

GOING TO SCHOOL IN RESCUE

by Barbara (Veerkamp) Coulson

The old Tennessee Schoolhouse is gone now--burned down in 1955. But, it lives on strongly in my memory. In my formative years, all I learned there helped point me in the right direction for life.

My school career began in 1945. I started first grade (there was no kindergarten class) from my Aunt Elsie Marden's place, way down on Green Valley Road (now Green Springs Ranch.) It was with awestruck excitement that I rode that big yellow school bus. My uncle Vint Veerkamp was the driver, and he was my hero. My parents had bought the place right next door to the Tennessee School, but it wasn't really ready for us to move in.

Most of the writing I've contributed to the Rescue Historical Society has been in collaboration with my lifelong friend Margie Carpenter Weber. She was one year ahead of me in school, so all the following described here she and I experienced together. My first grade teacher was a kind and gentle lady named Mrs. Morgan. I don't remember learning the alphabet or phonics, but obviously I did. I do remember learning to read from the "Dick and Jane, Spot and Puff" books, and reading opened up a whole new world to me. I rather quickly became a book worm!



The Tennessee School probably in the 1940s. Barbara Veerkamp (Coulson) is standing on the porch.

The school day ended for primary grades (1st, 2nd, 3rd) at 2:30; upper graders went on until 4:00. The primary kids were allowed to play, unsupervised, outside and entertain themselves. I don't recall any injuries or getting into any trouble at that time, except once in a while we would sneak into the school storage room--"kitchen", and snatch a pack of Kool-Aid and make it up to refresh ourselves. Once we couldn't find any sugar, so we reasoned (?) that salt would do. Ugh!! So we just played by ourselves until the high school bus came along about 4:30, to take us all home. During good weather, some kids opted to ride their bikes to school.

My "writing career" began in the second grade. We had been shown the fairy tale film of Jack-and the Beanstock" and our teacher asked us to write a brief summary of the story. I amazed her with a seven page report. In her astonishment she praised me profusely, and I've loved writing ever since.

By that time my parents had moved into their place next to the school. My sister Carole was a newborn just then, and I remember one afternoon bringing all the primary kids to our house to see the new baby sister, of whom I was so proud. I got very upset with my mother because she wouldn't let that grubby, motley crew in to see her newborn baby girl!

Let me describe what the school itself was like. There was a cement slab out front, with a roof covering the entry door. Just inside was we called the ante-room, where we hung our coats and put our lunches on shelves. There was also a shelf for the water bucket and dipper. One of the big boys would bring in a fresh pail of water each morning, and we all used the same dipper for a drink.



This is the Veerkamp house today. This is where the author of this article lived. It is located at 4341 Green Valley Road, about 100-yards west of the Tennessee Schoolhouse.

Beyond the ante-room was the schoolroom --one big open room for grades 1-8. There was a long row of shelves along the east wall, to hold all the textbooks currently in use, and our library books. Along the west wall were two huge black-boards--truly black, and made of slabs of real slate. They were a dream to write on. All through my own teaching career, I thought of those boards, and wished I had them in my classroom!

Our heating source was a wood stove, and in winter we would draw our desks in a ring around the heater. There was a stage (with real draw curtains!) at the back of the room, and we gave our Christmas programs and held graduations there. Off to the west side of the schoolroom was the before mentioned "Kool-Aid" room, and also the book room--storage for unused books, sports equipment and such. There was also large stack of donated National Geographic there, which I eagerly devoured. It was my first exposure to other lands, peoples and cultures, an interest I still pursue today.

There was a motley assortment of desks: some of the oak chair type with a drawer underneath, some of the

"fastened in a row, nailed to a rail" type with an open shelf beneath the writing surface. There were only 2 or 3 of the more modern "bin" types with the lift-up lids. These 2 or 3 were the coveted desks, and there was much bargaining to "trade desks". I think we all eventually got a turn. There were benches by the teacher's desk, where we were called .up as groups to read or to be given other lessons.

Playground equipment was limited. There was a teeter-totter, a length of pipe fastened between 2 trees for a "monkey bar", and a set of "rings". This was much like a Maypole--with a set of chains fastened to a revolving top, and each chain ending in a set of "grip bars". You could take a few running steps and then launch yourself to swing through the air. The fact that someone occasionally fell off, or banged into the center pole, didn't stop us from wanting to swing again. Later on (in the middle grades) our school board had a set of regular swings installed, and the somewhat dangerous "rings" removed.

