

A Little Bit of History

—Source: Internet Archive (www.archive.org), [History of Stanislaus County - No. 195](#)

The Oakdale Grammar School

For a number of years the children of Oakdale were obliged to attend the Langworth district school. In time, however, the population of the town rapidly increased, and the school children were so numerous that it became necessary to build a school building within the town. In 1881, a two-story wooden building was constructed on the block where now stands the fine grammar school. Additions were made to the building from time to time until it became nothing more than an old fire trap, in which a hundred children's lives were daily in danger. The citizens finally demanded a modern up-to-date school building. And in February, 1900, they circulated a petition requesting the school trustees to submit to the voters the proposition to bond the district for a school building. The school trustees, acceding to the demands of the citizens, called an election for June 30, 1900, for the issuing of bonds to the amount of \$26,000 for the erection of a school building. The proposition carried almost unanimously, only 34 out of a vote of 227 opposing the issue of bonds. Those interested in the movement became so enthusiastic over the result that a ratification jubilee was held "and there was danger of all of the powder and fireworks in the town being exploded to celebrate the event."

Laying of the Cornerstone

Almost immediately the trustees began preparations to erect the new building. The additions to the old wooden building were torn down and the main building was moved away and is now used as a lodging house in the northern part of the city. The plans of the new building were drawn by Hugh Bronton of Stockton and the successful contractor was Richard Nowell from the same city. The plans called for a two-story brick building, 140x150 feet, with a tower 40 feet in height. The building was to contain ten class rooms, each room 30x35 feet. There was a principal's room, a library, closets and hat and coat rooms.

Early in February, 1901, the foundation had been laid and everything was ready for the laying of the cornerstone. The matter was placed in the hands of the Oakdale Masonic Lodge and they appointed D. B. Warfield, Louis Kahn, Dr. C. C. Wood, E. P. Tulloch, E. M. Endicott and the master of the lodge, John W. Tulloch, as the committee of arrangements, and they invited the Grand Lodge of California to lay the cornerstone. The invitation was accepted, and Grand Master James F. Foshay deputized Grand Senior Warden Orrin S. Henderson to act as grand master. Saturday, February 9, 1901, is a day to be long remembered in the history of Oakdale, because of the important event and the immense crowd that filled her streets. All of the Masonic lodges of Stockton, Modesto, Turlock and other points were invited to attend the ceremony. The Stockton Masons in large numbers met at Riverbank by the Oakdale Masons, were taken in carriages to Oakdale. On arrival the grand lodge, comprising Orrin S. Henderson, grand master; Michael Fennell, deputy grand master; A. W. Davidson, senior grand warden; Frank Israel, junior grand warden, and W. F. Weinbeck, assistant junior grand warden, acting grand officers pro tern, all of Stockton, were escorted to the hall of Oakdale Lodge No. 275, by Pacific Commandery No. 3, of Sonora. The Grand Lodge then convened and after the opening ceremony all Master Masons were admitted. At one o'clock a procession was formed on West Railroad Avenue, comprising the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Woodmen of the World, children of the public schools, and citizens. Led by the band they marched along West Railroad Avenue across the track to East Railroad Avenue to the new school building. After a selection by the band and a song by the quartette, the silver trowel with which the

cornerstone was laid was presented to Grand Master Henderson. Then came songs by the children and the laying of the cornerstone in accordance with the time honored ceremonies of the Masonic order. The ceremony concluded with an oration by George McCabe. The splendid celebration concluded with a banquet in the evening which was tendered to all of the visitors. The building was completed in time for the beginning of the school term, and cost some \$40,000. The teachers in the new building, all of them having taught in the old wooden structure, were R. E. Murtha, principal; Lizzie Rodden, Elsie Turner, Ida Simpson, Jennie W. Roberts, Mrs. L. M. Cornwall and Mrs. Mary F. Sawyer. Mrs. Sawyer is the oldest teacher in the school department, having taught continuously from 1881 until 1914. Soon after retirement friends and her former pupils presented her with a purse of \$500. She died at Oakdale, January 7, 1920, the Oakdale Eastern Star lodge conducting the services.

