

PALMERSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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April 2006

On behalf of the Members of the Board of Directors, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all who have contributed in whatever way to turn an idea into reality. When a group of people first met one Saturday night in the summer of 1997 at the Fire Station in downtown Palmersville to share memories, stories, and pictures relating to Palmersville, it was soon agreed there was a need to collect and preserve artifacts, stories, and historical information for future generations to enjoy. When Palmersville School closed in the spring of 2003, a more pressing need arose for a permanent facility to house the pictures, trophies, and memorabilia from the school.

Several of this group of people met in the spring of 2004 and organized the Palmersville Historical Society, Inc. as a 501©3 non-profit organization with the goal of preserving, protecting, and presenting our heritage. Members of the first Board of Directors selected were Jim Cantrell-President; June K. Kemp-Vice President; Ben Cantrell-Secretary; Carol Brann-Treasurer; and Hugh Brann-Member. Our charter was granted early in 2005.

In April of 2005 the First State Bank of Dresden (previously Weakley County Bank) graciously donated their closed branch bank building in Palmersville to the Historical Society with the intent the building be used to benefit the citizens of Palmersville. This building is now the permanent home for Palmersville School pictures 1924-2003, sports trophies, and yearbooks as well as a growing collection of family histories, genealogies, and memorabilia from Palmersville and surrounding communities. Our "Open House" was held October 15, 2005 with over 100 attending.

The Board of Directors has expanded and now includes Ron Gifford, Gayle Griffith, Nelda Rachels, Magdalene Yeargin, and Joe David Laws.

We are now offering memberships which will help with operating expenses. Memberships are \$20 for individuals or \$25 for families and membership year will run from April 1st to March 31st. Quarterly meetings are planned for 7:00 p.m. on the last Friday of January, April, July, and October. We will send an informative Quarterly Newsletter before each meeting. Please note that the Alumni Banquet will replace our April meeting this year.

The Historical Society building is now open on Friday afternoons 1-5, but hopefully with more volunteers we can soon open on Saturdays also. To make arrangements for a visit at other times, please contact June Kemp at 731-782-3348, e-mail bkemp@wk.net; Hugh or Carol Brann at 731-822-7921; or Nelda Rachels at 731-822-7485, e-mail njrachels@yahoo.com. We welcome groups, class reunions, or individuals.

Sincerely, June Kemp and Nelda Rachels

PALMERSVILLE SCHOOL THROUGH THE YEARS

Several schools have come and gone over the last century or so. Typically one-room schools were located in many communities and offered an eighth grade education. However, Palmersville was home to the Minida Normal College built about 1890. This two-story frame building combined educational opportunities from the elementary level to the B.S. and B.A. degrees.

Following the closing of the Minida Normal College in 1912, the citizens of Palmersville determined their young people would continue to have access to a higher education. A lot was purchased from Mr. Charlie Pentecost a short distance from the heart of the village. (Remember that "old" Palmersville was located west of Hwy. 89 on what is now the Latham Hwy.) With very little money, but an abundance of will power and determination, a two-room frame building with an "L" shaped porch was constructed the following summer.

The newly elected school board members were Lis Pentecost, Johnny Buckley, and Gus Atkins. The first teachers were Miss Atkins, elementary, and Mr. Hassel, secondary. The curriculum consisted of Plane Geometry, Zoology, Agriculture, English, Geology, Bookkeeping, Algebra I and II. No diplomas were given to students completing this work, but certificates were issued.

It soon became evident that this building was too small, and another room was added and another teacher. Enrollment grew and the building was just too small to accommodate the students who wanted to attend. Plans were then made to construct a larger building.

An article from the June 10, 1921 *Dresden Enterprise* carried the following caption:

PALMERSVILLE ERECTING SCHOOL BUILDING

Mr. W. Jonah Gibson, the elected principal for the coming term, is quoted as saying, "Work has already commenced on the building and it will be pushed to a rapid completion. The building will be modern in every respect. It is being built according to plans and specifications suggested by the State Department of Education. The building is located on a beautiful five-acre campus west of the former building."

