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The First Five Presidents of Wofford College
By
William C. Herbert

Wofford College is the "lengthened shadow" of not just one great man. From the beginning she was blessed with a number of big men who cast long, long shadows. The stature of the men who composed the first faculty is remarkable. But we are concerned here with the college's good fortune in her presidents.

If the Rev. William May Wightman, employed to raise money for Randolph-Macon College, had succeeded in kindling Mr. Benjamin Wofford's interest in that institution, Mr. Wightman might not have had the first presidency and there might not have been a Wofford College.

It was no surprise that the first president of Wofford should be a Methodist minister. Mr. Wofford's will had definitely given his $100,000 for the establishment of a college "under the control and management of the Methodist Episcopal Church" of his "native state".

And it was quite fitting that the preacher chosen should be the Rev. Wightman, who was, according to Wallace, the outstanding member of the conference. He was strong in physique, intelligence, and wisdom. And that he understood the values and possibilities of Christian education was made clear in his address at the laying of the cornerstone, in 1851. He was at that time chairman of the board of Trustees, two years before there was a faculty.

Perhaps teaching English fits one for a college presidency. Three of the five presidents we are considering taught in that field. Prof. Wightman was an English teacher at Randolph-Macon from 1827 to 1829.

A student, forty-one years after he left Wofford, wrote in his description of President Wightman: He was "self-poised, scholarly, suave, always equal to any occasion, finical, uniformly pompous, and always overwhelmingly great in public speech".

Charlestonians might agree that growing up in their city and attending the College of Charleston had much to do with producing these qualities and
fitting one to occupy the three-story president’s mansion on the east end of the new college campus.

Though the Conference of 1853 had elected a faculty of five, President Wightman, aged 46, began his work with 24 students and two professors; Mr. David Duncan, 63, and Mr. James Carlisle, 29. Prof. Shipp declined his election and Prof. DuPre requested a year’s leave of absence.

But President Wightman’s stay at Wofford, 1854–59, was too brief to accomplish much more than the safe launching of the college. Perhaps the young college with enrolment of 70, seemed too small for a man of his abilities. At any rate, he left to accept the presidency of Southern University in Alabama. Later, in 1866, he became a bishop of his church.

President Shipp

Among the trustees appointed by the South Carolina Conference of 1851, along with Rev. Wightman, was Rev. Albert Micaiah Shipp. Or, if he would prefer the Latinized form that appeared on the commencement program of 1868 all of it in Latin — Reverendo Alberto M. Shipp, D. D.

Rev. Shipp was elected to the first faculty as professor of English. Had he accepted, four of the first five presidents would have been English teachers. But Prof. Shipp, in 1853, was holding the chair of history at the University of North Carolina. He declined to come to Wofford until he was elected president in 1859.

One wonders whether he would have come then, if he had foreseen the effects of war upon the new college. After 1860 the enrolment went steadily down, from 79 to none in 1864–65. During that last year of the war Professors Duncan and Carlisle were teaching students in what was called the preparatory department. Dr. Whitford Smith, who came to the college in 1855, went back to preaching, and Profess DuPre went to the coast to direct salt making.

President Shipp’s future must have looked hopeless. The endowment investments, in Confederate bonds and certificates and bank stocks, were all worthless; the
faculty had been scattered; the student body had to be rebuilt from zero, and the South was desperately poor.

In addition to all this, Dr. Shipp could not claim tact as one of his virtues. "His dignity was of the chilling kind which gets you on stilts at once".

Perhaps his dignity was affected by that of the ancient Romans, whom he very much admired. So devoted to Latin was he that the commencement program, two of the graduates speeches, and the president's farewell address were all in that language. The audience must have been glad to sing the fine English of Watts's great hymn:

> From all that dwell below the skies  
> Let the Creator's praise arise.

