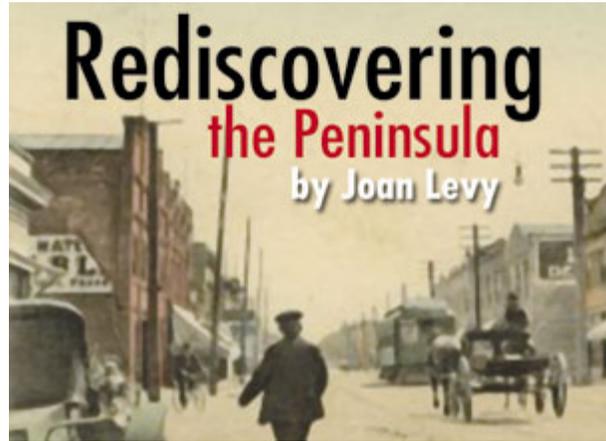


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Abbott Middle School should be proud

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Pansy Jewett Abbott was a pioneer in local politics. In 1925, she was appointed to the position of county superintendent of schools to finish out the remaining term of Roy Cloud when he left to accept another position. She ran for the job in the election in 1926 and won. In that election, four other women were also elected to positions of power in the county. Pansy Jewett was the fifth and youngest child born to Ephraim and Mary Abbott. Ephraim was a Nebraska farmer who came from Maine in 1861. He successfully managed a 1,220-acre farm. Pansy was born in 1881. At some later point, the Abbott family relocated to San Jose.



Pansy was educated in San Jose and graduated from the San Jose Normal School. She began her teaching career at San Mateo's Homestead School at the age of 18. She taught first through fifth grade in the four-room school. Some schools were pretty primitive in those days. Homestead had no plumbing and drinking water for thirsty students was available in a bucket with a dipper. Many of the children at Homestead came from a nearby orphanage and had special needs. Pansy recalled that at times she had 50 children in her class. She went on to teach at Central School. She became a highly respected teacher in San Mateo. It was not surprising, then, when she was appointed to fill the temporary vacancy in the county superintendent's office. What may have been surprising was that she turned that appointment into such a successful career for 25 years.

Pansy had supplemented her teacher's salary by working as a reporter for the San Mateo News-Leader. She co-wrote a book on good health for children. She organized the San Mateo County Teacher's Association and represented teachers at state conventions. She started the first countywide school for children with cerebral palsy in California. As superintendent, she was described in 1928 as "combining tact and good judgment with the necessary executive force." This was high praise for a woman in those times.

In 1927-8 a plan to consolidate San Mateo County with San Francisco County was being considered. When the matter of consolidating the two school systems was brought up, the San Francisco superintendent of schools saw no problem. Superintendent Abbott, rather than merely opposing the plan herself, cleverly suggested that the question be put to the 10 men responsible for the various districts. The idea of displacing the various district boards, superintendents, PTAs and other neighborhood school organizations amounted to a sizable opposition to the consolidation plan. Like Miss Abbott, they feared loss of local control, and in some cases, loss of their jobs. This no doubt contributed to the fact that the plan didn't pass.

Pansy Jewett Abbott remained in office as county superintendent of schools until 1951. At that time she announced her retirement from public life and her intention to wed John Darwin Gish, a widower and retired principal of Woodside School. Apparently, at the age of 69, she had finally decided to make some time for herself. She died in 1976 age the age of 95 and was buried at St. John's Cemetery in San Mateo. Abbott Middle School serves as a reminder of her years of dedication to education.

Rediscovering the Peninsula appears in the Monday edition of the Daily Journal. For more information on this or related topics, visit the San Mateo County