

Schoolhouse holds first lesson in 67 years

By Tammi Slater Staff Writer
Copyright © 2006 The Gazette - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Thursday, November 2, 2006

Former students share past with Baltimore students

Warren Dorsey walked through the doors of the Historic Sykesville Colored Schoolhouse as a student for the first time in September 1926.

Last week, Dorsey and his two sisters, Rosie Hutchinson and Mae Whiten, of Frederick, returned to the one-room schoolhouse as teachers of the past, educating eighth-graders from St. William of York School in Baltimore about what it was like to attend the school during segregation. It was the first since 1939 that learning took place within the buildings walls.



The Baltimore students came to the schoolhouse as part of their study of “Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,” a novel by Mildred Taylor that takes place in the early 1930’s that is set in a segregated schoolhouse. The novel bears a strong resemblance to her life history, Hutchinson said “I feel like this story is my story. When I read the story I thought about my family; it was our story.”

Dorsey, a former microbiologist, teacher and administrator, spoke of segregation, the importance of education and his love of Sykesville.

“I always looked forward to coming to this place,” he said. “I loved going to school.”

Many students traveled long distances to attend the schoolhouse, Dorsey said.

"I lived up on the hill so it didn't take me long," he added. "Kids six years and up walked three miles to come here and kids from Howard County walked here."

Dorsey and Hutchinson estimate that by the time they finished school they had walked around 10,000 miles. His family did anything to learn and gain an education, Dorsey said.

His younger sister, Hutchinson, agreed. "My mother never let us stay home, even if we didn't feel well," she said. "She stressed to us that it was important to learn and be educated."

Education did not come without its sacrifices, Dorsey said.

"We didn't have the privilege or luxury about life and what it had to offer," he said. "We were told what to do by our teachers and parents and we did it."

Hutchinson agreed. "We were seen, not heard."

But the hardships were well worth it, Dorsey added. "Education is something that can never be taken away from you." Following high school, Dorsey worked on a farm where he earned 10 cents an hour to attend college. "Ten cents an hour was the most I ever made on a farm," he said.

He later received his master's degree in elementary education, became a teacher and later a school administrator.

"I wound up as a principal of a school and it all started at this place right here," he said, smiling.

"Education was the light to the future and you had to make the best of every opportunity to learn."

Dorsey said life at the schoolhouse was far different from today's standards.

There were no facilities; students used outhouses, and shared one dipper for drinking water, he said.

Cassandra Kane, a St. William of York student, said she learned a lot from the lesson.

"It really made me think about what they had to do," she said. "We get rides to school and they had to walk, even in bad weather; we have it easy."

Morgan Rigsby, also a student, said the lesson opened her eyes to the perks students have today.

"I was surprised at the advantages we have and the behavior differences," she said. "Back then people weren't as bad as today and they listened to their teachers and parents more. They were all about learning and their future."

Shirley Richa, language arts teacher at St. William of York School, said she read about the schoolhouse, attended the open house last month, and thought it would complement her class unit.

"I thought the ambience of this schoolhouse would be perfect for students to get a feel of what it was like back then," she said. "Anytime we can make literature come alive it's worth it."

Debbie Rosenberg, oral history teacher at the school, shared Richa's sentiment.

"The chance to sit in a historical site and learn is so powerful for children," she said. "For them to understand the difference between then and now is so great and allows them to appreciate what they have."

Pat Greenwald, coordinator of the schoolhouse, said the day was exciting.

"It's so neat to see kids in here again," she said. "These are the first kids to be here in 67 years."

Greenwald said she hopes more Carroll County schools will visit the schoolhouse. “It will be used for kids to come on field trips and learn what it was like back then,” she said. “The neat thing about this is everyone in Sykesville worked together to make this happen; we’ve come from the early days of segregation to this.”

For more information on the Historic Sykesville Colored Schoolhouse visit www.sykesville.net/school.html.