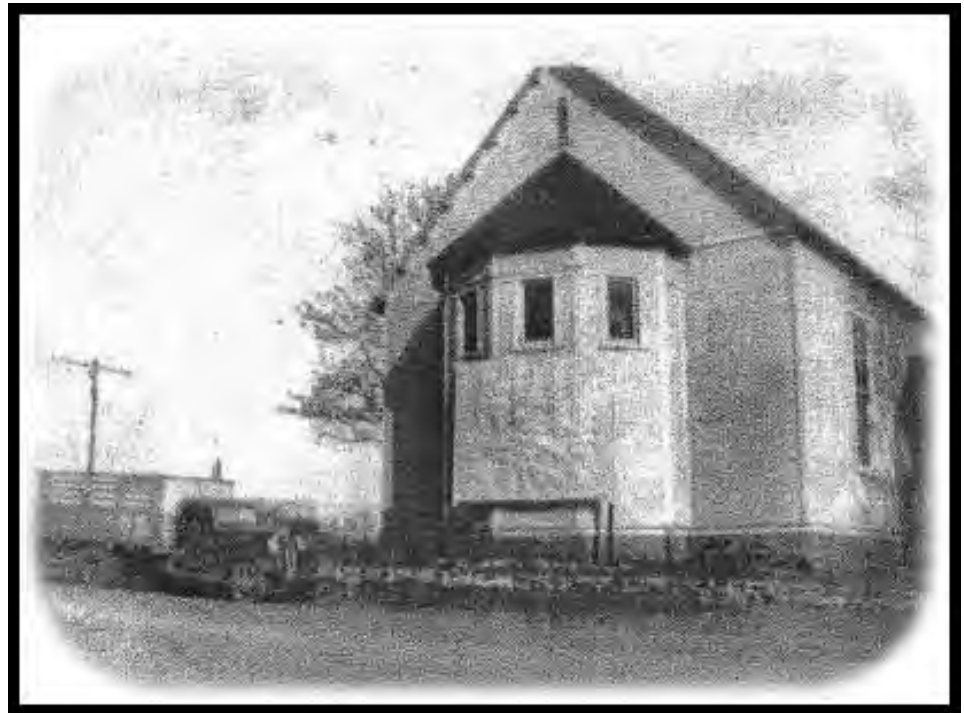


## Four Steps to "Where?"

Researched and Written by Jackie Layne Partin

Since 1958 the southwestern corner of city block # 224 in Tracy City, Tennessee has sat empty of her once busy house of hymns, prayers and sermons. The Warren Memorial Presbyterian Church building rested on the small knoll that was bordered by Laurel Street, Depot Street, an alleyway, and a vacant lot. Four, lonely, stone steps can still be seen built into the retaining wall along Depot Street, which was called Douglas Street on the 1873 map of the planned new town. One might stop for a rest on the wall or steps today, 2010, and ask, "Where were people going when they ascended these steps years ago?" The answer is, "Originally they were going to church, but down through the years, they were going to any of a numerous businesses that operated in that same building."

