

Celebrating Higher Education in Beaufort, 1795-2010

DR. WALTER EDGAR

Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of South Carolina

On the eve of the American Revolution, South Carolina was the wealthiest colony in the British North America. Beaufort and the surrounding area were part of that prosperity based upon the production of rice. The sons of the South Carolina elite were sent abroad for their education and little South Carolina had more of our young men studying law at the Inns of Court in London than all the other twelve colonies combined. And, then came the Revolution. South Carolina suffered greatly from the British invasion and occupation. This part of the state was particularly hard hit. Those who supported the king were sent into exile and among those who fled



the state was Major Andrew DeVeaux. He is going to figure later in the Beaufort story. DeVeaux went first to St. Augustine. Then, this ex-Beaufortonian personally funded an expedition to recapture the Bahama Islands from the Spanish. The British reclaimed the Bahama Islands, rewarding South Carolina and Georgia Tories with large land grants. Those individuals kept in touch with relatives back here in Beaufort County. After the Revolution, prosperity eventually returned to Beaufort and the



Major Andrew DeVeaux

surrounding parishes with the production of rice, called Carolina Gold--and the introduction of Sea Island cotton, which gave this area a new, profitable crop.

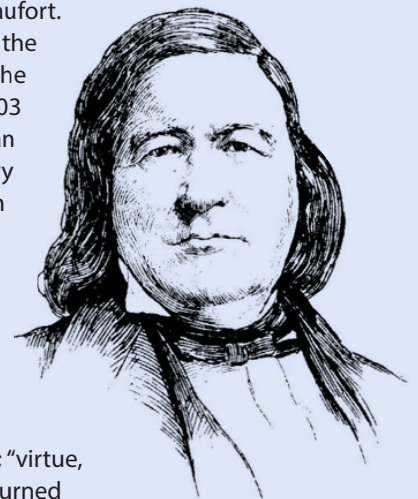
The little town of Beaufort reflected that prosperity. Area planters built homes; the mercantile and commercial communities were thriving. When communities thrive they begin to create institutions. Churches had always been here, but civic or social organizations were added. The St. Helena Society, the Beaufort Society, and the Beaufort District Society were organized. These societies as a group decided to cooperate and drafted a joint resolution: "We resolve unanimously that the erection and endowment of a college would not only be the most likely means of carrying our intentions into effect but would be an asset of the state." They didn't just talk and resolve, they raised thousands of dollars for educational purposes and on November 23, 1795 they petitioned

the General Assembly for the permission to incorporate for the purposes of promoting the education of the youth. They asked that the funds raised from the sale of confiscated British Loyalist estates be set aside for the use of the proposed college. Within a month, the gentlemen of the General Assembly responded. It's interesting to note back in those days a proposal could come forth and become law in two weeks. The General Assembly granted the charter of incorporation, gave the trustees the power to use the funds from the sale of confiscated estates to support the college, and empowered the trustees to confer, "such degrees in the liberal arts and sciences as usually conferred of the colleges in Europe or America."

With all projects sometimes there's a little bump in the road. Beaufort's was a financial controversy that arose as to who should really get the use of the confiscated estate funds. It went to court and eventually the college was limited to using only the funds from properties confiscated within the town limits of Beaufort.

But the trustees raised the money for the rest of the college elsewhere. By 1803 they had raised more than \$63,000 in early 19th century dollars [about one million 2010 dollars] for the building and operation of a college. They then began a search for a president and erected a large tabby and wood building on Bay Street. They chose for their motto; "virtue, liberty, and science." They turned to Steven Elliot to create the first curriculum and given his

own interests it was very heavily weighted towards science. On January the 18th 1804 the college opened its doors. Among the early faculty were the distinguished South Carolinians James L. Petigru and the two brothers of the president of the South Carolina College. He was Jonathon Maxey. His brothers Virgil and Milton were on the faculty of the Beaufort College.



