THE ARDEN STORY

By Herb E. Winterstein

Preface

The purpose of publishing “The Arden Story” is twofold: Very little history and information is written down concerning the important role Arden has played as a community school since its 1914 origin. Also, it is hoped that students and residents of this north area region, once known as Arden Acres, will find value and delight in the brief history given about the area from the time of the Mexican land grant up through the present residential development.

We are very grateful to Mr. Herb E. Winterstein for granting us the privilege of putting this bit of history into print. We feel there is no one more knowledgeable nor more dedicated to Arden School, having served as principal from 1935 to 1951.

Sincere appreciation is extended to Mrs. George Engberg for sharing her early photographs of Arden School.

We trust the distribution of “The Arden Story” will also serve as a fitting tribute to the P.T.A.’s 50th Anniversary in the school, as well as a profitable gathering of historical data during our country’s Bicentennial.

Arden P.T.A. Board
1975-1976
By way of introduction, let me say I retired from school affairs in 1968, after forty years as a teacher and administrator in the Sacramento County schools, 33 of them in the Arden, Arden-Arcade, and San Juan Unified school systems. All were good, memorable, exciting, and for the most part, very happy and fruitful years. I have not one regret.

One day, while teaching in the old Enterprise School near Florin, I received a visit from a board member of the Arden School, who offered me the principalship (full-time teaching too) of her school. After having four principals in as many years, suffering a community revolt and even a one-day strike by upper grade children, the board wanted to start all over again with a new principal. The talk around county school circles was that Arden was a desirable and growing district, but a principal going in would face seeming insurmountable problems, and might suffer the same fate as his four predecessors.

Nevertheless, in the fall of 1935 I took the job and even at the first P.T.A. meeting, three or four nice people suggested I might as well start looking for a new job, I would last only one year. I remained, however, at Arden until 1951 when I became Assistant Superintendent of the newly-organized Arden-Carmichael District.

Arden School District, located in what was known for years as Arden Acres, was formed in 1914 following a kind of secession from the early days Arcade School District. It covered the region immediately across the American River from Sacramento (Sacramento State University—once a great peach orchard) and H Street Bridge, along the river’s north bank east to Walnut Avenue, north on Walnut to El Camino, along El Camino to Fulton Avenue, south on Fulton to Arden Way, west on Arden Way to Ethan, thence south along Ethan to Howe, down Howe to H Street Bridge. The H Street Bridge (present one), incidentally, was the pride of the area, having been constructed in 1933 to replace an old wooden bridge.

The Arden District was sparsely settled, the school population for a 10-year period, 1935-1945, was no more than 200, and even during the war years it was a little more than 160-165, as I remember, with five or six teachers. I taught grades 7 and 8 and also acted as principal. Children, most of them came to school on our one bus, later two buses, and lived on the hop ranches, the river bottom farms on Fulton Avenue, some along Morse near Hurley and smattering along Fair Oaks Boulevard, and several came from Sierra Oaks, a new and fashionable residential area being developed starting in 1932. Some new homes also were being built during the 30’s in Sierra Oaks Vista in the vicinity of the present Winterstein School.

For years, until sometime in the 40’s, and after World War II, the Arden School served only grades 1 through 8. In about 1948, I believe P.T.A. and I got a small kindergarten under way. At that time, a kindergarten could be formed if there were at least 25 youngsters in the
district of qualifying age. It was difficult, I recall, finding that many, but we located barely enough to get going. Peggy Howard (Mrs. F. M. Howard) was the first kindergarten teacher.

Prior to 1932, as I recall, our youngsters went to high school either in Sacramento (as did almost all Sierra Oaks pupils) or San Juan High School way up on Greenback and Sylvan Road. Somehow—petition of parents, I think—brought the Arden District into the newly-formed Grant High School (1932) in North Sacramento. Grant agreed to run a bus into the area. Such was the secondary school situation until 1950 when rebelling parents who thought Grant was too far away, succeeded with Carmichael parents and school boards to vote into existence Arden-Carmichael Union District, which automatically brought the old Arden District into San Juan High School District, which in 1950 already had under construction a second (new) high school on 40 acres at the corner of El Camino Avenue and Eastern Avenue, and actually in the confines of the old Arden District.

