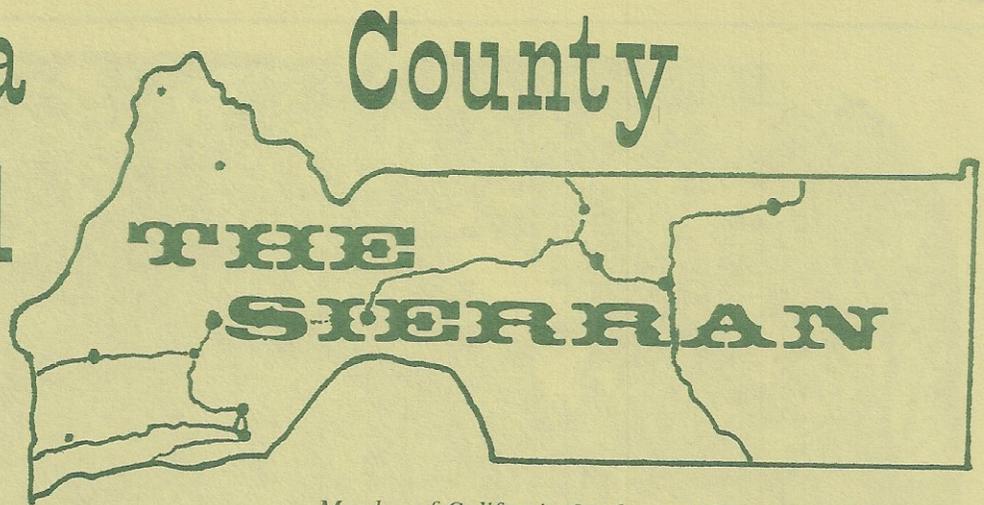


# Sierra Historical Society



*Member of California Conference of Historical Societies*

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## HISTORY OF THE EARLY SCHOOLS OF SIERRA COUNTY

### SCHOOLS OF WESTERN SIERRA COUNTY

The earliest white men to come into Sierra County were the miners who came to find gold in the west side of the county. There was almost a total absence of women in the early mining camps until the fall of 1851. By the middle of 1853, the first school in Sierra County was under way.

#### *Downieville*

Sierra County's first school was a private one, started in Downieville in the spring of 1853. The finances necessary were raised by subscription from the few families who had children. Since teaching was not a very lucrative profession, each of the first three men who tried his hand at it soon resigned. In the fall of 1853, a Mrs. Schoemaker established a school in a town building with a succession of men following her as teachers.

In 1856, Mr. George Hardy (grandfather of Belle Alexander, whose article appears in this Bulletin) started a subscription list to raise money to build a schoolhouse. He raised \$800 and the contract was let to George Webber and another party for \$780. At this time, the public also owed a considerable amount of money to the former teachers. To defray this debt, a theatrical performance was given in the Downieville Theater. The play was a huge success, netting about \$700.

The new school, located on Jersey Flat, opened in 1857 with an enrollment of 20 pupils. In 1861, the building was raised 8 feet to allow for a basement to house the primary pupils. By 1882 there were 151 pupils — the biggest enrollment in the county.



The Downieville School in 1902.

By 1886, there was need for a new school building, and through a bond issue the funds were raised. The new schoolhouse, constructed in 1887, stood on the site of the present school building in Downieville. The building was used until the 1950's, when it was torn down and the present Downieville School facility was built.

#### New Historical Society Policy

Beginning this season, Sierra County Historical Society members will be admitted free of charge to the Kentucky Mine Museum and stamp mill tour. Come and visit the Museum.



**SIERRA CITY SCHOOL 1870** — Julius A. Wixson was the teacher at the Sierra City School in 1870, when this photograph was taken by Murrey Dunham. The schoolhouse, built in 1883, was in use until 1954. It later became a business establishment.

#### *Sierra City*

A private school with 7 scholars was started in a room under the Masonic Hall in Sierra City in 1863. After six months, due to lack of students, it was discontinued. The private school was opened again 5 years later, in 1868, and the following year it began to draw state money, becoming a public school. By 1882, there were 62 pupils in attendance.

