

Burnt Ranch School District:

The Early History

The Burnt Ranch School area is known by the Chimariko name of Cutamtace or Tsuda'mdadji¹ and the Tsnungwe name of yinaq-dinung-ting (McDonald Ranch area of Burnt Ranch)². Although there are conflicting stories from different sources about how "Burnt Ranch" was named in English, at least two sources indicate Canadian minors burned down the Indian village there in 1849.³ This is supported by an article found in the Susie Baker Fountain papers in which "Grandma [Pauline] McDonald" states that "during a war between the Indians and white settlers, the Indians heard that the whites were coming, so they left. When the whites arrived and found no Indians, they burned down the Rancheria. From this came Burnt Ranch."⁴

The area was first believed by some early informants to be occupied by whites in 1853⁵ and was one of the oldest white settlements in Trinity County. The earliest identified White person to live in the area was C. W. Durkee.⁶ One area of Burnt Ranch was called McWhorter's Ranch or McWhorter's Homestead. Adams L. McWhorter and his wife Barbara owned different parcels and ranched there from 1870 to 1900. After James (Jim) McDonald, who owned and ranched a parcel nearby, married the McWhorter's daughter, the young couple took over the property, and it became known as the McWhorter-McDonald Ranch. The ranch also originally encompassed the Old Mill site, near the current Burnt Ranch School District's baseball field. Later, after the ranch was lost in the Depression, the Ranch was subdivided and called the Burnt Ranch Estates and was subdivided into individual lots.⁷

The first mention found so far about Burnt Ranch School was in February of 1883. The County Superintendent of Schools (Horace Given) visited the school for one-half of the day. J. M. Underwood was teaching at the time, making \$75 per month. He had been teaching for eight months, the same amount of time as a school term at that time. There were ten students enrolled, but only eight were present on the day of the visit. Mr. Underwood's teaching, as well as the progress of the students, were all rated as "good," but the state of the school grounds, outbuildings, and library were reported as being in poor condition.⁸

Following that visit, on December 6 of that same year, the County Superintendent visited the Burnt Ranch classroom now taught by Alice O'Neil. Her experience was listed as "none." She also received a monthly salary of \$75 (the same as Mr. Underwood) and had nine students enrolled. Their order and attention were rated as "good," but their subject area learning was listed as only "fair." Despite her inexperience, Miss O'Neil's methods and zeal were both also rated as "good." The school grounds, outbuilding, and the condition of the library and "apparatus" had not improved since the visit in February.⁹

Given the visits, Burnt Ranch School was being treated as a public school under the oversight of the County Superintendent, which seems to indicate that it was not a private school at the time. "Burnt Ranch School" didn't receive any public school apportionments, however, but "The Lower Trinity and New River School District" did.

¹ Bauman, James, "Chimariko placenames and the boundaries of Chimariko territory", *American Indian and Indoeuropean Studies*, 86,

<https://escholarship.org/content/qt8309x2k0/qt8309x2k0.pdf?t=krnn7a>; and <https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/anthpubs/ucb/text/ucp005-007.pdf>, accessed February 25, 2022

² Supahan, Sarah, email communication with Magdaleno, Dena, January 12, 2022; and www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~ammon/tsnungwe/placenames.html, accessed May 3, 2024.

³ Bright, William, *1500 California Place Names, Their Origin and Meaning*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998, 28; and Gudde, Erwin Gustav, *CA Place Names: The Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names*, 1960, 43;

⁴ Fountain, Susie Baker, "Papers, Vol. 54, page 167", Microfilm, Cal Poly Humboldt Library, Arcata; and "How Burnt Ranch Postoffice On Trinity River Got Its Name", *Blue Lake Advocate*, December 8, 1928.

⁵ Hoover, Mildred Brook and Others. *Historic Spots in California*. Rev. Stanford University Press, 1948, 378-382 .

⁶ "Burnt Ranch, An Early Tragedy", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1955, 20.

⁷ Bennion, Ben and Rohde, Jerry, *Traveling the Trinity Highway*, Mountainhome Books, McKinleyville, CA, no date, 161; and http://www.trinityjournal.com/obituaries/article_b87fffe-fc0f-11e3-a2cd-0017a43b2370.html

⁸ Superintendent's Record, Trinity County Historical Society.

⁹ Ibid.

