



“whatever is right and proper”

School Integration in West Virginia

A lesson from West Virginia Archives and History (www.wvculture.org/history)

Name _____ Date _____ Class Period _____

Instructions: Compared to other states, integration in West Virginia occurred quickly with little violence. However, integration at Matoaka High School was marked by violent protest. Read the articles below and watch video news coverage on the West Virginia Archives and History website to answer the following questions: Website link: (<http://www.wvculture.org/history/thisdayinwvhistory/0930.html>)

Integration of Matoaka High School

Princeton Observer
September 6, 1956

Integration Makes History In Mercer County Schools

Matoaka Pupils Start Boycott - Crosses Burn in Princeton - Colored Students in 14 Schools

Integration made history in the schools of Mercer county as 89 colored pupils attended 14 schools in the county when school began on Tuesday. The students of Matoaka schools are remaining away from classes in large numbers as the Observer goes to press. The county school board has taken no action as yet. Integration was forced on the county through Federal Court proceedings.

Chief source of trouble was in Matoaka where 28 Negroes, mostly from Giatto, enrolled. A crowd gathered and there was egg throwing. Rev. Don Spurlock, Methodist minister, talked to the crowd - and pacified them somewhat.

The parents met in the church that evening and under the leadership of H. V. Slemp, businessman of Matoaka, decided to boycott the school.

On Thursday [sic] morning, 131 students attended, of an enrollment of 602; fourteen of the 131 were Negroes. Parents wee [sic] again meeting at the church.

Crosses Are Burned

There was friction at Princeton High. At 10:30 on Monday night, a cross was burned on the high school grounds and another at 6:30 Tuesday morning. Boys are supposed to have set these crosses, but they were of good materials and expensively made, and it is suspected that adults

were behind the stunt. A picket line was formed at the high school on Tuesday morning, but broken up after a talk by Coach Buster Brown.

There were several anonymous telephone calls to the Princeton police asking that they come to the high school, but these calls were unauthorized and police not needed. Mayor Beam instructed the police that calls must be made by Principal McClain.

There was no trouble elsewhere in the county. Princeton Junior High school opened and proceeded without incident or friction, and likewise in the 12 other schools in the county.

There are 17,000 pupils in the county - 2,000 of them Negroes. Most of the integration has been in the schools where transportation has prevailed before. The Matoaka Negroes were transported to Bramwell, 15 miles away. The Princeton High school and Junior High school to Bluefield, ten miles away.

Only 89 colored students are enrolled in schools hitherto regarded as white.

Colored Registration

The Negro student registration in the schools was as follows: Princeton High 25; Matoaka High 20; Beaver High 2; Bramwell High 1; Princeton Junior 25; Wade Junior 2; Springton Junior 2; Preston Elementary 11; Ramsey Elementary 8; Bramwell Elementary 2; Pinnacle Elementary 2; and Springton Elementary 1.

There were 475 students at Knob school, three bus loads of children formerly enrolled at Mercer were transported to Knob and no classes will be held in the basement as formerly.

Opening of the Athens schools was postponed a week on account of the new building not completed.

Bluefield Daily Telegraph
October 1, 1957

Two Area Schools Stage Integration Protests

Two more student protest demonstrations against racial integration occurred in the area yesterday.

At Matoaka, scene of large scale demonstrations last year, school authorities reported that between 100 and 150 white students refused to return to class after the noon hour recess. About 56 white students paraded at the Hemphill-Capel Junior High School in McDowell County.

Principal Ralph Bird of the Matoaka school said that approximately 75 students stayed out at noon time and that the others walked out after classes started.

The students gathered across the street from the school until they were dispersed by a state trooper from the Princeton barracks and a constable. Bird said that the police were sent to the scene by the Mercer County school superintendent's office.

Two windows in the school were broken by thrown articles.

Bird also said that parents of two children removed them from the school while parents of three other children returned them to classes later in the afternoon.

There are ten Negro students in the school at Matoaka that has a total enrollment of 670.

An incident that occurred Friday on a school bus between a Negro student and white student was said to have had no bearing on the demonstration yesterday.

Bird said the demonstration was probably just "a show off" by the students and he expects no further [sic] actions.

It could not be determined last night just what kind of punishment would be meted out to the demonstrators.

At the Hemphill-Capels school the demonstrators blocked traffic until a McDowell County deputy sheriff arrived.

McDowell County School Supt. George W. Bryson said a majority of the protesting students had gone back to class by 10:30 a.m. He said a few went home.

There are four Negro youngsters in the Hemphill-Capel school.

Bluefield Daily Telegraph
October 2, 1957

Police On Guard At Matoaka High

Mercer County School Supt. W. R. (Pete) Cooke said last night that police would again be stationed at the Matoaka High School this morning to prevent any integration troubles. He added that he hoped they would not be needed.

Cooke said, "the situation appeared to be calmer at the present time and indications are that the demonstrations may have ended." Six Negro students were sent home from Matoaka High School yesterday during a demonstration by jeering white students against racially mixed classes.

Unobserved by the demonstrators across the street, the six Negroes - two boys and four girls - were escorted out of the school by an assistant principal, put in a taxi and sent home.

About an hour earlier, the crowd of white students had roughed up the two Negro boys as they got off a school bus to enter the school for morning classes. The girls were not bothered.

