

Menlo Park's Almanac

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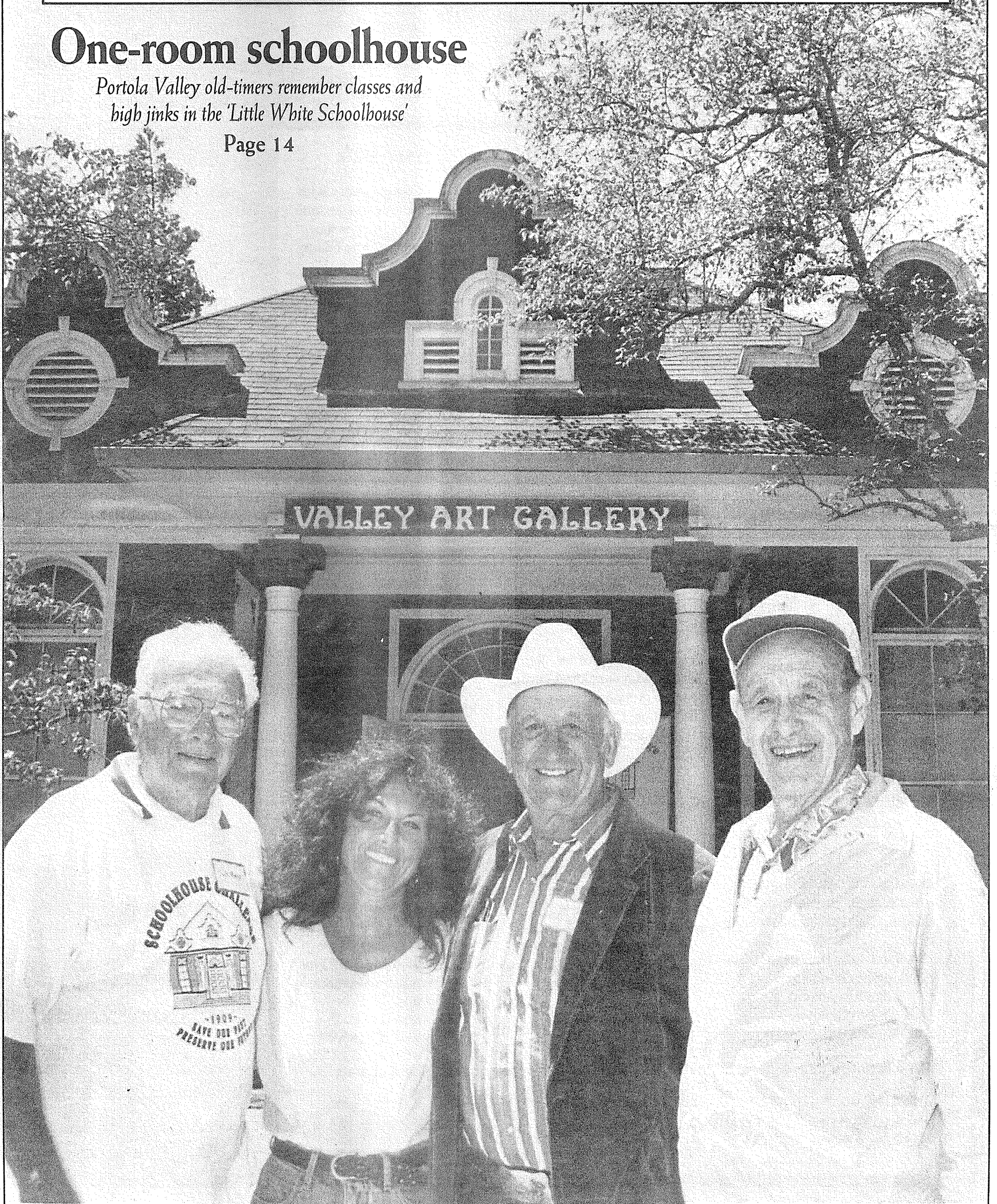
