

Ruth School, Mad River School District (AKA “Painesville School”)

The town and the school district were named for the river that helped to inspire explorer Josiah Gregg’s temper¹. The Mad River School District had no schoolhouse when it began. Instead, when Joseph “Jodie” Hutchens started school there as a student, they were taught under some large willow and ash trees.²

The Mad River School District was said to have been “organized” in 1897, perhaps first as a single, private school.³ The school district was officially established in county school records on January 10, 1898.⁴ In fact, that year is confirmed in an article in the Trinity Journal that lists the polling place for Hettenshaw area at the “Mad River school house” on October 29, 1898.⁵

In a report following an official visit to the school on June 5, 1899, there were 15 students enrolled with only eight in attendance on the day of the visit. Their “order” was “Exceedingly good”, very obedient and attentive.” Perhaps this was because the teacher, Miss Elizabeth “Lizzie” Taylor, displayed “an unusual amount of zeal and energy”.⁶ A note in the local paper declares that Miss Taylor of Weaverville would be opening the school for the Spring term on the 10th day of April, 1899.⁷

A schoolhouse was finally constructed for the school sometime between 1900 and 1904. It was built across the Mad River from the present (2023) Mad River Store and Post Office, in Lassik ancestral territory. Every year it was inundated by the rising waters of the river. Consequently, the school was rebuilt about fifteen miles upstream and was said to have been renamed Ruth Elementary School.⁸ The school was indeed located in the community of Ruth. The town of Ruth was named in 1902 after Ruth McKnight, the granddaughter of John T. McKnight and his wife who lived in the area.⁹ The school located there was administered by the Mad River Joint School District.¹⁰ However, the actual name of the school can be disputed. While some documents - as well as many individuals - refer to the school as “Ruth School”, in the historical school records at the Trinity County Office of Education the name of the school was officially written, “Mad River School, Ruth”, as though it was the Mad River School located in the community of Ruth. Also, there is no mention of a “Ruth School” in the local paper from 1900 to 1919 although there are many references to Mad River School District during the same period. Perhaps the school was simply more casually referred to by the community as “Ruth School” to distinguish it from the first, original Mad River School building. We may never really know for sure.

¹ “How the River Got Its Name”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1966, 22.

² Hutchens, Joseph N. “Jodie”, “Memories of Early Days on Mad River”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1967, 29.

³ “Trinity County Schools Growing With California”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 28, 1956.

⁴ Holland, James. *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 28; and historical records from the Trinity County Office of Education.

⁵ “Election Proclamation”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 29, 1898.

⁶ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historical Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 100.

⁷ *The Trinity Journal*, March 18, 1899.

⁸ Smith, Donald W., “The Historical Study of the Organization and Development of Sothern Trinity High School”, California State University, Chico, 1975, 10.

⁹ “History and Happenings, Acorns of Information about Local History and Genealogy”, <http://historyandhappenings.squarespace.com/trinity-county/?currentPage=4>, accessed March 24, 2023.

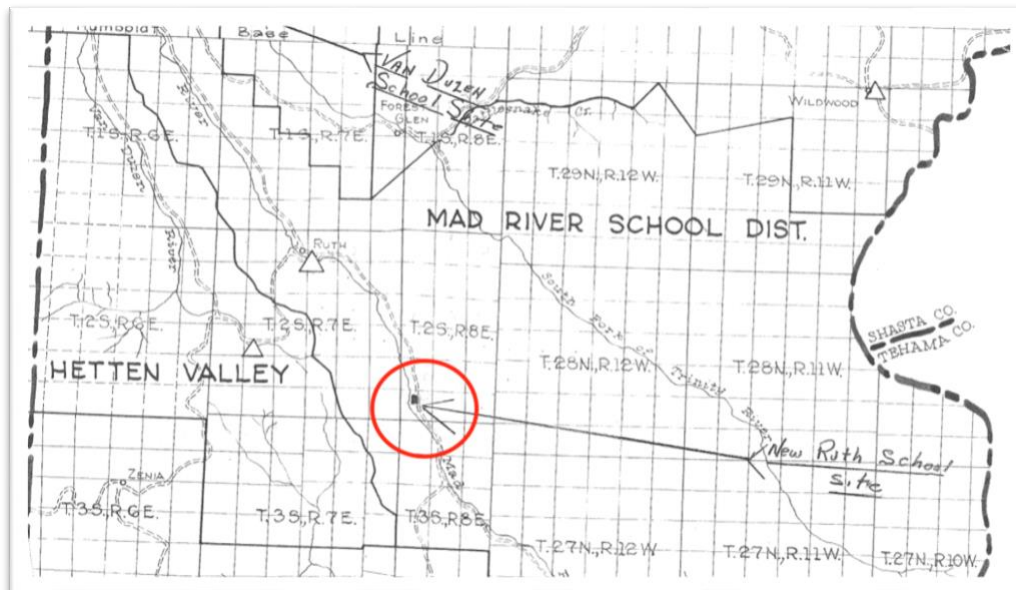
¹⁰ Smith, Donald W., “The Historical Study of the Organization and Development of Sothern Trinity High School”, California State University, Chico, 1975, 10.

