

The WPA Life Histories Collection

[Fairfield County]

Project #3613

W. W. Dixon,

Winnsboro, S. C. FAIRFIELD COUNTY George Gregg Mayes

(white) 72 Years Old [?]

George Gregg Mayes D. D., a retired Presbyterian minister, is a resident of the town of Winnsboro, Fairfield County, South Carolina . He is held in high regard by all classes of people in this section of the State.

"I was born at Mayesville, South Carolina , September 18, 1866. My father was Robert Peterson Mayes, a son of Peterson Mayes, for whom the town of Mayesville was named. Grandfather was a signer of the Ordinance of Session, by which South Carolina withdrew from the Union of States then composing the United States of America. The War Between the States, and its attendant circumstances, deprived my father of a college education, but he was possessed of a fine mind, sound principles, and lots of common sense. He was a good all around business man and a safe counselor among his associates who bore the brunt of the difficult times following the Civil War. He was prominent in the Red Shirt movement, which, as you know, resulted in the election of Wade Hampton and a return of white supremacy and good government to South Carolina . He died in 1881, when I was fifteen years of age.

"My mother was Caroline Chandler Mayes. She was a very remarkable woman and a devout Christian. The home she made for father and her children was a happy peaceful one and a haven for the ministers of her church and the returned Confederate soldiers. She wanted her children to learn in this way about God, the Father of us all, and the true motives of patriotism that actuated the soldiers of the South in sacrificing their lives and property in defense of what they deemed moral and right.

*Douglas*

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"Of the ministers who frequented our home, I remember Doctor James McDonald, Doctor W. J. McKay, Doctor J. S. Cosby, Doctor W. W. Mills, and the Reverend William Cuttino Smith. Association with such men early turned my mind toward a life work in the ministry of the Gospel. My mother encouraged me in this thought and bent all her tremendous energies to give me, as a basis for the work, a good education. Oh, the anxiety of a mother's heart! Who can measure it or sound its depth in sacrificial love? She was overheard asking one of the godly men who visited us, 'Do you think there is a promise of usefulness in Christ's service in George?' I had weak lungs and was predisposed to tubercular trouble in boyhood days, and she was anxious concerning my physical as well as my moral and mental fibre to undertake so great a work in the Master's service for a whole lifetime.

"I attended the ordinary school in the village of Mayesville for eleven years. Miss Sallie Leland was my primary teacher. I was afterward prepared to enter the freshman class of Davidson College. I spent one year at Davidson College and then entered the sophomore class of the South Carolina College, now the University of South Carolina. I was graduated in the class of 1888, with 'Magna cum laude' written on my diploma.

"My favorite studies always have been history and philosophy, but the philosophy being taught at South Carolina College was not altogether true. It stimulated me, however, to seek for and find the truth.

"It was while there that I came to know Doctor James Woodrow, and the power of his personality influenced and continues to influence my thought and life. I consider him, bar none, the greatest teacher I ever had. He knew of my mother's and my design to become a minister of the Gospel and was kind enough to give me extra help in my research for spiritual truth, and, above all, he encouraged me to think for myself.

"While in college, I took an active part in college Christian work. I was for two years head of the Y. M. C. A. I was sent by the association as the student's representative to the first students gathering at Northfield, Massachusetts. That was in 1886. From there, I went to the 'Meeting of the Nations,' as their first conference came to be known. I was one of the fifteen students who met at sunrise during the conference one morning for prayers and started the 'Students' Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions.'

"In the fall of 1888, I entered Princeton Seminary and also Princeton University for post graduate study. Here I was under such master minds as Patton, Warfield, Wm. H. Green, and others. The life at Princeton did not rob me of my Southern convictions and sentiments but rather intensified them in philosophy under Professor Patton and Professor McCash. When I received my certificate from the seminary, I also received my Master of Arts degree from the university.

"In the summer of 1890, I was licensed to preach by Harmony Presbytery.

"In March, 1891, I received a 'call' to supply three churches in Sumter County. I next supplied, during the summer, three churches in Anderson County. Shortly afterwards, I received a call from the Presbyterian Church at Walhalla, South Carolina . On the advice of Doctor John B. Adger, I accepted it and arrived there on June 5, 1892, without an acquaintance of anyone in the congregation. They had called me 'sight unseen.' They seemed disappointed that I, in appearance, was a mere boy. The next day the Presbytery met and confirmed the call. I remained in this pastorate six years, and then I was sent by the Presbytery to the Edgefield group of churches as a Home Missionary. I remained there 18 months, when the second Presbyterian Church at Greenville, South Carolina , prevailed upon me to accept their call.

