The Contribution of Wofford College to Methodism

By Charles F. Marsh

Benjamin Wofford, a local Methodist preacher in South Carolina, made the following bequest in his will dated February 1, 1850:

For the purpose of establishing and endowing a college for literary, classical, and scientific education, to be located in my native District Spartanburg, and to be under the control and management of the Methodist Episcopal Church¹ in my native State, South Carolina, I order $100,000 to be delivered to trustees, half, if so much shall be required for lands and buildings, and the balance solely for the purpose of an income-producing endowment . . .²

As a result of Wofford’s devise the cornerstone of the Main Building of Wofford College was laid on July 4, 1851 and the institution opened for its first session on August 1, 1854. Since Wofford’s will stipulated that from the outset the school was to be under the control and management of the Methodist Episcopal Church,¹ it has always been closely related to Methodism in South Carolina.

Now it is difficult to assess adequately the contribution of Wofford or any other church college to the denomination to which it belongs. The impact of an educational institution is mainly in terms of human factors. The influence exerted and the service rendered by its students, faculty, administration, trustees, and alumni constitute the contribution of a college in church and state. Though the registrar’s office at Wofford keeps through the years a record of the grades made by students, and though the alumni office maintains a file on their accomplishments after graduation, neither can provide more than a minimum of facts and statistics on which to base an estimate of the full contribution made by the college to Methodism.

Whenever a Wofford alumnus wields positive or favorable influence on the church, the college, like a parent, can do no other than take credit. But in instances in which the influence of its sons proves negative or unfavorable, the school must similarly accept some measure of parental responsibility. In this connection one might say in passing that Wofford has no doubt occasionally helped Methodism by not admitting, or by sending home, some students not predestined, as the Presbyterians might say, for significant service to The Methodist Church in or out of the pulpit!

No amount of research can accurately assess the role of some campus activities and influences on the moral and religious life of young persons while in school, or on their careers in later years.

¹ In South Carolina in the 1850’s this meant the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.
In this list one would include college chapel services, Sunday walks to Spartanburg churches for worship and the hearing of sermons, professors who are respected not only as good teachers but who are also revered as exemplary Christians, Christian fellowship club meetings, heated “bull sessions” which inevitably come around to a discussion of religion, and awesome moments of quiet meditation in a dormitory room.

One of Wofford’s beloved professors of religion, A. M. Trawick, once wrote, “There was always an opportunity at Wofford for a man to be as good as he wanted to be. There was always a faculty of religious men, always students who wanted to be religious.”

The Layman

One of Wofford’s most important contributions, but at the same time one which is often overlooked, is its graduates who as loyal lay members of The Methodist Church have returned to their homes or settled in new communities to become leaders and workers in the local churches. From Wofford they have gone back to their churches wiser and better prepared for service because they have studied religion, philosophy, or ethics taught by such men as Rembert, Snyder, Trawick, or Nesbitt. They have taken their places in the Church school as teachers and superintendents; they have become members of the official board; and they have represented their churches as lay delegates to Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conferences.

Wofford was particularly proud when the John Anthony White family of Easley, South Carolina, was named “The 1962 Methodist Family of the Year.” Dr. “Tony” White was graduated from Wofford in 1941, and although a busy general practitioner, he serves as church lay leader, Church school teacher, member of the official board, and as a lay member of the Annual Conference. In addition, he was elected as a lay delegate to the 1964 General Conference. Mrs. White teaches in the Church school, has held offices in the Woman’s Society of Christian Service, and has served on local church committees. The five White children are active in the Church school and other church activities. White and his family are good examples of the notable contribution which many Wofford alumni are making as Methodist laymen.

Many of Wofford’s faculty and administrative staff, in the present as well as in the past, are active in their local congregations and have assisted other churches in the two Carolinas. The five

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ordained ministers on the faculty today are often called upon to supply pulpits, as were their predecessors from the time the college began. Since 1875 all presidents of Wofford have been laymen, and all served The Methodist Church locally, as well as on the annual conference, regional, and national levels. The service of Henry Nelson Snyder (President 1902-1942) was especially noteworthy.