**Warren Memorial  
Cumberland  
Presbyterian Church  
Tracy City, Tennessee  
(1890-1916)**



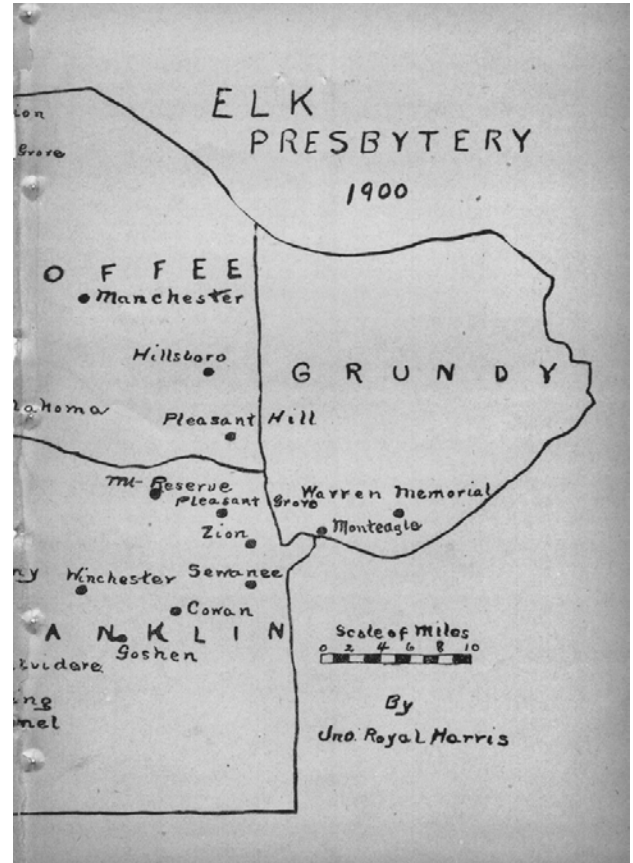
As early as 1890 the church group was established as a part of the Elk Presbytery. William Edward Tillett (1859-1939) was the first known Clerk of the Session for the fledgling group. Dr. Tillett was a well-known dentist, photographer and minister in the busy coal town. He was living in Tracy City a couple years or more before he married Miss Jennie Best in 1889 in Franklin County. In 1891, William was listed on the Grundy County tax list. The Tillett family stayed in Grundy County and kept their affiliation with the church at least through 1915 during which time Dr. Tillett was wearing another title, that being "Reverend." He seemed to be passionate about the church, treating it like it was his full responsibility. He

ministered in many places throughout his life; even as late as three weeks before his death in 1939, he was working some with the Monteagle Cumberland Presbyterian Church.



**Above: four steps previously leading up from Depot Street to the Warren Memorial Cumberland Presbyterian Church Building**

**Right: This partial 1900 Map shows only two Cumberland Presbyterian Churches in Grundy County – Warren Memorial and Monteagle**



Although the above map shows only two Cumberland Presbyterian Churches in Grundy County, and there are no records of others in the church Archives, this following excerpt from the book, Homecoming '86 History of the Elk River Valley, indicates that long before Monteagle or Tracy City existed or ever had any kind of churches, there was a group of the Presbyterian faith in Payne's Cove in the Valley.

*"In the mid 1800's a Mr. Sanders, great, great grandfather of Josie Sanders, gave land to the community to build a church. It was to be a one room log structure for members of the Presbyterian faith. Phillip Roberts is the only preacher remembered who preached in this building which was eventually torn down because of decay in the late 1800's when a frame building with a large steeple and bell was erected and used for both school and church,,,"*

By searching the 1850 Grundy Census, thirty-four-year old James Roberts can be found listed as a Cumberland Presbyterian clergyman. He was living in the same area where forty-five-year old Phillip Roberts, a farmer, was living next household to Lovey D. Sartain. This possibly establishes James Roberts as the first preacher of said faith. Just six years earlier, the Payne's Cove area was in Franklin County since Grundy County had not been formed.

Probably James was in contact with the 1808 Goshen group, became a member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and came into the Payne's Cove area and started a mission. Since James and his family moved on to Wright County, Missouri between 1855 and 1860, it is plausible to accept Phillip Roberts as taking his place as minister for the young group. The little log structure was in the area of the Payne's Cove Cemetery, and although it stood for several years, it ceased early on from being representative of the Presbyterian faith. Phillip was living in Altamont in 1860 and was still listed as a farmer. This little Cumberland Presbyterian mission may well have been the forerunner of different churches that came later to the area. Also listed in the Altamont area in 1850 was David P. Richey, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister. It appears that the Presbyterian influence was in the county when Altamont and Pelham were the only local post offices. Obviously, there was a struggle to hold out in the early beginning of the mission fields.

