

HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN WASHINGTON COUNTY TENNESSEE, 1780-1892

Settlers came to Washington County, the first settlement west of the mountains, as early as 1760. In those early days, education was considered to be the responsibility of the church and home, with learning a trade emphasized over a formal classical education. Samuel Doak, one of these early settlers, was a Presbyterian minister and graduate of Princeton University. In 1780, he visited the Salem settlement, five miles west of Jonesborough. Founding a church and a school named Martin Academy. The Academy was granted a charter by the State of North Carolina in 1783, becoming the first organized school west of the mountains. Twelve years later, in 1795, the academy became known as Washington College, named for President George Washington.¹

Jonesborough was established in 1779 and became a part of Tennessee at statehood in 1796. John Sevier, the first governor of Tennessee, reached an agreement in 1806 with the United States Government for the title to thousands of acres of land. This land, known as the Hiwassee District, was to be sold by Tennessee for the benefit of public education. The land sale produced very little money, but it provided the beginnings of a public school system for the state. The first law authorizing local taxes for the support of **common schools** was passed in 1829, and in 1830, the State Legislature set up plans to distribute the funds gained from the Hiwassee District land sale. Schools were established in each county after land had been secured.

Washington County deeds recorded between 1830 and 1860 include a few land deeds designated for these **common schools**. An 1845 notice in the *Jonesborough Whig* newspaper advertised political candidates speaking at Brown's School in Telford and Campbell's School in Bowman town. Brown's School was built on land sold to the county in 1830. Campbell's School, located midway between the Oakland and Bowman

communities, was built on land donated by the Campbell family.

In 1835, Tennessee's second constitution charged the General Assembly to cherish literature and science and recognize that knowledge, learning, and virtue were essential to the preservation of republic institutions.² Tennessee's first state superintendent of public instruction, Colonel Robert H. McEwen, formulated plans for statewide public instruction with funding coming from the state. Unfortunately, the General Assembly abolished the state superintendent's office in 1844, naming the state treasurer superintendent in the years 1844 to 1867, and 1870 to 1872. Colonel McEwen's vision of state funded public instruction was abandoned.

Not everyone was pleased with the **common school** education. The schools established by the Legislature had suffered from a chronic lack of funds. Charles Longmire presented a petition in 1851 to the General Assembly asking the state to correct the inadequacy of **common schools** in Washington County and recommending that the state amend the **common school law** to give school commissioners the authority to lay tax on each scholar [sic].³ When Andrew Johnson was governor in 1853, he endorsed state-supported schools. Because of Johnson's efforts, the Legislature passed an act in 1854 establishing Tennessee's first state tax for public schools.

Private and **subscription schools** were widespread in the 1800s with learning provided for those who could afford to pay tuition. In a **subscription school**, the schoolmaster contracted with a number of families to teach certain subjects for a set tuition rate for a specified time. In 1802 in Washington County, Phillip Denham contracted with a number of families to teach spelling, reading, writing, and **ciphering** for a term of one year at an area now known as

Johnson City. The original agreement can be found in Johnson City's Science Hill High School library.

John C. Harris recorded a private or **subscription school** in Jonesborough in 1812, near First Street and Woodrow Avenue. Other earlier **subscription schools** may have existed, but no records have been found. The Hebron Presbyterian Church moved to Jonesborough in 1816 and built an early **subscription school** called Martin Academy (not to be confused with Doak's Martin Academy, now Washington College). The Academy was in a two-story brick building one block off Main Street, with classrooms for the boys on the upper level and worship space on the lower level. This building was used until 1841 when John Green deeded two acres of land for the sum of two hundred dollars, for a new two-story brick building. The Odd Fellows and Masons took over Martin Academy in the late 1840s as a public service project.

The women of Jonesborough took an interest in private education early on with Mrs. Stephenson opening a school for female students in 1820. In 1828, Mrs. Howard (probably the wife of newspaper publisher and print shop owner Jacob Howard) operated a school for young ladies; and, in 1837, Mrs. Catherine Emmerson established a small school for young children on Woodrow Avenue. On a larger scale, the Jonesborough Female Academy was established in 1833 and offered a comprehensive course of instruction for girls.

The Odd Fellows Lodge purchased the original Martin Academy property in 1852. After building an elaborate two-story brick building, they united with the Jonesborough Female Academy and opened Odd Fellows High School. In 1856, Holston Female Institute opened in the Jonesborough Baptist Church and remained until funds were raised to move the school into a two-story brick building on East Main Street.

