

New River Area Schools (New River School, Denny School, Grover Ladd)

New River/Denny School

For some placed-based context, it is important to start with the fact that the river named “New River” originates in the Salmon Mountains. It eventually receives Quinby Creek and passes by the community of Denny.¹ It eventually flows into the Trinity River. “New River” often colloquially refers to the whole vicinity. There is also



New River School in Old Denny, 1904. Nellie Ladd photo, Bartlett Family Collection, a copy housed at Trinity County Office of Education. L to R: Hazel Dulion, Grover Ladd, Georgie Thomas, Martha Noble, school teacher Floy Lloyd with Steve Noble in front of her, and Willard Ladd in back with William “Tumsey” Noble in front of him. Martha was Steve and Sally Noble’s youngest child, while Steve and Tumsey were grandchildren. Their oldest child, Annie, married a Thomas, and so George Thomas here could be a relative as well. The building used to be the old Herricks Saloon.

mention of a “New River City” in the local paper in 1892. It became the town of Denny, named after the store owner of the same name. New River City is now referred to as “Old Denny” as it was abandoned in 1920 when the town was established further south. That community is known today as, simply, “Denny.”² In another source, the local newspaper in 1879 called the area “the Lower Trinity and New River section” of the county.³

New River was said to be named by the miners either as a new place to search for gold or simply as a “new river” that they “discovered.” It was originally named “yiduq ’nilin” (up country-creek) by Hupa language speakers, tcalitasom by Chimariko speakers, and akráah kumásaamvaroo by Karuk speakers – the original people of the area.⁴ The area of New River, however, is the ancestral territory of the Tsnungwe Tribe.

The Denny School was first opened as part of the “Lower Trinity School and New River School District” (1875-1904), and then as part of the Hawkins Bar School District (1904-1926), only later referred to as Denny School (c. 1950-60s). Later still the School was rebuilt and renamed “Grover Ladd” (c. 1964 - onward). All three names are referred to in different documents, all

located in or around the small community of Denny, “a remote mining community.”⁵

Unfortunately, because New River/Denny School was not a single-school district itself but was always a school that fell under a district’s name and oversight, there is little information in the educational records about it as most of the school directories and appropriations lists only refer to school *districts*. Old local newspapers are where most information can be found.

¹ “New River Back Country”, Shasta-Trinity National Forest, United States Department of Agriculture, https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm9_008476.pdf, accessed June 23, 2023.

² Ibid., and “New River News, A budget of Interesting Items From That Growing Camp”, The Trinity Journal, June 24, 1892.

³ “Pioneer Gone”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 20, 1879.

⁴ Tsnungwe Tribe, “General Description of Tribal Territory”, *Tsnungwe Place Names*, 13; Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_River_\(Trinity_River_tributary\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_River_(Trinity_River_tributary)), accessed June 23, 2023, and Ararahih’uripih, the Karuk Dictionary =, <https://linguistics.berkeley.edu/~karuk/karuk-dictionary.php?text-search=no>, accessed June 23, 2023.

⁵ Brown, Darleen L., correspondence with Jan Parrott, Editor, CA School Boards Association, Sacramento, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

As part of the “Lower Trinity and New River School District,” Miss Flora D. McKenzie taught for the first part of the 1899-1900 school year at the Lower Trinity School site, and Miss Bessie Coady taught the spring term at New River. This established the tradition of holding one school at two different locations during the year. Students would often stay with families near whichever schoolhouse was in session if it wasn’t located where they lived. For instance, the *Blue Lake Advocate* in August of 1902, reported that “Martha and Fred Noble of New River are boarding at the Newell place and attending the Lower Trinity School.”⁶

That school year, Miss McKenzie’s salary was \$60 per month, while Miss Coady earned \$75 per month. Twenty-one students were enrolled that year, although only nine students were present during the official visit to the Lower Trinity School site in October of 1899. A. L. McWhorter often accompanied Lizzie Fox, County Superintendent of Schools, when she visited the Lower Trinity School District. On this occasion, Mr. McWhorter and J. Koon both attended the official visit and were noted as being school trustees for the district.⁷ On a random side note, Mr. McWhorter also served as the postmaster for Burnt Ranch and was said to be “one of the best postmasters in the county.”⁸

Teacher George C. Sarvis left the Lower Trinity School and began teaching at New River School in January 1892. On June 24, 1892, he closed the school after a successful five-month term. Mr. Sarvis was from Eureka, where he returned during school vacations.

