

Founders Focused on Academic and Religious Integrity

Meredith Grows From Dream to Reality

"The purpose of Meredith College is to develop in its students the Christian attitude toward the whole of life, and to prepare them for intelligent citizenship, home-making, graduate study, and for professional and other fields of service. Its intention is to provide not only thorough instruction, but also culture made perfect through the religion of Jesus Christ. These ideals of academic integrity and religious influence have always been cherished at Meredith."

Starting Place

As one professor once said, "The best starting place for anything is to state its purpose," and, to some extent, Meredith had its starting place in just such purpose. In 1835, at the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, held at Union Camp Ground in Rowan County, someone moved the appointment of a committee "to consider the establishment of a female seminary of high order." This committee consisted of John Armstrong, Thomas Meredith, and W. H. Merritt. In 1838, after three successive committees, Thomas Meredith, still an appointed member of the committee, was determined that the denomination should

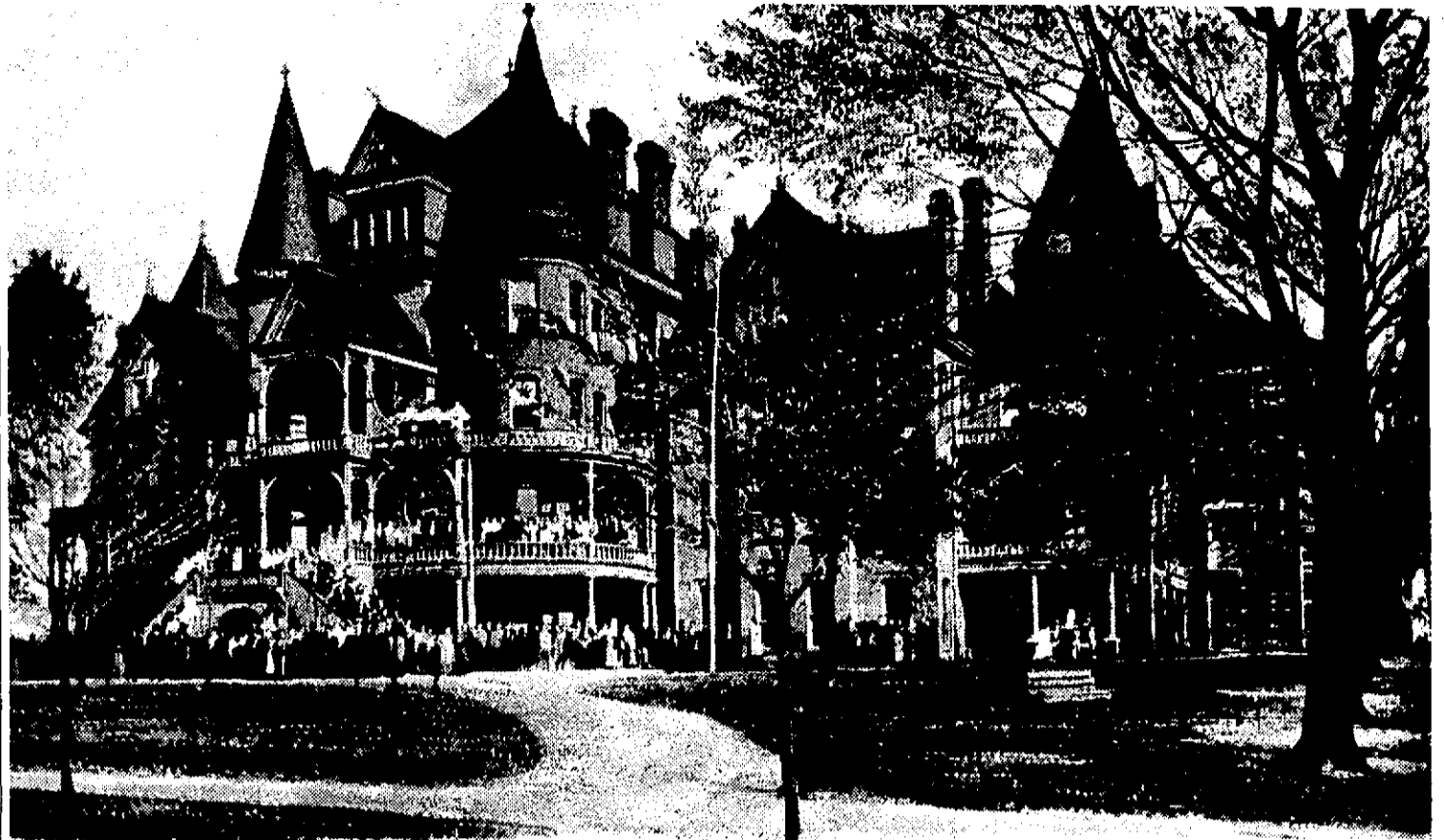
provide a real education for all young women. He was very vigorous and precise in the resolution that he offered to the Convention on November 6, 1838:

"Resolved, that in the estimation of this convention, it is expedient to institute a Female Seminary, adapted to the existing wants of the denomination and to be located in the city of Raleigh, or at some eligible point in the adjoining county."