Other areas of Washington County also established **subscription schools**. The Boones Creek Community had two small

subscription schools, Franklin Academy and a school held in Boones Creek Christian Church. These schools were very small. Causing community leaders to establish the Boones Creek Seminary, for which Lawrence Bowers donated the land in 1851. Boones Creek Seminary's tuition was twelve dollars per session, with students studying Latin, Greek, logic, morals, and criticism. Other subscription schools of record in Washington County are "The Seminary" and the McLin School. "The Seminary," a one-room brick building, was built in 1842 in the Fall Branch community. Records show that Mr. J. R. Lane was contracted in 1851 by thirteen families to teach at the McLin School, located on McLin Bend of Big Limestone Creek.

The Civil War and its aftermath caused the closing of female schools in Jonesborough and the opening of schools for freed slaves. Jonesborough's Martin Academy was used as a military barracks and nearly destroyed by war's end. Holston Female Institute was sold to Colonel R. H. Dungan, becoming Holston Male Institute or the Dungan School, (The Odd Fellows High School closed, leaving Jonesborough with no school for girls.) Other Washington County schools also showed the effects of the war as Fall Branch's original Seminary building was destroyed and many other schools in the county closed due to severe war damage. The Boones Creek Seminary survived several attempts to burn it down during the war. Two of the few area **subscription schools** that remained open during the Civil War were Laurel Hill Academy in Broylesville and Franklin Academy in Telford.

In all probability, the first school for black children in Washington County was started in 1867 by Mr. Judson at Mt. Zion. In 1875, the Society of Friends (Quakers) established Warner Institute in Jonesborough as a school for freed blacks. This was located in the building formerly operated as Dungan School. Langston School, in Johnson's Depot, began in the 1860s. Dr. Hezekiah Hankal, a physician and minister, and Professor Wolfe were instrumental in starting the drive for a

school building program to house the increasing black population in Johnson City. In 1889, their school was held in Johnson City's Main Street Christian Church. In 1891 and 1892, while the new building was being constructed, the school met in the two Baptist churches.

Johnson's Depot, later called Johnson City, was established in 1858 with the advent of the railroad system. School buildings were constructed but there was no formal attempt at public education for the small community. A group called the "Science Hill Debating Society" organized in 1864 at Oak Grove and met for a time in a school located on Roan Hill and at a school in the Brush Creek-Cedar Valley area. After Tipton Jobe donated several acres of land for a new school building, Science Hill Seminary was built and its doors opened in 1868. The name Johnson's Depot was changed Johnson City, and by 1892 there were several school buildings. But much of the growth of education in Johnson City occurred after 1892. The Martha Wilder School, on East Myrtle Street, was built on land given by General John T. Wilder and named for his wife. Columbus Powell on South Roan Street was built on land given by J. Allen Smith of Knoxville and named for Mrs. Smith's father. The Lusk School on North Roan and Watauga housed elementary students.

By the late nineteenth century, the general condition of schools and the educational system appalled many. As much as one-fifth of the adult population had never attended school. The State Teachers Association became involved and in 1873 submitted a bill, signed by Governor John C. Brown that provided the framework for a statewide system of public schools. The legislature levied a tax to pay for the new schools and teachers' salaries. These new public schools held classes for grades one through eight, with academies available for the high school grades.

Washington County was divided into 19 school districts, with each district having its own school director who was responsible for

the overall operation of the schools. The length of the school term depended on how well the director managed the funds, and there were no standard textbooks or starting and closing dates. In 1886, during this era of public school expansion, Oak Hill School was built. Many other school buildings also appeared in Washington County, thus providing an education available to all.

¹ History of Washington College Academy, Washington College Academy web page: <http://www.wca-pvt.com/#history>

² History of Education in Tennessee, Tennessee Department of Education web page: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/edhist.htm>

³ History of Washington County Tennessee 1988 (1988). Watauga Association of Genealogists Upper East Tennessee page 63.

