

4-1-2009

A Greater Furman

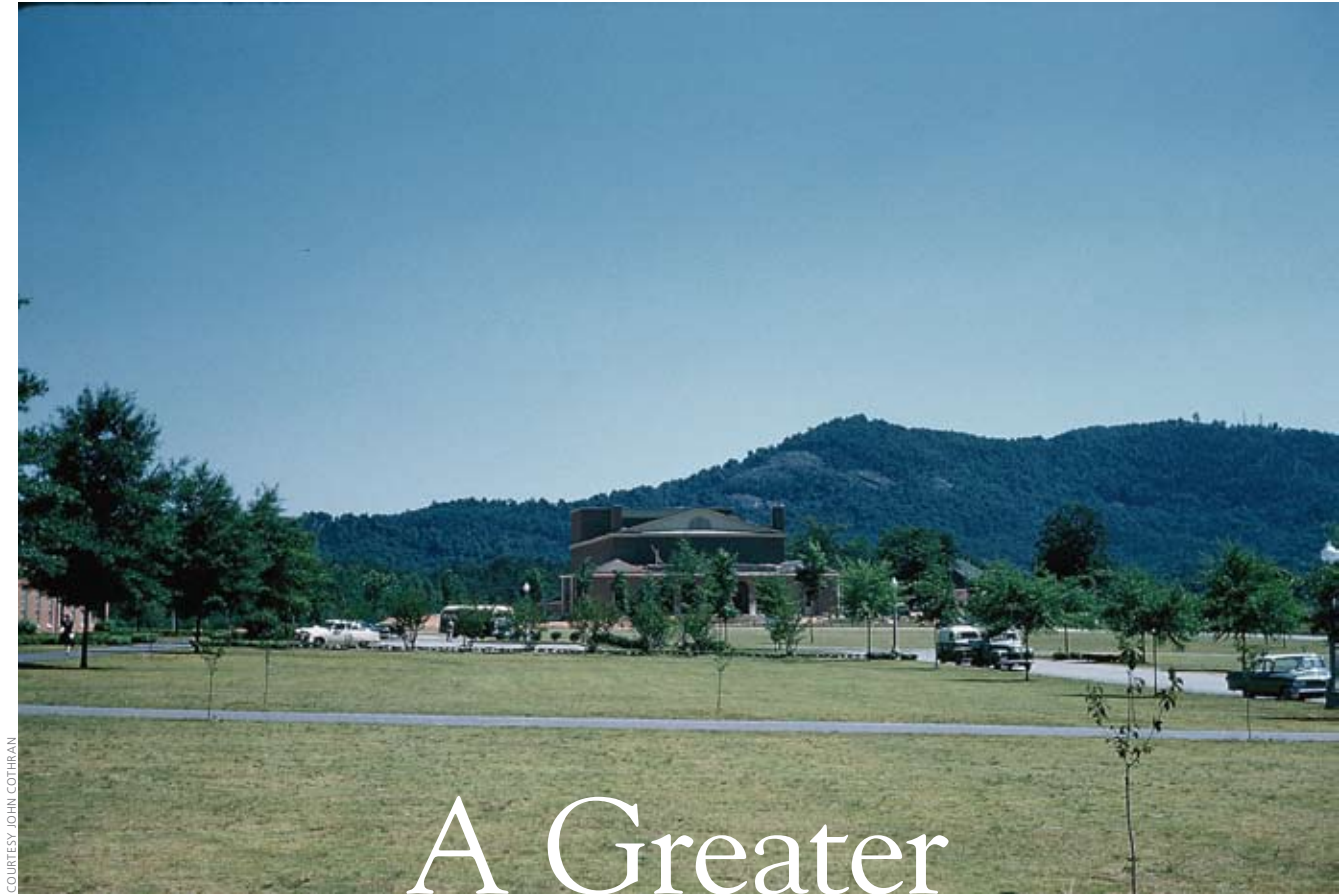
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Recommended Citation

