

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MARSHALL UNIVERSITY ONE ROOM SCHOOL MUSEUM PROJECT

By Dr. Paul Lutz, Professor Emeritus of History

Before there was a One Room School Project, there was a One Room School Teacher Oral History Project. During the Fall semester of 1989, a student in my West Virginia History class asked if she could interview her next door neighbor in lieu of a traditional research paper topic. She explained: "when I told her I was majoring in Elementary Education, all she wanted to talk about was her years as a One Room School teacher".

Although hesitant at first, I agreed and we set about developing a list of questions for the former teacher. The actual interview was taped on a cassette recorder so as to insure precise documentation. When the late semester due date arrived, I was both surprised and intrigued by the student's excellent treatment of the topic. I began to wonder how many more former One Room School teachers were still out there?

Fortunately, West Virginia's isolated 'hills and hollers' served to prolong the use of One Room Schools into the 1960s with the last one in Ritchie County remaining open until 1979! A W.V. school census in 1930 identified 4,551 such structures scattered across the state's fifty-five counties. For the next 'five years' students in my W.V. History course were required to identify, interview and prepare a term paper chronicling the experiences of a former one room school teacher. Without fail, each semester's announcement of the above assignment evoked the same incredulous look on student faces. Predictably, someone would blurt out: "Aren't they all dead?" In addition two other W.V. History professors, Dr. Frank Riddle and Dr. Carolyn Karr graciously allowed me to recruit students from their classes. Five years later our students had interviewed an astounding 'four hundred' former teachers!

One of the questions posed to teachers asked if they had any 'memorabilia' they would consider donating. We anticipated displaying a few as part of the Morrow Library's Special Collections Department. Surprisingly, each semester's conclusion saw us 'inundated' with donations of textbooks, grade books, memoirs, photos, teacher hand-bells, student 'slates' and a coal bucket to mention a few! One teacher offered her antique Peabody style student desk.

Taxed with what to do with dozens of boxes filled with teacher memorabilia and more offers of student desks, it suddenly hit me! Why not find an existing one room schoolhouse and bring it to campus to celebrate Marshall's long tradition as a 'nationally recognized' teacher education institution! Fittingly, Marshall Academy, chartered by the Virginia Legislature in 1837, began in a one room structure it shared with the Mt. Hebron Methodist Church located on the current site of Old Main. First, I took the idea to my Social Studies Department Chair, Dr. Carolyn Karr, who excitedly dispatched me to the office of Dean Carole Vickers in the College of Education. Dr. Vickers quickly embraced my idea and said she would set up a meeting with President Gilley for me to explain our unique project.

A few days later I nervously entered Dr. Gilley's office in Old Main. After all, I had never been 'one on one' with a university president. I had barely said hello when he quickly noted how excited Dean Vickers was about a prospective One Room School Museum on campus. Again, before I could launch into my Museum 'spiel', he interrupted and began reminiscing about how both he and his wife had attended one room schools in their native Virginia. He abruptly said I should 'go for it'! But, he quickly added, there were no university funds available for such a project. The President directed me down the hallway to discuss the matter with Dr. Ned Boehm, Director of Development in the Marshall Foundation Office. As I dizzily exited the office, he said: "Lutz, make sure you keep me in the loop".

Upon approaching Dr. Boehm with my idea, his eyes immediately lit up saying he knew the perfect donor for the project! He revealed a recent conversation with long time Marshall benefactor and alumnus, Phil Cline, who had casually mentioned both his father and mother had 'attended and taught' in a one room school in eastern Kentucky. "Unbelievable", I gushed! I had known Phil for years as we both attended the same church. Within days the future Marshall University Ovie and Jesse Cline One Room School Museum was guaranteed funding!

A few weeks later, a seemingly unrelated campus 'landscaping' report was released announcing the creation of a 'green space' to replace two tennis courts on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Seventeenth Street. Incredibly, the space would 'front' Jenkins Hall housing the College of Education! Not believing my eyes, I read it a second time and then hurried to Dean Vickers office with the news. I immediately begged her to phone President Gilley and claim the 'spot' for the future Museum. Dr. Gilley quickly concurred and so began what turned out to be a long tedious search for a suitable building. Suddenly, the stark reality of how and where to look struck me! Leads were few and far between and I soon discovered such buildings were either dilapidated or being used for other purposes such as dwellings and churches.

In Spring, 1992 I called the Wayne County Superintendent of Schools. He said we could have the long empty Crockett School if we so desired. After viewing the structure, I contacted a house mover and we did a dry run on the proposed route leading to U.S. 52 and then on to campus. While a little tricky, the mover said it was doable. Wow, I thought, that was a piece of cake! However, a few weeks later, I received a phone call from the Superintendent saying Crockett School had been torched by vandals and was a total loss! To this day I can't remember exactly what I said to him. I do remember sitting in stunned silence for several minutes trying to grasp what had just happened. I suppose one could say I was 0-1 as a batter in the one room school search game.

