

# Campbell's Creek School



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The September 1987 *Backroads* was solely devoted to the one-room mountain schoolhouses in Nelson County. I interviewed Alonzo "Junior" Hatter of Tyro who attended the Campbell's Creek School located near the bottom of Campbell's Mountain Road. I could never find a picture of the school to go with the article but I hit pay dirt when Carol Smegal gave me a copy while I was interviewing her for the fifth *Backroads* book, *Mountain Folk*. Her family lived in close proximity to the school. I thank her again for rounding out the story with her photograph!

Junior attended the first through the seventh grade at Campbell's Creek and he provided a copy of a 1929 end-of-year school booklet with the names of the teacher and students. This booklet provides information about the school and along with Junior's early memories, give a rich glimpse of what the early years at the school were like. Anyone who knew Junior knows what a great story teller he was so get ready to not only enjoy the school's history, but the shenanigans the students got into while attending there.



Alonzo "Junior" Hatter.



1929 School Booklet.

The building itself was an unpainted weatherboard structure with two large rooms in it. There were separate doors to each room although only one of the rooms was used as a classroom. The other one served as a storage shed for the year's supply of firewood which was needed to keep the children warm during the winter months. It was the parent's responsibility to keep the room filled with firewood and the bigger boys' responsibility to keep the stove stoked during school hours, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Junior remembers his school days well. The schoolhouse was located near the bottom of Route 814 (Campbell's Mountain Road) near the junction of Route 56. It sat alongside the road with Campbell's Creek running directly behind it. It was a short distance for Junior to walk to and from class each day since his family lived about a quarter-mile down Route 56.

There were many teachers down through the years, including a cousin of Junior's, Christi Hatter. Others were; Kathleen Arvin (who boarded with Junior's family), Gladys Dameron, John Mahone of Massies Mill, Miss Mattie Hatter and Mr. J. S. C. Snead. Of these teachers, Junior said Mr. Snead stand out more than the others since the kids used to pick on him more. Mr. Snead had poor eyesight and hearing and the pupils took advantage of his handicaps and played tricks on him. His initials stood for James Sterling Claiborne and he and his wife Alice lived on Route 56 in Tyro, just down the road from Junior's parent's house. He, like the children, walked to and from school each day. Junior laughed and said, "As kids, we would follow his unusual tracks in the snow. He walked with a cane and he swung it in the snow to make a certain pattern which we would follow all the way to school. One day we played a prank on him and the next day he was so mad he could have killed all of us. We waited until the close of school and then attached a wad of chewing gum to the end of his long coat tail. To the gum we stuck long lengths of paper which we had cut out

before class was over. By the time he left school, Mr. J. S. C. Snead was trailing a paper “tail” about ten feet long! We all ran home before he got too far so we could stand on our own property and laugh when he passed by.” Junior relayed that when Mr. Snead walked in the door of his house Alice met him, shrieking, “Jimmy, what in the devil is that swinging by your coat tails?”

Junior recalled Mr. Snead never “spared the rod” on his students. When punishment was needed, it was swift and sharp. But he did stick up for the children when he felt it was warranted. In one instance, the children had built a snowman alongside the road next to the schoolhouse and a man by the name of Bill Carr got upset about it because it caused his horse to spook as he was on his way to the mill. Mr. Carr went into the classroom to talk to Mr. Snead about it and told him that he “forbid” the children to make any more snowmen along the road. But Mr. Snead was not to be pushed into anything and he got up in Bill Carr’s face and announced in a stern voice, “The snowmen are *going* to be made, Suh!”

There was no bell to call the children to class. Instead, Mr. Snead stood in the door’s threshold and would yell, “Boooks!” He did this in a long, slow voice and the students knew it was time to go in. Infractions of the rules were met by a sound whipping or a stand in the corner with your nose touching the wall. “We just about wore our noses off, standing in that corner,” laughed Junior.

Miss Mattie Hatter, another teacher everyone remembered, was an old maid schoolmarm who was also picked on by the students. Miss Mattie was heavysset and wore long black skirts which touched the ground. She had the peculiar habit of stuffing her possessions down into her blouse as she walked along, making her ample bosom even more noticeable. She had a great ball of hair knotted behind her head and on one particular instance it became entangled in sycamore burrs. It seemed that while she was teaching one day her false teeth dropped out onto the floor. Junior’s brother, Sam Hatter, made fun of the situation by pretending to “call in the dogs” to look for them. Miss Mattie whipped him good for causing her embarrassment and when she turned around to the blackboard, Sam slipped outside and gathered a handful of ripe sycamore burrs and threw them at Miss Mattie’s ball of hair. The burrs broke open when they hit her head and their contents spilled over the whole floor, causing classroom chaos. Junior said, “I’m sure it took her a while to comb the sticky burr pods from that great wad of hair!”

Junior said that the funniest part of the whole episode was when she went to whip Sam a second time. Several other boys held him down and took his pants off but Sam made a break for it and ran home. That night when the rest of the children came in, Junior’s mother wanted to know what in the world had happened at school that made Sam come home in the middle of the day wearing nothing but his shirt!

The last teacher to teach at Campbell’s Creek School was Marie Parrish. After the school closed it became a private residence for many families of the area. I’m sure many other former students of the school have a wealth of memories, too, but Alonzo “Junior” Hatter’s memories were the most colorful.

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