

Letter from Mr. J. S. Shaffer.

AURORA, W. VA.

Dear Sir:—

Replying to your request of the 5th inst., I do not know that I can give you a very interesting detail of my boyhood days at school, but will give some facts as I recount them. My grandfather, Adam Shaffer, came from Germany, and at first resided near Hagerstown, Md., with other families accompanying him, for a time, and then located in Preston County, Virginia, now West Virginia. My father was born in Preston County. My mother before marriage resided in Cumberland, Md. In my early boyhood days the country here was sparsely settled and to get a sufficient number of scholars to employ a teacher, many of the patrons of the school, lived four and five miles distant from the school. Consequently, they would send their elder children to school in winter, and send the small children that could not attend winter school, in summer, and generally kept the larger boys at home in summer working on the farm; but I think there was a universal disposition among the early settlers or at that day, to send their children to school. Many of the children had been taught in German but to very limited extent, suppose by their parents at home, and with very few exceptions. the early settlers, of the people in my boyhood days, at least, could read and write in German. They named the settlement, German Settlement, and our Post Office was known by that name until 1875, when it was changed to Aurora. There was a town laid out one-half mile from the present town of Aurora, called Mt. Carmel, and here they built a log church about 22 x 36 ft., 1½ stories high, but the upper part was never finished. The church was Lutheran in denomination, but free for all orthodox societies. The furniture of the church consisted of one large tin

plate stove, to burn wood three feet or more in length; and benches made from split timbers and slabs with holes bored in them and legs put in, for seats; and a pulpit to correspond. This church was also the schoolhouse, and the only addition in the furniture line was a writing desk about twelve feet long with a flat space on top to lay your books, inkstand, &c. Later when the school became larger there were holes bored in the logs of the wall of the building with a suitable slant and pins driven in, a broad board fastened on for a desk at the windows. Here it was I first went to school in 1833, being six years of age. My first teacher was Robert Venable. I do not know where he came from, but one thing I do remember the scholar had to keep his eye on his book, whether he was studying his lesson or not; he had to go through the motion at least. And sitting on those benches from eight or nine o'clock A. M., I can never forget,

My second teacher was Arnold Bonnifield, from Randolph County, Virginia, now West Virginia. The scholars thought much more of him than of my first teacher and he taught a good school. The patrons wanted him to teach the next winter but his father moved west and he accompanied him. The only incident I remember the scholars penned him out of the schoolhouse Xmas morning to compel him to give us a holiday, when we all had a good time.

My third teacher was Jacob Kalor, who taught two terms of winter school, and Miss Dorothy Thayer, of Allegeny County, Md., taught a summer school intervening. Mr. Kalor taught successful schools. His first term he refused to give us a holiday or to treat and we as usual penned him out, and also the following winter when he taught his second term. At this time the teacher was boarding at my father's, and he told my father confident-

ially that he was going to surprise his school Xmas morning, and an uncle of mine living with my father overheard him, and as he refused to give us a holiday or to treat, we were suspicious of him and placed a watch near the schoolhouse. and as I before stated the upper part of the church was never finished. The flue was only built about five feet above the upper floor and the smoke escaped through the cracks or openings of the windows that had been roughly nailed up. Late at night when the teacher thought no one would see him, he went to the church or schoolhouse and by means of a ladder from the outside (as there was no opening from the inside) ascended to an upper window, pried off a board that would admit him to enter and placed a broad board with a little mortar he had prepared over the flue. His acknowledged intention was to get to the school first (and as the scholars in coming to school in the morning before school hours would play ball and other games until the teacher would call "Books," then all break for the schoolroom) and as the weather was not very cold he would not have a fire made until he called school, when he would order fire made and he standing near the door, when the fire was far enough advanced to smoke well, would go out and lock the door, and compel the school to agree for him to teach, or in other words we would relinquish our demand for a holiday to get out of the smoky schoolroom. The teacher was very early in getting to the schoolhouse, but two girls (sisters), Misses Mahala and Marcilla Mason, daughters of Joshua Mason, and now the wives of Mr. Adam and George W. White, residing in Tucker and Preston Counties, respectively, arrived at the schoolhouse a few minutes ahead of the teacher, and when he arrived he found the house garrisoned and the two girls holding the fort. He demanded admittance; they presented the

