

CELEBRATING A HUNDRED YEARS
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Ringin in the School Day

By Bobbie Bruton, Herald Citizen Newspaper Staff:

Barefoot kids came home with feet dirty from the oiled floors of schoolhouses during the early decades of the 20th century, and often heard the admonishment of their mother, "Be sure and wash your feet before you go to bed."

As Charles and Faye Carter leafed through their scrapbooks, memories — some bitter and most sweet—swept them back to the days they sat at a desk in a Putnam County school during the 1930s and early 40s.

"We all met, of course, in one room — first through eighth grade," recalled Charles. "Kids never rode any school buses. My parents never took me to school in my life.

"We didn't have much transportation until after 1935, but we still walked to school—about two miles. It was about three miles to school when I went to Mt. Herman, and I walked about two miles when I went to Poplar Grove."

Schools were abundant in number in those days and were scattered around the country so children could walk to school.

"I don't think anybody had to walk over three miles to school." Charles reflected.

Charles attended second through third grade at Vaden School, located in the lower western part of the county, near the Gentry Community, between Highway 70 West and Granville. The dwelling for the school is now gone.

The school had a pot-bellied stove that was fed coal furnished by the county.

"We would go into the woods in the back — and that was a pleasure to get out of school — and gather up kindling (small pieces of wood) out of the woods so the teacher could build a fire the next morning," Charles reminisced.

For kids attending one of the many country schools of Putnam County, there was no such thing as a water fountain or even a water spigot inside the building.

"We didn't have any running water," Charles said, matter-of-factly. "We didn't have any hot lunch programs or anything like that. Everybody either brought their lunch in a lunchbox or paper bag or wrapped up in a newspaper.

"We had a big spring within a quarter of a mile of the school. And that's where we got our drinking water. We'd take two big buckets and go to the spring. And I tell kids today that that was the running water we had," he said laughing. "We'd run to the spring and get a big bucket of water and run back to school."

Some of the old country schools had bells at the top of the building that the teacher would ring when it was time for classes to begin. But Vaden didn't have one of those bells. The teacher would stand at the door and swing a handheld bell.

"If you didn't hear the bell and was late getting in, you might get a licking," Charles said as he recalled one of those not-so-sweet memories.

The licking might be given to the palm of an outstretched hand with a paddle. Charles remembers one teacher who corrected with a cedar peg about a foot long.

"He would peck you on the head with that peg," said Charles. "I remember one time I went to ask him a question about the lesson, and he pecked me on the head and said, 'You know that. Go back to your seat'. He wasn't my favorite teacher," Charles laughed.

"Sometimes, when you did something pretty good, then they threw the switch to you," he continued. "Most of the teachers had a big paddle, and they gave you so many licks. I have stood in a corner. Sometimes you had to stand in front of the blackboard. The teacher would make a zero on the blackboard as high as she could lift, and you would stand with your nose in that circle. Then you would catch the teacher not looking, and you would take the eraser and erase that (circle) out right quick, and lower the zero so you could get out of the strain a little bit."

Charles next attended school at Mt. Herman, located in the southeastern part of the county. Mt. Herman had a well with a hand pump in the school yard that provided water for the students.

Although Charles doesn't remember any typhoid cases during his early years in school, he does remember the county doctor who came around to all the schools and gave shots to prevent typhoid.

"Once a year, the county doctor would come and he would make us all line up. He would have a nurse with him. The doctor would give us a shot," Charles said as he recalled one classmate who opted out of this preventative measure.

"Mt. Herman School was built high off the ground. When the little boy saw the doctor pull in the school driveway, he knew he was going to get the annual shot. He dreaded that needle. He had two or three brothers. Well, this little boy crawled under the floor of the school just as far as he could get. And when the doctor got through, the teacher told this boys' brothers to go in and bring him out so he could get his shot.

"Well, he was in there crying, and he didn't want to come out. Every time his brothers would get up close to him, he would reach down and get a handful of dirt and throw it in their faces and they couldn't see him. And they didn't get him. He escaped his shot," Charles said, laughing.