Construction continued and a picture of the new school building appeared in the October 14, 1921 *Dresden Enterprise* with the following caption: PALMERSVILLE'S NEW \$10,000 SCHOOL BUILDING. The old frame building was moved to the new school site and used for Home Economics and Agriculture. The school was now recognized as an accredited school.

An article in the September 22, 1922 issue of the *Dresden Enterprise* proclaimed:

PALMERSVILLE HIGH TO OPEN MONDAY, SEPT. 25.

Mr. Fitch, principal, invited friends and patrons to attend the opening exercises featuring speeches, music, and entertainment with classification of students to follow.

The first graduation exercise was held in 1924 with diplomas issued to eight men—Ned Ray Kilgore, Dessel Pentecost, Gordon Pentecost, Curtis Roberts, Carter McWherter, Royce McWherter, Euclid Griffith, and Noland Parker.

In 1936, the frame classrooms from the original school burned. (Ask some of the old-timers for details.) In 1937, a gymnasium was built which included two

classrooms, a stage, and a cafeteria, making it possible for hot lunches to be served for the first time. Prior to this, basketball games were played outdoors on dirt courts.

This gym served until the Weakley County Court appropriated money in 1950 for a new brick building consisting of a gymnasium, two classrooms, cafeteria, heating plant, and restrooms. This modern, state-of-the-art structure was completed and the first basketball game played there in January of 1951. The Weakley County Tournament was also held there in 1951. The boys team won the County tournament and went on to win the District and 3rd in the Regional.

Throughout the years, additional classrooms were added to the original frame structure and several renovations took place. However, the outward appearance of the building changed very little.

Then in August of 1980, construction of a new facility began while students began the school year in the old building. The new brick building would contain eight classrooms, a library, cafeteria, and office space and would cost \$660,537. This new facility would be joined to the existing gymnasium. The old cafeteria was remodeled for use as the Home Economics Department. Local citizens joined together, volunteered their services, materials, and financial assistance, and built an Agriculture and Industrial Arts Shop behind the new school.

In 1982, Palmersville High School Grades K-12 contained 170 students and employed fifteen teachers. In the spring of 1997, the final Senior class of Palmersville High School marched in their caps and gowns through the gymnasium onto the stage and received their diplomas. The school

continued to operate as an elementary school K-8 until dwindling attendance forced its closing at the end of the school year in the spring of 2003. On May 30, 2003 as teachers and aides were boxing up and cleaning out, many with tears in their eyes, one thought was prevalent.... "It's a sad, sad day."

Information contained in this article was gathered from *Dresden Enterprise*, Jerry Kennedy, Nelda Rachels, and June Kemp

The mascot for men's sports at Palmersville has been the "Pirate" as far back as anyone can remember. However, the ladies teams were called "Peaches" at least until the 60's when they switched to "Lady Pirates". If you know what year in the 60's this change occurred, please let us know. In the 80's, the Palmersville "Super Chicken" appeared on the scene to entertain the crowd and cheer on the team!

We are trying to determine when the first yearbook was published (1940??) and if one was published each year afterward. We have the 1940 and a copy of 1947 onward..

If you would like to contribute a memory or post a question in the Newsletter, please send it to us at---
P. O. Box 21
Palmersville, Tn 38241

DONATIONS OF ANY AMOUNT ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!

PRINCIPALS OF PALMERSVILLE
SCHOOL by June Kay Kemp

Palmersville School has had many outstanding principals throughout its history. Listening to visitors at the Historical Society's building reminisce as they view the senior pictures hanging around the room, one hears so many stories beginning with, "Do you remember when Mr. _____?" (You finish the question.)

The two men with the longest tenure as principals were Mr. Carl J. McDaniel and Mr. Robin Montgomery; both were principals for nineteen years respectively.

