

# NEARBY HISTORY:

## Early Schools

*Salaries were low. Turnover was high. Many poor students were overlooked, yet classes were large.*

The earliest school in this area, and probably the oldest in Upstate South Carolina, was associated with Old Waxhaw Presbyterian church.

The second minister at Old Waxhaw, William Richardson, established the Waxhaw Academy in 1759. For nearly a century, a series of ministers, or men educated at universities, trained a remarkable list of outstanding men. Among those educated at the Waxhaw Academy were President Andrew Jackson, Gov. Stephen Miller, U.S. Sen. and Judge William Smith, and the Rev. John Brown, who founded Franklin College, forerunner of the University of Georgia.

Academies established by churches were common but as early as 1770, the colony of South Carolina appropriated money for the education of the poor.

Usually the poor were not accepted by the academies, but teachers (invariably men) would often appear in communities and persuade nonpoor families to send their children to him. Tuition would be charged to supplement the state's contribution. Instruction might take place in a home or in a roughly built log cabin.

Ebenezer Academy at Ebenezer A.R.P. Church in Rock Hill was started in 1819. The peak years were 1821-1881. Whether it was due to Ebenezer's fine rep-

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utation or the persuasiveness of York County's legislature members, Ebenezer Academy was awarded \$10,000 by the state legislature. At the time, Ebenezer was all male. In 1834, a female academy was established separate from the male academy. In 1877, the schools became co-educational.

The first academy for girls that is recorded was known as Steel Creek Female School. It was established in northern Fort Mill township. A newspaper known as Western Carolinian on Dec. 12, 1820, carried a lengthy story, which reported the school was "under the direction of Miss Dorcas Alexander... at lower Steel-creek church, in York dist. S.C." It was mentioned that the school was first opened in the spring of 1819 and that there were 40 students.

Parents and the public were invited by the "Board of Managers" of the Steel Creek Female School to hear the students' responses to examination questions in reading, spelling, geography, history, Bible, arithmetic, composition, natural and moral philosophies, along with displays of needlework, embroidered maps and drawing on pa-

per or silk.

A list of Fort Mill teachers from 1808 to 1861 shows that every teacher was male. The list also shows that the teachers were likely to spend only a year or two on the job. Example: Hugh White, 1808; Hugh Ticer, 1809; William Davidson, 1810; Thomas Hutchison, 1811-13; Larkin Stowe, 1814; Thomas Garrison, 1815-17, etc.

Salaries were low. James Steele, 1855-1931, taught school at Belair in Indian Land but in 1886, when the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company was established, he quit and went to work as a carpenter at the cotton mill, which paid more than teaching.

Country school students generally walked to school, and many were one-teacher schools. Classes were large. John Elms, at Belair School in 1910, reported that four Belair families had 40 children with 20 of them attending Belair at one time.

The year 1910 was also the date of the High School Act which, for the first time after the end of the Civil War, appropriated money to build high schools within reach of every S.C. family. The state also mandated three compulsory holidays: Arbor Day, Calhoun Day and S.C. Day.

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