

Distinguished Alumni

Many significant people have made contributions to the development of the Arkansas School for the Blind into one of the best schools of its type in the nation. I hope to include additional biographies on this page in the days to come. Below is a list of some individuals who were prominent in the history of ASB:

Otis Patten was the first superintendent at ASB. he worked tirelessly to overcome public apathy and to secure funding and land for the first school for the blind in Arkansas.

Professor Emile Trebing:

Professor Trebing was a highly-gifted, partially sighted instructor of music who taught Piano, organ, strings woodwinds and music theory at ASB for 52 years. He was a talented musician who could play many instruments with great skill. Students describe "Professor" as a big, jolly, lovable teddy bear. He possessed an extraordinary ear for music. Those who knew him well say that he could play a piece of music immediately after hearing it played for the first time or after the music was read to him.

He and his wife were very active in the community. Professor Trebing was the organist at First Presbyterian Church in Little Rock for many years. Mr. and Ms. Trebing secured funding for a residence for blind women (The Trebing Home) at a time when the need for such a facility was acute. They were also largely responsible for the founding of the Association for the Blind which became the ASB Alumni Association.

Compositions of Professor Emile Trebing

Professor Emile Trebing composed songs to be performed by the choral group which he directed. Two of his most well-known compositions are "National Airs" and "Christmas Round."

National Airs

"National Airs" was a musical arrangement combining "America," "Old Folks At Home," "Dixie," "Yankee Doodle" and "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean." The composition begins with bass voices singing "America." When the bass section begins the second verse, alto voices join in singing "Old Folks At Home." As the bass section begins the third verse of "America," and the alto singers begin the second verse of "Old Folks At Home," Soprano voices join in singing "Dixie." Finally, the tenor section joins in singing portions of "Yankee Doodle" and "Columbia the gem of the ocean." This song has been a favorite of students over the years.

Christmas Round

**By
Emile Trebing**

**Do you hear the bells, the merry sleigh bells,
And old Santa's tuneful lay,
Waking everyone with shouts and happy hearts
to welcome Christmas Day!**

**Boys and girls find flashlights, air guns, marbles, tops and balls,
Watches, vases, dolls and dishes, stoves and games that all can play.
Wagons, rocking chairs and swings, books with pictures gay.
Candy, popcorn, and luscious fruits and mixed nuts, say!**

**We have no time now to mention all the other things,
for we must thank dear old Santa Clause ere he steals away.
Santa, Santa, ha ha ha ha ha,
heartiest Thanks, wish you could stay.
Good bye, come Back when e'er you may.**

James Max Woolly:

Mr. J. M. Woolly came to ASB in 1939 as principal and was appointed to the position of superintendent in 1947. Under his guidance, the school was transformed in to one of the leading schools for the blind in the nation. During his 44-year tenure, the curriculum was modified to place greater emphasis on academics and development of social skills. J. M. Woolly was able to secure funding for several new buildings which were constructed on

the ASB campus. These included Shults House, Prewitt Hall, The Smith Vocational Building, The Hartman Gymnasium, The Learning Center, the superintendent's residence and the Woolly Fine Arts Building.

Mr. Woolly accomplished these dramatic improvements by working 16-hour days and by recruiting and employing a highly-qualified work force which shared his enthusiasm and dedication and whole-heartedly responded to his leadership.

Mr. Woolly was directly involved in every aspect of the program at ASB. He drove the school bus, officiated at athletic events, oversaw curriculum development and supervised the teaching, home life and maintenance staffs. It was not unusual to observe him performing a maintenance task or picking up trash around the buildings.

J. M. Woolly was active in national organizations which worked towards improving education for visually impaired persons. In 1978, Dr. Woolly was awarded the Migel Medal by the American Foundation for the Blind for his outstanding contributions in the field of education. The contributions made by Mr. Woolly in the field of education of the visually impaired have made a vast difference in the lives of generations of students who attended ASB, and he is loved and respected by those who worked under his supervision or benefited from his work.

