

Hickory Withe Academy

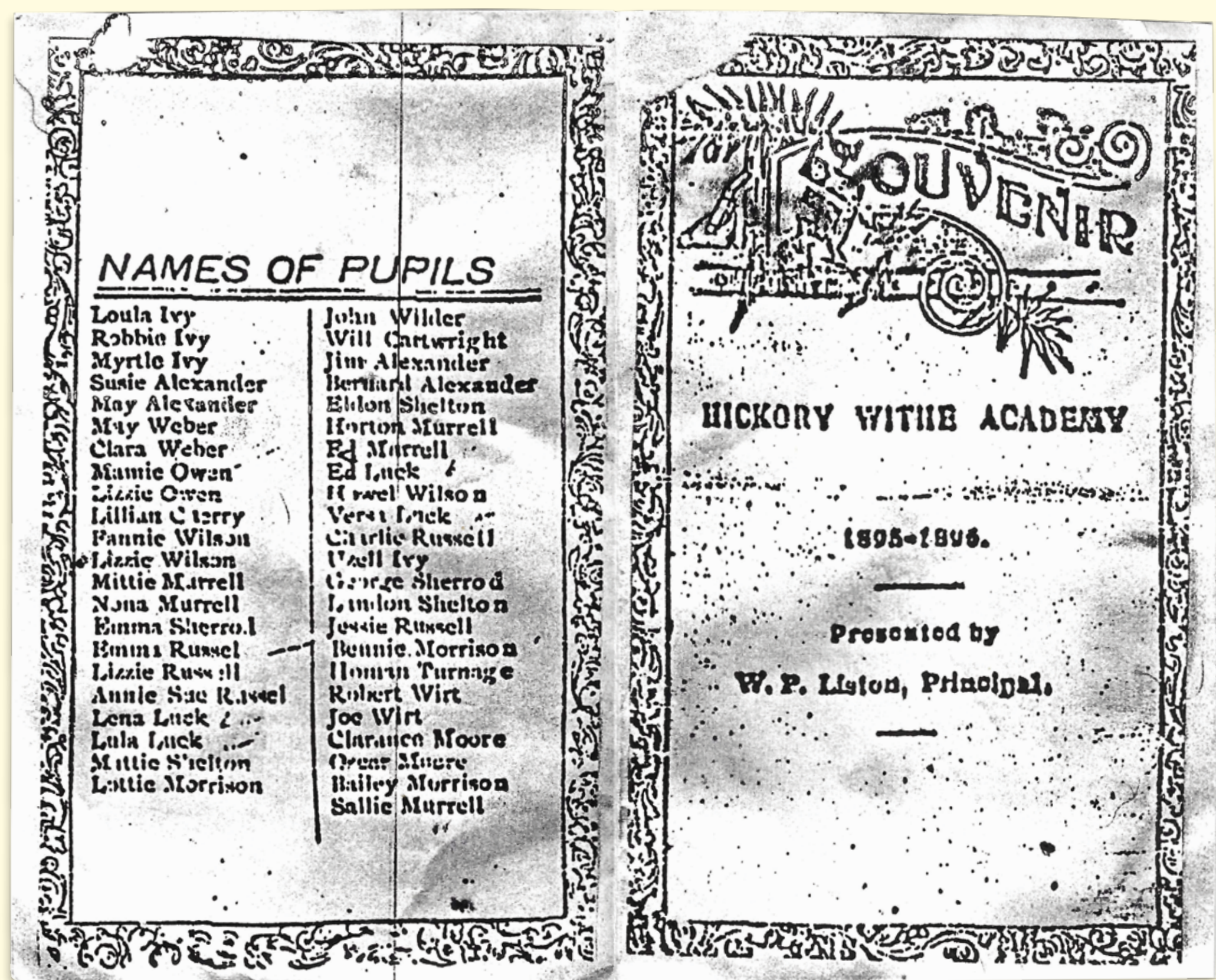
Samuel A. Leake

taught the first school in Hickory Withe

in 1846

In 1854, James M. Lane deeded land for Hickory Withe Academy. Mr. Lane was one of the Academy trustees, along with George Thompson, William Karr, Charles Lynn, Peter H. Cole, James W. Baker, and Jacob Young.

