

History Of Brick School

By
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Principal And Founder

Bricks, North Carolina
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Our Assets

1,129 ½ acres of land

Permanent improvements at \$150,000.00

Touches three counties with 81,000 Negroes

Water supply excellent

First class railroad conveniences

Bisected by Coastal Plant Highway, running from New York to Florida.

Soil adapted to good growth of all necessities common to this latitude.

Light and power facilities are unsurpassed anywhere in the United States.

Lands well drained- No cesspools of infection.

Splendid health and sanitary surroundings.

Race relations are most commendable with mutual and harmonious understandings.

Water stream bounds two sides which can be developed.

A school plant with buildings and equipment unsurpassed in Eastern North Carolina.

A background of forty years service.

The preface to this article may not have any bearing on the immediate matter at hand, but it does give the background for what we shall have to say later.

History states that during the Civil War, the armies of the Potomac were seeking to tie up the Confederate forces in the city of Richmond, and thus end the war. To this end General Oliver O. Howard was sent South from the valley of Virginia by the way of Cincinnati, Chattanooga, and Atlanta, Georgia. Sherman's army laid siege to Atlanta, and later marched to the sea. They could go no further than Savannah, Georgia, in that direction. From that place, the army, which said to have had twelve regiments, started North; some by sea and some by land. They were divided and travelled in different routes coming North. General O.O. Howard's regiment came by Fayetteville and Raleigh, North Carolina, and some of the other armies took over routes. General Estes took a more easterly route, having passed through eastern North Carolina, touching New Bern, Kinston, and Rocky Mount; and when he came into this immediate community, he is said to have remarked that he liked this particular location so well that after the Civil War shall have closed, he would come back here and buy the farm. Before these armies reached Richmond, peace had been declared.

General O. O. Howard was called to Washington to head an organization which had for its object the reorganization of conditions in the South among white and colored people that would be compatible for the further development of this section of the country. General L. G. Estes, true to his word, came to Edgecombe County and bought a farm on which the Brick School is now located, consisting of one thousand one hundred twenty-nine and one half (1,129 ½) acres of land.

This farm before the Civil War was the property of Mason Wiggins who seemed to have been very outstanding farmer of North Carolina. It was formally the property of the Garrett brothers—Paul, Charles, and Joe. Some of the Garrett's are still living. Mr. Paul Garrett is a manufacturer of Virginia Dare extracts, and in more recent years, one of the biggest bankers in the state. He now lives in New York.

General Estes came into possession of the farm immediately after the Civil War and grew on the place cotton, corn, peaches, strawberries, and various other fruits and vegetables. He had a side track from which he shipped most of his products. He was distinguished as a union general more than as a southern farmer. He had not been farming long when he became hopelessly entangled with debt and appealed to Mrs. Joseph Keasbey Brewster- Brick of Brooklyn, New York, for assistance. Through former friendships, she came to his rescue and tied up thousands of dollars into his extrication. Finally, the farm fell into her hands, as he was not able to make good notes and payments.

One bright and beautiful Sunday morning, a colored man, William A. Sinclair, a product of Fisk University, but at the time a financial agent for Howard University in Washington D.C., was speaking at the Clinton avenue congregational church in Brooklyn, New York. At the close of services, a stately and robust lady, though advanced in years, approached the speaker with the declaration that she owned a farm in North Carolina on which she would like to have Howard university conduct a school for the poor colored children who would not be able to attend other schools. She wanted them to have the opportunity of working their way. Dr. Sinclair informed her that he would like to make an appointment for the following Monday at a time most convenient to talk the thing over. He took a train to Washington immediately and had a conference with General O.O. Howard. He got General Howard to say that if it were necessary, he would go to Brooklyn and have a conference with the lady. Dr. Sinclair went back to Brooklyn

and had his primary conference with Mrs. Brick, and said that since he was not in authority, he would have General Howard come to her and offer plans for this North Carolina Farm, accordingly, she said that she would be glad to have a conference with General Howard. Later when she proposed to General Howard what she had in mind, he referred her to the American Missionary Association.