Arden School always, at least beginning in 1935 when I arrived, has had an active P.T.A. Mrs. George Greer, wife of an original board member when the District was formed in 1914, was the first president. She was an indefatigable worker until her death sometime in the 50’s. Although she had only one son, Floyd, who now lives in Arden Oaks, this great lady, was a foremost champion of the school and everything that was good for children. She worked hard and all we had to do was call Ethel Greer and things moved and were done.

Arden had one of the very first hot lunch programs for youngsters and, I recall, Mrs. Greer and Mrs. Anna Linn, mother of Dr. Bill Linn, organized the program, even cooked and served it, asking little, if anything, by way of remuneration. Even a P.T.A. meeting, and we had many, was no meeting without Mrs. Greer. Not that she took over at all, she just graced it and we knew all was well.

It was altogether proper and so very fitting that in 1953 when a new school was opened at Bell Avenue and Hurley Way, that it be named for the Greers who did so much for children in Arden District.

Some reminiscences of the Greers, who played so great a role in Arden affairs: In 1914, when it was decided to start a new district—Arden—the question arose, of course, where to build the schoolhouse. Parents along the river wanted it down there. Parents in the Hurley, Morse, Northrop, Fulton Avenue area wanted it there. There were no parents or children in the very center of the district (Arden and Watt) so the board compromised, bought 3 acres at Watt and Arden, and built Arden School. The Greers always recalled with chuckles those early days, with parents in controversy, school board in dilemma, and momentous decisions to make. George Greer recalled the time that Mr. Hurley (Ed, I think) even offered 10 acres free if the board would build the school near his home at Hurley and Morse Avenues. Also, remembered
the Greers, the schoolhouse was incomplete when school opened in September, 1914, so the
teachers and kids held forth for several weeks in a tent set up across the street in what is now
Arden Oaks.

The early 1914 school consisted of a small auditorium and two classrooms. Two or three
rooms were added in 1931, and in 1936 a new addition and two more classrooms were added,
much of it funded by federal funds. During the 1936 construction two temporary one-room
buildings were built along the east yard and one served as my classroom; I do not recall who
occupied the other. One burned about 1940 and was rebuilt at a cost of $500. Both are still
standing on the school yard.

In 1948, classes started in a new addition (separate structure) composed of a
kindergarten room and six classrooms. Grades 6, 7, and 8 were relocated there as I recall. It
was then we were starting steadily to get more pupils.

It was during those happy, carefree, tranquil days at Arden, until just after the war, that
I believe our educational program for youngsters was outstanding. Perhaps it was because we
always seemed to meet the finest and brightest kids, and because we had a strong, dedicated,
friendly staff of teachers, working together, not afraid to “put out” for every child. I remember
we tried ability grouping in reading and arithmetic; after school individual instruction in reading
and arithmetic, with primary teachers working in afternoons with upper graders who needed
help; one day a week – Friday, I think—we had electives: dramatics, home mechanics for boys,
a harmonica band, an advanced group in creative art and creative writing. There was also band
and orchestra one day a week. Our duplicating machine (early ones were quite primitive) and
during the 40’s our “Wonderful Bell and Howell” movie projector were supervised and
operated by some of our big 7th and 8th grade boys who found academics pretty “heavy stuff.”
We made them important and useful fellows in our little school.

A man teacher, one I recall was Wain Howard, and I use to take our teams, basketball
and baseball, to neighboring schools –Arcade, Carmichael, Fair Oaks—to play after school,
transporting them in our cars, not worrying about accidents, lawsuits, and overtime pay. We
had fun with the youngsters and we had great teams. Basketball players like John Stanich who
became a star at U.S.C., I think it was; Bill Linn, now a doctor, practicing less than a half mile
from Arden School, who played basketball all through high school and college; August
Waggershauser, who resides now in Arden Park, just to name a few.

The closest neighbor to Arden School during the 1930’s was a kind of legendary
character known simply to everyone far and wide as the “Goatman.” He and his goats could be
seen almost everywhere at any time roaming over what is now Arden Park, down by Eastern,
Arden, El Camino and Watt, Marconi and Watt, Cottage and Watt—almost anywhere in the open grassland countryside and there was much of it up until 1950’s.

