

Sanders Grove School, Marshall County, Tennessee: History and Building Documentation



Figure 1: Center for Historic Preservation staff and students with property owners at Sanders Grove School on November 10, 2025.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction	4
History of Sanders Grove School.....	4
The People of Sanders Grove	11
Building Description.....	24
Appendix.....	32
Bibliography	33

Executive Summary

Graduate Research Assistants Amelia Blakely and Liz Nahach at Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) prepared this report on Sanders Grove School in rural Marshall County under the supervision of the center's assistant director, Dr. Antoinette van Zelm, and research professor, Dr. Stacey Graham. We would like to thank the property owners of the Sanders Grove School for inviting the CHP to see the school and providing us with knowledge that supported the research in this report. Furthermore, the Marshall County Register of Deeds, the Tennessee State Library and Archives, and the Marshall County Public Library's digitization of local newspapers through the Community History Archive provided access to documents and sources that gave greater context about the Sanders Grove community and what likely led to the school's closure.

Sanders Grove is located on Yell Road in Marshall County, about three miles south of Lewisburg. It is a wood frame building constructed at the turn of the twentieth century that operated as a rural public school between 1900 and the early 1930s. The owners of the school, the McCullough family, are also owners of the adjacent Briar Lane Farm (1914), certified as a Tennessee Century Farm since 2014. The Tennessee Century Farm Program recognizes Tennessee farm families that have continuously owned and kept in production land for at least one hundred years. In the Fall of 2025, Victoria McCullough, the great-great-granddaughter of Briar Lane Farm's founder, contacted the Center for Historic Preservation to evaluate the condition of Sanders Grove School. On Nov. 10, 2025, staff and students from the Center for Historic Preservation visited the property, met the owners, and assessed the building. During the visit, the possibility of future restoration of the building was discussed.

The following is a brief report detailing the history of the Sanders Grove School and rural education in Marshall County, a description of the property, and an assessment of the current condition of the building. Appendices consist of photos of the building, brief preservation recommendations, and additional materials that outline federal guidelines on restoring historic buildings.

Introduction

Sanders Grove School is situated on a 12.47-acre lot on Yell Road in the central portion of Marshall County, about three miles south of Lewisburg. The property is bounded by Buddy Jones Road to the south and faces Yell Road to the east. Augustus (Gus) Henry Sanders donated the land for the school to the Marshall County School District on August 24th, 1897.¹ The district built the building between 1897 and 1898.² Sanders lived nearby at his farm across Yell Road until his death in 1930.³ The Marshall County School District owned the lot and school until at least the mid-1930s, when the school stopped operating. In the 1980s, the Kennon family bought Sanders' Farm and the lot with the school, and in 2025, the McCullough family owned the school property. The McCullough family owns and runs Briar Lane Farm, a Tennessee Century Farm, that sits less than half a mile north of the Sanders Grove School on Yell Road.⁴

History of Sanders Grove School

The Sanders Grove School operated as a rural, single-teacher elementary school serving white students in Marshall County, Tennessee. Representative of late-nineteenth-century country schools, the school provided families with a locally controlled and community-based education. Public deed and archival research indicate that the county assumed ownership of the property in 1897 and built the school shortly thereafter.⁵ The creation of Sanders Grove school occurred when common and public schools replaced children's learning in the home or at private academies, the nineteenth-century standard of education in Tennessee.⁶ In the school's construction, the builders used the former foundation of Marshall Academy, a school chartered

¹ Deed of Sale from A. H. Sanders to School Director, Property Deed, Aug. 24, 1897, Marshall County Deed Office.

² "1897 – 1898 Annual Report of the County," Marshall County, Department of Education Records, 1917 – 1978, Record Group 51, Reel 205, Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), Nashville, Tennessee.

³ "Gus Sanders," *The Tennessean*, Nashville, Tennessee, March 13, 1930, 5, Newspapers.com.

⁴ Merideth Gentry McLean began Briar Lane Farms in November 1914, when the school was in use. See Briar Lane Farm Tennessee Century Farm Application, June 27, 2014, Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University.

⁵ A. H. Sanders to School Director, Property Deed, Aug. 24, 1897, Marshall County Deed Office; "1897 – 1898 Annual Report of the County," Marshall County, TSLA.

⁶ Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "Education, Elementary and Secondary," in Carroll Van West, ed., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Publishers for the Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 280.

in the 1850s in the Beech Grove community.⁷ The Sanders Grove School replaced older schools nearby, including Marshall Academy and Bumble Bee School, both of which were torn down.⁸ Once built, the community originally called the school “Marshall Academy.” It officially opened in 1900 as a public school in District 3 after the construction of Yell Road. Other schools listed in district three around the turn of the century include Verona School, Berlin School, Lebanon School on Wiles Lane, Hardison Mill School, Milltown School, McCord School on Anes Road, South Berlin School, Snell School, Hickory Hill School, Elk Ridge School, Holly Grove School, Belfast School on Fishing Ford Road, Enterprise School on Belfast/Farmington Road, Normal School, Maple Hill School, and Cedar Grove Colored School north of the Lewisburg/Fayetteville.⁹

When Sanders deeded the land to the county for the school in 1897, he was a well-known Marshall County farmer who lived on Yell Pike. He operated a large, well-stocked farm with mares, mules, stallions, and Jersey cattle.¹⁰ *The Marshall Gazette* noted Sanders as being a prominent Republican in the county, as well.¹¹ Sanders and his wife, Alice (Fowler) Sanders, shared one son, Howard. The Sanders family continued to live and operate the farm across from the school with their namesake into the 1930s. Gus died in 1930, and Alice died in 1937.¹²

