



Ruth Simmons Ross
Interview by Janet Hardin

Mrs. Ross read about our history project in the *Pickens Sentinel*. She only attended Ambler for one year in the seventh grade but loved her teacher. She wanted to be sure that her teacher be given the recognition she deserved, so she called the school and offered to tell me about her year at Ambler. Since Mrs. Ross is 89 years old and doesn't leave home now, I visited her in her home one afternoon after school.

ROSS: Well, I don't have very much to tell you—only when I was in the seventh grade I was a pupil there, you see. At school—and what I remember most about was I had Mrs. Edens. She was such a good teacher. And she wanted everybody to go on to school. She had a son about my age. I think her children must have all went on to something bigger—because we were poorer people. My dad was a tenant farmer. I've read about them in the *Sentinel* through the years. If I had clipped out deaths and things that happened through the years then I'd have had them. But, I never thought about somebody doing a history of Ambler school.

I can remember hearing my dad's mother talk. There was a family—must have been a big landowner—somewhere in the vicinity back near Ambler school. There was a big old house. They call that the Ambler place. What I remember, one thing about it was that they must have been right well-to-do because they had a place out in their front yard—stones fixed where ladies with their long skirts could mount a horse, I guess you'd say. (I'd say climb up on one.) Things like that are interesting to me to remember.

HARDIN: I went and found that house recently. One of those rocks they used to step up on is still there.

ROSS: Is it? Well, you're doing something for Pickens County! I appreciate what you do!

Mrs. Ross tells me that she used to go to Oolenoy to the Pumpkin Festival years ago, and she is interested in the history of Pickens County. I show her the pictures of the old Ambler school that I received just that day from Evonne Elrod.

ROSS: What about that old school building!



HARDIN: Is that the way it looked when you were there?

ROSS: Yes, yes. Oh, these are wonderful!

HARDIN: I really like this one because it shows the yard and everything.



ROSS: I believe this is more like it because they had what they call a little cloakroom on each side. Oh, I wish I knew I was on one of these!



McJunkins at Ambler School about 1907. Note the wooden shutters and shingles of this building which was torn away in 1909. The youngest McJunkin child in this picture is E. Wyatt, the little boy on the front row who is wearing the dress. The oldest is Iler Dean, who is fourth from the left on the second row. Iler's future wife, Lillie Lynch is standing second from the left on the second row. Elbert McJunkin is fourth from the left on the back row and two more McJunkins are standing in the front row. Julius is sixth from the right

...1907? I was born in 1915. I remember the McJunkin family that lived on back from the school up there. I remember Mr. Dean McJunkin. He had a business on Main Street in Pickens—a tire and, like a service station. His dad was—I forget what his name was—and his mother were friends of my mother and we all went to Griffin Church. And Elbert McJunkin is the fourth one from the left. There was a McJunkin girl, Florence McJunkin, that married a Baptist preacher out of Greenville and he taught at Ambler.

She is wonderful to let you have these! Ambler Elementary—now who is that?



HARDIN: I don't know when that is. I had a man named Romaine Hamilton come up the other day. He was a former principal and I'm thinking that might be him, but I'm not sure. That was in the 60s or 70s, but I don't know. It looks earlier than that. (NOTE: I later found out that the man was George Bolding and that the picture was taken in 1957.)

ROSS: You know what? Look at that! They have on (tennis shoes). I wear mine for support...I'm telling you this is interesting. I am so glad I called you!

HARDIN: I am, too. That one is more recent—in the last ten or twelve years.

ROSS: I'd love to know this one.



HARDIN: I don't know what the date of that one is. Look at how she's dressed and her hair.

ROSS: Back then boys would go barefooted—I mean big boys would go barefooted then to school. I remember them in the summer session. They had a summer session then they had to stop awhile and gather the crops. Then they'd start the winter session. That one's really dressed up! (Pointing to the boy in a suit sixth from the right on the second row.)

HARDIN: He was ready for "picture day," wasn't he?

ROSS: You will find a lot of people that can (help you.) That Bertrand Day—he might could tell you more. He married a cousin of mine and I talked to him last

Saturday morning by phone...I am so glad that people don't forget and I don't know if they kept any records back then or not.

(We talk about doing genealogy and school research.)

ROSS: I was a Simmons before I married. There was a big family of Simmons's and they all had big families. There were seven of us. My dad's brothers—he had three brothers and sisters—and they had big families, too.

There used to be a Glassy Mountain School. I went there—I don't know how long I went to school there. But now it is no more, and you wonder if there are records, don't you?

HARDIN: I have a book about the schools and it tells about them being consolidated. Like Oolenoy, Town Creek, and Ambler were all consolidated. Now they're all at Ambler.

ROSS: Glassy Mountain.

HARDIN: Yes, I think it was one of them.

ROSS: It was. When I first started school when I was 6 years old, I went to the Town Creek School. Then I went to Glassy Mountain School awhile and then I went to Ambler awhile.

HARDIN: Do you remember what year you went to Ambler?

ROSS: I was in the seventh grade and I started when I was six years old. I would have been about 13, wouldn't I? And 13 from 2004...(laughs)...it's been a long time—a long, long time. I was born in 1915—April 2, 1915.

HARDIN: That would be 1928.

ROSS: You know, people used to move around from one farm to another. That's why I went to several different schools. I love to remember things like that.

(She talks about her travels.)

