

Camp History

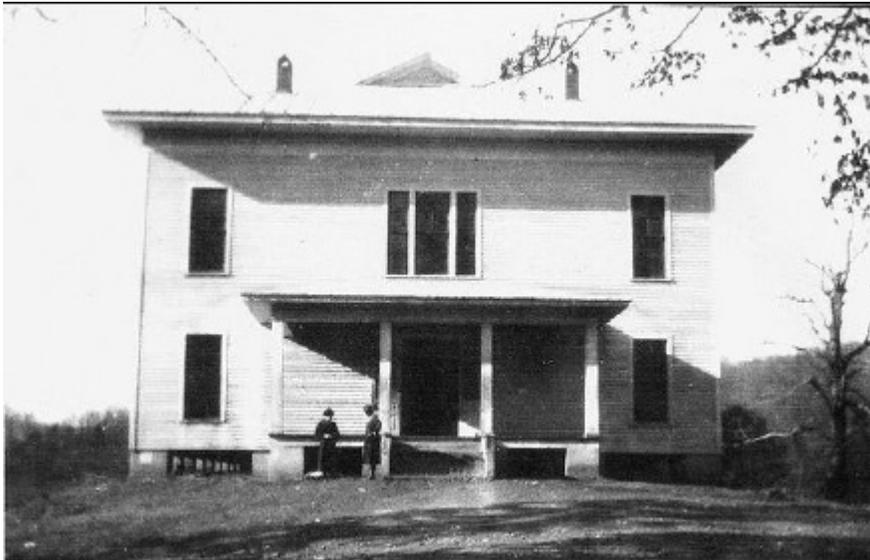
Camp Smoky greatly appreciates the use of this Upland Chronicles article written by Carroll McMahan.

Academy was county's first public secondary school

By Carroll McMahan

Until Sevier County High School opened in 1920, there were no public secondary schools in Sevier County. Since 1890 Murphy College had been operating as a "subscription school" in Sevierville and Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy was established in Seymour about 1880.

Around 1912 the people living in the mountainous area east of Gatlinburg began to talk about the need for a secondary school close enough for the children who lived in the coves and hollows in that section of the county to receive a high school education.



The Smoky Mountain Academy Administration Building was completed in 1915.

Several communities in the area were interested in furnishing a site for such an institution. Rev. J.F. Hale, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Sevierville, traveled many miles of almost impassable roads to see what each community had to offer.

When Sevier County Baptist Association met in the fall of 1914, Rev. Hale lay before the body the need for a high school and submitted the offers of property made by various individuals and communities.

After much discussion, some of which was quite heated, a site was selected. The little community known as "The Sheep Pen" was chosen as the site for the new school.

A one-room schoolhouse, Grassy Gap, and Zion Grove Baptist Church occupied a position on the crest of the hill. The new school was named Sevier County Baptist High School.

This offer included 15 acres of land donated by Rev. Smith F. Paine, a pioneer Baptist minister, and James Campbell. B.W. Clark gave timber and William I. King offered the use of his sawmill. Several men of the community agreed to work free of charge.



Organized in 1908, Zion Grove Baptist Church is located on the campus of Camp Smoky, formerly Smoky Mountain Academy.

Throughout the cold winter of 1914-1915, the men felled trees, sawed the lumber and hauled it to the construction site. There another crew did the actual construction work.

By the fall of 1915, the Administration Building — a substantial, two-story frame structure — stood complete. However, no dormitories had been built. Practically every neighboring family opened their home to students from other communities who lived too far away from the school to commute daily.

The mission statement for the institution was stated in the school brochure: “The institution lives and stands for the training of Christian influence, and the meeting of college entrance requirements in our standard colleges. Smoky Mountain Academy lives, not for itself, but for the boys and girls of mountain vigor and talent, to whom the world must look for standards of leadership and valor, both in religion and national life.”

When the first session opened in September, more than 100 students came from every cove and hollow of the surrounding mountains. But in the enthusiasm of erecting a building, little thought had been given to financing the school.

The Sevier County Board of Education agreed to pay the salary of one teacher. Rev. S.S. Story, a graduate of Carson-Newman College, and his wife volunteered to work without any assurance of salary. As principal, Rev. Story solicited funds but money came in much too slowly.

Rev. Story persuaded the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to accept the school as a member of the system of schools then operated by the board. But before the Home Board would accept the school as a member the name had to be changed to contain the word mountain.

Therefore, since 1916 the official name of the school was Smoky Mountain Academy. The Home Board was never able to adequately support the school but it did pay the salary of two teachers and partially funded the building of a dormitory that served both boys and girls from 1924 to 1931 when it burned.

At the time the dormitory burned, there remained a debt on the building of \$2,800 and no insurance. It seemed that the end had come for the school. But friends in Baptist churches in both Sevier and Knox County rallied to provide another building.

