

# FOUNDERS' DAY KICKS-OFF CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

On October 15, 1972 Bennett College officially began its celebration of its 100th Anniversary. Founders' Day was held in the Annie Merner Pfeiffer Chapel to recognize the purposes of the ex-slaves who were responsible for the establishment of the institution. After words of appreciation from the alumnae, the faculty-staff, and the student-body, the assembly was addressed by Dr. Isaac H. Miller, president of the college. His text follows:

"It is said of Fredrick Douglas, the great abolitionist, that when he was a young slave boy, his mistress set about teaching him to read. These lessons were a daily practice. One day the master, discovering what had been going on behind his back, finally reprimanded his wife saying, "Don't you know what will happen if you teach this boy to read. If he learns to read he will no longer be a slave."

Young Fred overheard this. As might be expected the lessons stopped. But you know what happened. Young Fred did learn to read and the rest of the story is history. People throughout the world, throughout the years know of Fred Douglas. Scores of chapters have been written about his life. But all we know of the slaveholder, however, is that he lived and died.

One thing he did acknowledge, most certainly, is that nothing can enslave, nothing can tame, nothing can contain, nothing can destroy the trained intellect.

We assemble here this lovely October morning to speak to the founding of a college — of the cause and circumstance which led to its founding and the concerns which we wrestle today as the context of what its people must face today.

Many members of the new generation think that words like freedom, overcome, liberation, and power were coined first by Martin Luther King. Many of you think that there was no revolutionist before Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael. Many of you do not know that Sojourner Truth, Mary McCloud Bethune, Harriet Tubman, and Phyllis Wheatley were really the first women libbers.

The hard truth is that there has been no event of liberation and empowerment in the history of mankind to equal the movement to educate freedmen and ex-slaves during the early post-Civil War days of the 1860's and 1870's. Bennett College came into being for just an occasion and duty as this — the freeing of the intellect of women and men just a few days removed from slavery.

This college was established and grew here in the hostile southeast where it was near treason to even teach a black to read, to say nothing of building schools and colleges for the purpose. So those were the times — when the freedmen were legally free — through a bloody Civil War.

The act of freeing his intellect is still being waged, and full freedom must await the outcome of a war, as it were, which is still in progress. The battle offers full educational opportunity. . . .

I think it is appropriate here to cite a brief rundown on our history. Bennett College had its humble begin-

nings in 1873 in the unplastered basement of St. Matthews Methodist Episcopal Church, through the inspiration of blacks, newly emancipated from slavery. Mr. W. J. Parkinson, called a principal, was in charge. In 1874, the school came under the auspices of the Freedmen's Aid Society and remained so sponsored for more than a half century.

Rev. Edward O. Thayer became the second principal. The school, in its first years, enrolled on the average 75 students who ranged from the ages fourteen to thirty-five. There was an urgent need for land and a school building. Rev. Thayer reported: "A collection was taken by the colored people of Greensboro which amounted to \$105.00. That amount was made up of small contributions that the Sabbath school children had been saving at the suggestions of their parents and pastor for this purpose."

Lyman Bennett of Troy, New York donated \$10,000 for the school. The name Bennett Seminary was given in his honor. The North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church gave help in purchasing 20 acres of land. Within the year, the first building, Bennett Hall was constructed. From this beginning to 1883, the institution was known as Bennett Seminary, but after that date became known as Bennett College.

By 1879, the little school had grown to the point of having full Normal, College Preparatory, and Theological courses.

In 1891 President Thayer moved to Clark University and was succeeded by Rev. Wilbur Fletcher Steele who remained in the presidency until 1889.

In 1886, Industrial Work for young women began on the Bennett campus under the auspices of the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. They established the "magnificent Kent Hall" for the purpose of instructing women in the "womanly arts." It was built at a cost of \$4500.

In 1889, the first black president, Rev. Charles N. Grandison, was installed. He was the first black president of any of the institutions founded by the Freedmen's Aid Society. That same year saw the appointment of the first black teacher, John P. Morris, who taught Greek and Mathematics.

In 1891, the collegiate division listed an enrollment of 222 students and a faculty of seven.

Professor Jordan D. Chavis became the president. Under his administration, a men's dormitory was built in 1893 called Carolina Hall. It was built by student carpenters, masons, and tinnners.

In 1905, Rev. Silas A. Peeler served as president until 1913. Between 1911-1912 eleven teachers and 237 students were on the campus which property was valued at \$36,000.

1913, Professor J. E. Wallace became president and served until 1915.

In 1915, President Frank Triggs became president during a time when Bennett was heavily in debt even though the enrollment was around 300. The plant value in 1924 was \$200,000. Carolina Hall had burned in January of 1921, losing housing, an audi-

torium, and classrooms. Under Dr. Trigg, the academic program was expanded. A new girls' dormitory, refectory, and classroom building was constructed.

By act of the Board of Education for Negroes of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Woman's Home Missionary Society, Bennett College at Greensboro, N. C., in February 1926, formally became a woman's college.

To give administrative leadership to the new Bennett College for Women, Mr. David Dallas Jones was elected President by the Board of Trustees. Mr. Jones, a native of Greensboro, N. C., was a Methodist of long standing. Mr. Jones brought to the presidency an excellent background of education and experience. He held the B.A. degree from Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, and in 1930 earned the M.A. degree from Columbia University. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. From 1911 to 1914, Mr. Jones was a member of the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A., and from 1914 to 1923 he was Executive Secretary of the Pine Street Y.M.C.A., St. Louis, Missouri.

