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Celebration and Sadness

Nineteen seventy-five—seventy-six at Furman was a year of celebration and sadness. Celebration that Furman had survived 150 years of financial and ideological struggles to become one of the finest colleges in the Southeast. Sadness that Furman lost one of its most beloved faculty members, English professor Alfred S. Reid, and that the year was the last of the administration of President Gordon W. Blackwell.

The sesquicentennial was celebrated with all sorts of activities, including dedication of markers at the sites of the former men's and women's campuses, a two-day celebration of Founder's Day in January, a series of lectures by a Shakespeare scholar from Stratford-upon-Avon, and the premier performance of a specially commissioned work by American composer Howard Hanson. The South Carolina Baptist Convention met on the campus for the first showing of the film, *Furman for All Seasons*, and Dr. Reid's history, *Furman University: Toward a New Identity, 1925-1975*, was published in April. All activities were planned and directed by a steering committee headed by Dr. Joe King.

Besides Dr. King, Alfred Reid probably spent more time getting ready for the sesquicentennial than any other person. For five years he worked on his book in order for it to be published during Furman's 150th anniversary. Having become an authority on the history of Furman as a result of his research, he was reconciled to the idea of speaking on the subject before many groups and delivered the Founder's Day address on "Furman at Its Lowest and Furman at Its Highest." Last summer and fall he worked many hours with students to prepare the sesquicentennial issue of the *Echo*, which contains a selection of the best student writing of the past 87 years.

For Dr. Blackwell, the year was one of his busiest. While he and Mrs. Blackwell were honored on countless occasions, he maintained a hectic work schedule until his last day in office, August 15. Although he had little time to look back, a report—which was published this summer—reveals the dramatic changes which have occurred during the eleven years of his administration.

These two men, Reid and Blackwell, had a profound effect on this publication, the *Furman Magazine*. At our request Dr. Reid contributed more material (articles, interviews, poetry) to the magazine than any other individual. And he was always available to give us advice on matters of grammar and style. Dr. Blackwell simply made this magazine possible by his encouragement and support.

This issue of the magazine, therefore, is dedicated to Gordon Blackwell and to the memory of Al Reid.

M. H.
Photographs on these pages were taken by university photographer Alan Whitman during 1976 graduation exercises, the last commencement for Dr. Blackwell as president.
In 1964 when Dr. Gordon Williams Blackwell announced that he was leaving Florida State to become president of Furman, educators and laymen alike were astonished. Why would anyone leave a large, rapidly growing university like Florida State to go to a small, relatively unknown college like Furman? Was Blackwell having a feud with the Florida legislature? Were there other circumstances that made his job at Florida State intolerable?

It is true that after serving as head of state universities in both Florida and North Carolina, Dr. Blackwell had grown weary of the frustrations of state systems of education in which a board of control, appointed by the legislature, administers the affairs of several colleges and universities. “At times I chafed under political influences and the absence of a board of trustees which I could call my own,” he says. “I felt that every college president needs a board that is 100 percent for his institution, a group of people he knows will support the college in every way possible.”

At one point during his administration at Florida State, the board of control passed a regulation which he thought was clearly in violation of the principles of academic freedom. Appearing before the board, he explained why the regulation was unacceptable to him; the board appointed a study committee composed of trustees and faculty, the old policy was rescinded, and a new policy was adopted. Another time, because of a shortage of funds, the governor of Florida impounded funds appropriated by the legislature for faculty salary increases. Blackwell felt that this was not only “unfair but illegal” and he took his case to the press. In the ensuing public debate between the governor and Blackwell, the governor was quoted as saying that, while Blackwell was a good college president, he did not know much about budgets. However, Dr. Blackwell, working with key members of the legislature, eventually persuaded the governor to rescind his action.

When Blackwell finally decided to leave Florida State, he recalls, he wanted to submit his resignation in person to the board of control, but he could not get even ten minutes on the agenda. He had to send a telegram to the board chairman and to the governor who was in the Bahama Islands.

“On balance, however,” Blackwell says, “there were a tremendous number of favorable factors at Florida State. I never really thought I would leave.”

When he was approached about becoming president of Furman, he found the idea attractive for many personal reasons. Gordon Blackwell, his father, and his two sons had attended Furman. Blackwell began his teaching career at Furman in 1937, when he and his
When Blackwell returned to Furman, the most serious weakness he observed was the lack of a strong administrative organization.

wife Elizabeth came to Furman directly from their honeymoon. Yet these were not the reasons he decided to return.

"Basically it was a decision to spend the rest of my career seeing what I could do leading in a good liberal arts college under church auspices," he says. "I felt that such a situation could offer a kind of quality education with emphasis upon the individual, which is difficult in a large university. I knew that Furman was a very good college on a beautiful new campus. The idea of being a part of its next era of development challenged me.

"I know that ministers feel a call to a particular church. I suppose in some way I also felt a call to return to Furman."

When Blackwell became president of Furman in 1965, he was ideally suited for the job by personality, background and experience. The only child of a Baptist minister and a professional musician, Blackwell grew up in a home where intellectual and cultural matters were of first importance. His father, Benjamin Lewis Blackwell, who graduated from Furman and Colgate Divinity School in Hamilton, N.Y., was pastor of a church in New York City before returning to South Carolina where he served as pastor of several small churches mostly around Spartanburg. His mother, Amelia Williams Blackwell, a graduate of Vassar College, played the organ and was choir director in both the First Baptist and First Presbyterian churches in Spartanburg, was supervisor of music in the city schools and directed a children's chorus of 500 voices—to the accompaniment of such orchestras as the Philadelphia Symphony—in the annual May Festival.

Gordon Blackwell was always an excellent student. As a graduating high school senior, he turned down a scholarship to Wofford College, which he won for having the highest grades of any boy in the class, because he wanted to attend Furman. At Furman he was first honor student for four years, in his senior year received the Feaster Medal for General Excellence and graduated summa cum laude. He later received the M.A. from the University of North Carolina and the Ph.D. from Harvard.

While attending Furman, he was active in almost every phase of campus life: he was president of the freshman class, the band, Quaternion Club and the Greater Furman Club; for three years he was number one player and captain of the varsity tennis team; he was also a member of the Adelphian Literary Society and editor of the Echo. Influenced by his uncle, a well known sociologist at Hobart College in New York, he decided to major in sociology and at some point during his undergraduate days decided to go into college teaching because "it seemed the natural thing to do."

At Furman, Blackwell was influenced most by two men: Dr. A. T. Odell and Dr. D. H. Gilpatrick. Dr. Odell, he says, helped him improve his writing and stimulated him intellectually. He liked Odell's openness, his courage, his understanding of what a college should be, and his great sense of humor. Dr. Gilpatrick, Blackwell says, "probably meant more to my intellectual development than all of the other faculty put together except for Professor Odell. Gilly taught me how to engage in critical thinking and to approach issues in a rational manner."

By the time he became president of Furman, Blackwell had almost 30 years' experience in higher education as both teacher and administrator. He had taught at Furman and the University of North Carolina, where he was Kenan Professor of Sociology, served as visiting professor at Columbia University and lectured at Oxford University. He had served as director of the Institute for Research in Social Science at U.N.C. for thirteen years, as chancellor of the Woman's College at Greensboro for three years and as president of Florida State for four years.

During his early career as a sociologist, Blackwell spent a good bit of time in social research, interviewing people throughout the South for projects sponsored by both federal agencies and academic institutions. The methods of the sociologist—talking with people, listening to their opinions, trying to get at all sides of an issue—became a basic part of Blackwell's administrative style in later years. It also led to his becoming a mediator on a number of occasions.