"Resolved, that the aforesaid school be modeled and conducted on strictly religious principles; but that it should be, as far as possible, free from sectarian influence."

Charter Granted

This was the beginning — the starting place — 1838. However, there was little decisive action to follow up this resolution. Not until 1888, when Leonidas LaFayette Polk introduced to the Baptist State Convention the motion to establish a female university, was any significant action taken. Even then, it was three years before the institution was granted a charter by the State of North Carolina. It is that date, February 27, 1891, that is being commemorated in the pres-



Meredith of the past, called Baptist University for Women, was housed in this building in downtown Raleigh.

ent seventy-sixth anniversary ceremonies.

After this, however, activity be-

gan. Many problems had to be solved — matters of finances, a site for the school, professors to be hired, courses of study to be planned. The solution to the last problem was a course of study composed of three departments — "Literature and Science, Fine Arts, and Technical Training." The school was first located in Raleigh, but not on its present site.

Opening of School

Contract for the first building was let in 1895, and four years later after several delays because of insufficient funds, Main Building was almost ready for occupancy when the school was first opened to students. "The students of 1899-1900 have vivid memories of those first days," wrote Dr. Mary Lynch Johnson in her *History of Meredith College*. Overwhelmed by the numbers seeking admission that first day, the trustees had to purchase and renovate an adjoining residence to house the overflow. Surely the headlines of the *News and Observer* summed up the significant opening of the Baptist Female University: "From the Hearts of Its People It Sprang Full Grown in a Single Day!"

The next major event in the history of the institution was the change

in name. In 1904, the Baptist Female University was changed to the Baptist University for Women. Then, in 1909, it was changed to Meredith College, in honor of Thomas Meredith, founder of the *Biblical Recorder* and the member of the Convention who first presented the resolution adopted by the Convention.

Twelve years later, according to Dr. Johnson, "the most momentous decision in the history of Meredith since its founding was made on May 23, 1921, when the Board of Trustees approved M. L. Kessler's motion, that the site of the College be moved to larger grounds in, at, or near Raleigh." The downtown location was too small — a pocket-hankerchief of a lawn, she describes it, with cramped space for tennis and basketball, inadequate dormitory space, and most important, no room for growth.

New Location

Impressed by this great need of a new location for Meredith, the Board of Trustees met the demands. After careful consideration, they purchased the Tucker farm, Meredith's present site, located about three miles west of Raleigh on Hillsboro Road.



The present site of Meredith College reflects its seventy-six years of growth.

Meredith's Name Honors Educator Who Was Great Influence on Baptist History in N. C.

When, in 1909, the name of the Baptist University for Women was changed to Meredith College, the denomination was pleased with the

tribute to Thomas Meredith, a man who, in the words of Josephus Daniels, "gave to his commonwealth the most priceless gift that any man can bestow, the gift of himself."

A native of Pennsylvania, Thomas Meredith (1795-1850) was educated at the University of Pennsylvania. As valedictorian in commencement exercises of 1816, he delivered an oration on "Christianity."

After a year in the study of theology with the pastor of a Philadelphia Baptist Church, he set out in 1817 as a missionary to the eastern section of North Carolina. The following year he was ordained "to the full work of the gospel ministry" and in 1819 accepted a pastorate in New Bern.

Succeeding years found him an increasingly prominent figure in the affairs of North Carolina Baptists, a brief pastorate in Georgia in the 1820's marking his only later residence outside the state.

In 1830 he drew up the constitution adopted by the newly

formed Baptist State Convention, including as one of its three purposes "the education of young men called of God to the ministry." This interest in education, an abiding concern of the man throughout his years of service, is evidenced also in his appointment in 1835 to the committee of the Convention "to consider the establishment of a female seminary of high order." It was Meredith, of course, who offered to the Convention in 1838, the "vigorous and definite" proposal, which at a later time was to give rise to the institution that bears his name.

When two years after the Convention itself came into being it voiced its need for a well-conducted religious journal "to impart information to the churches and congregations at large," it was Thomas Meredith who met the need with his monthly *North Carolina Interpreter*. This journal was soon succeeded by his weekly *Biblical Recorder*, which began regular is-

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Thomas Meredith



On Founders' Day last year, the Meredith community honored the memory of the man for whom Meredith was named. Anita Hauser, president of the Student Government Association, is pictured placing a wreath at the grave of Thomas Meredith in the old city cemetery in Raleigh.