

Hatcher's vision turned his home into house of education

First of two parts.

The grove of oak trees standing on the gentle slope above Judy Creek was such a pretty sight that William E. Hatcher often stopped what he was doing to admire it.

On hot afternoons the Baptist minister would take his work out onto the front yard of his house, where he could sit under shade trees and enjoy the cooling breeze. From this vantage point, he could see the nearby grove, and he often thought the rise would make a "splendid place for a school."

Hatcher was troubled by the fact that the nearby village of Fork Union didn't have a school of its own. Over the years, he had become aware that village girls who wanted an education often had to attend school far from home, and the boys' education, as



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often as not, consisted of learning how to farm.

The Bedford County native first visited Fork Union during the summer of 1864. He had accepted an offer to help the Rev. W.A. Whitescarver conduct a one-week revival meeting at Fork Baptist Church.

Hatcher fell in love with the quiet village and also with Oranie Virginia Snead, who lived with her parents in Fork Union. They married on Dec. 22, 1864, and the following summer started a tradition of vacationing each year in

Fork Union.

After Hatcher became the pastor of Grace Street Baptist Church in Richmond, he began to appreciate even more the peace and serenity he found in the Fluvanna County town.

In 1895 Hatcher purchased a 26-acre parcel of land on the edge of Fork Union that he had long admired. Two years later, he had a large house built on the land and he named it Careby Hall after his family's ancestral home in Lincolnshire, England.

Although the distinguished looking home was large and spacious, Hatcher fondly referred to it as his "hut in the brush." It was there that he began to think about the school.

On Sept. 30, 1898, Hatcher invited a large number of local people to his home. Also in attendance was a group of ministers

who were participating in a religious retreat at Careby Hall.

At the meeting Hatcher's presented his idea of establishing a "classical" school on his property. The idea found receptive ears and by the time the meeting ended, pledges of financial assistance had been made and a plan to make the school a reality had been hammered out.

The original 10 guarantors of the academy each pledged \$50 to get the school up and running. Just two weeks later, Oct. 15, 1898, 19 boys and girls took their places in a two-story, rented building in the village known as Cooper's Dwelling House.

The first class of the Fork Union Academy was under way.

The following year, W.P. Snead and his wife, Julia Seay Snead, gave the academy six acres of land. Some months later, they pre-

sented 11 more acres to the school.

This donated land would eventually become the center of the campus, but during its first couple of years, the academy had no buildings of its own and precious little money. The school's first catalog was printed on penny postcards and consisted of two paragraphs.

The sparse announcement called the readers' attention to the fact that the classical academy had been established with the goal of preparing young men and boys for college or the business world. Insofar as Hatcher hailed "co-education" as a valuable experience at the school, it was surprising that no mention of that was made in the catalog.

Although the catalog was less than ostentatious, it fulfilled its function. Students outside the immediate area started enrolling.