While in Greensboro, he witnessed the beginning of the civil rights movement—the first dime store lunch counter sit-ins in the winter of 1959-60. Three white Woman's College students, along with black students from North Carolina A&T College, took part in the sit-ins which so shocked and enraged the community that a race riot seemed bound to erupt. As a member of a special committee appointed by the mayor, Blackwell guided negotiations which led to a cooling-off period and peaceful integration of lunch counters a year later. The same sort of situation occurred while Blackwell was in Tallahassee: Florida State students joined with Florida A&M students to protest discrimination in restaurants around the campus. Here again he served as a mediator in negotiations which prevented an outbreak of violence, allowed peaceful demonstrations to continue and eventually brought about the integration of the restaurants.
When Blackwell returned to Furman in January 1965, the school was just settling into the new campus. The most essential buildings had been built, but ten major buildings remained to be constructed and one, the science building, was still to be completed. The academic program had been improving steadily for more than a decade: a relatively large percentage of the faculty had their doctorates and more highly qualified students were attending Furman. Yet faculty salaries were still low compared to those at schools of comparable quality, and the curriculum had not been updated in many years.

The most serious weakness Blackwell observed, however, was the lack of a strong administrative organization. “Furman did not seem to me to be structured and staffed adequately even for its size when the move was made to the new campus,” he says. “I’m sure that available funds were made to go just as far as possible, but there was only a skeleton staff.”

Strengthening the administration became one of the chief objectives of the Blackwell administration as enrollment grew and budget expanded. Almost immediately he hired a vice president for financial affairs and, within a few years, a vice president for development, a vice president for student affairs, an assistant to the president, a coordinator of institutional planning and a director of communications. He organized the academic administration, changing the title of the chief academic officer from vice president and dean to vice president and provost and creating the positions of academic dean and associate deans.

Realizing the importance of a strong student recruitment program, he created an admissions office—separate from the registrar’s office—and supported the hiring of a director of admissions and a staff of admissions counselors. He supported the creation of a separate office of financial aid and the hiring of a full-time director.

In student affairs, he reorganized the administrative structure, eliminating the traditional positions of dean of students and deans of men and women and substituting the more currently accepted positions of vice president and assistant vice president for student affairs and director of residential living. He also approved the hiring of a director of student development service and a director of career planning and placement.

From the beginning, Blackwell’s main concern was for the university to be firmly established on a sound financial basis, and strengthening of the business affairs office seemed essential to the process. Under the direction of the vice president, the business affairs office was reorganized and expanded (ten new staff positions were added between 1965 and 1975); new accounting and budgetary procedures, with emphasis on budget control and long range planning, were adopted; and many procedures were transferred to a computer, as the operating budget increased by five times.

To ensure a continuing flow of gifts and grants to Furman, in 1968 Blackwell established a development department which, in 1976, employs six fund-raising specialists.

He established a communications office, staffed by
three professional writers, and an office of institutional planning and research.

He advocated strengthening the Evening Division in 1972 by changing its name to Division of Continuing Education and by hiring a full-time director and program director.

Overall, Blackwell is pleased with the progress made toward a strong administration. "We have moved gradually but surely toward a sound administrative structure and staff to manage a university with an enrollment of about 2,300 and an annual budget of more than $12 million," he says. "Without effective administration such an enterprise would function ineffectively and inefficiently and, in my opinion, would soon deteriorate. Even so, our resources have not enabled us to shore up the staff in a number of areas where we have weaknesses."

Considering all of the developments at Furman in the past eleven years, Blackwell says he is most pleased with the growth of a sound business management system. "I am as proud of our business office and related activities as of anything I have been associated with in any university," he says.

Since Blackwell came to Furman in 1965, assets have more than doubled, going from $27,846,000 to $57,875,000. Endowment (market value) has increased 125 percent, from $9,271,000 in 1965 to $20,819,000 in 1976. Income from endowment has increased 180 percent from $395,000 to $1,104,000. Total additions to the physical plant, including buildings, equipment, land, grounds development and books, amount to more than $16,014,000.

Besides building a strong administration, Blackwell felt his main responsibility was to increase Furman's financial support. A tireless fund-raiser, he traveled all over the country seeking support from individuals, foundations, corporations and all sorts of organizations. In the past eleven years he probably spent few days without talking to someone about Furman, asking for his or her help.

Since 1965 Furman has received approximately $33 million in gifts and grants, including a $2 million Ford challenge grant and $4,365,000 from the Daniel Foundation of Greenville. Undoubtedly, many of these gifts were inspired by the donors' high regard for Gordon Blackwell.

Yet Blackwell thinks Furman has not yet generated the level of support the university needs. He says, for instance, that Furman needs an endowment of $50 million instead of the $21 million it presently has. "I believe, however," he adds, "we have the basis for the next era of fiscal development at Furman which will make the past decade appear only a modest beginning."

During Blackwell's administration, tremendous improvements have been made in the academic area. The faculty has grown from 92 full-time members to
137 full-time and 42 part-time and adjunct teachers; 81 percent of the faculty, compared with 64 percent in 1965, hold doctorates; faculty salaries have doubled and fringe benefits have been much improved. After a thorough study, the academic calendar and curriculum were totally revised in 1968, resulting in changed requirements, a new three-term calendar and a more flexible and innovative program overall. Three new degrees and many new programs, including foreign study, have been added.

Blackwell gives the credit for these changes to the academic administration and the faculty itself. His chief regret, he says, is that he did not have time to work more closely with the faculty and get to know them better on an individual basis. “But,” he says, “I felt I should concentrate on making Furman a place that would be attractive to faculty and enable them to do their best teaching. This meant spending most of my time strengthening the administration and support services and trying to increase Furman’s financial support.”

Although Blackwell is thought of now in terms of his most obvious accomplishments—growth of income and assets, new buildings, administrative reorganization—historically he will also be remembered for less visible contributions.

Always aware of the importance of planning and research, Blackwell introduced the practice of systematic planning throughout the university. During the early years of his administration, long-range planning was practiced mostly by top administrators and in financial affairs. In 1965 administrative officers drew up the first ten-year projections, which were used to plan for the university’s needs in the coming years. Each year since then these projections have been revised and used for planning purposes. Department heads now prepare budgets for five years in advance, although budgets are revised from year to year as circumstances demand.

With the boom years of the sixties over, Blackwell became convinced that a small college like Furman must develop an all-encompassing system of planning and management if it were to make the most of its limited resources. In 1972 he set up the Office of Institutional Planning and Research and, with grants from Ford and Exxon foundations, established a management planning program. This program called for planning and decision-making on all levels throughout the university; the planning and decision-making were based on information supplied by the Office of Institutional Planning and Research and objectives developed by each department. In 1975 Furman received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation to extend management planning further into the academic area.

In fairly wide use in other types of organizations like business and the military service in the early seventies, management planning was in the experimental stage in educational institutions. The program developed at Furman was used eventually as a model for other colleges.

Perhaps partly because of his training as a sociologist, Blackwell had an almost uncanny knack for sensing where problems might occur in coming years. Identifying a problem area, he would appoint a committee to study the subject and make a report and recommendations, so that by the time the subject became an issue, the university was prepared to deal with it.

Historically, Dr. Blackwell will also be remembered as the first president who tried to decentralize the decision-making process at Furman. Until he became president, major decisions (except major policy decisions, which have always been made by the board of trustees) were made by the president and two or three people immediately under him. Most lesser decisions were made by department heads with little consultation with other members of the department.

Blackwell’s basic style as an administrator is to get opinions from as many people as possible before making a decision. He also feels that many decisions should not be made at the top of the administrative structure but should be made at lower levels—as close as possible to the people they affect. “I have hoped all along to find ways of involving faculty in as many decisions as possible, while at the same time not burdening them unduly,” he says. “I felt the same way about involving students.”

At Furman Blackwell attempted to bring more people into the decision-making process by broadening the representation on committees and other existing groups, by creating new advisory groups and ad hoc committees, and by introducing the management planning program. For the first time during his administration representatives of the faculty, student body and alumni association were invited to attend trustee meetings as observers. Faculty members and students served as observers on many trustee committees, and students were put on most faculty and administrative committees. Blackwell created the administrative council, a group of administrators, the faculty chairman and the president of the student body, who met with him regularly to discuss problems and give recommendations. He created the student advisory council, which met once

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Blackwell was always willing to speak frankly about issues and problems.

a month to talk with him about student concerns. He also appointed numerous task forces and committees to study particular subjects and make recommendations.

