

## Dredge Schools of Trinity County

Dredging companies were many in Trinity County, especially during the 1920s. Each company created its own dredging camp community, often made up, simply, of tents. Very little is known about the “dredge schools” that sprang up in these communities. We know that where there were groupings of workers, there usually were families with children who needed education, so schools quickly followed the creation of a new community. Usually, the dredge schools were private, paid for, and run by the dredging companies themselves. Below is what information could be found for just a few of the dredging schools in Trinity County.

### Coffee Creek Dredger School

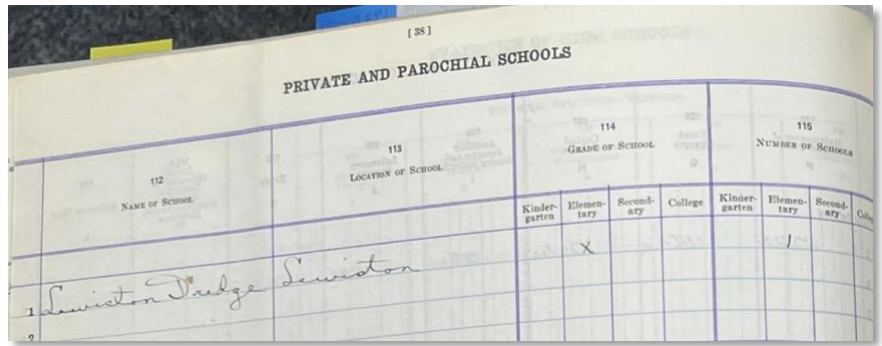
In November of the 1920-21 school year, the “Dredger” school was visited by the County office. Usually, private schools were not visited, but it was not unheard of for the County Superintendent to check on a private school. The visit report listed Agnes R. Rourke as the teacher, with nine students enrolled, seven of whom were in the primary grades. Their progress was noted as “Good” in all subject areas. Miss Rourke was receiving a salary of \$100 per month. She held a Trinity County Elementary Teaching Certificate.<sup>1</sup>

### Don Juan Dredge School

The Don Juan Dredge School was up and running near Burnt Ranch during the 1923-24 school year.<sup>2</sup> No other information has been found about this school or the Dredge itself.

### Lewiston Dredge School

The local paper reported that the Lewiston Dredge was completed and ready for operation “and will begin digging right away” in 1923. It was also noted that “Quite a little town has sprung up in a short time, and there are



112	113	114	115	GRADE OF SCHOOL				NUMBER OF SCHOOLS			
				Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	College	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	
NAME OF SCHOOL	LOCATION OF SCHOOL										
Lewiston Dredge	Lewiston			X				1			



prospects for a post office to be established soon.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the operation of the Lewiston Dredge School was reported in the 1922-23 school records listed under “Private and Parochial Schools.” The school was said to be “opening soon” on September 9, 1922, with Mrs. Harvey Bigelow teaching.<sup>4</sup>

In a regular meeting of the County Supervisors on September 20, 1924, the Trinity Journal newspaper noted that there was “a formal request to change the boundaries of the Minersville school district so that it may include within its bounds the *Lewiston dredge*, that the children at this place may attend said school. As this matter, to be considered would have to be regularly presented to the board, after due notices given, the matter is passed for further consideration.”<sup>5</sup> The request was approved in November of that year.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 56.

<sup>2</sup> “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 38.

<sup>3</sup> “Lewiston Newslets By Correspondent”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 20, 1923.

<sup>4</sup> “Lewiston Locals”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 9, 1922.

<sup>5</sup> “County Supervisors in Regular Meeting”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 20, 1924.

<sup>6</sup> “County Supervisors in Regular Session”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 11, 1924.

## Pacific Gold Dredging Company School

An official visit was made to the “Dredger School” which was labeled as a private school in October 1921 and again in May 1922. Catherine Baumgarten, who received her elementary teaching certificate from Texas, was teaching at the time and was paid \$110 monthly by the Pacific Dredging Company. There were ten students enrolled, split evenly between primary grade and “grammar grade.” Not only were the students doing well in all areas of study, but the building and grounds, library, and outbuildings were all determined to be in very good shape. A note on the record says, “A very progressive little school – children have special teachers in drawing and cooking.”<sup>7</sup>

130	131	134				135			
		Kindergarten	Elementary	High	College				
	Trinity Dredge	Minersville							

## Trinity Dredge School

During the 1924-25 school year, a Trinity Dredge private school was noted as operating in the town of Minersville, presumably for the children of the workers at the Trinity Dredge Company.<sup>8</sup> The Trinity Dredge, constructed in 1912 at the Blakemore Ranch, was powered by electricity produced in Minersville by water from the Van Matre

Ranch.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the Trinity Dredge area is now covered by Lewiston Lake, and it may have been the first in the world managed by a woman, Mary E. Smith. Her father, Ed L. Smith, was president of the company when it was formed in 1909. When he died, his son Ed Smith took over the operation but soon sold his stock to his sister Mary, who managed it until 1938.<sup>10</sup>

## Valdor Dredge School

Located “Below” Junction City, the Valdor (dredge) School was visited by the County Office of Education in October of 1922. Pearl Bigelow was teaching six students at the time. The school building was simply a tent in the dredge camp. However, the students were doing well, and their progress was good.<sup>11</sup> The Valdor Dredging Company moved to Lewiston in 1922 and became known as the Lewiston Dredging Company.<sup>12</sup>

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School Superintendent's Record of Official Visits

NAME OF DISTRICT Valdor (Private)

Name of District Valdor

Grade of School

Date of Visit October 25, 1922

Length of Visit 1/2 hour

Name of Teacher Pearl Bigelow

Class of Diploma or Certificate Elementary (Trinity Co.)

PROGRESS IN STUDIES

<sup>7</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 100

<sup>8</sup> “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 1924-25, 38, and “As it was: Trinity Dredge Hauls in Over 42 million in Gold”, [www.iipr.org/show/as-it-was/2019-07-24/as-it-was-trinity-dredge-hauls-in-over-2-million-in-gold](http://www.iipr.org/show/as-it-was/2019-07-24/as-it-was-trinity-dredge-hauls-in-over-2-million-in-gold), accessed January 15, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Fiorini-Jenner, Gail, “As It Was: Trinity Dredge Hauls in Over \$2 Million in Gold”, *Jefferson Public Radio*, <https://www.iipr.org/show/as-it-was/2019-07-24/as-it-was-trinity-dredge-hauls-in-over-2-million-in-gold>. Accessed March 31, 2024; and Bailey, Jim, Ph.D., *The Other California Gold: Trinity County Placer Mining, 1848-1962*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 131

<sup>12</sup> “Town Talk”, *The Trinity Journal*, July 7, 1922