

# Some Facts Re: Winton. (I was there from 1981-1996)

In the beginning, the property for the school was given to the school district by the Dillon family, the primary and first homesteaders in the Valley. One of the Dillon daughters, Ella I believe her name was, was a teacher at Winton for many many years although I do not know precisely which years she was there.

The Thomson family from Chiwawa eventually purchased the entire Dillon property (even though the Dillon family had been 100% unwilling to do any business whatsoever with the Thomsons, and I imagine there was a lot of rolling over in the grave when Claude ended up with all of their property). Claude was not real fond of Winton school at any time, and wanted very much to take over 100% of the property that it in the teacher's residence was situated on.

The school district rolled over and gave into his imprecations when they purchased the property in Plain, and the teacher's cabin, the empty basement foundation, and the small school yard was deeded over to Claude when they closed Winton and moved into Beaver Valley.

It was its own school district (#8) up until the 50s – – an era when the first big wave of school consolidation began in the state (as well as nationwide). They wanted to close Winton at that time and send everybody from the Winton, Merritt, Stevens pass, and Lake Wenatchee area to Leavenworth. However, the people in those three areas rebelled, because they absolutely did not want their children riding the school bus to town every day up and down Tumwater Canyon, especially in the wintertime. (The Chelan schoolbus accident from 1945 where the bus plunged into Lake Chelan was still very fresh in the minds of everyone, and the local residents, knowing the dangers of the highway due to ice and rock, snow, and mudslides, did not want to have any part of it.)

Additionally, forcing the kids, the youngest kids especially, from the far corners of the County to take the bus the back way down the Chumstick (then called SR 209), was another reason that they fought for leaving Winton open. For the kids living in the Winton school service area, traveling that route would have required them to be on the bus for a total of 3-4+ hours daily. (As it was, that schedule was even tough on the high school kids)

The decision to leave the school open as a "remote and necessary" school was reached only after a somewhat nasty turn of events which culminated in a court case, wherein the court made the decision to leave the school open to serve grades 1-8 from the geographical area of Stevens pass, Merritt, and Lake Wenatchee. (Plain, Chiwawa Loop, Ponderosa, and River Road were NOT included in the decision because they were much much closer to Leavenworth already and children from there would not have to be on the bus as long as traveling back way.)

The school carried on after that for many years with grades 1-8, and an enrollment that varied between 10-18 students.

As an aside, the designation of "remote and necessary" came equipped with extra funding from the state, to wit 3X the amount of money per student that regular school districts received from the state. This meant that Leavenworth School District (and later on what became Cascade School District) has always benefited financially to a great degree from Winton school and now from Beaver Valley, which

I believe is still receiving remote and necessary funding. More on this later. (However, the extra money was never spent on Winton, and we had to beg for pretty much everything we ever wanted)

Rebecca Corey taught there for seven years prior to my arrival (with a one-year leave of absence during which the late Gayle – – I cannot Remember her last name right at this minute, but she went on to teach for many years at Osborn, dying of cancer 10-15 years ago or so – – there again I can't remember but the information is available.) was the teacher). Rebecca always had grades 1-8.

When I was hired, it was still Leavenworth School District, as we had not yet consolidated with Peshastin-Dryden School District. Our enrollment had been climbing a lot, and the powers that be at Leavenworth school district were trying to cut back on the number of grade levels taught at Winton. We really did not have the space, to begin with, and they were also reconfiguring grade levels at the various schools downtown.

My first year was 1981-1982, and I had grades 1-7. Two of the seventh grade girls had opted to stay one more year just to see what the new teacher was all about :-), but that was the last year that we had seven grades. I started out with 27 kids in seven grades (they finally hired one of the mothers to help me a couple hours a week but otherwise it was all me), and my first grade class consisted of 8 kids, so it was crowded and challenging.

1982-83 , 1983-84 saw us with an enrollment of grades 1-5 only, and from that time onward up until the school closed, we only had grades 1-4, and that was strictly because of the huge demand for enrollment in the school. We had to limit our enrollment to 20 students (although sometimes we were able to stretch to 21) and enrollment was based on a prioritized list. ONLY if there were spaces available were kids from the Plain , Chiwawa, Ponderosa areas allowed in. The first priority slots were available only for children from the Lake Wenatchee, Winton, and Merritt areas.