Blackwell's most far-reaching effort to include more people in making decisions was his introduction of the management planning program. This program theoretically involves everyone in an institution since every department sets up its own goals and objectives which are agreed upon by members of the department. (Departmental goals and objectives also tie in with institutional goals so that all parts of the institution move toward common goals which are consonant with an agreed upon statement of purpose.)

To oversee the management planning program at Furman Blackwell appointed an institutional planning committee, made up of representatives of the faculty, administration, students, trustees and alumni. In the spring of 1975, when the university was faced with the necessity of cutting its budget, Blackwell created a priorities committee to review all programs within the university and recommend where savings might be made.

Inevitably, in his attempt to make the decision-making process more democratic, Blackwell disappointed some people who expected more dramatic results or wanted more immediate decisions. Some faculty members cite the example of a short-lived faculty advisory committee which had little impact on budget decisions. They say that two committees studied athletics and recommended that football should be dropped; yet football was never dropped. They complain that Dr. Blackwell did not consult the faculty before recommending that the trustees approve the establishment of a joint Furman-Clemson Master of Business Administration program in the summer of 1970. As for the management planning program, they say that they cannot see any evidence of individual faculty members having influence on important decisions.

Students have complained occasionally about Blackwell's "authoritarian" actions—when, for instance, he overruled a decision of the All University Court or refused to grant a change in dormitory regulations sought by the Association of Furman Students.

Yet Blackwell never suggested that a university should be run like a democracy in which the will of the majority always prevails. Some decisions—like those having to do with curriculum, specific courses, grading standards and degree requirements—should be made by the faculty, he felt. Other decisions should be made by students. Yet, many decisions—like the introduction of new programs or major additions to the academic structure of the college—should be made by administra-
sors and the trustees, who weigh all of the factors and decide what course is in the best interest of the university as a whole.

"Perhaps some decisions are too important for the future welfare of the college to rely upon students or faculty who necessarily have a vested interest in the present structure and programs," he says.

Blackwell thinks the decision to approve the joint Furman-Clemson Master of Business Administration program falls into this category. In this particular case, he explains, there were also other circumstances (like the fact that it was summer and Clemson needed an immediate decision from Furman), which made it impossible to get faculty reaction before making a decision.

"In retrospect I feel that we handled the matter in a proper way, considering the existing circumstances," he says. "The program has proven its soundness and its worth and has been more successful than we had expected. It has not been a financial drain upon Furman and has considerably improved our relationships with business and industry in the area."

Blackwell never hesitated to make a decision, whether it was popular or not, if he was convinced that he was right. But sometimes he agonized over decisions. Once he said about a particularly sensitive issue, "I wish I could be absolutely sure what is best for Furman. If I could, I would make a recommendation today and push it all the way. But I've been studying this subject for ten years—ever since I came back to Furman—and I'm still not certain what is best."

Blackwell is the first to admit that the management planning program has not been completely successful. It has not yet involved everyone to the extent he hoped it would. But, he explains, the system is much more easily assimilated into administrative departments than into academic departments, and even here progress is being made. While all faculty members are not involved in making major decisions, each faculty member has a part in determining the objectives of his or her particular department—which has not usually been the case in past years.

The Blackwell administration will be remembered as an open administration. Dr. Blackwell was always willing to speak frankly about issues and problems, and he set up procedures for sharing information throughout the university community. For instance, when financial data was developed about intercollegiate athletics, including all of the costs, it was made available to faculty and students. This would be considered a fairly uncommon practice in most universities, where financial
facts about athletics are often carefully controlled by
the athletic department, sometimes a corporation
separate from the university administration.

As he saw signs of coming student unrest, Blackwell
was particularly concerned about communicating
with students. He would talk to them individually or
in groups about any subject. When Mrs. Dorothy Ensor
came to Furman as his secretary in 1967, he told her,
“If a student wants to see me and needs to see me, work
him in as soon as you can.” Blackwell spent hours dis-
cussing campus issues with student government officers
and editors of the Paladin, the student newspaper.
He also held “fireside chats” to explain issues to students
and hear their comments.

Blackwell’s candor within the university carried
over into his attitude toward Furman’s outside publics.
He was always willing to discuss problems publicly,
with alumni, Baptists or the general public. He
couraged the communications staff to be honest in
their releases to the news media and in the university’s
own publications.

“Well, it is probably easier to administer in a
much less open manner,” he says, “in the long run I
believe that decisions will be better and the institution
as a whole will benefit through a policy of openness.”

Blackwell feels that one of the most significant
achievements of his administration was the development
of a statement of character and values by a task force
representing all segments of the university. The state-
ment, which defines what it means to be a church-
related college, was approved by the faculty and the
board of trustees.

“This is one of the most helpful statements I have
seen on the subject,” he says.

While Blackwell has always been considered a
friend of intercollegiate athletics, it was he who first
asked the board of trustees, in 1966, to establish a
policy that would limit the percentage of the total
college budget that could be spent on athletics. With his
guidance, the net investment in athletics was reduced
from 8 percent in 1964-65 to less than 5 percent in
1975-76. This was accomplished mainly by increasing
financial support of athletics and by increasing income
through gate receipts and guarantees. Also under his
leadership, Furman moved into women’s intercollegiate
athletics.

Although traditionally the fine arts have received
the least support at Furman, during the Blackwell
administration they have made progress. The music
department in particular, with its new Daniel Music
Building, has flourished. Music ensembles, like the
Furman Band and the Furman Orchestra, have improved dramatically, both in size and quality of performance. The Furman Theatre Guild has become a vital organization which each year presents four plays to capacity audiences. One of Blackwell’s greatest disappointments at Furman, he says, is failure to finance the badly needed building for the visual arts.

Gordon Blackwell’s greatest gift to Furman and to the other institutions where he has worked may be one that cannot be measured: the effect he has on other people. The story is told at Furman that he was scheduled to speak at a meeting of an organization to present Furman’s point of view and that of other private colleges. By the time his turn on the program came, however, everyone else had already spoken in favor of an opposite point of view, and members of the group seemed certain to adopt that line of action. Yet by the time Blackwell had finished speaking, he had completely reversed their thinking and they voted unanimously to accept his proposal.

Blackwell had a somewhat similar hypnotic effect on the people who worked for him. If he thought they were doing a good job, he made them feel that he appreciated their work but that they were probably capable of doing twice as much as they were already doing. And so they usually did it.

One administrator, who worked for him more than ten years, said, “Gordon Blackwell created an atmosphere that made it possible for things to happen. He encouraged people to try new ideas and move ahead, and I think that was a major contribution.”

Looking back on the past eleven years, Dr. Blackwell says he and Mrs. Blackwell never regretted their decision to return to Furman. Although he has been forced to work harder at Furman than at the Woman’s College or Florida State because of lack of sufficient staff support, the situation has had its compensations.

“One has the feeling that administration of a college like Furman is feasible,” he says. “One can feel that he has control of the situation. That is hardly true in a large university, especially in times of rapid change and crisis.”

The tranquility of the campus, compared with larger campuses, has given him pleasure. At times the Furman campus seems almost deserted, he says. “Yet what a nice feeling of peace . . . . Perhaps this is the finest kind of environment for genuine education.”

At Furman he has received the greatest pleasure from his relationships with people. “The personal, humane quality of relationships on the Furman campus has impressed me as being different from that on a larger campus. At Furman I know all of the faculty, most of the staff and a fair proportion of students. This is not possible at large universities.

“Even though the task seems to me to have been more arduous at Furman, it has been possible and I know I have found greater satisfaction here than anywhere else I have ever worked.”

During his career, Blackwell has served on boards or commissions of the most important education organizations in the nation, including the American Council on Education, American Association of Colleges, National Science Foundation, National Institute of Mental Health and National Laboratory for Higher Education. In 1975 he was the first president of a private college to be elected vice chairman of the Southern Regional Education Board.

With his background and experience, he is probably better qualified than most people to foresee the future of higher education. For liberal arts colleges like Furman, he sees a hard time in the next few years—and some rather profound changes:

“I doubt that we can go on with business as usual in the style of the traditional liberal arts college. The challenge will be, I think, to adapt to new needs and demands while continuing to emphasize the validity—and even the necessity—of the liberal arts approach.