Article, he refused to sign the day before, for his signature; he refused to sign it, and went and cut several long switches and came back and demanded admittance or he would give them a complete whipping. But the girls were good soldiers and stood firm. The teacher succeeded in raising one of the windows sufficiently high enough to admit of his entrance, but every time he would catch the window sill on the inside the girls would rap him across his fingers with a switch or rule, and compel him to fall back. In the meantime some of the larger boys had arrived on the ground and offered the girls reinforcements if they would let them inside, but the plucky girls took the honor to themselves and won the victory. This was the last time we penned the teacher out, and always had a holiday Xmas or a treat from the teacher and a spelling match in the afternoon.

As I stated, Miss Dorothy Thayer taught a summer school in the interval of Mr. Kalor's terms, and some of the larger scholars would get the small one, in his alphabet, when he would go to say his lesson, to call his letters in German and when the teacher would undertake to chastise him for it, he would skip off on those benches that were stored at one end of the church, ready to replace them when Sunday services or any church services were to be held, and the little fellow would keep out of the way of the schoolmam. When she would join in the laugh and merriment of the school at the cunning little chub and by coaxing he would repeat his lesson until he chose to give the school another entertainment. Following Mr. Kalor. Mrs. Stephen Blue taught a summer school; she came from Taylor County. Then Joshua Bond, a resident here. A little brother of mine was a pupil of the school his first term and apparently he was always full of mischief and neglecting his book and the teacher undertook to correct

him and gave him several whippings in one day, but have his fun (as he thought) he would. The teacher thought he would try other means, as he did not wish to punish the lad severely; so the next time the teacher had occasion to correct him he made him stand by the side of the stove with his toes to a certain crack or mark in the floor, taking a large wooden poker used to stir the fire, laying that across the stove. William, my brother, was ordered to stand there taking the burned end of the poker in his mouth. By throwing his head up a little he brought his mouth on level with the stove; he never hesitated, but when requested, obeyed, and with the black end of the poker in his mouth and the eyes of the whole school on him, more or less, he held the poker with his teeth and smacked his lips imitating smoking a cigar, changing his position as much as he could to see as many of the scholars as he could to make them laugh, and he caught the teacher's eye and puffed his cigar, and the teacher had to hide his face from him and laugh too.

The next teacher was Rev. Daniel Fleilig, a Lutheran minister, employed as pastor of the congregation, residing here for three years or more. He was a good scholar but rather peculiar in some ways. He taught for three or four years. The last term he taught he had several of the little boys who were not playing ball at noon one day, shovel the snow from his residence to the spring. The pastor's fire shovel was brought into requisition and the handle was broken off. The pastor told my brother William, as he went home, to take the shovel and leave it with the blacksmith and tell him to mend it and charge it to his father and to bring it with him next morning. William told the teacher that he did not break it and he would not take it to the blacksmith and have it charged to his father; but the

teacher repeated his orders, and as William passed where the pastor had placed it for him to get, the pastor called to him, but William walked ahead. Next morning when school opened the teacher ordered William to come to him, and William walked up to him asking if he did not tell him thus and so last evening. William replied "Yes sir, but I told you I would not do it and have it charged to my father for I did not break it." The teacher gave him a whipping. When he stopped applying his switch William shrugged and twisted his shoulders, saying, "Lay on, Mr. Fleilig, it feels good." The teacher became very angry and turning around facing William, he whipped him unmercifully, raising himself on tip toe and bringing his switch down with all the force he could command. I believe I was crying in sympathy for my brother, but when the teacher appeared about exhausted and let up, William shrugged and twisted his shoulders again, repeating, "Lay on, Fleilig, it feels good." The teacher saying, "Confound the boy," took his seat. My brother was then 8 years of age.

