

## Deadwood School District

The town of Deadwood was located 11 miles east of Weaverville (and northeast of Lewiston) on Deadwood Creek in Wintu ancestral territory. It is said to be named - not surprisingly - due to dead trees along the creek. It started as a gold camp in 1851. In 1880 the Brown Bear Mine was established in that location. A post office was established in 1886.<sup>1</sup> When gold was discovered there, families came with several children to take advantage. The first attendees at the school were the Garvin family: Edrin, Maggie, Ollie, Dolles, and Pearl; the Leonard family: Cina, Etta, Gertrude, and Saddle; The Blagrove family: James, George, Harry, and Earnest; The Maby family: Irene, Freddie, and Jenny; also, Vernon and Charlie Wilson and Edith and Addie Richards, "and Willie". The teacher was Miss Phillips. The school building was sometimes used for dances, Sunday School, and speeches.<sup>2</sup> Large crowds often gathered for the events because "Deadwood is famous for its jolly times."<sup>3</sup>

The first Deadwood schoolhouse was said to be built in 1885.<sup>4</sup> In the spring of that same year, teacher Nellie S. Lowden of Weaverville opened the spring term early in March at Deadwood School, and she closed that term on June 21.<sup>5</sup> In the spring of 1890, Miss Lucy U. Phillips was teaching there.<sup>6</sup> On May 22, 1895, County Superintendent Lizzie H. Fox made an official trip to the school. There were 21 students enrolled but only 15 students present at the time of the visit.<sup>7</sup> Miss Lowden continued as teacher for at least the fall term starting in August of that year. Her salary continued to be \$70 and while she had 21 students enrolled there was an average attendance of 12.<sup>8</sup> Miss Lizzie H. Fox visited Deadwood School again for an official visit on Friday, November 2, 1895,<sup>9</sup> prior to Miss Lowden closing the fall term of the school on November 27.<sup>10</sup> This is all very curious because it wasn't until two years later, on February 19, 1887, that the school district was officially established as a public school by order of the Board of Supervisors. There is yet no explanation for why, by all accounts, the school appeared to be a public school district before the official establishment date.

The boundaries of the new school district were reported as follows:

Beginning at Gibson's Arrastra\* on Deadwood creek [sic] and running thence south to the Lewiston and Shasta Turnpike: thence easterly along said Turnpike to the Summit of Trinity Mountain; thence in a northerly direction along the summit of said mountain to the intersection of the dividing ridge between Eastman and Mooney gulches; thence in a westerly direction along down said dividing ridge to a point due north from Blakemore's Lower Arrastra on Eastman gulch; thence south to said Arrastra; thence in a straight line to the place of beginning.<sup>11</sup>

The local paper reported that it only took a couple of days after the establishment of the school district to raise \$400, through subscription, to build a new schoolhouse. Work was to begin on the building right away. Henry Martin, H. L. Leonard, and Wm. Blagrove were appointed as trustees to hold office until the next school election that coming June.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *History and Happenings*, <http://historyandhappenings.squarespace.com/trinity-county/?currentPage=2>. Accessed June 26, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Information said to be copied from the back of a painting titled "In Memory of Our School House"; the painting is unknown. Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>3</sup> *The Trinity Journal*, June 29, 1895.

<sup>4</sup> Information said to be copied from the back of a painting titled "In Memory of Our School House"; the painting is lost. Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>5</sup> "Town and County News", , *The Trinity Journal*, March 16, 1895 and June 29, 1895.

<sup>6</sup> "Schools Closed", *The Trinity Journal*, June 28, 1890.

<sup>7</sup> *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education

<sup>8</sup> Fox, Lizzie (Superintendent of Schools), "Our Public Schools, Teachers, Clerks, and Other Matters of Interest", *The Trinity Journal*, August 17, 1895.

<sup>9</sup> "Deadwood News", *The Trinity Journal*, November 2, 1895.

<sup>10</sup> "School Notes", *The Trinity Journal*, November 23, 1895.

<sup>11</sup> "Board of Supervisors, School District Established", *The Trinity Journal*, February 19, 1887.

<sup>12</sup> "New School House", *The Trinity Journal*, April 30, 1887.

On April 7, 1888, this notice appeared in the paper:

The Deadwood public school opened the 2<sup>nd</sup>...for the spring term. The enterprising citizens of Deadwood testified to their appreciation of Miss Lucy Phillips' efficient work as teacher by raising sufficient funds, *by private subscription*, to carry out the school for the term.<sup>13</sup>

Then in 1890, the local paper reported that Miss Lucy U. Phillips closed the "Deadwood Public School" for the year on Friday, June 20.<sup>14</sup> Then in November of that year, R. Rankin was the new teacher assigned to Deadwood. Enrollment at that time rose to 34 students with an average daily attendance of 30.<sup>15</sup> The school also shows up in the county school warrants ledger book in 1891, having received and used public funding to pay bills.

