

"Looking Into The Past" by Estill County Historian Ellen Rogers

The following is part two from a two-part, hand-written manuscript produced around 1975 by one of Estill County's foremost historians and genealogists, Ellen Rogers, who lived on the Doe Creek Road at South Irvine, several years ago. She was raised at Mountain Springs and taught school at numerous places throughout Estill County.



Mountain Springs Church

The original Mountain Springs Christian Church was an old log building, made from hewn logs that had been taken from the community forest, according to older citizens that have been called away. They said it was a large one-room with two windows on each side with home made shutters and a heavy home made door. The logs were beautifully notched and fitted well, being "daubed" with clay and lime between the chinks to hold out the rain, wind and snow. It had a puncheon floor, and the benches were made from split logs -- flat side up -- round side underneath with pegs for legs to hold these heavy benches up.

As the farmers, lumberjacks, and ore diggers arrived at the church, their guns were placed in one corner, just in case they met a ferocious or vicious animal on their way there or going home.

In this first church, the men occupied the right side while the ladies sat on the left. On the right front corner sat the singers and in the left corner was the "Amen" group of the most loyal quality. On the pulpit was a huge log about 50 inches tall with a cut out place in the side to store the church Bible and church song books.

At the back of the church building was a style block made from two large flat rocks placed between two white oak trees so the ladies could have a convenient place to mount or dismount from their "side-saddled" horses. There were many horses hitched to the bushes, tree limbs or wagons. During service, they often joined in a very musical way with their neighing and braying and heehawing. They would sound so lonesome during a funeral and yet very comical at other times.

This church was still in use on the 15, 16, and 17 February 1888 because

the surveyors met there and divided up great, great grandfather William (affectionately called Preacher Billy) Rogers' land into 14 equal parcels of land as to quality and quantity. (My niece Diane and I have been very fortunate in finding these 14 links in our family). "Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation." Joel 1:3 It has been rumored that he gave the land for the church.

There are many marriage records in Estill County and some in surrounding counties that he performed. It is said that he requested the privilege of marrying each of his children.

Another great, great grandfather, William Reed (1774-1877) died at the age of 103. He is also buried here.

Yet, we can theorize there are many older graves than the ones I've mentioned. Not too far away is a small cemetery, just field stones that may have been there from the beginning of our community's formation of this sacred place that my family so dearly loves.

Quote from the Roman Cato, "I'd rather be asked why there is no statue of me among the great man, than be asked why there is one."

Let us assume the church at this time was roomy enough to accompany the regular congregation and their families, and still offer hospitality to the passing traveler.

Due to the many years of use and surviving harsh winter seasons, it became necessary to replenish the "old log building" with a new one and provide for a larger and growing audience. Grandpaw John W. Rogers Sr. and James C. Lowery provided the land on the dividing ridge about a half mile from the former one. My Rogers Clan gave the



One of the last groups of students at Mountain Springs School. This picture is estimated to be taken about 1952, based on the ages of the students. Left to right, front, Ella Maxine Booth Robbins (1938-2017), Wilma Irene Rogers Vojkufka (1945-2015), Wanda Ethel Abney Tuttle (1944-2018), Reva Rogers Seaton (1946), Joyce Rogers Donahue (1947-2017). Row two, Delmas Farrell Rogers (1943-2019), Unknown behind hat, Norma Wavalene Rogers Crockett (1942). Back row: Charles H. Abney, Verden Reese Rogers (1941), George Ervil Abney (1942-1977), Unknown, maybe the teacher, and Delpha Marie Booth Tipton (1940-2001). Photo is courtesy of Randy Riddle with names courtesy of William Edward Abney and edited through use of Ancestry.Com.

timber for the church. Chris Tipton did free sawing. The citizens provided the manual labor -- erected about 1905. For some unknown reason, the deed was not recorded at that time. Their word was not considered as their bond. James C. Lowery's father's was the first funeral held in the church -- held before the building was finished. The benches were hand made from yellow poplar. They were beautiful. So well-made, it's hard to believe the outstanding carpentry work. Not one nail was used. During the winter of 1979, those antique benches were hauled away by someone having no fear of God in their heart and being led by the devil. The church was invaded and every bench disappeared, leaving the church still standing.

On the second Sunday of each September, the Rogers Homecoming is scheduled to be held there, it being the most appropriate place for the whole clan.

The graveyard has grown much larger. It now surrounds the former foundation of the first church. Over four hundred lie sleeping (in this) sacred burial place. It is still in use, under a good fence, and will be cared for by Mable and Wayne Rogers with the help of others. People with loved ones provide donations for its upkeep.