School lunches were brought from home and gathered from whatever food was plentiful at the time.

In the summer, lunches usually consisted of baked corn on the cob, ripe tomatoes and maybe a biscuit with butter and sugar on it. In the winter months, during the time of killing hogs and plenty of meat, the lunch might be a sausage and biscuit with a baked sweet potato.

"Your tongue would nearly beat your brains out if you saw someone with peanut butter and crackers," said Charles, "because that was a delicacy at that time. Only the 'high-ups' or rich could afford peanut butter and crackers."

Even though these schools had no running water or indoor plumbing, there was still no communal water bucket and dipper.

"Most kids had an individual drinking cup—a little fold-up cup made of metal," Charles recalled. "You could pull it out and it was one cup and wouldn't leak. Most everybody had a drinking cup of some kind."

When the weather was warm, students were allowed to take their lunch outside to a shade tree and eat. In the winter, they ate at their desks.

At recess, kids at the country schools might play volleyball or softball. Some of the games they played were "Drop the Hankerchief," "Ring Around the Rosies," and "Aint Nee Over."

For recreation, sometimes the teacher would allow the kids to go into the nearby woods to a steep hill, where the kids would cut a grapevine and swing out from the hill.

"Sometimes the grapevine would get dry from one year to the other and die, and we wouldn't know it," said Charles. "The first guy that swung on it that was good and heavy would get out about to the 20-foot mark, and the vine would break and they'd go straight down. I don't think anybody ever got any bones broke from it."

Faye started school at City School, attended by students in grades 1-8, in 1931. The school had both electricity and running water. The three-story brick building had a gym for its basketball teams, a chapel and a cafeteria, where lunches — mostly soup — were served daily.

Faye's transportation to school for many years was a pony. She rode the pony from her home on Highway 70, near the Beverly Hills Subdivision, and left it at a hitchin' post near the square, where Southern Traditions is now located. She walked from there to City School, then located where the Cookeville Municipal Building stands now.

Faye remembers a teacher at City School who used his belt to discipline students. He instilled so much fear in the students that they could not recite their lessons to him. She remembers one boy who got 10 licks with the belt for not being able to recite his lesson. She said the boy knew the lesson but was so paralyzed with fear he couldn't talk and so he got the beating with the belt.

Students at City School had the conveniences of indoor bathrooms and drinking fountains.

“It was a good school,” said Faye. “I don't know why they tore it down.”

Faye graduated from Cookeville High School in 1942. She remembers eating lunch on the school lawn with friends. Although the school didn't have a prom back then, she does remember an annual spring party. The party included decorations and refreshments but no dancing. During her senior year, the class decided to forgo the party because so many classmates had left to serve in World War II. They used the money that would have been spent on the party to buy a water fountain for the school.

The Carters remember being looked over by their mother for the tell-tale nits of lice, but don't think the problem of lice was as prevalent back then as it is today.

The weather seemed colder to them back then, especially when they had to walk a distance to school.

Before leaving for school, kids in the country might have to milk two or three cows and feed the hogs and horses. Then they would clean up and put on overalls and leave for school.

“You had to stir around pretty good when you had to walk two miles to school,” said Charles.

Kids had to buy their own books back then and would usually try to find used ones from kids finishing a higher grade. Free text books came later when the Carters' own children were in school.

Today, Faye serves as the historian for her reunion group. The Carters have many scrapbooks filled with pictures and other mementoes that retell their school days, and often share these with elementary students.

Four rooms, four teachers -- Capshaw Elementary started small in 1939, when the school opened its doors to less than 100 students in grades 1-4

By BOBBIE BRUTON, Herald-Citizen staff

Four rooms, four teachers and four grades.

When Capshaw Elementary School opened in 1939, the school had four teachers, four classrooms, two bathrooms and a partially finished kitchen in the basement.

After students completed the fourth grade, they moved on to City School for fifth grade and remained there until they graduated eighth grade.

No buses came to Capshaw in those early years. Children either walked to school or were brought by their parents.

