

Mt. Vernon High School Reunion

Asterisks & Gold Stars
By Albert E. Griffin

On Saturday evening, September 8th, a hundred eighty some odd of us gathered at the Rockcastle County Middle School to celebrate our annual reunion of the old Mt. Vernon High School. Two classes were honored: the Class of 1951, who had graduated fifty years ago; and the Class of 1968. A criterion of our group is that you must be graduates three years before you are invited. Our fraternity is unique in many ways but a particularly interesting distinction is that there are only four more classes to be added. Why? After 1972 the old Mt. Vernon Grade/High School was no more. We bowed to progress and change. Those graduating after that date would graduate from Rockcastle County High School. I had the honored distinction of being president this past year. Each year a group of us gather at least three times prior to the Reunion to make plans for the celebration. For several years I have been responsible for designing and producing the program. With the development of computers, to design the program I now sit before a monitor to set the type and place graphic images of the old school in their proper places. It is a tri-fold design. On one page we list the names of all the former presidents, beginning with Mr. John Lair. On another page we place the names of those who are fifty-year graduates. On a third page we add the names of the incoming class...now thirty-three years since graduation.

Asterisks! On these three pages we are careful to designate those who are deceased by placing asterisks before their names. Remember, we are a part of a long history of graduates, going back to 1910...or thereabout. We only list the "deceased" on the before-mentioned pages. So many asterisks now...just on these three pages! I can't begin to comprehend how many have gone before us.

At the beginning of our program, as is our tradition, I asked for those present to stand and we bowed our heads for a moment of silent commemoration. For some the moment is to remember those in our respective classes who may have died during the past year. Or, for some of us, we honor our entire heritage as much as possible.

Little did we know on Saturday night what would happen on Tuesday, September 11th. Around 9:00

a.m. news would begin to filter into Mt. Vernon...and the rest of the world about a "horrendous" terrorists attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a fourth strange crash of another commercial jet in Pennsylvania. As the news unfolded we would begin to hear words of remembrance about Pearl Harbor, "The day that will live in infamy." Before the day was over we would find out that it was, indeed, another day that will live in infamy.

I was seven years old when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. During the developing years of World War II, children would hear awful stories of death and destruction. All over America, in county-seat towns, huge memorials...giant billboards were erected to honor the service personnel from our respective counties. There beside the old Court House in Mt. Vernon, our patriotic citizens honored our "boys" by placing the names of all those who were "serving our nation around the world." Besides some of those names were gold stars. We were only gold stars, but we were told those gold stars represented special young men who had paid the supreme sacrifice, having given their lives in battle. Sometimes I would stand before that giant billboard in awe, and my eyes were riveted to the gold stars.

Some of us were in the Mt. Vernon Grade/High School Band. During those days of World War II, on Easter Sunday morning we would gather to honor the Risen Lord. Our band director was Mr. Bragg Thompson. Standing there in front of that memorial, in our thin, white trousers and second-hand maroon band jackets, we would play "Low In The Grave He Lay" as music to speakers talk about our "beloved dead." My undeveloped reasoning could not comprehend all that was going on. It was too awe-some, too sacred, too frightening to understand. It would not be until many, many years later, when in Easter Sunrise services that I would conduct. I would begin to understand! All the "beloved dead...who died in the Lord" would be resurrected as Jesus was resurrected. In that early time in front of the memorial I thought it would be especially true for those who had given their lives for America.

All of us there on Saturday night were remembering. Some were noticing the asterisks and sadness crept into our joyful gathering...a kind of...sweet sadness. The old Mt. Vernon High School had more uniqueness than any single person

could identify. Billy Hiatt read his "now famous" Ode to a Mt. Vernon Broadhead Basketball Game. As he read it we all went back to...The old gymnasium. It was sunken and around it were the hallways that were so familiar to all of us. There were a couple of rows of seats around the floor...on floor level, but many fans stood upstairs and a few sat around that balcony-kind of seating arrangement...where posts supported the structure. Large pull-down wooden shades were recessed above our heads. They could be pulled down for special occasions...plays...performances...dances when some privacy was needed. And the band played on the stage of the south end of the gymnasium. Early on the old scoreboard was simply numbers that could be turned to display the score. Later a lighted scoreboard was located in the southwest corner...manipulated by some scorekeeper...as I remember, Grant Taylor.

