

HISTORY OF SPRING BRANCH SCHOOL

By ANNIE LORA McMILLAN

I. Ante-Bellum Period, 1849-1860

We are indebted to Mr. J. E. Purcell of Red Springs, for the facts concerning this period. We regret that we could not confer with Mr. Hamilton McMillan of Red Springs also, who contributed so ably to the success of the school.

Some time in the fall of 1849, Rev. Hector McNeill, Messrs. Alex Graham, Daniel McEachin, Daniel Love, Archibald McMillan, Neill Kelly, Neill and Jack Currie, Lauchlin McNeill, Alex Purcell and Miss Catharine Ferguson of Robeson county met at Spring Branch to consult about starting a school at that place. All of these men had small children and no school near them. At this meeting they decided to locate a school house about half way between Messrs. Lauchlin McNeill's and Alex Purcell's residences.

They built a plain log house with inside chimney made mostly with clay and sticks procured near by the school building. They appointed Rev. Hector McNeill, Messrs. Archibald McMillan and Alex Purcell, trustees. The trustees employed Mr. John Patrick Smith of the Philadelphia congregation to teach the school for the first three months. Soon after his time expired, the trustees employed Mr. Calvin A. McEachin to teach another three months. After his school closed, Mr. Robert Lynch Fairly, son of Mr. Neill Fairly, was employed. When his school was about half out, he was taken sick with typhoid fever and died in about two weeks.

The next teacher employed was Col. James C. Davis, who had been teaching at a school located near the residence of the late Mr. Alex Graham. He had the interest of the school at heart and put new life in it. He had quite a large number of pupils, many of them nearly grown. Col. Davis had the old-time school breaks, with declamation by the boys and compositions by the girls. He taught two years, or ten months. Messrs. Charles and J. E. Purcell, Tom and Frank McNeill, Daniel Kelly, John Sinclair, John and Angus McNeill, Wallace McDougald, Thomas Graham, Robert Love, John A. Love, James Ferguson and Misses Annie, Jane and Eliza McEachin, Margaret, Jane and Eliza Love, Harriet Graham, Sarah Ann Sinclair, Mary Purcell and Mary Ann McMillan were some of the scholars who went to Col. Davis.

Mr. Duncan E. McNair was the next teacher employed after Col. Davis. He taught five months. Mr. Gilbert McLean taught a session after Mr. Duncan E. McNair. The next teacher was Mr. John McKinnon, who was a son of Mr. Robert McKinnon and nephew of Messrs. Neill and John Fairly. He also taught five months. Mr. Hector J. McNeill, son of Mr. Daniel Calder McNeill, was then employed. He taught ten months.

Next Mr. Thomas S. Graham, son of Mr. Alex Graham, taught for three months, or until they could find another teacher. He was succeeded by Mr. Hamilton McMillan, who taught successful terms of fifteen months. He was followed by Mr. A. A. McBryde, who taught for probably three months.

The Civil War was then coming on, but the trustees hired Mr. John C. Campbell of Moore county, a nephew of Rev. A. N. Ferguson. During his term, the boys had a continual frolic. He was a good, quiet man. Many of the boys who had been going to school there for six or eight years were nearly grown. Though they were not very bad, they were rude and hard to control. Then, too, it was absolutely certain that the war would break out in a short time, and they became reckless and would not study. Quite a number of these boys made gallant soldiers in the Confederate army and many of them were killed or died of wounds.

Very few of those who went to school there are living now. Messrs. Arch McNeill and his brother Lawrence, J. E. Purcell, D. P. McEachin, Thomas A. and Frank McNeill, A. J. and Robert Currie, James Ferguson, John T. Sinclair, J. L. Landsay and W. B. McMillan, are all of the boys that can be recalled now. All of the girls are dead excepting Misses Cattie McNeill, Anne Brown, Flora C. McArthur, Sarah Jane McMillan and Ferbe Currie.

The influence of the school was wide, its patronage extended beyond the limits of the community. Capt. Daniel White Johnson, Mr. Duncan McNeill and Miss Jane McNeill (later Mrs. John McKay) and others coming from Richmond county.