“The liberal arts colleges which survive with quality—and I firmly believe Furman can be one of them—will be those who stick to their basic philosophy but are willing to innovate in curriculum, to widen somewhat the scope of the college to include legitimate professional preparation with a liberal arts emphasis. They will be those which are able to show that they offer something different and of superior quality to that which can be obtained in larger public institutions at much less cost to the student.”

During Dr. Blackwell’s administration, Furman has offered students something different and of superior quality—something worth paying more for. The challenge to those who follow him will be to enable Furman to continue to do so.
History is bunk,” said a maker of automobiles long ago, and successive generations of Americans have believed him.

College histories, according to this view, are especially superfluous. Alongside such immediate problems as enrollment, finances, and student behavior, they are luxuries that only sentimentalists can indulge. Writers of college histories themselves have invited scorn by their tendency to eulogize and falsify.

Nevertheless, as professional historians insist, a knowledge of the past can free the dwellers in the present from a condition of floundering and help reveal the direction of the future.

What then are the issues that have made Furman University what it is today? Two of the most important of those issues—Furman’s church-related identity and its financial base—are still partly unresolved. Many other issues have been resolved during Furman’s 150-year history.

As might be expected, time has weeded out most of the older emotional issues. There is no longer any question whether the Baptists of South Carolina should organize a state convention to found the school. Led by Richard Furman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, the little group of pastors and laymen who met in Columbia in 1821 settled that issue after years of debate and even more years of experience at various ways of encouraging the training of Baptist ministers. The convention of 1825 elected the first trustees, who secured land, buildings, and a teacher in 1826 and opened the school in January, 1827.

There is no longer any question of where to locate the school, one of the most persistent issues in the history of the school. The trustees first located it in Edgefield, near the Georgia border, in expectation of cooperating with Georgia Baptists in the founding of a southern Baptist seminary. The plan failed. After two years, the school moved across state to High Hills, close to Charleston. Eight years later, after it had been closed for two years, it moved to Winnsboro, near Columbia. Thirteen years later, in 1850, it closed again and returned upstate, where it settled on a ridge overlooking Reedy River waterfalls in Greenville.

Though it has remained in Greenville for 125 years, the issue of precise location in Greenville arose again in the 1920s when President William J. McGlothlin (1919-1933) proposed relocation of the school outside of town to avoid the almost certain prospect of its being hemmed in by the future growth of the city. Concluding that removal would jeopardize ownership of the land that Vardry McBee had deeded for the express purpose of Furman’s maintaining an educational plant there, the trustees rejected the idea of moving, and the school remained where it was for another quarter of a century.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, anxiety about moving continued to plague the board. After Furman absorbed the Greenville Woman’s College in 1933, the operation of two campuses, separated by downtown Greenville, proved costly and inefficient. Operating separate campuses any longer than was absolutely necessary was unthinkable within a few years after complete consolidation of the two colleges in 1938. As formally defined by a “new site” committee of the Board of Trustees in 1947, there were only three promising alternatives: move the women to an enlarged men’s campus, move the men to an enlarged women’s campus, or build a new campus on a new site outside of town and move both campuses. Another six years passed before the trustees were able to buy the necessary land for a new site five miles to the north of Greenville off Duncan Chapel Road near Paris Mountain. The men’s college moved to this new location in 1958, the women’s college in 1961.

All the planned buildings in the original blueprint for this new campus have still not been built fifteen years later, but the question of location, an issue that

Alfred S. Reid, who had taught English at Furman since 1955, completed this article for the Furman Magazine only a few weeks before his death on March 7, 1976. (See page 24.) His history of Furman, Furman University, Toward a New Identity, 1925-1975, was published by Duke University Press in April.

12
preoccupied the school for more than fifty of its 150 years, has finally been settled. It is an issue that at times sapped the strength of the school and contributed to resentments and animosities. Yet, paradoxically, turmoil about moving had beneficial effects. Three of the times in its life that Furman has enjoyed the luster of academic excitement and heightening of enthusiasms took place during or after significant additions to its treasury and physical expansions or relocations: in the 1850s after the move to Greenville; in the 1920s after a quarter of a century of expansion; and in the 1960s after the unification of the two old campuses on the current magnificent multimillion-dollar campus of nearly two dozen modern buildings.

There is no longer any question about whether Furman should be a college rather than a high school; there is still some question about whether it should be exclusively a college or a university, in fact as well as name, with certain professional schools.

During its first twenty-five years, Furman was a high school, an academy in combination with a seminary, called “The Furman Academy and Theological Institute.” It did not become a college of liberal arts until 1850, when the trustees legally had it chartered as Furman University. Afterwards, the school continued to operate a “preparatory department,” later called the Furman Fitting School, until the state of South Carolina successfully launched the public high-school movement after 1908. Furman closed its Fitting School in 1916 during World War I. In the 1920s President McGlothlin revived the question of offering preparatory work but decided against it.

The same ambiguity accompanied plans for professional schools. When Furman became a college and took the name of Furman University, the plan was to establish law and medical schools as well as a theological seminary. During the previous twenty-five years, Furman had been more successful at operating a seminary than it had been at maintaining an academy, and there was no doubt that the little cadre of three or four teachers would continue theological education in Greenville. In the early 1850s the “theological department” remained strong, and in 1858 the department branched off to become the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention. For twenty years, until the seminary moved to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1877, the college and the seminary enjoyed a close association in Greenville, sharing at least one faculty member, James C. Furman, the first president of Furman University (1844-1891; president, 1859-1879).

The idea of a law school, aborted by the Civil War, periodically came alive; but not until 1921 under President McGlothlin did it become a reality. The Furman Law School survived for only eleven years before the depression forced its closing.

The medical school remained only a dream. The closest the school ever came to serious consideration of medical training was apparently in the 1960s during the great building program for the current campus. The Advisory Council, organized in 1961, studied the feasibility of Furman’s founding a medical school in cooperation with Greenville General Hospital before finally concluding that such an expensive undertaking, though needed in upper South Carolina, was not feasible. Technically, therefore, until 1970, though chartered as a university, Furman was a university only twenty years of its existence, from 1850 to 1858, when it operated a seminary, and from 1921 to 1932, when it operated a law school. The persistence of strong undergraduate programs for pre-ministerial students, pre-law students, and pre-medical students is therefore based in part on a traditional ideal briefly fulfilled, as well as on continuing practical need.

Though the issue of these three kinds of professional schools seems settled, new trends have recently raised the question about other professional schools. The growing interest at Furman in economics and business administration led to the establishment in 1970, in cooperation with Clemson University, of a joint Clemson-Furman master of business administration degree. The move has sparked discussion of whether Furman should consider a school of business. The generous donation by the Daniel Foundation in 1972 of over four million dollars to build a music building has also inspired talk of establishing a school of music and some persons are currently urging reestablishment of the law school. The issue of university status, though closed on several traditional fronts, thus remains open on others. The discussion is part of that continuing reassessment of educational need and potential that takes place on the undergraduate level.

There is no longer any question about whether Furman should be a residential college. Throughout the country, students now room and board in nearly all four-year colleges, and any other plan is almost a novelty. It was not always so, either at Furman or elsewhere. The earliest colleges in the country had many bitter experiences with dormitory students. Students were rowdy and destructive. The fear of immorality and religious heresy among students herded into campus housing ran strong. The reputation of dormitories had sunk to its lowest level in the years before Furman
At first the trustees refused to build dormitories for the re-organized university in Greenville for fear of immorality and religious heresy among students.

Quarantined for scarlatina in 1908, Furman students succumbed to the vices of smoking, drinking (coca cola?), and playing cards.
moved to Greenville. At one of Furman’s earlier locations there had been problems with dormitory life. The Furman board therefore had no intention of building dormitories for the re-organized university in Greenville in 1850 even if there had been adequate funds. The board wanted students to live in private homes to benefit from the refinements and religious influence of family living. Only gradually in the 1880s as costs of room and board in private homes increased did students begin to petition the college authorities to help them set up cottages for boarding and eventually for rooming. More tranquil attitudes eventually led to theories of dormitory life as essential to a fully integrated educational experience. Finally in 1901 Furman built its first dormitory, Montague Hall, named after the mother of Furman’s third president, Andrew Philip Montague (1897-1902). Other dormitories followed. The new campus, on the other hand, built in a rural setting, constituted a complete reversal of attitudes; it was predicated on required residential living.

