

VII. The County Superintendent of Schools

In general, the job of the county superintendent of schools is to oversee and further the progress of education in all school districts within the county and serve as an intermediate link between those local districts and the state's Department of Education. The superintendent also has the responsibility of providing those services that can be more economically and efficiently provided by a central office than by an individual local school district.

For instance, in Santa Cruz County today--1978--the county superintendent, as head of the County Office of Education, provides programs for handicapped students, various vocational training courses, a central library of audio-visual materials, an outdoor education camp, centralized fiscal and administrative services, research services, curriculum and staff development services--and so forth. The superintendent's office also offers special assistance and support to the four small, one-school districts in the county.

But in the earliest days of the Santa Cruz County public school system the duties of the job were mostly clerical and were assumed by other public officials, such as the county assessor or surveyor, or by teachers or ministers, in addition to their regular responsibilities. Up until 1890 the superintendency was a part-time job.

In 1861--a mere four years after the first schoolhouse went up on Mission Hill--there were seven schools in the county and D. J. Haslam served as superintendent. (His report to the state describing those seven schools appears earlier in this book and is reproduced in the Appendix.) John Swett became superintendent in 1862, followed by the Reverend W. C. Bartlett, a Congregational minister, in 1863. And he was followed in 1864 by the Reverend Peter Y. Cool, a Methodist minister.

In those days there was no elected County Board of Education as there is today. There was instead a County Board of Examiners, appointed by the superintendent. It was composed of educators, and its main duty was examining the fitness of teachers to teach and verifying their teaching credentials or certificates. (The Board of Education wasn't established until 1880.)

When H. P. Stone, a teacher, assumed the superintendency in 1865, there were 21 schools in the county, with a county-wide school budget of \$6,344, serving 1,756 children. The superintendent received an annual salary of \$600 then, and Stone had to continue teaching in order to support himself.

The first superintendent to hold the job for longer than a couple of years was Hampton E. Makinney, who was elected in 1867 and served for six years "with conspicuous success," according to one historian. He was a staunch Republican and life-long champion of "the upbuilding of the schools" from the time he began his teaching career at the age of 17.

At the same time he served as county superintendent, he was serving as principal of Mission Hill School and supervisor of the Santa Cruz School District as well--all for the grand sum of \$600 a year. He managed for six years, and then, in 1873, he quit the educational field and went on to other endeavors. He was elected

county clerk and, later, deputy district attorney. In 1870, during his time as superintendent, there were 23 school districts, 38 schools, and 2,666 school children.

His successor was W. H. Hobbs, elected in 1873. He held the job for 11 years. In 1879 he wrote a report commenting on the school finances of his day:

The law now requires the State to raise not less than seven dollars per census child, and the county to raise not less than three dollars, which produces a liberal sum for the support of schools, and California today stands among the very first of States in the amount of money raised for school purposes.

His report showed that in 1879 there were 37 school districts in the county, more than 60 schools, and about 3,800 census children.

John W. Linscott, elected superintendent in 1885, could be called the "Grand Old Man" of the Santa Cruz public school system. At least he seems to have had more stamina than most superintendents, holding that office for 20 years, longer than any other superintendent before or since. (Next longest tenure is 12 years.) He, like Makinney, began teaching at the age of 17, and, aside from a one year stint in a watch factory, spent the next 55 years in the field of education--50 of them in Santa Cruz County.

Thanks to the Pajaro Valley Historical Association, we're fortunate to have a 21-page, unpublished autobiography of Linscott, which gives us an excellent, first-hand account of his career and of the school system of his day. For this reason we'll quote from it at length. (This manuscript was written in 1929 or '30 at the request of the Watsonville school board and was to be placed in the archives of the newly built Linscott Elementary School in Watsonville--a school named in his honor.)

