

YORKVILLE FEMALE INSTITUTE  
and  
YORK GRADED SCHOOL  
SOUTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORICAL MARKER CEREMONY

March 16, 2013  
11:00 am

ALMA MATER  
THE WHITE ROSE, 1938

In the heart of old York County  
'Neath the sky of blue,  
Stands our noble Alma Mater,  
Glorious to view.

Lift the chorus, speed it onward,  
May it never fail!  
Hail to thee, our Alma Mater  
Y.H.S. all hail!

Classic in her broad proportion  
Looks she proudly down,  
Reared against the arch of Heaven  
With her stars for crown.

<b>Prelude</b>	York Comprehensive High School Band Ensemble and Concert Choir
<b>Emcee</b>	Mary Lynn Norton <i>Culture &amp; Heritage Museums</i>
<b>Presentation of Colors</b>	York Comprehensive High School NJROTC
<b>National Anthem</b>	York Comprehensive High School Wind Ensemble
<b>Pledge of Allegiance</b>	Dr. Vernon Prosser <i>Superintendent, York School District 1</i>
<b>Alma Mater</b>	York Comprehensive High School Concert Choir
<b>Opening Remarks</b>	Carey Tilley <i>Director, Culture &amp; Heritage Museums</i>
<b>Guest Speakers</b>	John Spratt <i>Former United States Congressman and Alumni of York Elementary School</i>  Dr. J. Edward Lee, Mayor of York <i>Associate Professor of History, Winthrop University</i>  Bill Plaxco <i>Former Principal, McCelvey Elementary School</i>  John Bostic <i>Former Band Director, York Centralized High School and Former Director, McCelvey Inc.</i>
<b>Marker Unveiling</b>	
<b>Refreshments</b>	Photo presentation in Jane Bratton Spratt Reception Room

## TIMELINE OF THE McCELVEY CENTER

By Nancy Sambets.

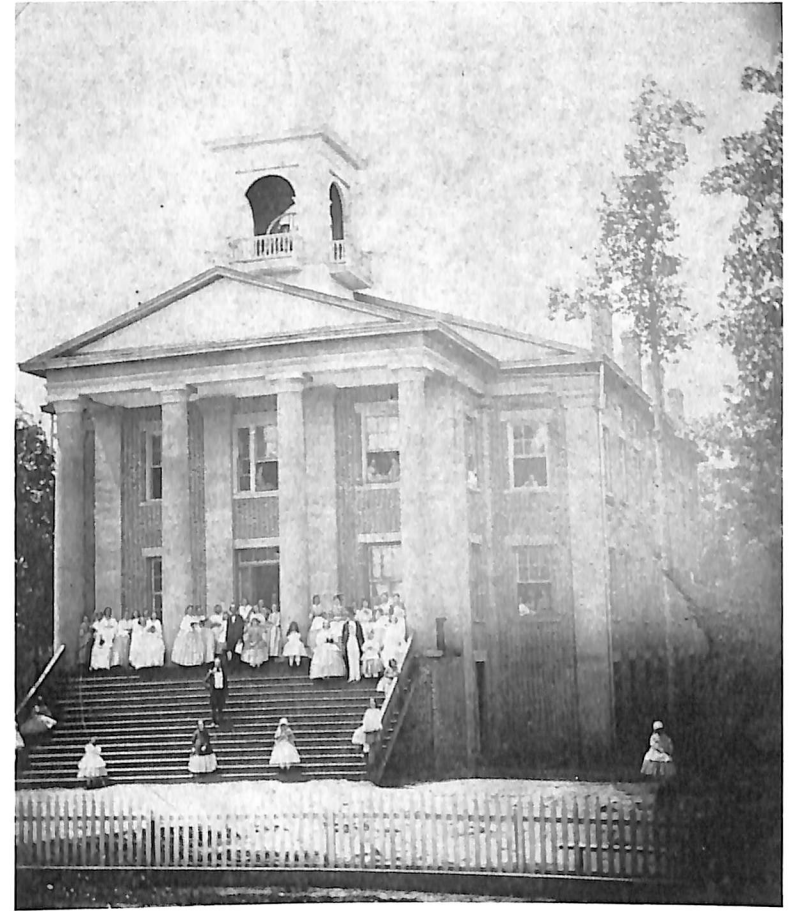
*Archivist, Culture & Heritage Museums*

The Bethel Presbytery founded the Yorkville Female Collegiate Institute in 1852 and a three-story brick building was erected on this site. The first term of classes commenced in 1853 and offered a general curriculum including spelling, reading, geography, music and French. Tuition ranged from \$6 for spelling to \$10 for embroidery and \$20 for piano. It became a boarding school in 1867 to about fifty young, aspiring women enrolled in either the Preparatory Department or Collegiate Course at \$26 per term plus \$15 a month for Board.

