

Chowan College: Unique Center of Hertford Cultural Quality

Often neglected, sometime forgotten, always struggling, Chowan College in Murfreesboro has remained a unique institution which has left a mark on Hertford County people that sometimes is not easily seen.

Established by a group of mid-19th century Baptist fathers, the college saw a golden era in the days before the Civil War. It was one of the few institutions to remain open during that conflict.

Since then, its vicissitudes have been many. But as it enters its 12th decade, Chowan is on a new plateau of growth and a new generation of Hertford people are learning once again that Chowan is something beyond all price in its contribution to the quality of life of Hertford people.

This is the story of the early days of Chowan College:

Chowan College at Murfreesboro is located near the birthplace of American civilization, and the beginning area of Baptist work in North Carolina. The two oldest Baptist churches in North Carolina are Shiloh, six miles from Elizabeth City near Albemarle Sound, and Meherrin at Murfreesboro, on the Meherrin River.

Due to the leadership of Lemuel Burkitt and Martin Ross, the Baptist churches of northeastern North Carolina became Missionary Baptist churches. They believed in an educated ministry, Sunday Schools and evangelism.

It was this interest in education which led the Chowan Baptist Association to give loyal support to Wake Forest College after its founding in 1834. Of the first-year enrollment of 75, 21 students were from the Chowan Association. This ratio continued as the college grew, and Sawyers Creek and Absokite churches were the first to subscribe scholarships of \$500 for the college.

Dr. Paschal in his History of Wake Forest says: "During the entire period of the Institution (Wake Forest), interest in the school was centered chiefly in the stretch of country lying northeast of Raleigh, including the Chowan Association, of which, with some show of reason, Wake Forest College has been called the foster child."

"Because of the desire for educational facilities for young ladies, to equal those afforded young men at Wake Forest, the Chowan Baptist Female Institute came into being in 1848.

A Meeting of Fathers Is Held . . .

In the spring of 1848, a group of fathers gathered at "Mulberry Grove," home of Dr. Godwin Cotton Moore, moderator of the Chowan Association. These men were determined to have an institution which would give their daughters a well-rounded education, and prepared a resolution to be presented to the Bertie Union Meeting at Pleasant Grove church in Hertford County.

Signers of the resolution, which was endorsed heartily by the Bertie Union, included Dr. Moore and A. J. Perry, members of Pleasant Grove; A. Jack Askew and W. W. Mitchell, from the Ahoskie church; John Mitchell of Holly Grove, and Dr. S. J. Wheeler of Murfreesboro.

Elder Amos J. Battle of Virginia, who attended the Bertie Union Meeting, was employed as agent to raise funds for the new school for girls. Within a month, it was reported to the meeting of the Chowan Association at Ramoth-Gilead church in Pasquotank County that nearly \$1,000 had been subscribed, on condition that the school be located in Murfreesboro.

At the recommendation of the Association, trustees were appointed for the "female high school" to be called the Chowan Female Institute. Those first trustees were G. C. Moore, A. J. Perry and J. W. Barnes of the Bertie Union Meeting; John L. Terrill, W. Stallings and W. Riddick of the Yoppin Meeting; J. T. Halsey, E. P. Melson and W. J. Beasley of the Washington and Tyrrell Meeting.

At the direction of the Association, the trustees purchased the two-story Banks Academy building in Murfreesboro for \$1,225. This is the same building now owned by the Woman's Club and Melrose Club of Murfreesboro.

Dr. McDowell Begins Task . . .

Dr. Archibald McDowell of South Carolina, a graduate of Wake Forest College, was elected first principal. Described as "a sublime Christian gentleman and a ripe scholar," Dr. McDowell received \$700 yearly. His wife's salary was \$500 a year, and Miss Sallie Owen taught music for \$400 yearly, Elder A. J. Battle was elected steward and agent.

The Institute opened on October 11, 1848, with eleven students. First graduate in July, 1853, was Miss Ann Jones Ward, who later married Maj. John Wheeler Moore, noted North Carolina historian. By the middle of April, 1849, the number of students had increased to 47, with 22 of these music students.

Then disaster struck—smallpox broke out in Murfreesboro. Principal McDowell suspended the school, and then resigned. Elder Battle, however, reported to the Association that he felt it his duty to continue religious instruction for the students, many of whom were planning to return home.

He credited the fact that six girls were baptized, as a result of his efforts with holding them in Murfreesboro until the reopening of the Institute on the first of May, 1849.