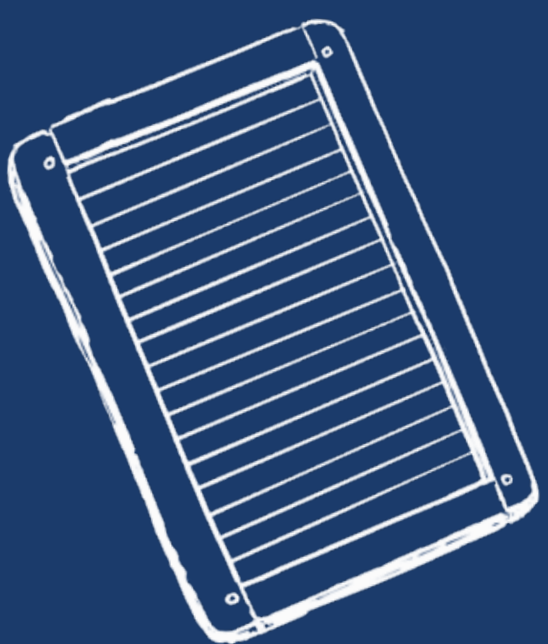
The Hickory Withe Academy was affiliated with the Mount Pleasant Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Hickory Withe Presbyterian Church (formed out of Prosperity Church in 1850).



“Souvenir”

Students enlisted in the **1895 - 1896** school year at Hickory Withe Academy.

Objects of Interest



Paper was expensive in the 1800s, so students often wrote on tablet-sized pieces of slate. They took notes on the tablets with pencils made of a softer grade of slate. Paper was only used for penmanship lessons. Students would dip their quills in ink bottles and practice their cursive on the prized paper.

Hickory Withe School

In approximately 1867

a public school was built on 2 acres of land on property slightly north of the current Hickory Withe Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall.

Originally, the school taught grades 1-11. Later, the school only taught classes through the 8th grade.

The State of Tennessee Board of Education required the principal of the school to complete a **Tennessee School Registry** at the end of each school

term beginning in 1929. The original school registries from 1929 through 1968 are on file at the Fayette County Board of Education.



The school building erected in 1867.

Marguerite Atkeison, principal for the school term 1929 to 1930, described the school as a frame building with an ordinary **stove, 2 outside toilets, 3 rooms, and a cistern for water.** There were 50 single desks in the classroom.

The school closed temporarily in 1936 approximately 6 weeks before the end of the school term. The reason for the sudden closure was a lack of funds to pay teachers due to the **Great Depression**. Students, such as Sarah Barron Russell, Ruth Russell Jones, and Bernice Whitworth Weber, rode the high school bus to Somerville to finish the 8th grade school year.



Photo taken during the 1924 school year.

Pictured are (first row left to right) Alfred Hodges, behind Alfred is Walter Jackson, Rose Marie (Jo) Barry, Elizabeth Morrisson, Elizabeth Barron, Lucy Kate Barry, Billy Whitworth; (second row left to right) Hallow Shelton Henderson, Jr., Richard Barry, Kenneth Henderson, Ivy Sharp, Dora Jackson, Rebecca Russell, Lucille Barron; (third row left to right) Alfred Morrisson, Thomas Jackson, Virgil Luck, Floyd Morrisson, Katherine Iola Barron, Frances Helen Luck, Geniva Jackson, Katherine Russell; (fourth row left to right) Mrs. H. S. Henderson (teacher), Alva Ivy, Barry Russell, Hartwell Morrisson, Florence Zellner, Jesse Jackson, and Linnie Mai Luck. On the left, between rows 2 and 3 is an unknown student.

