

Clinton Junior College Rooted In Religion

By RON CHEPESIUK
And LOUISE PETTUS

In 1894 the presiding elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches of York County was the Rev. Nero A. Crockett, D.D.

Crockett was a native of Lancaster County and a pioneer of the AME Zion movement in the Carolinas. He had built many churches, often using the ax and saw himself.

Now he was building a college modeled after the famed Tuskegee Institute, founded by Booker T. Washington in Alabama. Crockett was at a church conference in Montgomery in 1880 where he heard Washington explain the good things that could be accomplished in an industrial school. Students could work and learn at the same time. Crockett left determined to some day build a college in South Carolina.

The idea remained only a dream for more than a decade. Then one day Crockett was speaking at a church in the Pleasant Valley community in Lancaster County. He said that a man — to be free — must make the fist blow and even if educated must be willing himself to pay the first dollar.

Mrs. Eliza Springs, a widow and former slave, came forward with a dollar in her hand saying, "Take this dollar and educate the colored children."

Eliza Springs later said that she earned the dollar by cutting sprouts on Col. Leroy Springs' plantation.

Crockett said the widow's act forced him to implement the dream.

The college began in a dilapidated church building in Rock Hill with one teacher and six pupils. The operating cost the first year was 83.5 cents a day.

The first name of the college was Clinton Institute. It was named for the presiding bishop, Isom Caleb Clinton (1830-1904). Bishop Clinton was born in Cedar Creek Township of Lancaster County. His mother was a slave and his father was free. His owner was Irvin Clinton, a leading lawyer. Clinton recognized his slave's outstanding ability and saw to it that he received a good education.

Isom handled most of his master's plantation affairs. The relationship of the master and slave was very close.



Staff Photo By J. ALLE

Clinton Junior College Dean P.P. Smith walks on the campus



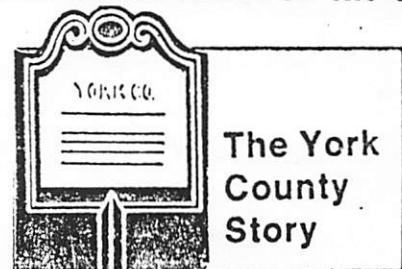
Chepesiuk

Pettus

In Lancaster's Old Presbyterian Church cemetery there is a simple tombstone erected by the slave for his master. Carved in the stone are the words, "Farewell, Isom, if I am lost I am pleading for mercy. You can't be lost pleading for mercy."

After the Civil War, Clinton, the former slave, was elected treasurer of Lancaster County. He served the county well for eight years. He was presiding elder of the AME Zion Church at the time he erected the tombstone to his former master in 1886. By 1892 he was bishop of the AME Zion Church, a church which was founded in New York City in 1796 and historically drew most of its membership from northern urban centers.

The first AME Zion Church built in the South was built in 1864 in New Bern, N.C. The first in York County was built three years later at a site southwest of Yorkville and called AME Zion, Unity. The same year the S.C. Conference was organized in Chester. By 1904-1905, Clinton College had 10 instructors and 265 pupils. It also needed more land and another building. The college



was almost moved to Yorkville that year but acquired some adjacent farm land for \$2,000 and raised \$3,000 for a "farm boys building." The college stayed in Rock Hill.

The first president of Clinton College (now Clinton Junior College) was Robert J. Crockett. He was replaced in 1908 by Prof. James Boulware, "... a good man and laudable educator." Boulware was president for the next 23 years.

Of numerous AME Zion colleges initiated over the years, only three survive: the Tuskegee Institute, Livingstone College in Salisbury, N.C., and Clinton Junior College.

Clinton's 1984-85 enrollment was 95, according to Dean P.P. Smith, who said the projected enrollment for this fall is 105. The school, which has 14 faculty members, currently offers associate (two-year) degrees in arts and business administration, Smit said.

Ron Chepesiuk is head of archives and special collections Winthrop College. Louise Pettus assistant professor in the Winthrop School of Education.