

SPANISHBURG SCHOOL

1924 – PRESENT

Introduction

Spanishburg School has not been just one building, but several buildings over the years. Two of the older structures were nicknamed the “Alamo” and the “Mansion.” The “Mansion” housed vocational-agriculture downstairs and a typing room and custodian quarters upstairs. The current building was constructed in 1950 with a significant addition in 1982. It has 50,712 square feet. The school grounds consist of 33 acres on Route 19 between Princeton and Beckley.

For seven decades of graduates (1924-1994), Spanishburg School played an important role in the lives and hearts of the entire community, not just those who attended school here. Today, the tradition of excellence at Spanishburg continues. Support from the community and the involvement of alumni still motivate present students to achieve their highest goals.

Our students’ hard work and determination have earned them a reputation for excellence, including our Mercer County Hall of Fame honorees:

Ray Johnson Eads (1925) was the first Spanishburg student named to the Hall of Fame. Valedictorian of his class, Ray Eads was a teacher and spent over 20 years in U.S. Civil Service. At the time of his induction, he attributed his success to the time he spent here.

Percy Lane Lilly (1945) is another Hall of Famer. He attributes his success to a “friendly environment and expectations of family, friends, and teachers.”

Another honoree is Harriet M. Deel (1953) recognized for her achievements in education. She feels that goals can be reached by putting “more into the world than you take from it.”

Deborah Akers (1970) was selected for numerous accomplishments, including becoming the first female superintendent of Mercer County Schools. “Our greatest accomplishments are to feel happy and satisfied with ourselves and who we are,” she said. She hopes students will realize that “as young people, we sometimes don’t take advantage of opportunities. It’s harder later to go back.”

Danny Farley (1973) is another special Wildcat. “The entire experience at Spanishburg High School prepared me for later opportunities,” said Danny.

The final inductee for Spanishburg is Beverly Maxwell (1966). Beverly helped start the Bluestone Valley Fire Dept. and helped reorganize the elementary PTO. According to Beverly, “SHS instilled in me a desire to help others and serve.”

Roaring Twenties bring peaceful times

“The Roaring Twenties” and “The Jazz Age” were phrases used to describe the United States during the 1920s, a time when the country as a whole prospered after the grim years of World War I. Although many have heard stories of the wild antics of people like Al Capone and movie stars, America itself remained sound. Spanishburg was affected by the nation’s culture changes but was able to hold on to its values.

One student to attend Spanishburg in the 20s was Sen. Robert C. Byrd, who was an eighth grader here. “I am thankful for the good teachers that I had at Spanishburg and elsewhere who instilled in

their students the respect and obedience that made learning in the classroom possible,” said Sen. Byrd.

The 20s also created new fads in entertainment, including jazz bands and dance steps like the Charleston, Black Bottom and Shimmy, and moving picture stars like Greta Garbo and Clara Bow. Leslie Cole remembers his favorite music was Bluegrass. “On Saturday nights, I’d drive up to Kellysville to the big square dances they held there. I always wanted to take my wife, but her parents wouldn’t let her go.”

Though many alumni didn’t go to the shows very often, they did find a special rhythm to life in the mountains. “I recall leaving my house before daybreak – we had no electricity – light was courtesy of kerosene lamps,” said Sen. Byrd, “and starting down the road to catch the school bus at the point at which that little dirt road intersected the paved road.”

Radio introduced a whole generation to the media blitz that still reigns today, as celebrities like Gene Tunney, Jack Dempsey and Babe Ruth became household names, and Lindbergh’s flight in 1927 brought tales of adventure into America’s living room. This impressed Leslie Cole so much that he decided to take a plane ride of his own. “On the Fourth of July, we went flying in a cabin cruiser over Princeton with my sister and her boyfriend,” his wife Mary Meador Cole said, “I’ve flown all over in planes, but he hasn’t got in one since then.”

The end of the decade brought the beginning of the Great Depression. “Life was hard under any condition,” said Sen. Byrd, “and one learned to survive or else.”