Neither the students nor the administration have ever been fully satisfied with dormitory life. To the students, the plan is less expensive and more efficient than their having to find private accommodations; it leads to camaraderie, to the development of certain group activities such as student government, and to opportunities for some students to defray expenses by working on the campus. There is more independence among one's peers than in a strange family. Living with persons of different ages, backgrounds, and major interests provides an informal education that many students remember and cherish as more valuable than book learning.

Yet the regimentation is a source of constant annoyance. Complaints about institutional food, irresponsible roommates, and meddlesome regulations never end. To the administration, a residential campus diverts effort away from education into the hotel and cafeteria business, into counseling services, and into a large-scale disciplinary program to try to maintain conditions conducive to study without restricting freedoms. In spite of continuing frictions, dormitories run by the college are probably here to stay because the alternative of private profit-making concessions, which
The Woman's College preserved some of its traditions until the move to the new campus.

After coordination, in the forties and fifties, class day exercises were often held in the amphitheatre on the men's campus.

have been considered, seems worse than muddling through under present circumstances.

Nor is there any longer a question of whether Furman should be coeducational. Since the 1930s coeducation has become essential for Furman just as mixing the sexes was anathema in the earliest days. Then common theory, not just at Furman, held that separate education was desirable. Shortly after Furman settled in Greenville, the convention established the Greenville Female College (renamed the Greenville Woman's College in 1916). Until 1908, one board of trustees oversaw both schools, and occasionally there was a sharing of faculty. But except for the decade of the 1890s under Furman presidents Charles Manly (1881-1897) and A. P. Montague, instruction of men and women remained separate until 1933.

The threat of bankruptcy of the Woman's College finally settled the issue in favor of coeducation; Furman took over the college temporarily in 1933 and permanently in 1938. The Woman's College preserved some of its traditions and some of its autonomy until the move to the new campus in 1961. Consolidation in the 1930s greatly enriched the curriculum for men at Furman by introducing subjects previously considered the domain of women, namely, music, theatre, art, and teacher education. In the 1960s Furman dropped two predominantly feminine subjects, home economics and secretarial science.

Nor is there any longer a question about whether Furman should have high standards based on academic freedom. Until the 1920s, when President McGlothlin achieved accreditation for Furman and upgraded the faculty by adding Ph.D.'s, the college was characterized by ministerial training and the intimacy of smallness rather than by an ideal of academic excellence. It was a brotherhood in learning and Christian society, symbolized in the name and handshake symbol of the Adelphian Literary Society; in the names of the student publications, Echo and Bonhomie; and in the motto on the seal, “For Christ and His Learning.” There were doctrinal controversies; but only once before the 1930s, as far as we know—in 1902-03—was there an unseemly discord that resulted in a teacher's dismissal.

Two decades afterwards, Furman experienced its
most agonizing period of academic growing pains. A series of controversies over the independent judgment of teachers in the teaching of their subjects culminated in 1938 and 1939 in the dismissal of one “heretic,” Herbert Gezork, professor of religion, and one or more of his ardent defenders. The debate—a completely lopsided affair because the faculty was subdued into silence—resulted, however, in Furman’s recognizing that learning and the prestige of learning depend upon the right of teachers to teach without intimidation because of personal beliefs. The board’s adoption in 1940 of the famous 1940 Statement of Academic Freedom and Tenure, drawn up jointly by the Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors, was a major event in the academic maturity of the institution. Perhaps only accreditation in 1924, admission into the College Entrance Examination Board in 1954-55, and the receiving of a Phi Beta Kappa chapter in 1973 have been as valuable to Furman in its growth to academic respectability as this recognition of the importance of academic freedom.

Nor is there any serious question of whether Furman should be a regional rather than a local college. Though founded upon an ideal of attracting Southern students widely, Furman never achieved this goal until the late 1950s. Neither the image of Furman nor the transportation facilities at its various early locations favored extension of its drawing power beyond narrow geographical limits. One of the reasons for the move to Greenville in 1850 was to benefit from a railroad, yet twenty-seven years later the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary regrettfully concluded that it could no longer remain in Greenville; the town had failed to develop either geographical appeal or transportation to match the growth and needs of the seminary, which the presence of John A. Broadus, James P. Boyce, Basil Manly, Jr., and others had given distinction among Southern Baptists.

After an exciting start in Greenville, Furman had already lapsed into local mediocrity, educating students drawn mainly from a 200-mile radius, developing its meager resources as best it could, without much desire or ability to broaden the scope of its influence. Its presidents and faculty were, for the most part, undistinguished until the 1920s. Not until President McGlothlin sounded the call of competitive excellence in 1919-20 did Furman seriously assert itself. The two succeeding presidents, Bennette E. Geer (1933-38) and John L. Plyler (1938-64), likewise brought only local reputations to the college. Despite concern between the 1920s and 1960s over how to attract a more cosmopolitan student body, students as recent as the 1950s were predominantly from South Carolina—80 percent. A substantial number always came from Greenville and surrounding counties, and ties between the college and the community were remarkably close, as befitted a school of local fame.

The new campus, however, set the stage for a leap of prominence. The physical beauty immediately attracted students from farther away. Long-standing efforts to recruit a superior faculty and student body succeeded more rapidly. Local conditions soon forced upon Furman a conscious revision of its scope and aspirations, for as Furman moved out of downtown Greenville, new colleges came in. To survive, Furman could no longer be content to be a Greenville and South Carolina college even if it wanted to be. Bob Jones University moved into town in 1948 as Furman was preparing to move out. Four years after Furman moved to its new site, Greenville Technical Education Center opened and began to offer college work, at first in cooperation with Clemson University, and then became a two-year community college itself. Commuting students from Greenville also discovered that neighboring state-supported colleges seemed closer than ever as a result of modern highways and faster automobiles. In 1963 the South Carolina Baptist Convention, partly annoyed by Furman’s ten-year recalcitrance over fraternities and partly sympathetic to pleas for a new Baptist college in the low country, founded the Baptist College at Charleston. All of these developments combined to raise Furman’s sights, of necessity and by design, beyond its local horizons.

When Gordon Blackwell arrived as the eighth president early in 1965, he formalized the transition by proclaiming as one of the goals of his administration at Furman the achievement of “excellence by national standards.” He consciously expanded recruitment of students throughout the Southeast and middle-Atlantic states, sharply increased faculty salaries to attract better teachers, and persuaded the Ford Foundation and other foundations to support Furman to achieve its wider aspirations. The days of Furman as a little Greenville college nestled under the oak trees on University Ridge, its students looking down at the swirling waters of the Reedy River and its athletic teams and student newspaper nicknamed protectively the “hornets,” had long since yielded to the age of Furman as situated in wide-open spaces, its students looking toward the distant Blue Ridge Mountains, and its athletic teams and newspaper nicknamed more cosmopolitanly the “paladins.”

The combined resolution of these various issues provides a partial definition of Furman—its founding
as a Baptist-sponsored college, its location in the piedmont of South Carolina, its emphasis on undergraduate liberal arts education, its residential, coeducational nature, its status of academic freedom and high standards, and its local reputation that is now undergoing a change.

The overriding issue in Furman's past, however, is its church-related identity. In one sense this identity, too, has long been settled. Legally and practically Furman is a church-sponsored college, an educational agency of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. The convention elects the trustees, who own and manage the college. In another sense, this identity remains the most unsettled of all issues because of the continuing debate over whether educational criteria or denominational criteria should prevail in policy-making. Friction occurs chiefly at three points: board authority, service to Baptists and educational atmosphere.

