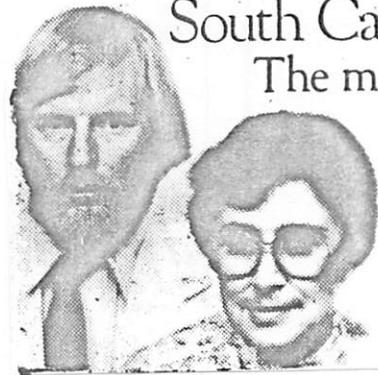


# Woman Spent Life Improving Black Education

## South Carolina's Story The making of a state



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Martha Schofield came on the heels of Sherman's army to Wadmalaw Island off the South Carolina coast in February 1865. She was a 26-year-old spinster from Bucks County, Pa., who had never forgotten the day a runaway slave woman, chased by bloodhounds and an armed posse, had sought asylum in her parents' home.

After a week in hiding, the runaway, clothed in Mrs. Schofield's shawl and bonnet, was escorted by Mr. Schofield to free territory.

On Wadmalaw Island, Martha Schofield quickly found herself with more than 1,500 black students and only one assistant teacher. The pupils ranged in age from 6 to 60. They were not only illiterate but were in desperate need of food and clothing.

As she was to do until the day she died, Miss Schofield sent eloquent letters North to every source she could think of — family, friends, fellow Quakers and abolition societies seeking new mission fields. Social reformers who responded included Lucretia Mott and Frances Willard. The "Quaker Poet," John Greenleaf Whittier, later dedicated his works to her.

Once a ship carrying needed supplies ran aground, Miss Schofield and the natives survived on oysters, acorns and a few wormy crackers for 31 days.

Two years later on St. Helena Island, Miss Schofield contracted a severe case of malaria. Her family, unable to persuade her to return North, despaired for her life. Penniless, for she always distributed everything she received, Martha Schofield looked for a healthier site for her school.

A charitable organization, the "Freedman's Commission," composed of 24 women of Germantown, Pa., sent her enough money to open a school in Aiken. In 1868, the Schofield Normal and Industrial Institute opened its doors.

In addition to the basics, the pupils were taught personal hygiene and sanitation. Miss Schofield's solution for inadequate numbers of books was to have the more accomplished pupils copy their lessons from the "Blue Back" speller during the day and take their hand copy home at night. Others carried the texts home overnight.

As soon as a student had mastered the "Blue Book" and his arithmetic tables, he or she became a teacher in a nearby school established and supervised by Miss Schofield. Gradually, departments were added. The "useful arts" of farming, housekeeping, sewing, shoe repairing, carpentry and harness-making were taught. Some of the more apt students went to higher institutions and became teachers, doctors, lawyers and architects.

Every year in February the annual meeting of the Farmer's Conference was held at Schofield School. Miss Schofield always presided and taught the black farmers parliamentary procedures as she led the sessions in goal setting.

The Farmer's Conference is credited with substantially upgrading the living conditions of the blacks who attended. One room log cabins were replaced with three and four-room houses. Tenant farmers worked to purchase their own land. The school year was increased from two months to six months in length.

Miss Schofield's pioneer work in industrial training for blacks became a model for later work by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Though socially ostracized by the local white community, the more sensible whites recognized that her efforts were sure to better the living conditions of both black and white.

The time that Martha Schofield was in physical danger occurred during the Hamburg and Ellenton riots in the summer of 1876. She proved herself to be absolutely fearless on one memorable occasion. With a lamp in one hand and a whip in the other, she faced a white mob that filled her yard and porch. Her voice was calm, and her language sprinkled with "thees" and "thous" was so eloquent that the men melted away.

In 1902, Miss Schofield founded Taylor-Lane Hospital in Columbia for the sick and lame. It was the first institution in South Carolina to offer nurse's training for blacks. The chief surgeon, Dr. LeGrand Guerry, was one of the state's leading white physicians.

Miss Schofield's friends and followers planned a special celebration to commemorate her 50 years service to South Carolina's black education. Miss Schofield died on Feb. 1, 1916, one day before the planned celebration.