

## Schools Prior to the American Revolution ~

Dr. Ramsay begins his literary history of South Carolina with the statement that the earliest settlers of the Province had no sooner provided themselves with shelter than they adopted measures for promoting the moral and literary improvement of themselves and of their children. He goes on to give this account of the establishment of free schools in the Province:

“In the years 1710 and 1712, the Assembly passed laws ‘for founding and erecting a free school in Charlestown for the use of the inhabitants of South Carolina.’ The preamble of the latter, after settling forth ‘the necessity that a free school be erected for *the instruction of youth in* grammar and other arts and sciences, and also in the principles of the Christian religion; and that several well-disposed Christians, by their last wills had given several sums of money for the founding of a free school, ‘proceeds to enact ‘that Charles Craven, Charles Hart, Thomas Broughton, Nicholas Trott, Arthur Middleton, Richard Beresford, Willaim Rhett, Gideon Johnson, Francis Lejau, Robert Maul, Ralph Izard, Joseph Morton, George Logan, Alexander Parris, Hugh Grange, and William Gibbon, and their successors, be a body corporate, by the name of the commissioners for founding, erecting, governing, and visiting a free school for the use of the inhabitants of South Carolina, with all the power of a corporation, and with particular authority to take possession of all gifts and legacies *formerly given for the use of the free school*, and to take up or purchase as much land as might be deemed necessary for the use of the school, and to erect thereon suitable buildings.” He went on to say, “Provision was also made for ‘the support of an usher and a master to teach writing, arithmetic, merchant’s accompts, surveying, navigation, and practical mathematics.’ It was also enacted ‘that any schoolmaster settled in the country parish, and approved by the vestry, should receive ten pounds per annum from the public treasury;’ and that ‘the vestries should be authorized to draw from the same source twelve pounds toward building a schoolhouse in each of the country parishes.’”

Dr. Dalcho, of Church History, writes “The want of schools was a source of great solicitude to the inhabitants, and called for the exertions of the virtuous and the good. The missionaries, and many other gentlemen of the Province, addressed the society on this interesting and important subject. They described the deplorable condition of the rising generation for want of sufficient education and lamented the decay of piety and morals as the inevitable consequence of leaving

the young to their own pursuits, and to the influence of evil example. The spiritual as well as temporal interests of the people were declared to be at stake, as an ignorant, uneducated community was but a small remove from the habits and feelings of savage life. Society felt the force of the appeal. In the year 1711, they established a school in Charlestown, and placed it under the care of the Rev. William Guy, A.M., whom at the same time they appointed an assistant to the rector of St. Philip's Parish.

Professor Rivers, in his *Early History of South Carolina*, says, "The Society for Propagating the Gospel sent out missionaries not only to preach, but 'to encourage the setting up of schools for the teaching of children.' Their school-masters were required 'to take especial care of the manners of the pupils in and out of school; warning them against lying and falsehood and evil speaking; to love truth and honesty, to be modest, just, and affable; to receive in their tender years that sense of religion which may render it the constant principle of their lives and actions.' The want of schools, however, was not immediately remedied, and so urgent appeals were made to the society that in 1711, they established a school in Charlestown under Rev. William Guy. In the previous year, several persons having bequeathed legacies for the founding a free school, an act was passed (1713) for this purpose, and soon afterward for extending similar benefits to all the parishes." (A tombstone standing in St. Philip's churchyard attests that such a school was actually established and maintained at least until 1729.)

The act described above by Professor Rivers was passed February 23, 1722. By this act, the justices of these courts were authorized to purchase lands, erect a free school in each county and precinct, and to assess the expense upon the lands and slaves within their respective jurisdictions. They were to appoint masters who should be "well skilled in the Latin tongue," and be allowed twenty-five pounds proclamation money per annum. Ten poor children were to be taught gratis yearly, if sent by the justices.