Nearly a year passed before I learned about another schoolhouse located just beyond the Huntington Galleries on McCoy Road/Eighth St. Road. The gentleman was a Marshall graduate and long time supporter of the University. We met and he quickly said 'yes' to donating the building with one caveat. At the time he was allowing a small church group to hold services there and said he didn't have the heart to evict them. However, as soon as they did leave, he said it was all 'ours'. Sadly, such uncertainty was too problematic so, despite now being 0-2, we had to move on.

In early Summer, 1994 word came to me about a prospective schoolhouse on Dry Ridge Road in the Milton area. After visiting the site, it looked like the 'third' time would be the proverbial charm. However, before I could identify the owner of the building, I was summoned to President Gilley's office and told to 'scratch' the Milton schoolhouse location because he was getting calls from District Boy Scout leaders who said they had been using the building for years and desperately wanted to keep it! Suddenly, as baseball great, Yogi Berra, once mused, it was "déjà-vous" all over again" and I had dropped to 0 for 3 'years' at the plate. I seriously began to worry about Mr. Cline's patience wearing thin.

Spring, 1995 arrived as glorious as ever 'energizing' my hope for the long suffering schoolhouse project. A casual conversation between my wife, Mary, and a teacher colleague led to a twenty mile trip north on W.V. Route 2 to Glenwood and another three mile sojourn on narrow Guyan Creek Road. As I rounded a curve, there it was! Reminded of the words "good things come to those who wait", I realized the good Lord had saved the best for last in my now four year search. My eyes feasted on the site of the 'weathered' but, amazingly 'intact' little schoolhouse sporting a dull black tin roof. The fact that it was smaller (24'-20') than the three 'earlier' ones made it a perfect fit for the smallish designated 'green space'.

When a motorist slowed to see if I needed help (probably wondering why I was snooping around) I asked if he knew who owned the building. He said Mrs. Bryan was the owner and lived in a brick house a 'short piece back yonder' pointing back the way I had come. I found Mrs. Bryan sitting on the porch of her stately brick home. I introduced myself and explained why I was there. "Now isn't that a coincidence", she declared, "my daughter, Linda, is a 'secretary' in College of Education". "What a wonderful idea", she continued, "just let me know when you want the schoolhouse and we'll make arrangements for its transfer to Marshall"! "Oh, thank you, thank you so much", I gushed. She went on to explain the 'actual' name of the school was Union School but locals called it 'Punkin Center' School due to the large pumpkin patch in the 'bottom' behind the structure. As I backed out of her driveway and onto Guyan Creek Road, the 'Hallelujah Chorus' burst forth from of my mouth making the twenty-three mile drive back to campus a 'joyride divine'!

The 'fourth time', not the third, was the charm and I immediately contacted the house mover to plan the complex undertaking. The three miles between Guyan Creek Road and Rt. 2 were the most precarious of the 'move' requiring the removal and covering of the roof so as to pass under overhanging tree limbs and power lines. The 20' wide building had to travel along the 16' wide road which prompted many a tree limb cutting and removal of several roadside mailboxes. The inside walls were stabilized with crisscrossed 2x4s in anticipation of bumpy road surfaces and the crossing of 'railroad tracks' on the approach to Rt. 2. The final test came about a quarter of a mile from Rt. 2 when Jim, our house mover, faced a scary 'S' curve which had us holding our breath as the old schoolhouse began to loudly 'creak and groan' as if to say: "You should have left me alone". Not surprising, the three miles to Rt. 2 took an excruciating FOUR hours to complete!

After crossing the railroad tracks, we met the State Police who escorted us south on Rt. 2 to a temporary prearranged site near Guyandotte where the building would stay until the

following Sunday. Under state law, moving structures on public roadways was restricted to a four hour 'window' on Sundays between 6:00a.m. and 10:00 a.m. The next move brought the schoolhouse to yet another temporary site near the stadium behind Wendy's where it would remain a few weeks while the designated site was being readied.

The first Sunday in June, 1995 was shrouded in fog at 7:00a.m. as the old schoolhouse made its way (the 'wrong' way) west crossing Twentieth Street and passing by the Twin Tower dorms toward its final destination. With Fifth Avenue blocked off at Hal Greer Blvd. (16th Street) and police cruiser red lights flashing, the four block trip proceeded at a snail's pace as 'spotters' on top of the schoolhouse gingerly maneuvered traffic lights so as to avoid damages to either of the two. Finally, the house mover turned left onto Seventeenth Street parallel to the long standing 'seafoam green' Crutcher Typewriters building on the left, currently Harless Dining Hall, and today's Placement Center on the right. Then, in a few amazing seconds, he 'backed' the schoolhouse perfectly across Fifth Avenue and cut a sharp left turn onto the designated site! Remember, this was a 24'x20' building! The remainder of the summer was spent turning our 'ugly duckling' into the beautifully restored structure which we would dedicate in late October. How ugly was it? Well, President Gilley told me about a phone call he received from a Marshall booster wanting to know what that ugly 'tool shed' was doing on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Seventeenth Street? Dr. Gilley assured him it was not a tool shed and he'd just have to wait to see, what the President described as a 'unique' historical attraction befitting Marshall's early mission.

