

## Ivy Hill School



**Ivy Hill School, c. 1909.**

For many years, I listened to my neighbor, Johnny Coffey, speak about the log schoolhouse he attended as a child growing up in Chicken Holler. His father, Tom Coffey, attended the Meadow School which had served both the Holler and the Love community until its closing in the late 1880s. As the population grew, so did the need for two schools, and, subsequently, the Snead and Ivy Hill Schools were built. Ivy Hill served the children living in the Holler while the Snead School served the Love community and surrounding areas, down to the bottom of the mountain across from Mountain View Mennonite Church where another school, Laurel Hill, was located.



**Snead School in Love, 1911.**



### **Laurel Hill School.**

I must explain the terminology of the mountain people concerning the name “Ivy.” When I first moved here, it was rather confusing to me the way folks referred to the flowering shrubs rhododendron and mountain laurel, which I had identified in my Audubon wildflower book. The older people called rhododendron “laurel” and mountain laurel “ivy.’ I would try my best to correct Johnny on this misinterpretation (unsuccessfully, I might add), and finally I just gave in and called them both by their “mountain names” so people would understand what I was talking about!

Where the schoolhouse was built in the Holler, the hills were covered in mountain laurel, thus the name “Ivy Hill.” There were actually two Ivy Hill Schools. The first, which Johnny attended, was a one-room log structure. The second was a replacement for the original, whose logs finally rotted and fell down, and was a frame building with weatherboard siding.



**Ivy Hill School, c. 1920s.**

Children's Names: l/r 1st Row: (3 boys) Houston, Malcolm, & Winfred Coffey -- 2nd Row: Willard & Ray Everitt, Owen & Saylor Coffey – 3rd Row: Gladys Snead, Eva, Clatis, Nellie, & Helen Coffey – Top Row: Mac Coffey, Otis Fitzgerald & Luther Coffey.

Both schools were built in the “flats” of the Holler, just beyond the present Weaver camp, at the top of what is still referred to as “Schoolhouse Hill”. They were both in the same general area but not exactly built on the same spot. I talked with Saylor and Annie Everitt Coffey, who both attended the second Ivy Hill and they told me about their early days there.

The school year ran from September through May. Classes started at nine o'clock in the morning and let out at three-thirty in the afternoon. Lunch was a half-hour with the standard short recesses at ten and two. The teachers they could remember were Pettit Coffey (Saylor's older brother), Miss Pearl Allen (who became Annie's aunt when Pearl married her uncle, Gordon Everitt), and Edna Brydge (who later married Harry Willis). The Coffey's described the school building as a frame structure with two windows on either side. The inside walls were frame with a bead-board ceiling. There were wooden desks that seated two pupils per desk. A cast-iron woodstove sat in the center of the classroom, and the stovepipe attached to it ran straight up into a brick flue to the outside. It was the parents' job to make sure there was sufficient wood cut for the long winter months.



**Pettit Coffey.**

There were ten to fifteen students per year, which is all that most teachers could handle. The teacher's desk sat at the front of the class on a raised platform so she could oversee everything happening in the room. A long blackboard ran along one wall. A brass bell was rung by the teacher to signify the start of school. Bib overalls for the boys and long dresses for the girls were the standard school uniform of the day. Punishment for laughing and out-of-turn talking was standing in the corner or being kept in at recess. The students who attended Ivy Hill School were from the Everitt, Hewitt, Coffey, and Snead families. The Snead children began attending Ivy Hill after the Snead School closed down in 1924. Looking back, Saylor said he walked the quarter mile to school on an old footpath that ran through the mountain up to "Schoolhouse Hill." The hill was so named because of the small rise of land where the school was constructed. Annie said she had farther to walk, since she lived at Love, which was about a mile away. Just as children today, the Ivy Hill students engaged in many types of games at recess. Hide-and-seek was an all-time favorite, along with marbles, baseball, and toss the beanbag. One game, which involved the use of sticks, had the children trying to steal the other team's sticks before they were caught and thrown into "jail." The children bought their own books to study from and, along with periodic report cards, were required to take end-of-year exams to see whether or not they could be promoted to the next grade. Ivy Hill had classes from first grade up to seventh, and many students opted to repeat the seventh for another year just to stay in school and learn more. Ivy Hill had its share of "entertainments," which consisted of the children learning dialogs and reciting them in front of parents and friends for special occasions and at the end of the year. There was usually music at these functions, provided by local talent. Saylor recalled a Christmas entertainment that greatly amused him. "My older

