

## Trinity County High School District

### Voting for a High School

The Trinity County High School began in concept at a meeting of the “Monday Night Club” (a branch of the “Weaverville Philomathian Library”) on April 18, 1908. This was a group of younger men and women who were active in the business and civic affairs of the town. They met in the courthouse every other Monday. At one such meeting, Mary Teresa Hocker Meckel read a paper entitled “High Schools.” By all accounts, Mrs. Meckel’s paper proved conclusively that Trinity County needed a high school. She indicated that at the time, there were only six counties in the state without high schools, one of which was Trinity County. The subject was fully debated by the group, and there were no dissenters. It was calculated at the meeting that to open a high school, the cost to each taxpayer would not exceed 10 cents for every hundred dollars of property value. It was also discussed that the County Board of Education would be the proper party to take the initial steps to open a high school.<sup>1</sup>

Those present at this historic meeting were Nellie Jordan (County Superintendent of Education and Secretary to the Board) and board members Lizzie H. Fox (former County Superintendent), Celia Weinheimer, and Horace R. Given (also a former County Superintendent).

Consequently, at the April 25<sup>th</sup> meeting of the county board, a resolution was adopted which said the following:

Be it resolved by the County Board of Education that the secretary of this Board prepare and distribute to the various school districts of the county petitions to be signed by qualified electors of Trinity County praying [that] the Board of Supervisors thereof to submit the question of establishing and maintaining a county high school to the qualified voters.<sup>2</sup>

Signed petitions were presented to the Board of Supervisors on September 10, 1908, and the board ordered that the question of establishing a high school would be presented to the voters. A few days later, Mr. Given resigned as a board member, and on September 21<sup>st</sup>, Mrs. Meckel was appointed to take his place.<sup>3</sup> It doesn’t appear that the decision had anything to do with his resignation.

There were only six weeks to go before the general election, so the campaign for a high school had to get off to a quick start. The idea was backed by the Trinity Journal, which was then owned by the same Horace R. Given and the Weaverville Supply Company, among others. The Eltapome Parlor Number 55, Daughters of the Golden West, supported the effort as well and wrote:

High School Education is not a local nor an individual matter but a matter of preparation for citizenship in the interests of the state. On behalf of the children of our county, we appeal to every voter to pass this educational measure on November 3, 1908 and prepare the way for future progress.<sup>4</sup>

Other arguments for the school included the idea that \$4,000 a year could provide a very good three-teacher school and that some of that amount would be provided by the state. The Trinity Journal, in an editorial on October 24, 1908, gave 25 reasons for voting for the measure, including the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Meckel, Henry C., “In the Beginning, The Founding of Trinity High School”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook, 1988, (reprint version)* 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

- “Civilization will ever go forward when its leaders are educated and broad-minded” and linking it to “the future of Trinity County”;
- Graduates would be admitted to the University of California, and their parents, instead of having to move away so that their children can be better educated, would be able to continue to live in town;
- Other families would move here so that their children could secure the benefits of a high school education; and,
- “The value of all properties in the county would be enhanced.”<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, the vote was 545 for a high school and 131 against. Every precinct in the county supported the bond measure except for Hayfork (20 for and 33 against) and Hawkins Bar (3 for and 8 against). Those against the tax increase may have assumed that the high school would primarily benefit the town of Weaverville.<sup>6</sup>

Trinity High opened its doors on September 18, 1909, with 14 students. Arrangements were made with the



1916

Weaverville Elementary School Board to lease a room on the second floor of the grammar school for high school classes for a period of three years. The lease price was one dollar.<sup>7</sup>

An opening ceremony was held, attended by members of the Board of Education, several judges, and other townspeople. Mary T. Meckel made use of the occasion to praise the women of Trinity County for their efforts during the election. She said that it was through their efforts that the election was won.<sup>8</sup> It should be added that, at the time,

women did not have the right to vote in California. On October 10, 1911, California became only the sixth state where women could vote equally with men.<sup>9</sup>

It was difficult to find a high school principal. On July 3, 1909, the Trinity High School Board met to select a candidate but failed to find an acceptable applicant. A second attempt to secure a principal came on July 14, 1909, enticing candidates with a salary of \$1,500 for ten months of service. They offered the position to a W. B. Netherton, but he declined the offer. In the end, Mr. F. L. Wharff was hired to become the very first high school principal as well as the instructor. His beginning salary was \$1,600.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>9</sup> Cooney, Robert J. Jr., *National Women's History Project*, [www.sos.ca.gov](http://www.sos.ca.gov), accessed July 4, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 10-11; and McGowan, Katherine R., “Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity,” *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972. 10.

