

## Coffee Creek School District

Coffee Creek, in Wintu ancestral territory, was said to have received its name from a pack mule loaded with coffee that was swept away by the creek's high water. A town was built along the creek, and a post office was established there in 1882<sup>1</sup>. In 1895, a petition went before the Board of Supervisors (at this time in history, they acted as a Board of Education) from the residents of Coffee Creek to form a new school district, but it was rejected at that time because the request had not gone first before the County Superintendent of Schools.<sup>2</sup> A new petition was submitted which followed the correct procedure and was approved in January 1896.<sup>3</sup> The new school was taught for the fall term of that year by Miss Alice R. Powers of San Francisco.<sup>4</sup> In December of 1896, the school's first entries began in the warrants register, and the new school was in the Apportionment lists in the local paper. Given the frequent warrant entries in the spring of 1897, it appears that Miss Mabel G. Bishop was teaching at the school. She remained teaching there until December of that same year.<sup>5</sup>



*Coffee Creek School, spring 1951. Courtesy of the Trinity County Historical Society.*

The Superintendent of Schools first officially recorded visit to the school occurred in October 1898. There were 29 students enrolled, although only 14 were there on the day of the visit. The teacher, Miss Anna M. Sprague, took over the spring before and then began the new school year in the fall of 1898 for \$70 per month. Miss Helen M. Sprague (unknown relationship to Anna Sprague) taught the spring term.<sup>6</sup> Four more teachers rotated through the district from 1899 to 1901, with one from as far away as Gilroy.<sup>7</sup> It wasn't unusual in the county to have a different teacher for each term - the fall and spring terms - especially since there was sometimes a four- or five-month break

in between. In 1902, the school had a new schoolhouse, and the first eighth-grade graduation occurred on May 24-26, 1905, likely under teacher Miss Alary Newton, who closed the school for the summer vacation on June 13<sup>th</sup>, although a Miss Edith M. Fuller was also teaching there earlier that spring.<sup>8</sup> Miss Christine Jessin, also of San Francisco, assumed charge of the Coffee Creek School on April 6, 1903.<sup>9</sup> She continued teaching there into the next school year, at least long enough to close the school for the winter break on Nov 6, 1903.<sup>10</sup>

It is impossible to say where the school was located in the early days as the school moved several times. At one point, the location was at the mouth of Coffee Creek. In April of 1911, a school was listed in the visiting records as "(Coffee Creek) Pinkham," with teacher Miss Helen Pratt teaching seven enrolled students. The teacher was brand new, having only eight months of teaching experience in the district and only two years in "Kindergarten

<sup>1</sup> *History and Happenings*, <http://historyandhappenings.squarespace.com/trinity-county/>, Accessed June 26, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> "In The Red Hill School District", *The Trinity Journal*, April 13, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Holland, James. *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 28; and "In Re Coffee Creek School District Established", *The Trinity Journal*, January 18, 1896.

<sup>4</sup> *Warrant Records*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 37; and Fox, Lizzie, "Districts, Clerks and Schools", *The Trinity Journal*, October 24, 1896.

<sup>5</sup> *Warrant Records*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 378.

<sup>6</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 88.

<sup>7</sup> Timeline found at Coffee Creek School District, 2021; and Fox, Lizzie H., *The Trinity Journal*, July 21, 1897.

<sup>8</sup> Handwritten notes, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, May 15, 1975; and "Districts, Clerks, Teachers, Trinity County, 1904-1905", *The Trinity Journal*, November 5, 1904; and "School Notes", *The Trinity Journal*, June 21, 1902.

<sup>9</sup> "School Notes", *The Trinity Journal*, April 11, 1903.

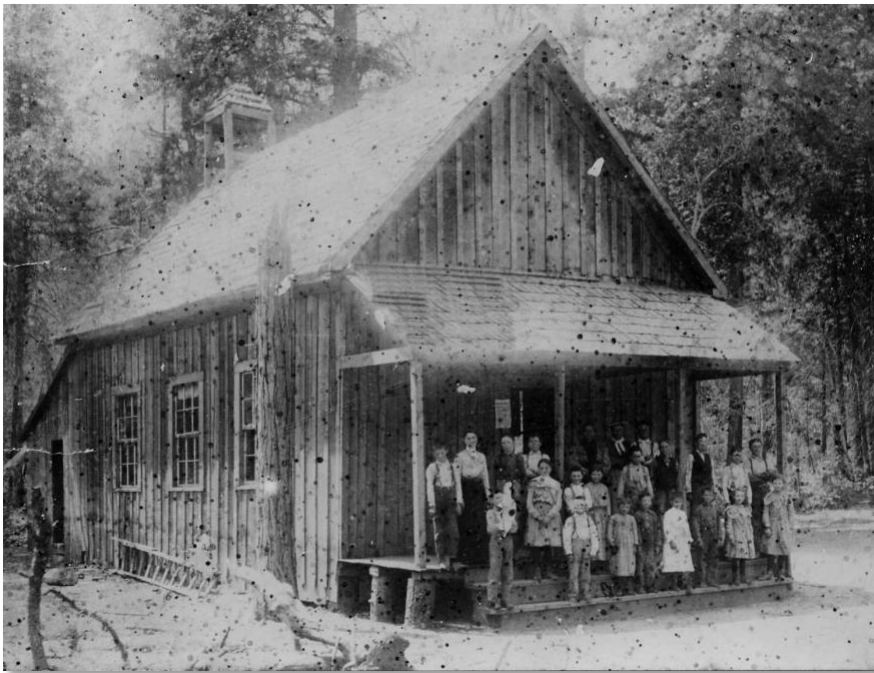
<sup>10</sup> "School Notes", *The Trinity Journal*, November 7, 1903.

