

Homeschooling History in Tennessee

Twenty years of legalized homeschooling in Tennessee have passed. In a nation-wide movement of God, a handful of Tennessee families decided to risk jail, attorney fees, heavy fines, public ridicule, and extended-family criticism in order to conduct the education of their own children. This was a radical step as our country entered its Post Christian Age. Parents were no longer seen as the highest and best earthly authority of their children; the state considered itself so. In this Revolutionary Union of States with a grand tradition of individualism, liberty, and freedom our government's opinion of its authority over children more accurately reflected that of the communistic/socialistic USSR, China, and Cuba. The Department of Education thought children should be taken from their homes at earlier ages and educated by "professionals". Parents were now considered necessary nuisances.

In Tennessee, seven families sat about their kitchen table assisting their children with their homework lessons. To their horror, they found in their children's Readers material that is contradictory to their Christian faith. They request of the school that their children be given an alternative assignment. Their requests are repeatedly denied. The controversy gets world-wide attention as the press again comes to Tennessee, reminiscent of the famous "Scopes Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee in the 1920s. A more sophisticated world again makes fun of the Tennessee Hillbillies who would dare question the wisdom and authority of the state in the education of "its" children. A young, inexperienced attorney comes to argue the case: a Michael Farris of a newly formed Home School Legal Defense Association.

Parents across the nation found confirmation in this case that their suspicions were valid: the world is believing and teaching a gospel other than that of Christ. Tennessee parents begin to quietly bring their children home.

A new generation is now teaching their children in Tennessee. Some have read or heard the history; some know nothing of the sacrifices of others to ensure their freedoms. Much like the history of the Church or the history of our free nation, these young parents assume as it is has always been so. They attend their tutorials and co-ops, they grocery shop in the middle of school hours, and they buy all of their curricula on the web. While serving others in our region, MTHEA members hear "What does MTHEA do? What can it do for me? What do I get out of it?" They ask because they have not heard.

Below is the history of homeschooling in Tennessee as reported in *The Teaching Home in Tennessee*, a newsletter insert in the old *The Teaching Home* magazine last published in 1996. Lana Thornton was its editor, and she and her husband Claiborne still serve as our THEA Presidents.

Tell this history to your friends that they might know what has gone on before. Tell them what MTHEA is still doing to ensure their freedoms and to help those who are seeking information about educating and raising children in their homes.

Michelle Fraley

Doug and Michelle Fraley live in Clarksville and have been homeschooling since 1995. They have six children, five of whom are at home and three of whom will graduate this year. They are now enjoying their first grandchild.

1983

Seven families in East Tennessee begin the fight to remove their children from a reading class which used a reading textbook the families considered inappropriate. In the process, some of these children were expelled for refusal to do assignments from this book, and a mother was arrested and imprisoned. Michael Farris of HSLDA and two inexperienced assisting attorneys defended these families while the trial received worldwide coverage and was billed the "Scopes II Case". In 1986 Federal Judge Thomas Hull uses TN Homeschooling Law to decide these families' rights as parents were violated.

Six families in Middle Tennessee meet for a picnic after learning they all homeschool but were somewhat fearful of "coming out". This was the beginning of the first Middle Tennessee homeschooling support group.

Charles & Susan Moffat of Etowah, Tennessee begin a two-year battle after being arrested and indicted for their constitutional and fundamental right to direct the education of their child.

1984

Five families charged with truancy and/or child abuse due to their desire to homeschool their children.

Tennessee Home Education Association (THEA) formed with approximately 250 parents and children. THEA is uniquely structured in the nation to be comprised of seven chapters across the state: Memphis Home Education Assoc. (MHEA), West Tennessee Home Education Assoc. (WTHEA), Middle Tennessee Home Education Assoc. (MTHEA), Chattanooga Southeast Home Education Assoc. (CSEHEA), Northeast Tennessee Home Education Assoc. (NETHEA), Mideast Tennessee Home Education Assoc. (METHEA), and the Smokey Mountain Home Education Assoc. (SMHEA). MTHEA is the largest chapter, geographically.