Once on site, the first order of business was to erect roof rafters since the 'original' ones had been removed in order to clear tree limbs and power lines. A new metal roof quickly followed and spray painted, what else, a beautiful 'kelly green'. For the remainder of the summer 'historic preservation' professionals set about constructing a striking foundation of 'field stone' in keeping with the buildings rural heritage. In addition new four-pane windows were fashioned to mimic the original ones followed by all white interior/exterior painting plus, the refurbishing of the original wood floor.

While the interior of the future Museum was taking shape, the 'green space' was being filled with sidewalks, trees, shrubs and park benches. Strangely enough, one of the most difficult things to come by was a State historical marker. In my conversations with the Charleston office in charge of markers I was asked if any people to be inscribed were living? "All of them are living", I replied, including benefactor, Phil Cline, schoolhouse donor, Mrs. Bryan and myself as the developer and director of the project. Sorry, I was told, no marker could be issued if any designee was living. "Huh, I thought to myself"? Let me explain this again, I said... the purpose of the marker was to celebrate the 'historical schoolhouse' and to inform the public of those who had made its relocation and renovation possible. A few weeks later I received a letter approving the marker along with an invoice for \$1,100.

As August arrived, I began excursions into Cabell and Wayne counties picking up a total of 'twenty-two' Peabody style desks from our generous teachers. Most were in good shape just requiring a coat of black paint on their metal frames and a little sanding of desk tops. Despite some desk tops displaying carvings and initials, I decided to resist any 'deep' sanding in order to

preserve a realistic appearance. Incredibly, the donated desks were a perfect 'balance' of small, medium and large helping to illustrate 'Punkin Center's' inclusion of grades 'one through eight'! In appreciation of these rare desks each was fitted with a small metal plaque with the donor's name. Following the donation of a teacher's 'desk and chair, the interior was completed by placing the long 'alphabet chart' across the top of the blackboard, positioning an American flag in the corner and, of course, placing George Washington's famed portrait high on the wall directly above the teacher's desk. (Examples of all memorabilia pictured in addendum).

At last, on October 22, 1995 the One Room School Museum was officially dedicated amidst a spectacular Autumn afternoon! Fittingly, I signaled the start of the event by ringing a donated teacher's 'hand-bell' and proceeded to introduce President Gilley who spoke glowingly about the generosity of Mr. Cline and Mrs. Bryan. Concluding Dr. Gilley's remarks, I presented each of the honorees with a token of our appreciation. The audience of about one hundred then joined all the above for a joyous tour of our little schoolhouse!

The following week students from my West Virginia history class began serving as 'Greeters' for one hour shifts per week between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. This scenario continued for the next 'ten' years until my retirement at which time various campus groups volunteered to serve as Greeters. In recent years Dr. Teresa Eagle, Dean of the College of Education, has encouraged her Faculty to recruit student 'Greeters' to insure our unique campus attraction remains open during the warm months of the Fall and Spring semesters.

Regretfully, at the time of this writing, the long anticipated 2020 celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Museum's dedication was postponed until October, 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

'RECOLLECTIONS' OF WEST VIRGINIA ONE ROOM SCHOOL TEACHERS

gathered by students of Dr. Paul Lutz enrolled in his West Virginia History course from 1989-1995.

While grading nearly 400 student research papers during the five year long West Virginia One Room School Teachers Oral History Project, I made a point to single out some of the more unique findings to share publicly. One of our most interesting findings was simply the 'names' of the schools. School names often described their 'geographical locations' such as those along small streams:

- Crooked Creek School
- Crawley Creek School
- Mud Fork School
- Buck Fork School
- Cedar Run School
- Jug Run School
- Trial Fork School
- Honeytrace Creek School
- Hungry Creek School
- Turkey Creek School
- Goose Creek School
- Coon Creek School
- Panther Run School
- Bee Branch School
- Right Fork Lick Creek School
- Brown Run
- Lower Devil Run School
- Upper Devil Run School (any connection to 'Devil Anse' Hatfield?)

Other schools were identified by scenic locations such as:

- Bone Ridge School
- Perry Ridge School
- Windy Gap School
- Sky High School
- Hickory Gap School
- Pleasant View School
- Peaceful Valley
- Hickory Grove School

Some schools were difficult to classify such as:

- Blackberry School
- Sycamore School
- Eureka School
- Petroleum School
- Deerpen School
- Wolfpen School
- Big Ugly School
- Licklog School
- Black Jack School
- Wahoo School
- Morning Star School
- Providence School
- Centennial School
- Rayon School
- Stonecoal School
- Unexpected School
- Alben Barkley School
- Mills Chapel School
- Belfort School