

## OAK RIDGE SCHOOL & WINTHROP

Early one Saturday morning in October 1915, a dozen farmers were hard at work on the grounds around a small rural schoolhouse. They mowed, sodded bluegrass, cleared underbrush, cut out trees and stacked the wood in a neat pile.

Inside the school, farm wives scrubbed and polished every inch of the building. While the work went on, a big pot of soup bubbled on the stove. All the women had brought something for the soup they would serve at noon to all those who had worked to beautify the building and its grounds.

The work was part of a project taken on by the Oak Ridge Community, a few miles outside Rock Hill on the Chester highway. Family names included Steele, Faires and Patterson.

In the afternoon, their children and others held meetings of their clubs. The older girls and some of the women were members of the Bread Club. The younger girls belonged to a Tomato Club and the boys had their choice of belonging to either the Corn Club or Pig Club.

These activities stemmed from a school improvement movement that originated in Maine in 1898 and spread from there to different sections of the country. The first school improvement association in the South was begun in Richmond by a woman's club.

Winthrop College's first president and a former school superintendent, David Bancroft Johnson, heard about the Richmond work and investigated. He was impressed by it and the work of the North Carolina Betterment Association.

In 1902, Johnson organized the South Carolina Association for the Improvement of Schools. Members of Winthrop's senior class were the first members. They met as study groups to address the particular problems of rural schools. With an almost missionary fervor, the girls pledged to seek positions in communities that needed the leadership skills they had learned as a part of their teacher training.

In 1904 the organization adopted a new name, The South Carolina School Improvement Association. It was composed of Winthrop faculty and the college's graduating classes of 1903 and 1904.

Any white woman who wished to join was eligible. By 1910 the membership was more than 10,000 statewide with clubs in every county. There were no club dues; only service was required. Each woman was required to do one thing during the year that improved a school district. At this time four out of five South Carolina schools were rural.

The association issued pamphlets and made suggestions for improvement. The Oak Ridge group clearing the grounds and scrubbing the building were following one of the major lines of improvement. The corn, tomato and bread clubs were another type of improvement.

The association also stressed better pupil attendance, building up school libraries, consolidating schools, and initiating local taxation to provide a sound financial base.

The clubs were expected to make the schools the intellectual center of the community, but they did not forget recreation. At Oak Ridge every Friday evening the whole family would gather with their neighbors to hear a talk that was intended to improve the quality of life and then would play games, sing and dance.

The enthusiasm of the Oak Ridge community for school improvement ran high. Farmers plowed and manured a large acreage for the school garden that Winthrop recommended as essential to a good rural school curriculum. The community had bazaars and box suppers to raise money to equip a modern kitchen for the school.

Oak Ridge School added rooms and space enough for two Winthrop College student teachers and for their supervising teacher when she visited. The famed Hetty Browne, considered by the U. S. Department of Education to be the nation's leading authority on rural education, was the Winthrop supervisor and Oak Ridge became one of her "model schools" in 1915.

Educators from all over the United States came to see Mrs. Browne's Farm School (on Winthrop's back campus) and some of them took the trouble to ride one of the farm wagons out to the Oak Ridge School or a companion school, the India Hook School at the junction of Mount Gallant and India Hook Roads.