



The Murray Spirit

Remarks made by Roy Weatherly, Former Teacher and Principal of Murray Middle and Murray High, At the Opening of the Murray Middle School Atrium September 12, 2002

The first line of John Greenleaf Whittier's well-known poem reads, "Still sits the schoolhouse ... by the road ..." Few communities can boast of such a rich history and long tradition as do we of the Murray City Schools. This is the 130th year that school children have gathered at the corner of Eighth and Main--once the far western edge of town.

The late Laverne Wallis noted in his research two generations ago that education has always been important to the people of Murray. He identified several small "independently run" schools in the early days of

our town's history, one located on the hill where the Murray Woman's Clubhouse now stands, and another on east Maple that left town for the quieter environs of the Old Salem Road, because of Civil War sentiments.

The first reference I've found to truly "public schools" in Murray is that in 1848 a Dr. Breckenridge became the state's Superintendent of Public Instruction and a concentrated effort was made throughout the state. Public lands were sold and the proceeds given to the counties for "seminaries." Calloway County was allocated two--one at New Concord and the other in Murray, located in the the northwest part of town where Walnut Street dead ends at North Sixth Street at the hilltop. That school was short-lived. I know nothing more than it did not survive the Civil War. The suggestion is that the property was later sold and the funds from that sale served as "seed money" for the well-documented Institute, here at Eighth and Main. As a semi-private school, the trustees committed \$17,000 (then a lavish sum) to what was referred to as "the handsomest building in the Jackson Purchase."

The school year consisted of two five-month terms, one free for local residents and the other, tuition paid, was open. Several locals opted for a "double dose" and non-residents came into town as boarders in nearby homes. We were rightly proud. Yes, there was Male High School in Louisville, but we had the Murray *Male and Female* Institute. Even then we were forward looking and progressive, setting the pace. But we were not radical. As the east entrance still indicates, there was a girls' entrance, and at the west, a boy's entrance.

In 1904, the state's educational system was once again revamped. We became the Murray Graded School District-in a new facility, the Institute building having been destroyed by fire. The importance of the Murray Male and Female Institute cannot be overstated. In their book on

local history, the late Edna and Kerby Jennings make many references to this. I was particularly caught by their suggestion of an elusive, but nonetheless real, characteristic—a unique quality, indeed a spirit, that existed within the Institute. It produced the generation that would rally behind Rainey T. Wells and lead to the location of Murray State here—literary here, at Eighth and Main, as their first classes were held in the third building to be built on this campus to serve our youth, now the East Wing of Murray Middle School.

We were among the first schools in West Kentucky to be fully accredited by the Southern Association, the first in Kentucky to have Drivers' Education, we were the leader with Head Start, the first in this area to move toward the innovative middle school concept, the first to have a national championship marching band, the first to be a nationally honored secondary school, and the list goes on.

Even in hard times, the Murray Schools have moved forward. My grandfather's name is on the cornerstone of the East Wing of this building. I'm even more proud to see his name on the plaque in the west wing, for that addition was added during the Great Depression. Oh, how bold they were! Always optimistic, always looking forward.

Allow me this personal aside. Several of you here tonight are better informed and more qualified than I to speak of the Murray City Schools, but none, I dare say, more willing to do so. For 92 consecutive years, someone in my family has been enrolled in the Murray City Schools. I've been told that this has prompted more than one teacher to re-read the Old Testament—for a fuller understanding of the Biblical plagues.

Robert Frost said, "Home is the place, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." I like to think of our schools as the place, where, if you get to go there, you know they'll take you in. Fond memories—strong ties. Theologians may speak of the Trinity and World War II historians of the Big Three. I think our community has been shaped by three also ... the families, the churches, and this school.

To borrow from yet another author, I don't know "of cabbages and kings," but I do know of the U.S. congressman, the lieutenant governor, the astronaut, the nationally-recognized publisher, the heads of several major medical centers, the university professors, the accepted voice of leadership in our state's department of education, doctors, lawyers, bankers, businessmen and businesswomen, and countless good, hard-working, tax-paying citizens (moms and dads) who walked these halls and sacrificed so that their children could enjoy the better education inherent in the Murray City Schools.