

#466-V

S.C. Biography - Shurley, Leitner

## REMINISCENCES

# The Oldfield School Gave Great Training

The oldfield school, as I knew it 80 years ago in the horse and buggy days, has passed away like the dodo bird.

Like many other good things of that era it has been succeeded by up-to-date but less valuable creations. I doubt if some of the substitutes are as efficient.

Our school in lower Mecklenburg was typical of the kind desired and maintained in old-time Scotch-Irish settlements in the South. It was half public and half private. Families with children helped to maintain it.

The teacher taught everything from ABCs to the last word in Latin and Greek grammars. It was called Carolina Academy, but many people knew it as Kell's School House, or the Shurley School.

It was located near the home of Dr. Thomas Kell, a popular rural family physician, and taught by Professor Leitner Shurley, who lived over the line in Pleasant Valley, South Carolina.

Some of his pupils grew up to attend colleges and universities and become leading professional and business men.

They included James A. Bell, father of Federal Judge Spen-

cer Bell; Dr. Richard Kell, son of Dr. Thomas Kell, who, with his brother, Thomas, Junior, became leading physicians in Mississippi; Victor S. Bryant, father of a leading member of the board of trustees of the University of North Carolina; Dr. Robert Felts, who was prominent for years in Durham; Revs. Robert and John Howie, of a well-known Methodist family, and many others who became merchants in Charlotte and farmers out West.

### He Had A Gift

Mr. Shurley lived in South Carolina but walked into Providence township, Mecklenburg, to teach five days a week

without a break for 15 years.

He prepared boys and girls for life or college. He had the gift to inspire proper-thinking youngsters for book education.

His school was a successor to one or two log cabins,

institutions taught by Presbyterian or Methodist preachers or laymen. Before that many schools were taught by ministers of the gospel.

In 1740, Mecklenburg county commenced to be settled by Dissenting English and Scotch from the Ulster section of Northern Ireland, some of them coming from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia.

The newcomers erected log cabins, churches and school houses. Many of the pioneers settled along Four Mile, Six Mile, McAlpine, Sugar Creek, and Twelve Mile Creek.

### A Fixture

Schools they needed and demanded. As the years passed and the people prospered schools improved. The Shurley school became a fixture near where a Miss Parks had taught a private one.

The aim was for more children and better churches and schools.

Andrew Jackson, seventh President of the United States, got his rudiments for an education from a rural school on Twelve Mile Creek, and James Polk, eleventh President, from one on Little Sugar Creek, near the present town of Pineville.

There is an unsettled controversy over the exact birthplace of Jackson, both North Carolina and South Carolina claiming it. But there is no doubt about the kind of elementary schools they attended.

### He Was Strict

I recall Mr. Shurley well. I started to his school at the age of seven.

My father took me to introduce me and tell the teacher that if I did not obey or ever lied to him to let him know and he would add a lick or

more with a parental switch.

I was recently asked why Mr. Shurley gave up the North Carolina school and established one in South Carolina nearer to his home, enrolling there as many as 70 children after he commenced to flourish.

About the time he left Carolina Academy there had developed a strong and popular demand for a teacher who could teach music as well as other subjects. Several women teachers were hired at various times after that demand grew.

Once after that, when I was on a visit home from the University of North Carolina, I was introduced to a South Carolina farmer, of a good old Scotch-Irish family, and informed: "That man can spell any word in the dictionary; he learned how to spell at the Shurley Pleasant Valley school."

Mr. Shurley closed his career in that South Carolina section and his remains, with an appropriate marker rest in a Baptist Church graveyard in Pleasant Valley.



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