

The Birth of Grundy County High School

Compilation and Comments by Jackie Layne Partin

"The members of the graduating class, having tried for a number of weeks, to find an appropriate name for their Annual, have finally decided on the name "The Mountain Laurel," offered by Mrs. Northcutt.

The work on "The Mountain Laurel," the high school annual, is progressing with such speed and quality that it is encouraging to the entire class to know that they are receiving such splendid co-operation from the entire school. The photographer came last Tuesday and took about eighteen group pictures which are to be used in the Annual. Since the photographer, selected to do this, guarantees his work, the pictures are the very best as evidenced by the students being well pleased with the grade of art work, he has given them, which is a great factor in putting out an attractive annual.



1925 — "The Mountain Laurel" staff hard at work on the first volume;
(no particular order of a names)--Staff: Willie Mai Anderson; Aileen Ingram; Glen Woodlee; Ethel Martin; Margaret Stone; Hazel Roberts; Veda Hunziker; Margaret McCurdy; Byrtle O'Neal; Earl Marler; Louie Berry

Since the annual is to go to the press in a very short time, some members of the graduating class will give everybody interested an opportunity to purchase a copy of "The Mountain Laurel." The only way you will be sure of getting a copy will be to buy now, for we, the graduating class, will contract for just the number we have subscribers for. Your attention is called to a few of the things which will appear in the Annual. The following is a limited portion of the contents: History of the school, cut of building, group pictures of all of the classes in school, memoriam to Col. Shook including his picture, dedication, history of graduating class, poems, faculty, Who's Who, music, alphabetical list of the alumni by years of graduation and their occupation and present address, Shook scholarship medal, brief mention of all the activities of the entire school.

The Staff has fixed the price at the minimum sum of only one dollar here in town and one dollar and twenty-five cents out of town, to cover postage. The Annuals will be delivered about May the first. Signed, The Staff" (Transcribed from the Mrs. Grundy newspaper of Feb. 19, 1925)

From this news article we can see that the Mountain Laurel was already in existence before any four-year high school was organized. Interestingly, the older students thought of themselves as high school students instead of high-school-bound students. In fact we see in this excerpt from *Mrs. Grundy*, **May 21, 1925**, they were called students of **Shook High School**. "*Musical; By the Pupils of Miss Hamby; Shook High School, Friday Evening, May 22, 8:00...*" Since the reader might find an ancestor, I will list those who participated in this particular event: Mary Bartella Waters, Alma Charles, Hazel Geary, Marguerite Geary, Annisue Bryan, Louis Bryan, Cleo Goforth, Marie Flury, Hazel Francis, Dorothy Fults, Katherine Gould, Margaret Stone, Bernice Kenopke, Evelyn Northcut, Haskel Ingram, Aileen Ingram, Ida Hunziker, Miss Lois Nearn, Robert Du Vergey, Louise Roddy, Howard Sanders, Rosa Kunz, Mrs. J. B. Isom and Miss Hamby." Obviously a few of these were adults who gave vocal and instrumental support.

In the same edition of *Mrs. Grundy*, **May 21, 1925**, we read, "*Some of the Programs of the entertainments to be given at the close of Shook High School; Musical by the Pupils of Miss Hamby, May 19, 8 o'clock.*" Names of those participating on that night follow: Arristine Petty, Nellie Jossi, Douglas Goforth, Miss Nearn, Margaret Stone, Glen Woodlee, Rosalee Werner, Pauline Gardner, Jessie Ruth Arnold, Elsie Goforth, Madge Warren, Miss Blanche Woodlee, Anna Carol Fults, Rachel Lewis, Ethel Martin, Howard Sanders, Frances London, Mary Eller, Estelle Henley, and Mary Katherine Schild.