Now, the American Missionary Association was and is a philanthropic organization doing work for Negroes in the South; on the Pacific coast among Chinese and Japanese; in Alaska, among the Eskimos; in the West among Indians; in Porto Rico and in the mountain regions of Kentucky, Virginia, and North Carolina among the white people who before were left behind in the march of events. But most of their schools were in the south.

At the same time, Mrs. Brick was assured that Howard University was not doing extension work and the American Missionary Association has the machinery for doing such work as she wanted. General Howard called a conference later with Mr. H.W. Hubbard, who was the treasurer of the American Missionary Association. Mr. Hubbard put before Mrs. Brick the work of the American Missionary Association, the plans of acceptance of her proposition and also the manner of procedure in carrying out her will.

The American Missionary Association then, as now, was in straits for financial assistance, and had a little or no money to invest in the new enterprise. Mrs. Brick eventually turned over the farm of one thousand one hundred twenty-nine and one half acres, later three hundred more, which was sold and the money put into permanent improvements on the farm here. At the time she gave the farm to the American Missionary Association, she made a cash contribution of five thousand dollars. The writer of this article had been in the service of American Missionary

Association in Arkansas and Georgia as head of two of their schools. He was called to Enfield in 1895 to head up the new enterprise.

Before the former accepted, Mr. Hubbard, Treasurer and the Reverend Doctor Beard, Secretary of the AMA at that time, and still living in 1933 at an age of more than one hundred years, were sent here to investigate the property and to find out if it was worth receiving as a gracious gift. They returned to New York happy over its acquisition.

I was sent here with five teachers in 1895, to begin this schools. Mrs. Brick was primarily interested in colored people learning how to do things with their hands. Her husband Mr. Joseph Keasbey Brick, was a civil engineer, and was said to have acquired his wealth largely in the south, building reservoirs and permanent structures in some of our present municipalities. At his death, a few years after the civil war, by the continual investment of her money into municipal and public enterprises, it accumulated greatly in value. Mr. George Ingraham, an outstanding lawyer and deacon of the Methodist Church was her legal adviser for many years. Before his death, he put five thousand dollars into a ten thousand dollar chapel which we have here on campus.

Mrs. Bricks was not a graduate of any institution, but was well informed, widely read, travelled all over the country extensively, particularly in the West during the stage era. She was a lady fine tact, judgement and poise. She had visited this section on several occasions and saw the relationship between the white and colored, and was in sympathy with the colored people and wanted to do something for their development.

I came here the first day of August, 1895. A contractor had been sent here a month before. The building was probably two thirds finished. I move a dining-room table to an unfinished room on

the second floor where there were no windows or doors, just holes in the walls. On this table I put my bed and slept. The snakes, cats, stray dogs, and the worst of all a million mosquitoes took possession. The nights were made hideous by dog fights, cats squalls, screech of owls, and whippoorwills and song of mosquitoes and last but not least, cursing and threats by drunken negroes passing to and fro to chicken fights, gander fights, and what not, convinced me thoroughly that this was the place that needed Christian influence.

In a few weeks, the building was finished and I was about to go to New York for equipment. Before leaving, I went to all the neighboring town to see if I could get equipment at reduced rates. I was informed by all the merchants that they were not in business for charity. They told me they could not do business for less than twenty-five percent on their investment. I told them graciously I appreciated their having given me the audience and apologized for such an affront as I had made. I caught a train and went to New York, I bought a carload of equipment.

Up to that time, I had not heard of Mrs. Brick. I was given a letter of introduction and went over to Brooklyn. With much trembling and fear, I was expecting to meet a lady with silks and satins, with wealth and education. When I arrive at her house, at the corner of Lafayette and Vanderbilt streets, on knocking at the door, I was met by Mrs. Brick herself. At this first meeting, all of my fears and anticipation disappeared. She was a gracious hostess. We chatted as if we had known each other for many years. Eventually she asked me what it had cost to put up the first building for which she had already contributed five thousand dollars, not counting the equipment. She said that she had only given five thousand dollars, to which I replied that I was appreciated. I told her that the building cost six thousand dollars. She wanted to know from whence the balance was coming. I informed her that the American Missionary Association would find a way out. She said that she did not want philanthropy to entail them in any debt, and that she would give the extra thousand dollars, and she did. At the same time, she said that she

was interested in several hospitals in Brooklyn and she could not give more to Brick for its future developments. After an hour's talk, I bade her goodbye, and started South. I did not sleep on my return that night. I was too much taken up by the interest shown on the part of Mrs. Brick in this institution here in North Carolina.

