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“Reclaiming the Child”:

Mountain Mission School as a Successful Appalachian Home Mission

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

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by

Rachel Rebecca Hood

December 2007

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Dr. Marie Tedesco, Chair

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Keywords: Mission Schools, Mountain Mission School, Samuel Robinson Hurley, Appalachia

## ABSTRACT

“Reclaiming the Child”:

Mountain Mission School as a Successful Appalachian Home Mission

by

Rachel Rebecca Hood

Mountain Mission School of Grundy, Virginia, founded by Samuel Robinson Hurley in 1921, is an anomaly of the mission school era of 1880 to 1940. Unlike other mission schools, Mountain Mission School was independent from its inception and was founded by a self-taught, self-made millionaire from southwest Virginia. The school’s purpose to “reclaim” the child from material and spiritual poverty lay in Hurley’s desire to develop a child’s mind, body, and soul through a Christian, industrial education. Through personal commitment to the school and tireless fund-raising efforts for the school, he inspired others to continue the mission he began. Primary sources from Radford University, Milligan College, and Mountain Mission School, plus contemporary articles published in the *Christian Standard*, defend these claims.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to the faculty and staff who serve God by “reclaiming” children at Mountain Mission School. May you continue to bless the children by following “Pa” Hurley’s example of faith and perseverance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my husband, Mark, for supporting my educational endeavors over the last five years. Two individuals provided invaluable assistance during the research of this project. Aaron P. Spelbring, archivist at the McConnell Library of Radford University, copied 300+ pages of correspondence between Hurley and McConnell that helped define Mountain Mission School's foundation. Jan Ricker, reference librarian at the P.H. Welshimer Library of Milligan College, for her assistance in teaching me how to operate the microfilm machine so I could copy the dozens of *Christian Standard* articles. I also want to thank those who were willing to read various chapters and versions of this thesis – your input was invaluable: Dr. Marvin Swiney, Charlice Swiney, Bill Rodda, Cindy Rodda, O.J. Gardner, and Becky Soendlin.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the center of the Mountain Mission School campus stands a statue entitled, “Reclaiming the Child.” The statue depicts Jesus hoisting a small child into the air, and serves as a reminder that Jesus considered children important. He even chastised his disciples when they tried to keep people from bringing children to Jesus by stating, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”<sup>1</sup> The message of this statue also reminds me who is central to the thesis: Sam Hurley founded Mountain Mission School because he, too, considered children important.

Mountain Mission School has been my employer since I graduated from Milligan College in the spring of 1993. For the first ten years, I heard stories about “Pa” Hurley, the school’s founder. Not until the school began working with Southwest Virginia Community College in a dual-enrollment program to offer the high school juniors and seniors an opportunity to earn college credit for their high school classes, did I ever seriously consider researching the school’s history. I knew from the beginning of my graduate program, however, that I wanted to study the story of the school’s early years.

The only published books available about Mountain Mission School focused on founder Sam Hurley. Family friend William Grant Burleigh published the first book, *The Man from Buchanan*, in 1926. Burleigh wrote the story of Hurley’s life to promote his run for the Ninth Congressional District in Virginia.<sup>2</sup> Judge Staton of Pikeville, Kentucky, another friend, wrote the second book, *A Colorful Career of a Miraculous Mountaineer: A Glimpse into the Life of a*

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:19 (New International Version).

<sup>2</sup> William Grant Burleigh, *The Man from Buchanan: A Glimpse into the Life of a Remarkable Character* (United States of America: 1926), 31-35.

*Remarkable Character*, which first appeared in 1943. This updated biography about Hurley included many stories of his youth, such as how he earned the nickname “Bad Sam.”<sup>3</sup> The final book was part of a Stone-Campbell Movement<sup>4</sup> series of publications. *The Mountain Mission: The Story of Sam R. Hurley*, published in 1968, presents Hurley’s life in historical fiction form.<sup>5</sup> As helpful as these three sources were for general background information about the school, none really explained the story of Mountain Mission School. Thus began my search for answers.

The school’s collection of historical documents, including Hurley’s personal papers, provided a basis for research. The Milligan College Archives houses the personal papers of the school’s first president, Josephus Hopwood, and provides additional background information concerning the start of Mountain Mission. In addition, Radford University’s archives offered a treasure of primary sources that documented the relationship between John McConnell and Hurley. Also of immense value were the dozens of articles published in the *Christian Standard* magazine, “the oldest and the most widely circulating periodical of the [Stone-Campbell] Movement.”<sup>6</sup> During the early days of Mountain Mission School, Hurley used the service provided by the magazine to promote evangelical work, including mission schools, and cooperation within the “brotherhood.”<sup>7</sup>

To prove Mountain Mission School’s unique place in the mission school era of 1880 to 1940, the thesis begins in Chapter Two with a review of the historical literature for the mission

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<sup>3</sup> Judge Willis Staton, *A Colorful Career of a Miraculous Mountaineer: A Glimpse into the Life of a Remarkable Character* (Johnson City, TN: Christian Craft, 1965), 3-6.

<sup>4</sup> The Stone-Campbell Movement was started by Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell in 1832 in their efforts to “restore” the Protestant church to following New Testament teachings.

<sup>5</sup> See William Heuman, *The Mountain Mission: The Story of Sam R. Hurley*, Honor Series of Restoration Biographies (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> James DeForest Murch, foreword to *Christian Standard Index: 1866-1966* (Nashville, TN: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1972), vii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

school era. This review compares the school to other mission schools and compares the founder with other home missionaries in Appalachia. Specifically, while other mission schools either changed their original purpose or ceased to exist, Mountain Mission continued to serve children by “reclaiming” them from material and spiritual poverty by providing a Christian, industrial education. Hurley shares similar religious and educational goals with many contemporary home missionaries, but overall Hurley limits himself to one mission rather than numerous missions throughout the Appalachian region.

The rest of the study is organized chronologically. Chapter Three begins with a geographical and economic description of Buchanan County in southwest Virginia to explain the reason Hurley started a mission school in that area. The chapter continues with a brief biographical sketch of Hurley, which explains his unique position as a mission school founder: a self-taught, self-made millionaire from the area. The remainder of Chapter Three examines the foundation Hurley laid for the school during the 1920s.

Chapter Four continues the story Mountain Mission School through the next two decades. Hurley’s faith in the mission of the school to “reclaim” the child, along with support from friends, gave him the strength to work tirelessly to raise funds to keep the school open during the Depression of the 1930s. When all appeared well, the country’s involvement with a second world war again seemed to threaten the survival of the school. The 1940s, however, proved to be a turning point for the school. For the first time, large numbers of churches joined businesses and individuals in sending contributions to the school. More importantly, they began adopting Hurley’s vision for the school as their own. By inspiring others, Hurley ensured Mountain Mission School would continue to “reclaim” children.

The conclusion explains Sam Hurley's reason for establishing a mission school in 1921 continues to direct the school's mission at present. The educational program still includes religious instruction, albeit within the context of twenty-first century curriculum, and children continue receiving care that provides for their physical, mental, and spiritual needs. Mountain Mission School's physical location may have remained the same, but the students it serves now come from a broader area that spans the globe.

## CHAPTER 2

### PLACING MOUNTAIN MISSION SCHOOL IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From its inception, Mountain Mission School's educational purpose was to offer religious instruction and practical courses of study. Following Reconstruction, a movement had started among those who promoted educational reform. Their opinion was that the best education would offer industrial skills that could offer students the opportunity to enter the workforce immediately.<sup>1</sup> By the time of Mountain Mission School's founding, vocational, or industrial, education had the support of the federal government and was, therefore, the current trend within educational circles. Because of his connections with college presidents, Sam Hurley more than likely was aware of current educational trends that could be adapted to the needs of the mountain children in his hometown.

The mission school era of which Mountain Mission School was a part was part of a larger movement for reform that developed during the end of the nineteenth century. The Progressive Movement, spanning the years between 1890 and 1914, focused on the promotion of reform in urban areas where industrialization had negatively affected residents. Some of the Progressive reformers focused their efforts on improving life in the slums of the northern cities through activities provided by social settlement houses. Both men and women provided these activities such as recreation and education as a means towards the goal of social improvement for urban inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Social settlements originated in the urban areas of the North; however, the idea of offering the opportunity for improvement migrated to the South.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert M. Kliebard, *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876-1946* Reflective History Series (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 27, 45. Kliebard's book provides an excellent source on the development of industrial education.

<sup>2</sup> Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1984), ix.

Settlement house reform work appealed to optimistic reformers in the North because settlement houses offered assistance to the poor without patronizing those who needed its services and offered women an opportunity to carry on noble work at a time they had limited job opportunities. The settlement house ideals could be carried into the Appalachian Mountains, where reform workers perceived inhabitants as needing assistance. The settlement movement in the South, however, focused on education. In the southern mountains, well-educated, idealistic young women could in turn educate mountain children and thus provide opportunities for their future.<sup>3</sup>

In her book *Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School*, Jess Stoddart focuses on arguably the most successful rural settlement school in the South, Hindman Settlement School. Katherine Pettit and May Stone, both from the North, founded the eastern Kentucky school in 1902 with the goal of bringing to the mountain region the services, such as health clinics and education, offered in northern urban settlement houses. They realized their goals in the early years of the school, but the “Progressive impulse” faded after the Great War of 1914-1918. By the end of World War II in 1945, the combination of out-migration from Appalachia and the takeover by public agencies of the services originally provided at Hindman, led the school to change its focus from offering “uplift” programs to preserving Appalachian mountain culture and providing educational services not offered by the county, such as adult literacy programs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nancy K. Forderhase, “Eve Returns to the Garden: Women Reformers in Appalachian Kentucky in the Early Twentieth Century,” *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 85, no. 3 (1987): 239-240.

<sup>4</sup> Jess Stoddart, *Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 5-6.

Settlement schools such as Hindman had noble goals of helping others, but unfortunately the “politics of culture,” as David Whisnant calls it in *All That is Native and Fine*, got in the way of providing truly beneficial services to local residents. Schools founded and operated by individuals from outside the Appalachian region failed to recognize the “hierarchy of culture values” they were creating. Northern women worked to preserve “traditional culture,” but as Whisnant asserts, they “were themselves powerful instigators of culture change” since they “saved” the Appalachian mountain culture that appealed to their tastes.<sup>5</sup>

The Progressive idea that influenced Alice Lloyd to begin her school included a unique twist to the goal of educating mountain youth. *A College for Appalachia: Alice Lloyd on Caney Creek* by P. David Searles summarizes the story of Alice Lloyd College and its northern founder. Providing quality education for area students was the school’s goal, but Lloyd also instilled in her students the responsibility of using their education within their mountain communities, instead of using it as a ticket to a “better life” outside the region.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Alice Lloyd College, which began as a junior college, Berea College of Berea, Kentucky, from its beginning in 1885 served as an institution of higher learning. The school’s academic level remained consistent, but the student body it served did not. In “Window on the Mountains: Berea’s Appalachia, 1880-1930,” Berea College archivist Shannon H. Wilson analyzes the college’s shift from focusing its service on an interracial student body following the Civil War to serving a predominately southern mountaineer student body by the late nineteenth century. During his presidency, William Goodell Frost described poverty in Appalachia as a

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<sup>5</sup> David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 46, 48.

<sup>6</sup> P. David Searles, *A College for Appalachia: Alice Lloyd on Caney Creek* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 91.

way to solicit funds. Frost's aim was raise money for Berea by appealing to the Progressive mindset of the day, but he inadvertently created the stereotypical image of the "hillbilly" that would spark the perception of Appalachia as a fertile mission field.<sup>7</sup>

Not all reformers dedicated themselves to one mission. The team of John C. and Olive Dame Campbell traveled the mountains of Appalachia gathering information for the Russell Sage Foundation of New York City. As Whisnant claims, Olive Dame Campbell wanted to "comprehend the connection between culture and the intricacies of politics, economics, and social structure in the Appalachian region," but made the same mistake as settlement school workers by focusing too much on "creating" mountain culture, rather than preserving it.<sup>8</sup>

Published posthumously, *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland* by John C. Campbell provides the relatively unbiased information he gathered for the Russell Sage Foundation. In his chapter on education, Campbell stated that education should not "shape men in the same mold," which he believed was the explanation for "the defects of our present educational system." Instead, true education would provide an opportunity for freedom, for "environment will not conquer easily men who read intelligently."<sup>9</sup> Hurley might have agreed with Campbell's assessment, since Hurley's was a self-educated man.

Instead of focusing on a large area within the mountains as the Campbells did, Helen Ruth Henderson directed her 1932 Ph.D. dissertation on Buchanan County, Virginia. Henderson's study, like that of the Campbells, acknowledged the problems created by local color writers who "exaggerated accounts of the mode of life in the Hills" and emphasized "the

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<sup>7</sup> Shannon H. Wilson, "Window on the Mountains: Berea's Appalachia, 1870-1930," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (1990): 397-398.

<sup>8</sup> Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 105.

<sup>9</sup> John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921), 260.

peculiarities of ‘mountaineers’ have been overemphasized.”<sup>10</sup> The daughter of the founders of the Baptist mission school in Buchanan County, Henderson offered a comprehensive analysis of this southwestern county, including details concerning the economy, geography, road conditions, and education, and concludes by offering suggestions to improve public education to serve the unique needs of the local students. The three mission schools still operating in the county at the time of Henderson’s study received a brief reference. She mentioned Mountain Mission School’s curriculum, which offered high school courses and secretarial courses, but offered no personal comment on whether Mountain Mission was succeeding or failing to serve the unique needs of Buchanan County residents.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, the Progressive Movement reached into Appalachia through the efforts of highly-educated women from the North who wanted to assist southerners who did not have the opportunity for education. The Progressive movement may have indirectly influenced the founding of Mountain Mission School, but the Social Gospel Movement, led by Walter Rauschenbusch, may have had more direct influence. The social gospel motivated reformers to serve others as a result of their religious beliefs, whether Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant in nature.<sup>12</sup>

One example of a Protestant leader of the social gospel was Edgar Gardner Murphy of the Episcopalian Church. Ronald C. White, Jr., commented in his article about Murphy that most research focusing on the social gospel only analyzed its effects on the northern and eastern sections of the country. Murphy, like Hurley, focused his reform efforts in the South because he

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<sup>10</sup> Helen Ruth Henderson, *A Curriculum Study in a Mountain District*, Teachers College Series (New York City: Bureau of Publications at the Teachers College, Columbia University, 1937), 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, 27.

was from the region. Unlike Mountain Mission School's founder, however, Murphy worked to reform more than to educate; he also contributed to improving race relations and ending child labor. And unlike Sam Hurley, Murphy's work extended throughout the South, into Texas and Alabama, instead of being limited to the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>13</sup>

Spurred on by the challenge of secular agencies or reform-minded individuals who served the "needy" in the South, churches began organizing services to Appalachian residents by starting home missionary movements. The general goal of these home missionary movements was to proselytize Appalachian mountain residents, but the achievement of this goal originated in the schools started in remote areas of the region. Thus, the mission school era offered a spiritual alternative for education.

