

We Felt Welcome Indeed

The Journal of Arkansas Education
May, 1957

By Jo Ann Kraft

Spending two weeks in Little Rock was not merely a Southern vacation for the thirty Wisconsin students and two teachers privileged to make the trip: it was a unique learning experience.

From the minute we got off the train, we were overwhelmed by the warm and friendly attitude of the people. Any feelings of uneasiness we might have had quickly vanished. We were introduced to Southern hospitality immediately as we paraded through the streets of Little Rock. It was easy to see the townspeople were interested. We felt welcome indeed!

A well planned schedule had been arranged for us, and by following it we were able to make the most of our time. We met a large share of the student body at a dance given in the school field house on the night of our arrival. By becoming acquainted with some of them ahead of time we were in a position to look forward with great anticipation to attending classes in a high school twice the size of our own Lincoln High.

On Monday morning we found the halls filled with friendly, smiling individuals rather than just a sea of faces. We followed our own class schedule as best we could during our stay in Little Rock. Even so, the classes were at different points in the course of study. At first we learned mainly by observation. It wasn't long, however, before Manitowoc students were delivering speeches, performing chemistry experiences, and in the singing of the choir. It was interesting to compare the teaching methods with those at home. We also learned how Central's clubs, publications, athletics and other extra-curricular activities were organized.

As guest of various schools and civic groups, we were able to tour a great number of points of interest in and around Little Rock. Our first tour was the new Jacksonville Air Base. We also visited the Territorial Capital and First State Capitol. A trip to the Arkansas State Capitol while the legislature was in session interested us all. There, we were honored to meet the Governor and receive Arkansas Traveler awards. Also, we were entertained at a tea in the Governor's Mansion.

An exciting all-day field trip to Hot Springs was especially enjoyed. We had a chance to visit Jones Mills. This was of special interest to us since Manitowoc manufactures household products from the aluminum obtained in Arkansas. Our breath was taken away as we viewed Hot Springs from Tower Mountain. A tour through a bath house and an afternoon at the races completed the day.

Not even the rain could dampen our spirits as we boarded the bus for Petit Jean Mountain. It was the first time many of us had been in a high altitude region. Of

course, we were amazed to find our ears popping! At Winrock, on top of Petit Jean Mountain, Mr. and Mrs. Winthrop Rockefeller were our gracious hosts. We enjoyed touring their farm and especially liked the party they gave us in their recreation room.

We learned not only while we were on tours or in classrooms, but all the time. Just meeting people and comparing ways taught us that basically people are alike everywhere. The difference in speech, weather, food and social customs seemed unimportant.

At first it was as hard for our hosts to understand us as it was for us to understand them. It is understandable though, that soon the expressions "you guys" and "ya' all" were being interchanged.

We found that many new eating pleasures were in store for us. Hush puppies, real Southern fried chicken, hominy grits, turnip greens, black-eyed peas, and sweet potato pie were some of the specialties we tasted. Rice and noodles were often substituted for potatoes, we discovered.

Little Rock teen-agers date more often and more casually than teens in Manitowoc. They all dance more at parties. Of course, one of the very first things we did was try to master the jitterbug step that was popular in Little Rock!

The number of students who drive their own cars to school was amazing. In Manitowoc we didn't have nearly so many because special bus transportation is offered to those living more than two miles from school.

Being able to go out into the warm sunshine without a coat never failed to please us. It was hard to believe that at the very same time people in Wisconsin were shoveling snow!

One of the hardest things for us to do was to board the northbound train at the end of our two weeks. It was hard to leave all our new friends, the warm spring weather, Central High, and all the wonderful people of the city. We will never forget the hospitality shown us for it is certain that Little Rock has won a place in our hearts.