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When and Why Did Menlo School Go Co-Ed?

Menlo School is less than a decade away from celebrating its 100th birthday. During the ninety-one years that Menlo has been around, it has seen many drastic changes. The Menlo of today is very different from the Menlo of the early 1900's. In its youth, Menlo had a strong military program. Later, Menlo became an all-boys boarding and day school with two facets: academics and sports. A lot had to happen to transform the all male, football crazy Menlo into the refined, artistic Menlo that it is today. One of the events that profoundly changed the school was the decision to go Co-Ed beginning in the fall of 1979. There is no doubt that admitting girls changed Menlo for the better, but there is still the question of why the Board decided that the school should be Co-Ed. After talking with Mr. Madison (a member of the class of 1979) and Ms. McPhaul, it is apparent that there are two reasons why the school went Co-Ed. First, the decision was a reflection of the "peace, drugs and Rock and Roll" era. Second, there was competition to attract the best students in the Bay Area, and admitting girls was the key to attracting more students.

The new ideas of "freedom" during the sixties and seventies had a big influence on boys and girls during that time; not many boys wanted to go to a school without girls, and less girls wanted to go to a school without boys. Both all-male and all-female schools were very popular before the 60's. Many of the schools in the area began as single sex schools. However, with the start of the 60's came the beginning of the end of single sex schools. Many all-girls colleges such as Skidmore, Connecticut College and Vassar became Co-Ed. The local high school, Crystal Springs, became Co-Ed school when it merged with Uplands School. This trend gave rise to the second cause of Menlo's decision. Because Menlo was still all male, and many other schools in the area were no longer only boys or only girls, enrollment at Menlo (numerically) fell below average. There was simply more competition for prospective students. The administrators at Menlo realized that if Menlo was to continue to be the best high school in the area, they were going to have to open the doors to girls, which would also attract those boys whose only problem with Menlo was its lack of femininity. According to both

an alumnus, and an administrator, these two justifications have proven to be the biggest stimuli for the decision to go Co-Ed.