

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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KCHS MEETING

DATE Thursday November 8

TIME 7:30 PM

PLACE Cold Springs Branch of
Campbell City Library
3720 Alexandria Pike
Cold Springs, Ky.

Ken Williams is the new editor of the Bulletin published by the Kentucky Historical Society located in Frankfort. He will have many interesting things to say about research and the things the Historical Society is doing.

The library is located across from St. Joseph Church.

Bulletin

November 2001

A TEACHER'S RECOLLECTIONS

By John Boh with the assistance of Betty Lee Nordheim

Third District (1934 to 1941)

At the age of 19, Elizabeth Hall began her teaching career in 1934 at Third District School, Fifth and Philadelphia Streets, Covington. "Like most of us in those days" she had completed but two years preparation at the teacher's college in Richmond, Kentucky to become a "full fledged teacher."¹

After student teaching in a fourth grade class, she had hoped to teach either the fourth or sixth grades. Her assignment came in August to teach at Third District School, and given the depths of the Depression, people did not quibble over assignments. Elizabeth called a girl she had roomed with in Richmond who was completing her fourth year. She exclaimed, "I've got to teach the first grade in two weeks." The friend came to Covington for the weekend, and briefed Elizabeth about the first grade "out under a tree" at her home on Twenty-Sixth Street.

Elizabeth taught two classes in half-day sessions, one each morning and one each afternoon. The old Third District building "was really ancient" Built in 1874, it was 60 years old at that time. Elizabeth remembers walking into her first grade class. "The floor had been oiled until they were black. You felt like you were going to slip." According to Betty Lee Nordheim, school historian, this was meant to keep down the dust.² There were forty-five desks secured to the floor permanently and a little circle of chairs for reading. There was not a book. There was not a picture. "Oh, I believe there was a flag, yeah." There was a set of textbooks, a set of primers. "Twelve or fifteen copies for the reading circle." One group would come up, then the next.

In those Depression years, many children did not have enough to eat or enough clothing. Jean Lutes' parents had a farm at Florence. She would bring in bottles of milk in the morning and the staff would fix breakfast "for those who needed it the most" before starting class. Elizabeth begged for clothes. "We depended on the Ladies Aid Society of the Presbyterian Church on Fourth Street. Those dear ladies sewed all year. They gave pretty little dresses." They would say, "Now you decide who gets them." They all seemed to need a new dresses. Teachers would try to give the new dresses clandestinely, ten or twelve in each class. Some mothers ingeniously turned dresses inside out and so forth. Others found more favor by not doing anything. Kids could not afford to buy books. You did well if a kid could buy a pencil and a pair of scissors. Many parents could not read and write themselves but wanted their children to get an education. Their attitude was, "What the teacher says is right....which did help a lot." Classes were large but "it seemed to get done."

In Richmond, teachers were taught "literally how to make books, print them, bind them, put them together." Teachers did a lot of hand printing of

books in order to have library books. She finally got a big second hand typewriter. To make copies from the originals, they improvised an exotic process of multiplying copies using a cookie sheet filled with a gelatin. The children took home the books that she "had made." She once complained to a student about not bringing one back. Finally the mother sent a note which asked why Elizabeth was so upset about missing a book she had made. The mother referred to the will of God, and implied that it had been thrown into the fire. Teachers did something else that they would not do today.....a black faced minstrel show. Elizabeth once did a picture show of Little Black Sambo from a cranked mechanism in a box. "Nobody thought anything about it [that it was racist]."

Elizabeth had playground duty in the mornings and afternoons. A gymnastic supervisor, Anne Campbell, came once a month. Wearing her bloomers, she took the students out to the playground for exercises or, in inclement weather, kept them in the classroom. According to Betty Lee, the woman conducted Maypole dances every spring in every school, and also put on pageants. Teachers conducted practice sessions. Elizabeth recalled that the old building had no gym but the new one had one "for physical education as they called it." Kindergartners and First Graders did not have physical education since they were in school half day.

