CHAPTER I
WOFFORD ANCESTRY AND BACKGROUND

Said Dr. James H. Carlisle, "Benjamin Wofford united three words not often found together: a rich Methodist preacher." Who was this man and how did this come to be?

The Woffords were of that great tide of migration from the British Isles such a large portion of which flowed mainly into Philadelphia and drifted along the Piedmont plateau into the colonies to the southward. Two Wofford brothers from Northern England settled in Pennsylvania, near the Maryland line, says the Spartanburg Wofford family tradition. More definite is the statement of a Wofford descendant Mr. J. W. Gladney of Phoenix, Arizona, whose family tree says that Absalom Wofford (1690-1750) of Cumberland County, England, settled with his wife Sara in Prince George's County, Maryland, and had at least one son of the same name as one of the five who are known to have come to Spartanburg, and, like him, was a Revolutionary soldier.¹ This is in harmony with the statement of the very reliable Landrum's History of Spartanburg County that Col. William Wofford, the eldest of the five brothers who came here, was born near Rock Creek, Maryland, about twelve miles above the present city of Washington, October 25, 1723. One of the Spartanburg Woffords settled in the Friendship neighborhood, one near the present Woodruff, one on Enoree River, one near the present Glendale, and one, Joseph, in whom we are most interested, near the site of the later Hill's Factory on Tyger River. William, Joseph, James, John, and Benjamin are names scattered abundantly among their descendants. William and James were Deputies Surveyors, whose names are signed to plats in the State archives from the early 1760's.²

These Woffords were substantial citizens, some of whom occupied official positions and several of whom prospered materially. Ensign Campbell of the British army during the Revolution says that Col. William Wofford was a rich Tory at whose house the Ensign's troops obtained abundant refreshments. Clearly Campbell fell into confusion as to Col.

¹. The genealogist Mr. Leonard Andrews, who prepared recently an extensive Wofford genealogy, to whom I am indebted for the data concerning Absalom Wofford, is uncertain whether to believe the five Woffords who came to Spartanburg County the sons of this Absalom, or of a William Wofford; inclines toward the latter.
². A. S. Salley to D. D. Wallace.

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Wofford’s politics. Draper in his King’s Mountain and Its Heroes gives an account of Col. William Wofford’s services in the American forces. He built Wofford’s Iron Works on Pacolet River, which the British burned—further evidence of the fact that William Wofford was on the American side. Numerous grants of land were made to Woffords from the 1760’s on, some of them quite large, especially those to William and James Joseph, in whom we are more interested, was by no means so prosperous as some of his brothers. We find a grant to him in 1793 of 61 acres on Tyger River, though surely he must have owned land long before that, and in 1795 one for 417 acres on Two Mile Creek in Spartanburg County, and in 1797 one for 370 acres in the same county. These data, taken from the Grant Book in Columbia, are not conclusive as to all property owned by the Woffords, for they take no note of inheritances or purchases, but merely serve our purpose of showing the general material welfare of the Wofford clan.

The Census of 1790 gives the following data:

<table>
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<th>Free white males 16 yrs. and over</th>
<th>Free duros under 16</th>
<th>Free white females</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Wofford</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt. James Wofford</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benjamin Wofford</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Jeremiah Wofford</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Wofford</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absalom Wofford</td>
<td>3</td>
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Joseph Wofford, the father of the founder of Wofford College, was a Captain in the American forces in the Revolution. An indent in the records acknowledges a debt to him by the State of £42 and interest for services in Col. Roebuck’s regiment since the fall of Charleston on May 12, 1780. Another indent, which he sold to Ferdinand Pheiney, is assigned and signed in Wofford’s own hand.

Another brother, Benjamin, illustrated the division of families which made the Revolution largely a civil war. The papers of the Council of Safety of December 9, 1775, tell us that Capt. Benjamin Wofford had been brought down to Charleston by a party of rangers and confined in one of the officers’ rooms by order of Col. Huger. It runs true to form that one of the richest, if not the richest, of the family stood with the Tories,

5. The Revolutionary records in Columbia show indents issued to one William Wofford, a private, and one to Captain William Wofford, the latter for service in Col. Roebuck’s regiment; also, indents for service by several other Woffords, Landrum’s History of Spartanburg County, and the History of the Wofford Family, published by the Wofford Memorial Association in 1928, give data on names and locations of settlements.