John Ed Chiles:

John Ed Chiles graduated from ASB in 1943, earned a degree in history and political science from Hendrix College, and completed graduate studies at Vanderbilt University before returning to ASB as secondary social studies teacher. During his thirty-seven years at the school, John Ed impacted the lives of hundreds of boys and girls. In his classroom social studies came alive and became meaningful to students who, heretofore, had given little serious thought to geography or history and who cared little for world affairs. Mr. Chiles commanded the respect of students and was able to motivate students to achieve at a higher level than they thought possible.

John Ed served a highly-successful stint as principal from 1956 until 1963, performing a dual role as he continued teaching some social studies classes. He demonstrated superior organizational skills and was respected by teachers and students for his fairness, his objectivity and his willingness to listen. However, his great love was teaching; and in 1963 he was permitted to return to the classroom full time.

John Ed sponsored many class parties, called square dances for the square dance club and organized the ASB Student Council in the early 1950's. He served as student council sponsor until his retirement in 1985.

Mr. "C.," as he was affectionately known, was a symbol of academic excellence at ASB for 37 years. He was a teacher and a friend to many students. Their great respect for Mr. Chiles served to insure that students remembered who was teacher and who was student. He was generous with his time, spending many hours after school and on weekends with his students whose company he sincerely enjoyed. It was a common sight to see John Ed with a group of students on a Saturday Morning discussing world affairs or yesterday's world series game, listening to classical music or the latest rock and roll hit as he shared his large record collection or playing horse in the swimming pool. Students found it refreshing and unusual to find a friend among the faculty who could enjoy with equal fervor a Bethoven symphony and the latest hit by the Dave Clark five.

After graduation, many students remained friends with Mr. Chiles and continued to call him or correspond with him for advice or encouragement. Mr. Chiles served as a model to generations of students- a reminder as to what could be achieved by a person with a visual impairment who was determined and applied himself. John Ed Chiles did not promote such a role for himself. He was delegated that role by the students who loved and respected him and who were buoyed by his encouragement and friendship.

Eula Shults:

Eula Shults taught home economics to girls in grades 7-12 from 1940 until her retirement in 1970. Ms. Shults possessed enormous patience, sincerity, great kindness and a tireless work ethic. Eula Shults served as the "Emily Post" of ASB. It was she who defined what was correct in social behavior and table etiquette; and in instances where there might be disagreement among faculty members, she cast the deciding vote. Ms. Shults was highly respected by boys and girls alike; who (in the words of Mark Twain) "never needed to be reminded to mind their manners when she was around." She was not as popular as some faculty members among students. That fact was of no concern to Eula Shults. She did not seek popularity. Her one goal, which she pursued constantly and with vigor, was that girls become independent home makers, and that all students learn proper etiquette and learn to behave as ladies and gentlemen in order to assume responsible social positions upon graduation from ASB. Ms Shults designed Shults House which stands in front of the Administration Building. The building was completed in 1970 and dedicated in her honor just prior to her death.

Oliver Wendell Holmes:

O. W. Holmes arrived at ASB in 1958 and functioned in the dual role of industrial arts instructor and senior-high boys houseparent, and for 22 years defined the male role for countless boys who were often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. From this kind, sensitive, caring, gentle, soft-spoken man, boys learned that boastfulness, vulgarity, violence and boorish behavior did not make a person a man-that it was manly to be courteous, quiet and respectful of others.

O. W. Holmes patiently stressed cleanliness to boys who had received little instruction or encouragement in practicing good hygiene. In his industrial arts classes, he stressed safety and conscientiously observed students working until they demonstrated to his satisfaction that they understood and would practice rules of safety. There was never an incident of a student's being injured while Mr. Holmes taught at ASB.

