

Cordova Community Center

OLD CORDOVA
Memories

Rev. Ed

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Compiled, Edited and Published
Darlene Hooker Sawyer
With permission of the Cordova Community Center

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(All photos unless otherwise noted are courtesy of the Cordova Museum)

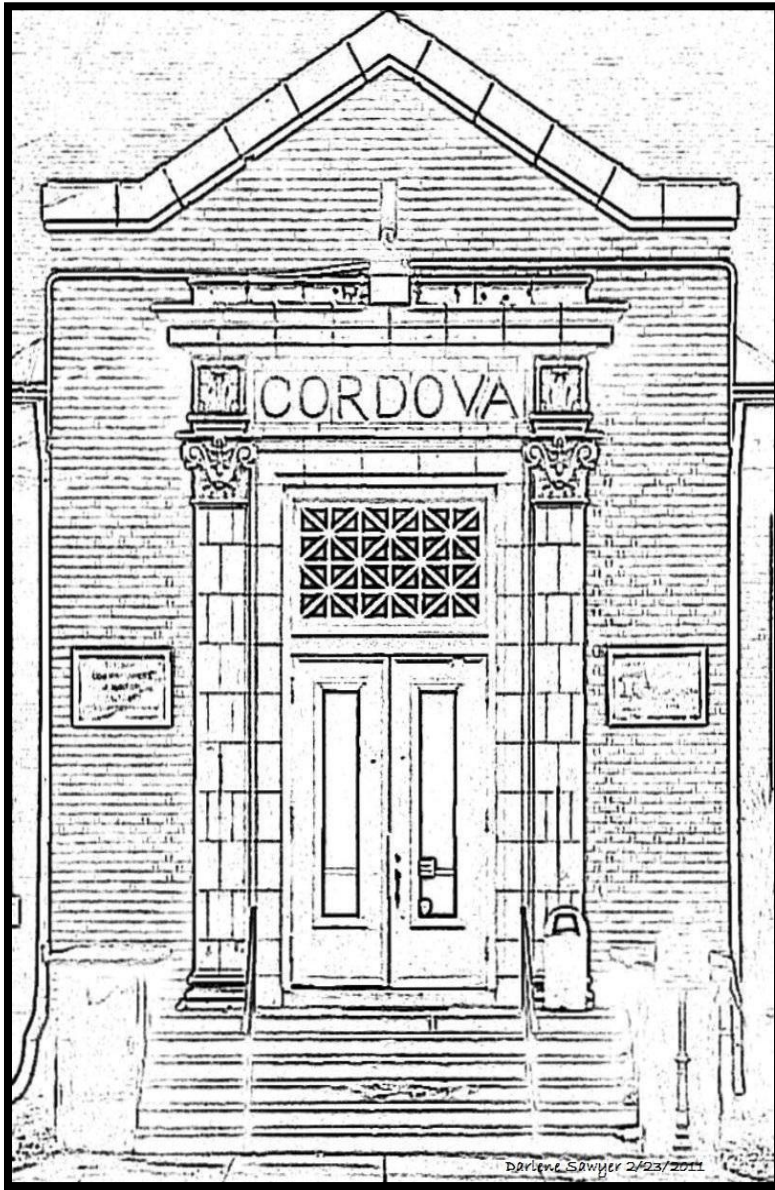
DEDICATION

In memory of the many students and teachers who walked through the doors of the old Cordova School

In recognition of those who worked hard to save the building and who gently transformed it into the Community Center

In appreciation of the many people who lovingly give their time and effort to ensure the old building will remain here through many tomorrows

