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Bakersfield High's Dormitories 1915 – 1955

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By Gilbert P. Gia

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In 1879 Lida and Philo Jewett and Charley Harding of Kern County moved to Oakland to attend high school.¹ In 1893 Kern County High School was created, but its location meant that some students had to move to Bakersfield to attend.² In 1900 William C. Wirth, who was a Weldon farmer and saloon owner, solved the housing problem for his son Henry by buying the Clark lodging house near the high school.³ Some families moved into town so their children could attend, which was what P.S. Pogson did in 1901 after resigning as Tejon Ranch manager. Francis Tracy in recalling the mid-1920s said, "Our oldest boys, Cecil and Darrel, had entered high school. I moved to town to supervise and help the children."⁴ Rose Stockton Logan (Class of 1933) said each fall when school started, her parents moved from the mountains to Bakersfield.⁵

¹ Kern County Californian, Jun 8, 1880 (Lynn Hay Rudy private data base of newspaper citations)

² Kern County High was the only high school in the county until Delano High opened in 1911.

³ *Daily Californian*, Sep 22, 1900 (email to Gilbert P. Gia from Lynn Hay Rudy). See "Lynn Hay Rudy. *Old Bakersfield: Sites & Landmarks, 1875-1915*. 2000. Privately printed. Lynn Hay Rudy, 22750 Hwy, I, Jenner CA 95450-9730)

⁴ Fannie C. Tracy and Glendon J. Rodgers. *The Tracy Saga*. Cardon Press. Merchants Printing and Lithography Co., Bakersfield, California. 1962

⁵ Interview with Gilbert P. Gia

Lodging in Private Homes

In 1910 high school teachers Dwight M. Griffith and Frank B. Gainer roomed at Stark's Boarding House on California Avenue near the school. Out-of-town pupils rented bedrooms in private homes, and that soon led to problems of unsupervised living. Omar Calvins, born in 1889, recalled the early part of the century. "Us kids of high school age, why, we went in the saloons and anywhere... I used to go in the side door of the Arlington. Clustered in the four blocks that cornered on [19th and Chester] there must have been a dozen saloons. Slot machines were everywhere. And they had rooms upstairs that were really, well, houses of prostitution, whorehouses."⁶

In September 1910, Bakersfield's school enrollment was 1300 and a year later was 1,900.⁷ By 1915, when 500 pupils attended Kern County High, there was a genuine student-housing shortage. The Californian reported, "High School Superintendent Chenoweth has an application from a country girl of a hardworking family saying she wishes to secure board and room with some family in return for what help she can be outside of school hours. He also has an offer from an excellent family who will give some young man a home while he attends school if he will do their chores."⁸

Even after dormitories were established, private homes continued to rent to students. Joe Brooks lived at home when he was in high school, and he recalled 1927 when his parents rented a spare bedroom to two high school boys from out of town.⁹ In the mid-1940s Catherine Giovannetti said her neighbors who owned big Victorian houses rented rooms to students "who came from all over."¹⁰ Beverly Mergenthaler, Class of 1940, told me, "Many girls couldn't afford to stay in the dorm. In exchange for room and board, I stayed in a private home for a while and worked for the family. I took care of their three kids and got five dollars a month."¹¹ Private housing for students was common through the early 1950s.

6 Earl Warren's Bakersfield, Interview with Omar Calvins, p 27. The Bakersfield City Directory of 1906 listed nearly 80 saloons in Bakersfield. See Gilbert P. Gia, *Mme. Brignaudy in the Bakersfield Tenderloin, 1905-33* (online)

7 Bakersfield Californian, Sep 10, 1911

8 Bakersfield Californian, Sep 11, 1915, p 1. (Lawrence E. Chenoweth)

9 Interview with Gilbert P. Gia

10 Ibid.

11 Interview with Gilbert P. Gia

The Dormitory at the High School Farm



Ranch Home at School Farm Laboratory where boys live while enrolled in "week-end" courses in practical instruction in farm work.