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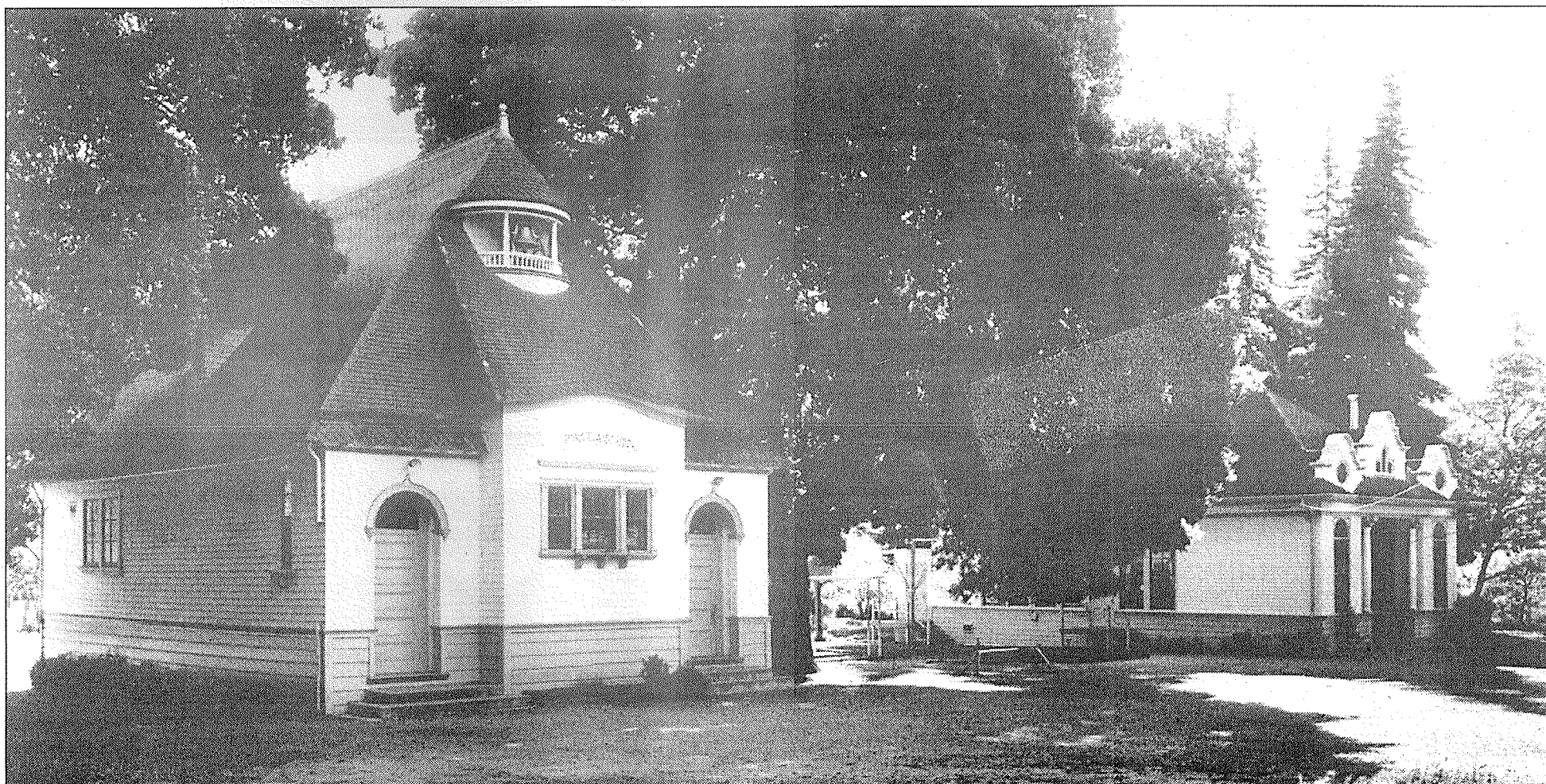
One-room schoolhouse