As far back as 1835 the convention concluded that it should not run the school from the floor of the convention and vested ownership and management authority in the Board of Trustees; yet, important disputes between the board and convention have been all too common. Sometimes the board has stood firm; sometimes it has surrendered to the convention. In 1950 the convention weakened the authority of the board by changing the charter to provide that a board member shall not be eligible for re-election on the board to another five-year term until a year after his first term ended. Controversies over board authority have traditionally turned on decisions affecting student life and the religion of the faculty but also on racial integration and separation of church and state. In all disputes, the board has argued mainly from educational premises, and the convention has argued mainly from denominational premises.

Besides longstanding friction over board authority, there has recently come to be friction over the number of Baptist students that Furman enrolls or should enroll. One of the original purposes of the school was to upgrade Baptist churches in South Carolina by educating ministers and Baptist laymen. Space for students of other denominations was always available. In 1858 when the seminary admitted students without requiring college degrees, Furman lost Baptist support and for many decades seemed to suffer a sense of confusion over its purpose. Ministerial emphasis has remained in the form of discounts to South Carolina Baptist preministerial students and to sons and daughters of South Carolina Baptist ministers.

As long as Furman was a local school, South Carolina Baptists retained their favored position in enrollments. As enrollment increased from 1,505 students in 1960 to 2,329 students in 1975, the percentage of South Carolina Baptist students declined in proportion to the overall decline of South Carolina students. More and more from the convention membership has come the rumble of protest that Furman is not serving the Baptist constituency. The policy of favoring South Carolina Baptists within the current levels of admission

The overriding issue in Furman's past is its church-related identity.
Dr. Sidney E. Bradshaw, who taught modern languages, was one of the relatively few independently wealthy professors in Furman's history. At his death in 1938, he left Furman $100,000 for a new library; the money was ultimately used in building the library on the new campus. A confirmed bachelor, Dr. Bradshaw is shown in these photographs with the children of President Bennette E. Geer and Dr. Geer's brother, Charles.
standards has actually not changed, but as College Board scores of entering freshmen have sharply increased since 1959 and as costs have risen, the percentage of South Carolina Baptist students among those applying and accepted has decreased. Unfortunately many South Carolina Baptists do not appreciate high academic standards and do not understand why a Baptist-owned college should not serve Baptists as directly and as exclusively as a Baptist-owned parking lot or motor pool.

The third and most persistent of all frictions over church identity is the extent to which Furman carries out its Christian commitment. At one extreme are those who say that Christian education is a contradiction and that the convention has fulfilled its obligation by founding and maintaining a college that aspires to excellence as a college. At the other extreme are those who say that Baptist influence should permeate the curriculum, the instruction, the faculty, the student body, and cultural activities. Practice has generally fallen somewhere in between.

As American society has become secularized, so Furman has become secularized as an educational exigency. As Furman has taken on a more Southeastern identity, it has shed some of its more restrictive sectarian forms. All students still take one course in religion. Faculty church affiliations, religious practices, and daily conduct, though still as strict in theory, have been interpreted recently within the context of educational effectiveness rather than exclusively on religious criteria. Although a majority of the faculty are Baptists and Protestants, a few faculty members have been non-Protestant in recent years. Compulsory convocation was still in effect in 1975, and it featured a religion-in-life lecture series under the supervision of the university chaplain; but religious worship services were voluntary.

Regulations pertaining to student social life—dress, dancing, drinking, curfew hours, and Sunday activities—have been brought closer into harmony with current practices among statewide Baptists and others. (Drinking alcoholic beverages is still not allowed on campus or at university-sponsored events.) These changes seem revolutionary to many conservative members in the convention, but many other persons, including many students from South Carolina Baptist homes, regard the changes as belated and superficial compared to the importance of a high academic aspiration.

The worst feature of this unresolved church-related identity at Furman is the spirit of distrust and hypocrisy that the dogma-education disparity creates. Long before the credibility gap became a popular concept in our national commonwealth, it existed at church-related schools. Hardened fundamentalist critics in the convention, to whom dogma takes priority, berate the board and administration for sacrificing denominational prerogatives to forms of unChristian education; equally hardened student and faculty critics berate the same persons, including the convention, for prostituting education to denominationalism. The attitude of distrust and prejudice is both fashionable and intrinsic. One can scarcely tell the idealist from the cynic. The course to take seems self-evident to each faction, which asks, often begging the question, why should trustees and administrators practice deceit? The result is a continuous debate. Is Furman a church-related college, or is it a church auxiliary?

The absence of a solution to this issue apparently argues no lessening of official ties between college and convention; controversy is essential to the relationship; Baptists are disputatious by heritage. Nevertheless, the number of persons of influence in the convention who have no understanding of competing identities is probably smaller than ever. Furman has certainly not achieved educational autonomy, but it has progressed beyond the days when denominational autonomy was so fierce that many church-related colleges, including Furman, stubbornly resisted participation in respectable standardizing agencies, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The old stigma of interference attaches only to procedural standards governing faculty employment and tenure as recommended by the American Association of University Professors. All other standardizing educational associations, however, exert more influence on boards and administrations than church conventions and state legislatures, and rightly so if a college is to maintain its ranking and quality as a college.

The other crucial unresolved issue in Furman’s history, as in all private colleges, is financing. Most of us prefer not to think about where the operating money comes from. Compared to all other issues, settled or unsettled, it is drably nonintellectual, yet it affects all these other issues in ways that determine the quality and tone of the place. The absence of adequate funds until about 1900 helps explain the long lackluster periods in the early history of the school; the availability of more adequate funds between 1900 and the great depression helps explain the stride toward accreditation, including a better trained faculty of doctorates and an expanded curriculum in the 1920s. Better funding since World War II has likewise meant the qualitative improvements...
"Furman's past is not glorious, but it is far from contemptible."

in the college of today as well as the more obvious quantitative ones.

The effect of financing on tone of management may not be quite as obvious, but it is nonetheless real. As in the economy at large, a period of prosperity, as in the 1920s and 1960s, generates confidence. The administration promotes expansion and creativity, and the board and convention support these innovations. A period of recession, as in the late 1920s and 1930s, invites hesitation and doubt. A spirit of retrenchment arouses latent fears of heresy, immorality, and creativity; it dries up innovation. Budgetary considerations join denominational narrowness in the driver's seat and relegate educational criteria further to the rear. Some persons want to preserve every program on a reduced scale; others want to eliminate certain programs.

As grubby as the subject seems to many people, financing cannot be ignored. It is an integral part of the issues of founding, location, instruction, the residential, coeducational nature of the school, and the quality and scope of its reputation.

In the early days money came only from three sources—student fees, church collections, and private donations. Later it came from foundations and endowment investments as well. Tuition is still the major source, about 65 percent. As costs have risen, tuition and fees have risen; yet the practice in American higher education has always been to try to subsidize students' education, even in private colleges, so that money has had to come from other sources. Before the cooperative program of budgeting church collections, college representatives, often the president or his specially appointed agent, appeared in person to request money of congregations and Baptist associations. This method gave churches a measure of direct control over the school and helped keep Furman local and denominational in outlook. Even after the adoption of percentages allotted to convention agencies, special campaigns for expansion or debt-retirement supplemented regular church offerings. The convention's current annual support of Furman of more than $800,000 explains some of the denomination's expectations for the college.

Private donors, whether alumni or friends, have made the difference between progress and stagnation. Green-villians have been especially generous. Even a few faculty members of independent wealth are numbered among the great benefactors of the school, especially Charles and Mary Judson and Sidney Bradshaw.

Around the turn of the century began the era of remarkable philanthropic generosity by private foundations. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, successive grants from the Carnegie Foundation, funded by Andrew Carnegie, and the General Education Board, funded by John D. Rockefeller, helped increase endowment, raise faculty salaries, promote academic programs, support scholarship funds, erect buildings, and expand the collections of books and periodicals in the libraries. In the late 1950s and again in the late 1960s Furman benefited from the largesse of the Ford Foundation, culminating in the two-million-dollar challenge grant of 1966, one of the most successful fund-raising campaigns and one of the most invigorating moments in Furman's history.