A schoolhouse was built in 1883, and was expanded to include a Primary Room in 1888. The schoolhouse was used until 1954, when students began attending school in Downieville. The schoolhouse building is still standing, and is now the location of Buttes View Lumber and Supply.

#### *Goodyear's Bar*

A private school was started for the few children in Goodyear's Bar in 1856. A schoolhouse was built in 1862 by public subscription. This building was also used for church and other public gatherings. It appears from all accounts that this building escaped the fire of 1864, and is the schoolhouse building which is still standing in Goodyear's Bar.

In 1859, the school became a public school. Enrollment in that year was 35 students. In 1866, the school became a part of the Alta School District. The school in Goodyear's Bar was used until 1953. After this time, students attended school in Downieville.

*Purdy*

A school was located in the settlement of Purdy, which is on the east side of Sierra County near the Nevada state border. It was located near the old California "bug station." Josephine R. Boyle, who had also taught in Alleghany, taught here at the turn of the century.

*Butte*

The Butte School District was active from 1898-1904, and again from 1922-1927.

*Clare*

The Clare School District, adjacent to the Alpine School District, was formed in 1881. When Calpine became a thriving lumber town in 1919, a new schoolhouse was built; this building is the present Sherwood Park Restaurant and Bar. Because of a large school enrollment for several years the first and second grade students attended school right in Calpine in a small building across the street from the present lodge. This building is presently a private home. High school students attended Sierraville High School. The school building in Calpine was used until 1943; in this year elementary students began attending school in Sierraville.

*Rocky Point*

The Rocky Point School District was formed in the late 1860's and was located on the west side of Sierra Valley near the present Plumas County boundary. In 1882 this school had 19 pupils in attendance. It was closed in 1896 and the schoolhouse was moved three times — moving to where the children were rather than transporting them to the school.

The schoolhouse was originally on a rocky point of land near the old McElroy Ranch (now owned by Dan Russell) on the west side of the road going from Beckwourth to Sattley, near the Sierra and Plumas County boundary. It was moved to the Freeman Ranch (now also owned by Dan Russell), and Josephine Humphrey was a teacher there. Next it was moved near the present Sherwood Park Bar near Calpine and was known as the "Little Red Schoolhouse." This building burned.

JOIN THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY! SEND \$5.00 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES TO P.O. BOX 260, SIERRA CITY, CA 96125.



On their best behavior, the students of the Loyalton School pose for the photographer in October of 1912.

SCHOOLS OF NORTHWESTERN SIERRA COUNTY

Northwestern Sierra County, now sparseley populated, once was an area of booming mining towns. From the 1850's through the early 1900's, hydraulic and drift mining flourished, as miners recovered gold from gravels where ancient rivers once flowed. Today there is often only a trace left of these towns; foundation stones, scattered buildings, cemetaries, and remains of old mine workings are reminders that these were not always ghost towns, as they are today.

*Howland Flat*

Settled in the early 1850's, Howland Flat was thriving by the early 1860's. The town had a population of 2,000. In May of 1864, construction was begun on a schoolhouse, which was ready in June. Miss Larkin was the first teacher, \$500 was raised by subscription and the school usually had about 20-25 students. Howland Flat School was in use until 1923. The school district was called Table Rock District.

*Saint Louis*

Saint Louis was located midway between La Porte and Howland Flat. It was first settled in the 1850's and was quite an active mining town until about 1915. A school was opened in Saint Louis in 1853, funded by subscription, and enrolling 20 students. Two years later a school building was constructed. The school was in operation until 1914.

*Gibsonville*

Gibsonville, located 8 miles northeast of La Porte, was settled in 1850, and by 1859 was a thriving town. A school was in operation from 1866-1915, often closing during the winter when snows were deep and the mines slowed to minimal activity.