Dr. Snyder was a member of every General Conference of his church, except that of 1926, beginning with 1906 and ending with 1940, and of the Uniting Conference at Kansas City in 1939 and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference at Asheville in 1940. He was a member of the commission for Methodist unification from its origin in 1914 to the completion of its task in 1939. He was a member of the General Board of Education of the Southern Methodist Church from the Board's origin in 1942, and represented that church as a member of both the Joint Hymnal Commissions of the Northern and Southern Methodist Churches. He was also a member of the ritual commission of the Southern church. He served as Associate Director of the Christian Education Movement of his denomination 1920-21. Not to attempt an absolutely complete catalogue, we may say that few if any other laymen in the history of the church ever held more church positions or for a greater total number of years of service.

Walter K. Greene (President 1942-1951) rendered outstanding service to Methodism at all levels, especially in the areas of stewardship and education. He demonstrated a high degree of religious and educational statesmanship in reshaping and undergirding the whole system of Methodist higher education in South Carolina.

The present president has been privileged to serve as a member of the University Senate of The Methodist Church and the Executive Committee of the Methodist Commission on Church Union from 1960 to 1964. In addition, he is a member of the new Commission on Ecumenical affairs for the 1964-1968 quadrennium. He was a lay delegate to the 1964 General Conference and to the 1960 and 1964 Jurisdictional Conferences.

The South Carolina Conference

Without doubt Wofford's most significant contribution to The Methodist Church has been within the South Carolina Conference. Of the 403 effective ministers in the Conference in 1963, 195 are graduates of Wofford. Sixteen more attended the College. This means that Wofford College has had a direct influence on more than 53 per cent of the effective ministers in the Conference. Of the 94 retired preachers, 34 are Wofford graduates and 12 others studied in the school. Seven of the eleven district superintendents for the conference year 1964-1965 are sons of Wofford and two others...
attended the institution. The presiding bishop since 1960, Paul Hardin, Jr., was a member of Wofford’s class of 1924.

Notwithstanding the fact that more young people go farther away from home to college in these days, and that hometown ties seem not as strong as in former times, through the years there has been no appreciable change in the percentage of Wofford graduates who serve as ministers in the South Carolina Conference. In 1961, a little more than 54 percent of the effective preachers and nine of the eleven district superintendents were Wofford graduates. Eight years earlier, in 1953, the figures were only one percent higher than in 1961.

In the eleven-year history of the Methodist Home for the Aging of South Carolina, both directors have been Wofford men. Of the seven superintendents of Epworth Children’s Home, men who have been influential in the lives of more than 4,000 youngsters, there have been four Wofford graduates. Allan R. Broome, one of the four, has held the post since 1953. One of the other three attended Wofford three years. The records show that five Wofford men have served the Home as superintendent in all but twelve of the sixty-eight years of its existence.

During the 127-year history of the Southern Christian Advocate, now the South Carolina Methodist Advocate, ten of the twenty editors have been Wofford graduates, and their total years of service is 58.

A cursory examination of the personnel of Conference boards and committees shows that at least a majority of the officers and members of these organizations have been Wofford alumni. Wofford graduates have recently served, or are presently holding Conference board and committee offices as follows: president and executive secretary of the board of education and the board of missions and church extension; chairman and secretary of the commission on world service and finance; chairman of the board of Christian social concerns, board of evangelism, board of hospitals and homes, commission on Christian vocations, and the commission on worship; and secretary of the Annual Conference.

Exactly one half of the lay and clerical delegates from the South Carolina Conference to the General Conference and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference in 1964 were Wofford graduates.

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The Episcopacy

Wofford has supplied nine bishops to Methodism, if we are permitted to count one man who never made it as an alumnus and had to settle for the position as first president of the College. William M. Wightman, elected bishop in 1866, served as the first president (1853-1859) of Wofford; he resigned the office to become president of Southern University, Greensboro, Alabama, where he remained until elevated to the episcopacy.14

One of the earliest Wofford graduates, William W. Duncan, was financial agent and professor of mental and moral philosophy in the school when elected bishop in 1886.15 A. Coke Smith, elected bishop in 1902, wielded great influence at Wofford while serving as professor and financial agent. John C. Kilgo succeeded Smith as financial agent, later becoming president of Trinity College (now Duke University) from which position he was elected bishop in 1910.16 The unusual number of Wofford financial agents who eventually became Methodist bishops may give the impression to some that in times past financial "know how" was as important as religious zeal as a qualification for the episcopacy!

