

HISTORY LESSON

From somewhat humble beginnings more than 150 years ago, the university has become a major educational institution

By Darryl Oliver

Change is nothing new on campus. It is just as apparent here as it is in any other progressive organization. The process of change can be haphazard and bothersome, but the end result is nearly always worth the trouble.

The university that we know today began as a few brick structures located on a hilltop in Colbert County. This modest cluster of buildings not far from Leighton was called LaGrange College. Opening on January 11, 1830, it was Alabama's first institute of higher learning. Among the 19th century notables who attended the new Methodist school were Dr. John A. Wyeth and General Edward A. O'Neal.

In 1855, most of the faculty and students of LaGrange found better accommodations in Florence and deserted their school in favor of a stately new building with towers and ramparts. The state of Alabama denied the new school the right to use the name LaGrange College, so on February 14, 1855, Wesleyan University was incorporated. Wesleyan Hall still stands and continues to be a useful and integral part of the campus. To see the very roots of UNA all one has to do is visit the hall and its annex (which was added in 1901).

The enrollment at Wesleyan University numbered 160 in 1856. By 1861, the number had grown to 225 students from five states and two foreign countries.

The rising tensions between the North and the South during the early 1800s reached the breaking point, and the War Between the States saw the grounds of Wesleyan University used by both sides for quartering troops and other activities. William T. Sherman found Wesleyan Hall ideal for his offices. Beauregard and Forrest visited the grounds and may have also used the hall for administrative purposes.

Confederate forces regained control of Florence in November of 1864, and used the college grounds for dances and parties for three weeks.

Wesleyan University survived the war unscathed, but the original buildings of LaGrange College were burned by Federal Troops in April of 1863.

In the turmoil of the post war economy the Methodists found that they had no more money to run Wesleyan University and offered the grounds to the state for the establishment of the agricultural college. Auburn was chosen instead, so the Methodists offered the facilities as a normal school.

A third name change occurred on December 18, 1872, when the school was established as Florence State Normal School, the first state supported teachers college south of the Ohio River. The following year women were allowed to attend, making Florence State Normal School the first co-educational institute for higher learning.

With the century came progress at a rapid pace and the need to expand and keep up. An annex, containing a modern laboratory, was added to Wesleyan Hall in 1907.

In 1913, a new dormitory was built to accommodate the increasing number of women attending the Normal School. It was named O'Neal Hall, after the governor of Alabama. The name of the college was again changed in 1929 to Florence State Teachers College, a name more fitting to its role in the educational system.

Advancement and progress became more apparent, and the teachers college flourished as it expanded to meet the requirements of modern secondary education. Most of the buildings familiar to us today began to spring up. Kilby Training School was the first in 1923, and was

expanded in 1930. Then Bibb Graves Hall came in 1930. It was built at a cost of \$300,000, and contained administrative offices, classrooms, a library, a cooperative store, a post office, lounges for men and women, society rooms, and a museum. Willingham Hall was built in 1938, as a dormitory on the site of Locust Dell Boarding School.

Powers Hall came next, in 1939, followed by Keller Hall and Collier Library in the late 1940s, all of which were named after former presidents of the college. Powers and Keller Halls were originally dormitories.

Florence State Teachers College was shortened to Florence State College in 1957. During the decade the new men's dormitory, LaGrange, was constructed.

The newer, modern campus next gained the Student Union Building, Flowers Hall, LaFayette Hall, Floyd Hall, and the Fine Arts Center. The twin towers of Rivers and Rice rose over the campus in 1967.

University status was granted to the college on September 1, 1968, and the name became Florence State University. On August 15, 1974, the name "The University of North Alabama" was adopted.

In the recent past the Education and Nursing Building was constructed; Flowers Hall was annexed, and the Fine Arts Center and Collier Library were both greatly expanded.

Progress is always in motion. Today the older buildings have been undergoing modernization. New telephone lines have been installed, and provisions made for the handicapped. Wesleyan Hall is scheduled for renovations, and O'Neal Hall has been razed for the expansion of the Student Union Building.

Progress continues, and the university continues to expand in order to meet the needs of students.

State Normal School (University of North Alabama)

1877 Tuition

Normal Dept.	FREE
Primary Dept.	\$10.00/term
Preparatory Dept.	\$12.50/term
Academic Dept.	\$15.00/term
Incidental Fee	\$1.00/term

"Boarding may be had in private families at rates varying from \$12 to \$15 per month."

THERE WERE GROUP SHOTS to be taken even in the early 1900s. When J. Emory Morris came to campus to shoot this picture at "State Normal School," he shot the entire class of 1907 on the steps of Wesleyan.

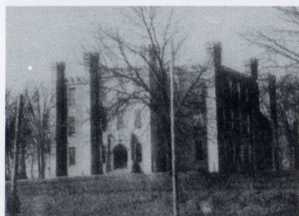


MEALTIME was a little more formal when all the tables had fresh flowers, white tablecloths, and proper place settings.

"THE REST ROOM" (honestly, that's what it was called) in O'Neal Hall provided the residents of the women's dormitory with a place to read, sew, or visit. The piano in the right fore-

ground also suggests an opportunity to practice scales or conduct a musicale. The common room was on one of the upper floors. (All photos courtesy UNA Archives)

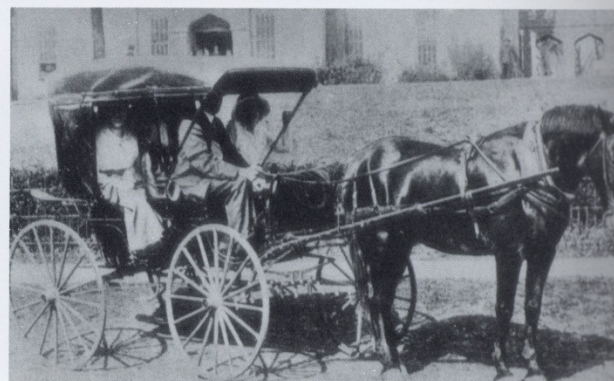
SNOW was a rare enough occasion even 50 years ago to warrant a photo session. The center building is the former president's home, shown in the era when Dr. Henry J. Willingham (term, 1913-1937) was the campus leader. If that hilly lawn looks vaguely familiar, there's a good reason—the home was on the site of the present Student Union Building.



USUALLY CALLED "the Castle," Wesleyan was the primary building on campus from 1855 until the 1920s. The trolley car, barely visible in the left foreground, passed by campus and provided students with cheap, convenient transportation.



IN PRE-COLLIER LIBRARY DAYS, Wesleyan Annex housed the school's library.



THE TROLLEY wasn't the only mode of transportation—these students used a horse and buggy to get to campus.