Richard Drake wrote an excellent article in 1978 explaining the social gospel in the form of the mission school movement entitled, "The Mission School Era in Southern Appalachia: 1880-1940." Here, Drake examines the attempts by Protestant denominations from both the North and the South to provide education both thought was lacking in Appalachia. Specifically, seventeen different denominations supported mission schools by the early 1920s. Drake does mention secular schools being established in Appalachia, notably the settlement schools and Danish folk schools. Drake's argument is the mission school era ended once public education improved, causing most mission schools to close or change their focus to collegiate programs.<sup>14</sup> This may have been true of the majority of mission schools. Mountain Mission School, however, neither closed nor changed its purpose at the end of the 1940s.

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr., "Beyond the Sacred: Edgar Gardner Murphy and a Ministry of Social Reform," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 49, no. 1 (1980): 51.

<sup>14</sup> Richard B. Drake, "The Mission School Era in Southern Appalachia: 1880-1940," *Appalachian Notes* 6, no. 1-4 (1978): 3, 6-7.

To understand the mission school era, one should be aware of the general perspective of the home missionaries. Henry D. Shapiro's work, *Appalachia on Our Mind* analyzes events in Appalachia during a much shorter timeframe, from 1870 to 1920. Although his work focuses on the creation of a regional mindset by "outsiders" over one hundred years ago, he does explore the work of Protestant home missions within his argument. An entire chapter is devoted to the topic, in which he gives broad descriptions of the work of various Protestant denominations in the Appalachian region, most notably eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, and northwestern North Carolina. Shapiro highlights the work of Methodists and Presbyterians, as well as certain missions like Berea College and Whitehall Seminary.<sup>15</sup>

Deborah Vansau McCauley focuses on native Appalachian religions in *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*. She concentrates on how Appalachian mountain religions interact and relate to American Protestantism overall. In relation to Mountain Mission School, McCauley provides new insight into the home missionary movement by noting that long-established Appalachian denominations, until recently ignored within the mission school era scholarship, along with their northern counterparts sent missionaries into the area.<sup>16</sup>

McCauley relied extensively on contemporary sources, including Elizabeth R. Hooker's *Religion in the Highlands: Native Churches and Mission Enterprises in the Southern Appalachian Area*. Hooker provides an unbiased look at the work of local denominations in the mountains, including their home missionary work in the form of mission schools. Mountain Mission School is not directly mentioned, but Hooker's assessment of the difficult conditions

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<sup>15</sup> See Henry D. Shapiro, "Protestant Home Missions and the Industrialization of Appalachian Otherness" in *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1879-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 32-58.

<sup>16</sup> Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 437.

and lack of public education offered in the region where the school is located, an area she calls the Northeastern Cumberland Plateau, supports economic and educational reasons Hurley chose to start a school in Buchanan County.<sup>17</sup>

The denomination that influenced Mountain Mission School's religious beliefs was not a northern denomination. Sam Hurley had aligned himself with the Disciples of Christ movement after he attended a tent revival and based the school's religion heritage upon the tenets of this denomination. Anthony Dunnavant, assistant professor of church history at Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, Kentucky, examines the Stone-Campbell movement, from which the Disciples of Christ denomination developed, in "'Mountaineers Are Always Free': The Stone-Campbell Traditions."<sup>18</sup> Hurley's mission school is a distinctive product of the mission school era because he was spreading an established mountain religion instead of introducing a northern denomination.

Mountain Mission School has been placed in a general historical context, from indirect involvement in the Progressive Movement through the social gospel to the mission school era. But to truly explain the unique place the school holds within this context, it needs to be compared to other mission schools of the time period.

From the Presbyterian Church, Samuel Tyndale Wilson, president of Maryville College and official historian of the Synod of Tennessee, offers his insights into how his denomination could best serve Appalachian residents. *The Southern Mountaineers* is similar in scope to the John C. Campbell study because Wilson explains the social and economic conditions he

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth R. Hooker, *Religion in the Highlands: Native Churches and Missionary Enterprises in the Southern Appalachian Area* (New York: The Home Missions Council, 1933), 200, 204-205.

<sup>18</sup> See Anthony Dunnavant, "'Mountaineers are Always Free': The Stone-Campbell Traditions," in *Christianity in Appalachia: Profits in Regional Pluralism*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 208-226.

personally observed in Appalachia. Like Campbell, Wilson encouraged the Presbyterians to organize schools and thus provide a way out of poverty while remembering to treat residents with respect instead of condescension.<sup>19</sup>

In 1887, Dr. Luke Dorland and his wife Juliette established one specific Presbyterian mission school in Hot Springs, North Carolina. Jacqueline Burgin Painter tells the story of Dorland-Bell in *The Season of Dorland-Bell: History of an Appalachian Mission School*, a contemporary mission school that is similar to Mountain Mission School. The Dorlands “accidentally” founded Dorland-Bell while on furlough. The Presbyterian Board of Missions then took over the school work in 1893, using the lack of schools in the area as an opportunity to serve both mind and spirit. Dorland-Bell served area girls, both residential and day students, by providing practical education that emphasized vocational training, as well as health services not available in the county. Once the county established adequate schools, however, the Board of Missions decided to close Dorland-Bell in 1942. The church planted in Hot Springs continued to serve the community.<sup>20</sup>

Dorland-Bell served girls in the Hot Springs area, while close by, the Asheville Farm School served local boys. Asheville Farm School, founded in 1894 by the Presbyterian Church, later became Warren Wilson College. Mark Banker explains how the three-sided approach of education, work, and religion continues to be the foundation for the school, despite its transformation from a high school to a liberal arts college during the mid-1960s, and despite

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel Tyndale Wilson, *The Southern Mountaineers* (New York City: Presbyterian Home Missions, 1906), 15-19.

<sup>20</sup> Jacqueline Burgin Painter, *The Season of Dorland-Bell: History of an Appalachian Mission School* (Asheville: Biltmore Press, 1987), 9, 17, 18.

shifting service from primarily Appalachian residents to international students.<sup>21</sup> Warren Wilson College offers a point of comparison with Mountain Mission School. The two schools share the common approach to services offered to their respective student bodies, but while Mountain Mission continues to serve elementary and high school students, Warren Wilson College shifted its focus to upper-level education once the local public schools became firmly established.

The Methodist Church also established mission schools in Appalachia. In her work on Red Bird Mission, Roberta Schaeffer examines Red Bird Mission of Beverly, Kentucky, established by the Evangelical Church Board in 1921 to combat the “appalling economic, educational, and religious problems of the region.”<sup>22</sup> Like Warren Wilson College, the Red Bird Mission began with a purpose similar to that of Mountain Mission. Unlike Mountain Mission, however, Red Bird’s mission is larger in scope because its services extend to the community in the form of housing improvement, medical clinics, and dental clinics.

Another example of a school from the mission school era comes from within the region. The Lutheran Church started Konnarock Training School in Smyth County, Virginia, in 1924. James E. Gay, who recounts the history of the school, notes that it was founded to attend to the “spiritual, mental, and physical needs of the children of the Appalachian Mountains.”<sup>23</sup> Like Dorland-Bell and Red Bird, Konnarock offered a basic education, including practical courses in home economics and hygiene, and religious services. And like Dorland-Bell, once the county

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Banker, “Warren Wilson College: From Mountain Mission to Multicultural Community,” *American Presbyterians: Journal of Presbyterian History* 73, no.2 (Summer 1995): 111, 112.

<sup>22</sup> Roberta Schaeffer, *The Story of Red Bird Mission: A History of Missions in Appalachia: United Methodist Church* (Red Bird Mission, Inc. of United Methodist Church, 1980), 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> James E. Gay, *Konnarock Training School: Its Spirit Lives On* (Lynchburg, Va.: Warwick House Publishing, 1998), 10.

offered social services, the reason for Konnarock's existence was removed, leading to the school's closing in 1959.

The Berry Schools of Rome, Georgia, offer a slight variation on the mission school era theme in two ways. First, church mission boards founded the majority of mission schools, while the Berry Schools began because of the efforts of an individual. Second, the founder hailed from the area in which she began her school. In her 1994 Ph.D. dissertation, "Education and the Evolution of the South: A History of the Berry Schools, 1902-1970," Carol Anne Guthrie examines the history of the schools founded by Rome, Georgia, native Martha Berry. Berry started her schools to meet the need for religious and industrial education on an elementary and high school level in her immediate community. Berry established a school because she saw a need. She spent the rest of her life working to maintain its mission without the benefit of an established church or mission board. However, the structure of the Berry Schools changed to a liberal arts college in 1942 following its founder's death, and its focus has changed to provide education for all students instead of primarily those from Appalachia.<sup>24</sup>

Martha Berry, then, offers both a comparison and contrast for Mountain Mission School founder Sam Hurley. Both individuals were from the region in which they worked, and both provided strong leadership to keep their respective schools in operation. Martha Berry, however, was unwilling to work with the school's board of trustees, so only upon her death was it finally able to make changes they believed necessary to direct the school into the future. Sam Hurley relied upon Mountain Mission School's board of trustees for assistance from the beginning of the school's existence, working with it instead of against it. Thus, Hurley worked with the board of trustees to continue fulfilling the school's purpose.

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<sup>24</sup> Carol Anne Guthrie, "Education and the Evolution of the South: A History of the Berry Schools, 1902-1970" (PhD Diss., University of Tennessee, 1994), 2, 11.

Not all participants in the mission school era worked in one school. Those who oversaw the workings of mission schools by one particular denomination in the Appalachian Mountains also performed important work. For example, Mark Andrew Huddle writes about the forty-plus years Edward O. Guerrant performed missionary work in eastern Kentucky for the Presbyterian church. Guerrant responded to criticisms of the validity of home mission work conducted by the Presbyterian Church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by organizing the Society of Soul Winners in 1897. This group constructed churches, schools, and mission homes on a non-denominational basis. Guerrant, then, offers a comparison to Hurley as a contemporary counterpart because Huddle's description of Guerrant as an "anomalous character in the story of the mountain mission,"<sup>25</sup> could also apply to Hurley. Both men broke the mold, so to speak, since usually mission workers were women, and both did not promote denominationalism, but simply New Testament Christianity. Also, both men came from Appalachia, giving them first-hand experiences of the needs of the area, which allowed them to adapt their mission without patronization.

Like Guerrant, A.E. Brown of Jefferson City, Tennessee, also provides a contrast to the general mold into which so many mountain missions fit. H. Page Lee examines the work of the Southern Baptists through the efforts of A.E. Brown. Lee's stated purpose is simply to introduce the influential work of Brown as the chosen Superintendent of Mountain Missions and Schools by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptists Convention from 1900 to 1924. This position required him to serve an 86,000 square mile area in the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Andrew Huddle, "Soul Winner: Edward O. Guerrant, the Kentucky Home Missions, and the 'Discovery' of Appalachia," *Ohio Valley History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 49.

<sup>26</sup> H. Page Lee, "A.E. Brown: Mountain Schools Superintendent," *Baptist History and Heritage* 29, no. 1 (1994): 12, 13, 16.

Therefore, even though service-minded individuals, such as Brown, were able to make a difference in Appalachia by working with their church mission boards, their efforts could be stretched over such a large area that they personally could not invest in one community as did Sam Hurley.

The River Rock School in Damascus, Virginia, offers a different example of education in southwest Virginia. Teresa Thomas Gereaux recounts the story of the community-built school. The one thousand residents of the town were willing to provide the necessary materials and labor so the children of the community had access to an education. Construction began in 1921, with classes beginning in 1923. The building remains, though it ceased serving as an educational institution in 1981, and instead currently provides a dual role as a community center and retirement community.<sup>27</sup> The River Rock School provides comparison for Mountain Mission School because it helps dispel the myth that Appalachian residents did not recognize the importance of education.

As a consequence of the activities of mission schools, more educational opportunities were available for children living in Appalachia. But though relatively accurate generalizations can be made for the majority of such institutions, there are indeed some schools that offer a different story. Mountain Mission School is one such institution. Its founder, Samuel Robinson Hurley, was a self-educated, self-made millionaire from southwest Virginia. Its purpose continues to be providing a Christian, vocational education for children in need of “reclaiming.” Thus, Mountain Mission School offers a contrast to the generalizations from the typical mission school.

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<sup>27</sup> Teresa Thomas Gereaux, “The River Rock School,” *Now and Then: The Appalachian Magazine* 16 (Spring 1999): 30, 31.

## CHAPTER 3

### LAYING THE FOUNDATION: THE MISSION SCHOOL COMES TO BUCHANAN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

#### The “pure Anglo-Saxon stock” of the Mountains: The Background

The “Mission School Era,” as historians of Appalachia have dubbed the years between 1880 and 1940, was well under way by 1921.<sup>28</sup> Various religious denominations from the North and the South had sent home missionaries into the Appalachian Mountains to bring their Christian beliefs to the “strange land and peculiar people” who inhabited the highlands in order to “uplift” their “contemporary ancestors” seemingly bypassed by modernization.<sup>29</sup> According to Berea College President William Goodell Frost in his 1899 essay, “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains,” those living in the newly “discovered” region of Appalachia had been in a “Rip Van Winkle sleep” that isolated them from progress. Frost described inhabitants as those “who are living to all intents and purposes in the conditions of the colonial times!”<sup>30</sup>

Frost’s allusion to colonial America referred to the accepted belief that people living in Appalachia descended from “pure Anglo-Saxon stock,” Ellen Churchill Semple echoed Frost’s sentiments of Appalachian “otherness” in her contemporary observations of Appalachia:

we find a large area where the people are still living the frontier life of the backwoods, where the civilization is that of the eighteenth century, where the people speak the English of Shakespeare’s time. . . In these isolated communities, therefore, we find the purest Anglo-Saxon stock in all the United States. They are the direct descendents of the early Virginia and North Carolina immigrants, and bear about them in their speech and

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<sup>28</sup> Drake, “The Mission School Era,” 1, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Shapiro, *Appalachia in Our Mind*, 3; and John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 197.

