

A Howling Wilderness: Education in the Summit Road Area

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The devotion of the Summit settlers to their children's education was evidenced by the number of school districts formed over this small area of the Santa Cruz Mountains. In all there were six school districts on the mountain. The first district was Summit School, originally housed in a private residence near the cross-roads of Summit Road and the Santa Cruz Highway in the 1870's. The school was near Schultheis Lagoon which "was a favorite spot in which to pass our noon hour paddling around on half-submerged logs," recalled Mrs. E. H. (Loomis) Chase. The school was finally located at a permanent location one-half mile down the Santa Cruz Highway toward Patchen. This school house, built by Edward Martin, is now a private residence. (40:1/2/1962; 38:/6/10/1935; 34:12/1927)

The second school on the mountain was also built in the 1870's. Lyman Burrell donated land right on the boundaries of Santa Clara County and Santa Cruz County, for the school which bears his name, Burrell School. In 1889 the Burrell School burned during a brush fire that covered a large area of the mountains before finally being extinguished near the Highland School. The Burrell School was rebuilt by local residents in 1890, and on July 4th of that year it was given the first flag pole of any mountain school. The new school was also the first in the mountains to have a school bell. The school is now a private residence, with the new owners remodeling the building. (40:12 / 4 / 1961; 34:5 / 1910)

Little is known about the Wright's School, located at Wright's Station. The school served the community of Wright's from the 1880's until 1929. The school was finally suspended permanently in 1932 because of a general decline in the population of the Wright's area. (8)

In 1882, Miss Rose Merrill held classes in a little cottage in back of the depot building at Laurel. The children were not subjected to tests or grades. What books that could be found were supplied by the children. The average daily attendance was between six and fifteen students. The teachers were paid between \$55 in 1884 and \$65 in 1906, but their living expenditures

were minimal. The rent for the teacher's cottage was only \$2.50 per month. The school was the first teaching experience for many of the early teachers who were fresh out of San Jose Normal School. In 1947 the school closed and the children were bused to Scotts Valley Union School. (2:22-27, 33)

The first classes held at Highland School, 1881-1882 session, were held in an old Chinese ranch-hand cabin. The next year Judge George Miller donated one-third acre for a new school building. Local residents built the building and William Sears was the first teacher. In 1892 the school census report shows twenty-two pupils in the Highland School. Of these, seven were under five years of age, which leads one to believe that the school might have been used as a baby-sitting service as well as an educational institution. In the 1890's faculty members from Stanford University held summer seminars at Highland School in such subjects as economics, history, and political science.

The April 18, 1906 earthquake damaged the school and The Realty chided the trustees for being so slow in repairing the school. In 1914 a new school was built next to the original one. The old school building was sold to the Farm Bureau and renamed Highland Hall. In 1971 the newer of the two schools burned down. Presently the old school is being used as a residence. (40:8/13/1959, 12/7/1961, 8/20/1959; 10; 34:6/1906; 44:125)

On December 1, 1906, a group of residents living in the lower section of the Highland School District met in the home of R. S. Griffith, and Redwood Lodge Road. These neighbors were concerned that their children had to walk a mile and a half in the rain up the hill to the Highland School. Voting to form a new school district the parents sought the approval of the Superintendent of Santa Cruz County Schools, C. S. Price. With Price's approval the parents built a twenty-six by thirty-foot, one-room school costing \$200. Miss C. Tempelton opened the new Hester Creek School on September 1, 1906. (34:12/1906; 40:7/21/1959) In 1949, the Summit, Burrell, Highland, and Hester Creek schools merged and formed a new school district, Loma Prieta School District. Hester Creek School became the Hester Creek Community Church (American Sunday School Union).

The constant problem facing the elected trustees of the various mountain school districts was that the teachers did not stay long. Most of the teachers were women and for many of them the mountain school was their first assignment. After teaching for a year or two, most went on to other districts. In 1879, the average spent on education by each district was under \$450 a year. Figures from 1881 to 1882 reveal that the State of California's share in educating the children of the Santa Cruz Mountains ranged between \$33 and \$100 annually per child, while the County of Santa Clara apportioned \$63.33 to \$190 per school district. The pay for teachers in 1892 was an average of \$57.93 per month for female teachers while their male counterparts received \$96.36. Although the teacher turnover was quite high and the total spent on local education quite low, the children were educated. Some of the former pupils continued their education and returned to teach in the schools where they had once been students. (34:9/1906; 46:205-206; 42;64; 33:9/3/1881)

Source

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