

Cox Bar / Big Bar School District

The Cox Bar area is located on the land of the Chimariko which has also been traditionally used by Nor Rel Muk (Wintu) people. In the Chimariko language, it is called Citimaadjji.

Despite its name, Cox Bar School is located in what is now known as the Big Bar area. In the fall of 1867, the Board of Supervisors, acting at this time in history as the Trinity County Board of Education, established the Cox



"Big Bar School", September 10, 1925, courtesy of the Trinity County Historical Society.

Bar School District as a public, one-school district. The Cox Bar School's original boundary description read, "...to be bounded as follows: commencing at the J.T. Weaver's Big Wheel on the Trinity River and continuing down said river to Anthon's Point and embracing all county between the dividing ridge on each side of the river."¹ In 1904, the boundary was changed, but it was not clear at this time what the change entailed.

Cox Bar was originally called Cox's Bar, named after Major Cox (also spelled Coxe), who kept a store there from 1853 to 1857. The school's

name was spelled both "Cox Bar" and "Cox's Bar" throughout its early history. In 1869, the County Superintendent referred to the school as "Cox's Bar" and continued to do so throughout its early history. In 1909, The Blue Lake Advocate also called the school "Cox Bar School."² In 1912, The Trinity Journal called the school "The Big Bar School District."³ It may be that the school was sometimes simply referred to, colloquially, as "Big Bar" since that was the location of the schoolhouse, even though it was not the official name. This type of naming convention occurred quite often in Trinity County.

In the early days, it must have been a rugged commute to school for those students who lived on the other side of the river. They had to cross the swollen river in stormy weather, sometimes piloted by an older sibling. Otherwise, they would have to navigate a swing bridge in bad weather.⁴

Throughout the years, the enrollment of Cox Bar School District ranged from six to twenty-five students with one teacher. In the June 25, 1870 issue of the Trinity Journal, an article listed Cox Bar School as having 19 pupils. That year, the district received funding of \$15.77 from the county and \$40.09 from the state.⁵ The funding was usually biannual, so the total for the school year was \$111.72.

The district's Board of Trustees was first mentioned in 1884, when J. A. Tinsley, Wm. Willshire, and Wm. A. Pattison, Sr. were members. Tinsley and Pattison remained on the board for many years.⁶

¹ "New School District", the Trinity Journal, November 11, 1867; and the original one-page typed speech for the dedication of the school in 1964, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

² The Blue Lake Advocate, May 1, 1909.

³ The Trinity Journal, September 9, 1912.

⁴ "Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity", The Trinity Journal, August 17, 1972.

⁵ "History of Big Bar and Vicinity, Part I," Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook, 1967, 20.

⁶ Ibid.

In 1884 and 1885, the teacher at Cox Bar was M. N. Wadleigh, and the school term was six months. The teacher's salary was \$85 per month – a great deal more than the usual pay for a teacher during that time. Perhaps the pay was so high due to the teacher's experience, which was reported as being, simply, "long." Twenty-two and seventeen students, respectively, were enrolled during those years, all in primary grades (1st – 3rd). Their progress in all subject areas was reported as being "good."⁷

In January 1892, Ella Blakemore was teaching at "Cox's Bar," according to warrant records.⁸ Later, Ella L. Blakemore and her sister Winnie, also a teacher in the county, traveled on an extended trip to Ferndale in July 1893 to visit their uncle, and then Ella ventured to San Francisco for a couple more weeks.⁹ When Ella Blakemore returned, she took over teaching Cox's Bar in October 1893, making \$65 per month. The school term was only seven months long. There were 10 students enrolled, and their progress in all subject areas was rated as "good," while the condition of the library "and apparatus" was rated as "middling."¹⁰ In 1894¹¹ and at the beginning of the school year of 1895-86¹², the school district was still taught by Miss Blakemore, who continued with the same salary. Enrollment dropped to seven students.¹³

In the fall of 1895, the Trinity County Office of Education first visited the Cox Bar "Private School" on October 16 and 17. Parents paid \$15 per month "by private subscription" to the new teacher, Miss Mary L. Olsen of Hyampom. If too few students were enrolled, the school would have been below the public school funding threshold and reverted to private status, which was likely the case.¹⁴

The requirement to have a certain number of students to operate a public school district hasn't changed in all these years: Six average daily attendance (ADA) in grades one through eight is the minimum necessary to receive state funding unless a temporary waiver is granted by the state. It wasn't until 2021 that the state finally included kindergarten students in that count.