It's fair to assume that Burnt Ranch was, therefore, a school under the umbrella of this larger district, which covered most of the "downriver" area.

Later, the local newspaper mentioned Burnt Ranch School very briefly in July 1887. Mr. L. E. Arny was teaching the summer term that year.¹⁰ Later still, there is also mention of a 'public school in Burnt Ranch' in 1890, which was where Miss Annie Fox was to open the spring term. It was said it would take her four days of hard riding from Weaverville to reach her destination, which was "...the school house near Tom Campbell's place." This was described in the local paper as located on the east end of what is now the Lazy Double B Trailer Park in Salyer.¹¹ Because the only official public school functioning at the time in the area was the "Lower Trinity and New River School District," which encompassed Salyer, it appears that this was not actually the Burnt Ranch School. At this same time, many private or family schools existed within the area that is now known as the Burnt Ranch Elementary School District. Teachers were brought in to teach in private homes, where they usually boarded as well. Those teachers might instruct both the family's children and those of surrounding neighbors.

In January of 1900, Viola Kane went to the McDonald home in Burnt Ranch to teach school as a live-in teacher. Ethel McDonald, her sisters, and her brother were Miss Kane's pupils, as were some of the neighbor's children. Miss Kane left there after the spring term in 1901 to teach in what is now called Willow Creek. After a year there, she became engaged and the school board refused to renew her contract, likely because of her upcoming marriage. She returned to the McDonald's home to teach until her wedding in November.¹²

... James McDonald [of Burnt Ranch] hired a governess for his five children and at least the older ones never attended a public school until the eldest daughter, Ethel, well enough coached to pass examinations for high school, rode on horseback a three-day journey to Yreka, the nearest available high school, since Trinity County lacked such a facility then. The McDonald's nearest neighbors, the Brannans, sent their three to board near Cox Bar for their schooling.¹³

Some years later, Viola and her husband, John J. Dailey, moved to the New River Farm, where she taught the "Normal School" for a number of years. Students who wanted to become teachers went there to study. Students would work for room and board and they paid a small fee for their training. Ethel McDonald was one of those students. Ethel arrived there on a mule around 1908. She milked cows, cooked for "the Daileys' other boarders," and took care of the babies as part of her duties. Later Ethel's sister, Idell, also went there to study. See more about Ethel in the Don Juan School information.

Later, designated buildings were constructed by local families to be used specifically for schools.¹⁴ For instance, the Grays of Grays Flat (and presumably of Grays Falls in Burnt Ranch), "determined to have only the best for their three children, built a tiny schoolhouse and imported a young lady from the East to teach this truly exclusive school almost a hundred years ago." As this statement was written in 1972 it is now referring to approximately 152 years ago today in 2024.¹⁵ In another example, on the McWhorter-McDonald Ranch, a separate schoolhouse was established by Adams McWhorter and opened in 1895. This private school was within walking distance from the current Burnt Ranch School. A rock monument remains there, built in September 1991, to commemorate this particular private school site. The monument was part of an Eagle Scout project initiated by Josh McKnight of the Burnt Ranch McKnight family.¹⁶ In 2020, Josh McKnight became a member of the Burnt Ranch School District Board of Trustees himself, and he remained on the board for several years.

¹⁰ "Summer Schools", *The Trinity Journal*, July 30, 1887.

¹¹ "Rich History Revealed of Western Trinity County Schools", *The Courier*, 1991.

¹² "Riding a mule to school in New River backcountry", *Arcata Union*, February 12, 1981, 2.

¹³ McGowan, Katherine R., "Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity", *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972, 10.

¹⁴ Berrien, Gay Holland, "A History of Education in Burnt Ranch", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 2004, 18.

¹⁵ McGowan, Katherine R., "Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity", *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972, 10.

¹⁶ Berrien, Gay Holland, "A History of Education in Burnt Ranch", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 2004, 56.