The next school year, on October 29, 1892, the Trinity Journal reported that Mr. Sarvis had left for Eureka after the fall term ended and then added this editorial comment:

For the next school term here, we suggest that the board of Trustees of the New River school district be considerate enough to hire one of Trinity [County’s] fair and accomplished daughters to teach our school. The qualifications of our young lady teachers in a public or private school room is [sic] already well-known. Then why not engage them rather than import outside pedagogue [sic] to teach our schools...⁹

The suggestion above seems to imply that at this time, the New River School was its own single-school district and not under the umbrella of a Lower Trinity (multi-school) District. However, in a ledger from 1897, the district title is written, “Lower Trinity School District,” and on the next line, “also New River,” so it seems they were, in fact, still one district at the time of the newspaper article above.¹⁰ Regardless, the Board of Trustees must have taken the advice provided in the paper because in July of 1893, “Miss Flora Woodbury of Weaverville opened the New River School after a vacation of two weeks.”¹¹ In April of 1894, the paper indicated that a Mr. T. M. Nicholson received a letter from Miss Woodbury stating that she would “be at White Rock to teach school April the 2nd or the 9th Providence permitting” (White Rock was a small settlement near what is now called “Old Denny” which was the location of the first Denny community). The newspaper commented that,

We are glad to hear that Miss Woodbury is coming back to teach here again although some of us have no children to place under her discipline, nevertheless, we all appreciate the general satisfaction she gave as a teacher here last year.¹²

⁶ *Blue Lake Advocate*, August 30, 1902.

⁷ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 111.

⁸ “From Lower Trinity”, *The Trinity Journal*, February 23, 1889.

⁹ “New River Items”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 29, 1892.

¹⁰ *Ledger 1891-1904*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 328.

¹¹ “Town and Country News”, *The Trinity Journal*, July 22, 1893.

¹² *The Trinity Journal*, April 7, 1894.

Another newspaper article confirmed that Miss Woodbury did indeed arrive and opened the New River School for the spring term of 1894.¹³

In a letter to her friend Blanche on July 1, 1894, student Mary Larcine of “New River Trinity Co. Cal.” writes, “School is out and I don’t know if we can have the fall term here or not if Mrs. Nicholson moves out we cannot.” She adds a line below her name, without apparent care for punctuation, “I don’t think I can go down and stay with you so I want you to come here and stay will you”¹⁴ It’s not clear where Blanche is located, nor is it clear why holding school in New River would be based on the plans of a Mrs. Nicholson, unless it was Mrs. Nicholson who was filling in that year for Miss Woodbury. The only reference to be found about Mrs. Nicholson is that she was one of the three ladies who performed an annual visit to the school.¹⁵

The very same teacher, Miss Woodbury, opened the spring term of the school in March of 1896,¹⁶ and she was still teaching there during an official school visit by the County Superintendent of Schools in October 1896. She was paid \$70 per month and taught 14 students.¹⁷ It’s possible that she taught there the majority of the time between 1893 and 1896, nearly three full school years. Teachers who remained at one school site for several years were unusual for the time.

In March of 1904, Hawkins Bar School was approved by the Board of Supervisors to become its own school district. At the same time, New River/Denny School left the Lower Trinity School District to help form the two-school district of Hawkins Bar.¹⁸ An article in the local paper confirms that a petition was presented to the Board of Supervisors from George Irving, the father of several children, to form a new district to be called “Hawkins Bar School District.” The district was to “take in all of New River and Lower Trinity, between the mouth of New River and Quinby Creek on the North side of Trinity River.”¹⁹ The newspaper also reported that an American flag was raised over the ‘Denny schoolhouse in the Hawkins Bar School District’ on August 8th that year.²⁰