Linscott, born in 1848 in Lincoln County, Maine, was the son of a farmer. He started to school at the age of four. In his thirteenth year a teacher boarding at the Linscott farm introduced John to algebra, geometry, history, grammar, and classic poetry. The

next winter he attended a more advanced school, walking three miles to get there, often through snow drifts up to his waist. Then, at 14, he attended high school for six months. The school was nine miles away, and he had to board out to attend it. During his sixteenth year he studied at home, and then, at the age of 17, passed his examination and earned his license to teach.

In 1864 he got his first teaching job at \$40 a month for four months, 40 miles from his home. "This was big wages," he wrote in his autobiography, "for the usual salary was twenty dollars per month." There was a reason, Linscott learned, for the generous salary. The last two teachers who had taught at the school had been driven away by the big boys of the class. One had been pelted with icy snowballs as he approached the school one morning. The other had been forcibly thrown through a glass window into a snowbank and chased, bleeding, to his home.

In spite of understandable apprehensions, the 17-year-old Linscott successfully met the challenge of his first teaching job. He began his first day at the school by burning the supply of birch rods used by the former teachers as an aid to "school management." He also allowed his lively students, who ranged in age from five years to 20, to leave their seats and talk "and even yell" for a few minutes each hour. He had no disciplinary problems during the four months he taught there.

During the next four years he served as teacher and principal in four different schools not far from his home. Because of failing health he then took a year's respite from his academic toils and went to work in a watch factory. He enrolled in a college preparatory school with the idea of getting a college education, but poor health caused him to drop out, and in the spring of 1869 he decided instead to sail with his cousin James (later a Santa Cruz County supervisor) to the "unknown land" of California.

The journey by sea and rail took about a month. They docked at San Francisco and boarded the train for San Jose. From there they took a harrowing trip to Santa Cruz "in an old Concord Stagecoach drawn by four frisky bronchos," he wrote. "Soon we were climbing the eastern slope of the Santa Cruz Mountains. At the

summit, a change of horses was made and with four wilder mustangs guided by the master hands of Tom Sutton, a noted driver of those days, we started down the old Saratoga toll-road through Boulder Creek and Felton to our destination, " which was the old Santa Cruz House, located where the Veteran's Building now stands on Front Street.

Two days later, on the following Monday, he called on H. E. Makinney, then county superintendent of schools, to inquire if any teaching jobs were available. He was granted a temporary teaching credential and referred to that pioneer temple of learning, Railroad School, near Watsonville. Linscott's account of that early school has already been quoted in Chapter Four.

Four weeks after starting his teaching job at Railroad, Linscott was called to Santa Cruz to pass an examination that would make his temporary teaching credential permanent. His account of this ordeal might be of interest to modern-day teachers:

...I went to Santa Cruz and for two days passed through a grill which could only be conceived by a Board of Examiners of that day. Puzzles in arithmetic, algebra, and analysis were fairly well met; but geography, school law, and methods of teaching were posers. ...California School Law was almost unknown to me, and "Methods," based on John Swett's recently issued book, was a new subject to me.

By trying to answer every question, I think that I secured the good-will of the examiners, and I was granted a Second Grade Certificate. A few months later, I was able to secure the highest grade of Certificate then issued in the state.

When school closed in early December due to heavy rains which made the roads almost impassable, Linscott went to work for the family with whom he was boarding, the O. H. Willoughby family. He arose at 5 a.m. to plow, feed the hogs, and do whatever needed doing.

One evening he visited the home of Professor Van Dorn who was operating a private school in Watsonville. Among a group of young people that evening he met his future wife, Miss Scott. (Linscott fails to tell us her first name.)

They enjoyed a long and happy marriage and had eight children. A daughter Anna, who never married, became deputy treasurer and tax collector of Santa Cruz County. A son Clyde had a fine voice and became well-known in New York musical circles.

From March of 1871 to June of 1872 he taught at Roache School, riding horseback from his home in Watsonville. He taught briefly at Beach School, part of the Watsonville School District, and then was asked to step in as teaching principal at Watsonville School. He accepted with trepidation, since no less than three different principals had held the job during the previous three months. Linscott writes:

The school building was situated on Fourth Street on the lot now occupied by one of the fine primary schools. I think a portion of the old house still is to be found in the rear of the yard. Five teachers, including the principal, were employed.

