

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

Editor's Note – We are continuing our reprinting of the History of the Schools of Sierra Valley articles in this issue. We will revisit the Sierraville School article written by Arlene Amodei in 2004 when the school was still being utilized for classroom instruction.

Sierraville School

By Arlene Amodei

The Sierraville-Randolph school was probably the first built in the valley. The first settlement – in what is now Randolph – began when W.C. and B.F. Lemmon and Ezra Culver constructed the first cabin in 1852. By 1862 both communities were thriving with hay and lumber being shipped to the Territory of Nevada in such quantity that the lumber mills could barely keep up with the demand. By 1865 the native hay land was being plowed and planted with grains. This venture was so profitable that the people met and voted to raise six hundred dollars for the purpose of building a schoolhouse between the two towns.



That same year, in April, the winter term of the school closed and Miss Parker, the teacher, was induced to teach an additional two months without vacation.

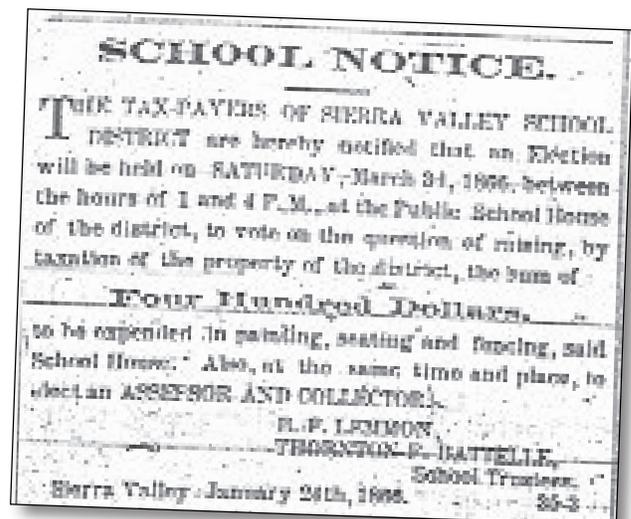
Obviously, there was a school in the area before 1865. A vote on a tax to raise \$400 was taken in 1866. The money was to be used for painting and improving the existing school. Was a new school built later between

the two towns? What happened to the first school? Sources are scarce on this issue. The following notice appeared in the Mountain Messenger in 1866, showing that there was indeed a school in place at that time.

There was a school built between the two towns during the summer and early fall of 1875. In December of that year a grand ball was given at the new schoolhouse to raise funds to finish and furnish it. It was built on the current location of the Sierraville School.

A Mountain Messenger reporter commemorated this event with the article below:

“The people of Randolph and Sierraville, as a compromise, have built a M. E. Church and a schoolhouse midway between the two towns. The schoolhouse is a fine structure, the best in the valley, and here is found a first-class school and one of California’s live teachers, Mr. E.L. Case, an Ohioan, to whom they are proud to pay \$125 per month. We are sorry to say we saw some poor schoolhouses in the valley.”



Sierraville School - (Cont. on Page 3) —

— THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY —



The Sierra County Historical Society is an organization of people interested in preserving and promoting an appreciation of Sierra County's rich history. The Society operates a museum at the Kentucky Mine in Sierra City, holds an annual meeting, publishes a newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of Society activities, receive THE SIERRAN, and are admitted free-of-charge to the museum and stamp mill tour. If you would like to become involved in these activities or would just like to give your support, please join us!

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Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are due and payable each January for the calendar year.

Membership categories are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL	\$20.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION	\$25.00
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Message From the President

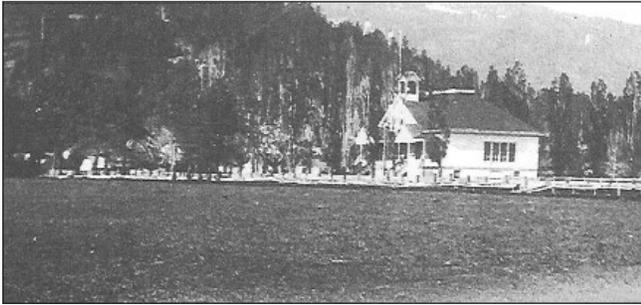
Mary Nourse

As we embark on a new year, the Sierra County Historical Society Board of Directors would like to thank you for your support. Your generous donations allow us to continue the work of preserving our precious local history. In 2017 we were able to have the historic Sierraville School placed on both the state and national registers of historic places. We also reprinted two of our popular books about the historic barns and homes of the Sierra Valley, and hosted a book signing event for Laura Thomas, author of *Gold Miner's Daughter*. In September we costumed up and participated in the Sierra Valley Ag and Art Tour.

