

# The Slate

Friends of the One-Room Schoolhouse, Inc.,  
Post Office Box 431, Port Republic, MD 20676-0431 • December 2008

## An Interview with Vivian Wheeler Jones

By Fran Armstrong

It was an honor to talk with my former principal about her experiences teaching in a One-Room School in Lusby, MD, in 1946.

Having been raised near Pittsburgh, PA, and just out of college, Vivian Wheeler came to Baltimore and boldly called the State Superintendent of Education asking for a job. Soon after that call, he offered her a job in Prince Frederick. Vivian and her relatives thought she was headed for 'Frederick', MD, until someone explained that there was indeed a place called Prince Frederick, and that a bus went there regularly. Heading out on her own, Vivian took that bus to the Evan's Hotel, which once stood proudly adjacent to the court house. The only problem was that this was an all 'white' hotel, and Vivian wasn't welcome there. This was Vivian's first encounter with Southern Maryland segregation in the 1940s.

A man wearing overalls and a straw hat greeted her outside the hotel, and introduced himself as her supervisor. He drove her to Lusby, to a 'teachorage' where she would live with three other Black teachers. She was assigned to teach at the One-Room School there, replacing Ms. Betty Gross.

Because she had no car, she was told, "you have to take that bus by the filling station." So, off she would go each day. Her One Room School had no electricity, and it had a wood stove in the middle of the room to serve as the only source of heat in the winter. Vivian fondly recalls that her students would come in and fix the fire in the



morning. One morning, when the wood pile was getting low, Ms. Wheeler told her boys to use the sawdust that was next to the pile. Admitting now that she didn't know how to build a fire herself, she says that she still expected the boys to bring her that sawdust. They tried to explain that the sawdust was 'green' and not for a stove, but she insisted. The stove had a bed of wood burning inside it, and the boys added the sawdust. Well, the stove 'blew up,' forcing the stove pipe to separate and crash to the floor.

Vivian also recalls that she started a PTA and told all her students to invite their parents to the school at 7 P.M. When the students questioned that time, she reiterated, "I told you 7 o'clock." They asked her if she wanted them to bring lanterns? She

said, "For what?" and then realized that they couldn't conduct a meeting in the dark!

Yes, this was a new world for Vivian Wheeler—a smart, educated, Black woman from PA—but she loved the community and they embraced her.

The next year, her father bought her a car, and drove it to her. This was the first time he saw where his daughter taught. He told her, now that she had a car, she could go anywhere she wanted. She chose to stay.

Later, she met and married Wesley Jones from Huntingtown, raised a family, and went on to have an outstanding career with Calvert County Public Schools. She retired in 1980 as principal of Calvert Elementary School.

# Port Republic School #7 in 1906

*Photo from Mary Ellen Romney*



*The teacher, center back row, is Marjorie Thomas who later married James Perry Ross.  
Their granddaughter, Mary Ellen Kurek Romney, is a  
Board Member of The Friends of the One-Room Schoolhouse, Inc.*

*Does anyone recognize any of the students in her class?  
If so, please e-mail Mary Ellen Romney at [meromney@comcast.net](mailto:meromney@comcast.net).*

# Tweaking The Trail – Bringing History Alive for Students

*By Carol Khalili*

Each visiting teacher is asked to complete an evaluation upon completion of their day at the One-Room Schoolhouse. While evaluations are overwhelmingly positive, one aspect of the program was mentioned often as needing improvement, the Trail-Walk or the 1.5-mile trek through the woods behind the Parish House that children attending Port Republic School #7 might have experienced in their walk to and from school each day.

The Committee determined that school groups of up to thirty students made it difficult to hear the trail guide's discussion. A second trail guide was added to each day's staff, breaking the class into two small groups. Now one group begins the trail closest to the school, pretending to be walking home from school, while the second group starts by crossing the jousting field and adjacent meadow, recreating a walk from home and arriving at school. It is always fun when the two groups cross paths midway along the trail in the secluded and sheltered woods. Students are now able to easily cluster around their trail guide at significant spots to hear and see samples as they learn historical, natural, and ecological facts and information.

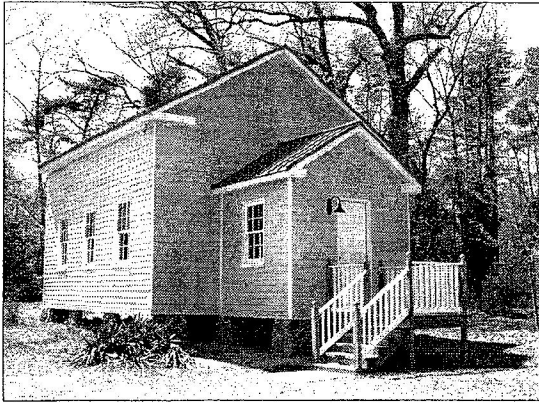
The second adjustment to the trail format is the addition of a flip-chart booklet for each trail guide. Illustrations include an ox cart, tobacco field and workers, jousting tournament rider, raised railroad bed, water well, and rain barrel. Each is displayed as the teachable moment arises, presenting a visual aid to augment verbal information—presenting and reinforcing concepts that may be totally new to today's students.