All of the elementary schools had "Blue Ribbon" picnic days to encourage parents to see that their children were healthy, that they had their shots and all that they needed such as glasses. The PTA in those days would help if a child needed glasses.

According to Betty Lee the nurse came to the schools two or three times a year to give health checks. If there seemed to be a problem, the student had to get a certificate from the doctor saying the child was all right, at which time the student got a Blue

Ribbon. The school sponsored a picnic for all the Blue Ribbon kids. They often went to Coney Island or the Zoo. "Third District went to Goebel Park! It was a big day, a play day."

In the old school, the fire escapes were chutes. Once a month the principal would recruit a couple of boys to clean out the fire escape chutes by sliding down on pieces of carpet or gunnysacks to prepare the chutes for fire drills. The boys loved it. Betty Lee heard that the school rewarded a student with good grades with permission to slide down on waxed paper. Persons at the bottom of the chute caught the kids. It had to be coordinated so that a student from the third floor did not collide with a student starting on the second floor.

In the late 1930s, the WPA replaced four old Covington school buildings which necessitated some makeshift arrangements. Fourth District students shared facilities with students at Sixth District. In 1938, Third District students paired up with First District at the old Covington High School. The old Third District building had no water. Likewise the old Covington High School campus had outside toilets ("closets").

When the new Third District School was completed, Elizabeth "had the most delightful room you could imagine. It was great big room with a bow window, a big storage room and a bathroom which was very, nice." The kindergarten and first grade rooms had bathrooms. "Being the oldest teacher there, I got the prize room." Everything was new and clean and spacious." Class size was usually in the 30s. At least you could get to know the students. The new Third District had an auditorium too and a little kitchen off to the side where the teachers had their lunch. The children in all full day classes went home for lunch.

In 1937 flood, the Ohio River did not inundate the old Third District building which had about a dozen entrance steps up from the street, but officials let neighbors move their

furniture in. When the flood waters receded, other schools reopened. But Third District opened a "little late," because it had to be cleared of flood victims' belongings. While the 1937 flood was by far the worst, the neighborhood saw regular flooding. "Every spring" children came to school by walking across boards from one house to the next until they reached dry land.

Elizabeth remembers Third District students fighting with St. Patrick's school children. Every time both schools let out about the same time "we'd have a fight" to settle things, it seemed. In those days, residential homes surrounded Third District on all sides.

John G. Carlisle School (1941 to 1946)

Elizabeth Hall's major had been English, which she taught at John G. Carlisle. She transferred to John G. Carlisle because the "salary was better if you taught at junior high.

She thought that first grade teachers should have been paid the most because they do the most work. She enjoyed teaching first grade but "it irked me." The salary difference was several hundred dollars. Therefore, she told Superintendent Glen O. Swing that she "would rather teach what she was prepared to teach." At John G., she also directed all the drama. She "put on plays all year long, but never got an extra penny."

In her first years there, she saw many of the children she had taught earlier at Third District. Third District, Fifth District, and First District fed into John G. Carlisle, one of the very new WPA buildings. The lowest of the four levels was called ground floor, housing the Second District Elementary School. Elizabeth taught on the upper floor, housing the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, John G. Carlisle Junior High. Then in 1971, the junior high moved over to First District and was called Covington Junior High. In 1977, all the Junior High students went to the Holmes campus. Second District then

became John G. Carlisle Elementary School. In 1944 the present two story John G. Carlisle was constructed.

John G. was departmentalized like Covington's other Junior High, John W. Hall. Elizabeth taught only English in the eighth grade and taught all the six periods. She taught grammar, spelling, and literature, including the classics.