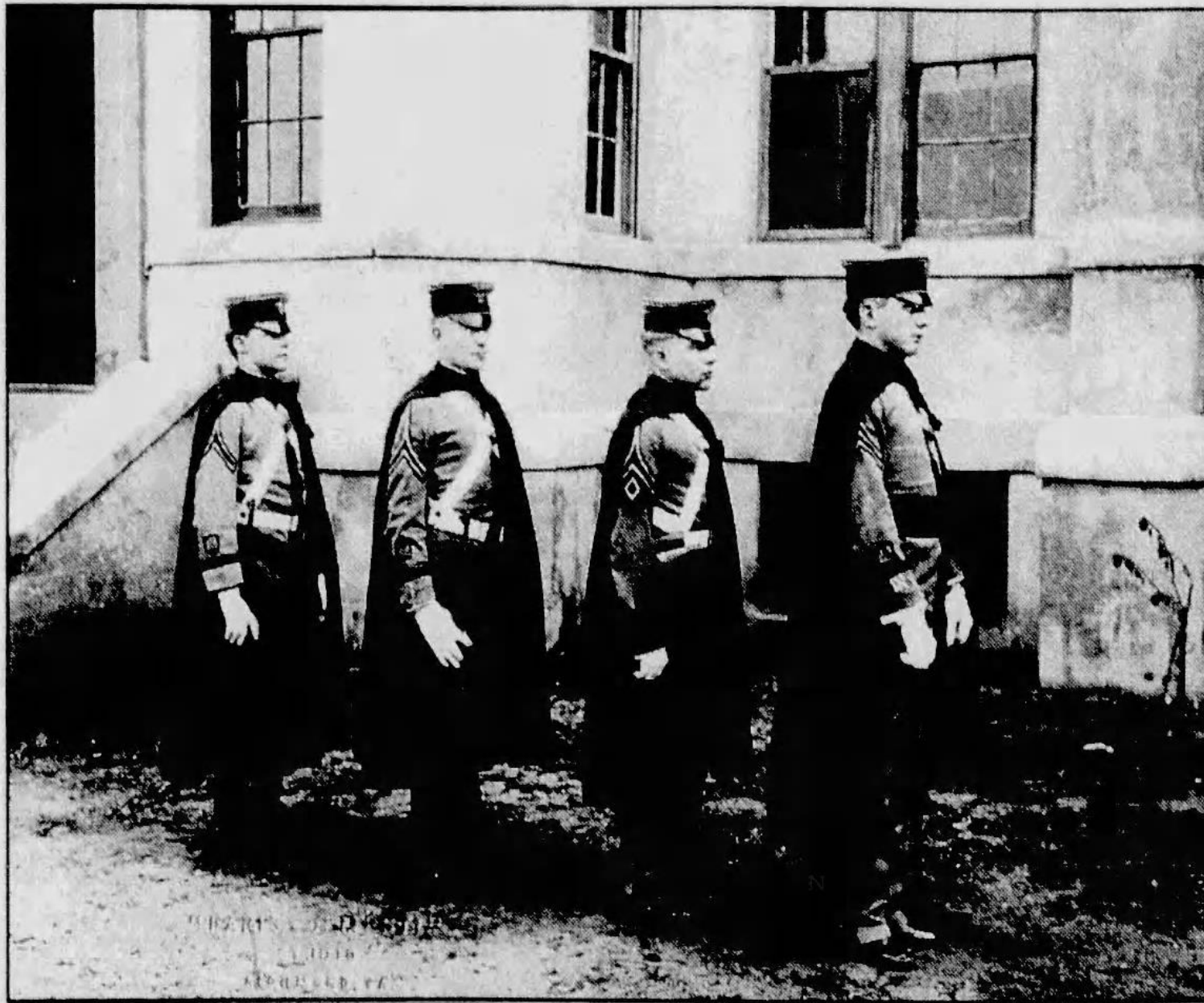
A number of Fork Union residents opened their doors to these out-of-towners and, for a nominal fee, they provided students with room and board.

Careby Hall also became a home away from home for many students. With a good-natured laugh, Hatcher would often tell people he called his dining room "the restaurant," because that's what it often looked like at mealtime.

With the school up and running, Hatcher had a ready supply of opponents to challenge in games of quoits, dominoes, backgammon and, during the mild months, croquet in his spacious front yard. His winning whoops of glee and losing groans were often heard around the house.

In 1900 the academy erected its first building, which was named

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These Fork Union Military cadets were Company C officers in 1925.

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Snead Hall. Soon other buildings were being added.

As the academy grew, some members of the governing body felt a greater degree of discipline was needed in order to maintain "proper decorum" and to ensure the students paid proper attention to their studies.

During a meeting of the school's board of trustees in the spring of 1901, George Holman Snead, a Baptist minister and physician, made the motion to introduce military training at Fork Union Academy. It was seen as a good idea and approved by an unanimous vote.

Once the decision was made to add military training to the curriculum, the trustees started to look around for a person who could provide it. They decided on Leslie Harvey Walton, a Baptist minister of slight physical stature who was completely devoid of even the most rudimentary military knowledge.

When Walton realized the trustees weren't joking, he tried to refuse the post of commandant of the academy on the solid grounds that he was magnificently unsuited for the position. The trustees would hear none of it.

The founders felt Walton's great caring and concern for young people would more than overcome the fact he didn't know a rank from a file or an about-face from a mess kit.