My next teacher was William Ferguson, from Barbour County. He was a good scholar and taught the best school I ever attended. Many young men from a distance came to his school, boarding at private houses, but with all his good qualifications for a teacher, he was most cruel and high tempered, when he would see a scholar not complying with his rules, or learn of any misconduct outside during school or from school to his home. If a large scholar, he would walk up before him sitting on his bench and grab him by the back of the neck, pull his head forward and at the same time throw his leg across his neck, holding him firmly under his knee, and in that position whip him unmercifully, laying the hide open in some cases, I saw, two inches in length. This was the last school I

went to in Preston County. My father moved from here in 1847, a short time before Mr. Ferguson's school was out and I went to school two winter terms after leaving here, and returned here in 1849, where I have since remained. In my early boyhood days our school books were Comley's and United States Spelling Books and the Testament; and later Kirkham's English Grammar and Pike's Arithmetic and such other books as the patrons or scholars chose. Those of us who lived near the schoolhouse and had the advantage of both winter and summer schools had the spelling book or a great part of it committed to memory, so that when we were spelling in the class, at noon or evening, many of us would spell the word before the teacher had time to give it out after the preceding word was spelled. Those in the Testament class in their lessons would read verse about, the teacher joining with them. In fact my history for a short time was a newspaper, the Pittsburg Christian Advocate. I do not know how the teacher got his pay when I first attended school, but later there was a school fund appropriated by the State of Virginia to pay for the poor or indigent children, with a School Commissioner in each district and generally where a parent would sign three scholars and Commissioner would pay for one and where persons were poor, perhaps pay for two out of three. The teachers, prior to the Lutheran minister and Mr. Ferguson after him, boarded around among the scholars, with each patron according to the number of scholars subscribed. During the time my history was a newspaper, a gentleman and friend of my father residing in Cumberland, Md., and whom I was named after, sent me a History of Rome, a very interesting book, and this was my school book for several terms until the book was lost. The teacher and some of the pupils would borrow it, and finally it was not returned, very much to my

regret. One thing that retarded the scholars in my early school days was the different pronunciations of the teachers; for example, one teacher would pronounce the last letter in the alphabet Zee, the next one Zed and, perhaps the next one Izard, and in the same line all through their pronunciation, so that what one teacher taught you it took some time for the next teacher to get in line with his teaching.

Very respectfully,

J. S. SHAFFER.

Letter from Prof. John G. Gittings.

CLARKSBURG, W. VA.

Dear Sir:—

I note from your circular, in regard to "Early Education in Western Virginia," that you call for such facts only as may be personally known to the writer. This will limit my remarks to the town of Clarksburg, of which I am a native, and to the schools about the year 1846, as then I first started to school, and removed the following year to Ohio.

I first attended a private school, in the second story of a frame house, still standing on Mechanic street, south of the Traders' Hotel. This school was taught by Miss Margaret Steen, the aunt of Hon. John J. Davis, of this town, who was also a pupil.

Miss Margaret was an accomplished scholar, an excellent teacher. There were perhaps, about thirty pupils, big and little, and very unequal in their attainments; some advanced scholars, other primary, and to the latter class I belonged.

The furniture was crude, consisting for the most part of wooden benches without backs, and simply a wide sloping board, fastened to the wall for a writing desk.

The teacher sat in a split-bottom chair and had no

desk. A portion of her time was taken up in mending and making quill pens, which were the only kind used. The teacher was absolute in authority and the school was orderly and well taught.

The text books were: Webster's Spelling book, Pike's arithmetic, Kirkham's grammar, I believe, and McGuffey's readers, which readers perhaps, were better than those used today, at least for scholars above primary grades; as many of the gems of English literature are not now contained in the revised readers.

The most defective book used was Pike's arithmetic and that objectionable because of the calculations made according to the English system, in pounds, shillings, and pence; however, this was supplemented by the use of Colburn's Mental Arithmetic, the latter more thoroughly taught than is now customary.

I next attended school, for a quarter or two, at the North Western Virginia Academy which had been opened in this town, Oct. 1, 1843. The North Western Academy took the place of the Randolph Academy which latter had been the school of the town and this section of the country for about fifty years previous, and was an offshoot of William and Mary's College, Williamsburg, Va.

The Rev. Gordon Battelle, a man of ability and learning, was the principal of the Northwestern Academy, and so continued for about twelve years. His assistants were a Mr. Calhoun, a graduate of Washington College, Pa. and a Mr. Howell, perhaps a graduate of the same college. The latter two were my teachers; they were classical scholars and very exacting in their discipline. They would hear a class in Greek or Latin, from the higher grades, in the interim of their primary recitations.

The rooms in this building were fine for that day—and were used up to late years, by the public schools,

the desks of wood rather clumsy, but comfortable and serviceable.

