



1907 Graduating Class of Somis School. Courtesy Somis Thursday Club

A Tour of Somis

Part 2

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Introduction

by Mary Goldberg

In this part of the two-part series, we explore two long standing Somis organizations. We'll first look at the building on the corner of Somis/Lewis Road and Bell Street—the Somis Thursday Club. Next, Jean Bricker and Dr. Colleen Robertson share the history and memories of the Somis School District.

Somis Thursday Club

www.somisthursdayclub.org

Ventura County Historical Landmark #85

A special thank you to Vanessa Otto, Somis Thursday Club Historian, who compiled the *Somis Thursday Club Our History* documents which were used for this article.



Mrs. Ida Goodyear

The story goes that in 1894 Ida Goodyear, a member of a prominent ranching family, invited some neighbor ladies to a lawn party. They enjoyed this social refreshment in the middle of the busy weeks, and began occasionally meeting to share an afternoon. In 1904 a social club was formed.

In 1910 the group was officially renamed the Somis Thursday Club with Mrs. Goodyear as its first president. The other charter members were Fannie Hughes

Fulkerson, Mary Snyder, Minnie Price, Martha Philbrook, Zoe Gabbert, Mrs W. A. Graham, Lucy Stewart, Emma Willard Pitts and Gussie Underwood. In 1912 they federated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs and incorporated in 1932. The General Federation of Women's Clubs-GFWC-was founded in 1890. It is a federation of over 3,000 women's clubs in the United States which promote civic improvements through volunteer service.

The building was constructed in 1895 as Somis School. It had one room, one teacher, Miss Jessie Clark, and 20 students. One architectural feature was the cupola with its bell. The style was copied when schools were built in the Center and Del Norte Districts on Los Angeles Avenue.

After a new Somis school was built in 1924, the group was the only bidder at a public auction. They purchased the old schoolhouse for \$250. It was extensively remodeled in the 1930's. Club members began many years of fund raising to extend and remodel the building. Mr. Richard Bard donated the land on which it stands. Mrs. Goodyear loaned money for the purchase and some of the renovations.

Highlights from the *Somis Thursday Club: Our History* documents:

July, 1939 the club paid Roy C. Wilson \$25 for preliminary architectural sketches. That same year, Mrs Ida Goodyear enabled clubhouse renovation to begin by giving a loan of \$3000. Work began in July, 1940. The cupola was razed, and the school bell was presented to Mrs. Goodyear. In addition to a new roof, dressing rooms and a new kitchen were added. The large schoolroom was painted and draped and received a beautiful hardwood floor. The old kitchen became a lounge. A wide porch replaced the narrow, steep stairway. The first club meeting in the remodeled building was held on November 14, 1940.

1943 In addition to the 17 usual committees these new war service committees were added: Aircraft Warning Service, Blood Bank, Camp and Hospital, Home Nursing, Nurse Scholarship, Outpost Service, Red Cross, Surgical Dressings, USO. The club had 98 members at that time. The \$100 Nurses Scholarship via the GFWC was the first time the club had made that type of donation.

The **1950's** saw an increase in community projects and improvements to the building. In 1951, the club voted to make clubhouse available as emergency shelter for civil defense. From 1950-53, renters included the Valley Star Square Dancers at \$13/time, and St Columba's Episcopal Church at \$16/time. A new foundation and termite work were completed in 1953.

In 1954, Minnie Cawelti, Laura Macy and Fannie Fulkerson were commissioned by the club to make a pioneer history scrapbook which “will be presented to the county library”.



That year the club also financed publication of fifty copies of the book “Legends and Lore of Long Ago” by Mrs. D.W. Mott. A 1929 copy, can be borrowed from the Local History Collection at the Camarillo Library. It includes “Contributions by Club Women of Ventura County,” and “The Land Grants of Ventura County” by Robert M. Clarke. It was printed at the Wetzel Publishing Co., Inc on South Broadway in Los Angeles, Calif.

The Home Crafts Section was formed in 1954 for those who did not want to play cards. Book Section and Recreation Section already met regularly. The assessed value of the clubhouse in 1959 was \$5500.

1960 was a busy year for the club. A new wing was added to the clubhouse for the Somis Branch of the Ventura County Library. The cost of \$8600 was financed with a \$5500 loan then leased to the County for \$60 per month. In 1970 Somis Branch of the library was closed. However, they seem to have gotten rental income from library thru at least 1974. This was the year the library on Ponderosa Drive in Camarillo opened.