In the fall of 1903, C. W. Leininger was the teacher and the school was closed on November 13 for the winter break.¹¹ For the 1904-05 school year, the teacher at “Mad River” was John J. Reid who taught for \$80 per month.¹² In April of 1906, an article in the local paper explained that Mr. Hill, who had taught in Hoaglin several years prior, was traveling to his new teaching assignment at “Mad River”. Unfortunately, he lost his way and had to spend the night in the woods. Finally, a day later, he arrived at “Ruth” just in time to open the school for the spring term. Not only is this information an illustration of just how isolated the area was – and still is – but it’s also an example of the way that the two locations are often used interchangeably.¹³

In any event, it appears that the schoolhouse was rebuilt in 1910 by the ranchers who lived nearby, and was described as a “very nice schoolhouse”. That school building was still there when Joseph “Jodie” Hutchens wrote an article about it which was published in the 1967 Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook.¹⁴

In August 1914, according to the official visiting records, the teacher at Mad River was Amy C. Sunde. Her entire teaching experience consisted of 20 months, four of which were at Mad River. Her teaching certificate came from Trinity County. There were 15 students enrolled at the school and 13 were present at the time of the visit. She was paid \$80 per month.¹⁵ Four years later, in a visit on October 1918, Caltha Robinson was teaching at Mad River for the same salary. There were 18 students at this time. The “Methods and Zeal” of Miss Robinson was reported to be only “fair”. The very next October, of 1919, Maori Davis, who received her diploma from the Humboldt State Normal School (a teacher training program), was employed at the school and had 14 students enrolled. She was paid \$90 per month. The records indicate she was an excellent teacher and her students were doing well in all subject areas. In fact, a note about the

visit reads “Very fine teacher, ardent and fond of her work.” Two years later, in 1921, the teacher was A. W. Mock who made \$120 per month. The enrollment had dropped significantly to six students, dangerously close to the



cut-off for public funding. In fact, a note in the visit records indicates that the McKnight children

¹¹ “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 19, 1903.

¹² “Districts, Clerks, Teachers, Trinity County, 1904-1905”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 5, 1904.

¹³ *The Trinity Journal*, April 27, 1906.

¹⁴ Hutchens, Joseph N. “Jodie”, “Memories of Early Days on Mad River”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1967, 29.

¹⁵ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 492.

had been attending irregularly and were planning to move to Big Bar so there was a danger of the school having a poor attendance record. Remarkably, the school was able to continue, however. There was a visit to the school in July of 1926 by the county superintendent at the time. Anne S. Hunder (? the handwritten name is not fully legible) taught at Mad River for \$145 per month, but there were only five students. The number of students had to have been a concern as there were still only five students recorded during visits in July 1929 and September 1930. Both years were taught by teacher Anita Anderson whose salary went from \$140 to \$150 over the course of a year. Luckily, enrollment increased to seven in August of 1931 under teacher Elizabeth Davitt. However, at that time the school needed repairs on the building and the water system.¹⁶ This could have spelled the end of the Mad River School District, but it continued on.