According to the monument, the site was used as a school until 1907. Today it is private property. This may have been the school that was later called “The McDonald School,” which had started in 1905 and was taught by Miss Bessie Brown. She taught four children.¹⁷ Miss Margaret McDonald was teaching at “the Burnt Ranch School” in 1910. She closed the school for the school year in mid-March that year and “returned home.”¹⁸

The Official Burnt Ranch (Public) School District and its Teachers

On January 1, 1916, a petition submitted to the Trinity County Board of Supervisors was presented, requesting the formation of a new school district to be known as the “Burnt Ranch District.” It was to be created from the territory of the Lower Trinity School District and was said to be “near Irvings.”¹⁹ By this, it’s assumed it is referring to the Irving family who lived in the “downriver” or Lower Trinity area near Hawkins Creek. The Board approved the plan.²⁰ The Burnt Ranch School District boundaries were set out as follows:

Beginning at a point on the line between Humboldt and Trinity Counties where the line between townships 5 and 6 north intersects said boundary line and thence east about 11 miles to the boundary of the Cox Bar District, thence south 10 miles to the boundary line of the Hyampom district, thence west 11 miles to the county line and thence north 10 miles along said line to the place of beginning.²¹

There wasn’t a published breakdown of school districts receiving apportionments in 1916, but Burnt Ranch was on the official state apportionment list (to receive state funding) in 1917.²² Miss Gladys Meyer was selected as the first teacher for the new district.²³ In October 1917, an official visit was made to the school by representatives of the County Office of Education. The visit report indicated that Esther O. Peterson had taken over the teaching position at the school district, with 13 students enrolled. Miss Peterson had graduated from the Humboldt State Normal School on the coast. She was paid \$75 per month. The student’s “Order and Attention” was rated as “very good,” and the “Methods and Zeal of [the] teacher” was also very good. The students were doing well in all subject areas, although their reading and writing were rated as “average” rather than “good” or “excellent.” The school building and grounds were only rated as “fair.”²⁴ A year later, Miss Peterson was still teaching during a visit in November 1918. The students’ reading scores had increased. However, it was reported that the school needed toilets, a woodshed, and blackboards.²⁵ In October 1919, student enrollment had dropped to nine students, with only three present on the day of an official visit by the County Superintendent of Schools. Esther Peterson had continued teaching and received a raise in salary to \$90 per month, perhaps



Burnt Ranch School District 1916

¹⁷ Unattributed note, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

¹⁸ “Trinity County Notes”, *Weekly Searchlight*, March 22, 1910.

¹⁹ “Notice of Appointment of Boards of Elections”, *The Trinity Journal*, April 1, 1916.

²⁰ *The Trinity Journal*, January 1, 1916.

²¹ *The Trinity Journal*, January 1, 1916.

²² “State School Funds”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 1, 1917.

²³ “In the Local Field”, *The Trinity Journal*, May 20, 1916.

²⁴ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 572.

²⁵ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 2.

because of her longevity at the school.²⁶ The need for improvements in the building had likely been addressed because, during this visit, the only things needed were a teacher's chair and desk.



Second official Burnt Ranch School District building, which later became the "Indian Hall," undated

Rosalena Martin taught at Burnt Ranch for the 1920-21 school year. The school was maintained for only six months without explanation, almost two months less than the regular school year for the 19 other districts that existed in the county at that time. Ten students were enrolled, but only seven were present on the day of an official visit in April 1921. By this time, the students were all doing well in their studies, and the building only needed to be "ceiled." This likely meant that a ceiling needed to be installed under the roof, as the definition of this older word is "to furnish (something, such as a wooden ship) with a lining."²⁷ There was also a note that indicated that it takes two full days to visit Burnt Ranch and the other schools "down the river" from Weaverville.²⁸

In May 1922, it appears that teacher Jeanette "Jenny" F. Irving ("nee Shafer") completed the spring term at the school

with eight students enrolled. The next fall, however, Effy Rowley took over the teaching position at the school. Her salary was \$130 per month. The school needed an inside flag, individual cups and a dipper for drinking water. They did have a new phonograph, and the school building was "much improved."²⁹

Rose Margaret Penn of Arcata was teaching eight students at Burnt Ranch in September of 1923. The school visit report was less than stellar as the students were receiving an "F" in arithmetic, and the "Methods and Zeal" of the teacher was reported as being only "Fair."³⁰ Surprisingly, perhaps, Rose Penn was still teaching during the 1924-25 school year when the school ran for a full nine months.³¹ That year, the school started out with only four students, but it was noted that there would be an enrollment of 12 students "soon," as some students had the measles.³²

It wasn't unusual at that time, at least in Trinity County, to have such a high turnover of teachers. There was usually a long winter break which may have been a factor in why the fall term was often taught by a different teacher than the spring term.