Also during that time, the men of the community worked together to build us a real baseball field--complete with a real backstop. They also put up basketball backboards and hoops, and made an area for volleyball. Fill dirt was hauled in and Mr. Dunning leveled it all with his tractor. Chicken wire was nailed over the east windows to protect from breakage by foul balls.

By the time I was to start 3rd grade, Tennessee School was to be closed, because there were too few students to make it economically feasible to keep the school open. I think there were only 5 of us. BUT--that summer, the Dunning family moved in. They had 10 children, 5 or 6 of them school age at that time, and our school opened on schedule!

My third grade teacher was Mrs. Leonie Greiner... an English lady, and one of my all-time favorite teachers. I loved reading and learning, and she fueled the fires. I was anxious to move into the middle grades, so I could stay in school all day!

One of the most sought-after jobs at school was flag duty. We had an outdoor flag pole and each week, 2 students would be in charge of putting up and taking down the flags. As soon as we arrived at school, up they would go. We were taught how to handle them with respect and dignity, and how to properly fold them. If rain began, we'd race out to retrieve them.

At 9:00 we'd circle around the flag pole for the salute, and usually follow up that with singing a few songs. We loved singing the traditional patriotic songs that are seldom heard today.

I had the same teacher for my 4th, 5th and 6th grades--Mrs. Marie McDonald (later Marie Bigelow). She was young and pretty, a classy lady from Texas. By then we had quite few students, probably about five? Our school board saw the need for more room and a second teacher. So--probably in the summer of 1951, the men of the community again pitched in and built an addition onto the existing building. That next term, the 1st and 2nd graders were placed over at the Deer Valley School, 3rd, 4th, and 5th in the original classroom, and 6th, 7th and 8th in the new addition. We lost our nice stage, but felt SO progressive with a TWO room school!

During Mrs. McDonald's years there, she had one student who constantly kept her challenged. Robert was a big, strong boy--stubborn, restless, and the oldest kid in school. Academic excellence was not Robert's first priority. Mrs. McDonald had: bought a new car--a silver-gray 1950 Ford. Robert loved that car. Whenever Mrs. McDonald sensed that Robert's rebelliousness was about to overwhelm him, she'd say, "Robert, would you like to go out and wash my car?" Robert would happily go out to wash, scrub and polish--and come back calm enough to resume his lessons.

At the north-west corner of our school ground was a large pit-like excavation--probably left over from the mining days in Rescue. It extended over into my dad's property, and in the rainy season would fill up with water to form a small, shallow lake. We would go over and raid my dad's pile of wooden fence posts and build a raft to float around on the "lake". This didn't thrill my dad at all, but we kids thought it was great fun.

We had sports program-of sorts. We played baseball games (and later basketball and volleyball) with some of the other small schools around: Springvale, Missouri Flat, Shingle Springs, Latrobe. It was always interesting playing at Latrobe. Their baseball field sloped off so much you could not see center field from home plate. On game days, several parents would show

up and we'd all pile into various cars. My mom's car would fill up fast, because she was always lots of fun to be with. We'd sing all the way to the game and all the way back.

We also had an "audio-visual" program--one that would be primitive by today's standards. About once a month, Mr. Reese, the county-wide audio-visual coordinator, would come out to show us educational and literary films on an old fashioned reel-to-reel projector. (Mr. Reese had been one of my father's teachers when he had been in grammar school over at Gold Hill). Mr. Reese always brought several films each time, so this was a real treat. Another occasion for celebration was the now and then arrival of the book-mobile, bringing a new supply of library books. Oh, happy day!

For music instruction, we had a gentleman named Mr. Clint and his wife drove out once a week to teach us instrumental and vocal. He taught us on "tone-flutes", which made more noise than music, but he was a patient man. Margie was attempting to learn the violin, and her practice at home drove her cats crazy. I struggled with a saxophone which I borrowed from my cousin, Lois Marden Dawson. If you can imagine a scrawny little kid trying to overcome a big heavy saxophone with a squeaky reed--t well, I didn't make much progress. Mrs. Clint taught us vocal music, including learning to sing parts: soprano, alto and so on. We had better success at this.

There were certain educational requirements every year to pass each grade. We were required to keep a notebook with so many book reports, so many



The Tennessee School probably in the 1950s. Note the fuse box and commercial electrical power lines.

essays and resumes, so many pieces committed to memory (the Preamble to the Constitution was a popular one), and a minimum of 50 new vocabulary words gleaned from reading our lessons. Toward the end of each school year a representative from the County Education Office would come out and inspect our notebooks, to approve our moving on to the next grade.

