

First Schools of Pottsville, by unknown

In 1828, eight years before Arkansas received its statehood in 1836, Kirkbride Potts, a pioneer planter from New Jersey, brought his young bride, Permella (sometimes recorded as Pamela) Logan Potts, from Missouri to begin their life in the Arkansas Territory.

They settled in a log cabin on Galla Creek in Pope County where the ambitious farmer had purchased 160 acres of land. With the help of his slave labor, the Potts farmstead produced enough cotton and corn to make a comfortable living for the family by 1848. Soon afterwards, the Potts family began construction on a new home which still stands today. The home was also where area residents received their mail, and was referred to as Potts Station, because it was a stop on the Butterfield Stagecoach Line. When the community was legally incorporated into a town in 1897, it was named Pottsville.

Potts wasn't the only pioneer to choose the area to plant new roots. There are records of people from Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and other eastern states coming into the area as early as the 1830's. A mass migration came in the 1840's and 1850's.

The first school in the Pottsville area was built before 1853. An article in the Pope County History Book by Julia Bryson Oates states, "The Pisgah Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was organized in 1853 at Potts Station School, on land owned by W.O. Ferguson, about ½ mile from where the present A.R.P. Church stands." The area referred to is located on the present Pottsville City Park. At the time, a road crossed from present-day State Highway 247, past the Potts Station School, and past the Pisgah Cemetery. The Potts Station School has been referred to as "the Old Log School." It was probably built during the late 1830's as a multi-purpose structure for the growing needs of a new frontier settlement.

A second Potts Station School was built in 1894 about 150 feet northwest of the present Pottsville Baptist Church. This building was used until 1914 when it was replaced with a two-story brick building at the location of the present Pottsville Middle School. The Pottsville Elementary is located just north of the Middle School. The present high school is on a separate campus on Apache Drive, three-tenths of a mile east of Pine Ridge Road on land previously known as the James Cyril Jones farm.

Just as the present Pottsville Schools are located on different campuses, so were the first schools of Pottsville. Over the past 150 years, several small one-room schools in the area have consolidated to make the present Pottsville School District #61. Some of the schools began as subscription schools in which the parents paid for their children to attend public schools first began after the Civil War ended in 1865 as part of the Reconstruction of the South. At this time, the subscription schools could list with the local county government to become public schools and charge a school tax, or millage for the residents. Not all subscription schools did so. Some opted to keep the Carpetbagger Regime from having any control over their schools and continued to pay tuition to keep the school private. It was required to have schools within walking distance of the students since there was no other way to get to school each day. In the process of consolidation and restructuring of the school borders over the years, some students began to attend Pottsville while their classmates across the road attended Russellville or Atkins.

One such example of this splitting of schools was the Cove School, located northwest of Pottsville on Cove Road and Hankins Hill Road. The actual location of the school is in the Russellville School District but part of the students in the vicinity attended Pottsville Schools.

Two newspaper articles have been written about the Cove School for Russellville's *The Courier*. The earliest article, an interview of 91-year-old Mrs. Erie Ewing Patrick, was written in 1929. The second article, by Ms. Laura Shull, appeared on February 8, 1998. Much of the following information came from these two articles.

Mrs. Patrick arrived in the Old Cove on September 10, 1837 with her parents, Cyrus C. Ewing and Elizabeth Barr Ewing, and her siblings. Mrs. Patrick recalled how "the Old Cove was nested at the foot of Crow Mountain and how the tall grass swayed in the sun for several miles as level as a floor." She and her family camped outdoors while trees were felled and logs split to make a cabin. Theirs was one of the first families to settle in the area.

Once again, as more settlers came into the area, the needs of the community changed. Unfortunately, the need to set aside land for a cemetery came first. In 1849, the Old Cove School, which was also used for a Methodist church, was built adjoining the cemetery on land donated by the Martin family. Many area settlers including J.A. Hearn, Kirkbride Potts, Sam Robinson, Arch Teeter, William Gideon, the Bradley family, Moses Wilson, John Petray, William Shaw, John Morphis, and James, David and Isaac Harkey took part in constructing the school building from hewn logs covered with boards. A well was also dug to provide water for the students.

Mr. M.G. Hearn, a former student at the Old Cove School, in 1904 recalled, "The scene that clusters around the Old Cove Cemetery and the playground are peculiarly sacred to me for it was here I learned my letters at school and received the greater part of my education." Mr. Hearn also listed some of the first teachers as S.D. Packard, John M. Ferguson, D.F. Berry, and Dr. F. Raymond. Mr. Hearn also made a correlation between the textbooks used and the callings taken by many of the students. He said, "The Holy Bible and New Testaments were used as textbooks and this, perhaps, may account for the fact that in after years, Old Cove and vicinity turned out 13 ministers of the gospel."

