



BETH REYNOLDS



A LASTING LEGACY

Jason Eller will never forget the first day he arrived at the Tamasee DAR School as a 9- or 10-year-old. On the ride over, he remembers crossing a bridge spanning a crystal-clear spring near the school entrance to a setting so serene American Indians of the area once called it “The Place of the Sunlight of God.” Eller marveled at the soaring pines and the rows of cottages that stretched out like mansions compared to what he had known.

The story of the DAR Schools and the difference they have made in educating children and changing lives

By Emily McMackin

“I knew right then that my life was about to change,” he says.

At Tamasee, a DAR-founded school in the South Carolina foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Eller found the structure and security missing from his volatile home where alcohol and violence set the tone. He developed a work ethic through daily chores, learned to set goals and assume responsibility, and discovered how to channel his anger into music. Hours spent learning how to play the piano gave Eller an outlet for expression and set him on a more productive path.

Graduating in 1994 with a DAR scholarship, Eller went on to study music at Southern Wesleyan University and human resources at Clemson University. He has since returned to Tamasee, where he works as chief development officer, raising funds for the school that once helped him.

“Tamasee really saved my life and made me successful,” Eller says. “If it weren’t for the DAR, I wouldn’t be here today.”

Thousands of others can share similar stories about how attending a school founded or supported by the DAR turned their lives around or changed them for the better. Many of these children have grown up to become doctors, nurses, soldiers, ministers, directors, engineers, entrepreneurs and teachers. Their success stories testify to the vision of DAR members and other women who started these schools nearly a century ago out of a desire to provide children in disadvantaged areas with the education and skills they needed to fulfill their potential.

“Each school has its own story—and the way DAR fits into that is we have been passionate about education and helping children since our beginning,” says Sally Napier Bueno, National Chair of the DAR School Committee.

At one time, the National Society supported as many as 35 schools. Today, it supports six schools, including two founded by state societies in Alabama and South Carolina and four started by DAR members or women who sought DAR support early on.

These schools blossomed in the Northeast, as well as the remote mountain regions of Appalachia with few roads and limited access to education. As these institutions have grown from a handful of buildings into full-fledged campuses, their objectives have changed, too. While transportation and public education have improved in these rural areas since the early 1900s, the schools continue to play a vital role in their communities by finding ways

to meet the changing needs of children in their care. Several are known for their programs addressing special needs, such as attention deficit disorder, dyslexia, adult literacy and families in crisis.

DAR members remain as active in these schools today as they were when they first began supporting them. More than 3,000 Daughters are involved with the DAR School Committee at the national, state and chapter levels, according to Mrs. Bueno—and many more give to the schools on a regular basis. Individuals, chapters and states send monetary donations to the Friends of DAR Schools Fund to National Headquarters, and the NSDAR Executive Committee disburses funds to each school based on the funding requests submitted by the schools.

Not only do DAR members collectively provide these schools with more than \$1 million in annual financial support, including more than \$150,000 in scholarships, but they also devote countless hours to working with schools to enhance education and enrichment opportunities for students.

“The Daughters are invested emotionally as well as financially in volunteer service to these schools,” Mrs. Bueno says.

DAR members are passionate about collecting box tops, Campbell’s Soup labels and Coke rewards points to help these schools earn loyalty points to purchase computers, vans and other expensive items, Mrs. Bueno says. The ladies also lend their support by hosting fundraisers, collecting school supplies and other items for classrooms, donating materials, sponsoring facility improvements and classroom projects, putting on special programs and events at schools, and corresponding with students through letters and care packages.

“We receive contributions from chapters as far away as Hawaii, and members also have contributed partial or full estates to support this cause. That shows you the depth of love



BERRY COLLEGE

Believing that education could provide a path from poverty, Georgia Daughter Martha Berry founded the Berry Schools in the early 1900s for academically able but economically poor children of the South. These schools grew into Berry College, a comprehensive liberal arts college.



science and professional programs, and graduate programs in education and business administration.

Throughout its evolution, Berry College has stayed true to its founder’s vision of building and sustaining communities through education. Just as its earliest students worked two days a week to keep the school economically viable, 88 percent of today’s students opt for on-campus jobs each semester.

“We continue to blend academics with meaningful work experience,” says Berry College President Stephen Briggs. “That blend was powerful for Martha’s students in the early 1900s, and it is equally powerful today.”