The “Goatman” was really George Zwirkis, who was remembered by early day settlers, like the Greers, the Jonas family, the Trimbles, and the Hobdays, as the one who bought 24 acres at the northwest corner of Cottage and Watt and raised goats. An old country Greek, George came there in about 1924 after working several years as a sheeperder for the Swanstons, who for years operated a ranch and meat packing plant near the railroad and Arden Way in North Sacramento. George lived with his goats in a little shack at Cottage and Watt and was a friendly, talkative neighbor who somehow knew what was transpiring everywhere. He was difficult to understand, but he was alert and loved company. Yet he was something of a recluse. He sold his 24 acres in 1956 for $165,000 – “big money” – George told me. He then moved to Elk Grove, became ill and died in about 1956, leaving oddly enough, a widow back in Greece, at least so reported by those who settled his estate. George was surely one of the district’s characters, and how proud he was of his new neighbors at Country Club Center; he loved to just drop in for coffee and doughnuts.

It might be of interest to know that in the early years at Arden, 1914 through 1916—one of the two teachers there boarded and roomed at the George Greer home on Fulton Avenue. Mr. Greer, early on Monday morning, would drive his horse and buggy to Ben Ali Station (Marconi and Railroad) and meet the teacher – name eludes me—who would arrive by train from her home in Sacramento. The Greers were pioneers in the Arden area, arriving in 1912 from Oklahoma where, George said, promoters of Arden Acres claimed it was the richest of soils, close by the Golden Foothills of California. George paid $200 per acre then (1912) for 40 acres, very poor soil (hardpan), but still not too bad a country for a life-long farmer like George D. Greer. The Greer property now is covered entirely by Fulton Avenue business and apartment complexes.

It may be timely at this point to sketch a brief background and history of Arden Acres.

In 1844, a settler, who was an associate of John Sutter, one Eliah Grimes, was granted a 44,000 acre tract of land north of the American River by Mexican government. It was known as Rancho Del Paso – it covered much of the present North Sacramento area, and everything north of the American River to as far east as Carmichael (Manzanita Avenue) and north to about the county line. Grimes lost the rancho a few years later to James Ben Ali Haggin, a New York and San Francisco millionaire, and Haggin’s brother-in-law, Lloyd Tevis, also of San Francisco. Haggin ran cattle over the region, but most significantly, he established a race horse breeding farm on the river in the area now known as Del Dayo Estates on Fair Oaks Boulevard. It became nationally famed, and at least one fine horse, born and bred there, won the Kentucky Derby sometime in the 1870’s. The great horse, Salvator, was raised here also and is buried on
the old farm, which in 1912 became property of the late, prominent Sacramento business and social leader, Stephen Day. Mr. Day had the first swimming pool in all the area, and it is still in use, I believe.

The shipping point for Haggin interests was at Ben Ali Station at the end of Marconi Avenue.

In the latter part of the century, Haggin tired of the race horse business and his great rancho was disposed of, portion by portion.

After the turn of the century the rich river bottom country from Watt Avenue to H Street Bridge became huge hop growing ranches. The two ranches were known as the Gerber and Brewer ranches, and were operated by E. Clemens Horst Company. The main offices were in San Francisco. Only during the last ten years or even less have the hop fields disappeared, giving way to businesses, pretentious homes and condominiums. The side of the old Brewer ranch is now known as Campus Commons. Great hop ranches on the south side of the river, from Sacramento University as far as Bradshaw, have also surrendered to housing development.

The bottom lands extending from Watt Avenue to Walnut, and into Carmichael were, until recent years, rich growing lands — tomatoes, potatoes, corn—but gave way in the 1960’s to schools and expensive homes, and farming days were over.

Even as late as World War II, there was some evidence of early day Indian habitation in the Arden Acres area. Located on the north bank levee, close by the river and less than a quarter mile west from the present Watt Avenue Bridge was the remnant of an Indian mound and an Indian burial spot. It was desecrated through the years by the curious, seeking beads and artifacts, and at the time of its obliteration by hoes, it was virtually non-existent. “Blind Tom”, an old Indian who was a friend of the old-timers in the area, was the last Indian interred there over 60 years ago, according to early settlers who lived in the area even as late as the 1940’s. The Indians who lives along the American River from Sacramento and even as far up the river as Folsom were the Valley Nesenan, families of the famed Maidu tribe.