*Poker Flat*

The town of Poker Flat was located on Canyon Creek 18 miles from Downieville. Its first public school was begun in 1863, when it became a school district. Before this time, children had attended small private schools or had been tutored at home. The Poker Flat school also had students enrolled from the nearby settlements of Deadwood and Bunker Hill. The school was in operation at least until the early 1900's.

*Port Wine*

Port Wine and Queen City were mining towns located near La Porte. A school in Port Wine was in existence at least by 1866. A schoolhouse was in use which later burned in 1888. In 1866, enrollment at the school was 19 students. The Port Wine School District was active until about 1910.

*Scales*

A public school in Scales was in operation between the years of 1885-1922. The school district was titled Union District. Enrollment in 1885 was 25 students.

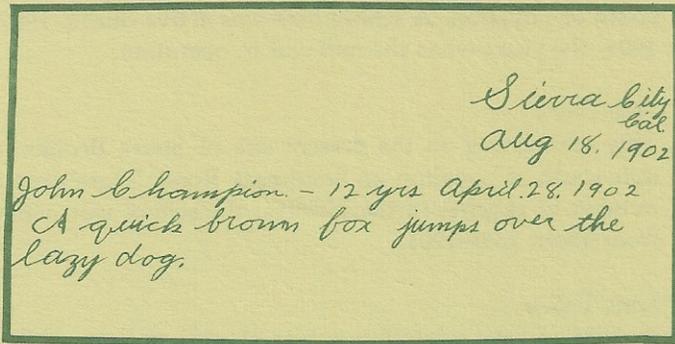
*Newark and Poverty Hill*

School districts were also in existence in Newark, located near Gibsonville, and in Poverty Hill, located near Scales. Information concerning these schools is not available, however, they were listed among the districts active in 1882.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS ACTIVE IN 1882

School	Attendance
Alleghany	—
Alpine	24
Antelope	21
Butte	62
Clare	11
Downieville	151
Eureka	18
Forest	138
Gibsonville	38
Goodyears	31
Long Point	12
Long Valley	24
Loyalton	45
Minnesota	20
Mount Pleasant	21
Newark	12
Plum Valley	30
Poverty Hill	21
Poker Flat	10
Rocky Point	19
Sierraville	78
St. Louis	36
Table Rock	51
Union	26
Washington	17





### Alleghany

The first school in Alleghany was built in 1854. It was a two-story building, constructed for use as both a Methodist Church and a school. Funds were raised by subscription; for an extra \$500, the lower room was made into a schoolroom. In 1859 there were 65 children in the Alleghany School District, and this enrollment had increased to 100 by 1862. Although this school district was receiving some state and county funds by the late 1850's, often local citizens had to subscribe funds to keep the school open, especially during the winter months.

The heavy snow of 1863 caved in the roof of the church-school building, and it wasn't until 1870 that a new school building was erected. During the years of 1863-1870 it is likely that school was held in various buildings in town, none of them actually being a schoolhouse. The school building of 1870 was used as a Masonic Hall and a school. This building burned in 1904, and, with money from General Public Funds, a new schoolhouse was built in 1905. This school was in use until it was condemned in 1934. The school building existing today was completed in 1937.

### Forest City

In 1854, a private school was started in Forest City. It was held in a room under the Odd Fellows Hall. By 1857 this had become a public school, receiving funds from the state and county. A two-room schoolhouse was erected in 1874 at the cost of \$2,000. This money was raised by dramatic events put on by the local people. In 1882 the Forest School District had an enrollment of 138 pupils, the second highest enrollment in the county. This figure indicates that the heaviest populations in the county resided in the now booming gold mining towns.

A high school was established in Forest City in 1932. This school was used until 1937; in that year, high school students from Forest City began attending the school in Alleghany. The Forest City Elementary School was discontinued in 1943.

### SIERRA VALLEY SCHOOLS

Sierra Valley, in the eastern half of the county, was not settled as early as the gold mining area. Because this was agricultural land and the ranches were miles from each other, schools did not start as early as in the western part of the county.

