Memories of Mount Holly School from the 1940s

Mount Holly School
1914 - 1949

By
Pat Hollis Grant
Student in the 1940s
Once there was a holly tree that grew by the side of Highway 901 in Rock Hill. In the late 1800s Shiloh Methodist Church built their new church behind the holly tree and renamed Shiloh Methodist to Mount Holly Methodist for the holly tree. The holly tree died years ago but its legacy lives in Mount Holly Church, Mount Holly School, Mount Holly Road and the Mount Holly Community. I was a student at Mount Holly School in the 1940s. The school burned in March 1949 but the memories are with me still.

Mount Holly School got its start in the mid-1800s as Shiloh School held in the Shiloh Church standing on the holly-covered hilltop in front of the present Mount Holly United Methodist Church on Highway 901. Shiloh School became Mount Holly School when a new school was built on the hilltop in 1914. Mount Holly School became a part of the Rock Hill School District in 1916. The school burned to the ground on Friday, March 25, 1949. The replacement school opened in 1950 in the Oakdale Community and named Oakdale School. In 2008, the Rock Hill School Board named the new school on Porter Road “Mount Holly Elementary School” in honor of the former Mount Holly School.

Mount Holly School was built in 1914 on property owned by the Mount Holly Church and given over to the School District for as long as needed. The land was to be returned to the church when the School District no longer needed a school in that location. Today, the property has been leveled and it is a baseball field for the church. The school was closely associated with the church. Most of the teachers were long-time members of Mount Holly Church and some were former students at Mount Holly School.

The school was a two-story wooden building in a rural community, back then called a country school. The building stood on brick columns and kids crawled about under the schoolhouse. The school for grades one through seven had five rooms, a lunchroom and an auditorium. The first grade usually had a room and a teacher of its own, rooms and teachers were shared by the second and third grades, fourth and fifth grades and the sixth and seventh grades. The shared grades depended upon the number of students in each grade. In the double-grade rooms, the desks on each half of the room seated a grade. The teacher would teach one grade for a while and then go to the other side of the room and teach the other grade. The principal was also a classroom teacher. Mrs. Mary Hollis Faris was principal when I was a student. Each classroom had a pot-bellied stove, desks, blackboard with an alphabet across the top, pull-down map, globe and a big dictionary. The teachers arrived early to make the coal fires to warm the rooms. The coal bin was under the school house. When the dump truck came with a load of coal to refill the bin, we all gathered around and watched the truck unload the coal. As a true environmentalist, I can tell you there is no such thing as “Clean Coal.”
Originally, Mount Holly School had 10 grades but in order to receive a high school diploma, students had to attend the eleventh grade at Rock Hill High School which opened in 1914. Rock Hill High School would not accept a tenth-grade diploma from a rural school so a rural student had to retake the tenth grade plus the eleventh grade for a high-school diploma. The State changed the requirement for a diploma to twelve grades in 1948. In 1930, the Mount Holly School Trustees voted to discontinue high school grades and bus the students to Rock Hill High School. The School Trustees dropped the grade level to the seventh grade.

Our teachers were: Mrs. G. M. Harley, Mrs. Mary Hollis Faris, Mrs. Frances Shillinglaw Locke, Mrs. Elizabeth (Ebbie) Poag and Mrs. Pauline Wingate.

All of the children at the school rode the school bus except Carol Ann Ratterree. She lived in the house by the school grounds and walked over. The school bus was the standard color but not the standard build of today's buses. We had a long unpadded wooden bench down each side of the bus and one wide unpadded wooden bench down the center length of the bus. Kids sat back-to-back on the center bench leaning against each other for support. The bus was driven by most likely the most patient man on earth and we all called him "Uncle Benny," Mr. Benny Williford. The school bus stopped in front of my grandparent's store, Wolfe's Service Station, on Saluda Road for pick-up and drop-off. The Parrish boys walked over and caught the bus there. Roy Parrish would bring his guitar and play and we would sing as we rode back and forth to school. Roy turned over a five-gallon bucket and sat at the front by Uncle Benny but facing the kids. The bucket was a permanent seat for him and often turned over to become his drum. Other school bus drivers in later years were Buster and Thelma Porter and Elmer Parrish.

