

Midway School And Beyond

By Robert H. Burch – July 2019

This short narrative is as much about a single individual who was once a teacher (Vada Coiner Foster) at the Midway School, as it is about the place itself called Midway School. During the period of my affiliation with Midway School, even before and after that time, Vada Foster was the face and personality of Midway School. There were other teachers prior to Vada but none during my attendance. I believe Emma Wyant was, at one time, a Midway School teacher. For reader information, Emma and husband Tom, daughter Althea and son Tommy were once close neighbors and lived about one quarter of a mile from the Burch farm. I could write a whole story about the Wyant family but if I do, I will save it for another time. One other teacher at Midway School, but again not during my enrollment, will be discussed in more length later in the story. For those readers of this story and who have knowledge of this former public education facility, your memory might be somewhat stimulated by the contents. If so, that would be good but I doubt you will learn very much new information about this former public education institution. If, on the other hand, you've never heard of Midway School and are discovering it for the first time, you will likely learn some things about this former tiny and unique education facility of its day called Midway School. Read on and you will find where it was located and much more about it.

Midway School at Midway, Virginia when I attended there in the middle 1940s was a grade's one through four elementary education facility of Albemarle County. Until I began collecting material from which to use preparing this story, I apparently had overlooked or forgotten that the Midway School building about which I am writing and the one which I attended, is a second, probably a third, generation school building for the Midway School. Bear with me and I will explain what I mean about school building generations. Assuming my logic is

correct, there were definitely two separate school buildings on this same acreage, both known as Midway School. However, two buildings may have existed prior to the school building that became operational in 1930. That is the opening date of the building in which I attended grades one through four and is the subject and focus of my story. Later in my story I will share the reason for beginning school in the second grade. This vintage little cracker box of a building is the same one room, four grade schoolhouse about which I am writing. I have Linda Burton of Port Saint Lucie, Florida, to thank for calling much of this school building history to my attention. During the writing of this Midway School story, I was often in contact with Linda, acquiring as much information as she could funnel to my attention. By way of identifying Linda, she is the youngest of the three daughters of Gordon and Mildred Burton. She also has quite an interested in the history and genealogy of the Midway area. The Burton family were longtime residents of the little hamlet community called Midway, Virginia. Linda was reared in Midway before moving on to obtain education degrees for a university teaching career in the state of Maryland. She did not attend Midway School, although both of her older siblings, Jean and Ann did attend there. I believe Midway School had closed by the time Linda became of age to enroll there. Linda and Jean have both shared historical information that I have utilized in writing this project about Midway School. Documentation supplied by them is attached to this story. Linda provided a photograph of the 1919-1920 Midway School class. That Midway School class is one hundred years old this year. Her father and my mother are both pictured in this photograph. This class picture provides substantial evidence that a separate and much larger Midway School building existed prior to the building I knew as Midway School. Obviously, from the numbers and sizes of students in the photograph and their apparent ages, indicate a much larger school building than the one classroom building I remember. That evidence alone confirms there was a larger school building, perhaps as many as six grades or more, than the one where I was a student. Linda also

provided a copy of an artist drawing of the Midway School building after it was closed and had been converted into a residential dwelling for the Burton family. It was Gordon Burton, the girl's father, who purchased this school building as surplus from the Albemarle County, Virginia Board of Education and completely renovated it into the family home. The elder Burton's and three daughters Jean (Holland) mow of Mechanicsburg, Pa., Ann (Hodges) and Linda lived there for a significant period of time. Jean and middle daughter Ann both attended the 1930 edition of the Midway School. As previously noted, Linda did not attend Midway School. Daughter Ann, who was living in Decatur, Ga., passed away in January 2009.

I am very aware of a number of repetitious comments in this story. Some of the repetition is intentional and some of it is because of my poor literary skills. Please excuse such repetitious remarks and comments appearing in these pages of text. I have purposely repeated some pieces of information for the sake of clarity and emphasis. Some are repeated because I am not a professional writer and don't know better.

According to information Linda had previously learned from her older family members (i.e. father and mother) years earlier, three separate school buildings did likely exist in the entire history of Midway School. All of these structures were known as Midway School. That is indicative of the probability three separate classroom buildings did exist at different times and occupied the same general parcel of land. I have absolutely no information about Midway School building number one. There is no information available to me about building size, classroom(s) or ages and numbers of students. There were third and fourth generation residents of Midway and surrounding areas. They surely attended school somewhere and I am assuming it was another Midway School. The second Midway School building is the one evidenced by the 1919-1920 class picture Linda Burton provided. The

third Midway School building is the one about which I write and is represented by the sketch and brochure provided by Linda and her sister Jean, respectively. This is the one classroom with four grades, dating from 1930. As far as I am aware, prior school buildings were apparently demolished and all evidence of their existence removed from the property. There was no evidence of earlier buildings, such as foundations or other structural indications noted when I attended school there. This third school building, the one erected in 1930, is what I personally remember as Midway School where I attended during the 1943-1946 time period. I attempted to obtain accurate and complete information on this Midway School subject. On several occasions, I telephonically contacted an official from the Albemarle County Board of Education in Charlottesville, Virginia to confirm what I had already learned about the Midway School. This official advised that he could not be more definitive regarding the Midway School issue. He said all records, historical data and related materials pertaining to the Midway School were stored in the archives of the school board. This official did confirm that there had once been a Midway School in Albemarle County. Having no immediate access to archived material and living hundreds of miles from the archive site in Charlottesville, Albemarle County, Virginia, I could not further pursue this vital resource. I was therefore, unable to obtain absolute dates when any of the above occurred. Based on what is revealed in documentation provided by the Burton sisters, only certain things are apparent to me. First, there was likely three, two for sure, Midway School buildings with the latest opening in 1930 and closing for the last time in the very early 1950's. Further, Midway School was a unit of the Albemarle County education system until it's closing during early 1950's. The photographs, artist drawings and real estate brochure literature, with descriptions, provided by the Burton siblings, are copied and explained in the last pages of this story.

To any who read this story, many questions will no doubt arise about the historical assumptions of Midway School. There is so much I was unable to nail down precisely. Because of that fact, I may have raised many more questions than I could successfully answer. Some may wonder where the school was located. Others might ask what the environment and conditions were like in the middle 1940's in a tiny one door, single classroom four grade elementary school? Yet, others might ask why it doesn't exist today and what are the reason(s) for it closing its door? Hopefully, most of these issues will be addressed, in one form or another, to your satisfaction. Moving on, yes, "door"; is what I wrote; did you catch my descriptive reference to the schoolhouse entrance? There was only the one door from the outside and the exact same one exiting the building. How unsafe was that? Remember throughout the story, this will be a one door, one classroom and four grade elementary school where, during my tenure, some 25-30 students annually began or continued their formal education experiences for four years. Discussions of these thoughts may answer many of the questions about the institution I knew as Midway School. I believe you will have a much better understanding of what it was like in the 1940's as I and others who contributed remember it.