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hang him. Mrs. Wofford, lying in childbirth, called to Young to come to her. As he sat on the edge of the bed, she pled with him for the life of her husband: “Nat, if Joe is killed tonight, it will kill me. I cannot survive the shock. So you will have to give account at the Great Day, not for killing Joe alone, but for two others. It is murder, Nat, and you know it. I plead tonight for the life of Joe, my life, and for the life of my babe.” “Captain Nat had once stood for her hand and her love, and he was touched by her helpless entreaty. He pledged her that not a hair of her husband’s head should be hurt; and, true to his word, he allowed Joe to escape. That night Benjamin Wofford, the founder of Wofford College, was born.” 11

Capt. Joseph Wofford bore to his death scars about his head and neck received during the Revolution; but he lived for at least 85 years and reared six children.

The house in which the child was born that night of October 19, 1780, has long since disappeared. It stood on the southern side of Hill’s Bridge Road, as it is now called, two or three hundred yards southeast of Tyger River, and about a third of a mile southwest of Tabernacle Methodist Church. 12 Benjamin Wofford’s mother was a deeply religious woman, who had deliberately chosen the Methodist instead of any of the other faiths that had been urged upon her. For many years her husband was so determinedly irreligious that he would not allow her the means of riding to church, several miles away; but, says Mr. B. L. Allen, he would habitually relent (or, we might better say, repent) and call one of his sons to go with the team after his mother. Once when the children were all away he went himself and heard enough of the sermon to make him a changed man. “Until 1802,” says Benjamin Wofford in the only article known to have been written by him, “she traveled alone in Zion.” In that year, he says, she had the happiness to see her husband and most of her children brought, under the preaching of Revs. George Dougherty and Lewis Meyers, into the fold. Her prayer that at least one of her sons should be called to preach was answered in her son Benjamin. She died a rejoicing Christian March 24, 1826, as she and her husband were reading together Clark’s Commentary. 13

Benjamin Wofford, as he himself tells us, was converted under the preaching of Rev. George Dougherty, one of the leading Methodist ministers of the South Carolina of that day, and Rev. Lewis Meyers. He joined the church under the pastorate of Meyers. “In August following,”

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under the preaching of Dougherty and Mark Moore at “perhaps the first camp meeting held in South Carolina,” he felt the call to preach. Several months later he was licensed by Dougherty, his Presiding Elder, to exhort. Something drew the young man of twenty-five to the West, and we find him during the first half of the year 1806 applying to Presiding Elder William McKendree of the Cumberland District in the Western Conference for work. McKendree assigned him as an assistant to Rev. Jesse Walker, who was serving the Hirtford Circuit in Western Kentucky. 14 Wofford ranked as an exhorter, intending at the next session of the Conference to apply for admission on trial. On the second day of the Western Conference (therefore September 15), 1806, he is listed as tenth among twelve applicants for admission on trial on the recommendation of their respective District Quarterly Meeting Conferences. The entry in the Conference Minutes reads:

“Benjamin Wofford came from South Carolina, as a licensed local preacher, into the bounds of the Western Annual Conference, and was employed [sic] by the presiding elder of the District [sic], to ride Hartford Circuit, and from the Quarterly Meeting Conference of said circuit obtained a proper recommendation. The Annual Conference think proper to admit him on trial, upon condition that he provide, as soon as may be, for the emancipation of his two slaves, now in South Carolina.” 15 Two days later we have this entry: “William McKendree proceeded to read one letter addressed to Benjamin Wofford, on the business of his two Negroes in South Carolina, and advises him to measure[s]:...” [sic] they [sic] may secure there [sic] emancipation.” A year later, i.e. September 17, 1807, we have the final reference to our friend: “The papers respecting Benjamin Wofford read and the Conference agreed to admit the settlement.”

We can only infer what “the settlement” was. Wofford apparently continued to work in the Western Conference as an exhorter under McKendree’s direction for some months into 1807; for his most intimate friends say he worked there “during the year 1806 and part of 1807.” 16 July 30, 1807, he married Miss Anna Todd, the daughter of Thomas Todd, the