1985

Governor Lamar Alexander signs homeschool legislation into law that legalized homeschooling in Tennessee for K-12 and allows for the designation of Tennessee as a “Private School Option Homeschooling State” for grades K-8. The law was not considered perfect by MTHEA/THEA, but it was a great victory for home education and ends a long battle.

THEA begins its yearly event, the THEA Capital Hill Rally Day at the Tennessee State Capital in Nashville.

A Lewisburg couple and a Marshall County couple are issued arrest warrants from Alabama for assisting an Alabama homeschooling family in protecting its children from a court appearance regarding homeschooling in Alabama. Tennessee Judge Boden and District Attorney Lee of Marshall County upheld the interests of the children and would not release them to the Alabama courts. They use the TN homeschooling laws to justify their decision: parents have the right to direct the education of their own children!

1986

Greg Harris’ Christian Life Workshop conducted at Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville and a Curriculum Hall was arranged for current homeschooling families to display the curricula they were using.

First MTHEA Science Fair and first MTHEA Field Day and Picnic were conducted.

1987

First MTHEA Curriculum Fair held at Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville along with seminars by Dr. Paul Cates.

1988

The Home School Legal Defense Assoc. (HSLDA) files lawsuit on behalf of a Tennessee family who had moved from another state and were denied their Intent-to-Homeschool letter because it was after the August 1 deadline.

1989

Brentwood homeschooled highschooler, Ashley Fitch is recognized on the floor of the Tennessee State Senate for her work as a page and as a homeschooler.

HSLDA files a class action lawsuit against the TN Dept of Education for its refusal to grant waivers to independent homeschooling parents without college degrees to teach high school, which is allowed in the Tennessee law.

1990

Approximately 400 homeschooling families attend the preliminary hearing in the Metro Nashville courthouse on the HSLDA lawsuit! Ashley Fitch of Brentwood testifies as well as Rev. Paul Williams, minister of education at Bellevue Baptist in Memphis. The case is denied. HSLDA begins the appeal process.

The MTHEA Curriculum Fair moves to Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville.

The first state-wide Homeschool Graduation Ceremony held at Community Bible Church in Nashville. Rev. Richard “Little Bear” Wheeler was the speaker. Five students were recognized as Tennessee Homeschooling Graduates.

First waiver from having a Bachelor’s Degree in order to homeschool during the high school years granted to the Van Tol family of Memphis.

1991

THEA presents legislation to 1) extend the option of affiliation with a church-related school from K-8 to K-12 and to 2) allow resident TN families to begin homeschooling after August 1 by notifying the local superintendent within 30 days and by August 1 annually thereafter. Further legislation would allow the selection and approval of a nationally-recognized standardized test by the Commission of Education to be taken by homeschooled students rather than the Tennessee-only test (then the Terra Nova). This would allow an exemption from the compulsory attendance law (currently ages 6 to 16) if they scored well in the high school years. Legislation fails to pass both House and Senate Education Committees in 1992.

HSLDA case goes before Appellate Court. Court of Appeals of TN issued a split decision in the HSLDA case and now heads to the TN Supreme Court. However, it was refused in March 1992.

The first MTHEA Homeschool Graduation Ceremony held at Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville honors 21 graduates! Holly Moffat is one of the graduates (see 1983).

MTHEA homeschooler Anne-Marie Baumgartner received early admittance to Vanderbilt University as a 16-year old graduate.

1992

MTHEA sponsors its first Junior Senior Banquet at Belmont University.

Tennessee Education Reform Act of 1992 passes to make kindergarten now mandatory (compulsory attendance is still not required until the age of 7). However, this requires homeschooling families to register their children with a church-related school for the kindergarten year in order to create a record of attendance for K. In May a memorandum is issued by the Dept. of Education stating that kindergarten will be allowed for independent homeschoolers registered with their local school superintendent after THEA’s working with the office. In addition, the Tennessee Education Reform Act changes the compulsory attendance law from 7 to 17 (inclusive) years of age, unless a child has received a diploma, is enrolled in a GED program, or is 17 and enrolled in a homeschool.