Bainbridge, Judith T. (2009) "A Greater Furman," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 52 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol52/iss1/4>

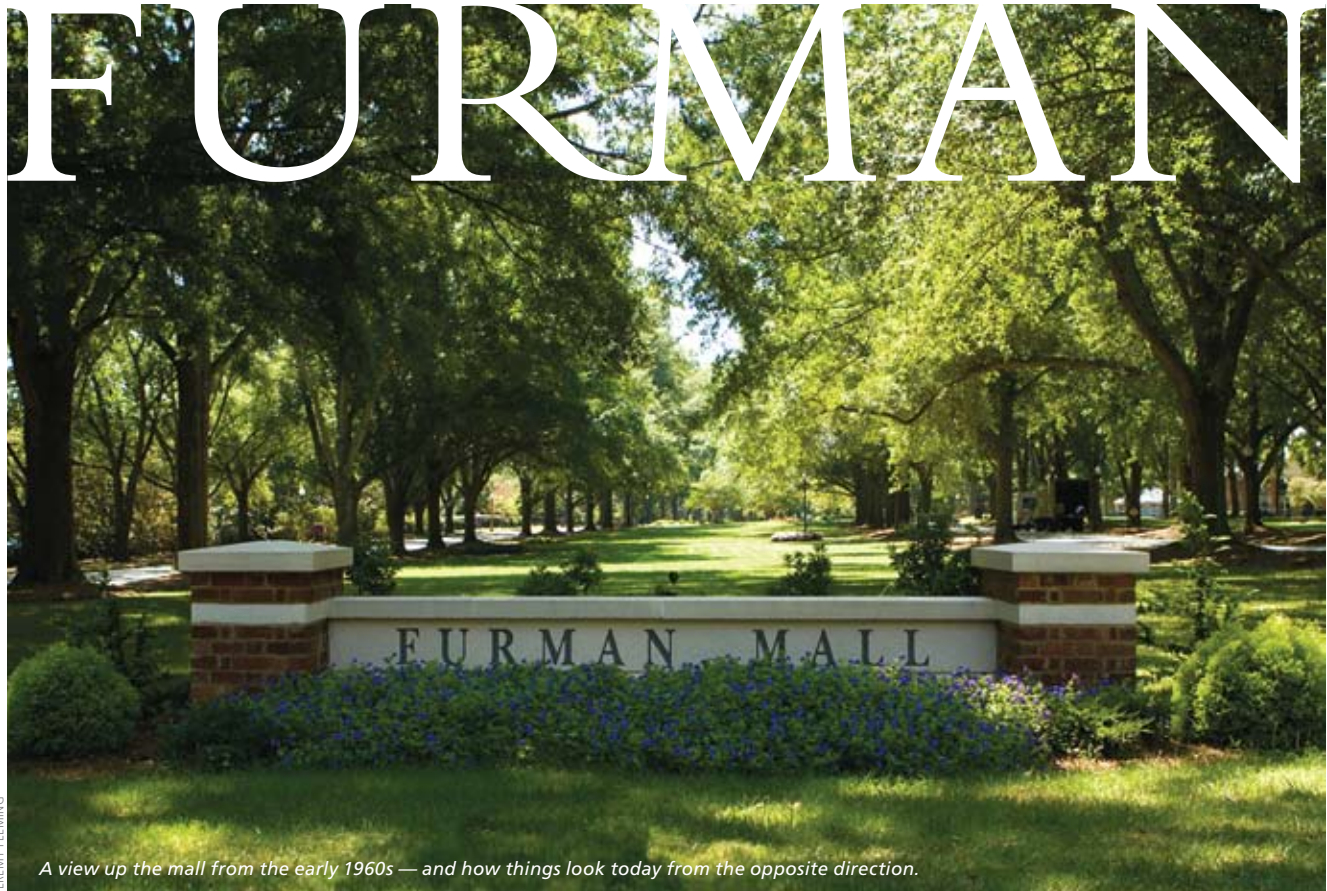
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COURTESY JOHN COTHRAN

A Greater

FURMAN



JEREMY FLEMING

A view up the mall from the early 1960s — and how things look today from the opposite direction.

