

## **The Beginnings of El Rancho Elementary School**

On June 14, 2001, El Rancho Elementary School celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the Chino Valley Unified School District. This is based on the plaque in front of the school that states the founding as 1952. However, the school opened to its first students on September 11, 1950 and the school was not fully completed for K-6 students until the beginning of the school year in 1952.

The situation in the Chino Valley in the late 40's was not too dissimilar to that of today. The School Board was operating in crisis mode due to the sudden increase in population due no doubt to the post World War II economy and the baby boom. The Board at this time had implemented a Building Expansion Program to construct an entirely new high school and decentralization of the elementary system by building new schools in strategic Chino locales.

The school district in the 1940's had Chino High School operating in the current Administration buildings on Riverside Dr., an intermediate school at Richard Gird as well as elementary schools at Richard Gird and E.J. Marshall. All these schools were in need of renovations and were filled past their capacities. In 1947, the school district set up temporary quarters at Cal-Aero, the former army air force cadet training school. In less than ideal circumstances, the district opened up the Cal-Aero Elementary School to handle the burgeoning student population. Since this was only a temporary situation the Board set about looking for land for new schools.

They first began by looking for land in east Chino and on March 22, 1949 they secured a site for a new elementary school. The board was originally looking at land on Chino Ave. and Palmetto however those negotiations failed. The Board then turned to an offer by William Bare and accepted his offer of 10 acres of his ranch land on 15<sup>th</sup> Street (now Benson Avenue). In addition to the school site, the district purchased a strip of land that was deeded to the City of Chino to be developed as an extension of C Street and the front of the new school. The total price for the land was \$13, 091. That same year, they were able to purchase 55 acres between 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets for the new Chino High School from the El Rancho Chino Corporation. A couple of years later, they would purchase land in northwest Chino from Glen Younkin for the Newman Elementary School.

In addition to obtaining land the Board was dealing with how to finance construction of the new schools. They applied for over \$2.5 million in funds from the State Board of Allocation as well as placing a Bond issue in an election. In May of 1949 the District was notified that they qualified for State Board of Allocation aid but they were #343 on the list. Desperate for classrooms, the District decided to undergo part of the construction prior to final approval of State funds.

In January 1950, the Board announced a Call for Bids to construct eight classrooms, a double kindergarten, administrative and health units to accommodate 400 students. The plan was to use the new school for K-3 classrooms and 4-6 students to continue at Cal-Aero in 13 classrooms. School boundaries were redrawn essentially along Central Ave. with students on the west side attending Gird and Marshall and those on the east side attending El Rancho and Cal-Aero. J.E. Stark of Ontario was the lowest bidder at \$172,792 for construction and work was immediately started on the new school. This initial construction project was completed in time for the beginning of the school year in 1950. The school was opened on September 11, 1950 under the following administration:

|                |                    |           |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Principal      | Mrs. Pearl Beckley |           |
| Superintendent | Levi Dickey        |           |
| School Board   | Homer Bogue        | President |
|                | Earl A. Newman     |           |
|                | C.R. Berry         |           |

Melvin K. Reilly  
W.B. Van Dusen

In October 1950, the State Department of Finance approved a loan to the school district of \$1,612,546 for rehabilitation and expansion of their building program. These funds would be used to build El Rancho, Newman and the new Chino High school as well as renovations at Gird and Marshall. The State loan would be repaid through surplus funds from a \$.40 tax. After 25 years the interest payments would cease and after 30 years the remaining balance would become an outright grant to the district. For El Rancho specifically, these funds would finance construction of the final phase of eight additional classrooms, a cafeteria-auditorium, fencing, playgrounds and parking lot. However these funds were contingent upon the district issuing a local bond to qualify for the funds.

The Board decided to present a bond issue to the voters of \$58,000 in a special election on January 9, 1951. Total number of voters in Chino in 1951 was approximately 4000 and the bond issue needed a two-thirds majority to pass. In a low turnout, the bond was approved by voters on a 3-1 margin. 730 votes were cast with a yes and 230 voted no.

Once the bond was approved, the District began making plans for construction of the final phase of El Rancho. Once plans were completed, it was necessary to submit them to the state for approval which delayed the project. It would not be until August that the District could issue a Call for Bids for the construction. Low bidder for the work was the San Antonio Company of San Bernardino at \$251,000 and work began in October 1951. Obviously, this was already the beginning of the 1951-52 school year which meant that everyone had to live with the split schedule with Cal-Aero for one more year. However, in 1952 the school was fully completed and operational.

In addition to the building funds, the school was initially in dire need of miscellaneous items. The first PTA was no doubt instrumental in providing additional funds for the new school. In March 1950 at the Cal-Aero cafeteria, Mrs. Earl Newman convened an election of the 1<sup>st</sup> PTA board for El Rancho. Those elected were as follows:

|                       |                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Mrs. Walter Matlin    | President         |
| Mrs. A. Lamont Smith  | Vice President    |
| Mrs. Austin Kimball   | Secretary         |
| Mrs. Ken Thornton     | Treasurer         |
| Mrs. Joseph Boyer     | Historian         |
| Mrs. L.M. Hinman      | Auditor           |
| Mrs. Leonard Anderson | Hospitality Chair |

There was no doubt some sense of relief once El Rancho was completed. It was no doubt an ominous task trying to quickly provide some housing relief to the growing student population especially while dealing with the complex financing issues. Sometime between the beginning of construction in 1950 and completion of the school in 1952, the district determined that its founding date should be 1951. It may be unknown why that date was chosen however understanding the complications of the times, we can only accept this as the founding and celebrate the 50 years of students, teachers, staff and administrators who have graced the halls of El Rancho Elementary School.

Researched and written by Mitch Gariador in 2001 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of El Rancho Elementary