

# The Evolution of Bonny Oaks

A TRIBUTE TO THE MEN WHO MADE IT A REALITY.

BY FRED HIXSON.

**O**NE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY boys and girls today are scampering over the broad expanse of the 365-acre Bonny Oaks Industrial school, happy, content and well kept under the splendid leadership of Dr. and Mrs. William S. Keese, who superintend the institution. **76-19-3291 Mac9**

Thanks for this aid to the youngsters are due to the late Dr. J. W. Bachman, whose zeal for better conditions among the children of the community led to the founding of Bonny Oaks. He was a crusader against the unfair visitations with which the child life of Chattanooga of that time met. His convictions against placing adolescents in jail with seasoned criminals caused Dr. Bachman to plunge into a campaign for an institution to isolate children from adult wrongdoers.

The beloved pastor was not alone in his fight. Others realized the unfairness of the "law" in those days. He soon found a good friend of the cause who turned his helping hands to aid in restoring unfortunate children to decent surroundings. This was Lapsley G. Walker, editor of The Chattanooga Times. He formulated a program of publicity which molded public opinion for Dr. Bachman's cause.

Started In 1895.

**A**FTER much campaigning Dr. Bachman succeeded in getting the Tennessee legislature of 1895 to pass an enabling act authorizing the county to create an institution for children. The county court at the January term in 1896 put the machinery into motion for the locating and building of an industrial school. Dr. Bachman held firmly to his proj-

ect until the court authorized the appointment of a board of trustees. The resolution creating the institution stated "in the opinion of the county court there should be established in Hamilton county, Tennessee, an institution for the reformation, correction, employment, instruction and education of neglected, evil-disposed, vicious or incorrigible youths of both sexes, etc."

In compliance with the resolution, Judge John A. Moon, of the circuit court, and Chancellor T. M. McConnell appointed the following to serve as members of the board of trustees: J. S. Bell, for one year; L. W. Bates, two years; Maj. Charles D. McGuffey, three years, and Dr. Bachman, four years. Under the provisions of the act the county judge was ex officio member of the board. Judge Seth M. Walker was the head of the

county government at that time. All members of the original board except Squire Bates are dead. Mr. Bell, a farmer and capitalist, died within the past few years. Mr. McGuffey was an author. Dr. Bachman was named chairman of the board. It held its sessions for many years in the basement of the First Presbyterian church, where Dr. Bachman served as minister.

Immediately the board began to discuss a location for the reformatory. Sites in all sections of the county were considered. A. R. Jones, of Daisy, offered his farm at the first meeting. The committees were busy for more than a year before the final location was decided upon.

Many Sites Offered.

**A**T a meeting of the board held Dec. 23, 1897, the following farms were offered to the board:

Shepherd farm, near Jersey, \$5,000; the C. S. Peak farm (Bonny Oaks), 250 acres, \$5,000; J. R. Henderson (Missionary ridge), twenty acres, \$3,500; Mrs. Steele, thirty acres, \$1,500; G. H. Jarnagh, Byrd's eighty acres, \$3,200.

At the January meeting the board called W. C. Kilvington, superintendent of the Tennessee Industrial school at Nashville, to come to Chattanooga to look over prospective sites and to give general information about the establishment of the institution. The board finally settled on the Peak place (Bonny Oaks). The board paid \$2,500 in cash and executed a note for the remaining \$2,500. For some reason Maj. McGuffey was not satisfied with the Peak place and voted against buying it. The deal was