The office staff created eight sections "grouped supposedly by ability" and handed the teachers a list. Elizabeth had 8-1 (the highest), 8-2, 8-7 and 8-8 (the lowest). The differences between 1 and 2 and 7 and 8 were like "night and day." Elizabeth wondered how they were grouped because some were better in English, some in Math. There was no advanced placement. Betty Lee said some kids were stigmatized by their grouping. Betty Lee had a student who could "not read a word" but was a whiz at math. In the tenth grade, students at Holmes High School could take either academic, business or industrial arts programs.

John G. Carlisle had "assemblies" every week. They scheduled dramas four or five times a year. It was fun and the children did love it. Elizabeth recalled a conversation with Russell Clark, assistant principal, who asked about a student coming to her drama practices but not attending classes otherwise. He was skipping school but coming into practices. The plays were hard work. In addition, during the War, their drama club put on shows for the USO—involving patriotic programs and Lady Liberty. They had a USO at the Covington YMCA. One of her students did a magic act for the USO.

Betty Lee recalled that in the early days of Covington's school history, elementary schools had included grades 1 through 8, high school 9 through 12. But in 1912 Superintendent Homer O. Sluss changed things. Elementary would contain 1 through 6; junior high 7 and 8; high school 9 through 12. Later on, 9 was added to

junior high. Elizabeth did not recall seeing grade 9 in junior high. Covington ended up with two junior high schools. One housed at Second District was John G. Carlisle. The other at Fourth District was John W. Hall. Hall had been a superintendent. John W. Hall merged into Holmes Junior High. John G. Carlisle became Covington Junior in the First District building. Finally it also joined Holmes Junior High.

Erlanger (1955 to 1975)

Elizabeth left teaching for eight years when her children were born. She is not sorry that she took time off from teaching, but "I missed teaching." Nevertheless, in her husband's family, the women had never worked outside the home. He thought it would be a reflection on him if she went back. However, he soon realized that she would be happier back in the classroom. When both of the children started to school she wanted to teach nearby but not teach either of them herself.

She went back to her "first love," first grade. She taught in the old Locust School building, which has since been torn down, and the Erlanger Elementary School, now the Little School, and at Sunset School, now called John W. Miles on Sunset Avenue.

Initially, "you really feel rusty when you have been away from anything for eight years." She had last taught first grade in 1941. But it was a lot easier to teach in Erlanger. "Erlanger was a very stable community." Her own children went through twelve years with mostly the same fellow students. Elizabeth and her husband had chosen to move to Erlanger "mainly because of the school system and the community." Covington was becoming more transient.

Reflections On a Career

In Covington, Elizabeth did not see much of superintendents—she recalled seeing Mr. Swing only once when he brought some men from out of

town to observe her class. There was very little contact with the Superintendent. Betty Lee says that Mr. Swing presided in the Covington School System from 1927 to 1960, 33 years.

Principals, however, observed classes more often in the elementary school. At John G., you sent the kids with discipline problems to Russ Clark's office, the assistant principal. James V. Wert was principal. But at Third District, the principal was the father figure that the kids went to. He was accessible. There was good rapport between the principal and his students and his teachers. In the 1930s, some principals were women. Betty Lee recalls the principal, Mr. D. B. Hubbard, who would take an ill student home in his car. That was the kind of rapport the principal had with the kids in those days.

In Covington, it was not unusual to spank a child. "It did not happen very often, but it did happen." You always had to ask a fellow teacher to witness "that you were not being abusive, I guess." If the teacher had one she could not handle, the principal took care of it. Elizabeth recalled that most, but not all, of the children knew that if they were punished at school they were going to get it at home too. And that made a lot of difference. You did have some families who did not care. At Third District, even before the War, there no male teachers; students did not get male teachers until Junior High.

In Erlanger, teachers got a lot of support from parents. You could expect "almost all of your parents there" at parents night or open house once a year, but there were always the one or two that you really needed to talk to that did not show up. Erlanger had all kinds of supplies and equipment. All you had to do was ask. It was quite a change compared to Covington.