Inside Walton's small frame

beat the heart of a man who would rise to, and overcome, even the most daunting challenge. To meet his new found military objectives, he sweated and strained through the hot summer of 1902 at a military camp.

Walton returned to Fork Union in September 1902 with the essential military knowledge he needed to start training his young charges in soldierly ways. During the next two years, he created the structure and laid the foundation of the academy's military training.

The students, now called cadets, were outfitted in smart, gray uniforms and the academy took on a

distinctly military air. So much so that in early 1904, Hatcher asked the War Department if it would detail an army officer to the school to teach military science.

That April, Capt. William Chamberlaine of the Artillery Corps at Fortress Monroe paid the academy a visit. It's probably a good bet that the barracks and grounds of the academy were as bright and shiny as the countryside that was flushed with spring greenery.

Chamberlaine conducted a thorough, in-depth inquiry into the school's character, history, buildings, course of studies and outlook

for the future. The academy passed muster with flying colors, and the captain made a favorable report to the War Department, recommending the academy be provided with the assistance requested.

In September 1904, Walton stepped down as the academy's commandant. He was replaced by regular army officer, Capt. Edward T. Winston, who became the school's second commander.

Winston also became the first of several government-appointed military instructors at the school who instructed the cadets in military science and tactics. Although these officers received their regular pay from the federal government, they also received a salary from the academy for their service as commandants of the school.

At this time the government began providing the cadets with rifles and ordnance. Uniforms and other pieces of military equipment continued to be purchased by either the academy or the individual students.

Technically, the school's name was still Fork Union Academy, but from 1902 — when military training was introduced the students — local townspeople started to refer to it by another name.

However, it wasn't until Feb. 17, 1913, that the name, Fork Union Military Academy, became official. By that time, the institute was well established and had formed the bedrock of traditions and esprit de corps that has been a hallmark of the academy for 100 years.

NEXT: Growth and change.

Fork Union carries Hatcher's dream into second century

Second of two parts.

After Fork Union Academy introduced military training and discipline in 1902, the bark of commands and the sound of marching became commonplace.

William E. Hatcher, the school's founder, added the sound of his own tromping feet to the military cadence of the students. As the minister aged, his weight became a problem, and he tried to keep it in check by walking.

A favorite route for Hatcher was along the circular concrete walkway that surrounded his Careby Hall home. He would often be heard counting off his steps as he walked.

Another of Hatcher's favorite activities was watching the academy's baseball team compete. When his boys would win, he



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would invite them back to his house and fill them up with chestnuts, peanuts, apples, popcorn and candies.

Hatcher would also provide plenty of laughs. The minister had a gift for tickling people's funny bones, and he rarely passed up an opportunity to ply his comedic talents.

When Hatcher died unexpectedly on Aug. 24, 1912, the school and village of Fork Union were cast into mourning. Although the Baptist minister and educator was gone, his hard work ensured that

his dream academy would go on.

Soon after Hatcher's death, the academy moved into an unprecedented period of growth. One of the first changes was turning the academy into a school just for boys.

This was a departure from Hatcher's initial vision. From the outset, he had felt that co-education was a valuable experience for both male and female students.

When the military training was initiated in 1902, the female students maintained the military air of the academy by also wearing uniforms. But starting in 1912, women were no longer admitted to the academy.

On Feb. 17, 1913, the school officially became the Fork Union Military Academy. As its reputation for providing a first-class education grew, so too did the enrollment.

The increase in students necessitated an increase in on-campus housing. On May 16, 1916, ground was broken for Hatcher Hall.

By the time the United States entered World War I in the spring of 1917, Fork Union Military Academy had trained hundreds of young men in military skills.

The caliber of men the academy was producing was made evident by Sgt. Earle Davis, a 1915 academy graduate. On April 29, 1919, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic actions during World War I.

Just a few months before, on Jan. 16, 1919, the War Department had bestowed an award of sorts on Fork Union Military Academy by designating it a Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps. This meant all students who were at least 14 years old, American citizens and physically

fit automatically became members of the ROTC program upon entering the academy.