James L. Petigru

Enrollments did not meet expectations for several reasons. One of these was that between the times this college was chartered and opened, the General Assembly had also chartered the South Carolina College in Columbia and most Carolinians had chosen to attend the new South Carolina College rather than the Beaufort College. Another major student cohort was to have been the children of West Indian planters. South Carolina and the Sea Islands had always had strong Caribbean connections but the Napoleonic wars interrupted those ties. That group of students did not appear, nor did the sons of the Bahamian cotton planters, many of them loyalist exiles from Beaufort. Their fortunes were receding and they were not able to financially send their sons here.

And, so Beaufort College evolved into a first rate preparatory school primarily for area residents. It became a feeder institution for the South Carolina College and the elite colleges of the North, including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Columbia. Twenty-five young men who attended preparatory school here went on to Harvard College. Except for Charleston and Columbia, more students from the Beaufort District attended the college in Columbia than any other district in the state. Beaufort College had a number of distinguished alumni who had an impact on South Carolina history: the author, William Elliot III, clergyman Richard Fuller, politician Robert Barnwell Rhett, and statesman educator Robert W. Barnwell.

Robert W. Barnwell entered Harvard in 1817, and graduated in 1821 Phi Beta Kappa and valedictorian of his class. He became a member of the faculty of the South Carolina College in Columbia, professor of political philosophy, and president 1835-1841. Mr. Barnwell succeeded the controversial Thomas Cooper and revived the college. Enrollments increased dramatically under Barnwell's leadership and he oversaw the building of the South Carolina College Library, what we now call the South Caroliniana Library. The South Caroliniana Library had 18,500 volumes, many of them purchased at Mr. Barnwell's direction. It was larger than the library at Princeton and larger than the library at Columbia University in New York.

In Beaufort, there were some difficulties in 1817. That year a yellow fever epidemic swept the town and killed almost twenty percent of the population. It was thought that one of the sources of infection was the college. It was closed and the building was torn down. So until the building, now called the Beaufort College, was built in 1852, students were taught in a variety of places, mostly in church buildings. The new building signified a revival of the idea for an institution of higher education here in Beaufort but it was really more of a junior college than it was a full four year college. The trustees insisted that the graduates of the college have all the courses necessary for admission to the South Carolina College as sophomores. Even though there was no official link as we have today, there was already an education link between higher education here in Beaufort and that in Columbia.

During the Civil War the college was closed. During the occupation by federal forces, the building was used as a school for freedmen and as headquarters for the U.S. Freedmen's Bureau. In 1873 the trustees regained control of the facility and by the 1880s it became

the Beaufort College Graded School. Several folks in the audience I know attended school in that building.

History doesn't always repeat itself but in the story of this campus it does. Let us fast forward ninety-nine years from the closing of Beaufort College because of the Civil War. On January 12, 1959, there was a public meeting held in the county office building and the purpose of that meeting is to consider organizing an "Extension Campus" of USC in Beaufort. Dr. Nicholas Mitchell of USC's Extension Division made remarks and he noted that the university had already established an extension division in Florence in 1957. Those who were at the meeting approved a resolution asking the Beaufort County Delegation to pursue the matter. Representative T. Reeves Sams was present. He was strong and supportive of the idea and spearheaded the effort in Columbia.

On March the 24th the Beaufort County Higher Education Commission was created by the General Assembly. It had three members; Dr. H. Palmer Jones, Marion DeVeaux Jones, and Mrs. Marion D. Bradberry. It's interesting to note that as higher education commissions were created with every one of the University's extensions they varied in size. Beaufort kept it small which I think kept it more functional. (E.g., Florence had five members and grew to a sixteen-member commission.) In the summer of 1959, the Beaufort commission framed a proposal to establish a two year college program. It was formally submitted for approval and approval was given. The guidelines were set forth by the University of South Carolina trustees in Columbia. Extensions would only be approved in those communities in which there was a demonstrated need and would only be approved in the event that local initiative and support was manifested. Both of these were clearly demonstrated here in Beaufort.



