

William Penn Elementary History



William Penn School was the tenth school added to the Bakersfield City School District, with its opening in September of 1917. One hundred and sixteen students enrolled, occupying five classrooms, Kindergarten through the 4th grade. Eleanor Pavey was the first teaching principal. During this period, playgrounds were not equipped. A gas stove heated each classroom. Clara Patterson became principal in 1921. During her tenure, she married and became Mrs. McNamara.

Miss Emma Buckmaster became our first grade teacher in 1922. Due to her continued devotion to education, these beginning students had a rich academic background to prepare them for further accomplishments. The Parent-Teacher Association was organized the same year the school opened. In 1927, Lois Hammon organized and led the famous William Penn harmonica band.

After teaching at the school for a number of years, Mary Lavers became the third principal in 1938. Mrs. Lavers and her close friend Mille Munsey, who was also a well-known pioneer teacher, enjoyed horseback riding in parades. Patriotism was the keynote during this period in history of William Penn. The United States was engaged in the Second World War. Our children were made aware of our country's need for loyal support from all the people. We all worked together planting victory gardens, collecting paper for paper drives, buying war stamps and bonds and knitting afghans for our men in the service.

A complete set of McGuffey Readers and an antique school bell are on display in the school hallway. These items were presented to William Penn Elementary School in memory of a former student, Second Lieutenant, David Gordon Harrington, by his parents.

After a splendid career in education, Mrs. Lavers retired. George Hanley assumed the responsibilities of principal and guided us through the post war years.

In the spring of 1952, the Board of Education appointed Mr. Chas Strong as the fifth principal of William Penn. However, due to the disastrous earthquake of the summer of 1952, William Penn School was condemned. Our students and those from McKinley, Lowell and Wayside, were re-located at Wayside School. Classes were on double session with approximately 1,200 students in each session. While at Wayside, William Penn's clerk, Voa Hubbard, coined the name McLopenside, meaning a combination of the four schools.

Noontime carnivals were held on the school playground in an effort to raise money for the student body.

The students moved into their new building in January of 1955. Here you see the results of the undaunted efforts of the parents and friends of William Penn District. These people strove to rebuild our neighborhood school, but were met by many obstacles and some being the State's objections to a substandard size playground. Our school was rebuilt entirely from district funds. The construction cost was the lowest per square foot of any school building. A former student, architect Whitney Biggar, designed the new structure.

At the close of the 1955 school year, a retirement party was held for our first grade teacher, Emma Buckmaster, who had served William Penn for thirty-three consecutive years.

Mrs. Clementine Newman undertook the duties of principal in 1956 and with her able leadership, William Penn continued its educational growth.

Our hopes for the future, for our community and our country, begin with these young people who are depicting the March of Time in education.