Responses on this fall's teacher evaluations of the program noted that these two changes to the trail format were positive, "being split into 2 groups made it easier for all of the students to keep up and listen to the guides!" One teacher's comments reflect the positive feelings of all the visiting classes, "As always, one of the most enjoyable trips for the 4<sup>th</sup> graders. It certainly brings history "alive."

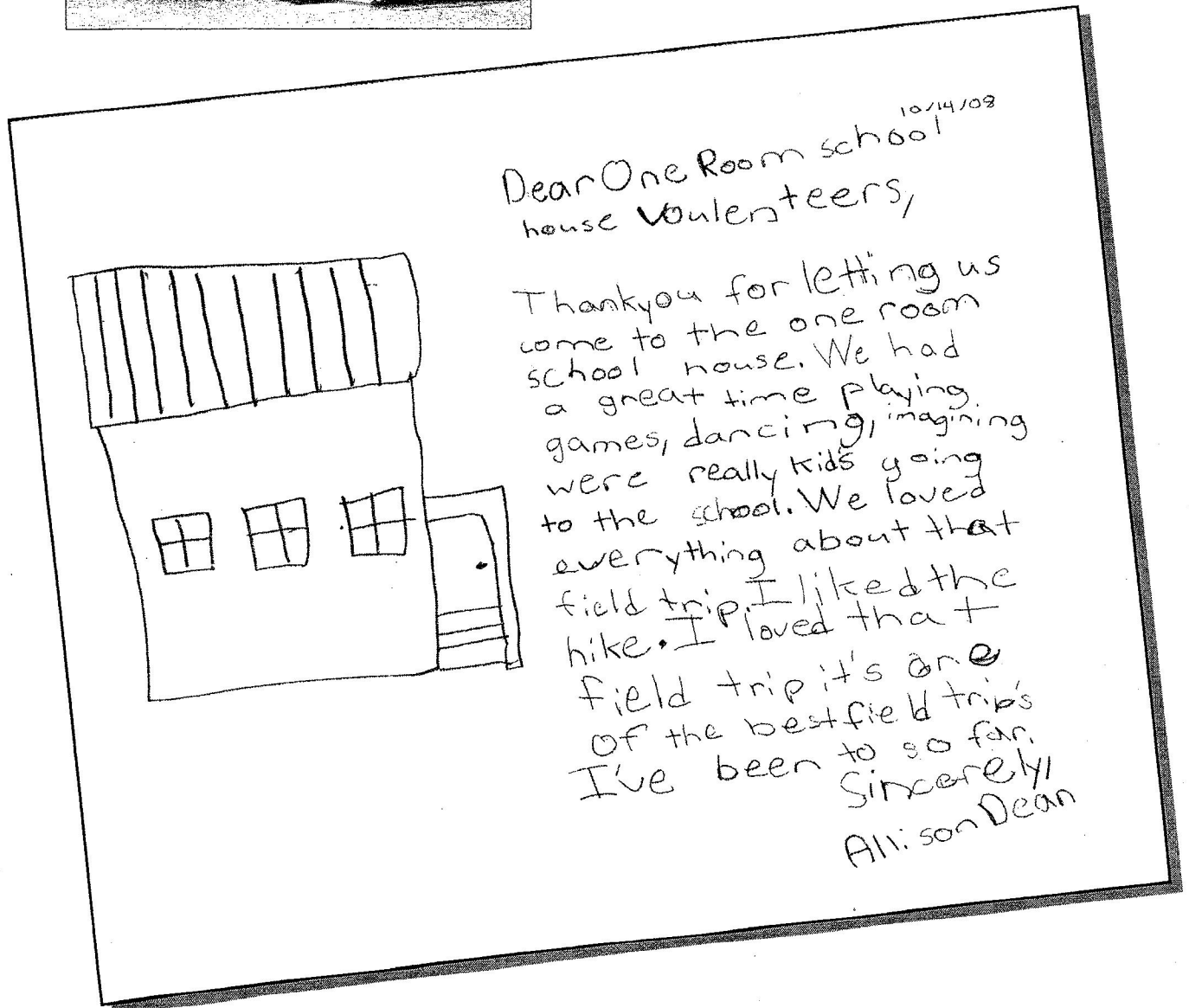
We are always thankful for the many talented and enthusiastic volunteers and teachers who provide this experience for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students of Calvert County.

