

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL SCHOOLS:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE SCHOOLS OF THE  
LEICESTER AND SANDY MUSH COMMUNITIES**

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## ABSTRACT

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The rural mountain community of Leicester, North Carolina, lies in the western section of Buncombe County, with its extreme western section of Sandy Mush spreading slightly into Madison County. The area was settled about 1800, making the community one of the oldest in the county. Schools in the area began as small subscription or “old field” schools, often near, or sharing facilities with, a church. Later, church affiliation and support prompted the growth of schools in the community, providing educational access to students beyond the most basic level. A number of families in the community were instrumental in the growth of schools and in their success over time.

With the advent of public schools, these private and church-supported schools gave way to state-supported facilities, but many of the same families remained active in the cause of education in the community. School consolidation, changes in community structure, and changes in the size and cultural makeup of the community have created differences in the schools, yet the support seen over time has continued.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### *Statement of the Problem*

The history of schools in the United States, both public and private, is a history of community activism leading to their initiation and continuation (Lefler & Newsome, 1973). Colonial governments were frequently unwilling or unable to fund the establishment of schools in areas with sparse populations. Tax monies paid to the Crown also were frequently directed to far more immediate purposes such as defense of the colonies. Similarly, in the North Carolina colony, few citizens were interested enough in a formal education to warrant the financial expenditure of building and staffing schools. At the same time, North Carolina's colonial governors constantly pleaded with the general assembly to remediate the lack of education among the colony's citizens by beginning a series of public schools (Ready, 2005). The general assembly failed repeatedly to respond to the governors' pleas. Thus, the history of community involvement in rural schools began. Interested citizens and groups of people joined together to begin the schools that came into existence in North Carolina. These community-based schools frequently operated on temporary bases and met with mixed levels of success. They were, however, the rural colony's first attempts at organized schools.

Organized religion played a large part in these schools. The first formal teacher to arrive in the Carolina colony was Charles Griffith (or Griffin), who came to the colony in 1706, thirteen years before North and South Carolina were separated. With the support of the Anglican Church, he opened a small school in Pasquotank County (Lefler &

Newsome, 1973). Other religious organizations, such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, began organizing communities and schools to arrange for the education of the colony's citizens. Most often, the church or religious organization provided the schools' teachers, while the community was responsible for providing a building and its maintenance, and for housing a teacher. Subscriptions, or tuition, paid the teachers' salaries.

As the colony's population pushed farther west into sparsely populated areas, the number of schools and availability of formal education became more and more scarce. When North Carolina's state constitution was written and ratified in 1776, a section was included providing for the establishment of free public schools at state expense. In the early years of the new state, though, the establishment and funding of public schools was a low priority for North Carolina legislators, as they faced multiple organizational and financial problems for the new state. Many citizens of the state also opposed the idea of free public education because of its associated tax burden on the citizenry (Johnson, 1937). Again, the wish for education fell to those who sought to obtain it at their own or the community's expense.

With its lack of education and schools, North Carolina developed and maintained a reputation for ignorance and a lack of societal progress (Lefler & Newsome, 1973; Ready, 2005). It was 1839 before public schools were actually established in North Carolina, sixty-three years after a provision for their creation had been written into the state constitution. The system put into place was designed by Archibald Murphey, a state senator from Orange County. His plan provided for every county in the state to have "adequate schools supported by public taxation" (Johnson, 1937). Each North Carolina

county was to have at least one public school for all students who wished to attend at public expense.

Traditionally, in North Carolina then, as now, the farther west one moved, the more sparse and scattered the population became. The Blue Ridge Mountain and Appalachian areas farther in the west had not even been opened to European settlers until after the American Revolution, when the Cherokee were forced to cede land to the newly-formed United States owing to the war's outcome (Ready, 2005). Even when the legal barriers to settlement of these southern Appalachian areas were removed, lack of roads, rough terrain, and distance to more densely populated areas made settlement and advancement quite slow. Counties were often left as extremely large land areas. Buncombe County, for example, in the early nineteenth century, was often referred to as the "State of Buncombe" due to its large size (Ready, 2005; Tessier, 1982). Its massive size encompassed eight current western North Carolina counties. Murphey's plan for at least one public school in each of the state's counties offered little benefit to the physically large but sparsely populated Appalachian region. Even when the state-supported schools did exist, distance, poor roads, and a lack of transportation kept most students from enjoying their benefit. Coupled with an attitude that did not value education, the new public school model met with limited success in the mountain region of the state (Johnson, 1937).

Private citizens and communities, therefore, filled the gap left by a lack of available schools and formal education. Private academies and small schools sprang up in communities as educational opportunities for students and families who had the financial means and the desire to take advantage of their offerings. By the middle of the

nineteenth century, several private academies had been established in Buncombe County, where no public schools yet existed. Families and communities provided the land on which the buildings sat, materials and labor for classroom buildings, and the teachers for the subjects to be taught. Student tuition and fees offset the costs, but the involvement of communities and citizens kept the schools open and maintained (Miller, 1965).

This background of community involvement for western North Carolina schools continues. Community involvement is still important to the success of schools and to the cohesiveness of the community in which they lie (Miller, 1965). This study focused on Leicester and its westernmost section of Sandy Mush, one western North Carolina community, and tracks its involvement with its associated schools through private academies founded and funded by area families. These gave way to public neighborhood schools, then, as time passed, progressed to the current model of consolidated area schools.

Currently, the larger community contains one elementary school serving grades kindergarten through five. This school feeds into one middle school approximately eight miles away, serving grades six through eight, and then further feeds into one high school serving grades nine through twelve with approximately 1,400 students. The high school sits directly across a hill from the middle school. This study examined the level of community involvement at early schools, then Leicester Elementary, its changes through time, and its focus on academics within the school and on extracurricular activities that are, today, a large part of the life of any school. Clyde A. Erwin Middle School and High School were also examined in order to ascertain the level of involvement in consolidated schools as students grow older.

I am a native of the Leicester community and am descended from many of the families who were involved in the public and private schools in the community since their earliest days. Today, I work as a fifth grade teacher at Leicester Elementary. Together, these facts have given me access to school records and family papers that otherwise might have been difficult to access. My position at the schools and long residence in the community also allowed me to “know where to look” for many of the sources used in this research.

My husband, Dr. Jim Brown, is not a native of the Leicester community, but today we live on a section of the old Reeves farm in Sandy Mush. He also works for the Buncombe County Schools as principal of Erwin High School. Erwin is the 1400-student consolidated high school that Leicester’s students attend. He, therefore, is also a visible presence in the Leicester community and its schools.

#### *Key Definitions*

A study of rural community involvement in a southern Appalachian North Carolina school requires clarity concerning what actually comprises a rural school, a rural community, and the southern Appalachian region of the United States. For purposes of this study, definitions from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the United States Census Bureau were used. Yet, within even these two governmental agencies, many differences in key definitions exist. Definitions depend on whether population or geographic measures are used in determining rural areas, schools, or populations.

In 2006, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) revised its definition of rural schools based on an “urban-centric” classification model. Rural areas

are defined under this model as those areas that do not lie inside an urbanized area or town cluster (NCES, 2008). All associated schools lying within that geographic area are therefore classified as rural schools, regardless of school size.

Those associated rural communities, for the purposes of this study, relied on another, but more commonly used, definition for a rural community as put forth by the United States Census Bureau in 2006. In this model, “rural communities” are defined by their associated geographic features, population, and their residual distance to a larger statistical area, such as a city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

In the United States, the Appalachian Mountain region occupies a large body of land east of the Mississippi River that extends from western Pennsylvania to northern Alabama. Pronounced geographic, economic, and educational differences exist in various sub-regions of the Appalachians (Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2004). This study focused on a specific area of the southern Appalachian region. For purposes of this study, the southern Appalachian region was defined as the geographic area encompassing eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, upstate South Carolina, and northeast Georgia.

Finally, a definition for community involvement is needed for this research. Community involvement in schools is here defined as any act performed in conjunction with or having to do with any aspect of a school’s function.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The wide variety in the definitions of rural schools provides a broad basis for study of different aspects of school size, academic performance, and economics. Much of the research on rural schools, however, centers on very small schools and areas with declining populations (Schwartzbeck, 2003). In the western North Carolina area that is the focus of this study, schools often have an enrollment of over five hundred students at the elementary level, and have growing enrollment. Many counties and communities in this area continue to see increases in population and, as a result, the school size continues to increase (Economic Research Service, 2007). In North Carolina, with a total population of approximately nine million people, the rural population of the state was estimated at 2.7 million in 2008. None of the top five North Carolina counties in agricultural sales are in the western region of the state. Rural therefore, does not necessarily mean agricultural, despite the common generalization. Rural school research is thus forced to become far more localized in character because of the wide differences and discrepancies in many aspects of rural communities throughout the southern Appalachian section of western North Carolina.

### *Characteristics of the Southern Appalachian Region and Western North Carolina*

The Appalachian region of North Carolina was the last area of the state to be settled by Europeans, and its population today is far smaller than that of the state's other regions (Ready, 2005). Isolation, lack of roads, difficult terrain, and poor availability of goods kept this section of North Carolina lacking in many of the benefits available in other sections of the state. Among the benefits that were lacking was public education

(Miller, 1965). Communities and interested groups of citizens often joined together to form and maintain their own small schools in order to correct this situation (Johnson, 1937).

By 2006, despite the United States' population growth, over one half of all its operating school districts and one third of all public schools were in rural areas (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). In the South, 28% of all public school students were enrolled in rural schools, making that region the largest in rural school population in the nation. The four states with the largest nonmetropolitan (rural) population growth between 2000 and 2005 were North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and Texas (National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance, U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The Appalachian region of North Carolina encompasses the western part of the state and Georgia has several counties in the southern Appalachian region. Therefore, not all rural southern Appalachian schools or communities are small or isolated.

#### *Educational Attainment*

Historically, the isolation of many southern Appalachian communities made educational attainment difficult. Until about the time of World War II, educational attainment in these areas above the eighth grade was outside the normal range, at least for students in public schools. In many families, this lack of educational attainment was simply not a large concern. Community concerns and economic realities came first. Commonly, citizens of many rural Appalachian communities believed that families and churches were the primary moral and learning institutions for young people, not government-sponsored schools. If further education was desired for students, it became

the responsibility of the family and possibly the privately-operated community schools, not the public schools. Any rigor or advanced curriculum beyond a basic education fell to the leaders of these small non-public schools. This resulted in a very uneven quality of education within various schools. Even in the early twentieth century when states began wide programs of educational reform, this reform often began locally on a small scale in Appalachian communities rather than statewide or nationwide (Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2004).

Many rural areas today continue to contain a population with less educational attainment than that of their suburban counterparts. Rural community residents are less likely to have a college degree than suburban and urban residents. Twenty-two percent of American rural residents hold a college degree, while 42% of suburban dwellers have degrees, compared to 39% of urban residents (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2003). In the southern Appalachian region, only 19.2% of citizens hold a bachelor's degree or higher, placing this sub-region even behind the northern Appalachians. Seventy-five percent of residents of the southern Appalachians held a high school degree in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This represents a 9.2% increase over 1990's census data, but still keeps educational attainment well behind that of most suburban and urban areas. In rural sections of North Carolina in 2008, 32.3% of the population had only a high school diploma, while 19.7% had some college credit. Only 15% of the state's rural population held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30.3% of the urban population. Little gender difference is seen in the percentage of males with degrees, either college or high school, as opposed to females with the same degrees. Younger residents are far more likely to at least have a high school degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

### *The “Brain Drain”*

This lack of educational attainment is a problem for many rural communities. Many young rural residents leave their communities due to the lack of work and opportunities in their areas; this is true of the southern Appalachians (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2003). Fewer family farms remain year after year in the United States, as do small businesses and manufacturing facilities in nonmetropolitan rural areas. The associated loss of jobs make finding employment for younger people increasingly difficult. Beginning in the 1990s, the exodus of younger residents from rural areas, male and female, began to increase rapidly as more of the population attended college and found economic opportunities in different areas. Concurrently, economic and opportunities in rural areas declined. The result has been a rural “brain drain” that has accelerated in recent years (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). In the same Kellogg Foundation survey, “being poor” was ranked as the predominant problem for rural America with a 19% response rate on a national survey, so the lure of better-paying jobs in urban areas is naturally tempting for young rural citizens. This often keeps the citizens of rural communities less educated than those of many other areas, frequently leading to a diminishing in the importance of and involvement in schools by their community members (McCracken & Barcenas, 1991).

### *Rural Southern Appalachian Communities*

The Appalachian Mountain region of the United States covers a geographic area extending from Maine to Alabama. The long expanse of the mountain range results in a division of the area into northern, central, and southern sections based on geography. Western North Carolina is considered part of the southern Appalachian region along with

sections of east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, northern Georgia, and selected counties in northeast Alabama and northwest South Carolina (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008).

Western North Carolina communities historically have been primarily farming communities. However, that is no longer true. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 6% of western North Carolina's population is currently engaged in agriculture as a profession (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Many residents of rural communities commute to nearby metropolitan areas for employment. Transportation has changed a great deal since the nineteenth-century isolation of most western North Carolina citizens. Historically, this commute would have been impossible due to poor roads and the state of transportation in the region. The changes in infrastructure have led to widespread changes in employment patterns and community changes (Bosak & Perlman, 2002).

Often, in small rural communities, the schools are culturally embedded in their respective communities to the point that they play a very significant role in the cohesion of the entire community (Beaulieu & Israel, 2005). Dating back to the nineteenth century, most rural communities had small populations, so few community gathering places existed. Schools frequently became that community center and gathering place (Miller, 1965; Reynolds, 1950; Goetz, S.J. & Rupasingha, A., 2005). This created a sense of commitment from the community to the schools, focusing on the schools as the responsibility of the entire community. Often, it became difficult to separate school activities from community activities. The community, through its activities, promotes a sense of belonging to the place (Budge, 2006).

Many researchers address a sense of place and commitment to place in rural communities (Budge, 2006; Grunewald & Relnick, 2003; Howley, 2001). Theoretically, Grunewald and Relnick call this sense “the marriage between the geography of the mind and geographic places” (Grunewald & Relnick, 2003). All parts of the community, including the school, become something precious that is worthy of effort to promote its success (Bickel, Howley, & McDonough, 1997). Budge, writing in 2006, even proposes six “habits of place” which include connectedness and civic engagement that are firmly in place in the southern Appalachians (Budge, 2006). In rural areas, the school often is the center around which community life rotates. Community members develop a sense of efficacy, feeling that they are contributing members of the school and the community.

This same sense of place frequently leads to successive generations of families continuing to live in the same community over long periods of time. This residential stability contributes to strong links among these communities and the social institutions in the same areas. Multiple generations of rural families attend the same schools and develop strong relationships with school staff and other community members. These connections may last for generations and promote attachments to place, especially to schools that parents or even grandparents attended (Beaulieu & Israel, 2005). Civic engagement and community participation become inextricably linked to the school through succeeding generations (Lyson, 2005).

### *School and Community Connections*

Research examining the cooperation between schools and community groups found that cooperation between school and community is a common attribute of rural communities (Howley, 2004). In many rural communities, the only communal buildings

are the school and churches. The school often becomes the “hub of life” for small communities (Dickerson, 2000). Plays, concerts, sporting events, and other activities take place in the school because it may be the only secular venue in the community large enough to house all the participants in many activities plus the accompanying audience. Robinson states that with rural schools being everything from a stage for holiday plays to the kitchen where senior Meals-on-Wheels are prepared, the school and community are tightly bound together. The residents of rural communities often retain feelings of belonging to the school well into adulthood and when beginning their own families (Robinson, 2006). The school in the rural community then becomes worthy of the individual’s effort in promoting its continuing success.

Along with their families, students become linked to their schools through the faculty and extracurricular activities (Kershaw & Blank, 1993; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992). A 1996 study done by Cotton found that students in rural schools are involved in a greater number of activities from which they derive more satisfaction than their counterparts in larger urban schools. Students in large schools frequently demonstrated extremes in involvement with school activities. Some participated in a large number of activities, while another large segment of the school’s student population is involved in few or no extracurricular activities. In smaller schools and communities, the schools may have fewer students, but they are often involved in a wide range of activities, though fewer overall activities may be available. This sense of belonging and participation leads to continued involvement with the school and its functions that continues after students leave their respective schools.

In rural schools, relations between students, families, staff members, and the surrounding community are likely to be close. Teachers tend to live in or near the community in which they teach and often know the parents of students in their classes outside the confines of the school. In many rural communities, the principal lives in the community as well. Parents and community members see school staff as more than simply fixtures in and of the school building. Interpersonal relationships are therefore more open than in larger urban schools. Multiple generations of the same family often have the same teachers, continuing a connection with the school long after the earlier generations have ended their own tenure in the setting. Rural schools thus have a higher rate of parental involvement because of families' and community members' connections to the schools and the direct connections to those schools held by parents and community members (Cotton, 1996).

Yet, the opposite can also happen. As rural communities shrink or their cultures change, a distancing may occur between the community and the school. This can diminish the community's involvement in the school and its programs over time (Fanning, 1995).

In many rural communities, the community actually becomes part of the school's curriculum. Students and parents may work together in conjunction with the school to provide service to the community in the form of building projects, research projects, or other activities that bring schools and community together (Leloudis, 1996). This collaboration promotes volunteerism in students and adults and establishes a pattern of reciprocal service to school and community by members. Black (2006) even found that the connection between schools and community action served as an important indicator

of the vitality of the schools and the community. She stated that this work continues the perception of the school as the center of the community and also promotes community involvement in the school itself. Involved parents were even found to reinforce the rural schools' high expectations for student academic achievement (Bartley & Beesley, 2007).

### *The Role of School Consolidation*

Writing in 1959, James Conant stated that for schools to be their most effective, each grade level or class level should have at least one hundred students. In the same vein, he advocated for the elimination of small schools, particularly high schools. Conant wrote that small schools were not cost effective, nor could they offer as wide a curriculum base as large schools (Conant, 1959). His book was used as justification for the increase and speed of consolidation in the United States, including rural areas.

Lyson (2005) found an even greater connection between rural schools and community involvement. He found that small towns and rural communities that lost their schools due to consolidation or any other reason failed to thrive as communities and often ceased to exist as cohesive units. School consolidation resulted in a community change as much as it is a school change. Patterns of community involvement change and often diminish. What had been one school community in the past would become two or more formerly autonomous units now trying to merge roles, facilities, and philosophies that may not be in agreement with each other. Schools and communities must remain closely aligned or both suffer (Howley, 2001).

In recent years, though, the small rural community school has become scarce in the southern Appalachian region and western North Carolina. Two factors have diminished the numbers of small rural schools in this area; these are increasing area

population and school consolidation. During the 1990s, the rural population of the United States grew by more than ten percent, with the southern Appalachian region having among the most rapid growth (Whitener, Jen, & Kassel, 2004). With this population growth, districts such as Buncombe County, North Carolina, have been forced to build new schools and even remodel and re-open old schools due to a student population of approximately 26,000 and the ensuing overcrowding (Buncombe County Board of Education, 2009).

One example of this phenomenon is the case of Barnardsville Elementary School in the northern section of Buncombe County. This rural K-5 school was closed in a consolidation move in the early 1990s, with the school's students being bused to the much larger North Buncombe Elementary School. By the late 1990s, though, population growth in the community created overcrowded conditions in North Buncombe Elementary. This overcrowding precipitated the refurbishing and re-opening on Barnardsville Elementary as a K-5 school once again (Buckner, 2005).

In most rural southern Appalachian school districts, school consolidation has had a great impact on schools and communities. In 1904, 110 schools existed in Buncombe County; fifteen of them offered high school subjects as part of their programs. The Asheville City Schools were also, at the time, part of the county school system and made up four of the schools of the day. By 1947, the county had reduced the number of schools to twenty-one, and by 1950, eighteen of those had high school class offerings. In 1959, the Buncombe County, North Carolina Schools operated thirty-three schools with regular class offerings. The system in the same year voted to consolidate its schools into six districts with a large district-wide high school at the center of each district. Smaller

community high schools were closed. Where community schools had previously spanned grades one through twelve (or eleven in earlier years), community schools after this consolidation stopped at eighth grade. Students in grades nine through twelve often traveled to new consolidated high schools outside their immediate communities, though the last of these did not open until 1960. Buncombe County, like many rural districts at the time, saw this as a cost-cutting measure in which the county district could consolidate debts owed by individual schools for construction and repairs and obtain new, modern facilities that met educational requirements for students as well as meeting North Carolina safety codes (Miller, 1965).

The Buncombe County Schools' consolidation efforts were a reflection of school consolidation practices throughout the United States, including the rest of western North Carolina and the entire southern Atlantic region. Rural schools and communities experienced this consolidation pressure most frequently. Their buildings were often old and in poor physical condition. Replacing smaller, old schools with new, modern consolidated ones serving a larger geographic area and its associated population was often seen as the most politically and economically astute solution to an economic problem. New schools are extremely expensive to build. Often, the small rural communities housing the schools to be lost have little political clout and are virtually powerless to fight the consolidation actions (Howley & Howley, 2006). School consolidation has changed the face of schools in the United States. In 1930, there were 128,000 school districts and over 238,000 schools in the nation. By 1980, the number of American school districts had dropped to 16,000 and the number of schools had been reduced to 61,000 (DeYoung & Howley, 1990). The North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction has strongly promoted a “one county, one district” policy as a cost-cutting measure which would reduce the number of schools districts in the state from 113 to 100 to match the 100 counties in the state(North Carolina General Assembly, 2009).

Another reason frequently cited as a benefit of rural school consolidation is that of student academic achievement levels. Small rural schools are often not able to provide advanced level classes or access to the same technological advances that are available to larger schools in more urbanized areas. In the classes that are offered, though, student achievement levels are often higher than those of their urban counterparts (Howley, 2004). Yet, many classes cannot be offered, affecting students who have the desire and the ability to succeed in advanced placement or other specialized classes. Teacher certification rules make it impossible for community volunteer practitioners to teach classes in the schools, as was done in some areas in the past. Therefore, those classes and programs may simply not be available to rural students.

The increased availability and use of technology in rural communities and schools is now making a difference in class offerings and learning opportunities for students, though. Distance learning, in which students may take internet-based classes or classes from area community colleges or universities, is becoming part of the curriculum offering for many rural schools. Hannum, Irvin, Banks, & Farmer, writing in 2009, found that 69% of rural school districts were already using distance education in at least some of their schools. Eighty-five percent had used distance learning at some point in the past. This use of technology in rural schools may then also have the benefit of creating economic development for the community due to integration of school and community development programs (Schafft, Alter, & Bridger, 2006).

As a result of rural school consolidation and population growth, many schools in western North Carolina and the entire southern Appalachian region continue to grow to the point they cannot be considered small schools. Leicester Elementary in Buncombe County is typical. This rural K-5 school currently has over six hundred students. Its associated middle and high schools, Clyde A. Erwin Middle School and Clyde A. Erwin High School have over 1200 and 1400 students, respectively. Though each may serve a rural or mixed suburban/rural area, neither could be considered small when compared to many rural schools (Buncombe County Schools, 2009).

The large size of rural districts, though, makes students have to spend a large portion of their day on long bus rides. Some elementary, middle, and high school students have bus rides of an hour both morning and afternoon. According to Aimee and Craig Howley (2004), this cuts into the time students and parents have for extracurricular activities, thereby diminishing student and parent involvement in many activities in their respective schools due to time and distance from the school each attends.

Community involvement, then, in the larger consolidated schools, became much more centered around school athletics, bands, and other extracurricular activities than with the academic purposes of school (Rural School and Community Trust, 2005). Student performances are well-attended and football stands are filled. The community involvement became much less academically-directed and much more school-as-community focused through extracurricular activities such as athletics, in which students and community members both participate. Particularly in rural middle and high schools, this involvement serves a similar purpose as in smaller schools and districts. It ties the community or communities together into one focused unit, at least temporarily and for

that one purpose (Miller, 1995). Community members may paint field houses, mow grass, and assist team coaches. The pattern of community involvement has changed with consolidation and the age of the students involved, but it is still present.

### *Demographic Changes*

For the last several years, the western North Carolina region has been a popular place for families of all ages. Retirees move to the area, as do young families wanting the type of physical and social environment offered by the region as a place in which to raise a family (Clark, Lambert, Park, & Wilcox, 2009; Herzog, 2005). These new families, both young and old, frequently become active members of their communities, becoming involved in the organizations most important to them. Even if no direct involvement occurs with the community's new residents, their tax dollars and votes on issues affecting the schools create an involvement in schools (Clark, et. al., 2009).

In many cases, the retirees who move to the southern Appalachian region have no direct interest in the schools; their children are no longer students. Some, however, spend time volunteering with schools and programs in their new communities (Buncombe County Board of Education, 2009). This occurs despite the fact that no concrete connection exists between them and the schools in their community. Often, this involvement centers on tutoring and academic support for students. The number of individuals who become involved in this manner is small, but can make a substantial difference in the schools and students that receive their time and expertise.

In the same vein, many rural southern Appalachian schools benefit from long-time community residents, especially retirees, who regularly volunteer in school classrooms. Again, these are not frequent volunteers, but some do continue their

involvement on a long-term basis (Leicester School Parent-Teacher Organization minutes, 2009). The involvement may have begun when their children or grandchildren were students, but it continued past the point of having family members as students in the school (NCES, 2008).

When families with school-age children move into an area such as western North Carolina, they often become involved with their children's school or school district (Howley, 2004). Schools are often seen as the center of rural communities, so community members and families help provide interdependent relationships between community and school activities. Families who move into rural communities and become actively involved in the school and its functions often build social capital in the community, thereby assimilating into the culture of the school and community more quickly (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Bushnell, writing in 1999, found that "newcomer families, whether they live in the nearby town, in a renovated farmhouse, or a subdivision, connect to a rural identity through the school" (pg. 83). Students in all U.S. rural areas are more likely than their urban counterparts to have parents who attend school functions (NCES, 2008). Yet, many of the families who move to the southern Appalachians choose the communities to which they move dependent upon the reputation of its schools (Howley, 2004).

