

# Nuggets of History

## ‘Old School’ Cottage Grove: Education through the Ages

By Katy Vaughn  
Cottage Grove Historical Society

In early panoramic photos of Cottage Grove, the skyline is punctuated by two beautiful old school buildings. The buildings were two and three stories high, with basements and distinctive bell towers.

The first of the buildings was the Eastside School built in 1892 near Fifth and Jefferson Streets. The first class graduated from the school in 1896.

At the time, the wood-frame building was by far the largest school to be constructed in Cottage Grove and was the pride of the town. The high school students were on the upper floor and the primary grades were on the first floor.

The first high school class from the new building graduated in 1896. The four graduates were Celia Lurch, Effie Younger, Ray Knox and a student whose first name is unknown but whose last name was Casteel.

It is interesting that the early 8th grade graduating classes would have five or six times as many students than the high school graduating classes. A 1907 newspaper article stated that three young ladies graduated from the high school and nineteen students graduated from the 8th grade.

Finishing high school was out of the norm back then. The term “drop-out” did not gain usage until the 1930s.

The high school graduating classes were mostly female because the only career open for girls was to become a teacher and for that they needed a diploma. Boys could get work easily without graduating.

Some of the early teachers at the Eastside School were Edith Brewer, Ida Dickenson, Bell Sutton, Ann Whiteaker, Anna Underwood, Will McQueen and Ivan

McQueen. Many of the first pupils bore names that are still seen on landmarks and street names in

town, including Veatch and Knox.

Early Cottage Grove students were generally well-behaved, but they had their moments. A 1912 article in The Sentinel reported that students had broken into the school at night and scattered red pepper throughout the building. School had to be closed to clean up the mess.

The school was built during the height of the Lemati/Slabtown feud when the east and west sides of town were fighting to become the town center.

Surely, the fancy new school on the Eastside helped to convince early residents that the future of Cottage Grove lay east of the Coast Fork River.

The Lurch family were the first merchants to move their business to Main Street on the east side. Along with the railroad station, the big new school nearby for their children may have been a powerful draw.

In 1913 a modern, brick high school was built right next to the Eastside School. The two were neighbors for 11 years, with the elementary kids in the old school and the high schoolers in the new building.

The disadvantages of a wood frame school became apparent in 1924 when the Eastside School caught fire and the kids had to escape the building. The old school with its lovely bell tower was torn down that summer.

Central School, also known as Adams School, replaced the Eastside School. The Adams school building is now the South Lane School District office.

The Westside School was built in 1904 on Birch Avenue, near the edge of Mt Da-



PHOTO COURTESY OF COTTAGE GROVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**The Eastside School was built in 1892 but caught fire in 1924.**

vid, where Community Sharing is now located.

A newspaper article from the time boasted about how fortunate the town was, to now have two first rate school buildings. The school served the first through sixth graders from the west side of the river and all of the 7th and 8th graders in town.

One of the most popular teachers at the school was Worth Harvey, who taught 8th grade. He was young, and looked it, to the point that he was often mistaken for a student.

Although Mr. Harvey loved teaching and enjoyed his students, the \$75 a month teacher’s salary was not enough for him to live on. He left the school in 1907 to work at a Eugene bank. He remained a banker until he retired.

Eli Hall taught the 7th grade at the school in the 1920s. The very busy Mr. Hall taught agriculture, geography, spelling, reading and was the basketball, football and baseball coach.

There was no transportation to school in those days; students had to make their way on their own.

A local farmer, Walter Huff, took pity on the kids on rainy, muddy days and turned his wagon and team of horses into an informal “school bus.” He would drive

down South River Rd, stopping at houses, and then carrying the kids to the wagon while wearing his high-topped rubber boots. He would stop at the school in the afternoon during inclement weather and reverse the process.

The Westside School operated until 1940.

The huge, new Cottage Grove High School had just opened on Taylor Street and the old High School became Jefferson Elementary School. There was plenty of room for the Westside kids and the brick and masonry building was deemed much safer than the old wood-framed school.

The Westside school building was used one more time when it housed the kids from Latham School while their building was being remodeled. The building was torn down in the early 1940s and the Cottage Grove Hospital was built on its site in 1950.

It would be 36 years before the west side of town had its own elementary school again when Bohemia School opened in 1976.

Jefferson Elementary School was torn down in 1980 to make way for the Jefferson Park Apartments, ending the era of pre-1960 school buildings in the city limits.



## Labor Day or Any Day ... this is a bad combination.

Labor Day is a well-deserved holiday for everyone. And like most holidays, it’s a day to relax and celebrate with family and friends. These sponsors would like to remind you that if you celebrate this weekend, please do so responsibly. That means not drinking and driving, using a designated driver, or best of all, being one for those you care about. With your help, everyone can have an enjoyable Labor Day weekend.

**Fort Rock Construction**  
**Starfire Lumber**  
**State Farm - Matt Bjornn**  
**Overhead Door Company**  
**Fountain Gutters**  
**Pinocchio’s Pizza**  
**Hitch Pro & Tow**  
**South Lane Wheels**  
**Ray’s Towing**  
**Rogers & Son**

**NORTH AMERICA’S**

# #1 Walk-In Tub

## *NOW with an Exclusive NEW Shower Package!*



***Now you can have the best of both worlds—  
there isn’t a better, more affordable walk-in tub!***

- ✓ First and only walk-in tub available with a customizable shower
- ✓ Fixed rainfall shower head is adjustable for standing or sitting
- ✓ Durable frameless tempered glass enclosure available
- ✓ High-quality tub complete with a comprehensive lifetime warranty
- ✓ Top-of-the-line installation and service, all included at one low price

**EXCLUSIVE OFFER!**

# \$1500 OFF

on a Walk-in Tub with this Limited Time Offer\*

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEE. FOR DETAILS CALL TODAY!**

**SAFE STEP**  
**WALK-IN TUB**

**541-238-9737**

FINANCING AVAILABLE WITH APPROVED CREDIT

SAFETY BUILT IN THE USA LIFETIME WARRANTY

CSLB 983603 F13000002885 13HV08744300