(See students' illustrated thank-you notes on the following two-page centerfold spread.)

# Thank you, One-Room Schoolhouse Volunteers!



Students from Plum Point Elementary School sent these illustrated notes after their day at the One-Room Schoolhouse.

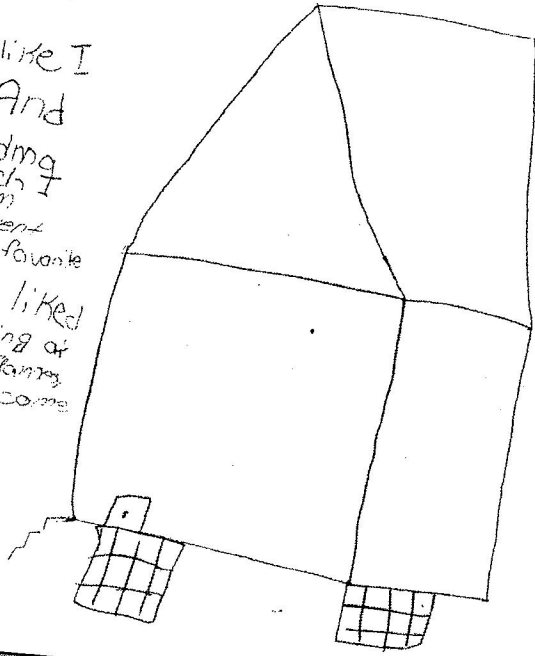




Dear One Room School Volunteers,

Thank you for letting us come to the one room school. I aculy felt like I went to the school. And guess what my great Grandma knew surprized how much I know about the one room school. she told me she went to a one room school. My favorite for was the hike. I liked seeing different plants, looking at the trees, singing and dancing, the games and drawing on the board. I hope I'm able to come again. Anyway Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Taliyah



Dear One Room School Volunteers,

Thank you for letting us come! I had a lot of fun and learned a lot about colonial schools and nature from the nature walk. Bye!

Sincerely,  
Rebekah



# Visitors to the One-Room Schoolhouse



*Wedding parties at Christ Church have found our  
One-Room Schoolhouse a charming—and educational—addition to the venue.*

## One-Room Schoolhouse Is Available for Special Events

Not just school children visit the Port Republic #7 One-Room Schoolhouse for a glimpse back in time. This historic building is also available for tours, club meetings, and now even as a venue to add a special touch to a wedding reception held at the Christ Church Parish House. This past spring during two wedding receptions, guests from many areas of the country enjoyed learning about school days at the turn of the last century and life in Southern Maryland.

## Regularly Open on Sunday Afternoons and During Jousting Tournaments

The Schoolhouse is open every Sunday afternoon during the summer months and by appointment at other times. It is also a popular stop at the Christ Church Jousting Tournament held the last Saturday in August with over two hundred people visiting the Schoolhouse on that day.

## To Schedule Use of the Schoolhouse...

If you are interested in having a function at the Schoolhouse or using it for guests' enjoyment during a wedding reception at the Parish House, please contact Carol Khalili at 410-586-0161. There is a fee to use the Schoolhouse.

# From the Podium

Robert Pfeiffer, President

We are ~~doing~~ everything within reason to get this newsletter into your hands before the end of the year, not due to a need to present another case for year-end contributions, but to highlight what turned out to be a very interesting year.

The year 2008 started out quietly enough but that tranquility was shattered with a tree falling onto the building during a spring "nor'easter." Not only did the building suffer damage, one of our valuable volunteers was injured while trying to secure the building from the weather. Both the building and Ken Romney are as good as new, but we all learned to further appreciate those who bring their skills to help with our program, volunteers in general and one volunteer specifically.

Working with the Vestry of Christ Church and with financial assistance from an anonymous donor, I'm happy to report that the building and its storage building are back in operation. The storage building is actually larger than its predecessor, but something tells me that the growing educational program can always use more space. You'll read about the fall educational program elsewhere in this newsletter.

As our regular attendees have noticed, we continue to search for a reasonable date for the Ice Cream Social. While it had been scheduled in mid-August until 2007, we found the heat oppressive and not conducive to eating ice cream outside. For the past two years we've hosted the event after the schools have opened and we have noticed a decline in attendance. Noteworthy this year however was the combination of the Ice Cream Social with the Annual Meeting. As required by the 501 (c3)

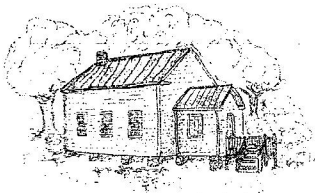
regulations, we brought the newly drafted By-Laws to the membership for adoption and they were unanimously approved. We enter the New Year with fresh guidance for the operation of the organization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Please note, however, we will still welcome your recommendations on when to host the Ice Cream Social.