In late 1913 Kern County established a student dormitory at the southwest corner of the high school's 27-acre farm a mile-and-a-half north of the school near today's Golden State Avenue. Plans for the 60x40 feet two-story dorm with matron's room, 14 dormitory rooms, laboratory, reading room, dining room, kitchen, and "bath rooms and other modern conveniences" were drawn by Charles Cullimore, an instructor at the high school.¹² The Californian noted, "The new dormitory will be a great thing for Kern county as it will give every lad who is willing to work and devote a part of his time to gaining an education a chance to go ahead without any money. The boys can find ready employment on the farm and at the same time take the regular school courses. The new feature will also put the high school farm in closer touch with the farmers of the county, as many of them will want to send their sons there for instructions in farm work."^{13 14} Nineteen dorm students who attended in April 1914 worked three hours a day at the farm and took turns with dorm housekeeping. In return they

12 The dormitory was built under the supervision of E.K. Blood by day labor with available materials (Southwest Contractor and Manufacturer, v. 12, p22. 1913).

13 Bakersfield Californian, Feb 13, 1914, "Plans For Spacious Dormitory at the High school Farm Are Adopted"

14 Bakersfield Californian, Oct 30, 1915. The dorm's address was 2504 M Street.

received room and board "and all the privileges of a home."¹⁵ By 1920, owing to changes in educational goals and Bakersfield's expanding city limits, the school farm was relocated to Stine Road. In 1921-1922 the old dorm was remodeled and became the county's newest detention home for juveniles.¹⁶

Long-Distance Bus Transportation

Routes to remote areas started in 1917, and by 1919 there were 87 buses in use. By the mid-1920s the school's bus fleet covered more miles per day than any other school-bus system in the country. The longer daily round-trips served students as far away as Frazier Park and Lebec, but such service was not possible for students living even more distant.¹⁷

The Girls' Dormitory

The school's farm-dorm experience was a model in 1918-1919 when a dormitory for girls was established southwest of the high school on C Street. Before describing it, however, it is necessary to mention that three newspaper articles between 1918 and 1934 named other dorm locations. In December 1918 the Morning Echo wrote, "The next meeting promises to be unusually enjoying, as it will take place in the dormitory on A street."¹⁸ That dorm was mentioned again in 1952 when the Californian wrote about a midnight panty raid on the "Bakersfield High School and College Dormitory at California Avenue and A Street."¹⁹ A girls' dorm at B Street and California

15 Bakersfield Californian, Apr 4, 1914. Mrs. J.E. Clarrige was matron (Bakersfield Californian, Dec 25, 1915). Former site of the dormitory is on the county parking lot near the northeast corner of 25th and M.

16 California State Board of Corrections and Charities, 1922. p 114

17 In 1919 the most direct route between Bakersfield and Kernville was via Walker Basin and Caliente. The first practical Kern Canyon road for automobile use was not completed until 1925. Daily commutes from Glennville were also impractical.

18 Bakersfield Californian, Dec 21, 1918. "Pleasant Meeting of High School P.-T.A." On Dec 22, 1918 the Morning Echo wrote, "The next meeting will be held at the high school girls' dormitory on A street on January 16. There will be refreshments served by the girls of Miss Siemon's domestic science class all parent are invited to attend."

19 Bakersfield Californian, Oct 31, 1952 "Youth Arrested in Panty Raid" The house today at the southeast corner of California and A Street (2331 California Avenue) was built the 1910s. It has two bedrooms and one bathroom.

Avenue mentioned in 1934,²⁰ but the preponderance of information shows that a girls' dorm was established on C Street.

