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### New Clipping - Reflections On The 1957 Fire

Dorothy Edwards

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# Reflections On The 1957 Fire

HUGGINS-CURTIS  
BUILDING



1957 - Huggins-Curtis Building burns - Possible electrical short.

**Mrs. Dorothy Washburn Hamrick Edwards is Registrar at GWC.**

By MRS. DOROTHY EDWARDS

On August 23, 1957, I was awakened by the shrill sound of the fire alarm which did not cease to blow for a long time. My son, who was a member of the Volunteer Fire Department and a student at Gardner-Webb, bounded out of bed a few seconds ahead of me and was on his way to assist in any way he could. As I remember it was sometime between one and two o'clock in the morning.

At that time I was living on Memorial Drive, east of where the Gardner-Webb radio station is now. As I looked out the window, there was already a red glow in the sky. I could not determine which building it was, but thought it was either the Hamrick or the Huggins-Curtis Building. My first thought was "The Records" -- the students records! I was dressed in a few seconds and was literally running from my house across the front yards of the M. A. Moseley's and John Washburn's, down by Royster Hospital (now a dormitory) and on toward the Hamrick Building. I figured I would get there faster on foot than going by car if I took the shortcuts. By the time I came up to Royster, I could see it was the Huggins-Curtis Building and was greatly relieved to

know that for the moment at least the permanent records of our students were not burning.

By the time I reached the Hamrick Building, the flames were leaping many feet into the sky. Several people had reached the scene ahead of me and hundreds of people came before it was over, many still in their pajamas and night clothes. My immediate and major concern was the safety of the 'permanent records' housed in the Registrar's Office located where Dr. Robert Morgan's office is now in the Hamrick Building.

Soon, however, I spotted Dr. Philip Elliott, and my thoughts shifted to other very important and irreplaceable records that were now going up in flames. Before I returned to Gardner-Webb in 1946, Dr. Elliott had already started collecting copies of the Gardner-Webb catalogues and yearbooks and after I came, together he and I were able to get one complete set of both that had been published since the beginning of the school in 1907-08. Now, they too were being consumed. Also, about two weeks before the fire Mr. W. L. Hicks, a long time trustee and Secretary of the Board of Trustees had brought the complete set of original minutes of the Board since the school's beginning, many of which had been personally written by him. It was one of the most complete, detailed and well-kept set of records imaginable. They were meticulous and his penmanship was beautiful and flawless. These too were burned by the fire.

In addition to those losses, Dr. Elliott, who was President of Gardner-Webb at that time, had a private library of around 2,500 books, most of which were housed in his Office in the Huggins-Curtis Building. He had priceless, rare books of Shakespeare, Milton, Spencer and many others too numerous to name with personal notes throughout many of their

pages. Of course, he had committed many passages to memory, but it was such a great loss to him and to the College. Among other precious items lost was his collection of sermons. No one ever knew how the fire started, but when questioned about that, in spite of his major losses, he came back with the remark that maybe it was the "dry wit" of his old sermons that set the building ablaze.

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Cont'd



Financially, one of the greatest losses from the fire was about \$45,000 worth of athletic equipment, particularly football equipment. Also, maintenance supplies and equipment were stored there, and when I first arrived on the scene Coach Harris and Mr. Horace Scruggs were attempting to get a few things from the basement areas. It was only a week before the opening of school with pre-school football practice already underway, but Coach Harris was able to retrieve only 6 football helmets and 3 balls before the heat became too intense and the danger too great to stay in the building. Mr. Scruggs saved a few things for maintenance. Otherwise, it was a complete loss.

The thing that amazed me most about the fire was that the blaze was contained mostly within the walls and the flame leaped directly skyward. The roof was made of tin shingles (probably 8x12 or 16") and the force from the heat flung the shingles as far as the baseball field (where the new multi-purpose building is now under construction) and on over into the field where the stadium parking lot is now. The walls (which were 16" thick) of the building were of bricks made locally from clay taken from below and around the Methodist and Baptist churches located on South Main Street. That, I suppose, accounted for the fact that the walls did not cave in, even from the intense heat as the rich, pine lumber burned like kindling. Some of the trees which now stand south of the Charles I. Dover Building were within a few feet of the fire and still survived. Also the large oak, on the northwest corner of the C.I.D., survived for several years after the fire and its stump still remains there, along with several trees between Hamrick and the Charles I. Dover Buildings. The flames could be seen as far away as Shelby.

When I attended Gardner-Webb, a student rang the bell in the bell tower for the changing of classes. During the fire the bell fell from the third floor and the last I knew about it, it was stored in the barrack structure over near the maintenance shop. However, the clapper, nor the frame around the bell, was never found in the ashes after the fire.

