

Alpine History Mystery for August 2013

The 2013 school year is starting and kids are wondering about their new teacher. But did you ever wonder about the first teachers in Alpine? Here's a new mystery that deals with the early Alpine teachers.

Who was the first teacher in Alpine? Well, there's some confusion about that. In her wonderful book *History of a Mountain Settlement*, author Beatrice La Force gives the nod to Zachias Lee Kay. He was a relative of Alpine pioneer Edward Foss, and came to Alpine to teach the Foss boys, Charles and Percy in 1877. However, in the book *My Alpine*, author Carlette Anderson tells us that a year earlier George Washington Webb created the first school on his property after getting permission from the Board of Supervisors to establish a new school district in Alpine. Mr. Webb hired Miss Emma Everhart as the first school teacher at a salary of \$60 a month. She taught the Webb children through 1876 and then in 1877 she became the first school teacher in Dehesa.

In 1881, the first one-room schoolhouse was constructed off of what is now the South Grade Road and Mrs. Eleanor Finley was the first teacher. This building was replaced in 1886 and Edwin Snow was the teacher of nearly 20 students. This 1886 schoolhouse was later purchased by and moved to Dr. Nichols property where it is still in standing today and is an integral part of the Alpine History Museum.

In 1890 Benjamin Arnold built a new one-room schoolhouse, called the Alpine Center School, and we know from Mabel Wood's diary that her teacher in 1892 was a Miss Kerlin. There were more schoolhouses and teachers along the way, but let's take a leap forward to 1928. This is where our mystery begins.

In 1928, students were still attending the one-room schoolhouse built by Mr. Arnold – the last one-room schoolhouse to serve Alpine. This school building had no electricity, no indoor plumbing and no drinking fountains. This year a new teacher was hired to teach the children – 17 in all – in grades 1 through 8. She was paid \$125 a month. Unlike the early teachers who stayed for only a few years, this teacher taught for 34 years until she retired in 1962.

Of course this wonderful new teacher taught the "3 R's" (reading, 'riting, & 'rithmetic), but she also taught the students to love music, drama and literature. In addition to the regular school lessons, she directed and produced an annual play performed by eighth graders. Her husband Forrest built the stage sets & props. She also directed a school choir, and in the 1940's she started a famous and very unusual harmonica band that performed at area events and had special radio performances as well.

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Alpine's Harmonica Band (circa 1940's)

It is said by many who knew her that she was the most wonderful person you would ever want to meet. And the school children thought she was the best teacher ever – most of them anyway. What was her name? Well that is our August mystery: what is the name of the last teacher to teach in a one-room schoolhouse in Alpine? If you know the answer, send a note to mystery@alpinehistory.org. Are you still puzzled? Here's a clue: there are still people living in Alpine who know the answer, because they were in her class. If you or someone you know attended the Alpine Center School between 1928 and 1953 or attended Alpine Elementary School from 1953 to 1962, you might remember her name. If not, you can find the answer in the books mentioned earlier or you can ask a docent for help at the next Alpine History Museum Open House on August 24 & 25 from 2 to 4 pm. Of course, we will print the answer to this mystery in an upcoming edition of this publication if you can't make it to the open house. The Alpine History Museum is located at 2116 Tavern Road in Alpine.