But President Shipp had learned that not all Wofford students could master Latin. For in 1870 the Bachelor of Science degree was first offered, with less emphasis upon ancient languages. What effect this had upon enrolment we do not know, but in that year the student body reached 100 for the first time. To grow from zero to 100 in the five dark years following the war, in the so-called Reconstruction Period, was no mean achievement.

In 1875 Dr. Shipp was called to Vanderbilt as a professor in the department of theology, later to become dean of that division.

--- President Carlisle ---

The election of young Mr. James Henry Carlisle to the first faculty of Wofford College was a rare bit of good fortune. He had all the qualities that would fit a man to be a great college president, except the desire to be one. He considered a great character much more important.

When elected president in 1875, he was probably already the most influential man in his state, without ever intending to be so. It seems to me that there were two reasons for his accepting the position. One was that as president of the college he could more effectively emphasize what he considered the important purpose of education. A second reason was in keeping with an injunction...
that he frequently hurled at his students: "Young gentlemen, seek no honors; decline none."

He did not seek to be a signer of South Carolina's Secession declaration, or to address huge crowds from the famous Chautauqua platform, New York, or to be a director of that great organization. They sought him.

A gentleman hearing him speak in Washington asked, "Where have you been keeping him, that we have never heard of him?" Well, they were keeping him in a little college in South Carolina, which he steadfastly refused to leave.

It is easy to record additions to plants and enrolments, but how shall spiritual growth be measured? Or how may morality be tabulated? President Carlisle's contributions were in the realm of the ethical, the moral, and the religious.

The Doctor — as he was usually spoken of — was not blind to the value of money. But he seemed unable to ask an individual for a gift. Since money was never important in his own life, perhaps he could not understand why a man would want to hold to wealth, when he could so profitably give it away.

For him, money was not important; athletics, hardly worth attention; and bigness, quite appalling. The enrolment never reached 200 during his presidency, and he wanted it so for it was necessary for him to know every student.

President Carlisle said of himself, "I have been an educator, not an administrator, and I do not regret the choice."

There are no adequate records of students' work in his day. He took the position that if a student made a worthy record, he would not need to refer to it thereafter. If he made a poor one, it had better be forgotten. After all, he thought, teachers' marks are a poor indication of a student's education anyway. And concerning teachers' attempts at making fine distinctions in marking he asked, Shall this be classified as comedy or tragedy?

If I have written of a man rather than an administration, that is correct.
And the amazing thing is that it worked. There went out from his small student body an incalculable amount and quality of leadership.

When young Henry Nelson Snyder asked a Vanderbilt teacher what sort of man President Carlisle was, he got this reply: "You will find him the most New Testament man of any you have ever known."

In 1890 the Wofford College trustees elected an English professor, without consulting the president - which he considered unnecessary.

And what most impressed the youthful Prof. Snyder upon his arrival in Spartanburg? Mud! Red, sticky mud, when it rained; red dust when it did not. The town and the campus were so unattractive that he almost returned to his blue-grass Tennessee.

But he met Dr. Carlisle, and he stayed for 59 years, in the same house next to the college building, except for his first year and one spent in Europe.

And why should he not stay? Besides having the most influential man in South Carolina as his president, he had as fellow teachers the courtly Professors DuPre and Gamewell, who were to spend their lives here, Prof. Craighead, who left to become Clemson's president; Prof Kilgo, who later became president of Duke, and later still Bishop Kilgo; and Prof. Prutchard, who was to become the dean of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Intellectual excellence was already on the campus.

In 1902 English Professor Snyder became President Snyder. And the presidencies are growing longer: Wightman, 5 years; Shipp, 16; Carlisle, 27; Snyder, 40.

The emphasis of Dr. Snyder's presidency was upon scholarship. He had fallen in love with learning as a student at Vanderbilt, largely because of the influence of men who had been inspired at Wofford; Kirkland, Baskerville, and Charles Forster Smith. Then, too, we must not forget the group about him.
when he came to Wofford.

