

*Lighthouse on the Hill:*  
**The Bluefield College Story**



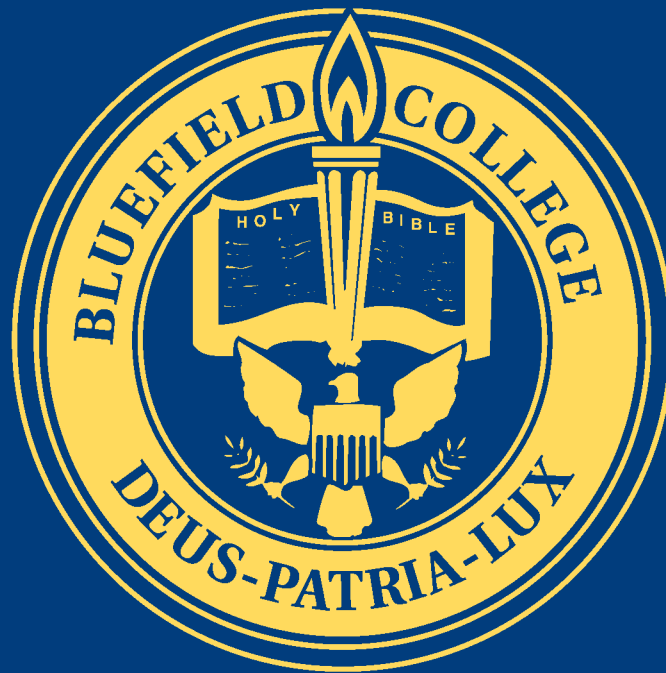
*By: Rev. David M. Armbrister*  
Retired Senior Professor of History

**Resiliency! This is a word that aptly fits the story of Bluefield College. Financial issues have beset the school since its beginning, often giving those directly associated with its operation, as well as those simply interested in its welfare, concern about its continuance as an educational institution. If there had not been men and women of strong faith and characterized by their willingness to make great sacrifices, the college might not exist today. There would be no eighty-fifth anniversary celebration in 2007.**

**We can be thankful for that band of men who made that trip to Bristol, Virginia in a day when travel was not easy. The enthusiasm and drive that they took with them established a model that others would follow in supporting a Baptist college and, initially, a fitting school equivalent to a high school for southwest Virginia. The courage and determination that accompanied their great belief that the school was in God's plan continued to uplift and guide the institution through its early years. These same qualities and convictions have enabled the school to overcome its problems and emerge as one of Virginia's leading institutions of higher learning today.**

**The author of this work has sought to present this marvelous story in a manner that will capture the unique spirit of this school and those who have been associated with it through the years. His prayer is that the story will awaken a new understanding of the service that the college has rendered in its eighty-five years and provide the groundwork on which it can go forward in the years ahead. Many students await the opportunity to receive their education at Bluefield College.**

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The seal of Bluefield College is a circular emblem. It features a central torch with a flame, positioned above an open book. The book has the words "HOLY BIBLE" written on its pages. Below the book is a shield with vertical stripes, flanked by two olive branches. The entire central design is enclosed within a circular border containing the text "BLUEFIELD COLLEGE" at the top and "DEUS - PATRIA - LUX" at the bottom.

**Lighthouse on the Hill: The Bluefield College Story**

*"This college will be a powerful lighthouse for  
the youth to whom no college had come before."*

Baptist General Association of Virginia Report, 1923.

**By: David M. Armbrister**  
Senior Professor of History, Retired

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— PREFACE —

Unofficially, I have been labeled the historian of Bluefield College. It is true that I did write an abbreviated history of the college as part of the celebration of the school's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1972. I also co-authored the work, *Dr. Charlie*, biography of the college's longest serving president, Dr. Charles L. Harman. I collaborated with my good friend, Dr. Jack Brown, on this project. At the time, he was serving as Dean of Students at Bluefield. I believe that, through these avenues and my long association with the institution as a faculty member, I do possess a reasonable amount of knowledge about its history. Yet, at the same time, when I undertook the challenge of writing a full history of the school for its 85<sup>th</sup> year in 2007, there still remained many gaps in my knowledge of its life.

Research that actually began in 1995-1996, only to be set aside for nearly nine years, and then resumed again in 2005, undergirded the effort to put together a meaningful history. This research basically concluded around the middle of 2006, although bits and pieces of useful information continued to be gathered beyond that date. This research has provided for me a much greater insight into the total history of the college, while, at the same time, it has also instilled in me a much deeper appreciation of the role that this institution has played in the realm of higher education. Throughout the entire process, my prayer has consistently been that the finished product will do justice to the story of this fine school and that it will also provide enlightenment and enjoyment to those who read it.

The college seal contains three Latin words – *Deus* meaning God, *Patria*, meaning country, and *Lux*, meaning light. While each of these words speaks clearly about the purpose of Bluefield College and has importance, I selected *Lux* as the key consideration in determining the title for the book. Throughout its history, there have been any number of references to the school as a light or lighthouse. From the minutes of the meeting held at the First Baptist Church in Newport News by the Baptist General Association of Virginia on November 3, 1922, come the words describing the college as a “lighthouse on top of the Appalachian Mountains.”<sup>1</sup> This was barely two months after the school had officially opened its doors to receive that group of pioneer students who were enrolled for its first semester.

In 1950, Dr. Charles L. Harman, only four years into his presidency, addressed the audience in attendance at the annual session of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. He remarked that, on behalf of the entire college community, “we want to thank our Virginia Baptist men and women for backing this ‘Light’ which God has planted here high on this great Appalachian plateau.”<sup>2</sup> Some forty-five years later, Mrs. Norma Mahood, now Mrs. Norma Mahood-Bay, a 1990 graduate, expressed the following thoughts in the interview conducted with her:

I love where it sits...when I see that college on the hill, to me, it's a beacon that sends out rays of hope for a better world through education fostered in a warm Christian atmosphere.<sup>3</sup>

This concept has remained very strong throughout the years. When I asked Dr. Primitivo Delgado, former professor, Academic Dean, and Chairman of the Division of Humanities at the college, what he might consider an appropriate title for the book, his prompt reply was “why not *The light on the hill?*”<sup>4</sup> I had said nothing to him about my own thoughts on the matter. Since I have always valued any advice that Dr. Delgado offered on any matter that I would take to him for his input, I found great satisfaction in his response regarding a title. It helped in fortifying my belief that what I was already considering was a suitable choice.

There are additional references that I could cite to strengthen my decision for the title selected, and I honestly believe that it is highly likely that the idea of light or lighthouse has occurred to many persons over the course of the life of the college without their thoughts ever being recorded. When one views the full scope of the influence exerted by this institution during its lifetime, it can truly be said that “light,” “lighthouse,” “beacon,” or similar descriptions fit quite suitably. For those who may not have seen the college from such a perspective, I sincerely hope that this account will serve to lead many to share this concept. Even moreso, I earnestly hope and pray that there will be renewed and increased support to ensure that this light will continue to burn brightly and, as Mrs. Mahood-Bay

said, to send out “rays of hope for a better world through education fostered in a warm Christian atmosphere” for a long time to come.

While great scores of Bluefield College graduates or attendees have first-hand knowledge of the school, this knowledge might well be limited in its scope. Certainly this would be the case when looking back at its earliest years. While there are materials that cover the decades of the 1920’s, ‘30’s, and ‘40’s, the people who experienced the college during those decades are fewer in number every day that passes. The opportunities to see and converse with them are very rare today. In addition, one must also consider the transition from junior-college to senior-college status. This development has left many on both sides of this transition with incomplete knowledge and awareness of the different phases of the school’s history. This writer hopes that the total history, as it unfolds in this work, will aid in opening up greater knowledge and understanding and will encourage new or strengthened loyalty to Bluefield College and the fulfillment of its mission in this new century.

Without question, there will be aspects that I have omitted, entries that some will wish had been included, both in the visual and narrative sections, stories that were associated with the campus, as well as other items that will not be found in the book. I regret that some things have not been included, but I can honestly say that I have tried very hard to bring to the work as wide a variety of materials as possible. I have sought to glean from my research,

the interviews conducted, and my own personal experiences as a student and faculty member, things of significance from every decade. I have also made a conscious effort to present the whole of the college’s history and not to leave a picture of two separate schools – one a junior college and the other a senior college, while, at the same time stressing the importance of this change for the college and the students served by it.

It has been a challenging but wonderful and rewarding experience for me to be engaged in this project. There were those moments when I did stop and question my worthiness in undertaking such a monumental task. Words of encouragement from my wife and from others at the college and outside of it helped in getting me back on course and in strengthening my perseverance to continue the work. In the final analysis, I can truthfully say that the rewards far outweigh the efforts and time expended. Now I await the responses of those who read and see this book in regard to its readability and its effectiveness in bringing the story of a special school to print in an interesting and informative manner. Hopefully when the college approaches its one hundredth year of service, there will be an interested person – faculty member, staff person, alumnus or alumna, trustee, or someone else who has connections with the institution in any way – who will take it upon herself or himself to complete the history at that century mark. ❁

## — ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS —

I am truly indebted to the many people whose cooperation and assistance have made it possible for me to undertake and achieve the goal of writing the history of Bluefield College. First of all, I thank Dr. Dan MacMillan, past president, who commissioned me to do this work. He expressed confidence in my ability to accomplish this goal and offered considerable encouragement along the way. Prior to his departure from the office of president, he took steps to ensure that the project would move forward and that things done in connection with the completed work would be done properly. I also acknowledge the fact that, prior to the commissioning by Dr. MacMillan, Dr. Roy Dobyns had commissioned me for this task. While it became necessary to put things on hold for several years due to circumstances, this early commissioning did allow me the time to do a fair amount of research and to engage in quite a number of interviews. For this, I am grateful. It gave me a “running start” when I resumed the task in 2005.

I owe so much appreciation to the people whom I interviewed on and off campus. Their time and cooperation meant a great deal to the work in which I was engaged. I appreciate the contributions of Mrs. Wendy Beavers (Wendy Stallard, student at the time), who did a number of my earlier interviews. She also assisted in formulating questions suitable for the various questionnaires used for the interviews. I knew then that she would be a good historian, and her subsequent employment as a faculty member at the college validated this confidence. I am proud of her achievements and anticipate further ones as she serves in the history department and shares her knowledge with the students.

I wish that the book contained comments from every person interviewed or who returned answers to questionnaires. However, as is the case, selections had to be made in the course of putting the various sections of the book together. Nevertheless, each interviewee is deeply appreciated for his/her willingness to share with me or Wendy. In addition to those interviewed, I am grateful to Crystal White-Kieloch for her monetary assistance to help cover some of the expenses involved with the project. She also provided some very nice pictures to be used in the book. Crystal serves as Administrative Assistant for

the Dean of Student Services. She indicated that she would be proud to stand up in public anytime in support of the project. She might have the opportunity to do this sometime. I would very much welcome her comments. Her support has meant a great deal to me and helped me to get back to the task when I strayed on occasion.

To my wife, Catherine, I owe much. Initially, she provided encouragement when I was considering Dr. Mac’s challenge to do the history. She has continued to give me her support and encouragement throughout the entire process and, in addition, has given me the benefit of her good services as proof-reader. Her skills in doing this task have helped to uncover grammatical mistakes, incorrect sentence structure, and other errors that would have robbed the narrative of some of its effectiveness. She has also provided suggestions that made a difference in the quality of the writing. She has been extraordinarily understanding and patient during these months that I have been engaged in this project. I can never really thank her enough for the help that she has provided.

I thank Mrs. Diane Shott, Administrative Assistant to the President, for her services during the period of research. She has also done work on the computer to provide certain forms that I needed and has gotten together materials that were required for my research. She has been a source of encouragement in a number of ways. Along with Diane, I want to thank Mrs. Teresa Stanley, Director of Alumni Relations and the Bluefield College Fund, for her assistance in getting together certain information that I needed for research purposes and contacts with Alumni. She also played a significant part in getting the project completed.

I appreciate the contributions of Chris Shoemaker, Director of Public Relations, for his services in searching his files for pictures to consider for the history to enhance the presentation. He also played an important role in determining the best cover for the book and in steering the finished work to the publisher who would provide the best services at an affordable cost. We worked together to produce a book of which the college could be proud and which would serve as a positive agent in making its outreach even more successful for a reasonably long time to come.



I express sincere appreciation to faculty and staff members who have expressed interest in the project and have spoken words of encouragement along the way. This support has been helpful to me as I engaged in a lengthy period of gathering information, doing the rough draft of the text, and getting the history in a form suitable for those at the college to receive and do the final steps that led to publication. It was good to have people cheering me on when, at times, the task seemed too daunting for me to continue. I am deeply grateful to every individual who, in some small or large way, has assisted me in completing this project. I especially thank Mr. Doug Bourne who provided some helpful advice in regard to end-noting. It has been a pretty long time since I have done any for a writing project, so I do appreciate his services in this respect. I also thank Dr. Wayne Massey, my next-door office neighbor during my final years at the college and a veteran English professor, for the assistance that he provided in answering questions that I posed for him. He also went over the manuscript returned by the printer to ensure that it had no typographical errors in its comparison with the work submitted to the printer. He was very helpful. In turn, I offered him some comforting words about retirement which he is putting off for a time.

Last, but not least, I express gratitude to Keilah Ramey, a student at the college, who understood a genuine challenge in agreeing to

type the handwritten manuscript of the author. She probably felt that she would never, ever get to the end of those six chapters, preface, acknowledgments, endnotes, and the other sections, but she persevered. She “stayed the course” and, for this, I am indebted to her. She also sent me a letter following the completion of this work, and I will treasure this letter. She said many nice things, but I want to call attention to one comment in particular that she made. In this comment, she expressed the essence of what this book is really all about. Prior to making this statement, she thanked me for the honor of doing the typing. Then, she added: “I pray that your book will change lives and make the friends, family, and community of Bluefield College see what a treasure the college is. And, if I were to guess, that’s exactly what your intent was in writing the book. She’s right in this assessment. Thank you, Keilah.

I also thank Vanessa Scruggs in the Institutional Advancement Office (Development for those who don’t know the new terminology) for her role in making the corrections that I noted when I went over the typed pages of the manuscript. This contribution to achieve the finished product is important, and I truly appreciate her efforts in this respect. She assisted the efforts of Chris and me in other ways, as well. ❁

## — DEDICATION —

It is traditional to dedicate one's work to someone or several persons who are very special to the writer. In keeping with this tradition, I dedicate, initially, this book to my son, Craig, a 1990 graduate of the college whose life ended in 1991 as the result of an automobile accident. It occurred shortly after the conclusion of his junior year at West Virginia University where he was majoring in psychology. His gentle and positive spirit has continued to serve as a source of inspiration for his father.

I also dedicate my work to my wife, Catherine, to whom I will have been married for fifty years in 2007, the same year that this work will be published. To her, I owe a great debt for her love, strength, and

faithful, ever-encouraging support in my life. She has been steady in her assistance in helping me to steer the best course in the writing of this book. She has been open and receptive to providing her thoughts on both the content and style of my writing.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my two living sons, Blair and Kenneth, able servants to this country through their service in the United States Coast Guard until their retirement. I deem them exemplary sons in every way, special and wonderful friends to their dad, and whose counsel I regard highly as they have become mature, experienced young men with skills that their father does not possess. I am grateful to you, dear family, for your love and support. ❧

— CHAPTER ONE —  
GETTING UNDERWAY – NO SMALL TASK: 1915-1922

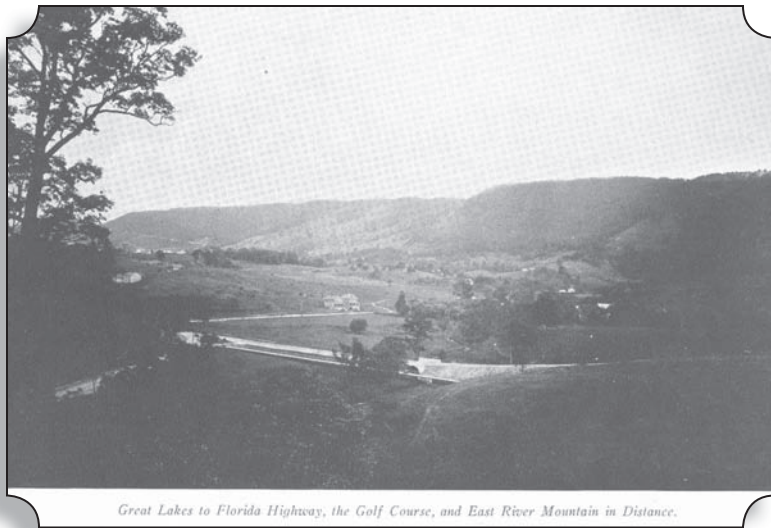
This is the story of the “little school on the hill.” It is a story of faith in action, for without the faith expressed and lived out by many individuals during its existence, there would be no Bluefield College. From the very beginning when there was the planting of the seed until this year when the college celebrates its 85<sup>th</sup> year, strong, vibrant faith, determination, and zeal have brought this school to where it is today.

