

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 21, 1965

### **Graves School**

Mrs. Annie McTarnahan Black whom I wrote about a few days ago, arrived in Salinas on Aug. 2, 1909, to teach in the Graves School, still standing on the Watsonville road.

Mrs. Black had been informed that the teacher generally, lived in Salinas and rode out on the "Dinky" train which stopped at the warehouse near the school about 8:30 a.m. But she wanted to be at school shortly after 8 a.m. when the first pupils arrived.

Mrs. Black rode all around the district trying to find a boarding place. No one wanted the new teacher. But toward noon she saw a white house on McFadden road, where two pepper trees shaded a hitching post. The neat trim yard was full of roses, snowballs and carnations.

Through the screen door she saw a neatly-set table with white cloth and shining silver. A well-dressed lady answered Mrs. Black's knock and asked her in. Excusing herself for speaking in Spanish she was doubtful about the teacher's request but said she would ask her mother.

"I adored the music of her words," said Mrs. Black, "not knowing even what she had said. The mother said in Spanish, "She looks tired; ask her to have dinner with us. Then we will think about it."

Mrs. Black has never forgotten that dinner: chili con carne, steaming parsley-covered potatoes, home-made bread and butter, jam, sliced cucumbers and tomatoes, fresh corn on the cob, string beans, delicious apple pie and coffee.

After the meal the mother said she would try the new teacher for a month. Mrs. Black volunteered to sleep in the basement, but one of the girls, Josie gave up her room and slept on the couch. It was a happy year, for Mrs. Black passed her months' probation.

Mrs. Black told of the children at Graves School, all clean and well-fed: the Bordges family De Portas, Simas, Torres, Potter, Foster, Thompsons, Margaret Beasley, the Fontes girls, Blanche Hoover, about 30 in all.

The Grave School had two doors, where boys and girls formed separate lines. Mrs. Black recently told the Monterey County Historical Society.

Everything was done in order, for the school was to be honored and respected. Opening exercises included "America" and "The Star Spangled Banner." There was no rowdy behavior, scattered trash or writing on the premises—there was paper and pencil for that. The Flag was raised daily and put away at night.

There were white curtains at the windows, geraniums on the window ledge and large pictures of Lincoln and Washington above the blackboard.

Heat came from a pot-bellied stove near the doors. Pupils in the rear froze, those in front roasted. Mrs. Black made the fires, swept and dusted daily.

At Christmas there was a program to learn. The Boronda girls had told Mrs. Black that because of a feud some parents did not speak to others. But she persisted, and the youngsters seemed delighted, practicing Christmas songs first thing after "America."

The night of the program, all seats were taken by parents and visitors. Bracket lamps hung on the walls, and the boys opened and closed a curtain of borrowed sheets hung on a wire.

Oh, the excitement of Christmas! The audience clapped and clapped. After the program Santa Claus came with his sack of treats: little red mosquito net bags made by Mrs. Black and filled with candy. Adam Thompson stood up with a sack of oranges and gave one to each child.

Old hurts were completely forgotten for that evening. Mrs. Black said she would never forget that merry Christmas.