Everyone enjoyed riding on the school bus. That was our social time. We learned the community roads and where everyone lived by riding on the school bus. Our bus picked up students on roads in Rawlsville, Robertson, Dunlap Roddey, Marshall and roads off of Marshall Road. We had Hoffman's, Sims', Parrish's, Steele's, Threatt's, Whitesell's and other families on these roads. All of these were dirt roads. School let out early on rainy days to avoid the bus getting stuck in the mud. If the bus got stuck, the boys gathered pine needles and boughs to go under the wheels and then they pushed. The bus did not go down every dirt road. The kids would walk to the main dirt road. They had a tin house on the main road where they could wait. The house had no front but it kept the rain out.

In the 1940s, school buses were not regulated as they are today. Jim Craig drove a school bus in my teen years and he made the rounds on Sunday mornings in the school bus to take us to Antioch Methodist Church for Sunday School and Worship Services.

Most students had the same style of book bag at Mount Holly. You could tell where a child's parents worked by the cloth of their book bag. You had regular blue denim bags or striped denim bags. The various cotton mills in Rock Hill either made blue denim or striped denim. The book bags were long, rectangular shaped with one side left open in the middle. You put books evenly in both sides and slung the bag across your shoulder. An easy and convenient carrier that kept the books protected as well. If we needed book covers, we made those from brown paper bags.
We did not have a janitor and all of the cleaning in the building and on the grounds was done by the teachers and the students. The students were regularly assigned various duties. We took turns sweeping the floor after scattering sawdust coated in oil to reduce dust, watered plants that the teachers had and cleaned the erasers by beating them against a tree trunk. The boys raked and cleaned the yard. We had lunchroom duties where we set the tables and served the plates and could sneak an occasional French Fry. We did not go through a serving line. When the bell rang, we went directly to the table as the plates were already served. We did not wash our hands before we ate and we did not have napkins. We had milk every day. I never heard anyone say, "I don't like milk." There were a couple of dairies on our bus route and we would stop to pick up milk to take to the school. We ate and drank what we were served. If one person did not want something on his or her plate, someone else asked for it. These were the years of war ration books and war recovery; we were grateful for what we had. The lunch bell and recess bell was a cow bell which the principal rang. The principal would come out on the porch and ring the cow bell when it was time to go into the school. We promptly lined up and went inside.

In a telephone conversation with Mrs. Poag in 1999, she told me local farmers would bring green beans to the teachers to snap and can. The teachers snapped the beans at school and after school they took them to the Rock Hill Canary behind the original Rock Hill High School. We ate the green beans the next school year. Margaret Adkins and Lily Johnson worked in the lunchroom. Sometimes farmers would bring turnips to the school and the lunchroom workers would slice them and place the raw turnips on the tables. We ate them raw.

The fire escape was a long slide extending from the second-floor window in the seventh-grade classroom and stopped 8 or 10 feet from the ground. When the bell rang for recess, Broadus Thomasson would slide down the slide. The hill was covered in rocks and the landing was rough on jeans and behind. The teacher was generous with the paddle to add insult to injury for the backside. Several of the boys were intimately acquainted with the ruler. A palm was pulled back to face up and the ruler had a sharp sting. I don't remember any of the girls getting a "dose of the ruler." One of the boys said a bad word and the teacher washed his mouth out with a bar of soap. She did this in front of the entire class as a warning to never say bad words.