The year was 1922. A fledgling institution would open its doors to receive students for the very first time. Bluefield College was now a reality. The year seemed to be a particularly good one, for along with the college, Trinity Methodist Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church, and the Bluefield, West Virginia Lions Club began their programs. In addition, plans were underway for organizing a church in South Bluefield in 1922. These plans resulted in the organization of College Avenue Baptist Church in 1923.<sup>1</sup> These developments pointed to very favorable circumstances that were

present and working for the area. Bluefield, West Virginia, was a booming community in terms of its population and retail business interests, which, according to an article in the college newspaper, *The Bluefield Appalachian*, dated November 1, 1924, produced eleven million dollars annually.<sup>2</sup> The writer was obviously impressed by the city’s location, facilities, services, and business enterprises. On the Virginia side lay the small community of Graham, later to be renamed Bluefield, a move which has provided some confusion for many people throughout the years.

What brought Bluefield College to this area? Where did the notion for a college in Southwest Virginia originate? Where did the story to be told in this book begin? One needs to go back seven years prior to the opening of the school to the annual session of the Baptist General Association of Virginia held in 1915. At some point during the session, the body entertained and approved a resolution calling for a committee of seven members to be appointed to report at the next session on the advisability of establishing a school for young men in Southwest Virginia. The resolution stipulated that the school was to be of the same quality as Virginia Intermont College located in Bristol, Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

J.L. Rosser, J.W. Cammack, H.W. Battle, E.B. Jackson, M.L. Harrison, E.M. Harris, and W.W. Moffett were the seven men selected to comprise the committee. At the annual session of the Baptist General Association of Virginia held from November 14-17 at First Baptist Church in Norfolk, this committee held its meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup>. As a result of the study that it had conducted, it reaffirmed its decision to propose that a school be established.<sup>4</sup> At the appointed time in the order of business conducted during the regular session, J.L. Rosser presented the recommendations of the committee. They were as follows: 1) That a junior college for boys be located at Wytheville, provided that the community provide not less than \$25,000 in cash and an acceptable site of not less than fifteen acres; 2) That the General Association of Virginia undertake the effort of raising an additional \$75,000 for the college; 3) That the Education Commission



*Great Lakes to Florida Highway, the Golf Course, and East River Mountain in Distance.*

A VIEW FROM THE PRESIDENT'S HOME ON CAMPUS, 1920

be instructed to commence this task without delay and to carry it out to a successful conclusion. These three recommendations received the approval of the body.<sup>5</sup>

In 1917, when the General Association's meeting took place in Roanoke at the Belmont Baptist Church, the Education Commission brought up the subject of the school, and, in spite of the fact that the judgment of the Commission had not been sought in developing the proposal for the establishment of a school, it, nevertheless, declared that it would do its part to carry out the instructions of the General Association.<sup>6</sup>

This group of men emphasized financial needs, the need for an endowment, and spoke of the "special friends" and their desire for a solid institution with high school offerings plus the two years of genuine college work. The Commission stated its thoughts on the matter in the following manner:

The Commission does not discourage the proposal to undertake to create and maintain such an institution, but...<sup>7</sup>

It went on to urge an emphasis on the financial aspects as paramount and a commitment which would go beyond the initial stage and continue indefinitely. Then it added the following words of caution:

We must not, if we are far-sighted, undertake this enterprise without intelligent recognition of all that it involves...<sup>8</sup>

In a very strong way, it stressed both present and future financial needs. Following this emphasis, the group recommended that the matter be placed in the hands of a special committee for the purpose of looking at similar institutions. There must also be a provision of "full and mature" information regarding Wytheville as the site if the recommendation to proceed were to be made. The committee must consider the scope of education to be offered, the proposed organization, resources undergirding operation, the form of a charter for adoption, and any other information which might be helpful. In short, it was calling for a thorough and painstaking investigation of the entire issue, urging the collection of "all the information which we can possibly bring together."<sup>9</sup>

The call for a special committee by the Commission received approval, and thirteen men received the appointment to serve. The group would include H.H. Noffsinger, President of Virginia Intermont College, F.W. Boatwright, President of the University of Richmond, and J.T. Stinson, pastor of Bluefield First Baptist Church, along with other qualified men.<sup>10</sup>

The following year, 1918, brought grave issues to the United States – her entry into the war raging in Europe and the terrible influenza epidemic which swept through the land, taking a great toll in human lives. Robert Pitt, President of the Baptist General Association of Virginia at the time, consulted the other officers and representatives of the various boards and, collectively, these leaders determined that it would not be in the best interest of the Baptist constituency to hold its annual meeting and made the announcement to this effect. Thus, there would be a delay in taking any further action regarding the proposed school in Southwest Virginia.

However, on November 18-21, 1919, the annual session resumed with Virginia Baptists meeting at First Baptist Church in Lynchburg. The Education Commission, citing the great impact of World War I, declared that "the Christian school has a vital place in the great commission and is essential to denominational prestige and power."<sup>11</sup>



HOME OF THE INSTRUMENTAL EASLEY FAMILY THAT STILL STANDS IN BLUEFIELD TODAY.

Following these words, it went on to point out there is a desire that

all of our institutions of learning shall be permeated by the Christian spirit, and that our Christian young people who attend these institutions shall be strengthened in their faith and trained for Christian service, that earnest effort shall be made to bring the lost to Christ, that in every way possible the Kingdom of God shall be sought first by our Baptist schools.<sup>12</sup>

After this powerful statement rang through the church, there followed a recommendation in line with the unanimous report of the committee on a school for Southwest Virginia. It read as follows:

That the Junior College for boys be located in the suburbs of Bluefield, in Tazewell County, Virginia upon the condition offered by Bluefield – donation of a certain tract of land of around sixty acres and \$75,000, and that a committee be appointed to formulate the necessary plans.<sup>13</sup>

A committee consisting of D.E. French, D.M. Easley, H.A. Lilly, J.M. Newton, Frank S. Easley, J.T. Stinson, and F. R. Christie had that challenging task of formulating the plans deemed necessary to achieve the creation of the Junior College.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas seemingly Wytheville appeared to be the chosen site for this institution in the early stages of discussion, how did Bluefield gain the prize? Behind this change, there is a powerful and meaningful story. Dr. R.A. Lansdell was in Bluefield on behalf of the Southern Baptist Convention and its efforts to raise money. First Baptist Church of Bluefield, West Virginia, where Dr. J.T. Stinson served as pastor, extended an invitation to Dr. Lansdell to fill the pulpit on a Sunday in July, 1919. Prior to the worship service that morning, David M. Easley and Frank B. Easley, members of the church and prominent citizens in the community, took Dr. Lansdell aside and engaged him in conversation about the new college. Dr. Lansdell shared the view that if the people of the city and area wanted it badly enough and were willing to campaign diligently for it, the college could be located in the area. This encouragement offered by such a distinguished and well-versed gentleman had the effect of getting the wheels turning and the excitement churning within the church,



THE DELEGATION OF MEN WHO HELPED PERSUADE THE BGAV TO BUILD A COLLEGE IN BLUEFIELD, 1919

the civic organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, and, ultimately, within the entire community and extended area. The Rotary Club received the challenge by pledging its support to the drive to obtain the college for Bluefield. Then, the Chamber acted by selecting an energetic and enthusiastic delegation of business and professional men to attend a meeting of the Committee of the General Association scheduled to be held in Bristol, Virginia, in a few days. Their task was to convince the Committee that Bluefield was the right place to locate the college. Apparently, Wytheville had failed to convince the group that it met the criteria agreed upon by Virginia Baptists. Bluefield had a chance to be the favored site.

The Chamber instructed the delegation chosen to represent the area to wire the members of the Committee on a School for Southwest Virginia to visit Bluefield as guests of the Chamber and to discuss the matter before July 30, the date set for the final decision to be made. Then, in a change of plans, the decision was made for the representatives to travel to Bristol on the appointed day to make an appeal to the committee.

A delegation of over sixty men, accompanied by delegations from neighboring towns who were cooperating with the effort, made

their way to Bristol on the morning of July 30. The group had in hand the authorization to offer fifty acres of land located in Tazewell County. Along with the land, the group would also make a pledge of money to undergird the establishment of the school. Forty-nine citizens of Bluefield signed a circular letter giving the advantages of a Bluefield location, and this letter went to the special General Association committee.<sup>15</sup> It should be stated that Frank Easley had agreed to hold options on the land being offered if the college would give him rocks taken from there to build his home in Bluefield.<sup>16</sup> As one travels along College Avenue today, the beautiful home that Mr. Easley built with those rocks can be seen on the north side of the street.

Following the meeting in Bristol where Bluefield vied with other communities for the privilege of being named the choice of the committee in locating the new school, this committee set October 1 as the date for the selection. The group requested that all offers be submitted in writing. Subcommittees would be visiting every potential site and report back their findings to the primary committee.<sup>17</sup> There was intense competition for this prize, and each group of representatives vying for it sought to put on the best front possible.

Bluefield demonstrated great determination and desire in seeking to raise \$75,000 for the purchase prize and to provide a \$50,000 bonus. More than \$50,000 would be pledged at a dinner held by the Chamber.<sup>18</sup> Pledge cards that still exist indicate the commitments made by many individuals. The card had the heading of "Bluefield Chamber of Commerce College Subscription." I cite an example in which the subscriber pledged \$150.00 to be paid in three payments of \$50.00 each.<sup>19</sup> Looking from our perspective, such a pledge might not seem so demanding, but in 1919, it represented a great sacrifice on the part of the subscriber, especially coming in the aftermath of the war and the sacrificial support provided by the citizens of Bluefield as they joined people from other communities throughout the entire nation in backing the war effort.

The final decision by the special committee came on November 1, 1919, at which time, this group awarded the college to Bluefield. One of the primary factors leading to this decision was the tremendous spirit and enthusiasm shown by the people of the area. They greatly impressed the selection committee and, in turn, the general body

of Baptists meeting that year in annual session.<sup>20</sup> Writing about this several years later in the college *Alumni News*, John T. Grigsby, class of 1927 and President of the Alumni Association at the time, stated:

In the fight to secure the College for Bluefield before 1920 the citizens of Bluefield, without respect to creed, were vigorous and united because they sensed and felt the value of such an institution to any community. There were men of foresight and consecration to high ideals.<sup>21</sup>

The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* newspaper, giving attention to the college in a special edition several years later, had this to say: "The vision of these pioneers and the public spiritedness of a group of Bluefield's leading citizens combined to bring the college to the city."<sup>22</sup>

The newspaper article went on to say that while the college was for the youth of the area, it would also be "open to the rich and poor of all churches, with equal opportunity for all."<sup>23</sup>

Having achieved the honor of being selected as the location for the college, Bluefield then engaged in a flurry of activities that included the obtaining of a charter under which the school would operate, the important task of selecting trustees for the governance of the institution, and the even greater challenge of choosing its first president on whose shoulders would be placed tremendous responsibilities of leadership. For these specific tasks, a committee of six men from Bluefield, West Virginia, and one from Graham, Virginia, set out on the arduous journey of accomplishing them.<sup>24</sup>

Twenty-five trustees were selected with years of service established, providing that five individuals serve for one year, five for two years, and so on up to a five-year term of office.

According to the by-laws, seven trustees would constitute a quorum, and officers for the body would be president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary. One annual meeting would be scheduled to take place during the final week of the school year.<sup>25</sup> The organizational meeting occurred on January 8, 1920. One topic of discussion was that of naming the school. Several possibilities emerged during the course of this intensive discussion. Among these were Bluefield College, Southwest Virginia Junior College, Appalachian College, Ellyson College, Southwestern College of Bluefield, Southwest Virginia Boys' College, Southwest Virginia

College, Bluefield Virginia College, and Virginia College. The men were unable to arrive at a decision on this matter at the time.<sup>26</sup> However, at the March 19 meeting, held in the office of French and Easley, they made their decision. The name would be Bluefield College, a choice that reflected the joint interests and contributions of both the Virginia and West Virginia sides.<sup>27</sup>

At a trustee meeting on June 3, 1920, the body approved the charter with only certain minor changes being made in this document. Officers elected at this meeting were M. L. Harrison, president; J. Taylor Stinson, vice-president; J.M. Newton, secretary; and F.R. Christie, treasurer. The body made a motion to direct the Executive Committee to select as president a man "to come and take charge of the whole enterprise of building the college and fix the salary to be paid him for his services."<sup>28</sup>

Other matters of business dealt with at the June 3 meeting were committee appointments, including a group to share with the Chamber of Commerce the readiness of the college to proceed with its construction and its readiness to receive the deed and any funds being held for the school by the Chamber. In addition, the body chose a committee whose primary assignment was simply that of conveying gratitude to the Chamber and to the citizens "for their loyalty, enthusiasm, and liberality in helping to get the college established."<sup>29</sup>

On June 15, the Executive Committee members were in session. They established a Finance Committee and appointed J.T. Stinson and J.M. Newton to correspond with the heads of educational institutions. The purpose of these contacts was to gain suggestions for persons whom they would consider good candidates for the presidency of the college. The committee also appointed a committee whose instructions were to seek an architect from a list of several possibilities to submit plans for the buildings at the college.<sup>30</sup>

In regard to a President, Dr. Cammack had already offered the name of Rinaldo Addison Lansdell as a strong possibility for the office. Other names had surfaced as well, but by July 12, 1920, there did not appear to be any doubt about the man whom the Executive Committee felt should be offered the position. At a called meeting on the date mentioned, the men present for the occasion centered their attention on Dr. Lansdell as the most prominent person being considered. In the course of the discussion taking place, someone

stated that "he (Dr. Lansdell) seems to be disposed to consider the matter favorably."<sup>31</sup> Thus, in a unanimous vote, the body elected Dr. Lansdell, set an annual salary for him at \$3000.00, and made provisions for a residence or the use of a house to be built on the college property. In order to accommodate him and his family until this house was ready for use, a place would be rented for them.<sup>32</sup>

The many steps taken by the college officials to date would be presented in the report of the Education Commission delivered to the Baptist General Association at its annual meeting on November 16-19, 1920, at First Baptist Church of Richmond. In speaking of Dr. Lansdell as their choice for president, the Commission stated that "we feel the trustees were most fortunate in securing for this important work a brother so well qualified for the task."<sup>33</sup> The report stressed the enthusiasm that existed in and around Bluefield over the new college and reported that the school's assets consisted of sixty acres of land, \$75,000 from Bluefield, and \$150,000 from the educational fund of the General Association. It called for "patient planning...unlimited work and a strong determination" and indicated that the prospects were "full of promise."<sup>34</sup> It called upon Virginia Baptists for their good will, prayers, and support. There followed a resolution endorsing the objective of the trustees to reach one million dollars in terms of the college assets and pledging "good will and hearty support." It concluded by recommending any "sane" plan to reach the objective without conflicting with the Baptist Seventy-Five Million Campaign underway and pledges supporting the campaign.<sup>35</sup>

Rinaldo Addison Lansdell – Bluefield College's first president! We know that he had been employed by the University of Richmond, that he had preached at First Baptist Church of Bluefield, and that he had encouraged Bluefielders to make a bid for the new college projected by Virginia Baptists. Beyond these bits of information about his activities, what were the other things about this man that appealed to the trustees of the college and the Education Commission? Born in



DR. R. A. LANSDPELL,  
BLUEFIELD COLLEGE'S FIRST PRESIDENT

1875, he was a native of Georgia, a graduate of Mercer University, a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he earned his Master of Theology Degree, and a graduate of Union University where he obtained a Doctor of Divinity Degree. He did post-graduate work at the University of Wyoming. Although raised a Methodist, he became a Baptist and received baptism in 1897. The following year witnessed his ordination as a minister, a step which aided him as he began services on a part-time basis to three different Baptist churches while a student at Mercer and then in seminary. He served as a fulltime pastor to a Baptist church in Colorado and then one in Wyoming between 1904-1907. He would then serve as Associate Pastor to a church in Salt Lake City for a year. From this point on, his life would take a decided turn which would move him into new roles for roughly the next twenty-five plus years.

He returned to his native state to assume the position of Financial Secretary at Bessie Tift College and served there from 1910-1913. His path then took him to the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention where he served as Field Secretary from 1913-1916. His next role placed him in Virginia where he worked as Financial Secretary for the University of Richmond from 1916-1919. His last appointment, prior to being selected as Bluefield College's first president, was that of directing the Seventy-Five Million Campaign for the Southern Baptist Convention for the period 1919-1920. He began his work at Bluefield during the latter half of 1920.