These families are often quickly assimilated into the school and the community and become actively involved in the school and its functions. This is particularly true of more affluent families who may have more leisure time with which to become actively involved with their child's school. This also becomes evident when one parent either does not work outside the home or is self-employed. An ethic of commitment and care

seems to come with residence in the community and with the enrollment of children in the community's schools (Howley, 2004). Involvement in the local schools is the result.

In summary, little research exists into the actual levels of community involvement in rural southern Appalachian schools. It has been shown to exist (Cotton, 1996; DeYoung & Howley, 1990; Herzog & Pittman, 1998; Howley, 2004; Lyson, 2005), yet, the level and form of that involvement and its ensuing benefits to the respective school are not known.

This historical case study examined the past and present roles of community involvement in a rural Buncombe County, North Carolina community and its associated schools. It provided insight into the rural community surrounding the school and the role played by the community's residents in the life of their school. The study also provided insight into the level and kinds of community involvement centered in the school.

The study is unique because the community and school are in a very stable southern Appalachian North Carolina community in which population increases and the socioeconomic status of families have remained somewhat constant through time. Average household size in 2008 for this community was 2.57 persons, only slightly higher than North Carolina's state average of 2.5. Estimated 2008 median income was \$37,453, below the state average of \$44,670. Sixteen percent of the community's population has income below the poverty level, as compared to 12.3% statewide. Much of the population increase of the community's total population of 15,702, living on 66.8 square miles is due to the number of retirees moving to the area. This increases the total population, but has little bearing on the school population (City-Data.com, 2008). The community and school in which this study will take place are also old by western North

Carolina standards. Early settlers moved into the immediate area in the late 1790s and schools were established by the late 1840s. Many of the current students and some of the faculty in the school are descendants of those early families, so community settlement patterns have been quite consistent.

The community studied has changed considerably over time and the seemingly normal pattern of community schools giving way to larger consolidated ones has long been in place. Since the early 1990s, many new housing areas and subdivisions have been taking the place of generations-old farms. Therefore, the face of the community is changing and will continue to bring changes to the school.

Little research has been done on community involvement in western North Carolina schools, southern Appalachian schools, or rural schools anywhere in the United States. A picture of the interaction between school and community developed that provided information to historians, community leaders, school leaders, and companies or families looking to relocate to a rural southern Appalachian area. The study also added to the historical and archival record for the school, community, and western North Carolina as a whole.

### *Research Questions*

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What was the role of community involvement in a Buncombe County, North Carolina school during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?
  - a. What was the role of community involvement in academic studies?
  - b. What was the role of community involvement in extracurricular and social activities?

- c. How did the role of community involvement in school change over time during this period?
2. What is the current role of community involvement in a rural western North Carolina school?
  - a. What is the current role of community involvement in academic studies?
  - b. What is the current role of community involvement in extracurricular and social activities?

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

### *Setting*

The setting for this study was the rural Leicester community in western North Carolina in which the original settlement by people of European descent dates to the 1790s. Currently, it lies about eight miles west of the nearest metropolitan area as the city extends its limits in the directions of this community. The smaller western portion of the area is also known as the Sandy Mush community. Parts of the community are still used for farming and are still lightly populated. Others are now seeing former farms being carved into new subdivisions as the population extends outward from the city. Small sections of the community still rely on unpaved roads for transportation.

### *Research Design*

This study was an historical case study of one rural western North Carolina community and its associated schools. In the past, multiple schools existed within the community, but school consolidation and the formation of the current public school district has all K-5 elementary students attending the same school. At the middle and high school levels, the students attend school with students from five other elementary schools from different geographic districts within Buncombe County to create large consolidated schools.

### *Data Collection*

The history of this community and its associated schools was examined through the gathering of historical and community records, as well as through interviews with study participants. Historical societies, schools, community organizations, and public

agencies were contacted in an effort to gather data concerning this community and its relation to the formation, development, and continuation of its schools. Among the documents reviewed were records of the Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, the Western North Carolina Historical Society, and those housed at the Mountain Heritage Center at Western Carolina University. Documents from Pack Memorial Library in Asheville's North Carolina reference section were examined to search for references to the Leicester community and its schools. Local public school records and government documents were also examined to ascertain the role of the school district and state and local governments in this community and its schools. These were obtained from the Buncombe County Schools board of education and the county commissioners from Buncombe County. North Carolina public school records and Calvin Wiley's papers were examined in the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh. Private individuals who had documents pertaining to or knowledge of the historical development of the community's schools were also contacted in order to gain access to materials in their possession.

#### *Participants*

The participants for this study were community members who have been involved in rural schools throughout the United States. The study's sample was community-based adults involved in the Leicester, North Carolina community and its associated public schools. The sample included current and past school administrators, school staff members of support organizations such as the Parent-Teacher Organization, and community members recommended for inclusion based on past or present roles associated with the school. Ten interviews were conducted for the study. Subjects

included community members associated with Leicester School at different time periods, faculty and staff members, and school administrators from Leicester Elementary and Erwin High School.

*Parent, Teacher, and Community Member Interviews*

Current and former principals of the community's schools were contacted and interviewed using an open-ended format in order to gain knowledge of the community's involvement with the schools. Available principals from the current elementary school were contacted with interview requests, as were principals from the associated middle and high school. Based on longevity in the community and school, as well as availability and snowball sampling, past Parent-Teacher Organization members were contacted and interviewed on the recommendation of current members and school personnel, again concerning community involvement in the schools over time. Past and present teachers and staff members from the elementary school were interviewed based on convenience and on longevity within the school and community, with interviews which asked the same questions of all participants. The total number of interviews was ten. Finally, I questioned all the aforementioned persons to gain information concerning other potential participants for interviews. These participants also provided other contacts for information, even when interviews with them were not conducted. Those persons selected for interviews were contacted to secure permission for the participants' interview sessions and for the tape recording of the interviews. Member checking was used with each interview in order for participants to review their comments. Names were used with interviews, since no one requested that their identity be kept confidential.

Interviews completed with principals of the schools attempted to provide information and insight into the role and level of community involvement in the school. Other participants selected for interviews were asked the same questions concerning their knowledge of or direct involvement with community interaction with the school.

Following are the questions that were asked of interview participants:

1. Tell me about your experience with Leicester School (or appropriate other school) and the years you were involved with that school.
2. How did you become involved with Leicester School (or appropriate other school)?
3. Can you think of a positive action or aspect you observed or experienced connected with the school and all involved parties?  
Can you recall some negative ones? Explain each.
4. What was the role of the community in the day-to-day operations of the school?  
Tell me about any specific events or instances that demonstrate this involvement?
5. Can you think of a special project or event you can recall in which the community's involvement played a large part in its completion or success and tell me about it?
6. Were (or are) there any instances you can recall in which a community group outside the school wanted to become involved, but you declined to allow their involvement?  
Please explain who the group was and your reasons for declining their involvement?
7. I wanted to ask about the community's overall involvement with the school. What was it like? Could you explain?
8. During the time of your involvement with the school, what changes did you observe in the community's involvement with the school?

9. What was the role of socioeconomic status or income level in the involvement of community members in the school? What differences in the level and kind of involvement were seen in different economic groups?

10. What was the involvement of minority members of the community in the school?

## Data Analysis

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

After gathering documentary evidence from archives and participant interviews for this study, I used qualitative analysis techniques to identify themes related to the research questions. Historical records obtained for the school and the community were examined and coded to look for recurring themes related to the topic of community involvement in a rural, western North Carolina school.

Interviews were conducted in person. Each was tape recorded, then transcribed to ensure accuracy. Notes were also taken by the researcher during the interview sessions. After transcription, all interview transcripts were analyzed for themes in the interview texts. All major and minor themes from the interviews were coded for thematic analysis and for comparison of themes related to the historical research on the topic. Themes were also identified from the analysis of historical documents. Interview participants had the opportunity to review the findings to determine the validity of the interview texts.

After comparing themes and information from the historical record and from the interviews, common themes were examined in order to find and relate examples of community involvement in this school and categorize them as to the kind of involvement each represents. A picture of community involvement in this school developed after

examination, coding, and triangulation of both forms of data. From this use of discriminate sampling (Creswell, 2005), patterns emerged in relation to the categories found within the coding and interpretation of the data.

Development of theories concerning community involvement in rural southern Appalachian schools took place based on examination of all sets of data. Findings and analyses were again shared with interview participants in order to validate the respective findings and theory developed within the study. No revisions or additions were made in interview transcripts based on suggestions by interview participants.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

I live in this community and work as a teacher at Leicester Elementary School. My family has lived in the community for several generations. Family members have worked in various capacities in the county's schools for many years. Though he did not grow up in the Leicester community, my husband is currently principal of Erwin High School. These facts may have opened doors to interviews and materials that would not have otherwise been available to a researcher examining this school and community. This may have also colored interview responses in some cases. Participants may have either opened up more because of my association to the school or community; they may also have been less willing to relate disparaging comments because of my position in the school.

Romanticism may also have been a factor in the interviews I conducted with community members who had attended Leicester School over time. Even with probes in interview sessions, I heard very few negative comments concerning the school or the community's role in it. Participants freely related stories and anecdotes concerning their

time at the school, facilities, teachers, and many other topics, but rarely was any negative comment made. According to the interview participants, their school experiences as students at Leicester and involvement as adults later were positive. Any negative experiences were either seen as trivial or the participants were reluctant to discuss them.

Out-migration has been an issue in western North Carolina for many years. The Leicester community is no exception to that trend. Many students, once they graduate from Erwin High School, go to college in other areas and find jobs in other cities and states rather than staying in the area or returning after college. This certainly can change the complexion of a community. Therefore, long-term community involvement in Sandy Mush and Leicester School may be tied to a limited number of families and community members who have stayed in the community over time or have returned to the community to live after living in other areas.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The isolation of rural settlements in North Carolina, as well as a lack of funding, led to a state and community with few schools and little educational opportunity for its citizens. Voters continually defeated measures aimed at providing funding for schools in all parts of the state, leaving the education of students to families and communities. In many areas of the state, such as the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, local community members elected to build schools and to subscribe to those already in existence in order to provide an education for their community's children. The financial means to pay for children's education and the importance placed on that same education varied greatly between families.

Families did not always have to work alone in Sandy Mush and Leicester in providing schools and teachers for their students, though. Church denominations, such as the Methodists and Presbyterians, saw education of community members as part of the mission of the church in the areas they served. They aided communities in beginning and maintaining schools until the public schools had grown enough to provide an adequate education for all students throughout the state.

The rise of public schools in Leicester and Sandy Mush signaled the decline of private schools, though the two often overlapped in the early days of public schools. The loyalty to and prestige of the community's private schools kept the best teachers and needed community support away from local public schools until officials worked to transfer that loyalty to the public schools. This was done through personnel moves and improved facilities as a concerted effort of early public school officials.

As time progressed in the new public schools, community involvement in Leicester and Sandy Mush gradually turned from that of academic support for classes taught to financial support and improvement of physical arrangements for the schools. Recent school administrators and many community members now see the fundraising abilities and community financial contributions to local schools as the most important aspect of their involvement.

School athletics and athletic teams now provide a focus for community support that is often the most obvious expression of that support. Large consolidated schools and their sports teams draw together all parts of the school community in a collective way that crosses smaller community lines. Parents and students identify with the high school teams and mascots that incorporate several different elementary school districts in several diverse communities. Yet when they come together, they become one large community united by those common teams.

Conversely, the communities which lost their individual schools in the same consolidation measures that led to large schools with popular sports teams, over time began to lose their individual community identities. Communities became so closely tied to their schools as part of the communities' identity that the closure of a school led to substantial changes in the entire community.

The Leicester community today is still one that is often identified by its school and the memories of community members who have been involved there, while the Sandy Mush community, in losing its community school in a consolidation move, lost much of its identity. Today, the entire area is simply known as "Leicester," as is its remaining school. History and schools have brought the two communities together to the

point that one is simply identified as an extension of the other.

### *Colonial Establishment and Development*

North Carolina's establishment as an English colony began with an expedition of one hundred eight men who sailed from Plymouth, England on April 9, 1585. The group reached Roanoke Island in the Outer Banks on August 17 of that year. The settlement suffered from problems with food supply, arguments within the settlement, and poor relations with local native groups. In 1586, the explorer Sir Francis Drake passed by the colony, and the settlement's remaining members returned to England on board Drake's ship.

This abandonment of colonization attempts signaled a pattern long seen in North Carolina's growth and advancement. In Virginia and South Carolina, to the colony's north and south, better harbors and the growth of larger port cities created settlements and states that grew far faster than did North Carolina. Settlers moved to North Carolina from these two neighboring colonies in a search for cheap farmland. Crops were shipped from ports in the other two states, so little money flowed into the state (Lefler & Newsome, 1973). The population remained low, as did economic development. In the 1790 census, the first of the new nation, North Carolina's population was documented at 289,182, well below that of South Carolina, a geographically smaller state. By 1800, South Carolina had a population of more than 80,000 over that of North Carolina (U.S. Census, 1790, 1800).

In the early decades of the North Carolina colony, development occurred within a relatively small distance from the Atlantic coastline. Numerous geographic obstacles lay in the path of population expansion or westward movement of people. Along the coast,

swamps occupied a great amount of the land. Farther west, the land became drier as it rose and gave way to land more conducive to settlements in the piedmont and mountains. Even then, settlements were small and isolated. The problem became one of transportation. No roads existed in North Carolina at this time except for tribal trading paths and those few built by the colonists. These, again, were primarily near the coast.

As isolated as the North Carolina colony was, the education of its children was a matter that received attention. Initially, education was provided primarily for the children of wealthier settlers as the colony developed and the population increased. This education was most frequently found in the form of private tutors or at private academies in more densely-populated communities. These private academies were often church sponsored and supported, with clergy frequently serving as schoolmasters and instructors. Education in these establishments was usually rudimentary at best. Often the instructors were viewed as being little more proficient in the subjects they taught than were the students in their classes. Better educated or more professional teachers did not often last long in their assignments or in the private educational enterprises they began (Ready, 2005).

The earliest known teacher to work in North Carolina was Charles Griffith or Griffin, who came to Carolina in 1706, before the division of the colony into the separate entities of North and South Carolina. Both surnames were recorded in different documents of the day, so the correct spelling is not certain. He opened a school in Pasquotank County near the coast. As became common in the following decades, his school operated for a few years before closing when Griffith left the colony declaring his preference to teach “savage Saponi Indians” in Virginia over Carolinians who cared as

little as the Saponi for education (Johnson, 1937). Griffith's story was typical of the early attempts at educating the children of North Carolina residents. Academic instruction was often too sporadic, too erratic, and too isolated to be effective. If a child began school in a given area under the tutelage of a particular teacher, it was likely to be short-lived and incomplete. If a school in a particular location closed, years could pass before another opened to take its place (Ready, 2005).

In defense of the instructors who came and so frequently left rather quickly, they did not operate under conditions that were conducive to optimal teaching or learning. While wealthy North Carolinians sent their children to college in another colony or in England after being educated by private tutors in the home, schoolmasters were left to educate everyone else in the colony who desired an education. Often, the first job of a teacher new to a community was to physically assist in building the school in which he was to teach (Johnson, 1937). Payment for a child's education often thus included paying for the building in which he was to be educated, as well as paying for books and the employment of a teacher. Many families paid students' school tuition or fees faithfully, but schools and teachers were plagued by sporadic payments or students who were not consistently enrolled due to lack of funds. Even John Gray Blount, a member of a wealthy Beaufort family and a brother of William Blount, one of North Carolina's representatives to the 1787 Constitutional Convention, had to be reminded to pay for a term of the "schooling" of a relative for whom he was guardian. A letter from a schoolmaster in the community of Bandon dated March 15, 1783, stated that

I have taken the liberty of drawing upon you for \$14 Specie in favor of Mr. John Barry. This is the balance due to me for the Board and Schooling of Mr.

Augustine Harvey. I applied to Colonel Thomas Harvey for the payment, and he told me ... you were the youth's guardian and therefore application must be made to you ... I make no doubt of your honoring it (Keith, ed., 1952).

North Carolina schools in the early colonial era were primarily mission projects of religious organizations operating under church sanction and supervision. The first organization to attempt the establishment of schools in North Carolina, as well as other southern colonies was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), an arm of the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church, or Church of England, represented the official state religion for Great Britain, including her North American colonies. The Society was organized at the beginning of the eighteenth century and was charged with educating and enlightening the inhabitants of England's colonies. Charles Griffith, North Carolina's first regular teacher, represented the Society and operated with initial funding from the Anglican Church. The patrons of the communities in which schools were established were then expected to fund the school facilities and the teacher's salary. These Anglican teachers also frequently established the first libraries in the same communities using books they had brought for instruction. Most teachers were clergy or candidates for the ministry who often left their teaching posts when they received other assignments from the Church in London. Others, like Griffith, did well for a short time, then left the Church or the organization. He was succeeded by James Adams, a Society missionary. His tenure was scarcely longer than that of Griffith. Within a few years, he followed the same path out of the school and to other areas, and North Carolina's first school closed (Lefler & Newsome, 1973).

Other church groups, such as the Presbyterians and Moravians, also attempted to

develop and operate schools for the communities in which they served the population. The Moravian Church was more successful than most in its planned communities at Wachovia, Bethabara, and Salem, in the piedmont region of the colony. The community of Salem, with its boys' and girls' schools as part of the plan for its building and operation, educated all boys and girls in the community. This development, though, did not begin until the 1750s, with the girls' school not opening until just before the American Revolution.

As early as the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the problems of community apathy experienced by the early missionary teachers in the colony spread to the colonial governors and the colonial assembly. Ready, writing in 2005, described a North Carolina population that

...paid less attention to the theater, fine arts, reading and literature. Indeed, they seemed to take perverse pride in their disregard of intellectual pursuits... Early North Carolinians, like many of their colonial neighbors, had little regard for education beyond literacy or manners beyond facility (pg. 58).

Colonial governors and officials, though, beginning in the early days of the colony, proposed schools for the entire population, often working in conjunction with the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Their official attempts at establishing and maintaining schools most frequently experienced the same lack of support and interest as experienced by the teachers. Colonial governors from William Glover to Josiah Martin, just prior to the American Revolution, publicly decried the lack of education in North Carolina's population. The same governors and assembly members from different towns and communities throughout the settled portions of the colony

consistently declined to appropriate funds for the establishment or operation of schools. For these community representatives, education was something to publicly support and promote. When the time came for the votes required for funding the schools, though, governmental support for the idea rapidly disappeared (Johnson, 1937).

#### *Westward Expansion and Settlement*

In the second half of the eighteenth century, settlement patterns began to change in North Carolina. No longer were settlements and developed areas exclusively situated on land near the Atlantic. Nor were many of the new settlers in the colony of English descent, as most of the earlier immigrants had been. Many settlers now used the Great Wagon Road and other former Native American trading paths as an inlet to the piedmont region of the colony. As these settlers moved into the North Carolina piedmont, small towns began that today are some of the state's largest cities, including Charlotte and Salem (now Winston-Salem), sprang up along the road shortly before the American Revolution.

An example of this migration to the North Carolina piedmont, known at the time as the "backcountry", is that of Daniel Boone. In 1761, Boone moved with his extended family from Pennsylvania to the Yadkin River settlement near the modern town of Mooresville. Aunts, uncles, and cousins moved as one family unit to North Carolina. In the group was a cousin who was the "schoolmaster" of a one-room school in the area and who provided Boone the only formal education he ever received. Not only was Boone typical of the early settlers of the time with little formal education, his cousin's small school was typical of the only available educational opportunities for frontier families and students in the backcountry (Faragher, 1992).

By the beginning of the American Revolution in 1775, these piedmont settlements frequently had developed enough of a community structure to include schools, though almost all were schools requiring payment for attendance and instruction. Outside the Moravian settlement, however, schools of this era in North Carolina's piedmont followed the same pattern as those of the coastal areas. All, with the exception of the Moravian schools, proved to be tuition-based, rudimentary, and temporary. A system of public, common schools would not be widely seen in North Carolina until well into the latter part of the nineteenth century.

#### *Expansion into the Appalachians*

Prior to the American Revolution, European settlement in North Carolina west of the Blue Ridge foothills was prohibited by the British government under the terms of the Proclamation Line of 1763. Settlement by people moving west in the colony stopped in the vicinity of the modern western piedmont towns of Marion and Old Fort. The primary western population centers of the day were Pleasant Gardens (modern-day Morganton) and Gilbert Town on the outskirts of the current town of Rutherfordton. Population expansion west of the foothills of the Blue Ridge by European settlers was prohibited, with the western land set aside as the "Indian Reserve" by the British.

This settlement prohibition for land in the mountains of North Carolina did not change until after the American Revolution. In North Carolina, as in other colonies, the end of the American Revolution with the treaty of September 3, 1783 in Paris changed the political landscape and the geographic settlement pattern in North Carolina. An American victory opened the Blue Ridge Mountains, the rest of the Appalachian chain, and areas beyond the Appalachians to westward expansion by European settlers. The

Proclamation Line of 1763 that had barred westward expansion into North Carolina's mountain region disappeared with the British troops in the new state.

As isolated as other sections of the new state might be with few roads, small settlements where any settlements did exist, and without a cohesive state government to promote or regulate growth, the new mountain region of North Carolina was even more isolated and thinly settled. In 1783, the mountainous western region of the state only contained three counties as separate political entities. These counties of Burke, Rutherford, and Wilkes all began in the western piedmont section of the state and extended westward across the mountains to the boundary of the new state of Tennessee. The new state of Tennessee was formed from six counties in North Carolina even before the remainder of North Carolina's mountain region was further divided and organized (Lefler & Newsome, 1973; Sondley, 1930).

#### *The Beginning of Buncombe County*

The first European settlers to arrive in the current area of Buncombe County, North Carolina began arriving about 1784, shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Paris ended the restrictions on settlement for the region. There may also have been a small number of settlers moving to the region illegally prior to the end of the American Revolution (Lefler & Newsome, 1973).

In 1784, Samuel Davidson settled in the Swannanoa Valley, becoming the first documented resident of current-day Buncombe County. He was shortly followed by other settlers with their families into the eastern portions of the county. By the mid-1790s, families such as the Lowrys, the Swains, and the Vances were moving into the western and northern parts of the county's current boundaries along and across the

French Broad River (Sondley, 1930).

Buncombe County as a separate political entity was created in 1791 from portions of Burke and Rutherford Counties. Its name honored Colonel Edward Buncombe, a Continental soldier in the American Revolution. Buncombe had died as a prisoner in Philadelphia in 1778, after his capture at the battle of Germantown. After its formation, the new county was large enough that all or part of several other western North Carolina counties were carved from within its borders. The last property dispute over the county's boundaries was not settled until 1925, when a portion of McDowell County known as the Broad River Township was ceded to Buncombe County (Corbett, 1987).

The new county of Buncombe encompassed such a large area that it frequently was referred to as the "State of Buncombe" (Tessier, 1992). Yet, as large geographically as the new mountain county might be, its just-as-newly-formed county seat was proportionally small. The first court session held in Buncombe County was held at Gum Springs, the home of Colonel William Davidson, on April 16, 1792. This site today lies just inside the gates marking the property line of the Biltmore Estate in South Asheville. A county seat was formed in the same immediate area in the same year and was named Morristown in honor of Robert Morris, a Philadelphia financier of the American Revolution who had no direct connection to the state of North Carolina. By 1795, Morristown's name had been changed to Asheville to honor Samuel Ashe, who later became the state's governor.

The first United States census taken after the formation of Buncombe County provided evidence of the small population in the isolated mountain county. The total population of the county, including slaves, in the 1800 census was recorded at 5,774,

while the population of Asheville as its fledgling county seat was listed at just thirty-eight citizens. Even then, Asheville was listed as one of only three towns west of Charlotte in the state (U.S. Census, 1800).

As settlers began to move more and more into the mountain region of North Carolina, the “state” of Buncombe began to lose some of its isolation as larger settlements developed. It also began to have land within its boundaries separated out and taken to form other counties. In 1808, Haywood County was formed from the southwest section of Buncombe County and was named for the state treasurer at the time. In 1851, Madison County was created from portions of Buncombe and Yancey, which had been formed from Burke and Buncombe Counties in 1833. The boundaries for Madison County were drawn

...beginning on the Paint Rock on the Tennessee line, and running with that line East to the top of the ridge that divides the waters of Ivy and Laurel from the waters of Caney River; ... thence a direct course to the mouth of Sandy Mush Creek; thence up said creek to the fork thereof; thence with the top of the ridge that divides the waters of Big and Little Sandymush Creeks to the Haywood line (Public Laws of North Carolina, 1851).

The new county was named for James Madison, fourth president of the United States. Its county seat of Marshall was named in honor of John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Marshall is still the nation’s longest-serving chief justice. He took office on January 31, 1801, and served until 1855. When Madison County was formed, Marshall was the sitting Chief Justice of the Court. In the description of the boundary lines for the new county, evidence is clear that established

communities already existed in this northwest section of Buncombe County. The Sandy Mush community, located in this area of Buncombe County and bordering Haywood and the new Madison Counties, gave its name to the creeks used to locate the county's boundaries. The new county line split the community; now most of the community was in Buncombe, but a section was also in Madison.

The population of Buncombe County, as well as that of surrounding Madison and Haywood Counties, continued to be quite low. The 1850 United States Census, completed just before the 1851 formation of Madison County, shows the total white population for Buncombe County as 11,601, while neighboring Haywood registered a population of 6,641 (United States Census, 1850).