Here I am guessing again. Due to declining enrollment, building maintenance costs, changing population dynamics, school's consolidating and probably a host of other factors, Midway School closed its single door, literally, and ceased to exist as an education facility. I am certain the building and land upon which it stood remained idle for some period of time. Eventually, it was declared as surplus property by the county board of education. The school building and parcel of land was purchased by Gordon and Mildred Burton, as previously stated. Gordon Burton was a very skilled and quite competent carpenter and builder in the Midway community. He and members of his extended relatives were multi-generational in the Midway settlement. During his work career he constructed numerous

buildings and structures throughout Albemarle County and adjacent areas. As previously noted, Burton converted the interior of the small but cavernous Midway School classroom building into a redesigned and multi-room family residence. The interior of the building became bi-level, with bedrooms, other rooms, a screened porch and a single bathroom. The family lived in this redesigned structure for a number of years. Burton added substantially to the exterior, including a large bonus room and screened back porch. A sketch of this dwelling and a real estate brochure, provided by the Burton sisters Jean and Linda, are attached to this story. The appearance of the Midway School building as I remember it, does not resemble closely the building depicted in the attached sketch and brochure.

Geographically, where was the Midway School(s) located? But first, exactly where is that little hamlet of Midway, Virginia and where is the school in relationship to this community? Those questions are relatively simple and easy to answer. The school and a small country grocery market, was essentially all that comprised the Midway community in the 1930's and 1940's. There were, of course, a number of scattered residential homes in the area. They remain there today; the grocery market and school are gone. For those who may have an interest, I have written a short story about Pugh's Store, that small country market in Midway that I referenced. The store is gone and the school has been converted into a dwelling. The Midway settlement is located in the extreme western section of Albemarle County, Virginia. Midway is almost halfway between Crozet and Batesville, Virginia, hence the name Midway. Albemarle County is in rural central Virginia and Midway is nestled snugly near the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Travelling west, about 15 miles or so, from the county seat of Charlottesville, on US Highway 250, exit south on Virginia State Road 635, or locally known as the Miller School road. In approximately 5 to 6 miles the traveler will arrive in and immediately pass through Midway. Where the store was located is now a grove of trees and other

vegetation. The old Midway School building is slightly north and adjacent to this plot of ground where the store once stood. Now that you know where Midway is located, I still recommend GPS assistance if you are going there for the first time.

My roots are deep in Midway soil, having been born in November 1936, on a 250-acre farm one mile from the Midway settlement and Midway School. I lived in the Midway community, on this farm or nearby, for the next 17 years. My heart is still there after all these years away from there. Our farm, the Burch farm, is where I grew to adolescence with parents Virginia and Richard and sister Betty. She was a four-year student at Midway School. After that I lived with my Foster grandparents at Midway Farm. Following the year with them I boarded at and attended the Miller School of Albemarle. I graduated from that institution in June 1954. None of these places were no more than one to four miles from Midway and Midway School. They were all in the country and I was definitely a country boy. I dearly loved those years. Based upon my birth location and the fact I lived on the farm there my early years, I was destined to be a student at this tiny one room, four grades school with the single door. The teacher at Midway School, all during my enrollment, was an exceptional and noteworthy individual. She was definitely a multi-tasking and multi-talented individual. In addition to being my mother's first cousin (my second cousin) Vada Foster had to have proven skills and abilities to manage and teach four grades in a single classroom. I am not sure she was ever adequately recognized or credited for accomplishing such a feat. Vada will be mentioned and featured many times throughout this Midway School story. My hope is that by the end of this presentation about Midway School, readers will have gained a greater sense of appreciation and importance for what she meant to the Midway School students. Not only was she a good teacher and strong disciplinarian, Vada was a great human being and surrogate parent to many different personalities for at least eight hours every school day.

Historically speaking, prior to Vada Foster teaching at Midway School there were others in the life of this school. In preparing this story, I learned there was a teacher for one or two years named Isabel Dunn. I did not know Isabel at the Midway School; I did know her well when I enrolled at Greenwood High School in the fifth grade after leaving the Midway School. She was my sixth-grade teacher at Greenwood. I believe Isabel roomed at Vada's home, and likely boarded there as well. There were no public eating establishments within miles of Midway. For information, before consolidation of schools in Albemarle County, there were seven high schools scattered throughout the county. These were all grades one through eleven. Midway School students, after completing the fourth grade, enrolled at Greenwood. This school consolidation occurred about the early part of the 1950's. This is about when Midway School would have closed its door for the final time as an education facility. So, school consolidation then, in the decade of the 1950's, is what doomed the Midway School.

My personal affiliation with the Midway School did not begin as it should have at the start of a new school year in September. Let me tell you what that's all about. My first personal association with Midway School actually began in June 1943 with the teacher and not the school. This would have been before I was officially enrolled as a student. There was a special reason for this situation. It took place in the home of Midway School teacher Vada Foster. Vada and her husband Dean lived about one half mile or less south and west of the schoolhouse on the Miller School road. Their residence was a little more than a mile from the Burch farm. My first cousin (Willard "Billy" Sisson) was 2 years older than me and about the same age of my sister Betty. Billy lived with his parents in Alexandria, Virginia. His mother, Lucille Burch Sisson, was a sister of my father John R. Burch and my uncle/stepfather Richard H. Burch. As a note of further explanation, after my father John passed away, his brother Richard married my mother and inherited my

sister Betty and me. Cousin Billy, from birth, was afflicted with both mental and physical disabilities. He, being mentally challenged, did not maintain an academic achievement level with his school peers. Vada, knowing Billy and his situation, proposed the idea she could provide individual tutoring to help Billy with his learning disability. In earlier experiences with formal education in Alexandria, Billy had lagged behind and failed to keep up academically. Vada thought perhaps she could help him academically with these issues. My mother and Richard, along with Billy's parents and Vada, all agreed Billy could benefit academically by spending the summer (1943) on the farm and go to Vada's home daily for tutoring.

Billy came to live with us on the Burch farm for that entire summer. Mother and Richard prepared me for the task ahead and informed me before he came, that I was to be with Billy at Vada's home each day for teaching sessions. I was to be his constant companion the entire summer while Vada tutored him. I understood that wherever Billy went that summer I was to go with him. Vada began her part of the agreement starting at the first-grade level. Of course, me being with Billy all of the time, I was there absorbing everything she was attempting to teach him. According to what I was told later, Vada covered all of the first-grade curriculum with Billy in eight weeks. At the completion of the eight weeks of tutoring, she was to administer a test to Billy for determining grade level placement. I was also to receive the same placement test.