<sup>30</sup> William Goodell Frost, “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains,” in *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture* 2nd ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 92.

ideas the marks of their ancestry as plainly as if they had disembarked from their eighteenth-century vessel but yesterday.<sup>31</sup>

Frost and Semple were just two representatives of the growing belief that residents of the Appalachian Mountains were somehow “different” because of their geographic isolation and therefore needed assistance to modernize.<sup>32</sup>

Does the depiction of an isolated region filled with Shakespearean-speaking residents describe Buchanan County, home to Mountain Mission School? Proving residents spoke English the way that contemporaries of Shakespeare’s time spoke the language would be difficult, but a description by one outside observer supports the idea that residents lived apart from others in this southwest Virginia county. An essay by Fannie Dunn, included at the end of *Religion in the Highlands*, placed Buchanan County in the Northeastern Cumberland Plateau. She described this section of the mountains in 1933 as “that most hemmed-in, internally inaccessible, poverty-stricken and undeveloped region.”<sup>33</sup> A question to consider is whether individuals living in Buchanan County would agree with an outsider’s assessment.

Life-long Buchanan County resident Arthur Ratliff, Jr., agreed. He described the area as one of the most secluded of Virginia.<sup>34</sup> One reason for its remoteness was the range of elevations: from 945 feet along the Levisa River to 3,735 feet at the Big A Mountain. The variations in elevation made the county difficult to access. The county population of 15,441 in

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<sup>31</sup> Ellen Churchill Semple, “The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains: A Study in Anthropogeography,” *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 42, no. 8 (1910): 561, 566.

<sup>32</sup> See Shapiro, “Protestant Home Missions” in *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 32-58. This chapter provides a thorough discussion concerning the invention of Appalachian “otherness” by various individuals, such as William Gooddell Frost, and groups, like Protestant Mission boards.

<sup>33</sup> Fannie W. Dunn, “Missionary and Philanthropic Schools,” in *Religion in the Highlands* by Hooker, 251.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Ratliff, Jr., *Tales of the Hills: A Story of a Queer Isolated Mountain Race* (Buchanan County, VA: privately printed, 1940?), 9.

1920 was entirely rural, as the Census Bureau did not identify any incorporated places of 2,500 residents or more from that decade. Even Grundy, the county seat, could boast only a population of 394 people.<sup>35</sup> Another resident, Helen Ruth Henderson, whose parents founded the Baptist-supported school in the county, noted that those who lived in the county were separated from industry and progress, which could be attributed to the lack of decent roads.<sup>36</sup>

The Virginia General Assembly delayed passing legislation to establish a state highway system until 1918.<sup>37</sup> Buchanan County resident and lawyer, H. Claude Pobst, described the county's roads bluntly: they were "full of dust (mudhole when it rained), filth, manure, hounds and other dogs, cows, hogs and fleas."<sup>38</sup> The first road construction project only connected Grundy, the county seat, with Deel, a small community just south of the town. The state did not complete the first state highway connecting Grundy to another county seat until 1930. Sam Hurley was one of the first residents to bring a car into the county in 1922, but it sat on school grounds for a year because the roads were so bad he could not drive it anywhere.<sup>39</sup> The lack of good roads, then, is one reason industry did not enter the county.

Another reason industry stayed away from Buchanan County was that most land was still dedicated to agriculture. H. Claude Pobst recalled in 1950, "Along in 1921, and thereafter, the

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<sup>35</sup> Henderson, *A Curriculum Study in a Mountain District*, 5; Staton, *A Miraculous Mountaineer*, 2; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920; Population: 1920, Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*, volume 1 (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1921), 175, 309.

<sup>36</sup> Henderson, *A Curriculum Study*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy Virginia Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful: A Bicentennial History of Buchanan County* (Grundy, VA: Buchanan County Vocational School, 1976), 55.

<sup>38</sup> H. Claude Pobst, *Memoirs of Henry Claude Pobst, an attorney at law, of Grundy, Buchanan County, Virginia* (Grundy, VA: privately printed, 1950), 149.

<sup>39</sup> Pauline Owens, *Buchanan County History: A Past to Remember, A Future to Mold* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth, 1983), 47-48; Alexander Stuart Richardson, *History of Buchanan County* (Grundy, VA: privately printed, 1958), 10; and H. Claude Pobst, *This An' That* (Grundy, VA: privately printed, 1961), 11.

depression which followed World War I began to be felt rather strongly. There was but little new business. During the early twenties practically no real estate changed hands in Buchanan County and no move was made towards any sort of development.”<sup>40</sup> The reason was simple: farmland comprised 71.4 percent of the county’s land.<sup>41</sup>

The 1920 U.S. Census recorded that county residents lived on 1,997 farms, the majority of which consisted of fifty to ninety-nine acres. Only fifty farms in the county were larger than five hundred acres. Family farms covered the landscape of Buchanan County; unfortunately, their average monetary value was much lower than the state average. The average value per farm in Virginia (including the land, buildings, machinery, and livestock) was \$6,425, while Buchanan County’s farms averaged only \$3,041. Land value in Virginia averaged \$40.75 per acre, while in Buchanan County land value averaged only \$16.73.<sup>42</sup> Because landowners could not make a profit from selling their land, most kept it. Thus, family farms dominated land usage, leaving less than thirty percent available for industrial development.

Without industry, county residents relied on the products of their small farms to make a living. Some traded surplus crops, while others had only enough food to feed their families. Many families raised chickens and pigs and grew Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, and corn. Corn could then be eaten or turned into moonshine, which brought more money than did corn sold in for human or animal consumption. A few farmers even managed apple orchards.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> H. Claude Pobst, *Memoirs*, 180.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920: Agriculture: Reports for States, with Statistics for Counties and a Summary for the United States and the North, South, and West*, vol. VI (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 153.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 141, 153.

<sup>43</sup> Ratliff, Jr., *Tales of the Hills*, 11; Staton, *A Miraculous Mountaineer*, 2; Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 29-30; and Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census: Agriculture*, 175.

Thus, without decent roads and with little land available for industrial development (all compounded by the mountainous terrain), no industry existed in Buchanan County until the arrival of the lumber industry. The lumber industry originally developed in the county as a result of the demands of the automobile industry, which required wood (e.g. yellow poplar) for the interior paneling of cars. The lumber industry, however, only stayed twenty-five years because of the over-timbering of virgin forests in the county. By the late 1920s, lumber companies ceased doing business.<sup>44</sup> Aside from lumber, few other industries existed. The U.S. Census recorded only sixteen manufacturing establishments in existence in 1920, with only 569 wage earners in the entire county.<sup>45</sup>

Because much of the county's land was used for farming and because few industries existed to provide revenue, the county had very little money available for its public school system. Also in limited supply is information about county schools before 1920. The county courthouse, containing all legal documents and county information, burned on numerous occasions (1865, 1885, 1915), destroying those school records. As a consequence, the recorded history of schools in Buchanan County prior to 1920 is limited.<sup>46</sup> Instead, one must rely on recollections of long-time residents such as Dr. A.S. Richardson and Hannibal Compton, founder of the local newspaper. They recalled the county-sponsored subscription schools operating as early as 1830, before the state established a formal public school system. These schools charged one dollar per month, per student, and usually held classes only in the winter. Few had

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<sup>44</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 111 and Pobst, *This An' That*, 6, 33.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920; Manufactures: 1919, Reports for States with Statistics for Principal Cities*, volume IX (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), 1523.

<sup>46</sup> Dave Bevins, "A History of Education in Buchanan County," *Mountaineer*, October 5, 1972.

established buildings, so schoolmasters secured whatever structure they could. Subjects taught included reading, math, spelling, and basic geography, but only up to a fourth-grade level.<sup>47</sup>

Virginia created its public school system in 1870 as permitted by article eight of the revised Virginia Constitution.<sup>48</sup> Buchanan, along with the surrounding counties of Dickenson and Wise, created one school division. Unfortunately, adequate funding was not available until the 1902 version of the state constitution permitted school districts to use property taxes.

Another problem was that a prospective teacher needed only to provide acceptable marks in the fourth grade to qualify for a teaching position.<sup>49</sup> Helen Henderson pointed out further problems: “Lack of strict enforcement of the compulsory attendance laws, bad road conditions, [and] the economic status of the parents” all contributed to poor public schools in the area at the turn of the century.<sup>50</sup>

School attendance for children in Buchanan County in 1920 was lower than the state average. Only 60.5 percent of children ages seven to thirteen attended school in the county, compared to 84.8 percent of children aged seven to thirteen in the entire state.<sup>51</sup> In 1922, Buchanan County recorded that 3,153 children, of whom 3,095 were elementary students, attended school. Of the seventy-five elementary school buildings in the county, an astounding

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<sup>47</sup> Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 7; Hannibal Compton, *Looking Back One Hundred Years, A Brief Story of Buchanan County and its People* (Grundy, VA: privately printed, 1958), 14; and Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 46, 60. Baker points out that no fire department existed at the time of these fires, leaving fire control to a “bucket brigade” which proved inadequate to fight the fires that devastated the county courthouse.

<sup>48</sup> 1870 Virginia Constitution, art. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Bevins, “A History of Education;” 1902 Virginia Constitution, art. 9, sec. 136; and Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Henderson, *A Curriculum Study*, 15-16.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census; Population: 1920*, 410, 426.

seventy-two were one-room schools. Of these, some were still log-frame buildings. The county had many elementary schools during the 1920s but only one public high school.<sup>52</sup>

Milton W. Remines founded the first high school in Buchanan County, nicknamed “The College,” in 1916, but it was a community effort that brought about its establishment. Local citizens bought the property and donated the materials to build the two-story frame “College.” The second floor of the building offered boarding facilities for male students, leaving only the lower level available for classrooms. “The College” offered high school courses in one room, but grade-school classes in the other room.<sup>53</sup> Despite local support for higher education, the existence of only one high school at that time limited the educational opportunities for older students. While 75.5 percent of children ages fourteen and fifteen attended school throughout Virginia, only 65.5 percent of the Buchanan County counterparts did so. Statewide, 44.3 percent of children ages sixteen and seventeen still were attending school, while only 40.1 percent of the Buchanan children in the same age bracket remained in school.<sup>54</sup>

Public education had taken a small step forward with the addition of the “The College,” but it was the church-supported schools, established between 1908 and 1921, that supplemented the county system. Many churchgoers, both within and without the region, viewed the white mountain natives as “people of pure, untainted blood and high native intelligence” who had “ability, active minds, energy, and ambition.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, various religious denominations sent missionaries to “rescue these marooned citizens,” as local resident Pauline Owens described

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<sup>52</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 63 and Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Bevins, “A History of Education.”

<sup>54</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 66-67, 80 and U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census; Population: 1920*, 410-411, 1063.

<sup>55</sup> Owens, *Buchanan County History*, 55.

them.<sup>56</sup> As Dave Bevins observed, much of the responsibility for education rested with religious institutions that established four schools in the early party of the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup>

Categorizing all denominations, or representatives of denominations, as patronizing, however, misrepresents the mission school movement. While many churches and individuals accepted the contemporary view of the “otherness” of Appalachia, there were those who held different views. Instead of combining all mountain residents together, Samuel Tyndale Wilson, president of Maryville College and official historian of the Synod of Tennessee, divided Appalachian residents into three different classes “that must be recognized by every judicious student of their history”: the “valley-dwellers,” “worthy mountaineers,” and hillbillies, the “pitiable lowland class of humanity.”<sup>58</sup> Wilson criticized the contemporary prejudice of so many home missionary movements even though he may have had difficulty in recognizing such bias in his own hierarchical views. He did point out that to consider mountaineers “as meriting patronizing disdain is to show oneself to be a most superficial observer.” He later warned, “Those who would help them must do so in a perfectly frank and kindly way, showing always genuine interest in them but never a trace of patronizing condescension.”<sup>59</sup>

### I Will Someday Build a Home for Children Like Me: The 1920s

“Genuine interest,” then, could best describe the attitude held by someone from the county that sorely needed help. And to understand the needs of others, one must have survived

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Bevins, “A History of Education;” Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 67-68; and Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 8. The Presbyterian Church started the Grundy Presbyterian School in 1908, The Baptist Church started the Baptist Mission School in 1910, and the Methodist Church started the Triangular Mountain Institute in 1920.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, *The Southern Mountaineers*, 15-19.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

one's own time of need. Samuel Robinson Hurley, born April 22, 1878, experienced deprivation growing up in southwest Virginia. Hurley family friend William Grant Burleigh described Hurley's childhood: "No one ever began the race of life under greater handicaps, and more discouraging circumstances than Sam Hurley. No human life ever seemed more certainly fated for failure."<sup>60</sup> The father of the Hurley family died after exhausting himself working the land and making split-bottom hickory chairs to supplement the family's meager cash income.<sup>61</sup>

Orphaned at the age of ten, the young Sam grew up in poverty without a chance to attend school.<sup>62</sup> Buchanan County offered only one place for homeless children – the poor farm. A general county levy paid for food, shelter, and medical services for the poor. Although residents came voluntarily, the poor farm was characterized by disease, and filth. Those at the farm accepted such conditions instead of starvation, though neither seemed satisfactory.<sup>63</sup>

Without the family breadwinner, and with no desire to live at the poor farm, Sam was left to fend for himself. Hurley described a turning point in his life in a 1955 interview with reporter George Hanna:

"The mountains were full of wild animals then," he recalls. One night, tired of walking, he crawled under some leaves to sleep. "Well," he said, "the wild animals began screaming and howling, and I was terrified. Right then, I promised the Lord if he would spare me I would build a home someday for children like myself."<sup>64</sup>

This promise would be fulfilled, but not before Sam Hurley had experienced the seedy side of mountain life while living in its lumber camps.