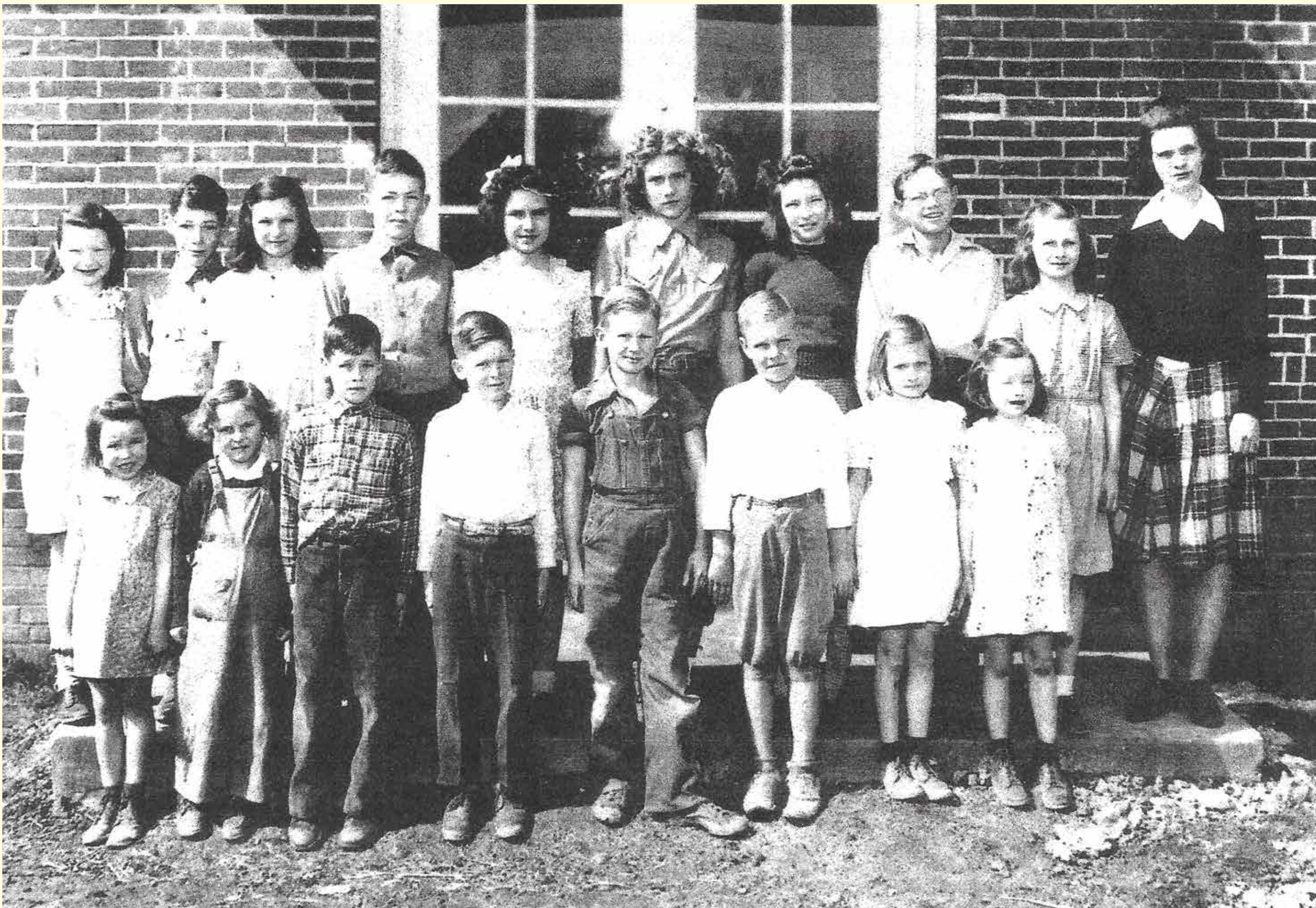
Works Progress Administration School Building