One factor contributing to the continued isolation and low population of Buncombe and other mountain counties was a lack of available transportation. At the time of Buncombe County's formation, only two roads led into and out of the central and southern North Carolina mountains. The longer of the two, commonly known as the Buncombe Turnpike, began its North Carolina section in the vicinity of Paint Rock near the Tennessee state line in modern-day Madison County and crossed into South Carolina north of modern-day Greenville. From there, it connected to other rudimentary roads and trading paths making their way to Charleston, its markets, and its harbor. The other road followed a trading path traversing Hickory Nut Gap at the Buncombe-Rutherford County line east into the vicinity of present-day Charlotte (Lefler & Newsome, 1973; Sondley, 1930).

Upon the formation of Buncombe County, officials began to call for and direct the building of new roads throughout the county. Early county courts began to direct the

building of roads to connect new population centers, and to connect those centers to Asheville. Even with the directives, some of these early road projects were built, while others were not. According to these rulings, roads were to be built and kept in good condition by citizens of the communities who lived along the roads. The persons named as project managers were charged with the task of building, but were given no funds. Workers who built and maintained these roads were not paid for the work, even if the road traversed their own property. An example was the order from the Buncombe County Court in 1798 that directed John Thacker to oversee the building of a road from John Davis's ferry on the French Broad to the Blockhouse on Newfound Creek. A new overseer was then appointed to see to the road's extension to the top of Newfound Mountain, later to become the boundary line between Buncombe and Haywood Counties. This road also became one of the earliest in the modern Leicester community. The first road into the Sandy Mush section at the extreme western end of the county was ordered by the court to be built in January of 1807 connecting Asheville to John Miller's on Sandy Mush. An earlier order in 1800 directed a road to be built connecting Turkey Creek and Sandy Mush, connecting large parts of today's Leicester community.

In January of 1849, another form of transportation began to change travel and life in the North Carolina mountains. The North Carolina Railroad Company built lines connecting points throughout the state as far west as Charlotte. This was followed in February of 1855 by the Western North Carolina Railroad Company, which was ordered by the state of North Carolina to build and operate a railroad line from Salisbury in the piedmont to Statesville, then eventually on to Paint Rock in Madison County. By the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, the line had only made its path as far west as

Connelly Springs, east of Morganton (Sondley, 1930). The beginning of the Civil War signaled the end of the Western North Carolina Railroad before it had ever reached the Blue Ridge. A railroad was finally completed to Biltmore Junction in the southern part of Asheville in 1886. This lack of transportation kept the population of Buncombe County and its neighbors isolated and kept the area from being privy to many services and institutions available in other parts of the state, including that of public schools. Even later, these transportation problems would prove a problem for the area's public school students. Not only was building schools and gathering public support for them difficult in these isolated areas, transportation of students to school would prove to be a continuing problem well into the twentieth century.

#### *Growth and Development of the Leicester and Sandy Mush Communities*

In the earliest days of Buncombe County, officials had directed roads to be built connecting the communities of Turkey Creek, Newfound, and Sandy Mush. These communities in the western section of the county were all settled by about 1800. Descendants of the early pioneer families continue to live in the communities to this day. These communities occupied adjoining mountain valleys connected by the creeks that ran from one valley to a confluence with others from other nearby valleys and finally to the French Broad River. Many coves in these valleys were given the names of the families who originally settled there, such as Clark Cove and Robeson Cove in Sandy Mush. Later, the roads connecting these coves to valley roads through the communities were given the same names.

According to the 1800 federal census, only about eighty-eight families lived in what was then Buncombe County (U.S. Census, 1800). With an area great enough to be

colloquially known as the “State of Buncombe,” an idea of the sparsity and isolation of the population can easily be discerned. The communities of Newfound, Turkey Creek, and Sandy Mush were part of this isolated area, but development and settlement were occurring. By 1798, John Davis owned and operated a ferry across the French Broad River at the mouth of Newfound Creek. No bridges yet existed across the river in Buncombe County. Davis’s ferry was one of several conveying people and products across the water. About 1800, Edmund Sams began operating another ferry across the French Broad in the Asheville area that became part of a major transportation route into the western part of the county. For many years, the Adolphus Gudger house, the first section of which was constructed about 1805, was considered the oldest standing house in Buncombe County. This house, which stood in Turkey Creek, was destroyed in 1989 (Swaim, ed. 1981; Bishir, Southern, & Martin, 1999). Though the ferry and the Gudger house have since disappeared, they provided evidence to the organization and the prosperity of the Leicester community for its day and time.

By 1806, a more well-known visitor was apparently making recurrent trips to the Turkey Creek section of the county. Francis Asbury, the early Methodist missionary, made recurrent trips to the site of the Turkey Creek camp meeting, which was near the site of the modern Leicester School. He, in the journal kept during his travels, referred often to two Buncombe County sites. One was Killian’s in the current Beaverdam section of North Asheville. The other site frequently mentioned was Turkey Creek, where in an entry dated September 27, 1806, Asbury reported he

...rode twelve miles to Turkey Creek to a kind of camp meeting. On the Sabbath I preached to about five hundred souls; it was an open season... (Clark, ed., 1958,

vol. 2., p. 518).

By the next day, Asbury reported that during the meeting, there had been "... eleven sermons and many exhortations" (Clark, ed., 1958). Asbury's report of five hundred people in attendance at a camp meeting in the still-today rural Turkey Creek section of Leicester testified to a population growing rapidly beyond the eighty-eight families documented in the 1800 census. Sondley, writing in 1930, also stated that the Turkey Creek Campground was the first of its sort in Buncombe County, but it was also the last to be kept up purely for community purposes (Sondley, 1930).

As the communities grew in the western section of Buncombe County, post offices, churches, and small schools were begun in each of the three adjoining communities that today make up Leicester. Turkey Creek developed the first post office of the three communities in 1829, but a new settler to the area in early 1850s would change the community, chiefly by legally uniting the major sections of the three communities. This was particularly true of Turkey Creek and Newfound. Sandy Mush, the farthest west of the three, maintained its own post office and separate identity for several more years, and kept its own post office until the 1920s. In the early 1850s, an English citizen who had been educated in London and later lived in Trinidad, moved to the United States. Originally, the man, his wife, and their children settled in Baltimore. There, they met Thomas Clingman, the United States Senator from North Carolina.

Apparently upon Clingman's advice, Leicester Chapman, the Englishman, purchased land nine miles from Asheville in the community of Turkey Creek. He opened a mercantile business with his brother-in-law, John Carpenter, a native of Ireland. The location of this business was along the Buncombe Turnpike. Chapman became

postmaster at Turkey Creek in 1852. By 1856, Carpenter took over the position as postmaster, retaining it from 1866 to 1876. An 1853 advertisement in the *Asheville News* for Chapman and Carpenter listed the business's address as Turkey Creek (*Asheville News*, 1/1/1853).

Soon, however, Chapman changed the name of the community's post office from that of Turkey Creek and Newfound to that of Leicester. Chapman's godfather was the English Earl of Leicester. The name change was designed to honor Chapman's affiliation with the Englishman. Apparently, local citizens cared little for Chapman's renaming, thinking the new name pretentious. About the same time, a nickname for the community appeared that has lasted as long as the name "Leicester". The colloquial name "Lick Skillet" is of unknown origin, but has long been seen and heard in the community (Sondley, 1930). It has been seen in "The Skillet" as the name of the school newspaper during the days of Leicester High School and in the "Lick Skillet Café" as the name of the current cafeteria at Leicester Elementary School, which opened in 1999.

Chapman did not remain in the community very long. At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, he intended to move to New York with his family. Because of various military actions, the family was prevented from reaching their destination. They then remained in western North Carolina, living in Asheville in a house located on South French Broad Avenue, which later became the site of the old Aston Park Hospital. Both Chapman and his wife remained in Asheville for the rest of their lives. Both were buried in Asheville's Riverside Cemetery (Bryant, 2004).

Though Chapman's residence in the community that had its name changed to Leicester was relatively short, his legacy lived on. Since Chapman's time, the

community, with its churches, schools, and civic organizations, is still known as Leicester. Even Sandy Mush, which retained a separate post office throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is now considered to be a part of the same community, sharing Leicester zip code, addresses, and phone number prefixes with the rest of the community.

The Leicester community grew and prospered to the point that it was incorporated as a town in 1859. A deed to the Zachary Candler property at the corner of Main and Alexander Streets dated January 5, 1886, described the lots sold as lying in the town of Leicester (Candler-Cody deed, 1886). An Asheville city directory from 1883 described Leicester as an incorporated village of about 200 inhabitants and as having a mayor (Davison, 1883). The same Gazetteer listed Sandy Mush at the time as a separate community, as it also did Newfound. Sandy Mush, like Leicester, was considered large enough to include listings for businesses and churches, though mail was listed as coming from Leicester. Incorporation of the town of Leicester only lasted less than fifty years, though. The town of Leicester was dissolved in 1905. Even in these nineteenth century community descriptions, schools figured prominently in the information listed. At this point, though, in this 1883 description, North Carolina's public schools only existed at a rudimentary elementary level, if at all in rural areas. The same 1883 "Gazetteer of Buncombe County" did list one school in the Leicester community. A listing existed for Leicester Seminary with Professor A. F. Ketron as principal of the school (Davison, 1883).

#### *Educational Beginnings in Buncombe County*

In the early years of the North Carolina colony and in later years, public schools

or public education simply did not exist. The closest thing to the existence of free schools might have been when a prosperous planter or farmer gave money to a community for the education of select children. Johnson, writing in 1937, documented the 1744 case of James Wainwright of Carteret County, who left money and property in his will to begin and fund a free school for his community of Beaufort. Such bequests were the only funds for free schools in the state, and therefore the only means for most children of the day to attend school. Excepting these rare bequests for small schools, much of North Carolina was a colony, then a state, of illiterate citizens. The few examples of individuals such as Wainwright and their individual or community support for education provided the only means for most of the state's students to attend school without paying tuition or subscription fees.

In 1766, the colony's general assembly allowed the granting of town lots in New Bern for the purpose of building a "public school" in the town, which was the colony's capital at the time. This act allowed a portion of the proceeds collected by issuing a tax on "spirituous liquors" brought into the colony on the nearby Neuse River. The funds were to be applied toward the education of "poor children" in the town. Even at this point, the colonial government was applying no public money to schools anywhere in the colony. Officials merely issued rules concerning community monies and how those were to be spent. The American Revolution a few years later spelled the end of most of these early community support acts for schools, public or private (Johnson, 1937).

Those few beginnings of community schools existed almost exclusively in the coastal plain region of North Carolina. As settlement in the new state moved west with its more difficult terrain and more sparse population, schooling for families and students

was less and less available. Into the Blue Ridge and beyond, the concept of public or community schools had not even begun to take hold. One major factor held back the development of school in North Carolina more than all others in the state – money.

Citizens were not willing to be taxed in order to provide an education to their children.

#### *Early Church and School Connections*

What the colony, then state, of North Carolina would or could not do in providing education for its citizens, churches and their subsidiary organizations stepped in to do. The earliest documented teacher practicing in the Carolina colony in the earliest days of the eighteenth century was Charles Griffith, an Anglican cleric assigned to the coastal area of the colony. Griffin had been sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, an arm of the Anglican Church operating in the American colonies.

Many of the early academies or private schools in the colony and state were sponsored, staffed, or maintained by various churches or religious organizations. The Moravians of the northern piedmont's Wachovia settlement were the only group providing education to all children in their communities. Yet, the Episcopal (Anglican), Presbyterian, and Methodist churches in North Carolina provided, with community support, education that the state of North Carolina could or would not. Johnson, writing in 1937, found that “The history of education in North Carolina is closely related to that of religion. For more than a century the preachers of North Carolina were also the school teachers” (Johnson, 1937).

Many backcountry church leaders of the day saw education as part of their mission for their respective congregations. Their congregants expected these church leaders to provide instruction in reading, writing, and other subjects along with

instruction in the Scriptures. If this instruction was not provided by church officials, often the same officials or clergy assisted the community in obtaining a school master. The local clergyman was, in the backcountry of North Carolina, frequently the most highly educated person in a community, so church, community, and educational duties often blended into each other. Until the close of the American Revolution, the Church of England, or the Anglican Church, was the official church of England's North American colonies, receiving tax money from colonial governments to establish and further their church work. Though the number and influence of the Anglicans, later the Episcopalians after American independence, was greater in more established coastal areas, it also ranged into the western frontiers of the colonies. Ministers and missionaries traveled to the backcountry western settlements, often as itinerants who did most of their work from horseback. In these backcountry settlements, they encountered Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, among others, who had moved with and into these new western settlements as they developed. No formal schools yet existed in these communities, so settlers banded together to educate their children from the most qualified source available, usually a church leader and teacher. Often, rivalry between church leaders and other teachers seemed to enter the picture concerning the quality of instructional leadership and education in the communities served. Charles Woodmason, an Anglican priest working in the Carolina backcountry in the early 1770s, reported that in one community he was serving

They have now got a schoolmaster at this Place. An old Presbyterian fellow, or between that and a Quaker – They send their children to him readily, and pay him, tho' they would not to me, who would have educated them Gratis. Such is their

attachment to their Kirk (Woodmason, 1953).

With other church denominations stronger in number in the western parts of North Carolina, Woodmason may have had less influence with his community than he would have desired. The pattern was established, though. For more than a century to come, many of western North Carolina's schools began and operated as a partnership. The partnership operated between the communities in which these schools were located and the churches which saw education of the local citizens as part of their mission.

In Buncombe and Madison Counties, schools started by church officials and clergy were primarily those initiated by the Methodists and Presbyterians. For many years in the area, attendance at a church-supported school was the only means of receiving more than a rudimentary education with an instructor who was at least somewhat qualified to teach the students he served. Buncombe and Madison counties saw the rise of such schools as Weaver College, Transmontane College, and Camp Academy supported by the Methodist Church. Dorland-Bell Institute in the Hot Springs section of Madison County was a popular school operated by the Presbyterians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, the Methodist Church dominated education for many years with their church supported schools, one of which lasted into the twentieth century.

The work of the community and clergy together led to the development of subscription schools, which were often referred to as "old field" schools. Throughout North Carolina in the early days of the state, community members and clergy often banded together to hire a teacher and provide a small, often rudimentary, log structure for the education of local families whose families were interested in providing an education

for their children. Families were also obligated to pay the fees for the teacher's salary and for the upkeep of the school, which were usually around \$6.00 to \$8.00 per month. These small structures were often called "old field" schools because they were located on land owned by local churches and near an existing church building. In many cases, these churches were the oldest community organizations in an area. Land had usually been given to the church for erection of a building, so no crops were any longer planted there, hence the name "old field".

Families or community members would "subscribe" to a school and commit to paying a schoolmaster and to providing a facility in which the class could meet. Parents would then pay the fees for their children to attend classes, thus also paying the teacher's salary. Part of the community's commitment for supporting the school was additionally that of providing space in homes for more distant students to board and so then to be able to attend school (Johnson, 1937).

The community involvement in these schools proved to be vital to their success or failure as an institution, or even to their continued existence. Many of these schools operated for a number of years, even growing larger over time, such as the school which operated at Big Sandy United Methodist Church in the Sandy Mush community of Buncombe County. Dr. Larry Melton, in his work on the Sandy Charge of the United Methodist Church, reported that the present church building, completed in 1878, was constructed as a larger facility for the accompanying school. The subscription school had been erected on the same piece of property and predated the church. The school had become so large and so popular that a new church was built to house both organizations. The building was used by the church congregation on Sundays and by the school, when

in session, during the remainder of the week (Melton, 1991). The average term for most subscription schools ran no more than four months of each year. Most of the time, then, the congregation had the church structure to themselves. Unlike the early Sandy Mush school, many subscription or old field schools operated for a relatively short time and dissolved, leaving their respective communities with no local means of educating their children.

Often, though, the reverse could happen. At the advent of rudimentary public schools in North Carolina, many families had strong attachments to these subscription schools and to the larger academies that frequently grew up in the same areas. Many families considered the education in these privately-funded schools superior to that of the fledgling public schools that began and kept their children in the subscription schools and academies if finances allowed. This often created friction between the two sources of education in a community and kept the public schools from growing and strengthening as quickly as they might have otherwise. Often, the more influential and affluent community members kept their students enrolled in the academies and subscriptions, weakening public support for the new public, free schools (Reynolds, 1950). In the Leicester community, early Buncombe County school officials developed a unique partnership between Camp Academy, a private school, and the teacher certification program needed for teaching in the public schools. Teacher certification examinations were given at Camp Academy, though the certificates given were issued for the license to teach in the public schools. The community's support for the private school helped to gather support for the public ones, also.

### *The Beginning of Public Schools*

On December 6, 1817, John M. Walker, a member of the North Carolina House of Commons, sent a written plan for public education in the state to the full state legislature in Raleigh. The plan documented the state of education in North Carolina and the gap between the 1776 State Constitution's call for statewide public education for students and the reality of the state of public education in 1815. Walker's plan proposed schools as being the means for

...having children receive from our hand a county ... advancing in moral and intellectual excellence. The committee have embraced a provision for the poor as well as the rich, and a gradation of schools from the lowest to the highest. Yet, to give effect to any general plan of public education, it is essentially necessary that ample funds be provided.

Walker's report went on to detail the creation of a fund for public instruction, a board to manage that fund, and a plan to educate "poor children at public expense". Academies were to be built and funded by the state. A local board of trustees was to be charged with creating and maintaining high academic and moral standards. Each county was to be divided into two or more townships. Each township was to have at least one primary school with a "sufficient house and not less than four acres of ground" (Murphey, 2009). Academies were to follow these primary schools for those students of sufficient ability and interest. After that, the state university was available for educating every male citizen of the state. Courses of instruction were designated and educational leadership hierarchies were established.

Only one obstacle stood in the way; no tax money was set aside to provide the

funding for this plan to become reality. North Carolina's legislature, since 1776, had steadily voted down every tax measure designed to fund public education in the state. The plan designed by Walker and Archibald Murphey, a member of the North Carolina State Senate, encountered the chief obstacle that had encumbered public education since colonial days, that of "a disdain for taxes throughout the state". David Caldwell, a member of the North Carolina state legislature and author of another 1825 plan for state-wide public education, lamented in an 1832 letter that

Another obstruction meets us in our aversion to taxation beyond the bare necessities of government and the public tranquility. Any scheme of popular education must be capable of deriving existence originally, and of maintaining it perpetually, without taxing us for the purpose, or we are well aware that we shall not as a people consent to its establishment (Caldwell, 1832).

Caldwell was not alone in his doubt for the successful establishment of public schools if higher taxes were involved. Coon, in his 1908 study, Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790 – 1840, failed to report a single legislator or community in the state that was willing to raise taxes in order to fund free schools anywhere in the state (Coon, 1908). On the same disparaging theme, Johnson in 1937 cited a reader of the Raleigh *Register* in 1829 who questioned the need for education of poor children at all. According to the commentary, they should have been in the cotton patch or at the plow rather than being "mewed up at the school house, where they are earning nothing" (Johnson, 1937). Poorer families often also opposed public education on the basis that education led to aristocracy and the opinion that they would educate their children if the money and inclination existed. Public education was seen as charity.

Any community support for public education today represents a reversal from these early days.

Finally, in 1839, an act of the North Carolina State Legislature established the state's public schools along the lines of Murphey's plan. Funding was still a serious problem for the implementation of the plan, though. Archibald Murphey's Senate Committee on Education had secured a bit of funding in the form of the state's literary fund, which had partially been established for the funding of public schools. This literary fund drew its funding from sales of eastern swampland, former Cherokee land, and other small and obscure sources of money in the state. This funding was to be used "when sufficiently large" to fund development of the public schools. By 1836, the fund's balance stood at \$243,162.00. Soon, though, much of this balance would be lost due to stock reversals and mismanagement (Murphey, 2009). Finally, though, and also in 1836, North Carolina received almost 1.5 million dollars in federal funds. The money was set aside to fund education. Public schools finally became a reality in the state.

One person in North Carolina received much of the credit for the nineteenth century development, promotion, and advancement of the state's public, or common, schools. Calvin Henderson Wiley was a member of the state legislature in 1850 when a bill was introduced providing for a state superintendent of common schools. The measure failed. By later in 1850, Wiley said in a letter to his mother,

Tomorrow I expect to introduce a bill for the appointment of a Superintendent of Common Schools. The Governor, in his message, strongly recommends it. The probability is one will be appointed. I do hope I'll be the man (Wiley, 1850).

Wiley was “the man”. As State Superintendent for the North Carolina Common Schools for more than fifteen years and with continued involvement for even more, Wiley oversaw all aspects of the schools from founding to funding to oversight and teacher training.

Wiley’s work with the state’s new public schools involved garnering community support for the new common schools as much as he worked to achieve uniformity in quality, teacher training, curriculum development, and length of school terms. Community members were either elected or appointed as members of the new local school committees, under Wiley’s leadership, and were required to report in writing to him each year as to the condition of their district’s schools. Board members were required to report to Wiley concerning the number of schools in operation, their budgets and expenditures, and even to the number of teachers within the individual districts. Reports were usually submitted directly to Wiley in the form of letters documenting the required information. A large number of these handwritten reports and letters have remained among the substantial papers of Calvin Wiley in the North Carolina state archives. Wiley targeted the school boards or committees in all counties and districts, increasing their responsibilities and therefore their direct involvement in the schools. County officials were also required to submit answers in writing to Wiley to a thirty-one question survey concerning school buildings, teachers, the number of students in schools, and even how school committee members were elected (Wiley, 1860). The school committees begun by Wiley far outlasted his leadership. The school committees in Buncombe County, later with three members for each school, remained in existence until the early 1970s and still held considerable power in personnel decisions within each

school (Payne, 2010).

The reports annually submitted to Wiley during his tenure revealed the extent of community involvement within the early common schools. The extent of the involvement rivaled that of the earlier subscription schools. Most teachers were natives of their communities. School sessions were most often taught in winter, so as not to conflict with farm duties. Communities were still chiefly responsible for building their own school houses. Difficulty was experienced in getting volunteers to serve on school committees. When votes were held to elect school committee members, few voters bothered to cast ballots. Money for operation was scarce (Wiley, 1860). In facilities, support, and public opinion, little appears to have changed. The equality and quality sought by Wiley for schools had yet to materialize.

Superintendents' reports to Wiley and to his successors, along with written reports by the superintendents documenting wishes, successes, and failures within the state's public schools began to be gathered and published in the 1850s. These Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina also included legislative actions taken or declined that directly affected North Carolina's public schools. The first extant volume housed in the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh documented the existence of over six hundred and thirty primary and common schools in 1840. By 1854, when this official report was made, the number of public schools the state had grown to over one thousand. Superintendent Wiley noted an average state expenditure of \$70.00 per school that year. \$56.00 was allotted for each school district in the state, with the average district covering four square miles. Wiley also boasted of teachers in these schools being paid "average" wages, with male teachers earning \$21.00

per month and female teachers being paid \$18.00 per month. These reports also presented a telling picture of school activity and the support given each district by its community in each county of the day. In addition to the school reports of the county chairmen (no county or other superintendents existed yet, save Wiley himself), financial allocations to counties, the number of districts in each county, the number of schools, and the county populations were also recorded. The reports for Buncombe, Madison, and neighboring Haywood Counties recorded numbers of schools, teachers, length of school terms, and teacher salaries that were all lower than most other counties of the state. For some years, no reports were made for Buncombe County (Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Education, 1854, 1860, 1863, 1876).

#### *Early Leicester Area Schools and Their Community Involvement*

The earliest school to be started in current-day Buncombe County for which records exist was Union Hill Academy, located near the site of eighteenth-century Morristown's organization at Gum Springs in Biltmore. The school sat across modern Biltmore Avenue from Memorial Mission Hospital's main campus in Asheville. Union Hill Academy was a small log school which began operating about 1787 with one teacher, Robert Henry. It was situated on private property that was owned by William Foster, a nearby resident. The private academy was organized by community members and was built with private local funds. Foster gave the school eight acres of land so that future expansion would be possible. The name was later changed to Newton Academy and later to Newton School in honor of the Reverend George Newton, a Presbyterian minister who was head of the school from its 1797 beginning until 1814 (Sondley, 1930). The North Carolina General Assembly in 1805 granted the school official status as a

seminary of learning for the area. The log building soon gave way to a larger and more substantial brick structure as the number of students and therefore its funding grew.

Another early school in Buncombe County was that taught by Robert Henderson in an area along the Swannanoa River from about 1790 to about 1800, when the small school closed.

The examples of these two schools provided a telling picture of the early schools in Buncombe and Madison Counties. Private schools and academies receiving more community support and financial backing tended to become more firmly established in the community and last through longer spans of time. Those without that same level of community support, as Woodmason had described prior to the American Revolution, tended to be short-lived (Woodmason, 1953).

Community involvement and support for these early schools extended beyond land donations and payments for student enrollment. In 1810, Newton Academy was authorized by the North Carolina State Legislature to hold a lottery aimed at raising funds for the school. The lottery was advertised state wide, as evidenced by a notice in the *Raleigh Register* on February 22, 1810.

Lottery Advertisement, 1810

Literary Advancement

Seven Thousand Dollars!

Many be gained for the small sum of

Four dollars!

In the

Newton Academy Lottery. (*Raleigh Register*, 1810).

The advertisement was signed by the five managers of the lottery, who were also the trustees of the school at the time. Among these trustees was George Swain. Swain was the father of one of Newton Academy's early and distinguished graduates. David Lowry Swain later became governor of North Carolina and long-time president of the University of North Carolina. David Swain's half-brother Joseph Lane, also a Newton Academy graduate, became governor of the Oregon Territory in the 1850s. George Swain's wife, Caroline, was the daughter of Colonel James Lowry, and grew up in the Sandy Mush valley (Sondley, 1930; Reeves family papers, unpublished).