Thirties students enjoy life, despite depression

The 1930s began with an unforgettable legacy of the decade before – the Great Depression. Despite financial troubles, alumni remember these years as some of their fondest. “Saturday nights were for square and ‘round’ dancing. Going to a movie on Sunday afternoon was a must,” said Lorene Basham (1935).

Promising an escape from everyday life, movies featured Clark Gable, Betty Davis, Shirley Temple, and Jean Harlow. GONE WITH THE WIND and THE WIZARD OF OZ hit the big screen.

School plays, produced and acted by the students, were important. “Some of my most memorable moments were the plays put on by our home room teacher, Mrs. Vera McDonald,” said William Hollis Wade. “One was an operetta called ‘Bits of Blarney.’” Comedies were also popular. In 1936, the seniors’ production of “Mammy’s Lil Wild Rose,” earned them \$30.00.

Bands led by such greats as Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, and Artie Shaw played everything from jazz to swing. Bluegrass and country were also popular. “I’ve always preferred country music since my family were all musicians,” said Alma Farley. Many remember evenings spent listening to homegrown music.

Another source of entertainment was radio, as families tuned in to “Fibber McGee and Molly,” “Amos and Andy,” and “The Shadow.” Students enjoyed social events like card games, pie suppers, and church.

"There were few high-paying jobs. Consequently, money was not plentiful. On the other hand, money was not needed as today. Many times clothing was made by our mothers who were blessed with sewing ability," said Lorene Basham. "When a door is closed, God opens a window."

Forties a time of war and peace

The forties will be remembered throughout history for Pearl Harbor, World War II, and the atomic bomb. For former Spanishburg High students, it was a decade that also included books, friends, and classes. "Gas was rationed," said Janice Stovall Bell (1944). "We had very few extracurricular activities because there was no gasoline."

Students did get involved in the war effort. "We had a Jeep campaign," said Delma McCormick. The students and faculty had as their goal to sell enough war stamps to buy one Jeep. They tripled their goal with money to spare.

When the 1944 class had graduation, there were hardly any boys to accept their diplomas because of the war, so they draped American flags over the empty seats, and parents accepted the diplomas in their son's absence.

"The war had a strong effect on us," said Betty Maxey Carrico. "I had brothers in the service. But by the time I graduated in 1945, the war was over. It was a happy time."

In addition to the war, there was other sadness. On April 12, 1945, Principal Gills interrupted an evening program at the school to announce the death of Pres. Roosevelt.

"The audience along with the nation mourned his death," said Rainelle Burton Belcher. "Graduation night was a sad time also for 1947 seniors. We knew we were parting, and life would never be the same."

There were also a few additions to the school. In 1943, the school bought the old store. That building soon became known as "the Mansion." A second floor was added to the grade-school section. Students remember the good times, including riding to the "prom" in the back of a pickup truck, hiding snakes in bags of popcorn, and being part of the Spanishburg "family."

Fabulous Fifties especially fabulous at Spanishburg

The Fabulous Fifties became a decade of poodle skirts, dancing, and rock and roll. Nestled in the Bluestone Valley, Spanishburg was right in style with the rest of the world. The most popular types of clothing were poodle skirts and oxford shoes with bobby socks for girls and slacks or rolled-up blue jeans, cardigan sweaters, and penny loafers or blue suede shoes for boys. "Girls weren't allowed to wear slacks and boys weren't allowed to wear jeans to SHS," remembers Mollie Gent Lilly (1958).

Students were very active at SHS in the fifties. "Basketball was always a big event at school," said Byron Farley (1957). "I remember playing the first basketball game in the new gym." To support the Wildcat team, the Pep Club was at every game. Students wore pins to show they were members of the club.

Another big activity was choir. Every year the choir went to the Spring Choral Concert at Ramsey School in Bluefield for two days. "Most of us never got to go to Bluefield," said Joyce Cottle Lambert (1957). "I took choir every year just so I could go to the choral concert."

A big event from the fifties was the popularity of Elvis. Most everyone liked Elvis. "My friends and family loved Elvis," said Josephine Conner Wiley (1952). "Most of my family still does." Byron Farley said, "I think all of the kids liked Elvis. My parents could take him or leave him."