BY JUDITH T. BAINBRIDGE



The way we were 50 years ago, when the university officially unveiled its new campus.

On November 12, 1958, Furman invited the Greenville community to visit its new Poinsett Highway campus.

The Greenville News published a special section, stuffed with congratulatory advertisements from vendors, to celebrate. Turning its pages opens a window to a 50-year-old past.

Furman was a small school with big dreams. With an enrollment of 1,349 (80 percent from South Carolina, 60 percent men), it was building a campus to house and educate 2,000 future students. The James B. Duke Library at the center of the university had only 90,000 volumes but space for 400,000.

The new campus had been a long time in coming. In 1947, overwhelmed by a surge of veterans into the classrooms, trustees began considering expanding Furman's downtown site above the Reedy River. The situation had been awkward since 1933, when, in the heart of the Great Depression, the Greenville Woman's College had become the university's coordinate Women's College. Students and faculty had used buses, taxis and personal cars to travel between two campuses a mile apart.



Old College arrives from downtown. Opposite: Daniel Dining Hall, then and now; early 1960s view from Duke Library toward Furman Hall.

Buying land near the men's campus downtown, the trustees soon learned, would be exorbitantly expensive; property values rose because owners knew that Furman wanted it. Furthermore, plans to extend several streets around the university were already being discussed, and a portion of the potential campus would be taken.

So the trustees searched the county. In 1950 Alester G. Furman, Jr., a realtor who was chairman of the board, found 1,100 desirable acres near Buncombe Road about six miles north of the city limits available for \$542,531. Seventy-five acres around the downtown men's campus would have cost \$750,000. In October 1953 trustees broke ground for a new campus that would house both men and women.

Its initial cost, they estimated, would be about \$8 million. The South Carolina Baptist Convention pledged more than \$3 million; The Duke Endowment committed \$500,000; selling the Women's College campus would raise another \$500,000. Led by major gifts from Charles and Hugh Daniel and Alester Furman, Jr. and Sr., a massive campaign for "A Greater Furman for a Greater Tomorrow" raised much of the remainder.

Visitors to the university that November day found a half-completed campus that only superficially resembles contemporary Furman. The gatehouses and entry had just been finished, but there was no student center and no facilities for art, drama, or music. (Furman Singers practiced in the library.) Residence halls had not yet been erected for women, although "comfortable married student housing" on Duncan Chapel Road — Montague Village — had been built.

Male students and senior women lived in what later became men's residence halls (now South Housing) on the southeast end of the campus. The rest of the "coeds" commuted to advanced classes from their downtown campus on "modern air-ride buses." It wasn't until 1961 that freshman, sophomore and junior women moved to the campus.

The administration building, with a 24-foot long oval cherry table for trustee meetings and stainless steel furniture in administrative offices, was complete. So was James Clement Furman Hall. And a good thing it was, too. It housed the departments of Classics, Economics, Education, English, History, Home Economics, Journalism, Mathematics, Modern Languages, Political Science, Psychology, Religion and Sociology,

together with the student canteen, the post office and a lounge.

Only the central section of the science building was finished, but Daniel Dining Hall, "a masterpiece of modern design and efficiency" (they didn't mention food), could seat 600 students. (The article also didn't mention that it had to be used for chapel services and convocations.)

But, as the newspaper put it, there was still time to play. The "athletic building," which would come to be called the "Old Gym," was open. While Furman still played football in Sistine Stadium and basketball games at the new downtown Memorial Auditorium, the first nine holes of the golf course were complete, and "a representative of the New York Yankees" had advised on the baseball field. The varsity rifle team had plenty of space to practice, and canoeing was possible on the lake.

