

The History of Bonsall Schools

The following information is taken from "The Little Old Bonsall Schoolhouse," written by Virginia Funk and copyrighted in 1984.

Bonsall, a quiet rural community in North San Diego County, was originally known as "Mt. Fairview" and later as "Osgood." A petition for a Post Office in 1889 recommended the names "Reed," "Favorite" or "Bonsall." Post Office Headquarters in Washington D.C. chose Bonsall, the name of a retired minister who developed a fruit tree nursery in the area in 1889. The San Diego Union and Daily Bee wrote of Mr. Bonsall, "Mr. James Bonsall purchased his property of a settler in 1879 and immediately moved on to commence active operations with a cash capital of \$3.00. His enterprise was successful."

The "little old Bonsall schoolhouse," as she is known affectionately to area residents, has been serving the community since she opened her doors on August 26, 1895 at her original location, the present driveway entrance to the school grounds. Grandparents and great-grandparents of present-day students received their primary education in the one room structure. Until 1920, one teacher taught all grades.

In the early years, four schools existed which later made up the Bonsall District: Mount Fairview, which opened in 1882 and was located near the present site of the "Little Old Bonsall School House," Monserrate, The River School and the Oaks. Teachers were hired for three months at a time. The school year usually ran for 7 1/2 months, beginning in mid-summer and closing for several months in mid-year. Research indicates that children had time off to help plant the crops.

It was decided to have a bond election in order to build a new school. The election was held on June 20, 1891 and failed. Supplies had to be purchased to fix up the old school building, which had to be continually refurbished and used for the next few years. August 25, 1891, the district elected to extend the instruction from eighth grade through grade twelve so Bonsall students could get a high school diploma.

In the fall of 1893, meetings were held for the purpose of building and relocating Mt. Fairview School. It was decided to hold another bond election to raise money to build the new school. The amount of money requested was \$900.00 plus interest at seven percent. The bonds passed. All 21 voters had approved.

Mrs. Elise Averill was the first teacher hired to instruct the children in the new schoolhouse. She received \$60.00 per month. Nettie Dusing was appointed "Janitress" at a salary of \$4.00 per month. These salaries had not changed since 1882 and remained the same until 1905, when they were increased \$5.00 to \$10.00 per month, depending on circumstances. It would take 37 years, until 1919, for teachers to earn \$90.00 per month, and the Janitress, \$10.00 per month.

According to the Census Marshall's report, dated April 1895, 41 children were attending area schools. Many years passed before there would be an increase in the number of attendees. These 41 students came from sturdy stock whose values were simple and absolute and who didn't know what tension or stress were all about. They walked to school or came by buggy and knew class was about to begin when the teacher stood by the door and rang the school bell. Lunches were brought in tin lard pails and eaten outdoors. In the school's small confines, good behavior was a necessity. Children learned in an atmosphere of firm but fair discipline. They "got a licking" if they were disobedient and were made to wear a dunce cap, which, in 1891 cost \$.45.

Bonsall Union School District was so named on July 25, 1919, when the Board of Directors met to choose the name and location of the building, which all five directors agreed should be on the site of the Mt. Fairview School. Miss Mitilda O'Neal was elected principal, at a salary of \$100.00 per month, and Miss Roberta Ellis as teacher for \$90.00 per month.

Plans for the new school building were approved and the contract awarded for \$16,671, with a 6% fee going to the architect. In 1920, a school bond election for \$18,500 carried and a new school building of Spanish style, consisting of an auditorium, stage, small kitchen, two classrooms, and a tiny principal's office was built. While the new school was being readied for occupancy, the little old schoolhouse was moved to its location behind the new building for use as a primary school.

As the Bonsall area grew, additional classroom space was needed. Bonsall Union School was built in sections of a period of 29 years, beginning in 1954 when two classrooms, an office, and a teachers lounge were constructed. The Spanish style building did not meet Field Act requirements and was torn down in the summer of 1967. As student registration increased so did the size of the school. In 1984, 30 classrooms and two trailers were on campus.

The Bonsall Lions Club leased the little old schoolhouse from the school district since 1968 when they moved it to its present site not far from where it originally stood. Although some classes were held there, it served more as a gathering place for various organizations.