Although the school house was made of logs, and the only window was a portion of a log removed, nevertheless the teachers were college graduates. The people of those days paid very little attention to external appearances. Judging from the excellent scholarship of some of the men and women trained at Spring Branch during this period, the teachers must have been master instructors.

II. War Period, 1860-1866

This sad period need not be discussed more than to say that like thousands of other schools in the South the light of the institution was darkened by the war cloud. For these six years there was no school at Spring Branch. Lying in the path of the raiders, the building was burned by Sherman. But fearless of the cannon's roar, and unconquered by the flames of war, the spirit of "Old Spring Branch" still lived in the hearts of the people.

III. Reconstruction Period, 1866-1872 With sessions of five months each, the following men taught during this period: Messrs. John A. Gillis of Cumberland county, J. B. McDonald of Moore county, A. B. McDonald of Moore county, T. M. Watson of Robeson county, William Johnson of Richmond county and Simeon W. Cobb of Robeson county. These sessions were conducted in a new building built where had stood the old building, burned by Sherman.

This is considered by the historians as perhaps the hardest and most bitter period in the history of the South. The years of the war had seen personal property used or destroyed, and real property became practically valueless. The glory of the battle-field and the never-dying belief in final victory kept the spirits of the people high, even in the face of personal bereavement; but now a new battle must be fought. The solemn problem of being ruled by the abhorrence of being ruled by former slaves faced the people. The primal needs, as always they must, asserted themselves and finally the school was discontinued.

IV. "Rolling Period," 1872-1910.

We have just referred to the discontinuance of the school at the close of the preceding period in 1872. In fact, the school existed in a fashion for years afterwards, but the location was changed so often and at times the same building rolled about, that we have called this the "rolling period". Finally, the house was removed to Richmond county, on Mr. Duncan Leach's land where Wagram now stands and dubbed "Rolling Academy". Until recently the old school house could be seen, but it was found necessary to remove it, to make way for more modern buildings.

If it were not for the solemnity of a community without a school, many things about this period would seem to us as laughable. One year a patron would send his children two miles in one direction, and the next year the same distance in another direction to the same school. One of the patrons objected to sending his children to school, saying that he was afraid they got to the place they had attended school the day before the school house would be gone! So much for the period of uncertainty and dissatisfaction.

