

By Angie Mayes

La Vergne was once an area thriving with schools, private and public, including a college.

Around the turn of the century, La Vergne was the home to the Women's College, Allen and Wallace School for Boys (both destroyed in a Nov. 1, 1900 tornado), Cooks Institute, the Blair School, Seed Tick School and more.

By the 1930's, a four room school, was located in the town but was destroyed by fire.

A new school was built in 1949 where the old elementary school once stood but settlement problems and a used furnace caused cracks in the walls and black smoke to belch from the stove, making the students and teachers sick. The towns people requested a new school in 1954, but their pleas were not heeded until the 1961-62 term.

"This cannot continue," wrote the Courier. "It is neither healthy nor warranted.

Most cities have a number of elementary school serving the different sections. The northwest end of the county is large enough to justify the same condition. La Vergne has its own school district and it must be utilized for the education of the children in the area. Why plan for today when tomorrow's children must be considered?"

The school had five rooms (and was considered a four teacher school). There were six classes and the library and the principal shared an "office."

"Like many other schools, the La Vergne Elementary School has more than outgrown its facilities," The Courier wrote in 1960. "The community has become intently aware of the space inadequacy which is now existing." Teachers taught in every available space, including on the stage and in the cafeteria. The growth of the community was sited as a problem. Ninety five homes had been built in the previous 14 months.

In her book about the city of La Vergne, "Green Trees," Shirlie Runnels Chaney stated "repeated requests for a new school were denied. Five gymnasiums across the county had been approved for construction but no new classroom facility could be approved for La Vergne. There was no doubt for the need for the gymnasiums, yet there was no doubt of the need for the La Vergne School. The residents keep requesting but were met with denial at

each request. The best descriptive word would have been gridlock...”

Registration for the 1960-61 year was at 171 students in grades one through six. The Rutherford County Court approved a resolution for \$150,000 to build the new school, but the school board failed to act on the request.

“The court approved the money despite the fact that the Rutherford County Board of Education had not recommended the construction of the school,” the Courier wrote.

Town leader Vester Waldron thanked the court for their help. “It was obvious from the reaction of the court that the needs of the students in the county communities are going to be considered despite the action of lack of action by the board,” he said. “Our success can be traced primarily to the efforts of the community, the men and women who decided not to be ignored by the Board of Education.”

Finally in 1961, the school commission voted to spend \$10,000 (\$1,000 per acre) to buy the new school site. They purchased the land from Ed Nevils, but a county judge almost wouldn’t allow the purchase because they had another site they could purchase for \$3,000 per acre. The school, the current La Vergne Elementary School, opened Nov. 1961 and housed 220 students. In 1963, there was a “student explosion” at the school: 330 students. “The end is not in sight,” the Courier wrote. In 1964, the board agreed to add a library, enlarge the kitchen and more to the elementary school.

In 1971, a gymnasium was built at the elementary school with federal impact funds left over from Sewart Air Force Base. The funds, which were given to communities in which servicemen and their dependants lived, had never been given to La Vergne prior to 1971, according to Jack Moore.

By 1974, The county court voted to purchase six acres adjacent to the La Vergne Elementary School for \$30,000. A \$5 million dollar bond was approved by the court to help finance the construction of the new school. In 1976, the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges accredited La Vergne Elementary School.

In 1985, area parents said they felt that the new school was not adequate. “Some parent felt that their child would be robbed of an equal education if they are forced to attend high school there,” the Courier wrote.

The Roy Waldron renovation began in November of 1985 and was completed by January of 1986. Originally designed as an open school, the renovations made the classrooms closed and added additional fire exits to the school.

The construction of Lavergne High School began in Spring 1986. In Dec. 1987, La Vergne officials said that the school should be named "La Vergne High School," because the address was 207 Chaney Road in La Vergne. All but the gymnasium was in the city, they said.

Ninety five percent of the school was in La Vergne, but the gym, football stadium, ball field, field house and a small part of the vocational building was located in Smyrna, it was argued.

In addition, the utilities and the road were constructed by Smyrna.

The school, named La Vergne High School, opened in 1988.

The recent growth of the area has forced School Board officials to build not one, but two elementary schools in the La Vergne/Smyrna area.

The first to open, Cedar Grove Elementary School, located next to La Vergne High School, will open in time for the 1997-98 school year. Consisting of grades kindergarten through eight, the school is expected to take the overcrowding pressure off La Vergne Elementary and Roy Waldron Schools, as well as Smyrna schools.

After a year long debate, the board has chosen the Batey property, located at Lake and Waldron Roads in La Vergne as the second location for a new school. After many months of searching, testing, planning and discussion, the board chose the site over more than a dozen others. The school is expected to open by the 1999-2000 school year.

Many state that those two schools won't do the work of relieving the pressure. In meetings the school board mentioned buying two parcels of land for yet another school. Nothing firm has been decided on that measure, however.