Opened to boys as day students in 1879, the school served as an integrated high school until South Carolina passed an act in 1888 to organize free public schools. The Yorkville Graded School opened in 1889 consisting of first through sixth grades and then "higher school." The building was destroyed when the chimney caught fire on November 16, 1900. Rebuilt on the original foundations, the new three-story structure opened in 1903 with the modern conveniences of electricity, steam heating, and plumbing.

The theater and east wing were added to the York Graded School in 1922. The school continued as grades 1-12 until a new high school was built in 1951 and then it became York Elementary School. A new building, called the annex, was constructed on the campus in 1956 for grades 1-3. Later renovations included air conditioning.

In honor of George C. McCelvey (1888-1973), the school's principal from 1912 to 1948, the school was renamed McCelvey Elementary School in 1973. Enrollment eventually outgrew the building and classes were relocated. The last school bell rang at McCelvey Elementary School on June 4, 1987.



Yorkville Female Collegiate Institute, 1861.

*Courtesy of Culture & Heritage Museums*

**1852:** Yorkville Female Collegiate Institute was founded by Bethel Presbytery. A three-story brick building was constructed and the first term of classes commenced in 1853. Rev. J. Monroe Anderson was appointed President and Rev. J.M.H. Adams as Assistant. Students boarded with local families.

**1855:** Two acres of land were deeded from E.A. Crenshaw to the Trustees of the Yorkville Female Collegiate Institute for \$1,481.67.

**1863:** Classes were suspended from February 1863 until February 1864. Rev. J. Monroe Anderson was appointed Chaplain in the 12th Regiment, SC Infantry in August 1862 until he resigned in October 1863. He returned to the Yorkville Female College in November 1864.

**1863-1866:** The Female College building was used as shelter for Civil War refugees from February 1863 until November 1866.

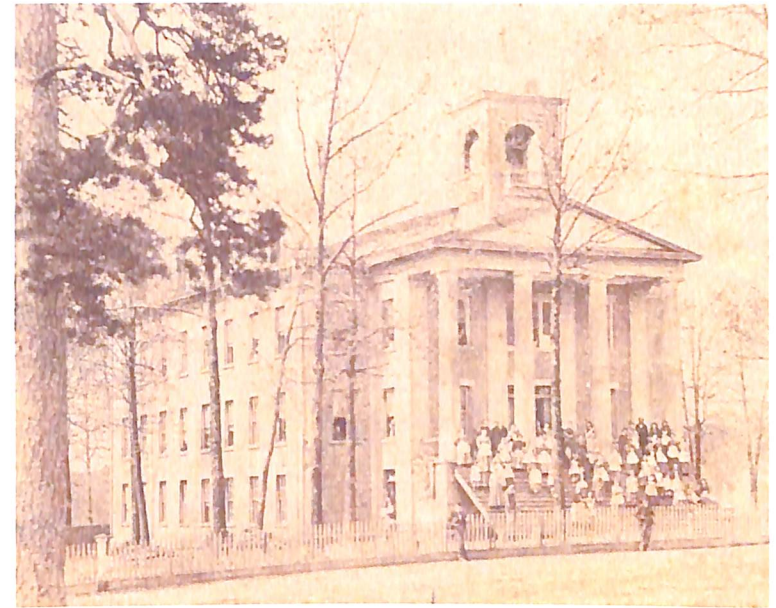
**1866:** In January, the Yorkville Female College had rented a "commodious building for teaching and boarding purposes" (identity of rented facility is unknown). The school was identified as the Yorkville Female Seminary in ads for 1866.

**1867:** Yorkville Female College grounds and building were re-opened with repairs and improvements for teaching and boarding students. The interest on the mortgage was more than the Presbytery could pay and they offered their interest in the school for sale. The school was identified as the Yorkville Female College in ads.

**1874:** The Presbytery temporarily transferred their interest to Rev. James Douglas who operated the school in their name from 1870 to 1873 and found subscribers to purchase the school. The Trustees of the College had six months to form a Stock Company to acquire the school and failed, thus allowing the property to be sold on February 19 for \$5,000. The deed lists the land, building and estate which belonged to the College including "3 Piano fortes, one Clock, one brass bell, and some School maps."

