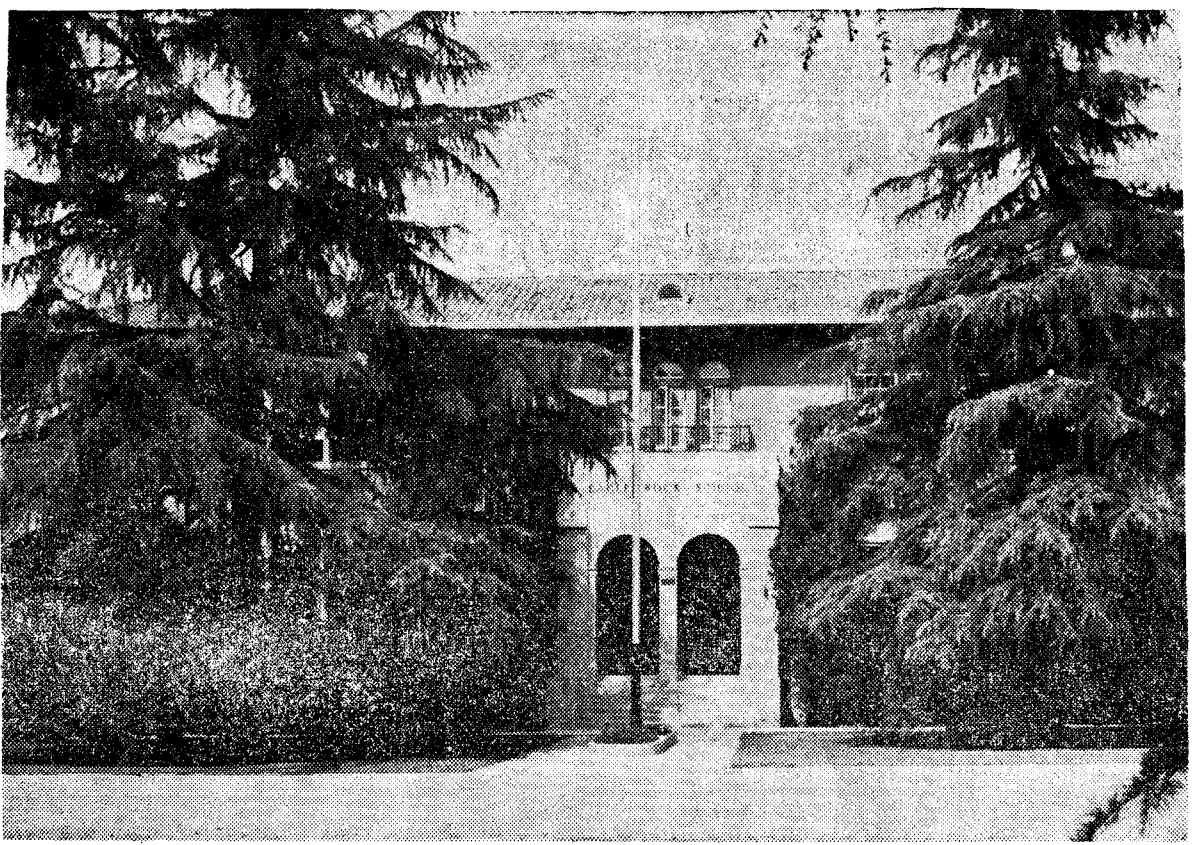
It was with the reign of Mrs. Jo Nagy (1964-65) that the academic world was stirred by the introduction of "new math" which sent parents back to study to keep up with their children.

Mrs. Robert Crouch (1965-66) took over at a time when school safety was being stressed and parking regulations were changed.

This year's president, Mrs. Royce Cavolt (with a membership of 980) and undertaken the summation job of looking back . . . in depth.

It has been a time consuming job, but a happy one for the committee who thoroughly enjoy their roles of historians. Busy on the job are Ruth Haviland, Gloria Graham and Pauline Jackson. They have had the help of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Welcome of Eagle Rock Historical Society.

Actual pictures and old-time paraphernalia of historic Eagle Rock will be on display and many of the presidents and principals mentioned in this account will be on hand to bring the old days back to life.



Eagle Rock Elementary . . . 1967

Here in the modern building at Fair Park and Eagle Rock Blvds., the public is invited to join the PTA in reminiscing about the old days of the community. Meeting is set for 7 p.m. Tuesday night.



In 1884 . . .

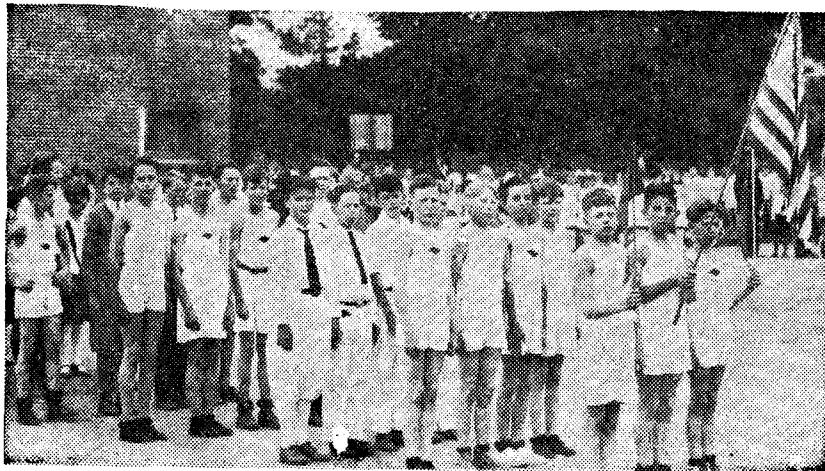
This was Eagle Rock Elementary back in 1884 when the student body included 17 students and one teacher. The building has been rebuilt twice in the 83 intervening years.



CLASS OF '21 . . . Do you recognize any of the small fry dressed up for picture-taking day back in 1921? Historians who researched the school history claim that almost 90 per cent of the kids who graduated from Eagle Rock Elementary still live in the area. Here's one who does . . . the handsome little boy on the far right answered roll call to the name of Charles Hamer, now principal of Eagle Rock High.



MAY FESTIVAL . . . This traditional May celebration is almost as old as Eagle Rock Elementary. Together with the Harvest Home celebration in the fall, May Day was a big event in 1926 . . . and 1967, too.



PHYSICAL CULTURE, 1919 style. Boys in their skivvies and girls in their middy blouses participated in a demonstration of physical skills.