

September 2021

History Matters

A Publication of the Friends of the Rogers Historical Museum



School Memories

A Note from Sandy



Thoughts by Joan Bender

When schools open again at the end of summer, many of us think about our own school experiences. These memories are frequently hallowed, occasionally grim, but always personal. To celebrate some of those memories, we are publishing a special edition of *History Matters*, focusing on some of the old schools in the Rogers School District.

There were many small schools in the district, usually covering grades 1-8. These students all went to the regal Rogers Public High School on West Walnut in Rogers. Of the schools in our stories, Avoca, Rogers Public High School, and Sunnyside have disappeared, Central Ward enjoyed extensive renovation and became Tillery, while Maple Grove serves other purposes.

Garfield School is an exception; It covered grades 1-12 until it became part of the Rogers School District. The high school was closed, but the rock building still serves as an elementary school.

We have only covered a few of the many tiny schools that dotted the area before consolidation. As noted, these are not meant to be the histories of the schools. They are memories of students who attended the schools. We hope you enjoy listening to the school bell ring again!

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History Matters

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Avoca Elementary School

By Linda Bray Setser

Children in the Avoca area attended a two-story wood school. Grades 1-2 were in one classroom with Mrs. Clara Dick, teacher. Grades 3-4 were in one classroom with Miss Aliene Fielding, teacher. Grades 5-6 were in one classroom with Mrs. Vada Zimmerman, teacher. We had 20-25 students per room.

Grades 1-2 were on the floor level as stairs to the second floor were very steep for small legs. Stairs on each side of the school gave access to the second floor. Of course, the school just shook as the students clambered down the stairs for recess and lunch.

We had a small kitchen, with Mrs. Nora Bishop as our cook. We had nothing fancy but just good eating. As we had no running water, Mrs. Bishop utilized water tanks to help with meal prep. She did great food and treated students as her own.

With no water, we had no indoor facilities. Yes, we went to the dreaded outdoor toilet winter or summer.

We had a wood stove to heat the entire first and second floors. Mr. Ike Bray was our local custodian and lived nearby, so he made several trips a day to ensure we had heat in wintertime. No air conditioning, just the open windows and fresh air in warmer weather.

Recess was mostly playing baseball on the parking lot shared with the First Christian Church. Our teachers even got into the games.

One Christmas season we were treated to a surprise party from a Rogers organization, and they came with gifts for each student. We later learned they made the holiday party for students less fortunate than others. It was really embarrassing when we discovered this as we all thought we had it pretty good. We all had good families, plenty of love, plenty of food, and certainly all the great friends we had at school.

Avoca Elementary School closed in 1954 and classes moved to Northside Elementary in Rogers. The building has been torn down, and a new building at the site houses the Avoca Fire Department.

Central Ward Elementary School

By Ben L. Bassham

So, is this what happens in every guy's home town: you move away and they start tearing down all his old school buildings?

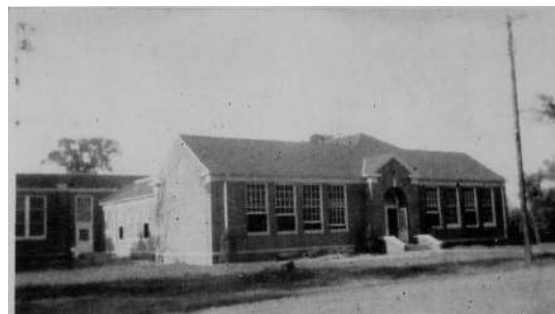
First the majestic Rogers High School on Walnut, the work of a local architect with a fine sense of style, falls under the wrecking ball. Then the Central Ward Elementary School nearby caught fire, was judged to be unsalvageable, and, poof, its elegant little red-brick and limestone self is no more. Too bad.

