

## MATTHEW ELDER, JR.-Part 2

Matthew Elder of Chester District, born in 1813, was unusually bright. In his autobiography he details his schooling and his life as a teacher

Before 1811 the establishing of schools was left up to local communities. There was no state support. The Free School Act of 1811 provided enough money to pay a teacher's salary for instruction of the poor, usually for three months. People of means were expected to pay the tuition for their children and to erect the school houses or find places large enough to accommodate the pupils. Often the schools were housed in a local church.

Matthew Elder wrote that his school days were "very irregular and greatly diversified." Sometimes the teacher was available for only three months, sometimes for a year. This was still the case in most communities of this area until about 1920. Young Bessie Rodgers of Lancaster County wrote about her schooling which began about 1910, saying that she attended Osceola Grammar School for three months each year and when that time was up she went to live with her grandparents in Belair where school ran for four months.

At schools near Hopewell A. R. P. Church in Chester County, young Elder studied under nine different teachers. Five of the nine teachers had what was known as a classical education. Two, he reported, "utterly ignored the art of speaking and writing correctly." Elder's first teacher, Robert M. Galloway, not only taught him his ABC's but turned him into a "fair reader in the Bible, the text books being the American Spelling book, the New Testament, the Bible and Gough's Arithmetic."

Bessie Rodgers reported that in Osceola where Miss Iva Bennett of Rock Hill taught about 35 youngsters, "Our school wasn't graded. You stayed in a book until you knew every word. Then those books were passed down to someone else to use."

Matthew Elder's thought his second teacher had never used a dictionary and failed to make arithmetic comprehensible. The third teacher, John Hemphill, was described as "a little pumpkined mouth pedagogue, haughty, scornful. . . .No tears were shed when the future Judge and Senator (Hemphill later was Chief Justice of the Republic of Texas and a U. S. Senator) left Chester to become a student at Jefferson College. This bears out the fact that many of the early teachers had no college degree when they began teaching. The state in no way prescribed any requirements for teaching.

As Elder worked his way through school he had several excellent teachers to balance off the inadequate ones. When not in school he worked on his father's farm. He decided that it would be possible to do both—farm and teach. In the spring he would plant a crop and when it was laid by he could spent six weeks in teaching. Then back to full time farming as he gathered the crop. When that was over he had four and a half months in which to teach school.

Conditions on the farm were harsh. There were no labor-saving machines. Still, Matthew Elder managed to find time to study on his own and taught himself Latin and became a popular teacher. He was invited to teach at Cedar Shoal

Academy. Elder then found himself in the "most desirable neighborhood in which it was ever my privilege to reside." Elder taught at Cedar Shoals for two years and nine months. He boarded with Dr. John Gaston who frequently visited the school and monitored the activities. Elder saved his money and taught so well that he was awarded an extra hundred dollars by the trustees.

It must have been tempting to stay at Cedar Shoals but Elder wanted a college education. He also wished to study in a Free State (non-slave state) and had been persuaded by an old friend to join him at Indiana University. He found the cost of living in Indiana to be only about one-third of the cost in South Carolina.

Elder distinguished himself as a scholar at Indiana University. After graduation he married Jane Stinson and several years later became an invalid. In spite of health problems so great that he could not stand, Matthew Elder taught for thirty more years in Chester and York counties.

Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop University history professor. Her columns appear Sundays.