In the 1930s it was determined that the Hickory Withe School constructed in 1867 no longer met the needs of the community. A new school was constructed by workers displaced by the Great Depression and employed by the **Works Progress Administration (WPA)**.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the WPA by executive order on May 6, 1935, with the goal to employ millions of American workers until the economy recovered from the Great Depression. The WPA oversaw the construction of traditional infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and libraries. **Hickory Withe School was one of 5,900 schools constructed under the WPA.**

The story is told that **Will Weber**, who was chairman of the Fayette County School Board, prayed all night asking God’s will on where the new school should be built. The next morning, he announced that the front of the school should be located adjacent to the southwest boundary of the church property. Hickory Withe School reopened in the newly constructed building as classes began in **August 1936.**

From August 1936 through May 1940, 2 teachers taught grades 1-8. Thereafter, the school only had 1 teacher teaching grades 1 through grades 5 or 6 depending on the students enrolled each year.



Enrolled students circa 1947. Photo submitted by Mrs. John Weber Webb.

Bottom Row: Clara Cox, Joy Wright, Bobby Dean Smith, Bobby Trotter, Clyde Cook, David Cox, Francis Crook, Zena Zellner.

Top Row: Gail Zellner, John Weber Webb, Edith Crook, Rhea Webb, Dot Morrison, Mittie Joyner, Jessie May Barkley, David Cox, Tressie Johnson and Miss Katherine Russell, teacher.

School Teachers & Principals

Marguerite Atkeison

Principal, August 1924 - May 1934

Marital Status: Single / Date of Birth: March 26, 1905

Grace McCaskill

Teacher, August 1926 - May 1931

Marital Status: Single during 1929/1930 term;

Married during 1930/1931 term / Date of Birth: April 1, 1909

Elizabeth Murrell

Principal and Teacher, August 1934 - April 1939

Marital Status: Single / Date of Birth: September 10, 1910

Linnie Mai Luck

Teacher, August 1931 - April 1939

Marital Status: Single / Date of Birth: June 16, 1911

Louise Brinkley

Principal, August 1939 - May 1940

Marital Status: Single / Date of Birth: June 23, 1914

Mary Evelyn Cocke

Teacher, August 1939 - May 1940

Marital Status: Single / Date of Birth: May 28, 1918

Lela Mae Lazenby

Principal and Teacher, August 1940 - May 1941

Marital Status: Single / Date of Birth: December 19, 1919

Imogene Floyd

Principal and Teacher, August 1941 - May 1942

Katherine Russell

Principal and Teacher, August 1942 - May 1968 (School Closure)

Marital Status: Single / Date of Birth: March 24, 1912

Elizabeth Murrell and Linnie Mai Luck

Miss Murrell

Miss Elizabeth Murrell was principal of Hickory Withe School beginning in 1934 and taught classes 5-8 with a total of 15 students.



After teaching at Hickory Withe, Miss Murrell married C. Willard Irwin and was a longtime **resident of the Oakland community**. She served as teacher and principal at Laconia and Ames Plantation and taught at Oakland Elementary School until her retirement in **1976**. Mrs. Irwin further served her community as the **first elected alderwoman** of the Town of Oakland.

On **December 10, 2005**, Mrs. Irwin passed away at the age of 95. Mrs. Irwin is remembered for her genuine example of Christianity and for her love of family, community, church, and education.

Miss Luck

Miss Linnie Mai Luck began teaching at Hickory Withe School in **1931** when she was **20 years of age**. She taught classes 1-4 with a total of 22 students.

After leaving Hickory Withe School in 1939, Miss Luck taught an additional **40 years** at Somerville Elementary School. Connie Price Bishop, a former student, described Miss Luck as a wonderful, kind, and patient person who always wore beautiful dresses. Miss Luck was her favorite teacher, and she looked forward to going to school as Miss Luck made learning fun!

Miss Linnie Mai Luck was a beloved resident of Hickory Withe and a member of Hickory Withe Presbyterian Church until her death on April 14, 2005, at the age of 93. She is buried at Mt. Pleasant Cemetery in Hickory Withe.



