

Here & Now

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An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

When the Florida Baptist State Convention was formed at Madison in 1854, the original constitution had 14 articles. Article 10 dealt with the "specific objects of the body." These objects, goals or aims for the new convention were then broken down into five areas. The Florida Baptist convention was to (1) facilitate Baptist unity and influence, (2) encourage revival, (3) aid associations, (4) finance ministerial training and (5) "promote pious and useful education."

It was the intent of promoting "pious and useful education" that brought about a dozen year saga (1907-1918) that produced Columbia College in Lake City.

The state had supported the Florida Agriculture College since it opened its doors in Lake City in 1870. However, a decision was made to move the college to Gainesville in 1905. So eight buildings, 355 acres and \$15,000.00 in cash was left with the citizens of Lake City. The city offered the property to any denomination that could best present their case to begin a school and Florida Southern Baptists won out.



Chapel Hall and Dormitory, Columbia College

The state convention called a special meeting for July 24-25, 1907, at Lake City to consider taking over the property for a Florida Baptist College. Enthusiasm and emotion ran high. Over 1,500 messengers attended the special meeting and the citizens of Lake City entertained the guests in their homes. Former governor W. S. Jennings (1863-1920) was a primary figure in the formation of the Lake City college.

The 1907 educational endeavor had a mixed bag of motivations. Some messengers were mad, some were sad and most were glad. The mad ones were angry over the fact that the Stetson charter did not give clear "ownership" rights to the convention. Others were mad because Stetson had allowed football to become a part of their athletics and the Florida Baptist Witness led the opposition to this "deadly game" on the Stetson campus. Some were sad because Stetson was being controlled by "Yankee dollars." The Stetson family had invested over \$300,000.00 in the school and Henry Deland and Andrew Carnegie had given money to the school which gave it a "northern touch." Many pastors were glad to see a new Baptist school in Florida because most of them had gone to Mercer or Howard and had little loyalty to Stetson. With high hopes and big ideas Columbia College opened its doors in October, 1907, with 133 students.



W. S. Jennings
Governor of Florida
(1901-1905)



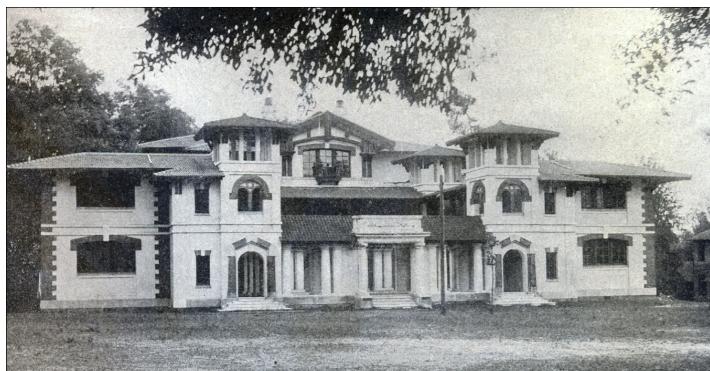
Columbia College
cheerleader



Interestingly enough in 1914
Columbia fielded a football team

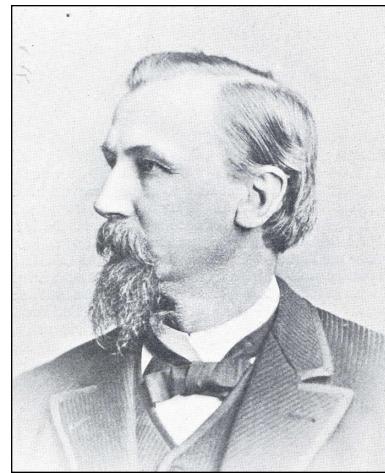
Dr. G. A. Nunnally of Georgia was the first of three presidents in the history of the school. He served for only one year and then Dr. H. W. Tribble became president in 1908. If Dr. Tribble had lived he might have been able to lead the school to academic and financial success. He was a graduate of Richmond College and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He had served as president of the Rawlings Institute before he came to Columbia County and he put the school on sound administrative and denominational footing. However, tragedy struck on February 3, 1912, when the car he was driving collided with a log train and he died a few days after the wreck.

Dr. Andrew Phillip Montague (1854-1928) became president in 1912. Dr. Montague had served as president of Furman University (1897-1902) and Howard College (1902-1912) before coming to Columbia. He was a Latin scholar and man of great integrity and distinction. However there were too many negative factors in the wind and the school chose not to open its doors for classes in the fall of 1918.



Columbia College Science Hall

The school was not able to continue for a number of reasons. The 1907 beginning had many in support but not much in the bank. A 1908 drought was one of the worst on record in Florida and seriously affected income. Stetson fought the school all twelve years of its existence and the pen of President Lincoln Hully was difficult to overcome. The Heard National Bank in Jacksonville failed in 1917 and \$5,000.00 cash was lost. The outbreak of World War I reduced the pool of male students and this seriously impacted enrollment.

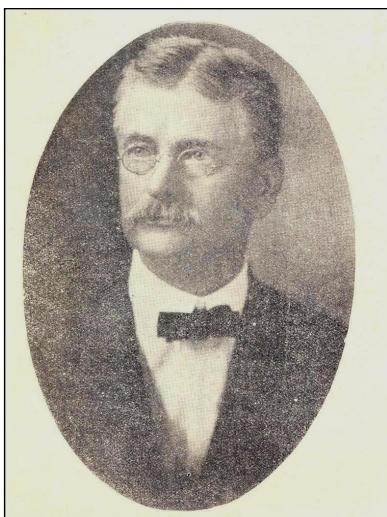


G. A. Nunnally

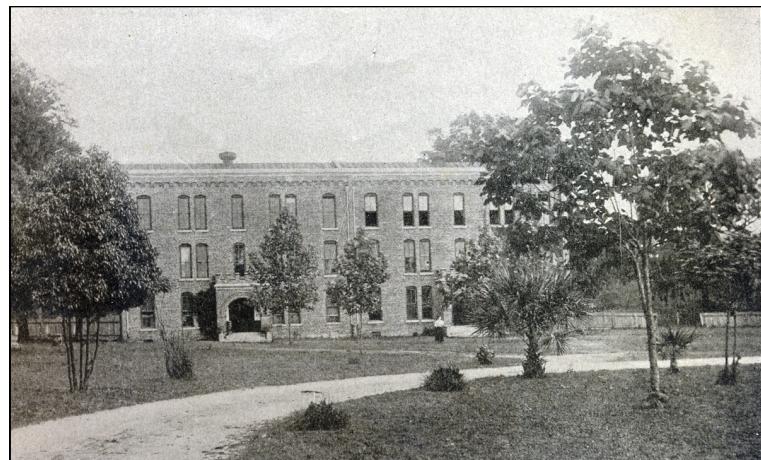
It would be too simple to write off Columbia College as an experiment that never reached its potential. But Maurice Fain in his 1952 Master's Thesis (at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) entitled "The Story of Christian Education Among Florida Baptists" stated "it can never be said that Columbia College was an educational failure. Its alumni are active as preachers, missionaries and teachers to this day. The investment in the lives of youth has brought eternal dividends."

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Matthew 6:33



A. P. Montague



Columbia College Young Men's Dormitory