The two corner stones, one for the Kings Mountain Baptist Association and the other for the Sandy Run Baptist Association, were retrieved and opened at a later date. Although little was salvaged from them, some of the things are now in our library.

Only a very few days before the fire, Martha Mason and her parents, who had made their home in Huggins-Curtis during the school year 1956-57, moved into HAPPY Dormitory. Martha is in an iron lung and

has been since the middle forties as a result of polio. One of our greatest joys at that time was, "She is safe." In spite of an iron lung, Martha graduated from Gardner-Webb and later from Wake Forest College with an all A record.

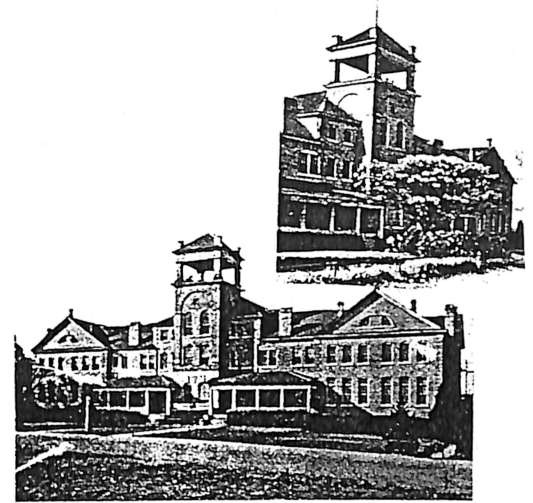
The fire raged unabated for three hours or more, and I along with hundreds of others watched with mixed emotions until it began to subside and then returned home in time to fix breakfast and go to school for another day's work.

Like buildings at many schools of earlier years, the Huggins-Curtis Building housed almost everything under one roof --

classrooms, library, kitchen, dining room, dormitories, offices, Literary Society Halls, auditorium, laundry, infirmary, parlors, maintenance and athletic storage, etc. For students who attended Gardner-Webb from 1907 to 1957, it was "The Building" with many memories (the tinkling of Miss Curtis' keys on the hallway, the clarion call of Mr. J. D. Huggins and countless others for a better way of life, joys and sorrows, disappointments, enriching experiences) - an edifice that was symbolic of an undefinable spirit that is Gardner-Webb College!

REFLECTIONS on the  
1957 FIRE  
THE WEB P.M.  
JAN-FEB 1981

HUGGINS-CURTIS BUILDING

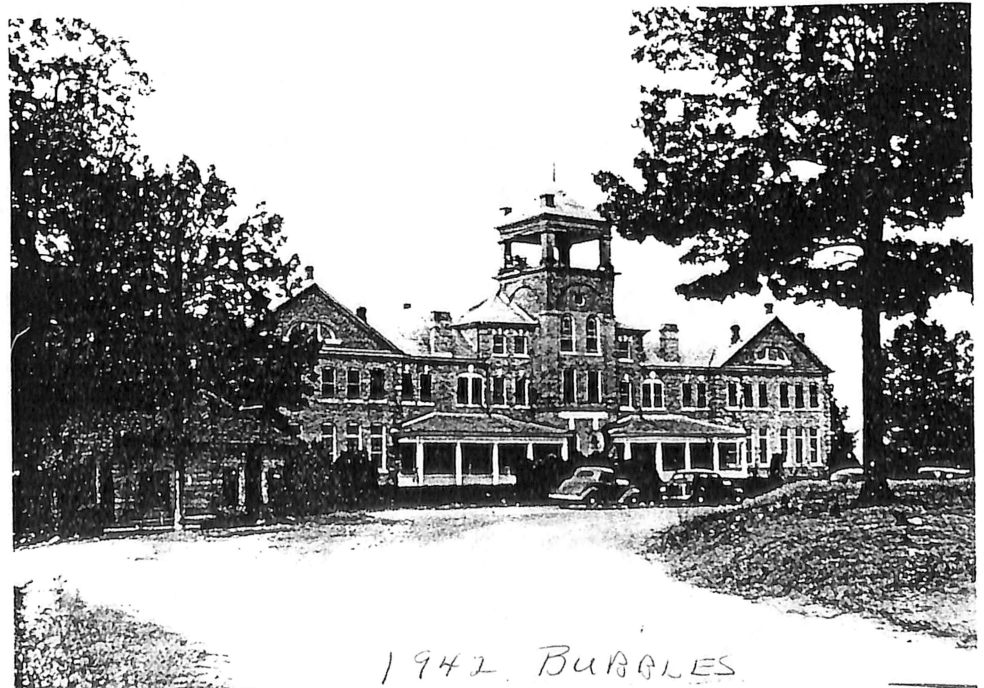


BUBBLES 1934



1942  
BUBBLES  
HUGGINS-CURTIS

MAIN BUILDING



1942 BUBBLES