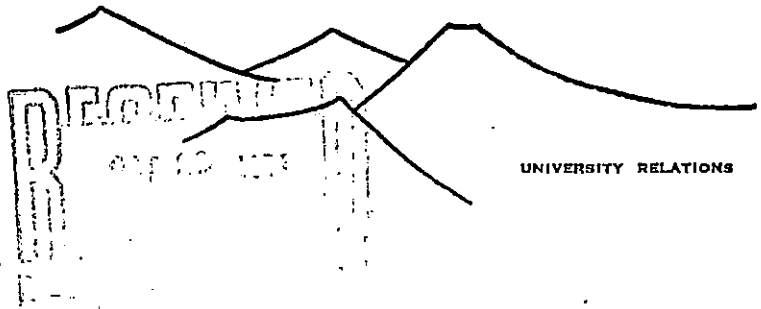


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OCT 30 RECD

# MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY

MOREHEAD, KENTUCKY 40351

Oct. 28, 1974



UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

RE: This article on "Moonlight Schools"

"Ambrose Boston" is the pen name of a reporter for The Lexington Herald-Leader Co. The news department would give me no other information. Henry Hornsby, editor of The Leader, might respond to a query. Shall I go further?

KEITH KAPPES

*Handwritten:*  
Hornsby  
Kappes  
Hornsby  
To: →

# Moonlight Schools, A Page From History

By AMBROSE BOSTON

The "Moonlight Schools" were started 63 years ago in Rowan County to teach adults to read and write.

They were called Moonlight Schools because they convened only on moonlit nights, due to poor roads and rough terrain of Rowan County in 1911.

The story of Moonlight Schools is the story of Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart, their founder, and Rowan rural school teachers who volunteered their services to make them possible. Mrs. Stewart became superintendent of Rowan County schools in 1910. In her contacts with pupils and parents she was alarmed that approximately 90 per cent of the adults in rural Rowan County were illiterate.

She asked teachers in rural schools if they would help her establish night schools for themselves. The teachers offered to help, but felt that with dirt roads the rule in the rural areas would be difficult for people to attend at night. This is why it was decided to conduct classes on moonlit nights.

Mrs. Stewart estimated that response at first would be light; maybe 150 would attend the classes. On the first night 1,200 showed

up expressing an interest in learning to read and write.

## Born At Farmers

Born at Farmers, Ky., not far from Morehead, Mrs. Stewart was a daughter of Dr. Jeremiah Wilson and Annie Eliza Halley. She was educated at the old Morehead Normal School, National Normal University and the University of Kentucky before becoming a teacher and then being named head of the county schools in Rowan.

A daughter of the hills, Mrs. Stewart understood her adult pupils and she and her teachers conducted the night schools in a manner which would have been impossible for an "outsider." Other Kentucky hill and mountain counties adopted the Moonlight Schools plan.

By 1913 the schools had attracted statewide and national attention. In 1914, Mrs. Stewart was named chairman of the Kentucky Illiteracy Commission, a post she filled for six years.

In 1918 she was named chairman of the Illiteracy Committee of the National Education Association. She served in this position seven years. For more than 10 years she was chairman of the National Illiteracy Crusade. She also served as chairman of the Illiteracy Commission of the World Federation of Educational Associations. She was elected to the last named post after other countries had become interested

in her success in teaching adult Kentuckians to read and write. Other countries adopted similar programs.

Another illustration of the widespread influence of Kentucky's Moonlight Schools was the fact that Mrs. Stewart was chosen to preside over the illiteracy section of the World Conference on Education in San Francisco 1920, Edinburgh 1925, Toronto 1927, Geneva 1929, and Denver 1931.

## Named By Hoover

President Herbert Hoover named her chairman of the executive committee of his Commission on Illiteracy. These are only a few of the honors bestowed on Mrs. Stewart. In 1928 she moved to Tryon, N.C., where she died in 1958 at the age of 83.

Why were so many adult Kentuckians illiterate early in this century? Rural schools in scores of counties were far apart and inadequate even as late as the turn of the century.

E. S. Montgomery, born in 1859 in a log cabin in what now is Elliott County, wrote 40 years ago some of his recollections for the Morehead Independent. What he said about schools helps explain why many residents of Rowan and other counties reached adulthood with no schooling. Mr. Montgomery's remarks about schools follow:

"In 1870 there was no school house in reach of us, and there was a new district laid off in the southern end of Rowan County, bordering on the Elliott County line, and called Cornette District. It is now (1934) known as Sand Gap.

"A large log house was built in the woods and covered with four-foot boards without nails. On the south side of the house was an opening, one foot wide and 10 feet long, four feet from the ground. This was used as a window, but there was no glass in the opening. Under this was placed a broad plank on two pins, that served as a standup writing desk for the children.

## Fire On Bare Ground

"The first year we had no floor or chimney,