The War Department also appointed 1st Lt. James Harold McDonough as the first professor of military science and tactics at the school. Along with formal military instructions, the cadets were provided free military equipment and uniforms that had been unavailable before.

The ROTC program was a great deal for military-minded cadets. It gave them the opportunity to earn commissions as second lieutenants, get paid to attend military summer camps and earn candidacies for appointments to military academies at West Point and Annapolis.

The downside for the cadets were grueling yearly inspections conducted by regular army officers. These white-gloved inspec-

tions required weeks of preparation.

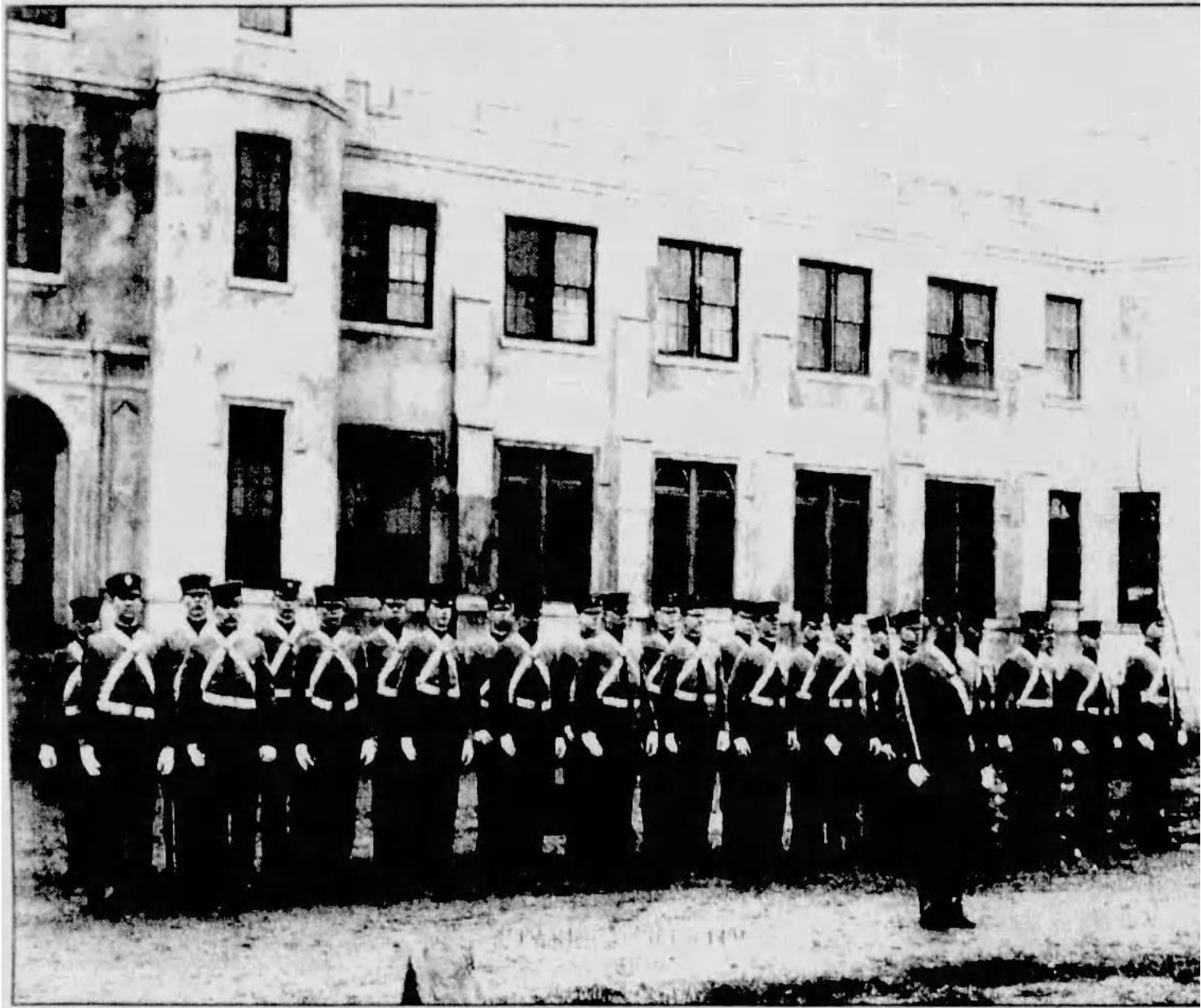
The cadets were up to the challenge and each year passed with honor grades. In addition to the spring inspection, the cadets had daily and weekly inspections.