Dances of all kinds were popular during this time. Sock hops were held in the gym once a month. Students sometimes square danced in the gym at lunch. Two popular dance places with jukeboxes in the area were TILLY'S and REEDS. Even the guys took part: "Many of us boys didn't or couldn't dance very well." There were often dance classes in the gym at lunch," said Byron Farley. "Many of us were too bashful or too macho to participate. However, when we found out girls liked the stuff, we made an effort to learn a few fundamentals."

A big event where the boys could use their new skills was the prom. Shelva Mills Mason remembers senior prom that never was. "Mr. Fleshman (the principal) had a rule that only SHS students could attend the prom. Our class had a sock hop instead."

"Most of us didn't have much money during this time. We voted for a formal or informal prom," said Joyce Lambert. "It was informal because we couldn't afford to buy formal gowns."

Sixties at Spanishburg still quite normal

Although the 60s are often considered a time of student unrest and social upheaval, life here remained quite normal. "The majority of us were from rural areas. Our activities centered on family, friends, school, and church," said Mary Lilly Pierson.

"We wore bell bottoms and clogs," said Bonnie Maxwell Henne. "As for sit-ins, protests, and bans, they weren't part of our class. That part of our generation did not affect us."

Students remember special times in class like when they tried to postpone a scheduled test in Mrs. Peck's class by asking lots of question. "It was fine until we were halfway around the class," said Terri Clay. "Linda Fink, who was smart, asked a question that was totally irrelevant. Mrs. Peck knew what we were doing, but she let all of us finish our turn. She said we'd learn more that way."

The death of President John F. Kennedy affected Spanishburg students. "Everyone was shocked that this could happen in the United States," said Susie McPherson Bishop. "Even those who were not his supporters were saddened at the tragedy."

Joe Friedl was a teacher when Kennedy was killed. "This is a sad but indelible memory," said Mr. Friedl. "Mr. Cooke had called me out of my room and told me the news. I hurried over to the store, saw it verified on television, and came back and wrote it on the blackboard for my class."

Seventies more than just 'Brady Bunch'

In the seventies, life ranged from the seriousness of Vietnam and Watergate to the silliness of streaking and mood rings. Even Spanishburg felt the impact of Vietnam, as many friends and relatives were directly involved. "Vietnam was in full swing then," said Mark Lilly (70). "When we were seniors, we thought about the war a lot."

In addition to international and national events like Vietnam and Watergate, the seventies were also filled with pop culture now showcased by reruns of programs like "The Brady Bunch."

One student who profited from a seventies' fad was Cathi Matherly Stump, who created and sold pet rocks. Cathi and her mother would get rocks at Mountain Creek in Dunns, and Cathi would glue and paint them into characters. "Cathi took a round rock that James Roy brought back from a hunting trip in Wyoming," said Mrs. Myers. "Cathi made me an adorable snail out of it, and I still have it."

Eighties...not so long ago

The eighties were the last complete decade for our school. Although the world was traveling at an accelerated pace, life at Spanishburg remained "small school." "My years at Spanishburg were good years," said M.C. Caldwell, "filled with many warm memories. I feel a sense of loss for generations to come."

Dennis Lambert agrees about the school's good qualities. "We were a small group and knew everyone in our class," said Dennis. "We knew people in the community and didn't have drugs or gangs."

Marsha Shrewsbury Tesmer believes that Spanishburg helped prepare her for the real world. "Attending school at Spanishburg has been important to my life," said Marsha. "I learned about leadership and responsibility. The teachers were very dedicated to teaching and helpful."

The school buildings themselves underwent major change early in the decade. New wings were added to house high school and elementary classes. At the time, no one even imagined that Spanishburg would someday be closed. "I never thought the day would come when Spanishburg would not exist," said Jennifer Scott Hicks. "For many of us, it holds not only our memories, but our parents' memories and their parents' memories too."

Like other alumni, the graduates from this decade want to keep their memories forever. "Just because the school is changing does not mean that fond memories stored in my heart and head will die," said Dennis. "The old building that we referred to as the Alamo was torn down in 1982, but I can still see it. You can never stamp out memories of some of the best years of childhood."