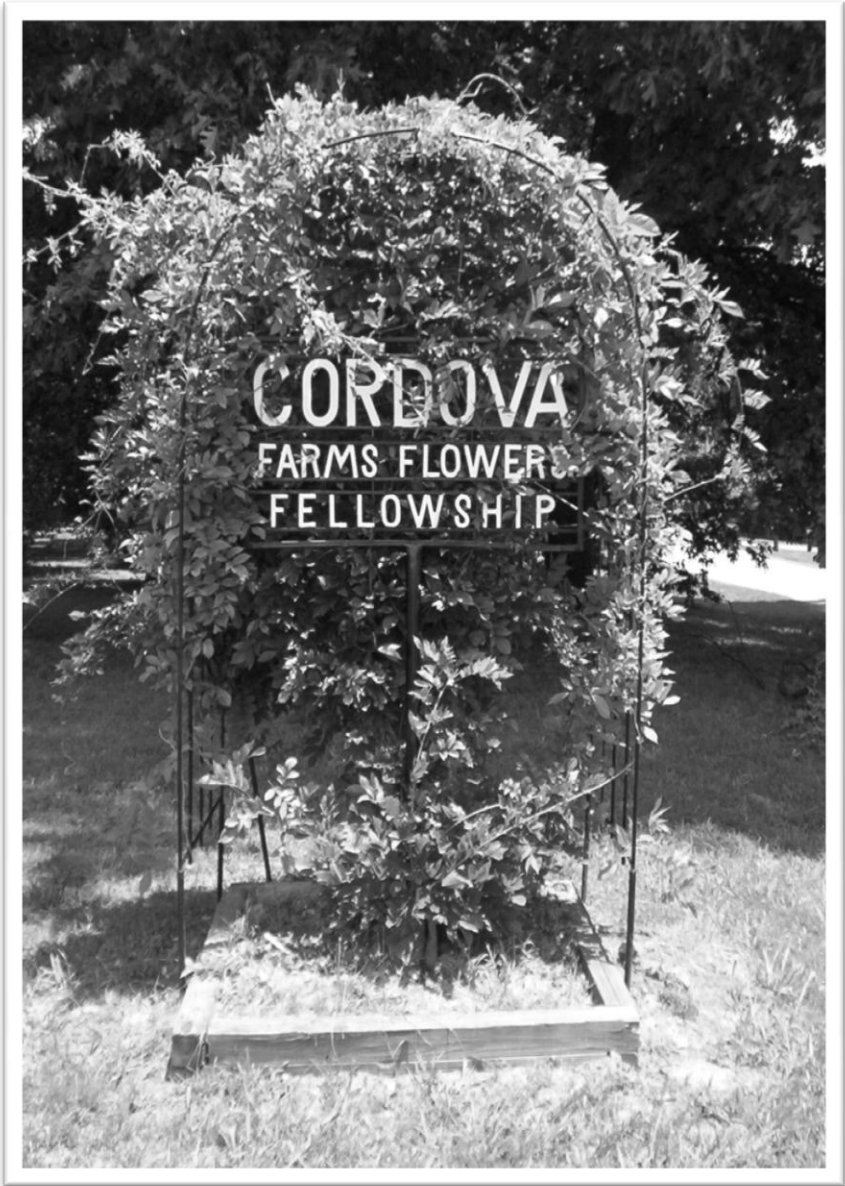
And in special recognition of Norma Rogers Ph.D. and Coy Haraway CPA, two people who truly love the people and town of Cordova, who gave lots of support, help, and encouragement with this book.



(By Darlene Sawyer 2-23-2011)

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(By Thomas R Machnitzki. Memphis. 6/20/2009)

Introduction

The nearly century old building on Sanga Road now known as the Cordova Community Center has become an icon for residents of the area. As the one building which most represents the town and its history, it has always been the prime gathering place for all families to become acquainted.

Cordova simply would not be the same without this one old building. You must first realize it represents a time of long ago, a time when life was not busy as it is today. Life seemed a lot simpler back then. Cordova was a rural area of farming, women growing flowers, people visiting with one another and playing card games, as children romping outside, not to mention the great food they shared. Well, come to think of it, that's exactly what the town is known for- Farms, Flowers, and Fellowship

Most everyone who's been in the area for a long time still remembers the early families who settled here. They listen for these surnames during introductions to new people who say they were raised from around these parts. It's like their brains are searching through an index system to see if the last name will ring a bell. If so, they are happy to share with you about your relatives they knew from days gone by.

People knew where one another lived, even from the farms that were several miles away. And kids didn't get into as much trouble back then because the whole community knew them and knew how to get in touch with their parents. People seemed to have more time to visit one another back then. Children played together outdoors and developed great friendships, which leads me back to why the building has such importance to all the local community.

The old building was the schoolhouse, where everyone got to visit each day while they were growing up. Of course it was the place where the community got an education, but we all feel it's the place where we bonded as a community, made lasting friendships, had our first crush, got embarrassed, got a spanking if we didn't behave, and ate someone else's cooking besides Mom's. It's the place where the teachers knew our older siblings. And for many, it's also the place where one or both of our parents went to school. It was not uncommon for a teacher to have taught whole families, or at least know of them.

When people of the community feared the building would be torn down, they met and made plans to save it. Because of their hard work, stoked by sheer love, the building still remains a focal point of the Cordova community.

Later on, you'll read the memories of many of the students. I've asked others to share their memories in order to convey a tiny fraction of the hold this old building has on their hearts.