In the 1899 map on the following page, Gus Sanders’s farm and the school, identified as “Marshall Academy,” are depicted (Figure 2). Additionally, slightly above Sander’s name, a W.W. McLain is identified and likely refers to William Watson McLean, the brother of Meredith McLean. In 1900, William McLean and his wife, Nannie May, lived in Civil District 15, and did so until McLean died in 1909 from blood poisoning at the age of fifty.¹³ Five years later, in 1914,

⁷ Sarah Jones, “Sanders Grove School,” included in Briar Lane Farm Tennessee Century Farm Application, Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University; *The Marshall Gazette*, August 24, 1924, Community History Archive.

⁸ “Out in the Country,” *The Lewisburg Tribune*, Aug. 16, 1900.

⁹ *The Marshall Gazette*, August 24, 1924; “History of Marshall County Education,” *The Lewisburg Tribune*, October 9, 1986.

¹⁰ *Lewisburg Tribune*, June 20, 1901; “Sim Wilkes and Jumbo,” *The Marshall Gazette*, April 7, 1905.

¹¹ “Large Delegation to Hear Hughes,” *The Marshall Gazette*, September 8, 1916.

¹² “Gus Sanders,” *The Tennessean*, March 30, 1930; “Mrs. Alice Sanders,” *Lewisburg Tribune*, March 26, 1937.

¹³ *Nashville Banner*, Nashville, Tennessee, July 14, 1900, Newspapers.com; *The Tennessean*, Nashville, Tennessee, August 1, 1909; “William W. McLean,” United States Census Bureau, Population Schedule, Tennessee, Marshall County, Civil District 15, 1900, Ancestry.com.

Meridith McLean established Briar Lane Farm either near or at the property that William owned before his death.

Briar Lane Farm originally consisted of three hundred acres on which the McLeans raised beef cattle and mules. Meridith and his son, William, ran the farm until 1959, when Robert S. McCullough assumed ownership after marrying Meridith's granddaughter, Cora McLean. Under Robert's ownership, the farm continued raising beef cattle and mules in addition to dairy cows, tobacco, hay, and corn. Throughout the farm's tenure, its operation has been a family effort. As the McLeans and Sanders cultivated the land around them and raised their families, the Sanders Grove School functioned as a church, a place for social gatherings, public meetings, and a school.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 16, 1900; *Marshall Gazette*, February 21, 1902; Briar Lane Farm Tennessee Century Farm Application, Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University.

time of the establishment of Sanders Grove in the 1897–1898 academic year, Marshall County contained forty-five white primary schools, eighteen white secondary schools, thirty-two Black primary schools, and one Black secondary school that served 5,266 white students and 1,846 Black students.¹⁶ The county employed eighty-three white teachers and forty-one Black teachers who taught an average of 122 days a year. The school district operated a budget of \$27,660.31, with the county being the largest source of funding. According to the county's superintendent, the county built two wood-frame school buildings in 1898, possibly including Sanders Grove.¹⁷

County-level information could be located at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, but the individual records for Sanders Grove School could not be found to provide detailed information about the teachers and students. However, local newspapers like *The Lewisburg Tribune* and *The Marshall County Gazette* documented the activities occurring in rural communities, including their schools. According to newspaper notices, in the early 1900s Sanders Grove typically started its fall session in July and spring session in March. One teacher typically instructed classes of about twenty-five students of various ages.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, concerns about rural and southern public education, particularly for African Americans, arose among members of Progressive reformers in the United States and led to the creation of the Southern Education Board in 1901, which was established at the University of Tennessee in 1902. From 1903-1913, the board aided southern public officials in building support for legislation and funding to advance public school systems.¹⁸

“The Rural School Problem,” as Progressive reformers called it, focused on country schools’ inefficiencies, poor student progress, and rural education’s inability to prepare pupils to work in

¹⁶ Marshall County in 1890 had a total population of 18,906. In 1900 its population was roughly the same at 18,768. See United States Census Bureau, “Population of Tennessee by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions,” Twelfth Census of the United States, *Census Bulletin*, 2.

¹⁷ “1897 – 1898 Annual Report of the County,” Marshall County, TSLA.

¹⁸ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 19-20.

a rapidly industrializing job market.¹⁹ In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission galvanized the movement for school improvement and standardization, conceiving of the rural school as a key social institution that could be improved and "build up" rural life.²⁰ As southern and rural education reform gained traction among the American elite, the topic became a major political issue within Tennessee. Between 1907 and 1908, rallies in support of public education were held throughout the state, and in 1909, the General Assembly passed legislation that provided additional revenue mechanisms to fund public schools.²¹ The Progressive Era increased support for public education between the 1870s and 1908 is evident in the growth of public education's reach. In 1878, 261,152 students in Tennessee enrolled in school; in 1908, enrollment increased to 507,887 students.²²