Yes, it's gone, but it still occupies a tiny niche in my mind. The building was pleasing to the eye and scaled perfectly to fit our own little selves, who spent six of perhaps the most important years of our education in its rooms and halls, with teachers who seemed to love us and whom we loved right back. Under their guidance we pledged allegiance to the flag, learned our multiplication tables, got to know adverbs and adjectives, and progressed from our original savage states to improved, if perhaps still not perfect, American citizens.

At recess we played cowboys and Indians, with rocks as "gold," and joined, boys and girls together—how exciting!--to play "Red Rover" on a playground that seemed as big as a national park.

In September it was a little thrilling to return to Central Ward to enjoy the fragrance of freshly waxed floors and to reunite with our pals after a long, hot Arkansas summer. And, most important, to fall under the spell of a new teacher, whom we would do our best to please.

So does Central Ward remain in memory, the place where I first learned the worth and wonder of learning.



On the Cover:

Front Cover: Maple Grove School, Ms. Jesse Holyfield's class in the 1931-32 school year.

Back Cover top: Southside School just before it was demolished in 2008.

Back Cover bottom: History Club Meeting September 16 at Key Wing, Rogers Historical Museum.

Garfield School

Chinquapins for Barter*

By Bob Ross

I was an inmate at Garfield School on most days from 1948 to 1956. This included first through eighth grades with the exception of serving a one-year sentence in fourth grade at Pea Ridge. Classmates were the likes of Kenneth Green, Gene Beard, Carroll Dye, Jackie Tacker, Jackie Tate, Charlene Ford, Joy Carter, Sally Grace, Mary Ann Wilks, and a few other notorious characters.

Garfield was, of course, a country school—much more so then than now. So it will come as no surprise to other country folks of that time that in autumn we would come to school armed with pockets full of chinquapins. These went by other names such as chickeepins, chuckapins, burrnuts, etc. They also had some profane names, and you would understand why if you ever tried to get one out of the burr. But regardless of the name, they were more valuable than money. (Money doesn't taste good nor is it nutritious so it is normally eaten only by babies.) These nuts were highly prized and could be traded for any number of things.

Newcomers and young folks need to know that the chinquapin was once a magnificent nut-bearing tree here in the Ozarks. Related to the chestnut and with trunks that sometimes reached four feet in diameter, it produced a prickly burr (ouch) that contained a dozen or so nuts. These looked like small acorns. Crack the shell and put the “meat” in your mouth and you will know that this was God's greatest attempt at food. More than one kid of that time got a bloody nose over chinquapin ownership disputes. But alas, the relationship with the chestnut was the tree's undoing. In the late 1950s and early '60s, a fungus called the chestnut blight killed these elegant trees seemingly overnight. Young shoots still grow from old stumps, but when they begin to fruit, the blight kills them. Future generations may never know the delight of attempting to beat the squirrels to these delicacies. But I digress.

Because of arguments and due to hulls being left everywhere, chinquapins became forbidden fruit on Garfield School campus. This, of course, didn't stop anyone from bringing them. We just kept them hidden a little better. Two of the wardens who enforced this rule were Agnes Bruce and Rose Neal Stewart. Mrs. Stewart taught English and cracked the whip over study hall, and there lies the heart of this little tale.

Veterans of Garfield School will remember that in the room that served as study hall there were two delightful structural flaws. One was a window that could be opened anytime from the outside. (My brother David and some of his pals threw a road-killed possum through this one night at the beginning of a school vacation. To say that it was ripe when we returned to school would be an extreme understatement.) The other flaw was a baseball-sized rat hole through the floor in one of the back corners. More chinquapin hulls went into this hole than could be calculated by the best computer. We would carefully throw hulls in the general direction of this hole and the person sitting closest would periodically push them in.

For one hour each day I occupied this throne. One day, after carefully scanning the front of the room for warden Stewart, I began to quick-draw and eat as many chinquapins as was humanly possible before her return. Hulls were hurled over-the-shoulder in the general direction of the hole. At some point I noticed that my classmates had their heads buried in books and were about to explode with suppressed laughter. My best friend, Kenneth Green, actually appeared to be in pain. The laughter was common but we rarely looked at books so I sensed that something was amiss. Yours truly was the only person in the room who was unaware that the hulls were hitting the Warden squarely in the stomach. She was sneaky and had maneuvered behind me undetected.