The Town Of Cordova

You may be surprised to learn Cordova had several different names prior to 1903 when its name was changed to Cordova. The town was first known as Marysville in 1860, named in honor of Mrs. Mary Williams who was known for her “good gifts” to the community, as she helped families with food and clothing. In 1875 the town changed its name to Allentown, in honor of Mr. Jim Allen who was a prominent citizen and business man in the community. Mr. Allen donated land for the various community establishments, such as the Cordova Presbyterian Church, and the school. In 1888 when the railroad was laid through the town, its name changed to Dexter. However, as the railroad line expanded another town named Dexter, in Kentucky, on their route caused some confusion. So the town agreed to change its name once more, to Cordova, in 1903.

MARYSVILLE
in 1860

ALLENTOWN
in 1875

DEXTER
in 1888

CORDOVA
in 1903

(Source: Conversations with Norma Rogers, history of Cordova notes written by Margaret Schwam that are kept in the Cordova Museum, an article written on Cordova history by Jane Carter found in the Cordova Public Library.)

The Town's History

Wouldn't you like to know more about the good ole days? Are you interested in where children went to school before the brick schoolhouse was built in 1913? Did they really walk to school? If so, did they walk 5 miles, and bare-footed, uphill, or was that a story told just to amuse us young folks? Did the children have chores? What did children do for fun?

The Cordova Museum has the answers to these questions! Drop by and listen to audio tapes, interviews of the old folks who wanted to share what times were like when they were growing up in this area. Take a look at the early class photographs; notice that some of the children really were bare-footed! Read through some of the articles about the town's history. (Below are portions of an article written by Margaret Schwam.)

"Horses and mules were raised and used in the fields and to pull wagons, etc. Visiting each other in the early years all were related, so they would spend a long weekend, or a week or more. They danced, sang, had ice cream parties, corn husking parties (when a man found a red corn cob he got to kiss the girl of his choice), horseshoe pitching, apple picking and drying, popping corn, the girls collected and put aside for HOPE CHEST....made own clothes, learned to cook, sew, entertain, crochet, tat, embroider and just visit. All the traveling was on dirt trails and later on dirt paths. The young people did their courting in buggies, at picnics and at church services. The early church services were held in the homes.

Everybody grew their own hogs, cattle and sheep. They made sausages, souse, bacon, smoked meats, milked cows, made cheese, ground meal for flour, churned butter, picked geese for feathers, shod horses, made soap and candles, feather beds, quilts, mattresses for beds, cut wood for kitchen use and fire places, carded wool, made shingles for fences and roofs, pumped water for the house, trimmed and cleaned lamp chimneys for light, made lace, took out ashes, made fires, grew gardens, learned to cook, to can, to dry fruits and to serve meals.

Many worked in the fields. It meant EARLY TO BED FOR EARLY YOU MUST RISE!!! Most of this continued until about 1940 on farms. Most farms had cisterns on them for rainwater was caught in them, mostly by running off the roofs of houses. We learned early that water caught in cisterns during the months without an R was not healthy at all...May, June, July, and August. Nearly every family had malaria fever yearly! Quinine became a home necessity, also Vicks salve, camphor, turpentine, castor oil, alum, soda, salt and Sloan's liniment."

I must tell you about the early cotton gin. The gin house consisted of a gin stand where cotton was emptied in by hand from large cotton baskets. The machinery was turned by mules hitched to a pole attached to a shaft pulled around, pressed down, taking out the seed. It was packed again into the baskets, tramped and pressed as tight as possible. These bales had to be hauled into Memphis by wagons.

Each family grew its own vegetables, corn, wheat, tobacco and livestock. We had 12

families who were growing flowers. At one time Cordova furnished Memphis with 92% of their fresh flowers. Mr. Ed Humphreys planted 3,000 gladiola bulbs one year. Cordova Flower Show, usually two or three days long, was a big show crowning a queen, exhibiting all kinds of flowers grown in this community.

In WWI, many of our young men volunteered service to our country; many came back with physical defects from 1914 to 1918.

In WWII most of our young men were drafted from 1941 to 1945. Almost every family had one or more involved in war. Cordova National Fireworks, Inc. made ammunition for the Army and Navy. They produced 20 mm shells, 40 mm shells, smoke pots, and incendiary bombs.

After the war, supplies were very scarce, but the men and older boys would make a trip into Memphis about twice a year taking two or three days to get flour, molasses, tobacco, sugar, cheese, green coffee, kegs of whiskey, bolts of material, lace and buttons for making clothes. They made a stop at the Seven-Mile Camp and Eleven-Mile camp to and from Memphis to gossip, trade information, talk farm practices, and trade farm products. You can imagine the excitement when the men returned.