Unfortunately, the Cove School building is no more. The well is still in existence and functional. Mr. Robert C. Lewis reports that after 150 years, the well is still potable (fit for drinking). He plastered the sides of the 18-foot deep well to use to irrigate his garden. The rocks used for the foundation of the school building were still on the site as late as 1985 or 1986. Once school was no longer held in the building, it reverted to the Martin family, the original property owners.

People continued to migrate into Pope County looking for better farmland. Some came from the hill country east of the Mississippi River because they had allowed their land to erode and wash away. They found the land on Crow Mountain to be much like their own before it had eroded. To them, Crow Mountain with its plentiful; springs and absence of mosquitoes seemed the ideal place to relocate.

Before 1860, Crow Mountain was as thickly populated, if not more so, than the land to the south with the exception of Galla Rock. There were at least three subscription schools on the mountain. Two of

these schools were on the south side of Crow Mountain. The Purviance School was located on the north side of the road 1.4 miles from Crow Mountain Road on Hudson Road, along with a cotton gin on the John Wilaker place. Spears School was just east of the Purviance School, and was to be non-existent by 1915.

Probably the biggest subscription school on Crow Mountain was Kings School. It was located 1.3 miles from Mars Hill on the present main road between Mars Hill and Atkins on the Wilker or Cauldwell place on the north side of the road on a hill.

The only known public schools formed on Crow Mountain were Double Springs, from which were formed Mars Hill and Maple Springs, and Palmetto School. The first three consolidated with Atkins School District #18. Double Springs, formed August 1, 1869, was District #12. It was the second in the county, with Ball Hill District #10 (north of London) being the first, for issuing a warrant to teach to a teacher on July 25, 1869. It was later the first of the twelve public school districts to form the present Pottsville School District #61. Mars Hill District #64 and Maple Springs District #94 were later formed from the Double Springs District.

The Double Springs School District actually had two locations. The first was located on the north side of the road from the present-day location of the Welcome Hill Assembly of God Church. The next home for the Double Springs School, which also served at this time as a home for the Methodist Episcopal Church, was located at the northwest corner of Crow Mountain Road and Double Springs Road, which is ¼ mile east of Meadow Road in the Cliff & Streams subdivision.

The Mars Hill School also had two schools built at the same location during its existence. This building was located north of _____ road by where the Mars Hill Cumberland Presbyterian now stands. It was a frame building destroyed in 1927 by a tornado. The exact date is unknown, although it is believed to have been March 18 as there were several reports of tornadoes touching down in Arkansas on this day. Not only was the school destroyed, Ford's Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, just a few feet north of the school, was also destroyed. The church built a new red brick building to replace their destroyed one, which now houses the Mars Hill Cumberland Presbyterian Church, who have added more space to the back of the building. The Mars Hill School was rebuilt from red brick and stone south across the road from the original building.

The next year after this catastrophe, in 1928, the Mars Hill School was consolidated with the Pottsville School District. School was held at Mars Hill for grades one through eight until around 1950 in order to keep from having to bus students up and down the mountain each day.

Northeast of Shinn's Orchard on Crow Mountain stands a small building used by the Maple Springs Church for a fellowship hall. It has three windows along each side, just as it did when the Maple Springs School was held there each day. It now faces west but at one time had faced south. It was moved about 150 feet to the southeast and a larger church building erected in the original location. The only other visible difference from the outside besides the location is that part of the front has been removed.

Not all the settlers were looking for the type of land they found on Crow Mountain. Some preferred the bottomland closer to the Arkansas River. Many people do not realize that there was a large community that lived south of Pottsville along the Arkansas River bottoms.

Before 1952, the Arkansas River created a large ox-bow, a term used to describe a river that meanders in a large s-shape. It was in this oxbow that many people made their homes and farms. In 1952, the Corp of Engineers rechanneled the Arkansas River to straighten it, start building locks and dams, and make it more navigable during the year for barges. Up until 1952, people could not always use the river for travel because of its flooding in the spring months or being too low in the dry summer months. The Arkansas River originally ran through the Holla Bend Wildlife Refuge.

The Bethany School District #45 was one the schools that served the needs of the farming families of the Arkansas River bottomlands. Bethany School was originally called the Galla Creek School. It was located 1.3 miles south of the 1914 Pottsville two story school on River Road.