12. Mr. Samuel T. Lanham to D. D. Wallace.
13. Wofford in Methodist Mag., TX, 358-9 (Sept., 1826).
14. The idea of many persons generally well informed on church history that Benjamin Wofford “traveled a wilderness circuit that stretched from Nashville on the Cumberland to Cincinnati on the Ohio” (Dr. Snyder’s Educational Odyssey, 111) is entirely erroneous, and arises from confusing Wofford’s circuit with Presiding Elder McKendree’s district, which the Western Conference Minutes of 1806 show contained eight circuits, of which Wofford’s Hartford Circuit went west from Saratoga to Carlisle’s vague statement in the Southern Christian Advocate of December 1, 1803, that Wofford “old missionary work under Wm. McKendree (afterwards Bishop), whose district included large portions of Kentucky and Ohio,” might be taken to mean that he worked all over the district. The Doctor presumably had access to the Western Conference Minutes only in the condensed form, which do not show the details of Wofford’s assignment to one circuit as an exhorter assisting the regular preacher, The Carolina Spartan, Oct. 28, 1805, quotes Dr. Carlisle as saying in an address on Benjamin Wofford, “he traveled a circuit reaching from Nashville to Cincinnati.”
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richest man in his section. We may assume that his own possession of only two slaves argues that he brought small possessions into the union. His parents were not rich, and he was not yet 27. His bride was just 23, having been born July 23, 1784.17

It is impossible to doubt that Wofford’s leaving his active religious work was chiefly due to his desire to marry. If the only impediment had been the ownership of slaves he could have met that by electing to preach in South Carolina instead of the West. “Locating,” i.e., retiring from the active ministry, as a result of marriage was in that day of small salaries and vast circuits so common that Bishop Asbury, like David on one occasion falling into exaggerated language on the untruthfulness of all men, lamented, The devil and the women will get all my preachers!

The relation of slaveholding to the ministry, which here entered into the career of Benjamin Wofford, early rose to vex the Methodists and ultimately led to the division of the church. Wesley, Asbury, and Coke, like Washington, Jefferson, and Patrick Henry, were all strongly unfavorable to the institution; but the Methodist leaders, particularly Coke, were more willing to do something about it. Asbury, though feeling strongly, was more prudent, while Coke’s agitation was so ardent that he was threatened in Virginia with mob violence and legal prosecution. The early persecution of the Methodists in Charleston was largely due to their being considered abolitionists. As early as 1780 the informal conference of Methodist preachers in Baltimore declared that all traveling preachers in the denomination owning slaves ought to be required to free them. The Conference which in 1784 gave the church its national organization established the rule that all Methodists must take this self-denying step where the law permitted emancipation; but the impractical nature of such an extreme caused its suspension in six months regarding lay members; and in 1808 the General Conference felt obliged to rule that each Conference should be allowed to deal with the question as it saw fit.18

Wofford’s marriage was of vast importance, not only in his own life, but in that of many others besides. Thomas Todd built a home, known as “the red house,” for the young couple, where they lived until Mr. Todd’s death July 2, 1809, after which they moved into the home of his widow and lived with her until her death in January, 1818. Says Mr. B. L. Allen:19

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“After the death of Mrs. Todd, Benjamin Wofford and his wife continued to live at the old homestead, inheriting all the property of Thomas Todd. This inheritance was the nucleus on which Benjamin Wofford built—the nucleus which gave Wofford College to the South Carolina Conference.”19 At that time ownership of the wife’s personal property, and the management, but not the ownership, of her real estate, and the control of its income, belonged to the husband, an arrangement which in this case by no means endangered the estate.

By all accounts Anna Todd was an exceptional woman. She was so widely beloved for her numerous works of kindness that, at her death, October 2, 1835, the little church was incapable of containing the mourners, so that the funeral service was held beneath the roof of a large barn then under construction. A persistent tradition credits her with a large part in planting in Wofford’s mind his interest in education. Dr. James H. Carlisle, writing in the Southern Christian Advocate of December 1, 1883, in referring to Mrs. Anna Todd Wofford, speaks of “the plans of benevolence which Mr. Wofford and his wife had begun very early to devise.”20 In another article he says that Mrs. Anna Todd Wofford “is believed to have suggested or strengthened the definite purpose to promote education.”21

The Woffords had no children; but, feeling the need of young life in the home, he persuaded his widowed sister Mrs. Nancy Tucker, says Mr. Allen, to allow one of her daughters to live in his home. The daughter Nancy accordingly lived with the Woffords until her marriage to Emanuel Allen, the father of the Mr. B. L. Allen quoted above. Emanuel Allen bought the place where Wofford then lived, Wofford reserving only the burial plot, when Wofford moved a few miles to the southward, where he made his home until he moved to the town of Spartanburg in 1840. From about 1833 to ’36 he spent the winters in Columbia.22

May 7, 1817, Wofford and his wife gave an acre and a half for the erection of a Methodist house of worship, which he always called “the chapel,” though Rev. William Martin later named it Grace Chapel. Membership having drifted away, it has long been abandoned. “In it he worshipped and preached for years,” says Mr. Allen, but with what regularity and on what terms we do not know. Dr. James H. Carlisle, repeating family tradition, says that he labored there as “local deacon.” As a matter of fact, Bishop Asbury ordained Wofford deacon at Bethel Academy.