The Rev. Martin Rudolph Fory, a native of New York and graduate of Madison University there, was named principal pro tem. At the Association meeting in May, he was appointed principal at a salary of \$800. Elder Fory met with much favor, and delivered an hour-long lecture illustrated with experiments on the "philosophical" apparatus of the Institute, at the 1849 Association meeting. By that time, a charter had also been obtained from the State of North Carolina.

Stock Company

Encouraged by the increase in students during the next year, a stock company was formed by friends of the Institute and several members of the board of trustees, to erect "a large and tasteful edifice for the use of the Seminary." Elder Fory emphasized in his report to the Association that the Baptist denomination would have full control "for all time," and that the stock company was merely to finance a new building, costing \$2,000. Dr. S. J. Wheeler was appointed agent to raise funds for the building and collect for the school, in which he succeeded.

Meanwhile, Elder Battle, who boarded the students, was battling with the faculty over who had responsibility for the conduct of students. Trustees decided that it was the duty of the steward, Battle, "to provide for the students comfortable board and to regulate their conduct in matters of behavior while in his house." The faculty's province was to "control the students in all matters of education and morality at all times."

The Columns Cost \$15,000 in 1851 . . .

One acre was decided to the Institute for the proposed building, the site of the Columns building today. Later a sedge field of about 28 acres was purchased from Perry Carter for \$1,120. This is the portion of the campus which now lies principally in front of the Main Building. Love Cottage, a two-room structure erected on the old Banks Academy lot, was moved to its present site. Now the oldest building on campus, plans call for remodeling Love Cottage for use as an alumni office.

In 1851, Dr. G. C. Moore reported: "In August, 1851, a contract was made with Mr. A. G. Jones for the erection of a building 106 feet long by 46 feet wide, four stories high. The contractor was to furnish the entire material to complete his job, save the hot air furnaces, blinds and lightning rods, to do the work, and receive as compensation \$11,267, when the building was delivered."

Jones contracted with Jesse A. Jackson to burn 450,000 bricks

for the job. After several important changes were made in the original plan the building was ready for occupancy on November 3, 1852. Contractor Jones received \$15,754.73, instead of the sum originally agreed upon.

It is interesting to note that much of the expense for scholastic equipment was paid to Principal Fory, who had brought furniture, musical instruments, chemical and philosophical instruments with him from New York. Including his "private account," Mr. Fory received \$8,247.37, including \$2,083 for musical instruments. It was necessary to purchase these items from him, since he had resigned as principal and it would have been necessary to refurbish the school.

First Catalogue Is Printed . . .

On August 7, 1850, the first catalogue was ordered printed. It appears in the minutes of the Chowan Association for 1851, with the following "Board of Instruction": Rev. M. R. Fory, A. M., Principal, Natural Sciences and Moral Philosophy; S. J. Wheeler, A. M., M.D., Lecturer on Anatomy and Physiology; Miss E. Delancy, French and Higher English Branches; Mrs. S. R. Morse, Latin, Drawing, and Mathematics; Miss S. Baker, Music, Piano; Miss S. A. Johnston, Music, Piano and Guitar; Miss C. W. Stephenson, Music and Piano; Miss M. Smither, English, Ornamental Branches.

Evidently love blossomed among the faculty, for by 1853 Miss E. Delancy was listed as Mrs. E. Delancy Fory, Assistant Principal, French and Italian. It is evident that Principal Fory married one of his teachers.

In discussing subjects and requirements of the Institute, the catalogue specifies "in order to form habits of economy, and to prevent rivalry in dress, a uniform is prescribed for Sabbaths and holidays." This consisted of a deep blue merino dress for winter, and in summer a pink calico, gingham, or white cambric or muslin dress. With this, the girls wore a straw bonnet, trimmed in blue for winter, pink for summer.

There were two sessions of five months each, commencing on the second Wednesday in October and March. Two vacation periods ran from the second Wednesday in August to the second Wednesday in October, and from the 25th of December to the first of January.

"The institution is incorporated, and may be regarded as a permanent establishment, where young ladies can complete the most extended course of studies," the catalogue assured parents. It was divided into three departments, primary, academic and collegiate. Pupils had to be ten years old before entering the academic department, and 14 years old before being admitted to the collegiate department.

First-year students in the academic department were required to tackle arithmetic, geography, English grammar, and U. S. history. By the fourth year they progressed to algebra, Latin, astronomy, and composition, universal history, and exercises in analysis and letter writing.

Juniors in the collegiate department studied trigonometry, Racine in French, logic, geology, heights and distances, mensuration of surfaces and solids, and mineralogy.

