

Education Tradition

Murray State University was founded in 1924, as an institute for training teachers. It was known as Murray State Normal School. Until the new university building was finished (now Wrather Hall), classes met in the first floor of Murray High School. In its coverage of the new institution, The Paducah News Democrat of Sunday, January 13, 1924, asked Rainey T. Wells about the history of the public school in Murray.

Among the very first settlers in the area were men of high educational culture, who had come from Virginia or North Carolina into the new world of Kentucky to make their homes, and they brought a real desire for education with them, which was sustained in later years. The names of such teachers as Fruit, Sturgis, Brown, and Nold stood in those days for the very best to be found in education, and most of the teachers who came to Calloway were brought from Harvard, Yale, or the other larger Eastern universities in existence then.

These men who were rich in the scholarship of the old school came to Murray, and even in my time I remember one of them, old Professor Hamlin, who was the most cultured scholar and learned teacher I have ever known.

The seeds for a fruitful background of education were sown here three-quarters of a century ago for it so happened that our early settlers, the MacElraths, the Joneses, Curds, Rowlette, Stubblefields, and the others, were filled with the educational spirit. though Paducah outstripped Murray in wealth, in commercial growth, and in importance as a city, Murray never lost her devotion to the highest educational standards.

It was hard, of course, in the midst of frontier difficulties to keep up this standard, and some of the teachers used to have a rough time. They even tell the story of one Yale man brought here to teach who, the first time he ever rode a mule, told it to "commence" when he wanted to start, but despite those little hardships the families who came here were able to give their children the best the conditions would allow in education, and the community was off in the right direction for educational leadership from the first.

The first school in Murray was called the Seminary. Later an incorporated board of local men took this school over and changed its name to the Male and Female Institute. Notice this was an incorporated board of only a few men, for that is largely responsible for the success of the school. They were the men and women most deeply rooted in the educational tradition; they knew what the needs of the community were, and they and no one to interfere with them in meeting their needs.

Young people from all over this end of the state came to Murray to school then, and the Institute was the very best West Kentucky had known at that time.

The Institute ran for a great many years, but it was destroyed by fire in 1905, a new building for high and graded school pupils was built the next year. About Christmas of 1920 this building was burned, and the next spring, I believe it was, we built the fine brick building we have now, which the new Normal School students are sharing with those of the high school and grades.