

Rock Hill Successful In Bid For Winthrop

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City Turns Out To Greet Committee Inspecting Sites For Relocated College

On April 20, 1893, Benjamin Tillman, South Carolina's colorful governor, along with State Superintendent of Schools W.D. Mayfield and nine members of the state legislature, were in Rock Hill for a site inspection.

The previous day the delegation had been in Chester; the next day they were to go to Spartanburg.

The three towns — Chester, Rock Hill and Spartanburg — were the survivors of an advertised bid for a location of Winthrop Normal and Industrial College.

Initiated seven years previously, the small teacher-training institution founded by David Bancroft Johnson, the Columbia city school superintendent, had outgrown its Columbia facilities.

Its promise and the state's need for professionally trained teachers was such that the state legislature had been persuaded by Johnson, with strong backing from Tillman, to take over the two-year institution and turn it into a four-year college for women.

The previous year the town of Anderson had edged out Columbia as the Winthrop site. But the validity of Anderson's bonds became questionable and Anderson was dropped.

Chester, Rock Hill and Spartanburg made bids for the school that resulted in an invitation from Tillman to come to the governor's mansion to make their offers to a special committee chaired by Johnson.

In addition to \$50,000 in town bonds and a site said to be worth \$15,000, Chester offered itself as a railroad center (three railroads converged there), with the "highest hills for location and two kinds of water," along with the "best and liveliest" of towns.

Spartanburg offered \$40,000 in city bonds, \$18,000 from other sources and "encampment grounds" valued at \$15,000.

Rock Hill offered \$60,000 in town bonds, a site worth \$15,000, two million bricks at \$4.75 a thousand delivered and \$700 in cash. And the Rock Hill Construction Co. offered to furnish all lumber at 70 cents per 100 feet.

Rock Hill had three possible sites — Miss

Emma Steel's place, in front of W.D. Stewart's residence (now the president's home at Winthrop), and the eventual winner, a site near the pavilion in Oakland Park.

For inspection committee's visit, schoolchildren from all over York County were invited to a "basket picnic" in Oakland Park. They came on excursion trains from Blacksburg, Fort Mill and Catawba.

The famed Gold Hill Band was on hand. One hundred little girls from the Rock Hill Grade School, designated as "future Winthrop students," led the parade of children, estimated to number around 1,200.

Besides schoolchildren, the town of Rock Hill had invited all the mayors in the county, all county officials, all newspaper editors and local leaders.

Every automobile in Rock Hill was used to carry the dignitaries and invited guests.

Tillman addressed the large crowd in front of the Presbyterian High School (now the central section of Withers-WTS Building on the campus).

Edwin Joynes, a member of the inspection committee, was then called upon to speak. Joynes said he had found there were 20 boys at the Presbyterian High School who were studying Greek. He said he was most impressed.

He also confessed that he had never heard of Rock Hill before. Tillman interrupted Joynes to say, "I would be ashamed to say that."

The following day W.H. Stewart, member of the state legislature from York County, telegraphed: "Rock Hill the winning city. A great victory for the hub of Piedmont. Eight to two."

The two negative votes were cast by Gen. R.R. Hemphill and F.B. Gary for Spartanburg.

Rock Hill "went wild." Factory whistles went off along with every noisemaker in town. A band led a citizens' victory march through town.

When the cornerstone of Main Building (now Tillman Building) was laid on May 12, 1894, special trains brought more than 10,000 people from all over South Carolina to witness it.

With no complaint and a great deal of satisfaction, Rock Hill made the last payment on the Winthrop bonds in January 1962.

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