Cox Bar, 1929-30

In April of 1896, the school closed after a successful spring term still under teacher Miss Olsen, and it continued to be maintained by private subscriptions. The

⁷ "Superintendent's Record", The History Center, Trinity County Historical Society.

⁸ *Warrant Records*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 50.

⁹ "Town and Country News", *The Trinity Journal*, July 22, 1893 and October 7, 1893.

¹⁰ *Superintendent's Record*, The History Center, Trinity County Historical Society.

¹¹ *Superintendent's Record*, The History Center, Trinity County Historical Society.

¹² "School Notes", *The Trinity Journal*, November 11, 1893.

¹³ Fox, Lizzie, "Our Public Schools", *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1895.

¹⁴ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

trustees of the district noted in the newspaper that they wished to thank all who contributed.¹⁵ Later that same year, student enrollment must have increased because the district showed up in school apportionments in December. Cox Bar had become a public school again.¹⁶ Miss Olsen was still teaching there on October 4, 1897, when the school was opened for the fall term.¹⁷ In addition, she closed the spring term on April 22, 1898, for summer vacation.¹⁸

At some point after 1900, the Big Bar Post Office - which had been located at Big Flat - was moved to Cox's Bar. Had the school been constructed after that time, it likely would have been named Big Bar School District. Student enrollment must have declined around that same time once again because around 1900, Cox Bar "borrowed" several students from Hyampom when that school was too crowded to stay open as a public school. A trail from Cox's Bar to Hyampom was a major route at the time.¹⁹

After perusing district directories and school visit records located at the Trinity County Office of Education and from information found in *The Trinity Journal*, a compilation of other early teachers who taught at Cox Bar can be made. That list includes the following:

- E. L. Blakemore, aka Ella aka Eleanor Blakemore, 1893 – 1895, paid \$65 per month²⁰
- Miss Mary Olsen, fall 1895 -1898 (at least)²¹
- Miss L. Belle Jordan, fall of 1898, 7 students, paid \$60 per month²²
- Miss Lubetha E. Post, fall 1903, 1904-05, for a salary of \$60 per month²³
- Ethel McDonald from Burnt Ranch (later her last name was Hailstone and then Chandler), 1909 - 1911
- Miss Ida Koon, fall of 1912 and spring of 1913²⁴
- Miss Idell McDonald (older sister to Ethel) of Burnt Ranch, fall 1914²⁵
- Mrs. Agnes G. Wright reported on September 18, 1915,²⁶ and then, apparently, switched to Miss Florence M. Fagan of San Francisco as reported on September 25, 1915²⁷
- Once again, Miss Idell McDonald, spring 1915²⁸
- Florence M. Fagan taught during the 1916-17 school year²⁹
- The school was opened late (October 1) in 1917 when Miss Verna Marshall of Douglas City was the teacher, and it was her very first teaching assignment.³⁰ She continued teaching there during the spring of 1918³¹

Skipping ahead some years and with information from various historical school records, the teachers were:

- Elsie A. Voss, 1921-22 and 1922-23 school years, nine students, paid \$100 per month
- Della Johnson, 1923-24 school year, seven students
- Virginia Elinor Brown, 1924-25 school year, 10 students, paid \$130 per month
- Mary Marshall, fall of 1926, seven students, paid \$130 per month

¹⁵ "Local Brevities", *The Trinity Journal*, April 25, 1896.

¹⁶ "Apportionment of County School Money", *The Trinity Journal*, December 21, 1896.

¹⁷ Fox, Lizzie, "Districts, Clerks and Teachers", *The Trinity Journal*, October 2, 1897; and "School Items", *The Trinity Journal*, October 30, 1897.

¹⁸ Fox, Lizzie, "Schools Closed", *The Trinity Journal*, April 30, 1898.

¹⁹ "History of Big Bar and Vicinity, Part I" *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1967, 20, 26.

²⁰ *Warrant Records*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 50.

²¹ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

²² *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 80.