As I recall or was later told, the "summer school" sessions with Vada began in early June and did not conclude until the middle of August 1943, about eight weeks. Mother or Richard transported Billy and me daily to Vada's home for the sessions. The lessons usually began around nine and lasted until about one, with breaks. After the work sessions, Vada often prepared lunch, usually consisting of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Mother also may have occasionally

prepared a bag lunch for the two of us. When lunch was concluded, Billy and I then slowly ambled our way the mile plus back to the farm. Often Richard came and transported us back home in the big farm truck.

During this entire tutoring period, I was actively participating in the same identical first grade academic material as Billy. I was learning the same identical first grade material Vada was presenting to my cousin. Vada did test Billy and me for achievement and grade level placement. Unfortunately, test results deemed that Billy had not advanced beyond his enrollment level. My test results indicated I had achieved sufficiently to be placed in grade level two. My mother agreed with Vada's test results and recommendation and I began my formal elementary education in the second grade, in September 1943. In hindsight at age 16, when I graduated high school, I should have begun school in the first grade. If for no other reasons, I would have been the same age as my peers, and maybe a little more mature at graduation. I did return to Miller School for a one-year session and earned a post graduate diploma.

The Midway School campus playground and classroom building of this tiny 20th century one room four grade public education facility was quite unique to my way of thinking. For a school so small the playground was a vast open and partially forested parcel of land. I believe it was slightly more than one and one-half acres. It permitted students opportunities for imaginative and diverse outdoor play and recreation activities. Bats and balls were not allowed by Vada; I am assuming the risk of student injury from a thrown or batted ball or from being struck by a bat was too great to take the chance. We had no playground supervisor or adult overseer; it was just Vada and the students. Midway School had no playground equipment either; no swings, no slide and no merry-go-round. Again, the risk of injury to students was too great and it also may have been too costly to equip a

10

small school with such expensive equipment. There was a thin circle of cement at ground level, maybe twenty-five or so feet in diameter, which served as the dodgeball court. This is where the students played the game of dodgeball. All of us remember dodgeball. For much of the recess time Vada was inside, probably preparing what she was going to teach four grades of children after the recess break. On the playground the boys frequently utilized the wooded area of the campus to build forts and make-believe military camps. The fact that the United States was in the midst of World War II, fighting both in the Pacific and European theatres, likely influenced our play. I would also believe many of the boy students had relatives or close family friends wearing the uniform of an army, navy or marine corps member. I had two uncles, brothers of my mother, who wore the uniform during WW II. For other types of play, there was also jump rope for boys and girls, using either the single rope or the long rope where multiples of students participated. The boy and girl students also participated in both dodgeball and kickball games together at recess times. The girls played jacks at times while the boys shot marbles. Pocket knives were not allowed but occasionally one of the boys had one and if so, we secretly played a game called mumble-de-peg. There was always some activity in which to engage and never enough recess time to complete it. Two recess periods were granted each day; one was called little recess in the morning and the other, the big recess in the afternoon. There was never enough play time. The difference in the two recess periods was the length of time for each. There was about ten minutes plus for the little one and about fifteen minutes plus for the big one. We ate our lunch at our desks and then went outside for big recess. While attending Midway School I do not recall any major playground disagreements, arguments, altercations, fighting or disturbances between or among students. We were a harmonious bunch and very even tempered as I remember. This was due as much to the strict code of discipline and behavior enforced by Vada as it was to the overall demeanor of our student population. We all respected each other and

authority (Vada). I personally knew she would inform my mother and Richard if I misbehaved. That punishment would be far more severe than anything Vada would do. I imagine this was the same for all the students. Vada was many things to the students of Midway School. I recall she had students stand every morning, place their hands over the heart and repeat the pledge of allegiance. This is how we began the day. She led us in repeating the pledge. Vada was the teacher, the law enforcer and policy maker, the safety and security person and school nurse, the principal, the care giver and queen of the 12-inch ruler. You will hear more about ruler discipline later in the story. During my enrollment Vada was Midway School and we never questioned, disputed or challenged that fact.

The Midway School building, not large by any means, measured maybe 30-40 feet wide and 70-80 feet in length, if that much. It was situated on the expansive open and wooded plot of ground I just described. Vada utilized available interior space to the maximum and I will attempt to explain that which I remember about the inside of the classroom. Along the east side of the building's interior wall there were a number of large near ceiling to about four feet from the floor windows. These provided the lighting system, our conditioned air system in hot weather and our only view to the outside. These windows were the only means of interior lighting and cooling the classroom in an all-natural manner. There were no other windows in this tiny classroom building. On a dark, dreary and cloudy day, the fourth-grade row of students (along the west interior wall) did not have the natural lighting that was available to the first-grade row of students along the east wall. To reiterate, the large windows on the east wall were the only windows in the entire building. The time period about which I am writing is the very early 1940's and neither residential or commercial electric service had made its way to Midway yet. It wasn't until the decade of the late 1930's and early 1940's that the federal government and President Franklin D. Roosevelt made the Rural Electrification Administration

(REA) program available in many rural areas. Midway was one of them. Installation of electric transmission lines countrywide took much time; the United States was embroiled in a world war on two fronts, the country was just recovering from a major financial crisis (the Great Depressions), electric generation facilities were slow in coming and electricity just had not reached Midway School at that time. Midway School had not yet been electricity blessed.

In addition to no electricity at Midway School during that era, there was also no running water (hot or cold), no water well on the property, no indoor toilets or restroom facilities (no sewage) and no thermostat to regulate for the heating and/or cooling in the classroom building. Think about this; there was no way to immediately summons emergency assistance of any kind, no security and law enforcement services or any easy way to obtain first responder assistance. There was, of course, no telephone service for calling assistance of any kind. That was a few years away. But Midway School survived and we had Vada. We had confidence she would provide whatever we needed. We just went merrily along not thinking about any of those things.