Yet, even so attractive a sum of money for the time failed to sell the desired number of lottery tickets needed for the sale's success. A subsequent advertisement in the *Raleigh Star* newspaper dated January 24, 1812 announced that the lottery was a failure. The same hopeful trustees of the previous year stated that

The Managers of the Newton Lottery, return their sincere thanks to all who have evinced a willingness to aid them in carrying the Lottery into effect; and with reluctance inform them, that owing to the extreme scarcity of cash, they are induced to believe that a sufficient number of Tickets, to justify the commencement of drawing in a reasonable time, cannot be sold. And lest those holding tickets should become uneasy, we deem it our duty to discontinue the sale of tickets; and have refunded all the money to the Postmasters and other Agents (Coon, 1908).

Obviously, the community involvement and support needed for the school's success in the area did not yet exist.

Schools in the Asheville area continued to develop and grow, though. Even

schools for female students were included. Again, church support became a key factor in school funding and success. As a Presbyterian minister had been instrumental in the development and success of Newton Academy, the Methodist Church built two early schools for women in Buncombe County. In 1830, Dr. John Dickson, a minister of the Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church began the Holston Conference Female College at the corner of Patton Avenue and Church Street in Asheville. In 1839, a new female academy moved into the basement of a building on the site of the current Central United Methodist Church in the same area of Asheville. In both these schools, female students were taught academic subjects, such as mathematics and Latin, alongside instruction in the more traditional areas of sewing and music (Bumgarner, 1990). Soon, new “colleges” and academies developed in the Leicester and Sandy Mush areas that welcomed female students with access to the same academic subject areas as their male counterparts.

As roads slowly improved in the county and the population began to grow and to spread from the immediate Asheville vicinity, schools grew as they had done in other parts of the state. Community members began their own schools, constructing buildings and hiring teachers on their own. Later, these schools would prove to be so popular with their community constituents as to hinder the development and success of early public schools.

By 1800, settlers were moving far enough into the western regions of the old “State of Buncombe” to warrant the naming of communities such as Sandy Mush, Turkey Creek, and Newfound. The later division of parts of that portion of Buncombe County into Haywood County in 1813 and Madison County in 1851 changed little of the

community organization or structure. Community structures such as trading posts, post offices, and churches were already established parts of their communities at the time of those separations, regardless of the location of the new county lines established by the state legislature. Schools also became part of that community organization that frequently crossed newly-drawn county boundaries. An example of this community tie to and involvement with local schools would even cause conflict between the Madison and Buncombe County Schools well more than a century after the county boundary was drawn through the Sandy Mush community. In the 1970s, students in the Little Sandy Mush section of Madison County were caught in an effort to move that small group of students from Leicester Elementary and Erwin High to Madison County Schools. Even though this small section of the Sandy Mush community was located in Madison County, students from the area had traditionally attended Buncombe County's public schools. Madison County began demanding that this small area's students attend the Madison County Schools, and refused to release the students to attend school in Buncombe County. Several years of appeals ensued, while area families even unsuccessfully resorted to a petition to the State of North Carolina to re-draw the county boundaries (Cain, 2004).

The 1850 United States Census listed Buncombe County's total white population as 11,601 citizens. Much of future Madison County was also included in that total. The county's population, with all the land it encompassed, was still quite small. The same census listed only one hundred twenty-five students at "academies or other schools" and teachers. Those five teachers served in one or more of the three private schools documented by the census as being located in Buncombe County. Public schools were

gaining in number and enrollment, though. The same census showed 2,856 students attending school as a total for the county. The great majority of schools in the county, then, had to be public. This student figure was almost evenly divided between male and female students. To provide an example of how small schools were, fifty-seven public schools were listed for the county, as were fifty-seven teachers for the public schools. This provided for one teacher for each county public school, no matter the school's grade configuration (United States Census, 1850).

Adding to the problems of the fledgling public schools was the problem of obtaining enough qualified teachers to staff the schools. In the 1860-61 biennial report of Superintendent Wiley, a total of 2,479 teachers were licensed in the state to provide instruction. This stands in contrast to the 2,834 "schools taught" in the same report. Of those, many worked in counties such as Wake and New Hanover, far from the isolated Buncombe and Madison County settlements. A legislative act passed in 1852 required all teachers to be examined every year in the county in which they taught or wished to teach. Teacher certificates were proposed as documentation of this process and a teacher's successful completion of the examination process. The measures were legislative attempts to improve the number and quality of teachers, but the process did not always operate as envisioned. Local school commissioners were elected to create the examinations and to administer them, usually orally, to all teacher candidates wishing to be certified in the county. In the 1860-61 Biennial Report, though, Wiley lamented that commissioners often did not carry out the examinations and publicly post the results as directed. But as directed, the commissioners did most often hire teachers from within the communities where schools were located. Frequently, family members, friends, and

political allies of school officials or committee members were hired for positions. Whether or not they had passed or even taken the teacher examination seemed to matter little. The reverse was also true. Wiley also complained about reports that political or family enemies of the school commissioners had little chance of securing teaching positions in their communities, no matter their qualifications. This seemed true particularly in the mountain region, but was reported throughout the state. Though aware of the problem, Wiley reported feeling powerless as to a means to correcting the situation. All power in each community or district or community's school stayed in that community. School committees or commissioners controlled money, personnel, and all other aspects of the local schools' operations (Biennial Report, 1861).

At the same time Wiley was decrying the lack of power of this office as compared to the community members where schools were located, Buncombe and Madison Counties were almost silent on the condition and number of their schools. Large gaps during the 1850s and 1860s in the reports to Superintendent Wiley gave a clear picture of the poor state of schools within those counties. Many of the years during those two decades, no reports were apparently submitted to the superintendent's office at all from either county. Because of this gap, determining the names of involved school committee members or commissioners, the number of schools in the area at the time or their locations, or the number of teachers has been difficult.

#### *Transmontane College*

The first documented school in the Leicester or Sandy Mush section was known by several names over time. Most often, it was known as Transmontane College. It apparently began in the early to mid-1850s, about the same time as Weaver College in the

northern part of Buncombe County. Both were apparently supported, at least in part, by the Methodist Episcopal Church in the area. Weaver College later expanded beyond the offerings and years of operation of Transmontane, yet both continued for many years in their communities. The school known as Transmontane College was first known as the Parker School, named after its first “professor”, Wiley Parker. Parker had apparently moved to the area expressly for the purpose of operating and teaching at the school.

According to old letters and newspaper articles, Transmontane’s offerings for students went beyond normal expectations for a rural school of its day. The parents of A.C. Reynolds, later Superintendent of the Buncombe County Schools for two separate terms, Superintendent of the Haywood County Schools, and president of Western Carolina University, both had attended the Parker School at Transmontane in the mid-1850s. These were also my great-great grandparents. My great-grandmother, Cornelia Reynolds Reeves, was A.C. Reynolds’s older sister. Reynolds, in his 1950 unpublished memoirs, said

My father, John Haskew Reynolds, was one of the students of the Parker School conducted near where the Methodist Church is now situated, on Little Sandy Mush Creek, Madison County, North Carolina. It was while there as a student he met my mother, Sarah Ann Ferguson of Haywood County who, with her brothers, was also a student at the school. This was one of the famous “Old Fields” schools taught by a master, whose education was limited in scope, but intense in the presentation of facts at his command (p.5).

Reynolds also recorded other smaller subscription schools in the portion of the Sandy Mush community in which he lived, such as Miss Clara Prestwood’s school which

apparently operated in or near the teacher's home (Reynolds, 1950).

The school was apparently of enough importance in the community that its building may have predated the Methodist church built on the same site. Possibly, the building could have been used at one time for both a school and a church. In his 1991 dissertation, Dr. Larry Melton asserted that the school came before the church, though the land on which the school sat was owned by the Methodist Episcopal Church (Melton, 1991). Calvin Reeves, in an unpublished letter from the early 1940s, also stated that the school building was the original occupant of the land, though the Methodist Episcopal Church was connected with the beginning of the school. Reeves stated that "later the upper story was taken off and the lower was repaired for church and school" (Reeves, 1944). Reeves's father, Humphrey, had also attended the school.

According to the same Reeves letter, thirteen trustees from three rural Buncombe and Madison County communities worked together to begin the school. Five of the trustees lived in the Big Sandy Mush (Buncombe County) section, including Colonel James Lowry, grandfather of Governor and University of North Carolina president David Swain. Swain's mother, Caroline, had grown up in the same community. Four trustees lived in the Little Sandy Mush valley (Madison County) where the school was located, and four final trustees lived across Doggett Mountain in the Spring Creek section of Madison County. The building was erected in or about 1846 on land given by Jackson Reeves. A deed in the Madison County deed book registers the deed to the school and church in 1855, yet the school had already been in operation prior to the registration of the deed (Madison County deed book, pg. 87). The school, when built, proved to be a true community effort which saw rural communities and families join together in order to

provide the best education for their children.

The four Little Sandy Mush trustees of Transmontane, two of which were Reeves brothers, another Reeves cousin, and George Robeson, brother-in-law of the two Reeves brothers, built large two-story brick or frame houses in the same valley near the school. Two of these houses still stand in the valley. Calvin Reeves, whose father had attended the school, stated that one reason for the existence of these large houses was to provide boarding arrangements for students from other counties or communities who wished to attend (Reeves, 1944).

Course offerings and levels of instruction often varied widely at rural schools and academies of the day. The term “college” was often used in this era to denote a school that contained more advanced high school classes, as well as elementary levels of instruction (Coon, 1908). Whether Transmontane’s offerings were advanced enough to warrant the name “college” is a matter of debate, but its offerings did apparently branch out beyond the standard “reading, writing, and arithmetic” of the day. One of its course offerings was instruction in Latin, which may have prompted its name “Transmontane” which was stated by Reynolds in 1950 as meaning “across the mountain” (Reynolds, 1950).

In an advertisement in the *Asheville News* dated November 24, 1859, Transmontane Academy (not college) listed its class offerings, costs, and requirements for enrollment for a session that had begun on October 10 of that year. Obviously, the session was already in progress, but students were to be allowed to register for the term, which was to last five months. By that time, the school boasted two teachers in addition to the principal, Reverend Wiley Parker. William Burder Ferguson of Waynesville was

listed as “professor”, and Mrs. N.M. Parker was the instructor for the “female department”. Class offerings included minor and higher classes in English, Latin, civil law leading to passing the bar examination separately for North or South Carolina, and orthography were listed with the tuition charges for each class per session. Prices for tuition were listed from \$4.00 per term to \$10.50 per term per class. Each class required a separate tuition from the student. Board, lights, and fuel were also offered at a charge of \$1.00 per week.

Some lectures, such as those in English and Latin grammar and different aspects of philosophy were offered without charge. Community members were also invited to attend. The religious connection to the school was seen in the fact that children of ministers or those preparing for the ministry could have their tuition and board reduced by one third. Provisions were also made for students who could not pay their tuition or board to be able to, with a “proper recommendation,” come to Transmontane and work to make enough money to pay for the expenses of attending the school (*Asheville News*, November 24, 1859).

Transmontane College lasted for several years, even surviving the loss of faculty which often signaled the end of such community-sponsored rural schools. In a February 22, 1860 advertisement in the *Asheville News*, the first session of the year for the “most desirable Institution in Western Carolina” was announced as beginning on March 19 of the same year. Transmontane had apparently suffered the loss of its principal, Reverend Parker, as he is listed next in another advertisement as the president of the new Bascom College in Leicester. Many of the course offerings listed for Bascom College were apparently the same of those Transmontane, yet tuition was slightly higher. For example,

“preparatory civil law for South Carolina” classes cost \$12.00 each, as opposed to \$10.00 at Transmontane. A complete list of the trustees for Bascom College could not be found, but J.T. Palmer, who was a Leicester resident, was listed as chairman of the board of trustees. J.M. Gudger was given as secretary and was also a Leicester resident (*Asheville News*, February 22, 1860).

William Burder Ferguson, listed as Transmontane’s “professor”, later moved to Haywood County, where much of his family lived. His older son, who had attended the school in Sandy Mush, later became mayor of Waynesville. His two younger sons, who had also attended Transmontane, became graduates of the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. Also during this period, Reeves reported students from as far away as Clay and Macon Counties in western North Carolina attending the school (Reeves, 1944).

Undoubtedly, Transmontane and its nearby Bascom College would not meet the standards of our 21<sup>st</sup> century colleges. For their time and place, though, they provided substantial numbers of rural students in the area with more than a rudimentary education. Reeves went on to report that Transmontane had more than two hundred students enrolled while his father attended the school. Jim Hannah, an area resident whose father taught in the area’s public schools for forty-five years, but who died in 1973, reported his father saying that the Sandy Mush community had “...produced more doctors and lawyers than any community he had ever seen” (Cain, 2004). Transmontane College, with its thirteen original community trustees, must have played a large role in that community and in those careers.

Transmontane College weathered the Civil War and lasted until at least the

middle of the 1870s. The Biennial Report of the State Superintendent for 1873-74 listed the school, along with Mars Hill College and Walnut Creek High School, as the only three schools in Madison County for that period. Willie Gudger, chairman of the board of examiners for the public schools and the author of the county's report, listed Transmontane as an academy with J.A. Reeves as the teacher. Reeves was a graduate of the school. In the same report, Gudger reported the "...working of the school system in this county has not been satisfactory" (Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Education, 1873-74). By the latter part of the same decade the Biennial Report would stop listing the names of private schools and academies, and would concentrate exclusively on public schools. The next report available which listed academies by counties jumped to the late 1880s (Biennial Report, 1886-1887).. Transmontane was then no longer among the listed schools for the county. Also, in the records of Little Sandy United Methodist Church, which was constructed on the same site, the first church building was built in 1887, although the congregation dates to 1846, the same year as the beginning of Transmontane College. The 1887 building was a wood-frame structure that was apparently a refurbished facility from Transmontane (Reeves, 1991).

#### *Growth of Leicester's Public Schools*

During Calvin Wiley's tenure as state superintendent of North Carolina's public schools in the middle of the nineteenth century, he had continually pushed for the creation of and funding for public schools throughout the state. His program of common, public schools throughout the state had been approved by the legislature during the 1840s. School districts had been created, yearly teacher examinations had begun, district committees had been formed, and their duties spelled out. In many districts, students

were beginning to attend these new schools. The largest remaining issue to be tackled was the always-difficult task of securing from the legislature the funding that would make Wiley's plans reality (Wiley, 1861).

Then, disaster struck – not just for Wiley's plans for public schools in North Carolina, but for the entire state. North Carolina, in 1861, became fully involved in the Civil War. For the next four years, the state, its money, and its attention, was much more focused on the war effort than in funding or promoting common schools. During the war, Wiley remained in office, steadily promoting his plans for schools and for their expansion. By 1863, despite the war turning against North Carolina and the rest of the Confederacy, Wiley had secured the passage of a bill in the state legislature designed to establish graded schools in the state. In Wiley's vision for graded schools, pupils would be assigned a grade level based on achievement, rather than all students in a school being put together in one ungraded mass grouping.

In Wiley's new plan, each North Carolina county was to have at least one graded high school and the system of graded schools was, by law, to be implemented throughout the state. County courts were to impose taxes "appropriate to the support" of the schools. Five-member boards of trustees for each county were to be assigned by commissioners, including the appointment of a chairman of these five "superintendents". Two citizens outside the board would have the power to remove any board member not fulfilling his duties (Wiley, 1863). Wiley's statewide plan ensuring a legislative basis to provide community support for schools was passed into law. One problem existed with the plan and its timing. The war effort was effectively commandeering the great majority of the state's available funds. By April of 1865, another problem appeared. Wiley's

achievements in the state legislature had occurred while the state was part of the Confederate States of America. With the end of the war and the Confederacy's loss, the state's budget was in crisis, laws were overturned, and state officials found themselves turned out of their positions. Wiley was included in that number. For the next several years, North Carolina had a succession of state superintendents of education with changing priorities and legislatures.

Students and communities in the state had to satisfy themselves with the old common, ungraded schools a while longer. Rural areas, such as Buncombe and Madison Counties, had been too rural and too far from power and population centers for much progress toward Wiley's new graded schools to have been seen. James Leloudis, in Schooling the New South, wrote that

...the state's common schools bore the stamp of that rural society. Before the mid-1800s, education was primarily a local enterprise that served to integrate children into webs of personal relations defined by kinship, church, and race. Meaningful authority (in schools) remained largely in the hands of three committeemen selected in each school district by the boards of education (Leloudis, 1996, p.6).

These school committee "holdovers" from the common school era remained in existence and in power until the mid-1970s with the advent of new laws concerning teacher contracts (Payne, 2010).

Under North Carolina's Reconstruction government, a new state constitution was passed and implemented in 1868. This new constitution provided for the education of African-American children, which had been largely excluded from educational legislation

to that point. It also made another change in schools which would be the basis for public schools as we see them today. A four-month school term was made a legal minimum requirement, and tax support for local schools was also made mandatory throughout the state (1868 North Carolina State Constitution). Most schools in Buncombe and Madison Counties saw little immediate change in schools, though. As Leloudis found throughout the state, most schools of the day stood on private property, were built with community funds, were staffed with local teachers, and were administered by powerful school committees made up of local residents. Communities banded together to develop and maintain their own districts encompassing only their own local schools. By 1902, North Carolina had 8,094 separate school districts (Leloudis, 1996).

A prime example of this was the Cross Rock School, erected by the Reeves family in the Little Sandy Mush section of Madison County. The school was built on property owned by the Reeves family, who never relinquished ownership, even after Cross Rock became a state-supported public school about 1900. Though children from throughout the community attended the relatively large one-room wood-frame school, the Reeves family to this day retains ownership of the site. The school was equipped with wooden desks, chalkboards, and a wood stove. Much of this is still in the old building today, though the structure is in quite poor condition. Many of its condition problems are especially due to many broken windows that expose the interior to the elements. Whether because of financial control, higher educational attainment, or political influence, the Reeves family largely controlled much of the school's operation from teaching to repairs to school committees. My own grandmother, Willie Reeves Duckett, graduated from what is now Western Carolina University and returned home to teach at

Cross Rock for a short time in the early 1920s (Reeves family papers, unpublished). The school finally closed in the late 1920s in a consolidation move when the larger brick Sandy Mush School was opened.

By the late 1870s, graded public schools began to dominate instruction in North Carolina's piedmont and coastal towns, yet it was the early 1890s before this reform moved strongly into the mountain regions of the state. Education officials such as University of North Carolina president Kemp Battle worked to promote the new graded schools and the new instructional methods that accompanied them. Yet, much of the state was also visited by and their schools "taken over" by northern reformers and educators of the day looking to spread the message of a new day in public education. Wealthy educators and social reformers such Francis Wayland Parker of New Hampshire, who had studied in Europe and had worked as superintendent of graded schools in Quincy, Massachusetts and in Chicago, came to North Carolina seeking ground to promote their reforms. Parker came to North Carolina in 1885 to deliver a series of lectures to the state teachers' assembly. His words and new teaching methods were so widely received that soon many schools were using and promoting those methods with their students.

A chain reaction began, and soon new native North Carolina voices joined in with those of the reformers calling to implement new graded schools and other reforms. North Carolina natives such as Charles Duncan McIver and Philander P. Claxton, one-time superintendent of Asheville's graded schools, began to visit classrooms, test teachers for the awarding of certificates, and change curriculum standards and methods seen within the walls of local schools. Claxton became well-enough known and respected for his

work that he later became United States Commissioner of Education. This state-wide and system-wide school reform began to lead to many aspects of public education still seen in classrooms today (Leloudis, 1996). Real power for the administration of schools, their teachers, and their curriculum began to slip from the hands of local committees and community members.

Local community influence, involvement, and power still existed in hiring and retaining teachers and other lesser roles in the schools. In the 1890s, Buncombe County had seventy-two white committee members for districts and sixteen African-American ones. Now, though, when “big” decisions were made for the schools, such as funding, buildings, and curriculum, those decisions were no longer in the hands of community members or local officials. These decisions were now made by county superintendents and state officials. These officials controlled everything from teacher salaries to funding, to the length and configuration of school terms. Until about 1890, these new schools provided instruction in the first four grades that sometimes had as many as four classrooms in one building. As time progressed, many of these schools expanded their offerings through seventh grade instruction.

New school buildings often followed these expanded course offerings. In 1904, the total school revenue for the Buncombe County and Asheville City Schools totaled only \$37,000. In March of that year, contracts for the building of eight new graded schools were awarded, including money for one new high school for the county at Limestone. Contracts for construction were awarded in the communities in which schools were to be built, allowing communities a voice in the new schools and in the construction of the building. A contract for \$550.00 was awarded to D.W. Duckett for

construction of a new Sandy Mush School and \$590.00 was awarded to Fate Morris for the construction of a new Leicester School, its first, which was built in 1914 (Miller, 1965). Both schools represented progress in the state and county's public graded school program. Both construction contracts also represented the first time true graded public schools were to exist in Buncombe County west of Asheville.

Older private and subscription schools and academies were not dead, though. In 1880, the Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church had started Brown's Seminary in Leicester. It either joined or replaced, in addition to Transmontane College and Bascom College, Leicester High School and its accompanying school for young girls built in 1868. New configurations of the conference boundaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church in North Carolina created the Blue Ridge Conference of the denomination, which encompassed most of the white churches located in it. An accompanying North Carolina Conference administered the African American churches.

The new Blue Ridge Conference stated its aim of establishing two new institutions of "academic learning as soon as practicable" within its confines. One of the two new schools begun was Brown Seminary, located on the site of the present Bell United Methodist Church in Leicester (Bumgarner, 1990). Brown Seminary was apparently organized much as Transmontane had been over thirty years earlier, but on a somewhat smaller scale. Seven trustees were listed at its opening. The school was likely named for T.C. Brown, a member of the church conference commission responsible for choosing the school's site. Brown Seminary's partner school was Graham Academy in Carteret County, literally at the opposite end of the state, begun in 1889.

Though Brown Seminary was the first school in North Carolina directly created

by the Methodist Episcopal Church, it met the same fate as many other small Buncombe County private schools as time progressed. The church decided in the 1890s to withdraw its support in favor of new schools in more populated centers of the state. Community support alone for the school was not enough to keep it in operation without the partnering church support. Brown Seminary closed. The school's one teacher, though, did not leave Leicester. Professor Henry Ketron came to Leicester for the purpose of being the principal of the new school, and apparently was the only teacher throughout the history of the school. When Brown Seminary closed, Ketron stayed in the community, becoming a committee member for the new Leicester School when it opened. By the early 1970s, Ketron's grandson was still filling an active support role for Leicester School by serving as one of its three school committee members, though his children were well past the age of attending elementary school (Payne, 2010).

Since the mid-nineteenth century beginning of schools in the Leicester community, at least four had existed in this rural area that had been large enough to attain public notice in newspapers or to be mentioned in local or family histories. By the later years of the nineteenth century, public schools, small and rudimentary as they might be, were beginning to move to the forefront in the community. In Leicester, Sandy Mush, and all of Buncombe County, one man and one school worked to bridge the gap between the area's public and private schools. The school was Camp Academy, which opened in 1896. The man was A.C. Reynolds.

### *Camp Academy*

Camp Academy in Leicester proved to be the last, the largest, and the most elaborate of the private academies in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities. It

exemplified many of the connections and premises on which Brown Seminary and Transmontane College had been formed, yet its reach also extended into the early public schools of the early twentieth century in Buncombe County.

By the 1890s, the earlier academies and larger subscription schools in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities had ceased to exist. Small, one-room public schools had begun, taking the place of those schools for younger students and providing a basic education for the day. Between ten and fifteen of these small schools had begun in different crossroads areas and small wood-frame buildings throughout the community. For students or families wishing a more advanced or thorough education for their children, the only option was to send their children to a boarding school in another community. Many area families enrolled their older children in Weaver College in modern-day Weaverville, which had existed for several years. Receipts still exist for payments made by Leicester families to Weaver College, such as one from 1919 for a term's tuition and board for a term at the school. Of the \$17.50 total charge for the term, \$10.00 was for room and board (Miller, 1919).

Weaver College maintained an affiliation with and had been supported by the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church. By the late nineteenth century, it had been joined by five other Methodist colleges in North Carolina. These included Trinity Academy and Trinity High School, later to become part of Duke University. The only other school in the western part of the state at this time to join this affiliation with Weaver College and the others was Camp Academy in Leicester (*Charlotte Observer*, November 18, 1898).

Camp Academy was built on the site in Leicester of the old Turkey Creek Camp

Meeting grounds, at which Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury had preached almost a century before the beginning of the school. "Camp meetings" of the time were large community gatherings which were most often religious assemblies. Throughout the nineteenth century, the property had remained in the hands of the Methodist Episcopal Church and that of the Reynolds family who owned the adjoining property. Leicester had become an incorporated town in 1859 (The charter was dissolved in 1905.), and by 1896, had a population of about two hundred fifty. This made it one of the largest towns in Buncombe County, outside of Asheville. Its population, the convenience of a ready tract of available land for building, and the financial and property support of the nearby Reynolds family, apparently dictated the choice of the school's building site.

The academy apparently opened in the fall of 1896, though its main building was not completed until 1897. Its campus consisted of at least two buildings; one was a two-story wood-frame house that was used to house students who boarded at the school. This building stood until the early 1980s and had been used as a private residence for many years after the academy closed. It was later abandoned and dismantled. The site of this building stood about one-fourth mile from the main campus structure, which still stands today. This building was erected and opened in 1897, built of locally-made brick with a wooden porch across the front. The school was two stories tall. It contained wide central hallways on both floors and had four classrooms on each floor; two were located per floor on each side of the central hall (United States Department of the Interior, 1984). It was quite an imposing building for a small rural North Carolina community of its day. When Camp Academy was built, all of Leicester and Sandy Mush only contained four other brick buildings. Of those, three were private homes and one was a church built in

1876. These were spread throughout the area; only the church stood in reasonably close proximity to the school (Bishir, Southern, & Martin, 1999). The school's size and imposing architecture even today bears witness to the community's support for education over time. Camp Academy's main building is the only remaining academy structure left in Buncombe County.