The studies for the lower grades were such as I have named, supplemented by Algebras, and the Classics, Caesar, Virgil, Xenophon, &c., for the advanced grades. Scholars attended this school from counties along the Ohio and the Kanawha.

I am happy to testify that my early teachers were scholars, and well qualified for their work.

In looking back to the schools of that time, I can recall some things that were different from the things seen now. The teachers sat on a platform with a railing, upon which, I remember, one or two teachers would place their feet, higher than their heads, and "chaw" tobacco, and spit all over the floor! This we thought was their privilege, and none dared object.

While perhaps, the instructions of the lower, primary scholars was not as carefully conducted as now, yet it was an immense advantage to these scholars that they could hear the recitations of more advanced classes: and it was a dull scholar that did not learn a little from each class that recited.

At the time of which I write, it was a two days' journey, by stage coach, from Clarkburg to St. Mary's on the Ohio River.

Very truly,
JOHN G. GITTINGS.

Letter from Mrs. David W. Swisher.

One of the "Old Girls."

SOUTH BRANCH, HAMPSHIRE CO., W. VA.

Dear Sir:—

Yours of the 15 inst. is at hand and I take this as the earliest opportunity to try and grant your request as far as I can, though I am not sure I can give you an interesting article from which you may cull for your paper.

My first school days I commenced in the summer of 1831. when I was only a little over five years old. Of course I know but little about any other schools at that time and perhaps the best I can do is to write of the ones I went to. But before describing any I will grant your first request. My father was born in West Virginia, in Randolph County, (now Tucker) in 1799, and though he never had a home in any other place, he traveled a good deal over the different States. Both my parents lived into their 88th year. They both lived, died and were buried within five miles of their birth place, the "Horse-shoe" and "St. George." Hu Maxwell's History of Tucker County gives an account of that County in his day especially; but my school days were before this time.

So I go back to that first school. It was where St. George is now; on the porch of the old "Stone House" where my grandmother lived, screened from the sun by "blanket curtains." The teacher was Miss Sarah McLaughlin. Do not know where she came from, nor how much she knew; only remember I stayed only a little over three weeks—homesick perhaps—and got as far as "Baker" in the old American Spelling Book, by Noah Webster, afterward author of the Elementary Spelling Book. I remember distinctly some of the pupils near my age, Charles See, now Presbyterian preacher; Ira Hart, now of Clarksburg, if living, (think he is dead); West

Bonnifield, of Ottumwa, Iowa. Schools were few and far between. Did not get to another school till I was nine years old. I then went to my uncle, R. Bonnifield, six miles from home. He hired a teacher to teach in his house two months and the same the next winter. I do not know what wages he gave. His name was Samuel Bowman and he obligated to teach only Spelling, Reading and Arithmetic as far the "Single Rule" in Pike's old Arithmetic. I remember there were two beds in the schoolroom, a log building, three large rooms below but none above; and there was a family of ten or twelve children. Think at that time there was no schoolhouse within ten miles in any direction. Old, unoccupied houses or cabins and the houses in which people lived were all. I am not sure it was that way all over the county, it was large—Tucker and Barbour have been taken from it.

I soon learned to read, learned that at home after those "three weeks." We had only spelling books, introductions to the English Reader and sometimes Testaments. The majority by far had only spelling books. Our writing "tablets" were a kind of quite coarse unruled paper which we ruled ourselves, using a thin straight piece of wood and a beaten piece of lead for a pencil. Our pens were made by the teacher or the pupils from goose quills. The copies were written by the "Master" or "Mistress." After these first schools, I went to a lady teacher about ten miles from home, near the mouth of Licking Creek. There I went to school in a schoolhouse, —I will try to describe it, as it was the first one I had ever seen. I think it was about 14 by 16 feet with a nine light window 8 by 10 inch glass, on one side, and a row of about eight panes of glass on the other side. The floor was made of puncheons, split out of logs; and overhead were puncheons and on them a coat of mortar to keep out

the cold. The roof was clapboards held down by weight poles, supported by wooden knees. The chimney to the height of about six or seven feet was a pen of rather small logs built up inside with mortar and rocks—undressed—for a fire-place. Above the fire-place the chimney was finished with split sticks about an inch thick, coated inside with a thick coat of mortar. I forget how the seats were made but remember there were enough of them to fill the room when needed, as it was a preaching place, and a quarterly-meeting was held in it while I was there. I know the seats had no backs and think they were puncheons dressed down a little. I went to that school only a few weeks—walked two miles to get to it. The teacher was Miss Susan Pierce and taught only Spelling Reading, Writing, and the very first rules of Arithmetic.