Seniors faced moral science, evidences of Christianity, natural theology, intellectual philosophy, analogy, elements of criticism, bookkeeping, and astronomy. Reading, writing, elocution, composition and the Bible were studied throughout the whole course. Music (piano and guitar), drawing, painting and embroidery were optional choices.

Fees for the primary English branches were \$10 per year, and sciences fees were \$15. Text music course costs \$15 yearly, with \$2.50 for use of instruments. Board, including washing, fuel and lights, costs \$8 per month.

Typhoid Fever Epidemic Hits . . .

Sickness swept down again in November, 1850, when typhoid fever hit the boarding house of A. W. Darden, college steward. Those girls who were well were moved into other boarding houses, and nothing more is recorded about the fever epidemic.

Principal Fory reported to the Chowan Association in May, 1852, that nine teachers were employed and 99 students had entered the Institute that year—the largest enrollment yet. Thirty-seven girls had been baptized following a meeting in the Murfreesboro Baptist Church, and the students had organized a missionary society to educate at least one Chinese girl at one of the stations in China.

In February, 1854, Principal Fory submitted his resignation, to be effective one year from that date. Since he had already started a female institute in Hampton, Va., however, the trustees accepted his resignation, effective in August of that year. Dr. William Hooper, then a pastor in New Bern, was elected president to succeed Fory, at a salary of \$1,500 yearly. Dr. Hooper had also been president of Wake Forest College for two years.

Dr. Hooper began his service as Chowan in October, 1854. The son of William Hooper, Sr., one of the North Carolinians who signed the Declaration of Independence, the Institute's new president was born in Hillsboro. He was allowed to erect a building on campus for his servants.

The first recorded person to remember the school in his will was James H. Carney of Norfolk County, Va., who died in 1854.

M. C. Babcock seems to have been the first Chowan bursar, for he was elected in July, 1854, to keep the books and collect the tuition.

Faced with pressing obligations in the spring of 1855, the trustees instructed their agent, Elder R. Warren, to undertake to raise \$25,000 in donations "to perfect our Institute." A public relations campaign was also started, with a history of the college to be prepared and distributed, and a request for aid from "certain interested ladies" in beautifying the grounds.

Dr. McDowell Makes a Report . . .

The winter of 1854-55 was a cold one, and caused further difficulties. Dr. Archibald McDowell, who rejoined the faculty in 1855, reported to the Association in 1856, that "imperfect heating" during the cold winter had caused a drop in enrollment, but that the situation had been rectified.

It was Dr. McDowell, more than any other, who was responsible for beautifying the campus. After trustees had authorized landscape work by a professional gardener, Dr. McDowell was authorized to solicit funds for the work. He brought from his own home in South Carolina the two large magnolias that stand today at the front corners of the Columns.

Special arrangements were made before the opening of school in October, 1856, for a steamboat to leave Norfolk after the arrival of trains from Weldon and Portsmouth. "Parties coming on that day can have their baggage checked through to Murfreesboro, and will

avoid the necessity of coming by hacks," the catalogue said. Fare from Weldon to Murfreesboro was \$2.50, from Portsmouth to Murfreesboro, \$2.00.

Winborne's "History of Hertford County" records a singular incident which occurred during the 1856-57 school year: "At the commencement of the Chowan Baptist Female Institute in Murfreesboro, July 1, 1857, the beautiful Susan Deans graduated, and to complete the grandeur of the occasion, just at the close of the concert, and before the melody of the sweet strains of music ceased to please and charm, Rev. Reuben Jones of Virginia, who later became Moderator of the Portsmouth Baptist Association, came forward with Miss Susan Deans and in the midst of her sister graduates were united in the holy estate of matrimony by Dr. William Hooper, president of the Institute."

At the recommendation of Dr. McDowell to the Association in May, 1858, a campaign to raise \$10,000 for the Institute was begun. Trustees also began a highly significant and advanced concept of financing education, when they authorized the faculty to secure a limited number of young ladies of promising talents who wished to

become teachers. These girls were to be educated on the basis of bonds (notes) which they would give, to be repaid after they had graduated and had time to make the money.

The heavy burden of debt which had handicapped the trustees in operation of the Institute was alleviated in 1859, when members of the stock company agreed to relinquish their holdings to the board of trustees. All agreed to this except Elder M. R. Fory, the former president, but evidently the matter was resolved with him by 1860.

By that date, 12 years after the founding of the school, the men who built the beautiful Columns building, still standing, had turned it over to the trustees of the Baptist Association. Enrollment at Chowan can be appreciated more fully when it is compared to enrollment at Wake Forest College for the same years.