Bonnie Welch Anderson, who was a first-grader the first year classes were held at Capshaw, said, “We didn’t have snow days back then. We walked to school in the snow.”

During the early years, Capshaw students celebrated the arrival of spring with a May Pole Dance in front of the school. It was quite an honor to be chosen for the May Pole Dance.

Anderson remembers the year she was chosen to hold a ribbon and dance around the May Pole. “I was one of the lucky ones. I got picked. We held on to a ribbon hanging from the pole, and we danced around the pole and plaited the ribbons.”

Gladys Hensley was the first principal at Capshaw, and the first teachers were Dorothy Draper, who taught first grade; Avo McGlason, second grade; Rozelle Huddleston, third grade; and Lucille Thompson, fourth grade. A few years later, Thompson left teaching to join the Air Force. After serving in the Philippines and Germany during World War II, she decided to make the military her career.

Lula Grogan was recruited to do the school’s cooking in 1940. At the time, she had a 5-year-old daughter, Martha, who was still a year away from starting school. But in an effort to acquire her services, she was told she could enroll her daughter in first grade a year early.

Martha, who is now Martha Dunn, said her mother prepared hot meals daily for about 100 people—a full meal complete with dessert. She remembers the delicious muffins her mother made for the school lunches.

After the food was prepared in the basement on a wood stove, a kindly janitor would help Grogan bring the food upstairs, where it was served in the hall. Students would fill their plates in the hall and then take them to their desks and eat. After the children and staff finished eating, they returned their plates to the hall.

During summers, Grogan canned vegetables from her own garden and sold the food to the county. She prepared and served the canned food as part of the school menu at Capshaw.

Whooping cough was going around in those days, and Dunn caught it and missed a lot of school her first year.

“We liked to build playhouses at recess,” Dunn said, as she recalled the early playground at Capshaw.

The wooded playground had swings and a see-saw, but mostly the girls liked to build playhouses. These playhouses were made by partitioning off “rooms” with twigs and bark from the nearby trees. The rooms were furnished with broken pieces of colored glass, rocks and any other suitable refuge that found a place in their fertile imaginations.

Each year, the particular teacher Dunn had for that year became her favorite.

“I loved all of my teachers, and I hated to say good-bye at the end of the year,” she said.

More classrooms and grades were added to Capshaw, and when Vallie Randolph Sullivan, who graduated eighth grade from Capshaw in 1955, attended the school, the building had a gymnasium and a library, and a modern cafeteria was on the main level.

Sparks Grocery, across the street from the school, became synonymous with the school in the minds of many of Capshaw’s former students, who once visited the neighborhood store daily.

A favorite playground snack that Sullivan bought at Sparks Grocery was a package of Kool-Aid.

“We’d open up the package of Kool-Aid at recess and pour it into our hands and eat it,” she said.

During Sullivan’s years at Capshaw, school lunches were served with milk in glass bottles.

She remembers walking with her class to the old Armory building on Spring Street for an end-of-the-year picnic. At that time, the Armory had picnic tables in the grassy area in front. At the picnic, students enjoyed tuna and pimiento cheese sandwiches.

During the 1950s, eighth-graders bid their good-byes to the school at a formal graduation with the girls wearing white dresses.

This custom changed during the early 1960s, when the eighth-grade class planned and presented a program to the school. A favorite part of this program was the pantomime of a popular song of the day.

Looking ahead to their own graduation, many times adolescent girls would practice a pantomime on the playground during recess.

During some years, eighth-grade students went on a class trip to Mammoth Cave, Ky.

Still tucked away in the memories of many former Capshaw students of the late 1950s and early 60s are pictures of the wonderful rolls baked by Capshaw cook Mary Grissom. These fluffy yeast rolls, served several times a week, had a fold perfect for a slice of butter. Students who went to the cafeteria for mid-morning milk break could see tray after tray of these rolls set out to rise on the tables in the kitchen. The best part was that after the classes were served, seconds were handed out.

