CHAPTER III
LAYING THE CORNERSTONE, 1851

THE FOUNDING of Wofford College, though a notable event, was not something new and strange in Methodist history. In England the foundation of the first Methodist school was laid a month before the laying of the foundation of the first Methodist chapel. In 1785 was begun in Maryland Cokesbury College, the first Methodist college in America. Burned in 1795, probably by incendiaries, and rebuilt and accidentally burned, its career was brief, but its successors were numerous. In 1795 Bishop Asbury founded his Mt. Bethel Academy in Newberry County, S. C., the first Methodist school in the State, which for twenty-five years or more served a wide constituency.1 Tabernacle in Abbeville County (called from 1800 to 1868 District) followed in 1821, succeeded in 1824 by Mt. Ariel, which grew into the George Dougherty Manual Labor School, and finally into the Cokesbury Conference School.2 The movement was nation-wide, and was participated in by all the Protestant denominations, striving to educate the people long before the State took up the duty. The driving power back of the movement was largely the determination to combat the aggressive deism which throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth conducted a distinctly anti-Christian campaign, as illustrated in South Carolina by Thomas Cooper as President of the South Carolina College from 1821 to 1833. Says Dr. W. W. Sweet, “the great college building era in the Methodist Episcopal Church was the twenty years between 1820 and 1840.” “By 1840 there were at least twenty-eight academies, seminaries, and manual labor schools in operation under Methodist auspices, each of them sponsored by an Annual Conference.” “The oldest Methodist institution of college grade in the South is Randolph-Macon, . . . intended to serve Methodists both in Virginia and the Carolinas,” opened in 1832. The years from 1840 to 1860 were also important, seeing in the North the establish-

1. Rev. John O. Wilson, D.D., address before the S. C. Conference Historical Society in 1914 on Methodism and Education; Rev. C. E. Pence before the same body in 1924 on The Dougherty Manual Labor School and the Cokesbury Conference Institute. George Dougherty (1752-1807) is sometimes spoken of as the founder of the Mt. Bethel Academy; but Bishop Asbury’s Journal shows that he had labored for the establishment of the school for several years and that he formally opened it March 19 (not 20), 1795, more than three and a half years before Dougherty became a Methodist Minister. Clearly the idea of Dougherty’s having founded the school arises from his well-known enthusiasm for education and his earnest work for its support after he became a minister.

2. H. N. Sagar in Methodist Unionistional volume, and preceding note.


4. Wofford College catalogue.

5. The part of the will relating to the college is printed at page 31 of the catalogue of 1870-71.
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well, Charles Betta, James Stacy, A. M. Shipp, T. R. Walsh, H. H. Durant; and Messrs. J. Wofford Tucker, Simpson Bobo, Harvey Wofford, E. C. Leitner, and Clough [S.] Beard. The charter grants the right to confer the usual college degrees and repeats the words of the will fixing the term of office for Trustees at two years and their obligation to render annually a financial statement to the Conference. It does not forbid a term of more than four years for any Professor or officer, though Wofford's will does. The charter was to run twenty-one years and until the adjournment of the next General Assembly thereafter. At the end of that time, we may add, it was renewed until repealed.

Though the will only required that the college should be located within the bounds of Spartanburg District (as the counties were called between 1800 and 1868), Wofford took it for granted that it would be located in the town of Spartanburg. The Trustees, however, acting under the freedom allowed them, considered whether location in the town or the country would be better. Dr. Wightman consulted Dr. Stephen Olin, President of Randolph-Macon from 1834 to 1837 and then the President of Wesleyan University in Connecticut. He strongly advised location in the town as more stimulating to intellectual life and better for morals and conduct. A wealthy citizen of the Glenn Springs community offered a gift of $5,000 if the Trustees would purchase a tract of 200 acres for locating the college there. The citizens of Woodruff also made a try; but the advantages of location at the courthouse and the liberty of the citizens of the town in offering to present the needed land as a gift turned the decision in favor of Spartanburg. Three tracts were considered, belonging respectively to Messrs. Thompson, Kirby, and Jesse Cleveland. Mr. Thompson went so far as to cut away some of the timber on his elevated plateau west of the present Charleston and Western Carolina Railroad so as to exhibit the grand view toward the village; but the Trustees selected the Cleveland tract, on condition that the owner would open a street around the college land and give a right of way to certain streets and to the location. Mr. Cleveland agreed to accept $50 an acre, and himself contributed $200, and the contract was closed April 17, 1851. July 3, 1851, they bought from J. W. Tucker 200 acres of woodland lying about a mile and a half north of the college as a source of firewood for the Faculty, Dr. J. H. Carlisle told me—a site many would think as to topography and under the changed conditions of today would be a much better location for the college itself than the spot on which it was built.