But by 1902 it was time to do something about the plant and grounds of the college. For Dr. Carlisle a roof was a device to keep out just enough weather so that a man could think.

The newly elected president had not a small task to keep faculty salaries high enough to get good men, which always he put first, to prevent the old houses from falling to pieces, to increase the endowment, and to add some new buildings.

Though it was completed within his administration, we cannot give President Snyder credit for securing the John B. Cleveland Science Hall. Alumnus Cleveland, '69, had already assured Prof. D. A. DuPre and Dr. Carlisle that he would donate that building.

But President Snyder did promote the addition of Carlisle Hall in 1914, the development of Snyder Field in 1931 — which he wanted named Law Field in honor of the donors — and the Andrews Field House, assured in 1928.

Enlargement required more money, and, while the president never considered money raising his most important task, the endowment grew from $60,000 in 1902 to $602,000 in 1942. Not bad for a small denominational college.

And the regular student body increased from 136 to 493, in 1927, the peak of this administration.

He traveled widely in the interest of education and at the call of the Methodist Church, giving Wofford College a publicity that money could not buy. After an address before the Southern Educational Conference in 1902, a man said, "You ought not be allowed to speak in public." "Why not?" Because I disagree with everything you said, and now I want to everything you advocated.

But with all the duties that pressed upon him on the campus and off, President Snyder never forgot his first love, scholarship. The installation of the Phi Beta Kappa chapter at Wofford he considered the crowning event of his administration. He had had a large part in the building of a good college, and
he knew it. Phi Beta Kappa was evidence that others knew it.

President Greene

President Few of Duke once said that Dr. Carlisle gave Wofford Character; Dr. Snyder preserved that and gave Wofford academic excellence; the next president must be a builder. And it was so. Except that in nine years marked by the turmoil of war President Walter Kirkland Greene could accomplish but a small part of his aims in building.

If, as President Few said, Wofford needed a builder, it would have been difficult to find a man with more varied experience for the job. Dr. Greene had managed a preparatory school and had studied or taught at Wofford, Vanderbilt, Wesleyan, Harvard, and Duke, where he was the dean of undergraduate instruction when elected president of Wofford in 1942.

By the spring of 1944, President Greene had worked out his plan for The Wofford of Tomorrow, printed in the March Bulletin of that year. It was thorough. A map of the campus shows the locations of buildings that are and those that should be. Twenty-seven needs are listed, with the estimated cost of each.

But we were at war, and the Army Air Corps took over the entire campus and much of the faculty from 1943 to 1945. So for two years Wofford College was really not herself.

Then came another interruption in President Greene's plan. Since 1927 the South Carolina Conference had been considering what to do with its three colleges. And in 1947 Columbia and Wofford were placed under one administrative control with Dr. Greene as president of both institutions.

This experiment was abandoned in 1950, and for a few months Dr. Greene was again president of Wofford only.

He resigned in 1951, after nine years of careful planning, renovating of buildings, enlarging the faculty, and the adding of Greene Hall to the plant, in spite of unforeseeable and drastic interruptions.
Wofford College's Fitting Schools

A hundred years ago, when Wofford College was founded, boys who went to college got their preparation in academies. And with some 2600 of these popular institutions in the South, colleges should have had plenty of well prepared freshmen. But most of these academies were not as good as our grandparents liked to think they were, and colleges had their own preparatory departments.

For 33 years Wofford's regular students and preparatory boys sat in the same classrooms and had the same instructors. Then, in 1887, the faculty recommended to the trustees that the two groups be separated.

On the crest of the hill west of the present site of the Spartan Hill there were three buildings that once housed the Spartanburg Female College. Into this ready-made plant the preparatory boys were moved. And thus began the Wofford College Fitting School, or, as the boys named it, the Fighters' Hole.