*Portola Valley old-timers remember classes and
high jinks in the 'Little White Schoolhouse'*

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Little White Schoolhouse

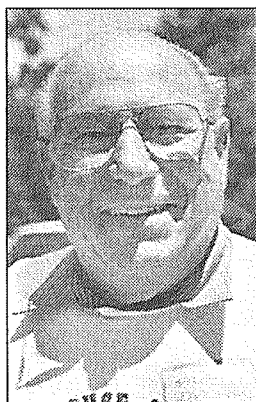
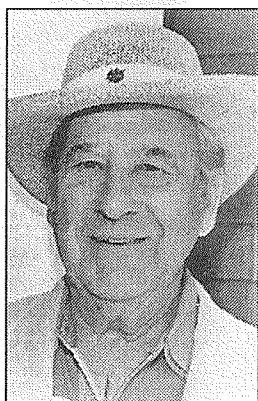


There were once two white schoolhouses under the two giant oak trees at what is now Portola Valley Town Center. The closer one was built in 1894 and torn down in 1950. In the background is the historic "Little Red Schoolhouse" to be restored this summer as a town and community center.



Anne Duzanica Loushin didn't speak English when she entered Portola Elementary School in 1915. She went on to teach at Woodside Elementary School for 15 years, the last three as principal.

Ed Jelich could take a half hour to fill a bucket of coal for the potbellied stove in the Little White Schoolhouse.



Nick Duzanica remembers riding his horse to school from the Morshead Ranch.

Generations of kids learned their three Rs in Portola Valley's one-room schoolhouse, now slated for restoration

BY MARION SOFTKY

Joe Gomes remembers when schoolmates put Mr. Nunes' carriage on the roof of Our Lady of the Wayside Church.

Ann Skrabo Goodwin remembers how Miss Zarevich taught all eight grades and still found time to read a story. "We had some wonderful teachers," she says.

Jack Mangini remembers one Halloween when the kids rigged a rope from the school bell to a safe hideout across the street. When the bell rang in the middle of the night, "The custodian (Andrew Jurian) went wild," he still chuckles.

Everybody remembers, "It wasn't red." It was white with green trim.

These are memories that local old-timers cherish of Portola Valley's historic Red, soon-to-be-white, Schoolhouse.

Starting in 1909, children of the sturdy immigrants who farmed the

Valley and worked the large estates learned their ABCs in Portola Valley's treasured one-room schoolhouse.

About 20 former students gathered at the Portola Valley Town Picnic June 15 to parade in antique cars, share memories, and help launch the drive to raise funds to restore the historic landmark.

Their names recall the roots of today's Portola Valley — Skrabo, Jelich, Duzanica, Mangini, Ramies, Boos, Gomes, Hallett, Nahmens.

These were people whose parents and grandparents immigrated from Croatia, Italy, Portugal, Spain, England, to make a new life in a new world. They worked hard on the farms and estates; they had large, close-knit families. Many still live in the area. "At Christmas we (the Croatians) would go from house to house and sing along the way," recalls Mrs. Goodwin. "We were very closely knit."

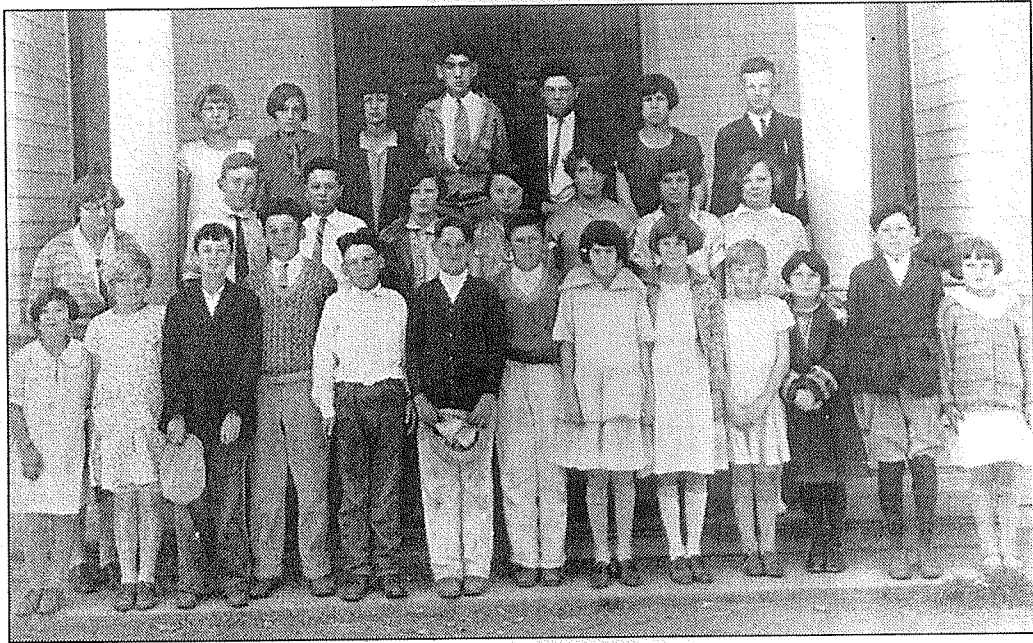
Their memories give life to the picturesque schoolhouse with its