The Californian wrote in 1929, "Under the leadership of Mrs. John Brower, the girls' dormitory was organized in 1918. During the first year-and-a-half it was located on C street in the 1918-1919 school year."²¹

Lynn Hay Rudy provided background. "Hugh Blodget had been on the Bakersfield City School District board from 1899 to 1915, mostly as president, and he and his wife [Anne Park Blodget] had often had young people as boarders at their 925 South D street home near the high school; the upstairs had three bedrooms and a bathroom." Lynn Hay Rudy wrote that after Mrs. Blodget's death in 1915, Hugh Blodget had his home removed in February 1918 a block west and faced it onto C Street. He sold the remainder of his two-acre, 180x405-foot lot to George Haberfelde so he could build an elaborate home on it."²²

The Blodget home at 924 C Street was two blocks southwest of today's Griffith's Stadium, and besides being the girls' dormitory, "at least once a month" it would be a social center for the faculty and board of education.²³ In December 1918 a high school PTA meeting took place at the new dorm, and later in the month "seven girls enjoyed a pre-Christmas dinner there."²⁴

In January 1919 Mrs. John Brower, who was a faculty member and the dorm matron, invited parents, teachers and "those interested" to visit and inspect the dormitory.²⁵ The Californian noted that the dorm was "an experiment for Bakersfield, but one that is providing a successful method of solving the problem of caring for girls whose parents do not live in the city. The girls who make their home at the dormitory will give a short program with readings and musical numbers, after which the girls of Miss Lida Siemen's domestic class will serve delicious refreshments made by their

20 Bakersfield Californian, May 24, 1934

21 Bakersfield Californian, Aug 6, 1929 "School Supplies Congenial Homes"

22 Email of 2003 from Lynn Hay Rudy. Morning Echo, Feb 2, 1918. Haberfield's 925 Oleander, six-bedroom, two-bathroom home (5,600 sq ft) was completed in 1922. D street was renamed Oleander. See Lynn Hay Rudy, *Old Bakersfield: Sites and Landmarks, 1875-1915*. Jenner, California, 2000; Rudy, Lynn Hay, *Granddad: Hugh A. Blodget in Early Bakersfield*. Jenner, California, 1990

23 Bakersfield Californian, Oct 5, 1918

24 Bakersfield Californian, Dec 21, 1918, "Pre-Christmas Dinner"

25 Bakersfield Californian, Jan 14, 1919

own hands. Since the street car passes directly by the dormitory, it will enable everyone to attend.”²⁶

The 1918-1919 high school yearbook wrote, "This high school has provided for its girls who are not able to live at home while attending school. It furnishes them free of charge a beautiful, handsomely furnished home, a place where any mother would be glad to know her daughter was staying. The school board, realizing the crying need of a suitable place for out-of-town girls to stay, rented the spacious house of Blodget, already furnished. The Board pays for the rent, the light, the heat and water. The only expense each girl has to pay is her proportion of the grocery bill. All the work is done by the girls themselves, each having a share, so that it is very little trouble for anyone. There are no inflexible, iron-clad rules. The girls have the responsibility of conducting themselves, and they have done it in a way that has made rules unnecessary. Mrs. Brower, teacher at KCUHS is the matron, and also adviser, friend and companion of the girls.”²⁷

Girls’ Dorm Influences State Legislation

The yearbook wrote that a dorm student accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Brower to Sacramento when the “bill legalizing high school dormitories came up, to tell Governor Stevens and the legislators what a success our dormitory has been.”²⁸ That trip came about because Assemblywoman Grace S. Doris had heard of the KCUHS dorm and requested more information.²⁹ In 1919 dormitory student Lucile Calkins and KCUHS teacher Mrs. John C. Brower met with Assemblywoman Doris and as a result she introduced a bill to allow union high school districts in California to rent or build dormitories.

26 Bakersfield Californian, Jan 14, 1919. Lida Siemon was a domestic science teacher who started at the high school in 1914. She and Mrs. John Brower were instrumental in organization of the first girls’ dorm.

27 1919 Oracle

28 Ibid.

29 Assemblywoman Grace S. Dorris had been a Bakersfield schoolteacher. She was a Republican who also won the Democratic nomination and gained support from the Progressive Party. “She failed to win reelection in 1920; won in both 1922 and 1924; and lost her last bids in 1926 and 1928. Her committee assignments were County Government; Education, Labor, and Capital; Normal Schools [the era’s term for teacher-training]; Oil Industries; and Public Health and Quarantine.” (<https://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/legislators/California.html>)

The bill gained the approval of both Governor Stephens and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Will C. Wood and it passed.³⁰

