

# Black Star Grade School Is Destroyed By Blaze

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Three area fire fighting units were unable to save the abandoned Black Star Elementary School at Pathfork and worked into the early morning hours to extinguish the fire which destroyed the school.

The school located deep inside a hollow near the Harlan-Bell County line was closed at the end of this school year.

Wallins Volunteer Fire Department responded to the fire call about 10 p.m. as did the Harlan County Rescue Squad and the Pineville Volunteer Fire Department.

A portion of the building was engulfed in flames when the firefighting units arrived and continued to spread quickly.

Bobby Smith, assistant fire chief with the Wallins volunteer firefighters, said the fire probably started in the portion of the school that once served as a gymnasium and then spread through the three-story brick structure.

Johnny Lee Saylor, a Wallins volunteer, said the fire was probably the result of an arson, but Smith said the cause of the blaze has not been officially determined.

There was considerable confusion when firefighting units arrived at the scene.

The Pineville unit pulled out about ten firefighters and left the scene shortly after the Wallins and Harlan unit arrived.

Pineville Fire Chief Bill Robbins, was frustrated by the apparent disorder at the fire scene. "We were just trying to help. I don't want to move in on

anybody's territory. Let them have it. I'm pulling my men out," Robbins said.

For about ten minutes confusion appeared to reign at the scene until the Wallins and Harlan units took over firefighting efforts.

The Rev. Ronnie Oplinger, Pathfork, said as the school burned; "I was in the last graduating class in 1961." He added, the school had become a "garbage dump" in recent years.

His companion, Jeremy Blanton, another Pathfork area resident, "I wouldn't waste the water" trying to save the building."

Mark Henderson, Black Snake, observed the building burn with several other area residents. Henderson, 26, recalled fond memories of his school days at the Black Star School as did other residents who watched the building burn.

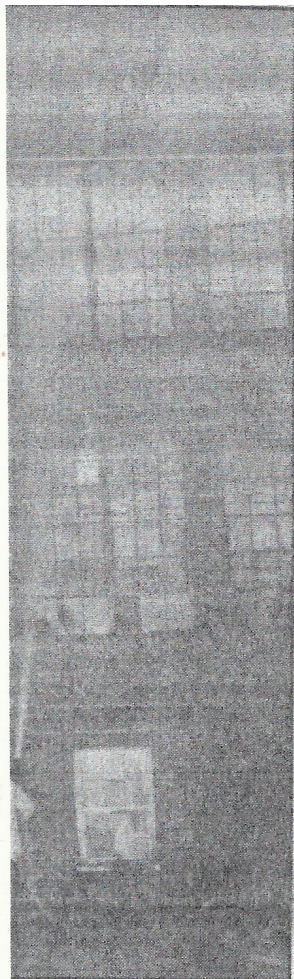
Two firefighters, Sheba Colinger and Chester Hubbard of the Harlan County Rescue Squad, sustained apparently minor injuries while fighting the fire.

Hubbard suffered from smoke inhalation and Colinger burned her right foot when she stepped into an area of the building where the floor had burned away.

The Black Star School has been the focus of considerable controversy in the last year.

One faction of the Harlan County Board of Education had nearly finalized plans for construction of a new facility to serve residents of the area.

The project has been stalled in recent months by a dispute among Boardmembers regarding the practicality of construction of a facility to serve a small number of students.







## School Destroyed

Volunteer firefighters from Harlan, Wallins and Pineville fought a blaze last night that destroyed the antiquated and vacant elementary school building at Pathfork. Two firefighters suffered minor injuries at the scene. The fire is thought to have started in an area that formerly served as a school gymnasium. The school once housed 12 grades. The last high school graduating class was in 1961. In recent years the school offered only education to elementary age students. The Harlan County Board of Education acted earlier this year to close the school for the coming academic year. (Daily Enterprise Staff Photos By Jeff Phillips)







### School Guttled

The Wallins Volunteer Fire Department and the Harlan County Rescue Squad worked into the early morning hours to extinguish a blaze that destroyed the Black Star Elementary School at Pathfork. A portion of the three-story brick structure

was engulfed in flames when area firefighters arrived at the scene about 10 p.m. Firefighters are shown at the gymnasium door where the fire is thought to have originated. (Daily Enterprise Staff Photo By Ellen Lorentzson)