

A Brief History of the Fair Oaks Elementary School

Jim Pearce, 2019

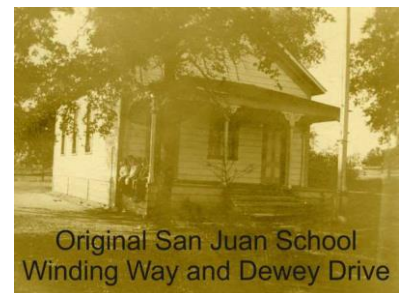
We are fortunate to have two authoritative sources on the history of the Fair Oaks Elementary School District and its several school buildings. John Holst, one of the first residents of the Fair Oaks

Colony, was involved with the District from its inception in 1897 and served on the Board for 45 years. He left his memories of the school district in an article in the Fair Oaks and San Juan Memories book (page 93 Section VII). The book is on-line at the Fair Oaks Historical Society website (fairoakshistory.org) and available for viewing at the History Center.



A more exhaustive book, “A History of the Formation of the San Juan Unified School District” by James R. Cowan, Ed.D. (125 pages) covers all of the school districts that were unified in 1960 and outlines their history.

There is some confusion, both in narrative and photos, regarding the “first Fair Oaks school.” Northeastern Sacramento was populated mostly by farmers and ranchers after 1860 when expansion of agriculture occurred in the area. Widely separated families built a number of one room schools in the area. Sylvan School, built in 1862 on the Old Auburn Road just south of the Sylvan Cemetery was followed by San Juan School on Winding Way across from the Dewey Ranch in 1880, and Roberts School in Orangevale in 1883. All of these schools were torn down and replaced as populations grew. Most of the early families who lived in the northwest section of what is now Fair Oaks, the Dewey, Ricketts, Coyle, O’Donnell and other families, had their children attend the San Juan School.



Fair Oaks as a named community was started in 1895 and was abruptly colonized by a large group of buyers of small tracts of land who brought their families out to the area from the midwest. From John Holst, “...tell you something about Mr. and Mrs U. B. Watkins. Mr. Watkins landed here with the first excursion to look things over, and he then returned to Kansas to dispose of his property. In March, 1896, he and Mrs. Watkins arrived on the second excursion to establish themselves permanently here. Mrs. Watkins was a retired school teacher and knowing that she was coming to a new country, she brought with her quite a number of Kansas school textbooks. Finding no school in session here, Mrs. Watkins asked the mothers of the school children if they would like to have their children come to her place and she would be glad to teach them.”

The parents agreed and Mrs. Watkins held school mostly under some oak trees on the Watkins property for two or three hours in the morning. About 12 – 15 students attended including two of the Holst children.

In Spring, 1897, the Fair Oaks residents formed a school district and began construction of a one room schoolhouse on property across the street from the Watkins home. While that was

going on “The very first session, in 1897, was held in a hall over a store building.” (ed – that would be the Levi Plumbing store on the northwest corner of Main and Capitola across the street from the hotel – burned after 1910).

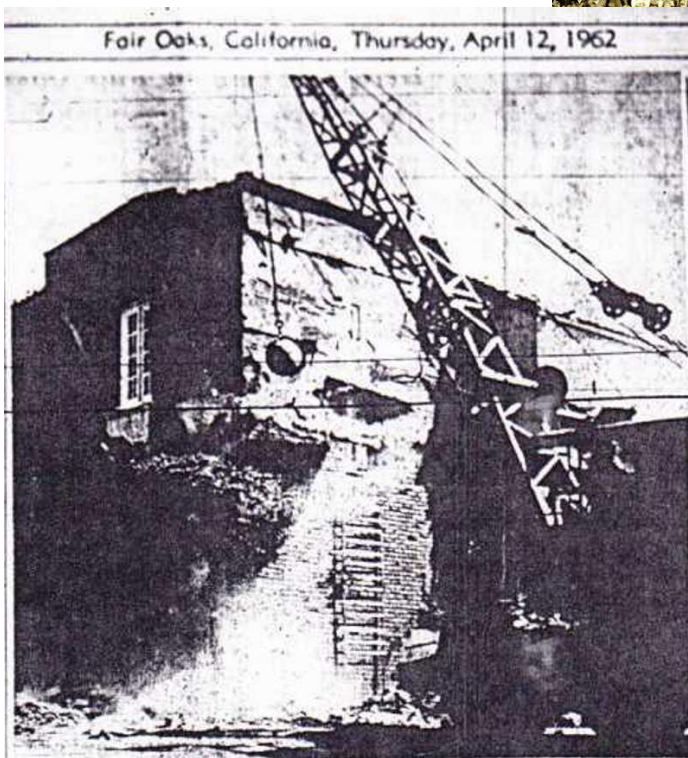
Finding the one room school immediately inadequate (1898 found over 50 pupils enrolled) , the residents in 1901 petitioned the Fair Oaks landowners Clark and Cox to donate a larger site for a new school, which they did, and Joseph Broadly, with community support, built the new school. It was located where the Community Clubhouse is now, on California Ave. A bond issue of \$5,000 was passed to build the school.



After the second school was built the one room school was moved to the east end of Fair Oaks to better serve the residents there, and renamed Fair Oaks School #2. Due to declining enrollment, it was closed in 1917 and the building became the Carpenter Rest Home. Later it was a residence and was torn down for redevelopment in the 1980's.

The second Fair Oaks Elementary School lasted until 1927 when more expansion was needed. The building was used as a community clubhouse until it was torn down in a WPA project in 1939 and a new clubhouse constructed.

A bond election was held in 1927 for \$45,000 and the new brick school was constructed at the northeast corner of Fair Oaks Blvd.



and Winding Way. That structure was demolished in 1962 after years of concern by the State Fire Marshal's Office about limited access for evacuation of the building. During the period 1930 to 1960, a number of additional buildings had been added to the grounds, so there was no need to suspend classes while the demolition and reconstruction occurred. The resulting one story complex served as the Fair Oaks Elementary School until until it was closed recently due to enrollment issues and is now used by the District for other purposes.

CR-R-R-ASH! The walls of the old Fair Oaks Elementary School came a tumbling down Monday morning as demolition work began on the condemned structure. A new modern building will rise in its place. Below, pupils were given time out by their teachers to watch the big steel ball batter down the brick walls and to learn some of the skills of a sidewalk superintendent. It was a little noisy for study, anyway.