The Trustees showed lamentable lack of foresight by requesting a tract so small that within a few years it was necessary for the college to purchase adjacent tracts to prevent the establishment of undesirable neighbors virtually at the doors of its buildings, not to speak of the needs for expansion. The original campus of about thirty-six acres was of most unfortunate shape. The narrow strip ran eastward from Church Street in such a way that the line was about three hundred feet in front of the main building, and so close did it come to the back of the premises, Dr. J. H. Carlisle told me, that a gentleman could almost have stepped from his carriage to the Doctor's well, which was within forty-nine feet of the house. There was no provision for playgrounds, no provision for future growth, no prudent extension of bounds as protection against undesirable neighbors.

Although the contract for erecting the buildings was not signed until July 29, 1852, the cornerstone was laid July 4, 1851, with imposing ceremonies. The Spartanburg lodge of Masons, organized in 1849, were proud of such an opportunity early in their career to exercise their impressive rites, conducted by their Worshipful Master William B. Seay. Mrs. Wofford was given an honored place, for which she expressed her thanks to the lodge. Never had the village of Spartanburg witnessed such a scene of community activity and joy. Early in the day at the corner of Church and Main Streets an immense concourse assembled from Spartanburg and neighboring Districts and from North Carolina (a large part of which was then in the South Carolina Conference). Several bands contributed to the noise and happiness. The procession was headed by the Sons of Temperance, like the others, in full uniform or decorations, followed by the Odd Fellows, then by the Masons, next the Board of Trustees and clergymen, and finally the ordinary citizens, all making a procession a half mile long, flanked by a line of carriages equally long moving beside them. At least 4,000 persons were estimated to be present.

The cornerstone of polished granite was presented from his quarry about two miles distant by Major H. K. Dean. 'A leaden box was enclosed in its center in which were deposited 1st a copy of the Holy scriptures, 2nd

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9. Temporary Trustee Minutes.

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a copy of the last will and testament of Rev. Benjamin Wofford, 3d a silver
medal containing an inscription of the name of the founder of the college,
the amount bequeathed, the date of the ceremonies and names of the Build-
ing Committee, 4th a copy of the Southern Christian Advocate, 5th a copy
of The Spartan, 6th a police report of the statistics of the Town of Spartan-
burg, 7th Constitution and By-Laws of the Spartan Division of the Sons
of Temperance, 8th a manuscript record of the Morgan Lodge of Odd Fel-
ows, 9th a silver medal, with suitable inscriptions of the Masonic Order, 10th
a box containing two locks of hair, one of the founder and the other of his
widow." There were deposited a coin and various other articles by indi-
viduals.11

An article in the Spartanburg Daily Herald of June 10, 1906, giving no
author or authority for the statement, says that the cornerstone was placed
in the southeastern corner of the building. Modern search has failed to dis-
cover the cornerstone, nor have the oldest persons now living whose associa-
tions with the college go back many years before the coat of plaster which
now covers the outside of the walls, ever seen it. Masonic usage would have
placed it in the northeastern corner of the building unless some such con-
sideration as the facing of the building dictated some other corner. The
Minutes of the Lodge give us no hint on the point.12 Two surmises occur
to me. First, since the cornerstone was laid before the contract for the
building had been signed, with the purpose, perhaps, of having the great
occasion on the 4th of July, it may have been laid either in the ground, or so
near the ground as to be permanently obscured. Second, the stone may have
been so located as to be enclosed within the walls when the exact spot
for them had been fixed.

The laying of the cornerstone was preceded by the address of the day
by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees Dr. William M. Wightman, as
always with his utterances direct and able. He said, verbatim as indicated
by quotations marks below, and when not so indicated said in substance:13

"The college structure which is to rise in majestic proportions and elegant
finish, on this foundation, will combine Temple and Academy: will be sacred at
once to religion and letters. . . . It is impossible to conceive of greater benefits,
to the individual or to society, than those embraced in the gift of a liberal
Education, combining the moral principle which grows out of a knowledge
of Christian truth, with the enlightened and cultivated understanding which is the
product of thorough scholarship. . . . Wofford College, I need hardly remind you,

will be a denominational College. . . . Its chief patrons will be found among
the members and friends of the Methodist Episcopal Church. . . . It will be
known throughout the United States as a Methodist institution of learning. It
will thus sail under no doubtful flag, and will doubtless be ready to show that
flag in the smoke of battle as well as in the summer of prosperity.

"I make this frank and distinct avowal on the present occasion, for two
purposes. First, that I may avail myself of the oppportunity of saying, in behalf of that
religion organization, that its leading principles are abhorrent to sectarian
bigotry, and breathe the true spirit of catholic liberty, of universal good will.
While its simplicity, directness and rigour,render it the religion emphatically
adapted to the masses; while its history shows that its power of expansion is
unlimited, and its grasp upon the popular mind, peculiarly powerful; while it
has poured into the bosom of society, a tide of enlightening and saving in-
fluences, and sent its streams of living water far and wide, into the deserts of
popular ignorance and vice; at the same time it challenges comparison with all
other forms of modern Christianity [on freedom] from the despiseable artifices
of party recrimination, the reprisals of sectarian selfishness, and the haughty
tone of ecclesiastical exclusivism. . . . In the spirit of these broad and liberal
views, we shall open the doors of this Institution to any of the youth of this coun-
try who may apply for admission, not only without demanding any tests of dog-
matic opinion, but also without any attempt to alienate them from the religious
views in which they may have been brought up. . . .

