



# Leonardtown School Memories

By: Eleanor Fenwick Ripple



My mother, LaVerne Miller Fenwick, was the Principal of Leonardtown School for many years. She enjoyed sharing the adventures she had as a city girl coming to St. Mary's County with anyone who wanted to hear them, especially her family.

LaVerne graduated from Frostburg State Normal School in 1929 at the age of seventeen. She was promised a job upon completion of her schooling, but was unable to get one. State law required all beginning teachers to be eighteen years of age! So she got a job as a waitress for the summer. In the fall, she made an appointment with the college president, Mr. Dunkle. She wanted to remind him that a job had been promised to her. While LaVerne was in Mr. Dunkle's office, he received a phone call from Miss Lettie M. Dent, the Superintendent of St. Mary's County Public Schools. Miss Dent needed a teacher who could begin work in January of 1930.

Mr. Dunkle told Mama that she was too young to go to St. Mary's County. It was too far away and too rural. He did not feel comfortable with her taking this position. He thought she was just too young. Mama, who would be eighteen on her birthday, December 20th, was adamant. She needed the job – no matter how remote – no matter how countrified – no matter what!

So LaVerne set out on the Greyhound Bus from Washington, D.C. to visit St. Mary's County. She had a job and she was happy! She asked the bus driver, Joe Russell, how to get to the Board of Education. He told her that she should take the street car to the end of the line and it was right there! She believed him and was utterly amazed when Miss Lettie Dent and Miss Harriet Reeder, the Personnel Director, were there to meet her when the bus stopped at Duke's Corner in Leonardtown. (Little did she know that as she stepped out of the bus, her future husband, Charles Fenwick, saw her and told Jimmy Mattingly and Froggie Connelly, his fellow workers at Cecil's IGA, that she was the girl he was going to marry! This prophecy came true on December 28th, 1936.)

Miss Dent and Miss Reeder took LaVerne to her new home in Loveville, the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley Love. The next day, she had to walk one and one half miles to Merryland Springs School. Because Route 5 was a dirt road and it was pouring rain, LaVerne had to trudge through mud and ruts. (On dry days, it

was dust and ruts.) Since she had no raincoat or umbrella, she was soaking wet when she arrived at the school. Her students greeted her with smiles, even though they were all drenched and soaking wet too. The students ranged from the first grade up to the seventh grade. The school was cold and they were all soaked, so it was a very miserable first day! Merryland Springs had no electricity, no running water, and no wood stove!

Fred Bowles showed Miss Miller the wonderful spring that supplied the drinking water for the school. Deacon James Somerville, who attended Merryland Springs at a later date remembers that down the hill from the school near the stream the spring bubbled up from the ground. At times the spring could become blocked by fallen leaves and debris. Fred Bowles recalled that sometimes they had to take their metal collapsible cups to get well water from Pat Somerville or John Frederick (Deacon Somerville's grandfather).

MERRYLAND SPRINGS SCHOOL  
REPORTS FIRST ONE HUNDRED  
PER-CENT ATTENDANCE

Merryland Springs School, Miss La Verne Miller, Principal, reports one hundred per-cent attendance for the month of September. This attendance achievement sets a new record for Merryland Springs and is the first perfect attendance reported for September 1930.

The following pupils are enrolled at Merryland Springs:

Olivia Bowles, Dorothy Faunce, Esther Faunce, Margarite Guy, I-a-bel Johnson, Fred Bowles, Bertman, Faunce, Henry Faunce, Alvin Guy, Clyde Guy, Woodrow Guy, George Johnson, Louis Johnson, Wm. A. Murphy, and Louis Williams.

Miss E. Violette Young, the Supervisor of Instruction, came to observe the new teacher on the Friday of her first week. Sometime later a woodstove was installed. The older boys brought in the wood and kept the fire burning. Those cold January school days got a lot warmer and dryer! Fred Bowles remembered some visits of Miss Young after the stove was in use. She would bring milk, warm it on the stove, season it with nutmeg and other spices, and then fill their metal collapsible cups with the warm and delicious drink. Mama sewed curtains for the windows and made bookshelves out of orange crates for the few textbooks they had. Merryland Springs School was now a cozy and comfortable learning environment.

But disaster soon struck! The school was so inviting that one cold winter evening some inebriated bootleggers broke in and warmed themselves by building a fire. That night, the wood stove cheerfully burned textbooks, book shelves,

curtains, and even some of the desks! At least one of the men came to apologize to Miss Miller sometime later.