Not all the students listed above were in the graduating group of **1925** at **Shook High School** but were in the upper two grades which did not exist in the initial organization of the James K. Shook Grammar School that opened in **1889**. *"In August 1894, Rev. W. G. Dillon became the principal through whose efforts the school was reorganized on a basis of ten grades or a third class high school."* The previous excerpt was taken from *The Mountain Laurel*, 1925. By **1919** Shook School could boast of having the curriculum of a four-year school coming to be known as The Grundy County High School. Around **1921** the school was bursting out at the seams, so four new rooms were placed in a newly excavated area. One now could see a continuance of higher education classes plus vocational studies

The Class of **1925** was jubilant as they proudly walked across the stage for their diplomas at the Shook High School or the first state-accredited Grundy County High School. Accepting their diplomas were Willie Mai Anderson, Louie Berry, Julia Mai Brown, Julia Brookman, Gertrude Etter, Esther Harris, Veda Hunziker, Aileen Ingram, Earl Marler, Corinne Mankin, Ethel Martin, Margaret McCurdy, Byrtle O'Neal, Marie Parks, Hazel Roberts, Evie Sanders, Margaret Stone, Mabel Schulze, Glen Woodlee and Frances Young.



Shook High School (1925)

Later in the *Mrs. Grundy* newspaper in the **June 11, 1925** edition, the Board of Education gave a partial list of teachers for the upcoming fall of **1925**. Listed for "**Grundy County High**, C. C. Justus, Prin.; Miss Caroline Austin, Miss Edith Reed, Miss Paulene Mankin Assist." One could feel the optimism for an autonomous four-year high school building as it surfaced on the wish list for educationally-minded citizens and students. On **Oct. 27, 1927**, "**Shook High School** Presents 'An Old Fashioned Mother'...in the *School Auditorium*..." Since I happily gave the names of participants in previous plays and years, it is only fair to list the students in this play as follows: *Nellie Jossi, Ruth Holland, Evelyn McCurdy, Alma Charles, Mary Elizabeth Banholzer, Little Dodie Jones, Jesse Speegle, Hershel Barker, James Cheek, Dorris Towry, Dennis Brown and Allen McCormick.*

On **Nov. 28, 1927**, the Grundy County Board of Education had a meeting where it "*ran into so many legal quibbles that it voted to decide the question of building the High School, finally and definitely, at a called meeting of the Board at Altamont, on the first Monday of January at 10 A. M. So much time was given to the question of the location of the High School that the question of transportation of the high school students was not discussed. The question regarding transportation stands at present as follows: The law requires the Board to make a budget for the schools in April and once accepted by the County Court this budget cannot be changed except by a vote of the Board ratified by the County Court.*"

"The Budget made last April was as follows:--For teachers' salaries \$9575, for operation \$2500, for note for borrowed money \$3250, for Trustees commissions \$275. The Board has contracted to spend \$6275 for teachers' salaries, leaving a balance of \$3300. Of the \$2500 set aside for transportation, \$1225 was voted for one half year on Route 56, leaving a balance of \$1275. On the Pelham Route the expense for the half year will be \$900. The understanding was when the Junior High School was not retained at Pelham that the salary of the teacher would be used for the transportation of students, so from that \$1125 there would be a balance of \$225."

"Now the problem is shall we take what will be needed (\$625) from the balance of \$3300--\$1125=\$2175, left in the salary account and use it for transportation? Or shall we save this money for next year and not transport the students the other half of the year? We begun our high school this year with no money in the treasury and have had to borrow at 6 per cent practically; we have used so far and will have to do so until the taxes come in. We have a tax of 50c for the high school this year in order to pay off and old indebtedness __owing out the fact that no appropriation was made for the high school the first year it was started. That left over indebtedness is now more than the note for \$3250, it is fully \$4000. So if we continue the transportation for the balance of this year, we will probably have to have a tax of 50c for next year again for the high school, and also borrow money at the beginning of the year."