The Southern Education Board dissolved in 1914, and the privately funded General Education Board took over supporting the salary for the state's rural school supervisors. The GEB's agenda from 1914-1930 focused on consolidation of rural schools, resulting in the closure of many nineteenth-century school buildings that did not reflect reformers' vision for educational facilities.²³ Reformers and experts asserted that the design and hygiene of school buildings was central in supporting the education and health of students. The School Improvement League, founded in 1909, advocated for "health, comfort, beauty, and attractiveness" in school design. Architects working with the Tennessee Department of Education applied these concepts to small rural school buildings, by adopting a style that emphasized simplicity and tastefulness.²⁴

¹⁹ Tracey L. Steffes, "Solving the 'Rural School Problem': New State Aid, Standards, and Supervision of Local Schools, 1900 - 1933," *History of Education Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (May 2008): 181; Tennessee Department of Public Instruction, *Rural School Situation in Tennessee: Bulletin of Information Regarding Consolidation of Schools and Transportation of Pupils* (Nashville, TN: McQuiddy Printing Company, 1911), 9 – 12; Scribner, *The Fight for Local Control: School, Suburbs, and American Democracy*, 40.

²⁰ Steffes, "Solving the 'Rural School Problem,'" 190 - 193.

²¹ Chronology of Recent Department History in "Tennessee Department of Education Records, 1874 - 1987 Finding Aid," Tennessee Department of Education Records, 1874 – 1987, Record Group 273, TSLA.

²² R.L. Jones, "Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for Tennessee for the Scholastic Year ending June 30, 1907 - 8," 29, Department of Public Instruction, Nashville, Tennessee, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015076586026> (accessed on April 1, 2026).

²³ Rockefeller created the General Education Board in 1902. It acted as the northern counterpart to the Southern Education Board. See Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 34-36.

²⁴ Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 23-24.

Although the Sanders Grove School was built in a period of early educational reform, its vernacular church-like style indicates that ideas predating school reform efforts informed the school's construction. Fletcher Dresslar, an expert in rural school design, would not have liked Sanders Grove school because it looked "too much like a church," with its steep pitch, wraparound lap wooden siding, bell tower, and double entrance.²⁵ He would have preferred Craftsman, Classical Revival, or Colonial Revival style to indicate a modern school building in the 1910s. Furthermore, a modern school building would be designed with a large series of windows or battery windows to allow for ventilation and proper lighting, and separate rooms built for different types of activities.²⁶ Although Sanders Grove had multiple rooms, they were not differentiated into individualized functions. In the farthest room, double desks faced a recitation bench in front of the stage that lined the back wall of the school. The teacher used two blackboards, one behind the stage and the other on a side wall, to instruct the students ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade.²⁷ The fact that this outdated vernacular-style building was not replaced by a modern one during the first three decades of the twentieth century suggests that this school successfully transitioned from the initial educational reforms of the late nineteenth century into the more comprehensive statewide reform movement of the early twentieth.

²⁵ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald School of the American South* (Gainesville, etc.: University Press of Florida, 2006; reprint, paperback ed., 2014), 75.

²⁶ William A. Link, "Privies, Progressivism, and Public Schools: Health Reform and Education in the Rural South, 1909 - 1920," *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 4 (Nov. 1998): 636; Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 45; Jones, "Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for Tennessee for the Scholastic Year ending June 30, 1907 - 8," 32 - 38, HathiTrust.

²⁷ Jones, "Sanders Grove School," Briar Lane Farm Tennessee Century Farm Application, 1-2.



Sanders Grove School - 1903
Teacher: Mr. William L. Barnett

First row, left to right: Flora (Rambo) Jean; Wilma (Rambo) Holly, deceased; Bessie (Emmerson) Bone; Kate Emmerson, deceased; Unknown; Elvis McCory, deceased; Cdeylene (Davis) Nix; Unknown; Clarence Adams, deceased; and Vollie Collins, deceased.

Second row: Teacher, Mr. William L. Barnett, deceased; Joe McKnight, deceased; Bessie Mai (Collins) Wilkes; Eula Mai (Collins) Ledford, deceased; Lillie (Emmerson) Cochran, deceased; Estelle (Collins) Thompson, deceased; Ethel (Endsley) McKnight, deceased; Olgie Mai (Cochran) Doss, deceased; Sam McCory, deceased and Gerald Collins, deceased.

Third row: Arthur Endsley, deceased; Howlet Bigham, deceased; Willie McKnight, deceased; Charlie Mottitt, deceased; Grover Collins, deceased; and Bennett McCory, deceased.

Figure 3: A newspaper clipping from the Lewisburg Tribune in 1971 of a 1903 photo of Sanders Grove students and their teacher.²⁸

The People of Sanders Grove

Before the twentieth century, rural schools used a single teacher who taught basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Teachers tested students with oral recitations at the end of the term. These schools typically used single-year contracts and boarded the teachers in local homes.²⁹ At

²⁸ *The Lewisburg Tribune*, Lewisburg, Tennessee, March 25, 1971.

²⁹ Campbell F. Scribner, *The Fight for Local Control: School, Suburbs, and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016), 38 – 39.

Sanders Grove, teachers followed this pattern, and therefore, students typically did not have the same teacher year after year. Newspaper accounts show the lack of teacher tenure at Sanders Grove, in addition to what some teachers did after they taught at Sanders Grove. Additionally, a brief history written in the 1980s by Sarah Jones, a middle school English teacher in Marshall County, provides glimpses into the day-to-day happenings at the school.