In the 1931 - 32 school year, LaVerne was assigned to Leonardtown School, which had two rooms. Mrs. Gertrude Foxwell taught the primary grades, one through three, in the smaller room and LaVerne taught grades, four through eight, in the larger room. Leonardtown School was huge compared to Merryland Springs. It had two outhouses each with its own fenced in area. It had a woodshed, a large playground, lots of textbooks, and some of the students rode the bus to school.

LaVerne's first big task was to paint the walls of her new classroom. The older boys helped her. Some of them were the same age as their teacher. They kept missing school because they were busy with the tobacco crops, but they kept returning to school in order to complete eight full years. Several of these boys asked for Mama's hand in marriage. She thought Charles King was really cute, but she wasn't ready for marriage yet.



**Left to Right:** LaVerne Miller, Ann Jarboe  
Stephen Jones, Charles King  
Circa 1931 - 1932



**Top, Left to Right:** Ann Jarboe, LaVerne Miller,  
Ethel Klobiski, Marie Steinfeld  
**Middle:** Hope Swann, Julia Emery, Marie Pilkerton  
**Bottom:** Agnes Connelly  
Circa 1931 - 1932

**Left to Right:**  
Caroll Morgan  
Frances Clements  
Sarah Hayden  
Philip Tuniman  
Melvin Russell  
LaVerne Miller  
Mary Jane Abell  
Marie Steinfelt  
Rita Clements  
Peggy Lee  
Rheinert Tuniman



Circa 1935

My mother told us many stories about the interesting happenings at Leonardtown School. One of the most memorable was about the time Thomas Guy was so disruptive that she sent him out to the woodshed to cool off. Thomas quickly lit up his cigarettes and caught the whole woodshed on fire! A neighbor reported the fire and soon the fire truck, sirens blazing, rolled into the school ground much to the amazement of everyone in school. The moral of that story was to never, ever let Thomas out of your sight!

During Halloween season, the outhouses would be turned upside down! This was a great prank during those times, but it came to an end when a fatal accident occurred because someone put an outhouse on one of the main roads.

My mother taught for many years and loved every minute of it. At some point, the seventh and eighth grades were sent to another school, probably Margaret Brent. She was the Principal of Leonardtown School until the new brick

school was built in the early fifties. Then she chose to teach sixth grade and have the summers off!

When I went to the first grade in 1943, Mama was the Principal. She was known as a strong disciplinarian. Her old student, Fred Bowles, said, "She wasn't a sergeant, but when she spoke, you obeyed."

Much to my mother's embarrassment, I could not stop hiding behind her knees that first day. I was five years old and scared. I didn't cry all day, like Dickie Norris did on his first day at school, but I did not want to leave my mother. She finally pried me loose and I was placed in a room full of strange children that I had never seen before.

Although I was terribly shy, I got used to my new setting and soon fell in love with my teacher, Mrs. Gertrude Foxwell. Mrs. Foxwell was tall and stately. She was beautiful and had the most luxurious hair I had ever seen. It fascinated me because her hair was snow-white in the front, pitch-black in the back, and salt-and-pepper in between. Mrs. Foxwell was musical and sang like an angel, always using a pitch pipe to get us started. She read to us with such expression that we couldn't stop listening until she said the last word. Because of this great talent of hers, I still love to read and hear stories. We were never bored in her classroom. Mrs. Foxwell was gentle and always fair. The worst punishment I ever received was having to stand in the corner facing the wall.

There were only three people in my grade. I was the only "town girl". Joseph Harris and Audrey Graves both lived on St. John's Road in Hollywood. They rode Mr. Hayden's big yellow bus to school every day. Being a "town girl", I never had the experience of a daily bus trip to school. Since I was the only student left in school at the end of the day, I got to help Mrs. Foxwell. Usually I swept the floors, cleaned the erasers, and washed the blackboards. It was great fun!

Audrey Graves and I became good friends. We took great pleasure in walking around the playground arm in arm. We did not want to be separated because we had such interesting things to say to each other. We were happy in our own little world. But the boys would not always leave us alone. Sometimes they

heckled us, saying they were going to look under our skirts. We would run to the only safe place on the playground – the outhouse!

