

# Teacher was feared, respected

■ Professor Shurley touched lives of students in Pleasant Valley and Providence Community.

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## Nearby history

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Leitner Shurley (1849-1902) was a third-generation teacher.

His grandfather, Meredith Shurley, taught in the Fort Mill area in several locations including a log cabin on Gold Hill Road. T.D. Faulkner, one of his students, said the textbooks were a blue-back speller and Pike's Arithmetic. Shurley required "strict obedience from the grown-ups as well as the children."

Leitner's father was John Rooker Shurley, who founded the Shurley Institute in Winnsboro before becoming the headmaster of the famed Ebenezer Academy, near Rock Hill.

Leitner's mother was Martha Ann Leitner, the daughter of Col. George Leitner of Fairfield District. She apparently died early in the boy's life, and he stayed with the Leitners.

Col. Leitner, the grandfather, like some other disgruntled planters of this area, packed up his goods and took his slaves to Brazil in the early 1850s. (Even more planters, especially from the Chester area, emigrated to Brazil after the Civil War.)

In Brazil, the Leitner family came down with fever. All died except Leitner. The Cephus Key family returned to the United States and brought Leitner with them. The boy lived with the Keys, who built a home they called "Water Oak" in Pleasant Valley in the Indian Land section of Lancaster County, until he was old enough to attend his father's school at Ebenezer.

John Rooker Shurley died March 15, 1863. Leitner was 14. His grandfather, Meredith Shurley, was still alive and living in Florida. Leitner went to Florida and studied under a Latin scholar. When he was 15, he joined the Florida State Militia. At some time he attended a Florida college.

Leitner came back to South Carolina and taught a while at Ebenezer Academy. Then he met widow Margaret Ross Elms of Pleasant Valley, probably when he visited the Cephus Key family, and married her. Margaret's parents were John Ross, a prosperous farmer, and Olive Ross, a pious woman who founded Pleasant Valley Baptist Church.

Leitner taught at a series of schools in Pleasant Valley and in Providence community in lower Mecklenburg County. He taught in one called the Kell School, which preceded the Carolina Academy on the same site.

The Kell School was a grammar school for local children. The Carolina Academy taught Latin and Greek and like all schools that used the name "academy," was considered to be a college preparatory school.

H.E.C. "Red Buck" Bryant once wrote a column in The Charlotte Observer about Professor Shurley, as he was called. Bryant said Shurley lived in Pleasant Valley and walked 3 miles daily to teach in the Carolina Academy in lower Providence.

Like his father and grandfather, Leitner Shurley was both loved and feared. He had the reputation of being a strict disciplinarian. One tale still told is about a group of his students who spent recess high-jumping in the nearby woods. Each boy put the blade of his pocket knife in a tree. It was agreed that the one who jumped the highest would get all the knives. Somebody tattled.

Professor Shurley rang the bell to call them in and asked them to empty their pockets. Jim Ardrey had all the knives. Each boy got a "thrashin'," and the group was brought back to the site of their transgression for a thorough cleanup of the area.

In the cemetery of Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, there is an obelisk, 9 feet tall, that marks the grave of Leitner Shurley. The monument was paid for by his former students. The last line of the inscription reads: "For thirty years a teacher and as such his labors were remarkable for ability, fidelity, gentle courtesy to his pupils and zeal for their advancement and success."