

BAXTER SEMINARY REUNION 1997

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville

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27 April 1997, pg. 1 & 6.

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Annual Reunion Saturday at Upperman; Alumni Funding Full College Scholarships.

As you flip through the yellowed pages of Baxter Seminary's 1935 yearbook, the smell of history rises from between class photos and club achievements.

Signatures and good-wishes from classmates, etched in faded black and blue ink beside boxed-in smiling faces, fill this copy of *The Highlander*, belonging to Maurine Ensor Patton, Class of '35:



"Always remember the dear days at B. S.," signs one friend; "Always remember our happy days together at the Seminary," another classmate writes.

And next weekend, many of these classmates will gather once again to celebrate their days of schooling at the Baxter school, deemed "a light on the Cumberland Plateau" by one historian.

(Forever grateful to Baxter Seminary: Hannah Hughes Hall, at right, hands her sister, Jimmie Jaquess, a ticket to the Baxter Seminary Alumni Banquet set for next Saturday at Upperman High School. The sisters will be the oldest graduates from the school attending the banquet, which has been held for more than 50 years. Photo by: Dyana Bagby).

For more than half a century, graduates of Baxter Seminary have been gathering together once a year in Putnam County to reminisce about those "dear" and "happy" days.

For the past several years, the alumni would meet and dine together in Cookeville at Tennessee Tech; this year, however, they're staying where it all began – Baxter.

"We're coming home!" exclaimed 87-year-old Hannah Hughes Hall of Baxter, Class of 1927, excited that the gathering will be at Upperman High School. She will be honored as the second-oldest student attending the banquet and has missed only one banquet, that in 1946.

"I was pregnant and at that time you just didn't go anywhere when you were pregnant," she remembers with a smile last week. "Times are different now."

Her sister, Jimmie Jaquess of Cookeville, who is 88 (soon-to-be 89), valedictorian of the Class of 1926, will be the oldest of the alumni there. Her age hasn't showed her down,

though – she still puts in a six-day-a-week schedule at Ideal Cleaners, a longtime family-run dry-cleaning establishment.

“We’re all just one big family from Baxter Seminary,” she said. “Parents, children, grandchildren – all will be coming to the alumni banquet. Families plan their vacations around it.”

These sisters, born and raised in Baxter, have nothing but fond memories of the school founded in 1910 by the Methodist Church to serve the rural population in the Upper Cumberland.

Baxter Seminary was an elementary and high school for more than 10 years, when, in 1922, a new public elementary school was built in Baxter. After 1922, Baxter Seminary developed a standard high school program with emphasis given to training for rural leadership, according to a history of the school, *A Light on the Cumberland Plateau*, by Ruth Robinson Matthews.



It was under the leadership of Dr. Harry Upperman and his wife, for whom the present Upperman High School is named, that the school became such a valuable resource to families in Baxter and the surrounding area. (Pictured: Dr. Harry L. Upperman).

Through the years, 1923-57, however, Baxter Seminary also enrolled students from many states and even from other countries, including France and South America.

“While the Seminary enjoys a liberal patronage by the citizens of Baxter, it is no sense a local school,” wrote President Upperman in the school’s annual catalog for 1924-25.

“Its design is to serve the Upper Cumberland section of Tennessee and other parts of the country, those choice young men and women who desire such advantages as we offer and help them to equip themselves for leadership.”

Although a rural school, the curriculum included Latin and Spanish classes, drama, a literary society and even an award-winning speech and debate team. Boys and girls could both play basketball and the boys played football, as well, providing students the chance for a well-rounded education.

There was time for fun, too, the sisters are quick to point out.

"Whenever a boy had a car, that was such a major event," laughed Mrs. Hughes. "We would all get in and ride around Baxter – that was just such a special thing to do."

But more than anything, the Baxter Seminary faculty taught its students the opportunity to work their way through school by milking cows and feeding hogs.

With students growing small crops and raising hogs for food, the school was able to maintain a mostly self-sustaining existence while at the same time teaching the students a work-ethic and respect for their education, said Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Jaquess.

"The school was strict, but we knew what was expected of us and we all worked hard at everything we did," said Mrs. Hall. "Our motto was 'Truth, Honor, Loyalty, Service' – and we lived by that every day."

Baxter Seminary alumni continue to live by that motto today through the Baxter Seminary Upperman High School Alumni Association, which awards scholarships each year to graduating seniors from HAS.

"Every year at our banquet, we honor the 50th anniversary class and the 25th anniversary class. We started our scholarship program in 1966 and since then we have given 36 four-year scholarships," said Mary Jo Johnson, Class of 1941.



"Currently, we have eight students attending school on scholarship and have more than \$150,000 we plan to give to aspiring students who want to further their education," she said.

But what is it about Baxter Seminary that inspires such a faithful and loyal following each year – a firm dedication to a school that no longer exists?

"Because we wouldn't have gotten an education otherwise," explains Mrs. Hall matter-of-factly. "If you couldn't go to school anywhere else, you could go to Baxter Seminary."

"Everyone was poor," added Mrs. Jaquess. "We were all in the same boat and didn't know any difference. If that school wasn't there, many of us would never have gotten a high school degree. And for that we are forever grateful."

*See more about Baxter Seminary at: Schoolyard Tales, <http://www.ajlambert.com>