Graduates of Portola Elementary School rode in classic cars in the parade kicking off the fund-raising drive to restore the schoolhouse.



Recent photos by Carol Ivie

A schoolful of old grads returned to Portola Elementary School for a reunion at the Portola Valley Town Picnic June 15. They are: Front row from left, Rose Mangini Baleri, Ann Duzanica Estacaille, Ann Skrabo Goodwin, Laura Ramies Mangini (in front,) Nell Skrabo Shine, Bill Nahmens, Anne Duzanica Loushin, Alice Seeborn Duff, Middle row, Nick Duzanica, Joseph Manuel Gomes, Jack Mangini, Ed Jelich, Jack Schoelhammer, Back row, Lida Irvine Raimondi, and Warren Van Sant.



◀ The upper school at Portola Elementary School poses for a school picture about 1927. Students are: Top row from left, Brita Seeborn, Ann Plastina, Nellie Skrabo, Wilbur Pierce, Louis Plastina, Margaret Robles, and Henry Wilfert, second row, teacher Ed Ainsworth, Albert Mangini, Estelle Jammet, Mamie Mangini, Gertrude Nahmens, Esther Silva, and Peggy Crary, and, bottom row, Elizabeth Ramies, Alice Seeborn, Andrew Mangini, George Jelich, Andrew Ramies, Walter Jelich, Nick Duzanica, Ann Duzanica, Katie Plastina, Marie Farber, Gertrude Boos, Louie Gambetta, and Annie Duzanica.

peeling paint and non-existent foundation. Some are romantic; images of the one-room schoolhouse come straight out of Bret Harte or Currier and Ives. But others give the bite of personal hurt or pride or mischief.

"I rode my horse to school from the Morshead Ranch," recalls Nick Duzanica. "One day I rode him up the steps. The teacher opened the door; it scared hell out of her."

Back to 1894

Today's Little Red Schoolhouse is actually the second schoolhouse on the site, shaded by giant oaks, where Portola Valley Town Center is now.

The first school opened in 1894 on land donated by Andrew Smith Hallidie, the inventor of San Francisco's cable cars, who operated a cable tramway up the hill behind the school — kind of like a ski lift. The new school replaced the old Searsville School, which was closed when the lake filled.

By 1909 the expanding estates of

wealthy San Franciscans had created a population explosion of workers who lived year-round in the Valley. With 76 eligible students, the Searsville School District board decided it needed a second school building. The same year, it renamed the district the Portola (pronounced Por-to-LA) School District.

District voters passed a bond issue by a comfortable margin of 21-1. Architect George Howard designed the Mission Revival building to be placed on land donated by Mrs. Hallidie. The contract was let Oct. 21, 1909 and the building turned over to the trustees on Jan. 27, 1910. Total cost for site, building and furnishings: \$3,602.11.

The two schools served many generations of children until the post-World War II population boom. In 1950, the older building was razed to make way for the first wing of Portola Valley School — now Town Center.

The second schoolhouse, still

white, was closed — briefly. Ever since 1950 it has been used variously for overflow classes, Valley Presbyterian Church, Town Council Chambers, school district offices, and — since 1980 — the Valley Art Gallery.