²³ "District, Clerks, Teachers, Trinity County, 1904-05", *The Trinity Journal*, November 5, 1904, and "School Notes", November 14, 1903.

²⁴ "Teachers Travel 100 Miles to Institute", *The Trinity Journal*, October 5, 1912; and "Local Brevities", *The Trinity Journal*, May 17, 1913.

²⁵ "In the Local Field", *The Trinity Journal*, October 3, 1914.

²⁶ "In the Local Field", *The Trinity Journal*, September 18, 1915.

²⁷ "In the Local Field", *The Trinity Journal*, September 25, 1915.

²⁸ "In the Local Field", *The Trinity Journal*, May 29, 1915.

²⁹ "Districts, Teachers and Clerks, 1916-1917, *The Trinity Journal*, November 8, 1916.

³⁰ "Schools are opening", *The Trinity Journal*, August 27, 1917.

³¹ "Just a Few Personalities", *The Trinity Journal*, April 6, 1918.

- Agnes Rourke, fall of 1932, and the 1933-34 school year, 18 students, paid \$135 per month
- Vira Griffith, 1935-36 through the 1938-39 school years
- Vernon Grist, 1939-40 school year
- Fred Jackson, 1941-42 school year

It's interesting to note that Cox Bar is not listed in the directory of school districts in 1918-19 and 1920-21. The local paper explains that it was suspended at the end of June 1918 for having less than five students once again.³² Fortunately, it was opened again a few years later. A brief note in the local paper indicates that Miss Agnes Rourke was the teacher at "Big Bar School" in the fall of 1932.³³

The school has undergone several different rebuilds since it opened, along with the change to the district's boundary lines in 1904. William A. Pattison – whose family supplied three generations of schoolchildren at Cox Bar and who was often a trustee on the school board - has been documented as having helped build the first schoolhouse in the 1860s. It was a 16-foot by 20-foot single-room building. It was built on the flat where all later schools were located.³⁴ It burned down sometime before 1887 and was replaced by a similar building. This wasn't the only time that fire threatened the school. In 1910, the school had a close call.

Name of District	Address	WARRANT NO.	COUNTY	STATE	FEDERAL INDIAN AID FUND	SPECIAL
1937		10		16.00		
July 16 B. P. Harvey		21		10.50		
" 9 Nellie J. Patterson		40		3.05		
" 15 B. W. Tinsley		45		10.00	50.00	
Sept 17 State Comp. Ind. Fund		188		7.50		
" 14 S. M. Campbell		206		22.40		
" 19 F. J. Morgan Co.		223		20.00	40.00	
" 21 Rubeid Pharmacy		250				
" 23 F. D. Barker		253				
" 23 Chas. J. Strong		257		34.03		
" 26 Weaverville Supply Co.		302		130.00		
Oct 7 Agnes Rourke		303		5.00		
" 7 Robert Crews		347			20.00	
" 14 S. M. Campbell		426			14.00	
" 21 Charles Rourke		475		130.00		
Nov 6 Agnes Rourke		504		5.00		
" 12 Robert Crews		585			75.00	
" 21 Grand Manufacturing Co.		586			28.00	
" 21 J. Q. Matthews & Son		587		7.50		
Dec 4 Lloyd S. Patterson		641			130.00	
" 4 Agnes Rourke		642		5.00		
" 4 Robert Crews		643				
" 4 Weaverville Supply Co.						

From 1931 to 1937, the school received Federal Indian Aid Funds due to the significant number of Native students who attended

The fire had been started near the schoolhouse and was under pretty good headway when discovered by Frankie Trimble. He immediately started out for the fire while his youngest brother took word over to [the] Tinsley Hotel. From there word was telephoned to the Forestry station. Brannan's help was immediately summoned. There also assisted the Trimble boys, George Tinsley, I. Zeiglar and Mrs. Brannan, Edna and Jim Brannan and Belle Trimble. By evening it was under control and the danger passed.³⁵

After the school closed for three years, from 1918 to 1921, a new, larger building was constructed in 1922 with donated labor, although it was not completed as planned in September 1923.³⁶ When it was ready to be used, sometime in 1924, the building included a kitchen and an additional workroom besides the main classroom. A few years later, a portable classroom was moved from Hayfork for use at Cox Bar to accommodate a growing

³² "Regular Session of County Superintendents", *The Trinity Journal*, September 14, 1918.