In October 1900, eighteen-year-old Marshall County resident Jessie Harris served as one of the school's first teachers. She later married G. Frank Hardison of Marshall County in June 1901.³⁰ Before Harris' marriage, her time at the school had already ended because in March 1901, Mina Davis was the teacher.³¹ Professor Jim Orr took over managing the school in July 1901. Throughout the 1900s, Orr led other area schools, such as Mooresville and Caney Springs, and even a school in Adairville, Kentucky.³² In 1903, William L. Barnett served as the teacher (Figure 3). Soon after teaching at Sanders Grove, Barnett attended dental school and became a dentist.³³ Thomas Coleman, a twenty-one-year-old teacher, taught at Sanders Grove in April 1904. Coleman later became a legislator and circuit court judge for Bedford, Marshall, Cannon, and Rutherford counties.³⁴ In 1905, Myrtle King taught in February, and Esther Ealy taught at Sanders Grove in the fall. Ealy later worked at the nearby Leonard School in 1908.³⁵ Cora Finley was the teacher for Sanders Grove in the spring of 1909 after she taught at the Cochran School.³⁶ In 1915, Wilma Rambo, a nineteen-year-old from Marshall County, served as the teacher (Figure 4).³⁷ Annie Lou Harmon taught at Sanders Grove in the fall of 1918. Harmon

³⁰ *Lewisburg Tribune*, October 18, 1900; "Mrs. Jessie H. Hardison," *Lewisburg Tribune*, June 20, 1901; "Mrs. Jessie H. Hardison," *Nashville Banner*, November 9, 1953.

³¹ *Lewisburg Tribune*, March 28, 1901.

³² "Mooresville," *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 2, 1900; *Lewisburg Tribune*, July 18, 1901; "Purely Personal," *The Marshall Gazette*, June 2, 1905; *Lewisburg Tribune*, July 7, 1905; *Lewisburg Tribune*, May 18, 1909.

³³ United States Federal Census, 1900, Civil District 6, Marshall County, Tennessee, 4B; *Lewisburg Tribune*, April 7, 1905; "Sanders Grove School - 1903," *Lewisburg Tribune*, March 25, 1971.

³⁴ *Lewisburg Tribune*, April 26, 1904; "Death Takes T.L. Coleman," *The Knoxville Journal*, February 21, 1950.

³⁵ "Sanders Grove School," *The Marshall Gazette*, February 16, 1905; *The Marshall Gazette*, June 6, 1905; "Leonard School, 1908," *Lewisburg Tribune*, January 23, 1953.

³⁶ "Cochran," *The Marshall Gazette*, December 22, 1908; *The Marshall Gazette*, March 16, 1909.

³⁷ United States Federal Census, 1910, Civil District 3, Marshall County, Tennessee, 2A; "Sanders Grove School, 1915," *Lewisburg Tribune*, July 22, 1971.

later became a longtime Marshall County teacher and principal at Roberson Fork throughout the 1930s.³⁸

Throughout the three decades that Sanders Grove School was open, children living north of Yell Hill attended the school. In the morning, the ringing bell in the school's cupola signaled to students that it was time to climb the high steps at the school's entrance and start school. They entered a vestibule where they stored their coats and lunches. Students prepared the school for sessions through daily chores like cutting the wood used to supplement the coal in the iron stove. The school used a flat-top iron stove with one ton of coal that the county provided. When heat was needed, the first boy to arrive at school was tasked with starting a fire, often using the kindling that he picked up on the way there. Students at the school drank water from a nearby spring across Yell Road using a dipper. Although the school had its own well, the water contained sulfur and no one wanted to drink it.³⁹

At the beginning of each school year, parents bought their children the appropriate textbooks at the Davidson and Beasley Drug Store in Lewisburg. The school did not have night programs because it did not have electricity. In the winter, the school held Christmas festivities including a Christmas tree. At the end of the year, students performed programs, including a "fan drill" in which the female students opened and shut folding fans in rhythm. The teacher would also annually take students to McCollum Gap on top of Yell Hill to hunt chestnuts.⁴⁰

³⁸ "Appointment of County Teachers," *The Marshall Gazette*, August 16, 1918; "Honor Roll Students of Roberson Fork School," *The Marshall Gazette*, December 6, 1929; "Teachers Selected for Elementary Schools," *Lewisburg Tribune*, April 28, 1939.

³⁹ Jones, "Sanders Grove School," Briar Lane Farm Tennessee Century Farm Application, 1-2.

⁴⁰ Jones, "Sanders Grove School," Briar Lane Farm Tennessee Century Farm Application, 2-4.



*Figure 4: Sanders Grove Class in 1915 in front of school, published in the Lewisburg Tribune.*⁴¹

42

Sanders Grove School served the local community as a shared place for gathering, learning, and celebrating for over thirty years. The building's function as a school was discontinued in the early 1930s, possibly between 1933 and 1935, likely due to consolidation. School consolidation was part of the nation's educational reform movement that occurred during a period of

⁴¹ "Sanders Grove School, 1915," *Lewisburg Tribune*, July 22, 1971.

concern about living conditions in rural America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To reformers, school consolidation was one of the only ways for rural children to have the same opportunities as urban students while still receiving a distinctly rural education.⁴³

Although support grew for consolidation in the 1910s, efforts were largely ineffective because of the nation's decentralized system of authority over education. Not all states favored consolidation, nor could all localities practically consider the option. Tennessee, though, supported and adopted consolidation early. In a 1911 Department of Public Instruction report that accounted for school consolidation in the state, the state described what "ideal" consolidated rural schools would consist of and the deficiencies of single-teacher schools. According to state officials, consolidated schools needed to hire no less than four teachers, cover a range of twenty to thirty miles, and provide transportation for students. In Marshall County, out of the forty-seven white schools in the county, twenty-six were single-teacher schools. According to the report, the county consolidated three single-teacher schools into one in 1911.⁴⁴