Everyone who knew the schoolhouse in the old days asks: Who painted it red and why? Town Historian Nancy Lund replies, "A school board member painted it red in 1955, presumably at his own expense and with his own effort."

Golden rule days

Anne Duzanica Loushin has little use for bi-lingual education; she dealt with the problem in 1915.

Since her family spoke Slavic at home, she and her older sister started school with no English. "My sister cried at school, so they sent me too," Mrs. Loushin recalls.

Little Anne — one of three Ann Duzanicas in the school — picked up English so easily she skipped second

grade. But she does recall problems along the way: she didn't know how to ask to go to the outhouse behind the school.

Mrs. Loushin remembers the teacher occupied a platform in front of the class, with a recital bench in front. Boys and girls had separate cloakrooms. Most years there were two teachers in two schoolhouses, with four grades in each. But one year, when enrollment was down, only the present red schoolhouse was used. "One teacher handled all eight grades," she remembers.

Discipline was also out of the familiar "School days" song. "I can remember the teacher lining up a bunch of kids to get spanked. There were five or six, even in the upper grades," Mrs. Loushin says.

From Thanksgiving to Christmas, school work stopped while the whole school prepared a Christmas production for parents, Mrs. Loushin remembers with relish.

Mrs. Loushin, who graduated in

1923 and went on to Sequoia High School — the first year it had a bus — returned in 1930 as a practice teacher. Later she taught at Woodside Elementary School for 15 years and was principal for three.

In the 1920s and 30s most children walked to school in groups. "Dad would come with a horse and cart to pick us up in bad weather," Mrs. Loushin recalls.

Mrs. Goodwin also remembers walking to school with the Duzanicas and Manginis — particularly the time they encountered a herd of cows going the other way. "We had to get out of the way quick. I was cut by barbed wire," she says. She still has the scar.

Rose Mangini Baleri, who graduated in 1936, remembers when the school was a San Mateo County Demonstration School. Students from San Jose State College were bused to Portola Valley to learn how to teach

(Continued on Page 16)

Portola Valley launches fund-raising drive to save historic schoolhouse

BY MARION SOFTKY

From 1909 to 1950 and beyond, Portola Valley's one-room schoolhouse nourished the lives of local youngsters. Now, its paint is peeling and its foundation gone; it badly needs an overhaul.

Enter Portola Valley's "Schoolhouse Challenge."

A group of town leaders has launched a drive to raise money to rehabilitate this piece of the town's heritage before it collapses.

The "Little Red Schoolhouse," a historic landmark, will be restored to its original white with green trim on the outside and used as a new Town Hall for town meetings and community events. Visitors will be surrounded by slate chalkboards, redwood paneling, and antique glass similar to what students saw almost 100 years ago. There will also, however, be modern heating and handicapped access.

The Valley Art Gallery, which has leased the Little Red School-

house for 17 years, will move across a courtyard to new quarters in Room 6 where the Town Council and commissions now meet.

But the price of preserving history is not cheap. Total cost of restoration is estimated to be \$370,000. The town has budgeted \$90,000; Bill and Jean Lane have offered up to \$50,000 to match donations. Sponsors hope the public will contribute the rest.

"This modest little structure is one of our most cherished re-

mindings of the first residents of this valley," wrote Mayor Ted Driscoll in a letter to potential donors. "Now is the time to step forward and save this gem of a centerpiece of our valley."

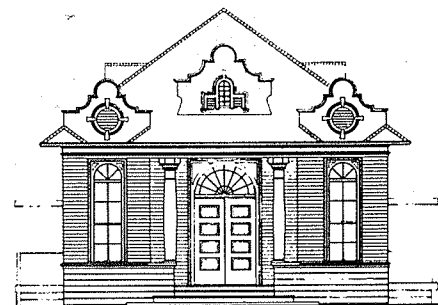
The council expects to award a contract for the rehabilitation at a special meeting Tuesday, July 2, at 5:30 p.m. so that construction can start this summer.