Wendell Holmes exhibited the highest respect for his students. His methods were unique and rare. He seldom laid down rules or told students what they could or could not do. His dialog with students included phrases such as: "you might want to," "You probably will want to," or "I don't think you would want to" . . . Mr. Holmes operated under the theory that people inherently want to do the right thing. His task, as he saw it, was to convey to students in a respectful and non-threatening manner what was proper and desirable. Though he encouraged students to better themselves, he never made comments which were belittling or which would cast dispersions on students' families.

He was wily and subtle in his approach and could state an opinion without students being aware that he was doing so. Implicit in Mr. Holmes' lessons was this message: "This is something which any decent, well-bred, intelligent, responsible person would do. Since you are obviously decent, well-bred, intelligent and responsible, I'm sure that you will want to do it too." His approach was successful because his respect for others was genuine.

Mr. Holmes' devotion to his family did not prevent him from spending countless hours with ASB students watching football games, reading to them from the newspaper and discussing world affairs. He enjoyed explaining football plays and formations to students, and was an avid Razorback fan. He was a mentor, a friend and a father figure for many boys who are grateful and fortunate that he touched their lives.

Runyan Eugene Hartman:

R. E. Hartman: was employed at ASB from 1945 until his death in 1973. Mr.

Hartman was something of a renaissance man. He served as physical education instructor for elementary and secondary students, coached wrestling and track and taught piano tuning and repair to secondary students. Though partially sighted, Coach Hartman was a gifted amateur photographer who developed pictures in his dark room at home. He played classical guitar and possessed a beautiful singing voice.

R. E. Hartman established wrestling and track as viable sports for students with visual impairments and promoted them in other schools for the blind. He stressed physical fitness and set an example for his students to follow. Coach Hartman's athletic teams achieved many successes over the years. In 1956, ASB wrestlers finished first among thirteen competitive teams in a tournament of schools for the blind.

However, it was as a physical education teacher that Mr. Hartman demonstrated his true brilliance. His well-rounded curriculum featured physical fitness, gymnastics, swimming and games specially designed to teach cooperation, sportsmanship and full participation by all students. Coach Hartman possessed an uncanny ability to judge how well each student could see and to understand the unique characteristics of each student's particular eye condition. He was able to design games which would force students to make maximum use of their vision. Mr. Hartman's games were so ingeniously designed that students with varying degrees of vision loss could compete on an equal footing. His games always included special rules which assured that students who were totally blind would play a meaningful part in the game. The result was that Hartman's games were fair and demanding, and students responded with enthusiasm and fierce competitiveness. Students with some vision learned to use that vision more effectively. Students who were totally blind learned to rely on hearing. All students under Mr. Hartman's tutelage learned sportsmanship and cooperation; and experienced the joy and pride which comes from being physically fit and competent.

Myrtis Jones:

Myrtis Jones was energetic, determined, plain-spoken and strong-willed. She arrived at ASB in 1959 and needed these traits to complete her many accomplishments. Though her tenure at the school was relatively brief, (fifteen years) she impacted the educational program and the lives of students as much as any person who ever graced the campus. She was the first certified librarian to be employed at the Arkansas School for the Blind.

Upon her arrival, she found a large, disorganized collection of books shelved in no particular order and according to no logical system. Scattered throughout the clutter were books written in raised print and in "New York

Point" formats. These were reading systems for visually impaired persons which had long ago been discontinued in favor of braille. Ms. Jones understood clearly what had to be done, and she worked long hours, often late into the night to set things right. She established the Dewey Decimal System and organized the book collection. She labeled shelves in large print and braille, and discarded those books which were of no use to teachers or students. Though she was told repeatedly that it couldn't be done, Myrtis Jones created the first dual-media card catalog with over-sized index cards containing information in braille on one side and information in large print on the opposite side.

To accomplish these tasks she enlisted the help of students who performed for Ms. Jones without any understanding as to why the worked was necessary. Some of the tasks were immensely enjoyable for students. Throwing discarded books out the window, for example, was an activity which had never been sanctioned by an adult. Brailleing and filing cards for the card catalog was a tedious and a task not relished by students.