It appears that Marshall County continued to gradually consolidate schools throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In Tennessee, as in other states, consolidation became a feasible option when state legislatures provided funding for building new schools and providing transportation. In 1924, Marshall County consisted of fifty-three schools, down from ninety-five schools in 1900. It is likely that a smaller student population resulting from an overall population decline in Marshall County in the 1920s, as well as rural school consolidation, led to the declining number of schools in the county.⁴⁵ In contrast to the student population in 1898 of more than 7,000, in 1929, the county's school census enumerated 3,012 students, of whom

⁴³ Steffes, "Solving the 'Rural School Problem,'" 190 - 193.

⁴⁴ Tennessee Department of Public Instruction, *Rural School Situation in Tennessee*, 9, 12, 19, 44, 64, 90.

⁴⁵ United States Census Bureau, 1920, Population of Inhabitants, Tennessee, Table 3; "Some Scholastic Statistics from Marshall County," *Marshall County Gazette*, Lewisburg, TN, Nov. 20, 1924.

2,717 could read and write.⁴⁶ In 1933, the student population increased to 3,631, of whom 3,363 could read and write.⁴⁷

School consolidation gained momentum when the state legislature created the Tennessee Education Commission in 1935. Soon after its creation, the commission released a report in which it recommended that Tennessee's State Board of Education set standards for school consolidation and transportation for students. It also recommended that wherever possible, consolidation should take place.⁴⁸ The following year, R.B. Stone remarked in his speech at an annual teachers banquet in Lewisburg that school consolidation "brought about improved conditions, better trained teachers, more enriched courses of study, and better buildings in which to work."⁴⁹ Maps depicting school bus routes and road conditions in the 1930s illustrate how school consolidation and reform in the early twentieth century profoundly changed education in rural Marshall County. Within the entire county, only a handful of county schools, out of dozens once situated on paved and dirt roads, remained. According to a 1935 county map (Figure 5), Sanders Grove School no longer operated.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Marshall County School Census, Report of County Superintendent to State Commissioner of Education, 1929, Department of Education Records, 1917 – 1978, Record Group 51, TSLA.

⁴⁷ Marshall County School Census, Report of County Superintendent to State Commissioner of Education, 1933, Department of Education Records, 1917 – 1978, Record Group 51, TSLA.

⁴⁸ Catherine Orr, "Educational Conditions and Needs in Tennessee," *The Marshall Gazette*, Lewisburg, Tennessee, February 1, 1935.

⁴⁹ "Teachers Hold Annual Banquet," *The Marshall Gazette*, Lewisburg, Tennessee, March 20, 1936.

⁵⁰ U.S. Office of Education, "School bus routes of Marshall County, 1935-1936," State of Tennessee: County Educational Maps, 1935-36 (Nashville: Tennessee State Department of Education, 1937), published digitally by Digital Initiatives, James E. Walker Library, Middle Tennessee State University, <https://digital.mtsu.edu/digital/collection/p15838coll8/id/64/rec/3>.

