

The Lee County Legend

K E E P I N G T H E M E M O R I E S A L I V E

PENNINGTON HIGH

An Opinion of the History of the Beginnings of Pennington High School

Pennington High School as we know it began in 1912 with the new building in the west end being completed that year. Most certainly though, there were schools in Pennington Gap prior to 1912, it is just a little cloudy as to what they were named.

Lee County was formed in 1792 and Pennington Gap was incorporated in 1892 as Pennington Gap after being named Graham, Han and Delphi in earlier years. There were schools in the county during those 100 years. Most were private, ungraded and single teacher schools until the state took control in 1870/71. From that point, teachers were required to be licensed to teach.

In an 1882 state school report, a west Pennington Gap School is mentioned as being located near Cane Creek and taught by a J. E. Graham. This one may not have been a high school. Other reports say that the first high school was built in the late 1800's on the hill above where the First Baptist Church stands today. This is the school that reports say, was the forerunner to Pennington High and was definitely called Pennington High when it opened in 1912 in the new building in west Pennington Gap. The school contained grades 1 through 10.

Accredited high schools in those days had 11 grades. Most students who wanted to finish the last year of high school, went on to the Lee Baptist Institute in Pennington Gap. Pennington High stayed a 10 year school, with 3 years of high school until it became an accredited school in the 1928/1929 school year. Though not accredited until 1928/1929, PHS was considered a high school prior to that because it included schooling beyond the 7th grade just as some other schools in the county. Lee Baptist Institute, Lee County Industrial School, Jonesville High and Flatwoods High were accredited before Pennington High. Accredited schools gave students going on to college an easier path and better preparation. Accreditation also gave the local school better financial support from the state.

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PHS Sports Trivia – Your History Test

Match Column 1 with Column 2 (answers on back)

1. What was the first school sport for PHS?
2. Name the sport that came next and was played as a doubleheader on school days with the sport in #1.
3. Name the 1st PHS football coach. (First Team – 1929)
4. Who was the first quarterback for PHS and coached football at PHS in the 40s and baseball in the 60s?
5. What PHS grad who threw the 1st TD pass in our history, went 7-0 in baseball in one season, played & coached pro baseball also saved PHS from burning down when he doused a blaze in the basement early one morning?
6. Who was the only PHS graduate to play Major League Baseball – 2 seasons, Cincinnati Reds, 1948/49?
7. Why did the 1930 Girls Basketball Championship Game end in a tie? 6-0 PHS vs. 5-1 Flatwoods
8. In what year did the girls basketball, baseball and football teams combine for a 20-1-1 record?
9. Name sites of 1st indoor basketball courts used by PHS?
10. Name the mid 40s PHS athlete who played football at Appalachian State, coached football and baseball at PHS. He hit .381 with 34 home runs in the Pennington Miners.
11. Name a 1950s football player who played pro football.
12. Prior to Tomcats in 1935, Bobcats in 1957, we were ?
13. Who scored the first point in the new gym in 1956?
14. What 1956 grad coached 2 Georgia State Champ teams?
15. Name the 1st 2 to score 1000 points in basketball.
16. What famous PHS football coach played baseball professionally for 1 tank of gasoline weekly?
17. Two PHS teams played in State Finals. Who are they?
18. What Hall of Famer coached 1961 Co Baseball Champ?
19. Who are 2 PHS players who earned All American honors?
20. Who is the 1 PHS athlete in the VHSL HOF?
21. Name my cousin who was 1st PHS pro boxer? J
22. Name 1932 PHS FB coach who played college FB and signed a pro baseball contract with White Sox.
23. Who coached the 76, 84, 87 & 88 Reg Champ FB teams.

A. Ideal Amusement Park and ME Church
B. Teams exhausted

C. Girls Basketball
D. Deb Rogers & Ronnie Robbins
E. Walker Cress

F. 64 Boys Basketball & 76 Football
G. Bearcats

H. Leffler Herndon
I. 76 Football and 72 Boys Basketball
J. Don Belcher and Mike Olinger

K. Steve Marsee
L. Barry Audia

M. Bill Halstead
N. Garda Ann Turner
O. Ty Harber

P. 1959
Q. Charles “Pee Wee” Herndon

R. Joe Robinson
S. Pat Carter
T. Ron Ely

U. Don Williams
V. Baseball

W. Jerry McElyea
X. Gladiators
Y. Gary Collier and Mark Mullins

Z. Pasko’s Palace and Mutt & Jeffs
AA. Buford Rhea

BB. Rain and muddy court
CC. 1930
DD. Don Williams again

The Lee County Legend
444 Campground Road
Jonesville, Va 24263
Leecountylegend.net

Dave Audia, Publisher
Dave.audia@gmail.com

FROM GLADIATORS TO TOMCATS TO BOBCATS

In the 1930 Powell Valley News (PVN), the Pennington High Football Team was called the “Gladiators”. The first time that I have found in print is in the October 9, 1930 issue when the Pennington High team was coached by Leffler Herndon and quarterbacked by Pee Wee Herndon. That was PHS’s 2nd year of having football and they went 7-1 that year.

In the October 11, 1934 and November 29, 1934 issues of the PVN, the Pennington High “Gladiators” are still mentioned and were coached by Creed Gilley. Zion was the quarterback, Walker Cress was a tackle and Ang David was an end.

