

## Deadwood School District

The town of Deadwood was located 11 miles east of Weaverville (and seven miles east of Lewiston, about ¼ miles before the fish Hatchery) on Deadwood Creek in Wintu ancestral territory. It is said to be named—not surprisingly—due to dead trees along the creek. It started as a gold camp in 1851. In 1880, the Brown Bear Mine was established in that location. A post office was established in 1886.<sup>1</sup> When gold was discovered there, families came with several children who all needed to be educated. The first evidence of the Deadwood School having been established and receiving state apportionments (funding) was in August of 1887.<sup>2</sup>

The first attendees at the Deadwood School were the Garvin family children: Edrin, Maggie, Ollie, Dolles, and Pearl; the Leonard family children: Cina, Etta, Gertrude, and Saddle; The Blgrave family children: James, George, Harry, and Earnest; The Maby family children: Irene, Freddie, and Jenny; also, Vernon and Charlie Wilson and Edith and Addie Richards, “and Willie.” The teacher was Miss Phillips. The school building was sometimes used for dances, Sunday School, and speeches.<sup>3</sup> Large crowds often gathered for the events because “Deadwood is famous for its jolly times.”<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> *History and Happenings*, <http://historyandhappenings.squarespace.com/trinity-county/?currentPage=2>. Accessed June 26, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “Apportionment of School Money”, *The Trinity Journal*, August 27, 1887.

<sup>3</sup> Information said to be copied from the back of a painting titled “In Memory of Our School House”; the painting is unknown. Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>4</sup> *The Trinity Journal*, June 29, 1895.

The first Deadwood schoolhouse was said to be built in 1885.<sup>5</sup> In the spring of that same year, teacher Nellie S. Lowden of Weaverville opened the spring term at Deadwood early in March, and she closed that term on June 21.<sup>6</sup> The Deadwood School must have first opened as a private school, like many others in Trinity County, paid for by subscriptions. However, on February 19, 1887, the school district was officially established as a public school by order of the Trinity County Board of Supervisors.<sup>7</sup> The boundaries of the new school district were established as follows:

Beginning at Gibson's Arrastra\* on Deadwood creek [sic] and running thence south to the Lewiston and Shasta Turnpike: thence easterly along said Turnpike to the Summit of Trinity Mountain; thence in a northerly direction along the summit of said mountain to the intersection of the dividing ridge between Eastman and Mooney gulches; thence in a westerly direction along down said dividing ridge to a point due north from Blakemore's Lower Arrastra on Eastman gulch; thence south to said Arrastra; thence in a straight line to the place of beginning.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, the school shows up in the August 1887 list of public schools in the local Trinity Journal newspaper as having received state funding. The local paper reported that it only took a couple of days after the school district was established to raise \$400 to build a new schoolhouse. Work was to begin on the building right away. Henry Martin, H. L. Leonard, and Wm. Blagrove were appointed as school district trustees to hold office until the next school election.<sup>9</sup>

The paper recorded that there were as many as 33 students at Deadwood in 1888,<sup>10</sup> but interestingly, on April 7, 1888, the following notice appeared in the paper:

The Deadwood public school opened on the 2<sup>nd</sup>...for the spring term. The enterprising citizens of Deadwood testified to their appreciation of Miss Lucy Phillips' efficient work as teacher by raising sufficient funds, *by private subscription*, to carry out the school for the term.<sup>11</sup>

While the number of students clearly supports public funding for the Deadwood School, the need for private subscriptions could very well have been because there were times in history when the state could not fund schools for the full year (which at that time was only seven or eight months).

By the spring of 1890, Miss Phillips was still teaching at Deadwood,<sup>12</sup> and there was an increase in enrollment to 47 students at the school; 19 were boys, and 28 were girls.<sup>13</sup> She closed the School for the year on Friday, June 20.<sup>14</sup> Then, in November of that year, R. Rankin was the new teacher assigned to Deadwood. Enrollment at that time rose to 34 students with an average daily attendance of 30.<sup>15</sup> The school also shows up in the county school warrants ledger book in 1891, having received and used public funding to pay bills.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Information said to be copied from the back of a painting titled, "In Memory of Our School House"; the painting is unknown. Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>6</sup> "Town and County News", *The Trinity Journal*, March 16, 1895 and June 29, 1895.

<sup>7</sup> "Board of Supervisors, School District Established", February 19, 1887.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> "New School House", *The Trinity Journal*, April 30, 1887.

<sup>10</sup> "School Census", *The Trinity Journal*, June 30, 1888.

<sup>11</sup> "Deadwood School", *The Trinity Journal*, April 7, 1888.

<sup>12</sup> "Schools Closed", *The Trinity Journal*, June 28, 1890.

<sup>13</sup> "School Census", *The Trinity Journal*, June 7, 1890.

<sup>14</sup> "Schools Closed", *The Trinity Journal*, June 28, 1890.

<sup>15</sup> "School Reports", *The Trinity Journal*, November 29, 1890.

<sup>16</sup> *Warrant Records*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education. 98.