Wake Forest, operating 14 years before Chowan's founding, enrolled 1,120 in the 1848-60 period, while Chowan enrolled 1,041. This is remarkable considering that female education was not nearly so popular as the education of men. Furthermore, Chowan's enrollment was achieved in direct competition with the Wesleyan Female College, a Methodist institution opened in Murfreesboro in 1855.

Civil War Period:

Nat Turner's insurrection on August 21, 1831, was the first shadow of the war to come 30 years later, for residents in the Virginia-North Carolina area. On that hot summer day, the rebellion which Nat Turner, a Negro slave preacher, had been fermenting for months burst forth upon unsuspecting white residents of Southampton County, Va.

Armed with "guns, scythes, axes, knives, clubs and the like," according to Winborne's "History of Hertford County," Nat and other Negroes in his area proceeded to kill all the white people—men, women and children—they could find.

First victims were Nat's master, Joseph Travis, his wife and three children. In all, 55 white people were slain before the Negro band was killed or captured. "The whole surrounding country was thrown into a great consternation," says Winborne. "Women and children were sent to the villages and towns for protection."

"A large number refugee for safety to Murfreesboro. John H. Wheeler of Murfreesboro raised a company of troops and marched quickly to the scene of trouble and rendered valuable assistance in quelling the treacherous and bloodthirsty Negroes."

Twenty-four of the assassins were tried, convicted and executed. One of the suspects was shot and killed in what is now the campus of Chowan College, and buried there. Apparently he was seeking to organize Negroes there to join in the bloodshed. Nat Turner was captured October 31, and executed November 11, 1831.

This memory was still fresh in people's minds when the Civil War flared in spring of 1861, heightening tensions between white people on one side, and slaves and free Negroes on the other. The first reference about any difficulty, found in minutes of the Chowan board of trustees for July, 1861, said: "In view of the unsettled state of the country and the probable diminution of the patronage of the school," the president, Dr. Hooper, and the Rev. A. McDowell would be offered salaries any proceeds left after paying current expenses and reserving five per cent to the board of trustees. They were to be allowed to retain as many assistants on the faculty as they felt they could afford.

Dr. Hooper's proposal was accepted by Dr. Hooper and the Rev. Mr. McDowell. However, since President Hooper's views on secession differed from that of most of the parents of his students, opposition to him developed soon after the outbreak of the war.

Early in the fall of 1861, at his own request, he left the Institute, returning for the commencement in 1862, when he offered his resignation. This was tabled until after the close of the war, three years later, and McDowell served as president in the intervening years.

The war soon affected both enrollment and prices at the Institute. By 1862, the steward raised board price from \$9 to \$15 per month, and enrollment dropped to only 44.

The fall of Roanoke Island, which gave Union troops access to interior rivers, caused prompt withdrawal of all pupils. After a few weeks of suspension, however, school resumed with 20 students.

It was fortunate for Chowan that the doors were closed for only a few weeks, while most colleges of the country were closed. Wake Forest and Mars Hill were closed for three years.

Single Grad

In 1863 there was only one graduate, Miss Mary O. Parker of Murfreesboro, who married S. S. Green of Emporia, Va. Their son, Rufus J. Green, who is about 90,



"WHAT REMAINS AFTER THE COLLEGE ANNUAL WAS FINISHED"



"THE CROW'S NEST"

Presented by Rose Nowell of the class of 1915. It has since been used as the exclusive property of the senior class.

Old Photographs Picture 1920's:

Charming Look at College

Chowan College has always been a favorite of visual artists: the engraver, painter and photographer.

Almost by the time the big Main Building, known as The Columns, was finished in 1851, it was the subject of engraver artists and amateur painters. The imposing building was like nothing ever seen in these parts.

Through the years, The Columns continued to be an important subject for drawers and painters.

And when the photographer began his business, the college also was a good subject.

The pictures in this series were taken in 1922 for a small pamphlet entitled "Views of Chowan College."

They give a charming insight into life at the Murfreesboro college in a day when it was the alma mater of young women exclusively.

The titles under the pictures are those which appear in the small book.

The book was printed as a promotional piece, sent to prospective students and other interested people.

(Other pictures on inside pages.)

donated \$40,000 in 1955 for the science building, as a memorial to his mother.

By July, 1863, food supplies had become so scarce that the trustees agreed to let the steward accept See AUSTERITY, Page 4



"A DRIVEWAY"

(These pines in 1859 were giant patriarches. They were growing as saplings when the college was founded in 1848.)