

In the 1880s and 1890s, railroads were the way to travel. Paved roads had not yet been built for automobiles. The "iron horse" had long since proven its superiority over stagecoaches. Railroad



Nearby history

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companies were making money hand over fist. One of the most popular railroad offerings was the group-excursion package. It became quite common for railroad companies to recruit whole trainloads of passengers for baseball games, state fairs, garden tours and political conventions.

In May 1889 the Charleston, Columbia and Charlotte Railroad, popularly known as the 3C's railroad, arranged with Rock Hill school officials to take their students on an excursion to celebrate

the end of the school year. In September 1888, the grade school opened as Rock Hill's first truly public school, following a successful bond campaign led by the Rev. James Spratt White. When the school opened it had 140 students. By May it had 276 students, with 204 of them ready to board the special train.

A mogul locomotive arrived decorated with wreaths of flowers and pulling "elegant palace cars." Excited youngsters, parents, teachers, trustees and several town officials boarded by 9:30 a.m. The first stop was at Old Point, the depot in Ebenezer. A party of Ebenezer folks came on board. A larger number boarded at Yorkville.

It was 26 miles from Yorkville to Blacksburg where Maj. John F. Jones, superintendent of the 3C's, met the party. Cannons were fired to welcome the train to the "progressive town of Blacksburg." The Blacksburg Brass Band led the school children on a hike up Whitaker's Mountain, a half-mile

from the town. On top of the mountain was a 50-foot observatory and a large shed.

From the observatory atop Whitaker's mountain, one could see the towns of Kings Mountain, N.C., Shelby, N.C., and Yorkville. At 1 p.m. a picnic meal was spread out and the people were free to visit Blacksburg until the 3 p.m. boarding for a special side trip to view Buffalo Creek. The creek was considered as attractive as the French Broad River and could be viewed from the train, which ran alongside it for over a mile.

At 5:30 p.m., the train headed back for Rock Hill.

When Winthrop College came to Rock Hill in 1895, a small depot was built behind the college. In September, and again in June, the Winthrop stop was very busy with piles of baggage to be picked up along with the students.

There were numerous excursion trips that were arranged by the college. Before a woman gradu-

ated she had the opportunity to see both the mountains and the ocean (a new experience for most students). A trip to Charleston was planned for alternate years with N.C. trips to Black Mountain, Asheville or Linville Falls.

Winthrop excursion trips were intended to be educational as well as fun. Accompanying faculty taught classes on the spot (geology in the mountains, botany at the gardens, history at Fort Sumter, and so on).

In the fall, almost every woman on campus went to the state fair (escorted by President D.B. Johnson and the entire faculty). The special-rate round-trip tickets were \$1 and the women wore their navy blue uniforms, of course. There were reduced prices for unformed groups. There also was a rule that whenever the train stopped at a station, the women must all be wearing their navy blue hats.

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'Iron horse' provided view of the world

■ Packages offered mountains and the ocean.

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