My brother Charles (Budgie) Fenwick, Allen Hayden, and I agree that the following list of thirteen children were in Mrs. Foxwell's primary classroom along with Joseph, Audrey, and me:

Second Grade: Danny Guy  
Allen Hayden  
Violet Heard  
Joe Jarboe  
Bobby (Bootsie) Mattingly

Third Grade: Wilmer Curry  
Brent Guy  
Pete Morgan  
Arthur (Snake) Norris  
John Lewis Norris  
Rose Norris  
Sammy Ogden  
Joe Ramos

As you can see, the girls were far outnumbered. The four of us spent a lot of time in the outhouse area!

Mrs. Foxwell's sixteen students filled the primary classroom to the brim. Our desks were antiques even then – complete with a hole in which to set an inkwell, although we were not allowed to use ink. The desks also had a groove at the top in which we placed our pencils or crayons. The desks were made of wood with fancy wrought iron legs. The seat folded down in front and was used by the person in front of you. We were always sitting on someone else's desk! This meant you had to sit in rows facing in one direction. It also meant that the person behind you could aggravate you with ease since you were sitting on part of their desk! My pigtails were constantly being pulled!!

We always sat in rows facing the front of the school. The students in the front could see out of the two windows. It was their job to alert the whole class if we were to receive visitors. Whenever Miss Young or Miss Reeder came to visit, we instantaneously straightened our desks, sat tall with folded hands, got very quiet, and waited to greet them as they walked in the door. When they left, we all breathed a collective sigh of relief.

When you entered the front door of the primary room, immediately to the left was the cloakroom. It had hooks where we hung our coats, hats, and scarves. The lunch boxes/bags and boots sat under our hook. It was very orderly. Actually, the cloakroom was not a room. It was a walk-through space divided from the classroom by a wall. You could enter or exit from either side. The teacher couldn't see behind the cloakroom wall, so lots of secrets were whispered, some stolen kisses were given and received, and lots of practical jokes were played. What an interesting space this was!

The wood stove that heated the whole area stood in front of the cloakroom wall. The older boys brought in the wood and helped Mrs. Foxwell keep the fire going. A cast iron kettle sat on top of the stove humidifying the room. Mrs. Foxwell brought in a bottle of water to fill the kettle. She taught us all about evaporation when the steam started rising out of the kettle.

There was no running water or electricity in the whole school. On cloudy days it was very dark, with the only light available coming through the windows. At lunchtime we ate at our desks, usually PBJ's. Some students brought their drinks in a thermos. We also went across the road to Mrs. Sarah Clements' house to get a drink of water. Mrs. Foxwell had some collapsible metal cups and she also taught us how to fold paper into cups. She was an expert at this and the paper cups lasted just long enough for us to quench our thirst. At some point, two sinks were installed in the area between the two classrooms.

Evidently the teachers had been begging for electricity to no avail. The Board of Education finally agreed to pay the bill if my father installed the lights and paid for the supplies. He (Charles Fenwick) ran a single wire up the wall and across the ceiling. He let one naked bulb hang down into the room. There was a pull chain to turn it on and off. I couldn't reach that high! I think he put two hanging bulbs in the upper classroom and an outlet on the wall under the windows. That room had a row of large windows and was well-lighted compared to ours. My brother and I were there for the historic installation of the light bulbs, probably sometime in 1944.

Both classrooms had back doors that were used to go to the outhouses, to haul in wood, and to take out ashes. We always used them when we went out for

recess or on any of our nature trips. We used the front doors to enter in the morning and to exit in the afternoon when the buses came, but rarely during the day.

Mrs. Foxwell loved nature. Science lessons included leaf, tree, flower, bird, and animal recognition. We took many hikes through the forest which grew behind the school. We studied everything we saw in those beautiful woods. One time, the boys found a living alligator swimming in the stream! It was a mystery because we knew alligators did not live in Maryland. Mrs. Foxwell said it was probably a Florida souvenir that someone had put in the stream. She said it would not survive through the winter. This upset us, but not enough for any of us to volunteer to take an alligator home as a pet!

Up against the cloakroom wall there were shelves that held all of our textbooks and a small bookshelf with three shelves of “library books”. Each year, Miss Young would bring one or two new books for this collection. Mrs. Foxwell would usually read the new book to us. My all-time favorite was *Rabbit Hill* by Robert Lawson. The boys loved the stories about Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and Kit Carson. Mrs. Foxwell read a chapter a day just before the bus came. We were always anxious to hear the next chapter.

