

Memories of Big Spring School

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Painted brick red and used for storage now, a small wooden building and the memory in the minds of those who attended classes in it before 1920 or 1921 is all that remains of the Big Springs School. After 1921 it was consolidated with the Cowan school system. The building stood on the side of the mountain near the bluff of Big Spring on Hawkins Cove Road, about three fourths of a mile from Cowan.

The school was called Miller Spring School as long as the Millers owned the land around it. The deed of John J. Miller called for one-half or three-fourths of an acre to be set aside for school purposes. In 1873 John's son, C.J. Miller, became owner of the farm, and his son, Ike R. Miller, went to school here and carved his initials on the blackboard.

In 1896 C.J. Miller sold to George M. Garner. When George M. died, his son, Ed, bought the end of the farm which contained the spring and school property.

After the Cowan Public School was opened, Ed Garner bought the school (Big Spring School) property from the county, moved the building and used it for storing grain.

School started in July with about 25 to 30 pupils of various age groups. Thanksgiving and Christmas usually marked the end of the school year, depending on the arrival of winter. Seven months was the longest school term during the eight years I attended there.

Some of the students lived as far as two and a half miles from school, and most of the boys and girls walked the distance through dust and mud. The Hawkins children (Lois, Florence, Howard and Mildred) had two donkeys which they rode to school. Box supper social affairs were often held to purchase supplies for the school. These fund drives provided the boys with a chance to pick their favorite girl and buy the picnic lunch boxes for them. Money from one box supper bought a large dictionary for the school. Another bought curtains for the stage for a Christmas program and a gift for each of the children.

The one-room building was lighted by lamps and lanterns hanging around the wall. The stove sat in the center of the room. Our teacher arrived early to kindle the fire on cold days. In very cold weather she would let us stuff paper in the cracks of the walls and floors and move our seats in a circle to study around the stove. Something different; we enjoyed it. In small groups we learned physiology, history, geography and more from 8 a.m. until 4 in the afternoon.

I remember the greenbacked Hill's Readers and slates we used daily. We punched buttons in our brain to calculate our math problems and computer other subjects that needed computing by hand

study and memory. What a contrast to mass education and much supervision now. Boys usually sat separated from girls on opposite sides of the room facing the "stage" and large blackboard.

In the fall we sat on the rocks cracking and eating hickory nuts. We bent down a sapling and ride it for a horse. Nature furnished us with a grapevine swing, and when sailing high, we felt like birds on the wing. Some of the other games played outside were ball, Anti-Over, Handkerchief, Skip-to-My-Lou, and Old Dan Tucker. Inside during bad weather we played Clap in-Clap out and Hide the Thimble.

The school bell was fastened on top of the building and was rung by a rope hanging from the crank. Originally there was no porch. Ed Garner and Duff Powers built the porch later free of charge. Lunches were carried in paper sacks or syrup buckets. The milk was put in the spring to keep cool. The spring also provided cool water in a bucket drunk out of a dipper, and we all grew and learned.

Updated Information: In 2006 the Big Spring School was purchased by the Pearson family and relocated from the old Garner place to the adjacent Pearson farm. It has since been restored and repurposed as an art studio and sewing room.