As for family, he married Ruth Kilpatrick on January 29, 1902, and to this union would be born seven children – four girls and three boys. His daughter, Anna, attended Bluefield College and married Professor Franklin T. Walker, Head of the English Department at the school and Associate Professor of Foreign Languages.<sup>36</sup> According to Mrs. Marvin Williams, graduate in the 1924 class, married to Professor Williams and able servant at the college as teacher, accompanist for the choir, and active in other areas, Anna and the professor eloped, an action which surely must have raised some eyebrows and become a prime topic for conversation on and off the campus. Mrs. Williams, after having shared this choice bit of information with me, quickly added that their marriage was a good one.<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Williams' father was Dr. Stinson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bluefield, West Virginia, and active participant in the life of the college. The Lansdell's daughter Emily became Mrs. Jesse

Weatherspoon, and served as Head of Carver School of Missions in Louisville, Kentucky, and, at a later time, Professor of Missions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Their daughter, Lillian, became a public school teacher in Georgia, while Ruth married and made her career as housewife and homemaker. Lillian had also married, and it should be added that Anna became a staff writer for the Mississippi State Board of Health.

As for their sons, Hudson, Addison, and Joseph, they succeeded, respectively, in becoming a state official for a noted life insurance company, a field supervisor for the Georgia Agricultural Department, and Sports Editor for the *Savannah Morning News*.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that, of the seven children, only two followed their father's footsteps and aligned themselves with the field of education. One can only speculate why this was the case. Certainly, the other five did have successful careers of their own and demonstrated diversity in their choices.

When Dr. Lansdell accepted the call to serve as president of a college whose buildings were not yet constructed, whose staff and faculty were yet to be hired and curriculum was still unplanned, he, in carefully assessing the situation, did so on the condition that there would be an enlarged conception of the character and work



THE CONSTRUCTION OF LANSDPELL HALL, 1922, BC'S FIRST BUILDING.





ABC CHEMISTRY LAB FROM THE 1920's

of the institution with a correspondingly larger financial objective. An article appearing in the November 13, 1921, issue of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* featured the president declaring that, instead of \$250,000 as a goal, the objective should be one million dollars in terms of buildings and equipment. This enlarged objective that he proposed received the approval of all the various entities involved in this great project – trustees, Education Commission, Virginia Baptist leadership, etc.<sup>39</sup>

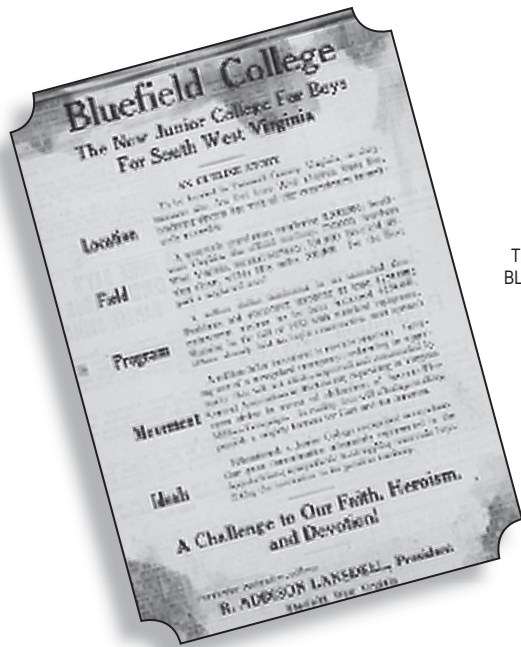
The idea of building the college from the ground up represented a real challenge for the new president. He believed that there was a genuine need for such an institution, felt a keen appreciation for the location and beauty of the site on which it would be built, and felt a deep regard for the enthusiasm of the Bluefield community and the strong devotion of those key persons who were involved in the undertaking.<sup>40</sup> Yet, even with the acceptance of his proposed vision for the school by the Executive Committee of the Trustees and those other entities, Dr. Lansdell was not quite ready to commit to the task. He must take an important step before he would commit himself to undertake so significant and challenging a work. He would seek the counsel of three men in whom he placed great confidence and whose counsel he valued so very much. He believed that their input was essential to the whole process. Thus, he went to these longtime

friends and key figures in Virginia Baptist life to seek their wisdom, experience, and honesty to help guide his actions. These men were R.H. Pitt, Editor of the *Religious Herald* and Chairman of the Virginia Baptist Education Commission, Dr. F.W. Boatwright, President of the University of Richmond, and Dr. George W. McDaniel, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia.<sup>41</sup>

He had come to know these men through his connections with the University of Richmond and the Foreign Mission Board and had grown in his respect for them through his association. It should be noted that, while serving the University, his headquarters for about six months had been in Bluefield, a fact which enabled him to get acquainted with the area and to meet many of the community leaders. He had also canvassed the southwestern part of Virginia for the Judson Centennial.<sup>42</sup> He would not be going blindly into the area should he decide to accept the presidency of the college after conferring with his friends, considering the positive and negative aspects, and praying about the matter. There is no question about Rinaldo Lansdell being a stalwart believer in prayer. The evidence is clear on this point.

His ultimate acceptance of the presidency indicated that his friends must have offered sufficient support to this move to prompt him to take this step in his career. With his recommendations agreed to by the Board of Trustees, the Education Commissions, and the representatives of the various Baptist schools, he began his work for Bluefield College, taking on a great multitude of tasks that carried him in many directions.<sup>43</sup> Anna Lansdell Walker stated that, for her father, Christian education was a "passion."<sup>44</sup> It is with just such a passion that he launched the efforts to build the college from absolutely nothing to a concrete entity. His daughter indicated that he put the college first in his order of priorities, even before his family. She expressed his commitment by saying that "he lived and breathed Bluefield College, day and night."<sup>45</sup> She would add that the story of the college is what one can read about its beginnings today because of the "mighty faith" and the "extraordinary strength of mind and body and his devotion to the cause."<sup>46</sup>

In line with what Mrs. Walker has written about her father, one can easily grasp the great range of emotions that he experienced in the letters that he wrote to his wife who was living in Hepzibah, Georgia. He informed her about the process by which approval had



THE BGAV, PRESIDENT LANSDELL AND THE BLUEFIELD COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES ANNOUNCE THE FORMATION OF A NEW JUNIOR COLLEGE FOR BOYS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA, 1922.

been gained for his concept of a one-million dollar school. First, the Trustees approved. Then the Education Commission of Virginia Baptists followed by the Mission Board and General Association, gave their approvals. The Home Mission Board subscribed \$200,000 of the amount on the condition that the balance be raised and on the condition that the amount would not be payable during the current year (1920).<sup>47</sup> In a later letter, he declared that “the way is cleared before us and our great struggle is ahead.” He spoke of this work as the “biggest task” of his life and one for which he felt “so unfit.” In a concluding comment, he told her that “God who has brought me to this good hour is my refuge and strength.”<sup>48</sup>

On January 17, 1921, the trustees met and approved for signature a contract with the architect. Additional land near the current property held would be purchased. Appeals to the General Education Board of the Northern Baptist Convention and the Home Mission Board received the approval of the body.<sup>49</sup> Even as these actions were being taken, Dr. Lansdell stayed quite busy with the various responsibilities essential to the building of a new school, working together with the Trustees in this quest. On May 26, 1921, his letter home made

this comment: “it seems I am kept on the road most of the time. I get mighty tired of it.”<sup>50</sup> At the time, his plans involved traveling to Chattanooga, Tennessee, for three or four days to work with the architect on building plans.<sup>51</sup>

By June, it appeared that the new president had some doubts about his calling to Bluefield, and, yet, he was not ready to lay it aside. His thoughts are well reflected in his letter home of June 30, 1921:

“...Well, it seems I am imprisoned, bound and held here by bonds stronger than steel...All that is dear to me in this world said to me ‘Let this cup pass’ and return to Georgia.”<sup>52</sup>

Yet, he admitted that if he were to take this course, he would never get over it, in the present world or in eternity. He concluded that he would remain at the college for, perhaps, another year. He did say that it might cost him his life, but added “I had rather die for this work and go home to my Master, telling him when I get there that I followed him the best I could.”<sup>53</sup> A letter dated the fourth of July told his wife, Ruth, that he could not give up the work, as the plans were made, and shared that without him at that time “they would be like sheep without a shepherd. They depended upon me...”<sup>54</sup> He would stay on for a time “until the light breaks upon the situation.”<sup>55</sup>

It is very clear that the immensity of the task was causing great concerns for Dr. Lansdell, even to the extent of considering breaking away from the commitment that he had made. The strain on him, physically, mentally, and otherwise, surely was burdensome. In a letter written on July 25, he told his wife that he was “walking by faith and certainly not by sight.”<sup>56</sup> He went on to add that “everyone sees and knows that I have on me more than one man can carry. But I am doing it and will continue to do so by God’s help.”<sup>57</sup>

It is helpful for the reader to know that in the effort to secure the \$200,000 from the Home Mission Board just a month earlier, there had been a great struggle. In the first attempt to deal with this issue, the Board had denied the funds by a single vote. Dr. Lansdell could have accepted that decision and gone on his way, but he was not about to do so. With additional support to back him, he returned to make his plea once more. He described this effort as “fighting for life.” His efforts brought the results that he was seeking. The vote this time went in his favor.<sup>58</sup>

Keeping in touch with his wife and keeping her informed about developments pertaining to his efforts on behalf of the college, he wrote the following remarks on August 16, 1921, when describing conditions: they are "getting tighter and tighter every day here." He simply was unable to tell what the days ahead would bring.<sup>59</sup> His gifts of persuasion, noted by his son-in-law, Dr. Walker, who served as publicity chairman for the college's Million Dollar Campaign, were being tested extensively through the work in which he was engaged. While, according to Dr. Walker, the college would, at a later time, be declared his father-in-law's "monument," during this extremely difficult period of building it, the school may well have been his albatross.<sup>60</sup> One can easily share this opinion from reading the president's words in a letter dated September 19, 1921. He spoke quite clearly his feelings about the situation. If he could "shake loose" from everything, he would go back home to stay. Yet, he declared himself "in prison" as a result of his "own dreams and visions." However, he did look on the brighter side in that while the doors were closed, he could say that "there is a glorious freedom – the freedom born of faith and attachment which imparts significance to a man's life."<sup>61</sup>

Dr. Walker spoke of the fact that Dr. Lansdell might well have taken tempting offers from business firms for his services, but "Rinaldo Addison Lansdell was God's man..."<sup>62</sup> His daughter Anna stressed her father's "steadfast purposefulness and ingenious resourcefulness."<sup>63</sup> Thus, even as he felt himself to be in prison, he still maintained his dedication to God and could call upon those qualities noted by Anna Walker – steadfastness of purpose and a resourcefulness that would aid him in moving on and getting past the feelings which, at times, beset him.

In August, 1921, the Trustees agreed to allow girls to attend the school as day students, at least for the time being, and approved Dr. Lansdell's actions related to faculty selection. Along with these actions, this body named a faculty committee.<sup>64</sup> The work was going forward. Things were getting done. No longer was the college simply a dream. Ground-breaking for the Administration Building was to take place in December of the year, and then would follow the initial steps in building the dormitory and dining hall.<sup>65</sup> Yet, as Dr. Lansdell wrote home on November 18, 1921, the president's spirits did not seem to reflect the positive steps that were taking

place. He wrote, "I am carrying a heavy load these days. In order to open next fall so much must be done and gotten."<sup>66</sup> He continued by saying that his hands would be full if all that he had to do was to buy what was needed, get out literature, and hire faculty. "But the puzzling situation is the lack of cash...No one can appreciate my condition unless similarly placed."<sup>67</sup> These are pure and plain words of discouragement, stemming from a great load being borne by the president, coupled with his deep concern about finances required for the construction of buildings, hiring of faculty, and the securing of essential equipment and materials. At times, the challenge may well have seemed insurmountable, even for someone well versed in fundraising.

The gloom reflected in that November letter seems to have been dispelled nearly a month later, as the year began to draw to a close. He announced to his wife that he approached meetings with a "firm faith," a "heaven-born optimism," a "judicious conservatism," a "clear conception," and a "strong grip upon present financial conditions."<sup>68</sup> He expected those on the Building Committee and the Trustees to be of the same mind in dealing with vital matters. Further remarks in this letter that should be noted are as follows:

"While our difficulties are high and great. While the way ahead is still shrouded with contingencies and



SOME OF BLUEFIELD COLLEGE'S FIRST STUDENTS PREPARE TO MOVE ON CAMPUS, 1922

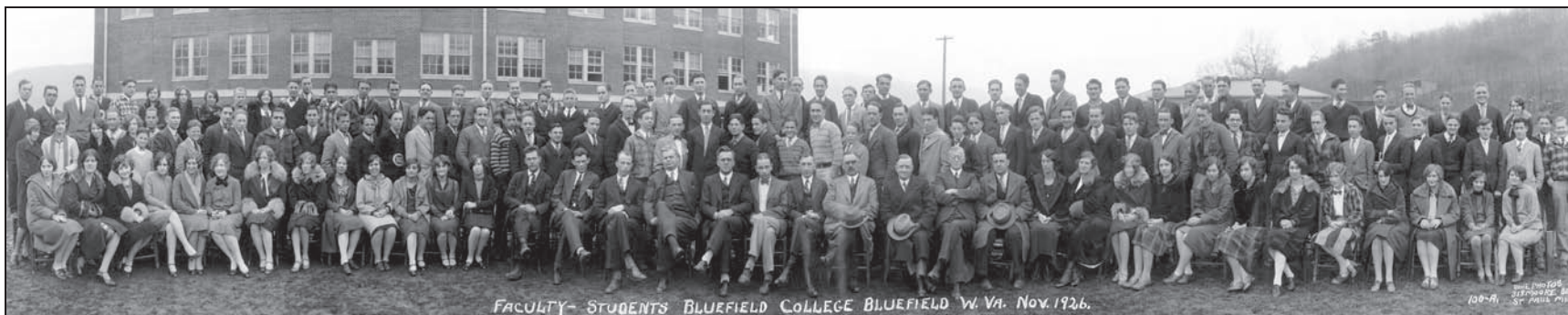
uncertainties. Yet, thanks to my Master, with no fear in my heart, and no trembling in my knees, I am facing the future with expectation and great joy. I, also, more and more feel that we are laying the groundwork of an institution whose ministry to a mountain empire, for the church, for the state, and for the spiritual Kingdom of our God, shall echo the world round and shall reach the very gates of Heaven. I feel it is worth dying for.”<sup>69</sup>

Funding for construction of the administration building, dormitory, dining hall and kitchen, central heating plant, and homes for the faculty plus the various other needs, came from a variety of sources. The city of Bluefield, working through the Chamber of Commerce, the special campaign being conducted among Virginia Baptists, and the Home Mission Board comprised the contributors to the college. Yet, finances remained one of the most pressing issues faced by President Lansdell and the trustees. As 1922 got underway, it was apparent that there was a struggle going on in regard to the monumental task of getting everything ready for the appointed time of opening the school for instruction. Dr. Lansdell stated it in this manner:

“My hands are full and my soul is full these days. Have more to do it seems than can be done. I am building a college from the ground up, erecting buildings, getting money, equipping buildings, building courses of study, selecting faculty, getting up literature, etc.”<sup>70</sup>

Construction on the three primary buildings went on as weather conditions and other circumstances allowed. In a letter to his wife in late March, he informed her that the Treasurer of the college and the Chairman of the Building Committee had approached him in regard to the lack of funds and inability to meet payments due. He explained that he was in the process of employing teachers and agreeing to pay salaries without even knowing where the money for these salaries would be obtained. In addition, he expressed uncertainties about what kind of an opening the college would have, how many students would enroll, and how they would be taken care of when they did arrive on campus. Concerning the funding issues, he remarked: “So on all sides I hear it and on all sides I am questioned.”<sup>71</sup> Here was a man under immense strain. The question of whether he would be able to stand up under such a burden was a genuine one.

Albert McDaniel was general contractor for the building of the early structures on campus. His daughter, Virginia Ranuoll, mentioned in a letter to me that there were, indeed, financial issues to be dealt with in terms of the construction projects in the formative period. Her father expressed a serious concern about this matter, not wishing to have to put pressure on the school officials in order to secure payment because the institution was a Christian college and he and his family were Christians. In her personal comments, Mrs. Ranuoll described her father as a good provider and one who stayed in touch with the family even though he could not always be at home.<sup>72</sup> The college was fortunate to have had such a principled man and one with strong religious bonds serving its needs at that time.