Bill Gibson, who lived close enough to the school to walk home for lunch some days, remembers these rolls and the other good food served at Capshaw.

He also remembers some rumors that were floating around when he first started school. "It was told around school that Mr. Bohannon (Oliver), the principal, had an electric paddle in his office. Mr. Bohannon was a reserved gentleman, and I was already intimidated by him. When I heard about the electric paddles, I was really afraid of him.

"Later on I got to know him and what a kind man he was. I don't remember him ever using a paddle on anyone."

Another rumor that Gibson remembers was about a hermit that supposedly lived in Capshaw Woods. It was told that this hermit had been seen occasionally on the playground.

Former students also remember the many beautiful trees around Capshaw, and for some there was an up-close and personal encounter.

"If you misbehaved on the playground, you were sent to stand next to a tree," said Gibson, as he recalled spending some playground time next to a tree.

A few weeks ago, Anderson, Dunn, Gibson and Sullivan were among the many former students who came back to their old school to walk the halls one last time before the bricks of the old building became mementos of days gone by. The bricks from the old building have been offered for sale as keepsakes to former students.

Just as when it first opened, Capshaw School once again serves students up to the fourth grade.

But those first four rooms are now gone. Capshaw students of the 21st century will be making their memories in a beautiful new building with 30 classrooms.

20th century brought many changes to school system in Putnam County

By BOBBIE BRUTON, Herald-Citizen staff

An eight-room, two story frame building, constructed in 1900 and called Cookeville Collegiate Institute, heralded the progress of public education that would take place in Putnam County during the 20th century.

Later simply called the “City School,” the Victorian-designed building sat on a four-acre shady lot, befitting its elegant architecture, in downtown Cookeville, at the present site of City Hall.

When the school opened in 1901, it offered eight years of primary and four years of secondary education. Teacher-training was later added to the curriculum.

Velma Thompson of Cookeville, who attended the school in 1919 as a first-grader and part of her second-grade year, remembers going to school only a half day. In the afternoon, the school day began anew for the students the overcrowded classrooms could not accommodate during the morning hours.

The playground faced Spring Street and under the big oak trees during recess is where the girls made their playhouses until the boys came along and tore them down.

“We built the playhouses around the roots of the trees with whatever we could find to put in them. We had to make our own entertainment back then. It was a different world from the schools today, for sure,” said Thompson, as she looked back fondly on these childhood memories.

Although enrollment at the City School soon soared to more than 400 during the early part of the century, and necessitated the construction of a larger building, attendance at the many rural schools was sporadic.

During the early 1900s, school attendance was not required. The Putnam County Herald reported in 1905 that Putnam County received from the state treasury \$4,694.30 for education for 7,222 Putnam County children. This money was allocated based on census figures. But school enrollment figures for the combined country and city schools revealed that less than half this number of students were attending school in Putnam County.

A Bloomington Springs resident complained in a letter published in the Putnam County Herald in 1907 about “paying taxes for children to go to school free, but having no law to require them to attend school.” The writer challenged someone to go to the legislature and pass a law to make children go to school, or do away with the free school system.

The number of country schools during the first half the century was rarely less than 70 and sometimes more than 90. As the population of a community grew or dwindled, so did the schools.

Earnings for country teachers at this time averaged \$25-40 per month, and about \$8 of that was used for room and board.

In 1904, Monterey High School, a combined grammar and high school, had 256 students enrolled, including students taking the two years of secondary education offered.

In the Dec. 14, 1904, edition of the Putnam County Herald, S.B. Yeargan of Monterey High School writes in the prose of the era, "The morale of this school is excellent and constantly improving. I have never had so large a school that was so easily controlled. The nervous strain so common in many schools is almost entirely wanting."

Two years of secondary education was also provided by Cookeville City School until 1914, when Dixie College began offering a four-year high school. Two years later, the high school consolidated with Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, a state college. The high school remained with TPI until 1924, when the college began dropping a year of high school each year as it added a year's college work to become a four-year college. By 1928, all high school classes had been moved to City School.