In this history, the early churches played a big part of the development of Cordova. Services were held in homes for years. In 1885 Morning Sun Presbyterian Church opened as our Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In 1887 the Dexter Presbyterian Church opened with charter members all Allens and Rogers. It burned Thanksgiving Day, 1911, and was rebuilt 1912. It has been refurbished several times and the Fellowship Hall was built in 1986. Cordova Baptist Church was built in 1896, and burned in 1925. It was rebuilt in 1943. The Walnut Grove Baptist Church was an early church but I have no dates on when it was built. Cordova Church of Christ was built across from the Cordova Presbyterian Church, but it was moved to Highland Heights Church of Christ. There are some old black churches, Oak Grove, and Pisgah Baptist, Trinity, and Mt. Zion. By the side of all these churches a cemetery is located. There are many family cemeteries in the area also. The Cordova Community Cemetery holds an annual meeting and picnic on the last Sunday in May. It is located behind the Cordova Presbyterian Church.

The school and the churches were the social life for everybody. The home was the place to grow: mentally, physically, socially, morally and spiritually.

From the beginning an education was much needed. The children were taught strictly in homes, all within walking distances or horseback ride. In the late 1880's a building was opened and a teacher, Mrs. Gussie Allen, was hired. The school was at the old Broom House, now where the Carpenters live on Sanga Road. After her, Mr. Tom Yates, a very strict disciplinarian and hard teacher, was hired. He had lost an arm in the Civil War. The next school was a house obtained for more than one teacher. It was just below where the present school building is located. My mother, Mrs. Jennie Lou Poston Schwam was from Cuba, Tennessee, taught in that school in 1904 and 1905, and you can find her certification in the Cordova Museum. Two teachers taught all

grades 1st through 8th. In 1913 the present building was built.

In 1910 Germantown Road was graveled! All roads remained graveled until 1930 when Germantown and Macon Roads were paved.

Cordova Bank and Trust was organized in 1912, and closed in 1932. It reorganized in 1989 on Germantown Road. It became Victory Bank & Trust Company, First American and now AM South. The sign is still on the old bank building in the center of Cordova midtown.

1915 Cordova organized one of the first 4-H Clubs in the county. My guess would be that Cordova has had more awards, honors, and trips than any other town of the U.S.A., in the entire county, district, state and nation.

In the 1930's Memphis Light Gas and Water came to Cordova, but most got their water from Ellendale. The telephone service came in the late 1930's—all party lines.

Cordova Civic Club was organized in the early 1930's. It has had ups and downs, but at present the membership is 400. It has tried to keep abreast with all current affairs involving the community.

In the 1930's Shelby County bought all the small farms surrounding the area from the Wolf River to Germantown Road to put a self-sustaining farm for prisoners of this area—approximately 5,500 acres known as Shelby County Penal Farm.

The first Girl Scout troop was organized in 1939.

The C.A. Chaffee Clinic and doctor was one of the best in the country. Dr. Chaffee made his own medicines and was known as a very fine kidney specialist. He was one of several doctors through the years. Dr. Clarence Rogers (his medical certificate is in the Museum), Dr. McKinley, Dr. S.E. Parrott, Dr. J.T. Carter, Jr., Dr. Pinkston were all gone from the town by 1948.

Cordova Library was opened in 1956 in the old Depot. It is a branch of Memphis Cossitt Library System. It was moved to the Cordova Community Center in 1986.

Cordova Bridle and Saddle Club was organized in 1960 and belonged to S.A.C.A. of West Tennessee. It organized the first 4-H Horse Club in the state.

Oh, a small town is a wonderful place to grow up in, and I wish every boy and girl could have that opportunity. However, we are not the 300 population of 1976 but a crowded metropolis of 55,000 upward in the early 1990's.

Farm, Flowers, and Fellowship is a plaque located in the park near the Baptist Church. Never was a truer nor finer slogan found for any small rural town.”

(Source: Notes written by Margaret Schwam found in the Cordova Museum.)

Old Cordova School Cordova Community Center

As we approach the 100th anniversary of historic Cordova Community Center it is not uncommon to hear people refer to it as 'Old Cordova School' (proudly distinguishing that it is neither of the present two schools.) Many people still living were students there, and they may tell you their parents attended there as well. Those are the people who refer to the building as a school, though it has not been a schoolhouse for over forty years. To them, simply driving past triggers thoughts of being inside, walking down the long hallway with its wooden floors. They remember every grade and teacher, past friends, and the good times they had there (mostly at recess).

Cordova School opened in 1913 as a high school, first through tenth grade. Three students graduated that first school year. The same three returned the following year as an eleventh grade was added, and graduated a second time. In 1924 a twelfth grade was added and the first graduating twelfth grade class was 1925. As the town grew and more students attended the school soon needed to cut classes. Fall of 1930 grades ten through twelve were sent on to Germantown High School, while Cordova served through ninth grade. In 1933, the 9th was cut and Cordova became an elementary school through 8th grade. It remained an elementary school until it closed in 1973.