A.C. Reynolds was the school's first principal from its 1896 opening until 1900, when he left the school to take the position of president of Rutherford County in Burke County. In the school's earliest days, he may have been its only instructor, as well as its principal. An article in the Asheville *Gazette* dated December 22, 1897, announced an "entertainment" at Camp Academy on December 23 with "refreshments and good music." The article went on to praise Reynolds as a "thorough instructor" and pronounced the school a "great success" with an enrollment of about sixty-five students (Asheville *Gazette*, December 22, 1897). By March of the following year, another article in the Asheville *Gazette* discussed commencement exercises for Camp Academy. Enrollment at that time was given as being over one hundred students (Asheville *Gazette*, March 24, 1898).

Camp Academy in 1900 began a "partnership" with the public schools of Buncombe County. This began near the end of Reynolds's four-year tenure at the school. North Carolina, in the push for quality public schools, had instituted normal schools and training schools for teachers throughout the state. While Reynolds was at Camp Academy, D.L. Ellis, superintendent of Buncombe County's public schools from 1897 to 1899, had organized teacher training institutes in each major section of the county. The one initiated for the western portion of the county was held at Camp Academy, even

though it was a private school. From 1900 to 1903, a Mrs. Humphries taught a teacher-training institute at Camp Academy. Concurrently, academy classes were taught for well over one hundred students (Miller, 1965). This public/private partnership apparently continued for several more years, until Camp Academy closed in 1913. Today, apartments occupy the large brick building, which is within view from the top of its public successor, Leicester School.

#### *Rural Public Schools and Their Benefactors*

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, North Carolina's public schools were finally beginning to move into all parts of the isolated mountain region. Frequently, these new public schools signaled the end of old academies and subscription schools. Other times, as in the case of Camp Academy, public and private institutions each filled a role in the education of the community's students.

North Carolina's public schools also proved to be fertile ground for school reformers who saw an opportunity in the state's economic difficulties in the post-Reconstruction period of the late nineteenth century. In the state constitution of 1868, a provision guaranteeing public education for all North Carolina students was included; the continuing issue with that provision was securing its funding. By the latter part of the century, the state's educational and political leaders such as Charles Duncan McIver, Josephus Daniels, and Philander Claxton were aided in their promotion of public schools by Northern philanthropists and reformers who saw in the North Carolina communities and schools opportunities for social change as well as educational progress. Church missionary teachers often aided in the effort, as well. One example of the organized church's continued push for improved education in the rugged and isolated areas of the

mountains was Dorland-Bell Institute in Hot Springs in Madison County, begun by missionaries of the Presbyterian Church.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Warm Springs, North Carolina (now Hot Springs) was a popular tourist destination along the French Broad River in Madison County. Socially prominent visitors came to “take the waters” and revel in the spa atmosphere of the town’s famous hotel and springs. Despite the more cosmopolitan atmosphere of the area surrounding the Warm Springs Hotel, the rest of Madison County continued to be isolated and to suffer from the same lack of economic and educational opportunity as many other mountain communities.

Into this environment arrived Luke and Juliet Dorland of Cabarrus County, North Carolina in October of 1886. The Dorlands were Presbyterian missionaries who were also retired educators. Their retirement was short-lived. Within months of their arrival in Hot Springs, they opened a new mission school that was serving twenty-five students in the Dorland’s home.

Within a few years, the Dorland Institute had constructed new buildings and had several new teachers. The new teachers were additional Presbyterian mission teachers and Northern reform-minded educators who expanded the school as the Home Industrial School for Girls, and later as Dorland Institute. By October of 1887, the school had seventy-five boarding students and forty-five day students. The school later opened another building to house male boarding students. By the late 1890s, money was arriving at the school from benefactors in New Jersey, Chicago, and Boston, allowing the school to continue its expansion. School officials reported that, as the school grew, so did the involvement of the community. Community members began contributing food,

firewood, and supplies for the school, even if the families had no children enrolled at the facility. By 1900, school officials were reporting families moving to the Hot Springs community from other parts of the county simply so that their children could attend the school (Painter, 1996). The school consolidated with Bell Institute in 1918, and remained in operation until 1942.

Part of this reform movement in North Carolina schools was an effort to educate the educators, not simply the students. Teacher quality, education, and skill had been a thorny issue for educational officials dating to Calvin Wiley's early days as state superintendent. Normal schools designed to train teachers in the content to be taught in schools as well as effective teaching methods began in different parts of the state. Teachers, upon successful completion of examinations, could obtain "class A" certificates. Summer institutes were taught at the University of North Carolina. Other schools were opened simply for the purpose of teacher training. Under the leadership of Charles McIver, a normal school for women was opened in Greensboro in 1891, which later became the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The same year, Asheville Normal and Teachers' College began, which later evolved into Asheville-Biltmore College, now the University of North Carolina at Asheville. In 1889, Cullowhee Normal and Industrial School, now Western Carolina University, was opened for the same purpose. Many of these schools offered one-year or two-year programs in teacher training. Students often came from nearby communities with the intent of returning to their communities to teach school there (Leloudis, 1996).

Once again, Northern reformers and philanthropists became involved in schools; this time the involvement targeted rural schools in the entire southeast region of the

nation. The Southern Education Board was initiated in Knoxville, Tennessee in the 1890s with a guarantee of \$40,000 per year for its first two years of existence. Its aim was that of promoting organized systematic philanthropy in education wherever it was most needed in southern rural areas. P.P. Claxton, former Asheville school superintendent, served as research director for the association. Other progressive North Carolina educators also served in leadership roles for the group. In January of 1901, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. contributed one million dollars to the Board; over the next two years, his father ensured the power and continuity of the organization by contributing another \$128 million to the cause (Link, 1992).

George Peabody had an even more direct influence on North Carolina's rural schools and communities. Peabody, a Massachusetts native and London banker, had established the George Peabody Fund in 1867 as an aid to southern states who were attempting to recover from the economic and financial destruction of the Civil War. This money helped to establish the state's first graded schools and to assist in funding for normal schools. A large portion of Peabody's bequest went to public, graded schools in rural areas of the south, but substantial portions of his money also were committed to the cause of teacher training. Peabody Fund money had assisted in providing funds for the summer institute for teachers at Chapel Hill and at other state teacher-training facilities. Peabody also funded the foundation and operation of the George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Tennessee. This institution began operation in the 1880s, and was the first institute of its kind to offer regional appeal, drawing students from throughout the southeast as candidates for teaching licenses, but also for higher level positions in public education. The college further became an outlet for the progressive movement in

education in the south. Many southern school leaders in the forefront of the progressive movement of the early twentieth century were graduates of Peabody (Link, 1992). George Peabody College still exists today as the College of Education at Vanderbilt University (Vanderbilt University website, 2010).

In addition to funding an institution for teacher and school leader training, Peabody and the state of North Carolina funded scholarships for a number of students in North Carolina to attend the college in Nashville. These students were selected by the state superintendent of education and the leadership of the state's public schools to complete their education at Peabody. They were then expected to return to North Carolina in the capacity of school leaders and system superintendents. Candidates were chosen from throughout the state with a view to the creation of new public school leaders or normal school teachers. They were also expected to return to serve wherever needed or directed in the North Carolina Public Schools. These Peabody Scholarships were considered so important to the state's educational development that names for awarded scholarships began to be printed in the Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Education. Twenty scholarships were awarded, worth \$100.00 each per year, to cover two years of tuition, room, traveling expenses, and board at Peabody. Many of the recipients were from rural counties, and no more than two recipients are listed from the same county in each group. The list included Flora Gash from Buncombe County and John M. James from Madison County. In the report for 1894 and 1895, though, one student stood out from the rest. This student, in the report, was the only one documented as attending Peabody College, not on scholarship, but by private funds. That student was A.C. Reynolds, who would soon have an impact on schools in his native Sandy Mush and

in all of Buncombe and surrounding counties (Scarboro, 1897).

#### *A.C. Reynolds and the Public Schools*

Alonzo Carlton Reynolds was born in the Sandy Mush section of Buncombe County on October 19, 1870. He was one of the seven children of John Haskew and Sarah Ann Ferguson Reynolds. His older sister, Cornelia, who was only twenty months his senior, was my great-grandmother, making A.C. or Lon, as he was known in the family, my great-great uncle. Reynolds's career in education in western North Carolina spanned fifty years and crossed from the old academy version of local education to that of an organized county educational system overseen by the State of North Carolina. The majority of his time and work was spent in the Buncombe County Schools, including two terms as superintendent of the system. His career also saw and fostered a continuing role of community support and involvement in the local schools.

Reynolds was born into a family with deep roots in Buncombe County. His great-grandfather, Abraham, lived in the Bent Creek section of Buncombe County, where he had defended a frontier block house for the militia under General Griffith Rutherford during the American Revolution. During the 1790s, he returned to the area as owner of several hundred acres of property in the same area, where he settled to raise a family. One child, Joseph Page, moved to the Turkey Creek section of western Buncombe County. Joseph's son, John Haskew, later moved to the Sandy Mush section even farther to the west in the county. Not a great deal of information exists concerning the educational level of Abraham Reynolds, the first Buncombe County resident of the family or his wife, Mary Leazer Reynolds. It is known that both could read and write with some proficiency, though. Unpublished family documents include financial account

papers belonging to Abraham and portions of letters and journals kept by Mary (Reynolds family papers, 1797, 1800, 1801, unpublished). This was not only unusual for the North Carolina frontier at the turn of the nineteenth century; it was certainly unusual for a woman of that time.

Abraham Reynolds's grandson, John Haskew Reynolds, grew up in the Turkey Creek (now Leicester) section of Buncombe County. As a teenager, his parents sent him to school at Transmontane, about eight miles from the family's home, in the Sandy Mush section of Madison County. By the mid-1850s, Transmontane had become a relatively large institution for its time and place, having an enrollment of over one hundred students (Reeves, 1944). These students came from as far away as Clay and Macon Counties in the state. The school enrolled female students as well as male. In the mid-1850s, Sarah Ann Ferguson, along with several of her siblings, attended Transmontane College as boarding students, as did Reynolds. Family records also indicate that siblings of John Haskew Reynolds, male and female, did the same (Reynolds family records, undated). This certainly, for its time, indicates the desire for and family involvement in education for their children, regardless of gender.

The fact that Transmontane College drew students from more than fifty miles away, given the state of transportation in the area of the day, also attests to the strength of the community's involvement as trustees of the school. Sarah Ferguson was from Haywood County; she and her brothers traveled approximately thirty miles to attend school at Transmontane. Reynolds met Sarah Ferguson at Transmontane. They were married in Haywood County on February 13, 1861, only months before North Carolina's entry into the Civil War. The couple bought a farm on Big Sandy Mush Creek shortly

before Reynolds's enlistment in the Confederate army. He later resigned from Confederate service on April 16, 1864, owing to disability from a wound. His Transmontane education reflects in his next service as a clerk in the 70<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Troops, a Home Guard unit based in Asheville (Jordan, ed., 1998).

An unpublished diary kept by Reynolds in 1862 and 1863 attests to his educational attainment. He kept almost daily entries reporting troop dispositions and camp activities. Also noted were the letters home he wrote for others in his company. Reynolds was apparently among only a few men in the regiment who could read or write. The diary's last entry was dated November 13, 1863 from a field hospital in northern Mississippi. The writing is not at the same level of neatness as that of earlier entries. These entries document the medications he is being given to combat infection in his wound. It is much more difficult to read, as well. He was re-learning to write with his left hand (Reynolds diary, 1863, unpublished).

The re-education of John Haskew Reynolds began after his return from Confederate duty. It also exemplifies the role of education in nineteenth-century Leicester and Sandy Mush. Though he was now in his mid-twenties, Reynolds returned to the role of student, learning medicine as a new profession. Despite a missing right arm, he became a doctor, practicing from his home in Sandy Mush until shortly before his death in 1918.

Upon his death, John Reynolds demonstrated in his will his commitment to education. He left to his four daughters all his property – house, land, money, everything. His bequest to his three sons had been their educations, which were advanced even for a rural community with a school such as Transmontane, especially in the late nineteenth

century. All four of his daughters had been educated at Transmontane College, so their education had not been neglected, but Reynolds's will states that he had "educated his sons to the best of his ability" (J.H. Reynolds will, 1918). A.C. and his brothers attended Weaver College, with A.C. then attending Peabody College in Nashville and graduating there in 1896. A second son, Thomas Frazier Reynolds, attended medical school at the University of North Carolina and became a doctor, practicing in Leicester and Canton for many years. The youngest son, Joseph Letcher, graduated from Trinity College in Durham (now Duke University) and worked as a Methodist minister for many years.

The educational commitment of Leicester's Reynolds family demonstrated the community's commitment to the education of its rural students. All three Reynolds brothers returned to their own home community to promote the education of its citizens. Their story may not be typical for the time and place, but it served to demonstrate a commitment to education and to the community.

In western North Carolina, the best-known of the Reynolds brothers was A.C., due to his long service to education in the area. During his fifty years in various educational venues, he observed, weathered, and implemented many educational changes in the communities of western North Carolina. These changes, beginning in the last years of the nineteenth century and lasting until near the middle of the twentieth century, signaled substantial changes for the area's communities, as well. Strong relationships continued between the schools and communities, but the type of involvement and its bearing on the academic quality of local schools began to change. Rather than school being the sole responsibility of families and communities, state and county governing bodies began to take greater and greater amounts of control. Curricular changes and

structural changes in the schools implemented by state and local authorities made community involvement in local schools take a different angle. Community academic involvement in schools continued, but at a much-diminished rate. Involvement of a much more social type, such as clubs, community activities, and team athletics became the more common form of community involvement seen in the Leicester and Sandy Mush schools.

During his long tenure in education, Reynolds served as a school principal, college presidents for two different institutions, and as superintendent of the Buncombe County Schools on two separate occasions twenty years apart. He also served for one year as superintendent of the Haywood County Schools, and was instrumental in the formation of Asheville-Buncombe College, which was later to become the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Reynolds began his educational career in the day when an education for students in the western part of Buncombe County had to be obtained at parental expense. It ended in an era when Leicester and Sandy Mush contained relatively large brick buildings that housed classes for students through a high school level. By the end of his career, not only was student education provided at public expense, student transportation to and from school each day was also provided.

Reynolds was born on October 19, 1870 in the Big Sandy Mush section of western Buncombe County. His education began at Miss Prestwood's subscription school near his home, and later at John Starnes's subscription school. Typical of the day, this was the best education available for many students in the area. As Reynolds continued his education at Weaver College, Peabody Institute, and beyond, he became exposed to the new progressive ideas in education proposed by many of the Northern

school reformers and North Carolina state officials. These officials led the way with North Carolina's push toward graded public schools, improved teacher training, and eventual school consolidation. After his graduation from Peabody, Reynolds espoused many of the new progressive educational practices and theories of the day and put them into practice in Buncombe County and the other school systems in which he served.

In his unpublished memoirs, Reynolds described his first experience with school at age six. His teacher, John Starnes, later became superintendent of Buncombe County's schools on June 4, 1883.

I had not yet heard of the public schools of the state. My father and several others fathers of families in the community subscribed enough pupils with a promise to pay one dollar per month for each pupil for a stipulated number of months to secure the services of Mr. Starnes to teach the school. To this my four sisters who were older than I regularly went. Clinging to the hand of one of my sisters, I stood for a very long it seemed to get a first look at the teacher. He seemed more wonderful to me than even the circuit preacher who preached at our church just one time each month. The long day at school so well satisfied a curious nature about that work that I remember nothing more about that school till its closing day. That day is still remembered as the day of the "June Freshet of 1876". All day and through the night it poured, but my father and sisters along with many others far and near attended the closing exercises of the school (Reynolds, 1950, p.8).

This account demonstrated the devotion to education maintained by some students and families in the community. They still attended commencement exercises for the

school, even during a flood. For each of the seven children in the Reynolds family to attend a subscription school such as the Starnes school, a minimum commitment of \$7.00 per month was needed. For many families, this was a financial commitment they were unwilling or unable to make. It would be several years before public schools began to make universal education possible for western Buncombe and Madison County students.

The Methodist church continued to play an important role in the education of this local community and in the education of A.C. Reynolds. Not only did he attend Miss Prestwood's subscription school which shared facilities with the local Methodist church congregation, he continued to attend schools at Transmontane and Weaver Colleges, both of which were at least partially supported by the church. After serving as principal of Camp Academy, he became president of Rutherford College, another Methodist institution. In his early work, Reynolds's moves show the important role of the Methodist Church in the area's schools. Many of the churches in Leicester and Sandy Mush of the day were Methodist. Schools were seen as part of the mission of the church, much as it had been with the Anglican Church in the colonial era (Bumgarner, 1991). For Reynolds, a lifelong commitment to the Methodist Church accompanied his devotion to the schools.

Reynolds took advantage of the philanthropy of the Northern school reformers pushing for public education and new teacher training methods by attending the Peabody Institute in Nashville, Tennessee. Unlike most other North Carolina students at Peabody of his day, he did not attend on scholarship. Private family funds paid for his time and work there. Enrollment at Peabody in the early 1890s, at least for those there on scholarship, was designed to train leaders for North Carolina's new progressive public

schools. Appointments to the school were even considered as being an important enough distinction to warrant the listing of names, home communities and counties, and proposed graduation dates in the Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Education during the 1890s (Scarboro, 1897). After completing Peabody's two-year program, unlike most graduates, Reynolds continued to complete a bachelor's degree in education.

At age twenty-five, A.C. Reynolds became principal of the new Camp Academy in Leicester. From that point, he was commonly known as "Professor Reynolds," no matter the educational capacity he filled at the time (Miller, 1965). The new school opened in the spring of 1896 with about fifty students, and continued growing steadily for the next several years (*Asheville Gazette*, 1897). Classes offered at the school included many of the same as had been offered at Transmontane College forty years earlier. These included law, philosophy, and geography. This school, like Transmontane, was co-educational and offered boarding arrangements for students when needed. After Reynolds left the school, he became president of Rutherford College and superintendent of the Burke County Schools at the same time. While at Rutherford College, he taught classes in "modern" educational methods that led to the training of new teachers for the area's public schools. Rutherford College was not a normal school in simply being a teacher-training facility, however. As with Weaver College, students continued to have the choice of different subjects and course of study (Reynolds, 1950).

During his tenure at Camp Academy, Reynolds began a partnership between the academy and the public schools that lasted for several years and kept a tie between the school and the community. Camp Academy, though private, was selected as one of three sites in Buncombe County at which public school teacher examinations were conducted.

Hamel Felmet, who had become superintendent of Buncombe County in 1893, sought to attract better-trained teachers from institutions from facilities such as Camp Academy to teach in the county's public schools. He worked with Reynolds, and later with others, to conduct examinations for teaching certificates at three institutions in Buncombe County. Examinations were conducted at Camp Academy, Weaver College, and at Fairview Institute in the southeastern section of the county. As the number and quality of public schools increased in Buncombe County, Reynolds and others worked diligently to transfer the public support to the public schools from the private ones. Reynolds even offered teacher-training classes aimed at the public schools during his time as principal of Camp Academy (Miller, 1965).

After five years with Rutherford College and the Burke County Schools, A.C. Reynolds became superintendent of the Buncombe County Schools on August 7, 1905. He had apparently applied for the job only a few days prior to his selection for the position, and had done so at the insistence of Leicester community members and of Charles Webb, president of the Asheville Citizen-Times Company. Reynolds inherited a public school system that was still small, weak, and often not seen as the academic equal of the private schools in the county (Reynolds, 1950).

In 1900, the United States Census Bureau documented Buncombe County's total population at 44,288 (U.S. Census, 1900). That population in 1900 was divided into over one hundred school districts. In those districts, about two-thirds of the schools stopped at fourth grade, while the remainder offered instruction through grade seven. Yet, by 1904, contracts for the construction of new public schools at Leicester and Sandy Mush had been awarded, along with contracts for six other schools in different areas of Buncombe

County. At the time Reynolds became superintendent, he inherited a system with one hundred seventeen districts, one hundred three “schoolhouses” and only nineteen teachers teaching in all seven grades. Though some districts in North Carolina now had public schools reaching to eleventh grade, Buncombe County had none to reach that level (Leloudis, 1996). Total enrollment for the county was 7698 students, but only 2244 were listed as being qualified for promotion in 1905 (Miller, 1965). Clearly, Reynolds had an uphill climb before him and the public schools.

Reynolds soon set out to improve academic success and financial backing for the schools. Rather than attempt this solely through state funding, he established an informal public relations campaign aimed at involving community members in the schools. He could therefore garner their support for local taxes designed to support the schools and to build new facilities. Early on, Reynolds complained about the conditions under which he carried out the duties of his position. His complaints, recorded in a 1950 memoir completed at his daughter’s insistence, also give a telling picture of the state of Buncombe County’s public schools early in the twentieth century.

Since the funds for support of public education in the rural districts had for a long time been estimated at two dollars for each pupil for the year, very little more was apportioned. As a result of such a plan I was requested to teach a school of children of both Buncombe and Haywood Counties, which alternated one paying teacher one year and the other the next. I therefore walked three miles up the road of Sugar Creek prong of Big Sandy Mush Creek to the top of Bear Wallow mountain to the Bear Wallow School. It was a log building with a chimney finished up to where a mantle is usually placed, with a door made of rived oak

boards, and a place for a window on one side. Within said house I found seats made of slabs with four legs, a tiny blackboard, and square trough contraption that we called the teacher's desk. To this came students ranging in age from a man of twenty-five years to a small girl five years old (Reynolds, 1950).

In this school of about twenty-five students, Reynolds went on to describe the short term issues with being paid for his Haywood County duties, and a general lack of funds for the schools. He even stated that he personally aided students at the Bear Wallow School in purchasing textbooks. For this effort, Reynolds was paid \$25.00 per month for terms in which the school was operated by Haywood County above his salary as Buncombe County's superintendent.

After such experiences, A.C. Reynolds became determined to improve and increase community involvement in the Buncombe County Schools. He accomplished this with a personal public relations campaign aimed at securing voter support for school tax measures and for making the public see the need for the financial support of their community's schools. He began with his home communities of Leicester and Sandy Mush, where he was long- and well-known, then expanded his campaign from there to the rest of the county. In his papers, Reynolds documented his schedule during the latter half of his first term as superintendent. Monday evenings were spent on official school board business, as was Saturday. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings were spent visiting the homes of community members in various districts. These visits were designed to seek community financial support for public schools and for the support of local tax measures to further school funding which needed votes for passage. Only Sunday was spent for church and family. Reynolds later recalled

During my term of office we had as many as thirty spirited contests, in which the school forces usually won. I learned that square dealing and reliance on the justice of your cause was apt to be rewarded by a majority of the votes. Five days each week were spent traveling in a buggy slowly drawn by Henry, tough hided black horse, in various sections of the county. Thus I was afforded an opportunity of getting many people and learning their desires concerning the best interest of their children. Sitting at the fire-sides of many of the good men, I gained much wise counsel as how best to push forward our work (Reynolds, 1950).

In doing this, Reynolds was able to help to secure passage of several tax measures for funding of the county's public schools. By 1910, nineteen districts in Buncombe County had also voted in special taxes designed solely for the support of the schools in that district. Not only did the special taxes assist in providing improved school facilities in those districts, the funds generated from the local taxes advocated by Reynolds allowed the school term to expand to seven or eight months of the year. Other districts often had schools terms as short as four months. One district in Reynolds's home area of Sandy Mush was one of the nineteen that had passed a tax measure for funding the schools. The Chestnut Grove district was the only one in Leicester or Sandy Mush to approve the special tax. The district was then able to expand its school term to eight months (Miller, 1965). The last of these district taxes remained in effect until the late 1990s, when the Hominy Valley section of Buncombe County finally repealed its district tax. Reynolds had accomplished his task by soliciting and creating community involvement in the local schools. The county's citizens had been persuaded that better educational opportunities for children could lead to better economic prospects for the

future.

Reynolds instituted another policy during his first term as superintendent that led to better instruction for students, but was not popular with individual school officials and teachers, who still most often were natives of the communities in which they taught. In 1907, he developed a Teacher's Institute at Weaverville, with the goal of having better educated and better trained teachers in the public schools. Reynolds continued the requirement of teachers facing yearly examinations in order to obtain or to maintain their certification to teach. Teachers were examined in areas from English to history; the better their scores on the exam, the higher their certification grade and therefore their salaries. Reynolds recorded opposition to these measures from the teachers and from their relatives in the communities in which they taught. These measures were thought to be too harsh and to demand too much of the teachers' time and effort. He also required teachers to attend monthly in-service sessions on designated topics and continued to work to improve school facilities. As in other endeavors with the schools, Reynolds encountered community opposition, as well as support, in any changes made to schools, whether facilities or teachers.

In 1912, A.C. Reynolds made a personal and professional change that would continue to impact schools, students, and communities in western North Carolina. Cullowhee High School had been started in 1889 as a high school with a normal department for training teachers. When Reynolds and his family arrived at the school, he became president of an institution that had a great deal of community and faculty support, but little academic achievement. Faculty often had only slightly more formal education than the students they were teaching.

A summer school for teachers was also begun in 1914 to allow existing teachers who taught during the regular term to attend. In that same year, one hundred two Cullowhee students had signed contracts to teach, and the school's summer session had to turn away students. The school rapidly outgrew its facilities, and, as in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, local citizens became involved. Money was borrowed from a local bank for construction, project managers performed supervisory duties without pay, and community members donated time, land, and labor to expand the school (Wood & Blethen, 1989).

