



Almer Michael Yealey

(1873 - 1962)

by

James Duvall, M. A.

Almer Michael Yealey, better known as Professor Yealey, or Mike, was well-known in Florence and Boone County as a public school principal and as the local historian. He was born 29 January 1873 in Union County, Ohio. His parents were Michael Yealey (born 10 January 1827) and Catherine Strebel (born 5 July 1833); both of his parents were born in Germany, but they met in Ohio, and were married 24 October 1854 in Bryan, Ohio. They had eight children of which Mike was the seventh. After attending the local Union County Schools, he continued his education at National Normal University, Lebanon, Ohio, Wilmington College, Wilmington, Ohio, and the University of Cincinnati. He taught school for five years in Union County, Ohio. He started a business selling coal and other commodities in Columbus, but the business was destroyed in the flood of 1898.¹

Yealey moved to Boone County in 1898. He married Lucy Ann Rouse 1 March 1898. Lucy was born in 1876, and died 12 December 1942; she was the daughter of George Rouse, of Florence. The children of Mike and Lucy Yealey are Mrs. Willa House, Russell Yealey, Georgia Y. Tanner; his grandchildren are Dr. G. R. Tanner, Mary Russala Yealey Demiosey, Robert Tanner, Sherry Tanner, Rene Demiosey. Mr. Yealey became a farmer and school teacher in Boone County. He taught in four rural Boone County Schools before becoming the principal at Florence in 1900 to 1931. He established the Florence High School in 1911. In 1931 he and his son-in-law, Russell House, built the Wild Wood Tourist Court, now known as the Wildwood Motel in Florence. Following this he went into the restaurant business for a few years. After his wife died in 1942 he taught again in Florence from 1943 to 1945, and for four years at New Haven. He taught school a total of 41 years.

Yealey became interested in local history soon after coming to Boone County. He recalled that in 1898 he photographed a re-enactment of an incident at Hangman's Tree. The re-enactment nearly had tragic consequences, but was successful, though he lost the scrapbooks containing the photograph and plates in 1919. In 1902, while plowing, he kept turning out the remains of a mill. Always a teacher, this reminded him of "The Battle of Blenheim" by Robert Southey, printed in McGuffey's Fifth Reader. This was apparently the incident that fired his interest in Boone County history. He later wrote an interesting account of the mill being blown up, and how the owners were taken North and imprisoned because they were considered Southern sympathizers. This piece is particularly interesting because he recorded in print a transcript of at least parts of the interview he had with a participant. Yealey ran unsuccessfully for Boone County School Superintendent in 1908.² He was four-time mayor of Florence, his first term being in 1908.

When he was still teaching school in Union County, Ohio, he attended a stereopticon slide lecture 1896, on the subject of, "Etidorpha, The End of Earth", based on the book written by John Uri Lloyd in the preceding year. Later he became a friend of Lloyd's and assisted him and his son, John Thomas Lloyd in taking pictures of the grave stones in bloody hollow and the old Tanner burial ground on the Utz farm, in Florence. Yealey was a frequent visitor to the Lloyd library in Cincinnati writing on the early history of Boone County. On 23 May 1929, Professor Lloyd delivered the class address for Mr. Yealey at the old Presbyterian Church in Florence. Lloyd was nearing eighty years of age. The address was delivered in the Rho Albert Theater in Florence. Yealey says, "This address was appreciated by a spell-bound audience in a packed house but when

Mr. Lloyd spoke of writing 'Stringtown on the Pike' (the book that introduced Florence to the world), cheer after cheer greeted him."³

Mr. Yealey authored many articles which appeared in the Boone County Recorder and the Northern Kentucky News. Some of these were later collected into a volume, which was later expanded. He was a member, vice-president, and historian of the Boone County Historical Society, which was organized in March 1950.

Dr. Henry Adams recalls that he and Mr. D. M. Snyder, who was the County Superintendent of Schools, and Professor Yealey, and others would sometimes hunt together.⁴ William Conrad writes: "A. M. Yealey — better known as Mike Yealey — resigned from the Florence Rotary Club several years after Charter Night, but remained active in city affairs. Every Memorial Day found him at the Florence Cemetery with a plat on which every lot was marked, and those seeking to find a grave of a loved one, found him very helpful in locating the grave site. He also continued writing articles for the local papers; especially the Northern Kentucky News based in Florence during 1954-56."⁵

In December of 1954 Mr. Yealey resigned as mayor of Florence and became the Superintendent of Public Improvement, a newly created office which paid \$100.00 per month.⁶ In 1959, when he was 86 he was described as "a very spry man". He died 25 November 1962 in Campbell County at the age of 89. He is buried in the Florence Cemetery.

