

North Fork School District

In 1849, a French-Canadian prospector by the name of Gross discovered gold on the North Fork of the Trinity River in Chimariko ancestral territory. Local historians believe him to be the first White man to settle in Trinity County. It may be no surprise then to learn that the North Fork School District is one of the first schools established in the county.¹

George Edmond Noonan relocated to California from Muckross Abbey, Killarney, Ireland via Nova Scotia and then New York. He arrived in Trinity County in 1852. He began here as a miner of the Bagdad mine in the community called by the same name. Later it was called North Fork, then "The Cove", and later still the community was renamed Helena which is what it's known as today.² After a time, Noonan became a hotel and storekeeper and also one of the first teachers in the North Fork School which received official apportionments from the county in 1866 for the 47 children attending there.³



"Old Settlers Association", George Noonan, front, 4th from Left, photo courtesy of the Trinity County Historical Society

Even in later years, George Noonan continued to be heavily involved in education in many different roles. He served as the County Superintendent of Schools from 1879 to 1882 and also became a trustee of the Weaverville School District.⁴

North Fork School District received further apportionments for a lesser amount in 1869⁵ for only 16 students, but by 1872 a huge increase in student enrollment brought the number of students attending the school to 45.⁶

In July of 1887, a very brief mention in the local paper lists the teacher at North Fork as Miss Lavina Brady who opened the summer term on July 25,⁷ and by 1889, Miss Cora Woodbury closed the spring term on May 10th.⁸ She was also teaching at the school in 1890 when she closed the school for the summer on the 25th.⁹

For the fall term of 1890, Celia Weinheimer taught at North Fork as her very first (of many) teaching jobs in Trinity County after having finished grade 10 and taken her examination before the County Board to receive her teaching Certificate that summer.¹⁰ She was 18 years old. She received \$60 per month and paid \$15 for room and board at Meckel's Hotel. She and her pupils who lived nearby at North Fork walked or skipped the two miles to and from school each day. Between 15 and 20 children attended at that time.¹¹

In 1891, it appears that Celia Weinheimer was still the teacher at North Fork as her name shows up multiple times in the school's warrant records. The odd thing is that she received her pay at irregular times for differing

¹ Holland, James. *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 19 & 24.

² "Old North Fork, Bagdad of the Frontier", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1955, 19.

³ "School Fund", *The Trinity Journal*, January 16, 1866.

⁴ "From Ireland to Trinity" unknown author, unknown date, article from the Trinity County Historical Society.

⁵ "Apportionment of School Monday for Trinity County", *The Trinity Journal*, July 3, 1869.

⁶ "Apportionments", *The Trinity Journal*, September 7, 1872.

⁷ "Summer Schools", *The Trinity Journal*, July 30, 1887.

⁸ "Town and Country News", *The Trinity Journal*, May 18, 1889.

⁹ "Schools Closed", *The Trinity Journal*, June 28, 1890.

¹⁰ "Board of Education", *The Trinity Journal*, July 5, 1890.

¹¹ Morris, Florence, "Auntie Cee" Biography of a Trinity Schoolteacher, Cecilia Weinheimer", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1967, 51-53.

amounts (in May 1891 for \$130; in December 1891 for \$227; in June 1892 for \$189.75; in July 1892 for \$21.50; in December 1892 for \$167; in January 1893 for \$44.25; and in May 1893 for \$195). Given that the going rate for teachers at that time was \$60 - \$70, it appears as though she was paid a regular salary of \$65 for multiple months at one time, and was also paid for some expenses.

Celia opened the school in March of 1892¹² and was still teaching at North Fork in March of 1893¹³ although she left North Fork sometime later that same year when her fiancé was killed in a mining accident. It may have been because of that tragedy that she left North Fork and moved on to teach at a private school in Trinity County named Wildwood which needed a teacher at that time.¹⁴ Strangely, however, a farewell party was held for her on May 18, 1891, two years earlier so it's difficult to know what actually occurred. Perhaps representatives of the North Fork School were able to convince her to remain at the school for another couple of years instead of leaving in 1891 as she had originally planned. The farewell party was described in an elaborate and sometimes humorous way in the Trinity Journal:

