

FADED IMAGES YIELD TO A NEW WAVE OF VIGOR

Second Thoughts by J. B. Leftwich

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(J. B. Leftwich wrote this article after a visit in May 2008 to the old Buffalo Valley School now the Buffalo Valley Community Center and Lending Library in Putnam Co., TN).

The cluster of automobiles gathered around the Buffalo Valley school building, the ramp along side the steep entry steps and the air conditioning units proclaimed the change.

But the most significant change was the indoor plumbing, especially the commodes and wash basins in the rest rooms.

In those ancient days – when the war referred to the one that took out Kaiser Bill – there was no running water except in the nearby creek where we boys violated rules and swam



anyway. The drinking water came in a bucket drawn from the well at Doll Maxwell's Store, (*Robert Lonzo "Doll" Maxwell*) about a quarter mile away. Drinking water duty rotated among the older boys.

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think. Needless to say, I knew the inside architecture of only one – the one where some pupils rolled cigarettes and dared to smoke.

And, needless to say, sanitation was minimal. Our hands were the great unwashed from breakfast until supper, and we never gave the matter a thought.

Our building was new in those early 1930 school years, a fine structure with four classrooms and three teachers. The fifth room was an auditorium where chapel exercise were held and the Bible was read, seemingly without corrupting the innocent young minds.

Some of the youngsters were not as innocent as adults seemed to think, and it was from the older kids with jaded minds that we expanded our education, albeit the language therein was less than academic and words were not repeated in family circles.

Teacher's cars were the only vehicles parked near the building in those often less than golden years. For school programs in our prized auditorium with a backdrop of advertisements from Cookeville merchants, parents in large measure transported themselves in buggies and wagons.

When we gathered recently for a program in the old school building, now a community center with a volunteer library, a kitchen and a dining room, not a buggy was in sight. Unlike the days of yore, the campus was neatly mowed and electricity served the building.

But forests grace the hillsides, instead of neatly plowed fields with rows of young corn. In a community which in the early days of the school building flourished with commercial enterprises, not a general store now exists. Zina Medley's and Doll Maxwell's store buildings are gone. And so are blacksmith shops, the produce house and the livestock pens of cattle awaiting the shipment in Tennessee Central cars to the Nashville stock sales.

The venerable old school building, a new facility when I began the fifth grade, now is a community center and a historic place on the national register. It was alive with John and Fay Lloyd of Lebanon, who were donating books to the library, arrived for the community's May birthday party.

'Twas a lively scene, lively voices from lively people, and not totally unlike the noise from us pupils almost eight decades ago. Clara Jared and I, average age 90, were the only from our Rock Springs community. I ma have been the only graduate of the school present.

Momentarily, I sought solitude to try to envision the kids who were my classmates. Few faces came to mind. And when Librarian Barbara Markel asked me to identify two basketball players in a team picture taken during my tenure, I struck out. Their features, faded by passing years, would not come to mind. Faces I thought I would never forget new were fuzzy and blended with other faces I thought I would never forget.

Not one of my classmates lives in the community. Many are in the Rock Springs, the Maddux, the Jared and the Smellage cemeteries. Some just vanished from the community.

But Buffalo Valley is under going a revival sparked to a large measure by newcomers to the community, many of whom viewed the pristine beauty of the lush hillsides and valleys and chose to relocated there.

The infusion of new and vibrant personalities energized descendants of old families, so the newcomers and the long-timers unified to invigorate a community.

A visitor senses the force of revitalized energy. Old and new residents worked side-by-side to update the building and to channel efforts. Much of what happened to the old building resulted from grunt and sweat as the center morphed into truly a community center and became a model for others to follow.

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