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Thursday, October 5, 1978, Vol. 24, No. 50

Tour results in district plan

by Dan Ward
A subcommittee appointed by the joint school committees of the Owen District found structure problems to be worse than expected in a tour

of Black Mountain Primary School October 2. As a result of their inspection, the committee chose to send a letter to all parents in the Owen School District urging them to attend the October 19 meeting of the Buncombe County School Board in Asheville.

Fred Myers, chairman of the subcommittee, suggested that color slides showing extensive water damage and unsafe wiring be made and shown to the board that evening.

Black Mountain Primary Principal Jerry Green, former Principal Leonard Keever, and custodian Leonard Worley took the subcommittee for a tour, pointing out places where moisture caused by improper roof drainage had caused three-month-old paint to peel off the walls, and in two places, caused the floor to rot to a point that a child could fall through.

Those two places are in a room now kept locked and unused, and in a used classroom, where the spot is covered by carpet and a table. Other rooms are kept empty and locked or are used for storage because of safety hazards.

Green pointed out a rafter in a classroom on the ground floor that is bowed and cracking from rot. Ceilings in other rooms are warped, and tiles are falling as a result of moisture.

Green said that most problems stem from construction of an addition to the 60 year-old main building that

limited the number of downspouts from the flat-roofed building to two. In a heavy rain, water puddles up and seeps between the walls — and into the ceilings of virtually every room in the older building. The existing wiring is the original cloth-covered exposed wiring installed when the school was built, adding to safety hazards there, Green pointed out.

Based on suggestions from Myers and Keever, the subcommittee chose to keep the board brief and simple, but with an intense emphasis on the immediate need to correct problems at the Primary School.

"We aren't going to tell them we need a new school — we'll just show them that something has to be done. They'll see for themselves, I believe, that a new school is

the only way," Myers said. Keever said that his experience in dealing with the School Board is that there is little effect from even the best demonstrations unless a number of persons are present to back it up.

"I'm afraid that you'd be wasting your money making slides if you can't pack that board meeting with parents," he said.

Myers said that the subcommittee will meet soon with the joint school committees to present the plan to enlist the aid of all parents in the school district, as was done to obtain a new school in Swannanoa, to attend the presentation to the school board.

A printed list of other problems in the Owen district schools will be given to each school board member at that time, also, the subcommittee agreed.



A group effort makes the potato harvest easier on the Lee Hutchins Farm near Tom Brown Road. (Dan Ward)

ABC profits down little despite I-40 opening

by Dan Ward
Profits from the Black Mountain ABC Store for the last quarter were down only 7.36 per cent from the previous year, in spite of predictions completion of I-40 would cut considerably into business from travelers.

Profits from the quarter were disclosed at the September 28 meeting of the

Black Mountain ABC Board. W.L. Wheelon, store manager, told the board that income from the quarter was \$229,237.50, down approximately 7.36 per cent from the same period in 1977.

Wheelon said that traveling salesmen and persons from out of town have continued to stop at the store, even though interstate traffic now

bypasses Black Mountain. Al Richardson, one of three ABC Board members, said earlier predictions indicated that business at the ABC store would drop by as much as 20 per cent.

In light of the relatively small drop in sales, the board informally agreed to drop a plan to build another store

near the interstate highway. The board had set aside \$5,834 — the amount paid yearly on the mortgage before the mortgage was retired last year — as a down payment on a new store. The new store would either have supplemented or replaced the existing store on State Street.

In view of revisions in the NC Open Meetings Act that

require a board to give 48 hours advance public notice of non-regular meetings, the board agreed to set the third Wednesday of each month at 4 p.m. as the regular meeting time of the ABC Board. Meetings of the board, held at the ABC store, are open to the public.

The board also chose to put off action on a suggestion by

the NC Board of Alcoholic Control that the store install two special cash registers that keep inventory as well as receipt records. The machines cost \$4300 each. The cash registers now used in the store were approved by the state board when they were bought, at \$2700 each, a few years ago.

One-man still had place in local economy

by Dan Ward
ed. note — When debate over the mixed drink referendum was at its height, opponents said that liquor did not fit in with the religious character of the valley. Proponents pointed out that the valley's first export, and the basis of its early economy, was distilled whiskey and apple brandy. Mary Lindsey is one of a number of persons living in the valley who is descended from the early distillers.

Days were when running off white liquor was not only respectable around here, but an art.

Mary Lindsey, who today, at 94, still works a good-sized garden, one of the most admired in Black Mountain, remembers the days when it was her job to carry firewood up to her father's government-licensed still in McDowell County and watched him at work in one of the most prided, but underpaid professions at the turn of the century.

"Sure, there were some who thought he shouldn't make it," Mrs. Lindsey said of the neighbors of her father, Charles Godfrey. "But many others were glad he made it."

The alternative to buying his government-regulated whiskey was to get blockade

or bootleg, whiskey from the moonshiners.

"There was a steam distillery in Marion then, but it was just like white lightning — fiery and all. Blockade stills operated under a whole different sort of rules, you know," she said.

"There wasn't much money to be made at a government still because there was a man there all the time from the government to oversee how much whiskey was made and what was put into it. He was called the 'storekeeper.'

"If they (licensed distillers) made more than their quota, they had to sneak in the extra ingredients on the side so that

the book man didn't know anything about it. That's the way the majority of the men that ran the distilleries made their money. They had to be very careful about what they did and who knewed it," she said.

Under government license, a distiller would supply the equipment and labor while the government provided the whiskey ingredients. For his labor, the distiller would get a small percentage of the finished whiskey, which he could sell himself by the bottle or in barrels to a wholesaler. Mrs. Lindsey said her father sold to a wholesaler after attempting to sell individual bottles.