Your correspondent in company with several others, had the pleasure of attending a farewell party, given by the young ladies of North Fork on the evening of the 16th at the Lorenz ranch in honor of Miss Celia Weinheimer, the popular young school ma'am who had on the 15th completed a very successful term of school in that district. We had no idea that so much youth and beauty could be assembled together on such short notice, but such was the undeniable fact, and your humble writer could not realize for some time whether he belonged to this earth or had gone to that other world where it is said all is beautiful. On invitation of our lovely young hostess we inspected the rooms used for the occasion, and found them magnificently decorated with flowers and evergreens in lavish profusion. At 9 o'clock the guests having all arrived, dancing was in order, which pleasure was indulged in until twelve when the announcement was made that supper was ready, and we sat down to what indeed was a banquet. I shall not say how good it was, but to us old barnacles it was a taste of Heaven, and made us think of what might have been, if in our younger days we could have followed the teachings of the Scripture, and found some one [sic] to share our lot, and—well, we didn't!

After supper music and singing charmed away the hours and almost before we knew it the darkness had melted into gray shadows which heralded the coming dawn and each one departed to their several homes, feeling that they had never enjoyed a more pleasant evening. We, the masculine residents of Coleridge that were present on the occasion, tender to the ladies of North Fork and vicinity our sincere thanks and, while we do not wish to impose on them, we think we could survive several parties of that kind, only we hope the farewell is not for all time.¹⁵

Given Celia's propensity for decorating, it's not a surprise that she read a paper at the first teacher's institute in Trinity County titled, "School Room Decorations".¹⁶

In August 1895, The North Fork began the school year with teacher Mary Hocker. She was paid \$65 per month with seven students enrolled, and an average attendance of five.¹⁷ The school also received a visit from the County Superintendent during the school year of 1894-95.¹⁸

¹² "Town and Country News", *The Trinity Journal*, March 26, 1892.

¹³ *The Trinity Journal*, March 4, 1893.

¹⁴ Morris, Florence, "Auntie Cee" Biography of a Trinity Schoolteacher, Cecilia Weinheimer", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1967, 51-53

¹⁵ "A Farewell Party", *The Trinity Journal*, May 23, 1891.

¹⁶ "First Institute of the County Closes Successfully", July 1, 1899.

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

¹⁸ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 7.

The first North Fork School building was originally located on the river bank near the Meckel Brewery Building. Later, perhaps due to the proximity of the brewing company which “dispensed its product in the cool tap room downstairs”, the school changed location to a place “by the big rock”¹⁹ and “along the road between North Fork and Lorenz’s Ranch”.²⁰ In another reference, the location was called Lime Point. The new school had students whose last names were Meckel and Schlomer; Pauline McWhorter was also a student there along with many others.²¹

In December of 1895, the schoolhouse burned to the ground. The building and contents, including the library, were a total loss and students returned to the original school building until the population dwindled and the school closed.²² As was reported in the local paper, the origin of the fire was unknown. The school had been unoccupied at the time and for the six months before the fire it had not been used as a school.²³ In August of 1896, as the new school year began, the North Fork School District received apportionments, so it must have been functional again. The apportionments had been minimal (\$25.02 when all other small districts were receiving \$45 to \$120) and because the amount of money per school was based on the number of students attending, there must have been very few students. It's not surprising then, that in January of 1897, North Fork School District was closed and lapsed into the Red Hill School District.²⁴ In April of that same year, Red Hill School District was the recipient of all the money in the North Fork Library Fund, as well as the books and “apparatus” from the North Fork School District as it was transferred to Red Hill School from North Fork by order of the Board of Supervisors.²⁵

¹⁹ “Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity” by Katherine R. McGowan, *Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972, 10.

²⁰ “School House Burned”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 7, 1895.

²¹ McGowan, Katherine R., “Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity”, *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972, 10.

²² *Ibid.* and “School House Burned”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 7, 1895.

²³ “School House Burned”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 7, 1895.

²⁴ “Board of Supervisors. School District Abolished”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 16, 1897.

²⁵ “Board of Supervisors; In Re North Fork Library”, *The Trinity Journal*, April 24, 1897.