In the September 12, 1935 issue of the PVN, the Pennington High “Tomcats” show up in an article that says, “The Pennington High ‘Tomcats’ open their 1935 football season here Friday, September 13 at ...against Clintwood...” Coach Gilley was still at the helm.

In the September 27, 1956 PVN issue, this article appears with headline: St. Charles Beats “Tomcats” 20-13. The article reads, St Charles Midgets defeated Pennington High Tomcats 20-13 Friday night..... Coached by WA Steele, Bill Sage, Tommy Tiller and Bernie Cox played on this last Tomcat team.

In the September 19, 1957 issue, the PVN article containing Lee County High School football results shows that PHS was defeated by Knox Central of Barbourville, Ky. It states that “Coach Steele was pleased with the vast improvement.... The “BOBCATS” are beginning to perk up on offense as well as on defense.

Reasons for the names or the name changes are not revealed in the articles. However, these secrets will surely come out sooner or later.

Some PHS Trivia

1925 School report – neat, clean building being presented. Also, sanitary drinking fountains are being installed. (PTA collected \$59 for the project)

February 1929 PVN and School report - Prof. and Mrs. S. L. Carpenter moved from their farm to town and will remain here until weather permits travel across Skaggs Hill.

26 April 1929 PVN – ACCREDITATION ARRIVES - The faculty and students are glad to have the 1928/29 Accreditation Certificate from the State Board.

5 May 1938 PVN – The Seniors of PHS are sponsoring a year book which is to be better than any other book of its kind and the title of the book is “The Rock”.

25 May 1929 PVN – Prin Robert Rosenbaum presented diplomas to 1st accredited PHS graduates: Fred Quinley, Sylvia Houser, Edith Myers,

A History of the Beginnings of Pennington High School

By Dave Audia 25 June 2012

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Buildings were added at the west Pennington site in 1927 and 1937 to accommodate the growing student population. In 1956, a new high school building was built in the east end of Pennington. In the spring of 1956, Pennington High School was moved to the new location. Pennington High remained there until consolidation took place in 1989.

A Tribute to the 1912 Pennington High Beginnings

The weaving of our PHS fabric!

- 8 September 1922 Powell Valley News (PVN) – The Pennington Gap Public High School opened the 1922/23 school year Monday with an enrollment of 350 students including elementary grades.
- 20 April 1923 – PHS Closing Exercises Play/Musical Cast: Southgate Ely, Ross Myers, Robert Wheeler, Rader Snavelly, Stella Fugate, Eloise Beeler, Evan Skaggs.
- 1925 School report –neat, clean building being presented. Also, **sanitary drinking fountains** are being installed. (PTA collected \$59 for the project)
- 1927 School report – **PHS library** now equipped with more than the required number of volumes for an accredited high school and has one of the **best equipped stages** in southwest Virginia.
- 12 October 1928 PVN – Seniors elect officers: Mabel Turner, Georgia Pugh, Edith Myers, Pauline Tiller, Ruth Rhea, T Musick. Class Motto: **We lead, others follow!**
- February 1929 PVN and School report - Prof. and Mrs. S. L. Carpenter moved from their farm to town and will remain here until weather permits travel across Skaggs Hill.
- 26 April 1929 PVN – **ACCREDITATION ARRIVES** - The faculty and students are glad to have the 1928/29 Accreditation Certificate from the State Board.
- 25 May 1929 PVN – Prin Robert Rosenbaum presented diplomas to **1st accredited PHS graduates**: Fred Quinley, Sylvia Houser, Edith Myers, Thelma & Lawrence Musick, Walter Young, Georgia Pugh, Ruth Rhea, Grace & Ruby Ely, Bascom Waddell, Mabel Turner, Stella Thomas.
- 1928/1929 Faculty – LG Herndon, Mtha Gibson, Alice Johnson, Mrgt Young, I. Gish, Hattie Gilley, Flrnce Orr, Ida Myers, Ms. M Orr, Mbl Howard, SL Carpenter.
- 15 October 1932 PVN – Lee County Teachers Vote Almost Unanimously to Continue the Schools and Accept (Paychecks) When Funds Are Available.
- 9 February 1933 – School News – The senior boys entertained the senior girls with a theatre party. After the show, Don Hawkins (Depression Café) served sandwiches.
- 21 December 1933 PVN - All Pennington HS Alumni are invited to attend **Alumni Reunion Banquet** Saturday night, December 23rd, in basement of Southern Methodist Church.
- 4 July 1935 – The **Pennington HS Band** made their 1st appearance before the public at the Woodmen Banquet, Friday night at the ME Church South.
- 10 Oct 1935 – Superintendent Shelburne just returned from Richmond where he was successful in securing \$18,000 to pay Lee County teachers for last month.
- 5 May 1938 PVN – The Seniors of PHS are sponsoring a year book which is to be better than any other book of its kind and the title of the book is **"The Rock"**.
- 16 June 1938 PVN – Pennington HS Graduates 46, largest class in school history.
- 1 June 1939 PVN – Mr. R.E. Beeler, Principal of PHS, accompanied the Senior Class on **senior trip** to Washington last week. Miss Rhea Graybeel was chaperon.



ANSWERS TO TRIVIA: 1-V 2-C 3-H 4-Q 5-0 6-E 7-BB 8-CC 9-A 10-M 11-S 12-X
13-N 14-T 15-D 16-U 17-F 18-R 19-J 20-K 21-L 22-AA 23-U or DD

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TO:

KEEPING THE MEMORIES ALIVE