

## SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORY PAGEANT, 1921

"It was probably the most gigantic spectacle ever presented in the South," was the way one newspaper described "The Making of South Carolina," a historical pageant that was sponsored by the South Carolina Historical Commission and performed on the Winthrop College campus, May 6, 1921.

The number of people attending the "glorious spectacle" was estimated to be more than 7,000. They came from all over the state and beyond. All seats for the amphitheatre were sold beforehand and the college built an additional section that would add 1,000 seats to the original grandstands.

"Spectacle" was not an over-statement. The pageant, written by J. E. Walmsley, head of the Winthrop College history department, had a cast of more than 1,400, a full-fledged orchestra, 50 horses, and more than 1,600 costumes were worn by the cast which included all of the Winthrop Training School student body, as well as the entire Winthrop College student body. The governor of South Carolina, Robert Cooper, also participated. D. B. Johnson, the Winthrop president, was the master of the pageant.

When D. B. Johnson sought publicity for the college he usually managed to get it. Wanting the world to know about Winthrop College, he also contracted with Fox Film Company to make a movie of Winthrop College and had them on campus at the time of the pageant so that pageant scenes could be used in the promotional movie which played in movie houses across the country.

\ The pageant was an attempt to recount the history of the state through dramatic episodes depicting key events. Following a "Symbolic Prelude" which depicted the four seasons of the year struggling to capture a Ball which is caught by "Sunbeams" and then bursts (gives birth to the state), the history begins. First, Capt. Jean Ribaut is met by Indians who perform tribal dances for him and then the scene shifts to an English family building a log cabin.

The log cabin evolved into a more affluent antebellum home by use of additional props. The pioneer family members faded into the background to be replaced by 60 hoop-skirted belles participating in a garden party. By using dancers throughout (trained by the inimitable Mrs. Ruth Potwine Bartlett of the Winthrop faculty), Walmsley was able to continually shift the scenery.

Some people thought the scene showing South Carolina's secession from the union to be the most dramatic point of the pageant. As soon as the Ordinance of Secession was signed the orchestra broke into "The Bonnie Blue Flag."

Others were impressed by the military action as Confederate and Federal troops confronted each other. "The Clash" episode opened with the strains of "John Brown's Body" which signalled the arrival of the Federal troops. They were slowly marching by when suddenly the orchestra struck up "Dixie" and the rebel yell "rent the air." Many fell in the fighting and the orchestra then played the "Death March."

The college rented the military uniforms but all other costumes were designed, cut and sewn by students in the household arts department under the direction of Miriam Myers. A generous amount of silk, satin, and chiffon went into the 1,600 costumes which were frequently trimmed in silver and crystal trimmings.

After Wade Hampton and the Red Shirts "save" South Carolina in 1876, the scene shifts to the Age of Progress set on the Winthrop College campus. The playbook explains:

SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORY PAGEANT, 1951

It was probably the most gigantic spectacle ever presented in the South, was the way one newspaper described "The Making of South Carolina," a historical pageant that was sponsored by the South Carolina Historical Commission and performed on the Winthrop College campus, May 6, 1951.

The number of people attending the "glorious spectacle" was estimated to be more than 7,000. They came from all over the state and beyond. All seats for the amphitheater were sold beforehand and the college built an additional section that would add 1,000 seats to the original grandstands.

"Spectacle" was not an over-statement. The pageant, written by J. E. Wainwright, head of the Winthrop College history department, had a cast of more than 1,400, a full-blooded orchestra of 200 voices, and more than 1,000 costumes were worn by the cast which included all of the Winthrop Training School student body, as well as the entire Winthrop College student body. The governor of South Carolina, Robert Cooper, also participated. D. E. Johnson, the Winthrop president, was the master of the pageant.

Walter D. E. Johnson sought publicity for the college he usually managed to get it. Wanting the world to know about Winthrop College, he also commiserated with Fox Film Company to make a movie of Winthrop College and had them on campus at the time of the pageant so that pageant scenes could be used in the promotional movie which played in movie houses across the country.

The pageant was an attempt to recount the history of the state through dramatic episodes depicting key events. Following a "Symbiotic Prelude" which depicted the four seasons of the year struggling to capture a ball which is caught by "Stumpbeams" and then pursued to the street, the history begins. First, Capt. John Ribault is met by Indians who perform tribal dances for him and then the scene shifts to an English family building a log cabin.

The log cabin evolved into a more affluent manor in the use of additional props. The pioneer family members faded into the background to be replaced by 600 skilled ballet dancers participating in a garden party. By using dancers throughout, trained by the instructor Mrs. Ruth Boring Barton of the Winthrop faculty, Wainwright was able to continually shift the scenery.

Some people thought the scene showing South Carolina's secession from the union to be the most dramatic point of the pageant. As soon as the Ordinance of Secession was signed the orchestra broke into "The Bonnie Blue Flag."

Others were impressed by the military action as Confederates and Federal troops confronted each other. "The Clash" episode opened with the strains of "John Brown's Body" which signalled the arrival of the Federal troops. They were slowly marching by when suddenly the orchestra struck up "Dixie" and the rebel yell "Mars, Mars" fell in the fighting and the orchestra then played the "South March."

The college rented the military uniforms but all other costumes were designed, cut and sewn by students in the homebased arts department under the direction of Minnie Myers. A general amount of silk satin and chiffon went into the 1,500 costumes which were equipped with silver and crystal trimmings.

After Wade Hampton and the Red Shirts" gave South Carolina in 1876, the scene shifted to the 1950s of Progress set on the Winthrop College campus. The play book explains

"The music takes up the Winthrop Alma Mater and the campus is filled with students preparing for a festal occasion. Members of athletic teams and student organizations are busy...."

The play script has a Winthrop student from the North say: "And when Dr. Johnson came North to get money for Winthrop, Grandfather was one of the first to help. He said that when a college in South Carolina was named for one of John Winthrop's descendants, the country was united again. He used to say this was the one college in the country where the lessons of reconciliation could really be taught."

The Record newspaper pronounced "The Making of South Carolina" a great success, saying: "Nothing seems impossible to a Winthrop student."

Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop University history professor.