Marriage Bars

In the **late 1800s**, the practice of marriage bars arose in the United States. Marriage bars were often enforced in the **teaching** and **clerical industries**. Marriage bars were policies adopted by firms and local school boards that prohibited hiring married women and allowed **firing women** if they married after employment.

Even though these policies were not always strictly enforced, marriage bars were not banned by law until **1964** when President Lyndon B. Johnson enacted Title VII of the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** which prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of **race, color, religion, sex, or national origin**.



Miss Katherine Russell: 1942-1968

Miss Katherine Russell taught at Hickory Withe School for **28 years** and was the only principal and teacher at Hickory Withe School from 1942 until the school's closure in 1968. **Her career began as a substitute teacher** for Lela Mae Lazenby during the **1940/1941** school term.

Miss Katherine had the will power and determination to obtain her **bachelor's degree from Memphis State University** in **1964**. The majority of teachers her age had teaching certificates that did not require 4 years of college. Miss Katherine taught at Hickory Withe during the school year and attended school at Memphis State in the summer. She lived in the girls' dormitory and returned home on weekends. Her family drove her back and forth to school until she was able to purchase a car.



Katherine Russell

Miss Katherine taught grades 1-6. The largest number of students on roll during any year was 38 and the smallest was 18 students.

The **9-month school term** started in **1947/1948**. Miss Katherine recorded that the students worked in the fields during their "leisure" time and approximately **one-third** of the students were projected to attend high school.

"I dearly loved Miss Katherine. I have talked more about her over the years than any other teacher. Those early years with her and that solid foundation she provided me are the reason I was able to do so well in school! I am sure many of her students feel this way. She really did make a difference, one child at a time."

- Joanne Butler Doyle, Student in 1960s



Bessie Russell

Bessie Russell

Teaching at Hickory Withe School was a family affair under Miss Katherine's leadership. On **rare occasions** when Miss Katherine was unable to teach, her sisters, **Ruth Russell Jones** and **Rebecca Russell Barkley**, were substitute teachers. Miss Katherine's sister-in-law, Bessie Smith Russell, was also a **substitute teacher**. Mrs. Bessie did not seem to have the discipline of Miss Katherine since the story goes that one of her students jumped out the window and ran home.

Daily School Life

Each school day always began with a devotional and roll call.