### Sierraville

Although there was a post office established in Sierraville in 1858, the first school on record was not in operation until 1867. In a *Mountain Messenger* news item of January 16, 1869, as quoted in *Sierra Valley, Jewel of the Sierras* by James Sinnott, it is noted that "owing to the illness of the teacher, the Sierraville School closed before Christmas, and persons who had moved into the village for the privilege of attending it have returned to their ranches. It is expected that the school will be reopened as soon as the scholars recover from the measles which is now pervading the vicinity." It further states that 45 children were on the sick list, which would indicate that with that many children in the area, the school may have been in operation a year or so before this. A news item of June 6, 1867 stated that the Rev. I. B. Fish, Superintendent of Schools, was in the area and planned to preach that evening in the Sierraville-Randolph schoolhouse. Another news item, of November 13, 1869, states that a Mr. William D. Ewer was hired for the Sierra Valley School (Sierraville) for the term commencing November 1st and that since Mr. Willis had "closed his labors at Loyaltown," the Sierraville School would be the only one open that winter.

A private school, called the Sierraville Select School, under the direction of E. L. Case opened in 1872. Again quoting from Mr. Sinnott's book: "In July of 1874 Mr. Case, with about ten of his pupils of the "select" school, and Professor J. G. Lemmon and others, went on a botanical and fishing excursion to Gold Lake from Sierraville." Mr. Case, who became County Superintendent of Schools, and held that post from 1886-1891, was also thinking of establishing a high school in Sierraville so as to prepare students for university entrance. However, Mr. Case gave up the private school in 1877 to become a teacher in the public school in a new school building.

The new schoolhouse was built in 1875 and was situated between Randolph and Sierraville on the present school site. A Grand Ball was held in the new building to raise funds for school furnishings. By 1882, there were 78 pupils enrolled in the school. In 1890 there were 35 pupils in the grammar school and 57 in the primary school. This schoolhouse burned in 1929; a new one was erected on the same site in 1930.



**SATTLE SCHOOL 1892** — The Sattley school, in Alpine School District, was moved twice. The school first opened in the early 1880's and this photograph was taken in 1892, when Bradford Newman was the teacher. Shown above are: (back row, l to r) Arthur Strang, John Burney, Harriet Church Humphrey, Edwin Church, Lottie Turner, Daisy Turner, Parker Miller, Frank Copren, Charlie Toomey, Suzette Copren, Jennie Toomey; (girls seated) Jennie Church Copren, Hattie Beaton, Alice Church Robertson, Agnes Berry; (two boys, seated) John and Charlie Copren; (three children, seated) David McNeer, Grace Foules, Charlie McNeer.

### Loyalton

The date for the first schoolhouse in Loyalton seems uncertain. According to *History of Plumas, Lassen, and Sierra Counties* by Fariss and Smith, the first schoolhouse was built in 1865. In an article in the *Plumas National Bulletin* of February 20, 1913, Mr. W. O. Peck wrote: "The first schoolhouse was built in about 1868. It was located near the present Catholic Church of today." James Sinnott in his book *Sierra Valley: Jewel of the Sierras* states that in the summer of 1869 the Rev. Doon and Mr. Rees built a combined schoolhouse and Methodist Church. The present social hall of the Loyalton Catholic Church (used as their church for many years) is the old Elementary School used in the 1880's and 1890's.

In 1873, the school district bought a hotel in town and used it as a school building. After a fire in 1879, a new school building was erected. There were 45 pupils in attendance in 1882. Due to increased enrollment, a new school building was built in 1903. This was used until construction of a joint high school and elementary school in Loyalton in 1938.

In 1959, the new high school was built; the Loyalton Elementary School was built in 1967.

### Lewis Mill

Lewis Mill was located on Smithneck Road 10 miles south of Loyalton. A school here was active during 1900-1905, the years when the mill was in operation.

### Pine Creek

This school was on the present site of Sierra Brooks, a mile south of Loyalton on Smithneck Road. There were a number of ranches in the vicinity; the school was active from about 1888-1901.