## The Early Curriculum

The curriculum originally consisted of courses in history, literature, science, mathematics, and office practices, but after Wharff was hired, he revised the curriculum to include English, algebra, Spanish, and ancient history. By December 18, 1909, a vice-principal and an additional teacher were added. By August 1922, manual arts were also added to the course schedule in order to remain accredited by the state. “Manual arts” at this time appears to mean skills such as woodworking and, possibly, metalworking<sup>11</sup>. In 1929, auto mechanics was also adopted as a high school course. By 1956, a course called “Training for Healthful Living” was included in the curriculum, along with “Morals and Manners.”<sup>12</sup>

Composition was an important subject taught in the high school. In that first year, students wrote papers on “the imperative need for keeping the English language up to standard,” which were submitted to a community committee for review. They also wrote compositions that were published in the local paper under the headline, “What Bright Students Have to Say,” in which three students presented arguments for having a county fair. Other paper topics included such things as The Boyhood of Alexander Hamilton, The Oldest American College, What Makes the Phonograph Talk, Educating the Deaf, and Birds of Trinity County.<sup>13</sup>

Fred L. Wharf was said to be a good promoter of the school in the community, hosting many events and meetings, producing plays, holding music events as well as “rallies” – meetings to discuss the future direction of the high school, including the need to provide room and board for out-of-town students so that the school could truly serve the whole county. Once again, it was the women of the county who got to work surveying the town for a list of households who would be willing to board students. The cost for room and board ranged from \$20 to \$25 per month. Sometimes, students were able to work off some of the cost.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, two more teachers were employed (L.A. Buchanan and J.S. Crittenden), a library was developed, and courses were provided in four general areas: academic, commercial, manual training, and mining.<sup>15</sup>

## The First High School Building

While a decision had been reached to hire two more teachers and to lease Whitmore Hall, however, just two years after the high school was located in the elementary school, the Trustees purchased the “Blake and Reed Livery Stable and Barn,” otherwise known as the “Blake Building,” built in 1893. It fronted Mill Street. It was initially a large, well-constructed hay barn, 24 x 80 feet. It was transformed into the school in “the modern Doric style, a revival of the ancient Greek Doric, with modern embellishments to comply with nature’s beautiful surroundings.”<sup>16</sup> There were many windows on the front side of the building with the light “coming from one side only, the pupils facing the south.” Interestingly, it was said that this was “proper” for school purposes, “as the light comes from the left, and neither blinds the pupil nor interferes with writing by shadows of the hand.”<sup>17</sup> This was an important consideration, as windows supplied the only light inside before electricity.

[The] front, or, more dignified, façade, has also three windows to each classroom on the second floor and a large double window for the library and the principal’s office, making

<sup>11</sup> *Woodworkinghistory.com* and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manual%20training>, Accessed September 2, 1922.

<sup>12</sup> “Trinity County Schools Growing With California”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 28, 1956, Centennial Edition.

<sup>13</sup> Meckel, Henry C., “In the Beginning, The Founding of Trinity High School”, *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook, 1988*, 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> “Local Brevities”, *The Trinity Journal*, August 13, 1898.

<sup>17</sup> Buchanan, L. A., “The High School Building”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 22, 1910.

in all fourteen windows or openings, for each floor in the front...The drawing room on the south side, for steady subdued north light, is arranged so that models and easels may be placed in position for the art work and left there without any disturbance until the pupil finishes the model, plaster casts, object, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Some references said that the purchase occurred by subscriptions of the residents of Weaverville and donated to the county;<sup>19</sup> another reference refers to “the taxpayers” who “have gotten a bargain – an eight thousand dollar structure for less than four thousand dollars,” although he adds “The barn and site was a present from the good people of Weaverville.” Likely, both are correct: the original barn and the land it sat on were purchased by the citizens and donated to the county; however, the building itself was remodeled through the collection of extra property tax.<sup>20</sup>

