

Fiddletown Preservation Society  
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2012

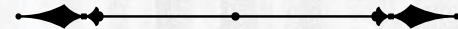
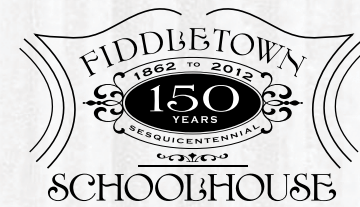
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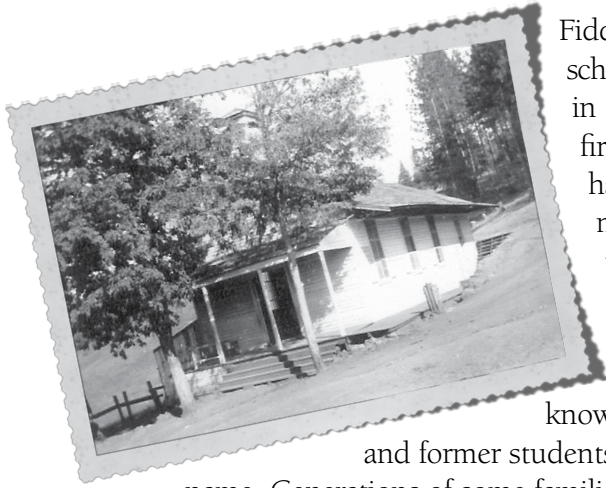
# FIDDLETOWN SCHOOLHOUSE MEMORIES



By Elaine Zorbas



## FIDDLETOWN SCHOOLHOUSE MEMORIES



Fiddletown's one-room schoolhouse was constructed in 1862, replacing the first schoolhouse that had been built in the mid-1850s. When the town's name was changed to Oleta in 1878, Fiddletown School became known as Oleta School—

and former students still refer to it by that name. Generations of some families attended the school. Brothers and sisters sat together in the single classroom, which covered grades one through eight. For 93 years, children were educated in this modest schoolhouse. In 1955 the school was closed when area schools were consolidated and relocated to Plymouth.

The Fiddletown Schoolhouse, owned by the Fiddletown Preservation Society, is in need of continuing preservation. In commemoration of its 150th anniversary, several former students shared their memories. This booklet summarizes and reproduces accounts of what it was like to attend Fiddletown or Oleta School. Unfortunately, there was not ample time to interview all the former students who still live in Amador County. Hopefully, this account encapsulates their experiences.

## SCHOOL DAYS: IN THE CLASSROOM

The bell tolled at 8:30 and was heard throughout Fiddletown. Students had a half hour to get to class. Most kids walked to school though rain, sleet, snow, and heat. School hours were from 9:00-4:00. The first four grades got out at 2:00.

Students entered by the front door and faced the back of the room where there was a raised area for the teacher and her desk. Wood was stored in a small back area behind the classroom; the wood burning stove was on the left side of the room as you enter.



Class of 1937

Class sizes could vary from 10 children to 40. After WWII, the student enrollment increased sufficiently to divide the classroom with a temporary horizontal partition [1946-1953], each side taught by a different teacher.

Students had a 15 minute recess to play outside. For lunch hour at 12:00 several children brought their lunch pail and ate on the porch or on the hill above the schoolhouse. Others who lived near by went home for lunch.

*We had Washington's picture on one side of the blackboard and Lincoln's on the other. The ABC's and first ten numbers were written over the blackboard. We had a world map; it had a weight [to] pull it up so you could bring it down and look at the map. We just thought it was the greatest thing in the world.*

Dianne Deaver Frutos [1933/34-1940/41]

*When there would be a funeral [cemetery directly across from the schoolhouse], we had to stay in until the funeral was over. Then we would play games for recess because we couldn't go out if there was a funeral. And believe me, it was quite often. We'd go, "Oh no, another funeral!"*

Colleen Fine Randolph [1946/47-1950/51]

# HOW ALL THE GRADES LEARNED TOGETHER



Class of 1940

A classroom had a span of ages and grades. Because of farm and other chores needed by a family, in the early days some children missed school and didn't graduate from 8th grade until they were teenagers. Not only were

brothers and sisters in the same

room, but some teachers had their own children as students.

