



First class at Ridgecroft

The first class graduated from Ridgecroft School in 1974. The members were (front row, from left) Tula Duke Benthall, Teresa Hill Kelley, Susan Cherry Kinlaw, Sharon Smith Taylor, Charlene Callis Wiggins, Elaine Liverman Evans, Deborah Brett Lane, Denise Britton Baldwin, Joan Forbes, Emy Felton Winstead and Debra Dickerson Bird; (back row, from left) Starkey Sharp II,

Wesley Daughtry, Teresa Pike Musser, Becky Johnson Wines, Tommy Sears, Eddie Williford, Kathy Brett Counce, Donnie Craft, Pam Curle Carr, Bruce Lassiter, Chris Beatty Check, Bill Majette, Meg Revelle Chapin, Charles White and Lynn Jones Perry. (Photo courtesy of Marti Tyler)

Ridgecroft began as Brown's vision

More than two decades ago, the founders of Ridgecroft School recognized the need for an alternative education program in the Roanoke-Chowan area.

The progressive vision of the founders in 1968, under the leadership of Bynum Brown as chairman of the board of directors, led the official opening of Ridgecroft School in September, 1970, with Thomas M. Parker as headmaster.

Since that time, the school has grown from an enrollment of 147 students in grades 1-8 to more than 360 students in grades K-12.

Dr. Carolyn Jackson was appointed headmaster in 1990, following Douglas Bowers, Michael Ellis and Dr. Thomas Aycock.

Other things have marked the 25

years since Ridgecroft was opened. The physical plant, on a 20-acre site, has been expanded to an 80-acre site to include a high school wing, gymnasium, administration building, library, parking lot and well-equipped athletic field.

Many of these items were made possible through a five-year "Campaign for Quality" capital fund drive with contributions from many dedicated staff members, parents, friends, alumni and businesses.

Curriculum development also has kept pace with the increased enrollment. In addition to basic courses, Ridgecroft offers these electives in keeping with its philosophy of total personal development: band, chorus, drama and speech, intramural sports, honors

classes, computer instruction, art and music.

Other special extra-curricular offerings include enrichment week, the Ridgecroft Dinner Theatre and field trips, and they all make learning relevant and immediately rewarding for the students.

A significant accomplishment came in December, 1984, when Ridgecroft was granted membership in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

A two-year self-study preceding the accreditation team's visit gave the school a solid sense of identity and recognition.

Since 1984, the school has had at least two National Merit finalists, Mark Mason and Larry Cooke. Beth Tripp was selected to attend the

N.C. School for Science and Math. The basketball team, participated in eight state playoffs, and the baseball team won four conference championships in a row and twice finished second in the state.

In the quest for continued growth and educational excellence, the positions of admissions director and director of development were created and filled.

Through its history, Ridgecroft has been characterized by continuity of leadership, enduring pride, and a spirit of dedication. Statistics matter less to school administrators than the satisfaction of knowing a student has reached a personal goal. Ridgecroft's nurturing environment can enable a child to recognize and develop to his full potential.

Martin improved facilities, handled school integration

By Dorothy M. Powell
Retired Ahoskie teacher

Active in many areas of community life, the late Russell Penn Martin exerted a powerful influence as an educator.

When he assumed the position of superintendent of Hertford County Schools in 1950, he found that there were many one-room Negro schools in the county. Those small units were primitive, uncomfortable for students and teachers, and in poor repair.

In a short time, he arranged for these schools to be consolidated into larger, more modern structures. **Integration accomplished**

Perhaps Martin's greatest accomplishment, however, was the successful and smooth integration of the public schools, beginning in 1966 with the freedom-of-choice plan. His careful and wise judgment were reflected in the steps he took to accomplish the transition.

After consulting with Dr. Everett Miller, assistant superintendent of the North Carolina Department of Education, Martin devised a plan whereby black students could fill out a simple form stating the

school which they had attended the previous year and indicating the school in which they wished to enroll for the next year.

In the first year 375 students from formerly all-black schools applied. No one from eligible geographic areas was turned down.

To keep the public fully informed, Martin and assistant superintendent J.M. Jenkins visited numerous civic organizations to explain their plans for integration.

To facilitate the procedure, Martin assigned some white teachers to the former Negro schools and some Negro teachers to the white schools. Citizens accepted the transition, because it was conducted fairly and legally.

Unlike some neighboring counties, Hertford never was involved in a lawsuit, because the schools always were in compliance.

With the laying of this solid foundation, total integration followed in the fall of 1970.

Technical institute started
In the early 1960's, Martin foresaw the need for a technical college

(See MARTIN, Page 17A)

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