Moon Lim Lee of Weaverville went to high school in about 1920. He described the building this way:

The high school was situated on Main and Mill Street when I was a freshman. Mr. Young was a principal at the time...[and] we had about 25 freshmen...there might be 40 or 50 in the whole school... In those days there was just a great big barn that was made over into the high school. In the center used to be a driveway through there [used to load and unload hay]. They made that a stairway going up, and it was a two-story building. They had on the right a study ad assembly hall. You can study on one end of the room, and they can hold classes on the other end. At the same time, they had a little stage on the same floor. On the right of this school is a shop building and they had their recreation part there in the winter time when we could do some exercise when the weather was bad...They had a lot of these bars and swings and things like that inside. That is all they had. They didn't have anything like volleyball courts or anything like that, but they [did] have these bars to chin themselves, pull themselves, turn over and a few things like that in those days. When it was raining, half of the shop was devoted for that purpose.

...On the top floor, they had a commercial room and a physics room on the right, and on the left they had a math and commercial room. There were two rooms on [the] top floor on each side so four rooms on top, and they [didn't] have much shower or toilet facility in the school.

The sanitation facility would be what they ... called the outhouse away from the building toward the west. They [had] one for the ladies and one for men...they had a partition[.] [W]hen you walk[ed] in, you had to turn to the right or left. They didn't have any doors.<sup>21</sup>

Thankfully, a resolution was eventually passed by the County Board to put doors on the outhouses.<sup>22</sup>

## The First Graduating Class

R.W. Everett succeeded Fred Wharf as principal and teacher in 1911 and was still the principal when Trinity High graduated its first class in 1913. R. W. Everette taught history and science. He was joined by three other teachers: Miss Elizabeth Young (English and Latin), Miss Edith Bliss (mathematics and commercial subjects), and I. J. Watts

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>19</sup> McGowan, Katherine R., “Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity”, *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972; and Holland, James. *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 36.

<sup>20</sup> Buchanan, L. A., “The High School Building”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 22, 1910.

<sup>21</sup> “Holland, James, “Interview with Moon Lim Lee,” *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 62.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

(drawing and manual training). There were 40 students in attendance. It was felt that in offering all of the different subjects, the high school was ahead of most schools of its size in the state.<sup>23</sup>

Seven students received the very first diplomas of graduation from the high school, having passed all of the subjects: C. Arthur Paulsen, Nellie Hennessy, Mary Robb Mahoney, Beryl Todd, Margaret Rodgers, Gladys Meyer, and Vera Hutchins. The graduation exercises were held at Whitmore Hall, which was full for the event. Judge Bartlett gave the graduation address:

You are going out into a new world, one in which you will find much dissatisfaction with social conditions, established usages, old laws, manners and customs. Street corner philosophers, yellow press sages, ambitious demagogues you will encounter at every turn, and battling with them you will find as sincere patriots, high-minded unselfish men and women, as the world has ever seen.

Your surroundings, your experiences, your training, the lives of your fathers and mothers, the memories of the old-time pioneers and women of Trinity, all lead me tonight to appeal to you to lead your lives not for self alone, but also for the assistance and betterment of others, for the welfare of your community, your county, your state, your nation, aye, even the whole world.<sup>24</sup>

Mary T. Meckel, then president of the County Board of Education, presented diplomas to the graduating students and proceeded to provide her own address to them, which reads, in part:

Dear Friends: Four years ago, as you have already been reminded, the Weaverville High School was opened. From its inception, it has been as we know, a success... we trust that the people of our county may realize that their high school stands among them as an element for the future strength of our civic institutions. Its function will ever be to develop the true character in its



<sup>23</sup> "Trinity High School", *The Trinity Journal*, December 6, 1913.