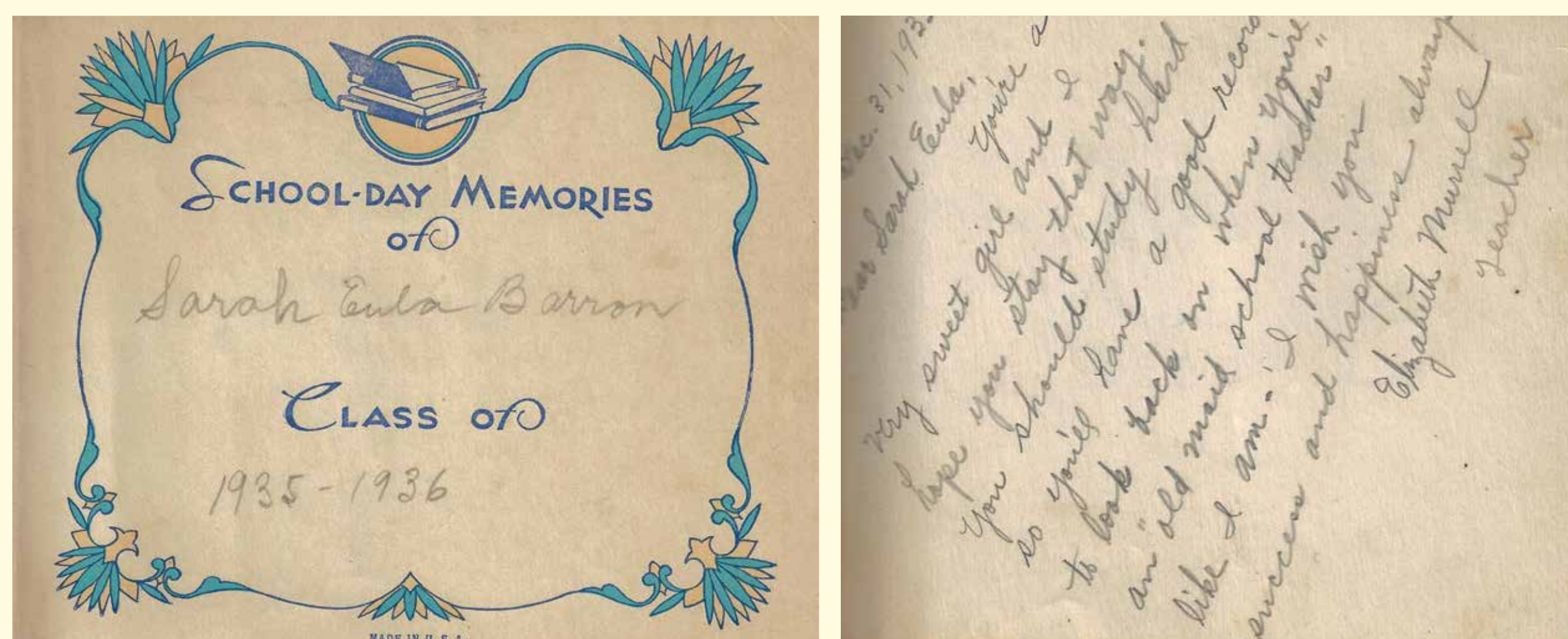


Each **Monday**, the pupils answered roll call with a Bible verse. In the early **1960s**, the pupils also shared whether they had brushed their teeth and drank their milk. **Miss Katherine** would read a Bible story then she and the students would recite **Psalm 23** and the **Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag**.

The students were seated according to grades. When each class was called to order, the students marched to the front of the classroom and sat on a long bench (**a recitation bench**). The remaining students would either study for their next lesson, finish their homework, or listen to the lesson being taught. This form of teaching changed in the early 1960s as the students were no longer required to come to the front of the classroom.

Paddlings, open hand slaps with a 12-inch ruler, and staying inside during recess were forms of discipline. When you talk to a former classmate who attended school at Hickory Withe, memories of the **cloakroom** always come into the conversation. Paddlings on the backside were done in the cloakroom, but no one seems to remember the paddlings with anything but laughter.

The cloakroom had hooks for coats and hats. Before there was running water at the school, individual **drinking cups** were stored in the cloakroom. Lunch boxes were also placed in **cubby holes** in the cloakroom.



A 1935 excerpt from a School-Day Memories notebook with a note from teacher Elizabeth Murrell to student Sarah Eula Barron.



Objects of Interest

Miss Katherine had a small **desk bell** that she rang to get the students' attention. A ding of the bell and all students knew to look up and listen.

Daily School Life

Most students brought their lunch from home, but those who wished were given permission to walk to the **W.A. Whitworth store** to buy their lunch or other goodies. **Miss Katherine** had a little problem with her watch, so every day when the **gin whistle** blew, the children were dismissed for lunch.

Children went outside and played during **recess**. The playground activities were simple. At most, the playground equipment consisted of a slide, 4-person swing set, merry-go-round, and 2 basketball goals anchored to the outside walls of the school building. Playing tag, hide and seek,

Red Rover, jacks, pick-up sticks, jumping rope, and baseball were just a few of the activities that kept the children busy and not wanting recess to end.

Computers and the internet were not available, so books were the main source of research. Some families had a **set of encyclopedias** in their home. Miss Katherine would go to the **Board of Education in Somerville** to pick up and return books for the school's library.

Teachers wrote on **blackboards** with **chalk**. There were no “smartboards” or “whiteboards”.



Objects of Interest

Miss Katherine called the students back inside the school by leaning outside one of the classroom windows and ringing a **school bell**.