*The grades ahead of you, the younger kids would kind of listen to the other kids so they would learn more things. Actually it is a kind of learning process. You advanced all the time... If someone was having problems, if you finished your work, why you would help some of the little ones who didn't understand. So everybody tried to help everybody else—that was nice.*

Dianne Deaver Frutos [1933/34-1940/41]

*We helped each other. If there was a student that was having a hard time, we would help him. We would go help him with whatever he was doing, with reading and all kinds of school activities. It was rewarding to me to be able to help.*

Esther Murray Woolfolk [1943/44-1946-47]

*My mother's theory was that the older students are always reviewing as they hear the young ones, and the young ones are constantly being introduced to new material that a lot of them are able to pick up on.*

*Maybe it ran like a big committee. [Elizabeth Deaver taught from 1923-1926 in Oleta; afterwards at Shenandoah School, attended by her daughter, Mary]*

Mary Cowan

## STUDENT RELATIONS

The word family most accurately describes student relations in a one-room school-house.

*Fiddletown was a different place. We played in the street in the evenings from [when we were] little, little kids*

*to adults. We all played together.*

*We played "hide and seek," "kick*

*the can." We played various games. And we were like a family—all of us. It wasn't just one or two that was left out or one or two that were special, we were all just a family of kids, even though none of us were related.*



Class of 1946

Esther Murray Woolfolk [1943/44-1946-47]

*Everybody got along. Everybody knew everybody. Everybody who went to school, their parents went to school together. Everybody knew everybody in the county....*

*Everybody got along all the way through, from the 1st grade to the 8th grade. If you were getting picked on in the 3rd grade, you had a friend who was a couple of years older, [and] they straightened*

them out. Everybody was together. We didn't have bullying... everybody played together. Everybody saw each other every day.

Mitch Lubenko [1952/53-1954]

I wanted to go to school so bad when I was five that Mary Ann Voloder or Laura [Whaley] took me to school to visit. I wanted to stay so...bad. That didn't happen.

I knew all the kids from the area—it was kind of a big family-type thing. We all intermingled.

Peggy Germolis Denton [1952/53-1954]

## TEACHERS REMEMBERED



Teachers Eva Shackleton, Bill Neal and Julia Farnham

Teachers often boarded with local families or lived in town and walked to school, just like the kids. Many former students recall Julia Farnham, who taught from 1944-1950, more years than any other teacher in the recorded history of the school.

Miss Farnham was a very good teacher, but she was ornery....It was her birthday and I knew it. So my mom baked her a cake. Nancy [Schoonover] and I, and Delores [Glavich], we walked down to get the cake and my mother drives us [back] up. And we walk in with the cake, and she [Mrs. Farnham]

says, "You're late. Now get in the corner." I thought that was mean! Finally she said, "OK, we'll cut it up and pass it around." She passes it around to all of the kids. My mom says, "Julia, I think it is kind of mean of you to make them stand in the corner. The only reason they are late is because of your birthday cake!"

Colleen Fine Randolph [1946/47-1950/51]

Elizabeth Deaver: She was firm but not rigid. She knew when to laugh, she was very patient, amazingly patient. She just loved being in the classroom with the students.

Mary Cowan



Class of 1947

We had some wonderful teachers and they cared about us. They did not just go to school to get their paycheck; they cared about us. And we knew it. We just loved some of them; we liked the others... Daisy E. Duvall [1943-44] was wonderful. She was so sweet. I could not get fractions—and the teacher that I had at the time—she was smart, she knew how—but she couldn't put it across to me. So Mama and Daddy took me to Placerville. Miss Duvall had gone to Placerville School, and in nothing flat, I understood. She just made it so I understood and I got it. That was wonderful because I needed help.

Esther Murray Woolfolk [1943/44-1946-47]

My favorite teacher was Alice DeCartret [1940-1942]. She was in the post office when I came to get the mail and Mrs. Schoonover said, "Oh, Dianne wants to be a nurse." Well, she [Miss DeCartret] was a nurse. And so she never forgot that, and we were friends until she died.

Dianne Deaver Frutos [1933/34-1940/41]

## READING WRITING AND ARITHMETIC

Teachers at Fiddletown School taught the basics plus history, grammar, geography.