“Personally I feel that the best investment of money that we can make is in the education of our children, only so can we hope to make them prosperous and happy. Moreover, a county will grow in proportion to the average of its education, but it must have leaders, and Grundy County needs both high school and college trained men and women, and the most patriotic thing we can do is to give to all of our children the very best education....” (The continuance of this news article is missing, but there is plenty news to come from these labor pains the school board was having on that night.) This lengthy article was sent to the newspaper by *Dr. Lillian W. Johnson, Chairman of the Grundy County Board of Education.*

Tracy City Secures High School Site by Vote of 4 to 2

The above statement was the headline of the *Mrs. Grundy* newspaper on **Jan. 5, 1928**. One can read the following article about the coming of a high school to Grundy County and feel the excitement and long anticipation for a dream to come true. *“The Board of Education meeting at Altamont, Jan. 2nd definitely located the Grundy County High School building at Tracy City on the site on the highway north of the cemetery. As Dr. Fletcher Dressler of Peabody College, and expert upon school building, has very kindly offered to locate the building on the site and to prepare the floor plan, the Board accepted this offer most cordially. This floor plan will be submitted to architects who will be asked to make bids to prepare plans and specifications, to let the contract, and to erect the building.*

The Board decided to continue the transportation of the High School students to Tracy City and this decision was ratified by the County Court. The Board therefore will advertise for bids for the transportation for the second half of the school term, a period of four and a half months. These sealed bids should be sent either to the Chairman or to the Secretary Supt. J. L. Rollings. Please mark on the envelope, “Bid for Transportation.” Supt. Rollings made a very complete report of the condition of the school and the elementary school fund will be able to take care of all warrants after this week when the County Trustee will receive from the State Department of Education the January apportionment of \$9,496.89. This fund which comes from the State absolutely based on our daily average attendance and when we allow our children to stay out of school without a very urgent reason we are robbing the school fund.

We are happy to hear that the amount which will come to Grundy County from the rural school building fund is somewhat larger than we were expecting, viz:--\$9,702.00, however the half of this amount which Grundy County must furnish will be met by the 15c tax levy for this purpose. In order to be able to use this money to the very best advantage possible for the whole county the board decided to invite an expert from the State Department of Education to make a

survey of the educational needs of the county and to prepare a plan of growth for the next five or ten years to which the board could intelligently work.

There are several possible consolidation of schools in the county and for each such consolidation we could probably get an additional one thousand dollars from the State toward a new building. Dr. U. B. Bowden, our County Health Officer, in a short talk before the board stated that the part time sanitary engineer would soon begin his work in the county, the board voted to co-operate in work of continuing the health program which Dr. Bowden is so efficiently carrying on, and will do its utmost to provide the sanitary toilets for the schools...signed Lillian W. Johnson, Chairman of the Grundy County Board of Education."

The school board kept the public informed regularly about what was happening and what could to be expected concerning the building of the new high school. At the **Jan. 10, 1928** meeting we read, *"The board elected Messesrs Sam Werner, W. H. Buford, and L. W. Starbuck as a building committee for the Grundy County High School. Dr. L. B. Dresslar, of Peabody College will be here Saturday to locate the High School building on the site chosen, and he will draw up the floor plans for the building. Prof. Dresslar hopes we can use our native stone and so secure a beautiful, substantial building characteristic of our mountain. As far as possible we wish this building to be the product of our own materials and labor."*

Dr. Lillian Johnson was so excited about the prospect of having the annual Grundy County Fair in the new high school building's gymnasium when it was finished. She was on fire with zeal for all kinds of civic programs in the county.

On **February 7, 1928**, the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company sold the county of Grundy approximately thirteen acres of land for \$525.00 for the purpose of building a public school. The county paid the full price, registered the deed on **Feb. 17**, and became the owner of the site for the Grundy County High School.



The map above is part of the deed involving the land bought for the high school.

