## **Riverlawn School History**

In the bend of the beautiful New River, directly across from West Radford, in Pulaski County, there nestled, in the year 1880, a blooming little town called "New River." This thriving little community boasted a depot and a post office along with an energetic group of people.

Needless to say, there soon became a growing concern for a school to serve the town. So, in the middle1880's a two story four-room building was constructed. Among the instructors serving this school the following have been mentioned: Mr. Bud Morgan, Mr. D. M. Swain, Miss Nellie Morehead, Miss Daisy Miller, Miss Margaret Miller and Mrs. Ida V. Stone. Two of these earlier teachers were remembered endearingly as a Miss Brown and a Miss Darnell.

In the year 1907, Plans were drawn up to relocate the school and make it more accessible to outlying farm families. As a result, upon a site at the intersection of 624 and route 11, the approved building – a one floor plan – was constructed. This building had four classrooms, a wide central hall and two covered porches. There was no indoor plumbing and water was carried from a well. Big iron stoves in each classroom heated the building. The teachers were responsible for the cleanliness of their rooms and the outhouses. Some of the teachers in this earlier school were: Miss Emma Karth, Principal; Margaret Miller, Early Dawn Sturdivant, Jesse Reid, Mary Morgan, Clara Stone, Annie Akers, Bertha Parrish and two Misses Ellers.

In the Year 1920, the school was taken over by Radford Normal School, later changed to Radford State Teachers College and used as a training school for prospective teachers. Among those serving as instructors then were: Misses Pearl Stone, Sona Kirby, and Nellie Hayter. A rented house called "the teacherage" served the instructors and student teachers as home. The school was the center for the community activities, many dramatic presentations, box suppers and the like were enjoyed there.

From these activities there emerged a very active organization called "The Community League", dedicated toward school and town improvements. Later this organization was called "The Home and the School League" and was the nucleus for the very active Parent Teacher Organization that continues to the present time. Mrs. Frank Williams served as president during the last year of the old New River School and this first year after the consolidation for the schools.

A very good lunch program has been in operation for a number of years. Mrs. Iva Linkous, Mrs. C. E. Ward, Mrs. Perdita Agee and Mrs. Nettie Meredith served as lunchroom personnel. The last teachers at the New River School were Mrs. Elizabeth P. Bird, Principal; Mrs. Edna Y. Brown, Virginia Yowell and Louise Elswick.

About the year 1922, it became quite apparent that there was a need for another school in the little town of New River. This school was to be built to serve the Negro portion of the community. A two room, white frame building was constructed and was known as "The William Gresham School" in honor of Mr. William D. Gresham, State Supervisor of Negro Schools. Large iron stoves heated the building and the water supply was furnished by a well in the schoolyard. This school opened its doors for the first time to begin the 1924-25 school session. Anna B., Norman served the school as head teacher from 1924-1948 and was the instructor for the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grades. A second teacher served the first, second and third graders.

Ellavester H. Howard became principal in 1948 and served in this capacity until 1966. In 1953, the present William Gresham building was constructed. The school boasted three classrooms supplied with three teachers and in the last year of its operation an aide was added. Hot lunches were prepared in the kitchen and served to the children in their classrooms. The school had an excellent PTA. Serving as teachers during the last year the school was an all Negro school was: Mrs. Ellavester H. Howard, Mrs. Daisy C. Lee and Mrs. Emma Alexander. In 1940, World War II began to become a threat to us. To help supply much needed ammunition, an arsenal was built on the banks of New River. People by the hundreds began to flock to this region. The little towns surrounding the area were not large enough to take care of the tremendous overflow, so in the bend of the New River, across from East Radford, a little village sprang up and became known as "Fairlawn".

True to tradition – a school definitely was needed. In September of 1942, a village school opened. It was located on a little strip of land sandwiched between Route 114 and Pepper Ferry Road. A two room tar paper building, windows on one side and two out buildings to serve as toilet facilities were constructed. The building was often referred to as a "chicken coop". Huge iron stoves heated the school and the students from Pepper Grocery carried drinking water across the street.

Among the teachers who served in this school were: Mrs. Eula Phillips, Mrs. Beulah Whitlock, Mrs. Inez Newman, Miss Marie Pannell, Miss Alene Bane, Miss Naomi Brooks, Mrs. May Lawton, and Mrs. Mary K. Bain.