The highest priority slots were given to the youngest children from those areas. We always had a waiting list because people wanted their children to go to Winton knowing that the quality of education was superior in all respects.

Now, it did not close because of lack of students! After I left, the following year was a bit chaotic. The young lady that was hired to take my place did not work out at all. In addition to being completely incapable of handling multi-grades, she got pregnant and also ended up having marital problems, which resulted in her leaving halfway through the school year. She was replaced by Kathy Sheehan, who was on the substitute list and lived locally. From all reports I was getting from parents, students, and classroom assistants, it was chaos from start to finish.

Mary Carol Nelson was hired with Lauri Jones continuing on as the para-Pro.

Now, the reason for the school closing had nothing to do with lack of students. (However, the demand for enrollment slots decreased considerably after I left, due to a lot of parent dissatisfaction with the teaching and general classroom climate with my successors)

Rather, the state demanded that the school include kindergarten. The building was absolutely not big enough or set up correctly to take on kindergarten. The school district tried to purchase some adjoining property from the landowner who owns everything around the school ( the late Claude Thomson), but

he was unwilling to sell anything whatsoever, so the possibility of building on or adding a separate building was out the window.

That is when the school district started working with the Chelan County PUD to acquire a piece of property in Plain on which to build a new school – – a 2 room school, so that kindergarten would be made available.

At that point I believe the school district totally jettisoned the idea of prioritizing slots for students. Because the location of the building meant that it was no longer “remote and necessary”, Cascade School District technically should have lost their “remote and necessary additional funding” but they didn’t.

When I arrived at Winton, it had been suffering from a great degree of neglect for many years – – ever since forced to consolidate with Leavenworth. The resident teacher was expected to do absolutely everything, and for things that the teacher was not able to do, Orville Richards (the neighbor down the road across from the mill site) took care of it. He had been a longtime Winton school board member and after the consolidation served another year or two during the transition.

When I arrived, we had very limited and out of date textbooks, no library, the building was shabby inside and outside, as was the teacher’ s quarters, and it was in serious need of TLC and a few extra dollars.

Starting in the spring up my first year there, my very active group of parents decided that they were not going to put up with neglect from the school district any longer, and starting with the school year of 1982-1983, their activism started paying off, even though the parent group ended up doing a great deal of work themselves.

Over the next few years the following improvements were made – – (1) the very old and temperamental oil furnace in the basement was replaced with a (used, but dependable) forced air electric furnace, and Bruce Disher constructed new ductwork to render the new system more efficient.

(2) parent efforts and involvement produced a wonderful log toy for the playground

(3) the combined efforts of Orville, the parents, me, and Vaagen Brothers (mill) and a couple of their employees along with donations from Marson and Marson were responsible for the construction of the covered play shed.

(4) the skills of Bruce Disher again proved of value when he replaced the rotting and tiny front porch of the teacherage with a nice covered deck, new steps, and a concrete pad leading up to the steps.

(5) Bruce Disher also undertook to remodel one third of the “garage” at the teacher’s residence, plumbing, wiring, and insulating it so it was a usable space for a laundry room, freezer, heat, and storage.

(6) the school district finally agreed to start buying some necessary equipment for me, as up until that time I had been using a lawnmower that I purchased as well as a weed Wacker and chainsaw that I had purchased, along with many other of my own tools to maintain the outside.

(7) the school district also decided to have the exterior of both buildings professionally stripped and painted, replacing the crappy chipped and faded paint that existed up until that time.

(8) they also agreed to paint the interior (I had painted the whole thing myself the second year I was there) and also replace the old beat up and smelly carpet.

(9) again, Bruce Disher came to the rescue by supplying us with a couple of credenzas from the surplus items in storage resulting from the closing of Peshastin-Dryden schools. That gave us some actual storage in the classroom. He also dredged up a goodly number of used bookshelves so that we were able to start our own library collection. He also built a lovely reading loft in a former large closet, and the reading loft and surrounding bookshelves became our "library".

We had an all-class reunion in 1994, which was well attended and produced many good stories. (I recorded all of the people that got up to speak, and have an extensive guestbook from my years there as well)

By Connie Nichols