As always, we worked in concert with the US Forest Service to protect the habitat of our Townsend Big-eared bat colony and with Sierra County on maintenance of the Kentucky Mine Museum building. Since Sierra County owns the structure, the Board of Supervisors dedicated \$15,000 toward repairs of the caretaker's apartment. Besides general repairs, painting, and installing new flooring; the long-standing concern of having a wood-burning fireplace above the museum was remedied by replacing that unit with a propane model. The new year will see our caretaker Bill Davey in residence. (See page 8 for pictures of the remodeled apartment)

In 2018 SCHS will lend a hand to the Truckee Donner Land Trust in its quest to restore the Webber Lake Hotel, and we will upgrade fixtures and exhibits at the Kentucky Mine Museum. We hope to expand the museum schedule to be open seven days a week. Our Music at the Mineproducer, Chris Stockdale, has a great line-up of summer concerts for you. Our goal is to acquire a golf cart to shuttle folks up the hill to the amphitheater. Please visit or volunteer at the Kentucky Mine any time this summer; we'd love to see you there!

Sierraville School - (Cont. from Page 1) —



Schools were paid for by the local communities through the issuing of bonds or levying taxes. Each school was its own district and was governed by a three-member board of trustees. Non-necessities, such as a library, or musical instruments were paid for through community fundraising. During the eighties, a bond issue was passed for a new school in Sierraville. Was that a third school? Or perhaps just an addition to the 1875 school?

Sierraville School then, was similar and different from today. The length of a complete term was 10 months, usually commencing in September and ending in June. There was both a primary school and a grammar school. The primary school was for the younger, less educated students and the grammar school for the older, better qualified students. This was like today's middle school and only had male teachers. In 1897 there was a total of 95 students enrolled. Most learning was by memorization. Margaret Burelle recalled that she learned to read by memorizing the word cards arranged along the chalk rail, and an older student helped her when needed. She also stated that if she got into trouble at school, she would be in a lot worse trouble when she got home! By 1908 the Sierra Valley Joint Union High School District was organized, and a



branch was established at Sierraville in 1918. See *Sierra Valley Jewel of the Sierras*, page 172, for a description of the three courses offered in the high school. All departments were housed in the same building.

On May 29, 1929, the school burned. At the trustees meeting on June 20, 1929, a new school budget for the building was set at between \$8,000 and \$10,000 with \$4,000 coming from the insurance of the old building. The architect's plans for the new school called for a concrete building costing \$23,000 or \$16,000 for a frame building. Both were rejected by the trustees who insisted that the building have a corrugated iron roof and shingled walls.

**DISASTROUS FIRE
AT SIERRAVILLE
LAST WEDNESDAY**

**Overheated Stove at School House Causes Roof to Catch
Fire and Building Is Totally Destroyed—Part
of Contents Saved by Quick Work.**

The Sierraville school house burned to the ground Wednesday noon of this week. The grammar school and high school had just been dismissed for the noon hour and Mrs. Jane Johnson, high school teacher, and Miss Hazel Adams, pupil, were alone in the building when smoke was noticed coming from the roof. George Beall, Frank Turner and Burless Heston, who were eating lunch on the school grounds, were the first to discover the fire and immediately notified Mrs. Johnson, who hurried to her automobile and went for help. George Beall stayed in the burning building and rang the school bell to attract the crowd people. In a very few minutes everyone in town was at the scene of the fire and all efforts to save the building proved futile. The Forest Service got the chemical engine to the fire at once, but owing to the dry condition of the building, together with the start it had got, it was soon found that nothing could be done to successfully combat the flames.

The high school boys and Mr. Heston, together, succeeded in saving the organ, piano, desks and books, as well as chemicals from the laboratory, which were carried out of the building before the flames reached the classrooms.

The fire is supposed to have been caused by a defective fire, it was cleaned up at the school and papers and rubbish had been burned in the school stove, which at times became over-heated. The roof must in some way have caught fire from the over-heated fire and burned slowly until discovered.