Lighting, as I've noted, was all natural and provided by the light of day coming through the windows on the east wall. But what about other necessary services such as heating, cooling, fresh drinking water and rest room accommodations? The building's so-called cooling was fairly easy; we just raised all the windows on the east wall. Heating was a different story. From the late fall into the early spring the outside temperature in central Virginia could be quite frigid, meaning the inside was also cold. The winters could be extremely cold with ice and snow outside measuring inches per event. In my years at Midway School I do not recall that we had such occasions as snow days, teacher work days, weather related days causing school cancellations or any breaks or excuses for the school not being open. The students could always count on Vada to have the classroom environment nice and cozy and ready

for learning, regardless of the outside weather conditions. To heat the classroom, when needed, there was a stove, often referred to as a potbelly stove. It was large enough and more than sufficient to heat the classroom. The potbelly stove at Midway School was fueled by coal which was apparently delivered by the county school board. The coal was stored in a shed adjacent to the girl's outdoor toilet. Vada usually had the largest boy in school, most often a fourth-grade student, go to the coal shed, fetch coal in the scuttle and bring it inside. I was never the largest boy in school so this was one task I was spared from performing. I remember that Vada did not allow any of the students to come near the stove when it was burning coal. The metal stove often glowed when the fuel was burning well. Additional job titles for Vada in addition to all of the others were the building custodian, the janitor and child care specialist. In my years at Midway School no one was ever burned or had any type of serious injury caused by the hot potbelly stove. Our appreciation for Vada was way more than we expressed at the time. On cold days when heat was required, Vada arrived at the school way ahead of the first students. Vada was entrusted each day with caring for and instructing the 20 to 25 children in the school, maybe a few more or less at any one time. She was a very pro-active individual who was always prepared for whatever was to come. She always thought ahead. The fire in the potbelly stove had to be ignited each cold morning; there was no overnight fire as it was too risky. For example, in cold weather she had students collect dry twigs and pine cones during recess periods to build the next day's fire in the stove. This was part of recess activities on a cold day.

The Midway School students were permitted two break periods each day; we called these periods morning recess or little recess and afternoon recess big recess. After lunch we enjoyed big recess. It was during recess periods that we collected kindling to use as a fire starter. Usually big recess is when we collected dry twigs. At that time all the moisture and dew had dried. Her instructions to students are still clear

to me, “now children, remember to bring dry sticks and pine cones with you when you come in” and we all brought those items in and placed them in the large kindling box in the front of the classroom. What would school children say today if their teacher told them to bring fire starting material into the school after a break period? Even the youngest, the first-grade students, collected kindling because they (students) knew Vada was going to build a fire with them to keep us all warm. The potbelly stove, famous in its day and available today in many sizes and models, sat at the very front of the classroom. Vada’s desk sat near enough to the stove for her to be warm but not close enough to be hazardous. When the fire was burning well with sticks and pine cones, small pieces of coal were added in the stove for the remainder of the day. Vada not only had to prepare a fire on cold days but she also cleaned out the “clinkers” or ashes after the fire had burned out. On the playground there were washed out places from rain runoff and this served as our disposal area for the ashes. Fall, winter and early spring days in Virginia can be fire burning days and the old potbelly stove at Midway School was quite often fired up and putting out the heat on cold days. I say again, thank you Vada for what you had to do; you were a jewel and we (students) did not always show appreciation as we should have.

The entry way, and exit also, to the school building, was the single door I spoke about earlier. This door was on the east side of the building. There was a small porch or stoop with 4 or 5 steps from ground level. When the recess periods were concluded, Vada always stood on this small porch and rang a large handheld bell. This bell could be heard over the entire playground. Students were allowed only what seemed like nano-seconds to be inside and seated, ready for learning. If not, they would incur the wrath of Vada. Upon entering the lone door, to and from the building, students encountered a small cloak or coat closet and combination supply and lunch storage area. This space was separated from the classroom by a wall or partition behind the

teacher's desk. There was no "lunch room" at Midway School; each student brought lunch from home in a brown bag. Usually, fancy lunch boxes and book bags or back packs were not yet very fashionable. I should say that I personally never had a back pack and don't remember them being available at the time. This closet space was also where students stowed their coats, jackets and rain gear during school hours. The first stop of the day for students was usually this little anteroom. Adjacent to this small space, and just inside the entrance door, was a wooden stand on which sat the galvanized drinking water container. I can't say water cooler because the water was always room temperature.

Remember, we did not have "running water" or a water well on the school property. So, how did Midway School students obtain their daily drinking water supply? According to that which I recall, and confirmed by lifelong Midway resident Virginia Glen Pugh Grinstead, drinking water was retrieved daily from a small, nearby spring fed pond. This spring was situated several hundred yards from the school, directly behind the home of another lifelong resident, Virginia Carter. Virginia Grinstead advised that drinking water for a number of Midway residents, including Pugh's Store and Midway School, came from this spring. On a daily basis a student or students, again usually one or more of the largest, went to the spring to fetch a pail or pails of water. I was dispatched by Vada on numerous occasions to get water. I also recall on some days we (the students) obtained drinking water from the Dollins family well. Ruth and Marvin Dollins were both students for some of the period about which I am writing. They both completed four grades at Midway School. Dutifully, when assigned, we brought drinking water, from either the spring or the well source, and filled that container by the entryway door. Hopefully, Vada emptied water from the day before and kept the container clean. I do not know how any of this was accomplished. I am not at all certain how Vada may have provided for the students to wash hands during the day; maybe we just did not wash

hands. In today's school climate this would be completely unacceptable.

The interior furnishings of Midway School were simple but adequate and certainly not excessive. These accommodations consisted only of essential items and furnishings, such as the teacher's desk, the stove, and four rows of student desks facing the front (south) wall of the classroom. A small area behind the first two rows of desks served as our library space and a student rest area. No more than 6 to 8 student desks were aligned in each row of desks. Where possible, Vada did not seat male students behind female students. The hair and braids (pigtails) of girl students were too much of a temptation for boys not to do devilish things. The row of desks nearest the windows was reserved for first grade students; the second row for grade two students; the third row was for grade three students and the last row of desks, nearest to the large chalk board affixed on the west wall, was for the fourth-grade students. I don't recall that total annual enrollment was more than 25-30 students in the entire four grades, if that many. On the wall (west) adjacent to the fourth row of desks (fourth grade) hung the large chalk board covering much of the wall. Vada seemed to prefer world maps and hung geography topics on the remainder of the wall past the chalk board. In the northeast corner of the classroom sat several small tables, with child size chairs, resting upon a linoleum carpet. This was a covering for the wooden floor treated with an oil-based substance. Our quaint little library area with the small book cases and shelves were in this area. The shelves were stocked with age related books. This was the entire library for Midway School. The floor surface throughout the entire schoolroom was treated with this oil-based liquid. The floor was recoated or retreated with this substance annually, usually in the summer when the school was not in session. When school opened in September, the odor of the oily substance applied to the floor permeated the building. The linoleum was put down for protecting students (first and second grade) when they lay on