It is interesting to note that a woman by the name of Nellie Ladd was appointed Denny Post Office Clerk in 1902 and also sat on the school board even before women could vote.²¹ According to one source, in 1904, the New River School was held at “Herrick’s Saloon” in Old Denny.²² In August of 1904, Miss Floy Lloyd arrived in the county, having accepted the position as the teacher for the Denny school, “a part of the Hawkin’s Bar School District”²³ where the school would be held for the fall term. In December 1904, the local paper announced that Miss Lloyd closed a successful four-month term on November 25th.²⁴ Nellie Ladd and her husband Frank Ladd, who lived in the area, offered lodging to young people who wanted to go to the Denny School but who lived too far away to walk there each day. The 1900 census reported that Laura Noble, 16, boarded with the Ladds, as well as the school teacher, Bessie Coady, aged 24.²⁵ A note in a visit record in September of 1905 indicates that students went to New River School for the autumn term and Hawkin’s Bar for the rest of the school year.²⁶

During the 1906-07 school year, the district warrants (record of bills paid) suggest that an S. A. Holman taught at the school for \$75 per month from August to June. It looks as though he continued through the fall term of 1907

¹³ “Town and Country News”, *The Trinity Journal*, April 7, 1894.

¹⁴ Larcine, Mary, A copy of the handwritten letter to Blanche, July 1, 1894, Historical Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

¹⁵ “New River News”, *The Trinity Journal*, July 2, 1892.

¹⁶ “Schools Open”, *The Trinity Journal*, March 14, 1896.

¹⁷ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 19.

¹⁸ “Board of Supervisors”, *The Trinity Journal*, March 12, 1904.

¹⁹ “Board of Supervisors”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 23, 1904.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Budig-Markin, Valerie, *Nellie E. Ladd*, 30.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

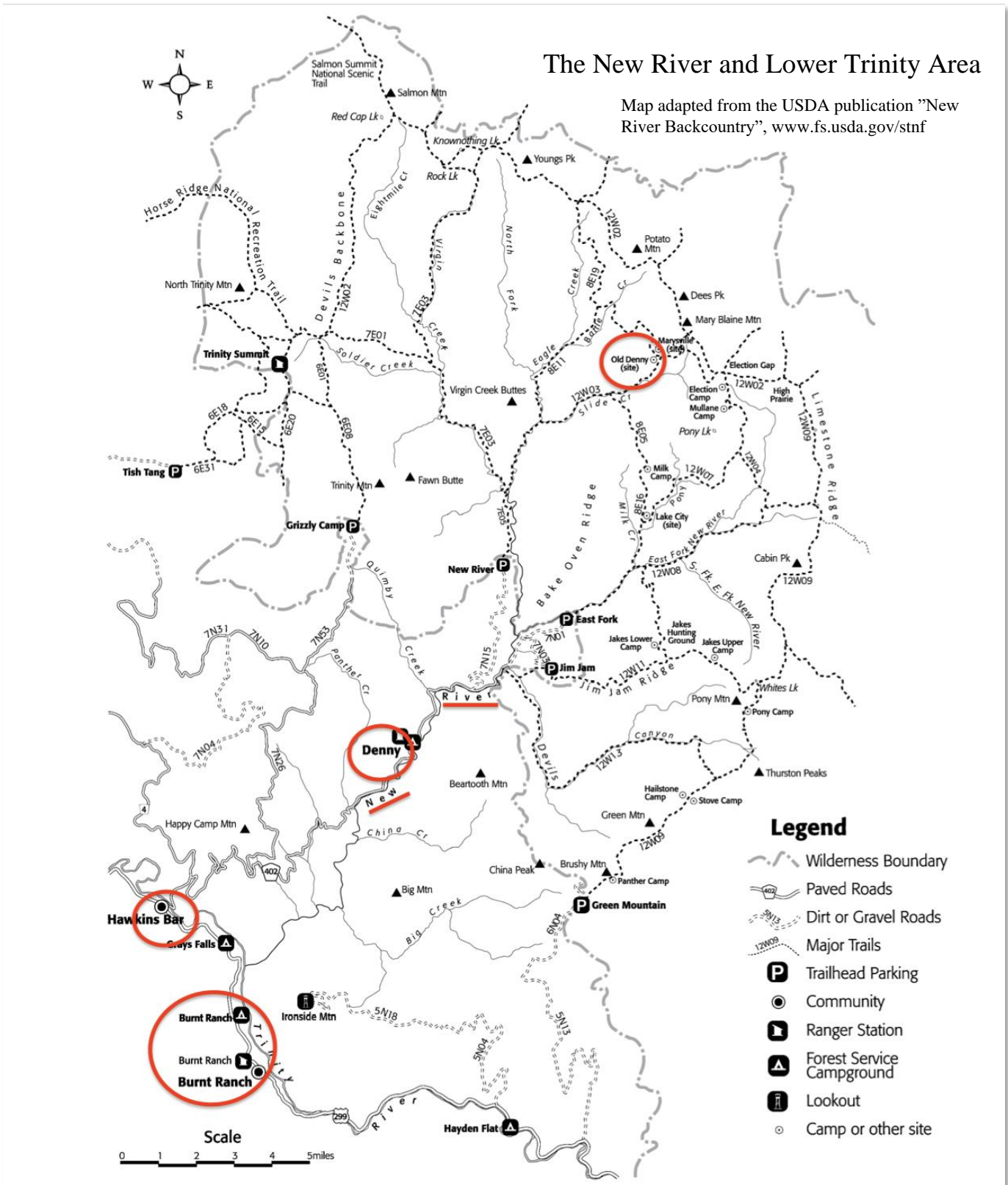
²³ “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 10, 1904.

