

## COMMENTARY

# Gift turns dream into reality

D.D. Crockett was a native of Lancaster and was a pioneer of the AME Zion movement in the Carolinas. He had built many churches, often using the axe and saw himself.



### Nearby history

LOUISE PETTUS

the good things that could be accomplished by an industrial school. Students could work and learn at the same time. Crockett left, determined to some day build a college in South Carolina.

The idea remained only a dream for more than a decade. Then one day, Crockett was speaking at a church in the Pleasant Valley community in upper Lancaster County and said that a way to be free is,

Now he was building a college modeled after the famed Tuskegee Institute founded by Booker T. Washington. Crockett was at a church conference in Montgomery, Ala., in 1880 when he heard Washington explain

### ■ \$1 donation inspires leader to build college.

even if educated, a person must be willing to pay the first dollar. Mrs. Eliza Springs, a widow and ex-slave, came forward with a dollar in her hand, saying, "Take this dollar and educate the colored children."

Eliza Springs later said she earned the dollar by cutting sprouts on Col. Leroy Springs' plantation. Nero Crockett said the widow's act forced him to implement the dream.

The college began in a dilapidated church building in Rock Hill with one teacher and six pupils. The operating cost the first year was 83½ cents a day.

The new college was called Clinton Institute. It was named for the presiding bishop, Isom Caleb Clinton (1830-1904). Bishop Clinton was born in Cedar Creek Township of Lancaster County. His mother was a slave and his father was free. His owner was Irvin Clinton, a leading lawyer. Clinton recognized his slave's outstanding ability and saw to it that he received a good education. Isom handled most of his master's plan-

tation affairs.

The relationship of the master and the slave was very close. In Lancaster's Old Presbyterian Church cemetery, there is a simple tombstone erected by the slave for his master. Carved in the stone are the words: "Farewell, Isom, if I am lost I am pleading for mercy. You can't be lost pleading for mercy."

After the Civil War, Isom Caleb Clinton, the former slave, was elected treasurer of Lancaster County. He served the county well for eight years. I.C. Clinton was presiding elder of the AME Zion Church at the time he erected the tombstone to Irvin Clinton in 1886. By 1892, Isom Clinton was bishop of the AME Zion Church, a church that was founded in New York City in 1796 and historically drew most of its membership from northern urban centers.

The first AME Zion church built in the South was built in 1864 in New Bern, N.C. The first in York County was built three years later at a site southwest of Yorkville, and called AME Zion, Unity. The same year, the S.C. Conference was

organized at Chester.

By 1904-05, Clinton College had 10 instructors and 265 pupils. It also needed more land and another building. The college was almost moved to Yorkville that year but ended up acquiring some adjacent farm land for \$2,000 and raised \$3,000 for a "farm boys building." The college stayed in Rock Hill.

The first president of Clinton College (now Clinton Junior College) was Robert Crockett. He was replaced in 1908 by Professor Robert James Boulware, "... a good man and laudable educator." Boulware was president for the next 23 years.

Of numerous AME Zion colleges initiated over the next five years, only three survive: the well-known Tuskegee Institute in Alabama; Livingstone College in Salisbury, N.C., a four-year institution; and Clinton Junior College, which still fights an uphill battle for survival in Rock Hill.

□□□

*Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.*