their rugs or mats for an afternoon rest period. I am not sure if afternoon rest was a Vada or school board policy. Who so ever put this policy in place, it was strictly observed? Vada monitored this rest time very closely. The students knew better than to talk, raise heads to look around or do anything other than rest quietly and motionless. My sister Betty can attest to this. Vada had a way of enforcing rules and policies in the classroom. It was called a wooden ruler and she carried it with her everywhere she went. This item was as much a part of Vada's instructional materials as were text books and lesson plans. She was never far from this wooden measuring device. When there was a rule violation or misbehavior of any type, the offender was given the ruler treatment. This meant the offending student would hold out their open hand, palm up or down, place your hand in Vada's hand and be ready to receive several (number varied) severe and hardy whacks with the ruler. The student offender always seemed to remember the ruler method of discipline. These were not light whacks at times and the severity depended upon how much Vada's instructions had been ignored or violated. Normally, the student offender remembered the ruler and did not misbehave again. This "corporal punishment" was not forgotten quickly. The "wrathful ruler" struck when needed but never to excess. Can you imagine the fallout if something of this nature occurred in today's school environment? The slightest provocation brought on the whacks with the ruler. As best as I can remember, serious offenses and violations never occurred. I was the recipient of the ruler on several occasions, as well as my sister. Sister Betty, who was supposedly resting on a desk bench seat, kept wiggling, squirming and making the desk squeak. Vada said to her that "you are disturbing" other students. She asked my sister several time to lay still and rest. She emphasized to my sister the squeaking desk was disturbing other children. My sister kept moving, ignoring Vada's warning and making this disturbing noise. Finally, Vada came to my sister and told her to hold out her hand. Vada then applied the ruler several times to the back of her hand. My sister became motionless after this and the

matter was resolved. This method of discipline was not unusual at Midway School; a number of students could have confirmed its effectiveness. I am one of those who could. Vada's ruler discipline was well respected, affective and remembered by all students. She applied it equally; it did not matter that you were a cousin.

Foster Wray Morse, my first cousin, was also once a student at Midway School. He had a rather unusual and interesting explanation for becoming enrolled there. Let me share with you his story as he related it to me. His mother Lois Foster Morse and my mother Virginia Foster Burch were siblings. Foster Wray and I were grandsons of Robert W. and Maymie C. Foster. They owned, farmed and lived at Midway Farm, less than two miles from the Midway School. Foster Wray lived with his parents Lois and Alfred (Hinkie) in Portsmouth, Virginia. This particular section of the tidewater Virginia area was heavily vested with U.S. military organizations and commands. It was also the headquarters for several military groups. Specifically, located in the tidewater area was the huge Portsmouth Naval Hospital, the Norfolk Naval Operating Base, with ships and sailors galore, the Naval Air Station, with gobs of sailors and airplanes and the Naval Amphibious Base at Little Creek, Virginia. Across Hampton Roads lay the sprawling Langley Air Force Base complex in the Hampton and Newport News, Virginia areas. It was during the latter stages of World War II (WWII), that Foster Wray was a student at Midway School. It came about due to the disruptive, disturbing, threatening, fearful and frequent noises and sounds of military activity in the area. There was an abundance of military noises in the area and his parents and grandparents agreed it would be beneficial for Foster Wray to move temporarily to a quieter and less disruptive environment at Midway Farm. They deemed that attending Midway School would be much more conducive to learning. Apparently, the constant airplane noises, sirens, air raid warnings and other loud annoying military noises were stressful for many school age children in the area. They became sleep and rest deprived which was

19

affecting school performance and participation. It was apparently not conducive to learning. Foster Wray shared that his parents were gravely concerned for him living as a young boy in this active military location. They moved him away from it, to the farm near the tiny remote hamlet community of Midway, Virginia, several hundred miles from the military complexes. Foster Wray, younger than I by a grade, attended Midway School for a portion of two school years in 1944 and 1945. Recalling his enrollment at Midway School, I believe he was a student there during this period of time. He enrolled at Midway School after the 1944 school year had begun and he remained as a student on into a part of the next school year. I am uncertain, as is he, about his exact enrollment dates.

As first cousins, he and I had been close pals and playmates whenever we were together. We did not see each other that often. This close relationship continued after he enrolled at Midway School. His first day at school, he sought a desk that was near me in the adjacent row of seats. It did not take Vada long to decide that Foster Wray's seating choice was not going to work. With me being a year older and maybe wiser, Vada quickly changed his seating arrangement. She separated us so we could not talk and distract other students. We had a lot of catching up to do and Vada wanted us to do it outside of the school. Vada, being the wise and astute teacher, dealt immediately with this budding issue and moved Foster Wray several desks away. In thinking about this situation, I am almost certain that the "wrathful ruler" must have played some role for me in bringing all of this to a conclusion. Without remembering specifically, I would be almost sure Vada gave me whacks for not listening. Foster Wray also shared with me other of his experiences and episodes while attending Midway School. An experience he related involved him and one of grandfather Foster's gentle work horses. He said that grandfather Foster, whom we called "daddy" Foster, occasionally allowed him to ride this particular farm work horse to school. At that time, about 1944-1945, my

grandfather still used draft animals to perform work in his farm fields. Foster Wray offered that on these few occasions of riding this particular work horse to school he came upon other Midway School students walking to school. He said he asked them if they wanted to ride with him on horseback. If they said "yes", he steered the horse into a roadside ditch or against an embankment. There the walking student(s) climbed aboard the horse and rode the remainder of the way to school. Foster Wray remembers arriving at school with as many as three students, including himself, astride the old work horse. He said he tied the horse in a stable-like structure near Pugh's Store, probably Mr. Pugh's garage. After school, he rode the horse back to Midway Farm, usually alone, but if a student needed a ride, he obliged them. The unusual thing about this situation was his age; only 7 or 8 years old. Can you imagine parents today sending an 8-year-old student to school riding a horse? He also remembered many of the things at Midway School about which I have written in this story.

I promised earlier to discuss or explain, with no indoor toilet facilities or plumbing, how personal hygiene needs for students and teacher were met at Midway School. Here I will try to do just that. Remember, there was no running water and no indoor plumbing or restroom facilities. To take care of those needs, both the boys and girls had separate outdoor toilets. These were rather large outdoor toilets, separated by some distance on the campus. The boy's outdoor toilet was further from the classroom building and sat partially obscured in a wooded area of the campus. The girl's outdoor toilet, identical in all aspects to the boy's facility, was closer to the school building. It was adjacent to the storage or utility shed used to store tools, maintenance items and coal for the stove inside the classroom. Both the boy and girl outdoor toilets were of the three-hole variety, that is, they could accommodate up to three students at one time. There isn't anything more to say about an outdoor toilet. I suppose the county school board provided toilet paper for student use; I simply do not remember even if

I ever knew. This I do remember very clearly, in the boy's toilet I occasionally noted there was a large catalogue, either from Montgomery Ward or Sears Roebuck. Pages were torn from this catalogue and rarely do I remember toilet paper being available. I have no additional comments to make about this subject.