MEMBERS OF BLUEFIELD COLLEGE'S FIRST FACULTY, 1926

It would be a great accomplishment that the college succeeded in getting the tasks done in the face of financial demands which certainly impacted the builders. There obviously was a solid working relationship which enabled things to get done and the college to open its doors in line with its projected plans. Several months after its opening in the fall of 1922, the trustees, in session, voted to express their thanks to John P. Pettyjohn and Company for their:

“splendid work done in the construction of the buildings of the college and the very satisfying services performed by them, as well as the courtesy shown the officials of the college by Mrs. Pettyjohn and Company and their representatives.”<sup>73</sup>

The days passed, bringing the college ever closer to its anticipated opening date. Dr. Lansdell shared with his family the matter of being under considerable pressure from his work, often requiring time at night to get it done. He was dealing with many responsibilities plus those having to do with finances.<sup>74</sup> Undoubtedly, the gentleman had his hands full, but the Trustees were also involved in decision making and in attending to various concerns. At their June 6 meeting, the men appointed a committee to seek action regarding the construction of a road from the college to the macadam road on the Virginia side toward Graham (later renamed Bluefield). At this same meeting, they reelected Dr. Lansdell as president and increased his salary to \$4250.00 yearly.<sup>75</sup>

A July letter written by the president to his wife spoke of the main buildings receiving the primary attention in terms of their construction. This was being done in order to have them ready by the opening of school, or, at least, as ready as possible. He admitted that much work still remained, and that there were certain hindrances that slowed the pace of construction. He mentioned the “rain, rain, rain, and more rain” as one of these hindrances, causing the ungraded and unpaved streets leading to the campus to become “sloughs of mud and water.” This made it impossible for the heavily loaded trucks to use them. It sometimes resulted in travel on them being suspended until drying occurred.

Other hindrances of which he spoke were the problems of getting materials shipped to Bluefield, leading to the dismissal of at least one hundred workers, the stoppage of passenger train service due



THE GIRLS DORMITORY IN THE 1920's, LATER THE PRESIDENT'S HOME,  
TODAY THE MISSIONARY-IN-RESIDENCE HOUSE

to strikes, and, once again, the issue of financial uncertainty. This uncertainty had produced conservative actions in getting contracts for teachers' homes and the president's home. Those plans were in the hands of the contractor, and he had been instructed to proceed with the projects. After having informed Mrs. Lansdell of these several hindrances, he concluded by saying “no need for us to go into a panic.”<sup>76</sup> One can speculate that Mrs. Lansdell must have shared the burden of her husband, pressed as he was to have the campus ready for the first students' arrival.

August came, and its days saw Dr. Lansdell “exceedingly busy” and increasingly so as the projected date of opening, September 20 or close to this time, drew near. He wrote his wife that he was “in deep water,” but he was not drowning.<sup>77</sup> If one had looked at the campus in late August and on into September, one might well have concluded that there was absolutely no way that the school would be ready to open, much less offer instruction. Yet, the marvelous thing is that Bluefield College did open its doors on September 20, 1922. While not everything was in the best of order – far from it – it surely was an occasion for great elation and praise for God's leadership and for the perseverance of Dr. Lansdell, the trustees, and others involved in the midst of what, at times, seemed insurmountable challenges.

The minutes from the Baptist General Association of Virginia sessions held at First Baptist Church of Newport News declared that the college opening “marked an epoch in the educational and spiritual development of a great territory in the Commonwealth of Virginia.”<sup>78</sup> They also spoke of Dr. Lansdell as the leader in “lighting the torch and lifting it high” and described him as “indefatigable, laborious, and wise” while praising the fact that “careful and farseeing management” had produced “unbelievable results” in the use of the funds to date.<sup>79</sup>

As Dr. Lansdell addressed the student body and others assembled on that opening day, he declared the occasion to be one of “significance.” He went on to state that:

We are doing today what we planned to do and what we said we would do. And as we do, it is with profound gratitude to God for his loving kindness and his tender mercies.<sup>80</sup>

His message also included mention of those envisioned plans to erect twenty-two buildings, geared to a capacity of 700 students and involving an expenditure of over one million dollars. He described the general financial situation as good, although somewhat “acute” at that time because of the need for funds. He mentioned the site on which the school rested and its cost of \$31,500 which came to the college through the generosity of Graham, Princeton, and Bluefield, as channeled through the Chamber of Commerce. Additional land had been obtained, bringing the total acreage to sixty-eight at a cost of approximately \$38,000. The Chamber had already given a little more than one-half of its pledge of \$75,000.<sup>81</sup> The Home Mission Board provided \$110,000 and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board gave \$90,000 from the Seventy-Five Million Campaign.<sup>82</sup>

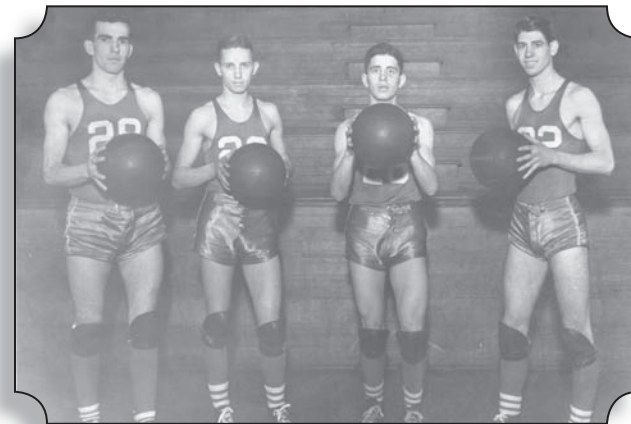
He continued his message by stating that the college had never really had much money, had never been without it, and until the previous week, had never borrowed a dollar and had never allowed a bill to go unpaid for more than a week. He concluded his comments in this manner:

We have come a long way. Much has been done in the last two years. Already \$400,000 have been expended. Whatever we may need to borrow, our expectations,

which are well-founded, will be sufficient to protect. We open this institution today with the belief in our plans, in these mountains, and our God.<sup>83</sup>

The president’s message was part of a formal program which included scripture reading by Reverend J.T. Stinson, prayer by Reverend Alexander, a hymn, addresses by E.L. Bailey and H.C. Callaway, mayors of Bluefield and Graham, a solo by Mrs. J. Frank Maynard, and a brief address by M.L. Harrison, President of the Board of Trustees, followed by the singing of “America” and a benediction by Reverend T.S. Hamilton. Toward the end of this occasion, the members of the faculty were introduced. This group consisted of seven well-qualified individuals – seven men and one woman. The men were Dr. R.A. Lansdell, president; Mr. M.O. Carpenter, Professor of Bible and Latin; Dr. E.E. Northen, Professor of Greek; Mr. E.M. Louthan, Professor of Mathematics; Mr. Frank T. Walker, Professor of English; Mr. Herman P. Thomas, Professor of History and Economics; and Mr. R.E. Alley, Professor of Chemistry and Physics. Mrs. Emily Greever, the sole female in the group, was the Librarian.<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Lansdell, writing in the January, 1923, issue of the *West Virginia Realtor*, asserted that “material equipment does not make a college,” referring to it as simply “The shop in which the college works.” He pointed out that “the personnel of the faculty and of the management,



MEMBERS OF AN EARLY BC BASKETBALL TEAM, 1920s

together with their ideals and aims, make the college. Not only so, but determines its future." He went on to add that the "type of education which is of greatest value is an education under influences which are positively and avowedly moral and Christian."<sup>85</sup> The *Religious Herald*, news journal of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, states in the November 13, 1924, issue the following remarks:

It was a sacrificing and consecrated faculty who took up their duties, though at times the work became almost unbearable and the future discouraging. Yet, with a smile and a determination that wins, they stuck together to the end.<sup>86</sup>

This faculty would grow in numbers as the program added new courses and athletic offerings grew in the years ahead. By 1924, for example, the group numbered thirteen, including the Athletic Director and Librarian.<sup>87</sup>

The steps leading to the official opening of the college doors and the commencement of instruction for the first band of students were fraught with uncertainty and discouragement. Certainly, they were not easy for those involved in the process of establishing the new



BC's 1<sup>st</sup> FOOTBALL TEAM 1922

school. Indeed, the road to getting underway was no small task. It was a huge task! As we look back through the years – eighty-five, to be exact, from the college's opening day – we should be indebted to those stalwart individuals who had a vision and labored diligently to make that vision become a reality. 🍀

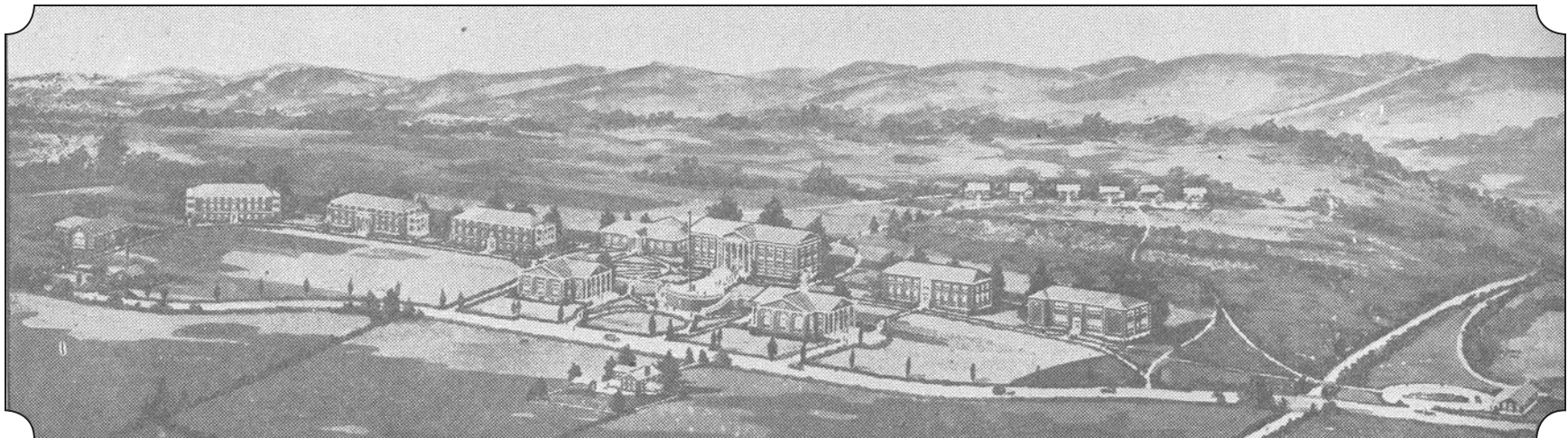
— CHAPTER TWO —  
UP AND RUNNING – SLOWLY BUT SURELY

Mrs. Emily Greever, in her history of the first quarter century of the school, recorded that “we were told that if we could enroll fifty students that first year, it would be an achievement.”<sup>1</sup> The enrollment turned out to be one hundred students, sixty of them from Bluefield and forty from other areas. Dean Claude Owen later on pointed out that Harvard had an average of fifty students for fifty years, a fact which made Bluefield College’s opening enrollment truly an “achievement.”<sup>2</sup> This beginning group included W.A. Sutherland who would serve the college well, even as a student, and ultimately became its first Alumni Director; Marvin Williams who returned to the college following his graduation from the University of Richmond to teach Biology for forty-five years; Kathleen Stinson, daughter of Reverend and Mrs. J.T. Stinson, who married Marvin Williams and served the college in various capacities but primarily as accompanist for the college choir for many years.<sup>3</sup>

Professor Herman Thomas, speaking about the school in 1925, stated that both teachers and students had sympathy for each other in terms of the difficulties under which both labored. He referred to

the student body in that beginning period as “devoted and faithful” and as men and women who “gave themselves to the calling of becoming the leaders.”<sup>4</sup> They, along with the faculty, worked under less than ideal conditions – torn up grounds, workmen still moving about doing their jobs to complete projects, dealing with an uncertain water supply, experiencing the bitterness of the cold without heat until Thanksgiving Day, and faculty and students having to share the dormitory.<sup>5</sup> The only heat available came from the small oil heaters which the dormitory students carried to class with them. Obviously, these students enjoyed great popularity with the girls from town. This heating issue had resulted from the delay in the delivery of the furnace because of a railroad strike.

Mrs. Greever also commented on conditions, mentioning things such as a few planks spread around for people to use in walking about on campus, the inadequate furniture, and also stressing the lack of electricity which meant no lights, and the lack of water in the buildings. She concluded by urging her listeners to “salute these worthy pioneers.”<sup>6</sup>



THE NOBLE DREAM: PRESIDENT R. A. LANSDELL'S VISION FOR BLUEFIELD COLLEGE



The voices of those who began their studies at this fledgling institution remain with us through interviews conducted, written responses, and various avenues of expression. For example, *The Bluefield Appalachian* began its publication life in 1923 with its first edition on October 31, a little over one year after the college had opened. It indicated to its readers that the paper would be dedicated to the increase of school spirit, the creation of pride in Bluefield College, being a medium of college life on the campus, and serving as a stimulus to young writers. It would be published as a student product "for, by, and of the students."<sup>7</sup>

Under the label of "School Spirit," the writer spoke of the spirit, enthusiasm, and support of a "small band of public spirited citizens" that made Bluefield College possible.<sup>8</sup> Then, he directed his words to the students, referring to them as "Trail Blazers" both in spirit and in fact. He challenged them to have a proper respect for the school at the present time, for if this existed, it would "grow through ensuing terms." He concluded by offering the following challenge: "He who would love his school, let him first manifest school spirit."<sup>9</sup>

Prior to discussing activities taking place during these early years, it would be in order to mention the ways in which the school operated, beginning with the fact that there would be four years in the Fitting School, equivalent to high school programs elsewhere, and one year in the college program in 1922 with the second year to be added in 1923.<sup>10</sup> Offerings included in the 1922-1923 catalog were Mathematics, several science courses, Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, German, History, Economics, English (Composition and Rhetoric), the Critical Study of Classics, American Literature, English Literature, Bible, Business, and Education.<sup>11</sup> There would be fall, winter, and spring terms.<sup>12</sup> The initial catalog listed for resident students a cost of \$330.00 for tuition, room, and board with payment of \$175.00 on entrance and the balance due on January 10. Day students would pay \$90.00 plus \$20.00 fees on entrance and the balance due of \$50.00 and \$40.00 on January 10.<sup>13</sup>

There were certain rules under which students were expected to live while at the college. Each student was presumed to be a "gentleman," and if it should be discovered that he was not, he would not be allowed to stay.<sup>14</sup> A boarding student must attend Sunday School and church every Sunday. Lights must go off at 10:30 p.m., and a rising bell would be rung to summon the students in the

mornings. There would be no visitation of male students by female students in the dormitory without the consent of the Manager on each occasion. Daily chapel attendance was a requirement. No playing cards, intoxicants, or firearms would be allowed. There was to be no gambling, or use of profane or obscene language. No tobacco would be permitted unless the student had a written request for this from a parent or guardian. If this was the case, such use would be permitted only in his room. There was to be no hazing. If there were violations of these rules, penalties would follow. Suspension or expulsion could result if a student repeated an offense.<sup>15</sup>

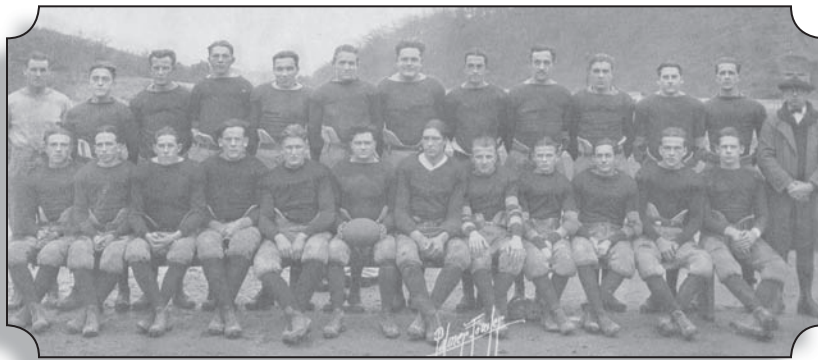
The catalog for 1923-1924 indicated that the dormitory had a social center with "harmless" games for the students and the faculty. It did not list specific games, but perhaps there were checkers, possibly chess, maybe other board games. One can only guess. The catalog also addressed the matter of contact between male and female students. In addition to the visitation policy related to the dormitory, it also declared that the female day students could not associate with the male students except at the dining room tables and for the period between dinner and the first afternoon class. They would also be permitted to meet and converse in the lower hall of the Administrative Building "under a proper chaperone" and on such occasions as when the Dean declared a "Rub Off," although even here, a chaperone must be present.<sup>16</sup> You thought that things were strict in your day! The college did continue to invoke strict rules during the years to follow, but, with the passage of time, things have eased considerably. The policy of strictness may have turned some away in their consideration of a college to attend, but others accepted it and made it through to graduation without any real harm done to them. In fact, there were those who probably benefited from the restrictions imposed on them and expressed gratitude for having the experience.