On entering my room I found about forty pupils from thirteen to eighteen years of age. I found them to be an active, mischievous set full of the spirit and ardor of youth, but not vicious. Give me the mischievous boys and girls as pupils for I know such to be normal and that they can be easily led by sane methods into the ways which bring earnest endeavor and success.

Not many teachers would face a class of 40 "active, mischievous" teenagers with such enthusiasm and optimism, but perhaps that's why Linscott was revered as a good teacher and administrator. Of his decision to accept the principalship of the Watsonville School he says: "For more than eighteen years I held the place and never regretted my decision."

Then, when he was 34 years old, he decided to run for the office of county schools superintendent. Excerpts from his autobiography give an idea of what the superintendent's office was like then:

In 1882, I was nominated on the Republican Ticket for the office of County Superintendent of Schools but was defeated by W. H. Hobbs, the incumbent, at the fall election; but as the southern end of the county to Aptos, which was largely Democratic, gave me a majority of over five hundred, I was not downcast by my defeat, especially when I was comparatively a stranger to the voters of this northern section. Two years later, I was again a candidate, was elected, and entered upon my first official duties January, 1885. As the salary of the office was very small at this time, I retained my position at Watsonville. Friday evening of each week I went to Santa Cruz and attended to the clerical work, on Saturdays taking home the unfinished portion for my evening recreation.

During vacations I visited the various schools of the county and was enabled to fill the requirements of the law by making at least one visit to each school during the year. These visits were short, but they were pleasant episodes in my life. Long rides up mountain roads unpaved then, down into deep canyons shaded by lofty redwoods, which then covered most of this northern section. I enjoyed the beautiful scenery as I have many times since. Meeting the bright, active teachers and looking into the faces of alert, healthy, wholesome children were always happy events. Sometimes I heard the whisk of a broom as I tied my horse and heard the pupils say "Mr. Linscott is coming," but for the most part I found the school rooms neat and tidy and the stove blacked.

About five years after Linscott become superintendent, the salary of the office was increased to "a fairly reasonable amount," and he resigned his teaching position at Watsonville and moved to Santa Cruz in December of 1890 to devote full time to being county superintendent of schools.

In 1891, under Linscott's direction, a significant piece of legislation was passed--the County High School Act. It directed the County Board of Education to develop a course of study which would prepare Santa Cruz high school students for admission to the University of California. Prior to that act, a planned and well-structured education beyond the ninth grade did not exist in Santa Cruz County public schools.

Linscott writes of his now full-time job:

Though I missed the pleasant duties of the schoolroom and the direct contact with the pupils, I found sufficient in the official routine to fully employ my time and efforts. Visitations to the schools were made more frequently than heretofore, and I had time to plan for better service. Often my trips extended over a full week.

Leaving home at an early hour on Monday, my lunch basket well filled, I would reach Vine Hill in time for the morning session; then, after a few hours stay, on to Laurel, eating my lunch as I journeyed, and that night rested in the comfortable home of Mother Grey at Skyland. The next morning with my basket replenished, I visited Highland and, in the afternoon, Burrell and Summit, joint districts of Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties; another good night's rest, and I was on my way to Brown and Central for my visits on Wednesday. The following morning the most beautiful drive I ever took was enjoyed. Along that wonderful Castle Rock Ridge one's gaze meets a vista of surpassing loveliness. From the summit one can see a

portion of five different counties and even the waters of the San Francisco Bay are in view. Visiting Castle Rock and Fairview Schools that day, I was ready on Friday for the ride down the Saratoga Road toward home.

...Visiting Dougherty School on my way, I arrived home that night. Often my wife or one of the children, May, Anna, or Clyde, accompanied me and added much to my enjoyment.

Perhaps the most onerous duty which revolved upon me was the month's attendance at the graduation exercises at the various schools at the close of the school year when the eighth grade pupils received their diplomas. The exercises were usually held in the evening and lasted till late hours. The programs were long for every pupil must take part. The long drive, often over bad roads and weak, narrow bridges, especially on dark nights was somewhat of a venture. It was long after midnight before I was able to seek my couch.

