

Once upon a time Mt. Holly's children went to school in one room about twenty feet long with a wooden stove in the middle. First, there was the Wells School, where the Rev. Abram Wells, Methodist Circuit Rider and grandfather of Mrs. Sarah Rankin McConnell, was the teacher. Mr. Wells, the first Mount Holly man to attend the University of North Carolina, taught from books of his own composition. Mrs. McConnell is the proud owner of one of his arithmetic copy books. Then, there was the Hunter School. Both of these schools were near the site of Everett Johnson's house.

At the Hunter School, according to Mrs. J.A. Costner, who was a student there, the children sat on long benches built for eight pupils, with long desks between the benches. Mrs. Mollie Harris was also a student, and she remembers how the boys took turns at starting the fire each morning. When it was time for school to begin, the teacher would beat on the side of the building with a stick.

In the Hunter School, the pupils all put their lunch boxes at the back of the room, on the floor along the wall. One day the late Miss Ada Dunn and one of her friends, the late Mrs. Lucy Abernethy Herron of Charlotte, tired of their copy books and sneaked back to the wall to peer into the lunch boxes. Lo and behold --- in one lunch box they found a big, round, hot baked potato! Wouldn't you know that they decided to take that delicacy out and roll it on the floor between them! All went well with the "potato rolling" until Lucy accidentally stuck her finger into the hot potato and cried out. I don't have to tell you the consequences they suffered at the hands of the teacher!

(Rec'd)

Another pupil who attended this school remembered a sentence she was given to diagram. It said: The fly sat on the hub of a carriage wheel and said, "Ch, what a dust I do raise!"

Next came the Academy, a two-story building located on what is now Piedmont Street. Among the early teachers here was an ancestor of Mrs. Jane Ware, Mr. Brevard Nixon, who afterwards became a prominent Charlotte lawyer.

The Green School was located on the R.K.Davenport property, now the George Davenport place. The late W.B. Rutledge, father of Mrs. Annie Rollins, Miss Sarah Rutledge and Mrs. Christine Rickert, was a teacher there.

These schools were supported by the state for four months. Any additional schooling was called "pay school".

In 1902-03 the late Rev. F.B. Rankin, father of Attorney Frank B. Rankin and Dr. Richard E. Rankin, was Superintendent of Schools of Gaston County. Under his leadership plans were made to organize a graded school in Mount Holly. The town band played for a big parade by the children of the community. A school bond election was held and passed with only one vote against it. After the election the town built a graded school, a two-story building with six rooms downstairs and four upstairs. The building stood on the vacant lot next door to Mrs. Alice Rhyne's home on North Main Street.

Mr. Charles Jonas, father of Congressman Jonas, was the first principal. Mr. Owen and Mr. J.B. Henson followed him in this office.

Dr. C. Excellence Rozzelle, retired Methodist minister of Winston-Salem, Mrs. Fay Davenport Hermon of Gastonia and Miss Sarah Rutledge were the

elaborate affairs for community celebration -- held in Rhyne's Hall.

By 1910 the enrollment had outgrown the building. The present site was purchased and the first brick building erected. Mr. Ray Funderburk became principal in 1912.

In 1914 there was not enough room to accommodate the increased enrollment, so two rooms were rented down town over Holland Drug Co. The first grade and the newly-added Home Economics Department used these rooms.

A number of good cooks and seamstresses in Mount Holly got their start with Miss Lois Faires, the first Home Ec teacher. One girl, who had used eleven yards of material in cutting out a dress, said, "When mama gets some more money, she's to buy some material, so I can finish my dress."

The late Rev. M.L. Barnes became principal in 1916 and served two years. During this period the second of the present buildings was constructed. It was also during this period that the first organized athletics began. The gymnasium was the play area in front of the buildings. These were the days of the bloomer girls! It took five yards of black sateen to make a pair of bloomers! They were worn with white middie blouses by the girls' basketball team.

During the school year of 1916-17 the first school newspaper, "The Holly", was published. It came out the first and the fifteenth of each month, and the subscription price was 25¢ per year.

Drinking fountains in the school yard were then supplied from water tanks filled by a hand pump. High school boys were disciplined by being ordered to man the pump for stated hours, thus insuring the water supply.

Mr. E.A. Thompson became principal in 1918 and served until 1938.

He organized and coached the first football team, and coached the 1921 baseball team to state championship. An eighth grader, Austin Cuten, batted .750 and went on after college to play with the Yankees and the Dodgers.