"At one time, he had an open bar, but it didn't last long — people tormented him so. They'd come in the night and want whiskey, and Dad didn't care for that. He called it his 'grocery store,'" she added with a laugh.

More than 80 years later, Mrs. Lindsey remembers well how her father's still was run. Would-be distillers would "find a place somewhere

where they could get water. Then they'd generally dig a trench for a furnace for the still. They'd use a furnace like you'd use for making molasses."

A furnace would be built of clay and brick or stone around the copper still itself with a flue created at the opposite end of the trench from where the fire is stoked, she said. Her father's distillery actually consisted of three stills with a capacity of 100 to 200 gallons each, lined up next to each other in a still house. The stills were so large, each had a set of steps that had to be climbed to pour in the fermented mash.

"The cap (lid), turned upside down would hold about a bushel," Mrs. Lindsey said. "From that, there's a coil of pipe that fits right down into a barrel of water and comes out to a spicket at the other end. A worm is what you call that coil. I guess it was about 1/2 an inch in diameter," she said, making a circle with her fingers to show the width of the pipe.

The barrel, or 'singling tank' had a continuous flow of cold creek water flowing through to cool the coil, so that vapor from the cooking mash would be condensed to liquid.

Preparation of the mash, or 'beer', was the most painstaking part of the process, and the one where moonshiners took the most shortcuts.

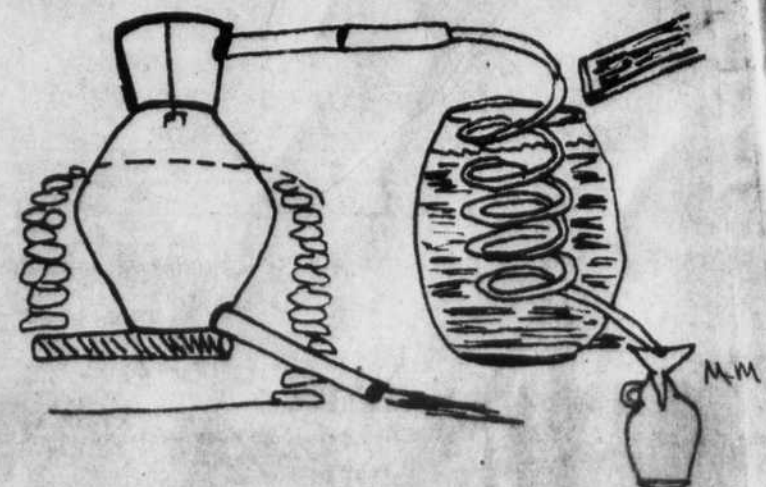
"When it (the mash) lost its strength, he would turn the stuff left over, the slop, into the hog lot for the hogs and cattle. They didn't get drunk on it, but they loved it," she said.

"Then the government would take so many gallons of the spirits, and Daddy would get a gallon. Working for the government like that wasn't the easiest way to make a living — there was a lot of work to it, honey," she said, laughing.



'It was hard work, honey'

—Mary Lindsey



Black Mountain firemen to hold open house

The Black Mountain Fire Department will observe Fire Prevention Week with an open house from 2 to 5 p.m. October 4.

The department's equipment will all be on display, and fire truck rides will be given to children and adults.

Refreshments will also be served. According to Fire Chief Gary Bartlett, the open house will be postponed until October 15 if it rains Sunday. All persons are invited.

The Black Mountain Fire Department made one run last week. A report of a stable fire

at Monte Vista Stables turned out to be a controlled burning on September 30. Two engines and 17 men responded.

The County Ambulance Service made nine routine and five emergency runs last week.

Our Valley

Wildlife declines with valley growth

by Bill Penfound and June Hodge

It is probable that the early pioneers witnessed huge flocks of passenger pigeons and smaller flocks of Carolina parakeets. Of the larger mammals they would have sighted the gray wolf which was last recorded in Buncombe Co. in 1890.

They might have seen the elusive puma (cougar, panther) which may still be present in the high mountains on the basis of tracks and supposed sightings in the last few years. Of the ungulates the elk (wapiti) was last viewed in 1949 and the bison (buffalo) was last seen about 1860. Apparently the reduction in the fabulous flocks of passenger pigeons was due to the hunting of the bird for food. Birds were attacked on the nest and woods were set afire. "The last passenger

pigeon, an aged female called Martha, died on September 1, 1914, in the Cincinnati Zoo" (Wagner, 1971:317). The Carolina parakeet was eliminated because of its fondness for man's crops. Apparently the pioneers viewed all competing animals as expendable, especially the large birds and mammals.

There is little doubt that clearing of land and subsequent farming have reduced the number of forest organisms. However, it is probable that the total number of plant and animal species had increased by farming practices around the turn of the twentieth century. Many new habitats were created including the forest-field border and the rail-fence haven for wildlife. The fence row served as a travel lane, a food source, a place of escape and a nook in which to

live. Abundant birds along railfence rows included bobwhites, cardinals, catbirds, kingbirds, orioles, robins, song sparrows and predatory birds such as the barn owl, screech owl, red-tailed hawk and sparrow hawk. Fence-row mammals comprised several species of mice; but also chipmunks, cottontails, groundhogs (wood chucks), possums and skunks.

The penultimate predator of the fence-row was the red fox with man as the ultimate, super-predator. According to Smith (1974:12) many farms considered the fence-row as an outmoded nuisance, since they wasted precious farmland. Throughout The Valley, most rail fences have been replaced by wire fences. Furthermore, the immediate, weedy borders have been destroyed.