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church used the Galla Creek School for its worship services. Its Sabbath School was organized in 1872. In 1877, a separate building was erected as a house of worship. It was called Bethany in honor of the Bethany of North Carolina from which the majority of the people had moved. It is probable that at this time the name of the school was also changed to Bethany.

Around 1930, the Bethany school building was moved to the Pottsville School campus. This building was used for Smith-Hughes (an agriculture program). The Presbyterians continued to hold worship services at the Bethany church for several years. Part of the church still stands but has been added on to and is used for a home. The Smith-Hughes program did not last for very long. The building was then used for storage and as a dressing room for men's athletics for many years.

Further south of the Bethany School was a second school, Pleasant Grove, District #25, founded in the 1870's. It was 3.1 miles from State Road 247 on River Road. As was the case with most of the early schools in the Pottsville area, this school also served as a meeting place on Sundays for church services. South Methodist Church services were held by the Pottsville Methodist circuit pastor.

References have been made to the Methodist Episcopal Church and to the South Methodist Church. These two churches had started as one. The years preceding the Civil War were trying ones for everyone in the South. People were beginning to air their views about slavery. Families, communities and even churches split over the slavery issue. The Methodist Church divided in 1844, with the South Methodist Church upholding slavery and the Methodist Episcopal Church supporting the anti-slavery position. Records show that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was formed in 1847.

A separate church building was eventually constructed for the Methodist church. Francis Marion (Frank) and Alta Jane (Janie) Kinder Burris lived beside the school and church during the 1930's. Their daughters, Eloise Burris Haney, Nona Ruth Burris Duvall, and Mildred Burris Johnson attended school at the Pleasant Grove School. Mrs. Nona Ruth Duvall recalls attending both school and church with her sisters. The Methodist Church building had a "beautiful stage across the front with a banister around it.

The preacher would have all of us little children come up front and sing on the stage each Sunday. That sure did make me feel like I was something special.” The Methodist Church burned during the 1930’s.

The school at the time had two rooms. The rooms were referred to as the “Little Room”, which held grades 1 through 4, and the “Big Room” holding grades 5 through 8. A door connected the two rooms. Ms. Spencer Henson was the first teacher Mrs. Duvall remembered having in the “Little Room” with Ms. Maxie Bullock replacing her later. Mr. Faust and Mr. King were teachers in the “Big Room.” Mildred Burris Johnson was 5 when she started school at Pleasant Grove. Living next door to the school, she would go outside to play with the children during recess Ms. Henson suggested she go ahead and start school since she was already there most of the time. Mrs. Johnson completed 1st and 2nd grades during the first year. When the Burris family moved to Pine Ridge Road and the Pottsville School District, Mrs. Johnson started the third grade at only six years of age. This happened quite often in schools where several grades were taught in one room. Mrs. Duvall also remembers the Assembly of God Church holding services in the “Big Room” of the Pleasant Grove School. Perhaps the size of the desks had something to do with which room was used for the adult church services.

Shinn School was part of the Pleasant Grove School District. It was located on the banks of the Arkansas River. Its location is believed to be under water of the river since its rerouting. Ike and Maureen Brewer’s children, Robert, Rosie and James attended school there. Rosie Brewer Patterson recalls what school was like at the time. Her parents lived in one of a row of houses near the school. They sharecropped land nearby. Mr. Jenks Lacy taught grades 1 through 8 in the one-room school. Mrs. Patterson remembers Mr. Lacy as being a strict teacher who definitely believed in “spare the rod, spoil the child”. She said, “The students really learned their lessons in his class because they weren’t allowed to go to the next page until they had learned the first one.” Even though he was strict, he still went outside at recess, played with the boys and built swings on tree limbs for the students. Mrs. Patterson’s relatives, Earl and Bernie Brewer and Jake Brewer and his wife lived in two of the other houses. Earl Brewer’s children, Raymond, Evalee, and Katharee (twins), and Jake’s children, Ima Jean and R.L. also attended the Shinn School.

To the southwest of Pottsville, there were more small schools. Mt. Zion School District was the 86th in the county to form a public school. The school was located 1.3 miles west on State Road 247 from River Road, and then traveling south on Mt. Zion Road ½ mile. The school was located next to Mt. Zion Cemetery. Once again, this school building was used for South Methodist Church services.

Mt. Zion was a prosperous community located on some of the best land in the area. The fact that it was one of the later school districts formed did not mean that people in the area did not have a good school or did not support the school. The truth was quite the opposite. They just financed the school themselves instead of applying for tax funds. The fact it was used for South Methodist Church services suggests people of the area supported the South during the Civil War. They may have been untrusting of the Reconstruction Government that was in charge of the public schools after the Civil War.

