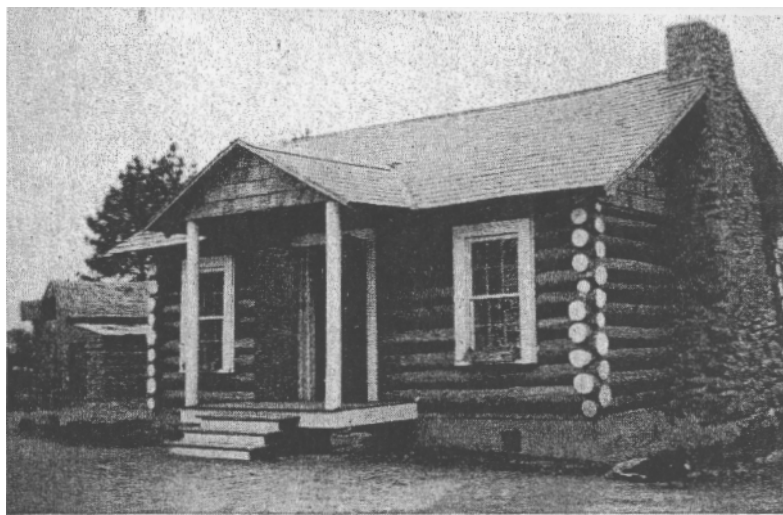




The first Faith Cabin Library, Saluda, S. C.



Faith Cabin Library, Ridge Spring, S. C.

Faith Cabin Libraries

By E. C. Peters

TRUTH is often stranger than fiction. This trite statement finds another illustration in the work of a white textile employee in the deep South. With only his desire to serve humanity through his faith in God and his love for his fellow-man, the person in question has brought the ministry of good books to several thousand disadvantaged Negroes in more than twenty towns and rural communities of South Carolina.

How did he do it? It is a thrilling story, mostly of grit and grace—both striking characteristics of Willie Lee Buffington, formerly an employee in the cotton mills of Edgefield, South Carolina. This amazing story is built around the work



Willie Lee Buffington, founder of the Faith Cabin Libraries

of a young man who began life some thirty years ago in a tenant farm home in Edgefield County. His parents were poor but God-fearing people. The opportunities for schooling in this community were meager, but young Buffington got a chance in his late teen years to study for two terms at the Berry Schools in Mount Berry, Georgia.

While Willie Lee was at Berry the failure of crops forced his father to give up farming and seek employment in the cotton mills of Edgefield. Returning home, Willie Lee was forced to give up his educational pursuits and take work in the cotton mills also. Since no opportunity presented itself for further schooling, he married and settled down seemingly to the life of a cotton mill employee.

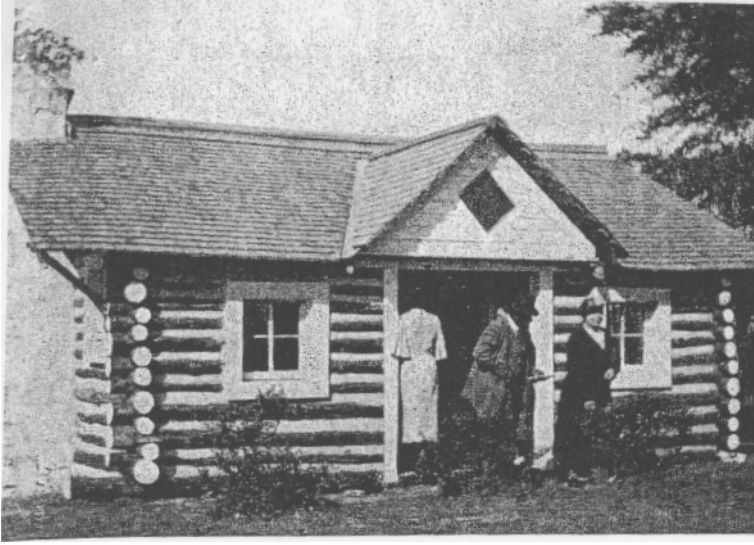
There were stirrings within his heart, however, and he could not forget the desire of his early childhood to do some thing for the Negro people, with many of whom he had played as a child.

About ten years ago young Buffington heard an inspiring address by a missionary doctor on furlough from his work in China. This physician told of his services to lepers, and this awakened anew the desire within his heart to do some thing for the disadvantaged Negro people.

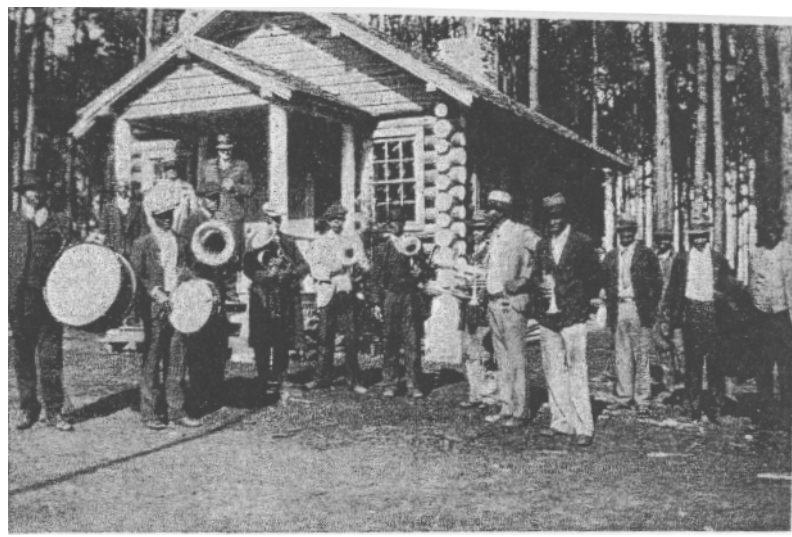
But how could he do this? He remembered the little Negro school back in his home community and the teacher of this school. He recalled how

