

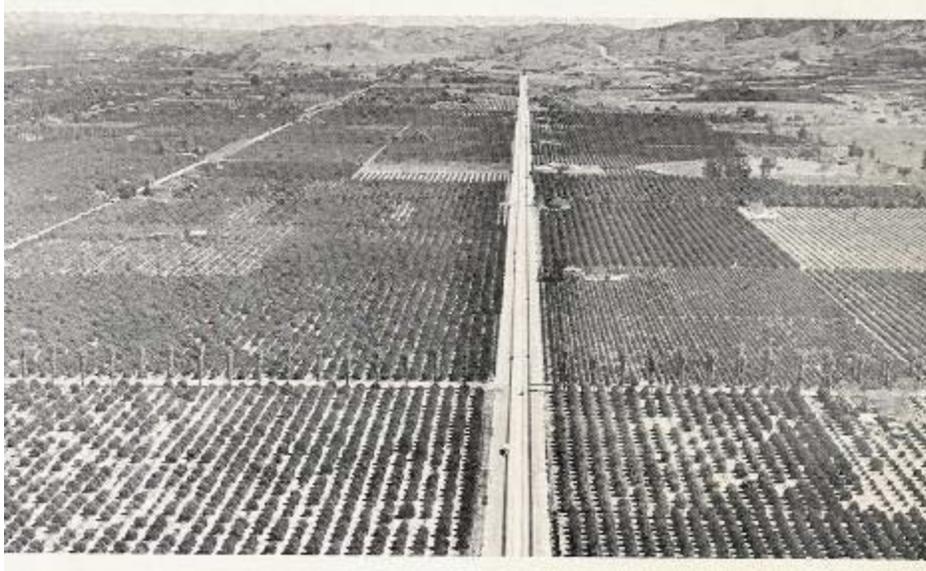
## A Brief History of West Covina Unified School District and Merced School



(The article below was written in 1956 by students at Merced School)

It all began before the time of the great gold rushes in 1849. Actually, we have to go all the way back to the days of the last Mexican governor of California, Don Pio Pico. He acquired a land grant from Spanish rulers, which included what is now Whittier, West Covina and most of San Gabriel Valley. He named this land the La Puente Rancho. It contained 48,000 acres, where he raised cattle and vineyards.

Eight years before the gold rush, William Workman and John Rowland worked their way along with others from New Mexico over the Cajon Pass and right into what is now West Covina. William Workman settled in Los Angeles where he became a prominent banker. Rowland and Workman purchased La Puente Rancho about the same time that California was annexed as a state in the Union. After the Civil War, business went down and in 1876 Workman's banking business went into bankruptcy. They were forced to mortgage their La Puente Rancho for \$220,000 to a man named Lucky Baldwin. He foreclosed on the mortgage and took full possession of the rancho and established a small community that is now Baldwin Park. After many years on his La Puente Rancho, Lucky Baldwin died and part of his rancho (now West Covina) was sold for \$6 million.



In 1905, the first settlers came to West Covina. They cleared the sage brush and cactus and planted walnut and citrus trees. Land sold for \$175 per acre. Improvements began by digging water wells pumped by steam power to irrigate the acres of walnut trees. In 1908 the first roads were built. They included Service, Orange, Cameron, Vine, Irwindale and Merced Avenues. A school site of 5 acres was donated in 1909 and the first school was known as the Irwindale School. It was a one-room schoolhouse and in 1911 three additional rooms were added. It had gas lights, no plumbing and the drinking water came from a hand pump. The first students were 11 children from 4 families.



In 1915-16 the school was renamed the West Covina Elementary School. A school bell was purchased by the class of 1915 for the three room school and following demolition of the old school house in 1952, the bell was placed at Sunset School. Currently the bell is on display at the West Covina District Office.

In the early 1900's there were only about a dozen students who attended the first school. The school population increased and by the 1950's the school district had approximately 611 students. In 1953 West Covina was the fastest growing city in California and the United States. During this time there were only four schools.



In 1954, 10 acres were purchased for \$53,000 to build Merced Elementary, the fifth school in the District. On March 14, 1956, Merced opened as a K-6 school with Russ Nichols as the first principal. Student enrollment was 435 with 16 teachers. In the years that followed, the West Covina School District added more schools through construction and annexation. Presently, there are eight elementary, two middle and two high schools with a district student enrollment of 10,285 and 490 teachers.



Today, Merced School serves an ethnically, economically and culturally diverse student population. We are a K-5 school with approximately 449 students. Our rich cultural heritage is evident through the 11 languages spoken and with 20% of our students being classified as English Language Learners.

March 2006 Merced Elementary celebrated its 50th Anniversary.