DATE	DESCRIPTION	CASH	STATE	LOCAL	TOTAL
Dec 31	Balance	6412			10998
Dec 31	Balance	4712	11459		16171
1935 Jan 1	Balance	6412			10998
Jan 28	Federal Indian Aid Funds 4th quarter 1933-34				1825
Jan 30	State School Fund Appt. Jan		1898		4789
Jan 30	State General Fund Appt. Jan	1659			7898
Feb 20	State School Fund Appt. (Dec)	1659			4739
Feb 20	State General Fund Appt. (Feb)		7898		7898
Feb 20	State School Fund Appt. (Feb)	3189			4739
Feb 20	State Gen. Fund Appt. (Feb)		7898		7898
Mar 28	State School Fund Appt. (Mar)	3189			4789
Mar 28	State General Fund Appt. (Mar)		7898		7898
	State School Fund Appt. (Mar)				4739

In the 1930s, Burnt Ranch School District received Federal Indian Aid Funds due to the significant number of Native students who attended the school

²⁶ School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 30.

²⁷ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ceil>, accessed May 28, 2024.

²⁸ "School Directory 1920-21", Annual Reports, and School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 55.

²⁹ Annual Reports, and School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 106.

³⁰ School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 132.

³¹ "School Directory 1924-25", Annual Reports, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

³² School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 159.

From other school visit records, as well as district directories, we know of several teachers who brought more stability to the Burnt Ranch School District in the early years:

- Miss Elizabeth A. Donahue taught the school years of 1925-26 and 1926-27
- Mrs. Jeanette Irving taught the school years 1927-28, 1928-29, 1929-30, 1930-31, 1931-32, [1932-33], 1933-34 [1934-35], and 1935-36
- Miss Dorothy Dillon taught the years 1936-37, [1937-38], 1938-39
- Miss Dorothy Rourke of Hayfork taught the years 1939-40, 1940-41, and 1941-42

(The years in brackets are assumed as the records are missing for those years.)

Mrs. Dorothy Carol (Rourke) Goodyear, whose first teaching assignment was at Burnt Ranch School, drove from Weaverville each Monday, which was a two-hour drive at the time, and stayed with Arabella Irving Carpenter Beerbower during the week. She earned \$112 a month.³³ After Burnt Ranch, she went on to teach at other schools in the county for a total of 27 years. She died in 2022 at the age of 104.³⁴

On January 21, 1928, a petition was received by the Board of Supervisors seeking to have a new school district formed out of a portion of the Burnt Ranch School District. The petition had been approved by Miss Lucy M. Young, County Superintendent of Schools, and by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The petition indicated that there would be ten children between the ages of five and 17 and seven more under five years of age within the proposed boundary of the new district, to be known as the Don Juan School District.³⁵

...In still the next generation, Ethel McDonald Hailstone, being now a qualified teacher with a flock of children too far from Burnt Ranch to ride or walk it, became her own children's tutor for a number of years. After she was widowed, she secured a public school, Don Juan School on her own property. Several families at different times added pupils to those Ethel provided, all of her seven children grew up having attended Don Juan School. All graduated from that school also, except Iris, the last Hailstone child. The last year of the school saw only three pupils, and when a daughter and Jay Hailstone graduated, Iris had to go for her final year to Salyer, to board with relatives.³⁶

Ten years later, in the winter of 1938, Burnt Ranch School had ten students enrolled, and Don Juan School had eight.³⁷

School Buildings and Locations

The early location of the Burnt Ranch School District was in a building that stood in what is now the parking lot of the present Burnt Ranch Indian Association Hall. Mrs. Ethel W. Chandler, who attended the school as a student and was later a teacher there in 1946 as well, reported that the school was built in about 1912 and was on the old Chesboro Trail, which was the main route of travel for many years. This may be the route that many local people refer to as "the Pony Express trail." The second school building was the "far room" of that building, and a second room was added to it for a primary classroom in later years.³⁸

³³ "Rich History Revealed of Western Trinity County Schools", *The Kourier*, 1991, 4.

³⁴ "Dorothy Carol (Rourke) Goodyear Life Story", *Redding Searchlight*, November 2022.

³⁵ "Board of Supervisors", *The Trinity Journal*, January 21, 1927.

³⁶ McGowan, Katherine R., "Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity", *Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972, 10.