The first edition of *The Bluefield Appalachian* provided great insight into the happenings going on in the earliest years of the institution. It allows a reader to see that there was more than mere academia on campus. In September, the school had a sacred concert, along with an art exhibit which had been set up in the dining hall. On October 5, President and Mrs. Lansdell gave a recitation for the college community in the dining hall. Dr. J.T. Stinson addressed

the campus family in chapel, held at the time on the third floor of the Administration building, and the paper described his message as having “made a deep impression on both the students and the faculty.”<sup>17</sup> Other things mentioned were little snippets about particular faculty members, items which might not seem too interesting from a modern perspective, but were to the readers of that day. For example, attention was directed to the fact that Dr. E.E. Northen had the only private telephone on campus, that Professor E.M. Louthan possessed the only radio set on the campus, that Mrs. Greever had finished the classification of the books in the library, and that Coach Snead and Professor Wood had challenged Professors Thomas and Louthan to play horseshoes, a challenge yet unaccepted. Simple revelations these were, and, yet, meaningful to the campus life at the time.

Other news included the organization of a literary society by the faculty prior to the Christmas break in 1922. It would consist of a limited number of active and honorary members and would organize formally with officers at a later date. This Appalachian Literary Society had as its primary purpose the study of literature and various authors. It planned to meet twice a month. The paper also included personal items about students and offered some jokes using professors’ names, all of this being done in fun.

The paper also announced that athletics at the school were now under the supervision of an Athletic Director, Coach Hobson Snead, former captain and star player on the University of Richmond football team. The football team, called both the “Fighting Deacons”



BC's FIGHTING DEACON FOOTBALL TEAM, 1924



ATHLETIC LETTER FOR FOOTBALL, 1930



AN EARLY GRIDIRON GREAT AT BC, GEORGE LAMANCA, 1926

and the “Mountain Ramblers,” while not winning too many games at the outset, nevertheless won the hearts of their followers. As the writer put it, “experience, maturity, and weight” prevailed.<sup>18</sup> The team finally broke into the win column with a 24-0 victory over Alderson High School late in the 1923 season, following that period of “fighting, striving, and learning.”<sup>19</sup> The era of the college team’s headline-making seasons lay several years away, although improvement could be seen each year.

Bluefield College basketball made its debut on January 16, 1924, with the team beating Morris Harvey 20-16 at the Beaver High School gymnasium.<sup>20</sup> The 1924-1925 catalog features a picture with nine basketball players wearing their kneepads with the uniform. At this time, the school had no gymnasium of its own. The Trustees, in their meeting held on April 10, 1923, had approved a temporary facility at a cost of \$5000.00 if the funds were in hand or in sight for the erection of faculty houses, grounds improvement, and the gymnasium.<sup>21</sup> In June of that year, this body instructed the Building committee to purchase the fairgrounds north of the campus on the best terms possible to add to the college property. It also instructed the committee to have a gym built, along with a new dormitory when funds permitted. They were to construct two faculty homes and the President’s home when it became possible to do so.<sup>22</sup> The



BLUEFIELD COLLEGE'S FIRST BASKETBALL TEAM, 1924

purchase of the fairgrounds would result in some positive things for the college, but it would also encumber the school with a financial load that would make it extremely difficult in the years ahead.

The 1923-1924 school year got underway with an enrollment of 118 students. All dorm rooms were filled. While the college was moving on, financial issues still constituted a major issue. As noted in the report of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in 1923, the college indebtedness stood at \$125,000.<sup>23</sup> The minutes of the June 12 meeting of the Trustees that same year had reflected a shortage of approximately \$7000.00. At the time, there were nine faculty members whose salaries ranged from \$1200.00 to \$2500.00 plus housing in certain cases and board in other instances.<sup>24</sup> In the previous year, there had been a matter of a loan for \$100,000 and the preparation of a bond to be submitted to the Trustees for approval.<sup>25</sup> Bonds would be issued a number of times in the handling of the college financial matters. On March 5, 1924, the Trustees did authorize bonds to be printed and sold.<sup>26</sup> On many occasions, finances must have seemed an issue of almost insurmountable proportions. Yet, the faith, resolution, and perseverance of the Trustees, faculty and staff members, students, the Virginia Baptist constituency, the Bluefield community and beyond, and all who held the welfare of the college as a major priority kept the program going.

When the General Association met at First Baptist Church in Bluefield in November, 1924, Dr. Lansdell delivered an address

in which he spoke of the progress made by the college in its brief existence. He urged those in attendance to take the time and opportunity to visit the campus and see things for themselves. He provided information about the status of life on the campus. The college now owned seventy-two acres with the overall plan for an ultimate enrollment of seven hundred, construction of twenty-two buildings, and over one million in funding. He stated that research had been done to arrive at the student body projection. He declared that the past three years had been filled – “filled with faith, sacrifice, planning, getting money, and the execution of these plans.”<sup>27</sup> He projected a deficit until the dormitory capacity could be increased. The present enrollment stood at 117. The Million-Dollar Campaign, about which more will be said later, had brought in very limited funds from some areas but good results from Bluefield and some communities in Virginia. The president reported that the hands of the college had been tied since there did exist the problem of soliciting Virginia because of The Seventy-Five Million Campaign in progress.

In further comments delivered at this time, Dr. Lansdell paid tribute to Mr. M.L. Harrison, president of the Trustee Board and others who had carried the weight and, likewise, to the community who had “met in fine fashion every demand which had been made upon it.”<sup>28</sup> He then called for the removal of limitations placed upon the Million-Dollar Campaign for the college, as far as requests for assistance from the Virginia constituency. Funds that were raised would be used for construction of buildings, maintenance, and student help.<sup>29</sup>

His appeal struck a chord. At the November 25, 1924, meeting of the Trustees, President Harrison shared with the members the resolution of the General Association giving a green light to the college, along with a pledge of its support to solicit Virginia Baptists for the Million-Dollar Campaign in 1925. Dr. Lansdell received and accepted the call from his Trustee board to serve as the Managing Director of the campaign. The Board instructed a Faculty Committee to take what steps were necessary to relieve the president of his duties for the time required for this project. At this same meeting, the men approved a second dormitory and authorized the Building Committee to proceed with its construction.

At this same meeting, with its very full agenda, the Trustees made the decision that, following the payment of debts through

money gained from the campaign, portions would be designated for endowment and scholarships.<sup>30</sup> Earlier in the year, the men had established an annual scholarship to Beaver High School for a student coming to the college, and an annual medal to go to the best all-around student at the college.<sup>31</sup> Thus, step by step, the college made its way, adding new features and anticipating its growth and expansion in the years ahead.

Before discussing the campaign conducted in 1925 with its great scope and significance, attention needs to revert back to campus life and developments taking place in this area. *The Bluefield Appalachian* provides the best information in this regard. Social outlets for the students were increasing. An official directory of campus organizations revealed the following groups were active: The John Marshall and Virginian Literary Societies, Athletic Association, Athletic Council, YMCA, Forensic Council, Rattler Club (one of the college's newest organizations), three sports – football, basketball, and baseball, and, of course, the very essential cheerleaders. Only a short while after this listing appeared, the first Varsity Club would be organized for the purpose of creating a greater interest in sports and of promoting the social features of the campus.<sup>32</sup>

In sports, the basketball schedule included fourteen games which included competition such as the V.P.I. Freshmen, Randolph Macon, and other larger and established programs.<sup>33</sup> One of the truly great victories experienced by the "Fighting Deacons" was the 23-21 basketball win over Concord.<sup>34</sup> Concord was a true rival in football and basketball in particular, and it was especially satisfying when Bluefield came out on top. There was some indication that wrestling was also among the sports offered at the college.

The paper also stimulated interest by conducting a Who's Who Contest in which the students voted for their favorites for several categories in a Best All-Around consideration. W.A. Sutherland, whose name became synonymous with Bluefield College for his work while a student and later as an employee, won the best spelling contest in the Fitting Department, receiving a medal from the University of Virginia for his efforts. There was also a freshman story-writing contest. Wynona Weatherly won with her story entitled "The White Dragon." In the Virginia Literary Society, an interesting debate took place with the topic being "Resolved: That the Town of Graham should change to Bluefield, Virginia."<sup>35</sup> Ultimately,



ATHLETIC LETTER, 1926



BASKETBALL IN "THE BARN," 1924

this would happen, although the debate probably had no bearing on the decision to do so. In respect to achievements, Mac Louthan, twelve-year old son of Professor and Mrs. E.M. Louthan, had the highest average for Winter Term – a 97 while three students tied for second with a 95 average. Kathleen Stinson was one of the three. An Honor Society began in the 1924-25 school year, with students having all grades above 90% or those with an overall average of 90% qualifying for membership. Other incentives for students to give careful consideration to their grades were connected to actions taken by the faculty. Any student not making a passing grade on at least two of his/her subjects could not play sports, and any student not passing at least two of his/her subjects would automatically be dropped from the school roll at the end of the trimester.<sup>36</sup>

One of the more interesting diversions for the students came on April 14, 1924. Mrs. Marvin Williams, Kathleen Stinson, student at the time, recalled that special day. A circus had come to town, setting up its facilities on the fairgrounds adjacent to the college. Professor Louthan met the students at the top of the hill, dressed in ringmaster's costume complete with top hat. Can't you imagine just what must have gone through their minds as they saw their stern math professor dressed in this manner? Whatever their thoughts, they embraced the plan set forth for them. If they would spend the

morning doing work at the college, then they would be given an afternoon holiday so that they could enjoy the circus. According to the report in the school paper, students joined faculty members in this cleaning effort. They performed under Professor Louthan's guiding hand with the ladies and girls washing windows, cleaning lights, and attending to interior areas. The men and boys took care of the roads and walks and cleared debris on the campus. This cooperation led to much being accomplished, certainly exceeding what a single laborer could have done in a full month.<sup>37</sup> It is fitting at this point to share remarks which had appeared in an earlier edition of the paper: "Professor Louthan is known and loved by every student of the college as a man, who in his daily life practices what he preaches."<sup>38</sup> The writer declared that this gentleman had a reputation characterized by his exemplary living and intellectual integrity.<sup>39</sup> It was fitting that he led the students in the performance of their duties on that special day.

This event may well have led to the further remarks offered in the paper, or, perhaps, they represent a cumulative effect experienced by the students. In any event, here are those remarks:

One of the gratifying features of Bluefield College is the close association and hearty cooperation of faculty and students, which makes for a spirit of loyalty and devotion to the school, which is being made in these formative years of its history by the cooperative efforts of teachers, students and community.<sup>40</sup>

The April 27 edition reflected the students' views about the school from a different perspective than the one just given. "We are now enjoying Bluefield College as a college, and we're prompted to say it's getting good." The article went on to tell how the students were forced to climb over great piles of building scraps and high mounds of excavators' mud. The ditch diggers were then cutting large underground passages for steam pipes. Thus, one had to stay alert lest some "missile" from the ditch diggers' blast hit a student. Care also had to be taken because of work going on in the buildings. The writer concluded that in spite of these hindrances, "the noise of the building trade has not molested us during this entire session."<sup>41</sup> While the things mentioned must have been annoyances, they did not deter the students in their quest for an education.

Other developments on the campus included the construction of two faculty homes during the previous summer (1923), the laying of a walkway from the dormitory to the administration building, the addition of four new faculty members, the addition of more courses to the curriculum, the addition of new books, newspapers, and magazines to the library, and the addition of a new Dean. The report described Dr. Claude Owen as a man who "ruled" with his emphasis on protecting property, urging the right attitude, enforcing any rules laid down in the catalog, and congratulating students on those things that they did well.<sup>42</sup> Dean Owen was a native of Tennessee and a graduate of the University of Richmond. He then spent three summers at the University of Virginia specializing in Education. He served as a high school principal and, in 1921, he was president of the Virginia High School Principals' Conference.<sup>43</sup> This gentleman would become a legend on campus and would remain a beloved figure for all who knew him during his long tenure.

He received the accolades of the students by virtue of the fact that he "revolutionized the song service in chapel, a much needed and wonderful improvement," according to the student paper.<sup>44</sup> He was the victim of a prank pulled off during a chapel program. An alarm clock went off which led him to seize the offender and to announce as he left the chapel that the clock would be returned upon the payment of fifty cents. When he returned to the room where chapel services were held each day, he confronted a chorus of alarm clocks, all ringing in different keys. Whether the students had already had the clocks in hand or rushed out and got them from the dorm will remain a mystery. It must have been an interesting time for the Dean. No doubt, there would be other eventful chapel sessions with which he had to deal.

In the closing days of each session, the college held an Athletic Field Day. Events that were a part of this special occasion were the 880 yard, 440 yard, and 100 yard dashes, hurdle race, broad jump, high jump, pole vault, shot put, sack race, three-leg race, plus others. The first field and track day took place at the fairgrounds on June 2, 1924. Ira Skeen beat Frank Maynard by one point to gain the honor of being best trackman. There was a faculty race between the Benedicts and the Bachelors with the Bachelors coming out ahead; a pie-eating contest took place, and a horseshoe tournament was another event held during this special time of competition. Track coach Goode

was in charge of the planning and execution of this period, assisted by Professors Sneed and Louthan. Special events between the two literary societies were also included in the day's events.<sup>45</sup>

In sharing this extensive coverage of campus life, a primary intent has been to point out that even in the opening years of Bluefield College, fun mixed with academics, students and faculty mingled with each other and had close contact beyond the classroom, and the college was doing its best in spite of financial issues to provide its students with a balanced education. While the faculty could share with the students in recreational pursuits, their primary goal was to serve as "living epistles" of the Gospel. A statement under "Religious Life" in the catalog emphasized the essential ingredient of any education, stating:

"The builders of Bluefield College believe in freedom of choice in religion, but no stone will be left unturned in the use of every legitimate means to lead students to a willing and intelligent choice of the foundation stone of the college, which is Jesus Christ."<sup>46</sup>

No commentary is required on this statement. It speaks clearly and with great strength for itself.

In 1924, eight students received their certificates of proficiency or diplomas at the college's first commencement. C.B. Martin and Kathleen Stinson were the first full-fledged college graduates. She won the scholarship to the University of Richmond (Westhampton College) and had the highest scholastic average during the year.<sup>47</sup> Simply having this commencement program was an achievement in its own right, and it certainly provided encouragement to all who were watching the progress of this young institution.

When the Baptist General Association met in Bluefield at the city's First Baptist Church in November, 1924, *The Bluefield Appalachian* issued the delegates a very warm welcome and stated "this is our first chance to show you how we appreciated the wonderful things you have done for us...."<sup>48</sup> The paper also mentioned that revival was taking place on campus with rededications and lives being saved as the result of this activity. It further stated that it was the policy of the faculty and the religious leaders of the college "to ever hold up Christ and his teachings."<sup>49</sup> The article concluded with the following words: "no person is truly educated until he has found Christ."<sup>50</sup> This statement

of the student newspaper reiterated the statement which appeared in the catalog and which the writer presented earlier in the text. President Lansdell's remarks to the group have already been cited.

Officials, faculty, and students had all recognized the contributions of the Bluefield community in terms of the tremendous support that it had given the college. Individual support is noted as well. The Henry Rodgin Company of Bluefield donated a silver loving cup to be awarded in the competition between the two student literary societies. W.E. Ross endowed a \$25.00 gold medal to go to the best debater on campus.<sup>51</sup> In addition, various churches in the community entertained the students, faculty, and friends of the college at various times.<sup>52</sup>

A sad note interrupting the many positive ones that had characterized the life of the college in 1924 was the death of Mrs. Gertrude Louthan, wife of Professor E.M. Louthan and mother of McIntyre Louthan.<sup>53</sup> Her death affected the entire Bluefield College family, as well as touching the neighboring communities where people had come to know and love the Louthans.

In the November 1, 1924, edition of *The Bluefield Appalachian*, Professor Thomas presented a review of the college's history and offered meaningful remarks about how things were going at that time. He declared that the college offered opportunities to the youth of the country of all faiths or no faith. Then he added:

It grants special privileges to none, but its advantages are for all...It is a young institution, but, in the few years of its existence, it has made for itself a place in the life of the people, not only in Bluefield and Tazewell County, but throughout the whole of Southwestern Virginia.<sup>54</sup>

Following his review of the history, he discussed the college as a whole. Four faculty homes had been completed on campus with two more in the planning. The president's home was under construction, a permanent walk and bridge to the car line had been built, and a car station had been proposed. A street through the campus now allowed approach. The third session of the school had 116 enrolled with the promise of additional students that would make the number exceed year two. There were now thirteen faculty members including the Athletic Director and Librarian. In writing about the faculty, he said that they were "strong, experienced, college and university-trained men and women who had teaching experience,



MEMBERS OF BC'S FACULTY, 1926

were genuine Christians and devoted whole-heartedly to Christian education."<sup>55</sup>

He then issued a challenge, commenting that the opportunities were many and "the rewards great. Who will accept them?"<sup>56</sup> After this, he mentioned the many needs of the college to which attention must be given.<sup>57</sup>

When Professor Thomas remarked about the car line and car station, he was referring to the trolley cars which provided transportation from various points in Bluefield, West Virginia, to the end of what was, at the time, Adams Street. It would later be renamed College Avenue. The proposed car station would be placed at this end-of-line location to offer a place for the students to wait. The trolley car was the primary means of transportation for most of them. Once off the trolley, a student would walk up a walkway, originally wooden, to the top of the hill where the college was located. They had to cross a wooden bridge that spanned the branch of the Bluestone River flowing through the campus. The 1926-27 catalog announced that, by that time, all walks on campus were cement and gravel, including the walkway and bridge from the trolley line.<sup>58</sup>

Mrs. Virginia Ranuoll, daughter of Albert McDaniel, building contractor who was involved in the building of the early structures on campus, provided the writer with a map showing part of the property of the South Bluefield Land Company. This map depicts the streets and plots of land on those streets making up the area, most of

which would not be recognized today as far as names go. However, it clearly shows the Adams Street Car Line following the same path as the current day College Avenue. The trolley made its way to the end, switched the cable, and went back to town.<sup>59</sup> Her sister, Doretta Drabic, while only a small child at the time the family lived on Adams Street before moving to Maryland in 1925, also remembered the trolley car as it went past her house.<sup>60</sup> A reliable source stated that Bluefield changed the name of the street from Adams to College Avenue when a group of men from College Avenue Baptist church, located at the east end of the street, went to the city board with a request to make this change.<sup>61</sup> Obviously, the group must have had some very strong arguments in favor of a change and must have presented them in a convincing fashion to get the board to take this step. There may have been other factors that played a role as well.

