

El Toro Grammar School

Transcript of Audio Tour Visitor Tape

The El Toro Schoolhouse, built in 1890 at a cost of \$2000, was dedicated in November of the same year. It served all 8 grades in El Toro from 1890 until 1914. The schoolhouse has been furnished with antiques and artifacts typical of an 1890's schoolhouse. Continuing the practice of community and county government cooperation, the furnishings are a combination of donations from groups and individuals and museum acquisition by county park staff. The building, abandoned for several years and heavily vandalized, was moved here in 1976. The original interior was tongue-in-groove, as you see here, but redwood rather than knotty pine.

The room you are standing in served as the boys' cloakroom. There is a separate cloakroom for the girls on the other side of the school, with its own entrance. As you look around the cloakroom, you can see where the boys sat to take their muddy boots or shoes off, hung their caps, and set their lunch pails on the shelf before going into the classroom.

Looking over the half-door, you may observe two small rooms between the cloakrooms, one of which was used as a teacher's office and housed a collection of books. After a new two-room schoolhouse was built, this one-room schoolhouse became St Anthony's Catholic Church and was used as a church until 1968. While on a docent-led tour you'll have the opportunity to view the other room, located next to the girls' cloakroom, which displays items from the St Anthony's era.

Looking into the main room, you will see desks similar to the ones the students would sit at. Notice the different sizes. These desktops have holes for inkwells which held bottles of ink. The pen used had a replaceable tip, or a nib. The trick was to get enough ink on your tip to write but with not so much that you made a mess of your work. The lower grades were not permitted to use ink but were limited to slate boards and chalk. Notice the desks get larger in size as they go to the back of the room until we have the 2-person desks that the eighth graders used. The younger students sat closer to the front of the room.

On the wall behind the teacher's desk is an Ansonia long-drop school clock. Located next to the clock is a map box used to teach geography. In the front of the schoolroom is the old pot-bellied stove that was the sole source of heat. Typical as it was in many rural communities, the El Toro schoolhouse also served as a community center and hall for town meetings and Saturday night dances. For that reason, they may have had a pump organ like the one you see across the room. A portrait of the last schoolmarm, Edna Nichols, hangs on the wall to the left of the organ.

The living standards of schoolteachers were very strict in 1891. Look at the rules teachers were required to live by hanging on the wall to the right of the teacher's office door. You will find no bathrooms inside the school since there was no indoor plumbing. Instead, there was two-hole outhouse built to the rear of the school. Please feel free to peek in our outhouse, located between the school and church.

At the end of this audio tour you may wish to go outside to the front of the school to observe some of the school's interesting exterior features. Look for the widow's walk across [the] top of the school with its truncated roof and iron fencework. Also note the sunburst design and fishtail shingles stud the portico, or porch, roof. These are typical Victorian-style architecture reflecting Queen Anne ornamentation.