In the early days the cafeteria and restrooms were located in two buildings out back. That required slipping and sliding through the mud on rainy days. There was very little privacy in the restrooms since the stalls had no doors, but at least the girls were on one side and the boys were on the other. Teachers taught combined classes, one room consisting of 1st and 2nd graders, another 3rd and 4th and so on. Teachers had their own ways of disciplining their pupils, but most had paddles (and they knew how to use them)!

A basement was dug out underneath the school, in 1938, to move the restrooms and cafeteria indoors. The basement was dug by the Civilian Conservation Corps, known also as Roosevelt's Army. The students no longer had to brave the elements to visit the two buildings out back, restroom and lunchroom. Circa 1955 another addition was made to the building, adding a kitchen and cafeteria to a downstairs area, and adding a bookstore, restrooms, 1st and 2nd grade, to an upper level. Children in this era often smelled the aroma of fresh bread baking because Miss Mollie Davis made the bread from scratch each morning.

The school closed its doors in 1973 and was vacant for 12 years, being used mostly for storage during that time. When the Shelby County School Board considered auctioning the building and grounds, nine citizens of Cordova formed a non-profit corporation and made an offer to purchase. They feared the building would be torn down and replaced. The School Board accepted their offer, and in October of 1985 they purchased the school building, gymnasium, and eight acres, including the ball field, for \$150,000. Then they began the hard work and slow process of restoration.

Neighbors and friends organized an ongoing series of fundraising events to cover the

mortgage and restoration expenses. Some of the local families and perhaps even former students rallied behind them to give donations. Most of the windows had been broken, the building needed air conditioning and painting, the wood floors had buckled, there were gaping holes in the walls, the gymnasium needed repairs, the grass waist high, and the list goes on and on. But with the big hearted community coming together, the mortgage was paid in full on October 31, 1990, after only 5 years. Cordova Arts & Crafts Festival was born (and is still an annual event). They also sold concessions at car shows and horse shows... you name it and they probably tried it one time or the other in order to raise the \$150,000 to pay off the building. I've heard that one time, falling short about \$10,000 for their next payment they called a board meeting to discuss the shortage and what to do about it. Herman Golding looked at Robert Schwam and said, "Robert, if you do five, then I'll do five, and we can get back home in time for the news!" Robert responded, "That sounds like a plan to me." So the two of them loaned the \$10,000 needed.

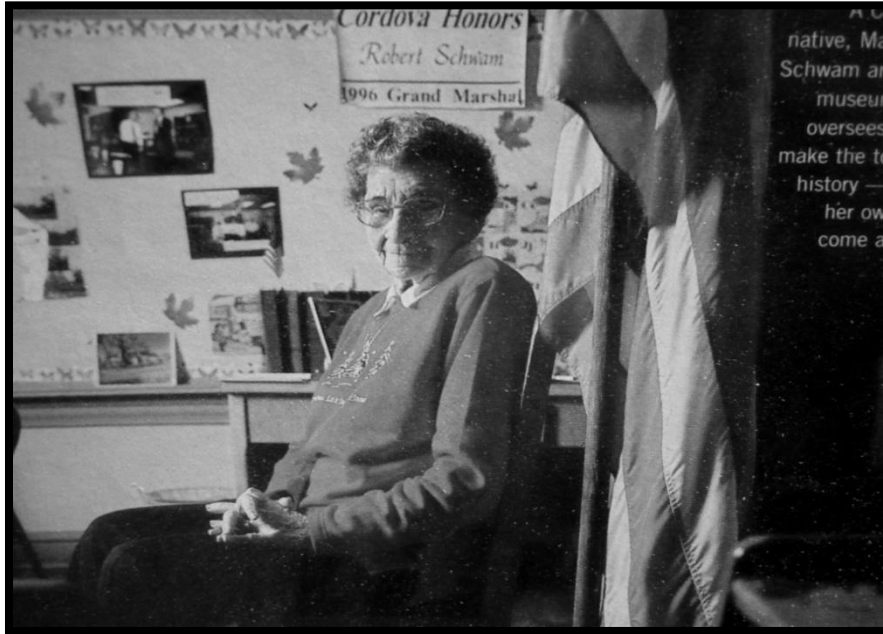
During restoration, three of the school rooms were named after people who helped with the purchase, fundraising, and restoration of the old building. One room was named the 'Schwam Room' after Robert Schwam. Another room was named the 'Rogers Room' after the Wesley Rogers family. Another was named the 'Orders Room' after Oneida Hooker Orders (who had been a 5th grade teacher in that very room). The front sign was changed to CORDOVA COMMUNITY CENTER (although there seems to be no hard feelings when it's referred to as the Old Cordova School either). The community began collecting items for a museum named the Harrell Room (after C.H. Harrell, the school's principal from 1928-1986, whose family donated \$10,000).