The Knob Creek Community

Knob Creek began as one of the earliest settlements in the central-northeastern part of Washington County, Tennessee. Rev. Samuel Doak and Hezekiah Balch organized the Hebron Church at the head of Knob Creek in 1790. They constructed a log building which was also used as a schoolhouse. In 1847, the congregation built a new church in Jonesborough and changed the name to Jonesborough Presbyterian Church. The Knob Creek Brethren Church was established in 1799. Services were held in homes until 1834 when a log church was built, which was replaced by the current church in 1905. On Knob Creek Road a stone monument marks the site of the William Nelson home, an ancient home of Methodists and Methodist preaching. Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury held annual conferences at the Nelson home in 1793, 1796, and 1797.

The Old Stage Coach Road ran through the community and then ran southwestward seven miles to Jonesborough, the county seat for Washington County.

Knob Creek was a self-sufficient community with schools and churches, **grist mills**, blacksmith shops, post offices, a **foundry**, a cotton spinning mill, and a sawmill. The creek, from which the community got its name, was central to this self-sufficiency. It emptied into the Watauga River and provided power for many water-powered, machine-operated businesses. The cotton spinning mill was located at upper Knob Creek by David Deaderick's home, with a nail factory nearby. A three-story **grist mill** stood on the Joseph Bowman homestead, with a power plant and sawmill on Daniel Bowman's property. A **grist mill** was also located below Oak Hill School on the Reed farm. George Miller had several water wheels providing power for his machine shop, sawmill, and blacksmith shop. The Bashor Mill, built in 1832 by Henry Bashor, still stands. Other mills in the community were Bill

Melton's grist mill, Peter Range's mill with two water wheels, and John Eden's and Buck Hale's mills near the mouth of Knob Creek.

Schools were an important part of the thriving Knob Creek community with education taking place at Hebron, a schoolhouse near the Peter Bowman house, at Oak Hill School, Carr School, and McNeil School. The only surviving school of the era is Oak Hill.

During the Civil War, Union cannons were positioned on upper Knob Creek along the Old Stage Road at Headtown Road. The Deakins house on Boones Creek and the Joseph Bowman house on Knob Creek Road were both hit by cannon balls during the war.

Today, the Henry Bashor Mill, Knob Creek Church of the Brethren and several homes remain in the community, which is a part of Johnson City. In 1981, Henry Bashor's Mill was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Knob Creek Historic District, the center of the Knob Creek community, was placed on the National Register in 1986. Early community history and artifacts can be seen at the Knob Creek Museum. This museum is the private collection of George and Margaret Sherfey Holley. Mrs. Holley is a life-long resident of Knob Creek and an Oak Hill School alumna.

The community still thrives but in a much different manner from its earlier times. Subdivisions and industry are taking over the family farms. A commercial shopping center now stands where Oak Hill School once stood. Instead of the Old Stage Coach Road (which still exists in part), highways, train tracks, and an interstate highway cut through the countryside of the Knob Creek community.

The History of Oak Hill School

Oak Hill School, also known as Knob Creek School, was a public school originally located in historic Knob Creek. The school was near the center of this community, providing an excellent place for educating children, as well as for social gatherings and special events.

The State of Tennessee built many one-room schools in 1885-86. Oak Hill School was completed in 1886, and was placed in the 10th District of the Washington County school system. The lumber was cut by Daniel Bowman for this large one-room rural school, which stood 38 feet by 24 feet, with three 18-pane windows on each side. It was constructed of popular **clapboard siding** and topped with a **Victorian-style belfry**, displaying very ornate **scrollwork** on the supportive brackets. The **belfry** housed the school bell which was rung by pulling a rope that passed through the ceiling just inside the front door.

Oak Hill School's first class consisted of five different grades. A surge in attendance occurred in the 1920s, when a curtain was used to divide the room into two classrooms. During the late 1930s, a wall was constructed to replace the curtain. At this same time an extra door was installed along the side of the building so each room would have a separate entrance. Electricity was added in 1941, replacing the oil lamps which hung from brackets on the walls. A coal-burning, pot-bellied stove, located in the center of the room, provided warmth during the cold months. When the wall was added in the 1930s, two pot-bellied stoves, one in each room, provided warmth for the winter.

The school served grades one through eight just before its closing in 1952. Except for a few bales of hay, the building stood

empty for over 40 years. In 1992, it was donated to the Jonesborough-Washington County History Museum by Nancy Sell Roberts, the property owner. The building was

moved in August 1996 to the present site in Historic Jonesborough to avoid demolition after the property on which it stood was sold.