<sup>24</sup> Meckel, Henry C., "In the Beginning, The Founding of Trinity High School", *Trinity County Historical Society Yearbook*, 1988, 11-12.

students...Today go forth its first graduates. Their success, needless to say, is a matter of deepest concern to the community whose heartfelt wishes are with each one of them.<sup>25</sup>

On behalf of the Board of Education it is my pleasing duty, dear young graduates, to confer upon you your diplomas of graduation, and to bid you Godspeed on the threshold of the future.<sup>26</sup>

In June of 1921, there were four graduates from Trinity County High School: Miss Helen Griffith, Howard F. Canton, Stanley Hanover, and Butler Riley, all residents of Weaverville.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Trinity County High School in the 1920s and 30s**

In November 1921, J. Arthur Young was the principal (salary of \$240 per month); Lucy R. Watkins taught History and English (salary of \$170); Dorothy E. Singer taught Math and Spanish (salary of \$180); and another teacher, Alma E. [the last name is not decipherable], taught "Commercial" (salary of \$170). There were 35 students. While the school buildings and grounds were in good condition, it was reported that the school needed "Sanitary Toilets."<sup>28</sup>

High school was only offered for two years.<sup>29</sup> When Moon Lim Lee graduated in 1922, there were only five boys in his class and no girls, even though his class as freshmen had about 22 students. The four other graduates besides Moon Lim Lee were Harvey Hilton Hanover, John Morris "Jack" Griffith, Alan Archibald Bigelow, and Ralph Louis Shuford. That year in science, they constructed rudimentary crystal radios, sending signals to each other's homes.<sup>30</sup>

In 1922, the first construction bond of \$25,000 was passed to be used for "constructing the proper and necessary buildings for the high school at Weaverville and Hayfork." A satellite high school had been set up in Hayfork by this time. Still, the old building in Weaverville continued to be used for some time as a shop class downstairs and a band room upstairs.<sup>31</sup>

The School's yearbook, "The Monitor," was published at least by 1926 and possibly earlier. In the 1926 publication, fourteen seniors were listed with their pictures. The senior women were Marie Brandes, Belle Carter, Marguerite Friend, Ameer Jordan, King Lee, and Lola Montgomery. The young men were Rollin Coumbs, Herbert Day, Charles Everest, Fred Everest, Dale Hanover, Marion Kay, Benjamin H. Mace, and Milan M. Senger. The Senior's "Class Will" was also printed in the yearbook. Things such as "my class spirit and pep" (Marie Brandes), "my quiet ways and manners" (Belle Coumbs), "my curls" (Marguerite Friend), "my neat appearance" (Dale Hanover), "my lively manner" and "my ability as a Charleston dancer" (Ameer Jordan), "my dimples" (Milan Senger), "my straight hair and my skill as a basketball player" (Lola Montgomery), "my Stenographic ability" (Dale Hanover) "my pretty hair" (Charles Everest), and "my gracefulness" (Ben Mace), were willed by the young men and women to Freshman class members.

Five teachers were pictured on the faculty page that year: Professor R. L. Lovett, Principal, Miss Ruth E. Taylor, Professor G. W. Hann, Miss Alice Drew, and Miss Ruth Gentry.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> "Four Graduated From Trinity High", *The Trinity Journal*, June 25, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> "School Superintendent's Record of Official Visits," The Trinity County Historical Society, History Center, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Holland, James. "Interview with Moon Lee Lim", *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 69, and "The News Back Then", *The Trinity Journal*, June 15, 2022, 17.

<sup>31</sup> McGowan, Katherine R., "Organization of small school districts on lower Trinity", *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1972. 10.



On July 21, 1931, the high school in Weaverville was granted permission by its board to build a gymnasium.<sup>32</sup> The gym began on a “pay as you go” basis, with the shop teacher supervising the construction with student assistance. The plan “bogged down” to a point in 1935 when a W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration – part of the “New Deal” under presidential order) contract was signed. The gym, Project No. 838, started construction on January 1, 1935, and was completed on October 8, 1936. The total cost in Federal Funds was \$18,989.63, with the Sponsor’s Funds totaling

\$9,339.19. It was a “Frame Stucco Construction – Steel Girders”.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly enough, a new gymnasium was the last building to be completed for the new Trinity High School in 1969. School started that year with 300 students, but no new gym, although it was scheduled to be completed in late fall of that year.<sup>34</sup> Fast forward to 2021, when that same gym has had to undergo dramatic repairs - nearly a rebuild - and was completed in 2022.