Moving back to the Shook High School graduating class spring of 1928, we find that twenty-five students would have the opportunity to move on up the hill to the new high school if it was finished in time for the fall entry. Those students were Dorothy Fults, Thelma Pirtle, Ora Thomas, Rachel Lewis, Margaret Geary, Lucille Sanders,

Catherine Gould, Blanche Parson, Bess Erville Seely, Callie Harris, Evelyn Bryant, Virginia Metcalfe, Glen Hampton, Martie Young, James Hunziker, Leon Parson, Albert Baggenstoss, Kenneth Henley, Joe Henley, Douglas Goodman, William Taylor, Austin Heubi, Lindsey Brown, Henry Garner, and William Geary.

The Ground Breaking for the \$30, 000 high school building was in **June 1928** and so began preparations for the laying of the cornerstone on **June 30**. *“The work upon the new Grundy County High School is progressing finely even tho it has been delayed somewhat by the rains. The corner stone laying will be on Saturday, the 30th. This will be an all day affair. The Parent Teacher Associations of the county will have a meeting in the morning under the direction of the county organizer, Mrs. W. W. Jones. Mrs. George Sitz is general chairman and with her able committee will have charge of the general program. The Masons will have charge of the ceremony of laying the corner stone, which will be after lunch. It is suggested that picnic lunches be brought, but the P T A will also have “eats” and drinks for sale on the grounds. After the afternoon program there will be games and stunts on the grounds and some good music throughout the day...Few events of more importance to the welfare of Grundy county have ever happened than the building of this High School building, let’s show our appreciation of this fact by being present at the laying of the corner stone and make it a day when all the county shall gather together to work out the best things possible for our children. Signed, Lillian W. Johnson, Chairman of Grundy County Board of Education”*

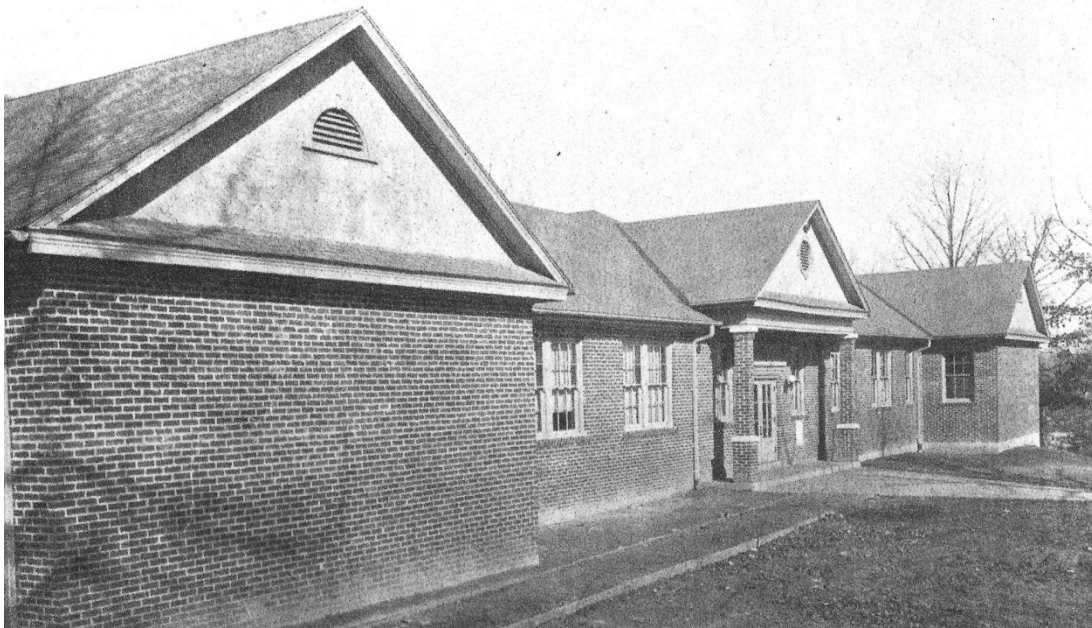
According to Norma Mae (Sitz) Stocker, a **1933** graduate, the original school was built where the John A. Anderson field is today (2016). The field is still being used by youth teams today. Norma remembered that they had to climb steps up a hill to get to the gymnasium, but they still had to go down a hill to get to town. After the **1935** fire that burned the original building, the second school building was rebuilt on the other side of the gymnasium. It too is still being used but not as a school.