An entry in "A Chronology 1940-1960," published by the Grundy County Herald states that in 1958 there were only three surviving charter members of the church. They were Mrs. Sam Werner, Sr., Mrs. G. B. Marler, and Mrs. R. A. Campbell. Mrs. Sam Werner, Sr.'s name was Elizabeth (Kramer) Werner. She died in 1914, so it is evident that the woman spoken of should have been listed as Mrs. Sam Werner, Jr., or Mary Ellen (Young) Werner, the daughter of James K. Polk Young (1844-1913) and Nancy (Payne) Young (1853-1921) who were from Goshen in Franklin County. Goshen has a beautiful old Cumberland Presbyterian Church building where the Young family attended services before their move to Tracy City.

Tracy City was on its way to becoming one of the largest towns around, so the Young family made the move to participate in the job opportunities offered by the coal town. Without the 1890 Census record, I cannot say for certain what year they came, but I believe that James Polk and Nancy packed up their children, William, Mary Ellen and Margaret/Maggie, and came to the mountain in the late 1880's maybe to be instrumental in working toward starting a Presbyterian Church in the area. They also would have worked alongside Dr. Tillett in his efforts to spread the gospel. I can say that in 1891, the congregation had a total of thirty-one members, so someone was doing some mission work.

One must also remember that exciting things were happening in the late 1880's in Tracy City besides the coal business. The James K. Shook School was being planned, and the building was started in time to have it ready for students in 1890. Some decisions to move to Tracy City were made because of the wonderful educational opportunities made possible by A. M. Shook. The Shook families were strong in membership at the Goshen Cumberland Presbyterian Church, so it is reasonable that they also had their input into the creation of a like group in Tracy City.

On 12 October 1893, Samuel Werner, Jr. married Mary Ellen Young in Grundy County, Tennessee, and John D. Black was the minister who officiated at the wedding. In 1894, I. B. "Ike" Woodard wrote, "Rev. Black and Miss Lena Thomas married," putting a Rev. Black in Grundy County. J. N. McDonald, a Presbyterian minister, officiated at John and Lena's wedding. John D. Black, born in Louisiana, continued his ministry with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church moving on later to California. Ellen Young was affiliated with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church through the teaching and guidance of her father James K. Polk Young. According to a Werner descendant, most of the Werners joined the Episcopal Church in Tracy City, but evidently, until her marriage, Ellen attended worship services with her parents at Warren Memorial, thus making her a charter member.



**Mary Ellen Young**



**Mary Ellen (Young) Werner**



**Mrs. Mary Ellen Werner  
(1873-1965)**

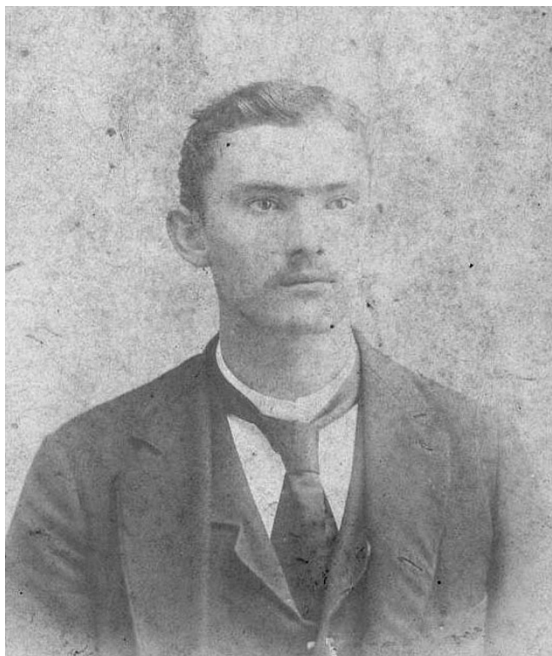
Mrs. G. B. Marler's maiden name was Margaret "Maggie" Young, a sister to Mary Ellen (Young) Werner. She married Gilliam B. Marler on 06 December 1896 in Grundy County. Strangely, the officiating minister was W. F. Wilson, pastor of the M. E. Church South and not someone associated with the Presbyterian faith. Gilliam got his good railroad buddy, Matt Cope, to go along as a witness when he got his marriage license. It is possible that Maggie had no say in the choice of ministers, but her adherence to her father's teaching would have also made her a charter member of the Presbyterian Church. By the time she got married, the membership at the young church had reached its pinnacle and had dropped off quite a bit.