“Mad River, Ruth” was the only school listed in the area until the “Emergency School, Mad River” was noted under the Mad River School District in the Annual Report records at the Trinity County Office of Education. This “Emergency School” existed from the 1935-36 school year through the 1939-40 school year.¹⁷ Bertha Martin taught school at the emergency school on Forest Service land along the Mad River in a tent in 1935-36. For one boy of 13, it was the first time he had ever attended school.¹⁸

For just one school year, in 1946-47, an additional school fell under the Mad River School District, referred to as “Lower Mad River, Bridgeville”.¹⁹ It’s interesting to note that the community of Ruth is located on “Lower Mad River Road”.

Roberta (Lynch) Frasier, the mother of Peggy Canale, for many years the Southern Trinity Joint Unified School District Superintendent, lived on the Van Duzen side and used to ride her horse over the Mad River Ridge to the Mad River School when she was in 8th grade in 1949.²⁰

Besides a school, the Ruth community also constructed a teacherage (a place for the teacher to live) which was later used as a classroom, at least in 1956. At that same time, Mr. and Mrs. Donald Reese were the teachers at the school and there were 30 students enrolled. The Mad River School District trustees then were Bruce Simpson, Chauncey F. Willburn, and Mrs. Earl P. Dillon²¹.

In 1959, the Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District began to buy land along the Mad River in order to construct a water reservoir for the Eureka and Fortuna communities along the coast. Ruth Dam was completed and Ruth Lake was filled by 1962. “Ruth School” was then rebuilt even further up the Mad River about two miles south of the community of Ruth due to the construction of the dam.²² See the un-dated map below with the hand-written location of the “new Ruth School site”.

¹⁶ *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1918-1933*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 18, 46, 70, 227, 352.

¹⁷ “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 1935-36 – 1939-40.

¹⁸ Keter, Thomas S., “A Compendium of People and Places for the North Fork Eel River Region during the Homesteading Era”, http://wordpress.solararch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/people_and_places_nferw_vol_1.pdf, 2017. Accessed August 23, 2023, 153.

¹⁹ “Statistics of Elementary Schools”, *Annual Reports*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 1946-47.

²⁰ Supahan, Sarah, email communication with Canale, Peggy, Superintendent of the Southern Trinity Joint Unified School District, April 22, 2022.

²¹ “A Short History of the Schools of Trinity County”, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 1956, 6.

²² Smith, Donald W., “The Historical Study of the Organization and Development of Sothern Trinity High School”, California State University, Chico, 1975, 11.

One building that was Ruth School later became the current (2023) community church located at 19320 Mad River Road.²³ An additional Ruth School that was only used for a few years is now Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District Headquarters.

Another school building was completed in 1964 (see the last photo below). It was 2,544 square feet and cost \$74,169.²⁴

When the Hettenshaw Elementary School and Ruth Elementary schools were both closed around 1969, students from both schools were sent to Van Duzen Elementary School, in the “Mad River Joint School District”.²⁵ In 1969, the Mad River District had a total of 126 students and 138 students in 1970.²⁶



Also called "Painesville School" due to its location at Painesville, across the river from Mad River Store. Photo provided by Peggy Canale from her family's collection

According to the California Department of Education, there are actual records that “Ruth Elementary School” of the Mad River Joint Elementary District did exist by that name, however, their records indicate it was open on July 1, 1980 (the same date as Van Duzen School), and closed for good on June 30, 1989. The County-District-School Code (CDS Code) was listed as 53 71753 6053797.²⁷ There’s no further explanation for this information.

See also **Hettenshaw and Van Duzen Schools**.

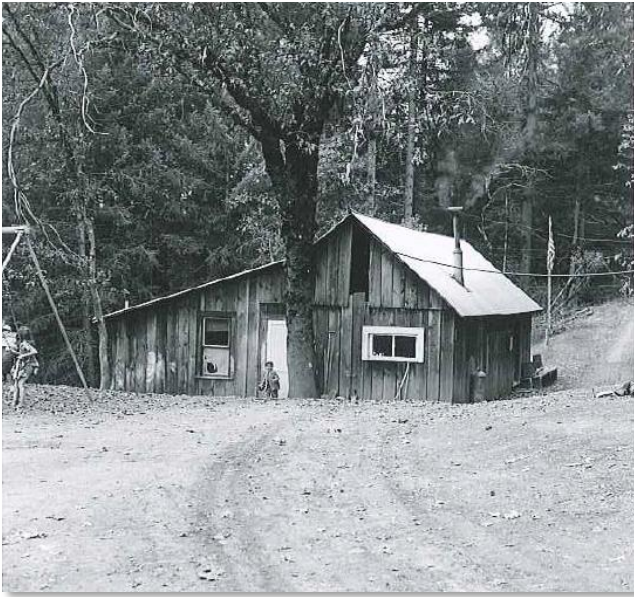
²³ Supahan, Sarah, email communication with Canale, Peggy, Superintendent of the Southern Trinity Joint Unified School District, April 22, 2022.