Until her death in 1942, Ms. Berry was a tireless advocate for the school, traveling nonstop across the country to raise funds on its behalf. Nothing meant more to her than the joy of seeing students succeed, as Ms. Berry told an audience in 1939:

“I would say the greatest result [of my work has been] the lives of the thousands of boys and girls who worked their way through Berry, and today are holding responsible places in the world. No one can estimate the value of education; no one can say where the mind will go, once it is set free.”

Martha’s Great Experiment

Education has always been integral to the DAR’s mission, but its passion for supporting schools was first stirred by Georgia Daughter Martha Berry. The daughter of a wealthy plantation owner and businessman, Berry was lucky enough to receive a private education in her home in Rome, Ga., and attend a Baltimore finishing school, but she knew that most children of poor landowners and tenant farmers in the northwest Georgia foothills lacked those opportunities.

In 1902, she started an industrial school for teenage boys on an 83-acre tract near her Oak Hill home, offering vocational, agricultural and mechanical instruction along with educational courses. As the school grew, Ms. Berry sought support from outside the region to keep it going.

In 1904, she traveled to Washington, D.C., to share her dream of providing an education of the “head, hands and heart” with Daughters assembled at Continental Congress. They were so moved by her words that they approved the school as the first to receive DAR support. Other leaders, from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie to President Teddy Roosevelt, also contributed funds, enabling Ms. Berry to construct more buildings and purchase 30,000 acres of adjacent land. The school welcomed girls in 1909 and expanded into a junior college in 1926 and a four-year college in 1930 as the need for advanced education grew.

Today, the school that donors fondly called “Martha’s great experiment” has become one of the South’s top liberal arts colleges, drawing more than 2,000 students with its accredited arts,

Pioneers for Education

The same year Berry launched her school in Georgia, a settlement school movement was growing in the Appalachian Mountains of eastern Kentucky. Drawing inspiration from urban settlement houses established in Chicago and New York to advance social reform, Kentucky Daughters May Stone and Katherine Pettit founded Hindman Settlement School in 1902, with the goal of providing children with education and refinement, while also preserving the cultural heritage of the region.

For nearly 30 years, it was the only school in the isolated mountain community. DAR chapters began contributing to the school as early as 1904, and it gained recognition as a DAR-supported school in 1921.



HINDMAN SETTLEMENT SCHOOL: In keeping with its cultural heritage mission, Hindman supports music and folk arts education and strives to meet regional educational needs.

COURTESY OF BERRY COLLEGE AND HINDMAN SETTLEMENT SCHOOL

As public education moved into the region, the school evolved to meet other needs, providing industrial and adult education before focusing on working with dyslexic students.

“No one else was doing it, and it was a huge need here, so we set out to become experts in it,” says Executive Director Brent Hutchinson.

The school works with Knott County Schools to provide reading intervention for students, offering after-school tutoring at sites across five central Appalachian counties. In the summers, it hosts a five-week program for more than 50 students, providing boarding for those who lack transportation or live too far away to commute.

“We have been such a stalwart institution for years that it puts us at the table for conversations about the changing coal economy here and what we can do to give kids a leg up in it,” Hutchinson says.

Farther east in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, another DAR-supported school has also thrived for more than a century. Crossnore School provides foster children of all ages with a sanctuary of hope and healing and has been serving the area since 1913.

Aspiring to break the cycle of poverty prevalent among mountain families of the era, missionary doctors Mary Martin Sloop, a North Carolina Daughter, and her husband, Eustace, founded the school to teach children in the area marketable skills. They also began taking in those whose parents or relatives died or couldn’t provide for them.

Dr. Sloop petitioned her fellow Daughters for help meeting the rising need for food and clothing at Crossnore, and the school became a DAR-supported school in 1924. That support

With more than half of its students coming from homes where they were abused, neglected or abandoned, the school offers specialized therapy to help them heal from past trauma and build brighter futures. Its Equine Therapy Center, for instance, helps students work through their feelings by interacting with rescue horses.

“We are changing not only the lives of children, but also the trajectory of their families and showing them how to break cycles of abuse, poverty and addiction,” Loftis says.

In the foothills of the Berkshires, another school captured the early attention of the National Society. In 1901, two sisters, retired teacher Charlotte Drinkwater and retired social worker Mary Drinkwater Warren, started Hillside School on their family farm in Greenwich, Mass., to give orphaned and neglected boys in overcrowded cities a home. In 1927, the school relocated to a 160-acre lot in Marlborough. That year the school also became associated with the DAR.

