

A HISTORY

GRUNDY COUNTY SPELLING BEE

By: David Patton, Palmer Town Historian

On February 11, 2014, we held the 30th Annual Grundy County Spelling Bee at Coalmont Elementary School. The years, they do fly by.



Grundy County Director of Schools, Mr. Joel Hargis (pictured left) and Palmer Town Historian, Mr. David Patton (pictured right), congratulate the 2014 Grundy County Spelling Bee Champion Miss Brittany Church (pictured center) after the February 11th event.

Let's begin by saying that this isn't an official history of those years, but we do hope that this information will be useful as a reference and serve as a valuable source for future historians.

Most of us old people (I'm 66) remember little spelling bees in the classroom during their school days, but not the County-Wide Bee that we know today, in 2014. However, there is one exception I've been able to find. In 1937, during the Great Depression, a Grundy County Spelling Bee was held at Shook Grammar School and was sponsored by *The Nashville Banner Newspaper*. This was during the heyday of newspapers and *The Banner* was an afternoon daily, similar to the old *Chattanooga News-Free Press*.

The 1937 Grundy County Spelling Bee Champion was Anna Polk Conry Creighton, from Palmer Grammar School. The Runner-Up was Howard Wright from Shook

Grammar School, in Tracy City (what we call elementary schools today, were referred to as Grammar Schools in those long ago days).

In 2012, I organized a visit to Palmer Elementary School for Mrs. Creighton and she met with the Palmer Spelling Bee team and told them about her experiences way back in 1937. When I wrote a story about the visit for the Grundy County Herald, she couldn't remember what her prize as the Champion was. According to an old newspaper account, Mr. Wright received \$1.00 and a subscription to *The Banner* for his second place finish, so I assume Mrs. Creighton got \$2.00 and a subscription. She soon went to Nashville and represented Grundy County in the State Spelling Bee.

Mr. W.H. "Bill" Nunley of Coalmont, was the pronouncer for the 2014 Grundy County Spelling Bee. He lived in Nashville for many years and will remember *The Banner*, which ceased publication many years ago.

Shook Grammar School burned in 1976, but Palmer Elementary School is still going strong at 86, and is Grundy County's oldest school today.

Mr. Howard Wright passed away in 1977 and is buried in the Tracy City Cemetery. Mrs. Anna Polk Creighton celebrated her 91st birthday on February 22, 2014, and lives in Chattanooga, TN today. Some of you will remember her sister, the late Frances Conry. Miss Conry began her teaching career at Tatesville Grammar School in 1940. The next year she returned to Palmer School where she had been a student. Still loved in many hearts today, she became a Palmer School legend, teaching there for 45 consecutive years, 1941-1986.

The modern era of the Grundy County Spelling Bee began in 1985 at Coalmont Elementary School. The smallest and only valley school in the county, Pelham Elementary, produced the first champion. Janelle Layne Taylor, of Pelham, now a retired teacher and past President of the Grundy County Historical Society, was the teacher and Spelling Bee Coach of that student. It would be a long dry spell and a new century before Pelham Elementary had another champion, that being in 2012.

Grundy County Spelling Bee Champions

1985-2014

1985 – Melanie Rogers, Pelham Elementary

1986 – Krystal Bean, North Elementary

1987 – Tyson Thomas, Tracy City Elementary

1988 – Tyson Thomas, Tracy City Elementary
1989 – Newell Lawson, Tracy City Elementary
1990 – Deanna Fults, North Elementary
1991 – Deanna Fults, North Elementary
1992 – Deanna Fults, North Elementary
1993 – Ginger Lusk, North Elementary
1994 – Rebecca Meeks, Palmer Elementary
1995 – Faith Caldwell, North Elementary
1996 – Rebecca Meeks, Palmer Elementary
1997 – Brooke Layne, Palmer Elementary
1998 – Jesse Jones, Coalmont Elementary
1999 – Ginger Yarworth, Tracy City Elementary
2000 – Jesse Jones, Coalmont Elementary
2001 – Alexis Rollins, Tracy City Elementary
2002 – Alexis Rollins, Tracy City Elementary
2003 – Alexis Rollins, Tracy City Elementary
2004 – Brian Turner, Coalmont Elementary
2005 – Johnathan Cook, Tracy City Elementary
2006 – Ashlyn Fincher, North Elementary
2007 – Caleb Brown, Swiss Memorial Elementary
2008 – Stella Parris, North Elementary
2009 – Stella Parris, North Elementary
2010 – Kaitlyn Evans, Tracy City Elementary
2011 – Kaitlyn Evans, Tracy City Elementary
2012 – Lacy Nunley, Pelham Elementary
2013 – Kendale James, Pelham Elementary
2014 – Brittany Church, Coalmont Elementary
2015 – Braden Kilgore, Swiss Memorial Elementary

DAVID PATTON SPELLING AWARD

When I was a student at Palmer Elementary, spelling was one of my favorite subjects and in 2006, I became involved in the Grundy County Spelling Bee and founded the “David Patton Spelling Award.” This award goes to the Spelling Bee Champion and in recent years, also to the First, Second and Third place runners-up.