Dorm Life at McDonald House

In summer of 1919 the high school board bought Mrs. Callie McDonald's property, which included the two-story family home and other buildings between Fourteenth Street and California Avenue. The buy pushed the boundaries of the campus to two blocks facing F Street and two on California Avenue. The McDonald family home was "a commodious two story residence at the corner of those streets [*F and California*], and which will be used as a girls' dormitory when the transfer is consummated. The girls' dormitory has been maintained in the old Blodget residence on C street during the past year and a number of young women have made their home there."³¹ In September of 1920, 955 students enrolled at the high school, and eight girls were accepted at the dormitory.³² The 1920 city directory listed Mrs. Florence Goodall at 924 C Street.³³

Bus Service for Out-Of-Towners

It is unclear exactly when the high school started weekly bus transportation for students living in more remote areas of Kern County. On Saturdays in the late 1930s Oscar Blackwood who attended Bakersfield Junior College drove an empty school bus to Glennville and overnighted there with a family.³⁴ Before noon on Sundays he transported students to the high school in Bakersfield, and other drivers made similar overnight

30 Morning Echo, Mar 7, 1919. (Tehachapi High School opened a student dormitory in 1921. Bakersfield Californian, Sep 2, 1921)

31 Bakersfield Californian, Jun 30, 1919. Bakersfield Californian, Jun 13, 1951, "Glendale Rites Held For Callie McDonald"

32 Bakersfield Californian, Sep 14, 1920

33 The house burned in the 1950s.

34 In 1916 a change in California law allowed Kern County High School to administratively separate itself from the Office of the Kern County Superintendent of Schools, and the high school's name became Kern County Union High School District, KCUHS. Bakersfield Junior College started in 1913 on the high school campus.

runs between Bakersfield and Kernville.³⁵ Charles Dumble remembered dorm students who came in from Walker Basin, Inyokern, and Ridgecrest. Other KCUHS alumni recalled dormies who arrived on Sundays from Tehachapi, Mojave, Randsburg, Johannesburg, Boron, and Trona. The Kern Canyon bus route brought in students from Weldon, Kernville, Bodfish, and the PG&E's canyon power stations. On Fridays after school, these students traveled home.

Girls' Dorm Is Moved

Purchase of the McDonald property allowed space for new construction on campus, and the McDonald house was in the way of progress. In July 1921 the Californian wrote, "The Domestic Science structure will occupy the corner at California avenue and F street where a girl's dormitory is now located." It added, "Located at the corner of F street and California avenue at present is the location of the high school dormitory, which is to be moved to another location in the near future."³⁶

In October 1921 the McDonald house, then about ten years old, was moved to 2200 California Avenue at the northwest corner of C and California. Next to it, at 1207 C Street, a bungalow was built for junior college women.³⁷ Those two dorms were in regular use through the mid-1950s.

35 In 1948, 29 bus drivers were Bakersfield College students.

36 Bakersfield Californian, July 26, 1921

37 Bakersfield Californian, Oct 14, 1921, "New Bungalow". In 1922 the dorm provided office space for the Kern County Home Economics Association. The contact was "Lida Siemon, 2200 California Avenue." (Bulletin of the California Teachers' Association, May 1923). The 1923 Polk city directory shows the name Lida Siemon "tchr in chg High School Dormitory" at 2200 California Avenue. In 1926 she headed the school's domestic science department and was director of the girls' dorm.



JC and girls' dormitories above as relocated to the northwest corner of C Street and California Avenue.³⁸

Life at the Relocated Girls' Dorm

Edith Likely (Class of 1925) wrote, "All through the night, no voice or step disturbed the repose of the inmates of that large frame building known as the girls' dormitory ...from the kitchen issues the tantalizing odor of fresh fried waffles and the girls are soon seated around the breakfast table, partaking of a hearty repast." Edith Likely concluded, "At last when the work is finished we girls amuse ourselves for the rest of the day over the washtub or iron, or in shopping if we happen to have received our monthly allowances that week."³⁹

The number of girls there varied over the years. In September 1926, 17 dormies elected Aileen White, Margaret Dennison and Juanita Beedlove as officers, and they made ambitious plans for social events. Other activities probably materialized, but by May 1927, only Alice Arp, Thelma Ammons, Mable Kerwin and Aileen Welch occupied the dorm.⁴⁰

38 The gas station with flag in the lower right corner is on the southeast corner of California and C Streets because C Street then dead-ended both northerly and southerly at Californian Avenue.