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<sup>60</sup> Burleigh, *The Man from Buchanan*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>62</sup> "Mr. And Mrs. S.R. Hurley," *The Restoration Herald*, February 1942, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 76-77 and Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> George Hanna, "'Bad Sam' Hurley is Kindly 'Pa' Hurley Now," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, May 8, 1955.

Young Sam Hurley secured his first job at age sixteen as a lobby boy for the Panther Lumber Company. The job of the lobby boy was demanding. He had to keep the fires going, to keep the rooms and main recreation hall clean, to empty the slop jars, to take out the garbage, and to prevent drinking and fighting among the lumberjacks. Unfortunately for Sam, the lumber camps proved to be rough; violent criminals, drunkards, and moonshiners populated them.<sup>65</sup> Though not proud of his early exploits, Hurley admitted later in life that he was a “bad one to drink and get into scraps.”<sup>66</sup> In fact, he was known for greasing his neck with tallow before a fight to make sure his adversary could not get a grip on his neck. All this fighting earned Hurley the nickname “Bad Sam.”<sup>67</sup> Despite learning such destructive habits as fighting and drinking, the time in the lumber camps did teach Hurley how to make money.

From observing the operations of the lumber business, Hurley began his own lumber business. Hurley’s fortune continued to grow as he expanded his business interests to include construction.<sup>68</sup> Judge Willis Staton, a friend of Sam Hurley, described how Hurley amassed his money:

Mr. Hurley bought a large boundary of fine timber on credit, and went into the lumber business, thereby accumulating considerable money. In connection with the lumber business, he opened up a general stock of merchandise, began building houses, bridges, and roads by contracts, and later was the contactor and builder of the fine cutstone Courthouse in Grundy.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Heuman, *The Mountain Mission*, 10-11; Staton, *A Miraculous Mountaineer*, 3-4, 6; and Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 114-115.

<sup>66</sup> Hanna, “‘Bad Sam’ Hurley.”

<sup>67</sup> Heuman, *The Mountain Mission*, 25 and Gary Robertson, “Mountain Mission School is ‘Bad’ Sam’s Monument,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 1980.

<sup>68</sup> Heuman, *The Mountain Mission*, 36; “Mr. and Mrs. S.R. Hurley;” and Robertson, “Mountain Mission School.”

<sup>69</sup> Staton, *A Miraculous Mountaineer*, 9.

Hurley's story is a rags-to-riches story. He began his life in poverty, but rose above his desperate state. Helping him overcome childhood difficulties was Jane Looney, whom he married in 1900, and his own family of nine children.

Sam Hurley threw himself into his work and devoted himself to his family, thus removing himself from the temptations that had once held him.<sup>70</sup> Another turning point also helped him resist temptation in 1909 when he became a Christian. He was baptized as Methodist in the Levisa River; however, in 1913 he joined the Stone-Campbell Movement by becoming a member of the Disciples of Christ.<sup>71</sup> The Stone-Campbell Movement was “the result of the union in 1832 of two frontier American religious groups: the ‘Christians,’ led by Barton W. Stone, and the ‘Reformers’ or ‘Disciples of Christ,’ led by Alexander Campbell.”<sup>72</sup> What makes Hurley's association with the Stone-Campbell Movement significant is that it is an original southern denomination. Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell both hailed from the Appalachian region, Stone from Bourbon County, Kentucky, and Campbell from Bethany, West Virginia.<sup>73</sup>

Upon his conversion, Hurley began proselytizing those in his community. He invited Church of Christ preacher Henry Thompson to speak in Grundy in 1917.<sup>74</sup> When the new denomination planted a church in the county seat, Hurley became involved in its Sunday school

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>71</sup> Hanna, “‘Bad Sam’ Hurley;” and “Faith and Vision Triumph: Amazing Story of Faith Revealed in Beginnings of Mountain Industrial Institute at Grundy, Va,” *Christian Standard*, June 14, 1924, 927.

<sup>72</sup> Paul M. Blowers, Douglas A. Foster, and D. Newell Williams, introduction to the *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), xxi. The original denomination resulting from the Stone-Campbell Movement was called the Disciples of Christ. Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, however, also consider themselves descendents of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

<sup>73</sup> Dunnavant, “Mountaineers are Always Free,” 209 and McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion*, 437.

<sup>74</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 94.

program as its superintendent, just as he had immersed himself in his business interests. Grundy residents had begun to notice a change in “Bad Sam.” Instead of the man they remembered for spending time with lumberjacks and “riff-raffs,” they saw a “go-getter.” Instead of “Bad Sam,” he was Sam Hurley the timber man. Many of his associates, such as Judge Staton, referred to him as the “Good Samaritan” of the mountains.<sup>75</sup> This new reputation proved valuable when Hurley ran for county clerk.

Hurley had heard many stories of shady land dealings in the county. The county clerks had been selling and reselling land to buyers outside the county based on questionable deeds.<sup>76</sup> The time had come for him to enter the political arena. Even more astounding than an orphaned boy winning the election was that he won as a Republican candidate in a heavily Democratic county. Elected in 1919, Hurley served as the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Buchanan County until 1926.<sup>77</sup> While serving as the County Clerk, Hurley experienced yet another life-changing event. A little boy entered Hurley’s office at the courthouse. He had heard how Sam, now married, had taken in seven orphaned children along with his own brood of nine. The boy asked Hurley to take him, too, but Hurley turned the boy away because his home had become crowded. Later, Hurley saw the boy huddled against the courthouse. According to an article published in the local newspaper, the *Mountaineer*, “at this moment Mr. Hurley could see himself in the little rejected boy’s place when many years before he had been left without a father.”<sup>78</sup> Hurley had been reminded of the promise he had made to God as a little boy, alone in the mountains. This time, however, he could act on his words.

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<sup>75</sup> Heuman, *The Mountain Mission*, 37 and Staton, *A Miraculous Mountaineer*, 17.

<sup>76</sup> Heuman, *The Mountain Mission*, 40-41.

<sup>77</sup> Robertson, “Mountain Mission School;” Owens, *Buchanan County History*, 23; Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 29; and Staton, *A Miraculous Mountaineer*, 15.

<sup>78</sup> “Mountain Mission . . . How it Began,” *Mountaineer*, July 1, 1976.

On April 22, 1921, Sam Hurley founded the fourth Christian school in Buchanan County. Similar to many other home missions of southern denominations, the focus was not evangelical, but educational.<sup>79</sup> Grundy Academy, Mountain Mission School's original name, was different from those previously established in the county. Sam Hurley was a local citizen who hired as staff members others who shared his vision for educating the region's youth. One of the first teachers was proud to report that fifty students had enrolled and that one-third of that number was over the age of fifteen. The wooden Church of Christ building, the one Hurley had helped establish, housed the first classes.<sup>80</sup> One problem remained – Hurley needed someone to oversee the educational program. He had not been able to attend a formal school and, as a consequence, did not think he was qualified to develop the school program. When the school's first term began on September 18, 1921, the supervisor was not Hurley, but renowned educator Dr. Josephus Hopwood, founder of two colleges in the Appalachian Mountains, Milligan College in Carter County, Tennessee, and Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, Virginia.<sup>81</sup> Hurley had turned to one man he knew could, and would, help the Grundy Academy.

Hurley had written to Dr. Hopwood at Milligan College in Elizabethton, Tennessee, in August 1921. In asking for help, Hurley had stressed the positive impact he hoped would result from his school. "I believe," Hurley wrote, "that this school will be the making of this mountain section." He further pressed Hopwood to come, insisting that "your presence mean[s] so much

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<sup>79</sup> Hooker, *Religion in the Highlands*, 200.

<sup>80</sup> Samuel Robinson Hurley, "Material for Broadcast Prepared at Richmond," February 23, 1939, Personal Papers of Samuel Robinson Hurley, Mountain Mission School, Grundy, Virginia [hereafter referred to as Hurley Personal Papers]; Leonard to Dr. Josephus Hopwood, August 1, 1921, Hopwood Correspondence: 1868-1936, Archives and Special Collections, P.H. Welshimer Memorial Library, Milligan College [hereafter referred to as Hopwood Correspondence]; and Bevins, "A History of Education." The Hurley Personal Papers is the name I have given Mountain Mission School's collection of Hurley's papers which is not currently organized into boxes with numbers.

<sup>81</sup> Christine Burleson, "Josephus Hopwood" in *Sketches of Our Mountain Pioneers*, ed. J.W. West (Lynchburg, VA: privately printed, 1939) 139, 141 and Hurley, "Material for Broadcast . . . Richmond," Hurley Personal Papers.

to these people.”<sup>82</sup> Hopwood could not refuse the invitation. Teachers already at Grundy Academy also requested Hopwood’s help: “we are right in the midst of such fine material that needs developing.”<sup>83</sup>

Dr. Hopwood and his wife came to Grundy to help establish the school, but the decision to come out of their retirement was not made quickly. Hopwood stated in his autobiography, “After seriously considering the matter we decided to go and look the situation over. The field was broad and needy, the call was urgent, and we at length consented to leave our new home in the hands of others and go.”<sup>84</sup> Specifically, the Hopwoods organized the education program for Grundy Academy. The Hopwoods placed their lasting mark on the school by adopting Mrs. Hopwood’s motto: “Christian Education – The Hope of the World.” This motto had become a signature for the Hopwoods, as it was affixed to each institution they helped develop.<sup>85</sup> In addition to Dr. Hopwood as a supportive “famous educator” Dr. John Preston McConnell, President of the State Normal School for Women in Radford, and a Milligan College graduate, lent his support. McConnell wrote to Hopwood, explaining why he supported the school:

I am more and more impressed with the idea that we are going to have to look to the hills, the mountains, and the wide pasture fields, and the pine-wood sections for the happy, patient, and self-denying class of young men and women who will be our real leaders in the future in unselfish and constructive work.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Hurley to Hopwood, August 4, 1921, Hopwood Correspondence.

<sup>83</sup> Leonard to Hopwood , August 1, 1921, Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Josephus Hopwood, *A Journey Through the Years: An Autobiography* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1932), 135.

<sup>85</sup> Burleson, “Josephus Hopwood,” 142; Bevins, “A History of Education;” and Hopwood to O. A. Thrown, November 29, 1922, Hopwood Correspondence.

<sup>86</sup> Burleigh, *The Man from Buchanan*, 26 and John Preston McConnell to Hopwood, December 30, 1921, Hopwood Correspondence.

He went on to commend Hopwood on “devoting your work to the boys and girls of the retarded sections, such as Dickenson and Buchanan counties.” As Dr. Hopwood’s health failed, Dr. Remines, the same gentleman who founded the first high school in the county, became Grundy Academy’s principal and remained at the school until his death.<sup>87</sup>

Upon completion of the school’s first year of operation, the state of Virginia incorporated Grundy Academy. Local lawyer and Virginia House of Delegates member J. H. Stinson drew up the first charter and took it to Richmond himself.<sup>88</sup> Twenty-five witnesses, including the Hurleys, the Hopwoods, Mr. Stinson, and Dr. McConnell, came together “for the purpose of incorporating an industrial Christian co-education school.”<sup>89</sup> Grundy Academy’s official purpose, according to its original state charter of 1922, was “the industrial, mental, physical, and spiritual training and education of young white persons of both sexes.”<sup>90</sup> The charter statement pointed out three fascinating details worthy of attention before focusing on the charter’s main purpose: which students could not attend, which students could attend, and which curriculum students would study while attending.<sup>91</sup>

At first glance, one might think Hurley intentionally prevented children of color from entering Grundy Academy. This is not so. According to the Virginia state law, white and “colored” children were not to be educated together. Section 22-221 of the Code of Virginia stated, “White and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school, but shall be taught in

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<sup>87</sup> McConnell to Hopwood, December 30, 1921, *Ibid.*, and Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 67. The State Normal School for Women is now called Radford University. No record has yet been found as to the exact date of Dr. Remines’s death.

<sup>88</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 68 and “Mountain Mission,” 11.

<sup>89</sup>“Grundy Academy,” *Virginia Corporate Charter Book*, vol. 117, 394, 396.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

separate schools, under the same general regulations as to managements, usefulness, and efficiency.”<sup>92</sup> Because no persons of color resided in Buchanan County in 1920,<sup>93</sup> the issue of race did not play a major role in the early history of the school.

While no evidence exists to demonstrate Hurley’s acceptance of the inferiority of non-white individuals, certain individuals supporting the school held very strong views on the issue of race. For instance, in March 1929, Hurley asked for support from then-Governor Harry F. Byrd. On the one hand, Byrd passed the “strongest anti-lynching law enacted by any state up to that time,” yet on the other hand, he allowed the passage of a law segregating the races in places of public assembly.<sup>94</sup> Although Byrd was unable to accept Hurley’s request for support, Byrd “seemed very much interested in the matter and thought it was very worthy work, but he said he was on so many committees and had so much work that he could not take on anything addition.”<sup>95</sup> Senator Carter Glass, however, consented. Glass had served as a delegate to the 1902 constitutional convention, where he made clear “Elimination of the Negro vote to the maximum degree possible was the intention from the outset.”<sup>96</sup> This convention amended the article regarding education by adding the following section to the 1902 version of the state constitution: “White and colored children shall not be taught in the same school.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>92</sup> Code of Virginia, 1919, sec. 719.

<sup>93</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census: Population: 1920*, 153.

<sup>94</sup> Hurley to McConnell, March 23, 1929, Personal Papers of John Preston McConnell, University Archives, McConnell Library, Radford University [hereafter referred to as McConnell Personal Papers] and Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion, a history from 1607 to the present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 483.

<sup>95</sup> McConnell to Hurley, March 26, 1929, McConnell Personal Papers.

<sup>96</sup> Hurley to McConnell, March 6, 1929, *Ibid.*, and Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion*, 436.

<sup>97</sup> 1902 Virginia Constitution, art. 9, sec. 140.

Hurley sought the support of certain individuals who accepted the separation of the races.

Whether or not Hurley agreed with these racist sentiments remains a difficult question to answer.

A second observation concerning the student body focuses on who *was* permitted to attend Grundy Academy. Many schools founded during this time were organized to serve children living in the Appalachian Mountains. Interestingly, the charter refers only to “young persons.” What this description lacks is the limiting characteristic of living in the surrounding mountains. Although it is doubtful that the school expected to serve children other than those in their immediate area, the fact that the Board of Trustees did not limit its mission to mountain children indicates its desire to serve any white child in need. Simply because a child came from poverty did not mean formal education was out of reach for that child.