17. B. L. Allen, in Hist. of Wof. Family, 126, on the Todds. Allen was the son of Emanuel Allen, intimate friend of Wofford, who married the niece who lived with Mr. and Mrs. Wofford and bought Wofford’s old home place when Wofford moved to a new home to the southward. Judge J. Wofford Tucker, great nephew of Wofford, is authority for the other statements from 1802 through Wofford’s retirement, except for the exact statement regarding his death.
22. Dr. J. H. Carlisle in Ib., 67-8, on Columbia residence.

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November 18, 1814, proving that, regardless of his having been denied ordination in the West because of holding slaves, his religious interest and his determination to preach continued.23 The late Major A. H. Kirby, who was all but 22 years old when Wofford died, writes that he was after the old type of Methodist preachers (then a local preacher), and was very earnest though somewhat methodical in style of preaching.” Dr. Carlisle says, “As a preacher he was earnest and practical.”

The Conference which met in Columbia, December 25, 1816, admitted Benjamin Wofford on trial. He was appointed junior preacher on Enoree Circuit, in which his home lay, for the year 1817, and as junior preacher on the Reedy River Circuit for 1818. At the Conference meeting at Camden, December 24, 1818, he was ordained elder and was sent for the year 1819 again as junior preacher on Reedy River Circuit. At the end of this third year of service as a traveling preacher of the South Carolina Conference, in the region near his home, he was located by the Conference meeting in Charleston, January 13, 1820.24

Wofford’s first wife, Anna Todd, died October 2, 1835. September 6, 1836, he married Miss Maria Sevier Barron, daughter of Dr. Barron of Virginia, whom he met while traveling in that State. She was 33 to his all but 56.25 Her portrait, painted by W. K. Barclay, of Columbia, S. C., in 1844, shows her as still a woman of considerable beauty and distinct refinement. In both his marriages Wofford illustrated that common occurrence of a man of ability out-marrying himself socially. This portrait and the one of her husband painted by the same artist at the same time were given to Wofford College in 1883 after Mrs. Wofford’s death by Mrs. Mary R. (Wells) Agnew, the niece of Mrs. Wofford.26 The young and beautiful Mrs. Wofford, though a woman of sterling character and devoted to her husband both in sickness and in health, did not like the quiet life in the remote and sparsely settled region below Tyger River. Wofford himself seems to have found it irksome; for he had, for three or four years before

23. This ordination was not at Annual Conference. The fact and the date are from an article by “A Friend,” in Southern Christian Advocate of March 28, 1851—evidently a very intimate friend, all of whose statements subject to verification are correct.

24. S. C. Ceuf, Minutes.

25. I thank Miss Willie Wells, of Morristown, Tenn., a relative of Mrs. Wofford, for the day and month of Mrs. Wofford’s birth June 9, 1801, and for her middle name. Sevier, both taken directly from the family Bible. The minutes of the Spartanburg Lodge of Masons July 7, 1851, speak of the letter received from Mrs. Maria Scott Wofford, but the transcription of the letter has Mrs. Marth M. Wofford, the same as she signed herself in deeds recorded in the Spartanburg County records. I thank Rev. M. B. Gass, of Bull’s Gap, Tenn., pastor in 1949 of the Antioch Methodist Church, about ten miles northwestward of Greenvile, Tenn., and his successor, Rev. E. C. Truax, for inspecting the tombstone, which, however, does not give the data supplied by Miss Wells; and Dr. Anna Wells Agnew of the State Hospital in Brussels, N. Y., a grand niece, for much assistance. The marriage that Mrs. Wofford met her husband at a camp meeting in Virginia which she often attended is from another great niece, Mrs. Mary W. Shoel.


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his second marriage, been spending the winters in Columbia. His home in Spartanburg village, a large square, plain two-story house, torn down within my memory, stood about in the roadway of the present St. John Street Extension, and faced Magnolia Street. Dr. Robert E. Cleveland’s house was on his north, the Russell house to his south, and the Simpson Bobo house (later moved to his, i.e., the eastern, side of Magnolia Street to make way for the courthouse) was diagonally across the street—distinctly an upper class neighborhood. Few today know why Wofford and Short Wofford Streets bear those names.