Reading was my delight. My father read to us every evening and because of this I could read before I went to school. When the older girls heard about this, they came over to our side of the playground with a new sixth grade “library book”. It was titled *Puppy Stakes* and was written by Betty Cavanna. They forced me to read certain pages from the beginning, middle, and back of the book. I passed their test and they went back assured that I was a child prodigy. What they didn’t know was that even though I could pronounce the words, I had no clue what many of them meant. What in the world were puppy stakes anyway!?!

In the primary classroom, we were taught to read using textbooks published by the Scott Foresman Company. Dick, Sally, and Jane were part of our lives. They were fun, but my favorite was *The Five-and-a-Half Club* from the Alice and Jerry Books. My main problem with reading was that I listened to each reading group in the room and neglected to do my written work.

Art was a major project. The whole room turned into a studio. We used finger paints, water colors, crayons, scissors, and paste. In 1947, Leonardtown students won their first blue ribbons for artwork sent to the county fair. Art appreciation consisted of studying and discussing the paintings that decorated the walls of our room. Three that I can remember were *A Girl with a Watering Can* by Renoir, *The Blue Boy* by Gainsborough, and *George Washington* by Stuart. The only other art appreciation class I had was in college and that class brought back fond memories of Mrs. Foxwell.

Music in the primary classes always involved singing. We must have known every song ever written by Stephen Collins Foster. We sang every day and we sang in school plays. My all-time favorite song was *Beautiful Dreamer* and my least favorite song of all-time was *Where Has My Little Dog Gone?* After we had electricity, on Friday afternoons, our whole class went over to the upper classroom for dancing. The room was circled with desks and all of us sat on the folded down seats facing the center of the room so we could watch the dancing. Everyone got a chance to dance. The place rocked with folkdances such as the *Mexican Hat Dance*, the *Norwegian Mountain March*, and the *Virginia Reel*. We waltzed to *The Blue Danube* and *Tales from the Vienna Woods*. Mama used her collection of phonograph records to teach us. My mother loved to dance!

Holidays were excuses for parties and lots of decorations. The classroom was festive at Halloween because we sprinkled the whole floor with crunchy fall leaves! We bobbed for apples floating in a big tub of water, carved pumpkins, and listened to the story of Ichabod Crane. No one ever thought of dressing up in costumes. We made Easter baskets by decorating one half of a cardboard oatmeal box. At Christmas, we made miles of construction paper chains that hung across our room. We also made special gifts for our parents. On Valentine's Day, all the cards were put in a huge box and then delivered one by one to the students by the chosen mailmen. At holidays, we often got special treats from the teachers – cookies – apples – oranges – raisins – peanuts or Twinkies. We sure did know how to celebrate!

Spring plays were held on the large and attractive front porch that connected the primary and upper classrooms. Leonardtown is the only school I know that had such a beautiful porch. After singing the closing song, we could run down the

steps to our loved ones in the audience. They sat in folding chairs on the road and lawn. I can remember running down to hug my grandmother, Nannie Greenwell Fenwick! In the winter, there was usually a musical play inside. Willie Stone stole the show marching as the wooden soldier! It was unforgettable!

P.E. on the primary side was mild. We played circle games such as *Duck, Duck, Goose* or *Drop the Handkerchief*. We also played *London Bridge is Falling Down* and *Ring Around the Rosie*. On the upper class side they played a mean game of dodgeball, a very serious softball, and instead of kickball they played handball. At recess or after school, marbles were in vogue. The Curry boys' pockets were filled with everyone's marbles. They were the undisputed champions. We always bought our special marbles at Mr. Longmore's Ben Franklin 5¢ and 10¢ store in Leonardtown. It was located between the County Trust Company and Bell Motor Company.

My brother, Budgie, was on the playground once when a plane landed. The pilot asked the children for directions to Washington, D.C.. They all pointed North and he got in his plane and flew in the right direction.

Every day of school began with the Our Father prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, and a patriotic song. This set the tone for the day. The classroom was an extension of our family. Times were simple and happy, even though we were in the midst of a war.

Each year, the group of children in our classroom changed. As far as Budgie, Allen Hayden, and I can remember, the new first graders in 1944 were:

Tommy Davenport  
Georgia Godwin  
Marie Graves  
Lois Ann Guy  
Frankie Harris  
Frannie Hayden  
Dickie Norris (who cried *all day*)  
Joe Norris  
Catherine Ann Stottlemeyer

The new first graders in 1945 were: Georgianna Bucher  
Elmer Curry  
Charles E. Fenwick, Jr.



