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October 8, 2008

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Obama has ties to former Flora teacher

By Jennifer Archibald Staff writer



Dunham

What does presidential candidate Barack Obama have in common with a former teacher at Flora Elementary School?

Turns out, they're related. Sen. Obama and the late Parker Dunham, who taught at Flora in the 1960s, are descended from the same early settler in Tipton County.

Obama connected with his Indiana roots earlier this year while campaigning for the primary election. He visited a house on his ancestors' homestead property in Kempton. His great-great-great-grandfather, Jacob Dunham came to the area in the 1840s. The newly restored house he visited was built by his greatgreat uncle, William Riley Dunham, who happens to be Parker Dunham's grandfather.

George Brown, who now lives near Denver, Colo., was one of Parker Dunham's students in sixth grade. He said he wondered about a possible connection when he saw a photo in the Comet of Obama and a Delphi couple at "the old Dunham house" in Kempton. He remembered that Parker Dunham had commuted to the Flora school from his home in Kempton.

His hunch was right. Obama's great-great-greatgrandfather and Parker's Dunham's great-grandfather were brothers. Dunham's grandfather, William Riley Dunham (the one who built the house in Kempton), also was in politics. Like Obama, he was a Democrat, and served in the Indiana General Assembly. Parker dabbled in politics and was Tipton County clerk in the 1930s.

He was clerk for four years and a teacher for 29 years, according to his widow, Dorothy Dunham, who still lives in the Kempton area. She said she and Parker were married 57 years before he died at age 99 in 2003.

His wife said he started out teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. He had 18 students and seven grades. He taught in Tipton, Howard, and Carroll counties. The schools included Burlington and Flora.

Roger Daugherty of Flora taught at the Flora building from 1962 to 1966. When he moved from sixth grade to junior high for the 1963-1964 school year, Parker Dunham took his place in sixth grade.

That's the year that George Brown was a sixth grader. He said Dunham and Galen Shope were team teachers. Dunham mainly taught English and social studies, and Shope taught math and science.

"We all loved the classes Mr. Dunham taught because we thought we were pretty smart at getting him to just talk about stuff and not do any class work," Brown said. "We thought we were good at derailing the business of school, but he outsmarted us by engaging everyone in the class in discussions that ranged from Mandarin oranges to India and Pakistan, and how to introduce a featured speaker to a group of people. He showed us the proper way to write a check, how to look up funny or unusual words in a dictionary, and was always talking about current events. He taught by talking about the world and people and places in it."

"I remember he was always trying to teach us about civil rights, and how he had high regard for black leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr."

"On Nov. 22, 1963, we were stunned at recess by the rumor that President Kennedy had been assassinated. No teacher was there to confirm or deny the rumor. It was just a rumor that some kid said he heard when he went home for lunch, so a lot of us dismissed it. When we got back to the classroom, Mr. Dunham was as white as a sheet, and he looked stricken. He couldn't look up at us as we filed back in. One of us asked him if it was true, that the President had been assassinated? He nodded his head, and fought back tears as he said, yes, it was true. Several kids, both girls and boys, started to cry and hid their heads..."

"Mr. Dunham pulled out a book of Walt Whitman poems, and started to read a poem Whitman wrote about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, 'O Captain! My Captain.' Somehow he held it together while he read. After about an hour, the school decided to dismiss everyone early...After that day, we were all closer to Mr. Dunham than ever. A shared trauma provided a bond between the teacher and the students that made his class unique."

Dick T. Bishop of Flora also was in sixth grade in '63-'64, and he remembers other details about Dunham.

"He drove a Karmann Ghia convertible and wore an Irishstyle flat cap," Bishop said. "His hobbies were photography and playing the ukulele. I learned to develop film from him, and Tom Bolter learned to play the ukulele."

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To the Men of Carroll County
This is just for you...

Come out and enjoy an evening of good food, darts, cards and one of the greatest games in history.

Special Guest: Art Lemmy Keyser
Fundball 48: Football

Date: Thursday, November 13, 2008
Time: 6:30 p.m.
Location: Canal Center, Delphi
Cost: \$12.00 per person
RSVP by calling the Chamber 765-564-6457 or e-mail: info@carrollcountychamber.com
Bring a friend!!!

BAKED STEAK DINNER

Delphi Presbyterian Church
Saturday, November 8th, 4:30-7pm
Adults \$10.00, Children 4-12 \$4.00

Baked Goods: Candy

Carry-outs are available & can be delivered!
Phone: 765-564-2371
Elevator Access
Proceeds go to mission work

Flora United Methodist Church Community Thanksgiving Dinner

Thursday, November 13th
Serving in the Fellowship Hall 5 to 7:30 p.m.
Please call the church at 718-997-3898 for all carry-out orders before 3:00 p.m. on Nov. 13th.
This will be available for pick up at 4:30 p.m.
Adults \$8.00 • Children (12 and under) \$4.00
Children ages 3 and Under - Free
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1st Annual Bow-titled Fire Department Breakfast And Big Deer Tournament

Hunter's Breakfast & Big Deer Tournament

Beats and grass, scrambled eggs, sausage and hash browns

November 15 & 16
November 22 & 23

4:30 am - 10:30 am

Rockfield Community Center
Proceeds will go to the purchase of rescue equipment for the Rock Creek Twp. Vol. Fire Dept.
Hosted by Rock Creek Twp. Vol. Fire Dept.
For complete tournament rules and registration contact:
765-202-3186
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Poll

Do you agree with Deer Creek Township's method for seeking input on spending surplus funds?

Yes, at the polling place is OK

No, Election Day is not appropriate

Advance information would have been helpful

Have no opinion

Vote

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Brown said Dunham had a vacation cabin in Ontario, Canada, and told the class about his fishing trips there.

"Toward the end of his period of teaching at Flora, he even took some kids from his class on a trip to Ontario," he said.

School yearbooks show that Dunham taught at Flora three years, from 1963 through 1966.

The *Tipton Tribune* ran a profile of Dunham when he was 79. The story related that Dunham knew Hoagy Carmichael (songwriter) and Ernie Pyle (World War II journalist) from his college years at Indiana University, Bloomington. Pyle was a senior when Dunham was a sophomore.

Dunham enjoyed fishing, serving as a guide on fishing trips, and writing about his own fishing experiences. He also was a hunter.

For many years he wrote an outdoor sports column for central Indiana newspapers. He also wrote outdoor columns for other publications such as *Sports Afield*.

The *Tribune* profile also described Dunham as a World War II veteran, former manager of a camera shop in Fort Wayne, and banjo player in a Dixieland band.

For many in Carroll County, Parker Dunham will be best remembered as a caring teacher.