Mrs. Ranuoll sent along a small diagram that she had done to show what buildings or facilities existed in the area near the college. It shows a skating rink, a race track, and a grandstand somewhere in the vicinity of the fairgrounds. She enjoyed skating and on one occasion, won the prize for being the fastest skater. She shared that a nice college boy at the rink came over and asked to skate with her. This may have been after she had just won the prize. Nevertheless, when he asked about skating with her, she replied, "I'm afraid you will skate too fast."<sup>62</sup> Her family, friends, and those at the rink would never let her live that one down in the light of her prize won on



THE BLUESTONE RIVER, ALONGSIDE CAMPUS, 1928



THE CAMPUS BOARDWALK AND BRIDGE OVER THE BLUESTONE RIVER ALONGSIDE CAMPUS IN 1928.

the strength of her fast skating.<sup>63</sup> In addition to this cute story, Mrs. Ranuoll did inform me that Bluefield College students did use the rink as one form of entertainment. Whether she had any further encounter with any of them, she did not say.<sup>64</sup>

As the college geared itself to conduct the Million-Dollar Campaign in 1925, a good point of departure for its discussion can be found in what the December, 1924, issue of the college paper had to say about Dr. Lansdell. The president had a “fighting, never-say-die spirit” in waging the campaign.<sup>65</sup> This spirit must have caught on with the students, especially after Harry Gordon, in charge of the publicity for the campaign, stated that the most valuable publicity for the campaign would come from the students. He urged them to “get enthusiastic” about their school, to “think, dream, and pray for the campaign – just as Dr. Lansdell has done and is doing – and success will surely come.”<sup>66</sup> The paper acted on this challenge and directed its own challenge by saying:

Let’s start our work of selling right now. First of all – sell yourself. Get enthusiastic – so enthusiastic that it will infect everybody with whom you come in contact. Write

home and to your friends about the campaign. Take it. Think it. Pray it!<sup>67</sup>

In a brochure entitled “To Develop the Mental and Spiritual Resources of the Virginia Appalachians,” the considerable information included about the college had, as its primary purpose, the encouragement of the public to support the campaign. Their support meant giving “these young men of the Virginia Appalachians the chance for an education which they deserve.”<sup>68</sup> This was the reason why the college came into existence. Through its students, the college was extending its influence until every part of Southwestern Virginia would benefit. It went further:

Bluefield’s beacon is reaching farther and farther back into the hills. The College and Virginia Baptists must prepare for future demands – an education for Appalachian youth.<sup>69</sup>

Then it added: “that is the ideal for which Dr. R.A. Lansdell, faculty members, and friends have worked and sacrificed during the past three years.”<sup>70</sup> The coverage went on to tell about every bit of work at the school being done by the students, with the exception of food preparation. They served in the central heating plant, cared for the upkeep of the administration building, waited tables in the dining hall, washed dishes, acted as bookkeeper for the college, and even served as secretary for President Lansdell. Others worked elsewhere. Some served churches. “Every student who cannot pay his expenses any other way is found work.”<sup>71</sup>

The publicity material then addressed the manner in which the college proposed to use the funds raised in the campaign. The first category of \$335,000 would go for necessary, imperative, and immediate needs – a dairy and opportunity building were included in this area. The second category of \$165,000 would be used for one additional dormitory, a science building, books, and other equipment. The third category of \$500,000 would go toward expenditures on the property and facilities already built (\$375,000 from other sources represented in the combined expenditures for property already held by the college plus an existing bonded indebtedness of \$125,000).

Funding secured through the Million-Dollar Campaign would answer the college’s immediate needs. Currently, it had to deal with the fact that there was no gymnasium, no place for physical training



and games, the campus needed grading and walks laid, a water system must be developed, and the library was in great need. Plans called for an Opportunity Building which would house a student store, a barber shop, a pressing club, a post office, and a repair shop, all of which would be operated by students as the means of earning their college expenses. Then, there were also plans for a student loan fund of \$50,000 and an income-bearing fund of \$100,000 to help pay operating costs.<sup>72</sup>

In 1925 the senior class had three girls and twenty-five boys, a ratio which was certainly beneficial to the young ladies but somewhat competitive for the young men. The enrollment that year had reached 150. The expenses for the full year were \$365. Eighteen of the male students were preparing for the Baptist ministry. The students were voicing their support of the campaign. They had a great admiration for Dr. Lansdell and attributed the good start for the campaign to his leadership. The president was described as being not only an outstanding educator but a resourceful businessman as well.

The students seemed to be convinced that "faith more than anything else" had carried Bluefield College through its brief life to date.<sup>73</sup> They understood that the college was educating its student body spiritually as well as mentally. "That is the Bluefield policy today. It is the Bluefield policy for the future."<sup>74</sup> Dr. Lansdell's faith was evident for them to see, as was the faith of the faculty members.



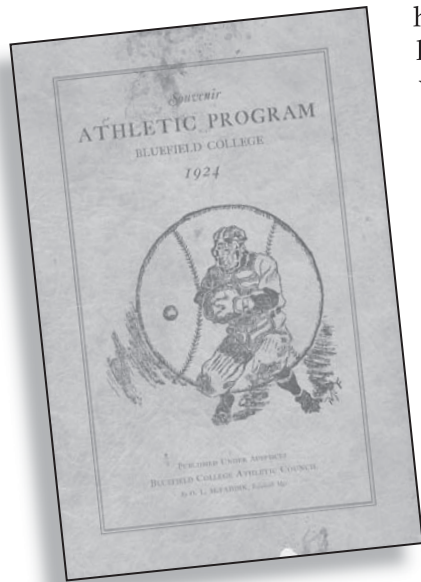
BOYS WILL BE BOYS, 1928

Therefore, the students would willingly join the many positive voices for the important campaign, so important that College Avenue Baptist Church in Bluefield would allow its pastor, Reverend W.E. Abrams, to be absent from the pulpit one Sunday each month to assist in the effort. He expressed his belief that "God had planted Bluefield College" in their midst.<sup>75</sup> He would serve for twelve months without being paid to do so and "without price."<sup>76</sup>

*The Appalachian*, in its February, 1925, issue, gave great coverage to the campaign. It noted that before Christmas in the previous year, a great rally had been held at the school. Faculty, trustees, and students were present. Mr. Frank Easley served as the chairman of the event. J.M. Newton of Bluefield, Virginia, spoke about how wonderful the encouragement had been and expressed confidence that the one-million dollars would be raised. F.R. Christie, college treasurer, said that while the Baptists of Virginia had sponsored the college, its future growth and its influence in a region filled with great natural resources would depend in great measure upon the success of the Million-Dollar Campaign. Charles Odor, student spokesman, addressed the audience, stating "we must encourage ourselves into a better spirit, and second write friends and to home papers and last but not least subscribe to the campaign."<sup>77</sup> Jean Brown, another student, added that "nothing is ever accomplished without sacrifice" and urged student support.<sup>78</sup>

Reverend Frank Walker, Head of the English Department, would serve the campaign as director of the publicity from the Bluefield headquarters in the absence of Mr. H.W. Gordan of Spartansburg, South Carolina. Dr. Lansdell, and his assistants would be directing the campaign from the central headquarters in Richmond.<sup>79</sup>

While the campaign was in progress, the college continued its normal routine. Development continued to take place. In June, 1925, the Trustees had approved the Building Committee's purchase of the fairgrounds. The committee was to proceed to obtain the deed for the property.<sup>80</sup> *The Appalachian*, commenting on this acquisition, stated that the area would serve as a permanent athletic field. The college had been using the Beaver High School gym for practice two or three times weekly. The new field should be ready to be used by early fall. In addition, work was to start on the gymnasium on May 20.<sup>81</sup> Later, in a November issue, the paper declared that the gymnasium was "made to fit its location."<sup>82</sup> It would be located one



hundred steps from the city car line, would be a three-minute walk from the dormitory, and would be situated almost at the gates of the athletic field, noted as the “pride of the college.”<sup>83</sup> The field had a half-mile dirt track, a baseball diamond, room for six gridirons, and a grandstand that would hold one thousand spectators. The college now owned 108 acres of land with this new property area.<sup>84</sup> The field consisted of thirty-five acres adjoining fifty-five owned by the city of Bluefield. The field would be available to the community

for such uses as fairs, circuses, and other events.<sup>85</sup>

In the sports arena, the college would continue to struggle, although there were victories interspersed with the defeats from time to time. In the South Atlantic Track Meet, the college entries did well enough to place above all of the other teams except the Universities of Maryland and Richmond and William and Mary College.<sup>86</sup> The football team rolled over Alderson 70-0, but lost to Milligan College 13-0. A Junior Varsity team was experiencing losses, but they were reported to display a “splendid spirit.”<sup>87</sup> An *Athletic Program Souvenir*, published under the auspices of the college Athletic Council in 1924, listed the sports being offered as baseball, basketball, track, and football. Coach E. Hobson Snead, or “Hobbie,” as he was referred to by many, was the man behind the sports program. At the University of Richmond, he was the fullback for the football team for four years and earned selection to the All-Virginia team in 1922-23. Professor B.C.R. Goode, a former University of Richmond track man, coached the track team.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to the sports mentioned, tennis, along with some wrestling and boxing were offered. Mr. Marvin Williams, student at the school in its beginning period and, later on, professor of Biology for forty-five years, pointed out that while the college lost

practically all of its athletic contests, the students, nevertheless, “enjoyed them very much in the old pioneer spirit.” The December, 1924, *Appalachian* stated that while there were no victories for the football team that season, the men were to be congratulated for their “courage and spirit of sticking to the task until the end.”<sup>89</sup> The paper also declared, in reference to the performance of the team, that “the Rattlers were out played but not outclassed, overpowered but not defeated.” In fact, the team could be said to be “glorious in defeat.”<sup>90</sup> It seems obvious that the students remained loyal to their young, inexperienced teams even when they were on the wrong side of the scores so often.

Aside from sports, the campus was alight with activities that focused on that primary focus of the college - a Christ-centered campus. The YMCA at the school received acclaim as the “one Christ-centered organization around which is centered the religious and spiritual life” of the campus. It should be noted that from October 29 to November 1, the YMCA Conference of Southern West Virginia met in Bluefield.<sup>91</sup> The college organization surely drew strength and inspiration from this regional gathering to take back to the campus for its own efforts.

The Ministerial Circle came into being, selected its officers, and prepared to engage in various areas of service. A variety of ministers came to the campus to speak to the students in their chapel services. Reverend Cecil Cook, who would later become the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Bluefield, West Virginia, spent an entire week speaking each morning in chapel.<sup>92</sup> This practice probably came to be followed by other ministers as well. Stony Ridge Mission came into existence through the efforts of three of Bluefield’s young collegians – Clayton Sweet, Hertel Jenkins, and David Bailey. Their aim was to provide Christian services to the area served by the mission.<sup>93</sup> Beecher Stallard represented the school at the



BLUEFIELD COLLEGE BASEBALL, 1928



LITERARY SOCIETY CONTEST PROGRAM

Baptist Student Union Conference at its meeting in Charlottesville, Virginia. He would address the conference and share with them news about the college.<sup>94</sup> In his address, he shared word about the five mineral springs on campus, the Bluestone River flowing through it, the twelve modern buildings, including seven faculty homes, the enrollment of 120 students, the presence of thirteen faculty members, and the favorable student-faculty relationships.

Mr. Stallard went on to describe the college as not being “narrowly sectarian but broadly Christian.”<sup>95</sup> He pointed out that every student had to attend Sunday School and church every Sunday. Powerful personalities were guest speakers in chapel services in addition to the local clergy. Dr. A.T. Robertson of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, noted minister and writer, were two of these outstanding speakers.<sup>96</sup> What a tremendous opportunity this was for this young man, and what an impression

it must have made on him. Beecher Stallard would remain a strong supporter of the college until the end of his life, serving it faithfully as a trustee for many years. He would join the ranks of many graduates who maintained their loyalty through the years and served the college either on the Board of Trustees or the Board of Advisors.

One final note prior to returning to the Million-Dollar Campaign is that the two student literary societies stayed very active with their programs and debates on various subjects while the faculty society met to discuss such topics as John Ruskin, the people of Appalachia, and other topics. The debate topics of the societies dealt with topics of the day. An example of this was the question of whether the Dawes Plan of Reparation should be adopted. This was a major issue associated with the post World War I situation. The affirmative side won in this instance.<sup>97</sup>

While the campaign was in progress, the college went on with its regular schedule of classes and activities. The campaign was encountering many roadblocks, namely, the lack of helpers, the competition resulting from Southern Baptist Seminary’s involvement in a Southwide canvas for funds and its use of several skilled fund raisers, the economic conditions at the time, the tail end of the Baptist Seventy-Five Million Campaign, and other factors. The hopes of extending the effort into 1926, while promising for a time, were ultimately dashed.<sup>98</sup> The purchase of the fairgrounds had left the school with liabilities of \$250,000 toward the end of 1925.<sup>99</sup> EvaEasley remarked that Emily Lansdell recalled her father saying that when Tyler was born to the Frank Easley family, his father enrolled him at Bluefield College to help out with the finances. The school badly needed funds raised through the campaign, but the outlook for its success was not bright.<sup>100</sup>

Add to the financial dilemma the shock experienced by the Trustees and, ultimately, the entire college family and so many others, when Dr. Lansdell submitted his resignation to the Trustees on September 15, 1925.<sup>101</sup> In responding to his friend, Dr. R.H. Pitt of *The Religious Herald* when Dr. Pitt inquired about rumors, Dr. Lansdell told him that he had found himself “wearing” under the strain of the task and feeling on the borderline of a nervous breakdown. He was unable to sleep. Emily Lansdell Walker’s comments about her father’s physical condition provided insight into his mental condition at the time. She explained that he had kidney trouble which had led his doctors to

tell him that he must get out from under the strain. The president went on to share with Dr. Pitt that for five years, he had only one ambition and purpose. He had given himself, not counting the cost to his family. Throughout it all, he had been "happy and contented," and he had been engaged in doing what God wanted him to do. He had been thoroughly convinced that God had been leading in the establishment of Bluefield College.<sup>102</sup>

His resignation did result from his belief that it was the right course at the time. It would become effective on January 1, 1926. The Trustees unanimously requested that he withdraw his resignation, and while he did agree to consider their request, he reiterated the decision to resign at the next meeting. He described the break as "painful" and stated that he had never before been committed to a task or to the men on the Trustee Board as much as he was to this task and to them. The Board reluctantly accepted the resignation, but they did ask that he remain at the college until March 1 to complete some unfinished financial plans and to promote the Million-Dollar Campaign in some areas where good results seemed to be promised.<sup>103</sup> It should be added that Dr. Lansdell had told the Trustees at a meeting held on January 11, 1926, that the college needed a new person to lead it, one who could "dominate" the situation and "lead it toward success in its coming work."<sup>104</sup>

The unfinished financial plans had to do with the debt stemming from the \$75,000 paid to purchase the fairgrounds as an athletic field for the school.<sup>105</sup> After helping out with this issue, the president, at the appointed time, would leave the college, go to Georgia for a period of rest, and then assume a new position at the University of Richmond on April 1.<sup>106</sup> However, in a change of plans brought about by a request of the Trustees to the university to allow him to stay at Bluefield until around the middle of April, he would follow this new schedule. He, then, would return to Georgia for a few days before going to Richmond.<sup>107</sup>

According to a letter to his wife in February, he had a written agreement to the university for three years. He would be assisting President Boatwright in the planning and execution of the Two Million-Dollar Campaign authorized in the fall of 1925 to help increase the university's endowment. His plans included fulfilling his obligations which called for him either to build or buy a home near the campus and to move there for the opening of Westhampton

College in the coming September to allow his second daughter to enroll there.<sup>108</sup>

His letter to the *Religious Herald*, dated April 10, 1926, spoke of the Bluefield College story as one of "faith, patience, sacrifice, and persistent effort."<sup>109</sup> He mentioned the "matchless cooperation" of the Trustees, working together with others to make possible the achievements realized by the school. He gave credit to the Lord and extended his support and best wishes to Dr. Stinson. He concluded by saying "I have done the best I could, it seems to me."<sup>110</sup> At the same meeting where Dr. Lansdell's resignation had been accepted, the Trustees had elected Dr. J.T. Stinson as Associate President to be in charge of internal affairs until March 1 and then as President until the annual Trustee meeting. Dr. Stinson had agreed to consider the appointments.<sup>111</sup> A news release at the time indicated that Dr. Stinson would require some time to make a decision on this matter, considering the fact that he was serving as pastor of First Baptist Church of Bluefield. Still, the Trustees expressed confidence that he would accept. Dr. Stinson had played key roles in the college story from its very outset and certainly had a grasp of its goals, its problems, and its potential. In addition, his personality, educational preparation, qualities of leadership, and his roots in Southwest Virginia all seemed to point to him as the ideal candidate. The college would be in "safe" hands. If he were to accept, he would continue his pastoral duties as well.<sup>112</sup>

At a called meeting on April 5, 1926, the Trustees approved a resolution thanking Dr. Lansdell for his years of service. This resolution, in part, stated that "what the school is today is due in large measure to his wise, constructive leadership and unremitting toil."<sup>113</sup> They wished him Godspeed as he moved on to Richmond. Dr. Stinson had agreed to serve as head of the college, and Mr. George Burnett would assist him by filling the roles of Vice-President and Dean.<sup>114</sup> In June, the Trustees elected Mr. E.M. Louthan to take over the position of treasurer from the retiring treasurer, F.R. Christie.<sup>115</sup> Mr. Louthan would hold this position until succeeded by Mr. Dan Parrish in 1961. One cannot say enough about the tireless efforts of Mr. Louthan and the dedication of this servant as coach, teacher, treasurer, and probably other roles as well. While he demanded output from those students under his instruction and may have appeared rather formidable to the students taking his classes, he

was, in fact, gentle and loving, considerate of the students. He was truly one of the “giants” in the efforts to make the college a Christian institution and a place where genuine education took place.