The museum opened in 1986. Margaret Schwam, former student of Cordova School, was the founder of the museum, gathering and organizing the items. Much of the furniture had been auctioned off. Items from the school that were not auctioned were saved for the museum, such as students' desks and old photographs and smaller memorabilia. The collection expanded to include articles representing Cordova's history, such as items from the train depot and National Fireworks, where ammunition was made during WWII. If anyone wanted to visit the museum, Margaret was happy to oblige. She was contacted by local schools, whose children could hunt for information about the community for their research papers, and by history buffs and former students as well. Margaret was museum curator from 1986 to 2006. Ray Morton applied for the job of curator, also an alumnus of old Cordova School. He had the same passion, interest, and love of these things in the museum that Margaret had.

Ray Morton was curator from March 28, 2006 to Sept. 27, 2010. He opened the museum for special occasions and for anyone requesting to see it. He would encourage people to visit and to donate items they might have at home. He'd tell them, "Come see. You might just find a picture of yourself in there." I met Mr. Ray a few months before his death. He and I bonded very quickly because we were both past students. He had a wealth of knowledge in his head about the community and the school, and he loved being curator and working around the items in the museum.

(Sources: Cordova Museum, Phares Morton taped interview, Cordova Beacon Feb. 18, 199, speeches made by Ray Morton, Norma Rogers, and Talbot Berry for the old Cordova School reunion Aug. 7, 2010.)

