“SCHOOLS OF THE THREE RIVERS AREA”

Recently Dody Marshall put together an outline of the Three Rivers Schools and we thought you would enjoy the information on the schools of our area.

In the late 19th century, many small settlements grew along each fork of the Kaweah River and schools were established in several locations to educate the community’s children.

Most students lived several miles at least, away from the school, and their mode of travel to and from was by foot, on mule, or horseback. Most of them had to cross one or more creeks, streams, or one or two of the forks of the Kaweah during their travels to and from school. Some of those students also had to walk a narrow, swinging bridge (no handrails) in order to cross over the rushing water. There were a few students who lived far enough out that it became necessary for them to live with a relative or another family just to be closer to the school site during the school week, and then they returned home on the weekends.

The late Grace Alles described the schools, “A school in those days meant a long building with windows along both sides. There was a blackboard on one end, the door on the other, and drinking water gotten from a bucket and a dipper at the back of the room.”

In her book “Sunbeams and Buzzards” Thelma Crain wrote, “The school consisted of one large room with a small room at each corner for supplies, wood, and cloak rooms for storing wraps and lunches. Across the front of the room and slightly raised, was a platform sealed off with folding wooden doors. There were shelves across the back and this served as the library. At graduation and other special days, with the doors open, it became a stage.

The school accommodated eight grades and had smaller desks at the front of the room, graduating to larger ones at the rear. At specified intervals, each class moved to the benches in front and the teacher heard lesson recitation.”

The 1920 legislation passed that required every elementary school to become part of a high school district. Three Rivers voters approved unionization to the Woodlake High School District over the more established Exeter Union High School. With unionization came bus service. Fred Ogilvie of Three Rivers was the first driver hired to drive the local route.

The first elected board of trustees included Rhoda Finch, Nellie Britten, Ben Hardin, Carrie Swanson, and Charlie Taylor.

Three Rivers Unified School District Superintendents:

- July 1933 to June 1969 Mary McDowall
- July 1969 to June 1984 Don Hise
- July 1984 to June 1996 Larry Horton
- July 1996 to present Susan Sherwood

In 1938 the school lunch program began due to hardships incurred by the great Depression.

The story of our schools continues on page 3
This summer has been very busy for us at the Museum. Two fund-raiser events, our Hot dog Festival and Silent Auction.

First the “silent auction.” June 21-22. Lots of action. We did OK, not a lot but I feel that Three Rivers has done its share of trading for now. We decided to wait a while before having another. What we didn’t sell in the auction we turned around and sold as a patio/yard sale during our Hot Dog Festival.

Speaking of Hot Dog Festival, we did OK here also, not quite as good as last year. Different factors came into play; hot temperature, although that day was the coolest in a 7 day period. Folks didn’t buy the full meal but instead purchased single items, for whatever reason.

We’re now gearing up for the California Native-American Days celebration, September 18-19. This event is for fourth grade students and put on by the Owens Valley Cultural Development Center of Visalia. The program is open to all fourth grade school classes and home schoolers. The public is invited to watch and learn about California Native-American life.

Reservations for a 4th grade class time slot is required so if you know of any home schoolers or fourth grade students tell them to talk to their schools and sign up. There is no charge for the tour.

Your historical society needs your help with a project. We are starting to put together a pictorial history of Three Rivers and need all kinds of pictures.

- Old schools
- Buildings or businesses throughout the years.
- Clothes that folks wore back when.
- Photos of social club events and members; Lions Club / Woman’s Club / Church Groups
- And especially photos of the museum before it was a museum. Before it was an art studio, or a yarn shop. We have no pictures of the museum building when Jessie and Bruce Bequette had it as a service station and shop.

Thanks to some of our loyal members we now have the equipment to scan photographs, slides and/or film strips.

And let us not forget those bygone days items you have been keeping in the store room, attic or closet. We are history here at the museum and we certainly want those donations so the rest of the world can enjoy them.

So, bring on those pictures, those artifacts and those items that your kids don’t want and we will show them to the world. And remember they could be tax deductible!

We just received a grant from The Bank of the Sierra to clean-up and condition our Paul Bunyan statue in front of the museum. This is really great news because Paul has not had a bath since 1942. Work will start with cooler weather in late September or October.

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Visitor Totals | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Visitors 2014 | 180 | 275 | 523 | 519 | 562 | 612 | 894
Donation Jar | 20.92 | 27.10 | 73.13 | 126.49 | 189.75 | 190.73 | 122.36
Visitors 2013 | 227 | 220 | 401 | 546 | 576 | 615 | 533* | 574 | 652 | 413 | 321 | 200
Donation Jar | 17.41 | 26.00 | 37.09 | 103.20 | 92.21 | 125.36 | 74.80 | 133.77 | 149.75 | 187.30 | 122.37 | 196.03

*the count for July 2013 did not include the visitors for the Hot Dog Festival
Atwell Mills School: In 1887, Judge Atwell who operated a sawmill 25 miles from Three Rivers on the Mineral King Road (present-day Atwell Mill), established a school at the high country location and hired a teacher for mill workers' children. The school operated from early May to late November 1889.