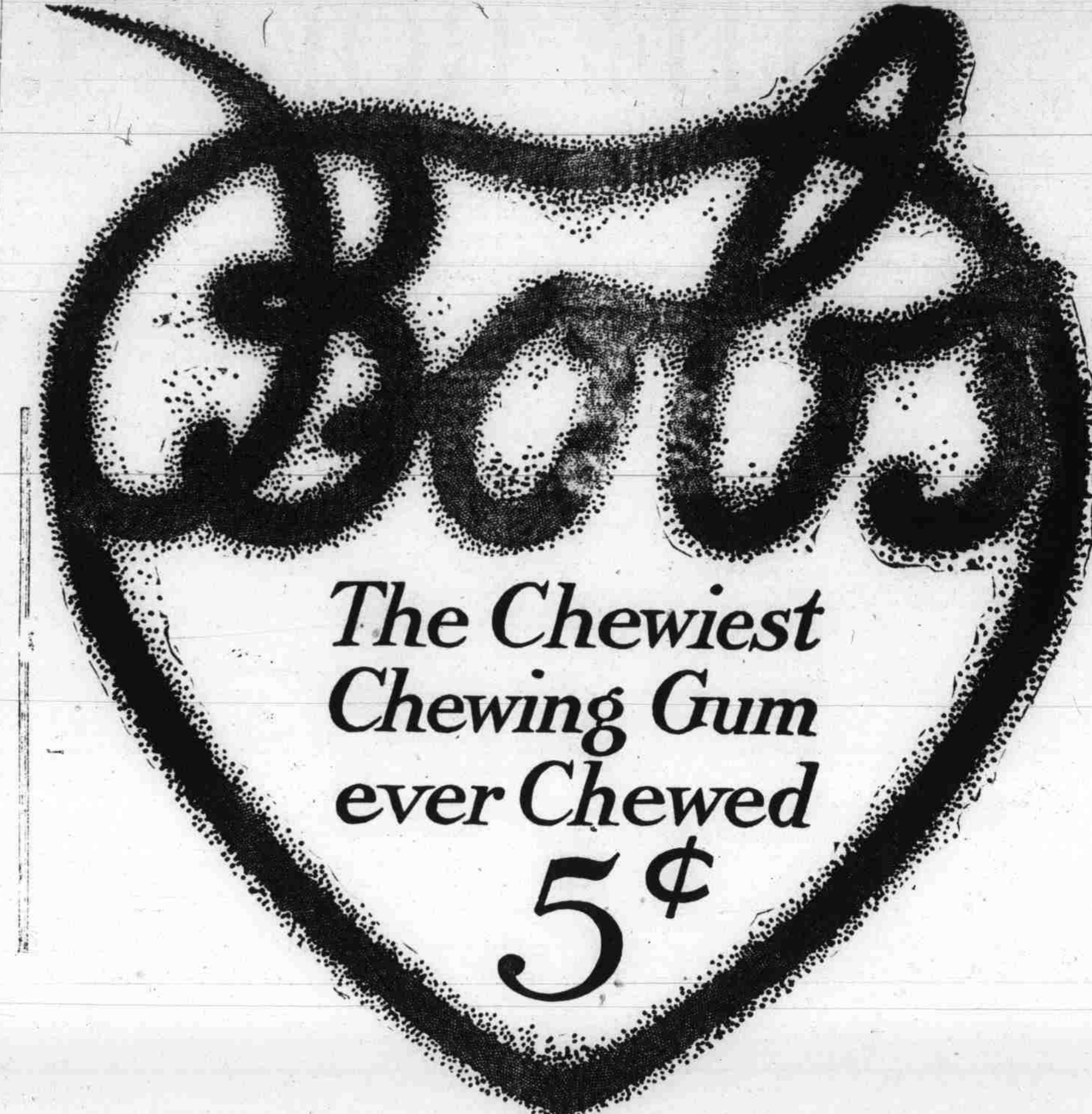
V. Present Period, 1910, Apr. 23, 1915

On August fourth, 1909, from far and near there gathered at the site of the first building the surviving students of the old Spring Branch school. In glad reunion and with firm hand-clasp, gray-haired and stoop-shouldered men and women talked of the good old days. Trembling voices told of those who on the battle field had given their lives for their country, or the surviving ones who later passed to their reward. Hearty laughs sounded out, when the jokes a half century old were recalled.

But these people gathered on that picnic day for a two-fold purpose: for reunion and to see if there survive sufficient spirit to establish another school near the site of the old one. Mr. Duncan McNeill Prof. Hamilton McMillan, Judge T. A. McNeill and Mr. D. P. McEachin told of the teachers, students and work of the old Spring Branch school, all of these having taken an active part in the life of the school. Then Prof. A. A. McMillan, and Supt. J. R. Poole of Robeson county schools, made impressive speeches on education. Prof. Poole urged that a special tax school be established where once stood the famous school of early days. So great were the impressions at this meeting and so in earnest were the citizens of the community, that a special tax was voted October 16 following. Our present attractive, modern building was erected immediately, and school opened for the spring term. Such a progressive achievement is worth recording. With the formation of Hoke county, the school passed from under the excellent supervision of Supt. Poole to that of a most worthy successor, Supt. J. A. McGoogan, who has always taken great interest in the school as well as others in the county. The trustees have been fortunate in securing good teachers, and the steady development, together with the present high standard of the school, testify forcefully that the spirit of the fifties did not die, but was only dormant. And today deservingly, Spring Branch school commands the respect of all friends and patrons.

The history of any institution means so much toward its development, that it is well to call a part of the honor roll of "Old Spring Branch". In doing this we labor under embarrassment of riches. Many who might have achieved prominence answered the call on the battle field and others who deserve mention must be omitted, because of our limited time and space. The following is a partial list: Ex-Judge Superior Court T. A. McNeill; State Senators—J. E. Purcell, D. P. McEachin and D. E. McBryde; Mr. Archibald Johnson, one of the ablest editors of the State; Mr. Archie McGoogan, father of the present superintendent of Hoke county J. A. McGoogan; Capt. Daniel White Johnson; Mr. Duncan McNeill, father of North Carolina's Poet Laureate, John Charles McNeill. Among the ladies who were former students should be mentioned the mother of Mr. A. W. McLean of Lumberton, considered by many as the logical candidate for Governor of North Carolina, and the mother of Dr. W. G. Shaw of Wagram, N. C. Many have one of the old familiar faces, but "their works do follow them."