Second Day

It was the second straight day of anti-integration demonstration at the high school. An estimated 200 white students out of an enrollment of 670 took part in the demonstration yesterday.

Ten Negro youngsters are enrolled at Matoaka High, but only six reported for classes yesterday. Cooke said he did not order the Negro pupils sent home. Cooke added that Principal Ralph Bird "did that on his own."

As to what will be done to restore order at the school, Cooke said he could not "say anything about that" until he has discussed it with Bird.

Some white students also cut class and marched in protest against integration for the second day in a row at the Hemphill-Capels Junior High in neighboring McDowell County.

About 40 of the school's 113 students, carrying signs protesting against integration, staged a two-mile march to nearby Welch. They headed for Welch High School, which had a brief anti-integration demonstration of its own last week, but were turned back by police before they reached the school.

Police escorted the marchers back to Capels without incident.

Four Negroes

The Hemphill-Capels school has four Negroes enrolled, all of whom were in class. The number of white students taking part in yesterday's incident was about 10 less than participated in an earlier demonstration.

Parents of some who took part escorted their children into class yesterday. But none of the approximately 40 in the march to Welch this morning had returned to class later in the day. At Matoaka, the crowd of white students gathered across from the school at about the time for classes to begin at 8:30 a.m. . . .

Someone threw an egg at Bob Horan, newsman from WSAZ-TV in Huntington, and his camera crew, but it missed and splattered on a car. Cameraman Bill Kelly said there were threats to rush the television crew, but nothing came of them.

State troopers, quickly intervened when the two Negro boys were mauled as they alighted from a school bus. The pair then went inside the school.

By mid-morning the crowd had dispersed. About noon, Cooke quoted Principal Bird as having reported that most of the protesting white students had returned to class.

Those still out had moved "up the street away from the school," Cooke said.

"There has been no decision as to when the colored students will be returned to the school," Cooke added.

Bluefield Daily Telegraph
October 3, 1957

Area Schools Returning To Normal After Integration Demonstrations

Matoaka High School, with police help, was back to something like normal operation yesterday. There was no recurrence of the two previous days' protest demonstrations by white students against racially mixed classes.

Quiet also prevailed at the Hemphill-Capels Junior High, near Welch in neighboring McDowell County. It likewise had been the scene of anti-integration demonstrations Monday and Tuesday.

At Matoaka High, Tuesday two Negro boys were pummeled by white students. Some 200 whites, out of an enrollment of 670 cut classes and took part in the demonstration. Because of it, school officials sent home the six Negroes - out of 10 enrolled - who had come to school.

When school time came yesterday, four state troopers, two deputy sheriffs and some town policemen were on the scene. They kept students moving into the building, giving them no chance to congregate on the street where they demonstrated before.

Four Negro youngsters arrived on a separate bus and were escorted into the building by troopers, without incident. As far as could be determined from outside, they were the only Negroes who reported for class. Newsmen have not been permitted to go inside.

Principal Ralph Bird has adopted this policy on students who missed class to take part in the protest: They are not being re-admitted until they have come to school with their parents and conferred with him.

Many students were escorted by their parents when they arrived at the high school yesterday.

At midday, Bird said, "I have been very busy this morning with these conferences." He added that he does not think the number still absent will be very large once the conferences are completed.

No attendance figure for the day was available. However, all indications were that the number of students who stayed away was comparatively small.

Late yesterday Bird said that a "little over 100" students, each accompanied by at least one parent, returned to the school.

"The parents are not upholding their children, you can rest assured," the principal said.

He explained that conferences held so far with students and parents have shown that the youngsters made a mistake and have learned their lesson.

At Princeton High School, meanwhile, eight youths were suspended and Principal Melvin McClain said he told them not to return until their parents came with them.

He related that four of the youths were picked up Tuesday by police when they allegedly were loitering in the vicinity of Princeton Junior High School.

Classes in Princeton were described as normal yesterday. McClain said he stepped among a group of two "outsiders" and about 10 boys in the high school corridor yesterday, and that the youths returned to their classes.

The other two persons left the building after "some argument," McClain reported. They were not identified.

Questions:

From *Integration Makes History In Mercer County Schools -- Matoaka Pupils Start Boycott - Crosses Burn in Princeton - Colored Students in 14 Schools*

1. How many African American students were involved in the integration of the schools of Mercer County?
2. How many schools did they attend that first day?
3. Who decided that there would be a boycott of Matoaka High School?
4. How many students attended school at Matoaka High on the first day of integration? How many were African Americans? How many students boycotted the school?
5. What did some people do to try to scare African American students from attending Princeton High School? Who was supposedly responsible for the act? Who did the newspaper suspect was behind the incident?

From *Two Area Schools Stage Integration Protests*

6. What did students do following their lunch break?

7. How did the protest end?

8. How did Principal Bird describe the protest?

from **Police On Guard At Matoaka High**

9. What happened to two African American boys when they got off the school bus?

10. What did the principal do to protect the students from the crowd?

11. What happened to the WSAZ news crew that was covering the demonstration?

from **Area Schools Returning To Normal After Integration Demonstrations**

12. How did the African American students arrive at Matoaka High School the day following the violent protest? Who escorted them into the school?

13. What was required of students who left school during the protest to return to school?

view the video footage located on the Archives and History website located at
(<http://www.wvculture.org/history/thisdayinwwhistory/0930.html>)

