

Prudden giving out Bibles as a reward for good academic work. Despite the seemingly positive reception in the community and the lack of public schools in the area for another decade, Prudden moved on.

Prudden was spending her spring at Trout in 1892, the same spring Annette Jackson's 'Nebraska Letter' was causing such a stir around Skyland Academy in Blowing Rock. The *Lenoir News Topic*, a newspaper published in nearby Lenoir, North Carolina, reported Prudden returning from Trout to Blowing Rock for at least a brief meeting with concerned community members about Jackson and Skyland Academy. Perhaps Prudden felt she needed to return to Skyland for the transition of leadership from Miss Jackson to Miss Ellen Dorsett. The questions of how Prudden came to spend a year in Altamont/Trout; exactly why she left, and who if anyone, ran the Owl Den School after she was gone, still remain a mystery.

SALUDA SEMINARY

By 1890 Prudden's success in establishing schools was apparent to the Executive Board of the American Missionary Association. All three of her schools, Jones Seminary, Skyland Academy and Lincoln Academy, were growing in enrollment and stature. After deeding Lincoln Academy and Skyland Institute to the American Missionary Association (AMA), the AMA leadership encouraged Prudden to establish another school for 'mountain whites' using AMA resources (Prudden, 1914). After a year long search, Prudden chose Saluda, N.C. as the location of the new school. Prudden noted in her autobiography that the town and district of Saluda had been holding school in an open pen prior to the erection of her new school. Saluda Seminary, as the school was named, operated as an AMA school from 1890 to 1921. The education of

approximately 2,000 students took place within its walls. Fortunately, many written documents about Saluda Seminary remain in existence. Several teachers and principals wrote articles for *"The Missionary"*. Local historians and the local newspaper have also left accounts of Saluda Seminary. The history of this school will be largely conveyed through these primary documents. Prudden bought a tract of land for Saluda Seminary in June, 1891 and started school four months later. As was the case at Jones Seminary, the school was barely ready to accommodate students when it opened. Despite the rapidity of events and lack of time to advertise the school, Prudden was gratified when parents brought over fifty girls to register for school on opening day in October, 1891. By November, 1891, just one month later, the enrollment had increased to 150. (Prudden, 1914).

The November, 1891 issue of *"The Missionary"* carried the following item:

"The large building at Saluda has been completed and rapidly filled with over 150 pupils. This number could be doubled during the coming year. Prior to the erection of our seminary, the village had no school building, although there is still standing a house of logs without seats, window, door or chimney, which formerly was used for a school.' (Prudden, E., 1891)

Local historians Osborne and Pace (1945) offer the following information about the school:

"School then was the Seminary which was organized and funded, originally, by the American Missionary Society (sic) of the Congregational Church. Miss Pruddens (sic) founded the school in 1889 and managed it for some time, with the students helping with the light housekeeping. County records show the purchase of land by the Society in 1900. ... A brochure for the year 1906 shows "Board, tuition, room, bedding and lights: per month \$7 for grammar and normal students. For day students, tuition ranged from 50 cents to \$1 per month. Besides Reading, Writing, arithmetic, the studies included Geography, Health, Physiology, History, Composition writing and Rhetoric as well as Piano and Vocal Music. Later, French was taught. The scholastic standards were very high, and students came to stay and study from all over the Carolinas. Graduates were accepted in good colleges and universities."

Indeed, one Saluda graduate became a Rhodes Scholar. The school was plagued,

however, by one chronic problem, overcrowding. Unfortunately, many applicants could not be accepted due to the lack of classroom and dormitory space. Patton (1950) describes the situation this way:

“To the passing visitor in the mountains Saluda Seminary stands as a little school of the AMA for the education of the mountain boys and girls. To the teacher who leaves behind her northern cities, rich in opportunities of intellectual enjoyment, it stands for rich opportunities of service, as richly paid in obvious results: to the pupil, whether from the cotton mill, the farm, or from the mountain side, or from the little log cabin in some hamlet, it is the door of hope opening outward into a larger, fuller life.”

Saluda Seminary, like most of Prudden's schools, and most mission schools, derived financial support from selling used clothing and household items donated by supporters of the schools. In addition to helping finance the school, the low cost of the items made it possible for families of students and other neighbors to improve their standard of living. Principal George Burrage discussed the salesroom in an article in *The Missionary* in 1913.