In the fall of 1945, there were 295 homes in the Fairlawn community with at student population of 110 crowded in the school's two rooms. It had become necessary to house one grade in the basement of the Fairlawn Baptist Church and transporting the sixth grade to the New River School and the seventh grade being transported to Dublin.

This situation was getting near a breaking point. For five years patrons met with the school board trying to get a new and adequate school building. After many promises of better things to come, the Fairlawn citizens called a mass meeting of all patrons for Friday, September 5, 1947. Mr. Frank J. Critzer, Superintendent, and Pulaski County School Board members were invited to meet with them. One hundred and thirty citizens crowded into one of the two classrooms. They were assured that some relief would be given. In the meantime, the patrons set up a voluntary fund drive to be used if necessary to get a court injunction against Pulaski County School Board. By 12:00 noon on Saturday, September 6, one thousand dollars had been donated.

On April 13, 1948, the school board met and opened bids for a new school, the lowest bid being \$151,744 and the estimated cost being \$150,000. The Fairlawn district pledged the difference of \$1,744. A building site on the old Smith property on Dudley Ferry Road had already been acquired and plans began immediately.

The present school opened in September of 1949, at a cost of \$166,000. The little village school was closed and the students were transported to the new school to be merged with the students from Fairlawn. A name for the new school had to be chosen. What better way than to take part of each community. So, the RIVER came from New River and LAWN from Fairlawn and Riverlawn Elementary School was born. What a wonderful way to honor the two communities whose prime objective had been to promote education for their youth.

Mr. Jesse J. Shelton, a graduate of Berea, Kentucky, was the first principal of the new building. In the fall of 1949, he took charge of a nine-classroom school with a principal's office and a staff of teachers from the New River school and the Fairlawn school. The teachers were Mrs. Elizabeth P. Bird, Mrs. Edna Brown, Mrs. Virginia Yowell and Mrs. Louise Elswick from New River and Mrs. Eula Phillips, Miss Alene Bane, Miss Naomi Brooks, Mrs. Mary K. Bain and himself from Fairlawn.

As the membership was on the increase, more space was needed. In 1950 the citizens passed a bond issue to pay for a multipurpose room and four additional classrooms to be added to Riverlawn Elementary School. In 1952 one of the new classrooms, on the first floor, was used as a lunchroom. Mrs. Iva Linkous, manager from the New River School, served as cafeteria manager until her death in March, 1974.

In April of 1953, the school and the community were saddened by the sudden death of Jesse J. Shelton, principal. Mrs. Dorothy L. Whitten completed the school year.

In September, 1953, Mr. Herman Ratcliffe became principal and served for one year. During his year as principal, construction began to add a multipurpose room and cafeteria to Riverlawn Elementary School. In 1954, Mr. Owen Bowman became principal and remained at Riverlawn until June of 1962 when he entered the University of Virginia to further his education. In September, 1962, Pulaski County tried the idea of using one principal for two schools. Mr. Charles B. Franklin served both Draper and Riverlawn quite successfully. In 1963, the enrollment had increased to such an extent that we again had a full time principal, Mr. Edwin Ray Martin. During this time music education was added to the curriculum.

During Mr. Martin's tenure, our school saw many changes. In 1966, the little community of New River was once again called upon to surrender its last claim to a school all its own, and complying with Supreme Court rulings, William Gresham School became a part of the Riverlawn Elementary School, which added sixty pupils to our membership. Mrs. Daisy Claytor Lee transferred, also, to be librarian and special reading teacher. The library was set up in a portion of the multipurpose room, awaiting another addition to our school.

In 1967, Governor Mills Godwin set up a bond referendum which enabled Riverlawn to add a library and two first grade classrooms. Mrs. Emma Alexander, former first grade teacher at William Gresham, came to Riverlawn to fill the third position available in first grade. Mrs. Daisy Lee moved to the new library and a mobile unit was put in place to help take are of the overflow.

During Mr. Bowman's tenure at Riverlawn, a very strong patrol system was organized. Mrs. Elizabeth P. Bird was a veteran leader of this program, the 4-H Club, and the seventh grade annual trip to Williamsburg. Mrs. Bird worked with these programs for approximately seventeen years.

Mr. Martin worked with the Riverlawn District Recreation Association and through their hard work the front of our school was hard topped providing a safe recreational site for the community.