**1876:** The new stockholders of the Yorkville Female College leased the building to Mr. W.R. Jones for the purpose of a female school with boarding accommodations. Under his leadership, boys were admitted as Day Scholars in 1879 until the school suspended operations. The school was identified as the Yorkville Female Institute in ads.

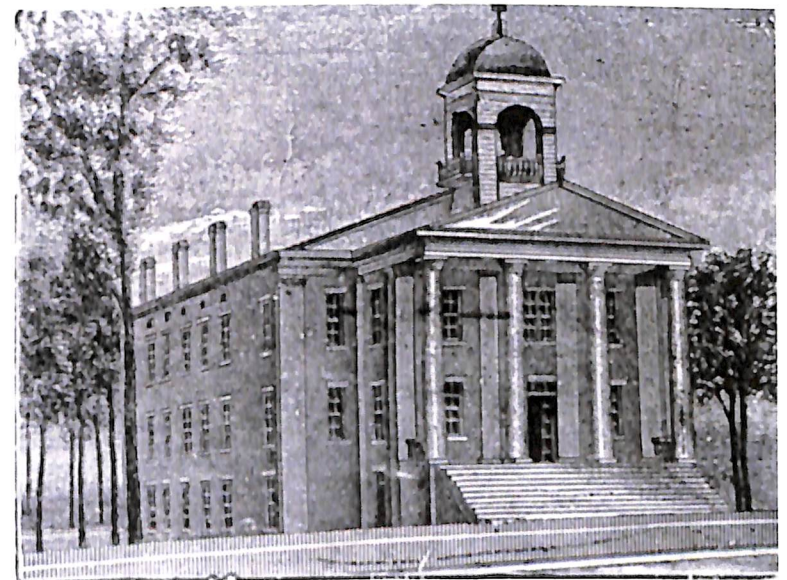
**1880:** Mr. W.R. Jones relinquished the building to Rev. W.G. White who operated the Yorkville Female Institute from September of 1880 to the spring of 1882.



Above: Yorkville Female Collegiate Institute, c. 1870.

Below: Yorkville Graded School, 1889.

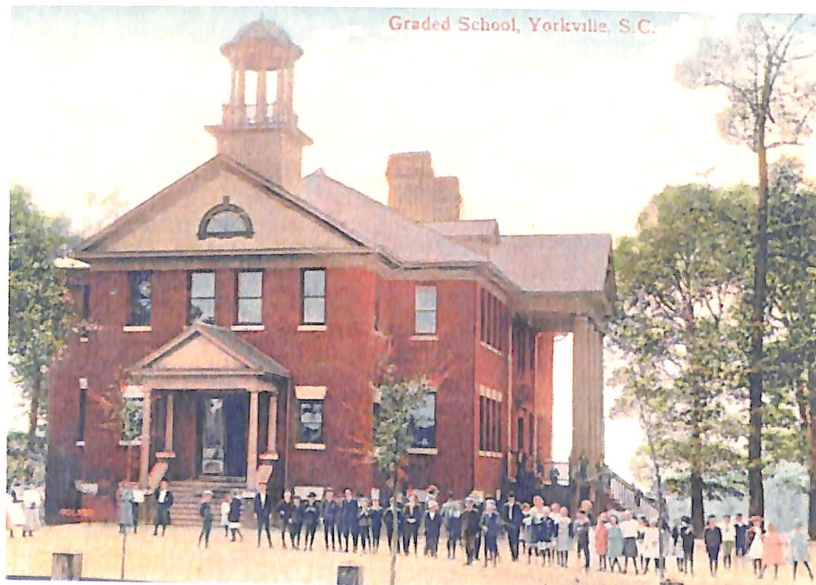
*Courtesy of Culture & Heritage Museums*





Above and below: Postcards of Yorkville Graded School. c. 1910.  
The portico faces towards South Congress Street.

*Courtesy of Culture & Heritage Museums*



**1882:** Mr. J.A. Wilson opened a "High School for Boys and Girls" in the building which functioned until 1888. The school was identified as the Yorkville High School in ads.

**1888:** The State of South Carolina passed an act on December 24 which organized a system of free schools and levied a tax to support and purchase property.

**1889:** The female college building had been repaired, the grounds cleaned up, and everything put in order to open the Yorkville Graded School as a public school for white students. Classes were held in the building until 1900.