Ellen and Maggie had an older brother, William H. Young, living in Tracy City, so he and his wife Anna Lee (Blessing) Young were probably members of the group. Anna was a resident of Pelham Valley when she met William. They became the parents of three children,

Lois, Herman, and Corine who may well have been amongst the first small children to run up and down the little knoll on which the building stood. Anna died in 1907 before the bell was hung in the church belfry.

**Left: William H. Young**

**(1872-1965)**



**Jennie (McBride) Campbell – 1872-1961}**

Mrs. R. A. Campbell's maiden name was Jennie McBride. She married Robert in Franklin County, Tennessee on 22 November 1887. Again, she must have been living in Tracy City in 1890 in order to be considered a charter member of the group. Census records show that she and Robert lived in Tracy City in 1900 and already had a large family. *{One of their daughters, Sarah (Campbell) Speegle was my 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades teacher at Monteagle Elementary in the 1950's.}* With this, we can see that Ellen, Maggie and Jennie could all have been available to help get the church organized and active. Jennie McBride may well have been a friend to the "Young" sisters, Mary Ellen and Maggie, from their Franklin County days.



**Katie Katherine (Anderegg) Stocker**  
(1876-1945)

In 1891, G. W. McWhirter was the pastor, but Dr. Tillett was always there to keep a watchful eye on the new congregation. It is known that Katie Katherine (Anderegg) Stocker, wife of Joe Stocker, was also a member of that church leading me to believe that her parents John and Elizabeth (Alplanalp) Anderegg may also have joined with the group since there was no Lutheran Church in Tracy City to attend. Maggie Marler and Katie Stocker were next-door neighbors in 1900, and probably good friends. Knowing a lot about Katie Katherine causes me to imagine that when she, Mary Ellen, Maggie and Jennie got together, they had fun. You know, women do that; they know how to laugh, giggle and simply love and enjoy each other's company. As time moved on Mary Ellen, Jennie and possibly Maggie joined the Episcopal group. Katie stayed faithful to Warren Memorial until she and Joe moved over near the headwaters of the Savage Gulf in Sequatchie County.

The year 1893 saw the largest membership count, ninety-two, that the church would ever have. In 1909 a bell was hung in the church's belfry – a hopeful sign that the congregation was in Tracy City for the duration. Some of the elders of the church were Harrison J. Campbell, G. R. Johnson, James P. Young, C. F. Sutton, and J. C. Dorris. The list of the pastors was quite long over the period of twenty-five years. They were G. W. McWhirter, E. J. McCrosky (*1<sup>st</sup> principal at Shook School*), J. D. Black, N. D. Crawford, Dr. William E. Tillett, C. C. Hines, A. K. Price, W. G. Dillon (*2<sup>nd</sup> principal at Shook School*), E. L. McWilliams, and C. K. Carlock. Other members of the local church who were clerks at the general assemblies of the Elk Presbytery, later called the McMinnville Presbytery, were Charles Johnson, G. R. Johnson, Harrison J. Campbell, G. M. Thorgood, A. B. Moffett, and Ira Campbell, (*son of Harrison*). Some of these names we recognize from our county's history, and some of them may have been circuit riders or visiting supporters from other counties.



**MCSHANE BELL FOUNDRY – HENRY MCSHANE AND CO. – BALTIMORE, MD. –  
TRADEMARK – 1888. The old bell now stands/hangs on the front lawn of the Myers Hill  
Congregational Church in Tracy City, Tennessee**

From all appearances the church struggled to stay afloat. The membership in 1892 was 48; in 1893 (92); in 1895 (55); in 1896 (42); in 1897 (75); 1899 (68); in 1900 (54); in 1901 (52); in 1902 (44); in 1903 (30); in 1904 (40); in 1907 (30); in 1908 (43); but by 1915, the attendance had dropped to (5), one being Ira Campbell. Dr. William Tillett did not stay continuously to hold the hand of the young Christian group since he also ministered to other churches in other counties. That may account for some of the weak periods in the attendance. Other churches offering different religious views and building up their numbers accounted for some of the loss in numbers.

