

90 years ago, Hickory Grove

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THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

was thriving little town

Hickory Grove in western York County showed a count of 380 people in the last census. Not very large, and like most isolated towns that lost their railroad (in this case, the Charleston, Cincinnati & Chicago), not likely to boom any time soon.

Ninety years ago, it was a different story.

That's when reporter James Carswell of The Record, a Rock Hill newspaper, wrote a feature story on Hickory Grove. Carswell found a railroad station that handled 4,000 bales of cotton a year and enough molasses and sorghum seed being shipped by W.S. Wilkerson to "make the railway



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Nearby
History

station smell like New Orleans."

Leaving the train station, Carswell found one short block of stores of brick and frame construction. The town's major merchants, more often than not, bore the name of Whitesides.

W.M. and J.H.D. Whitesides owned a cotton gin and sawmill and grew much of the cotton that

was ginned there. R.D., J.D. and W.C. Whitesides mined gold three miles south of town.

I.N. and T.M. McGill owned a mercantile business and handled beef and milk cattle. Carswell called I.N. McGill the champion apiarist of the region.

T.M. Whisonant, a former merchant, was organizing a bank with more than \$12,000 subscribed. The local cotton buyer, C.M. Whisonant, was also the owner of the Commercial Hotel (every town with a train station was bound to have a hotel). He also had hopes of getting a knitting mill for Hickory Grove.

I.M. Leech and Dr. C.C. Leech

owned the Hickory Grove Drug Co. There was a second drugstore, this one unidentified, but owned by Dr. T.S.R. Ward who also owned plantations and bought and sold real estate. The day-by-day operation of the drugstore was by Dr. B.N. Miller of Smyrna, a Johns Hopkins graduate.

Also downtown was the Farmers Mutual Life Insurance Co., owned by the "Sorghum King," W.S. Wilkerson. Wilkerson had invented a new process in the milling of molasses.

Hickory Grove also had the Grier Orphanage with 16 youngsters taken care of by the Rev. J.H. Simpson.

Walter J. Moorehead owned a general merchandise store along with a chicken farm that produced about 15,000 dozen eggs a year.

So what are we to conclude from all of this?

If anything, it is that the age of specialization had not hit Hickory Grove — or other small towns, for that matter. The major services were for the numerous farms around them. Most of the farms grew cotton, but there was also timber, chickens, cattle and sorghum to be marketed by rail.

Probably, though, if you had asked locals to name the most prominent citizen, they would not have chosen merchant or farmer.

They would likely say, "Professor Slaughter."

W.S. Slaughter was the former head of the Hickory Grove School who had become the head of the S.C. branch of Woodmen of the World, a combination fraternal society and insurance business.

Woodmen of the World was popular in small towns and rural communities. As proof, walk through small-town cemeteries and note the number of Woodmen of the World tombstones.

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