

The first "Big A" reunion was held Sunday, October 8, at the Old School House 5 miles south of Stuart. This get-together was held, along with the annual Hazelwood reunion.

Although the weather was not too favorable, approximately 200 people attended, and approximately 100 were former students of the school, and their families. A nice lunch was enjoyed and there was much reminiscing when the former students visited their classrooms.

Through the untiring efforts of Mrs. Aja Fulcher Conner, a former student of the school, the following information was compiled relating the many experiences of the group who was instrumental in the beginning of "Big A". This history was read by John Hardy Hazelwood.

"Things Remembered About Big A"

Around the year 1915, there was very little entertainment in this community. A group of young men who were interested in baseball, organized a baseball team. The ground selected for the diamond was owned by the county, who had several acres in this community. It is located in front of "Big A" school building. This land is now owned by several of the local farmers.

The team decided "Big A" would be the name of the team in honor of Mr. Aaron Blackard, as his name was spelled with a big "A" and a little "a" thus the name "Big A" originated.

At that time the main event on Saturday afternoons were the baseball games. People came from miles around just to see the game; especially, if their home team was playing. The ladies enjoyed the game almost as much as the men, but what they really came for was to enjoy the ice cream that was made under the big Oak tree. This tree was several feet from the diamond.

You could get all the ice cream you could pile on a cone, for 5c. The proceeds were given to the team to buy their equipment and for transportation to other games. The "Big A" team would travel quite a distance to compete with other teams, such as Martinsville, Stuart, Westfield, King, Sandy Ridge, Smithtown, Madison, Mayodan, and others.

This community had three small schools in the year of 1919. These were High Point, Rough, and Poor House. These schools were overcrowded, and more children were becoming of school age. It

was too far for a number of the children to walk to either of these schools, and there was no transportation of any kind provided.

The parents were concerned about their children's education. A group contacted Mr. Fay Reynolds and the School Board to see if they could get another school, one large enough to teach high school and elementary, as some of the boys and girls were ready for high school, and had no transportation to Stuart or Critz. Mr. Reynolds advised that the county did not have the funds to build a school; community would give their time and labor to do the work, the county would give three acres of land, which included the baseball diamond, and also the timber that had to be cut, sawed, hauled, and sawed at the mill, then, hauled again to the building. The men agreed and gathered their saws, axes, and wedges, and began to work. The women also had a part in the construction of the school. They cooked hot lunches and walked several miles to carry the food to the men and boys who were working.

When the logs were ready to go to the saw mill, which had been placed on the county property operated by Berkley Gray and Haymon Nowlin, they took their wagons and team to haul the logs, then the lumber. Some of the men were Ernest Gilbert, Hugh Nowlin, Fred Fulcher, Ed Gregory, George Nowlin, Will Nowlin, Jim Nowlin, Charlie Blackard and Ester Handy. Others who helped were, Harby Shelton and boys, Sam Shelton and boys, Millard Gunter and boys, and Riley Blackard and boys. All the men in the community helped in one way or the other to get the school built.

The carpenters who gave their time and skill were, Tim Fulcher, Pete Newman, Jim Newman, Arthur Newman and Bob Hazelwood. Again, many more gave of their time and labor to get the school built. It was not completed when it opened, but finished within the next two years. The most faithful workers were Mr. Arthur Newman and Mr. Bob Hazelwood. All the labor was free and no one received any pay.

The building was a two story structure. On the first floor there were four classrooms, a cloak room at the end of the hall, and two stairways led to the large auditorium. It also had a porch on the front. The question then was-- What will it be named? Since the building was located on the ground

where the games were played, Mr. Reynolds said there was no other name except "Big A".

The school opened in October, 1921, with three teachers. Kate Fulcher taught the two years of high school; Zula Hamby and Essie Shockley were the grade school teachers. The primary room was so crowded that a fourth teacher Ellie Blackard, was called. Four teachers continued to teach for four years, the duration of high school.

At the end of four years, a bus came to Big A and carried the high school students to Hardin Reynolds Memorial School at Critz. This resulted in a three teacher school for the term 1925-1926. Three teachers taught there for sometime and then several of the large families in the community moved away, then only two teachers were needed. Sometime later, one of the school rooms was used for the Home Demonstration Club. They held their meeting there and had a stove to use since cooking and ironing were taught by the H. D. agent, Miss Bundy. This room was used as a lunch room during the school term. Mrs. Artie Handy was the manager, and with the help of some of the girls, lunch was served for a period of two to three years.

About the year 1941, the enrollment was so small the school had only one teacher, and contin-

ued to have only one until 1949, when a school bus came by the school and carried the 7th grade to Stuart school. Later that session, all the grades were taken to Stuart, closing the school completely. This was the beginning of the 30th school term.

Miss Zula Hamby taught the first year the school opened and also the last year, making a total of 17 years she taught at Big A school. Other teachers were:

Ethel Ayers, Alma Ayers, Charlie Sheppard, Billy Clark, Elsie Gilbert, Mabel Griggs, Mrs. W. Moore, Myrtle Vernon, Ethel Vernon, Elizabeth Clanton, Frank Gilbert, Iris Clark Joyce, Agnes Vernon, Virginia Morehead, Grace Powell, Hattie Sue Clark, Clara Harbor, Millie Gilbert, Era Stovall, Elva Shockley, Una Newman Eunice Wood, Fairy Ayers, Mollie Clark and Nancy Shelton. Note Miss Elsie Gilbert, Mrs. Clara Harbor Freeman, and Hattie Sue Clark attended the reunion.

Substitute teachers were: O. Ayers, Edith Sheppard, Pearl Frances, and Irene Martin. Rue Flippin taught summer school.

On November 8, 1950, the school and land were sold at auction in front of the Patrick County Courthouse in Stuart. Ernie Hazelwood purchased this property, and presently owns the school and surrounding grounds.