39 The high school's student newspaper *Blue and White*, May 22, 1924

40 1927 Oracle

Beverly Mergenthaler Blackwood recalled her friends, "We were just 14 years old in 1938. When we were freshmen we had to pay to stay in the dorms. Mrs. Keester was dorm mother for the boys' dorm, too, and she ran it by herself. She was always a lady. Since we lived at the dorm, we went back there [to the boys' dorm] for lunch where she always had something ready for us. We helped with dishes and cooked. There were strict rules. Two nights a month we could go out, but we had to be back by ten o'clock. We couldn't go to Fox Theater because of this."⁴¹

Blackwood continued, "The dorm was just like a home. There were no bedrooms down stairs except for Mrs. Keester's. There was one large bedroom upstairs that five shared, and four other bedrooms that two or more shared. The large one was reserved for the freshmen. There was a cottage in the yard off the girls' dorm, which was usually reserved for the Junior College girls, as they were supposed to be more responsible, and for the most part, they usually were. I was one of the lucky few high school girls who got to stay in the cottage during my junior year in high school. Only sneaked out once!"⁴²

"The dorms were nice but I wished we could have done more social things in town. Sometimes we had a party, but it was hard to enter into the school dances or football games on the weekend because we went home on Friday night. If we stayed the weekend we had to stay at a friend's house. We came back to Bakersfield on Sunday afternoon."⁴³

In 1943 life at the girls' dorm was about the same as in earlier years. Wrote the high school newspaper *Blue and White*, "With fifteen young high school girls, the girls' dorm remains one big, happy family, with Mrs. Wilda Boushey as house-mother. There are now twelve high school girls all junior and seniors and three JC girls, living at the dormitory. The majority hail from Kernville. Dinner is served at six o'clock, and good, vitamin-plus meals are given. There are usually three girls to a room, and it is kept clean and neat by the occupants. Even with all the rules the girls enjoy themselves and have lots of fun."⁴⁴

41 Interview with Gilbert P. Gia

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 *Blue and White*, Sep 23, 1943. Rose Robinson (Class of 1945) recalled, "If you misbehaved at the JC Cottage you had to go back to the dorms." (Interview with Gilbert P. Gia)

A challenge was combatting home-sickness. In 1931, teachers Helen Blumer and Joan Morgan supervised "a Halloween party of dancing and cards." Present that evening were Donald Hart, Lido Sandrini, Bob Hewitt, Dan Weitz, Helen Stringham, Dorothy Lovell, and Stanley and Jack Powers.⁴⁵ Marge Gillette (Class of 1937) recalled one Halloween night when dorm boys put a ladder up behind the girls' dorm.⁴⁶ But that was probably wishful thinking on the boys' part because, said Gillette, most girls followed the rules. The exception, as Alice Rankin remembered, was the occasional duck-out the back door to Dewar's for ice cream.⁴⁷

In 1947 a 15 year-old girl arrived in Bakersfield from Dallas, Texas and enrolled at KCUHS as a Senior. In an email to the author she explained, "I had been made a ward-of-the-court and was placed at the dorm with the agreement that I could live there if I did not cost the county anything. I lived there one year. The dorm was closed weekends so I had to room with other people on Friday and Saturday nights. On the weekend I bused tables at a diner café called the Betty Lee Tea Room on Truxtun. I had roommates who were in the same situation as myself, that is, we had no family and had been placed in the dorm by the court."⁴⁸

The Boys' Dormitory

The boys' dorm was established in 1922 in a dilapidated house at 2230 California Avenue (just west of the girls' dorm), probably on property acquired in the McDonald buy.⁴⁹ A mostly-illegible Morning Echo newspaper from 1924 said the girls' and boys' dorms were then nearly side-by-side "in the 2200 block on California avenue."