The burning of the school is a serious loss to Sierraville, but would have been an even greater loss had the catastrophe occurred in the middle of the semester. Steps will be taken at once to rebuild in order to have a school building ready for the fall term in September.

Mountain Messenger, June 1, 1929.

The trustees wanted to have the new building ready for the opening of school in September, but that did not happen. A state law prohibiting the spending of money before it was received made building at that time impossible, as did the veto of all wooden structures

Sierraville School - (Cont. on Page 4) —

Sierraville School - (Cont. from Page 3) —

by the representative of the State Board of Education. That representative, Mr. Andrew Hill, sent a letter to H.A. Turner on June 20, 1930, authorizing the trustees to immediately start the completion of the working drawings, and in an end note to Mr. H.G. Adams, one of the Sierraville trustees added the following:

“Above is a copy of a letter to Mr. Turner that explains itself. I was, I am sure, as happy as you over the bonds carrying with such a fine majority. Sierraville stands to have the best schoolhouse in Sierra County, and those of you who stayed with the boat and fought the thing through are to be congratulated, for, I am sure, the future will point toward your having started a program of school improvement that will not stop with Sierraville.”

From 1929-1931 the elementary students, with Paul Roscoe as their principal, attended school at the old Congregational Church, and the high school students attended school in a building that had been the parsonage of that church. James Sinnott was the principal. The new building was completed by January, 1931, and consisted of an elementary school classroom, a science room, a library, a high school classroom, a smaller room for business type classes, a small kitchen and a “play room”. The “play room” and stage area were floored with maple hardwood. The contract is reproduced here. The last payment of \$7,753.50 was made to the contractor David Nordstrom, February 19, 1931. A grand ball was held to celebrate the new school in the same month. The final cost exceeded the initial budget by over 100%, but by today’s standards, it was very inexpensive and was paid for willingly by the local community with some county money for the high school portion.



Until about 1945 the high school students attended school at Sierraville, and after that were transported to Loyalton. The young men who attended have some great stories to tell about happenings in the shop, and about their treatment of the staff members. The elementary students were taught by Mr. Paul Roscoe – all eight grades!



The elementary school students circa 1934. Back: Vincent Amodei, unknown, Paul Roscoe, Kate Deller, Ken Walters, Boyd Davis, Bill Bearce. Middle: Lowell Davis, Harry Deller, Bill Deller, Jackie Plumber, Edmond Bony, Lawrence Plumber. Front: Lucy Amodei, Doris Deller, Hazel Davis, Alvin Amodei, Laverne Blatchy, Alma Deller. Photo courtesy of Betty Deller



The elementary school circa 1938. Students include, Back: Margretta Strong, Paul Roscoe, Francis Torri, Don Matterola, Don Webber, and Alvin Amodei. Middle: Gloria Amodei, Cledith Webber, Virginia Copren, Ed Roscoe, and Rena Amodei. Front: John Childres, Don Deller, Bill Dotta, Bing Dotta, Fred Deller, and Gary Koffard.

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Sierraville School - (Cont. from Page 4) —

In 1950 the elementary schools were unified and the ensuing district, Sierra-Plumas Joint Unified School District came under the management of the district board of trustees. At the time of this unification, Sierraville was the only community school that was paid for by its community, rather than with county side funds.

It had always been a community school with many functions held there, free-of-charge to the community. Brides and mothers to be were honored at community showers with fifty to seventy-five guests. Potluck dinners and town meetings were held there. Rising school costs and Prop. 13 changed all that, and now there are restrictions on the use of the school facilities. Sadly, the members of the community are not as close as they once were with the loss of this gathering place. Hopefully this will be rectified in the near future.