Students, an article clearly written by Furman personnel boasted, were the best in the state. The school was the only one in South Carolina (and one of only 170 in the nation) that required the SAT, with the class entering in September 1958 averaging a rousing score of 992. And Furman students did well: 49 percent of the Class of 1957 was attending graduate school, and Harvard University had recently reported that



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JEREMY FLEMING

between 1920 and 1950 Furman alumni had earned the highest grade point averages among all colleges represented in its graduate program.

These pioneering first students, said an article reprinted from *The Hornet*, as the student newspaper was then called, knew they were abandoning old traditions — the tug of war across the Reedy River between freshmen and sophomores, snake dances down Main Street following football victories, proposals of marriage at the top of the Bell Tower. They were sure, however, that other traditions would accompany them to their new home, among them May Day with its May Queen, Homecoming, the song “Brown Eyes,” and Furman Follies.

The *News*’ special section highlighted

every feature of the new campus, including the landscaping. Thirteen varieties of 1,100 trees had already been planted, although they were bare spindly sticks, and future “spray ponds,” the university’s fountains, would soon serve the dual purpose of air-conditioning buildings and adding beauty.

While the newspaper reviewed the university’s history and leading personalities in detail, it did not neglect Furman’s current status. Total costs that year for room, board and tuition were \$1,100. (For 2007-08 the cost was \$43,116.) The university was served by the Piedmont and Northern Railway and the Southern Railroad as well as the City Coach line. Forty percent of its 90 faculty members held the Ph.D. The

comparable figure today is 92 percent of 215 professors.

Today’s campus is far different from the one the university unveiled just over 50 years ago. What has remained consistent is the university’s commitment to providing the finest in private liberal education — and the best preparation for a rewarding life of leadership and service. **FI**

This article appeared in its original form in The Greenville News, November 12, 2008. Reprinted with permission of the author, professor emeritus of English at Furman.

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JEREMY FLEMING

Yesterday and today: *The Alester G. Furman, Jr., Administration Building, named for a leading benefactor and member of the university's founding family.*

The Pioneers of Dormitory C

In the fall of 1955 Furman officials were anxious to begin offering classes on the new campus. Despite the limited facilities, ongoing construction and lack of amenities — the partially completed Furman Hall had no heat until after Christmas — 102 freshman men and six senior counselors spent the year in Dormitory C (now Manly Hall), making the best of the spartan conditions.

By year's end, however, the administration had determined that trying to operate the university from three sites was too difficult. It wasn't until two years later, in the fall of 1958, that the pioneers, now seniors, would return to the more complete campus, where they were joined by the rest of the men and the senior women.

The 1959 Bonhomie featured this photo and tribute to Furman's "dauntless crew" of trail-blazing young men.

Here are the men who were thicker than thieves, closer than brothers, wittier than Bob Hope, and smart as Einstein. This may be slight hyperbole, but any group who survived the wilds of the New Campus in the year 1955 were a dauntless crew.

The first men to live with the three main water lines, Paris Mountain, and the Blue Ridge mountains spent lonely afternoons and evenings setting fires in the trash room, throwing firecrackers, sun-bathing, and playing bridge.

No one was any prouder or could get madder with his "one big happy family" than Dean (Francis) Bonner. Dr. Bonner and colleagues, Dr. (Jefferson Davis) Sadler, Dr. (Alfred) Reid, Dr. (James) Stewart, Dr. (Joe) King, and Dr. (Albert) Sanders, were the faculty members who "pioneered" with the Dormitory "C" boys.



Many of the Pioneers did not stay long enough to taste the pleasure of Old Campus life. Some married, some quit, and some faltered, but most achieved their goal of graduating in 1959. Regardless of their present or future academic state, none will forget the pioneer days on Furman's New Campus.



Even under construction, the library cut a distinctive profile from across the lake; below, the front of Furman Hall in the early 1960s.

