A Perspective: Main Building

When he laid the cornerstone of Wofford's Main Building on July 4, 1851, President William Wightman expressed the hope that "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 therefore appropriate for each Wofford graduating class to gather for worship in this historic building on commencement morning.

Many features of Main Building remain unchanged from the structure that Wightman knew during his presidency. The front (south) side of the building retains its distinctive Italianate bell towers and wide portico. The original college bell still hangs in the west tower and continues to be hand rung by students. Photographs of some of the college's distinguished faculty members of the past hang in the foyer, where there is a memorial plaque (with the misspelled word, "benificent") honoring founder Benjamin Wofford and his second wife, Maria Barron Wofford.

Main Building was designed around "the chapel" by the noted Charleston architect Edward C. Jones, and the auditorium was dedicated as a place of worship during the college's first commencement exercises in June 1855. Its present name, which commemorates a gift for renovation and modernization from the estate of The Reverend George Clark Leonard (class of 1895), was approved by the Board of Trustees in 1946. Leonard Auditorium has been the scene of many of the most important events in Wofford history, including addresses by Woodrow Wilson, Gerald Ford and George Bush. Portraits of the college's eight past presidents, arranged in chronological order from right to left, hang in Leonard Auditorium. A particularly significant and valuable portrait is Albert Capers Guerry's painting of James H. Carlisle, with a landscape of the campus in the background.

In use today for the first time is the beautiful Holtkamp organ donated to Wofford College by Duke University. From 1969 to 1996 it stood in the Duke Memorial Chapel in memory of Mrs. Mary Duke Biddle. It was removed, enlarged, revoiced, and installed at Wofford by the Charlotte firm of Gregory A. Hand, who added some new ranks of pipes made in England. It will be formally dedicated next fall and renamed in memory of Dr. William Preston Few (A.B. Wofford, 1889; Ph.D. Harvard, 1896), first President of Duke University.

While it is undoubtedly an important historic landmark, Main Building is much more than that to members of the Wofford community. Dr. Lewis P. Jones, Professor of History, expressed those feelings several years ago: "Main Building testifies to the continuity of an institution whose honors are numerous and whose pride is based not only on the worldly success of its graduates, but also on their character. Its roots are deep; its twin towers high."