DAILY PROGRAM OF CLASS ACTIVITIES
OK
GRADE 6

For Term Beginning *August 31* 1911, and Ending *June 3* 1912.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00 - 9:10			Opening Lessons		
9:10 - 9:20	1 st Math				
9:20 - 9:30	2 nd "				
9:30 - 9:40	3 rd "				
9:40 - 9:50	4 th "				
9:50 - 10:00	5 th "				
10:00 - 10:10	6 th "				
10:10 - 10:20	7 th "				
10:20 - 10:30	8 th "				
10:30 - 10:40	1 st Reading				
10:40 - 10:50	2 nd "				
10:50 - 11:00	3 rd "				
11:00 - 11:10	4 th "				
11:10 - 11:20	5 th "	5 th Reading	5 th Reading	5 th Reading	Spells
11:20 - 11:30	6 th "				
11:30 - 11:40	7 th Reading	7 th Reading	7 th Reading	7 th Reading	
11:40 - 11:50	8 th "	8 th "	8 th "	8 th "	
12:00 - 1:00	1 st Reading				
1:00 - 1:10	2 nd "				
1:10 - 1:20	3 rd Language				
1:20 - 1:30	4 th "				
1:30 - 1:40	5 th Spelling				
1:40 - 1:50	6 th Spelling				
1:50 - 2:00	7 th Spelling				
2:00 - 2:10	8 th "				
2:10 - 2:20	9 th "	9 th "	9 th "	Civics	8 th "
2:20 - 2:30	10 th "				
2:30 - 2:40	11 th "				
2:40 - 2:50	12 th "				
2:50 - 3:00	13 th "				
3:00 - 3:10	14 th "				
3:10 - 3:20	15 th "				
3:20 - 3:30	16 th "				
3:30 - 3:40	17 th "				
3:40 - 3:50	18 th "				
3:50 - 4:00	19 th "				
4:00 - 4:10	20 th "				
4:10 - 4:20	21 st "				
4:20 - 4:30	22 nd "				
4:30 - 4:40	23 rd "				
4:40 - 4:50	24 th "				
4:50 - 5:00	25 th "				
5:00 - 5:10	26 th "				
5:10 - 5:20	27 th "				
5:20 - 5:30	28 th "				
5:30 - 5:40	29 th "				
5:40 - 5:50	30 th "				
5:50 - 6:00	31 st "				

Enrollment fluctuates. In the past when Sierraville enrollment was down, students were transported from Loyalton to ease the crowding there. In the late 1950s, Loyalton's fourth graders were housed at Sierraville, and in the late 1970s Loyalton students attended Sierraville on a volunteer basis. In the 1980s enrollment soared to

over 80 students K-6; an extra teacher was hired adding another classroom to the existing three. The school board voted to have a modular classroom permanently installed on the premises. Today, this building is the administrative offices of both the District and County Offices of Education. By 2000 the enrollment had dropped so severely that the 4-6 grades were sent to Loyalton to the middle school and the elementary school there.

This school always maintained high academic standards. It was not unusual to have Sierraville students graduating as valedictorian and salutatorian of the Loyalton High School, and in one instance at least, of Downieville High School. Many of the students go on to colleges and universities.

Support of its students has always been a goal of the community. In a meeting on November 14, 1930, a chapter of the Parent Teachers Association was organized at Sierraville. Miss Georgine Graff (later Mrs. William Copren) was president, and for many years she served as a guiding figure in the education of students in the Sierra Valley. The PTA is largely responsible for the huge success of this school. In 1932 there was concern that many students had only cold lunches, so the ladies took on the chore of providing hot soup on a daily basis for the children. Their fundraising activities were responsible for providing the students with many amenities that would not otherwise be possible. No student who attended this school would forget the Halloween parties, Easter egg hunts, or the year-end swim party which was held for many years at McLeans in Mohawk Valley.



In addition to the PTA, volunteers have greatly contributed to the curriculum over the years. In the early 1980s Jan Drummond volunteered to teach music,

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Sierraville School - (Continued from Page 5) —

and for nearly fifteen years Mazie Carnell volunteered as librarian and to enrich the children's learning experience with hands-on science. Many parents became classroom aides, and their contribution was much needed and appreciated.



In 1981 Sierraville had a 50th anniversary party. Former teachers, superintendents, students and parents were invited to attend. It was a wonderful day of reminiscing and getting reacquainted for all. Lucy Amodei Anderson enjoyed telling how the elementary students decorated the classroom for the Christmas play. They had wooden templates and the children used them to create Christmas scenes on the many blackboards in the room using colored chalk. The blackboards are gone now, but the chalk rails are still there to remind visitors that the room had once housed eight grades and many blackboards were needed to post and practice lessons.

The Christmas program at Sierraville is unique, having been held for over 100 years, and on the same stage for the past 70 years. The first reference to this program is in 1869, stating it had been canceled because of an epidemic of measles. Later the program was held at Pritchard Hall as a community Christmas party. Pritchard Hall was located on the north side of the junction of Highway 89 and 49. The Christmas party by M. Pritchard was for the Sattley and Sierraville area ranchers and their families.

