

George Newman: Bethany Presbyterian Church and School

GN: Presently I'm a member of the Baptist Church here in Elkton, have been for about 40 years, 35 years I guess. But I was raised in the Presbyterian Church at Bryson, TN. This was an old church, built in the 1850's, late 1850's, on land that was donated by John Bass, to the, to build a church and a school on. The church and the school both burned about 10 years ago now. They rebuilt the church, but of course it's nothing like the old building. It, the church was one of these with two front doors. Originally, the women sat on one side of the church and the men on the other side; a row of posts down the middle which separated them. That was true of all, most all old churches, it may be all old churches are that way, I don't know. And standing behind this church, between the church and the manse, was the largest oak tree in Tennessee which blew down about five or six years ago, and the historical society had someone come in and make bowl art, yes the historical society and the chamber of commerce together had someone come in and cut some of the wood out of it and make bowls out of this, that they sold for a fund raiser. . . . The Bethany School, as I said a while ago, was built about the same time the church was, late 1850's early 1860's it was built before the Civil War, anyway. And it did not operate during the War, as a school. They kept a few, they did have one or two classes for the lower grade children during the war I think. The church did function during the war. The, it was more of a prep school or a, than what we think of a school today. It taught Latin and Greek and classical languages. There is a book, titled *From Dawn to Even, Eventide*, I believe is the name of it, that a lady wrote who taught there during the, prior to and, the war. she went to Mississippi during the war and then came back I think some after the war and taught again. They taught classical music. It was a three story frame building. When I started school in 1947, it was a county elementary school. We were not allowed to use the, we were not allowed to use the second and third floor, and you know what that means to a bunch of kids, they're going up stairs every chance they get. But we were afraid to go on the third floor, because when we got on the second floor and looked up, there were the legs of a baby grand piano sticking through the floor, through the ceiling. So we were afraid to go to the third floor to see anything about it. They did rescue the piano later and got it out of there. How they got it down that staircase I'm not sure, I wasn't around when that happened. There were several of the old school desks that were salvaged out of the building. I had one of them restored. It is now sitting in my garage because I don't have room for it in the house. And there was for a long time a piano on the down, in the first floor, downstairs of the building. There was an apartment over the side. . . [change of recording track]

GN: Where the headmaster, I guess is what they would have called him, lived, and he and his wife lived. And when I remember the school, that apartment was rented out. Mr. and Mrs. Watson were the last people I think I remember living there. I take that back, Albert and Louise Scott's parents did live there later, yes. The Watsons lived there when I started school, that may be what I should have said. The Scotts, I believe, did live there later, yes. And I don't know, I'm not sure how long they let people live there.

AS: Was anything in it when it burned? I mean, nobody was living in it.

GN: Nobody was living there when it burned. There was some old school furniture of course still in the building. They had salvaged most of the old books and things and I don't know what they did with those some time before it burned.

AS: Did it still belong to the county?

GN: No, it belonged to the church. It never did belong to the county. Now they used it rent free, but it never did belong to the county.