45 Blue and White, Nov 5, 1931. p 3

46 Interview with Gilbert P. Gia

47 Ibid.

48 This informant lived in Bakersfield. She wrote, "I've come a long, long way since then, and I prefer you don't use my name." No other interviewees for this study mentioned wards-of-the-court. Historian Ken Hooper wrote to Gilbert P. Gia in 2004, "Found a 1948-47 BHS Circular that has this description: Monthly dormitory fees to cover board and lodging in the dormitories are to be determined from year to year by the District. Superintendent and business manager are to be paid [receive payment from students] monthly in advance. Students who accept the privilege of living in the dormitories are expected to abide by the established rules, which parallel those of the average home."

⁴⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 6, 1929 "School Supplies Congenial Homes"; Aug 28, 1930 "Boys' Dormitory Is Popular Home."

In the summer of 1925 Principal H.A. Spindt was processing student applications for the girls' and boys' dormitories when he was asked about costs. He explained that because the girls rotated their weekly "KP" duty, the monthly charge at the girls' dorm was \$16 per person while at the boys' dorm costs were higher because theirs had a cook and housekeeper. In early July, 12 females and 17 males signed up for the dorms, and Professor Spindt expected more students to apply before the start of the 1925-1926 school year.⁵⁰

A page from the 1926 yearbook Oracle describes the renovated boys' dorm. Just ten months earlier it was "a run-down house with grease besmeared walls, dust laden and well-worn grass rugs upon a splintered and unpainted floor; walls and windows bare, plaster cracked, furniture dilapidated, and a lawn long-since fallen victim to the deadly mats of puncture vines and other weeds ... spring-cots the worst for wear and punctured, bumpy mattresses to match ... scattered hither-and-yon in the various sand-laden sleeping quarters."⁵¹

The dilapidated condition did not last long. "Floors once dry and bare have been treated to a goodly coat of paint. Neatly laundered curtains are now draped in a pleasing manner where the shrunken, wrinkled hanging of yesterday held sway."⁵² The Oracle announced that President Bill Bouchey Secretary Jack Reina, House Sergeant Ray Courtney, and others, were enjoying the rejuvenated building.⁵³

Boys' Dormitory Established On G Street

A review of the boys' dorm said, "The dormitory was established in 1922 at 2230 California avenue. During the 1929-30 school year, it was moved onto the high school campus at 1205 G street."⁵⁴ Today's readers

50 Bakersfield Californian, Jul 6, 1925

51 1926 Oracle

52 Ibid.

53 1926 Oracle. Leo B. Hart first taught at Bakersfield College in 1925. He was assigned as monitor of this boys' dorm. (J.S. Wallace, *Recollections of a High School District 1893-1968*, p 99)

54 Bakersfield Californian, Aug 28, 1930 "Boys' Dormitory Is Popular Home."

might construe that the old building was physically moved to G Street, but it was not. In September 1929 Mr. and Mrs. C.W. Beatty and family lived at 1205 G Street,⁵⁵ and according to Kern County Hall of Records the building remained in the Beatty name through the mid-1950s.⁵⁶



From 1926 Oracle when the boy's dorm was west of Griffith's Stadium. For location see aerial shot of the girls' dorm.

Mother Bouchey

A pause in the history is needed here to acknowledge vivacious dormitory-mom Wilda May Boucher who was fondly-remembered by hundreds of Kern County Union High School boys and girls. Beverly Blackwood recalled, "The dorm mother at the boys' dorm was Mother Bouchey who later came to the girls' dorm and was well-loved by both the boys and girls."⁵⁷ She was boys' dorm mother from 1925 to 1943 and girls' dormitory mother from 1943 to 1952."⁵⁸ Mrs. Bouchey's 18 years of service

Bakersfield Californian, Sep 5, 1929. C.W. Beatty was a former mayor of Maricopa.