Edwin D. Mouzon, Wofford 1899, was elected bishop in 1910 after an outstanding career as a pastor and educator in Texas. He was a distinguished episcopal leader, presiding over a number of annual conferences across the church including the two (at that time) in South Carolina, until his death in 1937.

In 1930, John William Tarboux was called from retirement to become the first bishop of the newly autonomous Methodist Church of Brazil. Prior to his retirement he had served as a missionary in Brazil, fifteen years of the time as president of Granberry College in that country. Two of Bishop Tarboux's daughters attended Wofford; one of them graduated in 1904, and in 1964 she attended the sixtieth anniversary reunion of her class.

Cyrus Bassett Dawsey went with his wife and daughter in 1914 to become a missionary in Brazil. In 1946 he was elected bishop of the Central Conference, the largest of Brazil Methodism's three conferences. Bishop Dawsey labored more than forty years in Brazil. As this paper is being written he is retired and lives in Columbia, South Carolina.

At the present time two Wofford graduates, John Owen Smith and Paul Hardin, Jr., are effective bishops in The Methodist Church. Both were elevated to the office in 1960. Prior to his election, Smith served as a trustee of Wofford. In 1954, ten years before he became a bishop, Paul Hardin, Jr. wrote of the inspiration he re-

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16 Paul N. Garber, John Carlisle Kilgo, President of Trinity College, 1894-1910 (Durham, 1937), passim.
ceived at Wofford. His statement articulates the kind of influence we hope the college has on most of its students:

While a stream of memories flows steadily by, I am aware of one constant impression, and that is that I found at Wofford College an inspiration that definitely affected my life.

Under the inspiration and guidance of the fine men who taught there, something happened to me. Occasionally the clouds of selfishness and littleness would break and I would glimpse the light of high and noble purposes. I have fallen far short of the great ideals that touched me, but I have never escaped their influence.

If other lives have been beneficially affected as mine, and I am sure that they have been, Wofford has radiated a tremendous influence for good. I am proud to be a Wofford alumnus.17

Education

When the cornerstone of the Main Building of Wofford was laid on July 4, 1851, William M. Wightman, chairman of the board of trustees who was to become the school's first president two years later, said:

We have no faith in the capabilities of mere intellectual training, apart from the vital and genuine elements of religious truth, to bless the individual or society—education makes men polished and powerful, but Christian education alone makes them good.18

A number of Wofford alumni have entered the field of education in church related institutions. Of the twenty-seven Wofford graduates who have been or are presidents of colleges and universities, twenty have been or are heads of Methodist institutions of higher learning. This record seems remarkable for a small church college whose enrollment was less than 300 until 1920, less than 500 until 1946, and less than 800 until 1962. Six alumni are presently active heads of higher educational institutions affiliated with The Methodist Church, and one alumnus not included in these figures is president of a college supported by the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

Wofford men have served as president of our sister institution, Columbia College, during forty-eight of its 110 years. R. Wright Spears, Wofford 1933, has been president of Columbia College since 1951. By contrast, of the seven men who have served as president of Wofford during its equally long history, only one, Walter K. Greene (President 1942-1951) has been a Wofford alumnus.

Four other Methodist colleges have had a succession of Wofford graduates as presidents, proving the point, at least to loyal Wofford alumni, that the first election of a Wofford man was no mistake for these institutions! George William Walker, Wofford 1869, served

18 D. D. Wallace, op. cit., pp. 43-46
as president of Paine Institute (Paine College after 1903) from 1884 to 1911. In 1917, A. D. Betts began a four-year term as president of Paine.

John C. Kilgo, Wofford 1892, as stated above, was teaching at Wofford when he was elected president of Trinity College in 1898. After Kilgo became a bishop in 1910, he was succeeded at Trinity by William Preston Few of the Wofford class of 1889. Few had been the first dean of Trinity College. President Few, with the help of a few dollars from Benjamin N. and Washington Duke, was able to convert Trinity College into Duke University. Few died in office in 1940. In addition to the two presidents mentioned, Wofford supplied Duke with two deans, W. H. Wannamaker and Walter K. Greene, the former also serving as vice-president in the early years.