Frank Easley, a dynamic force in helping to found the college, now served as a Trustee and Chairman of the Finance Committee. In a letter that he wrote to Dr. Lansdell in December, 1927, he said to the ex-president, “...It [Bluefield College] will always stand as a monument to your sacrifice and denominational leadership.”<sup>116</sup> In a previous letter, he had told Dr. Lansdell that “we have made many mistakes with our college but the greatest was in allowing you to leave it...”<sup>117</sup> Dr. George Burnett, the newly appointed Vice President, said in a letter written on February 4, 1927, to the former president that “My admiration for you and the work you have done grows as I get better acquainted with the details of the different efforts in campaigns for money.”<sup>118</sup> Dr. Boatwright referred to Dr. Lansdell as a “noble Christian gentleman and a faithful friend of youth and an educational missionary” whose service to higher education in Virginia would “never be forgotten.”<sup>119</sup> At his funeral in 1937, his pastor at the Hepzibah (Georgia) Baptist Church delivered a message which contained words that can be said to summarize feelings about Dr. Lansdell’s life and services. He remarked that “we shall not look upon his likes again.”<sup>120</sup> Lansdell Hall, dedicated on May 5, 1967, witnessed a man who had been in the first student body at the college and was a friend of the first president, returning to campus to deliver the dedication message. Reverend David White, Pastor of Monument Heights Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, had this honor.<sup>121</sup>

A chapter in the history of the college had come to a close. A new one was underway with a change of leadership. Dr. J.T. Stinson had arrived in Bluefield, West Virginia, in 1919 to assume the position of pastor of First Baptist Church. Previously, he had served a pastorate at the Lebanon Baptist Church in Lebanon, Virginia, for seven years.<sup>122</sup> He had been one of the stalwart supporters of the college and had provided a strong voice urging its establishment in Bluefield. When Dr. Lansdell had come to Bluefield prior to the opening of the college, the Stinsons had entertained him in their home.<sup>123</sup> He had been selected to serve on the initial Board of Trustees. Now he had been commissioned to lead the school at a crucial time. In order for him to be able to devote adequate time and effort to this challenging

task, an assistant pastor had been employed by the church to take on additional duties. This arrangement would enable Dr. Stinson to divide his time between the church and the college.<sup>124</sup> His tenure would involve a little over a year, and during this period, there was no slack in the work that went on at the college or in the leadership that guided it. The two most substantial developments, according to his daughter, Kathleen Williams, were the installation of a business area in the curriculum and an engineering program that had close ties with Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia.<sup>125</sup> Professor Clarence Trent had graduated from Bluefield in 1925. The competition of his degree at VPI resulted in his being sent back to Bluefield in 1928 to establish an engineering branch school, one of four branch schools set up in Virginia. He served as the head of this department and as teacher of engineering subjects for eleven years, returning to Tech when World War II broke out in Europe in 1939.<sup>126</sup>

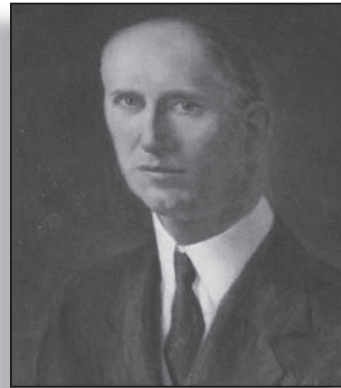
Professor Trent taught the aspiring young engineers basic subjects in the field, and with their successful completion, the students could transfer to VPI to complete the requirements leading to an engineering degree. This cooperative effort between the two schools proved very successful, and the man leading the program instructed the students well. It would become one of Bluefield’s most significant academic programs for a number of years and would be the entry point for many students, male and female, to become engineers. While Mr. Trent, later on Dr. Trent, would relinquish the leadership role, other qualified men would assume it and carry on the program.<sup>127</sup> This certainly was a major contribution of Dr. Stinson in its infancy. A January, 1927, report in the *Religious Herald* stated that the college was having one of its most successful years to date. The 1928-29 catalog reported an increase from 125 to 180 in the enrollment, a figure which, while it came during a time of new leadership, nevertheless, reflects a solid leadership by Dr. Stinson during his Interim Presidency. The Trustees passed a resolution expressing appreciation for his “fine work” and the fact that he had provided “loyal, faithful, and efficient services” to the college during the several months following Dr. Lansdell’s departure.<sup>128</sup> Little did he know that, in a relatively short period of time, he would be called upon a second time to fulfill the role of interim president.

The search for a new president concluded on May 31, 1927, when the Board of Trustees elected Dr. Oscar Sams, then serving as president

of Carson-Newman College in Tennessee. He would come to the college with an annual salary of \$4200. The newly elected president would begin his service in the summer.<sup>129</sup> Dr. Sams had gone to Carson-Newman in 1920. While he was there, the enrollment went from 257 to 607, and the endowment grew from \$300,000 to \$500,000. His leadership helped to eradicate an indebtedness of \$177,000 and stimulate a financial condition that led to the construction of a new gymnasium, a men's dormitory, and a President's home.

Dr. Sams married Pauline Cone of Riverton, Virginia, on May 8, 1906, and from this union came two sons, Oscar E., Jr., and Conway. His background included studies at Mars Hill Academy in North Carolina, a Bachelor of Arts from Wake Forest, a Bachelor of Divinity from Rochester Theological Seminary, a Doctor of Divinity from Carson-Newman College, and a Doctor of Law degree from Wake Forest. Ordained in 1902, he served as Pastor of First Baptist church, Harrisonburg, Virginia from 1902 to 1906. He moved from there to Rivermont Avenue Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, where he pastored from 1906-1917. The next move was to First Church, Johnson City, Tennessee, where he served from 1917-1920. This move marked a return to his native state. He did YMCA work at Camp Gordon, Georgia, a military installation, in 1917 and on into 1918. He accepted the call to become president of Carson-Newman in 1920.<sup>130</sup>

In an article entitled "Our Mountain Schools" written by Dr. Sams and which appeared in the *Religious Herald* of June 22, 1916, he shared an interesting and meaningful story. While he was attending Rochester Seminary, a cultured woman inquired just how he knew so much about the "poor, ignorant, depraved Mountain whites" (her words). Dr. Sams, probably looking her straight in the eye, said with great pride in his response, "Madame, I have the honor of being one of them."<sup>131</sup> With this display of pride in his region and its people, plus his very impressive credentials and the leadership that he had provided Carson-Newman, obtaining Dr. Sams for the presidency



PRESIDENT OSCAR SAMS

of Bluefield College was truly a stroke of genius for the search committee. In every way, this gentleman seemed to be the person needed to take the college forward. The *Religious Herald* of June 23 carried this statement about Dr. Sams:

Dr. Sams carries with him to Bluefield a large and ripe experience in educational work, having been for the past seven years president of Carson and Newman College.

I congratulate Bluefield College upon his coming and predict an era of great prosperity for the school. I feel that the man and the opportunity have met.<sup>132</sup>

Dr. Sams had measured the new opportunity with a favorable eye, and despite the heavy indebtedness that was present, he viewed Christian education as having never had a "greater challenge" than in the outreach of this young institution.<sup>133</sup> Obviously, the adjustments required for faculty, staff, and students with the coming of a new president would be balanced by the adjustments that would have to be made by Dr. Sams. Time and patience would be necessary for all concerned. Yet, it became obvious that the school was gaining momentum and even branching out in new directions. New faculty members with impressive credentials were being added – Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins, Master's degree from the University of Chicago, one of Bluefield's own, Marvin Williams, graduate of University of Richmond, best all-around graduate of the college in 1925 and now married to Kathleen Stinson, and Mr. Edwin Ott, assistant football and baseball coach and in charge of the dormitory.<sup>134</sup>

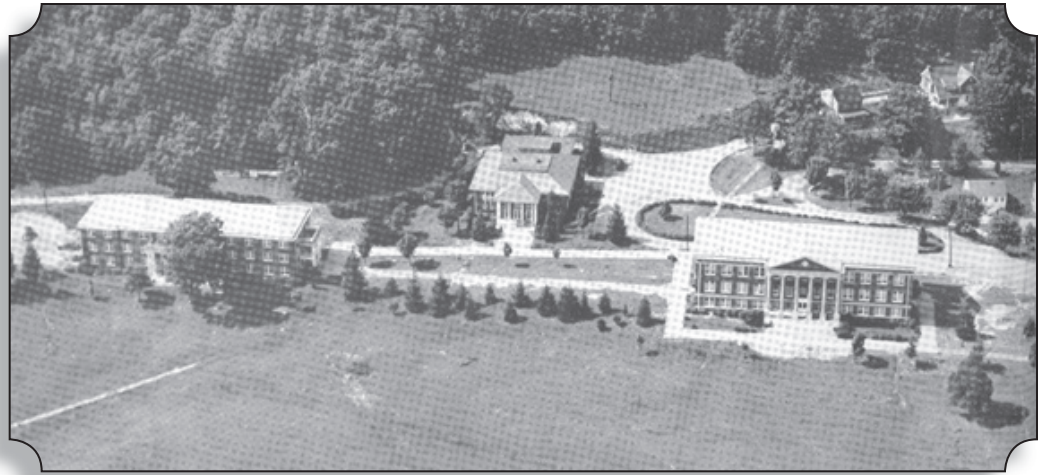
As a means of dealing with the financial issues of the college, the Trustees, in November of 1927, expressed through a resolution the desire to issue new bonds, not to exceed \$200,000 with the real estate of the school to serve as collateral. The Board requested that the Baptist General Association of Virginia authorize this move.<sup>135</sup> At the annual meeting, the State Mission Board passed a resolution permitting the college to take this action on the basis that the funds secured would be used in the liquidation and settlement of the outstanding financial obligations.<sup>136</sup> While the leadership of the college had to give time and attention to such a mundane thing as finances, the student body continued with their studies and various campus activities. However, as demonstrated during the Million-Dollar Campaign, students had an interest in the financial matters as well, because

whatever happened in this realm affected them and their opportunities for an education.

While changes were occurring, many of the same organizations functioned. The literary societies continued to provide genuine rewards for those students who participated in them. The school newspaper, now the *Bluefield Collegian* rather than the *Bluefield Appalachian*, focusing on the Virginia Literary Society, stressed the self-confidence to be gained through participation, the cultivation of historical and scientific tastes, and the development of debating skills.<sup>137</sup> While the paper spoke only of the one society, there is no doubt that the John Marshall Literary Society offered the same possibilities for students. Students were showing interest in school pins and rings whose designs would enable them to show their pride in the college. The college seal featuring the motto “Deus-Patria-Lux” – God, Country, and Light – was becoming ever more meaningful with the passage of time.<sup>138</sup> A *Views of Bluefield College Booklet* again stressed that first word in the motto when it stated: “It is the desire of those in charge of the College to make the spiritual life of the institution the most attractive feature of the work.”<sup>139</sup>

It went on to say that the desire was to put Christianity and the Church in their rightful places in the curriculum and the activities.<sup>140</sup>

In the beginning period of the school, the Fitting School had led in enrollment, but by the 1927-1928 session, the college students had come into their own and far exceeded the other group in members. Students were coming not just from Virginia and West Virginia. They came from distant states like Mississippi, Massachusetts, Florida, New Hampshire, Maine, and Kansas. There were also students from Canada and Brazil and even from as far away as Russia. Accreditation came swiftly as the work Bluefield offered to its students found ready acceptance at leading four-year institutions – West Virginia University, University of Richmond, Washington and Lee, John Hopkins and many others. The State Board of Education of Virginia approved the college, and, by the end of 1928, the American Association of Junior Colleges had received Bluefield into its membership.



CAMPUS AERIAL VIEW, 1930

The newspaper spoke highly of the seriousness of purpose which characterized the students. It commented on the good “spirit de corps” that existed at the school. It noted that the school was slowly but surely overcoming its obstacles and youthfulness and, yes, even its financial condition. It called attention to the addition of shrubbery and trees to the campus, the improved water system, and the new driveway that had been built. Poles and wires that had marked the scene had been removed by Appalachian Power and Bluefield Telephone Company, thus creating a more attractive campus.<sup>141</sup>

What can be said about the students is that they were really making Bluefield College their own – building traditions, selecting class rings, setting criteria for membership into organizations, using particular themes to honor new members (as did the Virginia Literary Society with Halloween, thus creating one of the most stimulating social events of the year), raiding the dining hall, and, yes, getting an education in the midst of all else.<sup>142</sup> In the March, 1928, issue of the *Collegian*, pages were devoted to those who had graduated thus far. While they numbered fewer than one hundred, these students were seen as “giving Bluefield College a worthy place in the esteem of thoughtful people wherever they go.”<sup>143</sup> The greater number had transferred to the University of Richmond where they were said to have given Bluefield College “a reputation and standing for scholastic

prowess, athletic ability and moral capacity of which they and we are glad.<sup>144</sup> It has already been mentioned about Kathleen and Marvin Williams and their return to Bluefield, following the completion of their college degrees. Their talents and dedication would be vested in service to the college for many years. Another graduate of special interest was Anna Lansdell who finished both the Fitting School and the college program and moved on to Carson-Newman College. She married Professor Frank T. Walker, head of the English Department at Bluefield at the time.

Changing the focus to the ever-present financial issues confronting the college, it should be noted that on January 31, 1928, the Executive Committee of the General Association separated itself from any obligation, legally and morally as part of its approval of Bluefield College's refinancing plan.<sup>145</sup> Dr. Sams appeared before the Board in April and requested that the decision made in January be changed, as the bankers involved with the refinancing were refusing to carry through because they considered the wording of the Board's resolution an expression of the lack of confidence in the college. In reconsidering its actions following Dr. Sams' appearance, the Board responded affirmatively and enacted new resolutions in which its members consented to the college plan but, this time, with a more positively stated wording regarding acceptance of obligation.<sup>146</sup> It would have been a tremendous step forward if this reversal of the Board had served to pull the college out of its financial plight, but it did not do so. Dr. Sams truly desired for the college to be solvent and put forth the efforts to lead in this direction. He urged that an endowment of not less than \$100,000 be sought, and the Trustees agreed that the college should move in this direction, even establishing a committee to look into this matter.<sup>147</sup>

In February, 1929, the Trustees reelected Dr. Sams president. In the course of this same meeting, the president stressed just how serious the financial condition of the college was. The issue built to a crescendo over the next few months, and when the Trustees met on May 1, it would be that issue that firmly held their attention. It would be revealed that Dr. Sams and Dr. Thornhill had each given \$500.00 to help meet part of the March salaries. Mr. Frank Easley had also given this same amount to aid the cause. A note for \$8000.00 at First National Bank contained the signatures of five men whose love for the college had led to their willingness to make this commitment.<sup>148</sup>

While the school continued to function, approving an airport contract in the June 1 Trustee meeting and performing other necessary tasks, the financial crisis loomed like a giant at the forefront of all other business matters. It would precipitate considerable attention being devoted to the matter over the next several months, and, in a sense, the future of college being carefully assessed.