work” before that.<sup>11</sup> The student’s “Order and Attention” was reported as “Good,” and the “Methods and Zeal of the teacher” were “Excellent,” and so was the condition of the school buildings and grounds. The students made good or excellent progress in their studies, depending on the subject. However, The report noted that the school needed library books, maps, and blackboards. It’s impossible to know for certain if this was Coffee Creek School, Pinkham School, or a temporary combination because of their nearness, but given other information about Pinkham teachers, it’s most likely Coffee Creek. In September of 1911, the teacher for Coffee Creek School was Eleta Reimers, “...who will wield the birch rod during the year”.<sup>12</sup>

A petition requesting that a portion of the Trinity Center School District be annexed to Coffee Creek School District was presented to the Board of Supervisors in November 1913. It’s likely this was to encompass the homes of more students for Coffee Creek. Since the petition went through the proper procedure, and with the Superintendent of Schools concurrence, the board granted the request. It was therefore ordered that:

All of Sections 19, 20, 21, 28, 29 and 30 in Twp. 37 N. R. 7 West M. D. M. and all of the Sections 24 and 25 in Twp. 37 N., R. 8 W. M. D. M., and that said lands herein described are excluded from and are no longer a part of the Trinity Center school district.<sup>13</sup>

In 1916, the teacher was listed as Mrs. Ellen Ferguson at Coffee Creek, and the school address given was Carrville. Whether this was a physical address or a post office box address is unknown.<sup>14</sup> In April of 1918, Coffee Creek opened for the spring term with Mrs. D. O. Ferguson of Carrville as teacher (unknown relationship to Ellen Ferguson).<sup>15</sup> In November of 1919, the school was being held in a bunkhouse, but it was proposed that the school be moved to the “former schoolhouse” in the spring.<sup>16</sup>



The Board of Supervisors decided on September 13, 1919, that Pinkham School would become part of the Coffee Creek School District. The school warrants note that Pinkham “merged with Coffee Creek this year and funds transferred to Coffee Creek.”<sup>17</sup> Given that the funds were transferred, it’s likely that any students left at Pinkham would have transferred to Coffee Creek as well.

In October 1920, a notation in the records said that the condition of the Coffee Creek School was poor and that a new schoolhouse was needed.<sup>18</sup> Later, the school was listed as “Coffee Creek (Carrville),” with Carrville as the address when Coffee Creek was suspended on July

<sup>11</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 377.

<sup>12</sup> “Schools of Trinity Supplied with Teachers”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 2, 1911.

<sup>13</sup> “Board of Supervisors”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 11, 1913.

<sup>14</sup> *School Directory*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>15</sup> “In the Local Field”, *The Trinity Journal*, April 1, 1918.

<sup>16</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 32.

<sup>17</sup> “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 23.

<sup>18</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 311.

17, 1926, having fewer than five students.<sup>19</sup> As with other schools in the county, the school appears to have maintained its original name of “Coffee Creek,” even though the school was possibly held in a different community. The school was back in session for the 1927-28 school year based on an approved petition and recommendation from the Superintendent of Schools, Miss Lucy M. Young, to the County Supervisors.<sup>20</sup>

When Mrs. Helen Bassham of Trinity Center was teaching at the Coffee Creek School in 1930<sup>21</sup>, the school visit records reported again that a new schoolhouse was needed. In 1931, the school was being held in a rented

building, but no location was noted.<sup>22</sup> It makes sense then that the school moved to Stringtown for the 1932-33 school year, even though the building was reported as being very small. That school year the teacher was Addie Graves who earned \$130 per month and had only five students enrolled.<sup>23</sup> If the building was small for five students, it must have been very small indeed. Stringtown was given as the address for the school in several different school records that year.<sup>24</sup>

