



Lafayette, California

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Located on the Lower Level of the Lafayette Library

**Our History Room Phone Number has Changed: 925-385-2297**

## LAFAYETTE'S SCHOOLS

The first school in Lafayette was built in the early 1850s by Benjamin Shreve on what is today Golden Gate Way between First and Second Streets. Shreve had come to California during the Gold Rush but apparently did not strike it rich and was heading back to San Francisco to return to the Midwest when he came through this small community. He was hired by Elam Brown to be the first teacher. The school was located on Golden Gate Way between First and Second Streets. This photo was taken probably in the 1860s at a community social.



Built in 1871, this building, another one room schoolhouse, was located on today's Moraga Road. It was built at a cost of \$825 on a lot that cost \$41. Jennie Bickerstaff is on the far right wearing an apron. She graduated from this school in 1888. She was born in Pennsylvania in 1872 and came to California as a child of 7. She taught school in Contra Costa County from 1892 until she retired in 1936. Her first job was with the Moraga School District and she also taught at the Pacheco School. Her longest tenure was 21 years with the Walnut Creek School District. She rode her horse Topsy to the schools where she taught.

There was a unique feature about this schools at this time....the numbering system. It was the reverse of the numbering system in today's schools. Students started school in the eighth grade and graduated from the first grade. This numbering system changed when the schools became twelve year schools. Grade advancement was not automatic. This school building was moved to Mt. Diablo Blvd. in 1925 and housed the Post Office, Library, and Telephone Exchange.

Teacher Jennie Bickerstaff and Principal Sophie Tucker can be seen standing on the steps of the Third Lafayette School. Jennie was a teacher at this school from 1893 to 1902. This school is now a part of the Lafayette United Methodist Church. The second school house can be seen at the rear.



Lafayette Elementary School was opened in 1927 as the school aged population in the town had grown. The first Teacher/Principal was W.B. (Bill) Ellis from 1932-1947. He was Lafayette School's Principal and District Superintendent from 1947-1950. He became the district's full-time superintendent in 1950 until he retired in 1962. Part of the school was demolished in 1997 and new classrooms were built as well as a multipurpose room and library. Other classrooms were remodeled, and additional classrooms have been added in the past few years.

Vallecito School opened in 1949 and was closed in 1983. The name of the school means "little valley" as the site was located between the nearby hills. When the school was closed, the students from Vallecito were sent to Happy Valley or Lafayette School. The school and property were sold to Bentley School in 1995 and are now a private high school.

**New Lafayette School to Open Next Month**

LAFAYETTE, Feb. 9.—Lafayette grammar school students will gain much needed elbow room early in March with the opening of a new \$120,500 school at Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Upper Happy Valley Road. The school, which will be under the direction of Mrs. Graylis Bossler, teacher-principal, will accommodate approximately 230 students from kindergarten through the fifth grade.

Relieving the overcrowded grammar school here, the new plant will draw its pupils from the western part of the Lafayette Grammar School District as well as those who live north of Mt. Diablo Boulevard, W. B. Ellis, principal for the district, said.

Two kindergarten units will be conducted at the school during the spring term, according to Ellis. The new plant will be one of the most modern in the country, featuring north lighting in every room, cross lighting and ventilation and radiant heating. A wide sun porch on the southeast side of the building provides an outside exit for all rooms.

The building is the first unit of a plan that calls for the construction of an auditorium, cafeteria, administration building and another classroom.



Montecito School also opened in 1949. The name means "little mountain" as the school was built on the eastern end of Lafayette near some hills. The school was closed in 1979 and was later sold to the Meher School. After the school was closed, students from this area attended Springhill and Burton Valley Schools.



**Stanley School opened in 1953. It was named after Matthew Howard Stanley who moved to Lafayette in 1925 and owned a drugstore on Mt. Diablo Blvd. He was elected to the Lafayette School Board in the late 1920s. Over the next 25 years he helped oversee the school system's growth from a single three-room schoolhouse with 150 pupils to three schools with 1800 students. In the 1930s, Lafayette residents began forming a high school district to include Lafayette, Orinda, Moraga and Walnut Creek.**

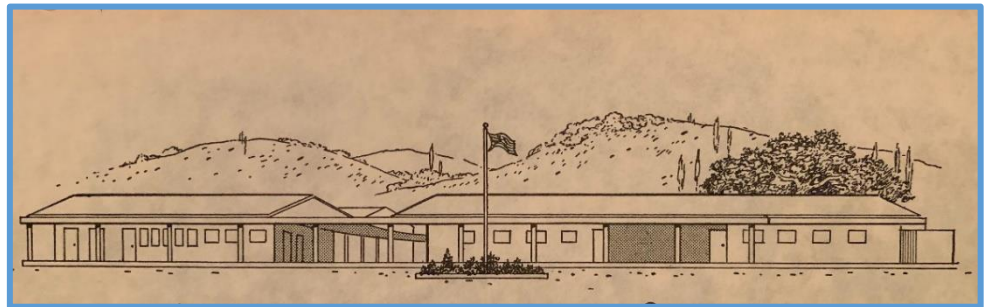


**Mr. Stanley was voted to the Board of Trustees for the new Acalanes High School District in 1938. By 1956, when Mr. Stanley left the school board, Las Lomas and Miramonte were up and running. In addition to his contribution to local schools, he was also on the Board of the Fire District, helped to form the CCC Sanitary District, was on the planning committee for the construction of the Caldecott Tunnel, on the committee to establish the Lafayette Library, and worked with the Boy Scouts, the Lions Club, and the American Legion. After a year-long renovation during the 1992-93 school year, 6<sup>th</sup> graders began attending Stanley Intermediate, along with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The four elementary schools became Kindergarten-5<sup>th</sup> grade.**