But, just as Sam Hurley had learned the value of hard labor from his youth, he expected the students to learn the same lesson. John C. Campbell had observed that mountain mission schools needed to balance offering educational opportunity without losing dignity: “One great need at present is some provision whereby promising students may earn their education without being pauperized or being taught that poor work or insufficient work receives recompense equally with work done well and thoroughly.”<sup>98</sup> Instead of a monetary payment for schooling and board, then, children paid their tuition with their approximately four to five hours daily of “honest, productive work” on the campus. In his biography of Sam Hurley and the school, William Heuman described the school’s farm:

They had their own cattle producing milk; they churned butter, raised corn, hogs, vegetables, and in all of this work the older boys and girls helped. They hoed the corn and milked the cows; they picked the peas and the corn; they churned the butter; they did the canning, hundreds and hundreds of jars of vegetables and fruits.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 278.

<sup>99</sup> Hopwood, “An Open Letter from Josephus Hopwood,” *Christian Standard*, August 5, 1922, 3529 and Heuman, *The Mountain Mission*, 53.

Instead of receiving a handout, students directly contributed to the workings of the school. Students were willing to express their gratitude in radio presentations and prose. One young man wrote, “I feel that I have some chance in the race of life.”<sup>100</sup>

The value of work fit into the industrial curriculum designed for Grundy Academy. Undoubtedly, the contemporary movements in public education had affected the views of Hopwood and McConnell concerning how to educate the mountain youth. In 1917, prior to the school’s founding, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Hughes Act into law. This law provided federal aid for vocational training at the secondary level and thus the priority the federal government placed on vocational agriculture, trade and industrial education, and home economics affected schools on every level.<sup>101</sup> Even John C. Campbell, in his report on the Appalachian Mountains for the Russell Sage Foundation, commented on the positive impact of the Smith-Hughes Act and its promotion of practical education, as he found most boarding schools in the mountains failed because their curriculum did not “adapt education to life.”<sup>102</sup>

Industrial education, then, offered an education beneficial to mountain life. And with this particular focus for its curriculum, Grundy Academy officially changed its name to Mountain Industrial Institute on March 17, 1924, with Sam Hurley replacing Josephus Hopwood as president.<sup>103</sup> The application card filled out by prospective students made the school’s purpose clear: “This Institution is not a REFORMATORY [sic], but is an INDUSTRIAL

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<sup>100</sup> Hurley, “A Voice from the Hills,” *The Restoration Herald*, 5.

<sup>101</sup> Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 133, 135 and Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 269.

<sup>102</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 277.

<sup>103</sup>“Certificate for Amendment to the Charter of Grundy Academy,” *State Corporation Commission – Virginia Corporate Charter Book*, vol. 127, 112.

SCHOOL [sic], industrious and ambitious boys and girls may secure an industrial and agricultural education.”<sup>104</sup> The nine-month term included a variety of liberal arts, as well as industrial, courses. Hurley, with Hopwood’s help, made sure students successfully completed basic coursework, which included traditional grammar school and high school courses, as well as Bible and music. Once the students completed their basic classes, they continued with the commercial work. Industrial courses included typing, shorthand, bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, farming, and blacksmithing.<sup>105</sup> Thus, the school established its focus on vocational education and the employment opportunities it afforded upon graduation. Campbell would have approved of The Mountain Industrial Institute’s concentration on “the various phases of work that fit for life in the mountains.”<sup>106</sup>

But the educational program had an even higher purpose. As Dr. Richardson wrote in his history of the county, “[Hurley] organized an agricultural and industrial school where boys and girls with little or no means could obtain a well-founded *Christian* education and also learn some useful trade or vocation” (emphasis mine).<sup>107</sup>

The 1922 Grundy Academy charter listed “spiritual training” as one of the purposes of the school, but later documents clarified this rather broad goal. The first of many articles published in the *Christian Standard* about the mission and work in Grundy stated, “The aim is to develop a great center of industrial education which shall be distinctly Christian.”<sup>108</sup> A

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<sup>104</sup> Mountain Industrial Institute Application Card, 1924(?), 1920s Correspondence, Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>105</sup> Hurley, “Radio speech of S. R. Hurley, WLW, Nation’s Station, Cincinnati, OH,” March 30, 1934, and Hurley, “Material for Broadcast . . . Richmond,” Hurley Personal Papers; “Mr. and Mrs. S.R. Hurley”; and Heuman, *The Mountain Mission*, 50.

<sup>106</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 278.

<sup>107</sup> Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 35.

<sup>108</sup> J.T. Watson, “Grundy Academy,” *Christian Standard*, May 20, 1922, 3564.

contribution to the magazine by Josephus Hopwood further explained why the school focused on Christian faith:

The greatest hindrances to the liberty and progress of our race are sin and ignorance. Christian education is the one divine means for removing these hindrances, giving young people opportunities to grow into their highest possibilities. Education alone will not do this. Education will give power but power may be used to destroy the good or to attain some selfish ends. Hence the instilling of moral principles with Christian truths must form a vital part of every true system of youthful training.<sup>109</sup>

An article published the following year affirms this desire to correct the problem of the current system of education: “We are giving youth intellectual training and liberty without educating them in reverence for law, human or divine.” Grundy Academy – and schools like it – provided the solution: “An industrial Christian institution conducted by men and women who love their work and who are themselves, in word and act, worthy patterns for young people to follow.”<sup>110</sup>

Such beliefs resulted in a Progress Report written in December of 1928 by the school’s financial secretary, H.L. Eddy: “The rock of our foundation – Christian education – will be our primary dominant note without which education would be bereft of its cornerstone and foundation.”<sup>111</sup>

Simply because an institution includes the label “Christian” does not necessarily mean it is limited to the control of one Protestant denomination. Hurley was a professed believer, yet he treated Mountain Industrial Institute as a business venture. The original charter for the school placed control of its operation in the hands of an independent Board of Trustees. According to section IV:

The entire management and control of the affairs of the institution is to be invested in a Board of not less than fifteen nor more than thirty Trustees, at least three-fourths of whom shall be members of the Church of Christ and in good standing with the people

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<sup>109</sup> Hopwood, “An Open Letter from Josephus Hopwood,” 3529.

<sup>110</sup> “Why Build Grundy Academy?” *Christian Standard*, March 17, 1923, 718.

<sup>111</sup> H. L. Eddy, “Progress Report,” December 8, 1928, McConnell Personal Papers.

known as Christians only or Disciples of Christ, and none of them shall be less than twenty-two years of age.<sup>112</sup>

The lists of trustees represented Hurley's business-like approach to the work at the school were impressive. Trustees for Grundy Academy included Thomas L. Felts,<sup>113</sup> head of Baldwin Felts Detective Agency in Bluefield, West Virginia; F.E. Morgan, cashier at the First National Bank in Grundy; A.J. Coffey, minister from Logan, West Virginia; Mrs. J.W. Waldron of Grundy; Josephus Hopwood; and Sam Hurley. Trustee members for 1923 included Mr. Hopwood, Mr. Hurley, Mr. Morgan, and Mrs. Waldron, adding new members Dr. J.P. McConnell, President of East Radford Normal in Radford, Virginia; Senator J.N. Harman of Tazewell, Virginia; A.C. Stacy, Buchanan County Treasurer; F. H. Comb, Commonwealth's Attorney for Buchanan County; and J. H. Stinson, lawyer and Virginia House of Delegates member.<sup>114</sup>

Hurley's approach to raising money to continue the work of the school reflected his knowledge of business. Beginning in December of 1928, Hurley worked to organize a National Committee with the purpose of raising one million dollars "to assist boys and girls with little or no means, in securing a preparatory, industrial, Christian education." Hurley successfully convinced many prosperous and influential individuals to accept a position on the committee, including Carter Glass, U.S. Senator from Virginia; Kathrine Langley, Congresswoman of Kentucky; Dr. John Wesley Hill, Chancellor of Lincoln Memorial University; C. Bascomb

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<sup>112</sup> "Grundy Academy," *Virginia Corporate Charter Book*, 394.

<sup>113</sup> Thomas Lee Felts joined William G. Baldwin to form the Baldwin-Felts Detectives, Inc. Depending on one's perspective, the Baldwin-Felts detectives were viewed as thugs or as good policemen. Felts ran the agency from Bluefield, West Virginia, to handle coal mine security.

<sup>114</sup> Hopwood, "An Open Letter from Josephus Hopwood," 3529 and "Trustees Grundy Academy Optimistic," *Christian Standard*, June 16, 1923, 1121.

Slemp, former Secretary to President Coolidge; General Mark L. Hersey, Major General of the U.S. Army; and Governor Henry W. Anderson of Kentucky.<sup>115</sup>

Hurley hoped to obtain financial security through an endowment for Mountain Industrial Institute and to use the National Committee to encourage “wealthy influential men” and “wealthy women” to donate large sums of money to continue the work at the school. Hurley looked to the wealthy, in part, because “We have received very little financial support from the churches”<sup>116</sup> and, in part, because other independent schools in Appalachia seemed to be receiving large monetary donations from wealthy patrons. In 1928, the same year Hurley began organizing his committee, Henry Ford bestowed four million dollars on the Berry Schools in Rome, Georgia, while Theodore Roosevelt, Julia Ward Howe, Woodrow Wilson, and Andrew Carnegie gave to Berea College in Berea, Kentucky.<sup>117</sup>

With the work of the school moving forward, Mountain Industrial Institute’s continued success seemed assured. Thus, when the stock market crashed in October 1929, no one, least of all Sam Hurley, was quite sure how to react. On August 4, 1930, upon receiving a letter from J. P. McConnell that he would resign from his position as a trustee member for Mountain Industrial Institute, Hurley replied:

I have several different propositions under consideration which makes it very difficult for me to decide what I ought to do. I am not looking out for what is to me best interest [sic] and that of my family [sic], but I am trying to decide what I should do in order to accomplish the most good for the most people. Realizing [sic] my limited qualifications to

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<sup>115</sup> Hurley to McConnell, February 11, 1929 and “The National Committee for The Mountain Industrial Institute of Grundy, VA,” McConnell Personal Papers. Proponents of industrial education had organized a lobbying group, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education; it is possible Hurley modeled his own National Committee on this model.

<sup>116</sup> Hurley, “Progress Report”, December 8, 1928, Ibid. and Hurley, “Mountain Prep. School Challenges Disciples,” *Christian Standard*, September 1, 1928, 890.

<sup>117</sup> Guthrie, “Education and the Evolution of the South,” 81 and Elisabeth S. Peck, *Berea’s First Century: 1855-1955* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1955), 147.

do the work which I have been trying to do, I have tried for several years unbeknowing [sic] to any of the Board members to secure some one [sic] to take charge of this work and release [sic] me of the position which I occupy with this school, but I have failed. Therefore I have been forced to continue or just withdraw and let the work go to naught . . . with reference to the many nice and flattering expressions which you have said about me, I appreciate [sic] them and thank you, but I feel that they are unmerited and unwarranted [sic], I really [sic] feel that my life has been a failure.<sup>118</sup>

The future of Mountain Industrial Institute was now at stake.

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<sup>118</sup> Hurley to McConnell, August 4, 1930, McConnell Personal Papers.

## CHAPTER 4

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: MOUNTAIN MISSION SCHOOL CONTINUES DESPITE A NATIONAL DEPRESSION AND A WORLD WAR

“The other three mission schools in Buchanan County are not attempting to operate”<sup>1</sup>: The 1930s

The Great Depression of the 1930s was not kind to the mission schools in Buchanan County. The Grundy Presbyterian School, founded in 1908, had closed at the beginning of the depression in 1929. The Baptist Mission School, founded in 1910, was taken over by the state school system in 1931 because of “lack of funds,” as was the Triangular Mountain Institute, founded by the Methodist Church in 1920.<sup>2</sup> Would Mountain Industrial Institute follow the fate of the other county mission schools and be forced by circumstances to close their doors?

Both Elizabeth R. Hooker and John C. Campbell commented on the importance of a strong leader to the success of a school in the Appalachian Mountains. Hooker claimed that a leader could influence the school, which in turn influenced the leader: “Especially important are the principals and other head workers who while moulding [sic] their institutions have in turn been shaped by the work to dominance and to tenacity of ideas and purposes.”<sup>3</sup> For Campbell, the most influential mountain schools were

those whose policy has been determined and guided by a strong individual or individuals upon the field, untrammled by outside restrictions. Their weaknesses arise, however, from this very element of their strength; namely, from a too great dependence upon the strong characters who have given their impress to the work and who, in the mind of the supporting public, are inseparably connected with it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hurley to McConnell, December 14, 1933, Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 1 67-68 and Bevins, “A History of Education in Buchanan County.”

<sup>3</sup> Hooker, *Religion in the Highlands*, 208-209.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 272.

Hurley would prove to be the leader needed to bring the mission school he founded through the difficult years of the 1930s, without being the too-strong personality Campbell warned could lead to its downfall. Circumstances resulting from the Depression made the school's second decade of existence difficult, but Hurley relied on the purpose he established at the school's founding, his personal commitment, and new fund-raising efforts, to continue the school's mission to serve children.

Hurley had arrived at a critical time in his life, both professionally and personally. When he had founded the mission school, he had not intended on remaining with the institution beyond its first few years. In a 1922 article published in the *Christian Standard*, J. T. Watson wrote, "A few loyal and determined brethren have begun in faith that God will raise up the right leader to take the task and with them follow the vision."<sup>5</sup> Professionally, he had taken up the cause of educating the needy mountain youth, but Hurley's apparent objective simply was to establish the institution before withdrawing his direct participation in its operation. Personally, however, he wanted to model service to God through the school. In the 1928 Progress Report to the Board of Trustees, the same report that explained a plan to pursue large donations from wealthy men and women, Hurley claimed a higher calling:

Whatever good has been accomplished by our school to these young people, God has done it, and God will perfect this work. You and I are but channels to accomplish His purpose. Our activity has been a demonstration of unselfish love for humanity, and that impulse can come but from one source – from God and His love for mankind. I am as never before depending upon God's guidance as we are using every honorable activity of mind and heart which he blesses us to bring the fulfillment of what we believe is in line with His purpose.<sup>6</sup>

But with the onset of the Depression, his faith wavered under the financial pressures of supporting his own family, as well as his mission school family.

