



Luther Byrd

# Professor Luther Byrd Wore Many Hats

By NANCY DAMRON  
Staff Writer

During his 77 years, Luther Byrd became regarded, not just in Surry County but across North Carolina, as a man who wore many hats.

He was a little bit of everything when all was said and done. A teacher and high school coach; a journalist; a genealogist; a principal; and a college professor. And those who knew Byrd say he was good at what he did — whichever hat he was wearing at the time.

He was born in Ellerbe to Watson and Belle Nicholson Byrd, who moved to Surry County when their son was about 10. They settled in Mount Airy and Byrd attended the local high school, where he graduated. He then attended the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where he majored in history and English.

But it was at Carolina that Byrd, a sports fan, got hooked on journalism, enrolling in the school's first course in that area.

At the end of his freshman year, the school newspaper, *The Daily Tar Heel*, announced an opening for sports editor. Byrd was picked from a field of 16 candidates, selected based on his story on a baseball game.

He later served as editor of the paper and of the "Yackety Yack" yearbook. By the beginning of his junior year, he was working with the University News Bureau, in charge of publicity for all teams.

In 1929, Byrd left Chapel Hill and returned to Surry County where he took a job teaching at Westfield School, embarking on the path that was to gain him nearly legendary fame.

It was in 1929 that Byrd began his 16-year association with the *Mount Airy Times*, a weekly newspaper, serving as editor for 10 years. During that time, Reporter/Editor Byrd organized and directed the Surry County baseball and Mount Airy softball leagues.

And the 1930s marked the years that Coach Byrd's West-

field School teams began racking up title after title in baseball and track. His 19-year tenure at the school included 14 conference championships in track, where his teams went 14 years without losing a dual meet.

Coach Byrd's baseball teams, along with the track teams, posted winning records of better than .700.

But in 1932, Byrd helped leave his mark in the state's high school athletic arena when he persuaded Frank Spencer, sports editor of *The Winston-Salem Journal* and organizer of the *Journal-Sentinel* Northwest Basketball Tournament, to include girls' teams in the action.

That earned him the title of "godfather" in girls' basketball. By the last tournament played in 1951, a total of 186 girls' teams had entered, sometimes playing 20 games per day during the three-week period.

The year 1932 also marked the year Byrd married one of his students, June Stone of the Asbury community. Today, she

lives in Elon College.

During the years of World War II, Byrd stayed busy with his newspaper endeavors, losing all the men on the staff to combat duties. Thus, from 1941-46, Byrd wrote all the paper's copy except society news.

The war also took his assistant coach, leaving Byrd all coaching duties as well as his five classes to be taught. Byrd also served on the Selective Service Board, handling questionnaires for two townships, was scoutmaster of a Boy Scout troop and a Sunday school superintendent.

He further served during those years as a correspondent for several daily newspapers across the state and did historical articles for other publications.

In 1945, Byrd was named as Westfield School's principal, holding the title until the spring of 1948 when returned to Carolina to do graduate work in history. He received

See BYRD, page 9

## Byrd

Continued from page 7

his master's degree that spring and began working for his doctorate.

It was in 1949 that he began his 30-year association with Elon College, starting as history and journalism professor. He was an active advisor to the former campus newspaper, *The Maroon and Gold*, served

as the professor of history and English from 1954-69 and from 1969-75 as professor of history.

It's been said that he taught more than 40 percent of all graduates between 1953 and 1975.

He retired in 1975, but continued to be associated with Elon College. He

was included for many years in "Who's Who in America," "Who's Who in the South and Southwest," and "Director of American Scholars."

Byrd was also a widely known genealogist, choosing that field in which to pursue his love of history.

Mrs. Byrd said she still has three filing cases full of her late husband's research and coats-of-arm patterns.

Mrs. Byrd has presented the North Carolina Archives with much of Byrd's work.

He died in December 1982 at the age of 77.