³⁷ "Burnt Ranch", *The Searchlight*, January 15, 1938.

³⁸ McGowan, Katherine R., "Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity", *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972, 10; and "Trinity Teachers Sign Contracts", *Record Searchlight*, July 10, 1946.

Many years later, when the building's side walls started "slipping out," it was declared unsafe, and school was canceled indefinitely. Some emergency repairs were attempted to make the old building temporarily usable "until the new Community Hall can be completed," but it was ultimately condemned in 1950. It was at this point that a man named Hollis Moss of the Moss Lumber Mill donated a bulldozer for Ernest Ringly to operate to begin clearing the site of the new building that was to be built by volunteer donations and labor "according to state specifications for a one-room school house."³⁹ A partially constructed building at the Moss Mill Lumber Company site on Hennessey Road was hurriedly completed, and the students were moved to that "emergency school" while, at the same time, plans were going forward for the building of a new community hall that could also serve as a permanent school.⁴⁰



Burnt Ranch April 10, 1940. Front row left to right: George Bailey, Bonnie White, Elnora McKnight, Tom McKnight. Back row: Eugene Kauffman, Luella Brannan, teacher Dorothy Rourke (or Dorothy Goodyear from another source), Lois White, Vista Lee McKnight, Eugene Colegrove (Billy Colegrove from another source).

Construction of the new community hall/school building had already begun by March 1951. Lloyd McKnight was the builder, but to save money, volunteers assisted him over the weekends. McKnight himself also donated his time on the weekends. There was an effort to speed up the completion of the school because the building being used as an emergency school belonged to the Moss Lumber Mill, and they needed the building returned for its use as soon as possible. The new school being built was also to serve as a community hall where community events could take place.⁴¹ The new school was completed just a few months later, in August of 1951, and was "indeed a credit to any community," despite it not having lights or plumbing at the time. There was, however, a sink on the front porch and outhouses for use, and also a wood stove that was sometimes used for cooking lunch.⁴²

Clara Van Matre, County Superintendent of Schools, was quoted as commenting, "[The] Burnt Ranch school is indeed a gem, and the residents of this district are to be congratulated on their consistent efforts to provide such a fine school for their children." The new building was described as situated on a broad shelf above the highway. "[A] slight incline of the grounds will be leveled as soon as a rain comes." The building was painted white with a forest green roof, "which harmonizes with the surrounding forest." The old building was to be completely removed in order to make space for additional playgrounds.⁴³ Given the preceding statement and the reference to the old [school] building, it is assumed this new community hall and school were built on the same site as the old school and would eventually become the current Burnt Ranch Indian Association Hall, also known in the past as the Veteran's Hall, VFW Hall, or the Community Hall not far up what is called "Veterans Hall Road" in Burnt Ranch. That building is still standing today in 2024.

³⁹ "School at Burnt Ranch Unsafe – Rush Rebuilding Work", *Blue Lake Advocate*, September 16, 1950.

⁴⁰ "Burnt Ranch Now Using Emergency Building", *Blue Lake Advocate*, September 23, 1950; and "Burnt Ranch School Construction Starts; Volunteers Assist," *Blue Lake Advocate*, March 8, 1951;

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Rich History Revealed of Western Trinity County Schools", *The Kourier*, 1991, 4.

⁴³ "Burnt Ranch School Near Completion", *Blue Lake Advocate*, November 16, 1951.

In October of 1951, a carnival fundraiser was put on by the 17 children in the new Burnt Ranch School. The fundraiser yielded “over eighty dollars.” They planned to use the funds for some play equipment, but also to purchase a vise and some pine wood to construct several different heights on the playground “acting bars.” Mrs. Hannah Watson, their teacher, was credited with being very clever as she would be the instructor for this “interesting manual training work, which is not found very often in a small school in the mountain area.”⁴⁴

In October 1952, an article in the *Blue Lake Advocate* mentioned that Burnt Ranch residents were “justly proud” of their new schoolhouse and community center. One Sunday, a group of volunteers worked at the school, “putting everything in good condition for the coming winter.” Hollis Moss brought his new road grader and smoothed out the entire playground while others worked with shovels, removing rocks and making drainage ditches. Still others, including women and children, raked the area.

