

Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

February Newsletter, 2024

Second in a Random Series Do You Remember? Writing Slates in School

If you can remember using writing tablets made of black slate for your classroom lessons, then you can lay claim to being a genuine “antique”.

Writing slates have been around for hundreds of years with references dating back to the fourteenth century.



Fourteenth century scribe with his pencil and tablet – most likely both made of slate.



Some writing slates date all the way back to the Roman Empire.

As education gradually improved and more people learned to read and write, slates became a practical alternative to paper. Paper, until the latter half of the 19th century, was handmade, expensive, and difficult to come by.



Thirteenth or fourteenth century teacher with book and student.

Used mainly for books and important documents, paper was not the throwaway commodity that it has become today. Writing slate availability and usage increased as transportation by land and sea improved.



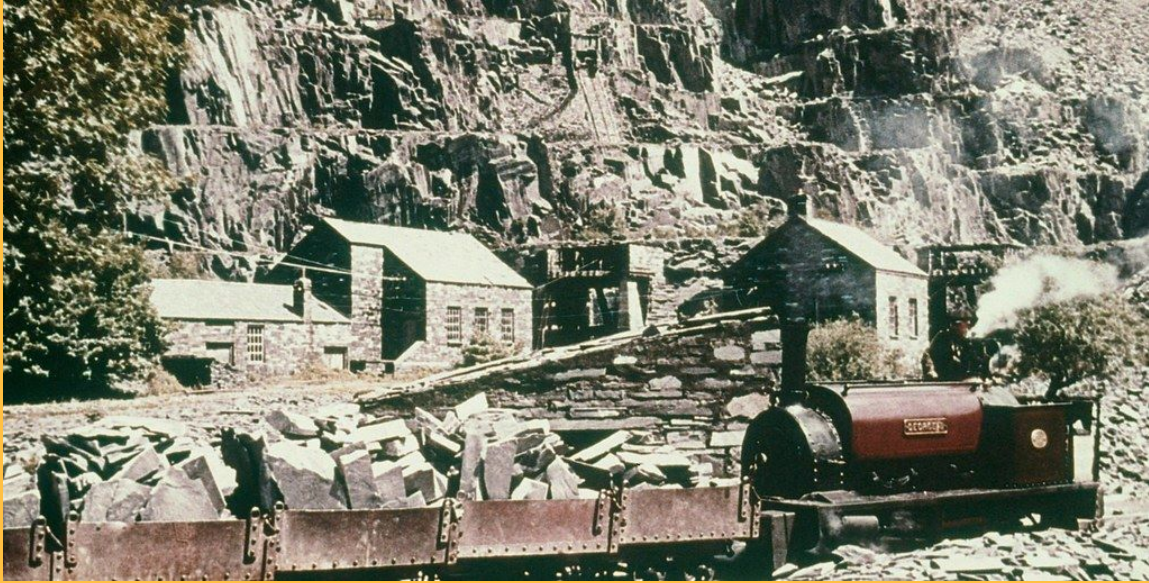
Clipper ships provided fast, reliable, transportation.

As distribution improved and increased, slate quarrying in Wales skyrocketed.



One of the dozens of slate quarries in Wales.

Wales was home to the finest, darkest slate which is best for writing. The demand for school blackboards and writing slates created a substantial slate processing industry.