"I beg leave, to remark with equal emphasis, that no Faculty who may be
placed in immediate charge of the Institution, may be considered to have
performed their duty ably and well, who do not exert their best and most strenu-
ous efforts to make it a place of Christian education. We shall expect them to
be men whose heart is in this work; and whose examples will carry it on as
well as their teachings.

"This sort of education is the emphatic want of the age and time. We have no
faith in the capabilities of mere intellectual training, apart from the vital and
genuine elements of religious truth, to bless the individual or society—educa-
tion which makes men polished and powerful, but Christian education alone
makes them good . . . .

"And let me ask, what higher boon could patriotism desire for the country,
than the erection and multiplication of similar seats and centres of popular
education? Need I point your attention to the fact that republican forms of
government are adopted only to a wise and virtuous people?" The republies
of antiquity were distinguished for intelligence and culture; they fell because
their civilization was not permeated with a pure religious principle. Our age is in
no danger of going back to the crude forms of idolatry of ancient times, but we are
in as great danger from the idolatry of materialism, the utilitarian. On the other
hand, socialistic nostrums are advanced which aim that foreign paupery
might reveal in the spoils snatched from the earnings of honest industry."

Experience has taught us that the best political constitution in the world is not
sufficient, unless supported by the primitive law of justice and morality, founded
on a firm belief in immortal life, to protect us from injustice and corruption.
Alarming is the influx of aliens, many of them from the dregs of European
pauperism, and without training or the understanding of the principles and proc-

11. Spartan, July 10, 1851.
12. Conversation with Mr. S. T. Lanham, of the Lodge.
13. Printed in full in Spartan, July 17, 1851.

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essence of self-government, in the coming conflict between labor and capital. “Totally unfit for self-government, with instincts favorable to the wildest agrarianism, they are a floating mass of inflammable materials, thrown into American Society, which may be taken up into the most dangerous combinations when the open collision comes between fanatical free-soilism and the reign of constitutional law.”

“Our dependence, in fine, should be less in the material—more in the moral; less in arsenals and navies, more in men of the right spirit—most of all in the God of nations.” We spend enough on the maintenance of one war ship to support twenty colleges, and pay her captain twice the salary of a college president.

I hope that our meeting today will be the precursor of another, at no distant day, to mark the breaking of ground for the railroad to connect this great district with the rest of the State, unite our sections, and promote the development of the industrial pursuits and the mighty agricultural and manufacturing possibilities of this part of our State—“the steam engine, mighty agent of physical and industrial development—the College, still mightier agent of a higher—more desirable moral and intellectual development—necessary both, let me say it with emphasis, to enable us to meet our proper responsibilities, keep abreast of the advance of the times, and fulfill a great and happy destiny. . . .

“We may lay our hands upon all the elements of prosperity and press them into the service of human improvement and consecrate them to the glory of God, by the true advancement of society. With ample resources we may multiply schools, adopt better systems of agriculture; invest home with richer charms; cultivate literature and philosophy; and unite intelligence in firm wedlock with religion, thus purifying the world’s spirit, and leaving behind us the enduring monuments of usefulness.

“. . . And now having drawn upon your patience thus far, we address ourselves to the task of laying this corner-stone. We lay it for the honor, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, for the good of posterity we plant the foundation of this Institution. After the lapse of ages, and amid whatever chances or changes may in the eventful future befall our social and our political institutions, may this corner-stone support a fabric still flourishing in its early freshness. And sooner crumble this solid granite into dust, than perish from the minds and hearts of our countrymen and successors, the great principles which have this day been enunciated, and which lie at the foundation of all our virtues as individuals—all our greatness and glory as a nation!”

Those “chances and changes” which the speaker feared might “in the eventful future befall our social and political institutions” were tragically near. The same issue of The Spartan from which we have Dr. Wightman’s address teemed with bitter attacks on each other of the two factions in South Carolina which were struggling, the one to bring about immediate secession of the State alone, the other to delay action until other Southern States were ready to join in the great adventure for the preservation of “Southern rights.” Dr. Wightman spoke, as of something inevitable, of “when the open collision comes between fanatical free-soilism and the reign of constitutional law.” Already in February, 1851, in the election of delegates for a State Convention the immediate secessionists had won an overwhelming victory; and when the Convention met, only the refusal of Georgia and Mississippi, on whom they had relied, to join forced them to wait until the whole South came to their view. Dr. Wightman, while not an extremist, was throughout his address thoroughly Southern in viewpoint and sympathies.