

# Mountain Springs School -- Ellen Rogers' "Favorite Alma Mater"

One of the most revered old Estill County Schools is the Mountain Springs School. It was described by Joe and Sonja Estes in the fall of 1998 as being "located between Cob Hill and Old Furnace on Mountain Springs Road. It is near the Mountain Springs Cemetery."

Mountain Springs was one of the earliest communities in Estill County and although fairly rugged now, it once boasted of several large families.

The early schools were later placed a couple of more miles apart in order that students would be no more than a mile or so away since they generally walked to the school. But many times students sometimes had to walk several miles to school until after bus transportation began about 1939.

Miss Ellen Rogers was a student at Mountain Springs and later taught there as well as many other schools throughout the county.

The Estill County schools book says this was the first school taught by Miss Rogers when she was only eighteen.

The late Estill County historian Ed Puckett interviewed Miss Rogers and the following information was related to him:

*We would get to school about an hour early to build the fire and get the room warm. She said that some children wanted to learn and others did not. For example, some children had good shoes and stayed at home. Some had no shoes but came anyway, with only coffee (burlap) sacks tied around their feet. The burlap would be wet and frozen, so Miss Ellen would take the sacks off the children's cold feet and place the sacks under the stove to dry so the children could put them on to return home.*

*Water for the school was obtained from a cave under the cliff on Perry and Mary Hall's farm.*

*At Christmastime, around 1931, the students were cutting out and coloring paper chains to put on the Christmas tree. It was a time of great enjoyment for the children. A young boy by the name of Verlon Townsend became very sick and could not come to school. His sister, Allie May, and brother, Elize, would go home and report on the progress of the Christmas preparations and talk of the treats they would receive from their teacher. Being able to go to school became an obsession to Verlon; so one morning his father, Sylvester, carried his small son four or five miles through heavy snow to the school. A short time later, Verlon died.*

Sometime in the mid-1980's, Miss Ellen wrote a paper that was published in the local newspaper about Mountain Springs School which she entitled "Ellen's Favorite Alma Mater." The text of the letter is given as follows:

*I cannot find a deed of conveyance for Mountain Springs School, therefore I do not know the original donor's name or date. But, without a doubt, it was given by my line of ancestors since they owned the land at the that time.*

*Reverend William "Billy" Rogers, the progenitor of the whole "Rogers Clan" in Estill County, Kentucky, was ordained as a minister in this community in October, 1834. Having a "brood" of twenty-two children by one union and being able to rear fourteen of them to adulthood. The majority of them settled in this area and reared their hardy offspring.*

*After my great, great grandparents were deceased, their acreage was divided into fourteen equal parts as to quality and quantity on the 15th, 16th and 17th of February, 1888*

*My great grandparents (on both sides) attended Mountain Springs School and so did my grandparents and parents. Then came my immediate family.*



Mountain Springs School (at left) and Mountain Springs Church (at right) courtesy of Eddie Rogers.

*One thing for sure that I do recall is, we "the beginners" were reciting our lesson from the recitation bench when our teacher, Miss Ethel D. Stewart, was instructed to bring us and our possessions up to the "New School."*

*How great! Our experience to have a real blackboard across the whole rear end of the room, and we got to use it, too. We also got to share our first "bought" school desks. They were double ones with an inkwell and a groove on each side for your pencil. Remember, at the old log school, a portion of the wall was painted black to write on. We didn't get to use it because the teacher needed the space to put up her assignments and give instructions for the class to follow.*

*The room was crowded with many pupils, and today I can almost hear those squeaking or shrieking strokes that each one made while using his own individual slate. When you got your assignment finished, you raised your right hand and the teacher came and checked your work. You corrected your mistakes -- erased -- and went on to the next task.*

*We had to buy our own books, and we were taught from the beginning to respect and take care of them for they had to be passed on down to the next child.*

*There were no notebooks, work books, crayons, scissors or paste. My, oh, my! What a comparison to what children have to use today and still in need of more materials and equipment to try and do a better job.*

*Compatible! Yes, I must say, Yes! I know and you know there was great intellect in our forefathers or they couldn't have survived the struggles and trials of early life.*

*Please don't neglect the "Three R's." They were essential then, and I know they are much needed today.*

*Our athletic program was great. Our day began at eight and ended at four (if you didn't have to sit in for not doing your class work or having a behaviour problem). We had a fifteen minute recess in the morning and one in the afternoon. Also, an hour for lunch.*

*We were fond of baseball for the older children. Bats and balls were home made -- a twine ball that had been tacked well lasted a long time, as well as one made of yarn from an unraveled sock or worn out sweater sleeve. The bat was made from a limb of a nearby tree.*

*We played "Fox and Dog," "Hand It Over," jump rope, marbles; and playing house was especially good for the smaller children on rainy or snowy days. We enjoyed "Hide the Tumble," "I Spy," and "Mother, May I?" And sometimes the older ones had a good snowball fight or a thrilling ride on a home made sled over the hill in a snow spill.*

