

Olive Branch School Rededicated



Written by Paul Collins

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History, Kurt Vonnegut once observed, is merely a list of surprises.

Clark County residents added to the list on Jan. 17 with the rededication of Olive Branch School, the little, round building at 9710 West National Road. It was a ceremony that was a 137 years in the making and included Representative Ross McGregor and Senator Chris Widener among its attendants. Both officers and committee members of the Olive Branch School Preservation Society were also on hand to celebrate their successful efforts to see the building receive recognition from the Ohio Historical Society as a National Historical Site.

"We're making history by saving history," Olive Branch School Preservation Society Chairperson William Berry explained to the audience. "That's what the Olive Branch Preservation Society is all about."



Former students

and staff were also present to witness the preservation of a significant part of their past. Charlene Flora, a teacher and the last principal to serve at Olive Branch School before it was closed to students, did not let her confinement to a wheelchair prevent her from putting in an appearance. Martha Hahn, a 100-year-young 1927 graduate, also came and took the podium to share her enthusiasm and gratitude.

"Well, I can truthfully say that it is indeed a privilege to find that our school will be preserved," Hahn said. "The committee has done a wonderful job. And I have worried for many, many years for fear it would be torn down. And I could not see that beautiful school torn down. Traveling all over the United States, I have never found another building that looks like it."

Hahn's fears were finally put to rest at the Rededication ceremony. According to Barbara A. Powers, head of the Ohio Historical Society's Inventory and Registration Department, the building was well-maintained during its years of use as a district warehouse. The building will now act as a district board office, archival center, and museum.

"I'm thankful," Hahn said. "I'm thankful over and over that our good old school building is going to be preserved. Thanks to all of you."

Don Wallace was also pleased to see the building saved from the ravages of time. Wallace attended Olive Branch School for seven years and his father, William Park Wallace, was a member of the first

graduating class of the 1880s.

"It's so pleasing to see our school preserved," said Wallace. "It's like a beacon to me when I come home."

Olive Branch School is not just a beacon for Wallace; it has been a center of learning and instruction since 1873, when the doors were opened for grades four through eight. In 1880, Olive Branch welcomed high school classes to its fold with the introduction of seven students and one teacher. The growth continued and four years later, the high school became a four-year institution. The year 1908 became a watershed moment when students left the rooms of the common building far behind occupied a new building.

Five short years later, tragedy struck with the Nov. 10 fire that destroyed the building. The story of Olive Branch, however, was far from complete. The building was rebuilt and providing educational services just one short year later.

A new installment in the school's story unfolded in 1928 when a new building was constructed. For four decades the building would provide an important and integral part of many young people's educational journey. Finally, the 1970s saw the building permanently closing its doors to students.

While the building went onto to serve the role of a district warehouse, the tenacious and determined among the community and former students and staff refused to allow the little, round school to go quietly into obscurity. The efforts of the Olive Branch School Preservation Society paid off when the building was recognized as a National Historical Site. Powers honored the society's work on Olive Branch School's behalf by presenting Berry with an Outstanding Achievement Certificate.

"What a wonderful way to preserve that building and make it exist here for many, many more years to come," Berry said.



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100-year-old Martha Hahn (Olive Branch Class of 1927) thanks the committee and community for saving her school

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