This interests me—it does. If you ever get it, I want to read your book. But don't be in no hurry—get everything you can because I'm sure people will be able to tell you more than I can.

HARDIN: You were going to tell me about this teacher that you had.

ROSS: Mrs. Inez Edens? She was a real short, chubby-like woman. But she knew—I don't remember where she went to school—probably Winthrop back then. She had her boys. I don't remember them coming to school only they walked every morning. But, she kept order. I don't even remember the other teachers' names. I just remember her. To me she was something, sure enough!

I read her some of the names I had, but she does not recognize any of those names. She then remembers the name of the man from Greenville who married the McJunkin woman, Mr. Ray Lynch. She thinks he was there sometime in the 1930s.

ROSS: If I'm wrong, maybe somebody can correct me. I don't say I'm the authority on everything. I can remember some things and some things—I just don't bring it to my memory. I can remember the first day I went to school at Town Creek. My mother had bought me a little plaid dress, and we had a little branch that ran down through there. Well, I was going to ride to school with a neighbor. His son was in the same grade that I was. Mama sent me across and I fell in the little branch. I had to wear that little dress right on, too. I didn't get that wet! But, you remember some things. We had a strict teacher over at Town Creek, Mr. Frank Wellborn. He was strict. We've had some good teachers in Pickens County. And I think Pickens County has done well to be in the northern part of the state--and the poorer part of the state. You might say...well, not the poorest part, but anyway...we've had some good people. We still have some good people.

HARDIN: What do you remember about the school building when you were there?

ROSS: Sometimes you'd have to stand in the corner if you disobeyed. We had a cloakroom where everyone hung up their coat. But, we had to carry our own lunches. We had no lunch program then. Of course, we all enjoyed recess. I don't remember too much about what we did. We loved to play ball. Get outside and run and jump and holler.

HARDIN: Did you ever have to stand in the corner?

ROSS: I guess I had to. I never did get a whipping in school. You know back then they would—they'd whip 'em. I heard this preacher from South Africa. He called it caning. They just whipped them then. If you were to leave a print on them today like they did, the deputy sheriff would be after you before bedtime.

(She tells me about her grandson's wife who teaches at Pickens High School. Then she talks about Mr. McKissick who built the mill, the church, and a school.)

ROSS: Teachers have their hands full, and they have their hands tied. And it shouldn't be! I guess people have gotten so mean that they have to have a lot of hard-set rules.

HARDIN: When you were growing up, were there a lot of people disciplined pretty hard? Was that a big deal?

ROSS: Kids weren't as mean as they are now. Most families taught their children that they had to respect their teachers. I know my dad and mother always—it was "Yes, Ma'am and No, Ma'am." And you didn't say, "Well, you're a liar!" You usually didn't say, "I'm sorry, but I didn't see it that way." What the teacher did was right and we went by it. I think it's good. I think we've gone down today. Maybe that's why our children get into so much meanness today. But, I enjoyed school.

When I came to Easley and started the ninth grade—my husband was six years older than I was. He was ready to get married, so we kept dating and we got married. We got married too young. I never thought of divorce. I started my family, of course. That's all you did back then.

(She talks about her family.)

I feel like if I hadn't had a good teacher like I had, Mrs. Edens—you know teachers can just put it in your being to make you want to learn more. And read—I want to read. The news we get—the *Greenville News*, and the *Easley Progress*, and the *Pickens Sentinel*—I tell people I read that *Pickens Sentinel* religiously! I read about the churches. I read Mr. Alexander's and Rick Simmons—he's no relation to us. There were three sets of Simmons's.

HARDIN: I know we've always had Simmons's at Ambler.

ROSS: My set is more that way, but there's another set out toward Six Mile that Rick belongs to. And there was a set down toward Liberty—he was a Wesleyan minister, I believe it was—and they had a big family. But they might have been some relations somewhere before my time that I don't remember, but there's a big bunch of them. McJunkins and Fergusons and Trotters—in the Griffin community there were a lot of Hendricks's. Mr. Ossie that owned the hardware store--their dad and mother owned a big chunk of land around the Griffin community—had a lot of tenant farmers. They were good people.

HARDIN: We have a teacher at Ambler now who married a Hendricks—Lesli Hendricks.

ROSS: They were good people. We didn't have anything hardly. We were poor, poor, poor, poor! But my mother and dad instilled in us to respect people, to be nice to everybody. We always went to church. Back then they didn't judge you by what kind of car you drove or how much education you had. They judged you by how good you was and what kind of person you were. Would you help someone when they were down and out? I'm just proud I've got to live this long.

(She talks about the history project.)

HARDIN: The fact that all these people have been calling in and that they care about Ambler tells me that it's always been a family.

ROSS: I bet it'll boil down to the fact that family, Ambler family, gave that land or somebody wanted to name it after that man. I had read all during the years about it, but until I saw what you had in the paper. I'd been thinking I was going to call. I thought I don't care what they think about it, I'm just going to call. I think Ms. Inez deserves her name in there—her part that she did. How she inspired me. She might have inspired half a dozen more to want to go on and get more education. I'm sure that they did. I've not stopped learning yet because through the years as we were able we did our best. We sent our children to school and to get as much college and tech schools as they could...I told my children, "We can give you all you need to eat and what you need to wear, but we cannot unscrew the top of that head and pour knowledge into it. You're going to have to do it yourself!" And I just preached to mine. I'm proud of Ambler.