56 Kern County Hall of Records, Beatty property records of Jan 10, 1948 and Dec 14, 1955

57 Letter to Gilbert P. Gia

58 Bakersfield California, Mar 2, 1955, "Mother Bouchey Dies"

overlapped that of Mrs. Francis G. Keester and Mrs. Lee Smith, both of whom also served the dorms in the late 1930s and the early 1940s.

Life at the Boys' Dorm

In 1930 it was estimated that over the years between 23 and 28 high school students and junior college men had resided annually at the boys' dorm.⁵⁹ "For eight boys who have spent the summer working in Bakersfield, the residence hall has provided a home during the three months' vacation. Since it was founded eight years ago, the following faculty men have been in charge of the dormitory: George Sagen, Ernest Dalbom, J.B. Haralson, Leo B. Hart, Herbert Anderson, and J.W. McDaniels, and Jack Oats and Jake Erwin, who are not affiliated with the local high school now."⁶⁰ In 1934 E. Ben Evans the high school librarian was supervisor.⁶¹



Girls' Dorm about 1938

The girls' dorm hosted occasional dinners for the boys, but in 1946 they took regular meals at the girls' dorm. Recalling them, Beverly Mergenthaler Blackwood wrote, "We knew most of them. They had the same

59 Bakersfield Californian, Aug 28, 1930

60 Ibid.

61 Bakersfield Californian, May 24, 1934

restrictions we had but were a lot more aggressive. They'd devise ways to get out of the dorms at night."⁶²

William Dolan who attended KCUHS the mid-1930s recalled JC students Charlie and Dick Bailey, Nick Rilcoff, and a fellow called Fred from Long Beach, all of whom lived at the boys' dorm.⁶³ Ed Simonsen who became President of Bakersfield College was an East High teacher who supervised the boys' dorm in 1938. "In 1946 when I came back from the war the boys' dorm was still there. About that time Bakersfield College started its own men's dorm. It was a private home we rented across to the south of California Avenue that we used for a while. We also used Earl Sargent's house. His wife Esther operated it as a dorm."⁶⁴

High school dormies sometimes felt like "hicks from the sticks," as Blackwood phrased it, but Bakersfield was in awe of the mountain kids. Shirley Jackson who lived in Bakersfield and attended KCUHS in the late 1930s recalled three dormies from the mountains, Elizabeth Weisman, Caroline Pasco, and Fay Smith.⁶⁵ At the beginning of the first term, Fay Smith rode her horse into town from Glennville and kept it at the Mission Stables. Bunkey Valdez [Class of 1936] said, "I remember those dorm kids from 1934 who were from the Kern River Valley. Other friends of mine were the Burlandos and the Seliz from Cummings Valley. One of the Burlando girls was something. She was into rodeo and could throw bulls."⁶⁶

Byrom Ellis (Class of 1938) from Bodfish moved to the dorm. He recalled a bell to get up, a bell to eat, and a bell to go to bed. For \$30 a month Ellis got three meals a day, an iron cot, and some interesting experiences.⁶⁷ He said, "I started at the dorm when I was a freshman in 1934. One afternoon I was coming back from town, and five or six upperclassmen backed me up behind a palm tree and said, 'Get your ass out here. We're going to paddle you.' I said, 'Try it. I'll get you bastards one-by-one when you're by yourselves.' Well, they turned off and left."⁶⁸

62 Interview with Gilbert P. Gia

63 Interview with Gilbert P. Gia

64 Ibid. Prior to WWII Earl Melvin Sargent (1912-2008) coached at KCUHS with Cap Harrelson and Goldie Griffith. After service in the US Navy he returned to the high school to teach and coach with Paul Briggs.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

Ellis: "Another time eleven of us freshmen that had come down from Kernville, well, they put our beds out on the dorm's upstairs porch. It was cold as hell that winter. That first year some of the upperclassmen would come out there and turn our beds over. So one day we all got together and decided to whip 'em. Every night after supper we had to clean up the dishes, and then everybody walked over to the basement of the JC where the study hall was. Everybody had to go whether you needed to study or not. So we went outside and waited in the dark. When the bell rang those guys came out and we drove it to them. I lived there at the dorm one year. The next year Bruce Landry from Bodfish and I got a room with the Brooks family, and we had our food from a lady that had a boarding house."⁶⁹