In the **Aug. 16, 1928**, *Mrs. Grundy*, we see that not all is so easy in getting a new project up and running. We read, *“Go to Manchester to High School; About 28 High School pupils of Pelham Valley who came to Tracy City to school last year are going to Manchester to High School this year. The reason for is the County Court eliminated transportation at its July term and with good roads and the help of the town of Manchester the citizens of Pelham Valley can send their children to school a great deal cheaper to Manchester than here.”* Grady Edward Partin and Georgia Goodman were two of those students. Franklin County sent a bus to pick up the Valley students; however, Georgia (Goodman) Mooney laughingly told me about driving a car to Coffee County High School, and she didn’t even know how to drive.

There were four faculty members during that first year at the new school (1928-1929). They were Prof. Ellis McCormick, Miss Stella Cox, Miss Edna Wyatt, and Prof. J. E. Brandon. On **May 17, 1929**, the senior class of Grundy County High School presented a three-act comedy, "Ace High," in the high school auditorium. The cast of characters were Adolphus Rollings, Margaret Brown, Mary Lou Walker, Clara Hall, Everett Bryant, Laura Thomas, H. B. Warren, William Metcalfe, Richard Woodlee and Margaret Curtis. Honor students from the senior class were Irene Goodman, Katherine Wiley, Willa F. Parker, and Virgie Payne. Others graduates not listed as characters in the play or on the honor roll were Lyda Anderson, Mabel Anderson, Douglas Goforth, Nellie Meeks, Eloise Partin, Blanche Payne, and Gladys Roddy.



The last labor pain; putting the finishing touches to the new building



The Birth of a Dream – Grundy County’s First 4-year High School

The building committee and Professor Dresslar had finished their high school building—a wonderful job, all for the benefit of Grundy County’s students who wanted to further their education. Now the high school-age children in Shook School and all other elementary schools in the county had a place to attend, one that made them so proud.

One major problem was the means of getting the students from far ends of the county safely to the new school. There were steep mountains, long distances, not-so-well-built roads, and cold, crowded buses, need for reliable bus drivers, and other obstacles with which to contend. If the school board and parents could have had as much fun as the students did in their travels to and from school, their nerves would not have been so frayed. My good friend Norma (Sitz) Stocker (who has since passed) spoke of her rides in a previous story I wrote in 2009: *“The first school bus she rode was an old, Dutch Maid Bakery truck driven by Mr. Pat Patterson. The bread truck was so cold for the students, but the second bus, which was bigger and built specifically for a school bus, was just as cold. Its design was simply a wooden box on a frame. Bud Flynn drove that bus. Later Crandel McNabb, who was a student, started driving the bus. This is where Norma reminded me that the children back then were older when they were in High School, so Crandel could do the driving. It took longer to work one’s way up to the High School level. Norma caught the bus on the corner where Laynes Funeral Home is today (2009). If someone wanted to go to the back of the bus and*

sit, everyone had to stand up and let the person work his/her way through the group to the back seat since there was no aisle."

E. H. Barker spoke of his long rides from Tarlton Valley to the high school in this excerpt from another story I wrote: "...he said that it was always dark when the school bus gathered the Tarlton children and started its climb up the graveled, mountain road. Dawn was generally breaking as the busload of half-asleep students rolled into Altamont on its way to Tracy City. E. H. ...one of the drivers was a University student, and at other times, Jones' Garage in Tracy City sent its mechanics to pick up the students. Since there were no heaters on the buses, in the winters it was always so, so cold. ...There was a lot of singing done on that long trip to Tracy City. E. H.'s sister Ruth even wrote a silly little poem around 1930 about all the boys and girls and their love lives. Isabel Scruggs, Ruth Barker, Dola Schild, from over in Gruetli, and Lenora Burnette from Pelham were in the 1933 graduating class that was the first group of graduates who had been all four years at the new school. The four of them went off to college together. On 07 March 1935, when E. H. was a senior, the bus rolled onto the High School compound only to find that the school had burned during the night. The students were aloud with "Hurrah's," but the jubilant voices were quickly soured when they found out that classes were to be completed at Shook. The joking talk of the day was, since the records of failure or promotion were all destroyed in the fire, no one had proof of who completed his or her credits and who did not; thus, every senior graduated that year."



