

***“A History of the
Rural Schools of
Greene County, Mo.”***

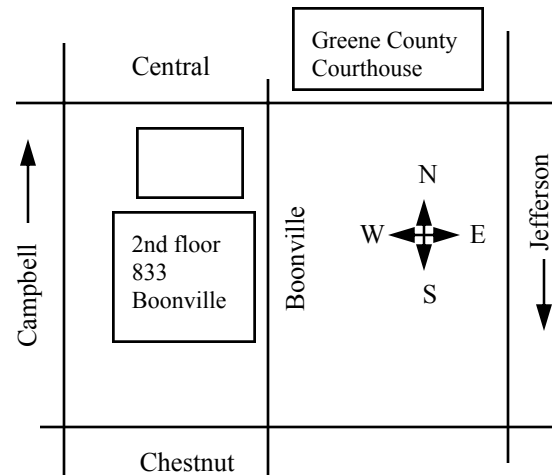
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**A History of the
Rural Schools of
Greene County**



Locust Prairie School north of Strafford, Mo.

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A History of Rural Schools in Greene County, Mo.

I began my research July 1997, for the Greene County Historic Sites Board which has a mission to locate and research potential historical sites and to conduct activities that assist with public education on the value of our local history. This historical schools research project has been discussed statewide in 68 different newspaper articles, three separate magazine articles, 11 radio interviews and nine television news broadcasts, including one 30-minute television special.

Much of the research began with telephone calls from former rural school students. I owe my deepest gratitude to those who cared enough to telephone and to the news media that saw the value of this project. Perhaps Hank Billings described this project best with his editorial in the Feb. 14, 1998, edition of the Springfield News-Leader.

"Springfieldian David Burton is to be commended for his research that lists 45 school buildings still standing of the 124 that once made a network of rural schools in Greene County. Local historians should not let his work for the Greene County Historic Sites Board stop there. The directory is a golden opportunity for local historians to add flesh and blood to the bricks and mortar by recording recollections of those who attended those schools.

"Some of that is in the database," said Burton, "but it really exceeds my mission. We may have waited a generation too late." Particularly frustrating are the lack of records on schools for African-Americans. Burton's survey showed that none of those schools, including ones in Cave Spring, Ash Grove and Strafford are standing. Burton's directory is available at the Greene County Archives, The Library Center, Greene County's University Outreach and Extension Center or online at www.geocities.com/dburton541.

It shows so many schools that most children only had a mile or two to walk. "I didn't really set out to dispute stories of walking five miles to school," Burton said. "My own grandfather told me he walked two miles uphill to school -- both ways." There are stories like these that would enrich the memories of the county's schools -- whether gone, abandoned, converted to homes, barns or community buildings."

My hope is that this project will educate the public about the rich history of Greene County, not just the unique rural school buildings found in this region. These structures, although constructed of wood, mortar, nails and brick, represent much more than just old walls, floors, ceilings, windows and roofs. The rural schools of Greene County represent a simple time and several great generations of school children who grew to adulthood -- excelled in war, science, politics, family and business -- and helped to form this great nation during the 20th century.

— by author **David L. Burton**

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