*She [Mrs. Farnham] had the books and she let us take them home. We could do our homework and bring them back for her to grade. I wasn't a very good speller and I'm still not. If we had a spelling bee, if I missed a word, she would write it down. Then on the weekend, I had to write the word ten times or so—and then I had to take it back! If I had anything to do on the weekend, I had to be sure that I wrote the word as many times as she said. So I learned to spell, and I was a pretty good reader. When we came in from lunch, she'd read us a story. I got all the different stories like "Heidi"; she'd continue every-day until she finished the book.*

Coleen Farnham Randolph [1946/47-1950/51]

*I liked geography, because there was always something new about a new area.*

Dianne Deaver Frutos [1933/34-1940/41]

*The teacher would stand up and give the spelling. She would give words 1st grade through 8th, one after the other. I used to write them down, my own words and the other words [too], because I liked spelling.*

Esther Murray Woolfolk [1943/44-1946-47]

*Math was easy for me; spelling would give me a pain. [The teacher] would work with each grade. There was a blackboard. The most math was in 7th and 8th grade; math then was like you get in college now. Some of it was very tough.*

George Woolfolk [1937/38-1944/45]

*I can remember reciting the alphabet backwards—for somebody. The two teachers looked at each other and said, "How did she do that?" Because the alphabet was up in the other room on top of the black-*

*board. Mr. Neal [1952-53] knew that he could do it, but I caught him looking up [at the blackboard]. He cheated, and I didn't have to cheat!*

Peggy Germolis Denton [1952/53-1954]

## WATER AND UTILITIES

Fiddletown School had no running water. Water was fetched from wells on Main Street and carried up the hill in big milk containers from the local dairy.

*Me and Marvin [Vose] would get on either side of the five gallon milk can and we'd carry it from the corner up to the schoolhouse. It wasn't too heavy with two guys carrying the one can. We'd stop and take a rest, then go, stop and go. I got \$5.00 a month for carrying water. I saved up and bought a bicycle....*

*In the morning, we had to build the fires [for the wood stove], and sweep the room after school. The room was kept nice and warm in winter.*

Delbert Glavich [1934/35-1942/43]

*There were two outhouses, one for boys and one for girls. Boys had to go way up on the hill—just had a two-seater. The girls had five or six seats, and were closer to the school. It worked—that is the way it was.*

George Woolfolk [1937/38-1944/45]

*We tipped the girl's toilet over a lot of times on Halloween.*

Delbert Glavich [1934/35-1942/43]



## FUN AND GAMES



Class of 1951-52

The empty lot adjoining the schoolhouse was a play area where the kids could go at recess and lunch to play marbles, baseball, and other games.

We had these rings at the end of the school yard, that you hold onto and you run. When you get

going, you start flying. We played baseball all the time. We didn't have basketball. All the boys built sleds and slid down the hill on the pine needles. Us girls wouldn't do it. We would make pine needle houses, and they'd fly through our houses.

Coleen Fine Randolph [1946/47-1950/51]

We had a game with two sides—drew a line, get caught and you went in jail. It was fun. Girls and boys played together, same games, even kids of different ages. Whether you were a toddler or 8th grader, we played together. We helped each other. There was competition between the two sides in the game, but as soon as the game was over, the competition was over.

Esther Murray Woolfolk [1943/44-1946-47]

Girls were baseball players, they were hunters, fishermen. They were tomboys; there were very few who were just girls. That was the way of life. We had some girls who were better baseball players than the boys. [Girls always wore dresses.]

Mitch Lubenko [1952/53-1954]

Halloween, they cut logs, and we'd save all the papers and save pine cones & pine needles and dump that all in. And then on Halloween, we'd set it all on fire in the center of the playground. And after it all burned down to ashes, then we could roast our marshmallows. And they would have wash tubs and put water in it and we'd dunk for apples. They made all kinds of funny costumes.

Dianne Deaver Frutos [1933/34-1940/41]

We always had a party [for Christmas], and we put on a play and everyone sang songs, some read poetry. And then they danced, everybody brought food and then at midnight at the Oddfellows Hall we'd go down and have our dinner. And after dinner they picked up—three or four women would wash the dishes and the rest would go upstairs and dance. Sometimes you danced until three or five in the morning.

Dianne Deaver Frutos [1933/34-1940/41]

## KIDS WILL BE KIDS: MISCHIEF AND DISCIPLINE

Discipline was not an issue. Pranks and mischief did occur, and some teachers ruled with an iron fist, reinforced by a ruler. Teachers and parents cooperated together to set standards of behavior.



If you got in trouble in school, you were in trouble when you got home. If you got in trouble for anything at school, you really didn't

want to go home! Teacher would tell parents. My folks were strict that way—you did what you were supposed to do.

Esther Murray Woolfolk [1943/44-1946-47]

We'd be late for school, me and Marvin [Vose]. Sometimes we were an hour late or so. They'd send us down to the Trustees. "Oh, you boys ought to know better than that!" and [they'd] let us go and we'd do it over again.

[Another time] we had skunks in the trap and put them under the schoolhouse and she [Miss DeCartret] had to let school out, it stunk so bad. They sent us to the Trustees and they just laughed at us "You guys know better than that. Don't do it next time. Get out of here!"