²⁴ This was referred to in handwritten, untitled notes found in the Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

²⁵ Supahan, Sarah, email communication with Canale, Peggy, Superintendent of the Southern Trinity Joint Unified School District, January 4, 2022.

²⁶ *Trinity County School Bulletin*, Trinity County Office of Education, October 1970, 2.

²⁷ “California School Directory”, California Department of Education, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/schooldirectory/details?cdscode=53717536053797>, accessed April 14, 2023.

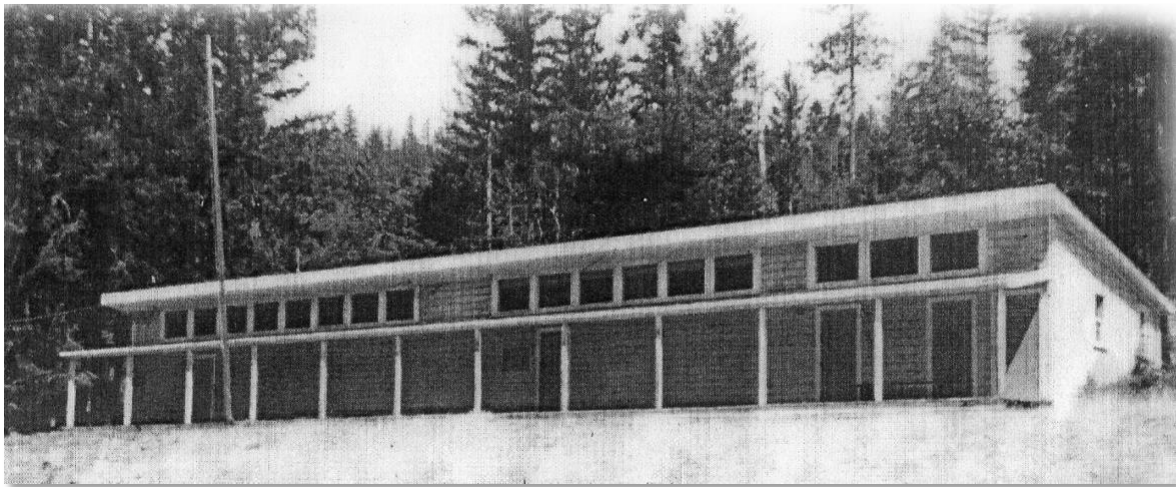


Four undated photos all labeled "Ruth School" found in the Historical Photo Collection at the Trinity County Office of Education



The same photo above is also labeled "Old Mad River School at Old Ruth Site" and found in "Community Treasures: An historical, anecdotal, and pictorial account of our community" by the 3/4th grade class of Van Duzen Elementary School, 2000. Peggy Canale was the Editor and the classroom teacher.

Students at the same Ruth School building that is pictured below .



Ruth School aka the "New" Mad River School Constructed in 1956 before Ruth Lake was constructed, used only a few years and is now the Humboldt Municipal Water District Headquarters.

District *Mad River*
 Address *Ruth*

RECEIPTS

	COUNTY	STATE	LIBRARY	SPECIAL
<i>Balance</i>	<i>29 06 ✓</i>		<i>310 ✓</i>	
<i>ate Appmt</i>		<i>700 00</i>		
<i>nty Appmt</i>	<i>103 60</i>	<i>1 55 40</i>		
<i>Balance</i>	<i>132 66</i>			
	<i>74 05</i>			

Federal Indian Aid Fund

The school received Federal Indian Aid funding off and on during the years of 1928-1938, meaning there was a significant population of Native students enrolled at the school



Ruth School Constructed in 1964, closed in 1969, and now the Ruth Community Church.