After this a Mr. John Miles taught a subscription school in my father's house, a summer term of three months, in an upper room, and three months in the winter in a lower room, at \$1.50 per scholar per term. I think he had about twenty scholars, they were called then. He was a bachelor, do not know where he came from, nor where he went. Sometimes he was quite cross, which we could not understand till one day we found an empty flask in the dust under the corner-rib. He could not take a pupil through the Arithmetic. We had some more pretty much the same kind. Most of them did the best they could and some of these same pupils in after years got to better schools and made their mark in life. The last one I will speak of is William Ferguson. He had a reputation in his day and locality for a good scholar. I do not know how much he knew, I only know he taught Arithmetic, Geography and English Grammar, in addition to the other elementary branches, yes and Surveying, too. Probably he understood other branches and could have

taught them had any one been in school to be taught. He had the reputation of being severe but I never saw him whip a pupil in the five months that I went to him, though once I saw him take two boys by the hair and bump their heads together till one of the girls said she 'could hear his brains rattle.' There was no whispering done in his school. My father hired Mr. Ferguson for \$10.00 per month and board. He built a school house for him to teach in, something in the order of the of the one I have described. I remember the seats in that were split logs about seven or eight inches broad with pegs to stand on. Of course they were about stationary. His price per scholar was \$2.00 when he taught a subscription school. Other teachers did not think it worth while to ask that much. I think the teachers generally got money for teaching. When Mr. Ferguson taught for us, a number of young men and women came to him. Several boarded with us at one dollar per week. I remember one young man worked six weeks after the school closed to pay three months' board.

I do not know where Mr. Ferguson was born nor when he died. He lived on Brushy Fork, a stream in Randolph—now Barbour County, when he taught for us. He was rather heavy set, had bright black eyes and a pleasant face, but he was sober turned. I do not remember having ever seen him laugh. I remember hearing him say once that his wife's people called him lazy and to show them he was, he went out and cut some poles and brought them in and put the ends in the fire-place to burn, when he expected some of them to come to his house. I was at his house once when he had just moved into it. It was a new log house of good size. I do not know why he moved in when it was in such condition nor how long he left it so, but there was no floor in it; overhead about half

way it was covered with loose planks. In one end were two beds, in the other the fire built on the ground, the smoke going up inside as there was no fire-place. Near by the house he owned a little mill and carding machine. Suppose there was a reason for his moving in such a house. He had a wife and two daughters. I do not know his wife's name but from what I remember hearing her neighbors say, "Xanthippa" would have suited. I know you will think this writing a backwoods sketch and so it is. Hope you can gather a few items of interest from it.

Yours truly,

M. K. SWISHER.

It is said a woman always adds a "post-script," so here is mine. After I had closed my "sketch" I remembered I had not mentioned the percentage. I cannot tell definitely what percentage could read and write. Think nearly all the heads of families could, except some very poor people. The scarcity of schools was not because the people did not want them, but because they were so thinly settled they could not make up a subscription school. The percentage of attendance was small, none got to go to school more than three months at a time, and perhaps not that, oftener than once in two or three years; yet most of the children learned to read much better than would be supposed. The long nights would be utilized in study of what they could find to study. Sometimes one of a family would go from home several miles to a school, and when that one came back would teach the other members what he or she had learned.

Newspapers were as scarce as books. My father took the "Winchester Virginian;" besides that I do not remember seeing any other paper till I was twelve years old. Father nearly always read aloud, and we all had to listen, at least be still. I remember hearing him read Jackson's

farewell address, delivered at the expiration of his second presidential term. I heard him read it a number of times to his neighbors, as they would come in.

It is about fifty-nine years now since Mr. Ferguson taught for us. Quite a change has taken place since that among the mountains of West Virginia.

Hope my tardiness in writing may not inconvenience you.

M. K. S.