

Lawrence Thornton Comer

Lawrence Thornton Comer was born September 14, 1908 in Oak Hill, Ohio, to Mr. Benjamin and Mrs. Moriah (Metzler) Comer. After graduating from Oak Hill High School, he attended Rio Grande College (later renamed University of Rio Grande) for two years. In 1929 he started his teaching career in Jackson County, Ohio with the Washington Local Schools. In 1930 Mr. Comer accepted a teaching position in the Wheelersburg Schools where he also coached basketball. 1933 Lawrence graduated from Wilmington College with a Bachelor of Science in Education.

While working and living in Wheelersburg Mr. Comer met the love of his life, Jessie Jim VanHoose. Jessie had a younger cousin that was enrolled at Wheelersburg HS, so while visiting her cousin, Jessie was allowed to visit the school with her. Jessie and Lawrence, whom Jessie affectionately called "Comer", fell in love and married July 14, 1934.

In 1938 Mr. Comer accepted a job offer from the Valley Local School District to teach Political Science and History. He and Jessie moved to Lucasville and purchased a house on Circle Drive (later renamed Broad Street).

In the book *Valley-Always Strong on Schools: A Pictorial History* by Linda Howard Scott, it states that "land was given by the Thomas family who had also given additional land for the cemetery" and in 1911-1912 a school was built. That school was used for both the elementary and high school grades. And in the Lucasville Area Historical Society archives there are pictures of Mr. Comer overseeing the building of an addition to this school in 1949-1950. The addition was for classrooms, a gym, and cafeteria. There are additional pictures in the archives of Mr. Comer standing inside the cafeteria on the first day of use.

In 1945 the Valley LSD Board of Education elected Mr. Comer to be the Supervising Principal. In the 1954 yearbook the students dedicated it to him and said "We, the senior class of 1954, wish to dedicate this annual to our Principal, Lawrence T. Comer; who is interested in our welfare and progress and who has worked constantly to give us the very best to be had".

In the Spring of 1956, the State Board of Education for Ohio was created. One of the new rules for this new board included a requirement that each school district must have an Executive Head. The Valley LSD Board of Education elected Mr. Comer as Executive Head. The 1958 Valley High School yearbook states that “no person has greater interest in the advancement for boys and girls, than has Mr. Comer”.

When the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant (locally known as the A-Plant) was built in adjoining Pike County, the enrollment of Valley Schools increased to such an extent that the school buildings began to bulge from the impact. A local bond issue failed for building a new high school. Mr. Comer then approached leaders in the federal government who recognized the situation and agreed to the building of a new high school for the Valley Schools.

Mr. Comer and the Valley Local School Board of Education made many trips to Columbus for conferences with the State Board of Education; they attended an incredible number of meetings with architects, contractors, carpenters, parents, and community members. Based on pictures from the Comer family files, oral history from Mr. Comer’s son, and records at the Heritage House, the new high school was under construction from 1955 to 1957. Yearbooks show that the new school was opened in the Fall of 1957. Sadly, Mr. Comer was not able to witness this milestone because he died on May 10, 1957. His son, Lawrence “Larry” T. Comer, Jr., was the beneficiary of his father’s hard work because Larry was part of the first graduating class from the new high school during the school year 1957-1958.

While living in Lucasville the Comers were active in community events, clubs, and organizations. Many newspaper articles can be found citing Mr. Comer as a member of the Lucasville Masonic Lodge 465, Lucasville Chapter Order of Eastern Star #495, Lucasville Civic Service Club, and Scioto Valley Grange of Lucasville. Mr. and Mrs. Comer were also faithful members of the Lucasville Methodist Episcopal Church (later renamed Lucasville Emmanuel United Methodist Church and in 2022 renamed Lucasville Emmanuel Church).

During an oral history interview in 2024, Larry shared a memory of his family having dinner with the new doctor in town. Larry stated his dad knew that Dr. David C. Coleman wanted to retire and neither believed that Lucasville should be without a physician, so Larry’s dad went to work recruiting a new doctor

to the area. Eventually, Mr. Comer connected with Dr. Armin Melior and he moved his family to Lucasville. Dr. Melior served the Lucasville area for many years.

Lawrence and Jessie were the parents of three children, Lawrence T. Comer, Jr., Elisabeth Ann “Libby” Comer, and Melissa Ruth Comer Bibbey. When Lawrence died his son was 18, Libby was 14 & needed specialized care due to a developmental delay, and Melissa was 3. According to family files and oral history, Jessie adopted a “Go Forward” attitude and went about the business of not only raising her children but also being instrumental in the creation of the Happy Hearts School (later renamed Vern Riffe School) and the adult STAR workshop.