

by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist



My last myth-a-month demonstrated that the Glendale schoolhouse, built in 1864 and now in Sparks, was a year older than the Dayton schoolhouse, built in 1865. Now a claim has been made that the Mottsville schoolhouse, moved from its original site, and greatly modified over the years, dates back to ca. 1855. Could this be true?

"The first school in western Utah [Nevada], wrote Myron Angel in the *History of Nevada* (1881), " was kept by Mrs. Allen, at the residence of Israel Mott, during the winter of 1854-55."

The Motts of Mottsville

(1974) asserted that Eliza Mott "is also reputed to have been the founder of the first school in the state, the Mottsville School, which was conducted in her kitchen with the assistance of Mrs. Allen." Whatever the case, the first documented effort in formal education was in a private residence and not funded by tax dollars.

The story goes that the former Mottsville schoolhouse, now located at 1201 Foothill Road in Carson Valley, dates back to sometime shortly after this first private effort at formal education. Why? Did anybody do the rigorous homework, or was this assertion based on assumption? Although the sources for answers are sparse in this early period of Nevada's history, I took the challenge.

J. Wells Kelly in his *First Directory of Nevada Territory* (1862) reported "There are two schools

[in Douglas County], one in Genoa, and the other farther up the valley [south of Genoa], both in a flourishing condition." There was no indication the schools were being conducted in schoolhouses constructed using public school funds.

The first extant Douglas County Superintendent of Public Instruction report dates to January 13, 1864. Superintendent Charles D. Daggett, M.D., noted there were three school districts: District No. 1, Jack's Valley; District No. 2, Genoa; and District No. 3, Mottsville. Jack's Valley and Mottsville school districts had schoolhouses, Genoa did not.

However, Douglas Co. School Superintendent and attorney Albert T. Hawley-- appointed by the county commissioners on March 7, 1864 following Dr. Daggett's death--reported that a new school district had been created out of the southern end of the Mottsville District. The schoolhouse at the mouth of Olds Canyon was now in the Fairview District, and Mottsville, with the construction of a schoolhouse in Genoa in 1864, was the only district without a schoolhouse.

According to *The Douglas County Banner*, Mottsville finally got its schoolhouse in 1865. "After many vexatious delays and false starts the trustees of this district have at last contracted for the erection of a comfortable and commodious schoolhouse," wrote the weekly

Banner

on October 7, "and we hope in the course of five or six weeks to be able to announce its completion, and the recommencement of studies among the children of the District." Two weeks later under the heading of "Mottsville School District No. 3,"

The Banner

noted, "The new School House in this District is being rapidly pushed to completion. Next week we will give our friends of that District an estimate of its probable cost and a statement as how the expense is to be met."

The follow-up story did not appear, and *The Banner*, despite A. T. Hawley's efforts to promote it, published its last issue in Genoa on December 23, 1865. The Mottsville schoolhouse was completed, probably in late November or December, because school records show \$888.71 expended by the Mottsville District "for Sites, Buildings, Repairs, and School Furniture" in the school year ending August 31, 1866.

So now we know that the Mottsville schoolhouse like the Dayton schoolhouse dates back to late 1865.

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, May 1999 edition)