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The Oakdale Union High School



The father of the high school is Prof. J. M. McKenzie, who emigrated to California from Nebraska, located in Oakdale. Soon after coming he saw the necessity of a high school in the prosperous town, and he induced a number of progressive citizens to form a company and erect a building adapted to school purposes. A building was constructed on Euclid Avenue, then quite a distance from the business center, and opened by the professor as a tuition boarding high school. It was a complete success. Soon after its establishment, however, the state legislature

passed a law providing for the establishment of a district high school, the school to be supported by district taxation. The corporation gave the district the free use of the building. Unfortunately, however, in September, 1897, the building was destroyed by fire. This, of course, put an end to the instruction of the high school branch for a time. After the building of the brick grammar school, rooms were provided in that building until 1906. At that time the Union High school was completed. Its first graduates were Jennie Acker Wood, Thomas Gray, Eleanor E. MacNuItly, Minnie Thompson, Mayme Holloway Smith, and Elsie P. McNealy.

Spotlight on Professor J. M. McKenzie

—Source: NEGenWeb Project (www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/state), [Nebraska Blue Book, 1936 - No. 208](#)

The territorial legislature in 1860 granted a charter for the establishment of a school of college grade in the village of Peru, a little town that had been laid out in 1856, known as Peru Landing. A group of settlers from Peru, Illinois, named the village Peru. There was nothing done, however, towards the establishment of this school until 1865 when Peru had become a village of thirty or forty families. The first funds were solicited under the direction of Rev. Hiram Burch and William Daily. The purpose was to erect a building forty by eighty feet and three stories high to give to the conference of the M. E. church for the purpose of a female seminary. In March, 1865, sufficient funds had been raised to warrant the letting of a contract for the erection of the building. Seventy-

two acres of ground were donated to the trustees for a campus. The land was paid for by Dr. J. F. Neal, Rev. Hiram Burch, and Mrs. C. B. McKenzie. Twelve acres were afterwards deeded to Mrs. C. B. McKenzie for her services as a teacher, thus leaving sixty acres of campus.

Not being willing to wait for the erection of the building, school was opened in an unused business house. Dr. J. M. McKenzie was president of the school. This was opened in September, 1866. The new building was completed ready for occupancy in January, 1867. The enrollment the first term numbered 58 students. In the fall of 1867 the school was offered to the M. E. conference, but the offer was rejected. The school was later offered to the state of Nebraska, and the legislature of 1867, at the urgent solicitation of Col. T. J. Majors and William Daily, of Peru, established on the 60-acre campus Nebraska's first state normal school. Dr. J. M. McKenzie was elected its first president.

—Source: NEGenWeb Project (www.usgenet.org/usa/ne/state), [Nebraska History and Record of Pioneer Days - No. 8](#)

Nebraska's First Educator

Dr. John M. McKenzie died at his home in California, May 19, 1918. He is remembered by the early pioneers as a Methodist preacher and all earnest promoter of education. In the sixties he helped to establish an academy at Pawnee City. The fact that the new institution was to be under the Christian church did not lessen his zeal. When the hard times of the then border county caused the new academy to lapse and die, McKenzie transferred the idea to Peru, and through his work the Methodist academy was established there, to be soon merged into a state normal school.

Dr. McKenzie was the second state superintendent of Nebraska, wrote most of our school laws, promoted the organization of the state teachers and left his impress on every branch of education in Nebraska. In his later days he sought a milder climate, but he never lost his interest in the state where he had done so much work. The newspaper at the old school town fittingly says: "He and Mrs. McKenzie witnessed the crowning glory of their lives, the semi-centennial celebration held at Peru last summer."

Mary L. McKenzie Keyser

Mrs. Mary Keyser, wife of Herbert T. Keyser, of Byron, Cal., and daughter of the late J. M. McKenzie of Stockton, Cal., died at the Damerin hospital in Stockton, June 3, 1918, after an illness of six days, only a short time after the death of her illustrious father.

Mary L. McKenzie was born in Fayette, Iowa, April 21, 1860. When two years of age she came with her parents to Nebraska, where she grew to womanhood, graduating with honor from the Peru State Normal school in July, 1883.

After graduating she taught successfully in the schools of Syracuse, Harvard and York. The family moved to Oakdale, Cal., in 1888. Here Mary proved an able assistant to her father in the Seminary and Normal school, which was afterwards merged into the Oakdale High School. She taught several terms at Langworth and in the Oakdale Grammar School. In the fall of '98 she accepted a position in the Excelsior school near Byron. Here she met her future husband, H. T. Keyser. They were married at Oakdale, September 26, 1900, and lived together happily for nearly eighteen years.