Yet not even that large grant compares with the steady financial stability that Furman's fortunate inclusion in The Duke Endowment has given Furman since 1925. President Bennette E. Geer's business friendship with James Buchanan Duke led to Duke's naming Furman as one of the principal collegiate beneficiaries in The Duke Endowment, along with Duke, Davidson, and Johnson C. Smith universities in North Carolina. Separate Duke Endowment grants in addition to Furman's annual share in the original endowment have meant nearly $16 million to the school (Furman currently receives approximately $700,000 a year from the endowment). Endowment support accelerated the move to combine the two old campuses on a new site. The new campus itself has attracted large donations, as Alester G. Furman, Jr., former chairman of the Board of Trustees, repeatedly insisted it would in the early 1950s when arguing with opponents of the move among members of the General Board of the convention.

Income from endowment investments, though subject to fluctuations of the economy, has increased the trend toward educational autonomy. But the issue of financing is by no means resolved. As the great foundations continue to withdraw their support of colleges and as interest notes fluctuate, Furman remains dependent on the continued generosity of the convention and private donors.

A college, of course, is more than issues. It is people who bring special strengths and special limitations, people who create issues and react to them.

Furman's past is not glorious, but it is far from contemptible. A knowledge of this past—both the issues which have shaped it and the people who have been part of it—may explain the present and illuminate the future.
Traditional May Day ceremonies—and a reception afterward—were held on the women's campus for many years.
Memories of Al Reid

by a former student

My first encounter with Al Reid was a painful one. A sophomore in Reid’s American Renaissance course, I had received a B on my first paper. I was outraged; having managed As in previous English courses, I thought I deserved one now. I marched up to Reid’s desk in a huff and asked him to reconsider the grade. When he smiled and agreed to look at the paper again, I felt confident that he would change his mind. He did, marking the B down to a C and covering the margin with scathing comments indicating that the paper was even more windy, pedantic, and verbose than he had realized on the first reading.

It took me several months to recover from this trauma, especially since Reid continued to savage my papers. But I kept signing up for his courses, partly out of admiration for his teaching, partly out of some obscure masochistic impulse. By the middle of my junior year, Reid had succeeded in harassing me into a more honest style; those A’s meant more to me than anything in my academic career. Whatever success I had had as a writer has come largely from bearing up under his attacks and following his careful suggestions.

The sting was worth it.

Reid’s special brilliance as a teacher was his ability to be at once warm and caustic, as if the two qualities were inseparably linked in his personality. He could be harsh—he once said “You put it so well” to a student who had put it miserably—but he was never hostile. I remember thinking that his cantankerous impatience with mediocrity issued out of a sense of disappointment that people he cared about were not allowing themselves to grow. Because we knew he cared enough to be honest, many of us who followed him from class to class felt a perverse pride in being attacked by Reid. The praise would come later, when we produced something really good: we would know it was good because Reid’s praise was as precise and intense as his criticism. It also had a unique edge, it was good because Reid’s praise was as precise and intense as his criticism. It also had a unique edge, 

by a colleague

Al Reid’s obituary in the Greenville News told of his co-founding the South Carolina Review, editing Furman Studies, publishing two volumes of poetry, and winning the Alester G. and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching. Through the oversight of some sleepy typist or copy reader, it also named him to instant literary fame and immortality as the author of The Scarlet Letter. (Al’s scholarly work is The Yellow Ruff and “The Scarlet Letter,” but the Greenville News gave him credit for The Yellow Ruff and The Scarlet Letter.)

At Furman that Monday we were grieving. Publicly we were attending to our duties on registration day; privately we were aware that Al’s office was closed, his almost nasal voice saying, “Yes, I’m willing to take forty students in English 23,” gone. Then somebody mentioned the obituary, and we laughed. “Al,” we said, “would have enjoyed that.”

Our laughter was the laughter that substitutes for tears, but it was also the laughter that acknowledges truth. Somewhere in our memories we could imagine Al Reid half chuckling, half remonstrating, “See what you guys (guys would have been his very word) get for making such a fuss over me.” Just a few months earlier he had read a Sunday morning news article that mentioned “Furman University: Toward a New Identity,” the definitive history of Furman University by Alfred S. Reid, American poet.” Early Monday he was armed with his dictionary and charging to verbal battle with Maryneal Jones, author of the press release. Maryneal had countered with her own dictionary, so the two finally called a truce. But Al never stopped complaining about the absurdity of his work’s being called definitive. “And, furthermore,” he would add as he grew even redder and even more delightfully indignant, “why call me an American poet? That’s pretentious.” Yes, he would have enjoyed knowing that our zealous praise of him had been pricked with a misprint.

Al Reid’s total lack of pretention may have been most amusingly evident in his forays against those people who wanted to publicize him as something more than he thought he was. But that lack of pretention characterized everything he did and was. It was evident in things as diverse as the leanness of his prose style and the simplicity of his life-style. He cared no more for the high-blown phrase than he did for fame, wealth, or the accoutrements of worldly success. He seemed as

Continued on page 26
Memories of Al Reid
by a former student

Continued from page 24

me more about literature and writing than anyone in
my academic career. But even more memorable was
the way he humanized the material with his saltiness,
kindness, and wit. A complicated man, he had an
infinitely varied style of teaching that reflected his
different moods. With Hawthorne and Whitman he
was formal and schematic; with Faulkner and Flannery
O'Connor, loose and anecdotal. When he taught
southern poetry, his special love (being a southern poet
himself), he was absolutely spontaneous, shuffling
about the room and startling us with insights that came
from thinking out loud.

The main insight he gave us is that literature in
a classroom context is not just an arid exchange of
ideas or an excuse for scholarship, but an experience
that puts us in touch with human feelings and aspira­
tions. In Reid's class, Poe was important because he
spoke to our feelings of loneliness and powerlessness,
Melville because he showed us the simultaneous need
and impossibility of finding neat answers to the mean­
ing of existence. Reid's approach was often controversial,
especially when he drew connections between classroom
material and contemporary political issues. When
presenting Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," for example,
he made no secret of his admiration for Martin Luther
King or his loathing for Lester Maddox.

Reid's interest in politics extended well beyond the
classroom. Although he never waved any placards or
marched in any demonstrations, he was involved in a
quiet but forceful way in the movement for social
change which transformed the nation's campuses,
including Furman's, during the late 1960s. As faculty
sponsor for the Furman chapter of the Southern
Student Organizing Committee, Reid thrust himself
into a remarkable period of controversy. I was one of
the half-dozen students involved in organizing the
group in 1967. We were pessimistic about having much
impact or even lasting beyond a few meetings: the very
notion of a "New Left" group on a Southern Baptist
campus seemed ludicrous. Even opposition to the
Vietnam War, our original rallying point, was rare in
those days (and by no means only at Furman). But
when Reid agreed to be our sponsor and started
coming to our meetings, we suddenly felt legitimate
(an odd need for a "radical" group to feel) and
strong. As our self-confidence increased, so did our
membership and our willingness to confront local
issues. Compulsory chapel, compulsory ROTC, sexist
dorm regulations, and an official speaker ban were
policies we took on, sometimes timidly, sometimes
head-on. Reid was our mentor during those two volatile
years, supporting us when we took stands, advising us
when we had strategy sessions, chiding us when we were
about to blunder, and helping us keep calm when
pressure came down. One of the ironies of the period
was that President Blackwell, whom we often regarded
as an opponent, was instrumental in keeping us from
being thrown off the campus by outraged trustees and
alumni. Always in touch with the administration, Reid
forced us to be aware of such bizarre anomalies and
helped us maintain a sense of perspective. For the most
part, he chose to remain in the background, providing
intellectual and emotional support when we needed it
(which was often), but trusting us to make our own
decisions. When he did put himself on the front line,
he came on with the same clarity and daring that he
used in the classroom.

The SSOC experience made me realize how avail­
able Reid was as a friend. Prior to my junior year, I
had been wary of getting too close to him: how could
I be friendly with someone who wrote things like "again
you are dull" on my papers? But Reid was so supportive
during the crises of the late sixties (he once wrote an
impassioned letter defending me against the charge of
being an undesirable agitator) that I finally fathomed
that the inhibitions were coming from me, from my own
fears and insecurities.

