

They cleaned up Rock Hill

■ Our spring tradition goes back more than 80 years, and women get the credit.

Rock Hill's "Come-See-Me" celebration helps promote civic pride and draws large numbers of visitors to the city. This is the 30th consecutive year of the event and the 28th that Vernon Grant's Glen



Nearby history

LOUISE
PETTUS

the Frog has served as the symbol. The flowering of Glencairn Garden has always served to set the date of the event.

Traditionally, local citizens have worked hard at cleaning up the town before inviting visitors to come see the azalea gardens, dogwoods, and other flowering plants that adorn Rock Hill in the spring. The mammoth spring-cleaning of Rock Hill didn't begin in 1962, however. That tradition goes back to 1909 when the Civic Improvement Association initiated "Clean-Up Day." The Civic Improvement Association was formed by a group of women headed by Mrs. T.A. Crawford, wife of a highly respected local doctor.

For years the men had talked about city improvement but rarely acted — that is, some concerned local government leader might sponsor a bill to pave streets, install sewerage lines, provide for city garbage collection, etc., but the voters (all of them male) would balk at anything that raised their taxes.

The women couldn't vote, but they shamed the men into cooper-

ating with them when they called for a "Clean-Up Day." City leaders agreed to provide the teams of mules and wagons to haul away the trash.

Actually, the motive of the Civic Improvement Association was not purely aesthetic. The women were fighting the "Great White Plague." The cleanup was part of a statewide anti-tuberculosis campaign. Across the state women banded together to campaign for a state park hospital setting for victims of tuberculosis and also to educate the people as to the causes of TB and the precautions that needed to be taken.

Besides TB, malaria was common in the area. The women gathered up a tremendous number of cans and bottles that had been collecting stagnant water, where

mosquitoes bred. The area around the railway trestle was particularly badly littered.

Committees composed of Civic Improvement Association members were assigned different parts of the city (Rock Hill was 1 mile square at the time). They visited each property owner and requested the owner to clean up the debris and rake it into piles for the wagon to come by and pick it up.

For at least four years the city and local property owners had been involved in what the newspapers usually labeled as a "sewerage fight." In 1904, Dr. Gill Wylie (for whom Lake Wylie is named) came down from New York to campaign for support for an electric power plant at India Hook Shoals. While in Rock Hill, he spoke, in very strong words, to the city fathers about the lack of sanitation in Rock Hill and how it was a hindrance to growth.

Dr. Wylie cited the backyard privies, open wells, lack of paving, and mounds of trash as dangerous to health. Besides TB and malaria, there was a high incidence of diphtheria.

Wylie and some Rock Hill citizens were also bothered by the number of families who kept milk cows in their backyards. It was the custom for the families to hire young boys to drive the cows each morning to pastures on the edge of town for grazing. In the evening the cows were driven back. Sometimes the boys would run the cows. There was a fear that the animals might trample small children. People generally knew that one cow had upset a baby carriage and another cow, in fright, tried to get under a house and got wedged there. There was a faction that wanted to ban cows in town but another faction insisted on their right to keep them.

The Public Works Commission was elected by the people. There was also a Sewerage Committee, which was elected by City Council. Within the City Council there were differences over the powers of the Sewerage Committee and over the various responsibilities of the Sewerage Committee in relation to the Street Commission.

While the city fathers squabbled over who had jurisdiction over what, Mrs. T.A. Crawford and other Rock Hill women cleaned up the city for the first time ever.

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