The Story of the Names of the Dormitories of the Woman's College

by

Mrs. Hope S. Chamberlain

Women of the East Campus, hailing as they do from all up and down the whole eastern half of the United States, coming to college in a little known North Carolina, must sometimes spend a moment wondering whence came those names chiselled upon the marble lintels of the front doors of their halls of residence. Who bore these names? Why are our houses named for these men and women?

First of the persons for whom our dormitories are called, alphabetically and in point of time, stands John Wesley Alspaugh. He went late to college, graduating in 1855 when he was twenty-five years old. He fought through the Civil War. Returning, he studied law, and became a journalist in Charlotte, and later in his own town of Winston. Finally he was a banker in Winston-Salem until his death. His especial title to the gratitude of his University is the fact that he helped keep it alive when it was in financial straits after the Civil War, and until the removal to Durham in 1892.

Mr. Alspaugh was responsible for the building up of Winston as a market town for the western part of North Carolina. He was a devoted friend and helper of Trinity College all his life. Today, if he can look down from mansions of the sky, he must be pleased to see how well his plantings have thriven.

Pegram Dormitory is named for W. H. Pegram, one of the professors in the old day.

A country boy from a rural part of North Carolina
walked back home after the surrender of Lee's army in that
momentous April of 1865, starting in company with many another
young fellow set adrift with no prospects whatever, in times far
leaner than any of us can remember. He knew that he wanted an
education. He had a brilliant mind. In 1869, he presented him-
self to enter Trinity College, then deep in the country, situated
in Randolph County, North Carolina. While it was far larger than
the primitive "log college" which was the beginning of so many of
our best institutions of today, it was a simple place showing the
pinch of the times. For President it had a genius named Braxton
Craven, who resembled the "Mark Hopkins" of Williams College
mentioned by President Garfield as the inspiration of his student
life. Soon, young Pegram was teaching as well as learning. He
married Braxton Craven's daughter. By 1875, he was teaching the
students all the natural science they studied there.

When Trinity came to Durham in 1892, Dr. Pegram came
with it as Professor of Chemistry, having laid aside his other
sciences. He taught a hundred men all by himself, except as he
used student helpers. He built up his department. In 1918, he
retired, as Emeritus, but lived ten years longer.

My son, who graduated here in Chemistry in 1925, re-
members his fine benignant presence around the laboratories he
loved to keep visiting. This man was the friend and contemporary
of Mr. Washington Duke, the first large benefactor.

It is strange how little most of us know in the present
of the governors of our great commonwealths, and how next to
nothing is remembered from the past. How many of you know who
is the Governor of Texas, let us say, today, or who is the
Governor of North Carolina?

Aycock and Jarvis are the names of two dormitories
facing each other as you enter the East Campus, and are buildings inherited from the days when this was all there was of Trinity College, when all the girls lived over in Southgate, when Miss Baldwin was newly come, and when affairs were far fewer and simpler. The two buildings were named for Governors of North Carolina, perhaps as an inspiration to the boys that were to live in them. When first built, they were considered quite the last word in college dormitory construction. Their peculiar plan, whereby they have three front doors and two end ones, and are shut into as many separate cubicles, was so laid out to restrain the enthusiasm of too many young men herded together, and to prevent them from rioting through a long building from end to end. Connecting doors were first cut to accommodate the girls, so I am told.

Governor Jarvis was elected Lieutenant Governor with Zebulon Vance in 1876. Then when Vance went to the United States Senate, Jarvis took over his office, and was re-elected for his own sake. Honest and laborious, he was not a brilliant man, but common-sense, hardworking, and doing much to bring order out of the chaos left behind by Reconstruction. Governor Jarvis was long a trustee of Trinity College. Governor Aycock was a University of North Carolina man, and a Baptist. His title to honor and emulation was because of his being the great apostle of education for the common people in North Carolina. His campaigns for more schools and better ones cover the earliest years of this century.

John Spencer Bassett, from whom Bassett House is named, comes later in time. He was born in Goldsboro, N. C., after the Civil War, and entered Old Trinity College in 1886. After gradua-
tion, he took his doctor's degree in History at Johns Hopkins, and after that, taught history for twelve years at Trinity, before and after the college was moved to Durham. While doing so, he became founder of the South Atlantic Quarterly, author of many monographs on southern history, and collector of much library material.

Dr. Bassett was criticized for his liberal ideas, especially regarding the education of negroes, and was pilloried by a certain element of the state press which was still occupied in "skinning the same old coon" as the saying goes.

The trustees of Trinity endorsed Dr. Bassett, and by doing so, they spoke out plain for liberty of thought and expression. The negro-phobes were silenced for the time.

All this I remember myself. I lived in Raleigh then, and wrote a letter to Dr. Bassett, taking his part and commending his stand. His reply I have preserved.

When we heard that Dr. Bassett had accepted a chair at Smith College, we surmised he might be assuring for himself the free atmosphere he craved as well as the larger room. He left for Smith in 1906, and remained till his death, twenty-two years later. The list of his books is a very long one. He belonged to two sections of the nation, understood two cultures, and was recognized by the historians of the world as a man of learning and distinction.

Mr. Joseph G. Brown was born in Raleigh in 1854. He lived there all his life. I must have known him there for more than twenty years. He was a leading banker. He just about ran Edenton Street Methodist Church, of which I was a member, as well as its great Sunday School. Indeed we used to call him the "Pope of Edenton Street" when he would do exactly as he thought
best, without paying much attention to free advice. He was a
fine-looking, upstanding, genial man, the very type and fashion
of sane, honest, business ability. To look at him you would at
once choose him for an executor or a trustee. He was a graduate
of Old Trinity, a trustee, and for many years President of the
Board of Trustees.

Mr. Brown, probably because of his experiences as an
executor, was convinced that women did not know anything about
business, nor much more about matters educational. I have had
a few good-humored tilts with him about the management of our
City Library. He used to have his way, for he had the advantage
of me in being a trustee of the library.

It is for him one of the ironies of fate, that he has
to find his fame, by having a dormitory in a woman's college
named in his honor.

Now we have come to that Dormitory for Women which
is named for women.

In 1874, three sisters came to Old Trinity. They were
Theresa, Persis, and Mary Giles. Their mother kept boarders to
educate the son of the family. The girls asked for education also,
and the members of the faculty taught them for three years, but
not in the same classes with men students. When they were
Seniors, President Braxton Craven swept aside all the traditional
nonsense. He had them come to his classes with men, and they
graduated, receiving their A. B. Degree in the same graduation
class with men. They are said to have been able students. After-
wards they maintained themselves by teaching their own school.
They were the first women, and the only ones to ask admission to
this college for ten years; but by their precedent, and ever after,
it has been the custom of this institution to not only accept
women as students, but to treat them with courtesy.

It was Mr. Washington Duke who took great interest in
the few women who later came to college in Durham. So much so,
that he gave an endowment of a hundred thousand dollars, condi-
tioning it upon the admission of women. A building was built
for them then, and at no time since 1900 has there been a class
graduated without having women members of it.

This address was delivered by Mrs. Chamberlain in the East
Campus Chapel on February 4, 1937.