For the remainder of my two years at Furman,
I visited Reid in his office regularly, seeking his counsel
on everything from graduate school plans to personal
problems. A relationship which had been mainly formal
and academic became warm and casual. Reid would
still not hesitate to tell me when he thought I was
making a poor decision, but by now I was able to
handle his honesty. When the Furman bureaucracy
"When he taught southern poetry, he was absolutely spontaneous, shuffling about the room and startling us with insights that came from thinking out loud."

arbitrarily assigned me to an "official" faculty advisor, I told the other professor that Reid was my advisor and always had been. Obviously miffed, the new man briefly protested to the department, but let the matter drop when Reid proved to be as stubborn as I was.

My one problem with knowing Reid was that when I left Furman to attend graduate school at Columbia University, I spent a good deal of time looking for someone to replace him. It was a wasted effort; there were no surrogate Reid-figures to be found at Columbia. Instead, I found Columbia to be fragmented and impersonal, conforming to its stereotypical image with depressing accuracy. On some level, the impersonality was good for me; Furman was close-knit and intimate, but also gossipy and claustrophobic. Each school had something the other lacked. Reid represented Furman at its best, but he had become an ideal of humaneness and integrity that transcended Furman. I found that ideal missing in my new instructors at Columbia, brilliant as they often were.

I used to return habitually to the Furman campus to see Reid and complain about my hard times in the cold northeast. Consumed with self-pity, I would look to him to brighten my spirits, as he always had in the past. Ironically, it was through talking with him that I realized the painful necessity of somehow letting him go, of relating to New York when in New York and to old friends when with old friends. Rather than a ghost from the past that I kept trying to conjure at Columbia, Reid gradually became a close friend I could relate to, even if only occasionally, in the present. By my third year at Columbia, I was able to get close to a couple of teachers and see their qualities fresh.

Part of the process was learning to use the principles of analysis and scholarship Reid had taught me without wishing he were actually present. What I had learned from him stood me in good stead, in class after class. When I began teaching classes of my own at Columbia, I shamelessly plagiarized his notes, feeling fortunate that I had so much to fall back on. As I began moving toward a style and methodology of my own, I alternated between trying to struggle from under his shadow and simply staying there, comfortable in the sensation that it was a good shadow to be under. However distilled by my own experience, his influence is potent and lasting.

The last time I saw Reid was in April, 1975. He looked worn and overworked, but not ill. He was in a witty mood, joking about how interminable it was to write a history of Furman. Five months later, I spoke to him from New York on the phone, feeling a little out of sorts that I hadn't seen him in so long. Again, he sounded cheerful. Another five months and I received word he had suddenly died. Shock and hopelessness flooded me, and I knew it would take me a considerable time to come to terms with his death. Writing this three months later, I don't feel the process has even started.

Reid would probably be impatient with my despair. He used to talk openly about death, sometimes grimly, but without a trace of sentimentality. It was no accident that he admired Whitman and made much of Whitman's notion of death being umbilically tied to the ecstasy of life. Reid's own view of death seemed to correspond closely with Whitman's. Hopefully, that attitude will one day sink into my own head, along with everything else he taught me.

Jack Sullivan

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Memories of Al Reid by a colleague

Continued from page 24

happy eating a hamburger as eating a steak; and he was as pleased riding his brown bicycle to Furman as Jimmy Carter will be when he rides his black limousine to the inaugural. He once asked my advice about buying his wife a birthday gift. "Flowers are always nice," I said. "Or you could take her out to dinner or do something else special." I continued my suggestions. "I think," he said after awhile, "she needs a new frying pan."

Phony was his most damning word of criticism for everything from food to scholarship to people to movies. Because he was so unpretentious himself, he disliked anyone or anything that smacked of pretension. Sometimes his views on just what was or was not pretentious seemed naive—especially when he and I disagreed about things like Ingmar Bergman movies or Eudora Welty novels. But Al was not, like Moliere's Misanthrope, ready to leave a false society that sickened him to rage. Rather he was always good natured in his tolerance of human folly, and he was secure enough in his own convictions to welcome a diversity of opinion from others.
"Al Reid was known for his almost quixotic devotion to those students who were outspoken critics of the establishment..."

Al's own lack of pretention coupled with his genuine respect for the attitudes of others made him one of the most beloved members of the Furman faculty. And also one of the most overworked. Because the faculty felt he would speak his own sensible convictions and never yield to self-interest, he was selected as one of three faculty members on the committee charged with finding a successor for President Blackwell. Several years ago he had served as chairman of the faculty committee responsible for making recommendations about salaries, promotions, and tenure. He was about to be pressed into service again in 1976-77. The job is hard, long, and sometimes painful; and Al did not want it. But as he said when asked if he would serve, "I don't see how a man can refuse to take an assignment his fellow faculty members ask him to take."

The same genuineness that made Al so valuable to the faculty made him a superior teacher. He was never a flamboyant showman in the classroom; nor did he allow his students to substitute regurgitation for thinking. For that reason he was never in vogue with those students who sought to have the pain of learning eased with either entertainment or memorization. But those students who sincerely wanted to learn usually loved Al Reid because he sought to help them respond to great literature with the best of themselves. His methods of teaching varied. Sometimes the students would write poetry to learn the difficulty of ordering language; sometimes they would write critical papers to learn the difficulty of ordering thoughts. Al might spend an entire period discussing the technical devices used in one or two lines of T. S. Eliot's verse, or he might relate Yeats' mythology to the Irish society out of which he wrote. The actual moments in the classroom could, of course, range from tedium to excitement, but they were always designed to elicit original responses from the students.

Superior teaching is, of course, based on more than the classroom experience. It also involves the relationship a teacher has with his students. Al Reid was known for his almost quixotic devotion to those students who were outspoken critics of the establishment, to use a term left over from the late sixties. He advised them, championed their causes among the faculty, praised their efforts and achievements—perhaps even lived some of his life vicariously through them. Al was also a patient advisor of marginal students. He labored hours in individual conferences in an effort to help them learn to write coherently and read literature intelligently.

Yet, for me personally the true significance and inspiration of Al Reid's attitude toward students was revealed not in his work with the rebels and the weak but in the sensitivity he displayed toward those students who had intelligence, sometimes maybe even minor talent, but who were too shy or too confused to defend causes and proclaim gospels. Al would labor with them over their bad poetry, give them fatherly pats on the back, ask them how they were doing in math or biology. They felt he cared about them, as he did. Several years ago we both taught a very shy girl who wrote an account of a personal experience which she asked us to read. Soon after, Al and I were engaged in a late afternoon conversation after the other members of the English Department had gone for the day. I asked him about the paper. "I read it this weekend," he said, "and tears began running down my face. My daughter said to me 'Daddy, why are you crying?' How terrible to be so lonely!" That kind of response was part of what made Al Reid a great teacher.

Al and I used to talk a lot—sometimes about students, sometimes about Furman, sometimes about literature. Whenever I got discouraged from reading what seemed like thousands upon thousands of freshman papers blending into one never ending nightmare and felt I had lost the capacity to tell an A from a D, Al would listen to my complaints and patiently help me re-establish my standards. I often imposed on him to read and offer advice about my efforts at Scholarship. But I too made a contribution to our friendship. I lent him lunch money on the days he forgot to bring his lunch or needed to entertain a guest. The inscription he wrote for me in Lady Godiva's Lover almost seven years ago reads in part, "To Willard, in appreciation for lending me lunch money."

And just a few days before he had his first heart attack, he rushed into my office and said, "Lend me a dollar. I need to invite a fellow to lunch." "Al," I replied, "you need more than a dollar. You need at least three dollars—even to eat in the Furman dining hall." "Gosh, it's gotten expensive," he said.

Once when asked to supply some biographical information for the Furman Magazine, Al Reid characteristically said of himself. "I guess I teach for a living, do scholarship as a hobby, and write poetry as a joke. I'm a fifth-rate poet and a second-rate scholar. The only consolation is that I'm probably better at poetry and scholarship than I am at tennis."

He was much, much more than that.

Willard Pate

Dr. Pate, associate professor of English, has taught at Furman since 1964.
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