The old floor was uneven...sometimes loose and wavy. And Charlie Hines was always there with his two huge mops, as he pushed them side by side, sweeping up the fallen popcorn and other "foreign objects" to make the floor safe for the awesome players. During the awful World War II, when there weren't enough men left in our community, men like Charlie Hines coached the basketball teams.

Asterisks and gold stars were significant to a patriotic group of Mt. Vernon graduates who remembered...kinda sadly...and very proudly. Someone mentioned the special teachers, the men and women who molded us into what we are. I think Glenn VanWinkle mentioned Mrs. Dorothy Landrum and smiles broke out everywhere. We remembered her snapping her fingers so loudly...and we were obedient to her provocative, innovative ways. Bill Landrum, Mrs. Ruth Blazer, Clyde Linville, Miss Myrtle Bryant, Albert Albright, Jack Laswell...on and on!

There on the program is a picture of the school we entered...at the front door...and progressed from one room, from one class to another...till finally we graduated. Looking at the front of that picture...the first room to the left was the first grade...and some of us remembered Ruby Bullock, our first teacher. To the right...the first room was the second grade and some of us remember Shirley Chrisman. The next room to our right was the third grade room.

Mrs. Nancy Helton was our favorite teacher and she moved with us the next year to the second room to the left from the front door...and grade four. Over there to the right, when entering the front door...behind the basketball goal was fifth grade...and Ruby Riddle...and the beautiful birds she drew on her blackboard. Her sister, Hazel McKenzie, taught way over there behind the stage...our sixth grade teacher. Then we moved to the west side of the gymnasium and the seventh grade. Rose Helton Jones was a remarkable teacher and we would always remember Kentucky history because of her projects, including the forts we made from match stens. From there we went to the last room before entering the hallway to high school...the eighth grade...there on the northwest corner...and Albert Albright.

Asterisks! So many asterisks! Now after our most recent "day that will live in infamy," after September 11, 2001...our world has changed forever. Hopefully we'll meet again next year on the second Saturday in September. But it'll never be the same. It never is! And we'll never be the same because of the countless asterisks and gold stars.



Mt. Vernon High School Officers

Shown above are officers for the 2002 organization. From left are: Glenn VanWinkle, vice-president; Pat Noe Baker, treasurer; Patsy Cummins Barnett, president; Carol Jean Purcell Riddle, secretary and Albert E. Griffin, outgoing president.



Class of 1951

17 members of the Class of 1951 were present for the Mt. Vernon High School Reunion on Saturday, September 8th. Shown above are seven of those graduates, front row from left: Ottis Noe, Nancy Noe Trexler, Paul Cummins, Rose Katherine Fred Tusler and Cynthia Hayes Rose. Back row from left: Hobert Harmon and Tom Payne.

2001 Rockcastle Co. Little League Picnic

Sunday, September 23rd
2:00 p.m.
RCMS Cafeteria

- Meat & Drinks will be provided
- Please bring a covered dish
- All participants and parents invited



For Sale - Livestock Protection Dogs

Italian: Maremma - Abruzzese
"Good with cows, sheep, goats, horses & kids"
Great Family Companion

Christmas Week Pups

Special Price \$150 each (Male & Female)
Send \$50 to hold pup for you and pay \$100 when you pick up pup!

Pup will be \$200 for those who do not reserve one!

Call Doug Brock

606-758-8621 Days or
606-256-3171 Nights

Parents are working dogs on Brock's North Hill farm

Refreshments
Community
Booths
Door Prizes

Open House Parent/Teacher Conference

Rockcastle County
High School
Thursday, September 27,
2001
3:15-6:15 p.m.

- 3:15-6:15 Teachers available to conference with parents
- 4:30-5:00 How parents can help students develop higher order thinking skills. Presented by GEAR UP.
- 4:30-5:30 Students want to checkout a laptop computer and/or digital camera? Attend the first required training !!! Laptops provided by the 21st CCLC.
- 6:00 RCHS Lady Rockets vs. Southwestem Pulaski Volleyball match "all parents will receive a FREE ticket for admission"
- Visit Rockcastle Area Technology Center Teachers and Booths to discuss vocational student needs

Mid-term progress/deficiency reports were sent with students on Wednesday, September 19

Help Support "Lights On Afterschool" sponsored by the 21st Century Community Learning Center
Rockcastle County High School and Rockcastle County Area Technology Center

Advertisement paid with Federal Funds from the U.S. Department of Education-21st CCLC