

Simmler School



The schoolhouse, used for classes until 1955, now serves as a community center.

Sixty-four miles from Paso Robles on the Carrisa Plains, beside Highway 58 on the road from Santa Margarita to Taft, Simmler School was founded in 1888. The nearest schools were Choice Valley, over 20 miles to the north, and La Panza, approximately 20 miles to the west.

Carol (Kester) Tucker attended Simmler School for first through fifth grades, 1928 to 1933, and then her family moved to Shandon where she continued her schooling until she graduated from high school. Carol looked back on her years at Simmler and said, "I had a lot of fun attending a one-room school—more fun than at Shandon. I think it was because we had to entertain ourselves and we enjoyed the games and activities we developed. Our ranches were so isolated that school provided the social life we needed."

Carol explained that the schoolhouse served as a center for community activities, including Farm Bureau meetings, dances and church services. The building had a front room used for special events, a large classroom and a kitchen area with tables and chairs. There were a windmill and water tank, but because the water tasted bitter and was not good to drink, it was only used to water the trees. Drinking water was hauled by truck (by wagon in the early days) and stored in a concrete cistern.

Carol reminisced, "We lived 8 or 9 miles from school. In fact, only a couple of families lived close enough to walk. Most families were spread out for miles on the broad plains. The school district bought a bunch of 1928 to 1930 Chevrolet cars, all the same color, for

the families to use as buses to transport us to school. After a good rain, the roads were very muddy and nearly impassable. The folks used the school cars for their personal use, as well.

"I remember how we brought 'Show and Tell' items to school, including cats, dogs and other pets. I brought a pet banty chicken hen. I held her up to the windows during the day so she could eat the flies buzzing against the glass.

"Vernon Van Meter tried to impress us girls with an unusual antic. Peeling a banana from his lunch bucket, he would find some red ant nests and stir them up. He would hold the banana close to the angry swarming ants until the banana was covered with the crawling beasts. Then he would eat the banana—ants and all!

"School began at 9:00 a.m. and was out at 4:00 p.m. For the hour lunch period, we students were pretty much on our own. The teacher would go into the teacherage to prepare and eat her lunch. We had lovely playground equipment that included swings, traveling bars, chinning bars and a giant stride. We had a basketball court and a baseball field with a track around it. We had a sandbox for broad jumping, as well for the younger students to play in.

"With 15 to 20 students, we all played a lot of baseball, having enough students to play work-ups, along with teams for baseball. Our dirt playground made for lots of skinned knees and elbows. We played 'pots' with marbles in the dirt under the shade of the umbrella and locust trees. We played chase games as well as running races.