Wing added for the Somis Branch of the Ventura County Library in 1960

Also in **1960** Mrs. Baptiste, formed a committee to organize building of the Pleasant Valley Hospital. Renters that year included: Latter Day Saints Church, Valley Star Square Dancers, Reese Cotillion, Ventura County Library and Election Board, American Legion, Edison Co lunch, Tracy Bridge group, Academy of Dancing

Arts, Conejo Symphony, Camarillo Garden Club, Faith Baptist Church, and the St. Mary Magdelene Altar Guild.

A **1962** fund-raiser was an enchilada dinner fundraiser with Carmen Camarillo Jones as chair of the event.



Kitchen where enchilada dinners were prepared by Carmen and her committee



1964 club officers Johnson, Rust and Hughes.
Look at those clothes and hats!

As we look back to **1970**, yard work cost \$20 per month, janitor \$48 per month, insurance \$426 per year. 100 yearbooks cost \$136. 1976 was the first year that the Yearbook listed members with their own first names, not just by husband's name.

An entry for **1985** states: “Birdie Fulkerson Culbert is the longest-serving member: she attended the initial lawn party as a baby!”

Parties were held for the inmates of the Camarillo State Hospital from 1990-96. Fred W. Hammar, Civil Engineer was the tenant of the annex (former library) building from approx 1993 to 1999 and David Awrey, Civil Engineer, has been the tenant since 1999.

In **1991** the club listed 100 members. Bridge parties are an important activity:



In **May, 2000**, the club could not find a candidate for President, and discussed dissolution of the club and sale of the building. Ultimately, Imogene Gregory consented to serve for an unprecedented third consecutive term.

In 2007 the parlor was cleared of much junk and painted in Behr Coastal Mist. The main hall was also painted in Behr Navaho White. The following year their old leaky gas stove was sold and replaced with modern unit.

For their 100th Anniversary in 2010, “the club purchased a birthday present for ourselves: a fine furniture chest with marble top for storage in the parlor.”

On April 29 they enjoyed an Old Fashioned Reciprocity Tea



2011 In this year they replaced the back porch and back door, repaired several plumbing leaks in the yard, and replaced the parlor toilet and sink. They also installed a water filtration system and two small water heaters.



In 2014 The club established a Little Free Library box to continue the tradition of library support in Somis. It was replaced in 2018 with this box which contains a variety of books to be enjoyed.

Men were first enrolled as members in 2019, first one then three more. Reading group, Mahjonn group and crafts projects all well supported.

Today, as when they formed, their mission is to pursue a number of activities to promote culture, education and civic welfare among the citizens of Somis and the adjacent communities. The club supports projects in the areas of the arts, conservation, literacy and public affairs.

The Somis Thursday Club has awarded scholarships to local high school graduates each year since 1944. They support a variety of charities including RAIN, Camarillo Hospice, and Heifer International. Their members donate time and money to the Somis Pantry, Somis Education Foundation, the Camarillo Library, For The Troops and other organizations.



Courtesy Somis Thursday Club website



Courtesy Somis Thursday Club archives

Somis School - 125 years of Teaching and Learning
Article and pictures by Jean Bricker and Colleen Robertson



Somis School in 1900

THE BEGINNING - From a charming one room school house in 1895 to a sprawling 9-acre campus in 2021, Somis School has educated the children of this tiny pastoral town for over 125 years. The original Somis School was built on the corner of Somis Road and Bell Street. Most of the original building still stands and was purchased by the Somis Thursday Club when the “new” Somis School was built.

In those first few years there was just one teacher and a handful of students. Each school day it was Miss Clark’s job to teach all of the students in first through eighth grade. A teacher planning book from the early 1900’s shows the subjects of penmanship, math, reading, spelling, and for the older students, the subject of poetry was included.



In those early days it was not uncommon for children to come to school barefoot and the boys sometimes carried a hunting rifle to be used in the hills after class was dismissed.

Though the Chumash Indian villages were the first inhabitants of the area, the planning book also reveals that Native American and Chinese children were to be taught “at their own schools” and were not allowed to enroll at

Somis School. Reminding us that not all glimpses into history are joyful, but must be acknowledged none the less.