Ms. Jones had a keen appreciation for history. She discarded that which had no value and saved those things which were significant in the history of education for the visually impaired or to the history of ASB. she created special displays which exhibited these items.

When she arrived, Myrtis Jones could not read braille, though she soon learned the braille code. She had never taught visually impaired students. However, Ms. Jones was one of a very few people who sincerely believed that individuals who were visually impaired could do anything which they wanted to do; and she manifested this attitude with such assurance that students were compelled to accept her convictions. Students in the Library Club, which she established immediately upon her arrival, always assumed leadership roles at local and state library conventions, campaigning for office, serving on committees, providing entertainment and serving as facilitators. In the early 1960's students in the ASB Library Club organized and hosted the state convention, with Myrtis Jones hovering in the background as was her custom. When one of her protégées achieved success, Ms. Jones did not respond with praise. Her words were more often, "of course, why not. If others can do it, you can also."

On one occasion, when key personnel from some schools failed to show up at a state convention, ASB students salvaged the convention, facilitating meetings, providing the keynote speaker and the entertainment. Ms. Jones sat smugly among the librarians in attendance, as was her custom, with just a trace of a smile concealing her pride as best she could. The pride she felt was not in the fact that her students could function thus, she had known that

from the beginning; rather, it came from the realization that after years of encouraging, pushing and nagging, her students possessed this knowledge as well.

Miss Rose Fussell Attended ASB in The decade between 1910 and 1920 where she studied music under Professor Trebing. She was an excellent pianist and could play most any song which she heard by ear. However, there were few opportunities for persons who were blind to work at that time; so after graduating in 1920, Miss Rose returned to Cotton Plant, Arkansas where she had grown up and lived for a time with her brother.

In 1929, she secured a position as "office girl" at ASB, but a year later when a new superintendent was employed, she learned that her position was being eliminated, and she went back to Cotton Plant to her brother's home. Miss Rose played piano for a time at the local theater. She persuaded the principal at the local high school to allow her to direct the student choral group, and succeeded in winning a state competition. The group performed "National Airs" at the competition, a composition written by her high school music teacher, Professor Trebing.

In 1939, Miss Rose was employed by the new Superintendent to serve as a houseparent for girls and to teach music to Kindergarten and primary students. Miss Rose loved the children and she loved teaching. She taught her rhythm band students five days a week for 28 years. No one can remember Miss Rose's missing a day of work. She composed little songs for her students to perform and taught them the basics of rhythm and meter. Later she began teaching her students to play flute-a-phones, and her students performed annually in Christmas programs for proud and incredulous parents.

In addition to her rhythm band instruction, Miss Rose taught beginning piano students and was responsible for teaching all braille users to read braille music. Generations of talented music students owed their success in large measure to Miss Rose, who provided them with a sound music foundation. She Had a big heart, often spending a portion of her meager earnings to help needy students. Her gifts to students were given anonymously. The beneficiaries of her generosity were never made aware from whence the money came; and Miss Rose never received the expressions of gratitude which would have certainly been forth coming.

Miss Rose was a hardy, determined pioneer at a time when opportunities for persons who were blind were very few. She was a cheerful, loving, proud, determined and independent person who. Asked for little and made the best

of opportunities which were available. Those young people whose lives she touched were grateful and fortunate for having known Miss Rose Fussell. .

Compositions by Miss Rose Fussell

The Rhythm Band Instrument Song

By Rose Fussell

Key of D, 4/4 Time

Silv'ry bells ring jingle, jingle, jing,
And the triangle says, "Ting, ting."
"A-rap-a-tap-tap," go the rhythm sticks,
and the tone block, "Click, click, click."
The tambourines will rap-shake-shake;
Oh hear the crash the cymbals make;
Then the drum beats loud and gay,
and the whole rhythm band will play.

