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# Jefferson Elementary Schools

**A**T AN EARLY DATE John D. Daly moved his family to San Francisco so his children could attend what he deemed to be better schools. Even as he did so, his neighbors in Colma and in the area that became Daly City were aware of the need for building adequate schools.

In 1866 they formed the Jefferson School District, which included a school built in 1856 on Mission and Old San Pedro Roads. While it was a one room school filled with benches for the students and a rustic desk for the teacher, it prompted the builders of the railroad that came through the area to call the depot School House Station. Soon this name became attached to both the depot and the post office, and so designated them until 1888 when Colma became the official name of the area. Even today the name lingers to designate a prominent Daly City thoroughfare, "School Street."

Within a year after the formation of the Jefferson District a new school was built on two lots donated by Peter Dunks, who is remembered for several donations of land for public use. This school stood where the Jefferson School Annex now stands.

The school was closed from the middle of December until the first of March so the children could remain home to help with the spring plowing and planting. This lengthened the years that the students spent in school. Thus, in the higher classes it was not unusual to see, occasionally, big boys and girls close to adult age.

It is interesting to note that the trustees for this school were the earliest settlers, including Patrick Brooks and Robert Thornton.

Twenty years after the first school was built a bond issue was passed "to make repairs on the old school and to build a new building."<sup>1</sup> In commenting on this house of learning a school official left a description as follows:

A new large room and an imposing steeple had been added to the old building. This made it a two-room school to take care of the increased attendance of about eighty to ninety pupils.

In the middle of each room was a big pot-bellied stove. Stoking that stove was a hazardous job and only the big boys were permitted to "stoke up" under the eagle eye of the teacher.

The new school was a big improvement over the one-room school. Each room now had two anterooms, one for the girls and another for the boys.

Today the back portion of the little building on San Pedro Road called the Jefferson Annex (now abandoned for school use) contains all that is left of the first Jefferson Elementary School.<sup>2</sup>

As recorded by Byron Curry in his **History of the San Mateo Public School Districts:**

Other early school buildings, now demolished, were the Vista Grande, located at Mission and Vista Grande, which was built some time after a bond election was passed in 1894; and the Woodrow Wilson Elementary on Santa Barbara Avenue, which was constructed in 1917 [and has been rebuilt].<sup>3</sup>

To continue the story of the development of the area schools, we turn to the Jefferson Elementary School District's **Teacher's Background of Information:**

Crocker, a new Jefferson, and Woodrow Wilson schools were built in 1935. No new schools were constructed until 1950 when Garden Village was built. The next year Colma Primary and Colma Intermediate (seventh and eighth grades) schools were opened. Westlake School was next in 1952, followed by Benjamin Franklin in 1953, and Olympia in 1955. Vista Mar and Vista Grande opened in 1958. In 1960, in addition to new General Pershing School, Daniel Webster, Thomas Edison, Abraham Lincoln and Fernando Rivera Schools were opened.<sup>4</sup>

During the decade of the 1960's new schools were built and named Christopher Columbus, Franklin D. Roosevelt, M. Pauline Brown, and John F. Kennedy. District offices were constructed at 101 Lincoln Avenue in Daly City. These schools will be followed by others that are planned to serve the children in the Serramonte area and in other new sections of Daly City.

Thus the one room school of 1856 had by 1972 grown into a district of twenty-one elementary schools with 9,373 students served by 462 teachers and 18 principals.

To the credit of the men and women who sat on the school board when these schools were being constructed and to the architects who planned them, the schools received national recognition for their excellence. This is demonstrated in an article that appeared in **Architectural Forum** in which Allan Temko said, "These schools appear with sudden brilliance: gay, technically inventive, adorned with paintings and sculpture, carefully suited, thoughtfully planned."<sup>5</sup>

Only a few of the names of the early teachers of the Jefferson District are available. These were Miss Etta Tilon, Miss Ada Hughes, Miss Eva Knowles, Miss

Rose Schubert and Miss Henrietta Engel, who taught at General Pershing School for thirty-five years.<sup>6</sup>

In 1898 William J. Savage became principal of the Jefferson School and so served until 1918 when he became superintendent of the entire Jefferson Elementary School District. This post he held until 1931 when he closed thirty-three years of service to the Jefferson District.

One of the teachers who taught under his direction said of William J. Savage, "I think he caught a vision of what the Jefferson district would become. He was always planning a new school or a big project." She recalled that, "He walked from school to school making a regular pilgrimage, sometimes every day, and always at least several times a week. He carried all his records in his head. There was no central office. And everybody adored him, for he helped many people out."<sup>7</sup>

To this may be added a tribute from one of his students. "I'll always remember Mr. Savage. He had a kind but scholarly charm that the students admired."<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Savage's name appears as one of six men who have served as superintendent of the Jefferson Elementary School District: William J. Savage, 1918-1931; Richard Crane, 1931-1949; James Snell, 1949-1951; Henry S. Weibel, 1951-1959; Richard Foster, 1959-1965; and Frank L. Greenwood, 1965-1973.



ROLL OF HONOR CERTIFICATE  
ISSUED IN 1902 & SIGNED BY  
WILLIAM S. SAVAGE