

At testimonial

School honors founder

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD

An announcement appeared in a Detroit newspaper in 1914 stating that a small school for boys would open the following September. It produced four students.

From that small beginning has come today's Detroit Country Day School (DCDS) at Laburn and Thirteen Mile in Beverly Hills.

The one continuous thread in the school's 62-year history is its founder, F. Allen Shaw, 90, who will be honored at a testimonial dinner Thursday at the Hildreth House in Southfield.

Hosted by the Detroit Country Day School Alumni Association, the affair will begin with a reception and cocktails at 7 p.m.

The dinner also will coincide with the 50th anniversary year that Shaw, his hand-diplomats to members of the DCDS, graduated class.

When Shaw does this each year, he is not merely a white-haired figure who appears before the students for the first and last time. Most of them have come to know him during their years at DCDS because they have been in his classes.

SHAW STILL teaches at the school on a regular basis—an elective course in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau whose writings are as relevant today as they were a century or more ago, he believes.

The first school, with its four junior high-age pupils, met at Shaw's home on Perry Avenue in Detroit. He had come to Detroit from the East when an acquaintance told him that it might be a good place to consider starting a school.

The second, at Shaw's mother's house, had high and took care of its meals and administrative details of the growing school. After two years the school and the Shaw moved to Euclid Avenue, also in Detroit, where it remained until after World War I.

Shaw enlisted in the field artillery and left the school in the charge of his mother and other faculty members.

Another move, again to larger quarters, took place after the war when Shaw rented the Senator Palmer estate at Second Avenue and Six Mile. By this time the student body had 80 members and a faculty of six.

THE SCHOOL'S new bookkeeper and business manager was Shaw's bride, Amy. The Palmer Estate was sold in 1925, and the school moved back into the home on Euclid Avenue. Although it was much too small for the constantly growing student body, the school continued to meet there until 1928 when Shaw and personal friends, including the late Walter O. Briggs and Luman Goodenough, formed a corporation and bought land on Seven Mile and Wornout in Detroit.

Recalling the moves the school has undergone, Shaw said Monday, "All the locations were in the country when they were started."

For the first several years that the school functioned, students attended for brief periods—more to catch up or get ahead—and it was not until 1927 that the first graduates received diplomas—three of them, including the late (River) Burke Jr., the world famous chemist and creator of the synthetic rubber process.

During World War II, Country Day students participated in military training to prepare them for the draft. The students wore military uniforms, participated in overseas drills and heard lectures by military officers.

SOON AFTER the war, Seven Mile changed from a two-lane street on the north side of town to a wide street lined with business establishments.

The present 33-acre DCDS site was acquired in 1956 and the new school was occupied in the fall of 1957. In 1961, Shaw retired and became headmaster emeritus. While remembering about the past a few

months ago, Shaw wondered if any of the first four students at DCDS were still alive. He recalled that one of them had been named George Booth.

"I looked in the phone book and called a George Booth," Shaw said. "I asked him in a very embarrassed way if he could tell me anything about the George Booth who had been in my school."

"I am that George Booth," he replied. Booth is a Birmingham resident.

SOON AFTERWARD, the two men met for lunch and discussed old times. Shaw asked Booth what he could tell him about the first year of the school and Booth said, "I remember the four of us around the dining room table."

Booth will attend the testimonial dinner Thursday along with many other former students including honorary chairman and guest speaker Simon Knudsen, president of White Motor Co. and a member of the class of 1931.

Master of ceremonies will be Bud Gurd, radio entertainer and public speaker, class of 1931. Blaise Nelman, of the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency, class of 1949, is publicity chairman.

Honored guests will include Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, Secretary of State Richard Austin, U.S. Rep. John Conyers and Val P. Plase, former associate conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and teacher of music at DCDS in the early days of the school.

An oil portrait of Shaw, by Patricia Burnett, will be presented to him at the dinner by Dr. Clayton Gordon, president of the DCDS board of trustees. Cochairmen of the event are Ed Hiru, class of 1927, and George Browne, track coach and member of the history faculty.

DETROIT COUNTRY DAY School was modeled after the original country day school in Baltimore, which was founded soon after the turn of the century by persons connected with Johns Hopkins Hospital who wanted to get their children out of the city and away from the "lax leisure" Shaw explained.

Shaw was a graduate of the Boston Latin School and Harvard University. Boston Latin School, founded in 1635, even before Harvard, has been in continuous existence ever since, he said. It provided intensive preparation for college.

Ms. Greek teacher never had a boy fail in Greek in any exam in any college, Shaw said. "He required tough precision. In my junior year in high school, my courses were Latin, Greek, French, English and math—no science. Harvard was very easy after that."

Shaw said he had always wanted to start a school because he was "always a person who liked to strike out on my own and who wanted getting into a system of any kind."

ASKED WHY he confined his teaching to one course dealer, with two authors, Shaw said, "I feel in our mechanized, factory system of society, it is very important that people realize spiritual values in addition to economic values."

Both Emerson and Thoreau were very concerned about the factory system, and I am still concerned about it," Shaw added. "They were both very American and very concerned that individuals should not get into a mold of any kind."

To Thoreau, facts were not important, the significance of facts was important, he explained.

Shaw and his wife live in Northville. They have had 10 children (two of whom will attend the testimonial dinner), 13 grand children and two great grandchildren.

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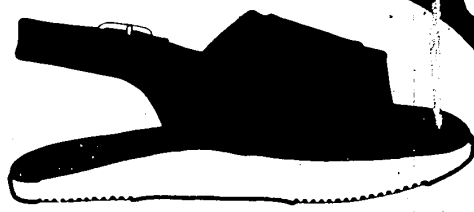
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