

We Are Family

By: David Patton

Palmer Town Historian



Principal John Ross Jones is pictured with Staff Members Jonny Rose (Sanders) Conry (right) and her Daughter Karen (Conry) Coffelt at Palmer School.

Being the oldest school building in continuous use in Grundy County, the roots run deep and it seems that just about everyone has some connection to Palmer Elementary School.

John Ross Jones of Gruetli-Laager and Jonny Rose Sanders Conry and Karen Conry Coffelt of Tracy City never attended the School but as fate would have it all three ended up on the Staff for the 2014-2015 School year.

Principal Jones' Grandmother, the late Kat Roberts Jones graduated from the School in the early 1940's as did Jonny Rose's Father W.H. "Buck" Sanders and they were First Cousins. Kat retired as a Teacher and Buck is a retired Tracy City Postmaster.

Kat's dad, Henry Roberts and Buck's Dad, Rose Burr Sanders, worked at the Palmer Big Mine during the heyday of coal mining in Grundy County.

Jonny Rose is a Teacher's Aide and her Daughter Karen Coffelt, is A Kindergarten Teacher and is married to Rev. Danny Coffelt who Pastors the First United Methodist Church in Tracy City.

However, the common ancestry of the trio is not through the Sanders' and Roberts' but through the James Family. William Eli "Jessie" James was the Great Grandfather of Jonny Rose and the Great-Great Grandfather of John Ross.



William Eli "Jessie" James

In the late 1800's, Jessie was a member of one of America's first Labor Unions, The Knights of Labor. After losing his wife in the Great Flu Epidemic of 1918, he moved from Coalmont to Palmer and worked in the mines here. A Mason and Justice of The Peace, he was known as a Fiery Democrat and a Champion of Organized Labor through his Membership in the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

A resident of Tracy City for most of his life, Buck has never forgotten about growing up in Palmer and going to Palmer School. Daddy` has talked a lot about the School and he said, "Just think you're walking in the same Halls and Classrooms I did over 70 years ago."

Jonny Rose told us "I drive 30 minutes from Tracy City each morning, but everyone here at the School is so nice and I get such a good feeling when I walk in this building."

Miss Jonny Rose's new found friends at Palmer School may not know that she was an All-Star Basketball Player and one of the best ever at Grundy County High School. Her Uncle, R.B. Sander, was her coach as a Freshman, and for the next three years her coach was Edd Cantrell. He Played football at the University of Tennessee and was probably the most successful GCHS Football Coach ever.

In her Senior Year, Jonny Rose was named to the All-SVC (Sequatchie Valley Conference) Team, All-District Team, and All-Region Team. What a talented Lady!