A sort of innate talent and love for making money early turned Wofford to business and finance. We find him connected with the first cotton mill erected in Spartanburg County, the little 489 spindle factory erected in 1816 by Philip Weaver, one of the textile pioneers, two groups of whom came to Spartanburg from Rhode Island at this time. The fact that Wofford, December 17, 1818, sold to Nathaniel Gist the sixty acres along Tyger River containing the South Carolina Cotton Manufactory would indicate it was his land, and perhaps his money, which supplemented Weaver’s technical skill.27 Wofford’s experience with the textile industry was not encouraging, for Weaver’s enterprise did not prove so successful as did that of the Hills just a little later a few miles up the river. Wofford’s conservative nature turned to banks and money lending. We infer that it was only as landowner or money lender that he was connected with Weaver’s enterprise. He seems to have steered clear of the speculations in land and railroads at which so many in his day made and lost fortunes, though at times he owned considerable land. Compounding his interest and dividends was his safer and surer plan. His executors, for instance, sold his stock in three banks in Columbia and Charleston for more than $60,000.

But Wofford was not interested solely in money lending. While very much of a combination of a Benjamin Franklin economist and a Methodist Puritan, he was, like Franklin, very much of a patriot. On one occasion, when the Indians on the Southern border, apparently in the Seminole War, were on the rampage, Wofford was on hand at the muster ground where militiamen from lower Spartanburg and part of Union assembled. To meet the immediate expenses for the equipment of the quota of men called for a collection was taken up. “The soldier spirit was upon him,” says his nephew Judge J. Wofford Tucker. “When the lines were established and the bugle sounded, he threw a $100 bill into the collector’s hat, mounted his fine bay

27. D. D. Wallace, Hist. of S. C., II, 411, with citation to Spartanburg County records. No land seems to have been acquired by the Weavers until eight months after the above sale. Weaver’s mill was on a creek running into Tyger River from the south.
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horse, and gallantly rode along the lines calling for volunteers.” Ten times as many men as were called for responded.\textsuperscript{28} Wofford was a great admirer of Calhoun and said to him the last time he saw him that if he was elected President he would go to see him inaugurated, but that otherwise he would have no interest in going to Washington.\textsuperscript{29} We are not surprised, therefore, to know that Wofford was a member of the defeated Nullification ticket for Spartanburg for the Convention of 1832.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28} Judge Tucker, in \textit{Wof. Fam. Hist.}, 58. Tucker says that he remembered the incident as a boy and was thrilled.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ib.}

\textsuperscript{30} Major William Hoy, \textit{Historical Reminiscences, MS.}, lent me by Mr. Robert J. Gantt.

CHAPTER II

BENJAMIN WOFFORD FOUNDS A COLLEGE

To his contemporaries, the outstanding fact in Wofford’s life was his propensity and gift for making and saving money. But deep in his mind, and known to only a few friends, was the purpose of accumulating and using money for some religious or educational purpose, with finally a preference for the latter. Dr. Carlisle thinks that his character may have been influenced in this direction by the two primitive Methodist preachers under whose preaching he was converted, George Dougherty and Lewis Meyers. Dougherty was an unflagging apostle of education. The plain, humble Meyers, with his tiny income, managed to save a few hundred dollars, which at his death he gave for widows and orphans. From one of these men, says Dr. Carlisle, Wofford may have learned to save and spend money wisely; from the other to value education for enlarging the life of the individual and the church. To this I think we must add the belief, supported by a widely held tradition, that his wife Anna Todd stimulated his interest in education, as well as, through her inheritance from her father, having supplied such a large part of the foundation fortune which constantly grew under her husband’s management and rendered possible transforming an ideal into a reality.

Wofford was solicited by Stephen Olin, President of Randolph-Macon College, chartered in 1830 and opened in 1832, or by its financial agent, Rev. William M. Wightman, to contribute to the support of that institution, and did, like several other South Carolinians, give $1,000;\textsuperscript{4} but he was not inclined to make an institution so far away the medium for realizing the plans maturing in his mind. By 1844, stimulated perhaps by the crisis in the life of the church connected with the separation in that year of its Northern and Southern branches, he seems to have come to a definite conclusion. It has always been assumed that in trying in 1844 to buy the Limestone Springs Company property at the later Gaffney he was seeking to obtain, at a most attractive bargain, as it would have been, a site for the college which he had determined to found. Dr. Carlisle’s expression is that his intention was to give it to the Conference for educational purposes. The company had in

\textsuperscript{1} Statement by Dr. I. H. Carlisle.