

History of the Tulare Joint Union High School District

Located in Central California's beautiful San Joaquin Valley, "In 1872, when bustles were still in their prime, high hats were common, and elections were serious matters, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company selected the present site of Tulare as an ideal spot on which to build a town." (quoted from the Tulare Union High School and City of Tulare Building Dedication program, 1937).

One year later, in 1873, when the population of the town was 25 persons, a wooden two-room school building was constructed. However, by 1884, the little community realized the need of a more adequate school to serve the needs of the growing population of Tulare and its outlying areas. On May 4, 1884, it was decided by the Fitzgerald School District to adopt the new name of "Tulare School District." A brand new two-story brick structure was built with nine classrooms and offices on the same site of the first two-room school building in the 400 block of West Tulare Avenue.

Central Grammar School (also known as the Tulare Public School) was capped with a belfry and four large clock faces, one on each of its four sides. The original bronze bell that was rung from that belfry each school day was installed at the dedication of Alumni Court at Tulare Union High School in May 1937 and remained there until April 2008. At the behest of the Tulare County Historical Society and proponents of its protection from the environment, the final resting place of the old Central School bell is now with the Historical Society Museum.

In 1890, the population of the town had grown to 2,697 and the little school district decided to utilize the upper level of the building for high school students. One year later, on September 1, 1891, the Tulare High School District was officially organized and in June 1893, the new high school graduated its very first class of eleven students. Quoting from the newspapers of the day, "Our high school teachers receive in the aggregate \$350 per month."

The high school remained at the Central School building until 1908 when it moved into a new building constructed on property owned by D.W. Madden bordering on Tulare, O and Kern Streets and re-opened to students in the spring of 1909 on a 14-acre site. This was a three-storied brick building with a small auditorium that seated 600 and would be shared with the city of Tulare.

In 1920, a new 450+ square mile Tulare Joint Union High School District was formed that included 16 elementary school districts and the high school district. Even in 1920, some of those names sound familiar today: Buena Vista, Liberty, Palo Verde, Sundale, Tipton, and Waukena. In 1922, four Garford buses were purchased by the District to transport students from the outlying country districts. A decade later, the high school district had grown to include 19 elementary school districts.

A catastrophic earthquake at 5:55 p.m. on March 10, 1933 in Long Beach damaged many buildings built of unreinforced masonry resulting in over \$50 million in property damage and 120 deaths. A total of 70 schools were destroyed, 120 suffered major damage and 300 received minor damage. One month later to the day, the Governor and the California Legislature passed the Field Act mandating resistant design and construction for public schools. Sadly, the beautiful auditorium and administration buildings at Tulare Union High School were thus condemned. When students arrived for school in the fall of 1935,

reconstruction was already under way. The main building had been razed and 12 frame bungalows were built to house classes temporarily.

The Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works was integral in the reconstruction of the high school and underwrote approximately 40% of the reconstruction costs. The first check payable to the Tulare Union High School District of \$60,338.75 arrived on November 10, 1936. Architect W.D. Coates of Fresno designed a beautiful modern building with simple classic lines that has proved its usefulness across the decades.

On Saturday and Sunday, May 29-30, 1937, Tulare Union High School and the City of Tulare held a weekend long Homecoming Celebration and Building Dedication Program for the new Tulare Union High School Auditorium and associated educational buildings. On Saturday evening, Tulare Union High School Alumni gathered together for a banquet at 7:30 p.m. in the Tulare Civic Memorial Hall at the price of 75 cents per plate! Alumni danced later in the High School Gymnasium. On Sunday afternoon, a Baccalaureate service was held in the new auditorium and that evening at 8:00 p.m. a dedication program was held to celebrate the completion of the school and civic buildings. The keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. Frank W. Thomas, President of Fresno State College. The new auditorium, constructed for a price tag of \$175,000 also housed offices for administration. Commencement of the graduating Class of 1937 was held on Tuesday, June 1 at 8:00 p.m. in the new auditorium.

A growing community and ever-increasing enrollment was causing overcrowding at Tulare Union High School, home of the "Redskins." The high school district saw the need to build a second comprehensive high school and in 1959, Tulare Western High School welcomed 350 first-ever freshmen and sophomore "Mustangs" to a brand new campus on 40 acres just minutes away from the original campus.

The high school populations continued to grow causing the district offices and transportation staff to be relocated from the congested Tulare High School campus in February 1973, to the city yard at 3981 S. K Street. Eight years later, in August 1981, under the leadership of Superintendent Ned Kehrli, the district offices relocated to their present location at 426 N. Blackstone Street.

Believe it or not, the Tulare Adult School has been in existence since 1928! One year after the Tulare Theatre opened in 1927, the forward-thinking high school district saw a need to offer educational entertainment to the local adult population. This, a whole decade before the first television sets from RCA and General Electric debuted in 1939. The Adult School was launched with a film lecture series that was well attended.

A decade later, 2,000,000 television sets had been purchased in the United States alone and sales were expanding by 600%. The Mooney Drive-In Theatre opened in 1948. The district's mind-set was progressive and in 1949, the Adult School began offering evening vocational programs. In the mid-sixties, day classes were added to the curriculum including academic classes to prepare for the GED or earn a high school diploma, as well as adult basic education.

Eighty years after launching that first film lecture series, the Adult School is just as forward-thinking today. Two campuses in Tulare, three portable classrooms in Pixley, and multiple off-site facilities offer an overwhelming variety of classes in adult basic education, adult secondary education, English Language Development, business, vocational, health, U.S. citizenship and literacy. Click Tulare Adult School for more information.

The school district proudly wrote a new chapter in their history when a third comprehensive high school, Mission Oak, opened its doors in August 2008 on the south east side of the City of Tulare. The Mission Oak Hawks graduated their first class of senior students in June 2011.

Today, the Tulare Joint Union High School District boasts three comprehensive high schools, Tulare Union, Tulare Western, and Mission Oak; one continuation high school, Tech Prep, one community day school, Countryside, a new charter independent study school, at Sierra Vista Independent Study High School, Tulare Adult School, and a working school farm and nursery. Our staff of 550 employees proudly serves a clientele of more than 5,300 high school students. This is a far cry from the original high school teaching staff of six, student enrollment of approximately 40, and a first graduating class of 11 members.

The district encompasses 365.2 square miles and serves the following feeder schools: Buena Vista, Cherry, Live Oak, Los Tules, Mulcahy, Alpine Vista, Sundale, Oak Valley, Palo Verde, Pixley, Tipton, Waukena, and two private schools – St. Aloysius Catholic School and Tulare Christian School. The governing board adopted new attendance boundaries for the district in September 2014 that shifted feeder schools to accommodate and best utilize three existing comprehensive high schools.