

HICKORY GROVE, AN AGRICULTURAL 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 their case the Charleston, Cincinnati & Chicago), not likely to boom any time soon.

Ninety years ago it was a different story when reporter James Carswell of The Record, a former 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 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 3 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 with his 60 stand of bee gums.

T. M. Whisonant, a former merchant, was organizing a bank with over \$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 drug store, 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 drug store was by Dr. B. N. Miller of Smyrna, a Johns Hopkins graduate.

Also downtown as 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 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. He also bought cotton and served as the town's Notary Public.

If there is any conclusion to make from all of this 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, sorghum, to be marketed by rail.

Probably, though, if you had asked the local citizens to name their 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 South Carolina branch of the Woodmen of the World, a combination fraternal society and insurance business. The W. of W. was extremely popular in small towns and rural communities. As proof, walk through their cemeteries and note the number of Woodmen of the World tombstones.

By Louise Pettus