High schools were also established in Algood and Monterey during the 1920s. A \$30,000 school was built in Algood in 1921, and a combined grammar and high school was constructed in Monterey in 1926. Baxter Seminary, first operated by the Methodist Episcopal Church, was also a combined school for grades 1-12. The school, known for its high academic standards, was contracted by the Putnam County School Board in 1922 to provide secondary education for students in the western part of the county; the school then became a high school.

A \$100,000 three-story brick building was constructed in 1920 to replace the City School on the same site. The school was attended free by Cookeville students and was also attended by tuition-paying students from out of the county. The new City School opened in 1921, and in addition to its 25 classrooms, it offered modern facilities such as a gymnasium and cafeteria.

Velma Thompson, who moved into the new school during second grade, still enjoyed recess under the big shady oaks and continued to build playhouses. But the playground now had some swings.

She recalls the big swings on the playground and marvels that "no one was killed because they were just bicycle frames hooked onto a chain out in the big oak trees. Mr. Greer, one of the teachers, would swing me up to the top of those trees, and all I had to do was turn loose, and that would have been it."

Another thrill enjoyed by some City School students was sliding down the fire escapes.

The "old City School," though only 21 years old, was torn down in 1922.

Originally built as a grammar school, three years after it opened, the "new" City School was also housing the four-year high school.

In spite of the Depression, education in Putnam County made huge strides during the 1930s.

By 1930, the previous enrollment of 400-plus students at the old City School had doubled to more than 800 students at the “new” City School. Added to that number were the approximately 300 high school students.

Community leaders, along with the Putnam County Herald, proposed building a new high school as early as 1928. The county court met twice during 1930 to consider this proposal, and twice rejected it.

Although the country was experiencing an economic depression at the time, newspaper reports of the meetings did not mention the Depression as the reason for the court resisting the building of the school. In fact, the front pages of the Putnam County Herald throughout year of 1930 reported on the opening of many new business and the arrival of new industries, as well as improved telephone service.

Agreement was finally reached in April 1931 to build a new high school, and the building was ready for occupancy by students at the beginning of the 1932-33 school year. Enrollment at the high school jumped by nearly 100 students in the first year. The next 20 years saw two new wings added to the building.

In 1936, a two-cent tax was levied for construction of a high school for black students living in Cookeville. Previously in 1928, the county had built a two-teacher school for black students in the Bushtown community.

With the opening of Central High, the overcrowding at City School was abated — but for only a short time. Within a few years the school was once again experiencing overcrowded conditions. In an effort to relieve overcrowding, a new grammar school, Capshaw School, was built in 1939 in a neighborhood just off the square. The four-room school had four teachers who taught grades 1-4. Students transferred to City School for grades 5-8.

The 1940s saw the advent of free textbooks for students in the elementary grades.

During the war years of the 1940s, students showed their patriotism by selling war bonds. Schools were also used to distribute ration books necessary to make purchases during the war. Classes were dismissed on the days these coupon books were given out. School officials faced a severe teacher shortage during World War II and were forced to fill many positions with people who were not certified to teach.

School populations continued to grow county-wide during the 1950s. Consolidation of schools that had been taking place in the city for years now expanded to the rural schools. This decade began with the decision to close City School, a school much beloved by many residents. Because of the traffic congestion generated by the presence of such a large student body in the business district, it was decided to close the school and replace

it with two elementary schools — Park View and Jere Whitson, along with an addition to Capshaw, expanding it to include grades 5-8. Additions were also made to other schools including Algood, Baxter, Sycamore and Tech Campus.

As the county began closing one- and two-room schools, more bus transportation was provided for students to attend the consolidated schools. It was also during this decade that free textbooks were provided for high school students.

At the end of the decade, Baxter Seminary was sold to Putnam County for \$200,000. This school was later renamed Upperman High School after Dr. Harry Upperman, who had provided many years of leadership for the school.

Consolidation of rural schools continued throughout the 1960s until the number of schools in the county had been reduced to 17.