The South New Hope School was located 3.5 miles on Highway 247 from River Road to the intersection of the road that goes north to Duffield Gravel Company and then south 2/10 of a mile. It was School

District #46; therefore, it was formed in the 1880's. Their last building was a native rock building built by the W.P.A., probably in the late 1930's. This building is currently used for an Assembly of God Church.

Bethel School District #47 was organized about the same time as South New Hope, as the district numbers would indicate. Their school building also served for Methodist Episcopal Church services as did Double Springs and Mars Hill. Bethel School buildings were still used for the lower grades until the 1930's. At this time, the high school students were being bused to Pottsville.

The present Pottsville High School on Apache Drive is located in the old Rocky Point School District. It was approximately ½ mile southeast as the crow flies on property currently owned by Calvin Jones. Although they consolidated with Pottsville in 1929, they still had summer school in 1930. Additional information may be found in this publication about Rocky Point.

In the late 1920's, there were three African-American schools in Pope County. They were Gold Hill and Happy Bend in the Atkins area and Norris Chapel, District #93, which was south of Pine Ridge in the present Pottsville District.

It is not known if Norris Chapel ever actually consolidated with Pottsville or not. Mr. (Coach) George Jones remembers traveling with his father in a wagon to south of Pine Ridge to get a calf he had purchased from an African-American man. They passed by Norris Chapel School about 4:00 in the afternoon and saw several children playing in the schoolyard.

The school was located 2.1 miles south on Pine Ridge Road (built in 1939) from East Ash Street. Any traveling done in this direction prior to 1939 required going through several pastures and the letting down of several gaps (gates) in order to pass through. It was located on the western side of the road.

Mr. Jones believes the Civil War. Mr. Parker ran a general merchandise store and gristmill on Galla Creek. His businesses were located at the Mill Dam crossing on Galla Creek where Old Military Road and the later Butterfield Stagecoach Line crossed.

Most of the white population moved north of Pine Ridge after the Civil War (1861-1865) to be closer to the railroad that was built through Pottsville in 1873. When they moved north, they either sold or gave their land to the African-American people who had formerly been slaves.

By 1943, most of the African-American population in the Pine Ridge area had gone north to Kansas City, Detroit and other large cities to work on the railroad or in large factories. It was in 1943 during World War II that the Pottsville School District dismissed school for the day in order for teachers to register people for their rationing stamps.

Mr. George Jones was one of the teachers at Pottsville at the time. He recalls the following about the day: "Each teacher had a small typing table and two chairs set up at various places on the gym floor to do this work. Bill Little's family (an African-American family) lived about ½ mile down Edwards Road off Pine Ridge Road. Mr. Little was working in Kansas City on the railroad. Therefore, his wife, Retha, a very attractive and neat lady, came to my table to sign up for rationing stamps. Today she lives in the Gold Hill area which was part of the Galla Rock area 150 years ago.

Some of the other African-American families living on Pine Ridge in the 1940's were Mace Henry, Eljian Bland, Dump Perry, Fleet Gatewood and Ike Holland. Ike Holland was the stepfather of Bill Little.

As technology made transportation easier, it was no longer feasible to keep all the small school districts open. The *Atkins Chronicle* reported on September 20, 1929, about some of the early consolidations. Double Springs District #12, Rocky Point District #40, and Mt. Zion District #86 were annexed to Pottsville District #61. This brought the total number of children in the Pottsville School District to 344. Two more buses had to be added to the fleet. Therefore, Pottsville had two buses in the school year of 1928-1929. These probably ran routes down River Road and in the Pisgah area. Arthur Rackley drove the first school bus off Crow Mountain in the school year of 1929-1930. The new Pottsville Crow Mountain was completed in 1927. The fourth bus probably ran a route from Rocky Point over to Horse Pen Creek.

South New Hope consolidated with Pottsville in 1949. The state legislature passed a law to require all public schools with less than 350 students to be consolidated. At the time, Pottsville had only 337 students with South New Hope having even fewer. The story is that Mr. N.H. Bell, the Pope County Supervisor of Schools, asked Mr. Wallace Bailey, who wanted South New Hope to consolidate with Russellville, to allow them to consolidate with Pottsville. This union would then raise Pottsville enrollment well above the minimum number necessary to avoid consolidation of Pottsville with some other school. This arrangement has worked well for both Pottsville and South New Hope. It was at that time that London consolidated with Russellville.