



Gilbert Gia's Historic Bakersfield and Kern  
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## East Bakersfield Schools and Icehouse, 1920s-1930s

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By Gilbert Gia

As told by Millie Giddings Munding, June, 1974

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In the 1920s and 1930s a small, wood icehouse, painted white with red and blue trim, was just down the corner from our house on Oregon Street. It had a little office and a wooden deck that allowed Mr. Stegelman to pull out blocks of ice and load them into cars or onto some other conveyances that customers brought along to tote their ice home.



Steam-powered ice plant at 33rd and Union in 1910. This was the source for almost all of Bakersfield's ice for many years.

Mr. Stegelman usually sat in the office and read, and when we kids came around he was rather crotchety, but I do remember once he gave my sister and me bits of ice. My only other recollection of him was he chewed tobacco in the form of a brick. I was very interested in watching Mr. Stegelman take out his pocketknife, cut off a chunk of

tobacco, and swallow it. When he offered me a bit, I said No!

Our next-door neighbor was Mrs. Richardson, or "Auntie" Richardson, as we called her. But she really wasn't our aunt any more than the other neighborhood women who we called Auntie this or Auntie that. I thought Auntie Richardson was a very pretty lady, and I was very much aware that she had her hair done every week at the beauty shop next to Libby's grocery store.

Sometimes Auntie Richardson paid me five cents to take my wagon to the icehouse (half a block up the street at Oregon and Owens) and bring back a 50-pound block of ice. The Richardsons had their ice box on the back porch, and I do not remember how the ice got from my wagon up the stairs. In those days every family had a set of ice tongs, so probably one of her boys did it.

The wooden icehouse closed for business just after school started in September, and it stood unused in the winter and spring. My sister and I and other neighborhood children like James Richardson and Louis Fudge scrounged around the icehouse platform looking for coins that customers lost down between the slats on the platform around the building. Sometimes we were lucky, and that was enough to keep us all at it.

About 1930, the company built an outhouse behind the icehouse and right up next to the alley. In the fall when I was seven, Mr. Stegelman didn't take everything with him when he closed up. In back of the shack we discovered a few old magazines and a lard can, which he had used as a spittoon. Kids remember those things.

Libby's grocery store was one block north of us at the northeast corner of Pacific and Owens Streets. I was acquainted with Mr. Libby's two children, a boy and a girl. His daughter had crossed eyes and wore glasses with the part next to the nose frosted over. For some reason

unknown to me, my daddy did not trade at Libby's. Auntie Richardson did, though, and she often told me the things she wanted me to charge and bring back for her. I repeated the list over and over all the way to store: "Four pork chops, a dozen eggs, sugar. Four pork chops, a dozen eggs, sugar."

Inside Libby's on the right side was a meat counter, and its floor was covered with fresh-smelling, curly, wood shavings. On the ceiling, two dusty, black fans with long blades turned around and around ever so slowly. Libbys had wooden shelves with glass doors that you could lift open. Inside were metal scoops for dry beans and rice and candy.

Other grocery stores were close by. Until about 1928, there was a grocery store three houses east of us and on the same side of Oregon. A family had set it up inside their house, and for that reason the porch had two front doors. One went into the front room, and the other opened directly into the store, which originally had been the front bedroom of the house. Some Jewish people owned it, or rented it, but about 1938 the Pacini family bought the place and changed it back into a house. Another store near us was at the northwest corner of Pacific and Gage, but it was hardly more than a shack. That one disappeared about 1935 when somebody built a house on the lot.

In 1927 I could stand in the alley behind my house and see the main entrance of Washington School three blocks west on Baker Street.



Above: Washinton School after 1938 remodel. New auditorium at left.

The door was set back from the sidewalk and framed by palm trees. On the northside of the campus was the schoolyard with a broad lawn and trees. The office was south of the school, and on the north side was the auditorium [in 1927]. A two-story schoolhouse was behind those buildings. Further back was the original, two-story brick, Baker School.<sup>1</sup> Its narrow fire escape and metal stairs were a fright to me when I was in the first and second grades.



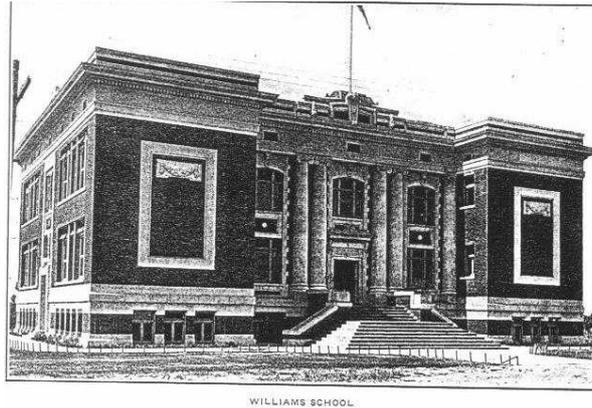
Above: Washington School and tower of Old Baker School.

When I was in the third grade, about 1930, Washington School switched to seventh and eighth grades only, so my sister and I had to

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<sup>1</sup> Three-story Baker Street School opened March 2, 1895 at the NW corner of Baker and Niles Street. In 1910 it was renamed Washington School.

change schools. The old two-story schoolhouse was probably demolished after we left.<sup>2</sup> In the 1950s Washington School became the administrative center for the Bakersfield City Schools District, and Washington Junior High moved north a mile or so to a new building at River Boulevard and Columbus Streets.



Above: Williams School. About 1920

My sister and I transferred to Williams School about a mile east of our house. We could have gone to Jefferson School that was next to the park and the swimming pool, but a teacher at Williams lived near our house. She was one of our neighbors who had been very supportive of my father, my sister, and me after my mother died.

Williams School was an attractive, two-story brick building. The flight of white stairs at the entrance were flanked by wide, cement "banisters" on either side. They were fun to slide down! The first floor of the school had the office, a nurse's room, and four classrooms. The upstairs had two classrooms and an auditorium. On

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(Lynn Hay Rudy, *Old Bakersfield: Sites and Landmarks, 1875-1915*. Jenner, CA, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Architect Stanton Willard designed the 1938 remodel of Washington School. Added were two air-conditioned, administrative wings and a 1,000 seat auditorium at the NW corner of Niles and Baker Streets, (*Los Angeles Times*, Apr 1938). Facing Baker Street at the north end of the campus, in 1938 new shop buildings were also built. Friezes facing

either side of the main building were two smaller buildings, but Williams School also had a basement. That's where we had gym and crafts, and the basement also housed the cafeteria. The principal was Mrs. Bender, and she ruled pupils with a firm hand.

I remember sitting in my third grade class and looking out the window at Eastside Grocery Store that faced the school from across Niles Street. On a spelling test I didn't have to remember how to spell the word *east* because it was written on the sign.

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Baker Street reflects the uses of the building. In 1985, second-floor restrooms still had child-sized toilet commodes.