My visits to the old school at Watsonville and my meeting teachers with whom I had labored in former years were always pleasant. I cannot refrain from speaking of one primary room whose teacher ever met me with a hearty greeting and a happy smile--Mrs. Mintie White, one of the truest friends and one of the best teachers I have ever known.

Many changes in the schools of the county had taken place during my incumbency. Several new districts were formed, many more teachers were employed, new buildings had been erected and old ones repaired, and better methods of teaching were noticeable. For nearly a quarter of a century I had given my efforts and the best

possible service as Superintendent, and the loyal support with the finest co-operative spirit of my teachers will ever remain a blessed memory.

In 1904 Linscott took on the duties of principal of Santa Cruz High School and supervising principal of Santa Cruz City School District. In 1905 he was elected the first superintendent of Santa Cruz City Schools and left the post of county superintendent of schools after two decades of distinguished service.

In 1906 Champ Price succeeded Linscott. As the responsibilities of the Office of Education increased, so did the superintendent's salary. During Price's 12 years in the office, his salary reached the sum of \$1,800 per annum. In 1911, a contemporary writer noted: "There are 60 grammar and 3 high schools in the county, employing 130 and 27 teachers respectively. There is an industrial department connected with the schools in Santa Cruz and Watsonville."

Miss Cecil M. Davis (later Mrs. Cecil Peck) was the county's first woman superintendent of schools. She served from 1919 to 1926. By then the County Office of Education she headed had become a much stronger force in the school system of the day, in contrast to earlier times.

In the earliest days most local schools were relatively autonomous, and teachers ruled over their classrooms with little supervision or help from the county superintendent. Quite often the local school trustees chose teachers--many of them quite young and with only a minimum of education--mainly on the basis of their ability to maintain discipline in the classroom; certification was not always required.

But as the years went by, the county office, in an effort to upgrade what must have been an inconsistent quality of education in the county's school system, began to play a more active and authoritative role in enforcing the standards of teaching. Teachers were examined and certified for teaching. Teachers' Institute, an intensive kind of inservice training session, was held yearly. In the

1920s and '30s the county office wielded considerable influence and authority over the local public schools.

Edna H. Young was the second woman to serve as county superintendent of schools. She followed Cecil Davis and served from 1926 through 1935. In 1917, when she was a first grade teacher at Branciforte School, she was elected to the County Board of Education. Nine years later, in 1926, she was elected to the post of superintendent.

As one of her first duties she appointed a county attendance officer--otherwise known as the truant officer. She was well aware that in many rural areas youngsters were kept home from school during crop harvesting season and other periods of heavy farm work, thus delaying their graduation from grammar school until they were 15 or 16 years old.

Superintendent Young also introduced the Stanford Achievement Test to the county. Until that time there was no county-wide, uniform yardstick by which to measure students' abilities. And she introduced the "Annual County Field Day," taking place at Soquel School, which heretofore had been conducted for several years before on a purely local level with only nearby schools taking part.

During her time as head of the County Office of Education, the Rural Schools Band was organized in 1930-31 with Professor William W. Morey--the County Office of Education's official "Music Man"--as leader and instructor. He was sent out from the county office to the small schools of the county to teach their students to play musical instruments--a "frill" that might not otherwise have been available to them. More than a thousand students were taught to play the harmonica or other musical instruments and to read music. By 1935 there were 175 students taking part in band activities. The Rural Schools Band gained statewide notice as a leading musical group of its class.

Miss Young also revised the study schedule, replacing geography and civics textbooks with social science studies. She conducted teachers' training classes each year to assist those high school graduates who wished to take the teacher's examination.

She was active in the County Schools Superintendents' Association of California and was elected president of the Central Coast Section of the California Teachers' Association.

Miss Young grew up in Scotts Valley and attended school there as a child. One time when she was very old, her sight almost gone and her teaching days long past, she remarked wistfully that she wished she could "see once again those beautiful oak trees on the Scotts Valley schoolgrounds."

