

## MOONLIGHT SCHOOLS

BY

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Out of a population of 9,000 in Rowan County, Kentucky, in 1910, 153 people, ten years of age or older were not able to read or write. This posed problems. If some one needed to sign official documents, he could only sign with an X and have someone else write his name for him. Written communication with absent friends and family members was difficult. Cora Wilson Stewart, who was then the Superintendent of Schools, started a campaign to solve the problem.

With the help of volunteer teachers, Mrs. Stewart had the county canvassed on Labor Day of 1911, announcing the opening of evening school classes. The first term started on September 5, 1911. One hundred-fifty students were expected to enroll but 1,150 people showed up. They waited in line to get into the schools. Women held babies in their arms and some of the aged leaned on canes..

Students came at night and met for an hour and forty-five minutes. each evening. Classes were held only on moonlight nights so students could find their way over the hills -- hence the name "Moonlight Schools".

Because they met for such a short period of time the teachers tried to include as much material as possible on family life improvement while teaching the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The first material used in the Moonlight Schools to teach the adults how to read was a newspaper, The Rowan County School Messenger, (later called the Moonlighter), edited by Mrs. Stewart. More advanced students used such books as "the Mother's First Book and books dealing with farm improvements, roads, sanitation and thrift.

Along with the reading skills students learned how to spell. This was done during the last five to ten minutes of the reading period. Most of the spelling was learned in the form of spelling bees. For writing instruction they used Mrs. Stewart's Country Life Readers, using dictation exercises included in the book. For the first part of the term pencils were used. Pen and ink was used during the second half as they grew more experienced.

When arithmetic was taught, they first learned how to read and write numbers. When they finally learned to figure, they solved problems relative to their lives such as they added up their daily wages and total the wages of the class as well. They measured their farms to find the acreage. They measured and planned for roads and buildings. This was done to show how important math was to their daily lives.

Along with everything else they had to learn, four drills a month were given. These dealt with subjects such as agriculture, health, sanitation, home economics and horticulture. One of the methods besides drills that was used to teach was Mrs. Stewart's "one-teach-one method", where more advanced students taught the less advanced ones.

The concept of Moonlight schooling spread to twenty-five counties by 1913 and then eventually country wide. Mrs. Stewart corresponded with James B. McCreary, the Governor of Kentucky, concerning the establishment of a literacy commission. She reminded him that over 1000 men and women had learned to read and write over the last three years. She was invited to Washington, D.C. in 1914, to testify before the Education Committee on the House of Representatives, in support of HR 2494. The bill was passed and Stewart was named to the five member education commission.

MSU still continues the work of the early Moonlight schools with the establishment of the Appalachian Adult Education Center and the Department of Adult and Continuing Education.

One of the schools used was the "Little Brushy" on the banks of Brush Creek. They discontinued its use in 1963, when schools in the area were consolidated. The building was donated to MSU in 1873 by William Daily of Morehead and renamed the "Cora Wilson Stewart Moonlight School". It now stands on campus on the grounds of the University Breckinridge Training School.