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Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Holy Innocents School

Published in the July 7, 2017 issue of *The Gazette* was an article about Bucklesberry's first one-room schoolhouse, Hickory Grove School. Other schoolhouses in the area included Holy Innocents School just a few miles south of the Neuse River.

This schoolhouse apparently held special meaning for the late Clellan Thomas Sutton (1908-1999) of Bucklesberry. He included a circa 1905 photograph of a picnic held at Holy Innocents School in the Collection of historical documents that bears his name.

Fully erect today, the schoolhouse is located on the north side of U.S. Highway 55 in Lenoir County, westbound toward Seven Springs, directly off the highway approximately a quarter-mile from the Strabane and Hardy Bridge Road intersection. The building is in extraordinarily good condition with its original wood plank siding. Surrounded by sizable, aging trees, a manufactured home sits out front within yards of the schoolhouse.

The building is owned by Joe Ball, Jr. He gave several Bucklesberrians a tour of the old schoolhouse on July 12, 2014, sharing information on the history of the old schoolhouse.

In the early 1900's, the building was initially located on the south side of U.S. Highway 55, directly off the road on the hill where the current Holy Innocents Episcopal Church is now situated, next to old Davis Mill. The building functioned as both a schoolhouse and a meeting house. When Joe was about five years of age (1949-1950), the building was moved from the hill across the road to the north side of U.S. Highway 55.

Local folks worked together to move the building by rolling it on logs. The late Howard Hardy (1923-1999), who lived just a mile or so away on Davis-Hardy Road, was among the team of men who assisted. A young boy at the time, Joe, Jr. recalled the Union Baptist Church in Moss Hill, where he and his family attended, burned around 1945. So, congregants met in the schoolhouse for church services. He described the pews as having open-slat wood backs. The pulpit was positioned on a raised platform still present in the building.

In subsequent years, Joe, Jr.'s father, Joe Ball, Sr. purchased the seven acres of land where the schoolhouse building had been relocated years earlier. Joe, Jr. inherited the land, the schoolhouse, and the renovated two-story home place, occupied presently by his son, Joey Ball and wife, Joy. The property also included a cemetery associated with the Holy Innocents Episcopal Church,

established in 1871, both of which were situated on the north side of the highway. The current brick church building was eventually constructed across the road on the south side of the highway on the hill where the old schoolhouse building originally stood.

Constructed in 1903, the schoolhouse was one large auditorium-style room with a cathedral ceiling and a platform at one end, elevated about two feet from the floor. In its original design, the large room could be subdivided into two smaller rooms, each 25-by-25 feet, by six moveable folding doors. Still visible today, the walls and ceiling are all covered with white-painted tongue-and-groove wood paneling contemporary with the time. The windows are framed inside with attractive molding. Single-hinged wood shutters cover the entire window openings on the outside.

Joe, Jr. finished-off approximately half of the floor area of the schoolhouse as a sitting room or a man cave of sorts, with a lowered, standard eight-foot ceiling. He also installed a bathroom. The balance of the interior of the building, however, remains in its original state. On the exterior, the front porch on the schoolhouse has been closed-in, and an A-frame roof, porch, and steps were added to the left-side of the building over an original exterior door. The building has a metal roof that was installed sometime after the circa 1905 photograph, which shows the schoolhouse with wood shingles in its early years.

[Caption for accompanying photograph]

Holy Innocents School near Bucklesberry in the Strabane area of Lenoir County, NC. The circa 1905 photograph, courtesy of the Clellan Sutton Collection, shows a picnic held at the schoolhouse.