A fire on January 8, 1963, destroyed Darwin School, attended by black students in Cookeville. The county was denied state funds to assist in rebuilding the school, because the school did not meet attendance requirements. So in 1964, Putnam County's black students and teachers quietly and smoothly integrated into the white schools.

It was during the early 1960s, that a vote was taken to build a new high school to replace both Central High and Algood High School. Central High would become a junior high school for grades 7-9, and the elementary schools were designated for grades 1-6.

The construction of the new senior high school, located on Highway 70 East, for grades 10-12 was plagued by various disputes and even litigation between the contractors, school board and Quarterly Court. The design of the school was a new concept featuring clusters of classrooms that branched from the school's gymnasium, cafeteria and auditorium. This design, which some people said gave the building an “extraterrestrial appearance,” immediately met with the disapproval of many residents, because of the inconvenience placed on students who had to go outdoors to change classes. And as soon as it was occupied, the school was again overcrowded.

During the 1970s, local schools focused on improving their programs and maintaining the always overflowing classrooms. During this decade, some schools were forced to add portable classrooms to accommodate the enrollment. A new elementary school, Northeast Elementary, was built on Old Kentucky Road.

Putnam County schools continued to struggle with overcrowded conditions during the 1980s. In addition to the lack of space, aging schools were showing signs of wear.

And once again, school officials expressed the need for a new high school. A 1980s Task Force studied the situation and decided the best way to create enough space for schools was to build a new high school and eliminate the K-6, 7-9 and 10-12 structure by returning to a four-year high school and establishing two middle schools.

After much debate about whether to build one or two high schools and where to build, construction began on a state-of-the-art facility on North Washington Avenue that cost more than \$40 million. The new high school, the largest in the state, would be called Cookeville High School and provide instruction for grades 9-12.

The former Central High School, turned into a junior high school, would now become Prescott Central Middle School for fifth and sixth-graders. Much of the building which housed the senior high school was torn down and rebuilt for seventh and eighth-graders as another middle school known as Avery Trace Middle School.

As the 1996-97 school year began, all Putnam County elementary schools became K-4 schools. Newly constructed Cane Creek Elementary, on the western edge of town, opened for the 1996-97 school year in hopes it would further reduce the overcrowding in the elementary schools.

More new schools were on the horizon as Putnam County entered the 21st century. Burks Middle School in Monterey and Algood School both opened in impressive new facilities for the 2001-02 school year.

In January 2003, Upperman High School in Baxter moved into a new building on the Nashville Highway. And in May 2003, Capshaw students moved into a new structure built behind the main school building that still included those first four rooms built in 1939. The older section has now been torn down, and a newer wing has been renovated.

Now with a firm foot in the 21st century, the challenges before Putnam County and its educators no longer include just staying abreast of an ever-growing school population and national test scores. A sizable group of Hispanic students are now being taught in Putnam County classrooms, as well as a number of children of other nationalities and languages. Most schools have a number of children with special physical and emotional needs to be met.

Foremost is probably the challenge of preparing students for a rapidly changing world. Yes, education has a ways to go in Putnam County. But a look back in history shows how far the school system in Putnam County has come during the last century. And the progress and improvements have come during a depression, several wars and myriad disagreements.

School bus routes -- Bus transportation in Putnam County was first provided in the 1930s and limited to the high schools and a few elementary schools

By BOBBIE BRUTON, Herald-Citizen staff

Walking to school with feet cold and numb from a snow-covered rural road, Betsy and Tacy, in a book by the same name and written by Maude Hart Lovelace, take flight on one of their many trips to fantasy land.

The two 8-year-olds, in a story set in the early 1920s in Minnesota, imagine that a horse pulling a house on a wagon fastened to runners stops for them and gives them a ride to school. Inside the “house” is a pot-bellied stove that warms them as they enjoy a smooth ride over the frozen roads. Within the reaches of their early 20th century imagination, these two best friends envisioned a concept of transportation that would later be available to children everywhere—the school bus.

For Putnam County children, school bus transportation first became available in the 1930s with limited routes.