Another dedicated woman followed Edna Young as county superintendent of schools. Janie M. Stocking was principal of Bay View School in Santa Cruz when, in 1935, she stepped into the county position. Mrs. Stocking was born in Canada but came as a very small child with her parents to live in San Luis Obispo. She grew up there and first taught in schools there, not coming to Santa Cruz until after her husband's death. She had two daughters to raise.

At Bay View School Mrs. Stocking started the Parent-Teachers Association and taught the sixth grade in addition to serving as principal. She had taught at other schools in the county, including Happy Valley, Live Oak, and Laurel.

She is also remembered for having pioneered the school cafeteria at Bay View and for the educational program she started for foreign-born adults. Unpaid, she worked evenings and extra hours to teach classes in citizenship, starting with a few mothers of pupils in the school. The classes grew as other foreign-born adults heard of them, and people began to attend to learn English. The project grew into an Americanization class, one of the first in Santa Cruz.

Someone once asked Mrs. Stocking why she worked so hard for no pay, those extra teaching hours. Her answer: "I do it for the love of it."

Mrs. Stocking resigned her post as county superintendent of schools on January 1, 1945, due to poor health. She died about a year later. Her obituary listed an impressive number of affiliations, including the Business and Professional Woman's Club,

California Teachers' Association, and National Education Association. She also had served as president of the Santa Cruz City Teachers' Association.

Edith E. Fikes became the next superintendent. The ten years she was in office were a particularly active period of county population growth. In 1945 there were 5,900 school children and 270 teachers. By 1955 when she retired, there were 13,000 children and 559 teachers.

During her time in office many small school districts became unionized (1946-47 was a particularly big year for unionization). There were 38 separate districts when Miss Fikes became superintendent, and when she retired in 1955 there were only 15. She spent hours visiting and speaking, encouraging small schools to join larger ones to create a more efficient structure both educationally and financially.

She was instrumental in establishing the Thornely Tri-County School for the Deaf, in providing regular school visits by a dental hygienist, and establishing a school health program with the aid of the County Health Department. (When she took office there was only one school nurse to serve 5,900 students.) County Office of Education classes for the physically handicapped were begun in 1948, and a program for the mentally retarded a year after that.

Miss Fikes began her teaching career in 1908 at Gault School in Santa Cruz and served there for 36 years as teacher and principal before becoming superintendent. She was a staunch support of the PTA and once, in defending it, she remarked that before the PTA was organized in 1913, "You didn't know the parents and they didn't know you, unless there was trouble."

Miss Fikes was one of the five founders of the State and Santa Cruz County Elementary Schools Administrators' Associations. The state group was organized in 1927.

Edith Fikes died in 1967, but she is not forgotten. In 1971 a memorial scholarship fund was dedicated in her name at Cabrillo College by two lifelong friends, Annie and Frances McCaskill of Santa Cruz.

During these 37 years of feminine leadership, the role of the County Office of Education continued to evolve. As many districts unionized and grew larger and more independent, the county office assumed less of a direct, supervisorial function and more of a facilitating, advisory, supportive function, providing needed services the district offices could not supply.

When Norman (Sig) Lien became superintendent in 1955, there were about 13,000 students enrolled in county schools. There were more than 30,000 (including 3,600 at Cabrillo College) in 1967 when Richard R. Fickel, the present superintendent, took over the job.

Of Fickel's career, and his memories of the school system of Santa Cruz County as he remembers it, we will speak in a later chapter of this book.



But for her solemn demeanor, Miss Stella Finkeldey doesn't look much older than her students. Laurel School, date not known. Students were Olive Jenne, Georgia Niles, Flora Carniglia, and Bernice Witney.



Thomas MacQuiddy. He served as teacher at Watsonville High in 1905 and 1906. From 1907 to June of 1948--a period of 41 years--he was principal of the high school as well as superintendent of the Watsonville elementary and high school district. The present T. S. MacQuiddy School in Watsonville is named for him.