Our health program included having the County School Nurse, Mrs. DeWier, coming out twice a year to weigh and measure us. Then there were always the dreaded "shot clinics." We'd be taken to one of the larger schools (usually Shingle or Missouri Flat) and added to the line. Our terror grew as the line in front of us shortened. As our turns came, we'd close our eyes tight, scrunch up our faces, and--it was all over in a split second. Such relief! Dr. McKinnon (the same one who delivered me into the world) gave all those shots. He was a kindly and much respected doctor. I don't know how we managed to stay as well as we did--all drinking from the same dipper, and, after recess, lining up to drink one after another from the spout of the hand pump that served our well. But--we were farm kids--used to being exposed to some germs and dirt, and our resistance was healthy and high. Our sanitary facilities consisted of a boy's outhouse on the east end of the school ground, and a girl's outhouse on the west end. After several years, some parents convinced the school board that it was time for flush toilets, and they were installed.

When I was probably in the 6th grade, my mother was offered the school janitor job. This had previously been done by students, two each month. I think we were each paid \$3.00. The offer to my mom was the princely sum of \$15.00 per month. She accepted and offered to split the pay with me if I'd help her. She actually did much more of the work than I, but she faithfully gave me half, and I felt enormously wealthy at \$7.50 per month.

As the end of each school year approached, like school children everywhere, we looked forward to the list day of school picnic. I don't remember it ever being anywhere else than Bass Lake. To me, in those days, it looked as big as the ocean (which I had never yet seen.) Games, races, good food, cold pop--just relaxing and having fun. Mr. John Outcalt (who loved children and had none of his own) would usually join

us and rent a rowboat to take us out on the lake. BUT WAIT!! I just did remember: one year we had our picnic down at Hollister's irrigation lake. We didn't mind that we muddied the water--it was a hot day and swimming was fun.

As I moved on into my 7th and 8th grade years, I had the new experience of having a man teacher, Mr. Eugene McGeorge. He guided us into higher levels of all our academics, and we respected him. After all, we were the "big kids" now, I happily housed in our new, nice, big room! One of the delights of those two years was, weather permitting, we'd take our library books outside, sit under the trees and read for the last half hour before lunch. Another was, on rainy days, we'd push all the desks to one side, and do folk dances for recess or P.E.

I'll digress for just a moment here to say that when I was teaching in the mid-1970's, "cross-age tutors" were the new discovery and all the rage! Nothing new to the upper graders at Tennessee School. We were frequently called on to help the younger kids with spelling, math, reading, and so on. Everybody knew everybody else's lessons--you either learned something new or got a good review of what you'd already learned!

So--the 8th grade year came and went, and the big day, graduation--loomed just ahead. There were 8 of us from that little Tennessee School: Nancy Ordway, Nancy and Della Dunning, Bunny Hollister, Marilyn and Bobby Freshour, Bob West, and myself, Barbara Veerkamp. Our graduation ceremony was held at the Rescue R.S.L.S. Hall. I was given the honor of class valedictorian. Mr., McGeorge helped me write my speech, and I still had the original, written in pencil on binder paper, until my house burned down in 1988. How exciting it was to be going off to El Dorado County High School in Placerville.

As I had approached my 8th grade graduation, there was the question of which course to sign up for in high school. My parents would have liked to send me to college, but were convinced that to do so would cost a fortune, which they didn't have. Mr. McGeorge went to our home and assured my folks that the state colleges were quite inexpensive, so I perused a college prep course in high school. I had the privilege of 4 years at San Jose State, graduating with a

teaching degree. I'll always be grateful to my teacher and my parents, and the good start I was given at Tennessee School.

One night during 1955, when I was a sophomore in high school, my family and I were awakened in the night by strange noises and strange flickering light on our bedroom walls. One look out the window told us that our beloved schoolhouse was burning down. I remember standing there watching, with tears streaming down my face, as a dear and important part of my life went up in flames.

It was later determined that the oil furnace, installed when the new room was added-had somehow malfunctioned, flooded and somehow ignited the pool of oil. That dear, humble little schoolhouse is gone now, but it will live on in my memory for all of my life, and I hope this written memory will help others to see and appreciate it as much as I did.

Carp's Corner

The story by Barbara (Veerkamp) Coulson about the Rescue School is great local history. The name of the school was, "Tennessee School of the Tennessee School District." If there is any doubt as to location, it was about ¼ mile east of Rescue on the Green Valley Road. It replaced the Rose Springs School of the Tennessee School District. The 1st Rose Springs School burnt and was rebuilt; the 2nd Rose Springs School burnt in 1906.