*There were no rest rooms, not even a wood "privy," so you had to be aware of a narrow path leading you into the woods in the back. Girls used the left side and the boys went right. You can't keep from wondering how we survived. How did we find or see a clean place to step? Later, we had a toilet or "privy" as they were called. Even later we had a sanitary toilet over the open pit. Today, our pupils are blessed with inside rest rooms, running water, soap, toilet paper, and paper towels. (Grateful for the progress).*

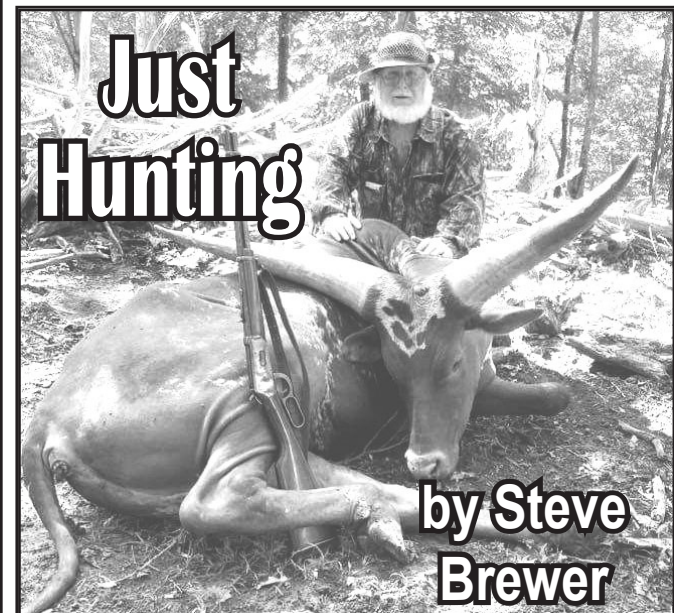
*As I turn back the pages of time, I think of our terrible water situation. Two children would go for a pail of water and by the time they got back, a third may have already splashed out while carried. By the time it was passed around and each one got a few "sips," from the same dipper, it would all be gone and still we would be thirsty. Wasn't it a miracle we escaped death from diseases?*

*A stove (the cast iron type with tin caps) sat in the corner of the room. The ones near it all but roasted while those farthest away nearly chilled to the bone. The stove used cord wood. Later, we were fortunate to have a coal stove to throw out more heat. Today, controlled heat makes everyone comfortable.*

*We had no lunch room and no cooks to fix us a fancy planned menu. We either took us a bag, box, or lunch pail from home. It was always fun to peek in and see what was in store for you to eat. The smaller children always had something for recess to eat. I suppose jam on biscuit was the favorite one, but when we had fried chicken at home, it was out of this world to bite into. Oh! There were other delicious foods such as roasting ears, baked apples, baked sweet potatoes, saucer half pies, and home made cookies. Let's don't forget that we didn't have loaf bread, peanut butter, cookies or cakes. Crackers were gotten out at the store by the hands full from a barrel and dropped into a paper bag.*

*Oh, well! Recall the story, "The Country Mouse and the City Mouse." The fare may have been simple, but it surely must have been wholesome when you look how robust we have all grown. And, we want to thank God for the health "He" has bestowed upon us!*

**CLOSING:** There are several pictures of Mountain Springs School and its students in the book, "Schools of Estill County, Kentucky." We are deeply indebted to Joe and Sonja Estes and Edward Puckett, along with Facebook managers, and of course, Miss Ellen Rogers, a really nice lady, for keeping the memory of Mountain Springs and other Estill County schools alive.



We are back. I hope everyone enjoyed their Christmas, New Year's break, as much as possible. We live in a strange new world, and I listened a lot during our break, hoping to get some nice hunting and fishing stories for our up coming year.

Mostly I heard idiots, trying to tell me this virus is just a form of the flu. When someone believes so strong in their mind, something is a certain way, I have learned just listen, and go on. You are not going to change what they believe, no need in trying. My Mother said many times, "Son, don't get involved in stupid fights, you know you

can't win." I guess because I wear bib overalls, a beard, and a hat, some people think I am one of those, uneducated stupid people from the hills, that Tracy Patrick wrote about (us being portrayed as sometimes). I am a very educated person from the mountains, so don't p--- on my boot, and try to tell me it is raining.

My favorite story was told to me, by a man that tried to tell me he just heard straight from the CDC, that they only could confirm 9,000 deaths from this virus, I was wearing a mask, he wasn't, I moved on.

I don't know if you tried to purchase a firearm during Christmas or not, they were not easy to find, was my experience. From Cabela's to Dunham's to Sportsmen Warehouse, to Rural King, to our own A&W here in Estill County, they were out of stock. Since I have not had the time yet to do any research on the why, we will save that story for another time.

I hope that 2021 will be a much better time for us all, and that you stay well, until a cure is in everyone's arm. Till next week, I am glad to be back. Oh, yes, Tracy, I so much enjoyed your trip back into the past, and I am sure we will journey there again soon.

**You can email Steve Brewer at <Steve@EstillTribune.com> and message is automatically forwarded.**



Mountain Springs school group. Rita Rogers Chaney says, "First row, third over, is my mom's little brother who died at 10 years old. Junior Abney. He's buried at Mountain Springs. Guessing around 1932-33."