

Saving Sunnyside School

Town, Former Students Aiming To Preserve Historic Building

"It was different because I was getting out of the woods. Shallotte wasn't much bigger back then, but it was something."

—Brightie Holden

BY DOUG RUTTER

Brightie Holden calls Sunnyside School her "pride and joy." But she cringes every time she drives through downtown Shallotte and passes the historic building.

"I love it. It's very special to me. I wish something could be done for it so it could be put to better use," said Holden, who attended school and later taught in the same classroom at Sunnyside.

"When I drive by, I look to see that room," she says. "I hope they make something decent out of it. When I go by and look at it, it bothers me because I don't like the way it looks."

Windows are broken, litter surrounds the building and the school is in dire need of a paint job. Sunnyside generally has the appearance of a building that has been left unattended for two decades.

The white, three-room structure at the corner of Main Street and N.C. 130 West has not heard the pitter-patter of school children's feet for more nearly 22 years.

Other than serving as home of the South Brunswick Interchurch Council Clothes Closet, Sunnyside has not been put to good use since it was salvaged from wrecking crews when old Shallotte High School was destroyed in 1972.

However, all of that could change this year. Shallotte Alderman Roney Cheers is heading up a committee of town officials and residents interested in relocating and renovating the 79-year-old schoolhouse.

In the past, community residents have been reluctant to get involved in Sunnyside School improvement projects because the building did not have a permanent home.

Brunswick Electric Membership Corporation officials agreed last fall to provide that permanent home for Sunnyside by giving the town a long-term lease for property about 200 feet from the present site.

BEMC General Manager David Batten said the company's board of directors has passed a resolution agreeing to lease the land indefinitely for \$1 per year. The board is waiting for the town to come up with improvement plans.

Cheers, a Shallotte native, said he hopes to have something done before the end of



FOUR GENERATIONS of Jo Ann Simmons' family attended Sunnyside School in Shallotte. She's among a group of residents interested in preserving the building. STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

the year. The committee needs to come up with plans and money to renovate the building.

"It's something that should be preserved," Cheers said. "It has a history dating back to 1915. There's a lot of people in this area that attended school there."

The history of Sunnyside is sketchy. A sign outside the building says it was built in 1915. It served grades kindergarten through eight at one time, and later became part of the Shallotte High School complex.

When Shallotte Middle School was constructed and the old high school was destroyed, Sunnyside was salvaged. It hasn't moved from its present site since the early 1970s.

The school has that "old-timey" look and feel about it. Front doors open to a small auditorium and stage, and there are large two classrooms on each side. Before the school was moved, it had a third classroom in the back.

Shallotte native Jo Ann Simmons has a special interest in Sunnyside. As a member of BEMC's board of directors, she's in a position to do something she hopes will ultimately help preserve the historic building.

"I personally would like to see it preserved because I attended school there. My children went to school there and so did my parents and grandparents," Simmons said. "About all the old schools have been torn down."

Simmons, who attended fourth and fifth grade at Sunnyside, said she has discussed preservation of the schoolhouse with former classmates.

"We've had a lot of people say they would volunteer to do electrical work or painting to help restore it and make it something school children could visit," she said.

Holden says the left wing classroom of Sunnyside will always be special to her. She was a student in Ida Parker's fourth-grade class in that room in 1925 and returned to the same room 32 years later to teach the fourth grade.

As a youngster, Holden said she liked Sunnyside School because it allowed her to

leave Royal Oak and visit Shallotte.

"It was different because I was getting out of the woods," she said. "Shallotte wasn't much bigger back then but it was something. I loved my teacher. She was a lovely woman."

Despite its name, Sunnyside School was never known for having the warmest classrooms. Its rooms were heated with pot-bellied stoves.

Marie Harrison, who was a student in Dorothy Sellers' fourth-grade class in 1948, remembers the chilly side of Sunnyside.

"It was always cold," she recalled. "There was no insulation of course and there were stoves in each classroom. It was up to the fellows to get the coal for the stoves."



FIFTY YEARS LATER (in photo above) Cliff Edward (right) of Raleigh and Holden Beach is reunited with his World War II buddies Larry Griffis (left) and Don Allan. Of their original company that entered combat, only five were never evacuated with the wounded or killed, and only these three are alive today. Also part of the reunion, though not pictured, was Ann Edwards, who was a Red Cross worker in the war. At left, in a 1944 photograph, the three are shown in a typical World War II "buddy" picture. They parted company in the European Theatre war zone in the summer of 1945.



Combat Unit's 3 Survivors Enjoy Reunion After Half A Century

Well-known Raleigh retired educator and his wife have been hosts the past few days for an unusual reunion, part of which took place at Holden Beach.

Clifton T. Edwards and wife Ann welcomed two of Edwards' World War II buddies, reuniting the three men for the first time in almost 50 years. They parted company in the European Theatre war zone in the summer of 1945.

The three men were infantrymen in Company E, the 289th Regiment, 75th Division. Their unit was awarded three battlestars for combat in Southern France, the crossing of the Rhine River, and the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardenne Forest of Belgium.

Of the original company that entered combat, only five were never at some time evacuated with the wounded or killed—and only these three are alive today.

All three met Ann Edwards during the war when she served them coffee and doughnuts during her stint as a Red Cross worker in Belgium and France.

They each escorted Ann on dates to Paris and Reims from time to time, but it was Cliff Edwards she would later marry.

All of them—including Ann—were residents of "Camp Chicago," a tent city in France where the Company E soldiers were housed while waiting to see whether they would be shipped out to the Pacific.

Edwards retired from the Raleigh Schools in 1987 after 30 years, ending his career as principal of Daniels Junior High School.

Larry Griffis is a sculptor and artist who directs the Griffis Sculpture Park in East Otto, N.Y. He has been

doing some painting at Holden Beach during the reunion.

Don Allan, accompanied by his wife Doree, is a retired educator from Yankton, S.D.

The group visited many Raleigh points of interest, spent several days at the Edwards' Lumberton Street home at Holden Beach, taking day trips from there to Charleston, S.C., to tour historic sites including The Citadel. They also took in Calabash, Myrtle Beach, Fort Fisher and Wilmington.

All three men were sergeants and have maintained a Christmas card correspondence every year.

Humorous stories, numerous recollections of past comrades, and the trials and tribulations of "blue braid" men punctuated their several years together, Edwards said.

"Wherever we have traveled, we have not been bashful about our long-time friendship and the fortunate gifts of life we have enjoyed," Edward said. "We all have several children and grandchildren, so picture-sharing has been a major activity."

Griffis, joking, said, "The Edwards' have been such marvelous hosts that we seriously thought about staying another month."

Continuing the good humor, Allan added, "I wanted them to come to South Dakota for the reunion. But Griffis didn't know where the state was, and Edwards didn't want to go any place above the Mason-Dixon line, even if it called itself South Dakota."

Edwards said, "We don't plan to wait 50 years before our next reunion."

The Edwards family has been coming to Holden Beach since the 1950s.

Their unit was awarded battlestars for combat in southern France, the crossing of the Rhine River and the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardenne Forest of Belgium.