

One-room school could become community center

Ted Hall

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On the summer evening young Fred Glenn sat on a bench watching a movie projected on a screen outside Baltimore Village School in Cramerton, he could not in his wildest dreams have imagined he one day would own the school building and the land on which it sits and lead a movement to preserve and restore the historic site.

In the intervening years, Glenn graduated from Reid High School in Belmont, studied mechanical engineering at North Carolina A&T, served

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Fred Glenn (second from left), president of the Baltimore Village School, Inc. Board of Directors, told Belmont Rotarians recently about efforts to preserve and restore the historic one-room school building attended by African American students in Cramerton until the 1950s. With him, from left, are board vice president John Howard, board member, and Fred's wife, Ernestine Glenn, board secretary Wendy Cauthen and Rotarian Alex Price of Edward Jones Investments in Belmont, who arranged the program



A young Fred Glenn is the boy in a striped shirt sitting on a bench outside Baltimore Village School while watching a movie.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY BELMONT ROTARY CLUB

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in the U.S. Army in Vietnam and worked as a certified tool and die maker. After years of watching the one-room school his mother had attended deteriorate in the village where he grew up. Glenn bought the building and the land around it, with, as he puts it, "no idea what I'd do with it."

He has an idea now. It's a big one. And he came to a recent meeting of the Belmont Rotary Club to talk about it. Glenn now serves as president of the nonprofit Baltimore Village School Inc. Joining him in the Rotary Club presentation was John Howard, vice president. Also attending were organization secretary Wendy Cauthen and board member Ernestine Glenn, who is Fred Glenn's wife.

The 17 homes still remaining in Baltimore village are on a hillside along the South Fork River off Cramer Mountain Road between downtown Cramerton and New Hope Road. The school was built in 1925 by mill owner Stuart W. Cramer to be used by the African



Baltimore Village School as it looks today.

American residents of Cramerton. Children from kindergarten through eighth grade attended, often bringing with them brothers and sisters too young to attend school.

Baltimore Village School was one of seven one-room schools built in Gaston County, and it is the only one remaining. It ceased operation as a school in the 1950s, but continued to serve as a community center for many years.

"We couldn't go to the community center in town or the theater," Glenn said.

He also recounted stories from his

childhood of Charlotte's WBTV personality cowboy Fred Kirby and his horse entertaining residents at neighborhood get-togethers.

The building, which is about 900 square feet, has been vacant for decades and narrowly escaped being burned in a fire department training exercise in the late 1990s. That's about when Glenn began considering how to save the building and finally decided to purchase it in 2003 and put protective measures in place to prevent further damage.

Ten years later the school was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places Study List, and in 2020, it was designated as a historic structure by the Gaston County Historic Preservation Commission, the first in Cramerton.

Baltimore Village School Inc. was formed in 2022 and obtained 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. The organization's goal is to restore the school and continue using it as a community center and a museum displaying the history of the Baltimore Village neighborhood and the African American community's contribution to Cramerton and Gaston County.

To make that dream come true will require raising \$500,000 for construction, grading and parking, furnishings,

exhibits, landscaping and operating costs. A major HUD grant has been awarded to the town of Cramerton, and from that \$210,000 has been allocated to the school preservation project. Several smaller grants have also been received. But much more will be needed to restore Baltimore Village School and make it once again a community center and a museum devoted to educating future generations.

How you can help

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to Baltimore Village School Inc., PO Box 195, Cramerton, NC 28032. For more information and how to volunteer or donate online, go to www.historic-baltimoreschool.org.

About Rotary

Belmont Rotary Club meets for lunch and a program on local topics each Wednesday, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m., at the Home2 Suites by Hilton in Belmont. Guests interested in learning more about local businesses and issues and how Rotary serves the community are welcome. For more information, visit www.belmontrotaryclub.com.

Ted Hall is a member of Belmont Rotary.