

Sidetracked: Travels Across the Undiscovered South

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"Pine logs were used in the construction of this gymnasium. This is where they played basketball from the 1930s to the 1960s. We've had a couple renovation projects the past few years. We had a structural engineer come in and check everything out and he was beyond impressed with the architecture and how they fitted it altogether. Central air and heating was put in 2005. There was no heating or cooling prior to that. There were wood-burning stoves at one point.

Alabama history is taught in the fourth grade and ninth grade as part of the state curriculum. But, history of the school and the town is one of the things we want to incorporate. I think it's important. You need to know where your state came from and what those events were. For a lot of kids, this mountain is their history. These are the things that helped make them and their families and who they are today.

They wanted to open a school here because the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution had an educational

mission to provide opportunities for children across the country to study civic responsibility and patriotism. Being that Alabama at that time had so many rural schools, the area did not have access to a formal school. The Alabama Society thought it would be a good thing to do with this part of the state. It's mountainous and travel was challenging. So the Alabama Daughters decided that would be something they wanted to take on.

We are a privately-owned public school. The buildings and the land are privately owned. This office raises money separately and acts as a foundation for the school. The principals, teachers, curriculum is all done through the Board of Education. It's a very unique relationship. It's one that really benefits the children. One of the most amazing things that really tells you about the people of this community, the DAR raised funds to build the school and hired a contractor and those things. But, as the local people plowed their fields, they would come across fieldstones, rocks, sandstone, and they would gather them and bring them here to the site to incorporate into the first school building. The local people were putting in their sweat equity and doing their part.

I was born and raised right on the mountain. My parents are graduates of the school. I was the first one in my family to go to college due in large part, to the scholarships I received while here. I went to Auburn University. It was culture shock from going from such a small town with classrooms of 25 to auditoriums of 300 where you're afraid to ask a question. You're not in that protective bubble anymore. But, I thrived. I loved it.

I vowed that I would not come back here, because, as kids, that's what you said. You want to go to a big city — somewhere different. When this job came open my mom called me and said they were looking for Executive Director of the school. And I told her it'd always been men who had moved up through the ranks. She said, "No, the ad says marketing, public relations, fundraising." And that's exactly what I'd been doing for the 12 years. So, I applied and it led me back here. Passion for this job and love of the school is required.

