

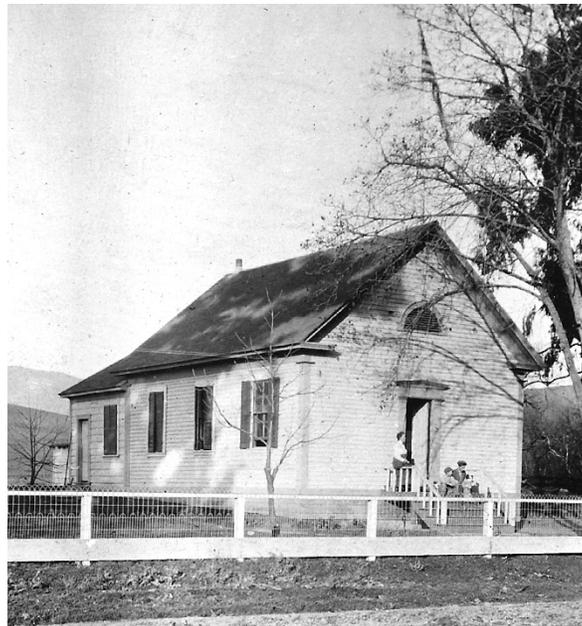
Sycamore Grammar School

San Ramon Valley Historical Society Plaque #11

Sycamore School was organized in 1865 when students first attended class in a small redwood building, called a “shanty” by some. They sat on benches and, since there were no desks, put their books on the floor beside them. Miss Mary Hall was their teacher. The attendance area extended to the Danville School District on the west and the Tassajara District on the east. The border between Sycamore and Tassajara Schools was Hansen Lane, just east of today’s Oak Gate Dr. north of Camino Tassajara.

Residents subscribed to build a new school house which opened on land donated by Wade Hayes in September 15, 1866. It was constructed by Ebenizer Dole who also created seats for the students and a desk for the teacher. This same school house served Sycamore Valley students until 1927. The first trustees were Charles Wood and Wade Hayes. Later some gum trees were planted nearby by Charles J. Wood whose large ranch was nearby.

We are fortunate in knowing many of the names Sycamore’s teachers. After Mary Hall, A. J. Young taught from 1869-1872; Mrs. (Mary) Young taught in 1879; Ida Hall taught in 1887. Kate Howard taught from 1888-1889, Charlotte Wood from 1890 to 1921, and Grace Donahue in 1923. Charlotte E. Wood, who was a student there from 1869-1877, and was the teacher for 31 years (1890-1921).



Sycamore School with Charlotte Wood at the door

She wrote a small history of the school in the Valley Pioneer's 1958 Centennial edition which included this:

In its early days the Sycamore School was a public center for important events—social activities, picnics, parties, school “exhibitions, etc. A literary society, Sunday school and church services conducted at various times and occasionally a Christmas tree celebration were held in this pleasant gathering place.

Miss Wood also said that some of the text books of the 1870s and 880s were *Robinson's Practical Arithmetic, Swinton's Word Book, Reed and Kellogg's Grammar* and *Willson's* and *McCuffey's Readers*.

William H. Langdon, who later became an Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court, began his schooling at the Sycamore School in 1879, then attended San Ramon Grammar School. The school had 16 children in 1865, 50 in 1904 and 66 in 1908.

Sycamore School closed in 1927 due to a small attendance. For five years the modern Danville Elementary School had been open and parents may have thought it was offering a better education. The Sycamore teacher at that time, Miss M. Collins, went to Danville Elementary to teach. The school building was the residence of Joe Mitchell and family when it burned down in 1945.

Charlotte Wood wrote histories of the school which are the best source of accurate information. Because of her efforts we know about books used, teachers, special events and families which attended the school. On July 28, 1990, a plaque from the SRV Historical Society marked the location of the school on Camino Tassajara just east of Woodranch Rd.

Sources:

Dotson, Irma, *Historical Sketch of the Sycamore School*, July 1990

Hulaniski, F.J. *Contra Costa County History*, 1917, (p. 213-214)

Jones, Virgie V., *Remembering Alamo; Historical Persons and Places...in San Ramon Valley*.

School files at the Contra Costa History Center. Notebooks with extensive newspaper clippings are categorized by school. Sycamore is Vol. XI.

Valley Pioneer Centennial Edition, Sept. 4, 1958 (written by Charlotte Wood)

Walnut Kernel, August, 1957