During the summer Frank Wallen, road master, and his crew spread crushed rock over the school yard and leveled it as well as possible at the time. After the recent short rain the local residents felt that by some good volunteer work the large yard could be put in good condition for winter. By their work this has been accomplished.⁴⁵

Walter Evans, Charles Moss, Billy Hensel, and Michael McBath were the first graduates of the new Burnt Ranch School after successfully passing their graduation tests.⁴⁶

In 1953, the *Blue Lake Advocate* briefly mentioned that Burnt Ranch School would open for the fall term on September 8th and that William Hockings of Tulare would be the new teacher. It also mentioned that during the summer vacation, the school building had been painted inside and thoroughly cleaned, and some new playground equipment had been installed.⁴⁷

In February 1954, the county roads department promised to widen the one-lane county road up to the school during the spring or summer months when the weather improved. Until then, the county roads department was going to spread rock in the large holes that had developed over the winter.⁴⁸

At least by the 1957-58 school year, Burnt Ranch had an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of 39, and there were two teachers: Homer Spellenberg and Mrs. Carol Y. Spellenberg. The district also encompassed the Denny School at this time, with Mrs. Rose Katt as



1937. First Row: Eugene Kauffman, Eugene Colegrove, Vista Lee McKnight, Luella Brannan, Alec Carpenter. Back: Verla Green, Thelma Green, Billy Scharschmidt, Bob Bennett, Chas. Carpenter, in the original building that was condemned in 1950

⁴⁴ “Carnival at Burnt Ranch School Enjoyed”, *Blue Lake Advocate*, November 1, 1951.

⁴⁵ McDaniel, Clara Duncan, “News Items of Interest from Burnt Ranch”, *Blue Lake Advocate*, October 23, 1952.

⁴⁶ McDaniel, Clara Duncan, “News Items of Interest from Burnt Ranch”, *Blue Lake Advocate*, May 29, 1952.

⁴⁷ McDaniel, Clara Duncan, “News Items of Interest from Burnt Ranch”, *Blue Lake Advocate*, August 27, 1953.

⁴⁸ McDaniel, Clara Duncan, “News Items of Interest from Burnt Ranch”, *Blue Lake Advocate*, February 4, 1954.

teacher.⁴⁹ In 1959, Burnt Ranch School had 50 students, and the Denny School had seven.⁵⁰ Also, in 1959, with the increase in student enrollment, a bigger school was needed. They speculated at the time that at least four more classrooms were necessary to house all of the students. They asked their voters to approve an application to the state for funding, but if state aid was not to be authorized, the trustees planned to “start in an abandoned prison road camp in Burnt Ranch,” which must have meant that they’d utilize buildings in the old honor camp for school.⁵¹ Permission to apply to the state for funding was approved by the voters, 113 to three, and the funding was also approved by the state since the school had exhausted its borrowing capacity with a \$4,800 bond in 1950 to help fund the new school at that time.⁵²

According to Steve Spellenberg, a long-time local resident who sat on the Board of Trustees for a number of years and also served as the Superintendent, a new school was built at the 2024 current school site in 1963. The



Burnt Ranch School dated 1968

new school replaced an older building and an abandoned school bus that was used as a classroom “for overflow students.” A dedication of the new building took place on May 17, 1962. At the event, there was to be new music that no one had heard before...because the teachers had written the songs that the students were to sing.⁵³ Steve Spellenberg called the new building a two-teacher, 30-student “situation.”⁵⁴

At the same time, the school was selling one 3-acre tract (with a starting bid of \$3,500) and a 4.5-acre tract (with a minimum bid of \$11,825), which contains seven houses. Both tracts were a part of the former State Honor Camp (in which prisoners built roads and other community projects) at Burnt Ranch, and

the houses were former residences of the prison camp supervisors. They also advertised that the old school would have to be demolished.⁵⁵ The Moss Lumber Company of Burnt Ranch was the only bidder on the three-acre parcel and bought it for the minimum bid. The former schoolhouse was sold to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) for \$200. The VFW planned to use the building as a Veterans Hall when it gets a use permit from the Forest Service for that site. No other bids were received on the other parcel.⁵⁶

In the 1967-68 school year, Burnt Ranch accepted the first kindergarten students due to a state law that said that kindergarten facilities had to be provided whenever a parent asked for them. Seven students took advantage of this new law, adding more children to the district.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ *District Directory*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 1957-58.

⁵⁰ *District Directory*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 1959-60.

