

GOLL FARM SCHOOL

Fall 2015

Report by E. Kit Cone

The Books Are On the Shelves! The Library Is “Open for Business”

There is great joy on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean: donors, sorters, packers, and shippers in the U.S. have seen their work bear fruit, and the faculty and students at the Goll Farm Elementary School have an excellent library up and running!



The Liberian school year was disrupted by the ebola epidemic, which also resulted in a delay in sending the book shipment. But while schools were closed by the government, at Goll Farm School the faculty and students joined in the big job of opening 131 cases and putting the books on the shelves in categories. They had guidance from a professional librarian from nearby Cuttington (Episcopal) University, who also suggested procedures for library operations for the benefit of pupils and villagers.



One of the great benefits for the teachers and students stocking the shelves was the discovery of how much knowledge is available through books. A lot of time was profitably spent thumbing through the books, not just out of idle curiosity but frequently with the intent that “This is a book that I want to take

out and read.” *Books contributed and shipped by Grace Episcopal Church, Madison N.J.*

In addition to textbooks, the huge collection of well over 5,000 books includes early readers, classic literature, encyclopedias, instructional books at all levels, children’s story books, and many books for adults. The latter were included because it is the goal of Fr. Prince Wreh, the founder of the school, to make the library available to people who can walk from nearby villages to learn to read and to discover the world outside their own farms and rubber plantations.



Some of the scholarship students have been trained in how to return books to the shelves. Rather than have all of the students putting books back after looking at them – and scrambling the system – these scholarship students keep the books in order, so that the next user can find them.

Nearly all of the school’s more than 300 students receive scholarship assistance. Donations by Goll Farm School supporters in the United States make it possible for these children to receive a first class education. The library plays a central role in this education process.



In the photograph above, Relhetta Wreh, right, and a first grade teacher conduct a class in the “Liberia Reads to Learn” curriculum. In addition to teaching students to read well, it teaches character

formation. As Fr. Wreh explained, “education without good character is useless to any society.”

It is significant that the “Liberia Reads to Learn” program will hold its annual national teacher workshop at Goll Farm School. In the past the annual workshops have always been held in Monrovia. Even though it is located far in the interior of the country, Goll Farm School has earned a national reputation. Teachers from a wide area will attend the classes during the summer vacation in July and August, 2016.

Road Widening Project Is Temporary Setback, But Fine New Access Road To the School Comes from Adversity

The Liberian government has engaged a major Chinese construction company to widen and improve the paved road from Monrovia about 130 miles into the interior to the city of Gbarnga. Two of the Goll Farm School buildings were found to be in the new wider right of way, so they had to be knocked down. The two were the vocational education building, and the guesthouse which had been built in 2008 to house United Nations personnel. When the U.N. staff people were called to Haiti to deal with the after-effects of a major earthquake, the building reverted to use by the school as a staff house.



Since there was plenty of advance notice, all of the useful materials were salvaged to be used for the construction of new buildings. As shown in the picture above, only half of one of the staff houses had to be destroyed, and the remaining half has been repurposed. The school was compensated by the Liberian government for the loss of the buildings, and with the addition of some donated funds the end result was an improvement in the school’s campus, as seen in the photograph below. In conjunction with the road widening, an opportunity was presented for building a road from the highway into the school campus.



Relhetta Wreh is the *de facto* construction manager at Goll Farm School, and time after time she has demonstrated her resourcefulness and persuasiveness as a real “ambassador of good will” for the school. One growing problem at the school had been access to the campus by the growing number of motor vehicles that make use of the improved road to Monrovia.



Setting her sights on a “real” road into the school, instead of the former trail through the rain forest, Relhetta met with the head of the Chinese construction company. After she gave him a guided tour of the busy campus, she talked him into a real bargain for the school: The school bought Diesel fuel for the big yellow machines, using funds donated overnight from the U.S. specifically for this purpose, and the contractor and his employees in turn gave their labor and expertise for the benefit of the school.



The end result was a fine road from the new highway into the school, a distance of about half a mile. The contractor crowned and graded the road to provide drainage in the rainy season. Although the rain slowed work somewhat, using heavy machinery the project took only three days.

Not an absentee manager who might hand out assignments and then withdraw, Relhetta, as shown in the photograph above, was out on the job every day to make sure everything was properly done. Perhaps the moral of this story is “Don’t get in Relhetta’s way when she’s on a mission!”

Castellanos Hall Nearing Completion

The new assembly hall for the Goll Farm School, dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Canon, Kermit Castellanos, an Episcopal priest, has almost been completed. Because additional space was badly needed, the building has been in use for many months, even though it had not been painted and had only a dirt floor. The big hall was used for the extensive ebola training given to volunteers during the epidemic which killed more than 2,500 people in Liberia last year and earlier this year.

Donations in support of the construction of this building have come largely from members and friends of the Castellanos family, honoring the great interest he had in education in Africa. When funds became available, it was possible to pour the concrete floor during the recent school vacation. The painting is yet to be completed, and there is a great need for chairs and tables for the students. At present the children must carry chairs from the classrooms for meetings in the assembly hall, and then take them back again.

The school wish list contains a hope for 50 new student chairs at a cost of \$20 each.

In the photograph above, a mason is shown leveling the newly poured concrete floor of the big building. The next phase of this project will include making a hardboard ceiling, which will greatly reduce the heat in the building during the day, and painting the inside and outside walls so they will conform to the “red and white” appearance of the rest of the school.



School Day Begins with a Prayer

Each day at the Goll Farm School begins with morning devotions in the schoolyard. Led by members of the faculty, the daily program includes prayers, announcements, songs, and a check of pupils’ uniforms. Even with scholarship assistance, many students simply cannot afford a uniform, and school principal Relhetta Wreh believes it is more important to be in school and learning than to wear a uniform. So while they are encouraged to get a uniform in order to be proudly identified with the school and with fellow students, they are not sent away.



At mid-morning, through the generosity of donors in the United States, the children receive a daily meal. Many Liberian families cannot afford enough food for more than one meal a day, and as a result large numbers of little children are stunted in

their growth – both physical and mental. One excellent result of this feeding program is enthusiastic and vigorous children who really want to learn in their Goll Farm Elementary School classrooms.