“The DAR in many respects kept us afloat in the early years,” says Rich Meyer, director of alumni and DAR relations and assistant dean of academics.

When the school’s administration building burned just before the Depression, Hillside raised funds to construct a new building within two years—a feat that would not have happened without DAR support, Meyer says.

For many years, the school served homeless and inner-city boys, but in the 1980s its focus shifted to students with attention deficit disorder. That formed the basis for its mission today of providing boys in grades five through nine with the structure, support and drive they need to reach their fullest potential both academically and socially.



HILLSIDE SCHOOL: “We have some kids who can blow the charts off when it comes to testing and others who struggle. What makes us a quality program is that we can meet the needs of both.”
—Rich Meyer

The First DAR School

Inspired by the early successes of schools led by women at the turn of the 20th century and the DAR’s growing commitment to these institutions, members of the National Society began contemplating starting their own schools. Not only did they seek to educate students, but they also hoped to instill in them core DAR values such as faith in God, love of country, citizenship and service. This led to the founding of two DAR schools that forever changed the dynamic of their communities, and still flourish today.

Motivated to help illiterate children in northwest South Carolina escape poverty, the South Carolina State Society of the



CROSSNORE SCHOOL

Nestled on 83 acres in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Crossnore offers a holistic approach to treating children emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually.

has continued to be vital as the school has grown to include a public K–12 charter academy and a Head Start program for pre-K children on its campus.

“Lots of organizations like ours have closed over the years,” says CEO Brett Loftis. “Our connection with the DAR has made us who we are today. We wouldn’t exist without the support of those who have invested in us.”



TAMASSEE
DAR SCHOOL



Tamassee housed only girls until 1932, when a boy whose sister boarded there wrote to the school asking if he could join her. “That marked the beginning of what we do today with serving sibling groups and working to strengthen families,” says Chief Executive Officer Amy Twitty.

DAR decided to build a school “in a place remote, yet accessible, where the need seems greatest,” the society’s history records.

After a three-year search, they accepted an offer of 110 acres of donated land near the town of Walhalla. Local businessmen pledged \$1,000 for a building, and the men of the town signed a petition asking the school to come and agreeing to provide labor and hauling services.

Tamassee DAR School opened in November 1919, with 23 female boarders and 23 boys enrolled as day students. Courses included math, English, social studies, history, home economics and carpentry, and students received credit for assigned jobs such as tending livestock, cooking, sewing, cleaning and canning. Poor families who sent their children to the school in its earliest days paid for tuition in produce and livestock.

In 1920, Vice President General Grace Ward Calhoun spoke before Continental Congress about Tamassee. Though the school consisted of just a single building on a wooded hill, her description of it captivated the audience and moved the National Society to adopt it as an official project. Growth took off at the school, with state organizations and chapters nationwide donating funds to construct buildings and cottages.

Students today come from families in crisis or homes in which parents are struggling to care for them. The school provides a nurturing environment where they can regain their confidence and trust, while also developing the skills to build successful lives and give back to the community, Chief Executive Officer Amy Twitty says.

Currently, Tamassee serves more than 200 children through its residential program as well as its after-care and day-care

program and middle school academy. Recently the school began offering a GED program for the community, an initiative that harkens back to its roots as the site of South Carolina’s first “Opportunity School”—a statewide movement in the early 1900s to boost literacy among textile workers.

Many students remain at Tamassee through graduation, and more than 90 percent of them choose to begin college, some with the help of DAR scholarships.

“Most children here are the first in their families to go to college and even to graduate from high school,” Twitty says. “They take comfort in knowing that being part of the Tamassee family allows them that opportunity.”

The DAR’s deep connection to the school, a National Register of Historic Places landmark, is evident in dozens of historic buildings throughout campus that display the names of state societies and chapters that have contributed to their construction and maintenance over the years. The South Carolina Daughters still maintain the oldest building on campus—the Grace Ward Calhoun Cottage.

“DAR ladies are the best cheerleaders for our children,” Twitty says. “They believe in them, and they show them they believe in them through their financial support.”

The Gem of Gunter Mountain

High on top of Gunter Mountain in the northeast Alabama town of Grant, a second DAR school opened its doors on February 26, 1924, to children living in a 100-mile area served by a single one-room schoolhouse. Founded by the Alabama State Society, the Kate Duncan Smith (KDS) DAR School launched on the 80th birthday of its namesake, a longtime regent of the Old Elyton DAR Chapter, Birmingham, Ala., who was instrumental in selecting the site.