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<sup>5</sup> Watson, "Grundy Academy," 3565.

<sup>6</sup> Hurley, "Progress Report," December 8, 1928, McConnell Personal Papers.

He wrote to Dr. McConnell, on July 17, 1930, just weeks before McConnell had resigned from the school's board, to request a favor. His plan was to take the bar examination in Kentucky. Since he had received no formal education, he asked McConnell to write a letter vouching for Hurley's "educational qualifications." McConnell's immediate response was positive, and he wrote a glowing report both of Hurley's personal character and ability to practice law.<sup>7</sup> But nothing more was ever mentioned of this plan. Hurley had a more challenging personal decision to face - should he stay at the school or, like McConnell, resign?

Ironically, although Hurley's personal test of faith stemmed from the loss of an influential member of the school's Board of Trustees, but his ability to overcome the difficult circumstances came from the same person. McConnell, who had worked with Hurley since the school's inception, continued to support the school through the 1920s, and now at a critical turning point in its history, remained a steadfast supporter. Hurley acknowledged how important McConnell's support was for him in the letter he wrote responding to McConnell's resignation:

It has been through the encouragement received from you that kept me connected with this school. I have undergone many hardship [sic], discouragement and disappointment [sic] by being connected with the school. But after all I have received considerable satisfaction and joy in watching the boys and girls grow and developed into Christian manhood and womenhood [sic] and make useful men and women out of themselves.<sup>8</sup>

What Hurley undoubtedly found was, indeed, dependence upon strong characters. John McConnell was one such person.

McConnell's resignation from the Board of Trustees of the Mountain Industrial Institute did not indicate that he had lost confidence in the school. In fact, the day after informing Hurley of his desire to withdraw from the board, McConnell again wrote Hurley, underscoring his continued support:

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<sup>7</sup> Hurley to McConnell, June 17, 1930 and McConnell to Hurley, June 20, 1930, McConnell Personal Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Hurley to McConnell, July 29, 1930, Ibid.

From the day the Mountain Industrial Institute was opened my heart went out to it. All my educational life I have had some doubt as to whether I did not make a mistake myself in not going into some kind of educational work like the Mountain Industrial Institute . . . I was born and brought up in a backwoods section of the country myself. Educational opportunities were meager,[sic] I know what it means for children not to have an open door to school and an opportunity presented to them. For this reason my heart has always been in the work at the Mountain Institute.<sup>9</sup>

Then, on August 1, 1930, he informed the other board members of his resignation, but reiterated his support both for the school and, more importantly, for Sam Hurley, stating, “I have great admiration and respect for the energy, the enthusiasm, and the tenacity with which the President of the Board of Trustees, Honorable S.R. Hurley, has gone forward with his work . . . It has been a pleasure to be associated with the fine type of forward-looking and upward-looking men and women.”<sup>10</sup>

Following Hurley’s desperate letter on August 4, McConnell responded with more encouragement: “I too have been a dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions for education for the better things for our people. I can understand your feelings and emotions. In season and out of it I have taken occasion to speak up for you or for the outstanding sacrifices you have made and the unselfish way in which you have done your work.”<sup>11</sup> McConnell’s support remained through the coming Depression years. He wrote in November 1932, “Only God in Heaven knows how much good you have done through your educational adventures and the patience and vision which you have followed this up.”<sup>12</sup> His support succeeded in pulling Hurley through the difficulties he faced in 1930 and beyond. Hurley shared his appreciation for the unwavering support of his fellow educator in a letter written in December of 1932:

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<sup>9</sup> McConnell to Hurley, July 30, 1930, Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> McConnell to “Friend and Fellow-Worker,” Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> McConnell to Hurley, August 7, 1930, Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> McConnell to Hurley, November 26, 1932, Ibid.

[Mrs. Hurley and I] both appreciate the sympathy and good will of you and Mrs. McConnell and the many good remarks which we have heard of you making regarding ourselves and the school, but above all of these, the inspiration and encouragement which your letters have brought to use from time to time have created within us a greater desire and determination to press forward in our work.<sup>13</sup>

As Hurley indicated, support from a trusted friend carried him through difficult times. But as McConnell mentioned, only God truly knew what Hurley had done, and it was through faith in God that Hurley was able to continue serving Him as President of the mission school.

Hurley may have remained President, but the institution he served had a new name. According to a letter Hurley sent McConnell on November 22, 1930, “The executive committee decided that under the circumstances [resulting from the Depression] it would be best to organize and incorporate the school under a new name.”<sup>14</sup> The school’s purpose would remain the same, but the school would from then on be known as Mountain Mission School.<sup>15</sup> The name change also reflected Hurley’s personal commitment to serve the school, as he now considered it his mission instead of a charity.

Hurley’s first course of action was to retrench. His unconventional “plan of cooperation” involved sending the high school students to the county school for their education during the 1930-1931 school year. Although Hurley preferred to keep the students on campus, but the one-year sacrifice saved the school the salaries needed for the high school teachers. In fact, the arrangement may have contributed to the school treasurer’s comment in June 1931 that “the school is in the best shape it has ever been financially,” an unusual statement considering the financial condition of the nation at large. But this arrangement was only temporary, as Hurley had already decided for the 1931-1932 year to “have school up here,” since he had hired more

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<sup>13</sup> Hurley to McConnell, December 3, 1932, Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hurley to McConnell, November, 22, 1930, Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

staff to create a full faculty that included high school and commercial work instructors.<sup>16</sup> With a new determination, Hurley began preparations for raising money using three major tactics: letter-writing campaigns, articles published in the *Christian Standard*, and radio addresses broadcast from regional stations.

In the early stages of the Depression, Hurley wrote to well-known philanthropists and public officials to seek their financial help. Despite the apparent disbanding of the National Committee following the stock market crash in October 1929,<sup>17</sup> Hurley continued to believe the wealthy would assist him in financing the school. In August 1930, he wrote both Calvin Coolidge and Andrew Mellon (who had sent \$1,000 to the school in 1929) requesting a monetary donation to help purchase the school property that was now in the hands of a bank receiver. On November 9, 1932, he asked Edsel Ford for a late model sedan to transport the school's children. In December of that year, he again wrote to Mellon. But none of these wealthy men sent what was requested. By 1933, Hurley appeared to have written many members of Congress asking for help. Those who replied did not send donations: Senator Morris Sheppard from Texas on April 1; Representative James Beck of Pennsylvania and Representative W.A. Ayres of Kansas on April 6; Representative Fred Biermann on April 8; and Senator Marcus Coolidge of Massachusetts on April 10. Hurley even wrote to John D. Rockefeller, Sr., in February 1934, but to no avail. The only positive reply he received from those early communications was some free trip passes from H.P. Raymond, the general manager of a bus line, to use in 1933 when Hurley traveled to raise money for the school.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> McConnell to Supt. P.V. Dennis, July 30, 1930; J.H. Stinson to McConnell, June 17, 1931; and Jeannette Hurley to McConnell, September 4, 1931, *Ibid.*; and Buchanan County School Board to Hurley, April 21, 1931, Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>17</sup> No documents have been found mentioning the National Committee after 1929.

<sup>18</sup> Hurley Personal Papers.

In spite of the lack of early success, Hurley's determination and new-found optimism prevailed. In an October 25, 1932 letter to Josephus Hopwood, Hurley remarked, "We are all well and the school is getting along nicely if we can manage to finance it through but our contributions are falling off since a year ago; however we are still hoping and praying that conditions will improve to the extent that we will be able to continue our work."<sup>19</sup> Hurley's positive outlook is also evident in an article he wrote for the *Christian Standard* in September 1933: "In the face of many difficulties arising from bank failures and financial losses by many patrons of the school, a full nine months' term will be maintained."<sup>20</sup> In other words, even though times were tough, Hurley continued operating his school without giving up hope. Hurley's fortitude was about to pay off. While he initially expected the wealthy would help finance the school, he instead discovered those of modest means would heed Hurley's call to "save the child."<sup>21</sup>

A January 1933 letter from Hurley to his daughter Jeanette at the Richmond subscription office indicated \$57.69 was spent on just one week's postage. Was such an investment worthwhile? The answer came as letters began arriving from all over Virginia and around the world. The letter that traveled the farthest was also one of the first to arrive, all the way from Coco Solo in the Canal Zone in Panama. A letter accompanied the donation: "Wish I were able to contribute more than the small check enclosed, but the depression makes it impossible."<sup>22</sup> A contributor from Philadelphia sent his regular subscription plus an extra donation on February 15, the same day the vice-president of the Mechanics and Merchants Bank in Richmond sent his.

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<sup>19</sup> Hurley to Hopwood, October 25, 1932, Hopwood Correspondence.

<sup>20</sup> Hurley, "Thirteenth Session of Mountain Mission School," *Christian Standard*, September 9, 1933, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Hurley, "Save the Child," *Ibid.*, November 4, 1933, 216.

<sup>22</sup> C.D. Allen to Hurley, January 30, 1933, Hurley Personal Papers.

Two Virginia chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution sent ten dollars each in the month of February.<sup>23</sup> Such letters and their contributions would become vital in keeping Mountain Mission School running as the nation's financial slump continued.

By March 1933 the Depression directly affected the school when the banking system collapsed during the transition of presidential power from Hoover to Roosevelt.<sup>24</sup> The "bank holiday" initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt locked up all of the school's assets when the bank holding the school's deposits temporarily closed.<sup>25</sup> Hurley immediately began another letter-writing campaign. When John McConnell asked Hurley about the new literature he sent out, Hurley responded, "it seemed to be very acceptable to those to whom we sent out letters as they have responded nobly to our appeal and until the recent closing of the Banks we have exceeded our most sanguine expectations in view of the economic conditions."<sup>26</sup> Letters continued to return later in the year. In September, a woman from Austin, Texas, after reading literature on the school, sent one dollar to help as she could even though "the depression has laid extra expense on my shoulders."<sup>27</sup> A member of the faculty of the Duke School of Religion sent a small check upon receiving a letter in November. He wrote the donation "is not the measure of my interest in your work but only of my ability to support it."<sup>28</sup> Another contributor to the mission school's cause may answer why these letters were so successful. Josephine Black, an employee of the Treasury Department (specifically the Office of Register of the Treasury) in

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<sup>23</sup> Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Editors of Time-Life Books, *Hard Times: The 1930s*, Our American Century Series, (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1998), 25.

<sup>25</sup> Hurley, "A Special SOS Call for Help," *Christian Standard*, April 15 1933, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Hurley to McConnell, March 6, 1933, Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Mrs. L.P. Pack to Hurley, September 28, 1933, Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Frank S. Hickman to Hurley, December 19, 1933, Ibid.

Washington, D.C. wrote to Sam Hurley on March 29, 1932, before the banking crisis. She stated, “While the demands are many here, I feel that if your needs can reach people here in some personal way, as through Mr. Hurley and letters, you may have more and more response.”<sup>29</sup> She referred in her statement to meeting Mr. Hurley in Washington earlier. Such encouragement undoubtedly led to his successful letter-writing campaign in 1933.

Hurley also used the *Christian Standard* to make pleas for monetary aid. The April 1933 article entitled, “A Special SOS Call for Help” indicated just how anxious Hurley was over his school’s future.<sup>30</sup> His appeal was heeded, as is indicated by a follow-up article written on June 10:

Despite the fact that funds were tied up in closed banks, and many supporters of the school suffered heavily during the financial stringency, the institution received aid from many new friends and goes forward with renewed hope. All operating expenses were promptly met and the budget balanced.<sup>31</sup>

Another article, published in the November 4 issue, also elicited a positive response. “Save the Child” led one Washington, D.C. resident to send a donation and a note: “Hoping you have had good returns in these bad times.”<sup>32</sup> The Christian Missionary Society of the Mechanicsburg Christian Church in Virginia sent a ten dollar donation and said after reading the article “it so touched us that we felt we must give what we could to help in this great cause” especially because it was a mission in their own region.”<sup>33</sup> But contributions did not arrive only from the immediate vicinity. Christians throughout the United States read and responded to Hurley’s

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<sup>29</sup> Josephine Black to Hurley, March 29, 1932, Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “A Special SOS Call for Help,” 16.

<sup>31</sup> Hurley, “Mountain Mission School Closes Successful Term,” *Christian Standard*, June 10, 1933, 16.

<sup>32</sup> “Save the Child,” 16.

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Bernard to Hurley, November 7, 1933, Hurley Personal Papers.

entreaty. A reader from Plattsburg, Missouri sent three dollars and another from Chetek, Wisconsin sent one dollar after reading the article.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Hurley's letter-writing campaign and article submissions to the *Christian Standard* in 1933 were successful in securing donations that allowed the school to continue to operate.

Unfortunately, the banking situation only grew worse for Mountain Mission School as the Depression continued. The most serious problem the school faced was the foreclosure of the mortgage on the school's property. This situation had been mentioned as early as 1930 in various letters written to potential supporters. The best explanation of the situation is found in a letter written to a school supporter in Bluefield, West Virginia, on July 31, 1934. Hurley wrote, "During the 'high tide' of business and prosperity the Trustees of [the] Mission School, in their zeal and enthusiasm . . . borrowed \$75,000 with which to finish the buildings, pay on the real estate and make other improvements" to the campus. The loan had been reduced to \$56,000 when "the financial crash came and the bank that made the loan closed. The mortgage on the property was foreclosed" and placed in the hands of a bank receiver.<sup>35</sup> These facts alone were sobering, but just what they meant to the future of the school had yet to be realized.

In July 1936, Hurley found his school in a grave situation as it was about to be sold by the latest bank receiver. In an appeal to *Christian Standard* readers, Hurley wrote, the receiver "is prepared to put the property up for sale at the end of July." He needed \$12,000 to \$15,000 to buy the property back before someone else was given the opportunity.<sup>36</sup> But in the *Christian Standard* article, Hurley was not completely candid about the severity of the situation. Hurley

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Hurley to A.Z. Peters, July 31, 1934, Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "An Investment in Good Work," *Christian Standard*, July 4, 1936, 4.

was more frank in a letter to a school supporter written the same month: “The present Receiver has been very hostile toward to school.”<sup>37</sup> In another letter, he explained the one ray of hope Mountain Mission School had: “It was [the receiver’s] intention to advertise and sell the property July 1<sup>st</sup>, but after prevailing with him he granted an extension of thirty days.”<sup>38</sup> Sam Hurley now had only thirty days to save his beloved mission school. How was he going to raise all that money in such a short time? The same way he raised needed funds in 1933 – sending letters and writing *Christian Standard* articles.

