

'Angel of Mercy' In Mountains Devoted to Crippled Children

By Miles Hughey

Observer Staff Writer

BLOWING ROCK-The National Guardsmen, 60 of them, were numb from exposure to stinging snow and whistling winds, around Grandfather Mountain a few nights ago. They sought shelter from the 14-degree weather in a little ramshackle combination store and dwelling house-and joined the throngs of people of all ages who have received aid and comfort from Miss Florence E. Boyd, RN.

Through the years, this well-educated, widely experience Angel of Mercy has found room in her heart for the unfortunate, particularly among crippled children. Although an incredible series of misfortunes has left her with little of the world's goods to use in her charities, Miss Boyd's dedication to her career of helping others, and a deep, touching faith in God has sustained her and left her ready and eager to resume her work.

A native of Caldwell County, Florence Boyd received an excellent education. She began at Globe Academy, where one of her teachers was Dr. E. B. Dougherty, later father of Appalachian State Teachers College, and then to Miss Emma Rankin's Private School Girls, in Lenoir.

She completed her local education with two years at Davenport College, a Methodist junior college then located in Lenoir. She then taught school in rural Caldwell for two years, accumulating funds to enter nurses training, which she did at Pennsylvania State Hospital, Scranton, Pa.

FINAL GRADE 99

Nurses of that period worked 10 to 12 hours a day, and pursued their scholastic work in addition. Her final exam grade was 99 ("I missed the biggest thing in the neck, the trachea.")

For several years thereafter. Florence Boyd served as a private nurse in some of the big metropolitan centers of the country—New York City, Boston, and Chicago included in the nine-state territory in which she has followed her profession.

Because of her fine professional background, Miss Boyd was always in demand, and had to seek rest when she could slip away from her duties for a few days.

During this time of intense professional activity, Miss Boyd would often visit her parents, Abner Hamilton "Sheriff" Boyd, and Jane Greene Boyd, in Lenoir, and what she saw in the suffering of mountain people, through ignorance, superstition, and lack of facilities. Made a profound impression that was to help dictate her future course.

"I was real young then, and had itchy feet, if you know what I mean," was her explanation of this nomadic period.

Finally, however, she "stayed put" for a considerable length of time, and her humaneness and ingenuity had ample opportunity for exercise. She was employed by a large Caldwell County lumber company to do nursing among their 3,000 employees in an isolated area of the mountains.

CAMP BLOSSOMED

Strictly on the professional side, Nurse Boyd became known as "Dr. Boyd" by the miners and their families, through her work in obstetrics, supplementing the efforts of the company's two overworked doctors.

BROKE HER LEG

The company then moved her to their West Virginia coal fields, where she broke her leg and moved only with the aid of crutches for a year (previously, she had suffered a broken back).

When she had recovered from this setback, she came back to Caldwell County, and was appointed County Superintendent of Public Welfare.

Continued true to form, Miss Boyd scoured Caldwell for crippled children, took them to the Orthopedic Hospital at Gastonia, and secured treatment for them, often having to overcome superstition of the children's' parents in order to accomplish her purpose.

"It seemed so futile, though, because I would bring them back to homes in which I knew they would not receive the supplemental treatment necessary for their permanent improvement or recovery," she said.

On one of her trips to the Gastonia institution, she observed a crippled girl, an orphan who had spent several years in various hospitals, but who was apparently incurable. The child's lonely plight appealed to the Boyd sympathies, and soon the little girl had been brought to Miss Boyd's home in Lenoir.

BEGAN REACTION

Her gratitude began a chain reaction, which resulted in Miss Boyd's opening of her home to more than 35 crippled children from 11 northwestern North Carolina counties over a period of years.

During this period, she treated and cared for the children, drawing on her vast experience in nursing and medical care and treatment, and financing the entire operation with the savings of her nursing career, plus occasional small voluntary donations from her many friends.

In order to give her charges the benefit of summer-out-of-doors therapy in the mountains; she purchased several hundred acres of land east of Grandfather Mountain, including buildings which had been used in a lumbering operation. She maintained a small dairy herd, and the children "just wallowed in plenty of fresh milk and butter."

LOST HOME

Then her strong sense of independence triggered a series of misfortunes which terminated her activities. In a maze of red tape, she lost her home in Lenoir, the family homeplace, and when she left Banner Elk Hospital following an illness of several weeks, she was arrested for having operated a home for children without a state license, and without conforming to regulations of the state. Angel of Mercy was found in her heart for the unfortunate, particularly among crippled children. Although an incredible series of misfortunes has left her with little of the world's goods to use in her charities, Miss Boyd's dedication to her career of helping others, and a deep, touching faith in God has sustained her and left her ready and eager to resume her work.

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CAMP BLOSSOMED

Miss Boyd's work among these people involved not only the medical activities usually expected of a nurse, but she ministered to their mental and spiritual welfare as community blossomed with the results of an increased pride in self among the inhabitants.

Her work gained the attention of other areas, and she was employed by the Consolidated Coal Company, to do general welfare work among several thousand of their employees, principally in eastern Kentucky,

The results were the same as before, but on a much larger scale, with greater territory and even greater need than she had encountered in her native county.

"Back then, coal mining people were notoriously extravagant and wasteful, and known for their inability to stay in one place very long, if the grass across the fence looked just a little greener," she commented.

Again, she got the families of miners interested in making the best of the wild country in which they lived, and through some shrewdly-planned machinations, acromes in which I knew they would not receive the supplemental treatment necessary for their permanent improvement or recovery," she said.

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She was cleared in a subsequent trial.

To top it all off, her large summer camp for the children burned, and she was left with the humble dwelling on the camp property, in which she has lived ever since. She lives just eight miles from Blowing Rock on the Linville road (U.S. 221), which links the two sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Rather than defeating her in her purpose to continue to work with crippled children, Florence Boyd's misfortunes and bitter disappointments have made her more determined than ever to begin to build again. With a charter and authorization to solicit funds for her project, Miss Boyd has completed her organization and is looking to the future with the utmost in optimism.

The Florence E. Boyd Home and Vocational School for Crippled Children, Inc., has the following officers and directors:

R. E. Agle, theater chain executive of Boone, president; H.O. Aldridge of nearby Shulls Mill, vice president; Miss Boyd as manager and secretary-treasurer; Directors, Rev. O.L. Brown of Greensboro, W. Farel Warlick of Conover, Hugh M. Morton, Wilmington, head of Linville Company, and C. M. Abernethy of Lenoir, superintendent of Caldwell County schools.

Most of the people who may read this article know something about the village of Blowing Rock and its out-lying district as a summer resort where thousands of cool-weather seekers come to spend a few months in an atmosphere of loveliness, but how many know of it as an all-year-around community? The situation is peculiarly interesting.

The tide of humanity varies throughout the year from the plainest Southern Highlander to the most deluxe model of mankind. Whatever may be the requirements of some regarding matters of health the needs of all are the same. Except that by the native mountaineer these needs are not as definitely recognized, probably entirely unexpressed. And how seriously do they effect his life's capacity?