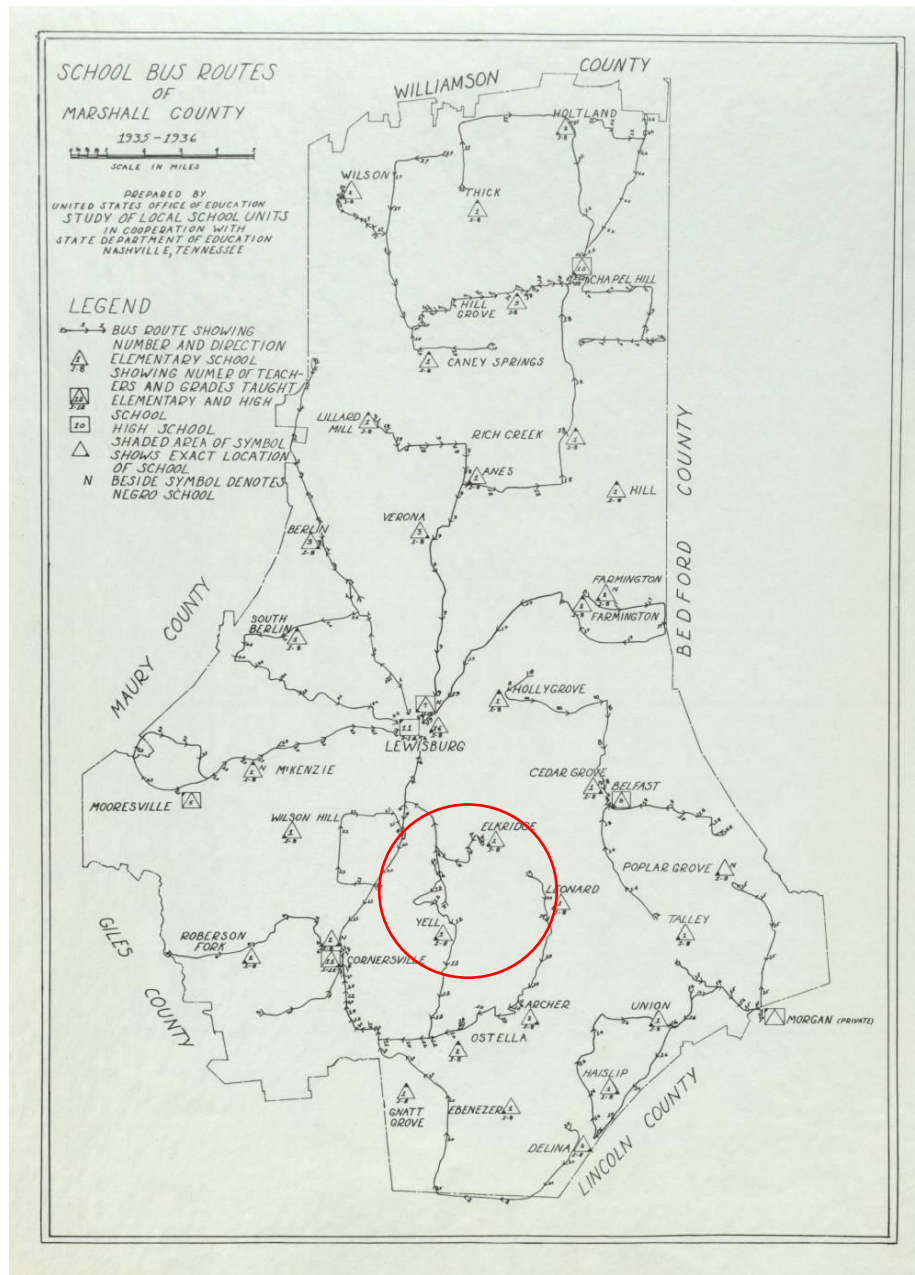


Figure 5: A 1935 – 1936 map of school bus routes in Marshall County. Circled in red is where Sanders Grove School was located; however, it is not marked, indicating that by 1935, the school had closed.⁵¹

Around the time of Sanders Grove's closure, there were several similar schools still operating nearby, including the Elk Ridge School, about three miles southeast of Lewisburg on Spring

⁵¹ U.S. Office of Education, "School bus routes of Marshall County, 1935-1936".

Place Road. A single teacher instructed students up to the eighth grade. Elk Ridge consisted of a population like Sanders Grove of roughly twenty to thirty students (Figures 6 and 7).⁵² Elk Ridge School was also multipurposed with instances of church meetings and preaching conducted at the school in the 1900s.⁵³ The school remained open until at least 1935 as indicated by the Marshall County school bus routes map (Figure 5). Located northeast of Sanders Grove, Holly Grove School, which opened in the mid-1890s and closed in 1939, was like Sanders Grove with a single teacher and approximately twenty to thirty students (Figure 8). It also hosted religious services.⁵⁴



Figure 6: Elk Ridge School in 1900 published in the Lewisburg Tribune.⁵⁵

⁵² "Honor Roll of the Elk Ridge," *Lewisburg Tribune*, May 2, 1930; "Elk Ridge School, September 8, 1902," *Lewisburg Tribune*, June 13, 1902; "Elk Ridge School - 1900," *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 24, 1967; "Millennium Memories," *Lewisburg Tribune*, February 17, 2000.

⁵³ "Elk Ridge," *Lewisburg Tribune*, January 17, 1901; "Church Notes," *Lewisburg Tribune*, May 24, 1907; "Church Chimes," *The Marshall Gazette*, October 9, 1908.

⁵⁴ "Church Chimes," *The Marshall Gazette*, May 9, 1902; "Holly Grove," *The Marshall Gazette*, August 7, 1924; "Honor Roll for Holly Grove School," *The Marshall Gazette*, September 22, 1933; "Meeting to Start at Holly Grove," *The Marshall Gazette*, September 9, 1938; "Holly Grove School - 1925," *Lewisburg Tribune*, July 13, 1978; Rhonda Poole, "Discover Marshall County, Part II," *Lewisburg Tribune*, July 29, 1999; "Holly Grove School, 1913," *Marshall County, TNGenWeb*, April 27, 2023, <https://tngenweb.org/marshall/holly-grove-school-1913/> (accessed April 7, 2026).

⁵⁵ "Elk Ridge School - 1900," *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 24, 1967.



#1 - Elk Ridge School located about three miles out of Lewisburg on the Spring Place Road. Grades 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th and 8th grades. 1941-'42.

#2 - Teacher Margaret Allen Jordan.

#3 - First row, left to right: Mable Cavender, Buddy Phifer, Joyce Harmond, Frank Helton, Marie Cochran, Hilda Glenn. Second row: Betty Jean Phifer, Robert Anderson, Christine Helton, Christine Hidgon, Lane Beard, Vinal Endsley. Third row: Gene Anderson, Evelyn Cochran, Joyce Beard, Melba Higdon. Years 1941-1942. Not pictured, Ralph Chapman and Jane Chapman. Pictures submitted by Joyce H. Allison.

Figure 7: Elk Ridge School Building, the 1941-1942 class, and their teacher published in the Lewisburg Tribune.⁵⁶



Figure 8: Holly Grove Class in 1913.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ "Millennium Memories," *Lewisburg Tribune*, February 17, 2000.

⁵⁷ "Holly Grove School, 1913," *Marshall County, TNGenWeb*, April 27, 2023.