HSLDA files a federal civil rights suit for four Tennessee families homeschooling at the high school level who have been denied waivers by the Dept. of Education Commissioner, Charles Smith. The families were the Floyds of Wartburg in Morgan County, the Goggans of Harrison near Chattanooga, the Snyders of Charleston in Bradley County, and the Williams in Memphis. The case is dismissed in Federal District Court in March 1993 and is moved to the Federal Circuit Court for appeal. MTHEA conducts a Back to School Homeschool Teachers’ Workshop at Two Rivers Baptist Church with Keynote Speaker Mary Pride.

1993

THEA sponsors the National Center for Home Educators’ Leadership Symposium in Nashville.

MTHEA sponsors a Winter Workshop with Susan Schaeffer Macaulay at Christ Church in Nashville.

A modified version of THEA’s K-12 Church Related School Bill is introduced and passed in the Senate Education Committee which would allow K-12 to register with a church-related school BUT would require yearly testing using TCAP.

MTHEA’s August Teachers’ Conference held at Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville features speakers George Grant, Dean Andreola, and Steve and Marijean Green. The theme was Find Us Faithful.

1994

Governor Ned McWherter signs into law the bill allowing church-related schools to enroll K-12 homeschoolers! TCAP testing will be required for grade 10 as of this passing since tests were not available for grades 9,11,12. Penalties are in place if a child does not test well for two consecutive years.

Two East Tennessee families in Sullivan County, Byrns & Jones, are jailed for removing their high school students to be homeschooled. The judge released them after HSLDA got involved in the case and informed the judge of the newly passed law.

MTHEA conducts its first Fall Homeschool Teen Retreat at Horton Haven Christian Camp.

Massive confusion with the new homeschooling law as the Dept. of Education released incorrect information to state newspapers stating ALL homeschoolers must register with the school superintendents by August 1. The Dept. of Education issues a new intent-to-homeschool form requiring more information than the law requires. A Cleveland, TN father is told by a school superintendent that he cannot homeschool after the father had registered with a church-related school. Area chapters of THEA are very busy this fall with phone calls regarding this!

MTHEA's August Teacher's Conference held at Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville featured John Taylor Gatto, former New York City Teacher of the Year.

New Dept. of Education Commissioner says he will not follow past DOE policy of automatic denial of requests for college degree waivers, and that each request will be considered on an individual basis. He also states he is presently in the process of developing criteria for those requesting waivers.

Tennessee elects two homeschooling fathers to the State Capital: Rep. Bill Dunn (R-Knoxville) and Senator David Fowler (R-Chattanooga).

1995

MTHEA's Curriculum Fair & Conference moves to the Tennessee State Fairgrounds.

1996

The Goggans family of Harrison, TN (see 1992) received the second Dept. of Education waiver for parents without a college degree to teach high school while registered with the local school superintendent.

Four TN Homeschoolers are 1996 National Merit Scholarship Semi-Finalists: Jimmy Dietrich of Greeneville, Nathaniel Goggans of Harrison (see 1992), Austin Whitver of Nashville, and Clairalyn Elliott of Chattanooga.

Governor Don Sundquist proclaims the first Tennessee Home Education Week! This is a great victory for MTHEA/THEA as homeschooling is more "legitimate" to the public!

Average Daily Membership Bill eliminates private, parochial, and homeschooled children under the age of seven & registered with a church-related school from truancy reporting thus protecting the compulsory attendance age at 7 for these students. Unfortunately, the compulsory attendance age for public schooled students lowers to 6. So THEA chooses to table this amendment in an effort to protect the state's 6-year olds from compulsory attendance, and the bill dies for this legislative session.