### A Student Dormitory

In 1948, Mr. John Lucas was the superintendent of Trinity County High School. In February of that year, Mr. Lucas suggested that state aid should be sought to establish a student dormitory in Weaverville as a way to address



*Trinity County High School Class of 1937 in front of the gym*

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>33</sup> “The Living New Deal”, livingnewdeal.org (located under “Project Type: Auditoriums and Arenas, Civic Facilities, Education and Health” and titled, “Trinity County High School Gymnasium – Weaverville, CA), Accessed March 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Trinity County School Bulletin, June 1969, front page.

the pressing housing problem for students:

Several children in Trinity county [sic] of high school age are not attending school because of the lack of boarding places in Weaverville. In addition, a number of the present students travel up to 120 miles a day to attend school, driving seven to ten miles beyond the limits of our school bus routes. These students live in the regions of Hetten Valley, Long Ridge, Hyampom, Mad River, Salt Creek and Lower Trinity.”

He added that 16 other students were boarding in Weaverville to attend school, but housing facilities were unavailable for all eligible students.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in May 1949, a request for bids was advertised in the local newspaper for the construction of “one wooden frame, four-room dwelling house” to be located in Weaverville in “accordance with plans and specifications and other contract documents now on file in the office of the Superintendent of the Trinity County High School...”<sup>36</sup>

### In Other News

By this time, the local newspaper was hosting a column called “Trinity High School Sluice Box,” produced by the school’s journalism class. The column covered such topics as “Facts and Figures,” Student Council, sports (girls and boys), student opinions about school, and “Fall Fashions”. “Back-to-school fashions range from peg skirts to the extremely full peasant skirts. Sweaters are quite the rage, too”. It was noted in the September 1949 column that there were 170 students enrolled as opposed to the 1948 enrollment of 138. Some of the comments from students about school starting included, “The sooner we start, the sooner we get out,” “It’s sure grand to be back with the crowd,” and “I like it better than last year,” and “If I could get away with it I wouldn’t go.”<sup>37</sup>



In 1969, Trinity High School in Weaverville “Hit a peak” of 300 students. At the same time, work was “rapidly being completed” on the “remaining portions of the new school” at the site where the current school is located. All facilities were being used that fall except for the

gymnasium, which was expected to be completed in the late fall of that year. The old school was still used for physical education instruction and sports until the new gym was completed.<sup>38</sup>

By 1970, the Trinity County High School had three “attendance centers” serving 471 students with a teaching staff of 33 with an average salary of \$10,409. The school year at that time was 175 days (at the time of this writing, the instructional school year is 180 days).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> “Dormitory Seen as Solution to Housing Problems of Students,” *The Trinity Journal*, February 5, 1948.

<sup>36</sup> “Public Notice Calling for Bids”, *The Trinity Journal*, May 5, 1949.

<sup>37</sup> “Trinity High School Sluice Box”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 29, 1949.

<sup>38</sup> “Trinity County School Bulletin”, *Trinity County Office of Education*, October, 1969, front page.

<sup>39</sup> Holland, James. *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 34.



On May 25, 1972, the old high school building on Mill Street in Weaverville began to be demolished. Continental Telephone purchased the property, and its engineers decided to destroy rather than save the old landmark. In 2024, the UPS transfer station and the fire station are located in this area, but portions of the metal fence can still be seen.<sup>40</sup>

### **Hayfork Attendance Center**

The high school board took action on August 30, 1919, to establish a branch high school with one teacher in Hayfork. That center began operations right away in the 1919-20 school year and covered the first three years of high school for students. Later, due to falling enrollment, only two years of school were offered, and in 1927, the school was discontinued entirely. The school was located in a structure on the main street in Hayfork, still standing in 1962<sup>41</sup>. In 1956, the community of Hayfork once again had a high school after a long lapse. In 1966, the district board approved the plans for a new high school in Hayfork, provided by a district bond to pay for the construction costs.<sup>42</sup> The school was located at the Trinity County Fairgrounds from 1956-1968. For more information, see [Hayfork High School](#).

For information on the **Southern Trinity Attendance Center**, See [Southern Trinity High School](#).



*Trinity County High School, 1938-1969*

<sup>40</sup> "The News Back Then", *The Trinity Journal*, May 18, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Notes created for the Bond and State Aid, 1962 and found at the Trinity County office of Education.

<sup>42</sup> Holland, James. *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 37.



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	<i>897</i>				

From 1922 to 1930 and from 1935 to 1937, Trinity County High School received Federal Indian Aid Funding, indicating that a significant number of students enrolled were Native Americans.