**1893:** Spring session of the Circuit court was held in the Yorkville Graded School building after a fire at the courthouse on November 14 in 1892 destroyed the second floor. Classes were suspended during the two-week court session.

**1900:** A chimney caught fire at 11 AM on Friday November 16; although the fire department responded promptly the building sustained significant damage due to low water pressure. All of the furniture and library books were saved and no children were injured. On Monday, classes were held in the old Trinity Methodist church and school trustees arranged with Mrs. Wilson to hold school in the W.B. Wilson residence/office building located on North Congress Street. Classes were held there for thirteen months.

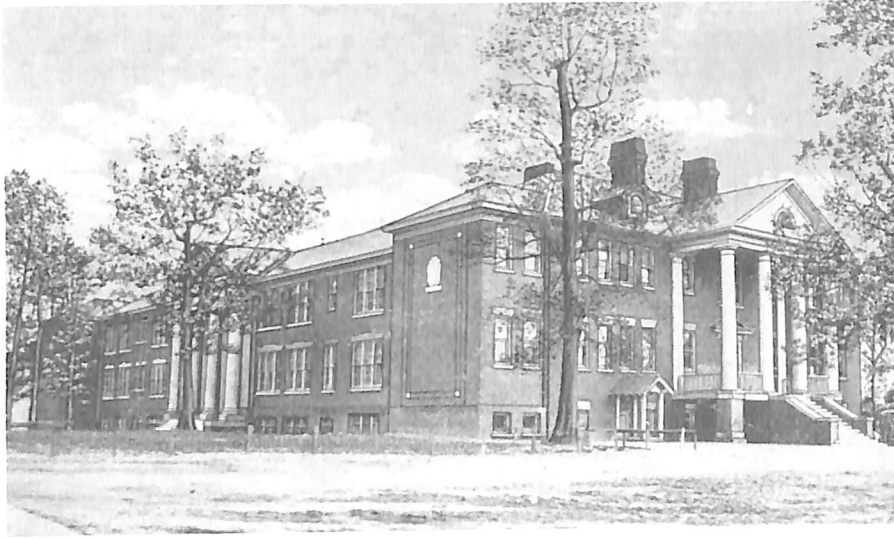
**1902:** A new building for the Yorkville Graded School was erected on the foundations of the Yorkville Female College. Two acres of land were deeded from W.H. McCorkle (last trustee of the land) to the School District of Yorkville.

**1903:** Classes were held in the new Yorkville Graded School on April 18. School furniture included 160 desks, 100 opera chairs, 200 feet of recitation seats, 500 square feet of blackboard, 4 teacher desks and 1 superintendent desk. At completion, the school was valued at \$18,000.

**1911/1912:** The Graded School Annual Report described the new modern school building as having sewer, electricity, steam heating, waterworks, and plumbing.

**1922:** The central portion and east wing were added to the 1903 building which increased the number of classrooms and included an auditorium.

**1929 - 1944:** The Barnett Brothers Circus wintered in York just down from the school on East Jefferson Street. Children of the circus workers and performers attended York Graded School. Inspired by the Barnett Brothers Circus, the sons of Police Officer Charles P. Bennett and his wife Olive began their own local circus. Most of the performers of the Bennett Brothers Circus attended York Graded School.



Above: Postcard of York Graded School, 1923.

The 1922 addition fronts East Jefferson Street.

Below: Photograph from 1937 Green Dragons yearbook.

*Courtesy of Culture & Heritage Museums*



**1940:** Mr. E.A. Montgomery (23 August 1880 – 1 April 1940) was Superintendent of the Yorkville Graded School from 1920 to 1940. His funeral was so large that it was held in the school auditorium.

**1950:** Grades 1-12 were located in the York Graded School building until a new high school was constructed, which is now Harold C. Johnson Elementary School. Classes began at York Centralized High School in January 1951 and the York Graded School became York Elementary School.

**1956:** York Elementary School was renovated to include fireproof stairwells and a fire escape on the third floor. In addition, an annex for primary classes with a cafeteria was constructed and the 1903 portico was removed.

**1964:** The Civil Rights Act became law on July 4. Under provisions of the Civil Rights Act, all school districts were ordered to submit desegregation plans by July 1 of 1965 or face court action.