Nineties bring change to school, world

The 1990s were a time of change, both here at school and in the world. Even before the beginning of the decade, rumors that SHS would close have circulated, but this year the rumor came true. "I will miss SHS," said Ella Billings (1990), "because the boys and girls are not going to get the same chance that I had." Her sister Launa (1991) also enjoyed her high school experiences. "I hated the thought of having to graduate," said Launa. "My senior year was the best with all the sports and clubs I was in, and being crowned Homecoming queen by Ella."

The decade was also a time of change for our teaching staff. As enrollment dropped and the budget tightened, each year the school faced the loss of another teacher. Remaining teachers doubled up and taught any class which was needed. "It was challenging and broke up the monotony of the day," said Jimmy McPherson. "The kids were receptive and really wanted to learn in math, history, and science."

Not limited to our school, change was taking place in the world also. The United States sent troops to the Persian Gulf and later to Somalia. During the Persian Gulf War, Rebecca Lovell Wright (1991) organized a care-package campaign for Spanishburg alumni stationed in the Gulf. "When the troops were away for Christmas, fighting for the lives of others, I tried to put myself in their shoes," said Rebecca. "When people chip in to show they care, it can make

time go by so much faster. It also lets the troops know what they're doing is being noticed."

In 1994 for the 71st time, seniors lined up to receive their diplomas from Spanishburg High School. This time, however, was different; this time was the last time ever. A mixture of emotions, ranging from relief to regret, swept the entire auditorium with memories contained in the hearts of all who have attended Spanishburg.

Seniors Emily Ellison, Jennifer Lilly, Bruce Meadows, Becky Hedrick, Venice Shrewsbury, Jason Thompson, Mike Ray, Sandra Shrewsbury and Angie Fulkerson gave prayers, introductions, and speeches. Reverend Rick Setser, pastor of Kegley Baptist Church, shared inspirational thoughts. To mark the final graduation, he included a tribute to the first, reciting the poem read to the 1924 graduating class – "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

The band, directed by John Shrewsbury, provided entertainment. Senior band members joined the band for their final performance with "Save the Best for Last" and "I've Had the Time of My Life." Andrea White sang "The Greatest Love," and Virginia Gleason directed the Alumni Choir as they sang "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Mrs. Gleason and her Alumni Choir revived a long standing tradition at SHS."

2011...change comes again

The eighth grade class of 2011 will make history when they take their "final walk" on June 8th. The new PikeView Middle School will open in August and middle school students (grades 6-8) from Athens, Lashmeet/Matoaka, Oakvale, and Spanishburg will join together in the new building. Spanishburg will remain open as a PK-5 with approximately 200 students.

Faculty reflections

As we close yet another chapter, current faculty share these parting words with the class of 2011:

It's hard to believe that your time here at Spanishburg has come to an end. Always remember to believe in yourself or no one else will. Live each day to the fullest, and never forget those who have made an impression on you life. Best wishes in your journey ahead!

Mrs. Jennifer Horton

I came to Spanishburg in 1981 and have had many fond memories in my teaching career. I remember the old building because I had to travel just like the students from room to room when the the classes changed. I even had one class in the cafeteria. I also remember the Bluestone Valley Fair, which was a big yearly community event and particularly Mrs. Ilene Myers who registered the homemade items for the fair. In 1982, I moved into the new high school wing, which in the fall of 1994 became the middle school wing. I hope through my teaching career that I have broadened the students' awarenesses to their world. While we were a high school, the students participated in extracurricular school trips during Spring Break and have traveled from Montreal, Canada, to Orlando, Florida, and many places in between. We even went to New York City, where we saw a Broadway play. I have enjoyed my time at Spanishburg, and I will miss my friends and colleagues that I leave behind. Just like the students, I am experiencing a change as I will be going to Pike View Middle School in 2012. Reflecting on my years teaching at Spanishburg, I would like to quote Bob Hope, and say "Thanks for the Memories."

Ms. Melinda Wyrick

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