

Askew Student Union building is gone

An enduring influence

A Chowan College campus landmark, Askew Student Union, was destroyed by fire on July 30, 1981. Constructed in 1956, Askew Student Union served class after class of young people as a center for study, recreation and inspiration. It was located just a short walk away from historic McDowell Columns building and in walking distance of all dormitories and classroom buildings.

All that remains of Askew building—beyond the influence that it has had on so many lives and the memories of this special place—are two bronze plaques. One plaque simply states "Askew Student Union 1956" and was located on the outside front wall. The other plaque tells us about a unique relationship between this Northeastern North Carolina family and the college which was so much a part of their lives in this Roanoke-Chowan region—a unique relationship that spans the generations. That plaque reads:

This Building Presented to

Chowan College in 1956

by

John O. Askew, III

Harrellsville, N. C.

in memory of

his mother and two sisters

who attended this institution

Though the plaque calls her "mother", she was once a young girl named Mary Duers Valentine and she was a student at Chowan College. She probably lived, went to classes, and enjoyed the friendship of her classmates in McDowell Columns Building—which still serves students today. She graduated in the Class of 1872.

Mary Duers Valentine married John O. Askew, Jr., and they built a home, reared a family and contributed greatly to the entire life of the community, church and region. They bore two sons, John and Grady, and three daughters, Mary Louise, Nora and Lillian.

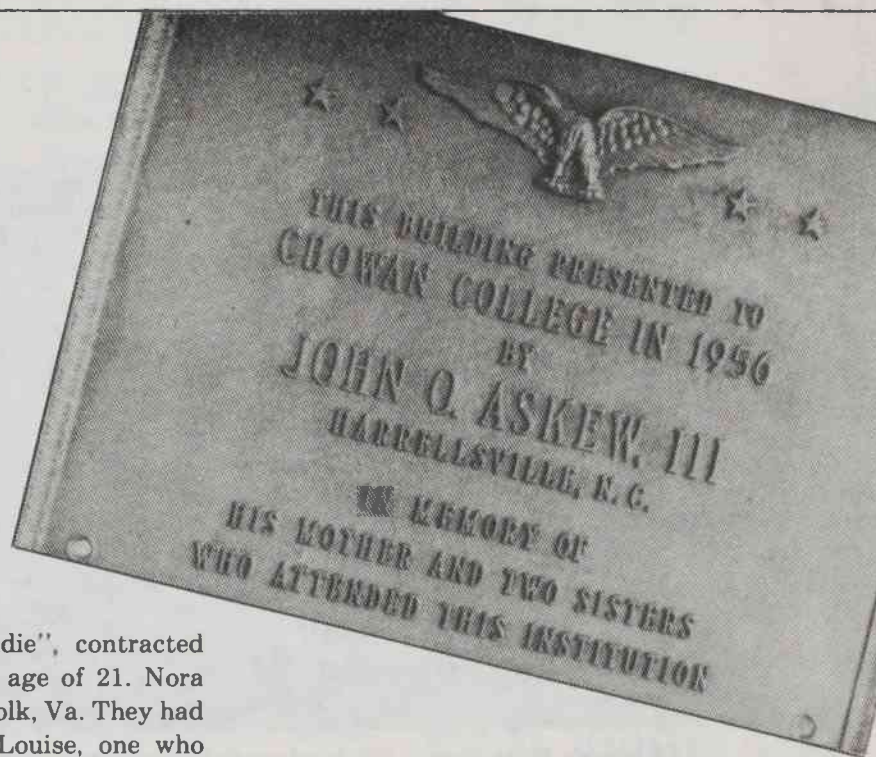
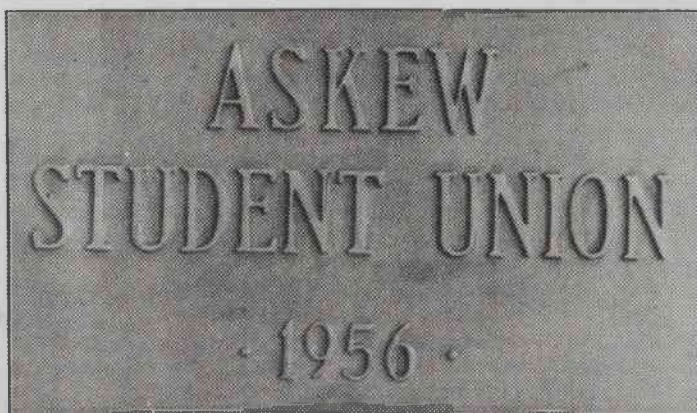
Two daughters, referred to on the plaque as "Two Sisters" Mary Louise and Nora came to live and learn at Chowan College.

Mary Louise, called "Maidie", contracted tuberculosis and died at the age of 21. Nora married H. I. Britton, of Norfolk, Va. They had two daughters, Mabel and Louise, one who became a teacher and one a librarian. Both are now retired.

Lillian (not mentioned on the plaque) attended Peabody Conservatory of Music and lived with her brothers in Harrellsville until her death.

John (John O. Askew, III) whose name is on the plaque, made a gift in 1955-56 to make possible the construction of a new student union building for the students at Chowan College. He made his gift "in memory of his mother and two sisters who attended this institution". Those who can remember the college in 1955-56, will know what a significant gift this was and what a critical need the new Askew Student Union would meet. Those who remember John Askew also know that giving to help others was a part of the nature of this benevolent leader. He generously supported the college in many ways, including pianos for Askew Student Union and Marks Hall and the entrance gate to the campus. His generosity included his church, his community, the hospital and so many other causes, many of which will never be known because of his quiet generosity.

John attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He served in the mercantile business in Harrellsville for 45 years. He had extensive farming interests in Hertford County. He was a member of the Ahoskie Kiwanis Club and Wiccacon Masonic Lodge 240.



He was a leader in the Harrellsville Baptist Church, and sang in its choir. He served Chowan College as a trustee and a member of the Endowment Committee. Dr. Whitaker states that "John Askew was a strong force and a gifted leader who believed in and generously supported the college mission of providing Christian Higher Education for present and future generations of young men and women." He died on March 8, 1969.

Grady (Grady D. Askew) graduated from Oak Ridge Institute and attended the University of North Carolina. He served his country in the army in World War I. He was a banker with the Bank of Harrellsville and had extensive farming and business interests.

Grady D. Askew was also known as one of the area's leading philanthropists. He established the Grady D. Askew Foundation in December, 1967, with an unrestricted endowment of \$300,000. Proceeds from the Foundation are divided equally among Chowan College, Roanoke-Chowan Hospital, and Harrellsville Baptist Church, of which Askew was a member. He provided an additional \$200,000 to the Foundation from his will.

Noted Dr. Whitaker, "Grady Askew's prevailing virtue was his love for his fellow man which he expressed through his service and benevolence to meet the spiritual, health,

and educational needs of the citizens in Hertford County and the Roanoke-Chowan area." He died on October 18, 1972.

The Askew Student Union building is gone . . . but its influence, like Chowan College and the Askew Family. . . will endure!