Here's a funny little story within the story and the joke is entirely on me. I believe I was in the second grade, maybe third, at this particular time. The boy students were engaged in serious recess play when we were in the "fort" we had built in the wooded area of the campus. One of my so called "responsibilities" in the fort as the chief guard was to maintain security in the camp; guard the camp so to speak. This really meant keeping the girl students away from and out of the boundary of the fort area. Readers all well remember the "boy-girl" challenges and competitions at that age. I suppose they have not changed one bit in all these years. Well, in order to recruit guard helpers in protecting the camp I appointed several other boy students to be guards as well. I wrote on pieces or slips of paper the names and title of the students for this assignment. I wrote, for example, Bobby Burch, god; David Shaver, god; Marvin Dollins, god, etc., etc. But, as you can see, I incorrectly spelled the word guard. Vada, somehow, obtained or came in possession of the slip of paper with my name and title god on it. At the following recess period, Vada excused all students except, well you know who (me). She said, "Bobby, I want to talk with you" in a stern voice. I know I must have thought "what have I done now". I am sure I was nervous and scared out of my wits, not knowing what it was she wanted to talk about. After all the students were outside, Vada confronted me with the paper slip containing my name and the word god written on it. She asked me a lot of questions about it; why had I written this on the slip of paper and what did it mean? She grilled me and gave me the "third degree" so to speak. She acted like I had been profane and vulgar. Vada really made me feel afraid and in a lot of trouble. All of this time I was terrified. I was pretty frightened by her

insinuations and just knew I was in trouble with mother and Richard. I feared that more than anything Vada would do. I explained to Vada, as best as I could, my purpose and intention in writing as I did on the slip of paper. Vada used my explanation as a “teaching moment” and I learned how to use and spell the two words correctly. She taught me the meaning and spelling of the words God and guard. To this day I have not forgotten this little episode which was big at the time. I still believe today that I lost or misplaced the slip of paper and one of the girl students found it. I think they turned it in to Vada. They (the girls), gave it to her for spite to get even with the boys for not letting them come into the fort. After this confrontation by Vada, I never heard another word about this little incident. If my mother and Richard found out they did not say anything to me.

Margie Grinstead Houchins, a former Midway School student in my grade, recalled a cute story very worthy of including in this written account of days at Midway School. In that era, school bullying was a phenomenon that simply did not exist. Margie’s story reminds me of a behavior so prevalent in today’s school environment. It was unheard of in our Midway School setting. The Herbert Grinstead family lived adjacent to the school campus. The Grinsteads had a flock of chickens including a rather feisty old rooster. Every afternoon, it seems, the rowdy rooster knew when school was dismissed. He always met Margie and older sister Marie as they were on their way home. Their house was just beyond the edge of the campus. It appeared to Margie the rooster knew when they would be walking home. According to her, the rooster was frequently in a bad mood and wanted to go on the offensive. This bird was in a bullying state of mind and wanted to be assertive towards two girls. After a rather severe encounter, the girls told their father about the rooster’s behavior. They suggested to their father that he get rid of the rooster. He was a menace and needed to be removed. Mr. Grinstead

responded the rooster was not a bad bird and would stay with the flock. He made it clear he was going to keep the rooster. One day, not long after this conversation with their father, the rooster attacked him as it had the girls. Apparently, that was the final straw. After that, the rooster made it to the Grinstead dinner table as the main course for that meal. This was a funny story and the nearest example of bullying at Midway School I could find. At Midway School we did not have any students that picked on or bullied any other students. It was just never heard of in that day and time.

It was a cold, windy and blustery day; but sunny and bright in February 1944 or 1945. I am not as certain of the date as I am about the event I am going to describe. Anyway, it was a very cold winter day. I had stayed the night before with my Foster grandparents. My cousin Foster Wray was living there then and attending Midway School. My grandmother offered to take us the mile plus to school. We declined the offer, saying we were big boys and we wanted to walk. She bundled us up as snugly as possible and we started out walking to school. When we had gotten to the mail box I knew we had made the wrong decision. It was cold and the wind felt like it was piercing the exposed flesh. Pride crept in and we kept going towards school. By the time we arrived near the Burton house, I came very close to going in to get warm. By this time, Foster Wray had gone on ahead of me, apparently in a hurry to get to the schoolhouse. I was trying to catch up with him. The faster I walked it seemed he walked even faster. By the time I reached the old landfill and started up the hill to the school campus I was doubting whether I would survive the bitterly cold conditions. Finally, the school building came into view and I saw smoke swirling above the roof line. I thought to myself, I can make it now, I'm going to be alright. My cousin had already arrived at school and I was probably less than a minute behind

him. When I first saw Vada's car it signaled to me there would be a hot fire in the potbelly stove. When I entered the schoolhouse, Vada was there to greet me. She seemed relieved when I walked in and she immediately shepherded me up close to that glowing stove. Never was I so glad to feel the warmth being put out by the stove. For those next few minutes heat never felt so good. This experience was printed indelibly in my mind and I remember it so well and in detail to this day.

Midway School was a totally and completely segregated public education facility. After all, this was the decade of the 1940's and all schools were segregated. In the long history of Midway School, I am most certain no African-American student ever attended there. Shamefully true, but that was the situation during that era. Volumes upon volumes have been written about this subject. Eventually, full integration of public education institutions came. I will not add any comments about this topic; enough has been written. Thankfully, the correct and proper decisions were made and justice prevailed. My sister Betty and I, in thinking about this topic, have reminded each other how a half-filled public-school bus of white children passed African-American children walking to their school. Henry Jones, an African-American who worked on our farm and wife Julia, raised their four grandchildren Hugh, Bobby, JoAnna and Roberta. These children were our playmates on the farm. It was these same children the half-filled school bus passed walking to their school. Our bus went past the segregated African-American school and they could easily have ridden to their school. But, in that era, it was not deemed to be.

So, what was there, educationally, for the students beyond the four grades at Midway School? Where did they continue their educations? How were they transported there? What was it like

for students coming from such a small, compact and unique education facility like Midway School and enrolling in a school that had a kitchen for home economics training, a gymnasium (full size basketball court) with a stage, sports teams, a playground with swings, slides and merry-go-round and multiple classrooms on two separate levels? Wow, that must have been the ultimate cultural shock in a number of ways. Going from Midway School of the tiny Midway community to Greenwood High School in Greenwood, Virginia, a not much larger community was quite a leap. I previously noted there were seven separate high schools in Albemarle County at that time. Greenwood was one of the seven. Midway School students were assigned to attend there. Students from Midway School entering the fifth grade were enrolled at Greenwood High School which had eleven grades. The twelfth grade had yet to be added at that time (1946). The Midway School students were transported by county school bus from the bus stop at Pugh's Store, in Midway. Ahead lay a 10-12-mile bus ride to Greenwood in the morning and a return trip to Pugh's Store in the afternoon. Students normally walked from their homes to and from the bus stop at Pugh's Store. I will spare you my ramblings of the life and activities at Greenwood. Maybe I will do that in another story. I personally attended Greenwood High School from the fifth through the eighth grade. After that, I enrolled at and attended the Miller School of Albemarle, near Batesville but still close to the Midway community. Here I remained until completing the twelfth year in 1954.