The plan Hurley finally adopted to save Mountain Mission School was one suggested by T.O. Hathcock of Atlanta. He proposed the selling of bonds to raise the necessary funds. To pay back the bonds, the school would sell lots, a viable plan since the school had some extra land and Grundy was steadily growing because of the discovery of coal in the region in 1930.<sup>39</sup> In the July 4, 1936, issue of the *Christian Standard*, the same one in which the bond plan was introduced, J.W. West of the Mountain States Evangelizing Association encouraged readers to purchase the bonds as a safe investment.<sup>40</sup> Even the magazine itself wrote an editorial promoting the bond sale: “It is high time we put [Mountain Mission School] on its feet. At least we have this opportunity to save it.”<sup>41</sup> The next week’s issue included an editorial endorsing the school’s bond sale by praising Sam Hurley: “Brother Hurley has, with marvelous skill, brought the school

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<sup>37</sup> Hurley to Mrs. H.G. Haney, July 25, 1936, Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Hurley to F.J. Messenger, July 8, 1936, Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Baker, *Bountiful and Beautiful*, 124, and Richardson, *History of Buchanan County*, 10, 12. Coal companies organized in 1930 included the Home Creek Coal Company, Buchanan County Coal Corporation, and the Panther Coal Company. A subsequent building of the Norfolk and Western Railway to transport the coal began running in 1931.

<sup>40</sup> “An Investment in a Good Work,” 4 and Hurley, “Grundy Christian Mission,” *Christian Standard*, July 4, 1936, 14.

<sup>41</sup> “An Investment in a Good Work,” 4.

through this depression thus far and had enlarged the load owing to drought conditions in those hills, without carrying a current expense deficit.”<sup>42</sup> The next issue then included another article on the school, including an announcement that \$6,000 in bonds had been purchased thus far.<sup>43</sup>

The article, “Grundy Mission School Opens Sixteenth Term,” published on September 26, 1936, informed *Christian Standard* readers that the school had been redeemed.<sup>44</sup> A letter sent to Mrs. S.S. Hinkle by Sam Hurley at the same time the *Christian Standard* article appeared, best explained the success of the bond sale: “We have succeeded in selling bonds sufficient to redeem all of the real estate which was held by the bank, and we expect to obtain title for the property on October 1<sup>st</sup>.”<sup>45</sup> As a thank you to all those who aided the school in its greatest time of need, the *Christian Standard* ran the following in its November 28 issue:

This year there was serious danger of losing the school. A plan of finance was adopted . . . Faithful workers and friends carried on and success was reported. There was averted this threatened tragedy which would have turned scores of children out of the only home they have. This is a project of faith, maintained by the prayers and gifts of friends.<sup>46</sup>

Mountain Mission School continued to serve children because of the many supporters who were willing to provide support in even the most critical situation.

Hurley used a third means to ensure Mountain Mission School’s survival. Although not as much information is available on the topic of radio addresses, the materials available demonstrate that the radio address offered another viable avenue of fund-raising. Early radio addresses from 1934 and 1935 simply consisted of speeches given by Hurley to provide a brief

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<sup>42</sup> “An Excellent Investment,” *Ibid.*, July 11, 1936, 4.

<sup>43</sup> “Save the Children of the Mountains,” *Ibid.*, July 18, 1936, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Hurley, “Grundy Mission School Opens Sixteenth Term,” *Ibid.*, September 26, 1936, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Hurley to Mrs. S.S. Hinkle, September 25, 1936, Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>46</sup> “Mountain Mission School, Grundy, VA,” *Christian Standard*, November 28, 1936, 10.

history of the school and promote its mission to the listening audience. Unlike the letters and articles he used previously, content sent via the airwaves was regulated. The traffic manager from the Crosley Radio Corporation in Cincinnati, Ohio, reminded Hurley that he was not allowed to solicit funds. Thus, to arouse interest from listeners, who would need to personally contact the school, Hurley introduced the various needs of students at the school and reminded listeners of the Great Commission to spread the Gospel throughout the world.<sup>47</sup>

Continuing to encourage Hurley, McConnell wrote to him concerning a program he had heard in February 1936. Hurley replied with facts concerning the success of that particular program: "I have received over four hundred letters the most of who stated that they listened at the program through tears. . . We received about three hundred contributions from the broadcast and they are still coming in." The program listeners heard in 1936 included speeches and entertainment provided by students: "We have two guitars, one banjo, and one violin. A group of nine sings with the musical instruments." The programs had developed into such a positive reputation that in 1937 the *Christian Standard* even ran advertisements to its readers to listen to the programs. By that year, programs featuring Mountain Mission School students were broadcast on stations in Cincinnati, Ohio; Nashville, Tennessee; Washington, D.C.; Richmond, Virginia; and Bluefield, West Virginia.<sup>48</sup>

Sam Hurley demonstrated his determination and leadership ability through his plans for the school after it was redeemed from the bank receiver. A June 1938 article in the *Christian Standard* explained: "After the school was refinanced, securing the property, plans were

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<sup>47</sup> C.L. Thomas to Hurley, March 27, 1934; "Radio Speech of S.R. Hurley Delivered over WLW, Nation's Station, Cincinnati, Ohio," March 30, 1934; and "Radio Speech of S.R. Hurley Delivered over the WDBJ Station, Roanoke, April 19, 1934"; Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Hurley to McConnell, February 22, 1936, McConnell Personal Papers; Hurley to Mr. James Moore, June 14, 1936 and Hurley to Manager WSAZ Broadcasting Station, January 23, 1937, Hurley Personal Papers; and "Tune In," *Christian Standard*, February 27, 1937, 153.

launched to finish and redecorate the buildings. A large number of rooms have been finished, needed brickwork completed, much repairing done, campus graded.”<sup>49</sup> The school was at risk just two years earlier, yet that close brush with failure did not deter Hurley’s vision for the future of the school. He did learn, however, from the experience. Instead of borrowing the money for the projects completed in 1938, as the trustees did in the 1920s, he used a new approach that was very popular in Virginia: “pay-as-you-go,” meaning “work is done only as money for same is available.”<sup>50</sup> In an article the following month, the magazine announced further improvements, including building more rooms for the boys’ residence. The school continued receiving support for such improvement efforts. Edwin Errett, *Christian Standard* editor, wrote, “All those who had a part in subscribing to the bonds and in giving may be assured that their help had been well utilized. The school is coming through. Repairs have been done well, and improvements are progressing.”<sup>51</sup> Improvements, indeed, continued. By December, Hurley announced the auditorium was enlarged, all stairways were rebuilt, eight new bathrooms were built, and 1600 feet of road were built to connect the school to the state highway.<sup>52</sup> Determined to keep Mountain Mission School strong, Hurley continued to lead the school towards a prosperous future.

Was all his hard work worth the effort? A number of graduates agreed that it was worthwhile. In a letter printed in the *Christian Standard* in 1938, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Fuller of

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<sup>49</sup> “Mountain Mission School,” *Ibid.*, June 25, 1938, 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Harry F. Byrd coined the term “pay-as-you-go” during his service as Virginia’s governor (1926-1930). The idea served Virginia well, for when Byrd left office, he also left the state with a four million dollar surplus in the treasury.

<sup>51</sup> “A New Day Dawns for Mountain Mission School,” *Ibid.*, July 9, 1938, 24, and “Mountain Mission School Winning Out,” *Ibid.*, July 16, 1938, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Hurley, “Mountain Mission School Takes in Nineteen More Orphans,” *Ibid.*, December 10, 1938, 17.

Minneapolis wrote, “To many you’ve been a lifeboat over the restless sea of life when all, it seemed, was lost . . . As my wife and I this year enter college we think of what might have been if it had not been for ‘Old MMS.’”<sup>53</sup> Dorothy Dolinger, another graduate, wrote a similar letter the following January. She stated, “Through the *Christian Standard* I want to pause to thank you for the wonderful things you’ve done for me and for others. You’ve meant so much to me during the past five years that it’s hard to express my gratitude.” She best explained why Sam Hurley, a successful businessman in timber, general merchandise, and contracting, would be willing to sacrifice his fortune to provide a home for needy children: “Your admirable character, faith, patience, lovingkindness and simplicity will stand when other things fall and go down.”<sup>54</sup>

On January 19, 1937, Sam Hurley wrote a song he had the children at Mountain Mission School sing before every meal, “I Want to Wake up in the Morning.” The words reflect both the joy of having redeemed the school in 1936, as well as knowing the school would continue into the future to serve other needy girls and boys:

I want to wake up in the morning under Grundy’s skies so blue,  
When the sun comes peeping in the place I am sleeping  
And the song-birds sing: “Howdy do!”  
I like to hike up in the mountains where the rhododendron grow.  
I like to live at Mountain Mission, it is the best place that I know.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, Sam Hurley, determined to lead Mountain Mission School into the future, used a variety of means to fulfill his vision. He encouraged success during the trying times of the 1930s through instituting a letter-writing campaign, writing *Christian Standard* articles, and broadcasting radio programs.

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<sup>53</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Fuller, “To Mountain Mission School, Grundy, VA,” *Ibid.*, October 29, 1938, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Dorothy Dolinger, “Address to Mountain Mission School, Grundy, VA,” *Ibid.*, January 14, 1939, 23, and Stanton, *A Miraculous Mountaineer*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Hurley, “I Want to Wake up in the Morning,” Hurley Personal Papers.

“I took up your call”<sup>56</sup>: The 1940s

With the war in Europe calling for participation from the United States, the potential for trouble for Hurley and Mountain Mission School again seemed inevitable. His daughter Lillian, now acting as secretary for the school, voiced her concerns to a supporter: “During these treacherous days of war, bloodshed, sufferings in the European countries, it seems that many of the American people have forgotten their duty to their God, their neighbor and themselves.”<sup>57</sup> But such a concern was to be unfounded, because there were, indeed, Americans who continued to support Mountain Mission School, whether Stone-Campbell Movement believers or businesses and unions. In fact, financial support arrived as never before.

On October 28, 1939, the *Christian Standard* published an article written by Hurley that challenged Sunday School classes to give their fifth Sunday offering to Mountain Mission School. Hurley stated, “We do not have the guarantee of a dollar from any source. However, we do have the faith in God, and faith in those who are possessor of God’s cattle, God’s land, and God’s money.”<sup>58</sup> The school began receiving donations in response to the article right away; the churches were rising up to answer Hurley’s call. The *Christian Standard* ran another article two months later complimenting the twenty-four Sunday School classes from eight states that had already pledged such offerings, including churches from neighboring Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia, as well as the Midwestern states of Missouri, Illinois, and Arkansas.<sup>59</sup>

But the fifth Sunday offerings did not stop with a one-time donation – the churches continued to collect them and send them to the school. The same month Lillian Begley

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<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Robert B. Harris to Hurley, August 16, 1946, Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Lillian Begley to Mrs. A.J. Sabourin, April, 11, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Hurley, “American Children Starve,” *Christian Standard*, October 28, 1939, 1044.

<sup>59</sup> Hurley, “Extensive Response to Grundy School,” Ibid., December 23, 1939, 1237.

communicated her concerns about donations, churches were forwarding their fifth Sunday offerings. The Christian Bible School from Williamson, West Virginia, sent their donation March 31; the Buffalo Sunday School in Bluff City, Tennessee, sent theirs April 1; the Christian Church at West Union, Illinois, turned in their contribution on April 3; and The Sunday School class at the Church of Christ in Damascus, Virginia, contributed April 6.<sup>60</sup>

Mountain Mission School also received money from unexpected sources, other children. In addition to adult Sunday School classes and churches sending donations, children's Sunday School classes from all over the United States began collecting money to help Hurley and the children living at Mountain Mission School. Groups included the Junior Christian Endeavor from Monmouth, Oregon; a Sunday School class of fifteen nine-year-olds from Bakersfield, California; and the primary department of the Church of Christ in Sebring, Ohio.<sup>61</sup>

Individual Christians also contributed what they could to help the mission school in Grundy. Like McConnell before them, they contributed words of encouragement in addition to monetary donations. Mr. and Mrs. J.O. Whistler from Indiana sent three separate donations in 1940 "for your beautiful Christian work."<sup>62</sup> Farther west, Mr. and Mrs. F.W. O'Malley of Temple, Texas, sent multiple donations and encouragement. Their December 12, 1940, contribution promised, "We trust to send some more in the coming year if we still remain on earth." They made good on that promise in a March 7, 1941, letter, encouraging the staff with

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<sup>60</sup> C.C. Terry to Hurley, March 31, 1940; Mabel Feathers to Sir, April 1, 1940; Fairy Collier to Mountain Mission School, April 3, 1940; and Brancen Wyatt to Friends, April 6, 1940; Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Mrs. W.A. Elkins to Sir, March 25, 1940; Virginia Farrell to Hurley, June 8, 1940; and Mildred L. Howell to Hurley, November 29, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Mr. and Mrs. J.O. Whistler to Christian Friends, September 7, 1940, October 13, 1940, and December 10, 1940, Ibid.