In the early 1950's the local people voted to combine many of the local schools. The State of California was pushing consolidation of schools. Tennessee, Deer Valley, Green Valley, Live Oak and Salmon Falls Schools were involved locally. Salmon Falls was actually split with part of the students going to Folsom. The result was the Rescue Unified School District. (I hope the new title is correct.) Classes were moved around some but there was nothing done about a new school building until the school at Rescue (Tennessee) burnt. (very convenient !)

Barbara says that the oil furnace malfunctioned and she may be correct. It was a newly installed, used oil furnace that replaced the old wood stove that supposedly caused the fire. This was the 2nd fire

at the school. That is the official version. We had no fire district at that time. The State Fire Marshal never investigated the fire, in fact there was no investigation.



The Tennessee School was located at about 4355 Green Valley Road, between Skinner Lane and Ponderosa Way.

There has been a change with the news letter. Bill is working on it now. Additional things that will happen will be in the President's Column.

Remember the next meeting is April 12 at the RSLS Hall at 10 am. I hope to see many, if not all of you there.

Carp

President's Report

On Saturday, April 12 at 10 a.m. in the Rose Springs Hall, we will hold our next general meeting of the Rescue Historical Society. Try to make the meeting; it will be worth your time.

The primary focus of the meeting will be to tell the membership what we have been working on. Here are some of the things we are working on:

- Bill Teie and "Carp" have begun showing the 4th grade students at the Rescue School a slide show on the history in and around Rescue. Bill has also given this slide show at the Cameron Oaks Apartment complex and is scheduled to do the same show at the Folsom Library in August.
- Marilyn Gillham, a resident of Rescue, has begun developing video records of historical sites in Rescue. Her first videotaping took place at the Pleasant Grove House. She is now putting finishing touches to her presentation.
- During a private tour of Pleasant Grove House, a very old grape vine was found. We feel it probably was planted in the 1850s. Mike Skinner (great-grandson of James Skinner and owner of Skinner Vineyards in Fair Play) has taken cuttings from the vine to graft on some vines in his vineyard. He will also have a DNA

test of this year's grapes to determine the type of grape and something about it "roots."



This is the historic grape vine (circle) that was found at Pleasant Grove House.

- The new owner of the land where the "brick factory" is located has approved plans to preserve the site. Bill and Carp are working on a plan.
- Randy Young is also heading up an effort to clean-up several of our cemeteries. The first one will be Rose Springs.

These and other items of interest will be discussed at our April meeting; see you then.

Handwritten signature of Bill Teie

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The Calendar

Mark your calendar:

- **April 12, Saturday** – Rescue Historical Society General Meeting. The meeting will start at 10 a.m. in the Rose Springs Hall conference room. After the meeting we will walk about 200 yards north to the site of the brick factory.
- **Date open, Saturday** – Spring Wildflower Tour along Salmon Falls Road, lead again by Rodi Lee.
- **May 17, Saturday** – Open House at the Zentgraf Home and Winery.
- **June 14, Saturday** – Program to be presented to the membership and general public. Program to be announced.
- **September 13, Saturday** - Program to be presented to the membership and general public. Program to be announced.
- **September 27, Saturday** – Rescue Bus Tour conducted by Bill Teie and “Carp” Carpenter. There will two identical tours, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, if required.

Rescue Historical Society, Inc.

PO Box 13, Rescue, CA 95672

Membership Application/Renewal Form

- Anyone interested in preserving the history of Rescue and surrounding area, is welcome to join.
- Dues are for one year, from January to January.
- Individual. \$15 per year.
- Family \$25 per year.
- Make checks to: Rescue Historical Society.

New member

Renewal

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

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Would you be willing to help clean up historical sites, participate in tours, be an officer, etc.?

What do you want the historical society to do for you and the community?

How can we improve?

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Important Notices:

- Please renew your membership.
- The next society meeting is set for Saturday, April 12 at 10 am, in the Rose Springs Hall.

Visit our homepage :

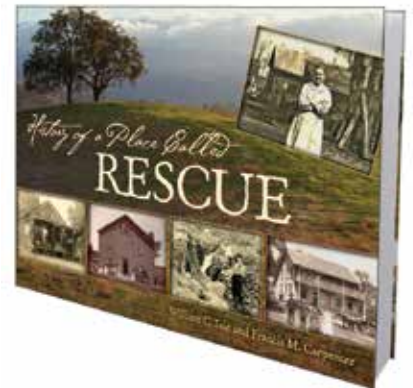


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