Margaret Schwam

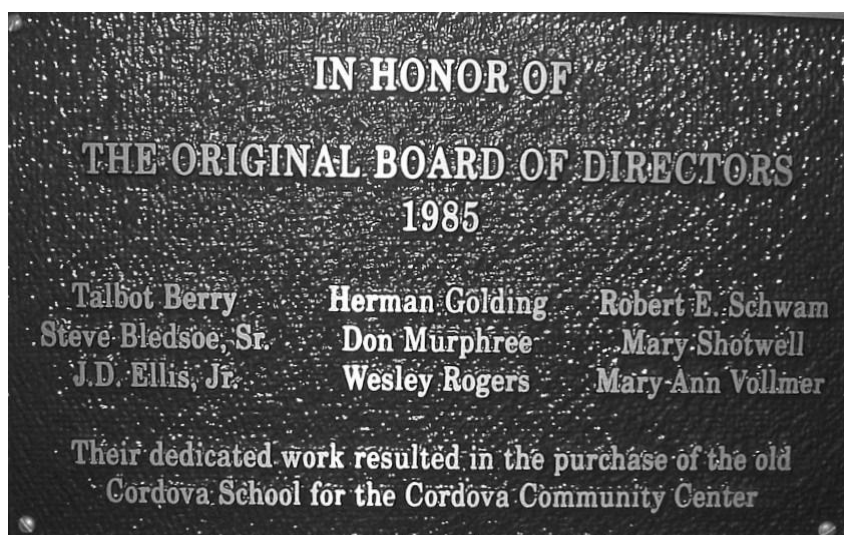


Ray Morton



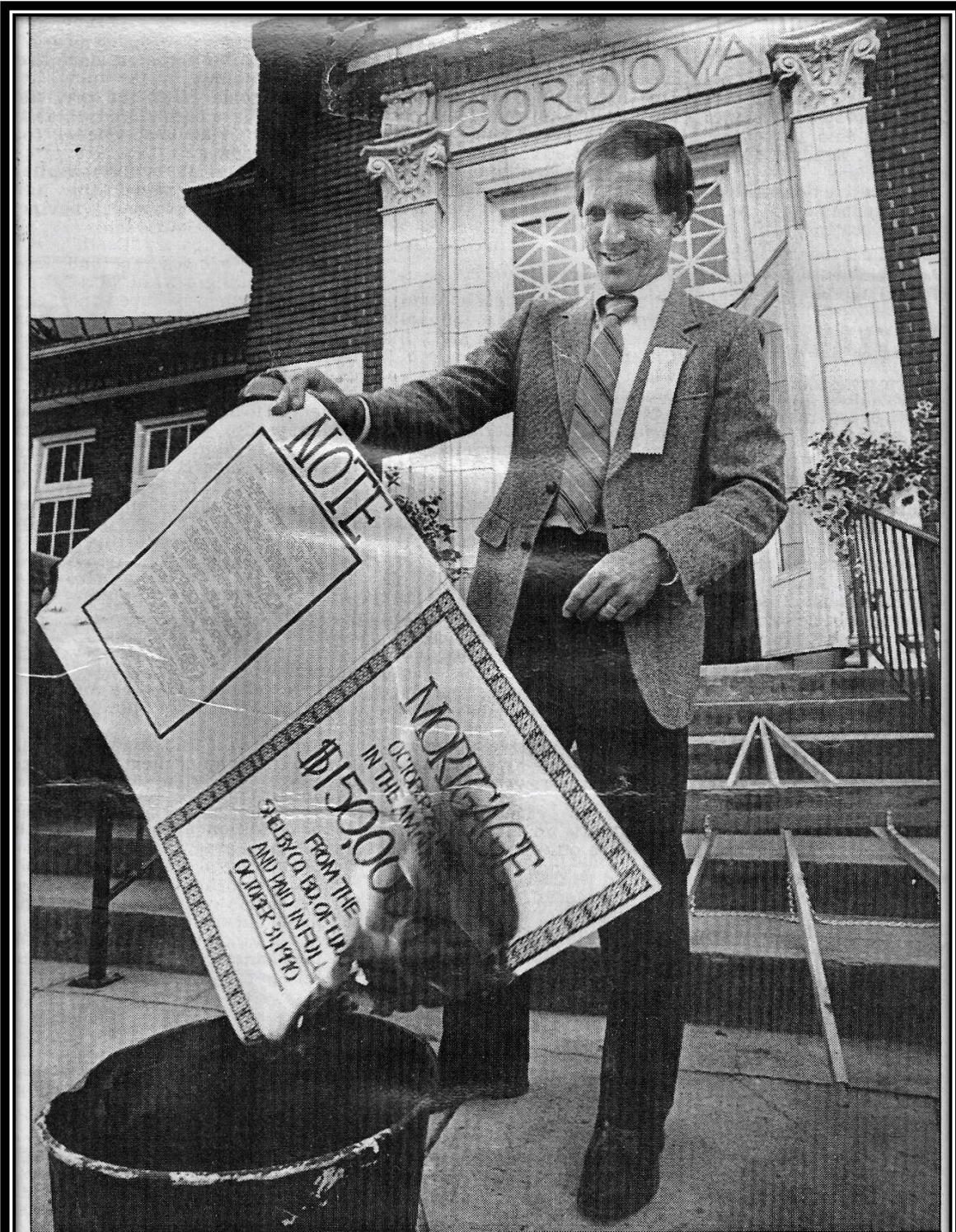
Founding of Cordova Community Center

In October 1985, citizens of Cordova community met to discuss the sign placed on the school property by the Shelby County Board of Education, announcing the intent of auctioning off the school building and property. The following nine concerned citizens formed a not-for profit corporation and offered \$150,000 (the estimated property value of the building and grounds). Their bid was accepted by the Shelby County Board of Education.



These seven men and two women put their bank accounts, good names, and future income on the line as they signed the note to purchase the school and property.

Talbot Berry
Dr. Steve Bledsoe, Sr.
J.D. Ellis
Herman Golding
Don Murphree
Wesley Rogers
Robert Schwam
Mary Shotwell
Kim Vollmer



Big debt blazes

Don Murphree, president of the Cordova Community Center board, burns an oversize facsimile of the mortgage during a ceremony Sunday commemorating the recent paying off of the center's \$150,000 debt to the Shelby County Board of Education. The former school building and storage site, purchased in 1985 by the Cordova community, houses a library, gymnasium and meeting halls.

CORDOVA COMMUNITY CENTER

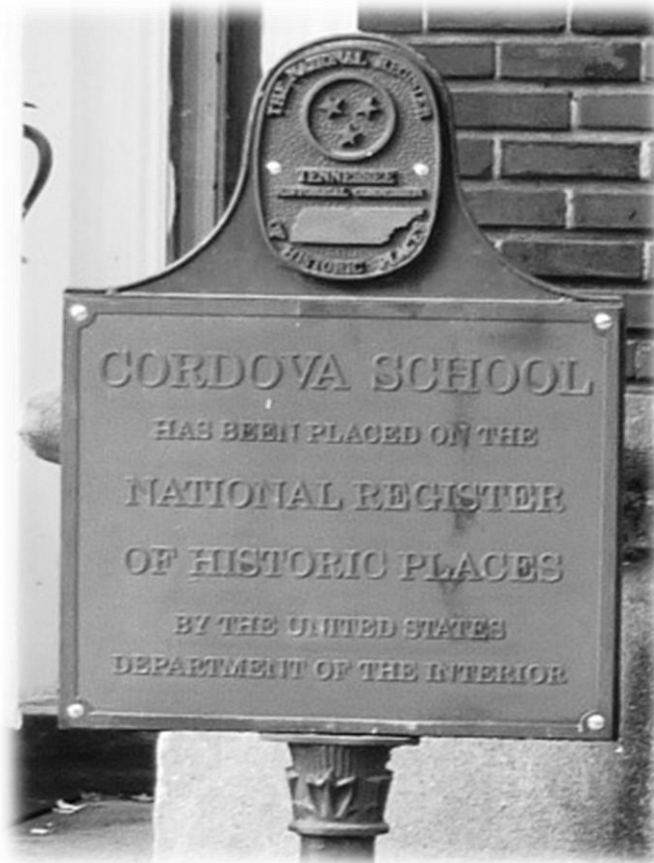
1017 SANGA ROAD
CORDOVA, TN 38018
Phone (901) 757-4400



