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PAGE 17

# Duncan starts work on oral history project

Morehead native Laura Lee Duncan has begun a very special oral history project — creating a one-woman show to depict the life and influence of Cora Wilson Stewart, founder of the nation's adult literacy movement.

Working under the sponsorship of Morehead State University's College of Arts and Sciences as principal writer/performer for the "Moonlight School Project," Duncan will research, write and appear in the production.

Of particular interest to Kentucky and especially Eastern Kentucky, the project already is attracting support outside of the campus. Duncan earlier this month received a \$2,000 check from the Investors Heritage Life Insurance Company for the project.

Other grants have included one for \$1,790 to the Office of Regional Development Services from the Kentucky Oral History Commission which will enable Duncan to produce approximately 30 oral histories related to the Moonlight School and Stewart's impact upon the literacy movement. She also received funds from the Citizens Bank of Morehead.

The production will focus on Stewart's work to improve the educational lot of Eastern Kentucky adults by conducting classes in community schools at night, a move that began in Rowan County in 1911 and spread throughout the nation.

Stewart later became what would be considered today the equivalent of U.S. Secretary of Education. The building housing Stewart's original "Moonlight

School" has been restored and moved to MSU's campus.

"Morehead State is proud to be a part of this endeavor which not only will tell the story of a determined and courageous Eastern Kentucky woman, but also will reinforce the importance of education in our lives," said MSU President C. Nelson Grote. "It is a story that needs to be told and one that our region should take pride in," he added.

"Dynamic women who have been able to effect change and those ahead of their time — especially those from Eastern Kentucky — hold a fascination for me," Duncan said. "Having begun her work here in Rowan County, Cora Stewart is even of more interest to me," she added.

"I would also like to encourage anyone with stories about the early Moonlight School program or memorabilia from those schools to contact me at my office," Duncan said. Her office is located in Rader Hall 204 on the MSU campus. Her telephone number is (606) 783-2793.

Duncan also recently received a nearly \$10,000 professional growth grant as an emerging artist from the Kentucky Foundation for Women.

While studying oral interpretation at Eastern Michigan University, Duncan earned numerous national honors, including the National Forensics Pentathlon Award as the Best Collegiate Performer as well as first place in poetry interpretation.

She has created other one-woman productions, based on the works of women poets, including those of June Jordan and Nikki Giovanni.

Duncan plans to offer the production as a possible program for regional arts groups, rural school systems and women's organizations.

Tentative plans call for her production to premier on International Literacy Day, Sept. 8, at MSU, with invitations to be guest of honor extended to the first ladies of the nation and commonwealth, Barbara Bush and Martha Wilkinson, both of whom are committed to eliminating illiteracy.

Duncan is the daughter of two MSU education faculty members, Dr. and Mrs. John R. Duncan.



Harry Lee Waterfield Jr., chairman of the board for Investors Heritage Life Insurance, recently presented Laura Duncan of Morehead with a \$2,000 check to assist in the development of a one-woman production depicting the life and influence of Cora Wilson Stewart, founder of the nation's adult literacy movement. Working under the sponsorship of Morehead State University's College of Arts and Sciences as principal writer/performer for the "Moonlight School Project," Duncan will research, write and appear in the production.