In 1920, Reynolds left Cullowhee Normal and Industrial School, as the facility was then known, to return to the Buncombe and Haywood County Schools. In 1924, he returned to Asheville and the county's public schools to become superintendent of the new Woodfin School. The arrangement did not last long. A.C. Reynolds was again asked to become superintendent of the Buncombe County Schools in 1926. During his more than fifteen-year absence from the position, the county had gained enough community financial support to pass a bond referendum to finance the construction of six new consolidated schools. One of these was a school located in Reynolds's home community of Sandy Mush, at a cost of \$50,000 and with brick construction.

During his second term as superintendent, Reynolds continued many of the progressive measures initiated in his first term. In 1916, shortly after the end of his first term, Buncombe County had one hundred seven schools. Fifty-seven of these had only one teacher and thirty-four had two teachers (Miller, 1965). Large schools such as Woodfin, which Reynolds had left with its thirty-three teachers, were a rarity in the county. Consolidation efforts had begun at this time along with the construction of new

buildings. Most often, one new consolidated building was erected for each larger community, with grades ranging from first to eleventh in the largest of them. Community conflict arose again. The immediate areas receiving new schools welcomed them; the communities losing their small, close schools were not so pleased. Parents complained that their schools were pivotal to the community and that transportation would be extremely difficult for families and that therefore students would not attend school as diligently (Reynolds, 1950).

Community involvement in rural schools began at this time to take a new direction. Community members no longer had to be as directly involved in the financial and academic life of the school simply to keep it in operation. In the case of the old subscription schools and academies, withdrawn community support and funds would leave the school with no means of operating. Now, community members began to be less directly involved in academic issues as more professionally-trained and educated teachers filled the classrooms. Much of the community involvement seen in Buncombe County, as with other areas in the South, turned to physical arrangements and the condition of the schools. Leloudis, writing in 1996, found that

Women organized themselves around individual schools and strove to cultivate local enthusiasm for reform through a wide range of improvement projects.

Outside the buildings, they mobilized neighborhood men and boys to cart away rubbish, clean wells, clear stumps and underbrush, and lay out grassy plots for children to use as playgrounds. Inside, the women installed window shades, painted walls, polished stoves, hung maps, pictures, and arranged bookcases and shelves (Leloudis, 1996, p.163).

This physical involvement continues today at the current Leicester School and its consolidated middle and high schools at Erwin a few miles away. Community members and organizations volunteer to install playground equipment, clean fields, plant flowers, and maintain walking tracks. Schools reciprocate by allowing community access to tracks, playgrounds, and new school facilities available to the public at times other than regular school hours (Boyd, 2010; Page, 2010). This functions outside such official organizations such as the parent-teacher organization or boosters' clubs.

Though consolidation was providing new school facilities and academic opportunities for students, Reynolds and the Buncombe County Schools faced a long span of change before it could truly move to the “one community, one school” model espoused by educational officials of the time. Money for new schools continued to be an issue, despite local taxes for the purpose. Finding and maintaining sufficient numbers of qualified teachers continued to be a problem. Transportation came to be an issue in the greater distances that had to be traveled by students over rough and rudimentary mountain roads.

In a directory of Buncombe County’s public schools published for the 1928-29 school year, ten schools were still listed as being located in the Leicester and Sandy Mush areas. Sizes of these schools ranged from the one-room, one-teacher Teague School to the two-teacher Union School to the new Leicester School, which had fifteen teachers and now included a high school. Outside of Leicester School, the average faculty of the community’s schools was only three teachers.

Community involvement in an official capacity was very much evident in the directory’s listing for each school. Directly underneath the school’s name and before

even the name of the principal or teachers, was the listing for the three-member school committee for each school (Buncombe County Schools, 1928). School committees retained a great deal of power, particularly in the area of personnel with the hiring or retention of teachers. Teacher contracts for services were on a year-to-year basis. Committees could, throughout this period and for decades to come, refuse to renew teachers' contracts for subsequent school years or to simply replace them with new teachers at will. No further explanations were needed for such actions. This practice continued until the early 1970s, with the advent of the "tenure laws" for North Carolina teachers (Payne, 2010). The involvement and power of the community was also evident in the listings of teachers for each school. Addresses given for almost every teacher in the entire directory was in the same community in which he or she taught. Some family surnames are also noted again and again in schools, such as the Newfound School in Leicester, where the only two teachers were Mrs. Aletha Brown and Miss Mildred Brown. Even at the larger consolidated schools such as Leicester, the same pattern occurred. R.M. Kimzey taught agriculture, Mrs. R.M. Kimzey taught Latin and French, and Miss Elizabeth Kimzey taught mathematics (Buncombe County Schools, 1928).

Reynolds's second term as superintendent of the Buncombe County Schools lasted through the beginning of the Great Depression, ending in 1933. During this term, he continued his first term's practice of keeping open hours at his office for "visiting" with community members to discuss school issues. Rather than the horse-and-buggy solicitations for support seen in his first term, he turned to community organizations for involvement and support. His solicitation for community support in the county's public schools never wavered, though. The 1928-29 Buncombe County Schools' directory

contained a message from Reynolds on the first page. It invited community members to visit the schools and observe their work at any time (Buncombe County Schools, 1928). They obtaining community support by directly asking for it continues today as the major way Leicester School derives its support from parents and other community members.

### *Isolation and Consolidation*

As new consolidated schools were being built in the 1920s and school grade span and subject area offerings were being expanded, students in the most rural and isolated areas of Leicester and Sandy Mush had less access than many to schools. Though the Sandy Mush community voted fifty thousand dollars for capital outlay for a new school in 1924, students were still frequently attending school in one-room facilities that also housed churches. A photograph taken about 1920 in Sandy Mush showed the wooden building housing the Ebenezer School on Willow Creek Road. Twenty-nine students and one teacher were arrayed in front of the school, ranging in age from five or six to what appear to be older teenagers. This age range was shown, though the school encompassed only first through fourth grades (Duckett, 1988).

Even with these rudimentary schools, many members of the school committees from previous generations in the community had been denied any appreciable amount of formal education. Many families had been financially unable or unwilling to take advantage of the subscription schools or academies that had previously been the sole means of education in these isolated communities. Even though Leicester had been an incorporated town for over forty years, the same situation applied. No public schools had existed in the nineteenth century. Because of this large gap in educational availability, many adults in Leicester and Sandy Mush had never obtained any formal schooling. The

only instruction they had received was whatever amount was available in the home (General Education Board, 1921). This may have come from parents who also had little or no formal education. Though not separated by individual community, the U.S. Census data for 1900 provided a telling picture of the problem in North Carolina. Of the state's total population of close to two million, 54,334 were adult males twenty-one years of age and older who were listed as being illiterate (United States Census, 1900).

During the early 1920s, as consolidated public schools were expanding and small one-room schools were disappearing, a new educational venue began to appear in Leicester and Sandy Mush. These were commonly known as "moonlight schools." These moonlight schools were appropriately named. They were conducted in isolated rural communities with needs for adult education in the evenings after other farm chores or work was complete. Teachers would travel into existing schools, churches, and even larger private homes to conduct classes in which adults learned to read and write. Throughout North Carolina, these moonlight schools often even took advantage of adult pupils' own children for instruction, with the public school students instructing the community's adults. Usually, teachers for these night schools were some of the same certified teachers who taught in the county's public school system. Often, though, these teachers were community volunteers who lived in the same local area. These schools were conducted in any available community structures that were not in use in the evenings (Leloudis, 1996).

During the second administration of A.C. Reynolds with the Buncombe County Schools, moonlight schools began to take on a more formal nature. In 1921, an adult education program was included in the Community Chest, a fund raised by volunteer

means in Asheville. The next year, the program was adopted as a formal item in the budget of the Buncombe County Schools. Early on, it was overseen by Miss Ethel Terrell, who was the county's rural school supervisor (Miller, 1965). Miss Terrell was later succeeded by Mrs. Elizabeth Morriss, who expanded the moonlight schools program. During Reynolds's term, she became the director for the system's elementary grades. She was assisted by four other supervisors who oversaw elementary teachers in the county. All five were involved in the moonlight schools program, with Morriss as the program's director (Reynolds, 1950). In the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, Morriss and Mrs. Della Day both conducted these adult evening classes. Particularly in Sandy Mush, a large segment of the community attended these evening classes.

In the archives of the Pack Memorial Library in Asheville, a large collection of letters and photographs belonging to Della Day still exists. Letters discussed the moonlight schools and were often sent to her by her adult student in appreciation of her work in the community. Photographs in the collection were primarily those taken by Mrs. Day during her work in the Sandy Mush community. The community was apparently involved enough in her work that Mrs. Day was invited into private homes and churches in the area. Photographs showed daylight scenes of ordinary work and community activities, so they could not have been taken during the evening class sessions. Over time, current and past community members have identified many of the photographs' subjects as residents of the community in the 1920s, though they are not usually identified in Mrs. Day's letters (Della Day Collection, Pack Library). Apparently, Day was the sole photographer of these images, and was keeping the photographs for her own private use. None have ever been published. According to A.C.

Reynolds, the beginning of the Depression caused the moonlight school program to end due to financial problems. The lasting effects of the moonlight schools are still remembered to this day. In a 1988 oral history project, Irene Cook, a native of the Sandy Mush community, related her great-grandfather's experience with the evening schools.

Well, my great-grandfather, Obe Surrett, learned to read when he was ninety years old. A school teacher by the name of Miss Day came in here and taught night school, and he went to night school and learned to read. He died in 1934, so that would have been about 1928. She just came and taught, and a lot of the older people went to school, night school. They met in the church – Chestnut Grove, up in that area (Cain, 2004).

The isolation of these communities, even in the new era of consolidated public schools had changed little from the days of A.C. Reynolds's first term as superintendent. His weekly travels on horseback across the mountain to Haywood County to teach during the early days of the twentieth century were echoed into the 1920s and 1930s by Mont Hannah, a long-time teacher in the community. Hannah began his teaching career in the Cataloochee community of Haywood County. In the mid-1920s, according to his youngest son, Jim, he moved to the Sandy Mush community and taught there for about thirty-five years. In 1998, Jim Hannah related stories of his father's days as a teacher in Sandy Mush and the unexpected support he received from community members who did not even have children in the schools.

This is the Davidson Gap Road here, connects across to Doggett Mountain Road.

There is a place down there called Cross Rock, down about two or three miles.

Used to walk across the mountain there every day, teach school there. And as he

came back across in the evening, there was some people over there named the Clancys? (Glance). And he'd stop every day, and they'd give him a glass of corn bread and milk before he came back across the mountain (Cain, 2004).

Mont Hannah later taught at the new Sandy Mush School after it was completed, and retired in 1958. He died in 1972.

Jim Hannah also related another aspect of community involvement in schools that accompanied the community's isolation. This came in the form of political power and connections, even dating to the more recent past in the community. He discussed the point that political affiliation was a sideline to community involvement in schools' power bases and for teachers' ability to secure a job in the community's schools. "You know, it wasn't many years ago that, if you wasn't a Democrat in Buncombe County, you couldn't get a teaching job. They asked you your politics before they asked your qualifications" (Cain, 2004).

Transportation continued to be a problem for all Buncombe County's consolidated schools, not just for teachers walking several miles to and from work each day. Leicester Highway, the area's main road, was not completed in its present form until the late 1950s. Buses for transportation of students did not yet exist in the communities. Yet, in closing small, one-room schools in favor of larger consolidated ones, students had to find a way to school. Increased distance from school often meant that community members had even less direct involvement in the school. Rather than just living "down the road" from the school, they may have been several miles from the facility. Families who had cars usually had only one. If one parent used the car for work, the other had no way to be at the school for any activities at a school that now might be

several miles from home. More affluent families had better access to transportation, so those families often were more involved with the school simply because of access and because of having available transportation (Sharpe, 2010). Other families had no way to be involved in activities at a school that now might be several miles from home.

James Cole, who is seventy-eight, is a long-time community member and former parent-teacher association president at Leicester School. He related that as a small child, he had walked to Hall's School on Newfound in Leicester. After fourth grade, he and other students in the Newfound community came to Leicester for the remainder of their time in school. He described students getting rides to school in any way possible in order to avoid the seven-mile walk each day. Cole describes students even riding in the backs of trucks with several neighborhood children as a result of someone simply "going that way". Also according to Cole, in harsh weather, some community members who lived in the Newfound area who had trucks would intentionally meet students and "carry" them to school in the mornings (J. Cole, 2010).

Buncombe County bought its first school vehicles for transportation to school in the mid-1920s. These were also trucks with open backs for students to be able to climb into and ride to school. These trucks, though, only served a few schools in a few communities on a few main roads (Miller, 1965). Most students were still responsible for their arrival at school each day by whatever means possible. When school buses did arrive in the Leicester area, they aided greatly in student transportation when they were functioning correctly. James Cole related how, in the mid-1930s, the buses frequently failed to arrive because of mechanical problems and because of muddy roads that often became impassable in winter. He also described the lack of comfort for students riding

the bus.

We had this old flat-topped bus. I don't guess you ever saw one. They had two side seats; most of the bigger kids would sit on those side seats. Us little kids had to sit on that seat that ran all the way back through the bus, back to back on that bus. They called that old bus the 'chicken coop' (J. Cole, 2010).

Nancy Cole, secretary at Leicester School for twenty-nine years, recalled how the isolation of many families led to a decline in community involvement for families who lived some distance from the school. She related that many families would send notes or later, when phone service was more readily available, call inquiring about things they could do or send to help at school. This was their only avenue for involvement because of having no means or transportation during school hours to be able to come for volunteer work or for other activities on campus. They would offer to buy things, make things, or help in "any way they could," but had to be able to use their children and the school bus as the means to get those items or articles to school. More affluent families could easily arrange transportation to the school and therefore became more involved (Cole, 2010).

The problem of isolation and the inability of some students and families to become involved with the school in anything more than basic class attendance did not completely disappear with better roads or available school bus transportation. Swann Payne, who was principal of the school for more than twenty years, recalled an incident when he was a teacher at Leicester in the mid-1960s. While teaching seventh grade, he had started a boys' basketball team for the school's seventh and eighth grade students, but encountered transportation problems for his players.

I was not married at the time, so I used my car to transport the kids to games and

sometimes after practice because they didn't have any way to get home. Kenneth Reeves, I remember him. I used to take him up on Little Sandy because he didn't have any way home (Payne, 2010).

Even today, with two or more cars in most families, transportation remains a problem for students, parents, and for any kind of community involvement. Leicester School and Erwin High School carefully arrange schedules for meetings, parent workshops, and for community events. Care is taken to schedule events after most parents leave work for the day or even on Saturday when many parents are not at work. Cynthia Rhinehart, a current teacher at Leicester, lamented that it gets harder and harder to get parents into the school for activities of any kind, even for such important ones such as conferences. In most families now, both parents work outside the home. They are involved with their work more than they are involved with their children's school (Rhinehart, 2010).

Consolidation and higher teacher standards played a large role in families' distance from school and also the amounts of involvement related to transportation issues for students and parents. Along with school consolidation in the 1920s and beyond was a continuing effort to raise teacher and instructional quality. Since the institution of yearly teacher examinations in the late nineteenth century, teachers had become more professional and more prepared to proficiently teacher their classes. They were now the "experts" on curriculum, rather than the parents or community wanting the teacher to adhere to their wishes for instructional content and methods. Standards for teacher certification and a state curriculum guide became increasingly stringent. Though the three-member school committee still controlled many decisions and activities within the

school, they could not hire teachers who did not have the proper certification for the position. James Cole, though, remembered Leicester's school committee as filling what he saw as a positive, if narrow role for the school. They hired, whenever possible, Leicester citizens as Leicester School's teachers. This kept the connection between the community and school strong.

The school committee had a lot of, I guess, overseeing ability with this and that at the school, but they always seemed to have good people and have good local people. It was the people who lived there. You don't have that at the school now. They did have some really good teachers, and I think that was part of it with the school committees they had and them doing their jobs (J. Cole, 2010).

Cole also related one interesting incident that occurred at Leicester regularly for several years. Garland Reeves, a parent of a Leicester student in the 1930s and 1940s, frequently accepted A.C. Reynolds's invitation to come and observe classroom activities in the Buncombe County Schools. Cole reported that Reeves, who was not a member of the school committee, would simply walk into various classes at the school, not utter a word, and sit down in an empty desk. When apparently satisfied with the class's instruction, he would, just as silently, get up and leave. According to Cole, he began the practice when his daughter was a student and continued it regularly all the way through and even past the time when his grandson was a student at Leicester (J. Cole, 2010).

Consolidation continued. In the late 1950s, the Buncombe County Schools began another round of consolidation and building. Now, rather than each community school in the county having its own high school, the county was divided into six high school districts, with the county being divided geographically. Now, these new high schools

were built in locations central to these new districts. As Sandy Mush had done several years before, now Leicester lost its high school to the new Clyde A. Erwin High School in 1958 (Miller, 1965). Due to construction delays and the availability of classroom space, though, Leicester's high school students moved to the new Erwin High School three years later than those in the accompanying district schools. Community involvement at the new, large high school soon changed from instruction in farming methods and activities directly related to the Leicester community, to athletic and sports-oriented activities based on the new Warrior mascot for Erwin School. The new high school and its athletic teams and activities created a community of their own based on those teams, rather than on the smaller, different communities from which students had come. When arriving at Erwin, students no longer simply had the identity of being Leicester students. They may have been from West Buncombe, Emma, or any of the other communities making up the new Erwin district. Their identities became that of Erwin students. Some involvement seen in the old smaller schools fell by the wayside. In its place grew community involvement based primarily on sports and on activities encompassed under the Warrior mascot (Page, 2010).

The continued isolation of the Leicester community helped spur the fame and career of one its almost life-long citizens. Bascom Lamar Lunsford was born in Mars Hill in Madison County on March 21, 1882. His father had moved from Madison County to South Turkey Creek in the Leicester section on Buncombe County in the early 1870s, but had moved to Mars Hill before Lunsford's birth to teach at the college. Throughout his long life and varied career, Lunsford frequently became involved with Leicester School in several different capacities. According to Loyal Jones in Minstrel of the

Southern Appalachians, "...the Lunsford family were well-educated professional people, but there have always been persons in all parts of the Appalachians who have taken advantage of whatever opportunities were open to them. They defy the stereotype of the mountain people (Jones, 1984, p.6).

Over time, Bascom Lamar Lunsford and many members of his family became involved in education in several capacities. Two brothers moved to Louisiana and became a school principal and a school superintendent, respectively. Two of his sisters taught high school in Buncombe and Rutherford Counties in North Carolina before moving on to other careers.

Lunsford's early education and career mirrored and followed that of another Leicester native – A.C. Reynolds. He attended Camp Academy in Leicester during the four years Reynolds was principal of the school. When Reynolds left to assume the presidency of Rutherford College, nineteen-year-old Bascom Lunsford moved there as a student. In reverse order from Reynolds's early career, upon the end of his first year at Rutherford, Lunsford came back to Leicester and Sandy Mush to work as a teacher at Cross Rock School in the Little Sandy Mush section of Madison County. Reynolds had taught briefly at the same school before leaving to attend Peabody Institute. The restless nature for which Lunsford would become known in western North Carolina soon emerged. He left Cross Rock, took a number of local jobs, married a girl who was also from South Turkey Creek, and settled back again in Leicester.

Bascom Lunsford's father was a teacher who wanted an education for his four daughters. He moved to take a teaching job at Connelly Springs in Rutherford County so that his four daughters could attend Rutherford College. Bascom and his new wife,

Nellie, tagged along so that Bascom could return to school and finish his degree. He then obtained a position with the North Carolina School for the Deaf, became a student at Trinity College, read law, passed the North Carolina bar exam, and was granted a license to practice law, all by August of 1913. The following year, he returned to Rutherford College to teach English and history. This teaching position gave him the opportunity to delve into the music and folklore he loved to learn and perform. With Lunsford, finding, playing, and documenting the music he heard and played always took precedence over making a living.

After working for the United States Department of Justice, starting two newspapers, and various other jobs in Rutherford and McDowell Counties, the Lunsfords moved with the children back to a farm on South Turkey Creek in Leicester given to them by Nellie's father. For the next several years, Lunsford maintained a law practice at times and taught school at times, but collecting and performing music always came first. He began writing articles for the Asheville *Citizen* and regional magazines in the mid-1920s. In 1924, he traveled to Atlanta to record his first songs for Okeh Records. A scout for the same record label established a recording studio in Asheville at which Lunsford recorded several times. Over the next forty years, Bascom Lamar Lunsford wrote, researched, and recorded dozens of songs, culminating in his recording done for the Library of Congress, beginning in 1949 (Jones, 1984).

Though Lunsford's work gathering and recording traditional music made him famous, it did not make him wealthy. Traditional music was obviously his primary interest, but he continued to have an on-again, off-again law practice in Asheville. He also returned to teaching for several years. During this time in the 1940s, he taught

agriculture at the newly-constructed Leicester High School. Despite his background teaching English and history at Rutherford College and his work as an attorney, Lunsford served several years as a teacher in a subject for which he may have been only somewhat qualified. The position was convenient. Leicester School was only a short distance from his farm on South Turkey Creek and from Camp Academy, where he had been a student years earlier.

Lunsford's years of teaching at Leicester School brought a new and unique variety of community involvement that seemed tailored to Lunsford and his life-long interest in local traditional music. The isolation of many of the community's families and students worked to his advantage. Lunsford had, for many years, used the method employed by Cecil Sharp, the folklorist who had traveled to isolated Madison County communities and homes recording early music at the beginning of the twentieth century. Lunsford traveled, visited, and listened. Now, on occasion, the music came to him by way of his students. Students would sometimes sing for Lunsford and he would, on occasion, sing for them. Parts of the community, through its students, provided history and music for Lunsford, which he, in turn, would then record. James Cole, a student of Lunsford's at Leicester in the early 1940s, recalled that

He was an interesting character. He was my agriculture teacher when I was in high school. He was good, but a lot of the agriculture we did was playing volleyball and singing. We would play a lot when we were having agriculture class. He remembered it all.

Cole also remembered how, with his former teacher an older man who no longer drove at night or over great distances, he would transport Lunsford and his wife Nellie to

venues throughout western North Carolina to perform for various visiting dignitaries. He had been their postal carrier for many years, and a friendship had developed between the former teacher and student. As they traveled, Lunsford would relate stories of his time and travels collecting folksongs. Often, according to Cole in 2010, the conversation would eventually revert to Lunsford's time as a teacher at Leicester and the songs students and their families had taught him through his involvement with the school (J. Cole, 2010).

#### *Community Involvement in Academic Matters*

From the earliest days of all the schools, public or private, in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, the emphasis had been on academic achievement for students. Transmontane College in the 1850s attempted to draw student and community interest and involvement with course offerings including Latin, law, geography, and logic. Many lectures were even offered free of charge to interested parties at locations off school premises (*Asheville News*, 1859).

The tradition continued through the era of the new consolidated schools and higher teacher standards. Teachers were now expected to have more than a rudimentary knowledge of the subjects they taught. While this gradual change was occurring, community involvement in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities changed with it. The moonlight schools of the 1920s brought the last of the large-scale direct academic community involvement in the schools purely related to academics. Even then, the involvement was for the betterment of the individual, not the school. Community members like Garland Reeves who would drop in to observe the quality of instruction in his children's and grandchildren's classes became a rarity.

Yet, the academic involvement by community members in the schools was not over. Beginning in the 1920s with the new consolidated Leicester School, the school's physical facilities were used in a reciprocal relationship with the community and with learning. Both Leicester and Sandy Mush were, and still are to a degree, rural farming communities. New emphasis began being placed on learning that would benefit the community's citizens as well as the school's students. Many community lectures, demonstrations, and presentations were made at the school that often had little to do with standard academic areas. In these cases, the community was invited to see and use the facilities of the new school for these community functions as much as the facilities were designed for student classes. An article in the Asheville *Citizen* dated May 10, 1922, announced that a program of

...inestimable value to farmers will take place this evening at 8:00 at Leicester school house. Chief among the features will be the address to be delivered by Mrs. Florence Forbes, poultry expert. The program will be carried out under the auspices of the farmers' federation. A four-reel motion picture will be shown to illustrate points on how to improve poultry flocks and increase the farmers' returns (Asheville *Citizen*, May 10, 1922).

Continuing newspaper articles from the Asheville *Citizen* throughout subsequent decades documented the continuation of this trend. Consecutive articles on October 2 and 3, 1928 announced and invited all of the area's residents to the Leicester Fair to be held on that Friday at the school. The fair used the school's facilities and faculty to assist in staging the events. Demonstrations were held on modern farming practices by state agricultural officials, community members, and even teachers at the school. The

October 2 article reported that the Leicester fair had become such a large event in such a good location that it would “take the place of the annual Western North Carolina Fair, which has been discontinued for this year” (*Asheville Citizen*, October 2, 1928). The fair continued to grow and work in conjunction with programs at Leicester School until the early 1950s. That year, in another article in the *Asheville Citizen*, five pictures were shown of different exhibits from the fair. Community members exhibited the usual farm animals, demonstrations of crafts, and hobbies. Students at the school did the same; a student’s large self-made map of Asia is shown beside Principal S.O. Wilde’s exhibit of produce from his garden. Those pictures shown on October 7, 1951 of the Leicester Fair were the last. The fair was discontinued. Even then, the same newspaper article cited an attendance figure of over 2000 visitors in one day (*Asheville Citizen*, October 7, 1951). This attendance was recorded in a county that in 1950s U.S. Census only recorded a total population of 124,403. There were also still 4,266 farmers in the county (United States Census, 1950).