At Kentucky Wesleyan College, John L. Weber, Wofford 1882, was president from 1901 to 1907 while the school was at Winchester, Kentucky. Forty years later another Wofford graduate, Oscar W. Lever, Class of 1925, served the same institution as president for a ten-year period. Kentucky Wesleyan is now located at Owensboro, Kentucky.

One other institution of higher learning close to our hearts, figuratively and literally, the Textile Industrial Institute (Spartanburg Junior College since 1942), was founded in 1912 by a Wofford graduate who also became its first president—David E. Camak, Wofford 1903. Camak was succeeded by Rembert Burgess, Wofford 1917. Presently the school is under the leadership of Lester H. Kingman, Wofford 1923.

The list of Wofford alumni who have served well as presidents of Methodist institutions of higher learning could be extended. Only one more will be mentioned in this paper, a graduate of 1877 who has been referred to as the “Chancellor of Southern Education” and as “the greatest educational statesman the South has ever produced.” James H. Kirkland was a full professor at Wofford when only twenty-three years of age and was chancellor of Vanderbilt University at thirty-four, a position he occupied more than forty years. It may be added that Kirkland organized or assisted with the organization of the major academic accrediting agencies to which Wofford College belongs.

Beyond South Carolina

Wofford’s contribution to Methodism has not been restricted to South Carolina. According to the records in the alumni office, more

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20 Garber, op. cit., passim.
22 Edwin Mims, Chancellor Kirkland of Vanderbilt (Nashville, 1940), p. xii.
than 100 Wofford graduates are serving as effective Methodist min­
isters in eighteen states, aside from South Carolina and the District
of Columbia. Not included in these figures are six alumni who at­
tended but did not graduate from Wofford, along with twelve
preachers whose denominational affiliation is not indicated in our
records. Wofford is represented by as many as six alumni in five
different foreign lands—Africa, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Japan.
A few years ago the district superintendents of The Methodist
Church in the capital cities of Virginia, North Carolina, and South
Carolina were all Wofford graduates.
The late James E. Ellis was for twenty-six years a missionary
in Brazil. In 1950 he became executive secretary for Latin American
Countries, Division of World Missions, The Methodist Church. Ellis
died July 9, 1962 a few hours after the passing of his wife, who also
served as a missionary in Brazil. Ellis was president of Union Col­
lege, Uruguayana, Brazil from 1926 to 1934.
Many Wofford alumni have served and are serving as chaplains
in the nation's armed forces. One outstanding member of this group
is Captain Francis L. Garrett, chaplain in the United States Navy.
Charles L. Allen, class of 1935, was pastor of Grace Methodist
Church, Atlanta, Georgia, 1949 to 1960. During his time in Atlanta
Allen also wrote several devotional books, supplied a column for the
Atlanta Constitution, and conducted a radio program. Since 1960
he has been pastor of First Methodist Church, Houston, Texas. J.
Claude Evans, class of 1938, served as editor of the South Carolina
Methodist Advocate, and since 1952 has been chaplain at Southern
Methodist University in Dallas.
Mason Crum, Wofford 1909, became a professor in the department
of religion at Duke University in 1930. He is the author of several
books on religion and race relations. He has served as vice-president
of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Historical Association. J. Emerson
Ford, Wofford 1914, served as a trustee of his alma mater, and was
for years editor of youth publications of the General Board of Educa­
tion, The Methodist Church.
We close the list with the mention of Albert C. Outler, class of
1928, one of Wofford's most distinguished living alumni. Outler has
taught at Duke and Yale, and at present is professor of theology,
Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. He
served as one of the American observers at the Vatican Ecumenical
Council, and is vice-chairman of the Methodist Commission on Ecu­
menical Affairs. He is widely recognized as an authority on the ecu­
menical movement.

Conclusion

This paper does not contend that Wofford College can take all
the credit for the achievements and the contributions of the men,
living and dead, who are mentioned herein. The writer would be the first to acknowledge that the family and the home, the Church school and the church, and the public school and the community environment made profound impressions on these men long before they entered Wofford College. But it is my hope and prayer that Wofford has given in the past and will give to the youth of today and tomorrow what Charles L. Allen ten years ago said the school gave to him. “Wofford,” wrote Allen, “gave me a deeper appreciation of scholarship. More than scholarship, however, Wofford put into me higher ideals, principles, and purposes. Wofford not only helped to educate my head but also my heart.” 