The Fitting School was blessed in the beginning with two excellent headmasters in succession, both serving long terms. The first was Arthur Gaillard Rembert. What a scholar! What a teacher! What a dynamo of intellectual energy! Dr. Rembert directed the Fitting School from 1887 to 1897. Somewhere along the way, either in the preparatory school or the college, the students nicknamed him "Knotty". There were and are few teachers the equal of "Knotty" Rembert.

Arthur Mason DuPre became headmaster in 1897, after teaching two years under Dr. Rembert. Fortunately we do not have to decide which was the greater schoolmaster - the brilliant-minded, quick-moving scholar or the deliberate, careful man, of firm convictions. Few pupils or teachers ever questioned the decisions of Prof. DuPre.
As a disciplinarian he was unsurpassed. Unhurried, he looked through the culprit and seemed to read his inmost thoughts. Hence, the nickname "Bad Eye", when he was not spoken of as "Old Mase".

These two teachers established the fame of the Fitting School.

In 1895 the school was moved to the campus, occupying Alumni Hall, then a 4-story building - the middle one of the three facing Church street. After a fire in 1901, Alumni Hall was reduced to two stories and two other buildings were added to the plant.

In 1912 Dr. DuPre went over to the College, as Dr. Rembert had done in 1897, and there followed six years of short administrations. A. W. Horton and J. M. Steadman, Jr. were co-masters on 1912-14. Mr. Horton remained for two years longer and was followed by Mr. F. P. White, who died before the end of his second year.

By the fall of 1916 we were deep in World War I. Military training was popular. So, when the writer took over in that year, an R O T C organization was set up, and for the next six years the Fitting School was a military school.

At one time in this period the enrolment almost equaled that of the College, which brought the comment that there was a possibility that the tail might wag the dog.

But academies had served their day, High schools were improving, and the College needed dormitory space. The Wofford College Fitting School was closed in 1924.

Carlisle Fitting School was largely a town of Bamberg enterprise. While it was authorized by the South Carolina Conference, in 1892, as a preparatory school for Wofford College, gifts to the undertaking were largely local. Probably that was the chief reason for Carlisle's enrolling girls as well as boys. And for the sake of economy it began very early to prepare students for Wofford's sophomore class.

But Carlisle was unfortunate in that its leadership changed so often. Of its nine headmasters, in its 40 years under the church and Wofford College trustees,
Mr. J.C. Guilds was the only one to serve as headmaster longer than five years.

Guilds had gone to Carlisle as a teacher, after his graduation from Wofford in 1906. He was elected headmaster in 1909, according to Wallace's History of Wofford College. No doubt that is true, but the Conference minutes state that the enrolment was so low that the school did not open in the fall of that year. However, Dr. Guilds's administration was a most successful one.

He had taken over the administration of a school at the point of failure. After eleven years, he left it with 10 teachers and 225 students. In 1920 he became president of Columbia College.

In the next eight years there were three headmasters: Duncan, Hageod, and Gault.

Then, in 1926, Mr. James F. Risher was elected. But the need for preparatory schools had passed, and Carlisle in that year ceased to be affiliated with Wofford College. Four years later South Carolina Methodism leased, and later sold, the plant to Col. Risher. Today it is the widely known Carlisle Military School.

Before there was a Wofford College the Methodists had built a school in "Abbeville District" called, at the period that concerns us, the Cokesbury Conference School. That was in 1834.

In 1893, the church placed Cokesbury under the control of the Board of Trustees of Wofford College, and at the Conference of the following year discussed "raising" it to the level of a fitting school. Evidently there was little enthusiasm for a third preparatory school, for the Conference of 1896 appointed a separate board of trustees, thus severing Cokesbury's connection with Wofford College.

Twenty-one years later, 1917, the school was closed and the plant was turned over to the community for the use of public schools.

And so ends Wofford College's participation in the unique academy movement.
Dear Mrs. Herbert,

I have read these sketches with keen interest. They tell me much about Dr. Herbert as well as about their subjects. Well written and interesting from first line to last.

I hope you will let us have these sheets for our archives some day.

Gratefully,

Paul