The Somis class of 1919-1920. Jack Fulkerson, Bob's dad, is third from the right in the top row. Other local famous family names in this picture are Baptiste, Bell, Bradley, Pitts, Cawelti, Saur, Snyder, Woods, Wooley, Barnett, Cline, Cardozo, Machado, Fox, Beasley, Palin, Guthrie, Hughes, Goodyear, Farrar, Stuart, Soars, and Unruh.
Somis School 100 YEARS AGO!

NEW CONSTRUCTION - As the number of children at school increased, so did the need for more space, so in 1924 a new school was built on the corner of North and West Streets. The school was originally built with just 3 classrooms, a main office, a custodian closet and a storage room. In 1931 a new corridor with two new classrooms was added and in 1940 a cafeteria was also built. The 50's saw the biggest expansion of the school with the addition of seven classrooms, along with two sets of boys' and girls' restrooms, a teacher workroom, bus garage, and another custodian closet.

These were all added between 1952 and 1956. The largest building on the campus, at 6,083 square feet, is the cafeteria/multipurpose room which was built in 1960.

This 1950's picture shows roof construction and the housing boom on North Street.



The 1980's and 90's were the decade of the portables, so named because they were intended to be a short-term housing solution for the growing number of students. In 1996 California Legislators passed a bill known as the Class Size Reduction Bill. This bill reduced the student/teacher ratio to twenty to one in grades kindergarten to 3rd grade, thus the need for more classrooms in Somis and across the state. Between 1981 and 1999, seven new portable classrooms were added to the campus, along with a modular library in 1992.

PIPELINES – Though still charming and quaint, Somis School was definitely showing its age by 2011, with antiquated bathrooms, water leaks and crumbling plaster. Money was needed for repairs so the new superintendent, Dr. Colleen

Robertson, along with the teachers, staff, and School Board of Trustees, rallied the community to support a \$9,000,000 General Obligation Bond. It was during the meetings to prioritize repairs and modernization that the subject of natural gas pipelines was brought up. It was shared that a few years after the school was built on North Street, a 13-inch, 300 PSI gas line was laid under the play field. In the 1940's a bigger 16-inch, 600 PSI gas line was added and in the 1950's an even larger 18-in 800 PSI gas line was installed in front of the school along North Street. The school was sitting in the middle of aged gas lines! The two gas lines in the field laid just 30 inches below where the children played. And to add concern to that, there was also a crude oil line that ran alongside the natural gas lines on the field!

The superintendent immediately brought in a respected gas pipeline engineer from a company in Oakland called Terraphase to do a pipeline risk assessment. The results of his study and his report to the Board of Trustees set into motion years of dedicated efforts to relocate the school. In the words of the engineer, "If you can move the school, do it, it would be unconscionable to stay." Despite the school's hopeful intentions, meetings with representatives from the Southern California Gas Company proved to be unhelpful. The superintendent and School Board sought input from the community and worked with Representatives from the California Department of Education, Bond Advisors, The L.A. Archdiocese, lawyers, architects, construction firms, surveyors, Department of Toxic Substance Control, County Supervisors, Project Managers, Bankers, land owners, and a whole host of others. Property was purchased, and architectural plans approved but the price tag to build kept growing and growing and the bond money wasn't nearly enough. Ten binders sit on a shelf at the school, documenting the efforts towards new construction, but a world pandemic changed the focus of where the bond dollars needed to be spent.

REUNIONS - What does it say about the heart of a place when 70 year old, 80 year old and even 90 year old 's, make that trip down memory lane? That is what happened in July of 2011, when Jean Bricker, Somis School Librarian, headed up the Reunion Committee to host a Somis School Reunion at the school. The reunion was attended by over 300 people, the oldest of whom was Max Grant, whose 8th grade graduation took place in 1932! What a special place it must be if people have lived through high school, college, careers, marriages, raising children, travel, retirements, and all of the joys and challenges that life has presented and still return to revisit their earliest school memories. Somis School was that special place and they came.



Max Grant was the oldest attendee at the 2011 Somis School Reunion. He graduated from 8th grade in 1932! He is shown here with Edith Peña Akeley.



This class picture of the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders from 1933 shows Edith Peña. Can you find her? She is the last girl in the top row!