By 1892, the number of enrolled students dropped significantly to 15, with five boys and ten girls. It closed for the year on June 17th. The teacher that year was M. Hocker. That next fall, there was yet another teacher, Miss Isabel Richmond from Anderson. By July of 1893, the number of students had increased to 17, but with an average daily attendance of only 14.<sup>17</sup> The next month, Miss Nellie Lowden returned as the teacher after several years.<sup>18</sup> The teacher turnover rate in the county in the early school days was often very high.



*Deadwood School House, undated photo*

In June of 1895, a school ball was held on a Saturday to raise funds to repair the schoolhouse. Tickets for the dance were \$2.<sup>19</sup> Nellie Lowden was still the teacher there. Only five months later, the schoolhouse had a narrow escape from being burned in a fire. During school hours, the fire started between the ceiling and the roof and was “getting under good headway when discovered.” Boys at the school climbed the roof, tore off the shingles, and extinguished the fire despite having their hands badly blistered from the heat.<sup>20</sup>

In August 1895, 21 students were enrolled, and Miss Nellie Lowden was paid \$70 per month. This was the average salary for a teacher in the county at that time.<sup>21</sup> School Superintendent Lizzie H. Fox visited Deadwood School for an official visit on Friday, November 2, 1895,<sup>22</sup> just before teacher Miss Lowden closed the fall term of the school on November 27.<sup>23</sup>

By March 1896, the school had been newly ‘papered’ and painted and presented “a very neat and attractive appearance.”

We are also pleased to see the interest shown by the pupils in improving their school room and grounds. A neat picket fence is now looming up, and the boys and girls propose to study botany out of their own Flower garden.<sup>24</sup>

According to the local paper, a heavy rain storm caused the school to close on Friday, November 20, 1896, with Miss Lowden leaving for her home in Weaverville the following Saturday. It likely resulted in the end of the fall term. Apparently, such a storm in November was notable in Deadwood as people were said to be caught without their winter wood in. Besides the school, some events were canceled as well, and many people were sick with severe colds.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., July 15, 1893.

<sup>18</sup> “Town and Country News”, *The Trinity Journal*, Ibid., August 19, 1893; and “School Notes”, March 3, 1895.

<sup>19</sup> *The Trinity Journal*, June 29, 1895.

<sup>20</sup> “Almost a Fire”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 23, 1895.

<sup>21</sup> Fox, Lizzie (Superintendent of Schools), “Our Public Schools, Teachers, Clerks, and Other Matters of Interest”, *Trinity Journal*, August 8, 1895.

<sup>22</sup> “Deadwood News”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 2, 1895.

<sup>23</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 23, 1895.

<sup>24</sup> “Deadwood News”, *The Trinity Journal*, March 7, 1896.

<sup>25</sup> “Deadwood Croppings”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 28, 1896.



Miss Lowden was still teaching at the school in the spring of 1897 when she had 20 students enrolled,<sup>26</sup> but by the fall term of the same year, Annie Fox, younger sister to Lizzie Fox, was employed as the teacher.<sup>27</sup>

Miss Grace E. Wilkie opened the spring term of Deadwood in 1903 on March 2.<sup>28</sup> A “Grand Ball” benefit was held to support the Deadwood School that spring. The teaching assignment changed again, and Miss Esther A. Cook was the teacher in December of 1903. There were 14 students enrolled, but only 11 were present at the time of an official visit.<sup>29</sup> By 1904, a teacher from Chico was engaged to teach at the school for the fall term. Her name was Miss Edna Arnold. She was paid \$70 per month.<sup>30</sup>

Again, in 1905, a benefit was held to help sustain the school. \$21 were raised. The teacher was “Miss Etta”.<sup>31</sup> In 1907, the student enrollment at Deadwood was 21 students.<sup>32</sup> By the spring of 1907, Miss Nellie Hennessey was engaged to teach at Deadwood, and she was the last documented teacher<sup>33</sup>, although there is a notation in the 1913 warrants under Deadwood School for \$70 paid to a “Mrs. O. Rudasill” who very well may have been a teacher at that time, given that the check amount was consistent with other salaries.<sup>34</sup>

Enrollment must have dwindled the next couple of years, so much so that it was notable in the local newspaper that Mr. Jack Cannon had moved his family from French Gulch to Deadwood in 1909, which would increase enrollment at the school.<sup>35</sup> In 1911, the

teacher at Deadwood was Masie Bigelow.<sup>36</sup>

The post office in Deadwood closed in 1915, and the school quickly followed. By 1916, the school no longer appeared on the public school apportionments list. The district was officially suspended during the 1916-17 school year, and it lapsed September 11, 1920, into Lewiston (17 students) and Minersville (nine students) School Districts.<sup>37</sup> The town of Deadwood is now on the list of ghost towns in California.<sup>38</sup>

\*An arrastra is a primitive mill for grinding and pulverizing gold or silver ore.

<sup>26</sup> “Districts, Clerks and Teachers”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 24, 1896; and *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Fox, Lizzie (Superintendent of Schools), “Districts, Clerks and Teachers, October 2, 1897.

