

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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Black History Month forum focuses on education in the county
By Joe Getty

The Historical Society of Carroll County will sponsor its annual African-American History Forum as part of Carroll County's celebration of Black History Month. The theme of this year's forum is education and schools.

A panel of speakers will cover the themes of one-room schools, Robert Moton School, and integration of the public schools. After these presentations, the audience is invited to share experiences, photographs and other artifacts of the African-American experience in local schools.

In the book, "Schoolbells and Slates," author Joan Prall uses the technique of oral histories to introduce themes of local education. These reminiscences provide a unique perspective on the one-room schools in the county.

Although the building was torn down long ago, the Western Chapel school provided a diverse educational background. Prall interviewed Mildred Wilson Robinson and Mildred Hughes about their attendance at the school. Robinson recalled, "We had a little bit of everything in our school, including singing and praying and cooking, especially when we had Miss Mary Thomas as our teacher. She taught manners too. Because she lived in the community she had a lot of interest in Western Chapel 1-room School."

Robinson also described the condition of supplies and materials at the school: "Almost everything in the school was secondhand from the white schools. Some of the books were marked up and in bad shape; the teacher used flour paste to patch them up." Prall interviewed several students from the Priestland School near Union Bridge. Christine Jones, Jewell Brown and Helen Margaret Dowery provide recollections about school days at Priestland. They described their favorite teachers and childhood pranks, topics that are popular stories throughout "Schoolbells and Slates."

Brown commented on the difference between the one-room schools and today's educational system:

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"Today's kids miss the closeness of a 1-room school. It seemed like we were one big family. There were some cliques, but all in all it was a peaceful atmosphere. One child cared for the other. Boys at Priestland were responsible for carrying water to the school and helping with the stove. Students had their own collapsible tin drinking cups."

The history of Bark Hill School is well documented by Prall through the research of Evelyn Brooks Howard. The lot for the school was purchased in 1867 and the deed lists the original trustees of John Henry Thompson, Lloyd Coates, Jonah Key, William M. Walker, Joseph Hughes, Dennis Green, Joseph Parker, Stephen A. Brooks and Isaac Landzell. A building was built on the site that served both as church and school for the community.

Prall also provides interviews with former teachers Jane Brightful Costley, Melvin Dowery and Betty Smith Dotson.

At the historical society's forum, Dotson and Prall will provide a perspective on the era of the one-room school house. Dotson attended the one-room schools at White Rock and Johnsville prior to her career as a teacher. Prall will describe the research and oral history work accomplished in writing her book. In addition, Charlie Smith of Union Bridge will talk about the one room school at Priestland.

Ron Hollingsworth will give a broad perspective of black education in Carroll County. He began his educational experience at the one-room Priestland School. He also attended Robert Moton School and transferred to Francis Scott Key when the county schools were integrated.

The segment on Robert Moton School will include representatives of the Former Students of Robert Moton School. Sally Green will discuss her experiences at Robert Moton School. Richard Dixon will provide a summary at the forum's conclusion. Our moderator will be Lou Ann Howard-Bowins, a member of the historical society board who is a teacher in the Carroll County public school system.

The African-American Forum will be at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 6. The location is the Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 East Main Street, in Westminster. Please call (410) 848-6494 for additional information.