

## Temple of Learning now Temple of Memories: Burkeville High School



With its roots beginning in an 1870 log house, Burkeville High School nourished the minds and souls of those who passed through its loft portico for 110 years. In 1980, the old building was torn down and an empty space was left in the heart of Burkeville. Those that graduated from high school—

the last class was in 1953—have felt that somehow even the earth itself was diminished when this temple of memories fell.

Shadowed only by the town's water tower, the school's Greek pediment looked like the Parthenon sitting across from the tracks. Its massive columns seemed to hold the heavens up so children could grow with the wisdom found inside. To these children who grew up in and around Burkeville, there were two absolute certainties in their world: one, there would always be a Burkeville High School, and, two, thirsty steam engines would be forever drinking water at the tower down the street.

Graduates from the classes of 1923 to 1947 met recently in Blackstone to feast on their shared memories. It was the first reunion of all the classes combined. This was a special group going through time together, these graduates of Burkeville High. Each had discovered other absolutes in the wisdom taught by their school and a bond that time could not take away.

To Martha Hardaway Agnew (Class of 1936), going to school meant her first taste of freedom—she could cross the railroad tracks without her parents for the first time.

Louise Hardaway Boswell (Class of 1925) could still smell the linseed oil used to condition the wood floors and the pungent smell of tobacco that followed her home after playing basketball in the tobacco warehouse used by the school for a gym.

J.P. Agnew laughed when he remembered his teacher pulling down the window shade so he couldn't watch the steam engines getting water. The school looked out on the railroad station which sat in the junction of two well traveled lines, the Southern and the Norfolk & Western. You couldn't go to Burkeville High without watching, smelling, hearing or dreaming about trains.

Mrs. Boswell remembered T.E. Turner bringing sandwiches from his restaurant on a flat basket to sell to hungry soldiers on the way to WWI, their down stretched arms making the exchange from the train windows.

And Agnew recalled the mule that pulled his milk wagon each morning before school to the Richmond bound train. Most of the boys worked on the many dairy farms that ringed Burkeville in those days. "There were probably more dairy cattle within 10 miles of Burkeville than any place else," he said.

Children grew up with responsibilities. Their school, which was hot in the summer and cold in the winter, gave them the strength to bear the extremes of life. Burkeville High taught character.

"You learned to do without and control your wants," said Mrs. Boswell. "You learned to take it, to depend on yourself and it made stronger

people out of us...There were no instant gratifications then.” Burkeville High taught the “basics with no frills and a high school education meant more then,” said Mrs. Boswell.

“I know we had more fun than they do now,” said Agnew. “When something was needed for a game, we made do with whatever we could find...We used our imagination.”

“Yes, it was a different time, I tell you,” added Mrs. Agnew.  
“Easier...it was easier and safer,” She let a sigh drift off “Oh, Goodness...”