After I returned to Bricks, I began to receive letters from her showing great interest, and I have a pile of those letters today. She asked a great many questions about Enfield, Brick School,, white and colored children, racial relations, political conditions, public schools, in fact, everything that one might think. I answered all these letters as best I could. When she found out that we were going to the woods to get plants, trees, and flowers to plant on the campus, she went to the nursery and sent shrubbery and flower seeds. She went to California and bought plants which she thought might grow in this climate—Eucalyptus trees, Pepper trees, and various other seeds. Soon she came down in company with the Reverend Dr. Beard and other friends. On this occasion, we had the children come together with music and recitations, using the dining room of our school auditorium. We brought benches from the neighboring church. These benches were not much more than slabs with holes bored through them. Mrs. Brick's interest on this occasion was mostly in the people who came from everywhere in the community. Mrs. Brick continued South with her niece, Miss Benediot, and the Reverend Dr. Beard visiting schools. When she got back to New York, she began writing me about growing interest in Brick. I was already glad to acquiesce in any suggestion for any improvement Mrs. Brick wanted to make. When she came down again, we had started to develop the farm. We had several old broken down mules that looked as if they had come down from the Civil War Stables, barns, gin houses all were in bad repair. The mules were standing out in the cold. She suggested that we build new barns, new storehouses, all for the future. When she saw us buying butter, milk, eggs, and chickens, she sent us money to buy cows and chickens with which to produce our own

commodities. She sent us shrubbery from Hicks Nursery in New Jersey to supplant that which we had been getting from the woods.

When Mrs. Brick came again, she saw how well we were utilizing what we had. We had one building. In this building, we had classes, nothing beyond the fourth grade, and most of the children in the first and second grades. In this building, we had our dining room and kitchen, serving room and laundry. We had on the second floor a few rooms where boys might stay, also a few rooms where teachers stayed, and a few room for girls. We were not expected to take any girls, but this was a compromise. The first year we enrolled thirteen boarders, fifty four students in all, and we did not have room for many more.

Mrs. Brick gave us a visit. On this occasion, she saw that we were crowded. The old Estes house had been burned a few months before I arrived here, but there was some insurance. We had some addition to the insurance by Mrs. Brick which amounted to five thousand dollars. This went into a recitation hall. When Mrs. Brick came down to dedicate the new hall, she was very pleased with the management of the school, and her interest continued to grow. During our commencement services, there was a great crowd of people who came on foot and in wagons drawn by mules and horses, all of which interested Mrs. Brick exceedingly. At the close of the afternoon services, we took a stroll around the campus and she said to me, "You really need a boy's hall." I said, "We certainly do." She said, "How much do you want to put into the hall and what kind?" I stopped down and made in the sand with my finger an outline of such a hall as I wanted, the approximate cost to be ten thousand dollars. Lumber cost thirteen dollars a thousand, dressed. We got stone from our stone own quarry. I told her that I would rather put up a building which would be in style thirty, forty, or fifty years from that date than to erect a building with ginger cake frills—every brick must count for utility. These buildings which were built during my administration till remain a substantial monument today as they were the day

they were built. For the most part, the stone and cement work was done by masons who lived in the community. Mrs. Brick asked us to have the plans drawn up for which she would pay, and she gave us ten thousand dollars for the construction of Brewster Hall. When the building was finished, I invited Mrs. Brick down to look it over. When she came, we had it packed with boys, and in many of the rooms we had three boys. I took her around at night so she might see how we slept them three to a bed. This interested her much and she decided we really needed another building. She wanted to know what it would cost. My reply was that it would cost twelve thousand dollars because material and labor had advanced a little. She advised me to have the plans drawn up and she would pay for that also. She sent our New York office the check on her return to Brooklyn. Mr. Ingraham gave five thousand dollars and she five thousand for the building of the Chapel which still stands as a monument to them. Beard Hall was erected at this time. The two buildings cost twenty-two thousand dollars. Both are well built and in excellent condition. When the first boys' hall was but, we also built a shop where the boys might learn handicraft. We taught blacksmithing, woodwork, wood-turning, mechanical drawing, and the use of small machinery and the finer arts in cabinet making. Quite of few of the boys receiving this mechanical training have been employed in some of the schools of the American Missionary Association making excellent record for themselves and their Alma Mater.

