

Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart, 83, Nation's Great Pioneer Leader In Adult Education, Is Claimed

Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart, who brought more publicity and favorable recognition to Eastern Kentucky than any Rowan Countian in history, died Tuesday of last week at St. Luke's Hospital, Fryon, N. C.

The founder of the Moonlight Schools, first coordinated effort in the United States in the field of adult education, was 83 years of age. She had been in failing health for sometime.

Mrs. Stewart, listed in Who's Who as a retired educator, lecturer and writer, observed from her position as a stenographer in a Morehead law office, that many of Eastern Kentucky's citizens were unable to read and write.

This was the beginning of the Moonlight Schools in 1911.

Friends and advisors told her the undertaking was doomed to failure because elderly folks were too self-conscious and embarrassed to go to night school, particularly since many would have to reveal they could sign their own names only with an 'X'.

Schools Gain Favor

But, the young, and attractive Morehead woman, who had a knack of making people like her and winning them over to her cause, was undaunted.

Within two years the Moonlight Schools were not only flourishing throughout Rowan County, but had spread to 25 Kentucky counties and other states.

Such publications as the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune gave considerable illustrated space to the effort and Moonlight Schools developed in many isolated areas of the United States and other countries.

Rowan teachers were awarded an all-expense paid trip to Canada in recognition of their work.

One remarkable phase of the Moonlight Schools, often cited in national magazines, etc., was the enthusiasm shown by the students, many of them 60 years of age. They accepted the schools as their own, and the progress they achieved was generally rapid. Many were able to read a part of the Bible within a few weeks.

Early in 1914 Kentucky Governor McCreary appointed Mrs. Stewart Chairman of the Illiteracy Commission, first of its kind in the United States.

Mrs. Stewart then moved into policy positions of the United States government and other national groups, promoting adult learning in a nation of mostly one-room schools back in those days.

As Mrs. Wilson transferred her talents and zeal from the East-



47 YEARS AGO—This is how Cora Wilson Stewart looked in 1911 when she started the Moonlight Schools in Eastern Kentucky. She died at age 83 after receiving many national and international citations.



THIS IS ONE of the last pictures of Cora Wilson Stewart before her death. Illness kept her from recently being honored on the "This Is Your Life" television program.

al level, she became a speaker and writer in great demand.

Aided Russia

She was named Chairman of the World Illiteracy Commission in 1923 and presided over conferences in Edinburgh, Geneva, Toronto, San Francisco and Denver.

Russia then started the literacy movement and Mrs. Stewart's policies became the basis for their organization. Her pamphlets and books were translated into Russian, and the progress of elderly people in the Moonlight Schools of Rowan, and other Eastern Kentucky counties, were cited for the advancement that adults, without prior schooling, could make.

Mrs. Stewart was in demand as a speaker and she received several national and international awards for her great humanitarian and educational work. These included: the Pictorial Review Award; the Ella Young Flagg medal; and the Clara Barton medal.

Highlight of the native Morehead woman's career probably came in 1941 when the General Federation of Women's Clubs, at their Golden Jubilee Convention, conferred its highest award to Mrs. Stewart for "pioneer work in combating illiteracy in the United States and the world."

Recognized By Presidents

Two Presidents took recognition of Mrs. Stewart's achievements. In 1926 President Coolidge named her Director of the National Illiteracy Crusade and in 1929 Herbert Hoover delegated the Secretary of Interior to appoint a national Illiteracy Commission with Mrs. Stewart executive director.

It was 17 years ago, at the age of 66, that Mrs. Stewart retired from policy and executive leadership, mostly turning her great program and resolves over to younger people. However, she did not go into retirement, and her advice was constantly sought at policy levels.

Some of her noteworthy work was with military personnel. She also set up schools to combat illiteracy in most of the prisons of the nation.

At the end she saw her vision of almost 50 years ago become a near reality with illiteracy almost wiped out in this nation.

A few months ago she was chosen as the subject of the "This Is Your Life" television program, but illness kept her from attending.

Mrs. Wilson was born at Morehead in 1875, daughter of the late Dr. Jeremiah and Anne E. Wilson. She was a sister of the late Dr. Homer Lee Wilson, a dentist, of Morehead.

Immediate survivors are a brother, Glen C. Wilson, Memphis, Tenn.; and three nephews and four nieces, including Mrs. Everett D. Blair of Morehead.