Signs of growth in the Arden District, however slight, began showing during the war when the community was involved in the war effort, and, of course, concerned with local defense measures and safety of the area. For example, fire protection in the region — unincorporated, of course, as it still is — was practically nil. Thus it was in 1943 that concerned men and women circulated petitions to create a fire district. They succeeded and the Arden Fire District was formed, a board of directors was appointed and Robert Jerauld was made the chief. Members of the first board were F.M. Howard, Crawford Cox, and A.J. Argante. All three are now deceased. The first fire engine was of 1925 vintage, nicknamed “Asthma,” and was
purchased from the Sacramento departments for $500. Afterward, Chief Jerauld was authorized to buy for one dollar a used 1926 school bus from Arden School District. The volunteers under Jerauld’s supervision and assisted by expert machinist, Carl Fuller, built a great tank and pumper and placed it on the school bus chassis. The old tanker, affectionately known as “Old Herk,” fought many a grass fire. As the district became more affluent, with Chief Jerauld always seeking improvements and new equipment, “Old Herk” was sold to a fire department in Lake County. Many an old friend has a lump in his throat as he watched the faithful old fire fighter lumber off that day on the long trek to Lakeport. The fire department today is one of the Sacramento area’s largest and most efficient departments.

Interest in developing in the sprawling northeast of the county gained considerable momentum right after World War II and even as early as 1946, Town and Country shopping area at Marconi and Fulton was ready for customers and almost simultaneously homes sprang up close by the area.

The first suburban restaurant catering to the best in dining was the Coral Reef on Fulton Avenue near Town and Country.

School attendance meanwhile in Arden was nothing spectacular, less than 300 pupils, but there were signs that an unprecedented surge in enrollment was near.

Also in April, 1947, a Sacramento real estate firm was ready to sell lots for home construction in an area it had acquired a year or so previously from what was known as the Robbins Estate, at one time a part of the huge Rancho Del Paso. The region was bounded by Fair Oaks Boulevard on the south, El Camino on the north, Watt Avenue on the west, and Eastern Avenue on the east. The area encompassed all of what is known today as Arden Park, Arden Oaks and Del Paso Manor. Anticipating the coming need for expansion, the Arden School board of trustees purchased four acres from the Robbins Estate sometime during the late war years and in early 1946 the board negotiated purchase of ten additional acres making a total school plant area of 17 ½ acres. Both acquisitions cost the district only $125 per acre.

The Arden Park lot sales began in April, 1947, and buyers flocked there on opening day; some remained at the site headquarters near a huge tent at Fair Oaks Boulevard and Watt Avenue all night long to be first in line the next morning, ready to stake claim to a choice lot. Realtor developers were said to have been astounded at the fever pitch enthusiasm of buyers. The cheapest lots, I recall, sold for $850. A $1,200 lot was an expensive one at that time.

From the time that the first houses were springing up in Arden Park, Arden School faced severe growing pains, and school bond issues were passed, at least two of them, with little or no opposition. However, bond monies alone could not build enough classrooms, and so by 1949 or 1950 a State loan of construction funds was negotiated.
Construction had been completed on the two-wing and kindergarten building and with that the school board decided to build schools elsewhere in the district. Thus, by 1950, plans had been developed for two additional schools and the two sites were purchased, one of eight acres at Morse and Northrup Avenue and another at Bell and Hurley. The eight acre (Winterstein School) site cost $10,000 and the ten acre (Greer School) site was purchased at a total cost of $6,500. Negotiations were underway also in 1950 to purchase a ten acre site in Del Paso Manor.

In the meantime the movement to leave Grant Union High School District was underway, led by an eager handful of parents, and at an election held in January 1951, the Arden-Carmichael Union District was formed and the 36 year old Arden District went out of existence. With a new board of trustees and a new superintendent, and the need to reapply for a new state building loan, it was at least a year, nearer two, before the district’s building program again got underway.

The youngsters kept coming and in droves, it seemed. Schoolrooms or not, there was no let up or moratorium on eager, fresh-faced, happy kids.

