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Carl Love: One-room Alamos Schoolhouse at Lake Skinner remains a historic relic

Visitors can step into the building – and into the past — from Thursdays to Saturdays.



Visitors explore the Alamos Schoolhouse at the Lake Skinner Recreation Area on a recent day. (Photo by Carl Love, contributing photographer)

By [CARL LOVE](#) | Contributing Columnist

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Children today love to play with the original, big school bell and ring it constantly.

Long ago, after some kids had ridden in on horses, the bell meant something very different — that it was time to get to work at the Alamos Schoolhouse.

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It was a one-room place, for first- through eighth-grade. Kids sat at wooden desks with ink wells. During breaks they maybe tried to catch tarantulas or look for bats underneath the school.

Previously located at Benton and Pourroy roads, it was a school from about 1900 to 1968. It educated the children of the farmers, ranchers and homesteaders of the French Valley area at the time, far removed from the commuters living in the tract homes that fill the area today.

Previous

Sound





Visitors to the Alamos Schoolhouse at the Lake Skinner Recreation Area can sit in student desks. (Photo by Carl Love, contributing photographer)

Now the refurbished school is a nature center at the Lake Skinner Recreation Area.

The history and the beautiful environment will be celebrated Saturday, April 20, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. It's an "Earth Day" event with live animals, butterflies, nature walks, an endangered species Easter egg scavenger hunt (That's a one-of-a-kind happening.) and other activities planned.

Visitors can see the schoolhouse from Thursdays to Saturdays. Park aide Charity Hagen regularly leads nature walks around the surrounding Lake Skinner area on Saturday mornings.

Giant trees surround the schoolhouse near the entrance to the recreation area. An ancient wagon and harvesting machine are on the property, giving it a rural feeling from long ago.

Mary Milholland, who lives in Winchester, attended the school in the 1950s and now organizes an annual reunion potluck for former students and families. It's been held for about 20 years on the last Saturday of April.

She recalls riding her horse to school and the annual play day when kids from other area rural schools would gather for games. As for having one teacher who worked with so many grades at once, she says it was no big deal because she got a good education and she was used to it.

“It was really a special memory,” she said.

Her mom, Frances Nicolas, attended the school in the 1920s and her grandfather went there in the early 1900s.

The school spirit continues on, in a sense. Two miles south of the original school site is today’s Alamos Elementary School. It was named after the one-room schoolhouse.

Murrieta resident Gary Dotson visited the one-room school last weekend with his kids, Gavin and Gary, who both attended the modern-day school.

Asked about the chalkboard in the corner of the room at Alamos Schoolhouse, eighth-grader Gary said his classroom today is mostly digital, far removed from the technology of a century ago.

The chalk board schedule in the ancient place includes the daily flag raising and time devoted for mathematics (today’s it’s just “math”) and penmanship, fast becoming another victim of the digital age.

Younger brother Gavin says it would be cool to stay in one school for so long.

Another visitor, Adrian Vargas, 6, sat at the old teacher’s desk in front of the room going through the giant dictionary, something else that’s fast becoming a relic.

“I’m the teacher now,” he said, proudly.

In the entry to the schoolhouse is a glass display case with pictures and other recollections of the place. A sample teacher employment contract from the 1920s speaks to more changes. The document says the teacher can’t get married and is “not to loiter in downtown ice cream stores.”

The one-room school represents a different time and different ways. I wonder what people will think of our way of schooling a century from now.

Reach Carl Love at carllove4@yahoo.com