**1965:** The federally approved compliance plans for York County School District One included the provision that student assignment to the individual schools was based on the choice of the parents. Parents selected from the following elementary schools: York Elementary, Jefferson Elementary, Sharon Elementary, Sharon Grove Elementary, or Hickory Grove Elementary. In the event of overcrowding, preference was given without regard to race to those who lived closest to the school and parents were permitted to make a second choice.

**1973:** Building renamed McCelvey Elementary School in honor of Mr. George C. McCelvey (21 June 1888 – 14 March 1973), who served as principal of the York Graded Schools from 1912 to 1948.

**June 4, 1987:** Last day of school held in the building. Grades 4, 5, and 6 were relocated to the Harold C. Johnson Middle School, which is now Harold C. Johnson Elementary School.

**1987:** York County School District turned over ownership and operation of the building and one acre of land to McCelvey Incorporated.

**2001:** Culture and Heritage Museums (CHM) took over management of the facility.

**2013:** Annex being renovated so that it can house the CHM collections of archival, historical, and art objects in a secure and environmentally controlled storage facility.



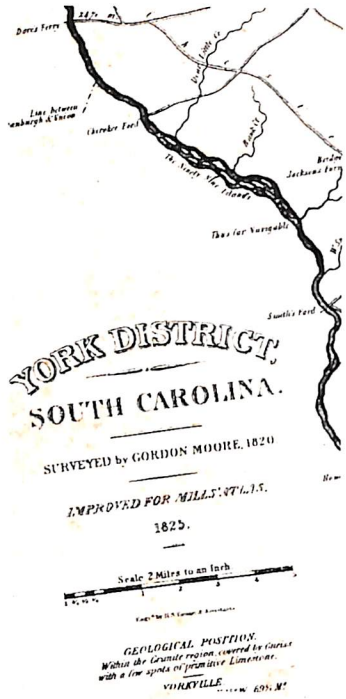
Above: Front of building from 1945 White Rose Yearbook.  
 Below: Sketch of building by artist Kay Fuller Mitchell, 2007.  
*Courtesy of Culture & Heritage Museums*



Photograph of George C. McCelvey from the 1946  
 White Rose Yearbook. Principal from 1912 to 1948.  
*Courtesy of Culture & Heritage Museums*

**SOURCES:**

- Bill Bennett Collection, RG-2, Historical Center of York County
- Love Collection, RG-114, Historical Center of York County
- McKelvey School Collection, RG-168, Historical Center of York County
- Photograph Collection, RG-17, Historical Center of York County
- Postcard Collection, RG-57, Historical Center of York County
- York High School Annuals, Rare Books, Historical Center of York County
- Yorkville Enquirer, Newspaper Collection, Historical Center of York County
- 1911/1912 Graded School Annual Report, Historical Center of York County



## HISTORICAL CENTER of YORK COUNTY

The Historical Center of York County was opened in 1989 to serve as the County's archival repository, and to collect, preserve, interpret, and maintain information of historical importance. The Historical Center provides opportunities for genealogical and historical research through its extensive collections. Educational workshops take place on designated Saturdays and are free and open to the public. It is also home to the Southern Revolutionary War Institute.

## LOWRY FAMILY THEATER

Throughout its long history, the McCelvey Center Theater has provided access to the performing arts. The historic theater seats over 500 guests, has a lovely 1920s ambiance and is noted for its remarkable acoustics. The Lowry Family Theater is the setting for an annual music series, showcasing established and emerging musical acts whose work embodies the culture of the region. The facility is also a venue for community events and is available for rentals.



## SOUTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORICAL MARKER

46-52  
YORK COUNTY

### SIDE I

#### YORKVILLE FEMALE INSTITUTE

Yorkville Female Institute, also called Yorkville Female College, was the first school here, where private schools and then public schools operated 1854-1987. The institute, founded in 1852, opened in 1854 and built a three-story brick school. In 1863, during the Civil War, it suspended classes and housed refugees. Yorkville High School, a private boys' and girls' school, operated here 1882-1888.

(continued on next side)

Sponsored by the Yorkville Historical Society and the Culture & Heritage Museums of York County, 2012

### SIDE II

#### YORK GRADED SCHOOL

(continued from other side)

Yorkville Graded School, a public school, occupied the old institute 1889-1900. It burned, and a new brick school was built in 1902, with an east wing and theater added in 1922. This became an elementary school after a new high school was built in 1951. In 1973 it was renamed to honor George C. McCelvey (1888-1973), principal 1912-1948. Since the school closed in 1987, McCelvey Center has been used by the community and the Culture & Heritage Museums of York County.

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