In 1900 the church was released from paying back dues in the amount of \$7.00. By 1902 Rev. W. G. Dillon was asked to look after the Warren Memorial Church. By 1915 the congregation at Tracy City was once again considered a mission field, and Rev. William F. Tillett was paid \$9.00 to minister to the mission. When the church attendance fell from

ninety-two to just five, the following statement was issued by the McMinnville Presbytery on March 16, 1916:

*“Owing to the fact that the membership of Tracy City C. P. Church, ‘Warren Memorial’ have gone to other churches or at least ceased to be active Cumberland Presbyterians, and the church property going to destruction, being the result of tramps and crap shooters and there being no hope of rebuilding an active membership, we, your Committee, with these facts in view, have bargained and sold such property to E. C. Norvell for the consideration of \$500.00 such action in its entirety subject to the ratification of Presbytery. We therefore recommend that the Presbytery ratify such action on our part and empower us to make a deed for same.”*

Entered into the McMinnville Presbytery minutes on March 15, 1917 are these words:

*“We your Legal Committee beg leave to report as follows: Your legal committee having previously by and with the support of Presbytery sold to Mr. E. C. Norvell the Tracy City Church property the same having long ago been abandoned but Rev. W. E. Tillet having appealed from the action of the Presbytery to the Synod and because of some technical irregularities in the way in which the same was brought to Presbytery the Synod referred the matter back to Presbytery for further action. In view of the same conditions that prompted the action before we still offer to this Presbytery, viz: that the church is abandon; no organization, no eldership, deacons, nor active members; no report to Presbytery nor dues for a number of years; the house fast decaying and having been in the past having been used for picture shows and gambling resorts and not long ago came very near being destroyed by fire. We would, therefore, recommend that this Presbytery, first, declare Tracy City or Warrens Memorial a vacant field, an abandon church. That this Presbytery, Sec, reaffirm its former action with regard to its sale to E. C. Norvell.*

*Dan T. Smart, E. C. Crawford, Rev. S. T. Byars.*

*The Legal Committee's duplicate was read and adopted.”*

In 1935, Ernest Campbell Norvell was operating his furniture and funeral parlor business out of the first floor section of the Masonic Temple on Railroad Avenue. In April of the same year, an arsonist set fire to the business district destroying the Masonic Temple and several other businesses. Although housing the Community House in 1935, Mr. Norvell, having been able to save some of his stock, also moved his funeral supplies to the old church building. He furnished, not only the coffin of your choice, but the shiny black hearse with brushed-to-a-shine black horses to pull one's loved one from the Funeral Home, or personal home, to the cemetery.

The old church became a place for everyone and everything. During the Great Depression era, one of the programs to help the needy was the planting of public vegetable gardens. Soon after the mid 1930's, the WPA had moved its activities into the old church. Jackson Venus Walker, a well-known former state senator, county tax assessor and trustee, and mine foreman became the supervisor over the 658 male and 103 female participants in the WPA project. His own office was over the Dixie Theater building. Some can still remember in the late 1930's when the WPA workers staged a sit-in at the old church building with encouragement and support from the Highlander Folk School. Workers' hours and manpower had been cut; thus, the sit-in happened. They threw up their tents and cooked on the scene. They had had instructions on how to "stand up or sit-in" for their rights. The government came in to break up the sit-in as seen in the photo below. Those were interesting times to watch and study.



**(Photo used with permission from William Ray Turner): Entrance to the old church faced Depot Street; WPA men involved in the sit-in and law officials confront each other.**

My story is about the Warren Memorial Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Tracy City, Tennessee, but embedded in the frame of that story are amazing local stories, each significant in its own right. Just in the photo above, we have (1) the old church building, though long minus its parishioners; (2) the Works Progress Administration, better known as the WPA in its efforts to hang onto its meager manpower and work hours; (3) the Highlander Folk School with its desire to improve the lives of Grundy Countians; (4) the law enforcers from all levels, and it appears to me that right in the center of the photograph stands the fast-talking, fist-

swinging, tough guy, actor, James Cagney, as if Elgin Ramsey, operator of the Dixie Theater across the street, had just projected him into the midst of the confrontation. Now I am just using my imagination, but I can't help but believe that old Cagney got matters straightened out before long. I declare – it appears that he may be reaching in his pocket to draw his gun!