Although neither were natives of Palmersville, they made it their permanent home and raised their families here. "Mr. Mac," as he was lovingly called, passed away June 14, 2003 and his wife "Miss Polly" passed away February 26, 2006. Robin and his wife Sherry (Oliver) still reside in Palmersville, though they do enjoy the sunshine of Florida part of the time.

Following is a list of principals at Palmersville:

1921-22 Mr. W. Jonah Gibson
1922-23 Mr. Fitch
1923-24
1924-25 Mr. W. Jonah Gibson
1925-26 Mr. Robert McAlpin
1926-27 Mr. B. C. Lynch
1927-28 Mr. Hubert I. Jones
1928-30 Mr. A. S. Campbell
1930-31 Mr. R. H. Ray
1931-32 Mr. Jim H. Elam
1932-35 Mr. T. W. Fisher
1935-39 Mr. T. Dessell Pentecost
1939-41 Mr. Happel Smith
1941-43 Mr. Norman Campbell
1943-45 Mr. L. B. Brown
1945-46 Mr. H. D. Hagar

1946-47 Mr. J. Leland Wingo
1947-50 Mr. W. H. Cravens
1950-52 Mr. Wyatt R. Cunningham
1952-54 Mr. W. A. West
1954-55 Mr. Lloyd Spiceland
1955-57 Mr. Walter H. Riggs
1957-59 Mr. Bob Childress
1959-78 Mr. Carl J. McDaniel
1978-97 Mr. Robert "Robin" Montgomery
1997-2003 Mr. Keith Darnell

"REMEMBER THE PIRATES"
by June Kay Kemp

Reflecting on the theme selected by the Alumni Association officers this year, we do have our memories. Whether we attended school in the old building or the new building, our memories were made from the people we knew-our classmates, our teachers, our coaches, our bus drivers-and those memories will be with us forever.

My first memory of the Alumni Banquet was 1955, I think. The Banquet was held in the cafeteria. Glenda Roberts and Sherry Oliver sang "Melody of Love" and I accompanied them on the piano, ineptly I might add. Three years later, our Sophomore class assisted with serving and cleaning up at the Banquet to earn money to pay for the Junior-Senior Banquet the next year. So I had attended two Alumni Banquets before I graduated.

These Alumni Banquets held every third year on the Saturday night before Easter and the Palmersville School and Community Fair which began in 1922 have given us opportunities to come home again, renew old acquaintances, and keep vivid our cherished memories.

TRIBUTE TO PALMERSVILLE SCHOOL by Nancy (Biggers) McClure

On May 30, 2003, an era ended for Palmersville. The teachers and staff of Palmersville School watched as the buses pulled away for the last time. For those of us who are deeply rooted in Palmersville School, it was indeed a very sad day.

I started school there, graduated there, and my boys went there. Also, for 14 years I worked there as an educational assistant.

My first memory of Palmersville School goes back to the white frame structure that stood very close to where the current building is. In addition to this, there were classrooms in the building that housed the gym and the lunchroom. Agriculture and shop classes were held in a separate building. In the 1970's another building was built for an additional elementary classroom. Later this building was used for a science room and lab. When the current building was completed in 1981, it was joined to the gym structure, and a new Agriculture building was added.

While going through my photographs, I came across so many that I have made over the years. Little did I know at the time how precious they would become. A flood of memories came back as I looked at them, some of which I had forgotten I had made. All of those taken in the classrooms, halls, lunchroom, gym, and outside have now taken on a new meaning.

When I look at our ball game photos, I can still imagine sitting in the bleachers and cheering on our beloved Pirates or working in the concession stand which was a "fringe benefit" of being a PTO officer. It was a lot of work, but we had a lot of fun, too.

Palmersville School may be closed, but let us not forget the quality of education that we and our children received there from an exceptional group of teachers.

One memory comes to my mind-the summer before my sixth grade year I found out that our class would have a male teacher. I had not had a man teacher up to that point, so it was a little unnerving.