²⁴ “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 10, 1904.

²⁵ Budig-Markin, Valerie, *Nellie E. Ladd*, 30; and Berrien, Gay, “The Nobles of New River”, Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook, 2021, 36.

²⁶ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 252.

when he was replaced by a D. S. Buterbaugh.²⁷ It must have been expected that one teacher would teach at both schools at different times of the year, and the two schools would never be opened simultaneously, as there is only one teacher at a time listed throughout most of the District records.

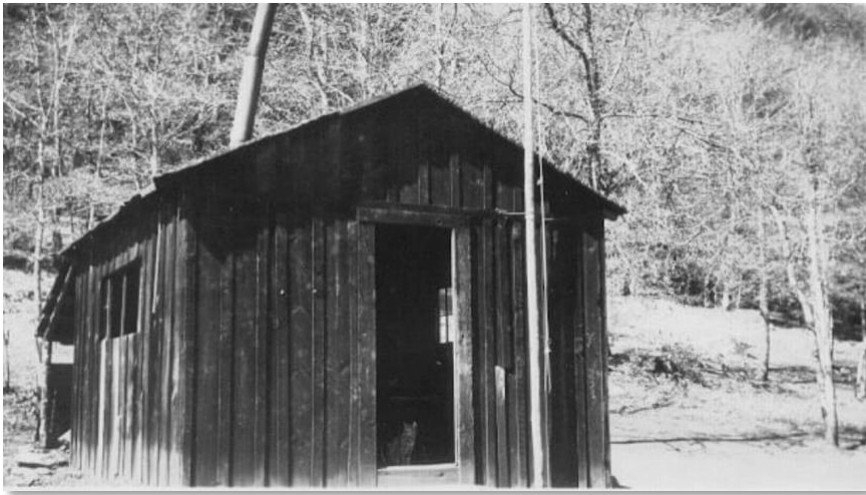


²⁷ Warrant Records, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

Roswell Koon was listed as the teacher at the Hawkin’s Bar School District in September 1911,²⁸ but he resigned due to poor health. It was said he’d been an excellent teacher.²⁹ By December 1911, Ethel W. McDonald of Burnt Ranch was the teacher of record, teaching six students. She had been teaching at the district for two months for \$70 per month. She had started teaching there with 22 months of teaching experience.³⁰ Ethel W. McDonald was still the teacher in 1912, and \$70 per month remained her salary.³¹ According to warrant records, she was still teaching there during February of 1913, although Elberta H. Bassham was paid mid-January of that year for teaching, perhaps for the previous fall term.³²

Between 1915 and 1917 there were four different teachers in the district, some only teaching for a month or two. They include Idell McDonald, Elberta Fontes, Caroline Koon, and Nellie Sheford. In 1917, Idell McDonald was back teaching in the District on a more permanent basis. The salary was still \$70. Worryingly, there were only nine students enrolled, with only four in class on the day of an official visit in October 1917.³³ Miss McDonald continued teaching the next fall in November of 1918, but now only two students were enrolled.³⁴ The lack of students in the district could have signaled an imminent closure, but by 1922 the district had grown to seven students – just over the threshold for a mandatory school suspension.

