

**"Chowan's trustees, faculty and administrators are challenged to prepare us for the new America of the twenty-first century."**

My employment at Chowan College began in August, 1968. During my first twenty-one and one-half years with the college, I served as Dean of Students. Since January, 1990, I have worked in the Office of Development as Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations. My responsibilities to the college have been varied. I have recruited students, given campus tours, directed all aspects of the student development program including housing and campus security, taught classes in history and the freshman year experience, and solicited gifts from Chowan College alumni and friends, foundations and corporations. These varied experiences have given me a rather comprehensive appreciation and understanding of Chowan College, its missions and its positive influence, especially in northeastern North Carolina and southeastern Virginia.

My work in the Office of Development has given me opportunities to more fully appreciate Dr. Godwin Cotton Moore and his friends who founded the college. On numerous occasions I have admired the judgment and foresight of Chowan's founders. Chowan Female Institute opened its doors with 11 students on October 11, 1848. That was 147 years ago today.

In the years prior to the Civil War, many people assumed that women needed little education. A great discrepancy existed between the amount and kind of education provided from men and women. Women were for children and the kitchen. Some people, both men and women, laughingly suggested that women should be awarded such degrees as the M.P.M. for Mistress of Pudding Making, or the M.S.B. for Mistress of the Scrubbing Brush.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was founded in 1795 and Wake Forest University was established in 1834 by Baptists

of North Carolina. Neither the state of North Carolina nor the Baptists of the Tar Heel State had the education of women in mind when these schools were created. The University of North Carolina was concerned about a gentlemen's education. Wake Forest was established primarily to educate men for the ministry. Against this background, we must express admiration for those founders who dared to establish a school of high order for women in Murfreesboro, a town described in 1848 as "a prosperous economic center with schools and churches and

lished in 1911. The first Student Government Association was organized in 1914.

By 1920, Chowan was once more facing economic problems. Citizens of Murfreesboro again demonstrated their appreciation of Chowan by pledging \$22,500 to pay the college's indebtedness.

The economic history of Chowan College closely parallels that of the United States. The Baptists of North Carolina were tightening their belts during the Great Depression of the 1930s and decided the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina should not support two four-year colleges for women—Chowan and Meredith. Attempts were made to consolidate Chowan with Meredith. Plans for merging Chowan with Wake Forest were discussed. There was talk of moving Chowan to Rocky Mount or Elizabeth City.

There was a shortage of students. Students either paid their way or went to work if employment could be found. Few people had the financial resources to attend college. There was no such thing as financial aid for students in the 1930s. One of Chowan's older graduates from Elizabeth City, when talking with me about her college experiences, told me that her father was able to pay her college tuition and fees with wagon loads of Irish potatoes. Others have told me their college expenses were paid with cows, sheep, cured hams, corn, potatoes, and canned goods.

Deciding to admit men in 1931 was a last ditch effort to ease the financial burden of the college. Accepting men would improve enrollment. Enrolling men changed the personality of the college. Football was introduced in 1933. In the spring of 1934, Chowan field its first baseball team.

Before Chowan would give up its life, the trustees, faculty and friends of the college took another step to continue its services. Chowan suspended its operations as a four-year college and began functioning as a two-year residential college in 1937.

A shortage of students brought about by World War II closed Chowan College in 1943. With World War II over and the availability of financial aid through the G. I. Bill, Chowan resumed operation in 1949 as a two-year residential college. The years following World War II were relatively good years for Americans. Chowan experienced remarkable growth.

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## "A school of high order"

A Founders Day Address  
Delivered by  
R. CLAYTON LEWIS  
October 12, 1995

a refined and intelligent citizenry."

On July 4, 1851, the people of Murfreesboro gathered for the laying of the cornerstone for McDowell Columns building. The cornerstone is located near the front of the building on the side nearest Thomas Cafeteria. Take time to read the cornerstone. Notice the classical Greek influences around the windows and doors of McDowell Columns. This beautiful structure, listed in the National Registry of Historic Places, provides us with an awareness of history and tradition, a feeling of stability and a sense of quality. McDowell Columns, with massive Doric columns and broad veranda—so typical of the old South—has become Chowan's symbol.

In spite of food shortages, high taxation, sharp increases in prices and a decline in students, Chowan remained open during the Civil War. The people of northeastern North Carolina experienced numerous difficulties after Federal forces captured much of the area we know as the Outer Banks, Hatteras Inlet and Roanoke Island. Prices soared. Bacon rose from \$.33 per pound in 1862 to \$7.50 per pound in 1865. During the Civil War, the tuition and fees of Chowan Female Institute tripled.

In 1863, the Board of Trustees instructed the business manager to invest the college's money in Confederate bonds. This decision led to critical financial problems after the war because the bonds were worthless. However, as always, the Trustees, faculty and Baptists of Murfreesboro were determined to meet the educational needs of young women in northeastern North Carolina and southeastern Virginia.

In 1910, the name of Chowan Female Institute was changed to Chowan College. The first yearbook, "Alaska Nuggets," was pub-



R. Clayton Lewis, center, is pictured on the front steps of historic McDowell Columns prior to his Founders Day address with two college presidents. Dr. Bruce E. Whitaker, left, retired in 1989 after serving as president for 32 years. Dr. Herman E. Collier, Jr., right, is currently serving as interim president.

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