Dr. Ramsay proceeds to tell that Sir Francis Nicolson, the first Royal Governor of the Province (1721-24), was a great friend to learning; and that he liberally contributed to its support and pressed on the inhabitants the usefulness and necessity of Provincial establishments for its advancement; and that the inhabitants, urged by his persuasions, engaged in providing seminaries for the instruction of youths.

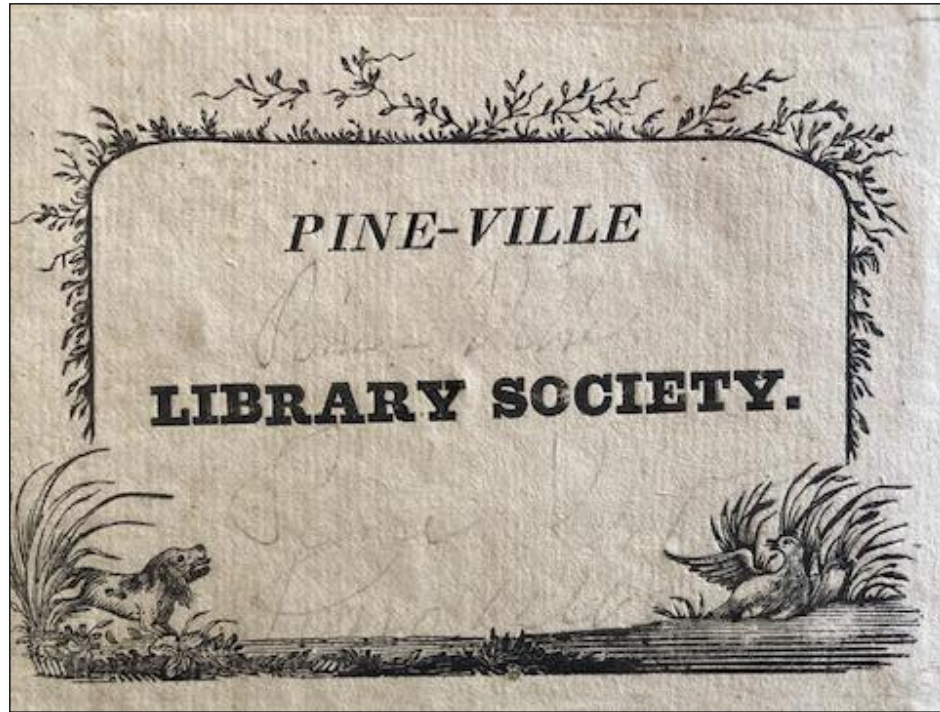
History records detailed contributions and amounts donated, and particular legacies left for this purpose . . . too much so to lists, but an example: John Whitmarsh left five hundred pounds to St. Paul's Parish for founding a free school in it; Mr. Ludlam, missionary at Goose Creek, bequeathed all his estate, which was computed to an amount of two-thousand pounds for the same purpose; Richard Beresford, by his will, bequeathed to the vestry of St. Thomas' Parish one-third of the yearly profits of his estate for the support of one or more school-masters, who should teach writing, accounts, mathematics, and other liberal learning; and the other two-thirds for the support, maintenance, and education of the poor of that parish. The vestry accordingly received from this estate six thousand five hundred pounds for promoting these pious and charitable purposes.

In 1733, we go on to read, a free school was erected at Childsbury, in St. John's Parish, on the foundation of six hundred pounds bequeathed for that purpose by James Child (which I think I may have told you about in an earlier story), and twenty-two hundred pounds subscribed by the parishioners. Many more parish examples may be given, but I'll try to spare you a bit with length.

The corporations of these schools were cherished by the colonial government, Dr. Ramsay says, and were favored in taking up lands. They formed a center to which were drawn the donations and bequests of the charitable. "From the triple source of tuition money, public bounty, and private donations, a fund was created which diffused the means of education far beyond what could have been accomplished by uncombined exertions conducted without union or systems."

Keith Gourdin

*Reference: Dalcho's Church History; Ramsay's History of South Carolina; Statutes at Large, South Carolina; The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; and Collections from library of Keith Gourdin*



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