In 1892, enrolled students dropped significantly to 15 with five boys and ten girls. It closed for the year on June 17<sup>th</sup>. The teacher was M. Hocker.<sup>16</sup> That next fall there was yet another teacher, Miss Isabel Richmond from Anderson.<sup>17</sup> By July of 1893, the number of students had increased to 17 but with an average daily attendance of only 14.<sup>18</sup> By August of 1893, Miss Nellie Lowden returned as the teacher.<sup>19</sup>



*Deadwood School House, undated photo*

In June of 1895, a School Ball was held on a Saturday to raise funds to repair the schoolhouse. Tickets for the dance were \$2.<sup>20</sup> At that time the school continued to be taught by Nellie Lowden. Only five months later, the schoolhouse had a narrow escape from being burned in a fire. During school hours the fire started between the ceiling and the roof and was "getting under good headway when discovered". Boys at the school climbed the roof, tore off the shingles, and extinguished the fire, despite having their hands badly blistered from the heat.<sup>21</sup>

In August of 1895, 21 students were enrolled and Miss Nellie Lowden was still being paid \$70 per month. This was average for a teacher's salary in the county at that time.<sup>22</sup>

By March of 1896, the school was newly papered and painted and presented "a very neat and attractive appearance".

We are also pleased to see the interest shown by the pupils in improving their school room and grounds. A neat picket fence is now looming up, and the boys and girls propose to study botany out of their own Flower garden.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "Deadwood School", *The Trinity Journal*, April 7, 1888.

<sup>14</sup> "Schools Closed", *The Trinity Journal*, June 28, 1890.

<sup>15</sup> "School Reports", *The Trinity Journal*, November 29, 1890.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, July 2, 1892.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, December 10, 1892.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, July 15, 1893.

<sup>19</sup> "Town and Country News", *The Trinity Journal*, *Ibid.*, August 19, 1893; and "School Notes", March 3, 1895.

<sup>20</sup> *The Trinity Journal*, June 29, 1895.

<sup>21</sup> "Almost a Fire", *The Trinity Journal*, November 23, 1895.

<sup>22</sup> Fox, Lizzie (Superintendent of Schools), "Our Public Schools, Teachers, Clerks, and Other Matters of Interest", *Trinity Journal*, August 8, 1895.

<sup>23</sup> "Deadwood News", *The Trinity Journal*, March 7, 1896.

According to the local paper, a heavy rain storm caused the school to close on Friday, November 20, 1896, with Miss Lowden leaving for her home in Weaverville the following Saturday. It likely resulted in the end of the fall term. Apparently, such a storm in November was notable in Deadwood as people were said to be caught without their winter wood in. Besides the school, some events were canceled as well, and many people were sick with severe colds.<sup>24</sup>

Miss Lowden was still teaching at the school in the fall of 1896 and the spring of 1897 when she had 20 students enrolled.<sup>25</sup> By the fall term of the same year, Annie Fox, younger sister to Lizzie Fox, was employed as the teacher.<sup>26</sup> Miss Grace E. Wilkie opened the spring term in 1903 on March 2.<sup>27</sup> By 1904 a teacher from Chico was engaged to teach at the school for the fall term. Her name was Miss Edna Arnold. She was paid \$70 per month.<sup>28</sup>

In the spring of 1903, a “Grand Ball” benefit was being held for the Deadwood School. Miss Esther A. Cook was the teacher in December of 1903. There were 14 students enrolled but only 11 were present at the time of an official visit.<sup>29</sup> And again in 1905, a benefit was held to help sustain the school. \$21 were raised. The teacher was “Miss Etta”.<sup>30</sup> By the spring of 1907 Miss Nellie Hennessey was engaged to teach at Deadwood and she was the last documented teacher<sup>31</sup>, although there is a notation in the 1913 warrants under Deadwood School for \$70 paid to a “Mrs. O. Rudasill” who very well may have been a teacher at that time, given that the check amount was consistent with other salaries.<sup>32</sup>

Enrollment must have dwindled the next couple of years so much so that it was noted in the paper that a Mr. Jack Cannon moved his family from French Gulch to Deadwood in 1909 which would increase enrollment at the school.<sup>33</sup>

The post office in Deadwood closed in 1915 and the school quickly followed. The district was suspended during the 1916-17 school year, and it lapsed September 11, 1920, into Lewiston (17 students) and Minersville (nine students) School Districts.<sup>34</sup> The town of Deadwood is now on the list of ghost towns in California.<sup>35</sup>

*\*An arrastra is a primitive mill for grinding and pulverizing gold or silver ore*

---

<sup>24</sup> “Deadwood Croppings”, *The Trinity Journal*, November 28, 1896.

<sup>25</sup> “Districts, Clerks and Teachers”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 24, 1896; and *School Superintendents Record of Official Visits, 1905-1918*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education, 55.

<sup>26</sup> Fox, Lizzie (Superintendent of Schools), “Districts, Clerks and Teachers, October 2, 1897.