Dr. John J. Duffy

In 1959, Beaufort became the second, two year "Extension" in the USC system and Dr. John Duffy was appointed the director. On November 19th of that year there was a dedication, the official opening, if you will, the predecessor to this ceremony. Mr. G. G. Dowling presided; the local Beaufort High School band provided music; and there were remarks by various people; Dr. John J. Duffy, the South Carolina Commissioner of Higher Education, and

Dr. Nicholas Mitchell from USC. The program concluded with the Alma Mater. This mini program which I discovered in the University archives had a list on the back with the people that helped make the campus, (the extension, the branch, all of these terms were in use), a reality: the Beaufort County Legislative Delegation including Brantley Harvey; the Beaufort County Higher Education Commission; an advisory committee to the commission that had fourteen members; the City of Beaufort;

the Beaufort County Chamber of Commerce; and the USC Alumni Association. No author was listed, but it is clearly the work of Dr. John Duffy. It captured the spirit of the day: "The contributions to the success of the Beaufort branch of the University of South Carolina, listed by name above, have been of so much importance that there could have been no school without them. In addition many Beaufort citizens and organizations have cooperated in the enthusiastic and sustained effort to bring an institution of higher learning to this community. Naming them would exceed the space available here but their reward is this school which is today being dedicated to the further education of the young men and women of this community. Nothing finer can be said, no reward could be greater." In that first year eighty-two students were enrolled for night classes only. All classes, administrative offices, and library were in that the Beaufort College Trustees erected building that in 1852 and in the 1909 annex in the rear, built as the first Beaufort High School.



Historic photo of the Beaufort College Building with addition.

There were growing pains, but that's healthy. When you're growing, things happen. The first thing that John did was create "Public Outreach," a public lecture series in 1960--the first year of operation. Among the speakers was Dr. Joab Lesesne, who later became the president of Wofford College; Dr. Wade Bateson, the great biologist from USC; and Professor Edwin Yaghjian, the distinguished artist. The cost for those six lectures was one dollar. In today's money that is \$7.31. Compare that to the four bicentennial lectures that Dr. Rowland, Dr. McCardell and Dr. Wise presented for forty dollars and we can discern the inflation factor.

By 1961, student enrollment had increased to the point that quarters were very cramped. John Duffy spoke to the local civic club. The "branch" he now said needed the entire 1852 campus and until that occurred, it would be impossible to have classes like those of the other USC Extension Centers.

In 1963 a momentous year for the Beaufort Campus, enrollment topped one hundred for the first time and the Trustees of Beaufort College (1795) came to the aid of USCB. Mr. Calhoun Thomas, the president of the Trustees announced that the building had been conveyed to the county for the use of the Beaufort County Higher Education Commission for the exclusive use of the University of South Carolina. The county was obligated to maintain and renovate the campus. This was another example of local support

and commitment by the community.

In 1964 the campus was extended further with the construction of the new classroom and library building that replaced the 1909 structure. A local bond issued for \$164,000 and funds that the board of trustees in Columbia got from the South Carolina Higher Education Commission funded that.

In December 1968, accreditation came from the Southern Association Colleges and Universities. That may sound like a bureaucratic stamp, but unless you have that accreditation for your institution, student's courses don't transfer anywhere. That accreditation was a very important step in the development of this institution.

The 1960s witnessed several reports and much politics regarding higher education. During that decade there were four separate reports on higher education written in South Carolina. They asked questions about establishing a comprehensive community college system in the state and should Clemson and Carolina be forced to abandon their branches? There was the Thomas Report commissioned by the State Commission on Higher Education which recommended that USCB be closed. The reports were discussed, and cussed, for a decade. In the end the regional campuses, as they were then constituted, were pretty much left alone. National affairs did have an impact on USCB and the country's increasing involvement in Vietnam. It led to a stagnation of enrollment as more and more young men from Parris Island were called out and sent to Vietnam and were no longer able to enroll on the campus.