When Mrs. Brick died eight years after the opening of the schools, and she left permanent improvement to the amount of one hundred fifty thousand dollars. When the dormitory was crowded, we needed more room, we went out into the community among former students and friends and raised money which went into three or four cottages for married teachers these cottages are still occupied by teachers and others.

When Mrs. Brick died, I was sent by teachers and friends to attend her funeral in Brooklyn. The night after her burial, I left for the South. Her niece told me not to worry about Brick School that

would run forever. The paper said after her funeral that Mrs. Brick had left a million dollars. She did not, but she left a good substantial sum, most of which I think went into teachers' salaries, improvements on the farm, equipment, etc.

Our highest enrollment for any one year was four hundred and sixty students, two hundred sixty of these were in the boarding department. We have turned our graduates who are an honor to themselves and to the institution. We have sent out thousands of undergraduates during my administration of thirty-one years and many of them in the eight years following. They have all done exceedingly well in their chosen fields. Many of them are teachers, most of these graduates and undergraduate teacher, dentist, physicians, home economics teachers, and others doing efficient service out in the world. Some are outstanding farmers.

This is an agricultural community, and we have sought in all these years to teach our boys and girls the dignity of home and farm life. To this end, the Farm Superintendent, a graduate of A&T College, for over twenty years helped us to put this program over. We produced all sorts of farm products, and did it in a way that made the community proud. At one time, we were running twenty-seven plows and it is no exaggeration. We have a few figures to substantiate this claim.

We have produced in one year:

5,000 Bushels of peanuts
125 Bales of cotton
2,000 Bushels of potatoes
5,000 heads of cabbages
9,000 Quarts of canned goods

(Peaches, apples, pears, blackberries, strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, and ever kind of product anyone could grow in this latitude.)

For more than twenty years, we never bought a pound of food for stock except a few concentrates for the cows. We never bought food for the horses, cows, and mules. The pictures of some of the old farm activities will demonstrate some of the above facts. When our poultry keeper came in at night, he brought two water buckets of eggs, leaving one thousand head of chickens on the poultry yard. Boys and girls and teachers ate so many eggs and chickens that they were crowing all the time. Cowpeas were grown in great abundance and were in great demand. This is nothing on the farm that has more utility than cowpeas. They make your cow give better and more milk; they make your horse and mule neigh. A teacher in the dining room would ask for peas three times a day. Students were never happy as when they saw a great dish of peas on a dinner table they constitute a very large food product.

When I came here, there were eighteen tenant houses on the farm. Most of the inhabitants were infected with malaria or typhoid fever. My first job was to buy a briar scythe to clear up the weeds and bushes; next to buy wrenches, shovels, pipes, pumps, and fill up all cesspools and put down sanitary pumps. In these of wells, I found watermelon rinds, frogs, terrapins, snakes, and every sort of thing. Here is where these people caught their diseases. The overseer of this group was white and when he was taken down with a serious case of typhoid fever he died. One house which I visited, had a bed swinging to the rafters from the floor when I inquired why he did this, he said it was to save himself from snakes and night marauders that infested his sleeping quarter.

When Brick School began, there was not a single Negro owning land five miles of the institution. Now, every piece of land to date, January 1, 1934, adjacent to Brick School is owned by Negroes. There are thirteen of them who owned their farms of various sizes from one hundred fifty acres down to a city lot. These farms are occupied by people who were influenced to come here by Brick School activities and attitude; I might say by her philosophy. The first year we had

a farmers meeting there were present at their land. Their reason for using the ox was that they did not have to feed it. They merely turned it loose in the cane breaks or in the woods. The annual farm meeting began to grow in numbers, the highest number was probably two thousand. Advancement was made from ox-cart to mule-team, to car and to tractor. There were seven hundred forty-three cars on the campus at one time. At another it was said we had on the campus, ten thousand people. At one of our earliest meetings, the Chapel was filled with farmers, eight-six per cent of whom owned their own farms or were farming on their own account. They testified that these meetings was the inspiration for owning their own farms.