<sup>27</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, February 28, 1903.

<sup>28</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, September 3, 1904.

<sup>29</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, December 12, 1903; and November 5, 1904.

<sup>30</sup> “School Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, April 16, 1905.

<sup>31</sup> “Local Brevities”, *The Trinity Journal*, March 9, 1907.

<sup>32</sup> *Warrant Records*, Historic Records Collection, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>33</sup> “Deadwood Mining Notes”, *The Trinity Journal*, October 23, 1909.

<sup>34</sup> *School District Disbursements & Receipts*, Minersville District information, Trinity County Office of Education.

<sup>35</sup> *Ghost Towns*, <https://www.ghosttowns.com/states/ca/deadwood.html>. Accessed October 25, 2022.



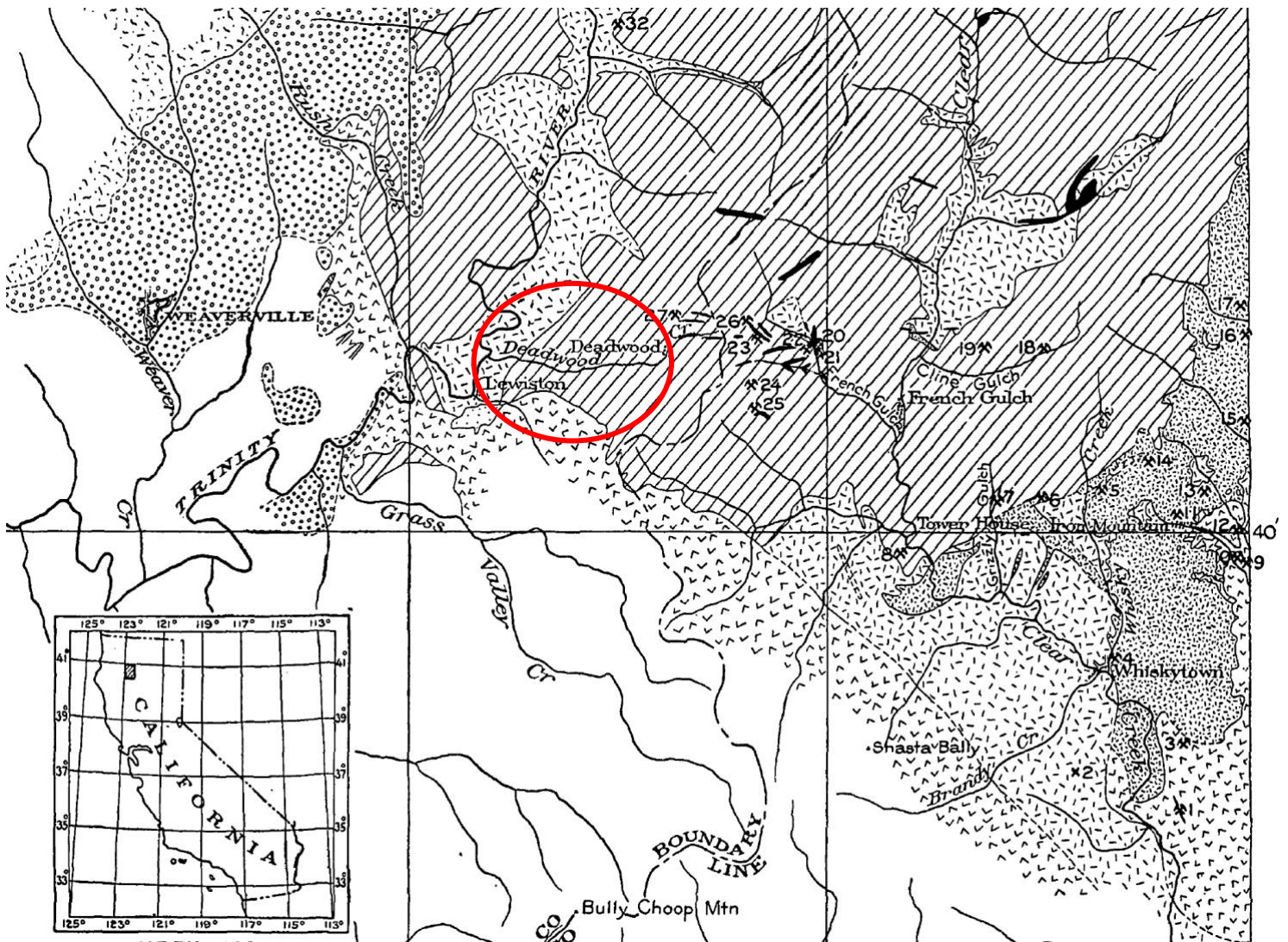


Figure 1 Map from the U.S. Geological Survey, 1906 Found in Diller, J. S., "Gold and Silver, Auriferous Gravels in the Weaverville Quadrangle, California", USGS Publications, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/bul/0540a/report.pdf>, accessed April 15, 2023.