³³ "News From Salyer On The Lower Trinity", *Blue Lake Advocate*, October 1, 1932.

³⁴ History of Big Bar and Vicinity, Part I", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1967, 20.

³⁵ *Blue Lake Advocate*, August 27, 1910.

³⁶ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 134.

student population.³⁷ These buildings were in use until sometime in 1964 when a brand new school was built, dedicated on May 17, 1964.³⁸

When another expansion of the school was under consideration in the 1980s, the school board applied to the Big Bar Ranger Station for a permit to make the improvements since the school sat on land administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Because the schoolyard contained a known prehistoric site, a test excavation was conducted in 1986. It was a surprise to the Forest Service archaeologists to find that there was a rich “cultural deposit” found a little more than two feet down into the ground. The artifacts all belonged to the Borax Lake Pattern,

indicating that they were from the oldest time in recorded prehistory and dated to about 8,000 years ago – older than other prehistoric sites (such as Cedar Flat and Helena) on the Trinity River. The site gained the state designation of CA-TRI-1008. That spring, further excavation was conducted by the Shasta College Archaeology class from Redding. Nine cubic meters of soil, or about 315 cubic feet, was excavated and sifted through small mesh screens, producing more than 6,000 artifacts and flakes. The artifacts included projectile points, large

bifaces (a tool that was worked on both sides for probable use as a knife), flake tools, flaking debris, hand stones, and milling stones. Most of the points were made of chert, which was found locally. However, about a third of the points were made of obsidian, which, upon analysis, was found to have originated at the Grasshopper Flat source in the Medicine Lake Highlands of Siskiyou County.³⁹

In documents found from 1995, it was also noted that the current school was built on Forest Service land early in the century and was under a special use permit to Trinity County. The document also indicated that there



Cox Bar 1921



Cox Bar 1964 Mrs. Thelma Wilson, teacher, K-6 only. No Electricity/Gas Heat

³⁷ “History of Cox Bar School”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1999, 26.

³⁸ Written speech that was given at the dedication of Cox Bar School District’s new buildings in 1964, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 1; and “History of Big Bar and Vicinity, Part I”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1967, 20.

³⁹ Sundahl, Elaine, “The Earliest People of the Trinity River”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1999, 19-24.

was an 8,000-year-old “National Register-Eligible prehistoric habitation” as determined in 1986. At that time, there was a plan to bring in one to three feet of fill dirt to cover the playing field to mitigate adverse effects on the archaeological site. Fill was to come from the Trinity County Road Department and Caltrans over time from slides, ditch cleanouts, and side cast material.⁴⁰ In 1997, there was an unsuccessful effort to purchase the land from the Forest Service by Jeanne Hunt, school administrator, and the District’s Board of Trustees. The property, without improvements, was appraised at \$14,000.⁴¹

It should be noted that when the specific award was still available from the state, Cox Bar School was proclaimed a California Distinguished School in 1994-95.

On May 8, 2014, this single school district, which had very few children by this time, lapsed into the Trinity Alps Unified School District (TAUSD) by resolution of the Trinity County Board of Education, which also sits as the Trinity County Committee on School District Organization. All of the school’s territory was annexed to TAUSD. TAUSD never used it as a school site and was told by the USFS that they had to occupy and utilize it as such or pay to have it torn down. Instead, in 2021, the school district transferred ownership to the Nor-El-Muk Wintu Tribe (“the People of the South”) for their use as a tribal education facility and for other community uses⁴².



Cox Bar, 1929-30

⁴⁰ USDA Forest Service, “Shasta-Trinity National Forest Determination of Effect, Cox Bar School Playing Field Fill Project”, ARR/Contract Number 05-14-408, Addendum #5, 3-4 and 11-12.

⁴¹ French, Jim, Superintendent of Schools, Letter to Jeanne Hunt, Cox Bar School Administrator, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education; and Smith, Ron, “Standard Appraisal Review Report”, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 9/9/97.

⁴² Supahan, Sarah, email correspondence with Tracy Foster-Olstad, Nor El Muk Tribe, January 26, 2022.



"Big Bar" School 1935 (i.e. Cox Bar)