

MURPHY COLLEGE - (1890-1935)

By J. A. Sharp

Murphy College was the successor to old Nancy Academy, Sevierville's and Sevier County's first secondary school. Nancy Academy was created by the Tennessee legislature in 1806, and was operated until about 1892.

It appears that Nancy Academy operated under the name of "Sevierville Academy" during the last years of its existence, because in the Sevier County Republican of November 12, 1886 "Sevierville Academy" was advertised and its trustees were: P. Stafford, chairman, J. A. Henderson, J. S. Maples, J. P. Wynn and W. P. Mitchell. The instructors and assistant principals were J. W. Trotter and J. F. Sharp and Miss Belle Walker was the music teacher.

The old school was still called "Sevierville Academy" when it open on August 11, 1890, with an enrollment of 130, and its announcement in the Republican of August 15 that "immoral students will be excluded and lazy ones put to work" indicated a policy of strict discipline and hard work as the surest means to an education. The principal was J. Wiley P. Massey, former head of Powell Valley Seminary.

Murphy College was established in 1890 and on April 4 of that year the College's first trustees: R. H. Andes, W. C. Murphy, P. E. Spence and J. R. Penland obtained the original two acres site from the Mountain Star Lodge of Masons. The old building was constructed on this site from bricks Witt McMahan burned in a nearby kiln.

The school opened in the new building in January, 1892, or as the Republican Star (January 15, 1892) stated "the school was changed from Nancy Academy to the College building." Mr. Victor Stafford, a first student, remember this "change" and the College's beginnings. The first president was J. Wiley P. Massey and the first teachers were: L. S. Fuller, Methodist minister, G. W. Matney and D. W. Cress. The college's first personnel was selected by a joint meeting of the Murphy trustees with the Nancy Academy trustees.

Mr. Stafford attended the school until 1897 and remembers that Mr. K. Rawlings and Mrs. Mattie (Nichols) Murphy were also early students. The first graduation class of 1893 was composed of Pink Atchley, O. J. Reed, W. A. Catlett, Charles W. McMahan and Josie Wolf. Mr. Stafford recalls studying Latin, Greek, English, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, botany and psychology in the old college.

Although from its beginnings Murphy College was operated under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, its catalogue stressed that it was "free from sectarian teachings" and that students could attend "any Church desired by their parents or guardians" and that "all denominations are represented in the Board of Trustees and Faculty."

Murphy College was named for Col. James C. Murphy whose contribution of \$1,000.00 was announced at the dedication of the school on June 4, 1893. The dedication sermon was preached by Methodist Bishop Joyce in an upstairs room of the old building.

In the brief space available it will not be possible to name every individual connected with the College during the forty-five years of its existence. However, the following men served as early

presidents: J. Wiley P. Massey, Rev. L. S. Fuller, Rev. J. C. Eckols, Alvin Craig, Rev. J. S. Jones, Dr. E. G. Ackerman, Rev. J. D. Evans and Elmer F. Goddard.

A new era in the history of Murphy College began in 1912 when Dr. E. A. Bishop (1852-1925) became president. Dr. Bishop came to the College from Montpelier, Vermont, where he was principal of Montpelier Seminary, another Methodist school. He was an ordained minister of the Methodist Church, but preferred educational work rather than the regular ministry.

Murphy's greatest expansion occurred under Dr. Bishop. The downstairs' auditorium in the old building was added and a nearby girls' dormitory was constructed. In 1919, the Col. M. P. Thomas property of 63½ acres was purchased from the Thomas heirs. Here, as a result of the untiring effort and great vision of Dr. Bishop, was constructed the first unit of seven planned buildings, consisting of an administration building, a boys' dormitory and a girls' dormitory. The school was moved to the new site and buildings in the fall of 1923 and it was henceforth known as "Murphy Collegiate Institute".

Dr. Bishop was undoubtedly Murphy College's greatest benefactor and the school never fully recovered from his death in 1925. Presidents who followed Dr. Bishop were: Upperman, Davis, Black and Martin.

Former Murphy students will remember such teachers as Elmer F. Goddard, James Keeble, Homer A. Hommontree, Mark K. May, A. J. Nave, Miss Nellie Henderson, Miss Eva Jackson, J. A. Nietz, J. O. Creswell, W. E. Turner, L. E. Sartin, C. N. Sharp, Jr., and P. M. (Uncle Pleas) Atchley. Later trustees who served the College well were: Hugh Cox, George L. Zirkle, A. T. Marshall, M. B. McMahan, Frank Murphy, Mc D. Brown, W. A. Bowers, George H. Wynn and Cleo Burchfield.

The need for Church schools such as Murphy College was not so great after the expansion of public secondary schools. Therefore, the establishment of the Sevier County High School in 1920 had a major part in the closing of Murphy College. Besides, the depression years of the early 1930's increased the difficulties of operating the school. The last Murphy College class graduated in 1935, and the school's property was sold to the Church of God which today operates a very fine "Home for Children" in the old Murphy buildings and in additional buildings erected by the present owners.

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