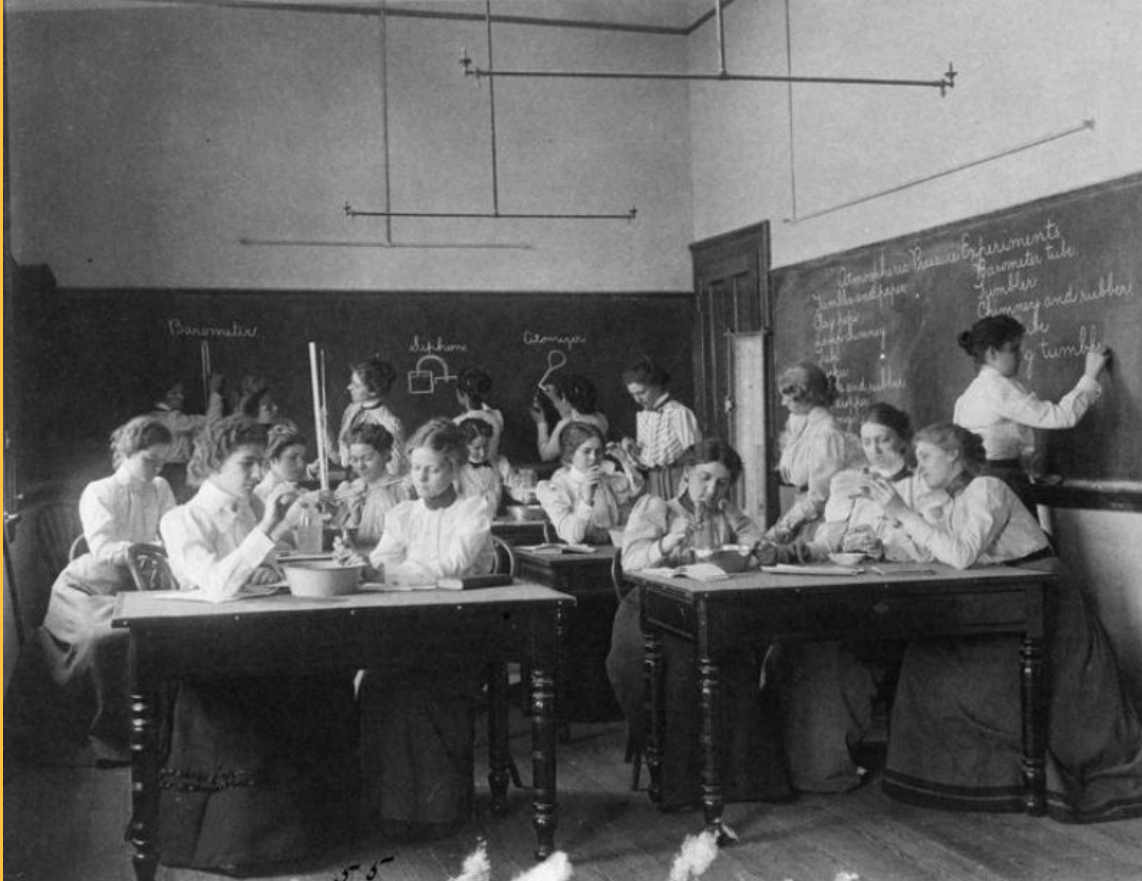
Top quality slate being loaded and moved by steam power in Wales.

Wales certainly prospered with this demand, shipping high quality slate products all over the world. By the nineteenth century, writing slates were used in nearly every classroom on earth.



Typical 19th to early 20th century classroom. Note benches instead of individual desks with writing slates ready for students.

Schools of size and substance augmented these with long, expanses of slate blackboards.



School rooms often wrapped 3 walls with slate blackboards and saved one wall for windows.

As the twentieth century dawned, writing slates were the primary classroom tool for students.



My first day of school teaching.

Net Beppo. Febr. 16th, 1910.

School room layout in 1910.

By the 1930's, however, the market began to decline in favor of refillable fountain pens, pencils, and cheap paper. Remember paper tablets filled with lined paper so crude you could see the wood fibers in it?



Children's writing tablet 1950-1955.

The obsolete writing slates quickly fell by the wayside as far as school usage. The once popular slates never really became completely disused.



Closed deserted Welsh slate mine.

The manufacture continued on a small scale into the 21st century. Even today, modern usage includes listing groceries needed, merchant ships tracking geographical locations at sea, and warehouse movement of various goods.



Some uses for slate today.

As technology advances, it looks as though the once critical slates will be relegated to curiosity status. That is

until one day...

