

Santa Rosa Middle School

In 1912, a building was constructed to the north of Santa Rosa High School when the campus was located on the corner of Benton and Humboldt Streets. This building was known as the Annex, and was designed by architect, W.H. Weeks, a prominent architect at the time. He was a pioneer in earthquake-resistant construction and many of his buildings are still in use. He designed several libraries, churches and schools in California, including the current Santa Rosa High School building.

The Annex became the first junior high school in Santa Rosa and served seventh and eighth grades. In 1942, the Annex was christened the Santa Rosa Junior High School. (The Annex building was later destroyed in the October 1969 earthquake.)



1912 Santa Rosa High School Annex, 756 Humboldt Street (1941 photo)

By the late 1940's, the Annex was getting too small to house the junior high students. So in 1950, the Fremont School and the Junior High School switched campuses.

The following is a short history of Fremont School: Fremont School was located on the site of Pacific Methodist College, which was built in 1871. Initially, Pacific Methodist College, an 1861 preparatory school, was located in Vacaville, CA. The college continued its sessions up to May 1870, until the main campus building burned down. After a generous donation of 10 acres by the citizens, the school relocated to Santa Rosa. (The Santa Rosa site was chosen by the church because of sympathy towards the South or Confederacy during the Civil War.)

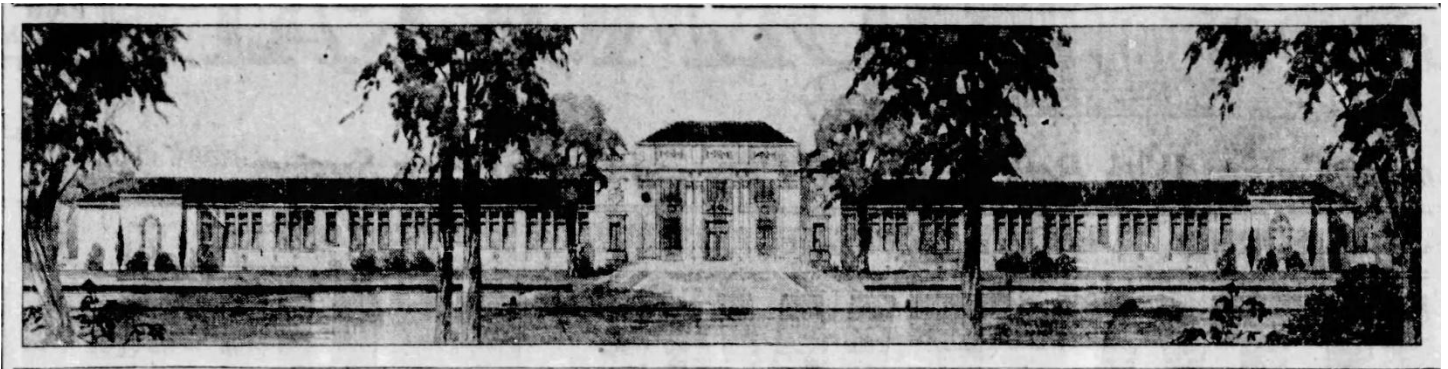
A spacious 3-story building was erected at the cost of \$25,000. It accommodated 150 students with a graduating class of up to 60-80 students. The library housed about 800 volumes.

The college continued classes until 1889. Then, because of land values, the board of trustees decided to move the campus to a less expensive site. The 3-story building was actually moved, amazingly, with no damage to the structure. The new location was one mile north of the courthouse. The college later closed around 1902. (The street, College Avenue, was named as such due to the college being there!)



Pacific Methodist College, view from College Avenue (1871)

Fremont School was built in 1924 and designed, again, by architect W.H. Weeks. The structure was furnished with the latest school equipment. See architect's drawing below.



Fremont School, College Avenue (1924)

In 1947, a plan was conceived to purchase and remodel the Fremont School (also called Fremont Grammar School). The remodel, along with a new auditorium-gymnasium, was completed for use for the junior high's 1950 school year.



Santa Rosa Junior High (1955 photo)

Later, the Santa Rosa Junior High School building was damaged by the October 1969 earthquake, and during the 1971 reconstruction the entrance was changed to E Street. A plaque was placed to the left of the front entrance commemorating the occasion.



The mural on the front entrance was painted by Lisa Skelly in 1980. Ms. Skelly was a parent and volunteered her time. The painting supplies were donated by companies in the area. The mural includes columns and arches, and between them are several vibrant Sonoma County scenes: the coast near Jenner, Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve and vineyards. In the center and above the name of the school, Lisa painted 2 cougars facing each other on each side of the middle school emblem.





Due to growth in the area during the 1990's, several schools were built to accommodate the student population. It was determined in 1997 that the junior high schools would include only the 7th and 8th grades, while the high schools would house the 9th grade students. All the junior high schools' names were changed to middle schools. So, *Santa Rosa Junior High School* became *Santa Rosa Middle School*.

The last year Santa Rosa Middle School had cheerleaders was 1999. For many years, the junior high also had song leaders.

Santa Rosa Middle School continues to be a vibrant and spirited school. This is Santa Rosa Middle School today!