Down a long dirt path, we had two outhouses, one for the boys and one for the girls. The boys most often used the woods rather than the outhouse. When a girl was in the outhouse, the boys would throw rocks against the tin building. The building was covered in dents. We had a well enclosed in a small brick building on the school grounds. A long pipe extended from the building with multiple holes in the pipe. You turned the valve at the end of the pipe and water shot up along the length of the pipe. Several children could get a drink of water at the same time. The fun for the boys happened here. Every time the girls went to the water pipe, the boys would slip up and turned the valve full force or cover a couple of the vacant holes with their fingers and water would soak the girl's face, hair and dress. It was to be expected and so the girls learned to drink water like a deer, always on the alert.
The school had little play equipment and this was divided according to boys and girls. The boys and girls did not often play together. The balls and bats went to the boys and this was an every recess activity. Some of the girls played ball as well. The jump ropes went to the girls. Sometimes we used two jump ropes for Double Dutch rope. Girl activities were hop scotch, ring-around-the rosie, giant step and building houses with rocks. The hilltop was covered in rocks; we gathered rocks and made the foundation shape of houses. The school yard was dotted with these outlines. We had see-saws and all of us took turns on the see-saws.

Friday mornings were the treat of the week. We went to the auditorium for scripture reading, prayer, news sharing and singing. We had paper-back books with folk songs, patriot songs and old favorites. Mrs. Poag played the piano and we sang until we no longer needed the books because we knew the words to all of the songs. At times we had school plays on Friday mornings and occasionally a play in the evening where families were invited. We had one play where I was given the role of Mrs. Brown. The character of Mrs. Brown had many lines and I felt honored and proud to have such a big part. Later in life, I realized that likely I was given the part because I wore round wire-rimmed glasses which made me look like a little ol' lady. Wearing glasses in the 1940s was not cool. In one of the plays the teachers borrowed artificial green grass carpet from the Funeral Home to cover the stage floor; they placed a picket fence across the stage and then filled the fence with roses. The entire auditorium was heavy with the aroma of roses. To this day when I smell roses, my mind instantly goes back to that stage filled with roses.

We had the opportunity to order the newspaper, Weekly Reader, which was delivered to the school and distributed once a week to those who paid the small fee for the paper. This paper was for elementary students and told about the world outside of our rural community. Reading the informative Weekly Reader was a high point of our week. The current events brought the world into the classroom though it was written in a this-happened style since it came through the regular mail delivery and was not news of the day. We were not worldly kids at Mount Holly School but the Weekly Reader broadened our world and instilled a desire to know more.

WWII was going on in Europe and the Pacific and every American put patriotism first. We all saved our money for the Red Cross effort to help the boys overseas. When the money was collected, Betty Ann Hoffman and I were designated to buy the gifts for the boys overseas. The Red Cross made suggestions as to what would be appropriate. Betty and I rode the City Bus to downtown Rock Hill and shopped at the Dime Store. We kept counting our money until every cent was spent. We took the items to school the next day and packed them in a brown pasteboard box and sent them to the boys overseas. We were doing our part for the war effort. We had regular Red Cross drives. If we gave as much as a dime, we got a pin with a Red Cross dangling at the end of a straight pin.

The York County Fair in October was the Big Event for school children. School let out early on Fair Day and the school bus carried the students to the Fair and left the Fair Ground at 6:00 p.m. to deliver us to our homes. I can't remember how we knew when it was 6:00 p.m. because we did not have watches. We were cautioned not to venture down to the far end of the Fair Ground because that was where the freak shows and the hoochie coochie shows were held. I doubt any of us followed that warning. The half-naked hoochie coochie girls would come out on stage and
perform their dance and the man running the show would tell about even more gyrations inside the tent. Men lined up to buy tickets. Side show barkers told of the Freak Shows’ bizarre and unusual things to see inside the tent like the bearded lady, midgets, world’s smallest horse, two-headed snake or whatever they happened to have that year. The Ferris Wheel, Carousel, Swings, the Whip, Bumper Cars for the boys, and the daring Loop-the-Loop carnival rides were the main attractions for us. We played some of the games and if we were lucky, we won a Chalk Doll or a Celluloid Kewpie Doll. We walked through the agricultural building with little interest for the cattle or poultry. The exhibit building was more interesting to us with the 4-H, Boy Scout and other educational exhibits. Ladies of the County showed off their canned goods, flowers, sewing and various hand crafts. My mother, my sons, my older grandchildren enjoyed the York County Fair but it folded tent its last time before my two younger grandchildren were born. Now the Fairground is a parking lot for Winthrop students and the American Legion who sponsored the Fair has moved from Cherry Road to Heckle Boulevard. The County Fair is “a gone but never forgotten” part of growing up in Rock Hill.