“God bless you and all the workers and all those who are being helped.”<sup>63</sup> From even farther west arrived four contributions in 1940 from Mr. and Mrs. N.E. Feakins of Oakland, California. Each donation explained the money was “to help with the work you are doing.”<sup>64</sup>

Responding to letters from Sam Hurley requesting aid, businesses also sent contributions. Charitable monetary gifts arrived from the Pet Dairy Products Company facility in Bristol, Virginia; the Pounding Mill Quarry Corporation in Virginia; and the Elkins 5-10-25 cents stores in Texas. J.D. Bassett, Sr., chairman of the board for the Bassett Furniture Company of Virginia sent encouragement, as well as a donation, to Hurley: “I have heard a lot about your school and the wonderful work you are doing and I want to wish you much success in it.”<sup>65</sup> But, businessmen were not limited to sending monetary donations. Dr. W.L. Stumbo wrote to Hurley offering hospitalization services to any student or faculty member in need of such services. He even offered to put on a clinic at the school.<sup>66</sup>

Donations from some organizations arrived under unusual circumstances. The Koppers Coal Company sent \$166 to the school on March 8, 1940. This amount “covers a portion of fines assessed against members of the Kopperston local union for violating its contract by striking last November 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>.” The letter stated that a contract between the United Mine Workers and the Coal Operators Association agreed to fine striking workers, with a provision that “these fines must be collected by the company and given to such charities as are agreed upon

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<sup>63</sup> Mr. and Mrs. F.W. O’Malley to Hurley, December 12, 1940 and March 7, 1941, Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Mr. and Mrs. N.E. Feakins to Hurley, March 9, 1940; March 29, 1940; March 23, 1940; and July 6, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> L.H. Pruner to Hurley, April 12, 1940; C.M. Hunter to Gentlemen, April 9, 1940; J.K. Elkins to Mountain Mission School, May 2, 1940; and J.D. Bassett, Sr. to Gentlemen, October 19, 1940; Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> W.L. Stumbo, M.D. to Hurley, August 24, 1940, Ibid.

between representatives of the union and representatives of the company.”<sup>67</sup> Other unions mailed donations without as much fanfare. The Modern Woodmen of America chapter from Mt. Jackson, Virginia, donated a small amount “as you are doing a fine job.” The Norton, Virginia, chapter of the United Mine Workers of America also gave to the school, sending along their “good wishes.”<sup>68</sup>

Ironically, despite the lack of success Hurley had with wealthy benefactors in the early 1930s, he was able to elicit more positive responses in the 1940s. Clark Gable may not have contributed to Mountain Mission School, as his secretary explained, “You will understand that the demands of this kind are so numerous that it had been necessary to restrict their contributions entirely to local charities.”<sup>69</sup> A number of politicians did. William F. Hubbard, a member of the House of Representatives in Kansas sent a donation on behalf of his Sunday School class. Harry Flood Byrd, again declined a position on the school’s Board of Trustees (“I have made it a definite policy not to accept appointment on any board unless I am in a position to attend to the duties involved”), but mailed a donation and a note of encouragement: “I enclose you a check, which please accept with my appreciation of the fine work you are doing.”<sup>70</sup> Even more impressive than the donation from the former Governor, and current Senator, of Virginia was the letters from the eleventh Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes sent a contribution to Mountain Mission School on May 6, 1940, and another March 25, 1946, after he had retired from the bench.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> C.R. Bourland, to Hurley, March 8, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> J.M. Dawson to Hurley, July 11, 1940 and John Saxton to Hurley, November 7, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> J. Earl Gareeau to Hurley, February 1, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Harry F. Byrd to Hurley, December 13, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> W.W. Mischler to Sirs, May 6, 1940 and March 25, 1946, Ibid.

The 1940s had, indeed, witnessed a growth in contributions despite the second world war. Yet unlike the contributors of the 1930s, a new category was emerging, those who began donating to Mountain Mission School as a result of the influence of a family member. Sam Hurley received a letter from Lucy G. Boyce on April 12, 1940 with an donation and an unusual request. Her sister, who was on the school's mailing list, had died. Boyce asked, "Will you please take her name off your books, you may substitute mine instead." H.M. Burton, Jr., also sent money in April 1940. He noted his father had contributed to the school, so in memory of his father's passing the month before he also sent a donation. When cleaning out her mother's purse following her death, Mrs. John Allen came across a dollar. She forwarded the money to Mountain Mission School because "Her heart went out to the children you told her of." When literature about the school arrived addressed to his wife, who had died a few months before, James Hill forwarded a donation in her memory and asked Hurley to "use it as needed in your work, as Mrs. Hill would also wish, if she were here."<sup>72</sup>

Why, then, was there an increased interest in supporting a school that had been open for almost twenty years? Two different sources provide the same answer to that question: Mountain Mission School had proven itself a worthy institution. The Gleaners Class of the College Park Christian Church in College Park, Georgia, sent a donation on September 26, 1940, noting "we found that we had \$5.00 in our missionary fund that we could donate to some worthy cause, and we know that your school is one of the most worthy."<sup>73</sup> Mark F. Harris, a minister from Griggville, Illinois, who attended Johnson Bible College with Hurley's son-in-law Charles Sublett, was more blunt; the mission circle from his congregation had been supporting missions

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<sup>72</sup> Lucy G. Boyce to Hurley, April 12, 1940; H.M. Burton, Jr. to Hurley, April 18, 1940; Mrs. John Allen to Hurley, May 14, 1940; and Mrs. D.C. Driscoll to Hurley, October 15, 1940; Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Mrs. E.M. Head to Hurley, September 26, 1940, Ibid.

for three years, but by 1940 observed, “most of them haven’t any more vision than a mouse . . . Our hearts yearn for those unfortunate children . . . we’ll do all in our power to give the church the vision.”<sup>74</sup>

By the 1940s, then, regular support continued to increase as contributors caught Hurley’s vision for the mission of the school. With optimism for the coming years, he wrote another article for the *Christian Standard* that summarized why the challenges the school had faced had been worthwhile:

Through faith, patience, prayer and perseverance, God enabled us to overcome numerous discouragements and disappointments during the lean years and dark days of the past. But after twenty years of struggle, self-denial and sacrifice, we enter upon a new era in the life and history of this Christian institution. The Lord directing our steps, thoughts and acts, many new friends and contributors were added to our roster the past year.<sup>75</sup>

Many of these new friends and contributors to whom Hurley referred came from the church. Twenty years had passed before many of the churches established by the Stone-Campbell Movement joined Sam Hurley in taking care of needy children, but once they did, their contributions made a difference: “at least the church caught the sound and has given more support to the mission work the past two years than it did the previous ten years.”<sup>76</sup>

In 1943, Hurley shared his vision for the future of Mountain Mission School: “It is our desire and ambition, while Mrs. Hurley and I are able to work, to make every advancement and improvement possible and to lay well the foundation for a million dollar institution.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Mark F. Harris to Hurley, October 28, 1940, Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Hurley, “Mountain Mission School, Grundy, Va.: Statement by the President,” *Christian Standard*, May 3, 1941, 482.

<sup>76</sup> Hurley, “The Voice from the Hills,” Ibid., January 24, 1942, 82 and Hurley, “A Voice from the Hills,” “*The Restoration Herald*, February 1942, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Hurley, “Outstanding Advance for Mountain Mission School: Valuable Thousand-acre Farm Purchased for Development of Food Resources,” *Christian Standard*, May 1, 1943, 395.

Questions concerning just how long the Hurleys would be able to serve their beloved mission school began to surface. Now in their mid-sixties, they both began to suffer health problems. Sam Hurley wrote to alumnus Judith Dawson concerning his health, explaining that he had been to the Bluefield Sanitorium to receive radium treatments for cancer on his face in the early months of 1946, while his wife suffered from high blood pressure.<sup>78</sup> Later in the year Hurley's health continued to be poor enough to require a visit Hot Springs, Arkansas, for relief.<sup>79</sup> The time had come to pass on the work of Mountain Mission School to another generation.

The alumna to whom Hurley wrote was willing to share the good work of the school by speaking about the school. Upon representing its mission to the Columbia Church of Christ in Cincinnati in July 1946, the program chairman commented, "Miss Judith was a very able speaker and I am sure everyone was glad to hear of your work first hand."<sup>80</sup> Later in the year, she and her sister presented Mountain Mission School to the Antioch Church in Montgomery, Indiana, stressing to their audience "the need of expanding your good work, so find enclosed check for \$75.00 to help in this work."<sup>81</sup> Another representative of the school was Evelyn Spring, who spoke to the C.W.M. Society of the Perry Christian Church in Perry, Ohio: "We enjoyed her talk very much, about the Mt. Mission School."<sup>82</sup>

Others who had heard about or visited the school shared its mission. Myrtle B. Lacy of Richmond, Virginia, sent a donation because she "heard through friends of the wonderful work your school is carrying forward," while Anna L. Meek of Phoenix, Arizona, sent in money after

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<sup>78</sup> Hurley to Judith Dawson, April 15, 1946, Hurley Personal Papers.

<sup>79</sup> M.H. Belcher to Guy P. Leavitt, September 19, 1946, Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Mrs. William F. Chapdu to Hurley, July 2, 1946, Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Carl R. Wilson to Sir, October 8, 1946, Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Floy V. Johnson to Friend, August 5, 1946, Ibid.

the Bible study sponsor at her church who had visited the school “recommended [sic] us to help your work.”<sup>83</sup> Pastors also advocated support of Mountain Mission School. The Sunday School of the Church of Christ of Metcalf, Illinois, sent a contribution as a result of their minister, M.H. Wright. Kenneth W. Knox, pastor in Roseburg, Oregon, encouraged his church to send in money. The members of the church in Junction City, Kentucky, contributed after C.A. Newcomb “gave us first hand information, as he had been a student there,” leading them to be “much more interested.”<sup>84</sup>

But most importantly, individuals who were inspired by Mountain Mission School’s purpose took personal responsibility to ensure that the school could continue serving children in the future. Mrs. Robert B. Harris in Cheneyville, Louisiana, explained her reason for joining this new group of school supporters – “I took up your call.”<sup>85</sup> Maybelle N. Blunett also took up the call. She brought the letter she received from the school to her Women’s Class at church and read it as part of the new business. The group voted to send a contribution. Sam R. Hurst in Winchester, Virginia, shared a letter from the school with friends, who immediately gave him a check to donate. Nellie E. Copley “spoke of your work to a friend of mine and she gave me a dollar to enclose with my check this time,” and Ethel Osborne sent in a list of ten new contributors, along with their donations, with whom she had shared the school.<sup>86</sup> With such support from those personally familiar with Mountain Mission School to those who fell in love with the school’s mission, it was apparent that the school would continue to receive support.

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<sup>83</sup> Myrtle B. Lacy to Hurley, May 2, 1946 and Anna L. Meek to Bro. and Sister Hurley, August 22, 1946, Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Gladys Rose to Sir, June 26, 1946; Alice Mahrs to Christian Friends, August 8, 1946; and Mrs. Logan D. Williams, August, 29, 1946; Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Mrs. Robert B. Harris to Hurley, August 16, 1946, Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Maybelle N. Blunett to Mr. & Mrs. S.R. Hurley, April 27, 1946; Sam R. Hurst to Gentlemen, September 26, 1946; Nellie E. Copley to Hurley, August 7, 1946; and Ethel Osborne to Hurley, March 13, 1946; Ibid.

Mountain Mission School, under the leadership of Sam Hurley, survived the Depression of the 1930s and the threat of fewer contributions resulting from the country's involvement in World War II. Now, the school would continue into the future because others shared Hurley's vision: "The purpose for which said corporation is formed, is to carry on and operate a charitable, industrial preparatory mission school, and give moral, mental, physical and spiritual training" to children.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "Mountain Mission School," *State Corporation Commission –Charter Book*, vol. 161, 87.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Today, anyone who visits the campus of Mountain Mission School must drive under a huge archway gate. On the front is the name of the school in large silver letters. On the back, in smaller silver letters, is Sam Hurley's favorite Bible verse, a promise made by Jesus and a reminder to everyone who has spent time at the school why Mountain Mission School was founded: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."<sup>1</sup> This promise is reflected in the current mission statement of the school: "Mountain Mission School functions as a full child care facility (home, church, school) for children with legitimate needs regardless of the child's race, age, color, or creed."<sup>2</sup>

Mission schools founded at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century served a variety of purposes, depending upon the founders, the boards that ran them, the denominations or individuals that supported them, and the needs of the community they served. For the majority of mission schools in Appalachia, the denominations assumed that elementary and secondary education were responsibilities of the government, and willingly closed their schools or turned their facilities to the local governments once the state was able to direct public education. Others simply changed their goals.<sup>3</sup> Church schools, were generally unable to change as needs changed because their focus was too limiting. Independent schools, as John C. Campbell called those institutions that served the same purpose as church schools

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 25:40 (New International Version).

<sup>2</sup> Mountain Mission School, Fall Newsletter 2007, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Hooker, *Religion in the Highlands*, 204.

without the limitations of denominational control, were able to adapt because they foresaw “from the beginning . . . the needs of the future more clearly than have many of the church schools.”<sup>4</sup>

Sam Hurley had a clear vision of the future needs his school could meet. Yes, the original purpose of Grundy Academy was “the industrial, mental, physical, and spiritual training and education”<sup>5</sup> of children. Such a statement was not limited by the promotion of industrial education of the 1920s, nor the school’s location in the Appalachian Mountains, nor the provision of direction provided by the Stone-Campbell Movement. The basic purpose of Mountain Mission School was to provide spiritual and vocational direction for needy children, and serving a child in need, no matter the specifics of how, never changes. That is why, in 1930, Sam Hurley decided to remain in Grundy at Mountain Mission School. That is why he was able to live up to the standards he wrote in a Progress Report to the Board of Trustees of the school in 1928: “May I here remind you of the basis on and the spirit in which I have engaged in the work for this school. I have sacrificed much – willingly, gladly – that these young people might have a practical, industrial, Christian education.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, he fought for Mountain Mission School through the difficulties of the Depression because he loved the children.

Ironically, then, what Hurley sought from the inception of the school, and what he commented on in 1922 in the *Christian Standard*, was the need to find the “right leader to take up the task and with them follow the vision,”<sup>7</sup> he was unknowingly referring to himself. Campbell’s observation that the success of an independent school relied upon finding a balance

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<sup>4</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 272.

<sup>5</sup> “Grundy Academy,” *Virginia Corporate Charter Book*, 394.

<sup>6</sup> Hurley, “Progress Report,” McConnell Personal Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Watson, “Grundy Academy.”

between depending on a strong leader and simply being guided by a strong leader<sup>8</sup> found an ideal model in Samuel Robinson Hurley. Hurley, himself an orphan from southwest Virginia, knew first-hand what foundation Mountain Mission School needed to ensure its continued success. By organizing the school to be run by an independent Board of Trustees, Hurley made sure the school would continue serving its intended purpose, whether he was there or not.

Sam Hurley may have founded Mountain Mission School, but others caught its vision, and have continued the work, just like ripples in a pool of water. Those ripples over time have come to include supporters from all over the United States, and beyond, while students today also come not only from this country, but from beyond its borders as well. But those ripples had to be initiated, and at Mountain Mission School, the foundation was laid by a married, uneducated, self-made businessman from the mountains, who built a school based on a promise made when he was a child in need of being reclaimed.

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<sup>8</sup>Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 272.

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