Jack Barton, former supervisor of Putnam County’s school transportation, doesn’t know the exact year when bus service was first provided for Putnam students. A map dated in 1937 shows eight bus routes covering the entire county, which had approximately 95 schools at that time.

The map shows a large circular bus route with a bus picking up kids and dropping them off at a country elementary school. Then the bus went a little further and dropped off kids at the next school.

Some of the early buses were large, van-styled vehicles with linear wood benches. A set of seats were placed on the outside, and a couple of rows ran down the middle, all in line with the vehicle. A seat also stretched across the back of the bus.

Although the early buses gave some protection from the elements, comfort was surely lacking.

“What I’ve heard is that if you had what was called a 48-passenger bus, and buses are rated according to three to a seat, which is horribly crowded to begin with, that children would be literally stacked in the aisles. There might be as high as 65 kids on a bus,” recalled Barton.

Until 1966, all of the buses that transported Putnam County children were under private ownership through individual contracts with the Board of Education. Exactly how many buses were available under this system is unknown.

Putnam County took ownership of the buses in 1966. During the first year of ownership, Putnam County bought 35 new buses.

“They also bought a few of the newest buses from the contractors and leased a few,” said Barton. “New buses at this time were estimated to have a road life of 10 years.”

One story told to Barton about one of the private contractors was that the “bus” used to transport school children in Calfkiller was actually a farm truck. The truck had a covered stock rack and was also used to haul livestock.

As the story goes, the kids really dreaded cattle sale day and the strong odor that remained from the four-legged passengers that rode on the “bus” that day. The owner of this truck would haul kids to school, go to the cattle sale and then return to school to pick up the kids.

When Barton came on board with the school transportation department in 1966, most of the roads traveled by Putnam County buses were dirt or gravel roads. Wet weather back then presented as much of a problem getting kids to and from school as snow does today. During times of rain, Barton remembers “the roads would just disappear.”

The entire bus route back then had no locations listed except for people's homes. Directions given to bus drivers might include these examples: “Go to Bob Smith's house and turn right. Go down to the Melvin place and turn left, or go to the Burton house and turn right.” If the driver didn't know the families of the area, he was lost. With most roads unnamed, only family homes and maybe the name of a store or a church close by provided a clue to location.

Some kids who were picked up and taken to school in the morning still had to walk home in the afternoon. Buses did not complete the circle of the map, so if kids were on the route going to school, then they might not be on the route for the return trip home. Now, buses always provide a way to and from school.

Barton, who began driving a bus when he was a student at Tennessee Tech University, remembers his first year on the job as the most memorable one.

A surprise snow storm that began just before dawn on Wednesday, Nov. 2, 1966, and by day's end had left 11 inches of snow on the ground, broke all Putnam County records for the earliest snowfall and left the bus system in disarray.

“That was a real test,” said Barton. “I know we got out of school at noon, and the last child got home at 10 that night. The buses couldn't even move.

“The snow started about the time the route started at 6 a.m. Back then I ran the equivalent of three routes. By the time I came off Brotherton Mountain into Algood, there was about four inches of snow on the ground.”

All the buses made it to school, but by the time school was dismissed at noon, getting children home had become questionable.

“My routes at that time were up on Brotherton Mountain and Rocky Point, and I couldn't get up either mountain,” Barton continued. “So I eventually went back to my apartment and kept kids with me there for several hours until I was told they were going to try again with some maintenance jeeps. My apartment then was located in Holiday Hills, and the bus wouldn't make the first turn.”

Barton put chains on his car and took the children to the foot of the mountain where a jeep was waiting to take children up to their homes.

“Back then a child might walk a mile to catch the bus,” Barton said. “The jeep took the children down roads the bus normally didn’t travel to get them home that night. Parents were waiting at the end of these roads in snow up their waist for their kids. Parents couldn’t even get out to go pick up their kids. The road from Algood leading up to Brotherton Mountain was literally blocked with cars that couldn’t make it up the mountain.”

After a harrowing afternoon and night, all the children were safely delivered to their relieved parents, who could do nothing but wait.