Books taught at Hickory Withe School have been donated by former teachers and students. Subjects include reading, writing, Latin, literature and math.



Utilities

In the late **1950s**, Fayette County installed a **well** on the school grounds. Following installation of the well, the school had an outside water fountain with a **hand pump** to pump water from the well into a pipe with multiple holes. Children would bend over and drink the water spouting up from the pipe. Before the well on the school grounds, the students would walk to the “**old cistern**” behind the **W.A. Whitworth store** to bring drinking water back to the school in buckets. The cold cistern water was then poured into a **crock container** with a spicket, so each student could fill his or her **tin cup** for drinking.

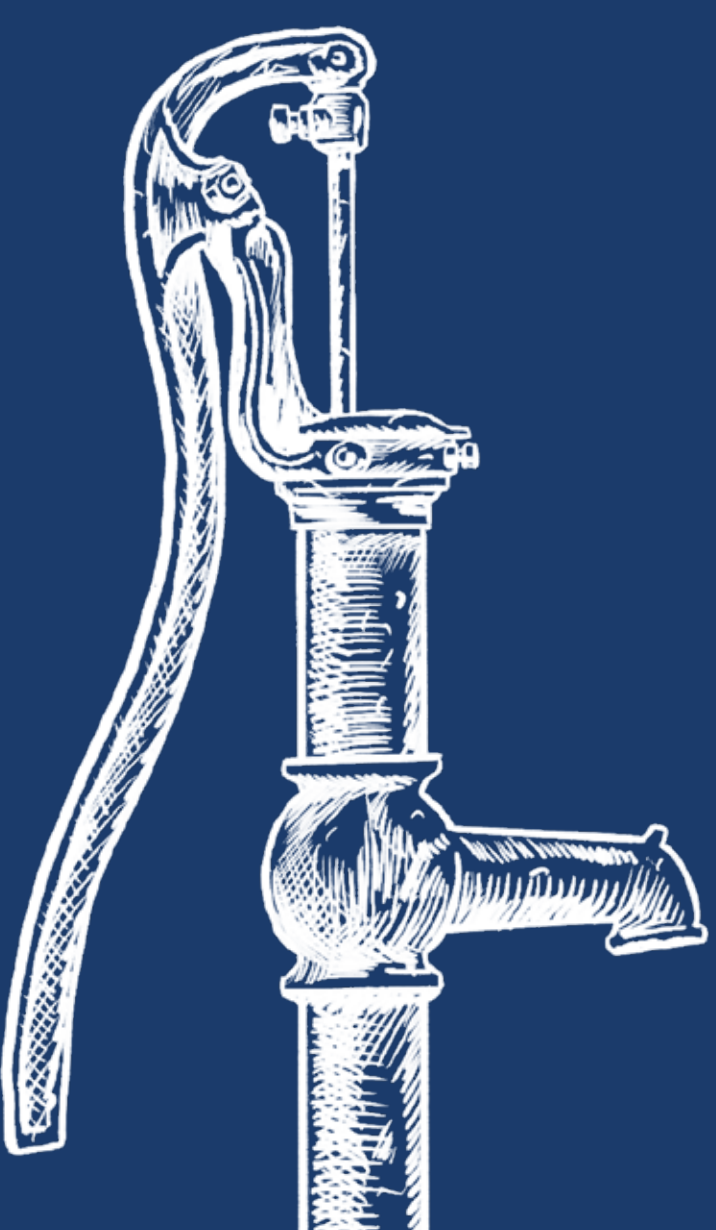
The school classroom was heated with a **pot-bellied stove** that burned coal. **W. W. Wilson** in Somerville, Tennessee had a contract with the **Board of Education** to provide coal for the school. The coal was stored at the northwest corner of the school building, and **coal pieces** can still be found on the school grounds. On severely cold days, class was held around the stove until the room was warm.

In the early **1960s**, the pot-bellied stove was replaced with **gas floor furnaces** and **inside restrooms** were installed. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) purchased a **refrigerator** and a **sink** for the school.

