

## Nannie Jordan Reminisces About Education in Lexington and Rockbridge County

“His pupils didn’t love him, so we will let him rest . . . ”

Nannie Jordan

**A**R. TIDD was the first educator I ever heard of in Lexington. He is no doubt “a forgotten man,” for the years have passed, and present generations are “speeding.” They do not stop long enough now to listen to Great Great Grandmother’s tales of the long ago. He gave them so truly the basis of education that served them well in the after years. Spelling, reading, arithmetic and a sharp paddle with his rule when he thought it was needed.

His pupils didn’t love him, so we will let him rest with a blessing for his good work. His school probably existed between 1830 and 1840.

He certainly taught our Grandmothers how to read, write and “figger.”

*[Owen Morton, the historian, wrote that Charles Tidd, originally from Connecticut, had taught in a brick schoolhouse that was built for him (at an unspecified time). The historian George West Diehl said that Tidd taught for several months in 1849 at the Hamilton School. Morton said Tidd “was one of the pedagogues who did not spare the rod and strap.”]*

### THE JACOB FULLER CLASSICAL SCHOOL

**N**O SCHOOL was ever better taught than this one, rigidly, conscientiously he prepared all the boys of Lexington for Washington College, then for Washington and Lee University – Latin, Greek, and mathematics – strictly a boys school.

Libbie, my sister, and Fannie Wilson were the only girls ever admitted to this school and all her life Libbie felt its advantages, and was proud of her knowledge of Greek and Latin, but she was a bum mathematician.

“Uncle” Fuller died in 1890.

*[Jacob Fuller began his “long and useful career” as a classics teacher in 1838, according to Henry Boley, writing in his book Lexington in Old Virginia.]*

### ANN SMITH ACADEMY

**T**HIS WAS MY Alma Mater, first, last and always. The school was founded by Ann Smith and her name will always be associated with it, though very little is known of her now.

As an academy it has passed through many hands. [Madge



Nannie Jordan, 1876.  
Photograph by Michael Miley.

Paxton became principal of Ann Smith Academy in the late 19th century.] I once heard Madge Paxton say she told one of her pupils to get an arithmetic book. She received this note in return. “I aint goin to buy no irthmetic book for my son. I got along without no arithmetic and he kin too.” Signed: “his father.” Annie White was Madge Paxton’s assistant.

*[For more on Ann Smith the person and the school, see “Education First: Lexington’s Public Schools,” Rockbridge Epilogues, No. 17.]*



**THE BAXTER SCHOOL**

**I**N THE MID YEARS of the 1800s, the established school was “Miss Baxters” – Miss Nancy, Miss Louisa, and Miss Lavinia. They taught all “the young ideas how to shoot” until they were ready, the girls for “Ann Smith Academy” and the boys for “The Fuller School.”

After Maggie Letcher was married, she came on a visit to Lexington, and went up the Baxter’s alley to find the rock on which she

had sharpened her slate pencils – it was still there.

*[The Baxter School was located at 18 North Main Street. The appearance of the building and alley remain today much as they were during the Baxter years.]*

**THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**T**HE SYSTEM OF GRADING in the Public schools had not reached its perfection when I taught there for five years between 1870 and 1880. I began as assistant to the Primary teacher and grad-

*The Ann Smith Academy. The photo is undated but this building was completed in 1809 and demolished in 1910.*

ually advanced to the 1st Grammar grade – the school rooms were crowded and the salaries small. The teachers in my first year were – Mr. Jones (Cush), Miss Emma Morrison, Loulie Bumpus and Kitty Estell – later there were Mr. Swartz, Sallie Davidson, Lula Kregloe, Annie White, Jennie Bacon.

[An article in the *Lexington Gazette*] gives a laughable and none too complimentary account of a visit of “The Board” to my class room – “fine recitations by the classes, but not a map or chart on the walls, nothing but pictures, flowers, and other decorations.” And yet! about that time my Geography class took first stand at an educational convention in Richmond in map drawing and I, a diploma for best map of Rockbridge County.

**NANNIE JORDAN**

*Nannie Jordan, born in Lexington in 1856, was a much-loved teacher and “a woman of happy and pleasant personality and strong character, deeply religious,” as the Lexington Gazette said when she died in 1942. Along the way, she wrote a delicious memoir she called “Smiles and Tears of Other Years,” consisting of stories, usually amusing and always vividly told, that shine a fascinating light on our town and its wondrous people. These stories are taken directly from that manuscript.*



*A mid-20th-century photograph of the building on North Main Street where the Baxter sisters operated a school in the late 19th century.*