Both dorms had a housekeeper assisted by a teacher or JC student to keep order. In 1927 Miss Lida Siemon and Miss Robin Rapp were supervisors for the girls, while over at the boys' dorm Irwin, Anderson, and Parker were in charge. William Dolan recalled a young teacher who lived there in 1931. "He was a single man by the name of J. Wesley McDaniel who was a psychologist who also helped with advising. I am sure he was shopping around for a wife because living at the dorm would be certainly no life for a married man. By 1935 he had indeed gotten married and moved on."⁷⁰

Cornelius H. Siemens, later the President of Humboldt State College, was a KCUHS student and later a teacher at Bakersfield College. He wrote in 1956, "After graduating from U.C., I was hired to teach science in Bakersfield High School and Junior College for the two-year periods, 1934-1936. In addition, I served as supervisor of the boys' dormitory, where life was rarely dull. I recall the time when the tinder-dry dorm almost burned because of an illegal cigarette thrown out of the second-story window by one of the Trona boys. Another time, I was kept up most of the night trying to solve the mystery of how the boys were helping co-eds escape from the girls' dorm after taps."⁷¹ The dorm probably got a good cleaning in spring 1936 when Mom Bouchey and teacher-dorm-daddies Cornelius Siemens and

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Bakersfield Californian, Oct 13, 1956, "Humboldt State President, Former Kern Educator, Sends Best Wishes"

Robert Wright hosted a dinner for the high school board members prior to their monthly meeting. The board praised the dorm's management.⁷²

After WWII some who lived at the boys' dorm did not attend Bakersfield High School. Lynn Hay Rudy (Class of 1951) explained, "Several Kernville kids spent their school evenings at the KC boarding house [*dorms*] and days were bused over to East Bakersfield High for school, poor dears. I only remember the four Ray kids. Stan in my class, Fred, and two girls, whose father was in charge of the Kernville fish hatchery, I think. I know they were rather 'outsiders' and it was probably hard on their social life, knowing how cliquish high schoolers are."⁷³

End of the Dorm Period

Kernville High School opened in 1941. Burroughs High opened at Ridgecrest in 1945, and Desert High opened at Edwards in 1951. Today a grassy athletic field occupies the space where the girls' dorm once stood. During WWII, in the spring 1943, trustees of the Kern County Union High School District auctioned the nine-room, two story girls' dorm with the stipulation that the winning bidder remove it from the property.⁷⁴ There were no takers, and the dorm continued in use until 1955. On June 10, 1957 it was auctioned again, sold, and removed from the campus. No other information about it was found.⁷⁵

72 Bakersfield Californian, Apr 7, 1936

73 Email to Gilbert P. Gia.

74 Bakersfield Californian, Apr 24, 1943

75 Bakersfield Californian, June 1957 "Notice For Bids"

The boys' dorm was showing signs of heavy wear in 1943 when it was shuttered for the duration.⁷⁶ It reopened in 1946 but closed for good in 1948.⁷⁷ In the fall of 1949 the two-story, 14-room building was advertised for \$1400,⁷⁸ sold, and was removed to the southeast corner of Brundage and Union.

But its memory persisted. Yvonne Loustalot Liner (Class of 1938) recalled, "My first husband attended JC and was staying at the dorm. We used to sit out in front and study in his car. When WWII started he went into the service and was killed. In the mid-1950s I was working at an office on Brundage, and I looked out the window and saw the boys' dorm being pulled down the street. In my purse I had his little pocket knife and his key to the boys' dorm. At that moment I remember thinking 'I have the key to that building.'"⁷⁹

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76 July 15, 2017 Gilbert P. Gia interview with Don Suverkrop (Class of 1943): "I remember the dorm. Its front steps were all worn down and the bare wood showing."

77 Some of the 1943 class left KCUHS mid-year to join the military.

78 Bakersfield Californian, Oct 29, 1949, p 27. In 1950 the boys' dorm was not listed in the Bakersfield telephone book.

79 Interview with Gilbert P. Gia