According to the 1935 Marshall County school bus route map (Figure 5), the schools that remained open in the vicinity of Sanders Grove School include the Yell, Elk Ridge, Ostella, Archer, and Leonard schools. Besides Ostella School, none of the institutions were part of District 3. All the schools ranged in size relative to Sanders Grove. Yell School, which served students south of Yell Hill (Sanders Grove taught students north of Yell Hill) was a part of District 5. Yell School was larger with two teachers in 1900; however, it only consisted of one teacher, with approximately twenty students.⁵⁸ It is unclear when the school closed, but by 1953, the Marshall County School District was selling Yell School at auction.⁵⁹ Ostella School was also a larger school. In 1912, it had a principal and two teachers with over sixty-five students (Figure 9). However, the class was about half the size in 1915.⁶⁰ The school continued educating students in grades 1 through 8 in the building until 1937.⁶¹

⁵⁸ "Yell," *Lewisburg Tribune*, October 8, 1900; "Honor Roll Pupils for Yell School," *Lewisburg Tribune*, March 7, 1930; "Yell School Children Write to Santa Claus," *The Marshall Gazette*, December 10, 1937.

⁵⁹ "Marshall County School Property at Auction," *The Marshall Gazette*, September 4, 1953.

⁶⁰ "The Ostella School in 1915," *The Marshall Gazette*, August 10, 1965; "Ostella School 1912," *Lewisburg Tribune*, December 6, 1973; "Ostella School - 1907-1908," *Lewisburg Tribune*, May 2, 1974.

⁶¹ "Ostella News," *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 6, 1954.



Figure 9: Ostella School in 1912 published in the Lewisburg Tribune.⁶²

Leonard School, in Luna, was a part of District 2, and began in 1880 after John Leonard gave the land to build a school. It also hosted religious services in the early twentieth century.⁶³ Enrollment varied over the decades. In 1908, the school had one teacher and over forty students, and in 1912, it had fewer than twenty students (Figure 10).⁶⁴ It is unclear when it closed, but it was still in operation in 1942. By 1955, the community was using the school for other uses, like the Luna Community Club hosted meetings there.⁶⁵

⁶² "Ostella School 1912," *Lewisburg Tribune*, December 6, 1973.

⁶³ "County Schools and Teachers," *The Marshall Gazette*, February 22, 1910; "Locals," *Lewisburg Tribune*, March 8, 1910. *The Marshall Gazette*, May 19, 1911; "Leonard School," *The Marshall Gazette*, April 10, 1936; "Leonard School, 1912," *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 16, 1973.

⁶⁴ "Leonard School, 1908," *Lewisburg Tribune*, January 23, 1953; "Leonard School, 1912," *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 16, 1973; "Leonard School - 1923-1925," *The Marshall Gazette*, June 1, 1982.

⁶⁵ "Luna Community Club Holds Monthly Meeting," *The Marshall Gazette*, December 30, 1955.



Leonard School, 1912, Teacher, Miss Myrtis Leonard. This school began in 1880. Mr. John Leonard gave the land for the school.

Figure 10: Leonard School Class in 1912, published in the Lewisburg Tribune in 1973.⁶⁶

67

Although Sanders Grove consolidated earlier than similar nearby schools, it is one of the remaining extant school emblematic of an early twentieth-century era of public education in the rural South. The Archer School is another potentially extant school in the area, and it contrasts greatly in its building design. Built in about 1917, Archer School resembles the Progressive and reform ideals that infused modern school design in the early twentieth century as a two-teacher and two-room school. Originally, it served grades one through twelve, but by

⁶⁶ "Leonard School, 1912," *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 17, 1973.

its closure in 1949, it only instructed students until eighth grade.⁶⁸ The Marshall County Board of Education sold Archer School in 1953, and it is potentially extant today (Figure 11).⁶⁹

Unlike Archer School, Sanders Grove is symbolic of an older period of public education that is akin to a country school more than a modern rural one. The McCullough family, the current owners of the Sanders Grove school, expressed interest in maintaining the dilapidated building. If stabilized and/or restored, the school could retain its historic architectural value despite its nearly century-long abandonment.



*Figure 11: Potential Archer School, 3603 Spring Place Road, Marshall County, Tennessee
Google Street View, June 2023.*

⁶⁸ "Archer School Reunion," *Lewisburg Tribune*, September 19, 1991; "Archer School reunion held," *Marshall County Tribune*, November 12, 2008.

⁶⁹ It is not definite that the Archer School building remains, but a 2008 article described it as still standing. The article stated that the location of the building was about a half a mile away from the Richland Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which aligns with the location of the building in Figure 11. The Tennessee Property Viewer reports that the extant building was built in 1917. "Marshall County School Property at Auction," *The Marshall Gazette*, September 4, 1953; "Archer School reunion held," *Marshall County Tribune*, November 12, 2008; "Parcel ID 109 012.00," 3603 Spring Place Road, Marshall County, Tennessee Property Viewer, <https://tnmap.tn.gov/assessment/#/parcel/059109%20%20%20%2001200> (accessed April 7, 2026); Google Street View June 2023, 3603 Springplace Road, Marshall County, Tennessee.