**Burton School (located on St. Marys Road) opened in 1954 and was closed in 1979. The school was named after the Burton Family who farmed the property in this part of Lafayette. The property was sold to the City of Lafayette in 1983 and became the Lafayette Community Center.**

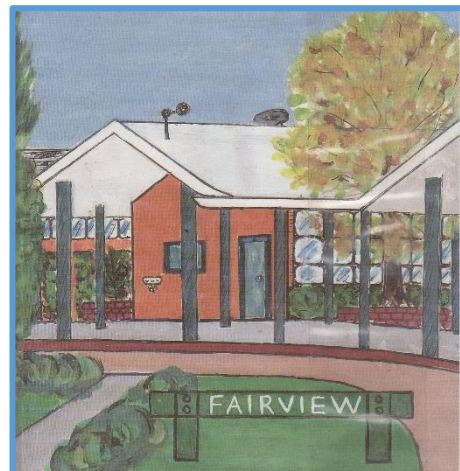
**Springhill School opened in 1955. The school was demolished (except for the multi-purpose room) in 1997 and completely rebuilt by 1999. Classes were housed in portable buildings until the construction was completed. The name Springhill may have come from the geography of the area which included hills and springs.**





**Happy Valley School was opened in 1956 and is still in use today. It was remodeled in the 1990s and new classrooms have been added several times between then and now. The name Happy Valley was first mentioned in 1887 but it is unknown why this name was chosen for this area and thus for the school.**

**Fairview Middle School opened in 1958 as Lafayette's second intermediate school with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. It shared a campus with Merriewood Elementary School. In 1978, the School Board voted to consolidate three elementary schools and two intermediate schools due to declining enrollment and less school funding from the state of California. In 1979 it became Burton Valley Elementary School when elementary students from Montecito, Burton, and Merriewood Schools were moved to the campus. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from Fairview were moved to Stanley Intermediate School.**

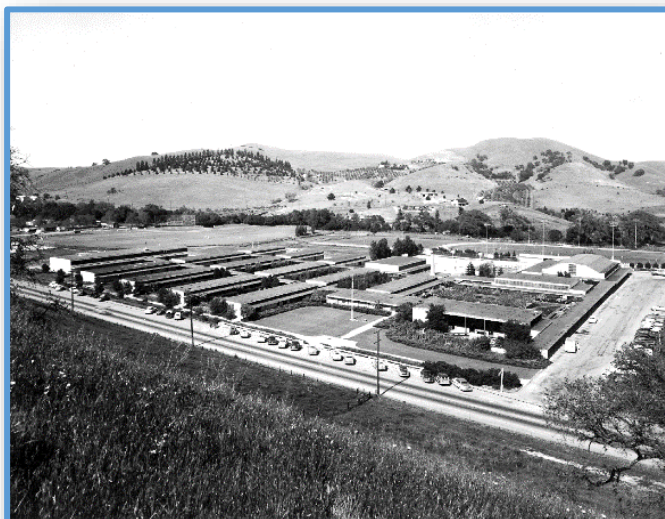


**Merriewood Elementary School shared a campus with Fairview Intermediate School and was opened in 1959. In 1979 the elementary school was closed and the entire site became Burton Valley Elementary School.**

**Ellis School opened in January of 1963 and was closed in 1976. It was located on the east side of Pleasant Hill Road off of Quandt Road. When it was opened, it housed 150 kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. After the school was closed, the land was sold to a private developer who built homes on the site. The school was named for Bill Ellis, longtime teacher, Principal and Superintendent of Schools in Lafayette. At first Mr. Ellis did not want a school named after him so other names were suggested: Sir Francis Drake School, Quandt School, Shreve School (after Benjamin Shreve, first schoolteacher in Lafayette). Ellis School was eventually chosen as the name.**







On September 10, 1940, Acalanes High School opened with a flag raising ceremony. There were 406 students enrolled that first Fall. For several years after its completion, the school was used as an example of the most advanced school design at national architectural conventions and in architectural magazines. 67 Seniors graduated in June of 1941. Prior to its opening, students from the Lamorinda and Walnut Creek areas rode the Sacramento Northern train and attended Mt. Diablo High School in Concord.

In 1954, the Lafayette School District enrollment was 2,824 students. By 1959 it had grown to 4,348. In the 1970s, school enrollment began to decline. At one time the District supported ten schools....today there are only five schools (plus Acalanes High School) and the elementary school enrollment is about 3,200 students in grades K-8.

## **MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2024**

Welcome to our new members and to those who have recently renewed their membership or have made a donation:

Mary Harper  
Adrienne Rogers  
Stan Pedder  
Tokiko Noricks  
Mike Raffo  
Kelly Daggs  
Levi Hunt  
Andree Hurst  
Sarah Blumenfeld  
Robert Fellows  
Nancy Holtzapple  
Sharon Fraetis

Acalanes High School Class of 1960  
Todd & Betty LaPorte  
Downing & Judith Exley  
Andy Monheit  
LOPC Senior Lunch Group  
Amy Anderson  
Carolyn Alderette  
Joan Bruzzone  
The Frazier Family  
Richard Whitmore  
Sharon & Peter Lingane  
Roger & Jeane Samuelsen

David Gerson  
Tom Edwards  
Diane Sasser  
Gloria Duffy  
Jay Lifson  
Patrick Kikkert  
James Cervantes  
Marrino Berbano  
Caroline Sjostedt  
Dick & Lisa Cohen  
The Brog Family

**Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.**

## **ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES**

Your membership is exceedingly important as it makes it possible for our organization to pay annual rent to the City of Lafayette for our space and be able to pay for our phone, insurance, and other needed supplies. Donations are always appreciated.

Student Membership: \$15 ~ Individual Membership: \$30 ~ Family Membership: \$60



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