These inspections ensured that the cadets kept their equipment and barracks at a high state of cleanliness. They also helped cadets get used to pressure.

Being able to function under stressful conditions certainly came in handy on the evening of Jan. 17, 1923, when somebody spotted flames shooting out of the roof of the school's armory.

Because of a lack of sufficient firefighting equipment, the students and teachers could do little else but watch the building burn ... and find adequate cover. The cover was necessitated by the

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Reviewing the Fork Union Military cadets in the 1920s.

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cooking off of an estimated 20,000 rounds of ammunition stored in the building.

One eyewitness said the ammunition would go off at intervals and sounded like "a small infantry battle." The armory and its contents were a complete loss.

Fortunately, the cadets kept their rifles in their rooms and they were saved. The estimated damage came to \$40,000. The cause of the blaze was believed to have been a defective electrical wire.

Less than a week later, on Jan. 22, Snead Hall — the academy's first building — also burned. The building was used as a dormitory and housed about 70 students.

The fire was discovered at about 4:45 p.m. but spread so quickly that the cadets managed to save little other than their personal belongings. Once again, the townspeople of Fork Union came to the aid of the students and put them up in their homes until new accommodations could be built.

modifications could be built.

The village of Fork Union and the academy have a long history of helping each other out. So it's not surprising that when Frank Wicks, an 18-year-old cadet at the academy, heard that the Fork Union bank had been robbed, he sprang into action.

The date was Sept. 23, 1935. When Wicks got to the nearby bank, he discovered that one of the robbers had shot and killed state trooper W.R. Thompson and then fled on foot.

Wicks was the regimental supply officer and had access to the school's arms room. He ran back to the school, grabbed a rifle and returned to town to join the posse of townspeople, police and other cadets.

The man who later was convicted of killing Thompson, John C. Daugherty Jr., was quickly run to ground near the outskirts of town. As Wicks walked forward to take Daugherty into custody, some trigger-happy individuals thought he was in danger and opened fire.

Capt. H. B. Nicholas of the State Police immediately yelled "cease firing," but the damage had been done. Daugherty, the target, was unharmed, but Wicks had been shot dead.

Daugherty's death in the electric chair on Feb. 7, 1936, brought

a close to the event. But to this day, Wicks has an honored place in the annals of Fork Union history and is remembered for coming to the aid of the small Fluvanna village in its time of need.

During World War II, the academy's men came to the aid of their country, and many served bravely in both the Pacific and European theaters of war.

After decades of distinguishing themselves at the academy and on the battlefields of war, the cadets and their academy were presented with a special honor by the secretary of war.

On Sept. 19, 1946, in a special order, the secretary designated the academy a military institute school. This increased the number of army personnel assigned for duty at Fork Union and also increased the opportunities to cadets for additional appointments to other service academies.

The academy and the U.S. Army continued their close relationship until 1965. That year the academy voluntarily canceled its association with the Defense Department.

The academy decided by unanimous vote to drop the ROTC program and all federally financed military education in order to eliminate any federal control over the academy. The governing board gave the academy authority to set up its own military program, purchase necessary materiel and employ an appropriate number of additional military personnel.

The high level of military training on which Fork Union Academy built its foundation continues to this day. Currently more than 600 cadets from 15 different countries attend the school.

A week ago, the academy celebrated its 100th anniversary with three days of events. If visitors stood on the front lawn of Careby Hall, they would see a Fork Union Military Academy that has grown into a large complex of buildings and athletic fields.

The academy is probably much larger today than Hatcher had ever dreamed it could become. Nonetheless, it has retained its high level of quality and its small town charm.

In the late 1800s Hatcher would often stand on the front yard of his Careby Hall home, look toward the nearby grove of oak trees and think it would make a "splendid place for a school." Time has proved the Baptist minister was right.