2006 – Ashlyn Fincher, North Elementary
2007 – Caleb Brown, Swiss Memorial Elementary
2008 – Stella Parris, North Elementary

2009 – Stella Parris, North Elementary
2010 – Kaitlyn Evans, Tracy City Elementary
2011 – Kaitlyn Evans, Tracy City Elementary
2012 – Lacy Nunley, Pelham Elementary
2013 – Kendale James, Pelham Elementary
2014 – Brittany Church, Coalmont Elementary, Second Place – Gracie Scissom, Third Place – Bailey Brown, and Fourth Place – Savannah Layne
2015 – Brayden Kilgore, Swiss Memorial; Second Place – Drema Cox, Tracy City; Third Place – Angel Lang, Swiss Memorial; 4th Place – Whitney Richardson, North

LOUISE GEARY LAYNE COURTESY AWARD

In 2007, we founded the Louise Geary Layne Courtesy Award to promote courtesy among the spelling bee contestants. The first recipient is now a Junior at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC).

2007 – Jerica Davis, Swiss Memorial Elementary
2008 – Robert Northcutt, Pelham Elementary
2009 – Keon Meeks, Palmer Elementary
2010 – Brianna Weaver, Swiss Memorial Elementary
2011 – Alexa Fults, North Elementary
2012 – Amanda Morgan Fann, Palmer Elementary
2013 – Alexa Fults, North Elementary
2014 – Ericka Childers, North Elementary
2015 – Ericka Childers, North

Y.B. ASHBY TEAMWORK AWARD

In 2008, we founded the Y.B. Ashby Teamwork Award to promote teamwork and cooperation among the spelling bee contestants and the recipients are:

2008 – Hunter Smartt, Palmer Elementary
2009 – Kirsten Jones, Palmer Elementary
2010 – Alexa Fults, North Elementary
2011 – Levi Higgins, Swiss Memorial Elementary
2012 – Brianna Weaver, Swiss Memorial Elementary
2013 – Hagen Stiefel-Cash, Palmer

2014 – Brittany Church, Coalmont
2015 – Katelynn Hammonds, Palmer

FAITHFUL ATTENDANCE AWARD

In 2012, we founded the Faithful Attendance Award to encourage good school attendance among the spelling bee contestants. This award is restricted to students in the Grundy County Spelling Bee who have perfect attendance and goes to the one among the participants who finishes highest in the spelling competition itself. Perfect attendance means no missed days, no tardies, and no early dismissals.

I had wanted to name this “The Perfect Attendance Award”, but was worried that we might not have anyone with actual perfect attendance. Man, were my worries unfounded, at the 2014 event, we had eight of the spelling bee contestants with perfect attendance!

Perfect attendance has really caught on in Grundy County Schools. All of the schools are doing a great job promoting it. Ms. Kasey Woodlee, Principal at Swiss Memorial Elementary, was one of the first to recognize the importance of perfect attendance and has been a leader in this regard.

2012 – Jase Rollins, Palmer Elementary
2013 – Brittany Church, Coalmont Elementary
2014 – Gracie Scissom, Palmer Elementary
2015 – Paul Allen Wise, Palmer

SHANNON BROWN MEMORIAL AWARD

In 2011, Mrs. Tressie Jo Kennedy of Pelham, founded the Shannon Brown Memorial Award in honor of her daughter. Shannon had been a teacher and spelling bee coach at Swiss Memorial and Pelham Elementary, and according to Mrs. Kennedy, she loved the Grundy County Spelling Bee.

Mrs. Kennedy is a kind and gracious lady and we feel blessed to have her involvement in the Grundy County Spelling Bee. The Shannon Brown Memorial Award goes to the spelling bee champion.

2011 – Kaitlyn Evans, Tracy City Elementary
2012 – Lacy Nunley, Pelham Elementary
2013 – Kendale James, Pelham Elementary
2014 – Brittany Church, Coalmont Elementary

2015 – Brayden Kilgore, Swiss (Mr. Haskel Meadows also presented 1st and 2nd Place Winners with a special coin this year)

We are proud to be associated with the Grundy County Spelling Bee because it brings together some of the “Best and Brightest” students in the local school system. Soon after our involvement began in 2006, we realized the opportunity was there to benefit the total student, not just in spelling. That is why we added the Louise Geary Layne Courtesy Award, Y.B. Ashby Teamwork Award, and the Faithful Attendance Award. To promote real life characteristics that will enrich the lives of these students as they become responsible adults.

Regardless of how much “book sense” you have, you will never reach your potential as a human being without the social skills needed in the real world. Miss Alexa Fults of North Elementary is a good example of what we’re talking about. Although she never won the Grundy County Spelling Bee, this Principal’s List student always finished high in the spelling competition and showed how versatile she is. She won the Y.B. Ashby Teamwork Award in 2010, and the Louise Geary Layne Courtesy Award in both 2011 and 2013. Now, a freshman at Grundy County High School, in February 2014, she became the first student in school history to represent GCHS in the State Swimming and Diving Championship Tournament in Nashville. No, it’s not just about spelling. Just think what a talented and versatile young person like Alexa has to offer the modern world in the 21st Century.

When we first began to study the history of the Grundy County Spelling Bee and its participants, we were amazed at the success they were enjoying as adults. One is a physician, another a lawyer, and so many have earned college degrees and entered various professions. The Grundy County Spelling Bee is one of the great success stories in local education and we expect to hear even more great things in the future. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Shelly McGinnis Meeks in bringing you this narrative.