brother, Pettit, came to the program dressed as Santa Claus and was trying to read his part in the play. It was getting dark so he told me to hold the lamp I was holding a little closer, so he could read better. When I put the light up to him, I accidentally caught his Santa Claus beard on fire! He ran behind the sheet we had strung across the front of the classroom and put out the fire in the beard so the little children wouldn't see. Everyone had a big laugh over it. Later in the same evening, Johnny and Forest Coffey, their sister Mary, and Dewey Fitzgerald played string music for everyone. Johnny played the fiddle, Forest and Dewey played banjos, and Mary picked the guitar. I can still remember how much we all enjoyed it." The last teacher who taught at Ivy Hill was Thelma Jones. That was sometime in the late 1930s, after which the school closed down for good. In fact, with the closing of Ivy Hill, the whole era of one-room schools drew to a close. By the time Billy, Saylor and Annie's son, was old enough to attend school, they had to walk him the mile and a half out to the Blue Ridge Parkway where he caught the bus bound for Stuarts Draft. For many years after Ivy Hill closed, Houston Coffey rented the little frame building from the county and used it as a private residence. After his family moved out of the Holler, the old schoolhouse fell into disrepair and gradually went the way of so many other mountain schools . . . back to the earth.

**VIRGINIA**  
**Daily Attendance Register**  
AND  
**Record of Class Grades**  
FOR

Ivy Hill School

In the County or City of  
Love Nelson County, Va.

For Year 1930-1931

Read the Introduction Before Making any Entries in this Register

Jearle M. Everitt Teacher

ISSUED BY  
SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION  
Richmond, Virginia

Property of Lynn Coffey

**Ivy Hill Attendance Records, 1930-1931.**



More than a few times, Edna would pick up the little children walking to school from Love. Her favorite was Guy Hewitt. Guy had a crippled leg from an earlier bout with polio and was slower walking the two and a half miles up the mountain than the other children. Edna would gently reach down and lift him up behind her on Lady and carry him the rest of the way. Many of the other children remember her doing the same for them. Annie Coffey said many times her brother Willard was the recipient of these rides. Recalling the school building itself, Edna said it was the second frame building she taught in. She remembered the interior pretty much the same way as Saylor and Annie Coffey did, but she also said as you walked in the door, there was a board shelf that ran from the door to the first window where a bucket of water sat with a metal dipper. The children all drank from the same dipper and used a washbasin to wash their hands before lunch. There were also nails on the back wall for the pupils to hang their coats on. Edna's mother gave her some material, and Edna made curtains for the windows. When asked if the children ever needed discipline, Edna was quick to reply that mountain kids were the most well-behaved students she ever taught.

“They thought of me as a country lady instead of a mountain lady, and for some reason, they felt that demanded more respect. But the mountain people as a whole were the most wonderful, God-fearing Christian people I've ever met, and the children were just a reflection of their parents. Whenever I made a visit to my student's homes, as a friendly call or a school-related visit, I was always ushered into the home and made to stay for a meal. In fact, once I paid a visit to the home of Winfred and Malcolm Coffey, and the weather turned bad while I was still there. Their parents, Johnny and Nin Coffey, made me spend the night with them in their log cabin. The parents were always most interested in their children's education and did everything they could possibly do to be helpful to the teachers who taught them.



**Coffey Log Cabin in Chicken Holler.**



**Pkin School, 1910-1911.**

The first year Edna taught at Ivy Hill, she had thirteen or fourteen students. The next year took her to the Pkin School near Vesuvius, where she served as teacher for one year. She remembers the school at Pkin as a two-room structure with more children. Each year, at the beginning of the new session, each pupil's weight and height was measured and logged into the school records. To weigh the children, Edna said they were marched down the road single file to the old Osceola Mill to use their scale. In her third year of teaching, Edna was given the Ivy Hill position again. This time, she boarded with Forest and Eva Coffey, since her own family had moved to Lyndhurst. During the year Edna taught at Vesuvius, the Snead School had closed down, adding four to six more students at Ivy Hill. Edna continued teaching for the county for just three more years before accepting a position at the Mennonite School in Stuarts Draft. There, she taught one more year, then decided to change careers and become a stenographer. She went back to school at Dunsmore Business College in Staunton to get her degree and found a job taking shorthand at the Stehli Silk Mill in Waynesboro. She worked there until she was twenty-six, then married Harry Willis. They were married fourteen months before Edna changed careers for the third time. This time to become a full-time wife and mother. It was a long journey from studying for a teaching degree at the State Normal School for Women in Harrisonburg, which is what James Madison University was called in 1922. But Edna never forgot her experiences as a young teacher at the Ivy Hill School and the kindness of the mountain people who lived there.



**Osceola Mill near Vesuvius.**