Mr. Jones, and Bennett College also, was fortunate in his having a wife, Mrs. Susie Williams Jones, who complemented so well his qualities and efforts.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones made a great team in initiating and carrying forward the program of Bennett College. For thirty years Dr. and Mrs. Jones were the central and directing force of the college, and a strong influence upon the lives of thousands of young women whose good fortune it was to be students whom they touched.

In 1926 Bennett College began with an academic program ranging from the seventh grade through the first year of college. By the end of 1931-32 all high school work had been discontinued, and the four-year college program engaged full attention. The college started in 1926 with ten students. Fourteen years later the student body numbered 356, drawn from twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia.

At the end of the 30-year period of Dr. Jones's administration, the physical plant consisted of 42 acres of land, 33 buildings, and an endowment which amounted to \$1,500,000.

Let me shift to another theme. It would be very easy for us to take such an occasion as this to eulogize our Founders and those who carried the dreams of the Founders down through years of anguish and anxiety. It would be easy for us to feel that the task is complete — That there are no new frontiers. It would be easy for us to ignore their contribution through irrelevant disregard of the facts. But clearly it must be a source of great pride and challenge to acknowledge that we assemble as the beneficiaries of that heritage and even more significantly that we assemble as the potential instrumentality of that heritage for generations yet unborn. It is in this spirit of looking back and looking forward that these words are spoken this morning. Gratitude for the past — Concern for the present — challenge for the future.

What does starting a new

century mean? New occasions and new duties for us individually and as an educational community? We must think clearly of the quality and character of the world we inherit. Surely we have the human material resources to do almost anything we choose. We have all the capability in the world to use our God-given talent in uplifting ways. Yet poverty, hunger, disease, war continue to rampart.

The old occasions exist with some new variations on the theme. As we look at these, however, one need not look very far to acknowledge man's responsibility for his own plight. For greed, avarice, selfishness, indifference and racism continue to prevent man from being his best self.

Each man, each woman must think introspectively of how he fits into the scheme of things. What personal contribution does he make? Does he in the day-to-day relations contribute to the disquiet and randomness in society? What reorientation, what new and re-directed application of energies was required of me as an individual in order to turn things around — to bring fruition, true community?

The answer is up to YOU. At the same time, what variable clearly and distinctly impinges on me as an individual trying to make it.

It takes each of us being willing to subordinate one's ego, one's personal selfishness in the interest of the institution and the society. The college as an organism must be an organism of change. We are supposed to produce dissatisfied people.

The college must have as its purpose expanding of black competence and at the same time expanding value and priority orientation. We must ask ourselves such questions as these: Is it wise to educate a person to pilot spacecrafts to a distant planet without having given him that which is needed to help him live with people right here at home? Does learning to perform a heart transplant not carry with it some need to care for the moral and spiritual implications of the technical capabilities? Does not learning carry with it the mandate of learning how to, as well as what to?

The decision that will turn this world around and turn it on for man must be made in the hearts and minds of men. And the college — any college — Bennett College — must be in the business of producing a new kind of person for a new kind of society. So indeed, there are new occasions and new duties.

The founders saw their new occasions and their new duties. They saw them as they comprehended them in that day. We, too, must see our new occasions and address ourselves to the situations.

A college is its people; who they are; who they think themselves to be; what they believe; what they believe in; what they are committed to; and what they address themselves to.

Many of us gag on words like CHURCH-RELATED and SPIRIT. Now if these words trouble you, try these: All education should be concerned with the influencing of sensitive, thoughtful men and women. It is not enough to be technically competent. . . . In his autobiography,

EXPERIENCE, Arnold Toynbee has expressed something worth hearing.

"The more potent science and technology become, the greater man's potentiality for evil as well as good. If technology continues to advance while man's moral standards remain static or decline, the science and technology will become more of a curse than a blessing. Man's last enemy is not death, but man himself. Man is his last enemy and his worst one — worse than death, worse than viruses, worse than bacteria, worse than sabre-toothed tigers."

These words are anything but anti-science. They are prohuman. As our second century of service commences, we have truly an inspiring opportunity. An opportunity to become a community turned on for scholarship and academic excellence—a community turned on for man. We must be about transforming and not about conforming. We must be about trend-setting, not about following the lead. We must be about great ideas, not stumbling over minutiae. We must be about openness to intellectual growth, not about slavish-pattern-oriented lock-step.

I see a great need for sound assessment of the future political, social, and economic world in which our graduates must function. And the development of comprehensive goal oriented education where the emphasis continues persistently on the interruption of ignorance and individually engineered person development. We must not be tied to rigid form and lockstep patterns of advancement. We must assemble here a clearly distinctive consortium of educational experiences both in terms of goals and philosophy, as well as in terms of technology. We must provide new configurations, fresh opportunities for the creative tension of ideas in confrontation.

We must state and reaffirm what we are about as an instrumentality for the great society. We must seek to enlist all members of the college community in the single task of achieving that new society by what we do and by what we engage in here together. We are concerned with birth and re-generation and if we are not, then what is the college about? New occasions bring new duties says the hymn.

The old man, the consuming, indifferent, self-serving man, must die and give place to a new creative force, a new man in our society. As an institution we must go forward resolutely and with steadfast hope, strong in the conviction that only in profound education is there true freedom. That is what those ex-slaves who founded the college had in mind, as the song writer had in mind:

"God of our weary years, God of our silent fears, Thou who has brought us thus far on our way. Thou who has by thy might, Led us into the light, Keep us forever in the path we pray."

I think on this Founders' Day as we approach this 100th year of the college, this ought to be our abiding thought: "If indeed a man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for; likewise if an institution should exceed its grasps or what's a heaven for."