Big Oak Flat School: School was opened around July 1881. It was located three miles south of present-day Lake Kaweah and three miles southwest of the South Fork road. Students traveled on foot or by horseback to attend the school, coming north from Blue Ridge or south from the South Fork area. The school was destroyed by fire in 1905 and the students began attending Cove School.

Cinnamon School: School was organized in 1888 and was located along the South Fork road, just northeast of the present-day junction with Cinnamon Canyon Road. The school was destroyed by fire in 1903, and the students began attending Cove School, five miles down the road.

Colony School: The Kaweah Colony settlement on the upper North Fork set up a school tent for the Colony students. Later the Colony School was moved down-canyon to the Taylor Ranch in Kaweah, the colonist settlement of Redstone Park near the present-day Lions Club Arena. In September of 1890, records indicate that Annie Haskell, wife of Colony founder Burnette Haskell, took a turn at teaching the students for a couple of weeks: "Thank Heaven! School is to end. I do hope I shant have to teach after the holidays."

Cove School: This is the first school in the area and from reports of early settlers, the Cove School, originally a log cabin, was built around 1867 near Cherokee Creek on the South Fork of the Kaweah River in an area today known as Cherokee Oaks, historically known as Cherokee Flat. Nothing remains now but the crumbling chimney of the schoolhouse. Other information claims the school was founded September 9, 1873. The students living north of the school had to ford the river to attend. In 1885 the school was moved across the South Fork river to property donated by Sam Kelly located at the present-day intersection of Old Three Rivers Drive and Blossom Drive. Big Oak Flat and Cinnamon Districts merged with Cove in 1906. Documentation lists Cove School teachers beginning in 1881 (W.F. Dean) through 1910 when the name of the school was changed to Three Rivers School.

Sulphur Springs School: The school was established in May of 1880. It was located on land donated by Dan Clotfelter, which later was owned by Clarence Fry. It was along the old Mineral King Road, which was the main route through the Kaweah Canyon’s Middle Fork, in the vicinity of the present-day Hawk Hollow Drive. Mary Griffes would take her children and other North Fork students across the Middle Fork River by rowboat so they could attend class at Sulphur Springs School. Other North Fork students had to walk a good 2 1/2 miles and cross two rivers to get to the one-room Sulphur Springs School. They would cross the North Fork Bridge, which was 12 inches wide, made of 1x12’s, and hung from half inch cable by nine gauge galvanized wires fastened to 2x4 cleats. The bridge was suspended from a tree on each bank and dipped down close to the water in the center. There were no handrails. The bridge across the Middle Fork was old and patched, and a mere 10 inches wide. The school burned down in 1905 and was rebuild across the old Mineral King Road on land donated by Charles Bahwell. That school burned down in 1910 and this time the school was relocated and built on the other side of the Middle Fork on land donated by Albert E. Ogilvy located next to what was the Three Rivers Airport aka Jefferson Davis Field on Kaweah River Drive. The Sulphur Springs School building remains as a private residence near the junction of the Middle Fork and North Fork of the Kaweah Rivers.

Three Rivers School: In 1910 the name of the Cove School was changed to the Three Rivers School. A new school was built in 1914 which replaced the old Clapboard room building. The school building is still in use as a private residence. That building was abandoned in 1928 when the unionized schools of the area were located farther up the rivers. The controversial issue of unification was approved by local voters and the Three Rivers Union School District was formed. A new building was constructed along the state highway and all the other school districts (Cove and Sulphur Springs) were merged into one.

If you have pictures of any of our old schools we would really like to make copies for the museum. We will scan them and return them to you.
Artifact of the Month for July

Fireman’s Uniform

Dress uniform belonging to Jerry Johnson while with the LAFD (1955-1975). In 1975 the Johnson family moved to Three Rivers and purchased the Lazy J Ranch Motel. Jerry was a member of the Three Rivers Volunteer Fire Fighters for many years.

Picture: Doug Graft on the left and Jerry Johnson on the right.

Artifact of the Month for August

School Corner

This entire display is the work of Bobbie Harris, who gathered and continues to put additional information in the display. Directly across from this cabinet are books of school classes going back to the 1920’s.

The collections are the work of Mary McDowall, Bobbie’s Mother, who was the Principal and teacher at the school before Bobbie’s work as a teacher.