

# Cora Wilson Stewart Led Fight Against Illiteracy

MOREHEAD, Ky. — A native Rowan Countian led the nation's fight against adult illiteracy in Appalachian Kentucky at the turn of the century, according to Dr. James M. Gifford, Morehead State University's coordinator of Appalachian studies and assistant director of the Appalachian Development Center.

Dr. Gifford's paper on the subject, "Cora Wilson Stewart and the 'Moonlight School' Movement," is published in *Appalachia/America*, the proceedings of the 1980 Appalachian Studies Conference. The paper is a scholarly examination of Cora Wilson Stewart and the drive she initiated to stamp out illiteracy in Rowan County in the early 1900s.

"Cora Wilson Stewart had a national impact on American educational progress in the 20th

century," said Dr. Gifford. "In many respects, what she did was a prelude to the recent emphasis in adult education."

An amazing aspect of his six-month research, according to Dr. Gifford, is the number of people who still speak of Mrs. Stewart with reverence, including some who worked with her.

"Mrs. S. D. Foster of Ashland and Mrs. Glenna Flannery Gearhart of Grayson both taught under Mrs. Stewart in the 'moonlight school' movement," said Dr. Gifford. "I just hope this article will help remind other local people of the contribution Cora Wilson Stewart made to this area."

The 'moonlight school' movement, so named because the adult classes were taught at night and the pioneers could travel over the rough roads

safely on nights when the moon was shining, has been commemorated by MSU.

"The one-room school where Mrs. Stewart began her drive to stop illiteracy, the 'Little Brushy School,' is serving as a museum of the movement on the MSU campus," said Dr. Gifford. "Dr. Morris Norfleet, when serving as a vice-president for the university, had the school brought to the campus as a reminder of the famous educational movement Mrs. Stewart began."

Copies of *Appalachia/America*, published by the Appalachian Consortium Press, are available from Dr. James M. Gifford, ADC, MSU, Morehead, KY 40351 or by calling 606/783-4731. The book may be purchased for \$5.

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