“Our sales room is a feature of the school. Here the second hand clothing sent us by individuals and church societies is displayed and sold or bartered to the people who come in on Saturdays on foot and mule back and in wagons for miles around. They often start before sun up in order to arrive in time to get a bargain. In the way of barter they bring chickens, eggs, vegetables, canned fruit and “fat pine” for kindling. The patrons of the salesroom cannot afford to patronize the stores in the village; the ready money is a scarce article with them.”

Local acceptance and appreciation of the mission school was profoundly expressed in 1908. In that year, the citizens of Saluda presented several acres of valuable land to the AMA and promised to raise one thousand dollars for the construction of a new dormitory. Ryder Hall was erected in 1909, almost doubling the capacity of the school. The new building brought only temporary relief to the problem. According to George Burrage, Saluda's principal in 1913, the reputation of the school continued to attract students from an ever widening geographic base in increasing numbers. While Burrage praised the construction of Ryder Hall, he concluded the

school was rapidly outgrowing its present accommodations after only four years. 1919 found Saluda Seminary celebrating the opening of yet another new classroom building.

The AMA only intended to sponsor mission schools until state and local governments could (and would) assume the responsibility of educating local children. By 1920, the AMA was facing a situation characterized by both decreasing financial donations and increasing interest from Saluda city and Polk County officials to provide adequate publicly funded education. Therefore, the newly appointed principal, F.M. Hollister began the task of turning Saluda Seminary over to the Polk County Board of Education. The last article about Saluda Seminary found in 'The *Missionary*' is dated July, 1921 and reads:

"There is nothing so successful as success. Thirty years ago in the sparsely settled hamlet of Saluda, North Carolina, a rural boarding school was begun by the AMA for the girls and young women in the region. It consisted of a single building very modest - to say the least - in its architecture and construction. There was nothing to attract but the fact that it was a school. It was soon filled to its capacity with eager students varying in age from ten through all the teens. In time, the one building became three fine school structures with modern appliances. In these thirty years instruction has been given - it must be - to more than two thousand students. Begun primarily for girls, it was impossible to exclude the boys, so that it soon became coeducational. Meanwhile, Saluda itself developed. It is now a thriving cotton mill center and a town of fifteen hundred regular residents. The homes have partaken of the prosperity, until now, when not single pupil of the old mountaineer type remain, the work which the Association crowned with success can be undertaken by the good people of the locality, to whom the AMA passes it on with boundless good wishes for its future."

Local reaction to the AMA's decision to turn Saluda Seminary over to the public school system revealed appreciation and regret. This is perhaps best illustrated by a resolution passed by the Saluda Board of Trade on May 20, 1921:

Resolved: that we, the Saluda Board of Trade, representing the citizens of this community, desire to convey to the American Missionary Society our unfeigned regret on learning of its decision to discontinue the operation of Saluda Seminary. We realize however the justice of the position taken by those responsible for the expenditure ... in the removal of the institution to other fields where the need exists in excess of that ruling our community, and, at the conclusion of the work of the Association here, we desire to place upon the record our warm appreciation of

the splendid services rendered the Saluda Seminary during the period of its existence.*

Saluda Seminary became a public school. The AMA constructed buildings and grounds served the community well for several more decades. Eventually the AMA buildings were replaced with more modern facilities.

THE ELK PARK SCHOOLS

In the late 1800s, Elk Park, nestled deep in the Blue Ridge mountain of North Carolina, just a mile from the Tennessee border, was a very small, rural settlement. Most families lived off the land - crops grown on small, rocky, farms supplemented by food that was hunted and fished in the surrounding mountains. There were no schools, newspapers, electricity, hospitals or central governing body. Under such conditions, the coming of mission schools and educators like Emily Prudden seemed a godsend.

Reverend Robert Payne Pell, a white Presbyterian minister destined to spend many years working in Appalachia, was the first link in a chain of events leading to the founding of two schools in Elk Park. Pell arrived in Elk Park, (then in Mitchell County, but now part of Avery County) around 1890. His first task was to establish a Presbyterian church (Woodside, 1952). With the sanctuary complete and the congregation growing, Pell along with many of his new congregants soon decided to build a school. Reverend Pell invited Prudden to come to Elk Park to assist in this effort. Prudden agreed to be the first teacher and soon, over 300 white children were attending the Elk Park Academy, funded through the cooperative efforts of the Presbyterian and Congregational missionary movements.

Prudden was soon joined by five missionary teachers from Cleveland, Ohio (Prudden, 1914). These teachers worked diligently both at the school and among the residents of Elk Park.