Mary Carney, who lived near Latham, had a library in her home, and my mother would take me there to check out books. That summer she told us that her son-in-law would begin teaching at Palmersville in the fall. I dreaded the thought of a male teacher all summer. Well, Mary's daughter is June who is married to Brad Childs. Mr. Childs did in fact start that year, and as they say, "The rest is history." My apprehension was unfounded. I dearly loved having Mr. Childs for a teacher. June Childs later started touching lives here and both retired from Palmersville School.

I dedicate this article to Robin Montgomery, teacher and principal; Robert Richards, teacher and coach; and other exceptional teachers who are no longer with us-Miss Lucille Austin, Mrs. Mary Nell Pentecost, Mr. Buren Austin, and Mr. Carl McDaniel. They all have left long-lasting impressions on those fortunate to have had them as teachers.

We had a lot of good times, and there were sad times as well. As we laughed together and cried together, we were a family, not just co-workers. To quote Mr. Ron Gifford, former English teacher at Palmersville, "To know where we are going, we must remember where we have been."



Did You Know?

Interesting Facts about
Weakley County Schools

By Nelda Rachels

When the last class of PHS graduated in 1997, the stage was creatively decorated with a sinking Pirate ship as the back-ground. The metaphor hit hard. My youngest graduated that year, and even though I planned to be a true stoic, the sinking ship had me crying like a baby.

The first Palmersville School Fair was perhaps held in 1922. A November 9, 1923 *Dresden Enterprise* article states that the **second** annual Palmersville Fair was held on November 2, 1923.

Discipline was truly innovative “way back when.” One older gentleman said he remembered “the brick and bucket method” at Palmersville. Every time an older student misbehaved, he accumulated a brick. At the end of the week, the student had to haul his stockpile of bricks in a bucket around the perimeter of the schoolyard. In other words, if he had 6 bricks in his bucket, he toted his heavy bucket around the grounds six times!

Volunteers ran the early school lunchrooms in the county. Parents and teachers held pie suppers to raise money for meat and flour, and families contributed canned veggies and dried beans and peas. Moms took turns cooking and serving meals.

At one time, school hours began at 8:00 a.m. and ended when all the day’s schoolwork was completed, often 4:00-4:30 p.m.

In 1885, a teacher’s average salary in Weakley County was 35 dollars per month.

After six weeks of school, students were let out to pick cotton.

Adrian Brann was one of the first to drive a school bus. He drove a Model-T converted by boarding up the truck bed and placing a tarp across the top for protection from rain and sun. He hauled about 10 students from Eagle Hill to Gleason High School

School consolidation has been implemented since at least 1950.

One-room schools had one teacher who taught grades 1-8. Two-room schools had one teacher per room: one taught grades 1-4, and the other taught grades 5-8.

Subscription schools were parent-organized schools. Parents banded together to hire a teacher, agreeing to pay him or her so much per child each month. Parents also provided the teacher with room and board and an appropriately furnished school facility.

There were well over 50 community schools (grades 1-8) prior to 1950. Between 1900-1930, 35 one-room schools were built: Donoho, East Grove, Fairview, Freeman, Glasgow, Liberty, Little Zion, McClain, Meridian, Morgan, Ridgeway, Barber Center Point, Brocks Chapel, Coats, Eagle Hill, Gibbs, Harris, Hill Top, Killgore, Lamb, Levister, Pleasant Hill, Reavis, Thompson, Ward Chapel, Fancy, Gully View, Hill Crest, Parrish, Pierce, Pittman, Shady Grove, Spears, Tumbling, and West Union. Between 1910-1930, sixteen two-room schools were built: Holts, Hyndsver, Jackson Academy, New Salem, Old Salem, Pisgah, Ralston, Rinda, Salem, Smith Chapel, Webb, Earls, Green Hill, Oak Grove, Parks, and Terrell.

Bible Union School was built around 1909.
