

## **Dry Creek Elementary Proud of Long and Distinguished History**

**By Carol Lawson-Swezey  
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Steeped in history and significant for its longevity, there is not much left of the original Dry Creek School from its early days. Its history has been pieced together, passed from generations, and sometimes varies in dates and specifics between local historians.

"The school was initiated in 1866 by ten families in the Dry Creek settlement who petitioned to have a school to service their 14 children," said Peggy Bos, president of the Clovis-Big Dry Creek Historical Society.

The school, initially held in a private home, was named Dry Creek after the area where the majority of voting residents came from. The school's first teacher, Elizabeth Ellis, received room and board and \$30 a month compensation for teaching all ages in the one-room schoolhouse. It was the year after the Civil War ended and the first school year lasted just three months because of the harvest season.

Fresno County purchased land and built the official schoolhouse, among the first of eight school districts formed in the county. Each individual school in those days had its own district, including Lecher, Nees, and Garfield, which joined in to become Dry Creek Union in the mid 1900's, said local historian and retired CUSD employee Duane Barker. Barker said the area got its name from a dry creek at Academy.

"It (the creek) never really went anywhere, it just sunk to the ground," Barker said.

The school was moved to its present location at Armstrong and Nees in 1906 and accommodated students from first to eighth grades. Kindergarten was not mandated then and the District's first intermediate school, Clark, wasn't opened to accommodate grades seven and eight until 1966. The school's original bell and a huge cedar tree remain from its beginnings. Some of the brick on the school's primary wings are also from the original 1906 schoolhouse. That original building was moved back to the town of Academy off Highway 168 in 1973, where it remains to this day. Emil Prude initiated the move for the purpose of starting a historical village, Bos said.

Dry Creek became part of Clovis Unified in 1960, one of the original seven members of the District.

Because of its initial rural complexity, Dry Creek has been home to succeeding generations of local families. George "Tink" Kastner, who worked for CUSD for 36 years as a teacher, principal, and associate superintendent, has deep roots at the school. Kastner's great grandparents were some of the original founders of the school. They had

10 daughters and wanted a closer place to educate their children. They also began a Methodist Episcopal Church which still sits on its original site at Academy and holds four holiday services a year.

Kastner attended first grade at Dry Creek and his aunt taught there as well. When Kastner began at CUSD, he drove seven children back and forth to Friant for a dollar a day, and then spent the remainder of the day teaching at Clovis High for \$10.

"That was a good day's pay in those days," Kastner said.

One of the District's intermediate schools was later named for Kastner.

Dry Creek still retains its rural charm. Cattle from an adjoining field graze next to children playing on the school grounds. The school currently has 640 students and covers the largest geographical area of any Clovis Unified school, said Principal Rich Smith. The largely rural area has boundaries that stretch to the foothills as far as Sample Road. "Dry Creek still retains that old Clovis culture and feel," said Smith.

The school christened a new library in 1999, named after a long-time school volunteer, Mr. Countois. The school's mascot is the Panther, changed from its original Blue Devils in the 1980's, and its school colors are navy blue and gold. It's a national blue ribbon school and has shown the greatest growth of any CUSD school in SAT 9 tests, Smith said.

"We have almost 100% participation in co-curricular activities," Smith said. "Our biggest future challenge is growth, our goal is to keep our students at Dry Creek, using portables to house them if needed."