Influences and lessons from our teachers have lasted throughout our lives. I first learned the benefits of being pretty (which I definitely was not) from my sixth and seventh grade teacher, Mrs. Pauline Wingate, a former Winthrop Beauty Queen. She was very attractive, nice and sweet. All the girls wanted to be like her and all the boys just wanted to look at her.

I inherited a strong work ethic from my grandfather and Mrs. Helen Reid Barrett showed me the joy from hard work. Mrs. Barrett, another physically beautiful woman with white hair, was the piano teacher at Mount Holly School. She gave recitals at the end of the school year in the auditorium. All the girls wore long evening dresses with corsages and the families were invited. The first year that I took piano, I did not have a piano. I found that I really liked piano and I would practice on the kitchen table and sometimes Mrs. Brooks Parrish would let me practice on her piano. I did well in piano. My first recital I played “Waltzing in Old Vienna” and “Under the Double Eagle” as a duet with Joyce Marthers. At the conclusion of the recital Mrs. Barrett called me to the front and gave me a miniature piano pin in recognition of my work. Inside the box she had written “To Patricia Hollis for Excellent Work.” I was surprised; we did not know that she planned to award a student for his or her work. That was a proud and happy evening for me. My grandfather always asked me to play for him and he wanted to hear “Take Me Home Again, Kathleen.” He said that was his favorite song.

Students performing in the 1949 piano recital of Mrs. Helen Reid Barrett were: Ebbie Poag, Donna Poag, Shirley Shugart, Betty Barrett, Miriam Workman, Bill Workman, Carole Baskin, Margie Wray Weaver, Melvin Reid, Bill Rhodes, Carrie Mae Love, Elizabeth Parrish, Betty Ann Hoffman, Frances Rogers, Sarah Ann Lowry, Betty Jean Feemster, Phyliss Steele, Elizabeth Ann Whitesell, Joyce Marthers and Pat Hollis.

My first boyfriend, Buddy Belk, was at Mount Holly School. Buddy was the nicest young boy and grew up to be one of the finest men in Rock Hill. While playing on the school grounds, I hit Buddy in the head with a rock and his strongest memory of me is that unfortunate and painful incident. My strongest memory is when his father brought him to my house one Christmas to bring me a box of chocolate candy. One never forgets his or her first boyfriend or girlfriend.
The Clemson Extension Program provided 4-H training for the boys and girls in grammar school. We met once a month during school hours. Our County Extension Agents were Charlie Fant and Kathleen Matthews. Georgia Taylor worked with us some. For several years, a lot of us kids went to 4-H Camp. We alternated camp sites between Camp Long in Aiken, South Carolina, and Camp Bob Cooper in Summerton, South Carolina. We stayed for a week for $5 including the food. We made new friends from other rural schools. The school district provided school buses to take 4-H members to camp each summer. This was a wonderful opportunity to meet boys and girls from other schools. We had classes all day with time for fun activities. The girls had cooking, canning and sewing classes. The boys had tractor and electricity. We made potholders, lanyards and bracelets. Swimming was a big activity. We used the Buddy System and could not go into the lake without a Buddy. The lifeguard blew his whistle and you and your Buddy had to join hands and hold your arms high. He would not blow the whistle to return to play until he saw that everyone had a Buddy. Weeks at the Camp were learning experiences. We made new friends, learned to look out for each other, learned to live together in cabins, share when we needed to do so and learned that everyone is mannered differently.