In Covington, Holmes High School offered a two-year commercial course which her husband and some siblings took in the 1930s. His parents considered two years enough to prepare

for work. After two years, many had to go to work. Her husband went into the service and got his GED when he came out and went on to college on the GI bill. The GED program was utilized starting in about 1944-45. GED stands for General Education Diploma.

Elizabeth believes she was the first woman to get married and continue teaching. Before that, if you got married on the weekend before school was out, there was a substitute for you on Monday morning. The contract was voided, the rule of the Covington system. Unless they were already married, they could not teach. Even widows had to quit if they remarried. In the beginning of the War, Elizabeth's future husband asked her to marry, but Elizabeth declined. Then in October 1944, after being in the Pacific for a year and a half, her fiance came home on leave but knowing that he would be going back to the Pacific, Elizabeth told Mr. Swing she was going to get married but wanted to continue to teach. "Mr. Swing gulped, but said all right. He had no other choice.....he was desperate for teachers." She also asked Mr. Swing for a week's honeymoon. "That was unpaid." Then the next year, she told Mr. Swing that she was pregnant but still wanted to teach. "We just did not have many men even in junior high or high school."

Even after announcing retirement, "they were betting that I would be back in the fall." But Elizabeth knew better. A retirement gift, the twenty six year old magnolia tree in the back yard is doing well. She retire at 62 officially in July 1975. Elizabeth has kept up with many of her students.

Endnotes

1. On October 4, John Boh and Betty Lee Nordheim, both members of the Kenton County Historical Society, interviewed Elizabeth Hall Sheriff (age 87).
2. Betty Lee Nordheim is an historian of the Covington School System.

Third District School

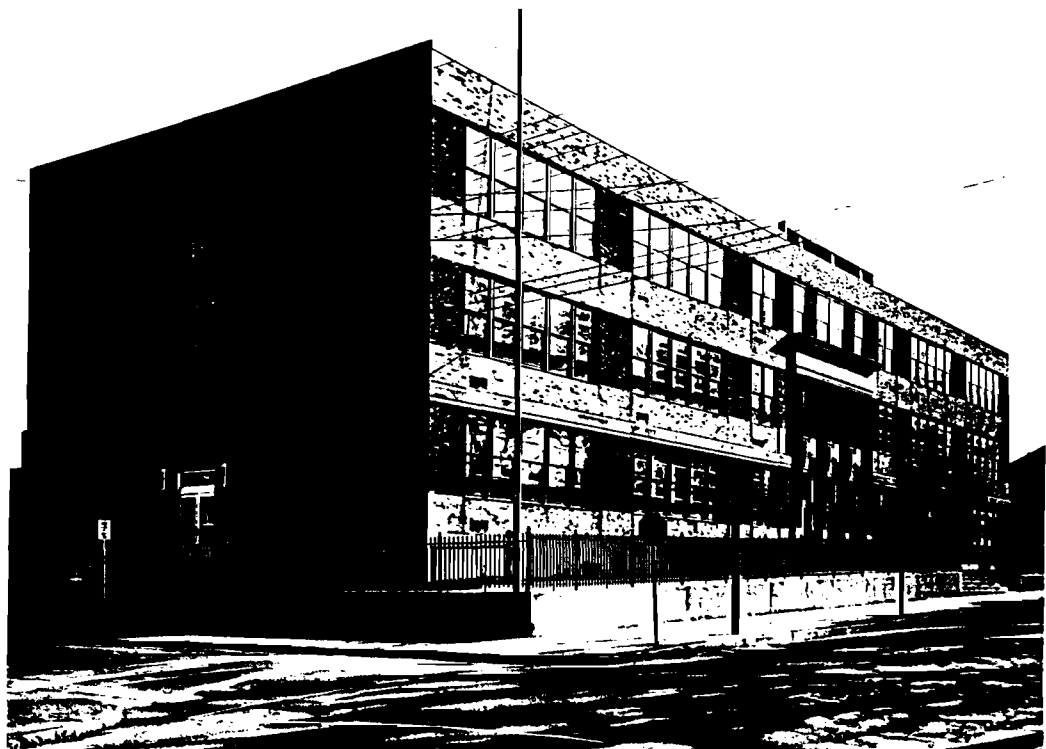
1863 - 1864
 1864 -
 1867 - 1870
 1871 - 1873
 1873 - 1877
 1877 - 1878
 1878 - 1904
 1904 - 1905
 1905 - 1934
 1934 - 1942
 1942 - 1959
 1959 - 1966
 1966 - 1967
 1967 - 1970
 1970 - 1973
 1973 - 1980
 Closed in 1980