<sup>28</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, February 28, 1903.

<sup>29</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 12, 1903; and November 5, 1904.

<sup>30</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 3, 1904.

<sup>31</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, April 16, 1905.

<sup>32</sup> “School Census”, *The Trinity Journal*, June 15, 1907.

<sup>33</sup> “Local Brevities”, *The Trinity Journal*, March 9, 1907.

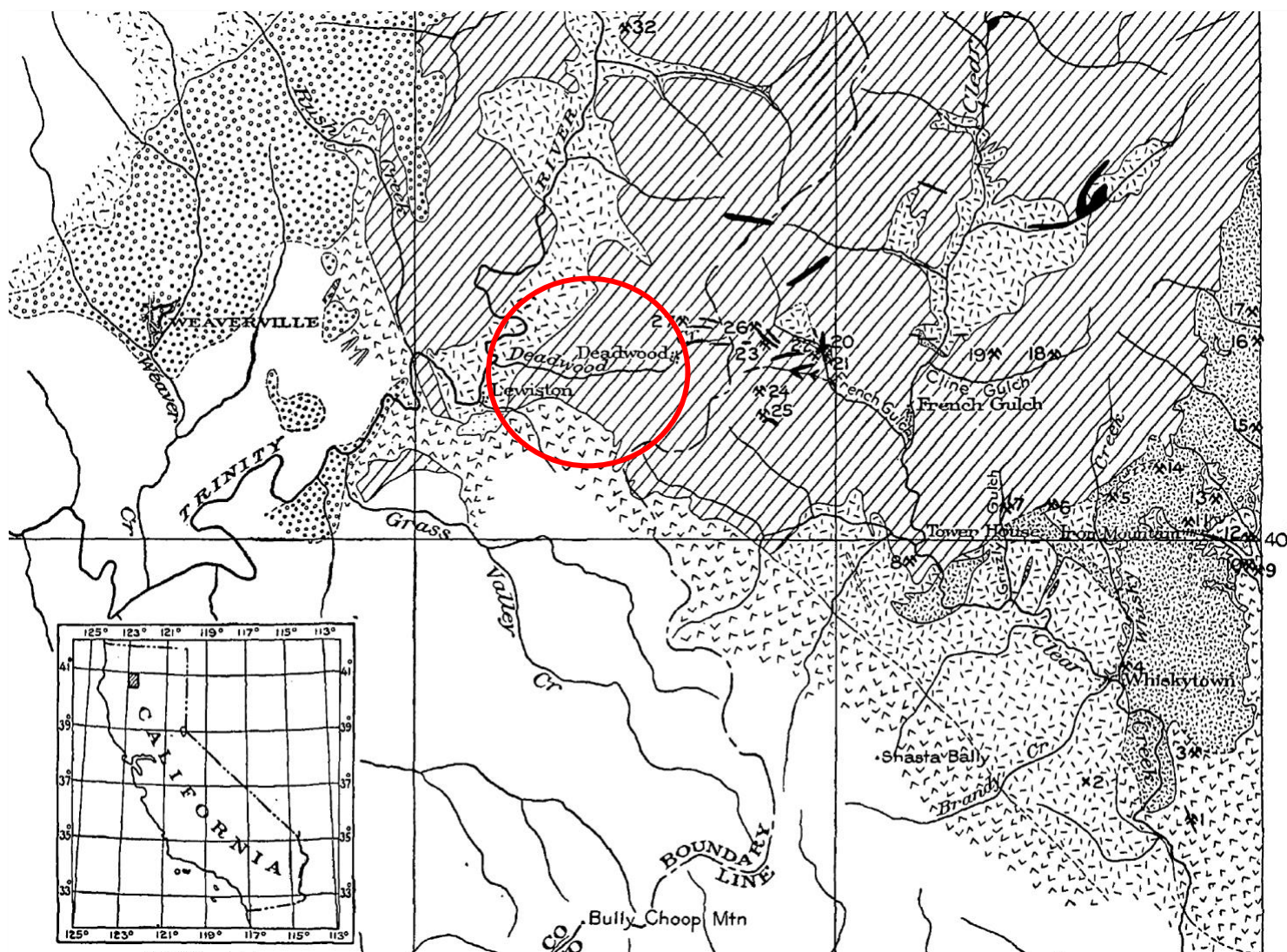
<sup>34</sup> *Warrant Records*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>35</sup> “Deadwood Mining Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 23, 1909.

<sup>36</sup> “Schools of Trinity Supplied With Teachers”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 2, 1911.

<sup>37</sup> *School District Disbursements & Receipts*, Minersville District information, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>38</sup> Ghost Towns, <https://www.ghosttowns.com/states/ca/deadwood.html>. Accessed October 25, 2022.



Map from the U.S. Geological Survey, 1906 Found in Diller, J. S., "Gold and Silver, Auriferous Gravels in the Weaverville Quadrangle, California", USGS Publications, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/bul/0540a/report.pdf>, accessed April 15, 2023.