Among the grave sites you will find nine Civil War veterans; namely, Weeden Howell, Moses Johnson, T.K. or Tommy Richards, Lee Hiram Rogers, John Sheridan, Eli Stewart, Weeden Tipton, John Willoughby, and James Wireman.

*When shadows fall about us
And sad hearts are alone
Then strength that comes to us
Far greater than our own.
There's a love that comforts,
There is a light that leads
There is a Heavenly Father
Who understands our needs.*

Historian Ellen Rogers is inducted into Estill County Hall of Honor

The Estill County Hall of Honor was formed to recognize both those individuals who have made significant contributions to Estill County and its people as well as those who are Estill County natives and have accomplished great things anywhere in the world. Between 1996 and 2013, there were one-hundred persons or entities recognized. Miss Lou Ellen Rogers, the writer of the above article, was one of five honored in 2011.



Lou Ellen Rogers

Lou Ellen Rogers was born on May 2, 1909 to John Witt Rogers, Jr. and Minerva Rogers Rogers in the Mountain Springs area of Estill County. She had five sisters and three brothers. Ellen attended Berea Normal School, Berea Academy and Eastern Kentucky State

Teacher's College.

Ellen was a wonderful teacher as evidenced by the many students who remember her so fondly. Her school life started when the new Mountain Springs School was being built. Half of her first day was spent in the old school building, but after lunch, the men who were working to complete the new building assisted the little children by lifting them in the door of the new building. By the time school was dismissed for the day, the workmen had completed constructing the new steps and the children could walk down on their own. She taught at most of the Estill County Schools, which were within walking distance of her home. She said that her first salary was \$32.50 for a month's work, but she felt rich. A few of the schools where she taught were Witt School, Mountain Springs School, Watson School, Cobb Hill School and Furnace School. Later, after she moved, she would teach at Harris School, Hargett Elementary and South Irvine Elementary School.

Ellen always loved teaching but didn't care much for the changes that often came. At the end of each school year, she shed tears for the tiny group of youngsters who would never be in her class again. She was convinced that some of her better teaching days were in the old one room schools where she was not confined by bells, lines and schedules.

Ellen was assigned to Furnace School after that school had lost several teachers. Some of the big boys had run them off. The story goes that she walked into the school with a hand full of switches, a Bible and various other schoolbooks.

She told the students, "I'm here to teach and if you stay, you are going to learn." By lunchtime, she had switched most of the students in the room, some more that once. She remained and was the survivor. While at Furnace she had her largest number of students, 77. It was during World War II and many of the male teachers had gone into service. The next largest class and her most difficult year, was at South Irvine Elementary when she had 54 first graders enrolled in her room during the year. A parent (who was a teacher as well) of one of those students said that it was the best start in school that any of his children received during their school years. The class contained no less than two students who would be in special education classes today. One of the students tried to fly all day and the other broke anything that he could get in his hands.

In total, Miss Ellen taught 46 years. She taught several years in the Head Start program as well. She ended her career after 23 years of teaching first grade at South Irvine Elementary School.

As mentioned earlier, both of Ellen's parents were Rogers. She often called herself a "full blooded Rogers" and this led to enormous enjoyment during her later years. Ellen developed a love for genealogy and during the mid 1960's, she ordered an ancestral book to record her family history. She was not able to trace her family back too far but she saw that she could spread out her search and spread out she did, into her great aunts, uncles and every other family who had a remote connection with the Rogers (clan). One of her biggest disap-

pointments was not being able to find her great, great grandmother Susannah Rogers who remained a mysterious lady for Ellen.

Because of her work on family histories, an untold number of others in the family became budding genealogists. Because of her questions about their own families, they felt that they also needed to know more. Ellen received many calls and letters from family and others and she always took time to answer them. The teacher and helper in her was always there for them.

Ellen assisted the Estill County Genealogical and Historical Society on many projects and was a lifetime member. She produced several genealogical publications including:

An Estill Co. Cemetery Book in 1976
Rogers and Related Families of Estill County in 1980 (updated in 1994)

Circuit Court Records (ten volumes)
Assisted in the authoring and publication of *The Beginning of Estill County 1808 to 1869*

Marriage Permission Notes
Ellen never married and moved to South Irvine on Doe Creek Road in 1950 where she lived until her death from a massive heart attack on March 22, 2000. One of her last happy accomplishments was to get the 2000 United States census form filled out and submitted. This allowed her to be accounted for in the hearts of her family, her friends and especially in the hearts of the many children who were blessed to be taught by Miss Rogers.

Photo and story courtesy of the Estill Development Alliance