Miss Rose's Rhythm Band Theme Song

By Rose Mary Fussell

Key of G, 4/4 Time

Did anybody tell you just how nice it is to be,
Playing in the rhythm band at good old A.S.B.?
Although we're not so very big, we count our 1-2-3's,
Playing in the rhythm band at good old A.S.B.

This song was usually sung, followed by Miss Rose playing the song on the piano accompanied by the rhythm band, and sung a final time.

Mary Harper Sowell

After graduating from North Little Rock Senior High School, Mary Harper Sowell entered Arkansas State Teachers College in the fall of 1944. She roomed with two students, Jeanne Mitchell and Nadine Fitzhue, who had attended The Arkansas School for the Blind. She became a reader to seven students who were blind for which Rehab paid her twenty-five cents per hour. Mary Harper earned enough to pay her room and board, which was twenty-eight dollars per month.

Through the students she met Mr. Phineas Davis, Superintendent of The Arkansas School for the Blind. During her junior year she was hired by Mr. Davis to teach English and foreign languages AT ASB upon her graduation, She was graduated in the Spring of 1947 AFTER attending three winter semesters and two summer terms.

In the fall of 1947 Mary Harper moved to the ASB campus for a twenty-four-hour-a-day seven-days per week job. She taught seventh through twelfth grade English plus high school French. She was housemother to high school girls, and, as did all teachers there, kept night study hall, did dining hall duty, three times a day taught Sunday school, lead a

group of Y-Teens, chaperoned students on weekly trips to downtown movies and taught social adjustment classes which emphasized self-improvement through the development of social and recreational skills. Miss Harper chaperoned students at parties, picnics, and proms. She washed forty heads of hair weekly and assisted the principal in cutting the boys' hair monthly. Mary Harper Sowell had no time off, nor did she really want any. Her school and her students were her life for five years.

In 1952, she was married and taught for two years at a Junior high school in her home town of North Little Rock. She decided to take a year off while she was expecting her first child. But before he was a year old, Mr. Woolly called and "ordered" her back to ASB. He would accept no excuses, so she returned in 1954 and taught there until she retired in 1974 to become the full-time State Braille and Recording Specialist at The Division of Services for the Blind, where she worked for 16 years.

In a recent interview Ms. Sowell stated:

"My wonderful memories of life at ASB sustain me now that I am bed fast with arthritis and osteoporosis, and I have become legally blind. My former students tell me, "'welcome to the club" and "join the crowd." I hear almost daily from students that I taught as much as fifty years ago, and many come to visit me. I get braille letters, and even some in French braille. I live in Fairfield Bay near my two children, Willy and Cissy, and my four grandchildren. I have had the best of all lives and I am grateful to all who remember me kindly."

Ms. Sowell is remembered by students and co-workers as a kind, generous, helpful and fiercely independent person who manifested respect for everyone and functioned in a manner which commanded respect from others. If one heard Mary Sowell conversing at a distance, it was impossible to determine if her listener was a student, a teacher, the superintendent or the custodian. She treated everyone equally. She was friendly, helpful, and kind, but never solicitous.

Mary Sowell believed firmly in the two platitudes, "God helps those who help themselves," and "Where there is a will, there is a way." When a student showed the will to succeed, he/she immediately earned the respect of Ms.

Sowell and gained an ally, always on hand with encouragement, advice and support. Students whom others gave up on succeeded under Ms. Sowell= s tutelage. If a willing student with cerebral palsy could use but one hand to type, she worked tirelessly to teach him/her to type with one hand. Students who encountered difficulty in reading found that they could learn material orally by exhibiting perseverance and benefiting from novel strategies employed by the skillful, caring teacher which Mary Sowell was. For these reasons Mary Harper Sowell is loved and respected by generations of students who owe a measure of their success in later life to the kindness and support which she bestowed constantly.