One of the earliest teachers at Smoky Mountain Academy was Mayme Grimes (later to become Mrs. H.S. Hill.) Fondly referred to by students as Miss Hill, she was a teacher at the Academy from 1916-1922 and served as principal from then until 1956.



Smoky Mountain Dormitory, built in 1939.

The school remained under the supervision of the Home Mission Board until financial difficulties forced then board to go out of the Mountain School business. Once again, it seemed that Smoky Mountain Academy was doomed due to lack of financial support. But this time a group of leaders in the Knox County Women's Missionary Union led by Mrs. R.L. Harris undertook to help the Sevier County Baptist Association keep the school open.

From that time the Women's Missionary Union paid the salary of two teachers and gave financial aid to individual students as well. Also, the Emma Byrne Harris Home for girls was made possible by gifts from the group.

In 1956 attendance began dropping because the county school system extended bus routes, providing students an opportunity to receive an education without having to live away from home.

By 1958 Mayme Hill voiced concern for the Academy. The gymnasium had burned and attendance was at an all-time low. The school only lasted one more year. The last class to graduate began in the fall of 1959 with only two boys, Bill Lowe and Carroll Newman, graduating in 1960.

At the 1960 annual Sevier County Baptist Association meeting, messengers accepted a recommendation that the Association retain the property and use it as a summer camp for the co-operative activities of the Sevier County Baptist Association.

Carroll McMahan is the Special Projects Facilitator for the Sevierville Chamber of Commerce and serves as Sevier County Historian. The Upland Chronicles series celebrates the heritage and past of Sevier County. If you have suggestions for future topics, would like to submit a column or have comments; please contact Carroll McMahan at 453-6411 or email to cmcmahan@scoc.org; or Ron Rader at 604-9161 or email to ron@ronraderproperties.com

Camp Smoky offered opportunities for youth

By Carroll McMahan

The 1960 Sevier County Baptist Association minutes includes the following paragraph describing the closing of Smoky Mountain Academy and expressing appreciation to those who made the school possible:

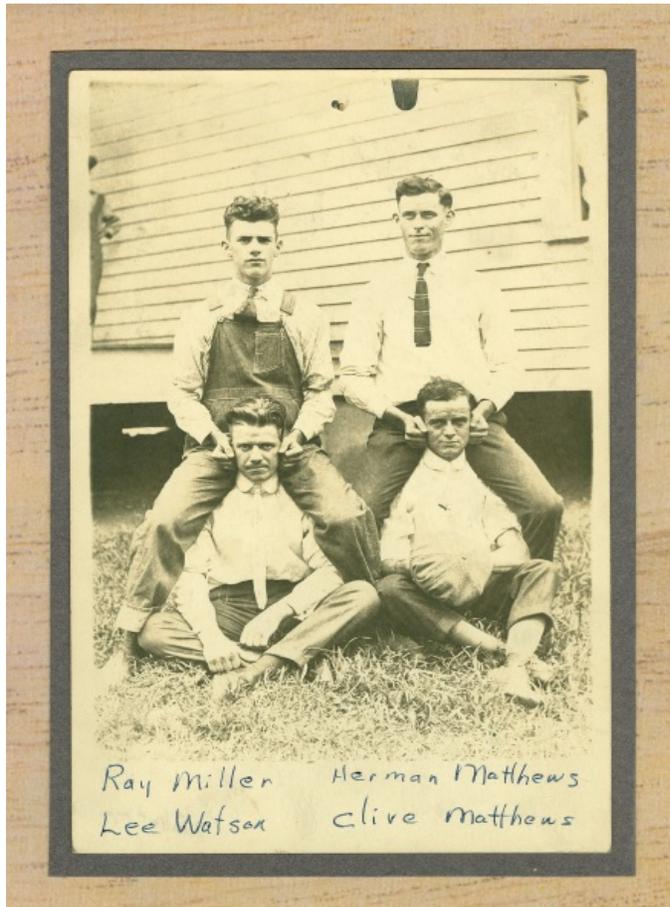
"Since Smoky Mountain Academy has gone into sacred history, we the committee on recommendations, concerning Smoky Mountain Academy, brings the following recommendations:

That one page of the Sevier County Association book of minutes be designated in honor of Mrs. S.H. Hill's sacrificial services at Smoky Mountain Academy, as she so unselfishly and devotedly laid her life on the altar of service.

Also carry her photograph, express gratitude and deep appreciation for Knox County Women's Missionary Union, Dr. F.F. Brown, Henry D. Blaine, R.L Harris family Reverend S.F. Paine and other donors of property for the school and many friends of Knoxville who continually contributed to the existence of the school."

At the annual Association meeting in 1960, messengers accepted a recommendation that the Association retain the Smoky Mountain Academy property and use it as a summer camp.