Swann Payne, who taught at Leicester for three years in the 1960s and returned as principal in the early 1970s, remembered a community that was supportive of the school’s teachers and of the school’s academic programs. He remembered few complaints concerning academics in his twenty-year tenure as the school principal. The school had become a K-8 school with the opening of Erwin High School and later moved to K-6 after the opening of Erwin Middle School in 1977. Payne recalled that

The community pretty much left it up to the teachers to do their jobs. The kids came from homes that were very supportive of the school and held the school in high esteem. You were pretty well the sole authority and the parents supported

and respected the teacher in what they did. You needed anything from them; you just asked and it was taken care of (Payne, 2010).

In the late 1970s, Payne began a new program at Leicester that brought community involvement into the school in a way that blended academics, community heritage, and social interaction. For the seventh and eighth grade students, which were housed in the old high school building and separated from the other grades, he began having community members come in to teach mini-courses in different areas. Community members volunteered to provide a number of class sessions in given topics, though none of them were certified teachers. The community members came to school once each week for a few hours and taught some craft, skill, or academic area to the students. Payne recalled each mini-course usually running for about five weeks. Classes ran from mechanics to basket-making to book talks (Payne, 2010).

A later principal, Diane McEntire, remembered one negative aspect to the academic involvement of the community in Leicester School. She became principal of the school in 2002 and remained at the school for seven years. She found that most of the community and parents were supportive of the school and its academic programs. Churches and community organizations worked together to provide money, materials, and time for the school and its programs. The negative aspect of community involvement with academics she saw at the school involved the parents of some students and their relationship with the school's practices and requirements.

You had a handful of parents that wanted to be supportive of their students or children; they just didn't know how. They were reluctant to come in for parent conferencing, they were reluctant to come in for school activities such as math

and science night, PTO programs. They came; they felt a little uncomfortable, but still, I think it was those parents who had either a bad experience in a public school or in their own school life. Possibly, they did not finish school and felt a little uneasy or intimidated by teachers or administrators or even coming on campus (McEntire, 2010).

A.C. Reynolds's invitation for community involvement in Buncombe County's schools of the 1920s continues to the present at Leicester. Staff members and administrators continually solicit parent and community involvement in the school. Staff members such as first grade teacher assistant Karen Lusk stated that the classes with whom she is involved have seen an increase in volunteerism and involvement in the last few years, especially since the school began actively soliciting that help. She cited the example of a local grandmother who had a heart transplant. "As soon as she was able, she came to the school. I just watched her work with the children. I've seen her over the years, and she is one of the best volunteers I have ever had in my room. It doesn't matter that even her grandchildren are way past my grade" (Lusk, 2010).

For older students, community involvement in the academic life of Leicester School involves a few local church groups and other area residents who volunteer to tutor students a few hours per week. These volunteers work simultaneously with two programs instituted by the school's current media specialist. I am a teacher at the school, so I see the work of these volunteers every day in the hallways and the classrooms. The Boy Zone targets at-risk third and fourth grade boys, pairing them with volunteer male mentors from the community and offering special monthly programs for the group that features male speakers. These speakers range from the current sheriff of Buncombe

County to authors of books featured in the school's collection. Also, a group of retired men in the community have been recruited to tutor other students once per week (Boyd, 2010). Though the staff works continually to solicit and maintain this community academic involvement, it remains an integral part of Leicester School's academic offering.

#### *Money Matters*

For the last several decades, since the beginning of more stringent requirements for schools' academic programs, consolidation, and more exacting requirements for teacher certification, community involvement in the day-to-day working of Leicester School has declined. Most tutoring and other special programs function for a few years, then diminish and eventually disappear. At the same time, involvement in athletic and social activities has increased. Several factors have created this condition. The need for more funds for athletic activities and other extra-curricular activities has helped to create this type of involvement. Currently, the state's budget crisis is prompting even more of this type of assistance in the schools from the community. Schools rely on these outside community funds for the implementation of programs and to continue athletic teams that draw and retain positive public attitudes toward the school.

The beginning of the community's financial involvement in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities dates to the nineteenth century subscription schools and private academies. Those schools could not have remained in existence as long as they did without the influx of funds from parents in the form of tuition and board or from the trustees who guaranteed buildings and teachers.

Later, with the new consolidated public schools, new and larger buildings were

needed to house the schools and students. To supplement the seemingly always insufficient funds coming from the state and county, citizens of Leicester and Sandy Mush voted to tax themselves in order to provide the funds for new school buildings. This was happening at a time when tax support for schools was consistently being voted down in many areas. A bond measure was successfully passed in 1925 that provided \$50,000 to build a new Sandy Mush consolidated school. In 1933, a similar measure was passed on September 27 to supplement the cost of a new \$120,000 consolidated school for Leicester with twenty-one classrooms. The bond measure raised \$38,500 of the cost of the new school (*Asheville Citizen*, September 20, 1933).

In 1940, when the new \$250,000 Leicester School building was constructed, money obtained from the federal Works Progress Administration was used. Community funds then began to support the school's activities and programs rather than construction costs. An Asheville *Citizen-Times* article dated August 18, 1945, listed several of the programs, classes, and clubs at the school. One club on campus, the "L Club", operated much as a modern boosters' club and stated its purpose as that of "encouraging and maintaining high standards of sportsmanship". In the same article, the club wrote that its project for the year had been a "box supper for support of the basketball team" (*Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 18, 1940).

By 1930, at least, Leicester School had its own monthly newspaper. The paper was originally named *The High Life*. It followed a publication dating to the mid-1920s serving the entire Buncombe County Schools and called *The Mountaineer*. Finally, about 1940, Leicester School's monthly newspaper changed its name to that of *The Skillet* in honor of the community's nineteenth century nickname of "Lick Skillet" (Sharpe, 2010).

In addition to articles documenting academic awards, class plays, and other activities, constant mention was made of student groups soliciting money from the community in support of programs and materials for student use. The March 23, 1925 issue of *The Mountaineer* discussed various activities that solicited funds from the community in order to purchase books for the school library, supplementary reading books, and even pencil sharpeners for classrooms. A Halloween program charged admission which was to be divided among different grade levels at the school (*The Mountaineer*, March 23, 1925). The activities apparently were successful in raising funds for their intended purposes. Subsequent issues of the paper published thanks and acknowledgements of monies raised from these community activities. Throughout the 1940s, the now-named *Skillet News* contained many similar instances. Boxed suppers, plays, musical programs, and raffles were frequently mentioned in the student paper as activities designed to raise money from the community in support of school activities. An article from one issue of the paper reported a December 6 “Leicester Follies” program at the school which was attended with admission paid by approximately one thousand persons from the community. Two hundred dollars was raised to apply toward the purchase of a new piano for the school (*The Skillet News*, December, 1946). Another earlier article documented a “box supper buffet” to which community members were invited. This September 19, 1930 activity raised \$112.00 to purchase new window shades for the school (*Leicester High Life*, October, 1930).

As time passed, principals and other school personnel saw the primary role of community in Leicester School and Erwin High School as the continuation of that financial support. Swann Payne recalled families and the entire community supporting

the school financially through such activities as the school's fall festival, which operated for more than ten years.

Financial (activities) was the most important thing they did in the years I was there. They were always supportive of any fundraising thing. That extra money created a lot of extra things for the school that we wouldn't have had without that money. The school was kind of the center of social movement in the community. It was a rural area and the parents would come and volunteer. They would get all interested in the fall festival and we would make probably ten or twelve thousand dollars in a one-night event. We had parents come in and help do that work. We couldn't do it all by ourselves (Payne, 2010).

Dr. Stephen Page, principal of Erwin High School for twelve years in the late 1970s and 1980s agreed. He recalled a community that did not have wealthy families and had few professional residents. Yet, they would work and contribute financially to school activities.

In general, there was not a cadre of professional people there in the community that I recall at all. They would be supportive of the school for their kids, though. We needed money, and one year, I invited my faculty and some other people came to help. We made our own discount books with the help of the community. We did it for several years, but we only made a limited number each year. We printed them in-house and we assembled them with kids. Businesses in the community would offer two-for-one or one-for-one deals. We didn't sell any ads. People were happy and many people in the community bought them and wanted them. We didn't do too many each year; we couldn't flood the market. The

money went into an account for the school. When I left, it had over \$60,000 in it.

Activities like that and a winning football team really help community support. I just was lucky enough to be there at a good time (Page, 2010).

Perceptions involving the different socioeconomic status of volunteers and community members involved in the school were mixed. The current Leicester and Sandy Mush communities have a slightly lower family and per capita income than Buncombe County as a whole (City-Data.com, 2008). Swann Payne observed that, in his time as principal

A lot of times moms and dads both had to work and they couldn't volunteer in the school because they were working on jobs and trying to make the family secure as far as financing. They would be willing to come and work, but they simply couldn't. As the economy improved, some would have two or three hours to give to the school (Payne, 2010).

Shannon Boyd, a former school volunteer who now works in Leicester School's office, currently sees a different aspect of socioeconomic status in the involvement by parents and community members in the school. To her, financial differences in family circumstances make a large difference in community members' involvement within the school.

We tend to flock more to those with money. We'd rather them come in and do... I feel bad saying this, but I do see it. 'Oh, you have money' over someone who doesn't, in a sense because maybe you can provide more. I've seen it, and I've seen them wind up on the advisory council over somebody that necessarily didn't have that. That bugs me. We do have some, though – I can think of three who

come all the time, but are very low-income. They are very smart and very outgoing, and are here faithfully for anything we need (Boyd, 2010).

Today, with the lack of funding that constantly plagues North Carolina's public schools, the emphasis on financial community involvement may be understandable. Leicester School has at least one major fundraiser each year. At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, a large sign was posted along Leicester Highway for several days in front of the Leicester Community Center. The sign invited members of the community to donate school supplies on a given group of days. Response was favorable enough that cases of copy paper, student supplies, and other materials were brought in a truck and turned over to Leicester School prior to the beginning of school. A supply room was started at the school for student needs, supplies were kept for office needs, and even more was given to teachers to fill classroom needs. All had been donated during those days at the community center. Though all the donations were anonymous community gifts, they continue to fill a need and to demonstrate the community's continuing tie to Leicester School.

#### *Minority Involvement*

The history of minority citizens in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities primarily involved African-American families who lived in the community for long periods of time. Currently, though, African-Americans comprise less than one percent of the community's total population (City-Data.com, 2008). African-Americans were living in these communities by at least the middle of the nineteenth century. At that time, many were slaves owned by local families. The will of Colonel James Lowry, who lived in the Sandy Mush valley, documented sixteen slaves by name in the terms of his will. Lowry

died in 1857 (James Lowry will, 1857).

In both the Sandy Mush and Leicester communities, African-American cemeteries exist. In Leicester, the cemetery associated with the nineteenth-century Brick Church contains a large African-American section to one side of the area. The cemetery as a whole dates to the first decade of the nineteenth century. The African-American portion is more difficult to date, though. Only nine tombstones are inscribed; all show twentieth-century dates. The remainder of the stones, of which there are more than thirty, are simple field stones or small rectangular blocks. The African-American cemetery on Big Sandy lies on land that once belonged to James Lowry in a gap between the present Ball Creek and Bee Branch Roads. Here, the same identification problem exists. The cemetery currently is not well-tended, and markers are hard to find. Only one in the cemetery is inscribed with a date.

A 2005 oral history conducted by Bert Abrams, a long-time resident of the community, of Miss Ida Mae Hawkins, who was born in the area in 1915, mentioned a school or a combination school and church building adjacent to the cemetery for the use of the slaves (Abrams, 2005). No trace of the building can be found today on the surface of the ground. Miss Hawkins has since died, so documentation of the location and building is not possible.

After emancipation, these African-American families remained in the community. James Hannah, in his interview for the Sandy Mush Chronicles, remembered that “there used to be a couple of black families here, and nobody thought anything. We just accepted them as if they were white” (Cain, 2004). The African-American Boyd family lived in the Sandy Mush community until the late 1970s. They then moved to the

Newfound section of Leicester where they still live.

Until the 1960s, no mention was made of any African-American students attending Leicester or Sandy Mush Schools. Segregated schools still existed, and Leicester's students became part of that system. Leloudis, in Schooling the New South, discussed the educational reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the growth of separate schools for African-American students in North Carolina. These schools ranged from small, one-room elementary schools to a state-supported normal school (Leloudis, 1996).

In Buncombe County, the pattern of the rest of the state continued. "Colored" schools were funded in the same budgets as white schools. This had been mandated by the 1868 state constitution (North Carolina State Constitution, 1868). By 1931, the county had six of the "colored" schools for African-American students. One of the six was in Leicester. It was the smallest of the six; the school's enrollment for the 1939-1940 school year was only fourteen students in all grades (Miller, 1965). Betty Sharpe, a lifelong community resident who graduated from Leicester High School in 1950, remembered no African-American students ever being in any of her classes (Sharpe, 2010). Leicester and all of Buncombe County's segregated "colored" schools remained in existence until the late 1950s with another round of school building and consolidation. The small population of African-American students then living in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities began attending the community's larger schools with other students.

The number of these students remained small until 1971. That year, to alleviate overcrowding at Johnston Elementary, another school in the Erwin district in West

Asheville, their seventh and eighth grade students were transported to Leicester School. Sandy Mush School, which had been reduced to a primary school in the late 1950s, finally closed altogether in 1966. Those students had been assimilated into Leicester that year. Now, another group went through the same process, but with more cultural variation than that of the Sandy Mush students traveling to Leicester. Leicester School still had the building on its campus that had functioned as the high school until 1962, when students from Leicester finally moved to Erwin for high school. Leicester therefore had vacant classrooms; Johnston School had no available space for all its students.

The move of Johnston's seventh and eighth grade students to Leicester created major changes for Leicester School. Aside from the sudden and dramatic increase in the school's population, many of the Johnston students were African-American "city kids" who were now being bused to a rural school that was almost exclusively white. Swann Payne, principal at the time, remembered that

The kids from Johnston came, and until that time, the kids from Leicester were not exposed to the black family with the exception of one family that I know of. The kids that came from Johnston School lived in those two low-rent housing projects; they were pretty much all black who lived there. You had that environment where you were getting kids that had moved from inner-city Asheville out to those low-rent housing projects. They had always gone to city schools where there was a good population of black kids. All of a sudden, they came to Leicester, where there were no black kids. The white kids at Leicester had never been around many black kids, as far as a school setting. The first year or so was a real adjustment for both groups. It smoothed out after the first year

and the kids accepted each other better. The first two years were the toughest two years, and by the time those kids went to the middle school, they were just all Leicester kids at that point. It did take a while for that to happen (Payne, 2010). At Erwin High School, Principal Steve Page saw the idea of any racial issues or difficulties as a matter of perception rather than reality. According to Page, a problem with minority students in the school never surfaced. The community perceived a problem, according to Page, that did not really exist. He stated that

A lot of parents perceived that there was a racial issue there, that the black kids were out of control. That's the perception I would get from some parents. The total opposite was true. The black kids, in general, were very well behaved and were only a very small percentage (of the school population). In general, they were intimidated themselves. I don't recall there being any racial tensions of any significance in the school (Page, 2010).

Today, many other minority groups make up the population of Leicester and Erwin Schools. Hispanic and Eastern European students comprise larger portions of the student populations than do African-American students (Leicester School Continuous Improvement Plan, 2010-2011). Cynthia Rhinehart, a teacher at Leicester School sees the influx of Hispanic students as the biggest change in the school's cultural makeup.

We've had great numbers coming in. For a time, I guess five or six years ago, we saw them coming for a short time and them leaving, not completing the entire school year. Now it seems like they stay. They become part of the community. Their parents come and in and want their children to have a good education. School is important to them (Rhinehart, 2010).

Shannon Boyd, who sees events and involvement each day from the front office of Leicester School, mentioned the father who comes into his son's class and volunteers weekly. He even teaches Spanish to his son's first-grade class. She related the story of another family who visits their children's classes frequently to help out however they can. "They come faithfully for fun things and academic activities, whatever is needed or happening" (Boyd, 2010).

One minority family became involved in the life of Erwin High School in the late 1990s and before the settlement of the issue, drew national audiences and attention from the United States Commission on Civil Rights and the Department of Justice. A 1996 basketball game between the "Lady Braves" of the Cherokee Indian Reservation School and the "Squaws" of Erwin High School sparked a controversy over Erwin's mascot that led to a North Carolina state resolution in 2002 requiring all North Carolina educators to ...educate themselves on the educational, curricular, and psychological effects of using American Indian sport mascots and logos, and that all public school administrators review their policies and procedures toward the use of American Indian sports mascots, logos, and demeaning imagery (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2002, p.1).

The Cherokee ladies' basketball team took offense with the name "Squaws", as the Erwin ladies' team was known. The Cherokees considered the name a considerable insult. They, after the game, returned to the reservation community and complained to a tribal elder. The elder promptly sent a letter to Erwin principal Mal Brown explaining the Cherokee's interpretation of the term "squaw" and voicing tribal disapproval of the name. The same day, Principal Chief Joyce Dugan of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians sent

a letter to Erwin's Mal Brown. Brown was completely caught by surprise.

Over the next twelve months, the incoming superintendent and other officials of the Buncombe County Schools became involved in the controversy, as did large segments of the community. Articles written by community members in support of keeping the mascot and in favor of change began to appear in frequent newspaper editions. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) became involved and spoke in favor of a change of mascots at a school board meeting. By July of 1997, a family in the community who had adopted three Native American children became major figures in the controversy. The family filed a racial discrimination complaint with the United States Office of Civil Rights of the United States Department of Justice citing a "racially hostile environment" at Erwin High School. The family stated that they were being discriminated against by the continued use of the Squaw mascot.

Many long-time residents of the community and supporters of the school saw the mascot as a traditional part of the school. My husband, Dr. Jim Brown, is the current principal of the school. At the time, he was a history teacher at the school and became a witness to the school and community actions concerning the controversy. In his 2007 dissertation on the mascot issue, he reported many community members who were adamantly opposed to any mascot change. He also reported other writers, community action groups, and national groups such as the NAACP and the Intertribal Association who just as strongly called for the mascot's change. Erwin High School, its faculty, and its students were caught in the middle of what became a political tug-of-war. In August of 1998, the controversy had grown to the point of meriting a report on National Public

Radio. Finally, the situation was resolved in February of 1999 by a letter from then-senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina to Janet Reno, who was then Attorney General of the United States. Helms saw the impending lawsuit over the mascot as frivolous and self-serving by the Justice Department. Helms advocated keeping the mascot, but mostly just wanted a resolution to the situation. Helms's involvement brought about a speedy end to the issue and to the investigation from the Office of Civil Rights. The school board soon voted to change the mascot to the "Lady Warriors" and eventually the situation was settled.

The mascot controversy brought together many in the community in support of the school, its traditions, and its decisions. It also brought in many groups from near and far who were strongly in opposition to its practices and decisions (Brown, 2007).

### *Conclusion*

A traveler along Sandy Mush Creek Road today sees the red-brick Sandy Mush School standing empty. No classes have been held there in more than forty years. A sign in front of the building presents a clearer picture of its place in the community, though. The sign reads "Sandy Mush Community Center".

Community residents cut the grass and maintain the building for its current purpose as a gathering place. When entering the building, pictures from its days as a school line the hallway. Today, the local 4-H Club meets weekly in the building. It is also used as a polling place for elections. Families can rent the facility for reunions. Community dances and dinners are held in the old gym. The school is far from abandoned.

Leicester School continues as a K-5 school on the same general site on which the

school has operated since 1914. Its over six hundred students continue to occupy the same classrooms that have been in use since the current building's opening in 1940. New construction fits into the original building's facilities.

A 1990s building project by the Buncombe County Board of Education was set to replace Leicester School with a \$7,000,000 state-of-the-art new school. Community opposition to the move resulted in a unique melding of old and new. Rather than razing the existing buildings, the board elected to spend the same amount of money on renovations and additions to the existing buildings. A local architect was commissioned to design the plan. In 1999, the "new old" Leicester School emerged with revamped classrooms, new additions, new technology and wiring – in short with all the hallmarks of a new school. From Leicester Highway, the main highway through the area, though, the old red-brick façade of Leicester School remained little changed.

In 2000, a "dedication and birthday celebration" was held at Leicester School. The program included tours of the school with community and school speakers. The evening's festivities concluded with refreshments in the Lick Skillet Café, the school's newly-built and named cafeteria (Leicester School dedication program, May 21, 2000). The cafeteria had been named in honor of Lick Skillet, the community's colloquial nineteenth century name. At that time, with many former Leicester students and community members present, the school's community advisory council was presented the Griffin Award for 1999. The award, from the Buncombe County Historical Society, honored the preservation work of the community and the Buncombe County Board of Education in keeping the Leicester School building as part of the school's new construction. Today, the plaque honoring that award stands in a display case in the front

lobby of Leicester School as a token of the community's long-running involvement with its schools.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Schooling the New South, James Leloudis discusses the underdeveloped state of the western region of North Carolina through the early twentieth century. Transportation was poor, the population remained low and isolated, and farming remained the chief occupation of most families. Schools that did exist mirrored that rural society and were largely efforts created and supported by local families and communities. Leloudis states that, even after the beginnings of rudimentary common, or public, schools

The state's common schools bore the stamp of that rural society. Most schools stood on private property and were constructed without state assistance ... on a foundation of home rule and self-government. The neighborhood school both shaped and reflected a sense of community (pgs. 6-8).

The Leicester and Sandy Mush communities reflected Leloudis's ideas. Today, the communities are joined as one school district and post office service area. Transportation improvements make the area function as a single community. Still, many of the century-old characteristics described by Leloudis still exist in the area. The community is still rural and continues to have a strong farming presence. Old school buildings exist in various physical states and with uses widely ranging from barns to apartment housing to community centers. Families and community members take part in activities at the current Leicester School from planting flowers to maintaining playground facilities to tutoring students.

In addition to Leloudis's description of the direct ties between North Carolina's rural schools and communities, several additional themes were noted in examining the

Leicester and Sandy Mush community's support for local schools. Many of these themes echo research findings from other sections of North Carolina or the central and southern Appalachian region. Others, though, are apparently unique to this community and the schools in the Leicester area.

#### *Community Attitude Toward Education*

Over time, the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities have seen a wide discrepancy in the value placed on education and the attainment of an education. In 2004, Shaw, DeYoung, and Rademacher described local rural communities that historically have valued education, while others have placed less emphasis on school. Even after public school reforms and widespread formation of state-supported school began over a century ago, school reform was often found to be uneven and locally initiated (Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2004).

In Leicester and Sandy Mush, this pattern was particularly evident. The work done by A.C. Reynolds of Sandy Mush in his roles as principal, college administrator, and school system superintendent began bridging the gap between the early academies and subscription schools and public schools in the early years of the twentieth century. Reynolds's early private academy education and his time at Peabody College, a center of educational reform, proved to provide the foundation for public school expansion and reform in Buncombe County and other areas of western North Carolina. During his tenure at today's Western Carolina University, teachers were trained and practicing teachers re-trained in models of teaching that were based on the progressive educational practices promoted by state schools officials and educational reformers of the day.

During his terms as superintendent of Buncombe County's schools and those of

other counties, his push for higher academic standards for schools and teachers coincided with school consolidation and the advent of the county's first public high schools. He sought community support for the public schools, particularly in the form of votes for school construction bonds. In his home community of Sandy Mush, the Chestnut Grove school district was one of the earliest in the county to vote in support of a tax on itself for the construction of a new school (Miller, 1965; Reynolds, 1950).

Support for education was uneven in Buncombe County and even in Reynolds's home area, though. When the Chestnut Grove district voted to tax itself to build a new school, other local districts failed to support the same measures. Many local families were simply not interested in supporting the schools or in having their children attend them. Reynolds's campaign of evening visits to families in local communities in order to improve support for schools highlights an issue seen in the Leicester community even today. Many families simply did not see school as important, especially important enough for the expenditure of additional tax money. They also did not see the need for their children necessarily to attend school, particularly to learn beyond the basic skills needed for everyday use (Reynolds, 1950). Community involvement in the schools was and continues to be seen strongly in certain families, but lacking in others.

Historically, support for schools, public or private, was seen in the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities in several families who helped fund and build schools in the area. Even before A.C. Reynolds's work with the area's schools, the Reynolds family name appears many times in connection with schools. This family, along with that of the Reeves, Robeson, Lowry, Gudger, Miller families and others appear again and again in roles connected with local schools. Family members were trustees of local private

academies, committee members for public schools, teachers in public and private schools, and even informal observers of classroom lessons (Reynolds, 1950; Cole, 2010; Reeves, 1944; Miller, 1919, 1965).

During the same time period, though, other families living in the same communities are never listed in any connection with local schools. The 1850 census records for Sandy Mush and other local communities (Leicester did not yet exist as a named community) show many other family names and list children of school age in the households (U.S. Census, 1850). These family names, however, never appear on trustees' rolls or any other documents connected with local schools. Economic circumstances may have prevented their involvement with the schools or even their children's attendance, or simple lack of interest may have kept them from providing support of any kind. Irene Cook, in a 1998 interview, discussed her grandfather who, in his 90's finally attended a "moonlight school" in Sandy Mush and learned to read and write, since he had never before attended school (Cain, 2004).

Today, former principal Diane McEntire describes many families who could not be persuaded to become involved with the school or with their children's educations. She cited families who were "...reluctant to come in for school activities, PTO programs, or teacher conferences" (McEntire, 2010). Cynthia Rhinehart, a Leicester teacher, describes the lack of involvement of some families, even when their children are current students at the school.

It gets harder and harder to get some of them to come in for conferences, and it seems to always be the ones whose children struggle the most. They just don't seem to be interested in school at all (Rhinehart, 2010).

