CHILDREN'S STORIES II

1999
Revisions and Additions

The James Waldrum Mathews Family c. 1901

INTRODUCTION

Family history is a continuing story. With each telling details become sharper, connections stronger, and meanings richer. That happened when the James Waldrum and Marion Jackson branches met in Clarke County on April 10, 1999. I certainly learned the importance of not improving upon the old stories. My grandfather told me that cotton worms had eaten his grandfather David's crop. I assumed he meant boll weevils but cousin Allan informed me that these insects didn't get across the Rio Grande until the early twentieth century. The culprit was, in fact, a caterpillar or cotton worm. And Jesse Mathews Harrell reminded me that David Mathews returned home from the Civil War around noon, when dinner was served, not in the evening. We also located the grave of James Waldrum on county road #23, just north of the Hebron Road in the W. A. Smith Cemetery.

About a month later, Bill and Marian Hearn joined me in reading through the minutes of the Clarke County Board of Education. We found records of the Mathews School, the Mathews who taught in the county and the actions taken when David Chapman (DCM) and Forrest Lee (FLM) Mathews were superintendents. This addition to the *Children's Stories* is an account of what we learned about the role of the family in education from the early 1900s to 1965. **We don't have all of those stories and I hope you will send me others.**

Schoolhouse Stories

In 1910, 19-year-old Mitford Mathews passed the state examination and was licensed to teach up through the eighth grade. In 1912, his brother David took and passed the same exam (he was married and living in Carson in Washington County at the time). In 1914, Uncle Mit, then living in "Greensborough" (as a student of Southern College?), passed the high school level exam, to be followed by DCM in July of 1916 (he had moved to Allen by then). These were not easy exams, a large number failed, and my grandfather, who said he studied at night while my grandmother kept the children had to take the exam twice in 1916 in order to be able to teach all grades.

Teachers from the Mathews family shared the regular duties of all teachers in Clarke County; they had a great many responsibilities, according to the Board of Education Minutes of 1912 and 1917. For monthly salaries that ranged from $35 to $50 ($5 was added for any experience), teachers had to:

> . . . have a bountiful supply of fresh water, both to drink and to bathe with, and no child should be allowed to come into the school room with a soiled body smelling like a rats-nest or the den of wild beasts. Rule 36
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> . . . be in the school room in time to have it properly heated and ventilated before school opens at 8 o'clock. Rule 15
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> . . . remain at the school building throughout the entire day — no going home to dinner. . . . Rule 21

Bill Hearn thought Rule 17 especially interesting because it probably contributed to the number of teachers who never married; it was obviously directed at young women. Rule 17 was in the

1912 board policies but only the last section appeared in the 1917 list. There is no explanation for the change. The original version read:

> Every teacher should be an example to the pupils and the community. To this end they must have a personal dignity commensurate with the moral training and rules for the government of their schools. For a young lady to sit out in a hammock, or swing, with a married man, is considered among nice people as very near the line of immoral. And if she takes walks down in the woods, alone with a young man, she has overstepped the line of what the Board considers decent. As she is an example in the community, the Board earnestly requests that she receive young men callers not later than ten o'clock. The young men should conform their habits to these rules as well.

With these exceptions, and a curious prohibition against "fancy sewing," most rules were common sense — be punctual, allow plenty of time for meals, try to enroll all school-age children in the community. Others reflected the growing influence of a state bureaucracy that was requiring more and more proof that teachers were doing what they were supposed to be doing, down to the last detail. They had to register with the county office and produce their state certificates, keep a daily record of all pupils according to a form furnished by the superintendent, send that form in every week, follow the prescribed course of study, and keep a register that was "neat and clean with pen and ink insertions." The state had a printed course of study but teachers had to order it, being sure to include $0.06 in stamps. All monthly reports were to be made out on the Friday before the last Saturday in the month. All blanks were to be filled out and, in the event the teachers did not have the required information, they were to enter a cipher. Annual reports were to be made in duplicate copies. National holidays were to be observed and teachers could list them as days taught — but they had to mark them in red ink only. Blue or black wasn't acceptable.

One of the reasons for many of these rules was the state superintendent's office, which had been highly critical of the teaching corps since its inception in 1854 and deeply suspicious of local trustees' commitment to a good education. The practice of exercising control through regulation seems to have continued to this day. My cousin, Jim Mathews, who now teaches in Houston, once told me that paperwork and other duties left him with little time for teaching students. He said, " I spend 60 percent of my time on discipline, 20 percent on filing and, if I am lucky, I have 20 percent left for instruction."

Because of the relevance to the book I am writing on how Alabama's schools became public, I noticed the emphasis that the rules placed on the relationship between teachers and their communities — as well as that between local trustees and teachers. While teachers were not to be hired from communities where they were born (perhaps for fear of favoritism), they were expected to form close ties to them. They had to be at their schools at least five days prior to opening and "to study the character and needs of their people and communities." They were also to spend Saturdays and Sundays in their communities because the board found that "community work has a reflex action on the school and both are strengthened by her presence. . . ." Specifically, teachers were to encourage the formation of civic improvement associations, "to the end that the school grounds and buildings may be improved" and in order to build up and maintain "common interest and good fellowship" in the community.