Objects of Interest

On display is the water pump used to draw water from the cistern at the original school building constructed in 1867.

In the 1950s, each student had a **tin cup** that they would fill with drinking water drawn from the W.A. Whitworth cistern and stored in a **crock container**.



Cotton Picking and Janitorial



The cotton gin located in Hickory Withe.

Through the **1950s/early 1960s**, public schools in rural areas temporarily closed in the fall for **cotton picking**. Many of the students were expected by their parents to go to the field to pick cotton. The number of weeks the schools closed varied from 1-3 weeks. School closures for cotton picking were no longer needed when the machine known as the **cotton picker** replaced manual picking.

The Board of Education paid for the school to have a **student-janitor** who lived close to the school. **Mary Barkley Bell, Bobby Russell, Larry Russell, Don Grammar, John Webb**, and others have memories of being the school's janitor and being paid **\$1.25** to **\$1.50** a week. This student would assist Miss Katherine with the following:

- Sweep the classrooms and auditorium
- Oil the wood floors periodically
- Erase the black boards
- Dust the erasers outside
- Prepare the pot-bellied stove for heating the next day, if needed, which included the following:
 - ♦ Remove ashes from prior day into a coal skuttle and empty outside
 - ♦ Carry the coal into the school in the skuttle
 - ♦ Place paper and sticks on bottom of stove and add coal
 - ♦ Light the fire in the pot-belled stove the next morning.

School Day Celebrations

Many fond memories are shared among the students who attended Hickory Withe School. Some of the favorites include **Valentine's Day parties** and plays on the auditorium stage. **Mr. John Weber's birthday parties** were another favorite. Each year he brought hot dogs and cake to the students, and they celebrated his special day.

Halloween activities included a parent dressed in a witch's costume hiding in the woods and giving candy from a big black pot to the students. The children had so much fun trying to guess who was in the costume.



A note about a 1935 Christmas Dance found in a School Day Memories Notebook

The **Christmas** season was celebrated by decorating a tree in the auditorium and performing a **Christmas pageant** for parents and Hickory Withe Presbyterian Church (HWPC) members. Former students' best holiday memories are eating Christmas cookies, receiving a bag of fruit from the PTA as well as a gift from HWPC's Sunday School teachers.

The end of the school year was celebrated by trips to various attractions in the Memphis area, such as the **Memphis Zoo** and the **Pink Palace**.

Believe it or not, students in the late **1940s/early 1950s** remember their end of year celebration being a picnic at the school followed by a 3-mile walk on a gravel road (currently Hwy. 196) to **Russell's Grocery** owned by **Donn and Bessie Russell**. A car driven by a friend or family member would follow along to pick up any of the children who could not finish the walk. After arriving at the store, the children would listen to music on a **jukebox** and sip on a cold drink.



Painting of Russell's Grocery by Kathy Bryant Williams

Memories from the students go on forever about the fun times at Hickory Withe School.



*The
Hickory Withe
Presbyterian
Church*

Established 1834

Present Day

In 1968, Fayette County closed Hickory Withe School which marked the first 26 years of Miss Katherine's teaching career.

She transferred to **Braden Elementary School** where she taught for 9 additional years making a grand total of **35 years** of teaching.

Katherine Russell passed into glory on **June 16, 1996**. In God's providence, Miss Katherine's funeral service was held in the **former school building** since the church was under renovation.

God provided **Alfred Hodges**, at the time a **Fayette County commissioner** and Hickory Withe Presbyterian Church (HWPC) **Ruling Elder**, and **Mayes Webb**, a member of the **Fayette County School Board** and also an **HWPC Ruling Elder**, the wisdom and positions to assist HWPC in the acquisition of the school building. **In 1978**, the church purchased the school building for **\$2,000**, and the building has served the church as its **fellowship hall** since that time.

Due to the generosity of many church members, the fellowship hall was **completely remodeled in the 1990s** and is currently used for **Bible studies, church gatherings, and community outreach.**