THEA presents a bill (sponsored by Sen. Randy McNally) to allow homeschooled students to participate in interscholastic activities, including sports, at their local public school. This begins a long battle with TSSAA that sees no progress until 2004.

HSLDA and THEA meet with Dept. of Education Commissioner and DOE attorney Kay Jeter regarding continued misinformation placed in state newspapers stating ALL homeschoolers must register with the local school superintendent by Aug. 1. They discuss the end-of-course testing currently required of high school students whose parents comply with the 1994 law (which requires the parent to have a high school diploma or GED and to dual enroll

with a church-related school) and which HSLDA and THEA hold to be illegal. The DOE intent-to-homeschool form is modified to state that some information requested is optional.

Nashville hosts first State Homeschool Invitational Basketball Tournament.

1997

August MTHEA Teachers' Conference speaker is Doug Philips of Vision Forum.

2000

The MTHEA Curriculum Fair and Teachers' Conference moves to the Nashville Convention Center in order to combine both events and to allow for a more professional venue. Speakers: Michael Farris of HSLDA, Chris Davis of The Elijah Company, and the Rob and Cindy Shearer of Greeleaf Press. Theme: Operation Restoration, Preparing the Hearts and Minds of Our Children for the 21st Century.

MTHEA put up its new website: www.mthea.org.

Bolivar, Hardeman County in West TN, homeschooling mother of five arrested and jailed for "violation of compulsory attendance law".

2001

MTHEA Curriculum Fair and Teacher's Conference: Speaker was Greg Harris. Theme: Seasons of Homeschooling.

2002

MTHEA Curriculum Fair and Teacher's Conference: Speakers were Mark Hamby of Lamplighter Publishing, the Maxwells of Managers of their Homes, Rick Green of Wall Builders, and the Burgesses of the National Black Home Educators Assoc. Theme: Rebuilding the Walls.

2003

The MTHEA Curriculum Fair returns to the Tennessee State Fairgrounds. The overall MTHEA participation in this event could not support the cost of the Nashville Convention Center.

The MTHEA Summer Teachers' Conference is held at Hendersonville First Baptist Church. Speakers: Cindy Rushton, The Binder Queen; Chris Davis of The Elijah Company; the Campbells of Far Above Rubies; Dewitt Black of HSLDA; Terri Camp of Ignite the Fire!; Maggie Hogan of Bright Ideas Press; the Notgrasses of The Notgrass Company, and the Shearers of Greenleaf Press.

2004

The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) finally relaxes its rules regarding homeschoolers participation in public school team sports (see 1996). A compromise was made after THEA's efforts to pass legislation forcing participation to be allowed. TSSAA agrees to allow its teams to compete against homeschool sports teams.

MTHEA Curriculum Fair is conducted at Hendersonville First Baptist Church by invitation. Use of this less expensive and beautiful facility allowed MTHEA to recoup the financial losses from the Nashville Convention Center.

2005

MTHEA Curriculum Fair returns to the Tennessee State Fairgrounds.

2006

MTHEA offers a children's conference conducted by Children's Conferences International at the annual Curriculum Fair at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds.

MTHEA Workshop Weekend is held at Madison church of Christ and Embassy House in Madison, TN. Speakers: the Pearls of No Greater Joy; the Campbells of Far Above Rubies; Mary Hood, the Relaxed Homeschooler; Todd Wilson, the FamilyMan; and Ginger Plowman of Preparing the Way Ministries.

MTHEA Presidents

1985-1988	Tom & Sylvia Singleton of Franklin
1988-1991	Ron & Judy Fitch of Brentwood
1991-1993	Bill & Marsha Horner of Orlinda
1993-1994	Gary & Carole Hargraves of Harrison
1994-1996	Tim & Karen Costello of Franklin
1996-1999	Melvin & Edie Spain of Fairview
1999-2001	Dennis and Debbi Tirjan of Lafayette
2001-2004	Meredith & Christy Flautt of Franklin
2005-????	Doug & Michelle Fraley of Clarksville