The first program at the school was held in 1875 in conjunction with a grand ball to celebrate the newly built school. The ball and Christmas program were held that year to raise funds to finish the interior work. Long-time teacher, Margaret Burelle, reported that her father, William Copren Sr., appeared in the Christmas program in the 1880s. He returned to the schools as principal in 1902-07 and was responsible for continuing this Christmas tradition. Paul Roscoe, principal at Sierraville for forty years beginning in 1926, helped combine the community and school program at the current school site where it has been held yearly since then.

In the beginning the program was financed by donations from the community and PTA. Volunteers met before the program and filled small brown bags with oranges, ribbon candy and chocolate drops. These were passed out to all in attendance by Santa. Since 1980, the program has been supported by the Goldie Chapin Legacy for Sierraville School. Mrs. Chapin and her husband attended the programs at Sierraville for many years. Having no children, and having enjoyed the children's performances in Sierraville, they left the school the means to support its Christmas program without having to ask the community for financial assistance. The money is used to buy all students and preschoolers gifts, such as sweatshirts, backpacks, T shirts, and windbreakers. The choir risers and Christmas decorations were also purchased with this fund. Each year different classes, under the direction of the teachers, presented plays for the community. Former principal Beverly Back increased the musical presentations that are now a tradition. Volunteers Mary Ann Garton, Jan Drumond, Ann Eldred, and Mary Hanrahan helped set the standard for musical excellence at this program.



*Sierraville was, is, and always will be a community school devoted to
excellence in education and the well being of its students.*

SOURCES

Mountain Messenger, April 15, 1865

Sierra Valley Jewel of the Sierras by James J. Sinnott, 1976, p. 174

Mountain Messenger, March 4, 1876

Formal Education and the Schools in Sierra County, 1880-1890, Sierra County Historical Society, Vol. 3, Number 1, by William Copren

Mountain Messenger, June 29, 1929

Hale Collection: documents from 1929-31

Mountain Messenger, January 16, 1869



Sierraville Elementary School Teachers

William D. Ever	1869	Irene Gray	1918
Miss Lawry	1888	Abigail A. Welch	1919
E.L. Case	1887-91	Lura Landis	1919
Marvin Power	1887-91	Harry A. Skinner	1920
Kate E. Brown	1888-90	David W. Brown	1921-24
Etta Meily	1890	Allyn O. Taylor	1924-26
Mittie U. Myers	1892	Paul C. Roscoe	1926-64
Minnie E. Northrop	1891	Gloria Russell	1937
E.L. Spinks	1893	Miss Ruth Spangler	1939
Blanche Rawdon	1893	Miss Elinor McGorty	1940
George E. Arnold	1894-1901	Miss Eloise Ference	1941
Miss Minnie Northrop	1894	Mrs. Margaret Burelle	1946-49
Miss Nellie Albee	1895-98		<i>and...</i> 1952-74
Walter Kynoch	1896-1900	Mrs. Alma Moore	1949-52
O.P. Palstine	1901	Mrs. Ruth Hudson	1953
Grace L. Nichols	1901-1906	Mrs. Selma Genasci	1954
M.P. Donnelly	1907-11	Margaret C. Hansard	1955
Edna Hamlin	1907	James Simpson	1956
Mrs. R.W.T. Garner	1907-11	Alice McCulloch	1956
Z.P. Millington	1909	Mrs. Jeanne Crane	1957
E.J. Cuthbertson	1909	Mrs. Florence Lombardi	1958-64
William R. Lane	1910-12	Mrs. Arlene Amodei	1964-69
Elizabeth Dearwater	1912		<i>and...</i> 1979-96
Mrs. Helen Turner	1912	Charles Miller	1964
E.W. Ekstrand	1913-15	Jay Haman	1965-74
J.B. Johnson	1915	Olivia McCaffrey	1969-73
Eph L. Musick	1916	Miss Vera Mack	1974-76
Arthur E. Mills	1917-19	Leonard Canepa	1975-79
Eletha Shields	1917	Mrs. Mary Genasci	1976

The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Pictures of the Caretaker's...

See "Message From the President" article on page 2 for details.



REMODELED APARTMENT!