Santa Rosa Middle School (E Street entrance, 2021)



Santa Rosa Middle School (College Avenue, 2021)

Our newest addition is a gorgeous LED sign at the right side of the school's front entrance. It was erected in early 2021. Up to date information will be displayed on it throughout the school year.



Plaques, Commemoratives, Etc.

Matt Testorelli Plaque: There is a plaque in the school's yard by the cafeteria in the honor of Matt Testorelli. Matt was a student at Santa Rosa Junior High School in 1972. While playing softball during gym class on April 20, the 14-year old collapsed and died of a heart attack. The plaque was created in his memory.



Bonnie Thomas Plaque: Bonnie Thomas was a counselor at Santa Rosa Middle School and a name plaque is in her honor. She was a counselor for (?) years. The plaque is located on the outside end column near the art classrooms.



Kathy Coker Plaque: Kathy Coker was a principal at Santa Rosa Middle School from 2002 to 2015. The plaque is located on the left wall at the front entrance of the library. The plaque was purchased by the PFSO and placed on the wall in June 2015.



Jessie R. Smith Honor Award: The glass cases in the library's hallway have a large honor award plaque with two students per year engraved on them, male and female. The dates start at 1968 and lists students until 1999. The tradition does continue with a plaque starting at 2000, which is not in the case at this time.

The award was founded in 1941 by teachers who worked with Miss Smith. The qualifications for students include: citizenship, scholarship, courtesy, and service to others. Early on, there were 4 awards per year, the two in January were for male students and the two in June were for female students. According to a 2/16/1947 article in The Press Democrat, the following are the students who had their names inscribed: Leland Titus, Robert Burka, Peggy Canby, Roger Smith, Elizabeth Ray, Martha Whitehead, Jessie Huntoon, Diane Mecham, Dale Edwards, Gloria Cassani, Peggy Hole, Ida Hae Bigham, Robert Moore, Nancy Winans, Stanley Levin, Nancy Noonan, Barbara Lee Read, Yvonne Michie, Josephine Kruymel, Eugene Canevari, Billy Slivkoff, Robert Beckland, Merlin Johnson, Robert Bruner, Sylzia Peresenyi and Delia Seghezzi. The 1959 award includes Lee Vice and Mark Little.

Most Outstanding Student Award: Selected by the Santa Rosa Teachers Association, these two plaques lists students from 1982 to 2006.

Most Outstanding Student Leaders: This large plaque, lists students from 1967 to 2002.

Biography of Jessie R. Smith



Jessie R. Smith was principal of the High School Annex and the Santa Rosa Junior High School from 1922-1936. She was born January 28, 1869 and died January 27, 1943 at age 74.

Miss Smith's parents were Thomas J. Smith and Ellen Smith, both from Illinois. According to the 1870 U.S. Census, Miss Smith was born in Santa Rosa.

She started teaching in Santa Rosa at Santa Rosa schools around 1888 or so. She became the Principal of Luther Burbank Grammar School around 1906. The grammar school was built after the 1906 earthquake. She was the principal of Santa Rosa High School Annex, later called the Santa Rosa Junior High School, for 14 years. She was an educator for almost 50 years.

According to a January 30, 1925 article in The Press Democrat, the first *Journal* (yearbook) was issued. The book was dedicated to Miss Jessie R. Smith. The *Journal* was published twice a year, January and June.

An article in The Press Democrat (1/28/1943), discussed Miss Smith's death. She collapsed at her birthday party hosted by Miss Esther Serel, a local teacher. Her sisters were at the party as well, Miss Blanche Smith (Lincoln School teacher) and Miss Agnes Smith (former postal worker). During the evening, Miss Smith had complained of feeling ill and faint. A doctor was summoned and attended to Miss Smith, but she died soon afterwards. Miss Smith's body was taken to a funeral parlor.

"Lifetime as Teacher: (Miss Smith's) entire lifetime has been devoted to educational work among young people, and she is now entering upon a well-earned retirement.

"Almost fifty years ago Miss Smith started her career as a public school teacher, later becoming principal of the old Luther Burbank school. For many years past she has been principal of the Junior High school in Humboldt street, supervising education work among thousands of young boys and girls between grammar and high school grades.

"Under her leadership the junior high school here has long occupied an enviable place in education circles, and has gained repute as an efficient school with a high scholastic record.

"Year after year Miss Smith watched young boys and girls grow up and continue on for higher educational institutions, never failing to shed a tear for each departing group of graduates."

Selected from an article in *The Press Democrat*, Jessie R. Smith, Veteran Educator, Will Retire Here, July 10, 1936.

Santa Rosa Middle School Principals

Jessie R. Smith	1922-1937
Edward H. LaFranchi	1938-1940
Lawrence Cook	1940-1953
Wilfred W. Rankin	1953-1957
Raymond Johnson	1958-1976
Eddie Burgess (Interim)	1976-1976
Dan Thomas	1976-1981
Robert Bunting	1981-1985
Michael Panas	1985-1989
Ron Campanile	1989-2002
Kathy Coker	2002-2015
Tom Fierro	2015-2018
Jason Matlon	2018-2020
Aida Diaz	2020-2022
Sarah O'conner	2022-