Huge fields of produce were raised and then stored until time to hand out to those in need. The government stored potatoes and other vegetables in the church building to be used for the needy; it also was used to store canned beans from the cannery that operated in the Swiss Colony. The Civil Works Administration building, or welfare office, was across Depot Street down the lane. The actual doling out of the commodities was done in the old Roddy Store building that stood where the new Ben Lomand drive-thru window is now. Many families used these products during hard times when nothing else was available. Some of my own families walked from Monteagle to pick up bags of food, and it was a great blessing for them. One of my uncles recalls as a young boy dragging his tow sack along the floor of the old store as he and his father moved along down the front of the long counter where the items were placed. One did not choose nor ask for specific food items, but took what was placed before him and was thankful for it.

Ironically, there were some families who were too proud to come to pick up the much-needed food items. One woman told me that her father was so proud that he refused to come to Tracy City for any help. He threatened his whole family with discipline if he ever caught any of them being seen in the food line. At times, secretly, the mother sent the children anyway, but told them never to let their father know about it or let him see them coming back with the items. She fed the food to her children while he was away, constantly being on guard for his unexpected arrival. The woman told me, "We children were starving, and mother knew we needed help."

Ms. Story and her two brothers operated a beauty shop in one section of the church building. The building was a huge structure, so several activities could be going on inside at one time. Rummage sales took place inside its walls, and the first town library was stationed there. The Peoples Baptist Church met there while they were building their own meeting place on Coke Street. It was said that somewhere along the way, parts of the building, possibly windows, were sold and used in the construction of the first Myers Hill Congregational Church. In some older photos of the building it appears that the windows had been boarded up. The old 1909 bell is still ringing out to parishioners, but only to a different group of believers, the Myers Hill Congregational Methodist Church.

Glenn Mayes and others recall sitting on the little side entrance porch while waiting on their shoes to be mended at Brawley's Shoe Shop across Depot Street. It seemed to be a place to meet, talk and take that last bite from the ice cream cone bought at Cheeks' Drugstore.

Later, the retaining wall with its four hewn steps made wonderful benches for waiting, shoe customers and Dixie Theater patrons who were anxiously awaiting time for the ticket booth to open. And God forbid, but it happened, many tipsy drunks from any of the several beer joints across the street from the old church, lingered or lounged on the old fence. Drink till drunk at the tiny "Cracker Box," or Mrs. Fults' Place, or Mrs. Nunley's Place, or "McDaniel's." Somehow or another, I just don't think that Rev. William Tillett or Elder James P. Young would have been happy to know that the fence and lawn were wallowed upon by drunks.

My uncle, Alex Benson Layne, recalls that the white cloth shown in the photo at the top of our story was used by the Dixie Theater to project movie trailers to pull in customers. Was that as bad as "*having been used for picture shows*" many years before? What a versatile old building!

Seeing the destruction of the once sacred building, Mrs. Carl Werner, or "Bird," as she was better known, entered the building to salvage the podium. Soliciting the help of Miss Lois Nearn and another lady friend, they took it upon themselves to move it. She felt that it was a piece of handmade art, and she had just a wonderfully safe place to put it. The three ladies carried it down the muddy road all the way over to the Church of Christ building on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and put it up on the platform at the front. It was a sight to behold! Now I happen to have known Mrs. Bird Werner; she was not one that I would picture doing such a thing. She was always dressed in the finest; in cold weather, at Sunday morning church meetings, she wore her mink stole. (As stated in a previous story, I hailed from those "*thrifty, sturdy urchins that generally infest(ed) the doors of ...mountaineer cabins,*" so as a child I was at a loss as to what those little fellows were doing lying around on ladies' shoulders! I can say this, "They entertained my thoughts a lot and got me through some pretty long sermons. That's what they did for me. What a voice Bird Werner had! No wonder she was called "Bird," for she sang like one. Everyone was so happy to have her in attendance for she lifted the melody right out of the songbook and bounced it off the ceiling of the building. She was one of the few in the group who could actually read the musical notes. After hearing the story of Bird's removal of the podium, I gained a new respect for her.