The Alabama Daughters considered 29 rural sites across the state, but Grant showed the greatest need and desire for the school. Locals pledged to provide labor, improve roads and make whatever sacrifices necessary to bring it there, and DAR members felt drawn to the community whose population included a large number of Patriot descendants.

When a national DAR selection committee visited the 100-plus acre lot donated for the school, area families assembled at the site in their Sunday best, greeting the ladies with a picnic lunch and promising their support. Their enthusiasm swayed the committee, which announced its selection of the site on October 23, 1922.

“People fought for the school to be here,” says Executive Director Heather Green. “That’s what makes it so special—that the community wanted it so much.”

The first KDS building, the Jacobs Building, was constructed with fieldstone and hand-cut pine logs from nearby forests. Community organizations donated the furnishings, and the Alabama Daughters raised funds to maintain the building and pay staff. In 1928, the National Society approved

the school as a national project. This support helped the campus, also a National Register of Historic Places landmark, grow from one building to 40 buildings spread across 240 acres.

Today KDS provides K–12 instruction to more than 1,400 students in partnership with the Marshall County school system, but its DAR connection makes it unique from most public schools.

“Times have changed, but our mission is still the same: to provide an excellent education for students with an emphasis on patriotism and citizenship,” Green says.

Along with sponsoring patriotic programs, DAR support allows the school to provide extras such as art and music enrichment and a professional school nurse as well as work-study and scholarship programs. DAR chapter members across the United States reaffirm their commitment to the school by pledging funds for future projects and by traveling to the school for Dedication Day each October. The event celebrates the school’s heritage with patriotic speeches, a craft show, student-led musical performances and skits, as well as a basket lunch.

“It’s humbling to see women come from all over who want to be part of this tradition and what we’re doing here,” Green says.

Not only has KDS served as the heart of the Grant community for more than 90 years, but it has also transformed it. The percentage of children living below the poverty level continues to decline locally, Green says—a result she attributes to the opportunities KDS provides. More than 60 percent of teachers and staff are alumni, including Green.

“I couldn’t think of anything better than to give back to the school that gave me so much,” says Green, who attended Auburn University on a DAR scholarship. “It’s not often you get to say thank you every day for what someone has done for you.”

The DAR Difference

As a child growing up in the Grant community, Josie McCamish heard about KDS from the time she was small. Her grandfather and uncle were among the men who hauled rock and sandstone to the Jacobs Building during the school’s construction, and her mother attended the school as a girl. Enrolling in the school in the seventh grade, McCamish learned firsthand how special KDS was while participating in its work-study program.

“Before coming to KDS, I hadn’t been able to eat hot lunches at school, because my family couldn’t afford them,” McCamish says. “Working in the cafeteria, I was able to buy a hot lunch every day, and it meant the world to me to be able to sit with the other students and enjoy a nutritious meal.”

Within a few years, the principal entrusted her with the responsibility of working the cafeteria cash register—a job that put a few extra dollars in her pocket each week to spend.

“He saw the need I had, and that’s why he gave me the job,” McCamish says. “When you are poor, gestures like that stay with you forever.”

One Christmas she received a surprise gift in the mail: a corsage with gold ribbons and a brand-new yellow cardigan from the Elizabeth Snyder-Continental DAR Chapter, Greenbrook, N.J. McCamish developed a correspondence with the women of the chapter that lasted until she graduated from KDS in 1962—and nearly 60 years later she still has their gift. Through KDS, she befriended other Daughters, too, including a woman and her husband from Ohio, who sent her letters and care packages even after she left for college at Lincoln Memorial University with assistance from a DAR scholarship.

At KDS, McCamish set her first goal—one of many that would follow. She won an oratorical contest that allowed her to be chosen to attend the DAR Continental Congress as a student representative.

“Before I came to KDS, my world was very small, and it broadened my world and my dreams,” she says. “Having that dream fulfilled taught me that if you dream big in life and stay focused, amazing things can happen.”

McCamish went on to receive her doctorate in education from Vanderbilt University and has since taught and trained hundreds of students and teachers in dozens of classrooms. In her work guiding the next generation of students to success, she has frequently drawn upon the lessons she learned at KDS.

“I have spent much of my career trying to be the kind of teacher that my teachers were and listening to students with my eyes as well as my ears,” McCamish says. “KDS taught me the value of caring for people before you attempt to teach them.” 🙏