⁵¹ “Bond Issues Go to Voters Tuesday”, *Record Searchlight*, May 14, 1959.

⁵² “Trinity Returns Brandes to County High School Board”, *Record Searchlight*, May 20, 1959; and “Burnt Ranch School Gets State Grant”, *Record Searchlight*, August 12, 1960; and “Burnt Ranch to Have a New School”, *The Shasta Courier*, November 16, 1950.

⁵³ “New Music to be Played at Burnt Branch”, *Record Searchlight*, May 17, 1962.

⁵⁴ “Rich History Revealed of Western Trinity County Schools”, *The Kourier*, 1991, 4.

⁵⁵ “District to sell old Schoolhouse”, *Record Searchlight*, March 8, 1963.

⁵⁶ “Lumber Firm Buys Land”, *Record Searchlight*, April 17, 1963.

⁵⁷ “Trinity Enrollment Up Thirteen”, *Record Searchlight*, September 25, 1967.

On February 1, 1970, in Resolution 11-70, the Board of Supervisors voted in favor of transferring some of the territory of the Burnt Ranch School District to the Hyampom School District. Supervisors Harrison, Durham, and Willburn voted in favor of the proposal. Supervisor Burks was absent.⁵⁸ The petition, on behalf of ‘not less than 25% of the registered electors in the Manzanita Boy’s Ranch area of the Burnt Ranch School District’, had already been approved by the County Committee on School District Organization on January 19, 1970. Prior to that action, the proposal was approved by the Hyampom School District Board on January 14, 1970.⁵⁹ The boundary change meant that six students and 14 square miles of mountainous land (at \$34,850 worth of assessed value at the time) were exchanged. The petition was more of a formality since the residents of the Manzanita Ranch had always been sending their children to the Hyampom Elementary School because there was actually no road from that area to the Burnt Ranch School.⁶⁰

In 1986, a new multi-purpose building for the school had begun being built. It was originally a 50 by 60-foot wood frame building with laminated beams in the ceiling. It was to serve as a gymnasium and auditorium for both the school and for community events. This was part of a \$600,000 building program at the school, along with an extra 30 x 40-foot classroom and an additional special instruction room added onto the main building. Sidewalks and other paved areas were also planned to be built.⁶¹ The building was dedicated to Steve Spellenberg’s parents Homer and Carol Spellenberg, because they were the first teachers at the present school site.

It was a good thing the school was expanding because, by 1987, there were 105 students, seven more than the year previous.⁶² Also in 1987, the County Board of Supervisors approved a 50-year lease with the Burnt Ranch School District. The agreement provided for the public use of the school grounds for recreational purposes. This condition had to be met for the school to receive \$52,000 in State Park and Recreation Bond Act funds to improve the area. This was when a baseball diamond was designed and created in the outer playground, and a public restroom was built, among other improvements (such as the addition of a large lawn and watering system).⁶³

The school was chosen as one of California’s Distinguished Schools of 1988 when that award was still available. By then, it was a one-school district with an enrollment of, again, 105 students (BRES D’s enrollment has fluctuated between 84 and 100 students between 2009-10 and 2022-23).

Under Steve Spellenberg’s leadership at the school, in June 1995, the papers advertised a request for a proposal for the reroofing of the main building⁶⁴; at some point, the Trinity County Office of Education (TCOE) purchased an old portable from Burnt Ranch School, and today, it serves as the “Summit Room” at TCOE.

Many years later, in 2017, mold was discovered throughout the old structure, requiring a complete rebuild of the school. The new buildings, including a much larger combined gymnasium/cafeteria, were completed in 2019, and today, in 2024, the site is a beautiful, landscaped facility with an expanded track and brand-new outdoor sports court.

⁵⁸ *Resolution 11-70*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

⁵⁹ Gravette, Robert C., Superintendent of Schools, correspondence with the Board of Supervisors, January 19, 1970, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

⁶⁰ “Boundary Airing Set”, *Record Searchlight*, February 3, 1970.

⁶¹ “Multipurpose Building for Burnt Ranch School District”, from an unidentified paper, unknown date.

⁶² “School Figures are Revealed”, *Record Searchlight*, September 9, 1987.

⁶³ “Trinity County Trying to Bag Illegal Dumping at Stations”, *Record Searchlight*, June 5, 1987.

⁶⁴ *Record Searchlight*, June 23, 1995.