Sadly, it appears that teacher Florence A. Laughlin was the last teacher in the District. She taught there for the 1923-24 school year until the district was suspended on July 10, 1924. She made \$130 a month. Only one student was enrolled during that school year, and the district could not be maintained without the required minimum of



Denny Schoolhouse, 1932-1934, photo by Elsie Hover teacher, contributed by Marty Lenk

six students.³⁵ In May of 1926, the Hawkins Bar School District merged with Burnt Ranch, Cox Bar, and Lower Trinity.³⁶ It’s not clear what occurred right away for the New River/Denny school, but we do know that Quimby School in Denny began in the area for the 1921-22 school year so it is possible students were able to transfer to that school.³⁷

An article in a local paper on August 26, 1933, reported that Denny School was to reopen after 13 years to be reestablished as a “branch” of the Burnt Ranch School District. Mrs. Elsie Hover of Orleans was hired to be the teacher.³⁸ In 1933-34, Denny School opened as an “Emergency School” under the Burnt Ranch School District, as there were 8 children in the area who needed instruction.³⁹ Emergency Schools were not unusual at the time and are still governed by the Education Code today:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall allow, in addition to all other allowances, to the county school service funds: (a) for all emergency schools maintained in each elementary

²⁸ “Schools of Trinity Supplied With Teachers”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 2, 1911.

²⁹ “Lower Trinity Items”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 4, 1911.

³⁰ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 418.

³¹ *1912 Warrant Records*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

³² *Register of School Warrants*, February 28, 1913, Historical Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 292.

³³ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 574.

³⁴ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 8.

³⁵ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 139.

³⁶ “School District Disbursements & Receipts”, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

³⁷ “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

³⁸ “At Salyer and Vicinity on the Trinity”, *Blue Lake Advocate*, August 26, 1933.

³⁹ “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 2.

school district of the county by the county superintendent of schools... pursuant to Sections 48633 and 48634.

Surprisingly, or perhaps mistakenly, the Denny “Emergency School” was first listed under the “*Denny School District*” and was held from the 1933-34 to 1937-38 school years. Then it was listed again for the school year of 1939-40 as an emergency school under the Burnt Ranch School District. Mrs. Elsie Hover taught at the emergency school during two of those school years (1936-37 and 1937-38).⁴⁰

Grover Ladd

It’s unclear what occurred between the 1940s and 1960, but we do know that in May of 1964, the dedication of the new Denny School took place with 115 guests in attendance, including Harold T. Underwood, Superior Court Judge, Mrs. Mary Carpenter of the Trinity County Board of Education, Mrs. Bertha Riley, first teacher of the Denny School, Arthur C. Sanborn, County Superintendent of Schools, members of the Burnt Ranch Board of Trustees, and many others including a representative from The State Department of Education. The highlight of the evening was the announcement that the new school’s name was to be “Grover Ladd,” in honor of Grover H. Ladd, born in the New River area in 1887 and whose father was the founder of the original Denny (Old Denny). Anthony Gully was the teacher at the Grover Ladd at that time, and there were six students.⁴¹ Given that the Burnt Ranch Board was present at the dedication, it can be presumed that the new school fell under the Burnt Ranch School District.