of Negroes in this community for good reading, since there were no library facilities for them. He wondered if there were not people in the world who had good books which they no longer needed and might be willing to donate for use by these underprivileged people.

Young Mr. Buffington was earning at this time only \$12 per week, from which he was compelled to support himself, a wife and baby. He did have a few pennies, however, which he could invest in this book enterprise. With ten cents, all the money he had at the time, he bought five two-cent postage stamps and wrote letters to five people whom he thought might be interested in such a project. Just one of these persons replied, but he expressed interest and promised



Faith Cabin Library at Seneca, South Carolina



Dedication of the first Faith Cabin Library

to send some books. The books arrived within a few days. Encouraged by this response, he wrote other friends, and before many months had gone by he had received several hundred volumes to be added to his book enterprise.

Mr. Buffington went back to the rural community of his early childhood, looked up the old Negro teacher, told him of his plan, and enlisted his help in the enterprise. They called together some of the Negro patrons of the school and explained to them the plan of this book project to be known as a 'Faith Cabin Library.' These people agreed to donate their time, labor, and certain materials toward the erection of the first building. They cut down the trees, hewed the logs, and constructed the first of the Faith Cabin Libraries on the grounds of the Rosenwald School at Plum Branch, South Carolina. When this cabin was completed, there were over one thousand volumes ready to be placed in it.

This was in 1932. Now, eight years later, there are twenty-three of these libraries connected with either rural or small-town Negro schools containing approximately 100,000 volumes, all the result of faith and hard work on the part of Willie Lee Buffington and hundreds of other good people whom he has interested in this remarkable enterprise.

Soon after the first library was opened the desire to further his own educational training came back to Mr. Buffington in a most challenging manner. Through the aid of friends he was able to complete his high-school training in Edgefield, attending school in the morning and working in the cotton mills in the afternoon and evening to support himself and family. It took a little more than two years for him to complete his high-school course; then he wanted very much to go on to college. Opportunity for college training came at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. Aided by this very splendid institution and certain friends, he was able to complete his college work in three years and three summer terms. Now, in 1940, he is a second-year student at Crozer Theological Seminary, Chester, Pennsylvania.

Each unit of the Faith Cabin Library has an in

Carolina, known as the Oberlin Unit, is very largely the result of the interest and effort of students at Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio. The young people in this institution became so interested in Mr. Buffington's work that they invited him to Oberlin to discuss it in detail. The result was the establishment of the unit at the Negro school at Seneca, South Carolina, from books given by these new friends. Practically the same method was used by the students at Dartmouth College and friends at Hanover, New Hampshire, who helped to establish the Hanover-Dartmouth Unit at Easley, South Carolina.

The Iowa City Unit at Bettis Academy near Trenton, South Carolina, is by far the largest of all the library units, containing approximately 7,000 volumes. This unit was made possible by interest created among the members of the Ministerial Association of Iowa City, Iowa, after reading an article by Beatrice Plumb in the December, 1936, number of the *Christian Herald*. The Hobby-Lobby Unit at Lexington, South Carolina, came as the result of a radio appeal. The manager of the Hobby-Lobby Program of the National Broadcasting System invited Mr. Buffington to appear on this program a little more than a year ago. The Hobby-Lobby Unit was the result.

In addition to serving the children in Negro schools, these libraries are invaluable to the people in the communities where they are located. It is not possible to evaluate fully the good which results from the reading of a good book by these poor but honest people. While many of them are slow readers and cannot read many books in one year, they do get inspiration and help from the books which they read. It is not an overstatement, therefore, to say that he who gives a good book for this enterprise likewise gives inspiration, good will, and good cheer.

These twenty-three libraries have all been established within the last ten years. This is an average of a little more than two a year. This in itself would have seemed sufficient achievement as full-time work for one individual. To know, however, that the person chiefly responsible for this work has had to earn a living for himself, his wife and, now, two children, and in addition has spent ap- [CONTINUED ON PAGE 31]

Faith Cabin Libraries

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11]

proximately six years in school is an accomplishment that is a most striking example of what can be done even in years of depression when one consecrates himself to a noble task.

Some who read this article will be interested in the type of work Mr. Buffington would like to pursue after he has completed his course of study at Crozer Theological Seminary. He would like to teach in one of the Negro colleges located in the South and continue his helpful ministry of providing good books for rural Negro people. Perhaps no greater means could be found to promote good will between white and colored people in the South than through enterprises such as Mr. Buffington has so successfully carried on during the last ten years.