

X. World War I and the Twenties: Two Students Remember

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was struck down by an assassin's bullets, and soon Europe was embroiled in World War I. The United States remained neutral until April 6, 1917, when it declared war on Germany.

The war ushered in the Air Age, with both sides using single-engined biplanes from which pilots shot at each other with pistols or rifles, and later with machine guns. On the ground, American soldiers, called "doughboys," fought to "make the world safe for democracy." Before Armistice was finally declared on November 11, 1918, many lives were lost and many more disrupted. The educations of many young people were interrupted.

What kind of effect did the war have on Santa Cruz County schools? Two former Santa Cruz High School students have shared their recollections with us. They are G. Darrell Cardiff who graduated from the school in 1920, and his contemporary Harold Van Gorder, who dropped out for a year to work and graduated in 1921.

There were about 350 in the student body and 95 or 96 in the class of 1921, Van Gorder recalled. During the war school spirit ran high.

"It's hard to believe today," Van Gorder said, "but we truly believed that was the war to end all wars."

Cardiff remembered: "Almost every class in the school was involved in some way. The war interrupted many of the fellows' educations because they dropped out to enter the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] or to enlist in a branch of the service."

A number of high school boys who signed up with the U. S. Naval Reserve got called up early. Of those Cardiff and Van Gorder recalled the names of Lester Reukema, Bill Denton, Elmer Jones, and Frank Trafton.

"It was a time of great sadness, going to the depot to see them off on the train. The whole town turned out," Van Gorder said.

George Bond was principal of the school during the war years, and he was deeply moved when "one of his boys" died in the war.

Bond started the World War I "Service Book" which was a record of each Santa Cruz High student in the U. S. Armed Forces, but unfortunately not a single copy of that book is known to exist today.

In 1918 instead of weekly student body meetings there were weekly "re-dedication services," with students renewing their vows to help in some way with the war effort. Boys even took up knitting and rolled bandages, according to Van Gorder, and almost everyone grew a victory vegetable garden.

The Bean Growing Club was formed in 1916. There was no rationing of foods during the war, but some were in short supply. When a housewife bought white flour she was required to take a certain amount of oatmeal or cornmeal with it. The late Robert E. Burton, agriculture and science teacher at the high school, had all his boy students growing home vegetable gardens.

"Remember the High School Cadets that were organized?" Cardiff interjected. "Deloss Wilder was captain. It cost \$28 for a full uniform, and they were ill-fitting, cheap khaki things."

The first year in the Cadets was voluntary, the second year compulsory. They paraded and appeared at all ceremonies in town. A. A. Morey, a retired Navy man, was the instructor of the Cadets, and he tried to teach them the ethics of military life as well as the marching in formation and so forth, Cardiff noted.

"He didn't have a very easy time of it," he laughed.

The name of one Santa Cruz High girl student of that World War I era has come down through the years: Pearl Turner went to Europe to serve as a nurse and died in France. The former Turner Gymnasium was named in her honor; she was the only girl student who lost her life in the war. Trees planted later around the gym and the edge of the football field commemorated all the high school students who died in the war.

World War I marked a time of awakening for many young women students. In Santa Cruz County, which was not by any stretch of the imagination a metropolitan county, girls began to consider higher education and careers more seriously. They began branching out into industry, becoming business secretaries and telephone operators. They went off to college in greater numbers: to San Jose Normal School (today it is San Jose State University) and to San Francisco Normal School (San Francisco State University). And they began to drive those "new-fangled" automobiles.

They were also participating in physical sports during gym sessions, something that heretofore had been the prerogative of males. Beryl LeBaron Bliss was the first paid woman gym teacher at Santa Cruz High School, Van Gorder recalled.

Women were entering teaching careers also in ever increasing numbers, and they were even considering careers which, a few years before, might not have been accepted as suitable for a proper young woman.

One new industry which was beginning to influence young people of that day was the movies. Zasu Pitts, a skinny girl in hand-me-down calico dresses who helped her mother run a boarding house in Santa Cruz, put her talents to work in the movies and became internationally known.

Zasu's talent as a comedienne was evident during her high school days. She appeared in all the plays and programs at the Opera House where she also graduated in 1914.

In Hollywood, Zasu's trademark was to wring her hands helplessly while lamenting "Oh dear me" in a plaintive manner. Somehow she made it seem hilarious. At least the audiences thought so for many years. She went from the movies to television, still wringing her hands and lamenting, and occasionally coming back to visit old high school friends in Santa Cruz, until she died of cancer in 1963.

"By 1920 we were seeing the end of fraternity days at the high school," Cardiff said. "Before the war the school was very socially oriented. You were either an 'inner' or an 'outer.' I was mostly an outer--I had gone to a private school in southern California for all my early education."

Due to fraternity hazing, which sometimes ended in injury to person or property, high school fraternities were eventually outlawed by state legislation.

At Santa Cruz High freshmen had to wear a certain kind of beany (some also wore knickers, Cardiff remembers), and they were not permitted to step a foot on the front steps of the school. If ordered by an upper classman to perform an errand or task, they had to obey.