There was no place to hide so the usual sentence was handed down—stay in during lunch for two weeks. But everybody knew that parole would come after two days for good behavior so it wasn't too bad. In fact the incarceration was kind of a badge of honor, so it was all fun. It becomes even more fun—and the memory fonder—as the years go by.

*Ross, Bob. “Chinquapins for Barter.” *Garfield and Her Ten Schools*. Ed. Dorothy Ross, et.al. Ozark, MO: Dogwood Printing, 2000. 122-123. Print.



Maple Grove School

By Janice Bender Brust

My first two years of school I attended Maple Grove. The building has stood at the corner of South Arkansas and Oak Streets for 123 years. Maple Grove School opened in 1898 and closed in 1951. The building has been a church for many years. My younger brother was married there.

The school consisted of four classrooms, two upstairs and two downstairs, with two restrooms on the first floor. The stairs to the second floor were originally on the outside of the building. We had to go out the front door and enter another door to access the second floor

My first day of school our teacher, Mrs. Reed, warned us not to drop our pencils down one of the many holes in the floor because we would never see them again. There were a lot of little round holes just the perfect size to drop a pencil down. They were so tempting. One day I couldn't resist and down went my pencil. Of course, I got caught! I never did know why the holes were there. I often wonder about the many pencils that must have been under the floor. Maybe that's why the building is still standing—it has an awesome foundation!

Maple Grove didn't have a cafeteria, and we were bussed to Sunnyside School on East Locust Street for lunch. The lunchroom was in the basement. I don't care for basements. We lined up to wash our hands. I was first in line and didn't know where the restroom was (didn't even know if there was one). They didn't give school tours back then. I went to the only running water I knew of which was the drinking fountain. Got caught again!

Sunnyside kids sat on one side of the lunch room and Maple Grove kids sat on the other side. We just looked at each other. After lunch we were loaded up and bussed back to Maple Grove. I understand the Sunnyside kids didn't like us because we got our meals first. But after all, we spent our lunch hour on the bus and in a basement. No recess for us.

Our playground was across the street from the school. It's also still there and is known as Maple Grove Park. It's a little different now than what I remember. It was just a large grassy area—no swings, teeter-totters, or slides. There was a basketball goal, but only boys played. We played a lot of tag. One day I saw the dial of a toy telephone with a long wire attached buried in the dirt. It crossed my mind that someone could get hurt, so I picked it up and threw it—right into the face of a classmate who wore glasses. Of course, the glasses shattered. I tried to blame it on the wind. Didn't work. Mom and Dad had to help pay for new glasses. They weren't very happy with me.



There were some bushes on the north side of the building and we played with our dolls behind the bushes. No grass, just dirt. Guess how we looked at the end of the day. Mom wasn't very pleased.

One of my classmates was having a birthday party after school, and I was invited. For some reason, the party was cancelled. Didn't matter to me—I went anyway. Fortunately, she only lived two or three blocks from the school. The teacher kept the bus waiting while she came and got me. Another lecture!

There was one location on the playground that would freeze solid, making a pretty good slide. A student who lived close by would bring a bucket of water every evening and pour it on the slide. It just kept getting longer and longer. We were not allowed to stand next to the building in winter. Ice would fall from the roof straight down two stories! Could have been dangerous. I remember how cold that building was in the winter—maybe because of all those holes in the floor!

During the late spring of my second year, we moved to town. I continued at Maple Grove until the end of the school year. I would ride on the back of my brother's bicycle—at least, until we were out of sight of home. He was always happy when I got in trouble at school. Took some of the heat off him.

After leaving Maple Grove I attended Sunnyside School. The lunchroom was still in the basement.