J. R. Ricke
 B. F. Yates
 Jennie Davidson
 A. C. Culbertson
 George A. Yates
 A. G. Brown
 George A. Yates
 G. C. Sherwood
 James P. Powers
 William H. Boyd
 Harry D. Perkins
 Bert A. Bennett
 George H. Wright
 Jon E. Draud
 James K. Burns
 Jefferson Herald

Building was sold and is now an office building



THIRD DISTRICT.



Third District School
 1938 - 1980

From the Editor.....

Some of the best history is written in letters and journals. Consider the Ken Burns Series on the Civil War. Without letters, he could not have created such a wonderful series.

Today we correspond by phone and e-mail, no written records of our thoughts, feelings, and actions about today's events. Our great-grand children will not be able to fathom what our lives are like in a war with a faceless enemy.

I have been reading Anna Hubbard: Out of the Shadow by Mia Cunningham. Anna Hubbard had an interesting life with Harlan, an artist, philosopher, and jack of all trades. He wrote and published journals, but I always wondered about Anna's life. Then this book was published.

The author, whose family was close friends of the Hubbards, writes Anna's story out of memories from her childhood and uses letters saved. She laments there were so few letters to complete the picture of Anna.

Letters and journal write history. They may seem mundane to us who are writing about day to day events, but to those that follow and read, they will be treasures from the past. They complete the cycle of life.



Fraternity, Third District
1935

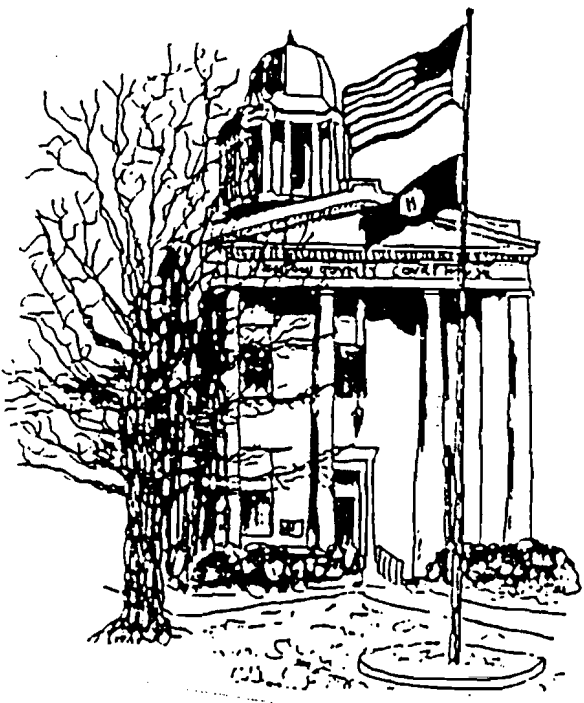


- Violet Lambert
- Jane Harberson
- Lucile Madeworth
- Elizabeth Hall
- Elizabeth Bellitt
- Lula Snuff
- Catherine Crauch
- Frank Horton
- Lena Kuebler
- Label Elliott
- May Silmanine
- Manie Ling
- Marguerite Prouty
- Vivian Buchanan
- Gertrude Lind
- Janie Dearborn
- W. R. Boyd
- Jane Reed
- Margie M. News

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

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INSIDE:
A Teacher's Recollections

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