The 1917 rules also required the citizens serving as local trustees to evaluate what was happening in the schools by direct, personal involvement. Once a month they were to visit, encourage

teachers and students, and sign teachers' reports. In those days, people didn't rely on standardized test scores or statistics; they judged the schools based on their personal experiences in them.

In the minutes of March 1915, the board gave David Chapman Mathews a 6-month contract for $400 for teaching in District 22. His father, James Mathews, who was a board member at the time, noted that the citizens in the district had promised to paint the school building in the summer. Seven years later on September 30, 1921, the board, without Jim Mathews as a member, selected D. C. Mathews as superintendent. He received two votes, one from Dr. H. M. McLeod (his cousin) and one from J. N. Maples. Two members abstained and P. R. Bush cast the tie breaking vote. The secretary to the board and superintendent at the time, J. F. Gillis, was being replaced. (I missed this election in my first account of my grandfather's career and reported that he began as Superintendent in January 1923.)

Less than a year later, May 26, 1922, on a motion by Dr. McLeod, D. C. Mathews was appointed for a term of three years, to begin July 1st. The board then fired Professor Texler as principal of Clarke County High School for reasons not specified. At the end of this term, my grandfather was elected for another four years at a salary of $2,400, plus such expenses as the board would allow. All seemed to be going well, but in the middle of his new term, May 27, 1927, Superintendent Mathews resigned. The board accepted his resignation, but after discussing various replacements, reappointed him for a five-year term at the same salary set in 1925. Expenses of $25 per month were also agreed upon. This must have been some meeting but the minutes do not say what really happened.

On November 30, 1933, the Mathews School was mentioned when the Board authorized improvement to certain schools. Nineteen thirty-three was also the year that my grandfather wrote his famous letter to the state superintendent's office. Toward the end of his last term, which ended in 1936 with the election of Dayton Robinson, Superintendent Mathews was confirmed in his appointment of Doris P. Mathews, my mother, to fill a teaching vacancy (January 1, 1935). At that same meeting, Gerald Bradford, who chaired the school board when I was a student, resigned as a teacher in Thomasville.

My own recollections of the superintendent's office in the 1940s are as much about seeing my grandmother (Emma Bumpers) as my grandfather. While his contributions are well documented, my sense is that my grandmother was really the chief operating officer of the school system for many years. She was certainly the one who knew about money. In the mid 1930s, the records show her as office assistant at a board-approved salary of $100 per month. By October 1933, she was listed as school treasurer and required to post a bond of $20,000. That same month, Mrs. D. C. Mathews signed a letter as Treasurer that instructed Mr. D. C. Mathews, Superintendent, to comply with a state law and recommend to the board a bank that would serve as a depository for school funds. When my grandfather returned to office in 1944, having defeated Dayton Robinson at the polls, he asked for, and the board approved, Emma Bumpers Mathews to be custodian of school funds.

The minutes of September 27, 1946, record that Mrs. Marie Garrick Mathews (my uncle Louis' wife) resigned as secretary to the superintendent (Louis having returned from the Army was probably the reason). In 1948, Dayton Robinson returned to office and the Mathewses retired to other pursuits.

Doris Mathews appears again in the roster of teachers from 1944 to 1949 with the exception of 1946/1947. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, she and my father lived outside the county while he worked for the Civilian Conservation Corporation and in the wartime businesses. My mother belonged to the last generation that learned to teach by teaching. She took some courses at Troy State and Auburn but learned more from her own experiences, beginning in Tallahassee. In the 1950s, when she taught English, I had a chance to see what a good teacher she was, though I imagine that having her son in the class was rather trying for her. She was determined not to show any favoritism. She succeeded.

In 1957, and again in 1960, Forrest Lee Mathews was elected superintendent by popular vote. His cousin, A. L. Payne was elected to the board. Doris Mathews was teaching in the 1957-1958 school year for $255 per month, a modest increase over the $167 she was earning a decade earlier. Doug Barfield, who was a grade ahead of me (and later was head football coach at Auburn), was appointed to the Clarke County High School faculty that same year.

My father's administration was burdened by keeping the schools financed when the state cut its appropriations. Minutes of April 1, 1960, show three years of reduced funding and the prospect of another ten percent reduction. The board responded by returning to the antebellum practice of charging tuition in order to keep the schools open nine months.