Heading the Schoolhouse Challenge Committee are Jane Gallagher, Nancy Lund and John Richards. Honorary chairs are

Jean and Bill Lane, and Zelda and Walter Jelich. Also serving on the Schoolhouse Challenge Committee are Zelda Angus, Cathy Behr, Joan Boyce, Ellie Gardner, Jean Isaacson, Janet Larson, Lynn McGowin, Lisbet Nilson, Lin Pearlstein, Janet Smith, Susan Thomas and Jane Yeats.

Artists from the Valley art gallery have donated works for a silent auction to raise money for the restoration. The art is on display in the library through Sept. 28 for people to bid on. Winners will be announced at Music in the Park on Sept. 29.

Checks should be made out to the Town of Portola Valley and designated for the "Schoolhouse Challenge." Send to Portola Valley Town Hall, 765 Portola Road, Portola Valley, 94028. For information call 851-1700.



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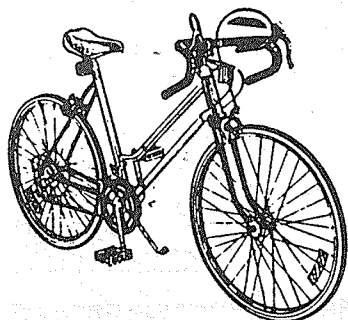
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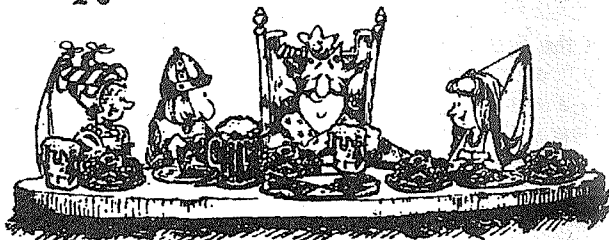
will conduct a public auction of unclaimed bicycles on
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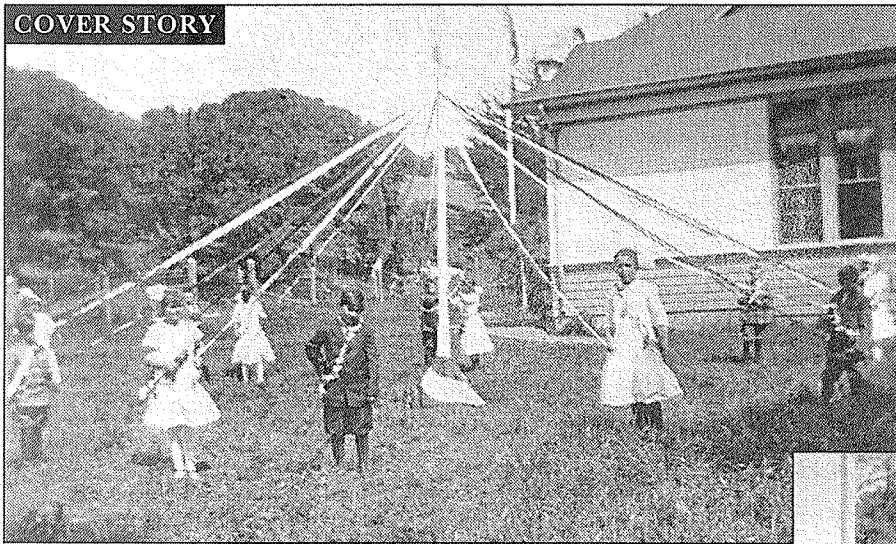
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COVER STORY



Local children dance around the maypole in front of Portola Valley's Little White Schoolhouse in one of many celebrations that used to enliven the hard work of learning the three Rs in the one-room school.

Little White Schoolhouse

(Continued from Page 15)

in a rural school.

She particularly enjoyed the school "Toy Orchestra" with all the students. She was named conductor ("because I was tallest") of the rhythm band of triangles, cymbals, tambourines and xylophones. Sometimes they even went to San Jose to play for students there.

Former students have happy memories of the two giant oak trees and the big swing. When Mrs. Lousin was there, the only play equipment was a monkey bar horizontal ladder. Later kids could enjoy a trapeze, rings and a baseball field.

