

4-1-2002

Defining Moments: The Move to the New Campus

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Recommended Citation

Reid, Alfred S. (2002) "Defining Moments: The Move to the New Campus," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 1 , Article 51.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol45/iss1/51>

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Timeline design and execution by Jermaine Johnson '02. A more expansive version can be viewed on-line at www.furman.edu/175.

THE MOVE TO THE NEW CAMPUS

Furman's decision to move to a new campus served as the catalyst for the university's ongoing transformation from a primarily regional college to one of national repute. But the decision is said to have emerged from an almost whimsical observation made by a member of the board of trustees.

By the end of World War II, both the men's and the women's campuses in downtown Greenville were suffering from overuse and disrepair. An influx of new students after the war included many veterans, who were not hesitant to express their disenchantment with the crowded, rundown facilities. And competition was coming to Greenville: Bob Jones University was about to open.

Recognizing that the university faced new challenges, President John L. Plyler and the board revived plans for campus improvements, beautification and expansion. The board had discussed changes for years, but financial concerns or other factors had prevented any action.

In 1947, in the midst of a committee meeting to discuss campus improvements and possible expansion, board member J. Dean Crain made the suggestion — "apparently as a sudden inspiration," he later told his biographer — "that Furman move to a new campus site that would allow room for necessary expansion." The idea quickly caught on, and the board began to consider it as one of three alternatives for the university. (The others were to consolidate on one of the current campuses or continue as two campuses.)

Crain's idea gained momentum, and the

full board eventually voted to pursue a new site. In October 1949, the trustees decided to request \$3.5 million from the South Carolina Baptist Convention over the next 10 years, raise an extra \$3 million elsewhere, and use the \$6.5 million to buy land and build a plant that could accommodate both campuses. The convention approved the request.

After first considering five sites, the board narrowed its choice to two. One area was off Grove Road south of town, near the current site of Greenville Memorial Hospital; the other was west of Duncan Chapel Road in northern Greenville County. The Duncan Chapel site offered the most promise, with its excellent views and ample room for expansion, and the board decided to purchase 938 acres on July 27, 1950 — almost exactly 100 years after the move to Greenville.

Despite an economic slump in 1951 and 1952, the board pursued its plans and finally, on October 6, 1953, ground was broken at the new site. After grading was completed and sewers installed, construction on a residence hall and classroom building began in the fall of 1954. The lake was completed before the year was out.

The first two buildings were finished by the end of the summer of 1955, and that fall 102 men moved in with six senior counselors and dorm managers. Despite their isolation, they were an adaptable lot, as they were forced to divide their class time between campuses. The classroom building had no heat, so professors and students wore overcoats and hats to class in the winter. When the year ended, it was decided that the



Alester G. Furman, great-grandson of Richard Furman, turns the first spade of earth with the help of his son, Alester G. Furman, Jr. (left), and President John L. Plyler.

new campus should remain empty until there were enough buildings to accommodate the entire men's student body.

Construction continued, and by the summer of 1958 four residence halls, the dining hall, library, James C. Furman Hall and the Alester G. Furman, Jr., Administration Building, plus assorted recreational facilities, were ready. The men and the senior women, who would live in Manly Hall (and be dubbed Furman's Manly girls), took the plunge.

Furman would continue to operate two campuses until 1961, when the women's residence hall complex was completed and the Woman's College moved in its entirety. When the 1961-62 year began, all Furman students were finally together on one site.

Adapted from Furman University: Toward a New Identity, by Alfred S. Reid.