Thus, the years of 1951, 1952, and 1953 were years fraught with problems—double sessions, make-shift housing, moving of youngsters to and fro, disturbed and unhappy parents, frustrating delays at the state and local levels, inadequate supplies, shortage of furniture, and countless other problems. In 1953, kindergarten and some grade 1 classes were housed in 23 off-campus facilities—rumpus rooms, church halls and garages. In the fall of 1953 the district opened five (5) new schoolhouses, and problems were alleviated somewhat, but still children kept coming and at the same time, too, the Carmichael schools started bulging and the board continued to plan and build right on “up the hill,” it might be said.

All the while, as far back as 1947, attempts were made to unify all the school districts in the northeastern area (San Juan Union High School District). It failed in 1947, failed again in 1957, and finally passes on an almost 2 to 1 vote of the people in 1960. It was then that the newly-created San Juan Unified School District assumed command of all elementary and secondary education programs in what was formerly the old San Juan Union High School District, which had included the elementary districts of Arden-Carmichael, Arcade, Fair Oaks, Citrus Heights (Sylvan), and Orangevale. Today the district is the seventh largest school district in California with slightly under 50,000 children.

It is interesting to note that in 1950, one elementary school at Arden Way and Watt Avenue, and one high school, San Juan Union, served the entire old Arden School District. Today, 26 years later, eleven (11) elementary schools and three (3) high schools are located within the original boundaries of the old Arden District!
What a spectacular and most incredible change has taken place within a quarter of a century in Sacramento’s finest and most beautiful suburban region!
The 1950 Flood

It was not at all unusual for the American River during heavy rainfall years to overflow its banks from Folsom all the way to its confluence with the Sacramento River. Early Sacramento history is filled with descriptions of the disastrous floods that all but washed the town off the map. The backup of the waters where the two rivers meet was tremendous and caused great havoc to life and limb.

Old timers recall any number of occasions when flood waters covered the hop fields, Fair Oaks Boulevard, lower Howe Avenue, and all the lowlands region throughout Carmichael and Arden area. It was frequent during rainy winters for H Street Bridge (Fair Oaks Boulevard) to be closed with the only entrance to the city from the northeast being old Highway 40 (Auburn Road).

The most memorable flood, however, was in November, 1950, when waters again covered the lower Arden region, and, for the first time, succeeded in breaking a secondary levee along Fair Oaks Boulevard that protected Sierra Oaks Vista. On that one unforgettable night, flood waters inundated the entire lower end of Arden District, including much of Howe Avenue and along Fulton Avenue almost to Hurley Way. Waters reached within a couple hundred feet of Morse Avenue and Northrup Way, causing numerous families to abandon their homes. Families in the low regions, particularly west of Fulton, were evacuated during the night and an evacuation center was set up at Arden School. The Red Cross brought in food, supplies, and some personnel. Arden P.T.A., the fire department and scores of neighbors worked around the clock for at least two or three days in the school and in the flood areas.

Even after the waters had receded, many residents were homeless, losing personal belongings, and clothing. Helen Post, P.T.A. president then, organized volunteer workers and a call went out for help. Within just a few days, the school auditorium was filled with clothing, foodstuffs, bed clothing, even draperies and curtains, and Mrs. Post and her aides worked virtually night and day dispensing items to unfortunate neighbors. The true holiday spirit prevailed that winter of 1950 and the full tragedy of the flood scene was made considerably more bearable for our unfortunate neighbors.
Many of the incidents of the disaster were both tragic and amusing. For example, there was the attempted rescue of a stranded couple on Lincoln Way and the plight of the rescuers who got stalled in the darkness in a rowboat when their outboard failed; the three-feet of debris that inundated the then new Wedding Chapel on Fair Oaks Boulevard; the hop poles that floated two or three miles along Fair Oaks Boulevard; the hive of bees carried almost a mile from home and deposited in a front yard; the lady who moved upstairs in her flooded home and defied firemen rescuers for a couple of days. And then there was the incident during the height of the flood when the foreman of the huge hop ranch took off in a rowboat to inspect the water damage to his fields. He was accompanied by his tiny white poodle. Somewhere in the middle of the waters, the poodle fell overboard and when he came aboard after being rescued, he was almost coal black. The flood waters on the ranch had become thoroughly mixed with the black fuel oil used by the ranch to fire the giant kilns. The huge underground tanks had been filled with the oil only shortly before the flood.

