

#A-2 Carteret County Historical Research Association takes on Beaufort Cafeteria



Old Beaufort Graded School (Beaufort High School) building, erected in 1915, now known as the Courthouse Annex.

here. When the meeting adjourned the club had voted almost unanimously to take as their project for the coming year the operation of a cafeteria in the Beaufort Graded School. With no capital and no prospects of much money to be spent, the club members offered their time and labor free of charge.

All of this is so indelibly stamped on my mind I think, because as vice-president I had filled the un-expired term of Mrs. S.H. Haywood, president, who moved from town while she was in office. Then at the time for the election of new officers, because presidents were hard to get, I had agreed to serve for the coming year. And not this! All because I had been the vice-president! The more I thought of it the colder my feet became, and I think they have been cold ever since!

Project Underway

However, when some task stares you in the face the sooner you begin the better, for truly "the beginning is half." The first thing was to get permission to operate in the school. Then my job was to set up an adequate organization.

Since I had never undertaken anything like it I had to think out some plan which I could visualize as workable. Once the organized group was functioning I knew I could slip into the background, and that is exactly what happened. I was simply the over-all manager, and dropped in just to keep in touch.

All summer I walked the town over contacting so many of our women other than club members for this was in truth a community project, the parent's concern. Each woman had to be told all the details and in such a way that she would want to have a part in fulfilling the vision. I recall only one woman I approached who refused to serve in any capacity. Later in the year she contributed produce towards the free lunches. The two club members who so bitterly opposed our doing this project I didn't approach!

The plan I used was something like this: since the school term was nine months that

meant approximately thirty-six weeks. I thought if we could secure eighteen regular teams of five women each, a captain and four assistants, who would serve for a week, then at the end of the half-term they could repeat.

As I talked to each one I explained this plan, and each one who agreed to serve readily accepted the two weeks. It was understood that no woman was to fail at the last minute. When the day came for her to be there, if she could not go, she was to have someone to take her place, no throwing it back on the captain of the team or the club president. What marvelous women! Not once did anyone call me to say she could not serve — get someone else!

Almost everyone wanted to do something. Women who couldn't go to the building would cook at home. Others who could not be there in the morning would go later to help with the dishes. Approximately some hundred women assisted in the work. On all teams it was necessary to have at least one person with a car for there was much transporting to be done, and some women who couldn't serve otherwise could use their cars. Truly, "the people had a mind to work."

Then came the opening day, September 21, 1932! It was exciting, very exciting! It may be that the organization team felt like the Wright Brothers with the first airplane, "Will she fly?" Mrs. Everitt did the planning for the first day. I remember only one item on the menu — "meat loaf". She was at my house the previous afternoon wondering this and wondering that. We were too excited to wait.

However, when the day was over we felt that it had been a great venture and a thrilling success. Something new, something needed, and a task that challenged the finest spirit of co-operation from every source: parents, teachers, children, community, churches, fraternal — just everybody! Mrs. Everitt moved from town not long after the opening, but she was satisfied that it would not fail.

We were using the Home Economics room, second floor, which was short on equipment

for preparing and serving so many dinners per day; on rainy days there would be several hundred. There was nothing electric, only a four burner oil stove, and as I recall there was a ice-box of any kind. There were some tables and chairs, but not many dishes or cooking utensils. I remember Ruth Taylor (Mrs. Wiley Sr.) had a pressure cooker. How many hours she cooked no one knows!

Resourceful Women

One afternoon I went by Alma Potter's (Mrs. E.H.) home on business about the cafeteria for that was our whole thought. She had been on duty that day, and in preparation for the next day she was in the back yard cooking string beans in a lard stand set on bricks over an open fire! I don't begin to know how resourceful our women had to be. To see Julia Arrington (Mrs. Will) seasoning huge containers of soup was a sight to remember.

The Baptist church and the Masonic lodge lent their dishes, great heavy white ones. There were no dish-washing machines. When the dinner was served the labor was only half over. So the women spent the afternoon washing dishes. Never will I forget the picture I have of little Bessie O'Bryan (Mrs. Allen) standing by one of those deep sinks with her arms in suds up to her elbows washing dish after dish, glass after glass, and oh, the knives, forks and spoons without number. But rest assured no knives or spoons were put on the table unless they were needed!

The plan for operating was somewhat like this: those children who could pay for their lunches did so; teachers bought theirs also; those children who were underprivileged as determined by the teachers were served the same dinners without cost to them. Through some plan with the teachers tickets were issued to children, both paid and free, in such a way that the children knew no difference. Rural children could exchange produce, canned foods and milk for meal tickets.

There were no WPA or NYA projects at that time, but their forerunner, the Emergency Relief Fund, came into being after we had been operating ten weeks. Since the cafeteria was a welfare project it was allowed fifteen dollars per week. As free lunches increased in numbers the amount was increased until by March 1935 it was receiving thirty-five dollars per week.

The dinners served were not "mere lunches" but generous, well-prepared, balanced meals. Milk was sold extra with paid lunches but included in the lunch for the underprivileged. A marked improvement was noticed in these children. The dinners for the undernourished were served at approximately nine and one-half cents, and the paid dinners including milk were fourteen cents. As a sample of the menus, I quote from the file of Mrs. Leslie Davis (Ruth) who, I suppose, served more time in actual work than any other woman.

MONDAY
Roast pork
Stewed tomatoes
Dried apple sauce
Bread
Milk

TUESDAY
Scalloped eggs
Dried lima beans
Green cabbage
Stewed prunes
Bread