Rogers Public High School

By Bonnie Hardy Deason

“Faithful and true-hearted, let us boost for our Old High!!!”

Rogers Public High School (1911-1960) 500 W. Walnut, Rogers, Arkansas. (My High School from August 31, 1954-May 23, 1989.)



My beginning day, August 31, 1954, was a scary time for me because I was extremely shy. School was so different. At Central Ward I had one classroom and one teacher. Here they assigned me to a section that would have the same students in it, but we would be moving from classroom to classroom, each with a different teacher. And we were called “Birdseeds” by the other students. After a few days, I adjusted to the routine and decided that it was okay!

The RHS Building was already very old with floors that creaked and stairs that had large dents in them from all the thousands of Mountie students that had tread up and down them over the years. The halls were lined with lockers where we kept our books, and maybe a snack was enjoyed occasionally with the student’s head stuck deeply inside. Johnny Clayton, 1954 Student Body President, joked in school assembly one time that the building was held together by chewing gum in the cracks. If anyone got caught chewing gum, they would have to suffer the humiliation of walking the halls with a tin can and a paint scraper to clean up gum from the floors.

Each day at RHS started with a loud bell, RINGGGGGGGGG!! Then there was a mad rush in the hallway to get to first period class (pausing, of course, to see what everyone was wearing and to speak to your “crush”), then students would enter classrooms or girls’ gym on the two floors or basement of the main building or the classrooms and boys’ gym in the newer building at the back. Maybe they would listen to the teacher, and maybe they wouldn’t (no confessions here!). Then RINGGGGGGGGG, and scurry in the hallways again to do as much socializing as the short time would allow, then off to the next class, repeated several times from 8:45 until 3:45, taking time for a quick lunch at the lunchroom downstairs, where government commodities were turned into good, balanced meals. One of the favorite desserts was Wacky Cake with gooey fudge frosting, which, by the way, was invented by my mother who was a cook there.

RHS, like most schools, provided a good, all-around curriculum as required by law. There were clubs to develop all students’ interests: Press Club, Future Farmers, Future Homemakers, Future Teachers, Future Business Leaders, Library Club, Drama Club, Science Club, Yearbook Staff, National Honor Society, and the marching Mountie band under the direction of Georgy Fentem, who also taught chorus. (I took this class. He gave me a B for lip syncing! LOL.) Our band members took so much pride in their form and sound, they made a Mountie proud!

The physical education classes were required for every student unless he/she had a doctor’s excuse. So much so that my senior year I had three periods of it!! I volunteered to assist Mrs. Nelma Fay Williams with two classes, the 7th and 9th, and then I had P.E, the last class of the day. Mrs. Williams was much more than a P.E. teacher. She helped so many less fortunate girls. She was very strict, but we all looked up to her as a role model. It almost made the blue bloomer jumpsuits that we “Birdseeds” had to dress out in each day seem okay. Then for girls there was the Girls’ Athletic Club, and the Blue Bomber and Blue Demon Pep Clubs with their cheerleaders and drill team members. Mr. Beck Scott was our drill instructor.

Football and basketball were the highlights of the boys’ P.E. Program. They involved the interest of the whole school and the town and state. Coach Harol Beisel led the 1956-57 basketball team to a State Championship, the only team to have ever won this honor. The Mountie Hall of Fame has the full story of this team, plus many more outstanding honorees. These can be seen at the current Rogers High School.

There were some really good coaches and role models for the boys during the 1954-59 years. They included Sutton, Tillery, Johnson, Matthews, Seabolt, Camfield, Baber, Tow, Norman, and Beisel.

The Rogers School District Leaders during the ‘54-‘59 period were Superintendents Birch L. Kirksey and Greer Lingle. Secretary to both was the lovely Mrs. Agnes Ford.

President of the School Board was J.O. Rand. RHS Principals during this time were Joe Fay Moore, L.N. Gaines, and Howard Sutton. Principals’ secretaries were Mrs. Rosemary Bryan and Mrs. Kenneth Bland.