**The Big Wind- 1938**

One day in February, back in 1938, a windstorm of almost hurricane proportions hit the Sacramento area. The wind velocity gradually rose during the early afternoon, and by 2 p.m. it had reached a frightening, howling speed. Debris, including some large pieces of galvanized sheeting from somewhere danced across Arden School playground, like deadly flying carpets, capable of cutting a person in half. Dismissal time for the little ones came and we ordered youngsters to stay inside, and instructed classes to pull shades and stay away from the windows.

Within a few minutes, the great wind started to abate, and about that time, anxious, frightened parents started arriving to get their children. Some businessmen drove from Sacramento to check on their youngsters’ safety.

In Sacramento, the scene was utter chaos. Scores of huge elm trees all over town simply were uprooted and they collapsed like jackstraws across streets, automobiles, and homes. Yet, I recall, there were no deaths or serious injuries. Although it’s now almost 40 years afterward, the Big Wind is a lively topic when old time Sacramentans and Ardenites get together.
War years in Arden School

During the years 1940 to 1945, Arden School became a community center in every sense of the word.

Teachers and parents, P.T.A. members, and Arden Improvement Club members joined together to mobilize their talents, energy, patriotism, and work power in a number of vital projects connected with the war effort.

In 1940, I believe it was, the government asked the school to organize and conduct the registration of all men in the area (draft registration).

The school, like all schools everywhere, was designated by the government as registry and distribution point for ration books, sugar, coffee, and gasoline. Schools became busy places as teachers and parents worked together on the first and original distribution of the important little books. Draft boards and ration boards later assumed responsibility for renewal rations.

Any number of so-called community defense meetings were held in the school, and always the auditorium was filled to overflowing with anxious and fearful residents. Our school’s one and only film projector was pressed into use to show defense films of every sort, even some of the London bombings, even the still memorable film on the “Defense of Stalingrad.”

Our school children instituted a scrap metal drive; it caught on, and within weeks we had a huge pile of metal at least 40 feet in diameter. In fact, a local newspaper sent a photographer out to see it. It was big news; the pile was located near Fulton Avenue and its intersection with Sierra Boulevard.

In case of enemy attack, how were school children to be protected? It was of vital importance those World War II days, and an orderly escape across the street into the gulley and among the giant oaks in what is now knows as Arden Oaks. Periodically, teachers practiced such a procedure, striving, of course, not to unduly alarm the little ones, who looked wide-eyed, just a bit apprehensive, maybe, and fearful. I recall some held the teacher’s hand just a little tighter.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Throughout the almost 40 years of its existence as an independent, single district, Arden was fortunate, I believe, to have always had its control in the hands of sincere, intelligent, progressive school board members, who may have seen conservative, but when expenditures were made they were made for the best interests and the welfare of the
children. The members, and we had little turnover on the board, insisted on employing the best of teachers, and expressed a keen interest in the educational program always.

Incidents of vandalism in and about school are rare, and I cannot even recall any. One good reason may have been that the children were proud of their school, came from families that cared, and vandalism as we know it today was hardly a common word in our community.

Perhaps another reason rested in the board’s action in 1938 when it constructed a bungalow or teacherage, just east of the school, and made its occupancy part of its annual contract with the school principal and his family. The comfortable and attractive home was occupied until 1953 when it was sold and moved into another part of the country. For at least a decade or more, the home was the only one located on the vast region now known as Arden Park.

If there was ever a community school anywhere, Arden School must certainly have been it.

Herb E. Winterstein


ARDEN BECAME AN INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL, SERVING 7TH AND 8TH GRADES ONLY, DURING THE 1965-1966 SCHOOL YEAR.

PLEASE NOTE: ARDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL WILL BE HAVING THEIR 100TH YEAR CELEBRATION IN 2014. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE SCHOOL, 916 971-7306, OR MAIL INFORMATION TO ARDEN SCHOOL, 1640 WATT AVENUE, SACRAMENTO, CA 95864.