

A missionary's memories of tiny Catawba school

Students made their bats, balls for baseball

Willard Hayes, a Mormon missionary, came to the Catawba Indian Reservation in 1935 as a teacher, Boy Scout leader and spiritual leader. In 1973, Mrs. Emma Echols and Mrs. Frances Wade interviewed Hayes and his wife, Dessa, at their home in Gaffney. The interview was done for the Southeastern Indian Oral History Project at the University of Florida.

Hayes recalled the Catawba school as having two rooms. The other teacher was Miss Ethel Smith, who taught first and second grade. One student was doing ninth-grade work. While eligible to attend Rock Hill schools, none did.

There was no transportation until a government agent, a woman, loaned her car to bring students into Rock Hill. Not long after that, Samuel Beck found a "big old long car that he could carry a whole bunch in, and he would take them."

The agent paid the tuition out of funds allotted her by the federal government. The agent also provided the money for the books, paper and pencils. Hayes' salary was \$90 a month.

The second year, Hayes taught alone in a "jam-packed" classroom. Some of the older students helped teach the younger ones, and "the girls liked to have something to do other than lessons, so they'd sweep the floor to get out of doing lessons."

Water came from a spring. Students fetched the water in a bucket. Hayes didn't like the idea of everyone drinking out of a

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common dipper, so he taught the youngsters how to make paper cups out of sheets of paper.

There was no lunch program at first. The students were allowed to go home for lunch. Many of the boys failed to come back in the afternoon — especially in the spring when the fish were biting.

Hayes recollected that the students were especially talented in art, but there were no art supplies. He didn't remember how he got the money, but he managed to get a supply of beads, bead looms, wire, needles and thread. The children made rings, bracelets, watch fobs and neck-

laces, which they sold to tourists. When children visited from other schools, they often bought them for souvenirs.

When Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt visited Winthrop College, Chief Samuel Blue of the Catawba tribe presented her with a special beaded necklace made by a student that showed how the Indian reservation originally had 144,000 acres. One little black bead among red and yellow beads showed the size of the reservation at the present time. Roosevelt later sent a note of thanks, but Hayes had no idea what happened to the note.

Mrs. Echols asked what kind of sports program went on at the Catawba school.

Hayes replied, "You give them a baseball and a bat, and that's all they wanted. They were great ballplayers. Girls played and boys played and everybody played

ball."

The bats and balls were made by the children. A piece of board would be hacked with an ax or sawed into the general shape of a bat. Sometimes the students would unravel their stockings, place a small rock in the middle and wind the thread around it. Then, to keep the ball from unraveling, they would use a needle and thread and sew back and forth.

Hayes said that he believed that he was the last person to hear two Catawbans use the Catawba language in conversation. Sally Gordon would come to the well at the church to draw water in the early morning and would

talk with Blue.

Dr. Frank Speck of the University of Pennsylvania came almost every summer. He had learned the language and "... he devised a phonetic alphabet so that he could write that Catawba language so it could be read." Speck continually asked questions about the traditions and the customs of the Catawba.

Willard Hayes said Blue had leadership qualities that would have made him outstanding in any society — "a natural-born leader."

Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop University history professor. Her column appears Sundays.

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