The New Denny School renamed "Grover Ladd", under construction

Unfortunately, the brand-new, one-room school closed just a year later, in November 1965, due to unstable enrollment. Teacher Iris Ruppert had up to six students, and then there were periods when only one child attended. Miss Ruppert lost a “backpay lawsuit” about the fact that she’d been hired to teach for ten months at \$500 per month, but because the school closed, she’d only worked a portion of that time.⁴²

At some point, the school was reopened and then closed again in June of 1969 because of a lack of students. However, it reopened in September of 1970 because eight new students had just moved into the area. Howard Cole of Denny was employed as the teacher that year by the Burnt Ranch School District. The Burnt Ranch Board had considered requiring students from that area to drive to the Burnt Ranch School site each day to attend school, but they wisely decided that approximately 22 miles was too great a distance for students to travel, especially in the winter months on hazardous roads.⁴³ The enrollment at the beginning of the school year was 11, but it declined to only one student by the end of the year, and the school could not be sustained. It was suspended at that time.⁴⁴

Although the school was closed in 1971, it was reopened again on September 15, 1975, with Mrs. Sheryl Meier as the teacher. She had been working at the Burnt Ranch School site but became available for the Denny position when the enrollment dropped at Burnt Ranch. The drop in students was due to the local mill closing which

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Written on the back of a photo, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education; and “New Denny School Dedicated, Renamed Grover Ladd School”, *The Trinity Journal*, May 14, 1964.

⁴² “Teacher loses in Back Pay Suit”, *Record Searchlight*, December 7, 1967.

⁴³ “Denny School Opens” *Trinity County School Bulletin*, October 1970, 4.

⁴⁴ “Denny school reopens with 16”, *Record Searchlight*, December 23, 1975.

resulted in families with children moving away. Grover Ladd in Denny (still often referred to as “Denny School”) had 16 students enrolled at that time, which was the greatest number of students since reopening in 1964.⁴⁵ The Trinity County Superintendent of Schools, Bob Gravette, attributed the jump in enrollment to the arrival of a number of people “who are looking for a different lifestyle” on the dead-end Denny Road, a road that climbs over a 3,500 mountain range. Mr. Gravette added that the new “settlers” were also attracting others to the area. “We had one family from Florida – now we [have] two families from Florida.” he is quoted as saying. The

few students who had been in the Denny area before the influx were instructed by a resident tutor, Mrs. Connie Sanders, who was hired by the school district part-time.⁴⁶

In 1977, Grover Ladd School was, at the time, one of only two one-room schoolhouses left in Trinity County (the other was Zenia). It was described as a school located “in a remote mining community” and under the auspices of the Burnt Ranch School District.⁴⁷ An unnamed visitor to the school in April of 1977 said that the road lived up to its bad reputation but that the school was spacious and modern with its own well, light plant, and septic system. The school also had a well-stocked library and a kitchenette. Each child had his or her own desk. The ten children there were still taught by Mrs.



The New Denny School renamed "Grover Ladd" after it was completed, 1964

Meier as well as an assistant, Mrs. Donna Hamel. Each grade, K-8, was represented at the time, but there was only one female student. Music was a part of the curriculum. Often the 8th graders were included in the Burnt Ranch graduation ceremony, but that year, Mrs. Meier was planning her own ceremony in June for the two upcoming graduates.⁴⁸

The school closed its doors again around 1979 when it cost too much to keep a teacher for too few children. In 1984, the school still sat as an empty shell on a grassy knoll above the New River. By then, students were still either being driven from Denny to attend Burnt Ranch School or boarding nearby in Burnt Ranch, as one student did in 2008 when this author was the Superintendent of the Burnt Ranch School District.



The New Grover Ladd School with teacher Anthony Gully and students

⁴⁵ “Denny school reopens with 16”, *Record Searchlight*, December 23, 1975.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, and Sanders, Garth, “Denny School Reopens with 16”, *Redding Searchlight*, December 23, 1975.

⁴⁷ Brown, Darlene, L, Administrative Assistant to Robert C. Gravette, Trinity County Superintendent of Schools, correspondence with Jan Parrott, Editor, California School Boards Association Newsgram, June 8, 1977, Historic Documents Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

⁴⁸ “School Hopping”, *The Trinity Journal*, April 7, 1977.

For information about earlier dates of the New River School history, refer to the **Lower Trinity School District** history document and the **Hawkin’s Bar—The Traveling District** history. See also **Burnt Ranch School District**.