

# CARLSBAD'S CALAVERA SCHOOL

1896 to 1919

The Calavera School was started in 1896 because there had been an exodus of people leaving after the "boom" of the early 1880 era, ended in 1888. Since all of the people with children had moved away, the old established families found themselves without a school. Those families were, the two Marron families, Tito and Sylvester Marron, the W. W. Borden family, the Mathew Kelly family, the W. S. Kelly family and the Robert Kelly family.

These six families were living on ranches strung out from the Marron Canyon (on Vista way where the rock plant is now located) to Palomar Airport Road (where the Frazee Flower Warehouse is now located) and inland from two to three miles. All good sized families---the two Marrons, ten children; the Borden---ten; the Mathew Kelly seven, the W.S. Kelly three and the Robert Kelly family five. Because of the range in age there were never more than two or three children from any one family of school age, so that in all of the 22 years the school was in operation, no more than 12 children were ever in attendance at one time. All of these children walked to school except for three years when the Robert Kelly children, Dewey and Emily Kelly rode a Burro to school. It was during these three years that the Robert Kelly family boarded the new teacher, Miss Lydick, who was just out of training school in San Diego. She had her own horse and rode to school over the distance of about six miles each way. The teachers didn't last long at the Calavera School, and all the other teachers that I can remember, boarded with my family because we were the closest to the school. My father was W. S. Kelly.

The school building was moved from the flat area just north of what is now CAR COUNTRY. It was built by the Minniapolis Beach Co. as part of a scheme to grow mulberry trees as food for silk worms and thereby produce silk in competition with China. About as far as they got with their plan was building the cocoonery to grow the silk worms. It was a well built building with redwood sideing and lath and plaster walls inside. It had four doors, one in each corner and four large windows. It had a plaster ceiling too, about 12 feet high and a good tongue-and-groove floor. The shingle roof was high and sharp like those in Minneapolis to shed the winter snow---some said, but it served one good purpose: Our only game, anti-over. We divided up in two teams, one on each side of the building and threw a soft rubber ball over the roof. If the team on the other side could catch it they ran around the building and hit any player on the other side with the ball. That captured him for their side.. We also played Run-Sheep-Run, a team game in which one team ran out of the school yard and hid in the brush--while the team that was "it" shut their eyes and counted to ten. Then they went to hunt for the sheep. If the hunters went in the wrong direction, the captain of the sheep would yell---run-sheep-run and make a dash for home base.

The teacher rang a small hand bell at five minutes to one, and all the children came running to stand on the Cistern platform. Then the teacher would say---"Wash your face and hands, comb your hair, and go out to the toilet if you wish." There was a 15 minuite recess

I forgot to mention that Miss Lydick had to open and shut 5 wire gates on her way to school and back and this meant getting off her horse and on again ten times---no fancy gates in those days

in the morning but none in the afternoon. The school day was from 9 to 3, five days a week. I attended the Calavera School through the fourth grade and then my family moved to San Diego where I went to the old Florence School, a big city school where the 8 rooms accommodated all but kindergarden, that did not then exist--- in those "good-old-days."

How those farmers and ranchers managed to move that building without breaking it into small peices I will never know. There was no road to move it over, just native brush land, and some sections were so rough and steep that they must have built temporary roads. They may have been able to rent house-moving equipment in Oceanside which was then a town of perhaps 1000 population. Horses, of course, were the only means of power to pull the load.

Building the Cistern was another problem. The broken up volcanic rock that was just below the surface( one can see it in the road cuts near by, today) was a big job with nothing more than a pick, shovel and crowbar, tools that every rancher possessed. The cistern was 12 feet in diameter, ten feet deep and rocked up and plastered inside. It was covered with redwood planks and a coat of tar and sand.. Eve troughs were built and down-spouts into the Cistern, with a hand p pump on a box on top of the cover. The rain water was not used for drinking, everyone carrying a bottle of water to school along with their lunch. In winter time on rainy days the teacher sometimes cooked beans or a stew. I don't remember any plates but everyone had a tincup and spoon.

There was a wood stove and woodbox in front of the teacher's desk and some one of the ranchers was supposed to haul in enough wood for the winter. and pile it in one corner of the school yard. Three of the four doors to the building were always kept locked and the front door always locked each night.

The library books were kept on the shelf back of the teacher's desk and a large globe on a stand was provided as well as a large Websters dictionary on another stand. Each desk had a lid and a place beneath to store books and pencils. The Ante Room was for the girls coats and hats. Only the big girls wore shoes, and all the little girls, little boys and big boys went barefoot. Rubbers were for city kids. The boys hung their hats in the entrance anteroom. And every boy no matter what size wore a hat as did all grownup men. Only Indians went bareheaded with a feather in their hair!!!

The euclyptus trees were planted when I was going to school there, and we all had little gardens about 4 x 8 feet. Three corner trees are now missing, and I am not sure which tree I planted but my garden was near the tree that is now number six, counting around from the tree on the northeast corner of the yard. A swarm of bees were on duty for years over the ceiling in the southeast corner of the building. We learned about the "birds and the bees" naturally.

There were large black boards on either side of the room, and that was where the teacher did most of her teaching and the little kids got some advanced learning in seeing what the older brothers and sisters were doing at the black board.

With all this historic background on the Calavera School site, most new citizens will understand why the writer thinks that the site and the trees should be preserved for future generations, but some will say: Whats all the fuss about? Why not cut down these old trees and build a softball diamond, tennis courts, and all of the other physical structures for a people playground? My answer to that is that all of these goodies can be had and the trees saved too. The area between the trees (60 by 80 feet) is large enough to hold a number of things: A volly ball court, a lawn with concrete tables for evening cookouts, or daytime lunches. Rest rooms for the kids and old folks. A little outdoor theatre with stage and lights. A band stand over the old cistern--cleaned out for a giant sounding board. The old picket fence restored by a cement block wall three seats high for spectators, and a ticket gate for money-raising events. And dozens of other ideas that the people of Calavera Hills will be thinking about. But above all else--and first: The trees need to be trimmed up---cutting out the dead wood and installing a deep irrigation system that will reach the roots that have penetrated into the volcanic rock below, the rock that has held the moisture over the wet years to carry the trees through the dry years. With a little fertilizer in the water, the old trees would turn into beautiful specimens like many of those in downtown Carlsbad, that have been so nicely rejuvenated.

As I understand it, there is about five acres in this park site that developer, Mr. Saunders, has donated. This is plenty of land for a ball diamond and all of the other goodies here suggested, but, whatever the area (if only the area between the trees) some very interesting and worthwhile things can be developed

Sincerely,



For the Carlsbad Historical Society:

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Sept 23, 1986