

[1964, Aug. 25]

County
Madison, Freedom Schools, Summer Project
1964

This summary is incomplete because of insufficient or no information on the schools in Valley View and the school in Cedar Grove.

An overview of reports from the other five schools can be divided into three sections: 1) experiences common to all or most of the schools; 2) notable differences among them; 3) recommendations and requests for the fall and winter program.

Common Experiences

A sharp drop in attendance occurred in every school but Gluckstadt (where attendance remained c. 18). With the exception of Pleasant Green, every school began with large numbers of students (30, 50, 70). Pleasant Green began with none; canvassing brought in c. 20. After about three weeks attendance was down almost by half everywhere. Another drop occurred in the last weeks, leaving the schools with a fourth or less of their initial enrollment. An upward trend did appear during the last three days at Cedar Grove near Flora where attendance rose to c. 55 or 60 in the closing sessions.

Every teaching staff was juggled around, and every group of students had accordingly to adjust to such changes; the adjustments were not always satisfactory. New Bethel students lost Earl Bessey, who had to return to the north early; they also had to accept the switch of Bob Gilman for Peter Prastz. Pleasant Green students had to get used to the switch of Pete for Bob; later Jo Ann Oolman was transferred out of their school. Gluckstadt students had no constant teaching staff at all. Mrs. Chute and Peggy Gunn left early (Peggy was not with them much when she was here because of a foot injury); Bob Stout worked with them only a week; Arlene Bock wasn't with them much longer (tho' she had substituted earlier for Peggy). They were also substituted to two or three other substitute teachers. The Flora Cedar Grove school lost Dorothy Hess just a few days after school began and then, just before the last week, Sandy Watts was transferred out of there. Both of these departures very much bothered the students. Asbury kids, of course, suffered the worst trauma. They had been unhappy in the beginning days when Sandy Watts was moved from them to Flora. They were very troubled when Nancy Cooper and Nancy Wright had to leave unexpectedly early.

Make-shift provisions had to be made for age groups considerably younger and older than the high school students for whom the schools were planned. Full adult classes were set up in both Cedar Grove schools. A small adult citizenship class, plus a one-man literacy

class, were established at New Bethel. Every school worked up special programs of drawing and reading and spelling for the young children.

The summer's curriculum was pretty uniform, as were students' responses to it -- much enthusiasm for Negro history, good success with "creative dramatics" (role-playing), growing enthusiasm for discussion of citizenship materials. The visits paid by Mrs. Jeannette King to the Canton schools were enthusiastically evaluated by the teachers as valuable. Such contact with a southern white is a provocative experience for these youngsters.

Notable Differences

These differences stem from two causes: a) teacher-student initiative; b) uncontrollable circumstances. Asbury students produced three editions of a Canton Freedom School newspaper and a public play (three performances -- two in Canton, one at Tougaloo). New Bethel teachers had commendable success with a reading program in which each student undertook to read one important (or famous or "classic") book. Gluckstadt teachers (Mrs. Chute, mostly) were well pleased with their kids' responses to assignments of giving reports. Pleasant Green experimented with letting the students take over the lectures and discussion-leading and were excited by the good results. Pleasant Green students also had the benefits, well-used, of Sue Sanford's tape recorder. New Bethel, Pleasant Green and Flora Cedar Grove had good responses to quiz games. Asbury, New Bethel and Flora Cedar Grove students all enjoyed and became very skilled in canvassing for the FDP.

As for unique experiences stemming from "circumstances," the Gluckstadt experience is most notable -- the total loss by fire of the building and an estimated 800-1000 books and multiple other supplies as well as the church furniture and piano belonging to the owner of that building. New Bethel had circumstances to battle, too, in the person of Jake Vinson who threatened and harassed them in many ways.

Photo of Vinson in the summer of 1964.

Recommendations and Requests for Fall and Winter Programs

If possible, find the enrollment lists for each of the schools and contact the summer students with information on the winter programs which should include adult classes, tutorial work, and programs for younger children. (The adults at New Bethel would like to keep their small group going).

Send out teachers to both Cedar Groves (at least two per school, preferably three).

Negotiate with the congregation of Mt. Pleasant Church in

Gluckstadt (being built across the street from the burned building) for the use of their building for winter classes and the establishment of a permanent library for which the community has expressed a desire.

Arrange transportation systems wherever possible and necessary for getting people to school in the winter.

Gather exceptional written materials and artistic works to be sent to Jackson for inclusion in the Freedom School anthology which is now being put together.

Maintain close touch with students who are potential college material. Keep abreast of all SNCC, CORE, COFO, etc. scholarship programs; also seek information on northern scholarships.

Be certain that books and materials left in Pleasant Green are transferred to the Community Center as soon as possible.

Establish a system for coordinating the winter schools which will operate more consistently and will maintain better communications between the coordinator and the teachers than the summer's system did.

As much as possible, maintain an unchanging teaching staff at each school.

Jo Ann Coiman
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