"In Greenville, I had no easy task. It was a struggling congregation, heavily in debt, but in six years we climbed out of its difficulties and paid its debts. The work was too hard a field for my dear wife, so we left Greenville for Concord and Blackstock churches in Bethel Presbytery. These churches are in Fairfield County. We remained in charge of Concord and Blackstock congregations for five years, and then I was called to the superintendency of the Home Mission work. It was a work congenial to my taste. For six years I was engaged in this position. It took me to all parts of South Carolina , and well-nigh into every pulpit of the Presbyterian Church within the bounds of the State.

"The close attention and family demands caused me to relinquish this special work, in 1915, and accept the call of Sion Church at Winnsboro, South Carolina . On the 7th of November, I entered upon the duties of the pastorate, and for twenty-three years I have ministered and labored in this community.

"I took an active part in the various World War activities in drives to raise funds, sell bonds, and conduct stamp sales of the government. The night of

the armistice I led a parade up and down Congress Street in Winnsboro. It was the largest crowd ever assembled in Winnsboro. I also led in a prayer of thanksgiving for victory and peace at a service conducted at the foot of the Confederate Monument at the intersection of Washington and Congress streets.

"After the World War, I busied myself to help secure from the War Department one of the Y. M. C. A. huts at Camp Jackson, Columbia, South Carolina, and to transfer it to Winnsboro as a community house for the town and surrounding county. I was successful in doing this, and I superintended the removal and reconstruction of it.

"During my twenty-three years of pastorate at Winnsboro, a new church building was erected and paid for. The membership of the church increased by 33 1/3 percent.

"I was one of the youngest moderators the church has ever had to preside over the Synod. I represented our church in its General Assembly eight times and was a member of the board of trustees of the Presbyterian College at Clinton, South Carolina, for twenty years. This college conferred on me the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

"When I reached the age of seventy years, I carried out a long declared purpose of resigning the active pastorate work of the denomination. After one year, and six months, the church and the Presbytery consented to the release. On the 14th of October, 1891, when I was at the pastorate in Walhalla, South Carolina, I married Alethea S. Cosby, a daughter of Doctor J. S. and Mary Low Cosby. Through the many years that have followed, she has proven to be a true helpmate, the chief adviser and counselor of my life.

"To us have been born six children, two sons and four daughters. Our first born son died in infancy the other son, F. B. Mayes, has been ordained to the Gospel ministry and is the pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Beaufort, South Carolina. Mary, Mrs. J. M. Workman, is a resident of Winnsboro. Alethea is married to Doctor. R. T. Douglas, and lives in Winnsboro. Carrie, wife of C. M. Turner, lives in Ellenton, South Carolina.

"Customs? When I was a boy, no instrumental music was permitted in the home, except Watts' Hymns. A ride on a railroad train was a sure sign that

you were on the road to perdition. One's hands would go up in horror at a golf game, a pavilion dance, or a theater show on Sunday. Sight-seeing in conveyances and swimming at a public resort or beach would have been scored as partaking of the world, the flesh, and the devil. These things are toned down now, in the light of the age. They are classed as innocent pleasures by the general public and many church members. My opinion has suffered little change from what they were deemed in the old days.

"I have been asked many times why there is a decrease in church attendance on the Sabbath and at prayer meetings in mid-week. 1. The radio sermons have had something to do with the decrease. 2. Sunday sermons in Newspapers. 3. The disparity between the rich and poor, as to members, is greater. There are fewer well-do-do people of leisure now and more hard-laboring folks than there used to be. The latter really need a rest, or think they do, when Sunday comes around, and many of the whole number are at work on prayer meeting nights. Some have schooled themselves that God didn't consider it of such importance as to ordain and provide for prayer meeting night. 4. The multiplicity of social clubs and card parties in another hindrance. 5. Ministers are somewhat to blame, too. Many of them are place hunters and are not capable of holding the membership of the church to regular periods of formal services nor the congregation to continued church sermons from Sabbath to Sabbath throughout the year.

"One thing worthy of notice, along this line, is that from year to year Church membership increases in spite of all the foregoing enumerated causes that militate against its increase. I think that the regulation of all sumptuary laws and rules of society for its government should have been left primarily to the family and secondarily to the church, instead of to the State legislature.

"One thing I have observed about legislating morals with the public is that it is done at the expense of the home, the church, and the school governments. And when there are too many such enactments by the legislature, it diminishes the respect for the whole body of the law, and the individual gets into the habit of selecting the ones he intends to respect and the ones he is going to disregard. And he winds up by ignoring them all, when any one of them runs counter and contrari-wise to his or her self-interest.