Delbert Glavich [1934/35-1942/43]



Class of 1953

I never got hit, but she [the teacher] would pop people on the head with a ruler. I think someone told her, "I think you can do the hand, but no more head."

Coleen Fine  
Randolph  
[1946/47-1950/51]

If there was any trouble, the teachers took care of it or got to your parents and you didn't want that. The teachers could spank you. They weren't scared; they had permission from your parents. That was it! You knew what you could get away with. There was always people pulling jokes on people, everybody did that [a little mischief] in those days.

Mitch Lubenko [1952/53-1954]

## VALUE OF A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL

I think you learned more. You heard what they heard. The next grade would be easier if you paid attention. The older you were, the more you could learn if you could retain.

It was a good thing.

Mitch Lubenko  
[1952/53-1954]



Class of 1927

When I think of Fiddletown School, I think of "Little House on the Prairie." All the kids were in the same class. The little ones had their things. You are sitting right there. There is no way that you can sit there and not absorb, unless you completely plug your ears.

Peggy Germolis Denton [1952/53-1954]

If any one thinks we are in a wasteland just because we live the rural areas—this isn't true. There are wonderfully talented people—and many professional people come out of our one-room schools and may be all the better for having a well-rounded education. Being exposed to all the curriculum, all the different people, all the different ages—more like a family, as my mother used to say. In a one-room school, it's more like a family, instead of being in just with your own age group only.

Mary Cowan

## PRESERVE FIDDLETOWN SCHOOLHOUSE



Schoolhouse in 1886

There were other one-room schoolhouses in the vicinity that at one time accommodated children living on Fiddletown's scattered farms and ranches: Gilmore School was located just east of Hale Road and Bridgeport School (also known as Evening Shade) stood at the end of Tyler Road. These schoolhouses are long gone.

The Fiddletown Preservation Society (FPS) came into being in 1964 over the issue of saving the Fiddletown Schoolhouse. Because the property had not been used as a school since 1955, the Oro Madre School District intended to put it up for sale. There was a possibility that the school would be demolished and turned into a parking lot. With strong interest from the FPS, the school district changed course and deeded the Fiddletown Schoolhouse and property to the new organization.

Starting in 1994, the Fiddletown Preservation Society prepares an annual Buffet Breakfast & Bake Sale to benefit the Schoolhouse Restoration Fund. This all-you-can-eat breakfast attracts people from the area and former students, friends, and families are reunited.

Over the years, many repairs have been made by dedicated community volunteers to address deterioration and renovate the interior. More improvements which require funding remain to be accomplished before the Schoolhouse can be reopened for public use.

**Your donation to the Fiddletown Schoolhouse Restoration Fund will ensure that it continues to stand as reminder of the past and a community meeting place for the future.**

## TEACHERS OF FIDDLETOWN / OLETA SCHOOL

The first known teacher, a Mr. Kemp, originally from Massachusetts, taught a class of 30 students in 1856. Dennis Townsend from Vermont, Fiddletown's first Postmaster and later Amador County School Superintendent, was a teacher by profession and taught in 1857.



Class of 1914

Teachers were listed starting 1880, when Oleta was formed as a school district. The names and years are itemized below, starting with the 1900s.

T.A. Bell	1900-01	Frances Otter	1930-31
Vanne McLaughlin	1901-03	Evelyn Hartman	1931-32
Nellie Robeson	1903-04	Doris M. Bryan	1932-33
Margaret Schilling	1904-07	Anthony Noia	1933-36
Ethel Berry	1907-8	Dorothy Yager	1937-38
Nettie L. Armstead	1908-9	Mayme Lubenko	1937-39
J.P. Confer	1909-10	Muriel Garrison	1939-40
Inez Lawrence	1910-14	Alice DeCartret	1940-42
Mary Billalon	1914-16	Eva Bliss	1942-43
Cora Brown	1917-1920	Daisy Duvall	1943-44
Florence Maddox	1920-21	Julia Farnham	1944-50
Clara Benners	1921-22	Eunice Goodall	1946-47
A.B. Simons	1922-23	Verl Pugmire	1947-48
Catherine Northrop	1922-23	Mary Sacher	1948-49
Elizabeth Deaver	1923-26	Eva Shackleton	1949-51
Florence Brown	1926-27	Gladys Buck	1950-53
Ethel Farnham	1927-28	Helen Vineyard	1951-52
Helen Carr	1928-29	William Neal	1952-54
Olive C. Holtz	1929-30	Patricia Murphy	1954-55