Ed Jelich, who graduated in 1933, remembers being sent to the back shed with another boy to bring in coal for the stove. "We'd take half an hour," he said, still gleeful at the trick.

His brother, Walter, remembers having a little four-wheel racing car. "The boys would push it to start, and I'd drive it around the baseball field," he says.

Asked about the high point of her school days, Nell Skrabo Shine's answer was simple: "Being promoted from third to fourth grade. A couple of people didn't make it."

Walter Jelich's high point was even simpler: "Girls!"

Mrs. Baleri concludes, "I loved that school."

After the War

With World War II just over, teacher Jane Phipers and her principal wondered what would happen if there were a Japanese child in school.

Sure enough, there was little Jimmy Ono, a nice child who had been in an internment camp. "Nobody paid any attention to what nationality he was," says Mrs. Phipers, who still lives in Los Trancos Woods.

That story captures the spirit that people remember from the last years of the two little one-room schoolhouses. This was a time of transition as baby boomers started flooding the Valley, changing it from an agricultural enclave dominated by big estates to today's upscale suburb.

Lida Irvine Raimondi, also of Los Trancos Woods, recalls many nationalities in the years after the war. "We had tremendous diversity of ethnic groups, and it never mattered," she says.

From 1945 to 1947 Mrs. Phipers taught the first four grades — 30 children from 6 to 10 years old — in one room and loved it. She would organize her classes like a general. Different kids would do different things. She would write assignments on the blackboard and recruit older children to help younger ones. "They wrote things; they didn't fill in workbooks," she says. "They were awfully good children. There were very few discipline problems."

As a student Mrs. Raimondi loved the one-room setting. Students learned to concentrate, listen, focus, and still absorb everything going on around us, she says. "There was no remedial reading. We were where we could excel. We absorbed what was going on at a level we could understand it. We had no excuse for not learning. We had nothing to slow us down."

"It's not class size; it's the teacher," she adds.

Mrs. Phipers earned an additional 25 cents a day for driving Lida and several other children, including her own two, from Los Trancos Woods to and from school. "I was the bus," she says.

Having her own children in class was never a problem. "I was Moms at home and a teacher at school. They didn't have any trouble," she says.

Mrs. Raimondi loved the field trips. "Rather than ABCs we were into field trips — the Egyptian Museum in San Jose and the KPIX studio in San Francisco," she says. "We were country bumpkins; they gave us interest outside the Valley."

Nathalie Cooper, who taught in the old schoolhouse in the late 1940s, remembers putting on shows and parties. She would use the teacher's platform as a stage for frequent programs. They would celebrate Christmas and May Day and graduation with community parties. Sometimes there would be a "basket supper"



Back about 1913, students Ethel Nabmens and Edna Boos had to help out by pumping water from the well by the Little White Schoolhouse.

(potluck,) and the band from Pearl's and Art's grocery store and bar across Portola Road would play. Other times, "The kids would dance and sing; there would be a basket lunch, and softball in the afternoon for everybody," she says. "It was community entertainment, not just people with kids."

Even in Mrs. Cooper's day, school was primitive compared to today's modern facilities. "I had children that walked all the way from Skyline," she recalls. There were oil heaters with fans that could dry out sopping garments.

"The roof leaked. You could listen to the music of the raindrops," she adds.

Kids who didn't bring their lunches could go across the street to Pearl's and Art's — formerly the Hallett Store, now due for remodeling — for lunch. "Pearl would put place mats on the bar and scoot the bar flies to the far end," she recalls. "It was a very respectable cafeteria."

Mrs. Cooper, who still lives in Portola Valley, stayed on teaching long after the first school was torn down and the new school opened. She retired 13 years ago. "I remember kids as being more resourceful than today," she says. "I have very happy memories. It was so natural and real and wholesome."

Mrs. Phipers' greatest satisfaction came, not from teaching the bright and competent children, but from succeeding with those who had trouble learning. She remembers a Mexican boy called Jeffie: "The day he first wrote his name, the whole class came over and gave him a big hug."