Coffee Creek School, having fewer than five students, was suspended again a year later, reestablishing on July 2, 1929, with eight students.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, eight students began school the next year as well (in September of 1930) under Mrs. Helen Bassham, a local teacher from Trinity Center, who taught Coffee Creek School in the “MacDwaine building.”<sup>26</sup> Four years later, in June of 1934, Coffee Creek Students and their parents were treated to an outdoor picnic by their teacher, Miss Bertha Ross. Miss Ross had arranged for the use of a pool at Mrs. Frank Derrick's home for the day, where swimming and games were played. The picnic consisted of salad, sandwiches, cake, and lemonade. An “enjoyable time was had by all.” It was expected that Miss Ross would return to teach the next school year after she attended summer school at Long Beach.<sup>27</sup>

During the 1936-37 school year, the enrollment dropped to less than five students again, with an attendance rate of only 3.70 – too low to receive state funding - causing the Board of Supervisors to suspend the school on July 22, 1937.<sup>28</sup> According to several sources, the school joined Trinity Center by the 1937-1938 school year, likely due to the lack of enrollment, and was considered lapsed (permanently closed) by June of 1940.<sup>29</sup> However, the School District was reestablished during the 1942-43 school year with the “assessed valuation” of the district at \$509,465 –



<sup>19</sup> “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 9.

<sup>20</sup> *School District Directory*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 9; and “County Supervisors Have Much Business At Regular Session”, *The Trinity Journal*, July 16, 1927.

<sup>21</sup> “Personal Items of Interest About the Movements of Trinitarians”, *The Trinity Journal*, May 24, 1930.

<sup>22</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 311 and 336.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>24</sup> “Trinity County Schools Growing With California”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 28, 1956, Centennial Edition; and *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 311.

<sup>25</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 286.

<sup>26</sup> “Trinity Center Items”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 6, 1930.

<sup>27</sup> “Coffee Creek Has Out Door Picnic”, *The Trinity Journal*, June 4, 1936.

<sup>28</sup> “Proceedings of Trinity County Supervisors”, *The Trinity Journal*, July 22, 1937.

<sup>29</sup> *School Directory*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

higher than even the Weaverville Elementary School District at the time (\$465,695).<sup>30</sup> The valuations of districts were something noted at that time in history but are no longer. During that school year, the address for Coffee Creek School was changed to Trinity Center. However, this must have only been the mailing address for Coffee Creek since the Trinity Center School was still listed as a separate district from Coffee Creek.<sup>31</sup> Those same notations continued until the 1950-51 school year.<sup>32</sup>

December of 1949 brought together the Trinity Center and Coffee Creek Schools to present a Christmas Program to a large crowd. It was directed by the faculty: Paris B. Simmons Jr., Principal, Miss Joan Hett of Trinity Center School, and Mrs. Elizabeth Gorsuch of Coffee Creek School, with Mrs. Jack Lee as accompanist. Student Kathy Jacobs performed "All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth." Earnie and Richard Ward performed "Hanging the Wash," written by Mary Lou Carr, who played "Ma," with Richard Ward as "Pa." Students Norma Phillips, Dennis Smith, Wayne Phillips, Phillip Ward, and Russell Noble performed "Christmas Train Special." There were many other presentations of plays and songs, including community singing, followed by the appearance of Santa Claus distributing bags of candy and oranges to all children present.<sup>33</sup> There were other entertaining presentations that same year, and there was a report of a new oil stove and a new coat of paint inside, with the woodwork "enameled," which was also news in the local paper for Coffee Creek School.<sup>34</sup>



<sup>30</sup> School Directory, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>31</sup> "Statistics of Elementary Schools", *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 2.

<sup>32</sup> "Statistics of Elementary Schools", *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, multiple years and pages.

<sup>33</sup> McKay, Maude, "Trinity Center", *The Trinity Journal*, December 29, 1949.

<sup>34</sup> McKay, Maude, "Trinity Center", *The Trinity Journal*, September 29, 1949.

In 1956, an effort to unify Coffee Creek with another district was evidenced by a letter dated May 31, 1956. In the letter addressed to Mrs. Van Matre, County Superintendent of Schools, from Marjorie E. Poole, Clerk of Coffee Creek School District, she said she would vote no to unification. Many assume that the unnamed district was Trinity Center. The Coffee Creek School has stood as a one-school district ever since.

In 1968, the Coffee Creek School District student body was invited to a rather unique event: the wedding of their primary grade teacher. On Saturday, November 2, students attended the country wedding inside a log cabin church in a glen as Miss Sharon Bohannon married Mr. Pat Cartwright. Their principal, Mr. J. Joe Neuman, also a minister, performed the ceremony. The bride was dressed in a full Victorian-style gown. Their teacher and her husband were to reside at the Seymour Ranch, where they held a buffet supper after the ceremony. She continued teaching at Coffee Creek.<sup>35</sup>

The Coffee Creek School District still thrives today, although it still struggles with a very small student body.

See also **Pinkham and Trinity Center School Districts.**

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<sup>35</sup> "Wedding Treat for Coffee Creek Youngsters", *Trinity County School Bulletin*, December, 1968, 2.