Although there was some vocal opposition among Baptist church members throughout the county, the Association executive board appointed a committee to develop plans to operate a summer camp program on the property.



Smoky Mountain Academy

Elected Camp Smoky trustees, Ray Miller, Walter Ogle and Estel Ownby, replaced the Smoky Mountain Academy trustees. They accepted responsibility for obtaining a grounds custodian and purchasing insurance. Glenn Cardwell served on the camp committee for 25 years, serving as chairman from 1967 to 1988.

From its inception, Bill Atchley who served as Association Missionary from 1955 to 1976 was an outstanding force behind development of Camp Smoky. Bill and his family gave freely of their time with little or no pay.

With some remaining hesitancy on the part of the Association, a budget item of \$500 was finally approved in the fall of 1963 for a Smoky Mountain Academy Camp for the summer of 1964.

The first camp opened in 1964 with certain stipulations such as boys and girls would not be allowed to attend at the same time. 51 boys attended the first week followed by 38 girls the next week with Rev. Herbert Gibson serving as director. The following year a four- week camp (two for boys and two for girls) was approved. Rev. Ray Williams served as director from 1965 to 1966.

Campers were transported over to Emert's Cove in the afternoons to swim in the Flint Rock Swimming Hole during the first two years of the camp. In the fall of 1965, a special designated "Camp Smoky Pool Fund" was established by the Association. Initially, a condition applied that there was to be no "mixed swimming."

Beginning in 1966, a group of missionaries spent 12 weeks at Camp Smoky each summer. The young missionaries were appointed by the Tennessee Baptist Convention missions department.



Smoky Mountain Academy

The camp program was extended from four weeks to six weeks in 1966 with 236 campers enrolled. The twelve summer missionaries built the open-air chapel, later dedicated as the Bill Atchley Chapel in honor of many years of devoted work at the camp.

Rev. Ray F. Williams served as camp director from 1965 to 1968. Bryan Atchley followed in 1968 serving in the position for three summers. Atchley was followed by John Leeper, 1972; Glenn Whaley, 1973 and Ray F. Williams, 1974.

Barbara Atchley led the camp in 1975 and her father Bill Atchley assumed the role in 1976. Other directors include Melinda Kenny, 1978; Mike Henagar, 1979 and 1980.

Ray F. Williams was back at the reigns from 1981 to 1986. As a matter of fact, Ray F. Williams spent 21 summers either as Camp Director or as Camp Pastor. Mildred Faulks, Thomas and Sara Holland traveled from Mississippi to assist in the kitchen, free of charge, for six years beginning in 1981.

Sally Gibson spent several summers as counselor and assistant director. Two ladies who contributed greatly to the camp through their excellent cooking were Eunice Carr and Monica Ellis. Both ladies were school dietitians who gave up most of their summer vacation to provide nutritional meals at Camp Smoky.

Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Rogers lived at Camp Smoky for 9 years. Mr. Rogers served as ground supervisor and Mrs. Rogers was a dietician.

Several individuals and families, such as Gatlinburg businessman Luther "Coot" Ogle and the Temple and Waters families have given liberally to the camp over the years. Both Glenn Cardwell and Estel Ownby served tirelessly as a chairman of the trustees and committee member.

Representing the Association, Bill Atchley applied to the Home Mission board for a US-2 couple to work in the Sevier County resort area. The US-2 plan provided a missionary appointment on a two-year basis. Thus, it became a sub-committee of Camp Smoky. Mr. and Mrs. Randy Hurst served in the position in 1975.



Lydia Spence & Ora King - Smoky Mountain Academy

The work was so effective that the Home Mission Board sent Stan and Joan Albright in 1978. The Albrights stayed until January of 1981 when they left to attend a Seminary. Randy Harris came in 1981 to help at Camp Smoky as well as to participate in Resort Ministries.

Under the direction of the Home Mission Board, Bill and Cindy Black came to Sevier County to head the Resort Ministries program. The Blacks immediately began a program of ministry that has been added to and built upon since that time.

While the future of Camp Smoky as a traditional summer camp for boys and girls is in doubt, the board is exploring other options for the historic campus.

Rev. Smith F. Paine donated the hill to Sevier County Association of Baptists for the purpose of building a school. At that time the area was called "Poor Hopes." Rev. Paine said "the land is so poor it won't grow a decent head of cabbage, but can be used to develop heads on students." Since the first school session in 1915, young people have taken advantage of Rev. Paine's generosity.

For 44 years as a school and since that time as a summer camp where young people could develop their physical abilities and spiritual life, the accomplishment by those dedicated mountain families almost a century ago has served Sevier County well.

Carroll McMahan is the Special Projects Facilitator for the Sevierville Chamber of Commerce and serves as Sevier County Historian

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Dan Williams & Edith Davenport - Smoky Mountain Academy