

Friendship School opened as 19th century academy

Before the days of the public school systems in Alamance County, students attended educational facilities which were called academies. These were schools often operated by individuals, or some were family operations, and some of which were actually boarding schools.

There were a number of academies in the county, the most well-known of which was Sylvan Academy. That school was organized in 1866 and operated in the Cane Creek Meeting House in the beginning. Sylvan, still operating as an elementary school today, became one of the largest academies in the state, was said to have been the first consolidated school in the state, and operated one of the first "school buses," a horse-drawn vehicle which picked up students.

There were other academies, including Oak Dale Academy (1876) and Gilliam's Academy (1879) in the Altamahaw-Ossipee area, there was Salem Academy At Cedar Cliff, Nicholson's School near Mt. Hermon, Yadkin Academy for blacks near Mebane, Forest School in Mebane, Union Academy at Union Ridge, Swepsonville Academy, Pleasant Lodge Male Academy and the famous Bingham Academy near Mebane.



Don
Bolden

Bingham Academy attracted students from all over the nation and several foreign countries.

Another well-known facility was Friendship Academy, located at the site of today's Friendship United Methodist Church south of Alamance.

Friendship was one of those early academies in the county, formed in the later years of the 19th century. Today's photo shows Friendship School in the early part of this century when it was a part of the Alamance County School System.

The student body is shown in front of the building with the teachers. The only person identified in this group is George Stafford, fourth from left on the back row. The date of the photo is not on the picture, but it is likely in the 1915-1917 era. We have another photo from 1912 showing that same George Stafford at New Hope School,



(Submitted photo)

Friendship School students in early part of this century

and he was a much younger man.

This school building was larger than most of the rural schools of the day. This one appears to have several rooms, while most were only one or two-room units. This is a well-

kept building with concrete steps and a good coat of paint. There are more students here than in the other school groups we have seen from that period of time. It was not unusual to have a school with no more than 12 to 15 students.

Friendship School continued in operation until 1927 when it was consolidated into a new district at E. M. Holt. Joining Friendship were Bellemont, Shoffner, New Hope, Eldermont and part of Oakdale. Friendship was well-known in

that part of the county, but in the 1920s, it became known all across North Carolina. Some of its male students had a track team, and they raced their way to the state championship in the '20s — a remarkable achievement for a school so small.