### Long Valley

In 1888, a new schoolhouse was erected in Long Valley near what was later to be called Hallelujah Junction. It was used until 1908, then closed. It reopened from 1938-1940 and again from 1947-1952.

### Antelope

The Antelope School District was in existence in 1871. In 1882 there were 21 students enrolled. A new schoolhouse was built in the summer of 1888 by the sale of \$800 in bonds. The school was closed, however, and the next year the district was annexed to the Island School District farther north in the valley.

The original location of the schoolhouse that was the Antelope School was somewhere north of Lombardi Point and east of the George Filippini ranch. That building was moved west of Loyalton and stood north of the present Highway 49 to the left of the cattle guard going into the Filippini ranch. The site of the well for the school can still be seen.

Caesar Lombardi attended the Antelope School. His son, Alvin Lombardi, has his father's third grade reader with the name Antelope School and his teacher's name, Helen Turner, on the inside cover with the date of 1898.

### Long Point

The Long Point School District was formed in 1909. It closed in 1916, was opened from 1923-1931 and again from 1937-1946.

A small new school building was erected in 1909 near the Charles Jones ranch (now owned by the Muldowneys). When the school population here decreased, the building was moved to a point north of Highway 49 near the junction of that road and the road into the George Filippini ranch. From there the building was transported two miles east to the present Don Vanetti residence. When the school was closed in 1946 the building was moved into the west end of Loyalton near Cemetery Lane where it was used for some years by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In 1981, the building was purchased by Pamela Metcalf, a Loyalton teacher, and moved next to her home on the Bruce Miles ranch.

## A PERSONAL HISTORY OF EARLY DAY SCHOOLS

by

Miss Belle Alexander

My grandfather, George Hardy, came to Downieville in 1849 and returned to Illinois in 1851 for his wife and three children, the youngest child being my mother, who was then three years old. After reaching Marysville, they came up the river on horseback, and miners, working along the river and seeing them passing on the trail above, would pause long enough to put their hands to their mouths and shout to let the miners working up the river know that they were coming, as few women and children had reached Downieville at that time.

My mother first went to private school in Downieville, but later a school building was erected on a lot almost opposite the house now occupied by Mrs. Lambert on Pearl Street, and she attended there. When sixteen years of age, a friend of her father's came from Sattley to secure a teacher for the school there, and asked her why she did not try the teachers' examination, as she could have the school if she received a County certificate. She decided to take the test, so the School Superintendent, I.B. Fish, met with two of the other members and prepared the questions. Her teacher, Noah Flood, who was a member of the Board, seated her in a corner of the school room at a table where she would be by herself and she wrote the test. At that time there were five "test" subjects in which one had to make a certain percent regardless of the standing in other subjects, and it is interesting to me that, at that time, there were five of those subjects while at a later date there were but three, Arithmetic, Grammar and Spelling. In that test, Spelling was omitted as a test subject and U.S. History, Geography and Theory and Practice of teaching were included. There were eight other subjects, with several "extras" one could take to raise the standing if he wished, and she passed the test and received a second grade certificate.

There was, at that time, no road from Downieville to Sierra Valley and the trail followed the ridge across the river from their house, which was on the level place now owned by Mr. White. Later they bought the place where the Slate Castle Auto Camp now is, on which was a large house. I have heard my mother tell of standing at the window and seeing the mules laden with hay winding their way down the ridge at one point bound for Downieville. I believe the trail came into town near where the Matthew house stands.

When she went to Sattley, her belongings were packed in a small leather trunk which was strapped to the back of the mule, and she rode another animal while her father walked. While teaching, she "boarded round" as it was

called, staying with each family that had children in school as many weeks as there were children attending school from that family.

She next taught in Sierra City and I have often heard her mention people who lived there at that time, some members of whose family still live there. She next taught in Morrystown, and later finished a term at Meadow Lake, in Nevada County. The school was about to lapse the next year and they wanted to have school as long as the money would last.

