

Student Betsy Stewart Née Robinson

I started attending LCPS when I was 6 and in the first grade. Between 1951 and 1963. I attended Bull Run Mountain Elementary, Banneker Elementary and graduated from Douglass High. My family lived near Aldie on New Mountain Road (Route 631), two doors down from the school. In fact, my grandfather (Albert Hall) donated the parcel of land where LCPS erected the school. The school sat on the east slope of Bull Run Mountain on New Mountain Road. I walked to school. All of my classmates walked to Bull Run Mountain and lived within a couple miles of the school. Some of my classmates lived in the communities of Bowmantown (east of New Mountain Road) and Deep Hollow off Buchanan Gap Road (Route 764). The students that lived in Bowmantown would take Bluegrass Lane which came out on New Mountain Road just down from the school house (a trip of about 0.5 miles). Though I had the easiest walk to school (two doors down from the school house), the students from Bowmantown had the next easiest walk. Those living in Deep Hollow had the longest walk. 'As the crow flies' the distance between Deep Hollow and the school is not that far. However, that route would have students walking through steep wooded terrain. The safest route was Deep Hollow lane to Buchanan Gap Road and then take New Mountain Road north to the school house. Those students living in Deep Hollow had the longest walk (about 1.5 miles). The school was one room, divided into two sections. It had two teachers and a principal. One teacher taught lower grades in one section and another teacher taught higher grades in the other section. It had two outhouses (one for boys and one for girls), no running water and was heated by a coal burning stove. I attended the school from the 1st through the 5th grade (1951/1952 - 1955/1956). Then, I rode a bus to Banneker in St. Louis for my 6th and 7th grades (1956/1957 - 1957/1958). Bull Run Mountain school continued to offer grades 1 - 5 until it closed in 1958/1959. After that all of its students rode a bus to Banneker. About 30 of us rode a bus to Banneker for the years that I attended Banneker. New Mountain and the roads around Bowmantown and Deep Hollow. were all narrow, rough gravel and dirt roads. The bus would make stops, picking up students along New Mountain Road and the roads around Bowmantown and Deep Hollow. The ride along these roads was always bumpy. The bus would leave New Mountain Road and take Route 50 west through the towns of Aldie and Middleburg to St. Louis Road (Route 611). The bus would travel north on St. Louis Road until it reached Banneker Elementary. St. Louis Road was a gravel road then. The bus made no stops along Route 50 but may have picked up a student or two along St. Louis Road. The route was approximately 14 miles one way. Route 50 was paved and would be plowed free of snow in the winter. The gravel roads of New Mountain and the roads around Bowmantown and Deep Hollow (accounting for about 4 miles of the route) seemed to be the last plowed, if at all. That said, the bus never got stuck or had a mechanical failure or a flat tire. It was not a new bus but was in fairly good condition and was heated in the winter. The bus driver was an adult, though I don't remember his name. In the beginning, attending Banneker was a little intimidating. It was a large school compared to Bull Run Mountain and had more than one room. Furthermore, I was far away from home. Before those two years were up though, I became comfortable taking the bus to the larger Banneker Elementary. I began attending Douglass High in 1958/1959 and graduated in 1963. During my five years at Douglass High I had a student bus driver who also attended Douglass. He lived in Deep Hollow and would start his route from his home. Once again, the bus would make the stops along the 4 bumpy miles of New Mountain Road and the roads around Bowmantown and Deep Hollow (which were still rough, narrow, gravel roads). About 30 students would board the bus before it turned east on Route 50, then north on Route 15 into Leesburg and Douglass High

School. The route was about 17 miles one way. Routes 50, 15 and the streets of Leesburg would be plowed free of snow in the winter. Still, the roads in my neighborhood along New Mountain Road and those roads around Bowmantown and Deep Hollow were the last plowed, if at all. Once again, this bus never got stuck, had a mechanical failure or a flat tire. The bus was not new but in fairly good condition and was heated in the winter. The student bus driver would drop us off at Douglass, park the bus and then attend class. His name was Albert Stewart and in 1965 we married. We remained married for 30 years until his death in 1996. We raised one daughter in a house we built on a plot of land next door to the old Bull Run Mountain Elementary school. By then, it had been purchased and today is private property.¹

¹ From August 23, 2021 interview with former LCPS Student Michael Clark conducted by Nathan Bailey