The community itself has had a peculiar history. LaFayette stopped in the town of Enfield; Cornwallis is said to have passed through this section before the Battle of Yorktown; the first Masonic Order was said to have been set up at the county seat in Halifax a miles away; the first State capital was Halifax; the constitution of the State of North Carolina was written there. A small cottage, a yard enclosed by a brick structure, with a metal plaque on which are the names of the signers of the State Constitution, marks the site.

A mile west of us is said to be a Ichthyosaurus fossil stretching the entire width of Fishing Creek, which is probably more than a hundred feet wide.

The main highway running from New York to Florida cuts the Brick School farm into halves and the mainline of the Atlantic Coastline Railroad Company runs through the Brick farms. We have our station some six-hundred yards from the campus. We have our own side track of two-car capacity. We also have a United States Government Post Office in our administration building. The mail is handled by one of our own graduates. There are thirteen homes adjacent to Brick School farm owned by Negroes. We have a Local Tri-County Federal Farm Loan Association, organized here fourteen years ago, run by Negroes. It has put into saving Negroes farms more

than two hundred thousand dollars. The inspector who visits us from time to time has said that the records are excellently kept. There is probably no other organization of this sort where fewer of its members have failed to meet every requirement.

Thirty-eight years ago the little town of Enfield had a population of three-hundred. Today it has a population of nearly three thousand. Then, the stores and homes were lighted with kerosene oil. Today, they were lighted by electric power from a forty thousand plant or by the Virginia Electric and Power Company Plant at Roanoke Rapids. Then, the streets were nothing but winding mudholes, two brick buildings in the whole town. Now, the streets are well paved. The buildings are built of brick or cement. Then, the fire company was composed of the colored boys about town who ran with their buckets and hand pumps. Now, its company is of the best colored and white men of the town with the latest fire-fighting equipment. Then, slops and waste water were thrown out of the back door to contaminate the yard. Now, they have one of the best sewerage systems. There is great improvement in the churches, schools, etc., in Eastern North Carolina. The white people and the colored people understand their relations well. I have never heard of a lynching or anything bordering on one in the community.

I will say a few words about the Brick School campus. We have a beautiful campus, comprising fifty acres, certainly not much less. We have on our campus three large dormitories, well furnished with heaters, located in the basements sufficient for heating each building. We have here a bored well probably four hundred feet deep, more than one hundred feet into a granite rock. This well cost approximately two thousand dollars. The bore is six inches in diameter and brings up about one hundred ten gallons of water per minute. It is led to every building and cottage by underground pipes. I have seen the electric engine which furnishes the power to this well work a total of twenty-four hours. It gives as much water the last hour of its working as it does the first hour of its pumping our campus is one of the prettiest in North Carolina. We have

all sorts of trees and shrubbery planted;- elms, poplars of various kinds, mulberry, pecans, black walnut, etc. the railroad passes one end and the highway the other.

The school farm is located in the Northwest corner of Edgecombe County with Fishing Creek running about two and a one-half miles on the north and east sides which separates Edgecombe County from Halifax County. In these three counties, Nash, Edgecombe, and Halifax, the consensus says there are eighty-on thousand Negroes, the larger per cent of the population being Negros. In eighteen of the counties, nearby, there are over two hundred thousand Negroes. The State of North Carolina conducts a State Normal School at Elizabeth City, one hundred twenty-five miles east of us. The A.M.E. Church has charge of Kittrell College sixty miles west of us. We have a State School in Fayetteville, one hundred sex miles south of us.

In 1926, Brick School was made a Junior College. With this idea the industrial phases were not emphasized. Later, the depression made its appearance. Students could not meet their accounts. The opportunity for working their way had decreased. The enrollment fell off, but there was no way to curtail the overhead accounts with the falling off of patronage which could not meet their accounts. Eventually the school had to close its doors. A few persons persuaded our office, and the officials did not need much persuasion, to keep the doors open in some way. In view of the past history and the interest of the people of the community, our office in New York was willing to lease to the State of the buildings and equipment necessary for an Elementary and High School until they could see their way clear for future developments. Now, this is the story with perhaps a few irrelevant tangents, but even tangents may be a background.