



By Jeff Taylor/The Courier

Lillian Hopkins with her sixth grade class at the 2-room Clarksburg school house.

Students experience living history

BY JOAN CANDY
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Gladys Pratt recalls learning her lessons while sitting on her teacher's lap by the stove. She remembers doing her arithmetic with chalk on a slate.

She remembers girls wearing white pinafores to protect their good dresses - and boys segregated on the other side of the room from the girls.

The most exciting part of school, she says, were the Friday afternoon spelling bees. When she went to school, she adds, a great deal of emphasis was put on spelling and penmanship.

Now 85, Mrs. Pratt recently took a trip back into her past to visit her old two-room school house in Clarksburg.

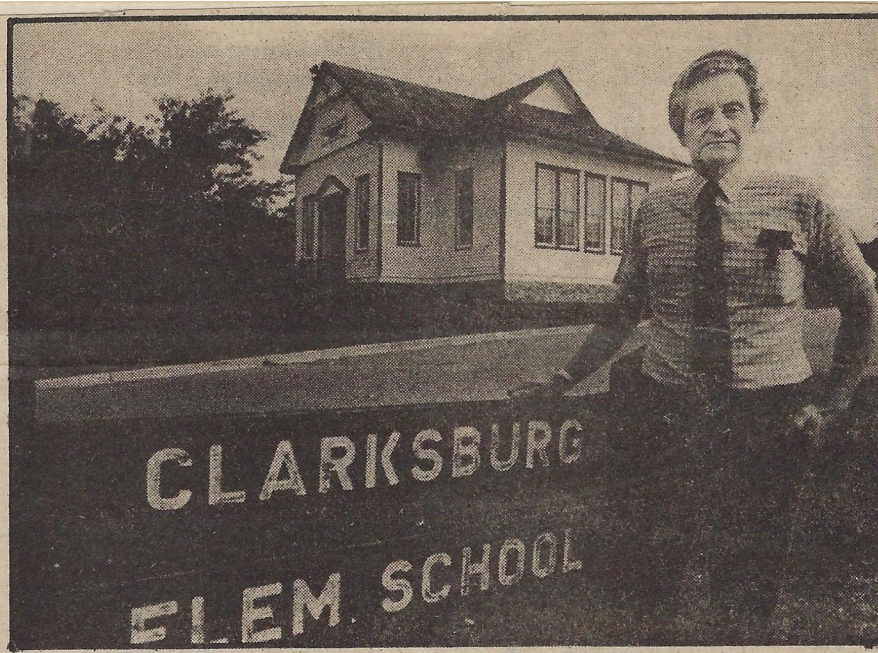
She was surprised, she said, to find the building looking almost the way it did when she attended sixth grade there in 1909.

But one thing did confuse her - the school building wasn't where she'd left it.

During those years the old wooden school had undergone many changes, only to finally return to its past.

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A 1909 two room school house now holds sixth grade students of Clarksburg Elementary after community support enabled the school to be restored to much of its original state. A rededication ceremony is planned at the school at 10:00 a.m. on Nov. 4. Above, Principal Richard Stevens in front of the school.



Clarksburg School

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As the need for more space grew so did the school - first adding a brick wing to one side, then to the other. Eventually seven different additions were built, surrounding the original structure.

When the county began to talk of tearing down the wooden center because of the fear of it being a fire hazard, the community undertook a successful campaign to save the original school house by moving it to a new site.

There it sat, unused for almost ten years.

Then boundary changes added more children to the Clarksburg school district and educators there turned their attention to the abandoned building.

With community support, the school was renovated to much of its original state. Old tiles were taken up to reveal the original pine flooring. The walls were replastered and paneled. The bathroom was remodeled with a classic pull chain toilet.

The bathroom, like the heating and air conditioning, is a concession to modern times. In 1909, recalls Mrs. Pratt, the bathrooms were located outside, spring water was sipped from a dipper, and a big chunk stove heated both rooms.

But many of the other things about the school are vintage, like the old school bell to summon children to class, the ceramic door knobs, the antique clock, the public address box.

Still needed are old desks, globes, maps and a woodburning stove similar to the one that used to heat the school.

"Nothing is ever complete - always becoming. This is a becoming project," comments Clarksburg Principal Robert Stevens.

The children attending sixth grade in the old school this year have a sense of doing "something special," he adds. "We're trying to make it really special for them."

"They are really caught up in it," he adds.

For some it is an opportunity to attend class in the same room that their parents did. Karen Marshall is the third generation of her family to go to school there. Her mother and grandmother both were students in that building.

The children's excitement about learning the history of the school has inspired an idea. Stevens says that, after this class leaves, the building will continue to be restored with the long range intent of using one of the rooms as a museum depicting school life as it was at the turn of the century. Then school children from other areas will be able to visit there and share an understanding of the environment of those days.

A special rededication ceremony is planned at the school at 10 a.m. on Nov. 4 - the anniversary of the original opening day of the school in 1909. Anyone who ever attended the school is especially invited to be Present.

Mrs. Pratt, now living in a senior citizen's home in Bethesda, says she plans to be there. She was a student the first year the school opened.