The year 1969 saw another great step in our educational system when the old William Gresham School building became the home of our first kindergarten classes.

Children from the Riverlawn, Dublin and Belspring areas were transported there and three sessions were taught. The kindergarten as well as Belspring Elementary School came under the supervision of Mr. Martin. In 1972 the position of assistant principal was added and Mrs. Joyce L. Simpkins served in this capacity until 1990. She then became the principal of Northwood Elementary School.

In 1973, Riverlawn Elementary School again expanded to include a combination cafeteria/gym with a modern, efficient kitchen and an open area classroom. The old cafeteria was completely renovated to become part of this open area. Along with the new additions, the grounds were terraced and grassed and a large bus loading/parking area was hard topped.

During the years our instructional programs have been strengthened due to the many federal and state programs made available to us. The Head Start Program, Title 1 Program, N.D.E.A. Program, and the 4-Year Old Program have made a great impact on our quality of education.

In 1973-74, we had "student assistants" from Radford University for the first time. This program was organized to allow students who were juniors and enrolled in the education department at RU to receive first hand experience in the classroom as they participated in non-teaching duties.

In the fall of 1974, Belspring Elementary School was closed. Riverlawn Elementary School became a K –5 elementary school with the 6th and 7th grades going to Dublin Middle School. The William Gresham building was closed and the kindergarten classes moved back to Riverlawn in 1983.

In 1985 a physical education teacher and an art teacher were added to the staff. Other additions included a mobile unit to carry materials to and from the School Board, full time special education programs, and the services of a part time county health nurse. In the spring of 1989, the school board approved a plan for elementary guidance counselors in the elementary schools. Mrs. Denise Goff was employed to serve our school during the 1989-90 school session. Mrs. Martha Jackson became guidance counselor for Riverlawn in August of 1990 when Mrs. Goff transferred to Dublin Elementary School. Upon Mrs. Jackson's, retirement Mrs. Mary Cheverton became guidance counselor for Riverlawn. Mrs. Cheverton transferred to Pulaski County High School in August 2005. She was replaced by Mrs. Jennifer Wilson.

On June 29, 1990, Mr. Martin's tenure as principal ended after 26 years. Mrs. Judith M. Barr came from Snowville to replace him. During her tenure, educational programs at Riverlawn were expanded to include pre-school programs and other special needs. Mrs. Barr retired in June of 1998 and was replaced by Elizabeth Vansant. Because of increasing services and programs, the assistant principal position was reinstated. Larry W. Price joined the Riverlawn staff as assistant principal in August, 1998. A part-time school nurse was added as another special service in August, 1999.

August, 1999 gave us another change in assistant principal. Linda Edwards joined our staff to assist with our growing enrollment. In 2001, Riverlawn's enrollment dropped and Linda Edwards transferred to Dublin Middle School as assistant principal. Riverlawn continued to

grow under the guidance of Ms. Vansant with the addition of three mobile classrooms, an additional Title 1 teacher, a half-time PALS teacher.

In the fall of 2003, Ms. Vansant transferred to the Pulaski County School Board office as assistant to the superintendent, Dr. Don Stowers. Mr. John Bowler, a former Riverlawn PE teacher and Critzer assistant principal, became principal. In 2005 another mobile classroom was added. In 2006 Riverlawn added a preschool program through the Virginia preschool initiative. Plans were also being made for the construction of a new Riverlawn Elementary School. In September of 2007 ground was broken for the new school. Construction was begun on a state of the art facility. The 22 million dollar school has the capacity of 600 students. The facility utilizes a geothermal heating and cooling system. The building houses 5 classrooms per grade level, 3 computer labs, a science lab, a community room and several other instructional areas. Riverlawn applied and became a School-wide Title I school in 2008. The new school opened to the 330 students on March 23, 2009.

The attendance zones were changed in the fall of 2009 and the enrollment grew to almost 450 students. Mrs. Maureen Spaulding moved from Pulaski Elementary School to serve as the assistant principal. In the Fall of 2014 Mrs. Spaulding moved to Critzer Elementary School and Patricia Betteken was appointed as the next Riverlawn Assistant Principal.

Mr. Bowler retired at the end of the 2015-2016 school year. Mrs. Kimberly Sink was appointed as the next principal to serve at Riverlawn Elementary School.