

# Chalkboard

By

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Are you a native of Gentry? If so, have you ever wondered what your life would have been like had you been born and raised in another place other than Gentry? I say that to say that every community has its local legends, its family names, and its ‘characters’. I asked around for some names of families who have been living in or around the Gentry area for at least for at least three or four generations. Here are a few of the names I was given- Carl, Curran, Bever, Twiggs, Smith, Still, Steele, Shields, Harper, Sullivan, Reynolds, Ward, Fox, Doss, Long, Patterson, Reading, Covey, Wade, Jordan, Bledsoe, Luedeke, Allen, Hendrix, Van Fleet, Glasscock, Shockey, Edwards, Case, Parks, Bartlet, Lambertson, Millsap. Being a newcomer of only 12 years, I apologize in advance to those whose family name would have qualified but was not listed; I intend no disrespect.

But while I am a newcomer here, there is a place where I would not be considered so. Last week when I was visiting my mother, I sat down to a Thanksgiving meal in an old farmhouse where four generations of my family were present and where at least six generations had “darkened” the same front door. I think the year my mother’s family, the Lyle family, moved into what is now Southeast Arkansas from South Carolina was about 1835. That makes about 168 years of the same family occupying the same area. They built a home and, with other settlers, founded a church- Mt. Zion Presbyterian Church. They also built a one-room school, where my mother went for eight years. It was named, as you might expect, Lyle School. (She went to Drew Central in Monticello for her high school career.)

I never had the pleasure of attending Lyle School. It was consolidated with Star City Public Schools before I was born. I understand that perhaps some of its lumber remains in an old barn there on the home place.

I rather doubt if anyone would debate that all the one-room schools that existed in Arkansas in the 30’s and 40’s should still exist today under the tutelage of the state. No, as Stephen King’s Roland would say, “The world has moved on...” and the way that education is delivered to the students of the state “moved on” then and probably is about to “move on” again.

Did Star City Elementary provide me with a better education than Lyle School provided my mother? I doubt “better” can really be used here.

The Lyle School provided my mother with the education she needed but the education she needed was not the education I needed as the “world had moved on”.

The Star City Elementary School building I began first grade in, in 1960, no longer exists. The school building was replaced with a new one, and then more new additions, etc. Star City Elementary “moved on” because enough students continued to attend to justify building new buildings to replace old ones. There was no reasonable justification for Lyle School to continue regardless of the type education it was providing.

Look at the names that opened this article. Some have “moved on” too. Though I only knew him causally, I came to appreciate Joe Carl. I think I learned a lot of what mattered to him reading “*The View*”. How indicative of the way that the world has moved on it is when a native son of Gentry would be drawn to Macedonia and would end his days living life in a manner he might not have considered 50 years ago.

Look around in our school district. To a large degree our school system has kept pace with the world as it moves on. The buildings Joe Carl grew up thinking of as Gentry Schools are as radically different as those at Star City where a new high school is now under construction to replace the one built in the WPA days.

Nothing or no one lasts forever in the state in which it was created (no pun intended). Embrace that thought or reject it, but you cannot change change. If our town and community and school ever decide to put up walls against the natural course of change, any or each may find that the world has moved on leaving that particular entity behind.