

ROCKY GAP SCHOLARS A CLEVER, HARDY GROUP

By Robert "Bob" Rodgers Chaffin
Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN
Sunday, 16 June 2013
'Writers Corner'

I hate 'rithmatic and a hickory stick
but we all will soon be scholars
School board found some fool
To teach our school
and give him fifty dollars

"School Butter", was what those who did not go to school called the ones who did and to yell that out was to invite a rock fight. No one seems to know what it meant but everyone knew it was a slur against those it was aimed at and was done to cause trouble. Typically when it happened the school room and yard would be emptied of every boy big enough to fight or big enough to imagine they could fight.

During the period following my Granddaddy Charlie Chaffin's death, the children who were old enough attended school at Rocky Gap School; a couple of miles east up the river road. I can remember fifty years ago going to the place where the school house had stood. It was during a rabbit hunting trip with Daddy; and he pointed out the foundation, still visible. That was the last time I had the urge or strength to hike up the hill to investigate. I remember thinking what a strange place this was to build a school house. It was on a low gap in the spine of a ridge which connected two hills which lay behind Aunt Eva Lynn's house, and was just across the river from "the big house with the three gables and the wrought iron fence". I could not understand why Rocky Gap School would have been built in such an unlikely place, but Daddy explained that it was to enable the children from the community on the other side of the ridge (The Blackburn's Fork Community) to also attend the same school. (So you see the school house was not "three miles uphill both ways" – only one way).

Schools such as Rocky Gap were a center of not only learning but also of community activity. I remember one Rocky Gap School story which Daddy liked to tell about a time when the school was preparing for the Thanksgiving Play. Everyone was to be either a pilgrim or an Indian, with the choice roles being Indians; at least as far as the boys were concerned. Bob was, however, appointed the role of a pilgrim this year and his mamma was making him a black coat and cardboard pilgrim hat. His speaking part was to say "How thankful we all must be that God has provided for us in such a bountiful fashion" which didn't sound to Bob like anything a real person might say; besides he had trouble remembering the word bountiful and kept saying beautiful instead. He was somewhat concerned since he had encountered trouble with his piece last year at the required recitations at school end. The poem he was to recite was about a cat walking and contained the line "leaving prints like a dark fern seed". Layton, one of his cousins, a twin to Clayton, had suggested that the line would have been better written "like a dern fern seed," since it was a poem and this rhymed. This had stuck in Bob's mind, and sure

enough, when time for recitation came, he had unwittingly used Layton's version instead of the Authorized Version. The teacher had been neither pleased nor amused.

It was at Aunt Eva's house, on the way to Rocky Gap School, where the great basketball incident occurred. Johnnie Joe Lynn had somewhere managed to get a basketball and had therefore become the envy of all of the other local boys.

He only allowed a choice few boys to join him in enjoying its pleasures and since Bob was a favorite, he was in the basket ball "club". Bob and Johnnie Joe were passing the basketball back and forth as they started up the path to Rocky Gap. Around the barnyard, Aunt Eva had an old red rooster named Ben Franklin, with spurs about an inch long on the inside of each leg and was "bad to flog" anything he came across, including small boys if provoked in the slightest. Johnnie Joe passed the ball to Bob and Bob, being focused on whether or not Francis Maxwell was seeing him exhibit his athletic skills, but not being particularly gifted in the area of athletics, missed catching the ball. It got away and rolled down the hillside path and into the barnyard. Ben Franklin, perceiving the basketball as some type of red, round, fat, rooster that was moving in on his territory, promptly attacked; flogging and spurring the gall with his long sharp appendages, he put a large hole in each side. This marked the end of basketball season at Rocky Gap and caused a considerable rift between Bob and Johnnie Joe.

But as they say, time heals all wounds and Bob and Johnnie Joe remained life long friends, even after John went off to Oak Ridge to work for the government as did so many of the young men and women from that area.

They were clever and hardy stock, those Rocky Gap Scholars, and they became part and parcel of "The Greatest Generation. So when you pass the old Albert Lynn place on the river, remember those boys and girls who climbed to the top of that hill behind the house each day; and roll down the window of your car and yell "School Butter", if you dare.

Have a blessed day.

*Read more stories by Robert "Bob" Rodgers Chaffin at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>