Sophomores and juniors wore corduroy trousers and caps, and very white, clean shirts.

"It was the style to get those corduroys so dirty they would stand alone," Van Gorder said. "They weren't washed--that would have ruined the effect!" As Van Gorder was something of an artist, he further embellished his corduroys with a drawing of a hip pocket and a flask--considered very daring, indeed.

Senior students held forth on the school's front steps and wore brimmed campaign hats as their identifying apparel. None of this was ordered by the school or the parents--these traditions just grew up among the students themselves.

Senior Sneak Day was a tradition too.

"Going to Brookdale was the big thing to do," Cardiff said. "Sometimes some of the boys would get hold of some wine."

"Remember the time everybody went out to the Prescott Ranch in Soquel?" Van Gorder queried. "There was a regular procession of Model T's and Hupmobiles--all driven by seniors and loaded with kids. Mr. Prescott called the sheriff."

Sheriff Howard V. Trafton arrived, accompanied by Principal Bond, and they took one look at the carousing seniors, then called them all together for a lecture before sending them home.

The sheriff addressed the motley group: "There are too many of you for me to do anything about it," he shouted, "but if you were mine I'd beat the hell out of you!"

Van Gorder and Cardiff laughed, remembering.

"Principal Bond was furious with me for just being there," Van Gorder recalled. "He wouldn't let me ride back to town in his car."

Van Gorder was an "outer" too, but he had his own group called The Shovel Gang, six boys he went around with. Cardiff had the ABC Gang--the letters stood for "All Bolshevik Club"--and they met in a shack clubhouse near the corner of Bay and West Cliff Drive.

"We were mavericks," he said.

There were two fraternities at Santa Cruz High: the GEKs and the PiDelts, to which wealthier "in" boys belonged. The fraternities had their own rivalries going and would crash each other's parties to break them up, steal each other's girl friends, and compete furiously in sports.

The letters stood for Gamma Eta Kappa and Pi Delta, and they existed until state legislation ended them. The old fraternity brothers still gather each year for a dinner, although the ranks have been thinning rapidly the last year or two. They "buried the hatchet" years ago.

High School sports consisted mainly of rugby, football, and basketball, but rugby was banned when a boy was killed while playing in a game at Hollister.

"His name was Russell Pease, and he got kicked in the head during the game," Van Gorder said. "Rugby was a tough game with a lot of running and kicking--no helmets or protective padding at all."

In the fall of 1920 American football was introduced at the school, and Van Gorder played in the first game.

In 1920 tennis also became a popular sport. The principal helped start it.

"Principal Bond was a far-sighted man who understood young people very well," Cardiff said. "He brought inspiration and gave us a sense of pride in the school."

"He also coached the first teams," Van Gorder said. "The school didn't have a paid coach until 1917 when Earl A. Harmon was hired."

Teachers were regarded with respect and a degree of awe in those days, they recall. Lillian Howard who taught art and astronomy demanded--and got--absolute silence in her class.

"She could look at you and you'd feel guilty even if you weren't," Cardiff said with a laugh.

H. B. Lathrop taught geometry and trigonometry; Elsie King, another stern female, taught algebra and geometry (and quietly helped several brilliant but poor boys through college on the side). Harriet Liles instructed home-economics classes and Walter Burn, mechanical drawing.

"Remember Mr. Stevens, the shop teacher? If anyone cut off a finger, he would keep it."

Both men laughed.



Pupils of San Vicente School, 1920. The school was established in 1872. This building erected in 1895. School closed and was absorbed into newly formed Bonny Doon District in 1947.



First grade, 1922, at Mission Hill. Back row, from left: Gino someone, Lewis Andreotti, Joe Netto, Manuel Netto, Tanner G. Wilson. Middle row, from left: Peggy Pope, Betty Jane Conray, others unknown. Front row, from left: Alice Sinkinson, Rose Elizabeth Anthony, Vivian Carmean, unknown, unknown, unknown, Ruth Gordon, Jane Rittenhouse, Virginia Dellamonica, unknown.



Class of Jefferson School, established 1875. Photo probably taken in early 1930s. Teacher Ella Hazeltine taught there from 1922 to 1933.



Jefferson School harmonica band. Date uncertain.



Do you recognize any of these people? This is the 1939 class picture of Larkin Valley School. Teachers are Bernice Herbert (left, rear) and Eleanor Fontes (right, rear).



Class photo of Seaside School pupils, probably taken in 1925(?). Tall girl at center rear is Constance Mattei.



Class of Bald Mountain School. Photo probably taken in the 1930s. Older woman in front row is Mrs. Rice, who taught there from 1925 to 1937. School established in 1879 and closed in 1962. Catherine Gove (?) of Santa Cruz provides identification: Back row from left: Renie Rocchi, Morris Moretti, unknown, Jackie Rocchi, unknown, Doris Moretti, Diva Rocchi. Front row: Geno Rejardo (?), Amerigo DeLucca, Mrs. Rice, Pia Rocchi, Norma Rocchi.