When the first Church of Christ building, which was previously a Christian Church that had been destroyed by fire in June 1902 and rebuilt in 1903, was revamped, the podium was sold to Douglas and Agnes Partin. They later gave it to a good friend, Mr. William "Bill" Curtis of Layne's Cove, because his grandfather Edward L. Curtis had built it with his own hands many years before. Edward was a woodworker and built furniture for churches and homes. (*The story of Edward L. Curtis can be read in the "Dennis Curtis Diary" on [www.grundycountyhistory.org](http://www.grundycountyhistory.org)*).



**The lonely, grassy knoll  
and metal shed as seen  
from the alley way**



**The podium behind which Wm.  
Tillett, James K. P. Young, A. K. Price  
and others stood to deliver their  
sermons**

A couple months ago (2010) when the ground was still covered with snow, I ventured off toward Gizzard Creek from the old Yarber place situated somewhat behind the old Leonard Meeks home. I was looking for the original bridge where the Tracy City/Monteagle road crossed the creek. When I found the spot of the crossing, I stood wondering where all the stone had gone from the old bridge. Recently Mr. William Ray Turner informed me that they were the same stones that were in the retaining wall in the photo above. Bob Crick and his son Ralph were the contractors who built the wall. This information told me that the wall was not built by the Presbyterian Church, but was built later. No doubt, it too, was one of the many projects of the WPA. Of course, those beautifully hewn stone from the bridge could have replaced older crumbling ones that the church previously had in place.

Finally, one end of the old Warren Memorial Cumberland Presbyterian Church was torn out to make way for parking the town's fire engine. No doubt, it was the same engine that rushed a few years earlier with its full tank of water to a fire in Monteagle. Clara's Restaurant and Cabins on Highway 41 was on fire, but just as the engine crossed the railroad tracks to descend the mountain, it turned over. The log structure had no hope. Then in June 1958, James Walker, using the hose from the old engine and the force of the water, blew the weathered boards off the building, one at a time. At long last, the struggle for the old building to maintain some sort of belonging and dignity was over as each water-soaked board cried out in dissension. Later, a small metal building was erected in a corner of the churchyard to serve as a health department when the previous building was declared unsafe. It, too, is now an eyesore for the little green knoll.

Often I stand in the center of the lush green knoll of the church compound and listen for the long ago words of an ancient hymn, or the sounds of rolling dice hitting the church floor, or the profanities yelled out loudly in the beer joints across the road. I can almost smell the freshly trimmed leather at Brawley's Shoe shop, just like I remember it smelling when my "Pop," Alex Layne, cut leather in his shop at the east gate on the Monteagle Assembly. I visualize lines of people at the Dixie Theater across Laurel Street and wonder if "old man Ben Wooten" had really, many years before, been buried where the steps lead up to the ticket booth.

Strangely enough, one hundred and eight years down through time, I can now in 2010 smell the same aromas of yeast breads and rolls from the Dutch Maid Bakery, just like Mary Ellen Werner, Maggie Marler and Jennie Campbell did as young church goers. Better yet, I can leave the lonely knoll of history and walk across the vacant parking lot now owned by the Grundy County Historical Society and Heritage Center, enter the bakery door and order fresh-from-the-oven bread.

**Note Sources: Presbyterian Archives, Homer Kunz, Charles Dykes, William Ray Turner, Ellen Boyd Stamler, Dara Speegle, Catherine Flury, Glenn Mayes, Bill Curtis, The Heritage Book of Grundy County, the U. S. Census Records, Grundy County maps and much, much, more "word of mouth." Thank all of you for putting up with my many questions. If you have corrections, additions or comments, email them to me at [jackiepartin@blomand.net](mailto:jackiepartin@blomand.net) .**