What effect should this illustrious record have upon us the students and patrons of today? We should determine solemnly to exert our every effort toward higher civic efficiency, working for the day when the disgrace of illiteracy will be wiped from North Carolina, and Spring Branch school will be as a beacon light to lead men to nobler lives.



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REVIVAL AT BACK SWAMP

Gracious Revival Conducted by Evangelist Huggins.

Correspondence of The Robesonian. Lumberton, R. F. D. 6—July 25 marked the beginning of a glorious week in the history of Back Swamp Baptist church, which is located near Lumberton. On this day the famous evangelist Rev. W. M. Huggins of Fort Barnwell began a revival meeting which in every sense of the word can truly be called a Revival. It was carried on for eight days. Mr. Huggins has a keen clear-cut knowledge of the necessary equipment to run a successful meeting. On his arrival at the church he began to make preparations for his work. A piano was at once installed and the small church organ was disposed of. That was one step toward better music. A number of lights were then put in, after which work began.

The greater portion of the evangelist's texts were taken from the book of Romans. He beautifully portrayed the teachings and admonitions of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Rome. He made them strikingly applicable to the church of today. While there were only six additions to the church, it can be said that on the whole the church was never more thoroughly revived before. It seems to me that it was stirred to its foundation.

Mr. Huggins is possessor of a strong personality. He won the hearts of all the people and to see him leave was exceedingly painful. For when one meets him he not only feels that he has met one who can preach the gospel, but a friend to mankind in whom one can confide his troubles and feel lifted afterwards. People from far and near came to hear this wonderful speaker. He has a peculiar magnetism which held his audience spell-bound for thirty minutes twice each day. Even the small children loved him and were ever ready to greet him. It seemed that he had the power to stir their innocent souls.

And now last, but not least by any means, it must be said that the music during this meeting was the best it has ever been at this church. This is entirely due to the fact that Mr. W. H. Rowe of Newbern, a great singer as well as choir director, accompanied Mr. Huggins. Mr. Rowe knows how to make everybody sing. It would have seemed a breach of courtesy to have failed to sing when he asked it. His solos were unsurpassed for their marked simplicity and beauty of melody. He has the power of moving the hardest-hearted sinner when he proclaims the gospel in song. He sang for us at each service. Miss Eunice S. Britt served as accompanist. Mr. Rowe's voice is clear and full of resonance and to say the least, the way in which he sang was tender and appealing.

The congregation contributed \$75 to these laborers which only partially compensated for their efforts. We reluctantly bade them farewell after the last service on Sunday evening, Aug. 1, feeling sure that through their faithful service we had been revived again and our souls rekindled with fire from above.

CENTER DOTS

Death of Mrs. Alice Willoughby.—B. Y. P. U.

Correspondence of The Robesonian. Center, Aug. 7—Our community was greatly shocked at the death of Mrs. Alice Willoughby, which came Monday morning, although it was not unexpected as she had been in ill health for some time. The funeral services were conducted at the residence by her pastor, Rev. W. R. Davis, after which the remains were laid to rest in the family burying ground near Smyrna. She leaves to mourn their loss two daughters and a host of friends. Our B. Y. P. U. enjoyed a picnic at the mill pond Thursday p. m. Miss Maude Bullock, who has been

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ADAM WAS NOT GUILTY

Noah Was the Party That Ate the Forbidden Fruit, Says Assyrian Tablet.

Philadelphia Dispatch. Noah, not Adam and Eve, brought about the fall of man, according to a translation of a tablet now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum. An announcement to that effect, made today by museum officials said the tablet, written before the days of Abraham and translated by Dr. Steven Langdon, professor of Assyriology in Oxford University, England, recorded that Noah was ordered not to eat of the Cassia tree in the Garden of Paradise and when he disobeyed the curse fell upon him. The curse was that he should have ill-health and an early death instead of living to be 50,000 years old like his ancestors.

According to the announcement today Doctor Langdon believes the tablet is at least 1,000 years older than the book of Genesis.

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