On August 7, 1958, my mother was granted a leave of absence, but I don't think she ever returned to the classroom. My aunt, Louise Mathews Hearn, did continue to teach until my father's term ended in 1965, when he lost the election to Norman Loper. Despite difficulties, my father accomplished a great deal in improving the facilities for education, as this editorial on his retirement recounts:

> Foresight, vision, and ability are three key words in the success story of F. L. Mathews, Clarke County's superintendent of education.
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> The three words that describe Mathews are needed to manage a $1.5 million per year business that is the Clarke County Board of Education. And education means a lot more than just a business or job to Mathews.
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> Mathews graduated from Clarke County High School in Grove Hill in 1928. Four years later, he graduated from Auburn University with a B.S. in education. And since then he had found time for graduate work.
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> His first job was an athletic coach and a math teacher in Monroe County. After two years there, he came home to Clarke County as athletic director and math teacher.
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> Three years later, Mathews was employed with the government as director of training with the Civil Conservation Corps, and spent five years establishing training programs in various CCC camps throughout the south.
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> During the war years, Mathews served as assistant director of training with Alabama Dry Dock and Ship Building Co., and at the conclusion of the war, he took over as head coordinator of Veterans Training Program in Clarke County.

In 1952, Mathews went into business for himself building houses in the south. Although successful in business, he felt the call of education again in 1956 he ran for the office of Superintendent of Education in Clarke County.

When he took office in 1957, Mathews found only one Negro high school in Clarke County and three other schools were greatly overcrowded.

His first plan went into effect when he rebuilt the Negro High Schools in Coffeeville and Jackson by selling some $350,000 in warrants.

Next, he reworked the transportation system by buying 10 new school buses. Clarke County now has 72 school buses, all less than 3 years old.

A state bond program that issued $750,000 in capital outlay funds came next. New classrooms were added everywhere, new cafeterias, libraries, science labs, and other facilities were added to the accredited high schools in the county.

A new Negro high school was built at Thomasville; a 20-room elementary school at Jackson and the Sage Auditorium in Grove Hill was replaced when it was destroyed by fire.

Next, a five mill ad valorem tax was approved by voters, increasing school board funds from $115,000 to $250,000 annually.

The Wilson Hall Negro High School was burned in January last year. The board of education sold $250,000 in school warrants to rebuild the school. It is set to open April 15.

The school board was in debt some $750,000, in 1957, and now owes some $850,000, but during 8 years, $1.5 million has been spent in building and buses.

And although the debt increase is $100,000, the local revenues have more than doubled in the past 8 years. 'Clarke County teachers never knew proration,' said Mathews, 'they always received their checks on time and in full.'

Our History in Pictures

L. G. Walker, Jr., grandson of Charlsea Mathews, got a copy of *Children's Stories* from his nephew, Bill Walker. He is a physician in Charlotte, North Carolina. In response, he shared the early picture on the cover. James Waldrum Mathews (b. 1852) is at the center of the front row with a rather stern look on his face. To his right is Christian McLeod Mathews (b. 1850), his second wife and first cousin of his first wife, Frances Isabella McLeod (b. 1852 and the mother of all of his children). Mary Alice (Mamie) Mathews (b. 1884) is on her right. The tall young man on James Waldrum Mathews' left is Albert Sidney Mathews (b. 1881). David Chapman Mathews (b. 1886) is standing next to him with his younger brother, Mitford McLeod Mathews (b. 1891), in knickers, at his side. On the back row — left to right — the first person seems to be Wynona Alethea Mathews Bolen (b. 1875) with baby Roland Bolen (b. 1900). The occasion for the picture may have been the 1901 wedding of the next two people: Elias Hodges Walker (b. 1876) and Charlsea Mathews Walker (b. 1879). There are two children in front. The older was probably Fannie Mathews (b. 1893) who contracted measles and died at age 10 in 1903 (along with her older brother, Forrest Lee (b. 1872)). The other young person is thought to be Gladys Bolen (b. 1897).

Our History on the Internet

The Walker family, which begins for us with William Walker of Walker Springs, owes its name to a group of workers who earned their living in the early textile industry by treading cloth in a mixture of water and fullers earth to thicken and clean it. (Fuller and Tucker have the same origin.) The name dates back to before 1000 AD where it was found as part of the name of German villages where this trade was common. The Walkers may have come to England as foreign textile workers in the reign of Edward III or a bit later. Our William Walker could have come to Alabama from the same area in South Carolina where the Mathews lived for a time — the Edgefield District. Two men by that name were in the census for Edgefield, one in 1790 and two in 1800. None were in the 1820 records. There were 82 other William Walkers in that state between 1790 and 1870, however.

The Waldrums in our family appear to be descended from the Irish family, *Waldron*. James Waldrum also seems to be from the Edgefield District because the 8 people with that surname were all in that county in the 1790 to 1870 censuses of South Carolina. His marriage to Polly Walker on December 31, 1818 is recorded in a list of Alabama marriages on www.ancestry.com.

For more details on family history, check www.familytreemaker.com; that is where I found Jerry Mathews Palmer's page on the descendants of Tobias Mathews, father of Governor Samuel Mathews of colonial Virginia. Palmer's address is palmer.jerry@worldnet.att.net. Other useful sites are www.genealogy.com and www.familysearch.com.