Once in 4-H Club I got involved in the poultry project. I neglected to mention this to my family and showed up one day with 100 baby chicks. My grandfather built a nice long chicken pen that would accommodate 100 chicks for me to raise the chickens. I kept the light on for warmth, fed and watered the baby chicks and kept their pen clean. I learned that I did not care to raise baby chicks.

Girls always wore dresses and socks to school regardless of the cold weather; never pants. Girls had the cold air and wind circulating on their bare legs. Our bare legs would turn red from the cold. My grandmother made me wear Union Suits every year until the first day of May. Warm weather in March and April never persuaded her to allow me to take off my Union Suit early. The Union Suit had short legs that fit over your thighs and sleeves that would show under a short-sleeve dress in the Spring. The Big Day to shed the union suit was May 1; no need to negotiate for an earlier take-off date. We were never allowed to go barefooted until after May 1.

Life changed forever for us on Friday, March 25, 1949. The school burned down to the brick foundation columns. News traveled fast. My grandmother ran a store on Saluda Road and someone came in that evening and told us that Mount Holly School had burned. My first thought was that I had left my pink sweater at school; cool morning and warm afternoon day. My next thought was where will we go to school. The school bus picked up everyone on time on Monday morning and delivered us to Mount Holly Church. Five teachers and 150 students crowded into the small Sunday School rooms but we did have an indoor toilet. Chairs were in rows against both walls. The girls sat in front and the boys climbed over the chairs to sit on the back rows. Girls could not sit in the back because we could not climb over the seats in our dresses.

We had an outbreak of lice in those close quarters. My grandmother combed my hair nightly with a metal pick-out comb and my head was sore for the duration of the lice episode. Luckily, I stayed lice free and society had advanced beyond washing a child’s hair in kerosene to kill the lice. The seventh grade students ordered class rings for grammar school graduation. They were silver with a black set and the letters MHS.
At the start of the next school year, the 1949 seventh grade students from Mount Holly were bused to Ebenezer Avenue Elementary School for their eighth grade. The much larger two-story brick building of Ebenezer Avenue School, built in 1921, had indoor water fountains and toilets. Mount Holly students in grades one through seven had classes in the old Armory on Saluda Road. The next year Oakdale School opened and Mount Holly students went to Oakdale School.

The fire on Friday, 25 March 1949, marked the end of childhood for us but left a lifetime of wonderful memories.

Pat Hollis Grant
1940s Student

MOUNT HOLLY SCHOOL
1914-1949

March 2015
Mt. Holly School Burns To Ground

Fire Destroys Mount Holly Grammar School

Children of the Mount Holly community were snapped by the Herald cameraman this morning as they viewed the ruins of their school.
Mt. Holly School Burns To Ground

In addition to the building much valuable equipment was lost including a new Rectigraph machine, refrigerator, and other furnishings. A group of men, however, were able to save a piano and a number of desks.

The fire was first noticed by a passing motorist about 7:45 p.m. and a phone call was hurriedly made to the Rock Hill fire department. One truck was sent to the scene and for a time it appeared the blaze might be kept within one room. But the blaze had crept along the wall and broke through to the roof. Wiring which furnished power for operating a small water pump was soon burned away and from that point on there was little to do except watch the school burn to the ground.

Huge flames soon spread through the building and sparks, carried by a slight wind from the south-east, cascaded like flaming snowflakes into an adjacent field and the roadway. Big clouds of smoke rolled several hundred feet above the flames.

As the fire grew bigger the entire area was lighted and spectators lounged against cars and on the porches of nearby buildings to watch the flames hungrily eat away at the school for about two hours. This morning the ruins were still smouldering.

Tentative Plans To Hold Classes At Methodist Church

One hundred and fifty Mount Holly school children and their five teachers prepared today to meet in a new location Monday. The 35-year-old Mount Holly grammar school was completely destroyed last night as firemen and several hundred spectators stood helplessly by.

In addition to the bull...