In conclusion, there is much more that could be written about the Midway School. If I had been able to contact more former students, and perhaps family members still with us, I am certain I could have written much more. But I believe what I have written gives the reader a flavor for what a one classroom, four grade, single door schoolhouse in the 1940's was like. Thanks to

Virginia Glen Grinstead, Linda Burton, Jean Burton Holland, Margie Grinstead Houchin's, Betty Burch Mawyer and Foster Wray Morse for their contributions to this story. I only wish Althea Wyant could have been here to contribute; she would have added so much more.

Attachments and Descriptions

- (1)– This is a copy of a class photograph of the 1919-1920 class at Midway School (one hundred years ago). This photograph represents the second of the probable three Midway School buildings that sat, at different times, upon the same parcel of land in Midway, Virginia. Pictured in this photograph are Virginia Foster (mother of Betty and Bobby Burch), fourth row, likely fourth from left; and Gordon Burton (father of Jean, Ann, Linda), bottom row, second from left. Photograph provided by Linda Burton.
- (2) - This is a copy of a real estate brochure advertising the converted/renovated Midway School building to a residential dwelling. View is from southeast to northwest. Many updated features have significantly altered the exterior appearance of the building. Brochure provided by Jean Burton Holland.
- (3) - This is a copy of an art student's concept of the Midway School. View appears to be from northeast to southwest. This drawing bears only slight resemblance to the 1930 Midway School building I remember. Drawing provided by Linda Burton.
- (4) - This is a copy of an artist drawing of the Midway School building. The view of this illustration is from southeast to northwest. This drawing very much

resembles the appearance of the Midway School building I remember in 1943-1946. I can almost see Vada standing on the stoop, ringing the bell to end a recess period. Sketch provided by Linda Burton.

(5) A photograph of former Midway School boy students waiting for the school bus on the porch of Pugh's Store (no longer in existence). The children are waiting to be transported to Greenwood High School. Students pictured are, left to right, Marvin Dollins, Bobby Burch, William Shaver, Edward Kirby and David Shaver.

Photograph provided by Betty Burch Mawyer.

(6)– A photograph of former Midway School girl students standing on the porch of Pugh's Store, waiting for the school bus. Students will be transported to Greenwood High School. Standing, left to right, students are believed to be; Jean Burton, Betty Burch and Ruth Dollins. Photograph provided by Betty Burch Mawyer.



1

1930 Schoolhouse - Midway School



708 Miller School Road

- ◆ New interior paint
- ◆ Exterior painted 1996
- ◆ Metal roof, stucco exterior
- ◆ 15' x 20' barn/workshed/storage building
- ◆ Screened rear porch
- ◆ Three bedrooms, one bath
- ◆ Bonus rooms upstairs
- ◆ Hardwood floors
- ◆ Huge hardwoods
- ◆ Large cinder block building
- ◆ Lots of interior storage room
- ◆ 1254 finished square feet
- ◆ Western Alb. HS, Henley, Brownsville
- ◆ 1.55 acres
- ◆ Large, nearly level yard
- ◆ Ready to move in

Call **Ken Clarry** CBR, CRS, GRI
984-7456 - Anytime

MLS # 300766 Price \$129,900.

Directions:

From Charlottesville, Rte. 250W
to left on Miller School Road.
Home on the right.