Thomas Guy

When it came time for me to go to fourth grade in my mother's classroom, I was sent to St. Mary's Academy. My mother didn't trust me to say Mrs. Fenwick. She was worried that I would just blurt out "Mama" instead. But she didn't have the same problem with Budgie. She taught him in the fourth and fifth grades and then he went to Leonard Hall School.

So now in June of 1946, my Leonardtown School days came to an end. Leaving Audrey Graves was the hardest part for me, but God is good! He gave me a new friend, Peggy Graves, and believe it or not – she lived with her grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Clements, right across the street from Leonardtown School!

My friend Peggy was different from me in many ways. She was two years older, had curly blond hair, blue eyes, and a beautiful fair complexion. She was short, graceful, musical, and very lady-like but we were, are, and always will be, "kindred spirits".

Peggy and I would walk to her home from St. Mary's Academy. Then we would help Mrs. Foxwell or Mama if they needed us. We loved spreading Fitch Dustdown on the oily wooden floors and sweeping it up with a long-handled push broom. (Allen Hayden remembered how hard it was to get the oil off of bare feet. He also remembered that the Mennonites were allowed to come to school bare-footed. A special dispensation from school law was made for them).

Peggy and I cleaned erasers and washed the blackboards – always a favorite job. When the jobs assigned to us were completed, Peggy and I had fun finding textbooks that had plays written in them. We would choose the parts we wanted and then read the play out loud, each taking our assigned parts. It was fun, dramatic, and sometimes noisy. So after school, my mother's classroom became a very special place for us. Leonardtown School was still a part of my life.

My mother taught the grandchildren of some of her first students. She taught school for 42 years. Mrs. Foxwell also taught school for many years. She and my mother became good friends. Every summer we would go to her house at Foxwell Point to swim. I hated all the oyster shells, but still liked to swim. We liked to drink from her spring that was always pouring out cold, delicious water.

Whenever I drive by the Rescue Squad on Lawrence Avenue (the back street) all of the wonderful memories of my years at Leonardtown School come to mind. The uncomplicated and happy years I spent there formed a strong foundation for the rest of my life. No group pictures were taken when I was there but the following pictures were taken the year after I left.

**Good Memories!!!**



Upper Grades – Leonardtown School – 1946-47

Front Row – left to right:

Arthur (Snake) Norris – grade 6  
Joseph (Sam) Harris – grade 4  
James Brent Guy – grade 5  
Carleton Osbey (CO) Meyers – grade 6  
Joseph (Joe) Ramos – grade 6

Middle Rows – left to right:

Mrs. LaVerne Fenwick – Teacher  
Joe Jarboe – grade 5  
Allen Joseph Hayden – grade 5  
Rose Norris – grade 6  
Violet Heard – grade 5

Audrey Graves – grade 4  
Carolyn Mann – grade 5  
Danny Guy – grade 5  
Bobby (Bootsie) Mattingly – grade 5  
Sam Ogden – grade 6

Top Row – left to right:

Bobby Overstreet – grade 5  
John Lewis Norris – grade 6  
Wilmer Curry – grade 6  
Joseph Mattingly – grade 5  
Peter Aloysius Morgan – grade 6



Primary Grades – Leonardtown School – 1946-47

Front Row – left to right:

Donna Jean Mann – grade 2  
Margaret Graves – grade 1  
Joan Frances Mattingly – grade 1  
Marie Graves – grade 3  
Georgianna Bucher – grade 2  
Georgia Godwin – grade 3

Middle Rows – left to right:

Frankie Harris – grade 3  
Dickie Norris – grade 3  
Rose Marie Harris – grade 1  
Charlie Norris – grade 1

Frances Ruth (Frannie) Hayden – grade 3  
Thomas W. (Rooster) Guy – grade 2  
Lois Ann Guy – grade 1  
Charles E. (Budgie) Fenwick – grade 2  
Mrs. Gertrude Foxwell - Teacher

Top Row – left to right:

Joe Norris – grade 3  
M. Thompson – grade ?  
Elmer Curry – grade 2  
Catherine A. Stottlemeyer – grade 3  
Tommy Davenport – grade 3