L to R: Ted Partin, Boyd Charles, Crandel McNabb, and Hagan Hamby posed on one of Jones' Garage vehicles used as a school bus



**Another view of the buses used;
Grady Edward Partin, wearing a flat cap, is the student standing in the forefront.**

Gladys Mae Cox lived in Monteagle and attended school at the Monteagle Grammar School on King Street. The following is an excerpt from an interview I had with her several years ago: *“Upon completion of elementary school, Gladys attended school at Shook School in Tracy City for two years. At first she had to pay for her ride to school. On the same side of the street as the Merriman family house, very near the DuBose Center in Monteagle, there was a station house for the railroad, and this is where she caught the train for the ride to Tracy City. After two years at Shook, she went to the newly built Grundy County High School. A school bus was furnished, but by the time the Valley students were gathered, and the bus got to Monteagle, there wasn’t enough room for everyone. Gladys said happily, “I just sat on my boyfriend’s lap all the way to Tracy... until word got out that some of us were doing this.” Suffice to say that Gladys thought the young man was mighty handsome but not someone she would have married. The decision was made to have a Mr. Jones (could have been William or Cedrick Jones who had an automobile business) from Tracy City drive down to gather the leftover*

students along the roadside in Monteagle and Summerfield in one of his vehicles. Then he unloaded at the High School. Gladys graduated in 1930.



The 1931 Grundy County FFA Band: L to R: Aubrey King, Homer Kunz, John King, Paul Thomas and E. C. Barker pose in front of the new high school. They are on their way to the Grand Ole Opry. (Homer Kunz and E. H. Barker were my good friends who helped me with local history. They have passed away and I miss them.)

May 7, 1935 brought tragedy to the school system when fire destroyed the new high school. This sent the students back to their earlier Alma Mater, Shook High School. They desperately needed to be moved out of that building but it was a few years to see that dream come to fruition. The P. T. A. met on **Feb. 6, 1936**, and among other issues there was a discussion concerning the building of a second high school for the county. Meanwhile, during that same month the Grundy High School buses were put to rest for a week because of inclement weather and influenza. In **April 1936**, "the Grundy County Quarterly Court convened at Altamont ...Most of the time was taken up in

discussing a bond issue to build a high school at Tracy City to replace the high school...and \$60,000 was finally voted for this purpose, the money to be raised by issuing and selling bonds."

The Grundy County High School year started on **August 5, 1940**, with Professor John A. Anderson as principal. I am not certain if the fall of 1940 was the first school year at the second building, but it seems to me that that date may be correct. Sixteen years later (**1956**), I entered the doors of GCHS for my freshman year. Mr. John A. Anderson was still in his office or in the halls carrying his barber strap that he rarely used but would if the need arose. I miss him and his leather strap. I miss the days when a leather strap could be carried as a deterrent to bad behavior.

Many wonderful teachers challenged my thinking in my four years there. My favorite teacher in my years at GCHS was Miss Anna Mary Parker who was one of the teachers who started teaching with Professor John A. Anderson in **1940**. Mr. Anderson was the greatest principal imaginable. I've lived long enough to see my Alma Mater cease to be used as a school, but I am still young enough to appreciate the hard work of many people that gave and gave and gave, so that I might have the opportunity of great schooling in my own county.



After the first building burned in 1935, the 2nd building was built west of the gym whereas the original school was to the east of the gym.