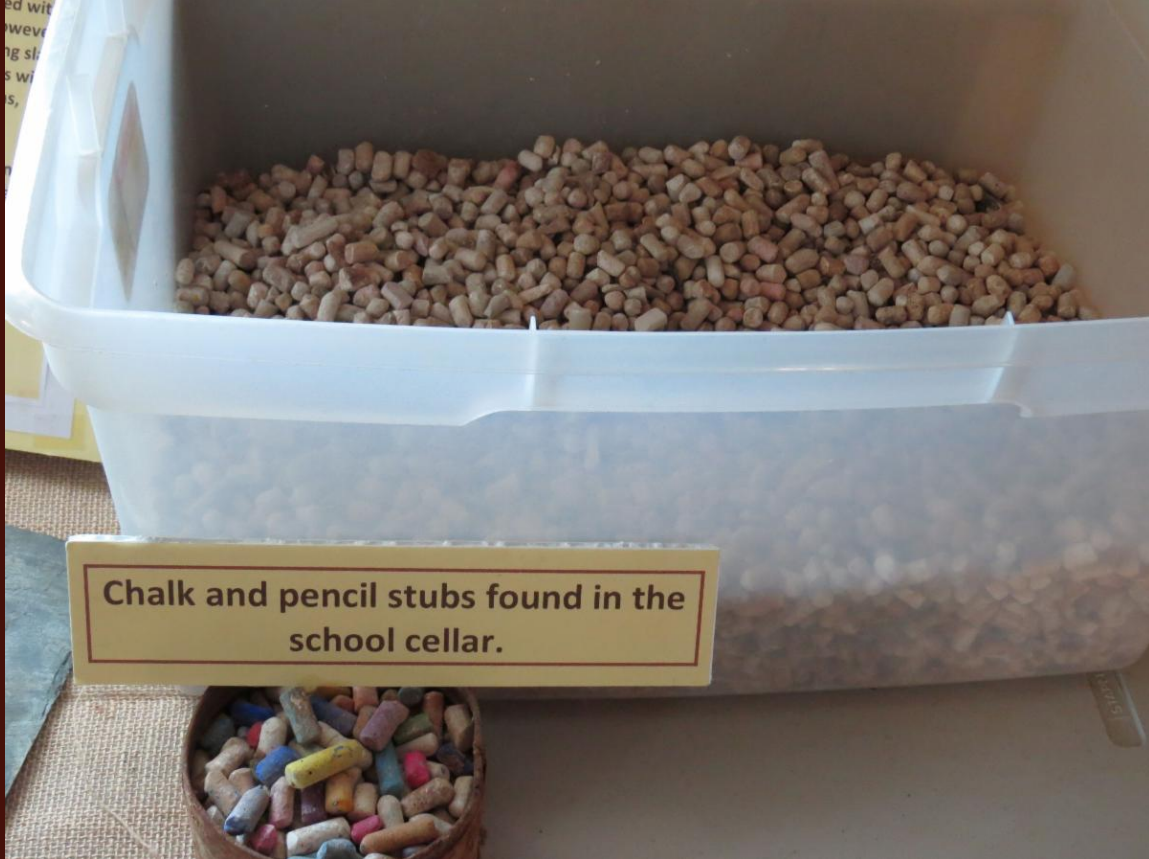


Currently, a new display featuring antique writing slates is being assembled in Room 4 – the museum room, at the Historic Sutter Creek Grammar School. The museum room will be open before and after Glen Villa's lecture "A History of the Local Miwok People" on March 16 at 5:00 pm. The lecture will be held in the classroom which still has original slate blackboards on the walls.



Below are photographs of the slate on display in the museum room and chalk found in the school's cellar.





Back to 2024

We are offering the third in a series of free lectures on March 16, 2024

SCCBF

FREE LECTURE

To Reserve A Seat

Email

Info@SCCBF.Org

(Seating is Limited)

Lectures are Held at the Historic
Sutter Creek Grammar School
Sutter Creek, CA



Glen Villa

Director of the Miwok Heritage Center

The Miwok Heritage Center (MHC) was founded to preserve, promote and interpret the history and culture of the Miwok people.

Saturday, March 16, 5:00 pm
A History of the Local Miwok People

Come Early and Visit SCCBF's museum room at the school.

PARKING: Look for a sign on Broad Street to access the large area for parking behind the primary school. If you need a more level access to the rear of the building, the small upper parking lot will also be available. To enter this lot, go up Randolph Street and turn left on Fullen. Follow the road around into the lot. Most of the parking spaces are not marked, so please park diagonally along both sides.

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