In 1986 the old school became a nonprofit corporation known as Cordova Community Center with its school rooms, auditoriums, gymnasium and almost 8 acres of ball fields and grounds. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places on July 28, 1995.

Cordova School-Cordova, TN U.S. National Register of Historic Places

The Cordova School building, currently the Cordova Community Center, was accepted into Tennessee's National Register of Historic Places on July 28, 1995.



CORDOVA SCHOOL (added 1995 – Building #95000932)
Known as CORDOVA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; CORDOVA COMMUNITY CENTER
1017 Sanga Rd., Cordova, TN 38018

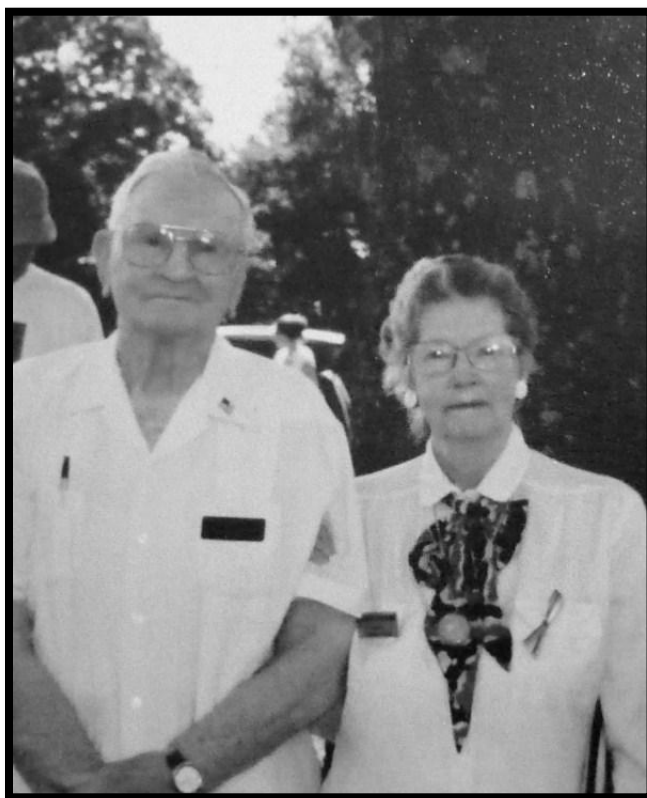
Historic Significance: Event, Architecture/ Engineering
Architect, builder, or engineer: Furbringer, Max H., Jones, Walk C
Architectural Style: Colonial Revival
Area of Significance: Education, Architecture
Period of Significance: 1900-1924, 1925-1949
Owner: Private
Historic Function: Education
Historic Sub-function: School
Current Function: Social
Current Sub-function: Civic

(Source: <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/tn/Shelby/state.htm>)

Ray Morton and Hazel Richmond
(touring the building and museum)



Robert and Juanita Schwam



Interview conducted by Dr. Norma Rogers
On April 15, 1989
(transcribed by Darlene Hooker Sawyer Nov. 17, 2010)

Dr. Rogers: This is the oral history department of Memphis State University. The subject is the survey of the history of Cordova, Tennessee, in Shelby County. The person to be interviewed today is Robert Schwam of Cordova. The interviewer is Dr. Norma Prichard Rogers, and we are sitting here across the table at my home on April 15th, 1989. Now, Robert, you and I, too, have been old friends for a long time. I used to come across your pasture and get milk from your mother and enjoyed the visits when we first came to Cordova. Where were you born and when?

Robert Schwam: I was born in Cordova in 1914 two miles west of Cordova.

Dr. Rogers: And your father and mother were?

Robert Schwam: My father was John Henry Schwam. Jennie Lucinda Poston Schwam was my mother.

Dr. Rogers: And I remember both of them very much because my mother seemed to