

EARLY SCHOOLS

The earliest school in this area, and probably the oldest in upstate SC, was associated with Old Waxhaw Presbyterian church and dates back to 1756. Robert Miller, who had long been a schoolmaster, was licensed as a minister in Charleston in February 1756 but after charges made that he had violated the 7th commandment , never practiced the ministry. However, it is recorded that he taught Latin to John Wall who also was active in a militia company under Capt. Andrew Pickens.

For certain, the second minister at Old Waxhaw, William Richardson, did establish 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 Pres. Andrew Jackson, Gov. Stephen Miller, US senator and judge, William Smith, and Rev. John Brown, who founded Franklin College, forerunner of the Univ. 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 non-poor 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

reputation 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 that was separated 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. A newspaper known as "Western Carolinian," on December 12, 1820 carried a lengthy story which reported the school ". . . under the direction of Miss Dorcas J. 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 currently there were 40 students.

Parents and the general public were invited by the "Board of Managers" of the Steel Creek Female School to hear the students' responses to examination questions in the areas of reading, spelling, geography, history, Bible, arithmetic, composition, natural and moral philosophies, along with displays of needle work, embroidered maps and drawing on paper 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 W. 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 school teaching.

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

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 South Carolina family. There were three compulsory holidays: Arbor Day, Calhoun Day and South Carolina Day.

Louise Pettes