During a meeting this fall, the Board requested that Richard Dodds a board member and a specialist in museum collections begin to catalogue our growing educational collection. Richard's first suggestion, that has now become guidance for our giving program, is to only acquire those items that are related to education during the period of 1870 through 1932. For those of you who might want to donate items that were used in education during this period, we will certainly welcome all items, big and small.

Now that winter has forced a level of dormancy on our activities, we are already planning for the arrival of spring. We intend to contract for the first interior painting since the restoration of the building in 1976 and will complete the landscaping around the storage building. We hope to have all of this work completed in time for the arrival of our first students in April of 2009.

In closing, I want to thank all of you for your continued support and welcome any ideas or contributions to the program. With the adoption of the new By-Laws we will also be looking for new members to the Board. So if you have an interest in education, history or children, it's really an outstanding use of your precious time.

Thanks and Happy Holidays!



## We Always Encourage and Welcome New Members as Friends of the One-Room Schoolhouse, Inc.

The Friends of the One-Room Schoolhouse, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization formed to establish a partnership between the Calvert Retired School Personnel Association and others who are interested in preserving Port Republic School #7.

Membership includes a newsletter plus information on activities with updates on coming events.

Make your *tax-deductible* check payable to "Friends of the One-Room Schoolhouse, Inc." and mail to Post Office Box 431, Port Republic, MD 20676-0431.

Individual or Family \$20.00  
 Benefactor \$50.00  
 Sustaining \$100.00  
 Additional Contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone # \_\_\_\_\_  
E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Friends of the One-Room  
Schoolhouse, Inc.**

Post Office Box 431  
Port Republic, MD 20676-0431



**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**President ...** Robert Pfeiffer  
**Vice Pres ....** Chloe Ewalt  
**Secretary ...** Fran Armstrong  
**Treasurer ...** Alexander Graham

**Board of Directors**

Richard Dodds  
Phillip Fleming  
Jack Fringer  
Carol Khalili  
Mary Ellen Romney  
Joseph Showalter

*(Newsletter layout and design  
by Frances Dunkle Poling)*

# Our One-Room Schoolhouse Still Teaches...in California, of All Places!

## California Friends Inspired by DVD Reminiscences

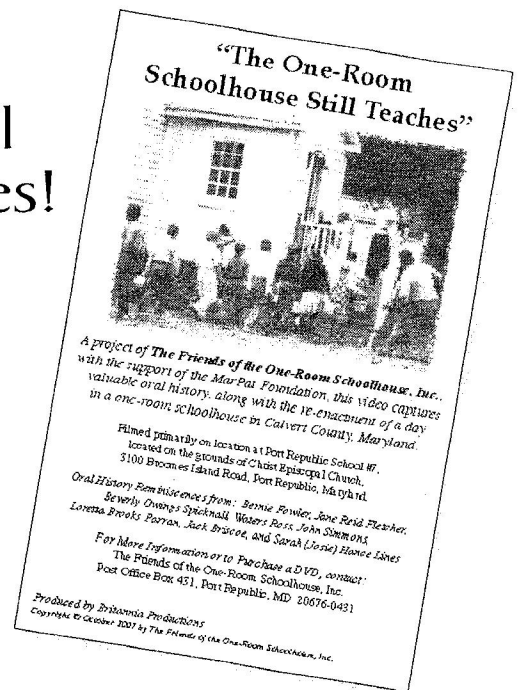
What fun it was to find out that a one-room schoolhouse museum board in Danville, California, found the Port Republic One-Room Schoolhouse DVD to be an inspiration for a project they hope to begin at their little school in Tassajara Valley.

Beverly Owings Spicknall, who attended the one-room school in Owings and one of the individuals interviewed for our video, sent it to a friend in

California. She wrote back to Beverly that, after viewing the DVD, they hope to begin interviewing individuals who attended their one-room schoolhouse and perhaps pursue a similar biographical history of students' memories.

## DVDs Make a Wonderful Holiday Gift

If you are interested in purchasing the DVD "The One-Room Schoolhouse Still Teaches" or want more information about the DVD, please contact: The



Friends of the One-Room Schoolhouse, Inc. Post Office Box 431, Port Republic, MD 20676 or call Chloe Ewalt at 410-535-3235.