South Carolina’s Story
The Making of A State

Dora Dee Walker is a name not immediately recognized by the current generation of South Carolinians but, during her long life, Walker influenced the lives of countless thousands and had a lasting impact upon the rural communities of the state.

For more than 35 years she traveled throughout the state, working with tomato canning clubs, fostering aid to areas devastated by the boll weevil, helping to beautify and develop farm communities, and providing those communities with wholesome recreational activities.

Dora Dee Walker was educated in the public schools of Georgia and attended what is now Wesleyan College, receiving an A.B. degree. In 1911, after 12 years as a public school teacher, she began work as a home demonstration agent. She was appointed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as “County Collaborator of Barnwell County,” supervising girls’ tomato clubs. This position earned her the distinction of being “the first home demonstration agent in the world”.

Her club began with 47 members and rapidly increased to thousands. The tomato clubs, which had their beginning in South Carolina, were important to development of the 4-H club movement in the United States.

The tomato clubs also led to the beginning of modern extension work, which spread from South Carolina to other states. From the growing and canning of tomatoes, the clubs expanded to include poultry raising, the making of clothes and home care. Eventually the program became internationally known.

France, England and other countries sent girls to South Carolina to be trained at Winthrop College under the direction of Dora Dee Walker.

As home extension work spread into the rural communities of the state and the name of Dora Dee Walker became familiar to farm women, she became affectionately known as “Mother” Walker because of the beneficial effect she had on their lives.

“Mother” Walker developed an extension program which led to improvements in homes, churches and schools. Community parks became meeting centers for clubs, farmers, school and church activities, and holiday celebrations.

A remarkable change in the rural homes of the state took place under her direction. Storerooms were built and filled with canned food for the winter. Home gardens now grew a variety of vegetables. The family table became more attractive with a vase of flowers as its centerpiece. Food became more pleasing in taste through the use of recipes provided by “Mother” Walker.

To stimulate interest, prizes and money were given to the county in South Carolina which had done outstanding work in gardening and beautification. Often this money was given toward a scholarship for a club woman.

Years later, looking back on her work with the extension service, “Mother” Walker commented that the development of leadership among farm women and girls was one of her most satisfying accomplishments. When she began her work, women shunned public activities. Later she said, “Even the most casual observer notices the ability of hundreds of farm women and girls to lead with perfect ease and conduct their meetings with parliamentary distinction.”

Dora Dee Walker retired in 1946, ending a 35-year career in home extension work. She had spent the better part of a lifetime showing farm women how to live better. A newspaper tribute at the time noted that her effort “shows many a humble cottage brightened inside with a little paint, a few yards of cloth and better food. This change in conditions has brought relief, contentment and a joy of living.”

“Mother” Walker died in 1951 at the age of 93. She is buried in Mount Armon Cemetery, just a few miles from Allendale.

On October 9, 1977, a memorial in Allendale was dedicated to Dora Dee Walker, the world’s first home demonstration agent.