EQUAL HOUSING
OPPORTUNITY



REALTOR®

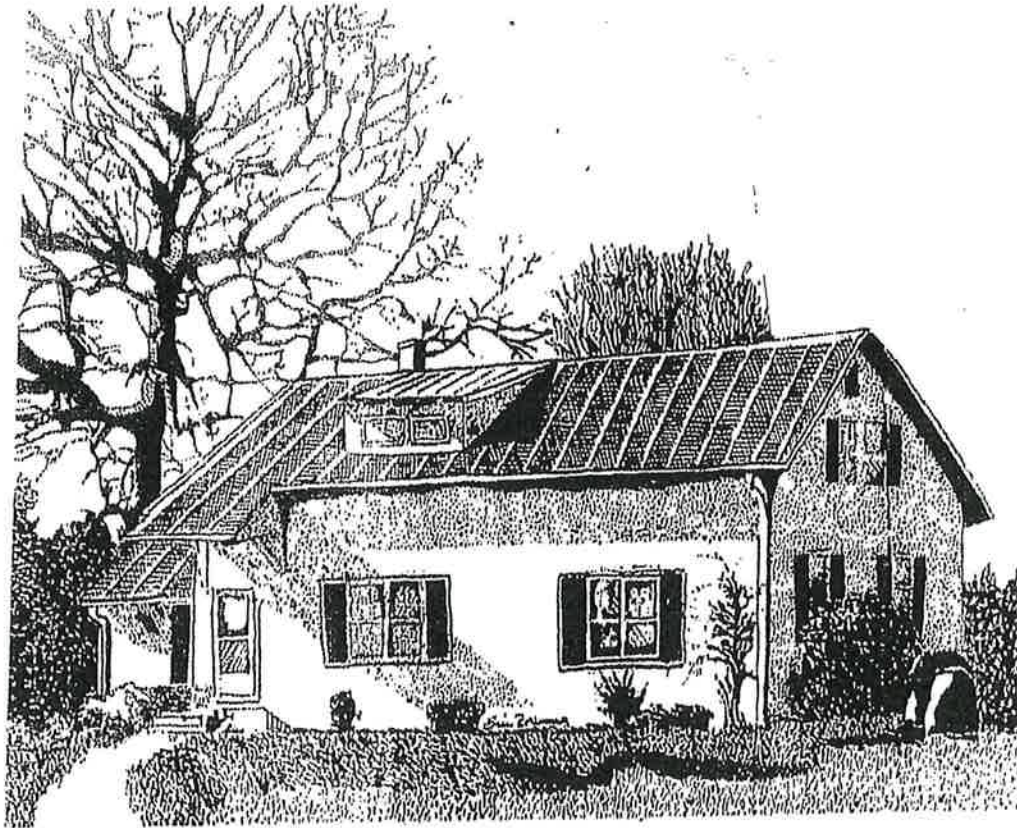


Real Estate III

500 Faulconer Drive
P.O. Box 7786
Charlottesville, VA 22906

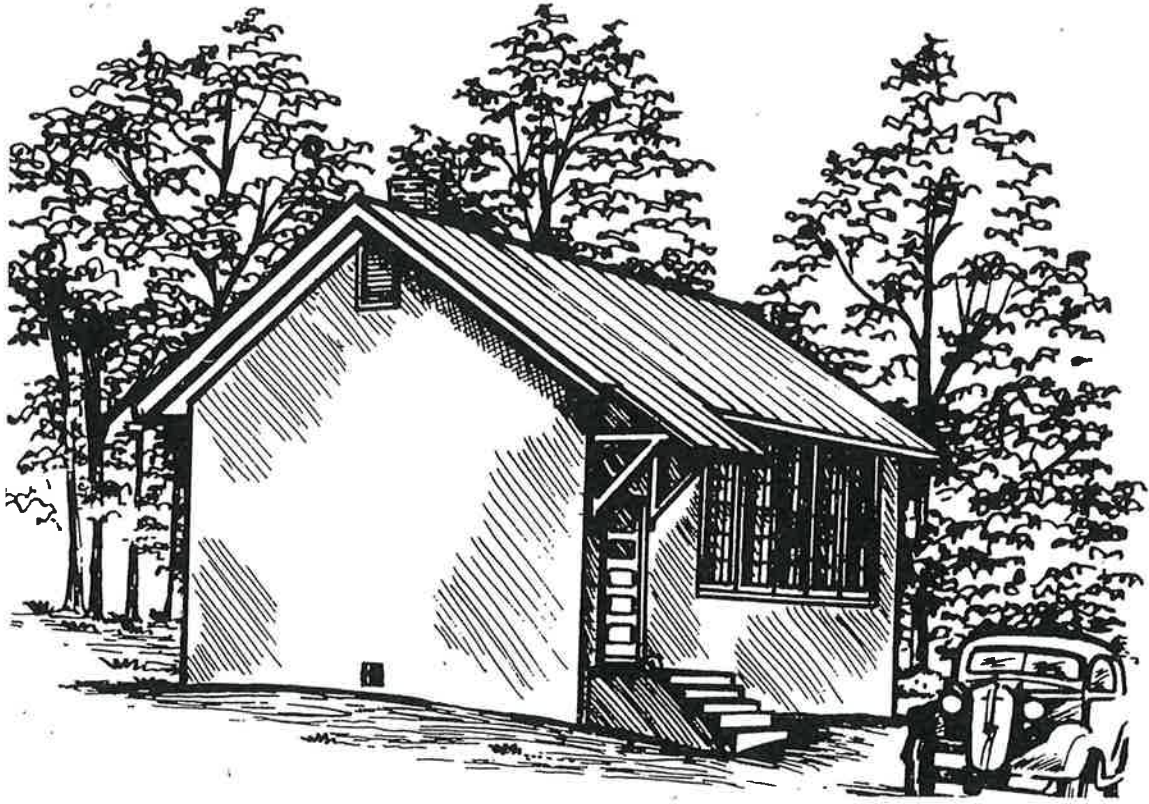
This information, though believed accurate, is not guaranteed.

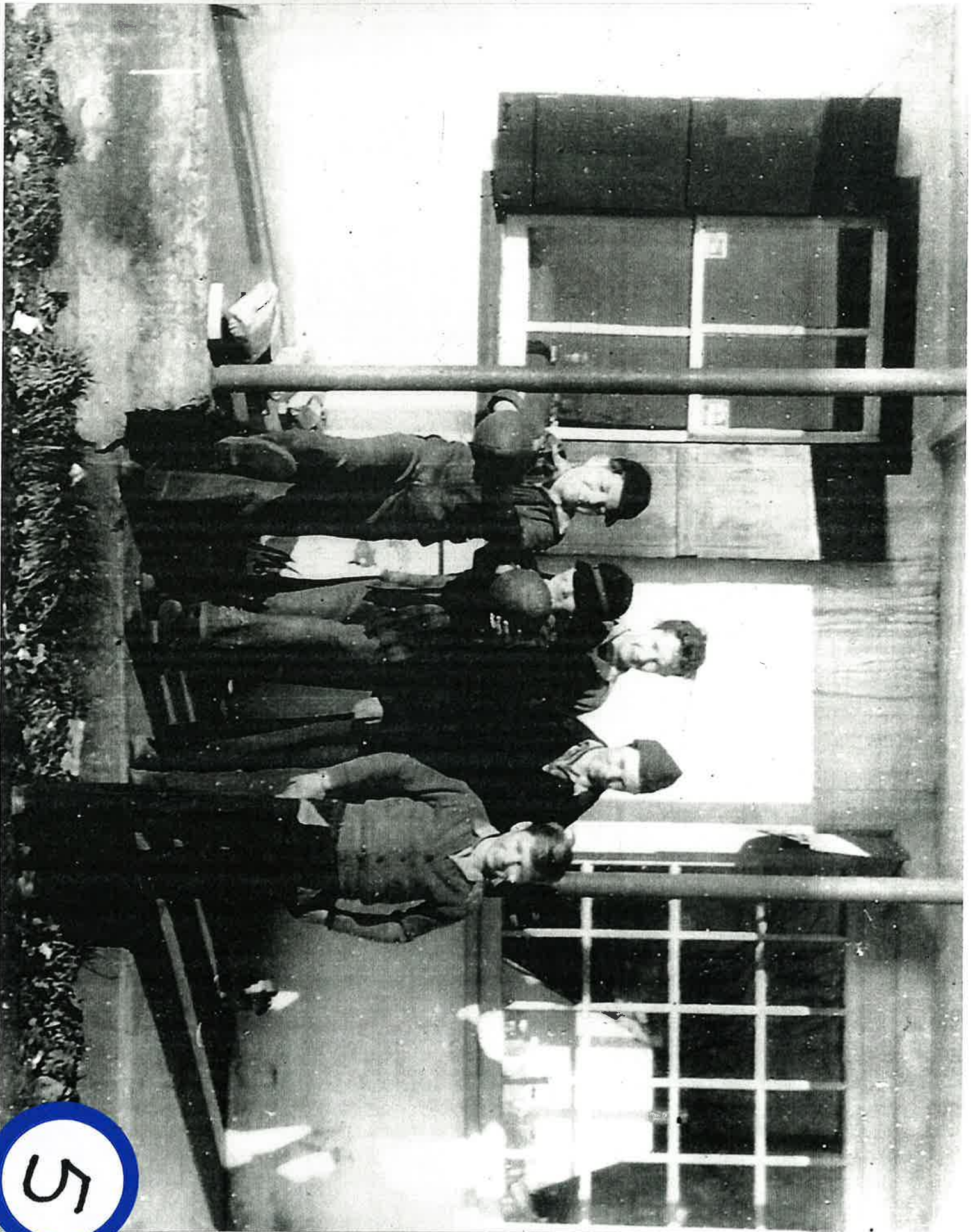




Renovated Midway School Building

The building was purchased and renovated into a dwelling around 1950 by Gordon Burton who owned the adjacent store. He lived there with his wife Mildred, and daughters Jean, Ann and Linda. He moved out of the home in 1967. He then rented the home, and one of the residents was Mrs. Betty Harding, an art teacher. This sketch of the renovated building was done by one of her students from Jackson Via Elementary School in Charlottesville VA in 1988.





5