May 23, 1959, my graduation day from RHS!!! I was fortunate enough to have Maurice Deason, a distinguished member of the School Board and my future father-in-law and grandfather to my future two sons, present me with my diploma. It was the perfect conclusion of a fun-filled six years for me!

Sunnyside Elementary School

By Joan Bender

Sunnyside Elementary School was on East Locust Street. Walkers came from the area bordered by North Arkansas and East Walnut Streets, and buses brought students from along Highway 12, which at the time was a narrow dirt road. We learned only later that we came from “the wrong side of the tracks.”

The school had three large classrooms and two bathrooms grouped around a small entry. Each classroom housed two grades and one teacher. There were easily 50 or 60 students in each room. The teacher gave instructions to one grade while the other grade worked on assignments.

Mrs. Bressler taught first and second graders. We learned to count on an Abacus and to read using dogeared Dick and Jane and Spot readers. Mrs. Bressler was one of my favorite teachers. When I received my first report card, it contained elaborately swirled and curled letter grades. One of the older students told me that the grades were “Fs”! I was crushed and went sobbing to Mrs. Bressler. She assured me that I was a good student and she patiently showed me the difference between an “F” and an “A”. I decided then and there that I would become a teacher just like Mrs. Bressler.

In Mrs. Douglas’s third and fourth grade room we learned how to multiply and divide. Mrs. Douglas also taught music and penmanship. We drew long rows of circles and straight lines to practice Palmer handwriting. Posters showing examples of cursive capitol and lower-case letters marched around the room above the blackboard. I never mastered the Palmer cursive capitol Q that vaguely resembled the number 2!

Mrs. Tuell, who was the principal of the school, taught fifth and sixth graders. She was also in charge of the large hand-held school bell.

The rocks and red clay playground produced many skinned knees and elbows during games of Red Rover, Lemonade, tag. Playground equipment consisted of a dodgeball, a jumping rope, and rocks for hopscotch. However, on nice days during recess most kids could be found hunting chinquapins in the hollow behind the school. There were many chinquapin trees there, and we could always fill our pockets with those little treasures.

Those were the days when girls were not allowed to wear slacks or shorts—only dresses. I had a tendency to sit on one foot (or both) and came home most days with the hem ripped out by the heel of my shoe. The only time we could wear trousers was if it was bitter cold—and then only under our skirts! Today dressing in layers is a fashion statement. Then it was just bulky.

Most of us lived nearby and walked home for lunch, but there was a small dark cafeteria in the basement of the building for bus students, including those from Maple Grove School. (That school had no cafeteria.) As I was headed home to eat, I often stood and waved to my cousin, Janice, who was on the bus from Maple Grove.

The PTA and scout troops used the cafeteria for meetings. My parents were active in the Sunnyside School. My mother served as PTA President once, and she was our Brownie Troop leader. My dad served a couple of years as the Cub Scout Den “Mother” because he was the only one who volunteered! He taught the scouts (and me) archery.

In the early 1950s a sparkling new school, Southside, opened on South 5th Street, and Sunnyside 5th and 6th graders were bused there. Mrs. Tuell and Mrs. Bressler also moved to Southside. The younger students stayed at Sunnyside until another new school, Northside, opened on North 4th Street. Even though Northside was quite close to Sunnyside, parents requested bus service so their small children did not have to walk across the railroad tracks and Highway 62. When Sunnyside School was closed, a church bought the building and lot. The little red brick building is gone, but its name remains in the Sunnyside Baptist Church.



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HISTORY CLUB

Rogers Public High School,
Rogers, Ark.

“School Days in Rogers”
September 16 @ 7:00 p.m.

Guest Speakers:

**Sue Fleming, Bonnie Deason, Bob Ross,
and Mayor Greg Hines**

Rogers Historical Museum | Key Wing
322 South Second Street
Corner of Second & Cherry, Historic Downtown Rogers

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