While she was teaching at Morrystown, her brother taught a term at Eureka, not far distant, as it was quite a town then with stores, a hotel, etc. Later, one of her sisters taught at Minnesota, which was also a thriving community at that time situated across Kanaka Creek from Alleghany. Her youngest sister taught at Indian Hill — about 1885, I think, when hydraulic mining was still in progress and some children came from Indian Valley. Later this school was moved to Luce's Mill, near Camptonville and I visited it several times when I first became Superintendent. Afterward the school equipment was moved to Brandy City, where school was maintained for a number of years during a temporary mining boom at that place.

I speak of these almost forgotten districts because, to me, it is interesting to know about them. Other more recent districts which are lapsed are Howland Flat (Table Rock Dist.), Gibsonville, St. Louis, Port Wine (Union Dist.), Scales (Mt. Pleasant Dist.), and Poker Flat — the latter has been lapsed for years, but I attended school at one time. In another part of the county were Loganville, Clare Dist. Alleghany, Long Point, Lewis Mill, Antelope, and a little school over the hills from Loyaltown in Long Valley where children of the little valley received their education, besides some later districts such as Forest, Plum Valley, which has an emergency school at this time, and some that have been gone for many years.

Some of the places mentioned have been gone so long that nothing remains to show that people ever lived there except huge masses of loose boulders where mining was carried on. Cedar trees are growing on the rock piles where they can get sustenance, and alders grow in damp places where Mother Nature is trying to cover the devastation made by the search for gold; and in the Sierra Valley region one sees meadows and willow fringed streams where once was heard the sound of the school bell calling the children to school. Forgotten? No, not by those who attended those little rural schools, for many fine men and women received their education in small district schools and are prone to wander back to childhood scenes and relive happy childhood in memory.

SIERRA COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

The school system in the late 1800's was divided into primary and grammar departments. The smaller communities had only primary departments; larger communities also had grammar schools. The grammar schools were similar to our junior high schools.

Before 1908, few people sent their children to high school, as they had to be sent too far from home. In that year, the Sierra Valley Joint Union High School District was organized which included 5 districts in Sierra County and 5 in Plumas County. Loyalton had the first high school in Sierra County — in 1908. A branch high school was started in Sierra City in 1917. A high school was incorporated into the Sierraville School in 1918. Forest City had a high school in 1932. Alleghany started a high school in 1937, which the Forest City students then attended also.

Teachers for all schools had to pass an examination which was administered by the Superintendent of Schools. Sierra County did not recognize certificates from other counties, but a temporary certificate would be issued until the next teacher's exam was given. It was possible for a student, upon graduation from a good grammar school, to pass the teacher's exam and at the age of 16-18 become a teacher.

In 1881 male teachers were paid an average of \$84 per month and female teachers \$68. Grammar school teachers, always men, received more than the primary teachers.

The first Teacher's Institute of Sierra County was held in Downieville in 1866.

County School Superintendents

David Gould Webber	1852-1854
R.J. Plunkett	1860-1862
Wm. C. Pond	1862-1864
Rev. I.B. Fish	1864-1867
J.H. Thorp	1868- ?
J.H. Wixson	1878-1886
E.L. Case	1886-1891
Thomas J. McGrath	1891-1895
F.H. Turner	1895-1899
Miss Josie Finane	1899-1903
Miss Belle Alexander	1903-1935
Miss Anna Forbe	1935-1939
Mrs. Edna Gottardi	1939-1943
James J. Sinnott	1943-1947
Mrs. Laura M. Johnson	1947-1951
Virgil S. Hollis	1951-1955
Gerald Gelatt	1956-1960
Clarence Bateman	1960-1975
Herbert Stocking	1975-1979
Charles Best	1979-present

Credits to the following:

Copren, William G. "Organized Education in Sierra County." *Sierra County Historical Society Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 1.

Fariss and Smith. *History of Plumas, Lassen, and Sierra Counties — 1882*. Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1971.

Sinnott, James J. Series of Books on Sierra County history.

Information published in 1950 on the history of Sierra County obtained from Mr. Milton Gottardi.

Interviews with many residents of Sierra Valley.



SIERRA COUNTY SCHOOLS