Another foray into the archives turned up student handbooks from the first decade of operation and the mission of the college set forth to the students that came here in the 1970s still applies today. First of all the purpose of USCB, was to provide at a modest cost to the Beaufort area, a quality education, and in this case in the 1970s a two year degree. USCB was to offer programs comprising quality and diversity that individuals could transfer to the Columbia campus, to a four year campus in the system, or any other institution of higher education. USCB sent history majors very regularly to the Columbia Campus in the mid-1970s. My experience with those students and those that have followed from this campus has been exceptional. They walked right into the classes in Columbia and did not miss a beat. Of course in the 1970s associate degrees being granted in some fields was more than enough. The campus offered eleven majors including business administration, criminal justice, education, engineering, nursing, and pharmacy. Despite Vietnam there was a very active on-base program for military personnel. Another part of the mission was to encourage the cultural development of this community by making its courses readily available to the general public for both degree and non-degree credit. Encouraging the faculty to take part in the community was also part of the mission. All you have to do is look at Exhibit A: Larry Rowland. He is typical of the men and women of this faculty who have participated in the life of the Beaufort community. The Beaufort Campus has always sponsored popular public programs like those begun by Dr. John J. Duffy in 1960.

By the time of the 30th anniversary, the eight-acre campus in downtown Beaufort was a reality. It featured the marine life

science building and with the purchase of Beaufort Elementary School, provided a much needed performing arts center. By 1985 classes were taking place on Hilton Head. The student body was nearly nine hundred. Through the cooperation with USC Columbia and USC Aiken baccalaureate degrees could be awarded.

In 1994 Union Camp, which is currently International Paper Corporation, donated eighty acres to USCB and it was hoped that that donation would help spur the development of a four-year campus. In 1994, the same year the Beaufort County Commission on Higher Education expanded its scope and became the Beaufort-Jasper Commission on High Education. Both counties were undergoing tremendous growth.

In the year 2000 another citizen's meeting occurred, reminiscent of community meetings in 1795 and 1959. The public forum attracted local, regional and state leaders. The subject of the meeting was the change of USCB mission from a two year campus to a four year baccalaureate degree granting institution. The meeting revealed a very strong consensus of local support for four year status. The next question was how to find the physical plant and staff and faculty that such a move would require. The answer of



First Chancellor of the University of South Carolina Beaufort, Dr. Jane T. Upshaw

In 2004 USCB received full accreditation from the Southern Association for its four year program and in August of that year this campus opened with the Hargray building, the Science and Technologies building, and the library. And here we are fifty years later from 1959. USCB is today, a four-year baccalaureate campus with fourteen bachelor's degrees, thirteen concentrations, a faculty of more than one hundred and twenty, and a student body of over sixteen hundred, a community outreach that includes classes to some fifteen hundred senior citizens, the highly acclaimed chamber series, and the ever-popular Beaufort Lecture Series.

Now we historians know history doesn't always repeat itself but we do frequently look for common themes or threads that might better help us tell the story. In the case of USCB there clearly is a common thread. First, while we just celebrated

the 50th anniversary of a campus in the University of South Carolina system, we need to understand that it has a much older antecedent that originated in 1795.

First there was a desire by the Beaufort community for an institution of higher education, second the local community was willing to raise the funds for that institution, and third those that dreamed of a college sought to partner with local and state governing bodies to make that dream a reality.

In 1795 the result of community desires and private and public funding created the Beaufort College. That same partnership created the Beaufort extension of the University of South Carolina in 1959, which, in turn, evolved into a two- year and a four-year college.

So in 2009 the latest example of long standing tradition in this part of South Carolina is a highly successful public private partnership that we celebrate here today. A four year baccalaureate degree granting, fully accredited institution of higher education. Without question the University of South Carolina Beaufort is responding to the regional needs and drawing upon regional strength. Congratulations to all you concerned and Happy Anniversary!



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course came from the Beaufort County Council and the South Carolina General Assembly in the form of the "tax increment finance district." It was authorized by the General Assembly to use incremental increase on property taxes for the campus development. Beaufort County used the "Tif" Funds to finance twenty-eight million dollars in bonds to build the Hilton Head Gateway Campus where we are today.

Because of the new partnership between USCB and Beaufort and Jasper counties, ongoing operating funds of two and a half million dollars annually flow to USCB through the Higher Education Commission.

By 2002 USCB had the financial wherewithal to achieve four-year status, which was granted by USC's Board of Trustees and the Commission on Higher Education that year.