Building Description

The Sanders Grove School is a one-story, wooden frame, front gable building with a steep pitch and wraparound lap wooden siding. It sits on a foundation of stone piers with three equally spaced rows running approximately the length of the building. The piers raise the building above ground level, but there are no stairs leading up to the entrance of the building (Figure 12). Original square metal tile roofing with raised scale detailing covers the entire roof. There is a moderate overhang around the entire perimeter of the building. At the east end (near the front) of the ridge of the roof, there is a square wooden bell tower with a hipped metal roof of the same tiles as the main building. Approximately centered on the roof's ridge is a small brick chimney (Figures 13 and 14). The building is in poor condition, especially in its foundation, with none of the windows or doors intact and pieces of the siding missing throughout. The roof is in surprisingly good shape but it appears as if erosion from the hill has impacted it, and perhaps water runoff dislodged some of the foundation stone piers.



Figure 12: East (front) elevation of Sanders Grove School. Note the symmetrical front and piers raising it from the ground but lack of stairs to the entrance.



Figure 13: Southeast oblique, clearly showcasing the front belltower.



Figure 14: A wider view of the southeast oblique.

The front (east) elevation resembles a church-like structure from c. 1900 as indicated from its bell tower and two side-by-side single door entrances (Figures 12-14).⁷⁰ Like Sanders Grove, schools during this period often served various community functions. By 1930, modernization of school buildings led to the inclusion of more rooms to accommodate increased educational and community needs. Often, these needs resulted in consolidation of schools to be able to house more rooms, such as a large assembly room and a library. Sanders Grove, while it contained several rooms, was not as extensive as standardized public schools in the 1930s.⁷¹

The east elevation serves as the front of the school facing Yell Road and features a symmetrical facade with a dual entrance (Figure 12). Centered on this facade are two separate recessed single doorways with top one-by-one transom windows. Since the main entrance is recessed forming a small portico, there is a single door adjacent to both front doors that face inwards to each other. Flanking either side of the main entrance is a single framed window opening. The window closer to the north elevation retains the middle rail.

The south elevation faces a grassy field that ends at Buddy Jones Road (Figures 15 and 16). The building is laid on a downward hill with the roof and building visibly caving downwards starting from approximately the middle of this elevation. The downward slope of the landscape would not have been ideal by 1930, when the government was recommending the modernization of schools, since it would have most likely not allowed for enough adequate recreation space for the children.⁷²

The school features three evenly spaced window openings closer to the east (front) elevation. The window closest to the east elevation retains the original wooden framing but is completely open. The middle window is partially filled with wooden lapboard on the top, and the bottom half has wooden framing. The final window is also completely open with most of the original framing intact. On the bottom of the window there is a partial repair of the siding with two nailed wooden planks. The fourth opening, closest to the west (rear) elevation, appears to be a

⁷⁰ Fletcher B. Dresslar and Haskell Pruett, "Rural Schoolhouses, School Grounds, and Their Equipment," United States Department of Interior, *Bulletin* no. 21 (1930).

⁷¹ Dresslar and Pruett, "Rural Schoolhouses, School Grounds, and Their Equipment," 3-8.

⁷² "Dresslar and Pruett, "Rural Schoolhouses, School Grounds, and Their Equipment."

former single door entrance. The doorway with the wooden framing now features a partial, vertical, wooden planked, gate-like door. The two-over-two transom window frame remains.



Figure 15: South elevation. Note the downward slope of land, caving of the building, window openings, and tile detailing.



Figure 16: Southwest oblique.

The west elevation of the building serves as the rear of the building and features no window or door openings (Figure 17). A tree approximately in the middle of this elevation is adjacent to the building and extends almost its entire height. Behind this elevation is a grassy area and further back is a dilapidated stable (Figure 18). The lack of a window would not have been ideal for modern school buildings by 1930, since the government emphasized improving ventilation and providing adequate lighting. There were only about ten windows for the entire school, which for a school that size most likely would not have been suitable for enough ventilation.⁷³

⁷³ "Dresslar and Pruett, "Rural Schoolhouses, School Grounds, and Their Equipment."



Figure 17: West (rear) elevation featuring no window or door openings and a tree growing adjacent to the building.



Figure 18: Dilapidated stable behind the west (rear) elevation.

The north elevation of the building features three evenly spaced window openings, closer to the rear of the building (Figure 19). Closest to the front of the building, there appears to be a former window opening, but it has been filled in with wooden lapboard. The window opening adjacent to the filled in window retains the wooden framing and middle rail. The middle window is missing the sill part of the framing, and the middle rail is partially intact. The window closest to the rear is completely open and does not have the sill of the frame remaining. Similarly to the south elevation, the building and roof cave in at the middle of this elevation. Near the foundation, several pieces of siding are missing, and the stone pier foundation is visible. At the northwest corner, where this elevation meets with the rear, there is a large separation between the elevations, reflecting its current poor condition.



Figure 19: North elevation. Note the caving in and separation of the building at the northwest corner.

Appendix: Links for Additional Guidance

- The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings (link [here](#))
 - Technical guidelines from the National Park Service for the preservation of historic buildings with a lot of detailed information on various buildings, materials, and building features
- How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (link [here](#))
- General National Park page about technical preservation services (link [here](#))
 - Preservation standards and guidelines
 - Preservation briefs, specifically look at the following:
 - Roofing for Historic Buildings (Preservation Brief 4) [here](#)
 - The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows (Preservation Briefs 9) [here](#)
 - The Repair and Replacement of Historic Wooden Shingle Roofs (Preservation Brief 19) [here](#)
 - Preservation tech notes with case studies in historic preservation

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