

Little Journeys to Piney Woods School

by

Dr. D. J. Harris

A Chicago Banker

Before his death Dr. Harris was a business associate of N. W. Harris in the Harris Trust & Savings Bank.

and

Dr. Chas. E. Barker

Former Physical Advisor to President Taft.
Now lecturer for Rotary International.

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D. J. HARRIS IN LETTER.

Prominent Evanston Citizen Sends Communication to Friends Through the News.

Calls Piney Woods School Good, and Says Dollar Does Great Good There.

Editor of The Evanston News:

On the 21st of Nov., 1912, we left Evanston for the Sunny Southland, making our first stop at Birmingham, Ala., which has been well named the Pittsburgh of the South.

Visited Piney Woods School.

Leaving his wife here to rest, the writer made a side trip to Braxton, Miss., to visit the Piney Woods Industrial School, established there in the black belt about three years ago by an ambitious and energetic young colored man, Laurence C. Jones. Young Jones worked his way through the Marshalltown High School and then through the Iowa State University, from which he graduated in 1907 with credit, and won the respect and indorsement of his teachers. Realizing the needs of his race and willing to sacrifice himself for its good, he gathered about him other young colored men of kindred spirit and, with practically no money or material support but with a vision, and a generous supply of young black folk, went into the pine woods about three miles from the village of Braxton and under the shade of a spreading pine started his school. Previous to this he had won the confidence of an ex-slave, E. N. Taylor, a hard-headed man of little or no school education, but endowed with good business and moral sense, and who had accumulated property and standing above most of his fellows.

This Mr. Taylor gave, as a nucleus for the school, forty acres of land, \$50 in money and not a little good advice.

Walk Three Miles to School.

The village of Braxton has a school with three teachers for the white children, but no school for the black children, and they are more than a few. At present black boys and girls—some of them only 5 or 6 years of age—are walking three miles and more to Mr. Jones' school, returning to their homes at night. It is sometimes said the black people lack the requisite ambition to have their children avail themselves of the advantage of schools. A few days before my arrival there a widow—the mother of twelve children—walked fourteen miles to the school with one of her elder daughters and left her there to earn her schooling. She was working at laundry work each day and attending the night school. Practically the only crop raised in that part of the state is cotton, and during the last two or three years this crop has been largely a failure, due to the ravages of the boll weevil, which infested Texas some years ago, and seems now to be moving eastward. The people hereabouts are now feeling very poor and find it difficult to pay tuition and board for their children, even of the simplest sort. They are allowed to pay in almost anything they have to spare. Sometimes it is a cow, a pig, a pair of geese, or it may be a few bushels of sweet potatoes. Cornmeal and sweet potatoes and molasses constitute a large part of the school's dietary. The day the writer was there a man and his wife came in a farm wagon, bringing six gallons of cane syrup, and a daughter to enter the school. As a rule each child old enough to labor is required to work about one-half of the time and attend school

the other half. If not able to pay for board and tuition, then to work during the day and attend night school. Only the common branches are taught. Then, outside, gardening, farm crop culture, carpentry, blacksmithing, broom making, shoe mending, printing, etc., to the boys, and sewing, millinery, housekeeping, etc., to the girls. The teachers have been well trained for their respective branches.

Farming Results Good.

Not a little in the way of extension work is being done in the surrounding country, and already the results are apparent in more diversified farming, better tillage, more tidy homes, etc. Mr. Jones has won the respect and confidence of the best white people of Braxton, as is evidenced by the fact that they have aided in providing a two-story building for the girls' dormitory, the construction of which was mostly done by the larger boy scholars, under the direction of the manual training teacher. Fairly good land in the vicinity can now be purchased for from \$7 to \$10 per acre, and Mr. Jones is desirous of securing more land as rapidly as possible in order to afford opportunity for a larger number of boys to earn their schooling, and is now negotiating for about 100 acres.

Rising Bell at 5 a.m.

It is a busy place, the rising bell being rung at 5 a.m. The equipment, which includes chapel and dormitory building for boys, with printing shop in the basement, several small buildings for the various shops, poultry yards, etc., represents an estimated value of \$7,000, and all free from debt. At present the scholars number nearly 150, but the demand is much larger than can now be cared for. Everything is severely plain, not to say crude, but the great Abraham Lincoln acquired much of his training by the light of pine knots in a log cabin. Up to the present Mr. Jones and his associates have given their services with practically no compensation except a meager living. Should any of your readers be disposed to render any assistance, however small, either in money or equipment, it will be most gratefully received.

Mr. Jones and his associates are now married and have wives—cultured, capable and enthusiastic in making the most of their opportunities.

I know of no work where a dollar will go further in effecting an uplift of a people, white and black, than in this work that is being done at the Piney Woods School.

D. J. HARRIS.

REDPATH CHAUTAUQUAS

Harry P. Harrison, Manager

General Offices: Evanston Ill.

May 10th, 1916.

Prof. Laurence C. Jones,
Braxton, Miss.

My dear Mr. Jones:—

I have thought of you and the wonderful work you are doing there many times since my visit last Sunday, and let me say now that I do not know when I have seen anything that has given me more inspiration than just what I saw you have been doing at your Country Life School during the the six years of its life.

So many times since my visit I have thought of how Christ took those "five loaves and two fishes"

and fed that hungry, tired multitude, for beginning as you did out there under that famous little cedar tree with no money and only a few pupils, you are now bringing the knowledge of truth which sets men free, and feeding the "bread of life" to hundreds of those who for so many years have been sitting in darkness and as sheep having "no shepherd."

I can really think of no institution in our country, that according to its resources, is doing any better or more needful work than that which you are doing at the Piney Woods Country Life School, and I am sure that the future is big with promise if you continue with the same spirit and methods that have characterized your undertaking thus far. History has repeatedly shown that the greatest and most helpful institutions of the past have been those that have not only sprung from the crying needs of the people, but where the methods adopted have been intelligently adapted to meet just those needs, and this is just what you have succeeded in doing in a most commendable and really remarkable fashion at your Country Life School.

Another thing which forcibly impressed me was the fact that you have succeeded in winning the confidence of white people who live in the neighborhood of the School and that in the nearest town, Braxton, your warmest friend perhaps is Mayor Mangum, a fine business man and cashier of the Braxton Bank. This speaks volumes for the sane and practical way that you have conducted the management of the School right under the eyes of these people and no better testimonial could be given you than this.

Summing up the impression I have of the visit I paid to your institution last Sunday, I can think of no better way of expressing than that by exclaiming, as I stop to consider the wonderful things accomplished during the six years of the life of the School, "What Hath God Wrought!"

Praying that the torch you have lighted for the guidance and inspiration of your people may continue to glow with increasing brilliancy, and that your life may long be spared to hold it aloft, I would remain,

Very sincerely yours,

CHAS. E. BARKER.

("Physical Advisor" to President Taft during the years of his administration.)