Rick Johansson, a beloved retired teacher, donated hundreds of slides to the school. Jean sifted through the bags of old slides and created slide shows by the decade to share at the reunion.



Dorothy Donovan, in the Somis School, kitchen cooked up special treats for students and staff.



Principal Jones was at Somis School from 1954-1980, He was well-liked and well respected by the teachers and students.

Rick Johannson, dressed the part when teaching history to his students. Rick taught at Somis School from 1966 - 2003.



Laughter and lively conversations filled the cafeteria and outdoor lunch area as alumni from the 1930's all the way to 2010 shared memories on a multitude of topics such as: favorite teachers, and staff, baseball team competitions against other schools and other city teams, skipping out of class to buy burritos at the Somis Market, Carnivals, the 8th grade graduation trip to Catalina by plane, shenanigans in the classroom that resulted in a paddling from Principal Charley Jones, track meets, Jog-a-thons, and the Show-Stoppers. They even talked about when Jim Bushong donated a corvette to be raffled off to earn money to build the new science lab.

There were so many memories to share – over nine decades worth! What a grand time was had by all! A second successful reunion took place a few years later and another was scheduled for the summer of 2020, but the coronavirus put a halt to those plans.

PANDEMIC – Though many life altering events have occurred over the past century including, the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918, The Great Depression, Two World Wars, The Vietnam War, 9-11, Earthquakes, Floods, and Fires, nothing has had the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic! It was Friday, March 13, 2020, when all 20 Ventura County Superintendents agreed that the students should not come back to the campuses for at least a few weeks, until there was more information about the new virus that was spreading fast. The teachers and administrators scrambled to put a distance learning plan into operation so the students would not lose their learning time. Little did anyone know that almost a full year later Somis School students would still not have returned to their desks!

Teachers, staff, and administration have continued the work of perfecting distance learning but reaching every single student has proved to be elusive as parents juggle their work responsibilities, (either from home or outside the home), while simultaneously trying to support their children's distance learning. The inequities of internet availability have also played a large role in the challenging efforts to provide reliable communication between the school and home. This has been, and continues to be, trying times for everyone involved in education. But the advantage of being a small school, where everyone knows your name, is that no one is invisible. Somis School has been the center of the community for 125 years and as long as there are children and families in Somis, the school will continue to serve.

MANY HANDS – Through the years, there has been an army of people who have worked behind the scenes to make each school year memorable. These people are all volunteers and without them school just wouldn't be the same. One such group is the Parent/Faculty Organization, or PFO. It is through their fundraising efforts that things like the Harvest Festival, Book Fair, Assemblies, Field Trips, Jog-a-thon, Teacher and Staff Appreciation, Awards Assemblies and so much more happen each year. It cannot be overstated that parents make a HUGE difference in the joy

that is found on a school campus. Hats off to all of the parents, over the years, that have made that commitment to the success of Somis School. You are heroes.



Carnival Pictures then and now



The other critical group that is sometimes overlooked is the School Board of Trustees. This group of elected officials is responsible for selecting the Superintendent/Principal and ultimately everything that happens at the school. They are a dedicated group of educational leaders that continue to devote their time, energy, and focus to making the school a better place for students, families, and faculty.

One name has been on the School Board of Trustees almost continuously since 1917! That name is “Fulkerson”. Everyone in Somis knows about the Fulkerson



Dr. Robertson with Board members, Bob Fulkerson, Michelle Quintero, and Scott Mier, selling tickets at the 2019 Harvest Festival.

Hardware Store which has been in operation for over 100 years but not everyone knows that the Fulkerson’s have been involved with the school for over 100 years as well! Bob Fulkerson, the current Board President, has been on the Board since 1987. He is one of the longest serving Board members in Ventura County, perhaps in the state. His Dad served from 1941-1942 then left for a stint in the Army. When he returned, he once

again served on the School board from 1947- 1979. Bob’s Granddad served from the 1917’s through the 30’s. Records are hard to come by from those early years but it is certain that the Fulkerson family has been dedicated for many, many decades. Some other family names that have been a long part of the Somis history are Culbert, Gill, Underwood, Peña, Ramos, Pellerino, Bell, Fernandez, Bean, Mier, and many others. Somis School has a long history behind it with many stories yet to be told.

Do you have a comment, story or photo you’d like to share?

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