For the 13th Anniversary of the Florence Rotary Club, a banquet took place at the Southern Trails Restaurant, 5 Feb 1979. Roy Lutes, Florence postmaster, and president of the Rotary Club, presented a lengthy rhyming declamation, memorializing many of the shining lights of that institution, living and dead. That tribute included a stanza for A. M. Yealey which might have served as a suitable epitaph:

*"Mike Yealey, in Florence for forty years or more,
For whom Yealey School was named —
Teacher, historian, Town Board Chairman, Politician,
Mathematician, charitable beyond end . . .
He was a personal friend."⁷*

Notes

1. Professor A. M. Yealey, "Biographical Sketch of the Author," in *History of Boone County, Kentucky: Articles Published in Newspapers over a Period of Fifty Years*, Covington: Privately Published, 1960.
2. "Candidate for Boone County School Superintendent," *Boone County Recorder* 16 Sept 1908 p. 4 col. 1
3. A. M. Yealey, "Florence Schools, " in *Florence, Boone County, Kentucky* Florence: Boone County Historical Society, 1958), p. 15.
4. Henry Adams, "My Remembrances of Burlington" (Privately Published, 1976), p. 15.
5. William Conrad, *41042; A Story About Florence, Ky., and the Florence Rotary Club* Compiled by William Conrad and edited by Roy C. Lutes, Past Presidents. (Florence, Ky.: Privately Published, 1989), p. 48.
6. Conrad, p. 60.
7. Conrad, p. 80.

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History of Boone County, Kentucky: Articles Published in Newspapers over a Period of Fifty Years, Covington: Privately Published, 1960

"Florence Schools, " in *Florence, Boone County, Kentucky* Florence: Boone County Historical Society, 1958), p. 11-17.

"Florence's First Jail Described by Mr. Yealey," *Northern Kentucky News* 15 Oct 1954 p. 4. (Includes Photo)

"Boone County 'First'," Feature Historical Article *Northern Kentucky News* 1 Oct 1954 p. 4.

"Big Bone History Reviewed by Local Man" *Northern Kentucky News* 24 Sept 1954 p. 7.

"Writer Tells About Early Town Laws, The Judge Who Helped Prisoner Escape and the Story of High Tax Burdens," *Northern Kentucky News* 22 Oct 1954, p. 4.

"Teenagers of 75 Years Ago in Court After Chirivari," *Northern Kentucky News* 5 Nov 1954, p. 2.

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"Writer Reviews Slave Laws; Tells About Boone Owners' Difficulties with Runaways," *Northern Kentucky News* 24 Dec 1954, p. 2.

"Local Historian Tells More About Slaves," *Northern Kentucky News* 31 Dec 1954, p. 1, 3.

"The Story of Joe 'A Slave Boy' A Story of Murder and Near Mob Violence — Yet A Story of Early Justice by Local Courts," *Northern Kentucky News* 8 Oct 1954 p. 2.

"Mayor Yealey Writes About Carpenter Family; Traces Name Back to 1303 Tells of Different Family Branches," *Northern Kentucky News* 29 Oct 1954 p. 4.

"Writer Visits Early Graves and Notes Interesting Facts," *Northern Kentucky News* 3 Dec 1954 p. 2.

"Underhill Family History Traced," *Northern Kentucky News* 12 Nov 1954 p. 2.

"Many Improvements and Changes Made in Florence," *Northern Kentucky News* 4 Feb 1955; article reprinted in Conrad, *41042: A Story About Florence*, p. 60-64.

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"Applicant for a Teacher's Certificate", *Boone County Recorder* 22 May 1901 p. 5 col. 1

"Boone County Teacher", *Boone County Recorder* 11 Sept 1901 p. 4 col. 1

"Boone County Teacher", *Boone County Recorder* 3 Aug 1904 p. 8 col. 2

"Candidate for Boone County School Superintendent," *Boone County Recorder* 16 Sept 1908 p. 4 col. 1

"Ordinance No. 299: An Ordinance Proposing to Annex Certain Territory of the City of Florence, Boone County, Kentucky, Said Territory Being Contiguous to the City of Florence on the North-West," *Northern Kentucky News* 26 Nov 1954 p. 4 (Signed by A. M. Yealey, Chairman of Board of Trustees, Florence)