The design and operation of buses has continued to improve over the years, since the days of vehicles with a capacity of 24, 36 and 48 passengers.

Buses used to be able to operate at a 20 percent overload, but this practice was discontinued about five years ago. But according to Barton, a bus at capacity is actually an overcrowded bus.

“Buses allow 13 inches of seating space per passenger,” Barton explained. “You put 84 kids on an 84-passenger bus and you will literally have one child who is half out into the aisle.”

Buses still are not air conditioned. It is available, but very expensive. Generally, what the bus requires for this is a second diesel engine. The engines on buses are not large enough to operate the buses and the air conditioning.

To help out with the heat problem, windows are tinted and roofs are painted white. A study found that if identical buses are parked in the hot sun and one had tinted windows and a white roof they heat up 25 degrees less than the one without tinted windows and a white roof.

The first buses were heated nominally, and mostly included the area around the driver and the front of the bus. Today's buses have more than adequate heat from the front to the back.

A warm ride to school is no longer a fantasy.

Central High School finds a new home

By BOBBIE BRUTON, Herald-Citizen staff

For many years, high school students in Putnam County were bounced from one place to another, sharing space with college students and then grammar students, never finding a real home.

Velma Thompson of Cookeville was a member of the last high school graduating class at City School in 1932. She and her classmates shared a building with grammar school students.

“We didn’t see much of the younger students,” she recalled. “Our classes were all on the first floor, and the younger grades were on the upper floors.”

Cookeville officials and the Putnam County Herald began promoting the idea of a permanent home for high school students in 1928.

In a special session of the county court on Feb. 10, 1930, that lasted more than four hours, the first vote was taken on whether to build a new high school in Cookeville.

Speeches were made in favor of a new high school noting that a special session of the legislature had enacted a bill requiring that each county build and maintain a high school in the county seat of the respective county.

Others at the meeting stressed the need to serve the first and surrounding districts and the value of the school to the county.

But when the vote was taken, it was soundly defeated with 30 voting against it, eight voting for it and seven not voting.

Another meeting was held that summer to try and figure out what to do with the more than 800 grammar school students and the 340 high school students, all housed in the City School.

One suggestion was to move the lower grades out of City School and school them in churches. But that idea didn’t meet with the approval of citizens.

For that year, the problem was finally resolved by allowing one floor of the building to be used for high school students for the 1930-31 school year.

The issue of voting bonds for a new high school was finally put to the voters in 1931 and passed.

Fourteen acres of land were purchased north of town to build the school. When construction of the school was completed in 1932, it had 14 classrooms, a modern cafeteria with a steam table, a gymnasium, science labs, an auditorium and facilities for vocational and home economics courses.

On Sept. 5, 1932, a few days before the school opened for classes, the public was invited to tour the new building. The Putnam County Herald reported that those who toured the new school were impressed and pleased with what they saw.

James Grogan and his wife, Billye Marguerite Lee Grogan were students at Central High School from 1936-40. Central High School was not a meeting place for the two, who actually met in first grade at City School. The only class the two shared while at Central High was a Latin class.

The school had clubs related to the courses offered, and Grogan was a member of the FFA (Future Farmers of America). This club, as did many of the others, held a banquet each year.

Grogan took agricultural courses at the high school and remembers David Terry, the agriculture teacher, as one of the teachers he liked most.

“I had a good English teacher, too,” he said. “She was Sheila Officer. She was strict, but she was a good teacher.”

Grogan remembers the school as “really modern for its day.”

Although the school had a cafeteria and served hot lunches, most students continued to bring their lunches from home. Students were not required to eat in the cafeteria and could, in fact, eat their lunch outside or just about anywhere they wanted to.

With the opening of the new high school, Putnam County began providing bus transportation for students who lived outside the city. This early bus system, which was privately contracted, included two buses as well as some private cars used to transport students.

“We thought we were living high, going to a new high school,” Grogan said.

This past spring, Prescott Central Middle School students, who now occupy the building, celebrated the 70th anniversary of what was once Central High School.

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