*Church Support for Leicester and Sandy Mush Schools*

Along with the support of these early families in the community, church organizations in the area provided a great deal of support to local early schools. Newton Academy, possibly the first school in Buncombe County, was established by George Newton, a Presbyterian minister. Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, Dorland Institute was started in Madison County's Hot Springs community by Presbyterian missionaries with the aid of northern school reformers (Painter, 1996). Newton and other early schools in North Carolina often followed a pattern of church involvement in the establishment and continued support of schools. The Moravians in Salem built separate schools for male and female students with the goal of education all the community's children. Anglicans (Episcopalians), Presbyterians, and Methodists throughout the colony and early state organized schools as part of their service to the communities in which they worked and ministered. Coon in 1908 and 1915, along with others, described how land would be set aside in communities for the establishment and building of a church and the same piece of property would often be also used for the building of a school. Thus the "old field" schools were born (Coon, 1915; Lefler & Newsome, 1973; Ready, 2005).

In the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, church support for early schools was particularly evident. Transmontane College, Bascom College, Leicester Academy, Camp Academy, and Brown's Seminary were all early private schools in the community. All were initiated or supported in some part by the Methodist Church (Reeves, 1944; Reynolds, 1950; Bumgarner, 1991). Some received direct financial aid and organizational support, as in the case of Brown's Seminary in the 1880's by the Blue

Ridge Conference of the Methodist Church, as an official arm of its work in the state (Bumgarner, 1991). Others simply shared property owned by the Church, as in the case of Transmontane College, where the school predated the church by several years (Reeves, 1944; Melton, 1991). The newest of the group, Camp Academy, opened in 1896, occupied land that had historically been a “camp meeting” site used by the Methodists for a century, as well as land donated by the local Reynolds family (Sondley, 1930; Reynolds, 1950).

#### *Public Schools and Community Involvement*

As schools began to become more standardized in quality, curriculum, and teacher qualifications, community members began to be less and less involved in the day-to-day academic life of the schools. In order to qualify for a teacher’s certificate, individuals now had a set of academic requirements and tests that had to be passed for a job to be obtained. A.C. Reynolds, in his unpublished 1950 memoirs, described personally examining every teacher candidate in Buncombe County, placing them in the “best fit”, and them observing each teacher at work in his or her classroom. Over time, the county’s teachers came to be seen as the local authorities on how best to educate the community’s children (Reynolds, 1950). No longer were local trustees the sole authority in what was to be taught in classrooms and the methods for its execution. Garland Reeves’s observations, just to see what was “going on” in Leicester School’s classrooms for twenty years, came to be seen as an oddity (Cole, 2010).

By the 1970s, Swann Payne, principal of Leicester School at the time, described a community in which involvement in academics had been pushed to mostly peripheral areas. He described a school in which

The community pretty much left it up to the teachers to do their jobs. The kids came from homes that were very supportive of the school and held the school in high esteem. You were pretty well the sole authority and the parents supported and respected the teacher in what they did.

Payne goes on to describe community-taught mini-courses on various topics offered for older students during his tenure at the school. None of those were aimed at strictly academic pursuits, though (Payne, 2010).

In 2011, the academic involvement most frequently observed in Leicester School is that of community members who volunteer periods of time weekly to tutor students identified as needing additional academic assistance. Many of these volunteers are affiliated with local church or civic groups; many are retirees who simply have the time to perform this service. Shannon Boyd, who works in the office at Leicester School, sees these volunteers arrive at schools several days each week. They have standing appointments with individual students in the media center for tutoring in areas in which the students have difficulty, usually math or reading (Boyd, 2010).

#### *Educational Attainment in the Leicester Community*

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, in 2003, found that less of American's rural residents held college degrees than their counterparts living in other areas. In their study, 22% of the nation's rural residents were found to have college degrees, as compared to 42% of suburban residents and 39% of urban residents held degrees (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2003). Today, at Leicester School, that statistic holds true. Less than 20% of students have a parent who holds a college degree (Leicester School Continuous Improvement Plan, 2010). Many parents do not even have a high school diploma. Some

of that number are likely included in the group former principal Diane McEntire described as those “reluctant to come in to the school” (McEntire, 2010).

Others, though, in the area have been involved in the school far beyond simply graduating from high school at the local campus. Jim Hannah, who grew up in the Big Sandy community and has lived in many different areas of the world, described the Sandy Mush community as “producing more doctors and lawyers than any community he had lived in or seen” (Cain, 2004). Clearly, a large discrepancy exists between different groups and families in the community in the involvement of such people as Garland Reeves on one hand, who observed classes and the families who produced all those doctors, lawyers, and other professionals noted by Jim Hannah. This is compared to others in the same community who are not high school graduates or do not hold college degrees. Diane McEntire saw these community members as reluctant to become involved in the academic life of the school because they had not been successful during their own school careers (McEntire, 2010).

### *The Role of School Consolidation*

In 1959, James Conant wrote that, in order for schools to be the most effective, each grade level needed to have at least one hundred students. He also advocated for the elimination of small schools because they were not cost effective and could not offer as wide a curriculum selection as larger ones (Conant, 1959). Many rural communities cannot even approach Conant’s school size suggestions, even with school consolidation having taken place. Today, Leicester School has over six hundred students in grades K-5, but few grades have Conant’s suggested minimum size of one hundred students per grade. Leicester’s current size has been the result of multiple consolidation efforts over

the years. Schools such as Chestnut Grove, Cross Rock, Odessa, Hall's and others in the same area often had one or two teachers and small one-room facilities.

In Buncombe County, school consolidation did not wait for Conant's suggestions in the 1950s. It began in the early years of the twentieth century and continued until the late 1950s. The small one-room schools gave way to larger consolidated ones, especially beginning in the 1920s as larger brick buildings and high schools began to be seen in the county. By the late 1920s, consolidated schools such as Leicester and Woodfin contained first through eleventh grades, and one had more than thirty teachers (Reynolds, 1950; Buncombe County Schools, 1928).

Lyson, writing in 2005, found an even stronger connection between school consolidation and rural communities. In his research, Lyson discovered than many small towns and rural communities lost their individual identities and even ceased to exist as separate entities after school consolidation (Lyson, 2005). Craig and Aimee Howley, writing in 2001 and 2002, even found that without the close alignment of rural schools and communities, both units suffer (Howley & Howley, 2001).

In the case of the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, this happened in the wake of school consolidation. In examining documents from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Leicester and Sandy Mush were written and spoken of as completely separate communities, despite their physical closeness. A.C. Reynolds identified himself as being from the Sandy Mush community in Buncombe County (Reynolds, 1950). Transmontane College is described as being located in the Sandy Mush section of Madison county (Melton, 1991). In 1884, the Gazetteer of Buncombe County listed Sandy Mush as a completely separate community from its Leicester

neighbor (Davison, 1884). The first district in the northwestern section of Buncombe County to vote to tax itself for the construction of a new school in the 1920s was Chestnut Grove in Sandy Mush (Miller, 1965; Reynolds, 1950).

Today, though, few residents outside the immediate Sandy Mush area have even heard of the community. Lyson's findings concerning the loss of community identity with the consolidation and loss of a community's school have come true. Sandy Mush received a new consolidated brick school building with a high school before one was built in Leicester (Miller, 1965). Eventually, though, Leicester's more central location and more rapid population growth made the Sandy Mush School a victim of consolidation. In the 1940s, the high school portion of the school closed and students were moved to Leicester (Sharpe, 2010). Finally, in 1965, the Sandy Mush School closed completely. Students all were sent to Leicester Elementary or to Erwin High School.

During those years, Sandy Mush lost its school, its post office, and its separate community identity. Addresses were changed to that of Leicester and students were bused to schools ten (or more for the high school) miles from their homes, as opposed to being no more than three miles away before the consolidation. Dr. Stephen Page, principal of Erwin High School in the late 1970s and 1980s, saw the Sandy Mush students as "proud of who they were and not about to lose their identities" (Page, 2010). Lose the identity they did, though. Today, the only means of identifying Sandy Mush families in schools is by their mailing addresses, if road names are found on a map or known to the individual (Payne, 2010). Losing their school lost the community its identity.

Swann Payne, former principal of Leicester Elementary, saw another side effect

of consolidation. Students from Sandy Mush lived greater distances from the school than did other students, so they and their families were less likely to be involved in school activities such as PTO activities or sports. He recalled taking basketball players home from practice in Sandy Mush; that was the only way some of the students could participate in after-school activities.

I was not married at the time, so I used my car to transport the kids to games and sometimes after practice because they didn't have any way to get home. Kenneth Reeves, I remember him. I used to take him up on Little Sandy because he didn't have any way home (Payne, 2010).

One element of school consolidation produced stronger community involvement, though. The Rural School and Community Trust in 2005 found that community involvement in larger consolidated schools often revolved around extracurricular activities such as athletics or bands (Rural School and Community Trust, 2005). The fall football season in 2010 was a prime example. Students from Leicester attend Erwin High School, which currently has over 1400 students. The fall football season for Erwin was a particularly successful one for the school. For the first time since 1981, Erwin's football team moved to the third round of the state playoffs, and defeated the defending state champions from the year before. As the season progressed and the team became more and more successful, the stands at home football games became more and more filled. By mid-season, principal Dr. Jim Brown reported the stands resembling a "sea of red" and filled to "standing room only". Even when traveling to other schools Erwin would have more people in attendance than would the home team (personal communication, November 15, 2010). Former principal Dr. Stephen Page summed it up. "Nothing

produces positive feelings and community involvement in a high school like a winning football team (Page, 2010).

*Rural Schools as Centers of Community Life*

Howley (2004), Dickerson (2000), and Cotton (1996) all found that, for many rural communities, the school is the center of community life and events. Especially in the light of modern consolidated schools, the school may be the largest building in the community and is usually centrally located in the area.

In Sandy Mush, as in other rural communities where schools have closed, the old brick school building is now maintained by the community as a community center. In the case of the Sandy Mush School, the parking lot is paved; basketball goals dot the perimeter. Community dinners, club meetings, and family reunions are frequently held in the building's old gym and other rooms. For several years, I have attended the Reynolds family reunion at the school on a Sunday afternoon each August. The reunion is attended by family members from as far away as Australia. Though the organization of the family reunion is now 101 years old, the closing of the Sandy Mush School prompted family organizers to move the reunion to the school as a permanent location. This was seen as being easier than moving to a new site in the area each year (personal communication, 7/31/10). For the last several years, the Leicester Volunteer Fire Department has even maintained a satellite station beside the school, further consolidating the communities.

During his second term as superintendent of the Buncombe County Schools, A.C. Reynolds encouraged the building and use of new, large school facilities as community gathering places. In the 1928-1929 Directory of the Buncombe County Schools, Reynolds states in an opening letter that community members are invited to and welcome

at the schools at any time (Buncombe County Schools, 1928).

The invitation soon progressed well beyond that of simply having community members visit the schools. Leicester School became the center of community activities of all types. An Asheville *Citizen* article from September 20, 1933 announced a vote to be held concerning a bond measure aimed at raising money for a new brick building to house Leicester School. The article touted a new a larger facility as a good venue for community activities as well as for classrooms (Asheville *Citizen*, September 20, 1933). When the school was built and opened in 1940, the community began using the school for purposes well removed from basic academics. Even prior to the opening of the new school in 1940, programs and activities with little relation to school took place in the facility. On May 10, 1922, an Asheville *Citizen* article announced that Mrs. Florence Forbes, a poultry expert, would be lecturing at Leicester School that evening (Asheville *Citizen*, May 10, 1922). In 1928, the Leicester Fair schedule and venue was announced for its run at Leicester School. That year, it would "take the place of the Annual Western North Carolina Fair" because of its large size (Asheville *Citizen*, October 2, 1928).

With a new school building came more and bigger community activities held at the school. An Asheville *Citizen-Times* article from August 18, 1940 discussed the opening of the new school. It listed home demonstration clubs and other activities slated to take place at the school (Asheville *Citizen-Times*, August 18, 1940). The largest community activity to take place on Leicester School's campus and in its building may have been the last Leicester Fair in 1951. An Asheville *Citizen* article contained several photographs of fair activities and notes that over two thousand people attended the fair in one day. Principal S.O. Wilde and students submitted entries and exhibits, including the

principal's garden produce. Farm animals were shown in outdoor areas and on the playing fields (*Asheville Citizen*, October 7, 1951). School for the day was dedicated to fair activities. This type of activity recalled an *Asheville Gazette* article from December 22, 1897, in which the community is invited to a Christmas "frolic" at Camp Academy before the end of the fall term (*Asheville Gazette*, December 22, 1897).

### *School, Family, and Community Connections*

In researching the schools, public and private, and the community support found for them in the Leicester and Sandy Mush areas, several family names appear frequently as trustees, principals, and teachers. Kershaw and Blank in 1993 and Stockard and Mayberry in 1992 discussed the links to schools between students, faculty, and the community. They found that students become linked to the school and community due to a web of families and activities in which school personnel become involved in community activities (Kershaw & Blank, 1993; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992). Cotton, writing in 1996, found that rural schools have higher rates of parental and community involvement because of direct connections to the school held by community members (Cotton, 1996).

The Leicester School faculty and community is no exception. Historically, family names like Reynolds, Reeves, Gudger, and Miller were repeatedly seen as trustees for early academies and private schools. Later, with the advent and expansion of public schools in the area, the same names appeared as teachers and school committee members for local schools. In the October, 1930 edition of the *Leicester High Life*, the list of faculty members included two teachers with Reynolds as a surname, with one Reeves listed, as well (*Leicester High Life*, October 1930). In the same article, a person with the

last name Gudger was listed as one of the members of the committee for the school.

Decades earlier, the same surnames were commonly noted on trustees' lists for the community's academies.

Currently at Leicester School, seven of the faculty's twenty-eight classroom teachers are natives of the Leicester community and still live in the same area near the school. They are involved in community activities such as church organizations, sports teams, and community clubs with parents of the same students that may sit in their classes each day (personal communication, October, 14, 2010). Cynthia Rhinehart, a fourth-grade teacher who is a Leicester native and still lives in the community, reports that it is not unusual to see a neighbor as a student in her class or to see the same student in church on Sunday as she sees in class on Monday. She also reports that parents often walk into her classroom saying that their own parents had class in the same room or that their grandparents also attended Leicester School (Rhinehart, 2010). A web of relations between Leicester's families, past and present, keeps the community involved with and attached to the school. Another example of the bond between community and school in Leicester remains the May 31, 2000 dedication program for the opening of the newly-renovated and expanded Leicester School. Community members filled the school for tours of the newly-renovated facility. Speeches from other community members accompanied those of school officials (Leicester School Dedication program, May 31, 2000; Wolfe, 2010).

#### *Community Newcomers in Schools*

In 2004, Craig Howley wrote that when families with school-age children move into a rural area, they frequently become involved with their children's school (Howley,

2004). These families often then build social capital in the community and therefore assimilate more quickly (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Leicester's schools and community exemplify these findings. In decades past, with transportation difficulties and more farm families in the area, families tended to remain in place over time and live in the same area for generations. Today, Leicester has, as has much of western North Carolina, seen family farms become subdivisions and small county roads become four-lane highways. The improved transportation and new home construction has prompted new families to move into the Leicester community and for newcomer parents to become involved with the school. For the past three years, Leicester School has had three Parent-Teacher Organization presidents who had recently moved to the community. Only one of the three was even a native of the southeastern United States (Boyd, 2010).

### *Minority Involvement*

For many years, schools in the Leicester community were segregated, with Leicester School only attended by white students. This occurred in part because the Leicester community had very few minority residents. Throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, the only minorities noted or recalled by individuals were slaves or the descendants of slave families in the community (Abrams, 2005; Sharpe, 2010; Lowry will, 1859). The community's few African-American students attended a "colored" school that grew out of the post-Reconstruction educational movements in North Carolina (Leloudis, 1996). Schools in Buncombe County followed the pattern of the rest of the state. By 1931, the county had six "colored" schools for minority students. The smallest of the six was located in Leicester, with only fourteen students being enrolled for the 1939-1940 school year (Miller, 1965).

After the closure of the “colored” school, those African-American students began attending Leicester or Sandy Mush Schools. Nancy Cole, a long-time secretary at Leicester School, remembered those students as being “like everyone else” at the school. Their families had been long-time Leicester residents and were known by members of the community (Cole, 2010).

The influx of minority students at Leicester School began in 1971, when seventh and eighth grade students from Johnston Elementary in west Asheville were bused to Leicester to alleviate crowded conditions at Johnston. Many of these students were inner-city African-American students. Swann Payne, Leicester’s principal at the time, remembered adjustment problems for the schools and the community. Community members, as well as school personnel, worried about the adjustment to the minority students now suddenly at Leicester. Payne recalled the first two years creating a difficult adjustment period, but then the community and school accepted the students. Students also, according to Payne, accepted their new school community. By then, Payne reported that they were “just Leicester kids like all the rest” (Payne, 2010).

At Erwin High School, former principal Dr. Stephen Page recalled a similar situation. He recalled the community’s perception in the late 1970s and early 1980s that a racial problem existed at the school. Page reported that this was a matter of perception rather than reality. A problem with minority students coexisting with white students never occurred more than with any other group of students. He recalled that

A lot of parents perceived that there was a racial issue there, that the black kids were out of control. That’s the perception I would get from some parents. The total opposite was true. The black kids, in general, were very well behaved and

were only a very small percentage (of the school population). In general, they were intimidated themselves. I don't recall there being any racial tension of any significance in the school (Page, 2010).

Currently, there are still few minority students in Leicester School or families in the Leicester community. The largest minority group in the school today is that of Hispanic students, which comprise approximately two percent of the school population (Leicester School Continuous Improvement Plan, 2010). When these students and families began moving into the community less than ten years ago, teacher Cybthia Rhinehart recalled students and families who did not become active members of the community. They seemed to avoid involvement in the school or the community. They simply did not stay in the area long enough. Most were migrant workers who followed seasonal work in crops to different areas.

Today the situation has changed. Most Hispanic students at Leicester School are year-round residents of the community and stay in school, rather than moving after a short time (Rhinehart, 2010). Language barriers still exist for families, but most students speak English fairly proficiently. Shannon Boyd, who works in the office at Leicester School, reported that these Hispanic families often call the office to ask questions, have things explained by a translator that they cannot understand, or to ask how they can help at school. She recalled the father who comes to his son's first-grade class to teach Spanish and to volunteer in the class. Others simply come for "whatever is needed or happening" (Boyd, 2010).

A family in the Erwin High School district who had adopted three Native American children, in the late 1990s, sparked a new variety of community involvement in

the life of the school. The controversy over the mascot for Erwin High's female sports teams garnered grass-roots community support for opposing positions on the issue, as well as national attention from the media and governmental agencies. Beginning with a basketball game between the Erwin Squaws and Cherokee's Lady Braves in which the Squaw mascot was seen by tribal members to be demeaning, the situation escalated. Over the next two years, the controversy thrust Erwin High and the school community into the national spotlight and made clear how divisive the support from a community can be. Entire sections of local newspapers were devoted at times to the publication of letters in support of the mascot's retention or of the opinion that it should be changed.

The family of the three Native American students filed a racial discrimination complaint with the federal Office of Civil Rights. National Public Radio broadcast several pieces on the situation. For over a year, the entire United States became part of Erwin's school community because of the national attention received by the controversy. Widely divergent groups such as the NAACP and the Department of Justice, even those from other areas of the nation, became involved in the discussion of the mascot. Only a letter stating the opinion that the issue was frivolous and self-serving from then-senator Jesse Helms to Attorney General Janet Reno brought an end to the issue. Helms demanded a quick end to the situation. Though Helms advocated keeping the mascot, it was changed to that of the "Lady Warriors" and the situation was resolved. Today, the Erwin community rallies around the "Lady Warriors" in athletic competitions (Brown, 2007).

#### *Financial Involvement in Schools*

Today, community involvement at Leicester School largely involves fund-raising

efforts and financial contributions to the school. Craig Howley, writing in 2004, saw a pattern of newcomer families quickly becoming active in local schools and building social capital by active participation in school activities (Howley, 2004). At Leicester Elementary, that involvement often includes fundraising efforts to benefit the school. Swann Payne, a former principal, recalled fall festivals in which the entire community would participate. Many community members would donate money or prizes, others would man booths, and others would simply bring their children and spend money. With the finite and limited amount of funds received by schools, Payne saw the fundraising as the most important aspect of the community's involvement and the one most appreciated. He recalled that

Financial (activities) was the most important thing they did in the years I was there. They were always supportive of any fundraising thing. That extra money created a lot of extra things for the school that we wouldn't have had without that money (Payne, 2010).

At Erwin High School, former principal Dr. Stephen Page recalled similar activities as the largest part of the school's community involvement. He remembered a community without many professional residents, but also recalled the creation of coupon books created by the school with the help of the community. Local businesses and merchants would contribute goods or services in order to make the coupon arrangements possible. Throughout the remainder of his tenure at the school after the booklets were begun, he recalled over \$60,000 being placed in a fund to benefit school programs from the proceeds of the coupon booklets (Page, 2010).

Leicester School's Parent-Teacher Organization, which contains many families

new to the community and school, also fills a role centered primarily on fundraising efforts. At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, a PTO fundraiser raised over \$19,000.00 for the school and its activities. Mary Kirchner, Leicester's assistant principal, stated that, of the 1567 volunteer hours recorded at the school during the 2009-2010 school year, a large portion was spent on fundraising activities (personal communication, December 1, 2010).

Today, with schools in the midst of a financial crisis, these fundraising efforts aid in supporting school programs that might not otherwise survive. For this and other types of community involvement, Leicester School's personnel actively seek and recruit parents and community members to volunteer at the school or to support school efforts. During 2010's successful fundraiser, Principal Melanie Collins made announcements at the end of each school day, sent recorded messages to parents, and place signs along Leicester Highway asking for parental and community support for the effort (personal communication, September 20, 2010).

#### *Active Recruitment of Volunteers*

For the Boy Zone male-mentoring program for at-risk third and fourth grade boys, media specialist Caryn Levy actively recruits community members to work with the program and to provide activities for the group. Each year, as she begins with a new group of boys, she begins the school year asking for volunteers. Without a group of volunteers, Levy stated that she could not continue the program. Few of her volunteers are fathers of Leicester students; most are from the community, though (personal communication, August 19, 2010).

Overall, Leicester is a community with a long history of community support for

its schools. From nineteenth-century support for subscription schools and academies to current financial support and tutoring of students, the pattern continues. At one time, without community support, no school existed. Now the school would continue, but many programs and activities would not. The involvement is still evident and welcomed by the school.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

The Sandy Mush and Leicester communities are relatively old by the standards of western North Carolina and the southern or central Appalachian region of the United States. Both communities were established by the early years of the nineteenth century. Roads, primitive as they were, connected the communities to Asheville, the French Broad River, and beyond. Early community members, often with church support, began and supported schools even before such public institutions existed. Groups of families and individuals became involved with early private schools, then with public schools upon their beginning. One community member was elected superintendent of Buncombe County's schools and pushed forward many new ideas and programs that changed education in the area.

In any case study, findings are at least somewhat limited by the individual subject of the study. No two settings or cases are ever identical, even in similar geographic areas or with similar economic conditions. For this reason, recommendations for further study on this topic would include examining other communities and schools to see if similar findings were discovered. I would suggest performing a similar study in different areas of North Carolina or in areas throughout the nation, both urban and rural. Much of the literature examined for this study only examined communities that were rural, located in

the central or southern Appalachians, or both. Examining schools and communities in other locations, rural, urban, or suburban, would provide a picture of community support for schools in many areas. Should location or economic conditions provide different findings, that could be noted.

Examining communities that formed after the advent of public schools would provide an interesting contrast to the study of the Leicester and Sandy Mush communities, where schools well predated the beginning of public institutions. In public schools today, teachers are professionally trained, curriculum is dictated by state standards, and school facilities are used for housing academic pursuits. Should the early private schools in this community and the rudimentary public schools in the area not have existed with their community-backed beginnings, differences in community involvement may have been evident. The tradition of involvement evidenced in this community may not have been seen.

Finally, examination of schools of different sizes may produce different results. Though located in a rural community, Leicester is a school with over six hundred students in six grades. This makes Leicester Elementary larger than the average elementary school in Buncombe County or in North Carolina (Leicester School Continuous Improvement Plan, 2010). Schools vary greatly in size, as do the communities in which they are located. Examining involvement in schools and communities of varying size could produce varying results. Larger schools are often viewed as being impersonal; a study such as this could determine the validity of such perceptions in communities where large schools exist.

Any school and the community in which it is located are influenced by many

factors and people who create lasting effects and community characteristics. The Leicester and Sandy Mush communities are old by western North Carolina standards. Over time, they have been influenced by many things, including their schools. In turn, the community and its involvement in its schools have influenced those schools and the education of students who spend time within their walls.

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## APPENDIX A

## Leicester and Sandy Mush Area Schools

<u>School</u>	<u>Years of Operation</u>
	<u>Private</u>
Bascom College	1859 – about 1865
Brown Seminary	1880s – 1890s
Camp Academy	1896 – 1913
Leicester Seminary (female)	1870s – 1880s
Transmontane College (Academy)	1846 – mid-1880s
	<u>Public</u>
Bear Wallow	to about 1908
Brick Church	to 1933
Chestnut Grove	to 1926
Clyde A. Erwin High School	1955 – present
Clyde A. Erwin Middle School	1977 – present
Crossroads	to about 1902
Cross Rock	about 1890 – 1926
Ebenezer	to 1926
Embler	to about 1900
Garretts	to about 1900
Halls	to 1933
Highland	to about 1902
Leicester	1913 – present
Leicester Colored School	by 1902 – about 1950
Liberty Hill	to 1933
Newfound	to 1933
Newfound Colored	about 1875 – before 1902
Piney Grove	to 1933
Roadside	to about 1900
Roberson	to about 1930
Round Hill	to about 1900
Sandy Mush	1927 – 1966
Sandy Mush Colored	to about 1902
Slate	to late 1890s
South Turkey Creek	to after 1929
Teague	about 1895 – 1933
Turkey Creek	to about 1930
Union	about 1875 - 1933

