

# Bonny Oaks Industrial School History

## Story of Thirty-Five Years of Progress

First Board of Directors,  
Named by Judge Moon in  
1895, Headed by Dr.

J. W. Bachman as  
Chairman.

*J. H. 26-31 p 20*

BY MRS. F. C. M'KENZIE.

Hamilton county was established in 1819. Situated in the southeastern corner of the geographic rectangle which is Tennessee, it confines within its limits scenery of incomparable grandeur, whose beauty to the eye is enhanced for the mind by historical associations both of pioneer days and of the Civil war period.

The Tennessee river, which makes the most graceful bow of its entire length in the majestic presence of Lookout mountain, cradles in its curves extremely fertile farm lands and the mountains and ridges among which it flows conceal vast stores of ore and minerals. These natural advantages of attractive homesites near at hand to profitable commercial possibilities early attracted to the vicinity the highest type of citizenship. Never at any time the scene of a boom, with the consequent influx of undesirables and instability of business values, this territory has seen steady growth and normal expansion.

At the time of the Civil war Chattanooga, the largest town and later the county seat of Hamilton county, was already a thriving hamlet and a leading railroad terminus of the southeast. On account of these railroad facilities it was a bitterly contested spot during that distressing period and was the scene of much bloodshed. The mountains and ridges around Chattanooga offered unique opportunity for skillful military maneuvers and demanded unusual tactics. Both armies occupied the territory at different times and it has been remarked by a sensitive observer that many soldiers of the northern army, becoming familiar with this vicinity during their period of occupation and being impressed with its advantages, returned after cessation of hostilities to take up residence here. Thus was established the nucleus for a broad cosmopolitan population and bitter factionalism died in the early days of reconstruction. A united body of citizens, recruited from both armies, set to work to rebuild the city and repair the ravages of war.

As the community increased in popu-

lation and in a multiplicity of industries social problems inevitably arose and chief among these was the problem of the underprivileged child. Youths in increasing numbers were being brought before the courts for small offenses, indicating in most cases no premeditated offense against society. Many children were found to be living in the streets by day and by night, refugees from unfit homes. Other homes rendered suddenly destitute through illness of parents or other misfortune were yielding their quota of homeless and friendless children. Chattanooga was growing up and this was part of the price she had to pay for her majority among the cities of the land.

In April, 1856, the general assembly of Tennessee approved "An act to establish and provide for a system of reformatory institutions for youthful persons." In January of the next year *The Chattanooga Times* carried the following headlines:

"For a Reformatory.

"The Committee Makes a Favorable Report and Drafts a Resolution."

Then follows the resolution in formal phraseology stating the opinion of the county court that such an institution was needed in Hamilton county and directing the county judge, at that time the late Seth M. Walker, to request John A. Moon, judge of the circuit court, and T. M. McConnell, chancellor, to appoint four citizens of Hamilton county as trustees of said institution.

Judge Moon lost no time in selecting his men and in March of the same year the personnel of the first board of trustees of the as yet unnamed Bonny Oaks Industrial school was announced as follows: J. S. Bell, L. W. Bates, C. D. McGuffy and J. W. Bachman, for terms of one, two, three and four years in the order named. The law provided that each appointment thereafter should be for four years. Though this wise provision of different lengths of the terms of service has not always been observed it was intended to insure the injection of new serum into the bloodstream of the institution at stated intervals and to give many citizens the opportunity to serve as well as to render stable the policy of the institution through the overlapping of tenure. A history of Bonny Oaks is inevitably a roll-call of illustrious citizens, for great hearts are ever the first to respond to the plight of little children.

Of these the venerable and revered Dr. Bachman was chosen as first president, Maj. McGuffy, secretary, and J. S. Bell, treasurer. Meetings were at first held in Dr. Bachman's study in the basement of the First Presbyterian church, then occupying the edifice at the corner of Georgia avenue and Seventh street, which is now the home of the First Christian church. Sessions convened monthly.

For two years the board occupied itself with the choosing of a suitable site for the proposed institution. Many locations on both sides of the river were considered and inspected. At one time the plan of utilizing a part of the Erlanger hospital property was discussed. Again was suggested the feasibility of transferring patients from the County hospital near Orchard Knob to Erlanger and utilizing for the school the county hospital facilities. Agents of various land companies offered parcels of land in different sections of the county

But it was not until January, 1898, that the board finally decided upon a farm known as the Peak place near Jersey and Tyner. The purchase price was \$5,150. This property embraced 250 acres of fine farm land bounded on the north side by the county highway and on the south by the Southern railroad tracks. Located nine miles out from the city it was judged to be near enough to be accessible and yet sufficiently remote to be somewhat removed from the temptations of the city streets. It was known by two names, viz: Peak Place and more picturesquely Bonny Oaks from the numerous gigantic oaks that dot the portion of land not under cultivation and attest the quality of soil that is capable of producing trees of such magnificence. The institution in time came to be known as the Bonny Oaks Industrial school.

In addition to the usual barns and outhouses there was on the place a very substantial dwelling. It was a frame building at that time, but through the generosity of the Chattanooga Rotary club has since been veneered with stucco. Built after the manner of southern homes in the period just preceding the Civil war, it is considered a very good example of its type and many interested visitors to the institution have remarked that it should be preserved as a landmark. It is judged to be one of the oldest buildings standing in Hamilton county. For the first several years the ten great rooms of this old-fashioned building

housed all the activities of the institution. Besides being home for the superintendent and his staff and also for the first boys committed to the institution, school sessions were held here.

Once the site was selected and the formalities of purchase gone through the board lost no time in setting in motion the machinery of operation. The next step was to engage a superintendent to organize and commence the work. Upon the recommendation of W. C. Kilvington, superintendent of the Tennessee Industrial school at Nashville, J. C. Kalleen, of Nashville, was engaged as first superintendent of the Hamilton county institution, the services of his wife and daughter also being engaged.

The minutes record that at this time, February, 1898, J. M. Trimble was appointed to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Trustee C. D. McGuffy. Mr. Trimble was elected to the post of secretary of the board.

The school was formally opened and first pupils received Feb. 17, 1898. Beginning with an enrollment of two, the number increased until by July, of the same year, there were under the care of the institution eighteen white and eight colored boys. The girls' department was not opened until several years later. The colored department was housed in a separate building and was in charge of a colored assistant, deputy to Mr. Kalleen. The pupils worked on the farm, during the day and attended school at night. All the work of the institution was done by the pupils and the staff. No laborers were employed. The first report of the board to the county court at its quarterly meeting in July, 1898, records that five acres of the farm had been set in strawberries, that a new orchard and grape vines had been started and crops of oats, corn, peas, potatoes, as well as a complete garden, were under way.

It was not considered practicable in the beginning to undertake to cultivate the entire acreage of the farm. Small