

Historical Ramblings

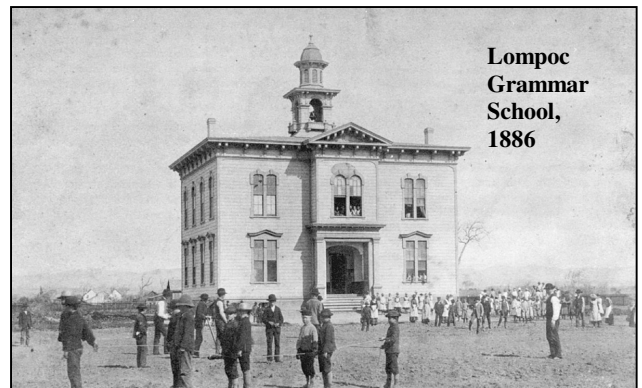
Lompoc Grammar School

From its beginnings, the town of Lompoc was dedicated to providing educational opportunities to local youth. Throughout the valley numerous picturesque schoolhouses dotted the landscape, occupied by all grade levels taught by a single teacher in one room. In 1877, Lompoc Grammar School, Lompoc's first in-town school was constructed on property set aside in perpetuity by the Land Company in 1874 for the construction of a public school. One city block was dedicated for this purpose, bounded by H Street on the east, I Street on the west, Chestnut Avenue on the south and Laurel Avenue on the north.

The Grammar School became a familiar landmark throughout its life until its demolition in 1922. In all old photographs, it is easily identifiable. The two-story wooden structure, topped with a cupola stood majestically near the corner of H Street and Chestnut Avenue with its impressive front façade facing south. Constructed at a cost of \$7,000, the school opened in April of 1877 with a staff of three. J.W. Webb was principal and Albert Olinger and Henrietta Whittock teachers.

Only one classroom of the original four was used at first, inviting criticism from the townspeople that the large building was a waste. The three additional rooms were used as playrooms. Population grew so rapidly, that the next year all four rooms were in use as

classrooms, quickly silencing the skeptical public. As Lompoc's population continued to



**Lompoc
Grammar
School,
1886**

grow, additional space was needed, so four additional rooms were added in 1891, two each on the east and west sides. These spaces were adequate until 1911 when the school was once again bursting at its seams. An additional two-story, four classroom building, known as the “Industrial Building,” or “Sloyd Building” or “The Annex,” was opened in 1912.

In 1921, a new building was begun closer to the corner of Chestnut Ave. and H Street just in front – to the south – of the first grammar school building. The new single story Spanish style building had frontage on H Street and wrapped around the corner onto Chestnut Avenue, eventually connecting to an auditorium constructed in 1937. It was to as familiar a landmark as its predecessor.

The original two-story building was dismantled in 1922, when the new building was completed. Grammar School trustees put the old wooden structure up for bid. It was torn down and removed from the school block by Everett Building Company, who paid \$957.20 for the structure. Lumber was reused in the construction of several homes in Lompoc. The “Industrial Building” remained in use until the 1950’s, when it was damaged by fire and torn down.

In the 1940’s, additional buildings were constructed west of I Street to serve a burgeoning military population. Originally designed to be temporary buildings, they still stand today as part of El Camino Middle School. The 1922 building became known as Lompoc Elementary School and later as El Camino Elementary School, serving the City as its only elementary school until the construction of Arthur Hapgood School in the 1950’s.

In 1969, the 1922 building was declared unsafe, because it did not adhere to earthquake standards for schools, set forth in the Field Act of 1933. The original cornerstone was removed, contents examined, then relocated in front of new buildings built on the opposite side of the campus on North J Street.

Even though the cost of retrofitting the school was far less than constructing a new facility, the decision was made to raze it. The wrecking ball was called to duty in 1969 and, when it made its first swing, it simply bounced off the solid concrete walls, garnering much respect for construction techniques of 1922! Eventually, the building was razed, forever changing the character of Chestnut Ave. and H St. The auditorium and those “temporary” buildings still stand as a part of the campus of El Camino Middle School. The H Street frontage is now merely a grassy area, giving no clues to its past as the location of Lompoc’s most recognizable educational landmarks.