Mr. Thompson, far ahead of his time in teaching and in psychology, would have been right at home in our modern methods of education. One of his history students remarked, "He could make people come to life ---- and he could make you think you were hearing the muskets rattle at Bunker Hill." Mr. Thompson was a natural psychologist. He was able to divine the needs and abilities of the individual child. He knew the children so well he seemed to anticipate behavior problems and figure out the perpetrator. He once punished a class for playing hookey on April Fool's Day by telling them to stay in the room after school until he got there. He then played hookey ---- and didn't show up to dismiss them until nearly 5:00 P.M.

In 1930 a group of sly seniors painted the water tank, an act of defacing city property. They thought they had gotten away with it until Mr. Thompson called them together and said, "I understand the town has offered a reward for information concerning who painted the tank. Why don't you turn yourselves in and collect the reward? You could use the money to help with the school annual."

Mr. Thompson encouraged versatile development of children before it became fashionable! He thought that one who participated in athletics and other extra curricular activities available at the time ---- and made average grades ----- was better fitted for life than the book - worm who memorized the text to make all As. He encouraged initiative and was most tolerant --- looking upon a mischief maker as imaginative --- a good characteristic to him.

Great respect was accorded Mr. Thompson by the entire community --- and Miss Ida Rankin, who taught with him during his entire career, in Mount Holly, and for whom our new Ida A. Rankin Elementary School was named. I was one of the lucky ones who was assigned to Miss Ida's second grade. It was like going to a birthday party every day! In Miss Ida's second grade I learned that I had worth as a person ---- and I still live by the values Miss Ida taught us were important.

By 1920 the school had outgrown the two buildings. A two-room hut on the front lawn took care of the overflow. The third building, next to the athletic field, was built in 1923.

In 1923, also, the 15-room, two story teacherage was built. A number of romances bloomed from this teacher's home-away-from-home, and some of our outstanding Mount Holly ladies were courted and won by their husbands while they lived in the teacherage.

The first commercial teacher, Miss Margaret Gettys, came in 1926. The first public school music teacher, Miss Bessie Smith, now Mrs. Henry Massey, Sr. of Waxhaw, mother of Henry Massey and Charles Massey, came in 1927. (*Binging*)

The first football coach, William Hodgin, was hired in 1924. A number of outstanding coaches followed him, including P.C. Beatty and Dick Thompson, who were home town boys, and Seaton Holt, who married a Mount Holly girl, Mildred Thompson. D.R. Wiles and Joe Spears, the last of the Mount Holly High School coaches, together with able staff assistance, have been conspicuously successful in both their coaching careers and their leadership of the young people with whom they have worked. Since the beginning of organized athletics in 1916, the athletic program of the school has grown from one sport --- basketball--- to the three major sports and a well-rounded physical education program.

The present Junior High School building was ready for use as the High School in 1927.

In 1930, despite the depression, the senior class sponsored the first high school annual.

The first high school band was organized in 1928. *Rhythm Band* Band was later discontinued and was again made possible by a special tax voted in 1943 and 1945. Miss Virginia Isaacs, now Mrs. Paul Jones, was the band director at this time.

The present director, Mr. Bob Black, came to Mount Holly in 1950, and under his able leadership the band has continued to grow and develop until today it is one of the outstanding high school bands of North Carolina. In 1953 the Lions Club of Mount Holly sent the band to the Lions International Convention in Chicago, and in 1956 to the International Convention in Miami, Florida. It has appeared in Keenan Stadium at Chapel Hill, in the Shrine Bowl in Charlotte, and the Carousel parades.

The school lunch program began in 1932-33, when the Methodist ladies served soup. The late Mrs. P.A. Rhyne and the Home Ec department followed the Methodists as leaders, and then the P.T.A. took charge.

In 1938 Mrs. W.G. Henson, Sr. was hired as manager, and she had a long and successful service. Now Mrs. Iva Perkins in high school and Mrs. Ruby Guin in the Elementary School, are the capable dietitians.

In 1935 the P.T.A. was organized with Mrs. M.L. Barnes as president. This association has grown through the years, and from its membership have come leaders of three active organizations: the Mount Holly High School P.T.A., the Mount Holly Elementary School P.T.A. and the Pinewood Elementary School P.T.A.

Elementary is soon to move into the newly constructed Ida A. Rankin Elementary School. With these two moves we leave behind pleasant and significant memories --- and look ahead to new challenges and greater achievements.

I have made this history as short as I could in an effort to avoid boring anyone. You probably wish I had made it shorter! Through the years there have been outstanding assistant principals and capable faculties supporting the principals. I wish it were possible to mention the names of all of these, but time does not permit. Also, interesting and amusing events and incidents have had to be omitted in the interest of time.

Thus ends a short history of our schools from the 1880's to today. A fitting valedictory might be: MOUNT HOLLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND MOUNT HOLLY HIGH SCHOOL ----- HAIL AND FAREWELL! -----FAREWELL AND HAIL!

Hymn

*From the files of -
Harris E. Burns*