The school is now safely located behind the Historic Jonesborough Visitors Center, which houses the Jonesborough-Washington County History Museum. Extensive restoration has taken place since the move to Jonesborough, including reinstalling the roof and **belfry**, replacing the foundation, repairing and painting the exterior and interior walls, and exposing the original five-inch pine board flooring. A brick sidewalk, a handicapped ramp, and new entrance steps have also been added. Much of the work was done by community volunteers, including the Washington County Sheriff's Department's Dirty Street Fighters.

School Government for 1892

Public school administrators' thoughts on how a school should be administered in 1892

Teachers, to be able to govern your school well should be your highest aim. A school that is governed or kept quiet only by fear and threats of corporal punishment backed by muscle does not at all meet our idea of a well governed school, but a school governed by the resolute, firm, thoughtful. Kind teacher— first by governing himself, second by governing his pupils by giving the plenty of work to do and interesting them in the same so much that they will have no time for anybody but study is a model school. . .

In every school there are three important factors—the teacher, the pupils, the patrons. No two of these will make a complete whole, each has a work to do. The duty of the patron is to send his children to school regularly and promptly, and see that they are supplied with necessary books, etc. It is the duty of the children to recognize and regard the authority of the teacher, obey and respect him and prepare their lessons . . .

The duties of the teacher are varied and many. The two most important ones are instruct the pupils and govern the school . . .

Suggestions for governing the school are: Be just and impartial in your dealings with your pupils. Be kind and courteous in your intercourse with them. Be generous and ready to commend them for whatever, in their actions or work, is deserving or worthy of approval. Do not make a long list of rules and read them the first morning only to be broken the first evening, and get you into trouble the second morning; do not scold or threaten, do not talk too much, make no set speeches, do not govern the life out of your schools.³

³ Watts, F.T. (1892). Manual of Instructions and Regulations for the Government of the Public Schools and School Officers of Washington County. Jonesboro, TN: Herald and Tribune pages 20-21

1892 Teacher's Duties

1. Every teacher must have a valid license or certificate, and must sign a contract with the School Directors.
2. Teachers must keep an adequate supply of fuel for the school and arrange for regular janitorial work.
3. Teachers shall be in the school room at least 15 to 30 minutes before opening the school (which shall be at 8:30 a.m., suntime), and shall see that the room is warm, the floor swept, and furniture dusted. He shall give a one-hour recess at noon and a brief recess during the morning and afternoon sessions. The school day shall close at 4 p.m. The teacher should allow no pupils to loiter on school grounds after hours.
4. Each teacher should post up in his school room a printed program of exercises to be followed.
5. Teachers should assign pupils to the different grades to which their scholarship may entitle them.
6. The teacher shall require at least one recitation or exercise every day in spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic and English grammar, from every pupil belonging to the grades in which these studies are required, and shall require recitations and exercises in the other studies as frequently as practicable.
7. Teachers shall observe written compositions and conversation of pupils, and call attention to the errors they may detect therein, and correct them.
8. Teachers shall devote their whole time and attention to their schools, and shall maintain a strict discipline among their

pupils in conformity to the principles of morality and good order.

9. Teachers shall treat the parents or guardians of the pupils attending the public schools with proper respect and courtesy.
10. No teacher shall allow the use of profane or indecent language, the use of intoxicating drinks, the carrying of weapons or playing of cards, or anything that in any way tends to demoralize the school, on the school grounds or on coming to or returning from school.
11. No teacher shall suspend his/her school without the consent of the Board of School Directors unless in the case of an emergency.
12. Punishment shall not be of such a nature as to injure the health or person of the pupil. Teachers may instantly suspend pupils from school in extreme cases of misconduct. No pupil shall, after suspension, be reinstated in the school unless by the direction of the Board of School Directors.

³ Watts, F.T. (1892) Manual of Instructions and Regulations for the Government of the Public Schools and School Officers of Washington County. Jonesboro, TN: Herald and Tribune, pages 16-19.

1892 4th Grade Course of Study

READING: Appleton's Third Reader. Special attention to sight reading.

SPELLING: Pupils will be expected to spell all words in any of their lessons, and other familiar words given by the teacher. Practice in use of dictionary and other books of reference; Diacritical marks. New American Pronouncing Speller to page 60. Phonic exercises.

ARITHMETIC: Robinson's Rudiments completed.

LANGUAGE LESSONS: Tarbell's Lessons in Language Book I completed. Graded Lessons in English to Lesson 49.