

EARLY INNOVATIVE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS AT WINTHROP

From the beginning, innovative teacher training programs have been a hallmark of Winthrop College. David Bancroft Johnson, the founder and first president, intentionally hired teacher trainers who represented progressive education. As a result, Winthrop, during the pre-World War I era, became known as one of the four best teacher training colleges in the United States.

Johnson hired the best instructors he could get on the recommendation of educational leaders. Four of the early teacher trainers were exceptional. Mary Leonard, Annie Bonham, Minnie Macfeat and Hettie Browne all had vision, determination and the necessary skills to turn raw, but eager, future teachers into the best that the state had ever seen.

Mary Leonard of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, who laid the foundations of the teacher education program, and Annie Bonham, the vivacious daughter of a South Carolina governor, did all of their work with Winthrop in Columbia before the college moved to Rock Hill.

Even though Annie Bonham stayed in Columbia (where she conducted a school called Bon Air for many years), her "outdoor school" concept was modified and practiced at Rock Hill for some years. Miss Bonham believed that children needed much fresh air in order to keep their minds active and divided their time about equally between physical and mental activities. The classrooms had one wall that could be pushed aside and was generally kept open except on the most blustery and raw winter days. Pictures survive showing rosy-cheeked children at their lessons while bundled in quilted sacks that resemble sleeping bags.

Sarah Withers (1873-1955), a Chester native and early Winthrop College graduate, became a national figure in education.

Miss Withers was the author of four books that made a difference. The first book was coauthored with Dr. James P. Kinard who was later the second president of Winthrop. It was a grammar text for high school students that was long on the state-adopted textbook list.

The second book, conceived and written by Miss Withers alone, made an even larger impact. It was a basal reader for children learning to read, titled "Child World Reader." The first part featured a boy called Baby Ray. Although only 26 pages were devoted to Baby Ray, the more cumbersome title was dropped in favor of "the Baby Ray book."

Twenty-two states, including all southern states, adopted Baby Ray as a first reader. Miss Withers, who resigned in 1916 to become editor-in-chief of Johnson Publishing Co., was gratified to eventually sell more than 17 million copies of her book.

Sarah Withers also published two first readers for adults who were functionally illiterate: "Letter Writing for All," and "Good Workers All." She firmly believed that adults needed adult topics written on a simple level and provided appropriate materials. It sounds obvious now but it was a new idea for its time.

Withers Building on the Winthrop College campus is named for Sarah Withers.

Hetty Browne came to Winthrop in 1911 to conduct her famous "farm school" which was intended to better the quality of rural education. Curriculum materials were plants, animals, soils and seeds. The tools for children's learning were plows, hoes, books, pencils, paper, yardsticks, saws, globes, pots and pans.

What Hetty Browne really taught was problem-solving skills by forcing the child

to continuously make decisions about things that mattered to him. The teacher asked questions; the child "discovered" the answers. Everything that happened in Mrs. Browne's school evolved around the principle of "learning by doing."