An auditor's report prompted the Mission Board of the General Association of Virginia to appoint two members of the Executive Committee to examine the report and inform the Board of its findings. This was in September, 1929.<sup>149</sup> The appointed representatives gave their report in October, at which time they indicated the poor condition of Bluefield's finances. At that particular time, the school's bonded indebtedness stood at \$235,500, while its operating deficit was \$82,637.72. These figures actually refer to the situation as of May 31. The Executive Committee decided that the report should go to the Mission board and a copy of it should be sent to Dr. Sams and indicate the intended action to be taken.<sup>150</sup> In November, the Board determined that a committee of three members would be appointed, with their responsibilities being to study conditions at the college, to ascertain the exact situation of the operating expenses and the deficit, and to report to the Mission Board its findings and recommendations in January, 1930.<sup>151</sup>

The committee had visited the campus on December 19 of the previous year. Its report shared the following items: 1) the campus consisted of 74 acres and an athletic field had an additional 29 acres; 2) there had been a good meeting with the faculty and Trustees which had resulted in a good impression of their ability, loyalty, and consecration; 3) the average deficit for seven years was \$11,805.67 and the net increase of bonded indebtedness, and notes payable amounted to \$31,055.56; 4) current salaries and bills owed, amounting to \$10,000, had been paid; 5) some accounts were long standing; 6) because funds had been pledged and a certain amount of cash had been received, expenses for the current session should be met.

As for recommendations to handle the problem which the committee labeled as "great" and "serious," the college must have a more dependable income until its enrollment could reach a point where greater income would be produced. No fault rested with the faculty or trustees. Rather, it could be attributed to the decline in contributions expected from the State and Home Mission Boards,



the failure of the effort to raise funds for building and endowment, and an unwise investment of \$75,000 in an athletic field. President Sams indicated that a six percent allocation after the current year could help the situation, along with more students in the dormitory. The college could then break even and experience reduction of its indebtedness. The committee stated in a straightforward manner that unless such developments did occur, the college would have difficulty even refinancing its bonds in 1933. Ideally, the school should raise sufficient funds to pay off obligations and to create a productive endowment, not only to deal with the current situation but later ones as well. If such a course could not be achieved, the General Association should, if it feels that it is the practical step to take, raise the allocation. Another step would be for the college to sell the Athletic Field if a reasonable price could be obtained. The 1930-1931 session would require at least an additional \$10,000. A recommendation to provide this allocation followed. Then, there came a motion to refer the recommendations of the special committee to the Executive Committee with the power to act or to the General Board if there were to be a meeting in June.

Even in the midst of this terrible financial ordeal being experienced by Bluefield College, the investigating committee indicated that it was impressed with the institution and its people. They expressed the belief that the school was necessary and shared their faith that it "should be put on a sound substantial financial basis."<sup>152</sup> This confidence and the strong words of support from the committee undoubtedly meant a great deal to the college as it dealt with such a serious financial problem.

While Dr. Sams and other leaders at Bluefield did have to devote considerable attention to the pressing financial matters of the institution, they could, at the same time, take pride in what was happening on campus. The college was making strides, and it was demonstrating just how effective an institution it could be in providing students with a sound education and a wholesome Christian environment. A Glee Club had been organized in February 1928 under the direction of Mr. Alexander of Westminster Presbyterian Church of Bluefield, West Virginia.<sup>153</sup> The two student literary societies continued to be very competitive with each other and challenged one another to rise to the occasion whenever they debated. A Debating Society came into existence, formed on

the basis of a suggestion by a student, Ben Greenspon. A Faculty Committee on Literary Activities served as critic and advisor for this particular group. Well-known business sponsors of the area lined up behind the school newspaper. While most of them do not exist today, three familiar ones that do exist are Appalachian Power, Warlick Furniture, and Mercer Funeral Home. These businesses were all part of a Bluefield that was thriving with its railroad and coal business connections and which had a population well up into the twenty thousand range. The *Bluefield Appalachian* of December, 1925 contained an article that featured Bluefield as the "cultural, educational, social, and entertainment capital of the area..."<sup>154</sup> The article, written by Conrad Brevick, Secretary of the Bluefield Chamber of Commerce, also stated that Bluefield College brought to the city and area "youth, enthusiasm, culture, clear thinking, Christianity, ideas and ideals" and concluded with "It's our college."<sup>155</sup> It was apparent that the community had great pride in the school.

In June, 1927, the college had initiated its first summer school program.<sup>156</sup> The following year, it dropped the first year of the high school program offered by the Fitting School.<sup>157</sup> This process would continue over the next several years until the Fitting School had been phased out entirely. There would no longer be a need for it. Beginning in April, 1929, the college took a step that was definitely quite novel and exciting, although somewhat short-lived. It added to its curriculum a course in aviation that would be open to all regularly enrolled college students. This course was conducted in cooperation with the Pocahontas Air Transportation Company to which the school turned over parts of its athletic field for an airport. The field had formerly been the old Bluefield Fair Grounds. The company erected a hangar and provided a Curtis Robin passenger plane to be used for the instruction in flying. The chief pilot of the company, a former World War I ace with fourteen years of experience and medals received for his services, was the instructor. The course itself consisted of a study of the airplane by parts, as well as theory. Students would learn instruments and controls and gain knowledge about the weather, as related to flying.

The actual course consisted of two lectures and one lab period each week and called for a special fee of \$25.00. Each student had the benefit of one flight where he had the opportunity to observe the operation of the controls.<sup>158</sup> It is uncertain whether young ladies



COACH MULLIE LENOIR MAKES THE NEWS, 1932

were permitted to take the course or not, even though all regularly enrolled students were supposedly allowed to do so. In any event, for those students who did take it, it was definitely a unique experience for them and a truly attractive offering for the college. The 1929-1930 catalog indicated that the course would be repeated if twenty students enrolled.

Sportswisely, football was experiencing some better days than it had right in the beginning stages. While the 1927 season saw signs of this improvement, the 1928 year brought four losses and four victories, one of which was a very satisfying defeat of Morris Harvey to the tune of 13-12.<sup>159</sup> The glory days for this sport were just around the corner. Appeals went out for young men to sign up for baseball and track. The results were not always as good as they were with football and basketball. Membership in the Varsity Club, considered one of the highest honors attainable at the college, brought many students into the sports arena. An individual had to have earned his letter in a single sport to be admitted into this prestigious group.<sup>160</sup>

Mr. B.E. "Mullie" LeNoir's arrival on the campus of Bluefield College in 1929 heralded a new era in sports for this small Baptist school. His predecessor, Coach Ott, resigned after being with Bluefield for two years, serving as head coach since the 1927-1928 session. At the time of Ott's departure, the *Collegian* praised his work

as coach, pointing out that Mr. Ott had led the basketball team to eleven victories and the Southeastern Championship at Asheville, North Carolina. The newspaper assessed Mr. Ott as leaving the college with a good record. Three of those who had played under his guidance had earned first-team honors on the All Southeast Junior College team, while another received honorable mention recognition.<sup>161</sup> Thus, the college had enjoyed some measure of success up to 1929, but the glory days lay ahead under the leadership of Mr. LeNoir. This period of 1929-1940 is a story unto itself and to take the space to tell it is not to say that all else took a back seat to the sports program. The decade of the thirties was a time of change for the college with many significant developments. The sports program operated within the context of these developments, and so its telling will be delayed for a time.

Following the reelection of President Sams in 1928, his recommendation led to the termination of the first year of the Fitting School, mentioned previously. He also received the approval of the Trustees to house female students in the President's house, making it a temporary dormitory. The board did not approve the granting of scholarships to athletes, presumably because of the problem with the finances.<sup>162</sup> Summer School enrollment had brought the 1928 total to 226. Potential graduates, as the president reminded the Trustees, were subject to Trustee approval.<sup>163</sup> This practice continues until this present day.



THE INTRODUCTION OF COACH B. E. MULLIE LENOIR AS BC'S NEW MEN'S BASKETBALL COACH, 1934



BC FOOTBALL,  
1930

The students on campus appeared to be like students of any age, always looking forward to the end of the school term and even raiding the Dining Hall kitchen on occasion. Young ladies had taken to the basketball court, and, according to the *Collegian* were playing some good basketball, with reports coming in that they were “the best looking (quintet) to grace the hardwood of two states.”<sup>164</sup> Baseball faced some problems because of weather (“and the beat goes on”) and the fact that other schools were dropping Bluefield from their schedules. A clay tennis court had been constructed, and there were hopes for a team to be organized by the 1929-1930 school session. The John Marshall Literary Society had won the Rodgin Cup the previous year on a permanent basis and hoped to gain the new trophy offered by Mr. Rodgin as a replacement. The students enjoyed nice receptions given by First Baptist Church and College Avenue Baptist Church of Bluefield.<sup>165</sup> All in all, things appeared to be coming along quite well with the exception of finances.

Whether it was this persistent and overwhelming issue that led Dr. Sams to tender his resignation on February 11, 1930, is uncertain. While it must have been a most discouraging matter from which he could never really escape, there may have been other factors that played a part in his decision. Whatever the cause or causes, the Trustees accepted. Then, they proceeded to nominate and

unanimously approve Dr. Stinson to take on this role once again. They passed a resolution thanking Dr. Sams for his “patient, efficient, and loyal services.”<sup>166</sup> Now, Dr. Stinson stepped into the office at an extremely critical period and served a longer term in this interim position than he had his first time, staying until 1934 when a successor would be named. He would spend a great amount of his time working with the Trustees, the State Mission Board, the banking business, and other interested and concerned parties to find, if not a complete solution, certainly a means of getting the college finances on firmer ground. Otherwise, as the picture seemed to suggest, the college could fail.

On June 10, 1930, he appeared before the Mission Board and reported on the status of the college and requested an increase of \$10,000 in the allocations given to the school. In February 1931, he went before the Executive Committee of the Mission Board and again discussed Bluefield’s financial condition. He indicated that steps had been taken to reduce expenses, including a voluntary cut in the salaries of the school’s employees. He asked that permission be granted for the school officials to borrow \$20,000 with the plan of applying twenty percent of the allocations to the indebtedness. The committee gave the authorization for this action to be taken, and, if necessary, the Trustees would be permitted to take out a second mortgage on the property.<sup>167</sup>



1934 - ATHLETICS

Dr. Stinson, appearing before the Executive Committee on March 17, reported the failure of the college to secure the loan and requested that the Board commit to a note for the \$20,000 needed, with the possibility that the figure might by some means be reduced to \$15,000. No matter the fervent appeal by this well-respected minister and servant of the college, the committee denied the request, citing strained credit already. However, the Board did appoint a three-member committee to work with Dr. Stinson in an effort to reach a solution.<sup>168</sup> One has to remember that all of this was happening right in the context of a national depression which had so adversely impacted the country. Unbelievable numbers of banks had closed their doors; others were virtually in limbo, and all banks and financial institutions were up against the most difficult circumstances possible. Bluefield banks would face this crisis alongside all others throughout the land. In some ways, their situation might be a little better than that of their counterparts in larger towns and cities, but, still, they must weigh things carefully under the scrutiny of the federal government and its “New Deal” program.



DR. J. TAYLOR STINSON,  
BC'S THIRD PRESIDENT

In January 1932, the president went before the Executive Committee again, this time proposing a plan for raising money through a special campaign under the direction of Dr. W.G. Sparks. The committee indicated a move toward approval but not without a more detailed plan to be presented at its February meeting.<sup>169</sup> Dr. Stinson complied with this request. The matter went to a committee composed of three individuals to be examined and then brought back to the full committee. Following the study by this sub-committee and the introduction of a resolution calling for a favorable response to the college request, the full committee approved the college proceeding with its plans. The approval carried with it a strong endorsement of the plan by the Board and its commendation to the “friends of Christian Education everywhere.”<sup>170</sup> Plans did not go well, however, and on September 30, 1932, Dr. Stinson, laboring under a heavy burden and great disappointment, informed the Board that the

campaign had failed. The bond issue would be due in June, 1933. The college needed help so badly was the gist of his appeal. He asked that a committee be selected to assist in working out some plan, a request that the Board granted with the naming of a three-member group.<sup>171</sup>

The committee, now enlarged to five members, met in October on the Bluefield campus to study the financial issues with the school officials. On October 14, the Trustees presented a resolution calling for the authorization of a new bond issue of \$275,000 with designated amounts going toward the refunding of the present bond issue, payment of debts owed the banks, and attention being given to taking care of other debts. Future allocations from the Mission Board would be used for payment of interest and the creation of a fund to be directed toward retirement of bonds. The committee indicated its approval of this plan contingent on no further obligation for equipment or buildings without the prior approval of the Board or the General Association. There was an insistence on the fact that Bluefield College was a Christian college and that Christian ideals and standards operate in every area of the school, plus that “careful, sympathetic, and intelligent vision and administration be administered.”<sup>172</sup> A motion followed calling for the report to be continued until the February meeting in order to seek further determination of the matter in interaction between the Committee and the Trustees.<sup>173</sup>

When the meeting in February took place, the committee recommended that the college be allowed to refinance its indebtedness in whatever manner the Trustees would deem appropriate. A three-to-two vote supported the recommendation, but, in doing so, the Board set a limit of \$200,000 bonded indebtedness and a limit of \$15,000 on refinancing any other indebtedness. It requested that the Mission and Education Board also give its approval to this move. J.H. Matthews, one of two men who voted against the proposal, expressed doubts about the college even remaining open and in operation unless further Board involvement be available. The past record of the college did not provide much confidence that this could be done.<sup>174</sup>

Mr. Matthews’ concern was certainly a legitimate one since the situation at Bluefield did seem to be on shaky ground and had been this way for some time. However, there were those who saw things

differently and let their faith in the school and its leadership prevail in the final analysis. If their faith and the faith of the guiding hands of the school had not been sufficiently strong, there is no question that the institution might well have been forced to close its doors. Such a move would have brought great disappointment and sadness to many. God did have a place and a plan for the college, and, while it was undergoing the heaviest of trials in terms of its financial resources, it continued to meet the needs of the students and to provide for them the education and resources to be successful in life. God's gracious and loving hand continued to be noted in the affairs of the school.

Whether or not the students were fully aware of the financial straits cannot be easily discerned. Did they know that a grocery in Bluefield arranged for the faculty and staff to secure food in lieu of their salaries, at least for a period of time?<sup>175</sup> Perhaps, word did get out to them about what was happening. The school newspaper, usually a good provider of news about campus happenings, had nothing to say on this issue, at least as far as sources consulted would indicate. It can certainly be conjectured that there was a degree of knowledge about the situation, but, for the most part, students were busy and immersed in their studies and activities. There was every indication of student satisfaction with the school.

The *Bluefield Collegian* certainly reflected this point of view in its featuring of the advantages of the small college, namely the personal



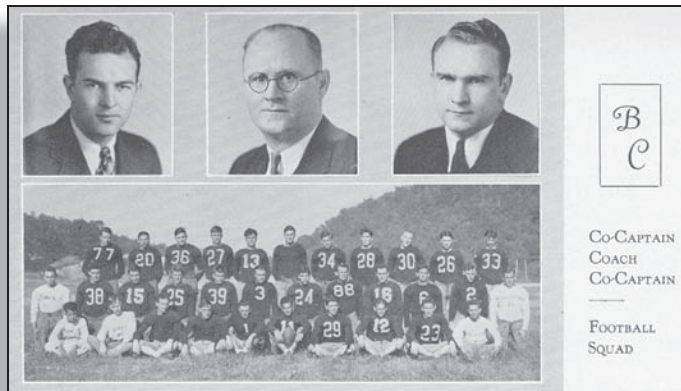
STUDENTS ENJOY THE SWEET SHOP ON CAMPUS, 1934

relationships and social contacts of students and teachers being much closer than those found on larger campuses. This very fact tended to bring about a better understanding between student and teacher, which, in turn, resulted in better work on the part of the student.<sup>176</sup>

The *Collegian* changed its format in November, 1929, going from a magazine format to a four-page leaflet. It also became a bi-monthly publication.<sup>177</sup> It seemed to be effective as a medium of information for the students, as well as other members of the college family. It introduced new faculty members and expressed regrets whenever a faculty member left for a new assignment. It even reflected on world events – the issue of arms reductions, recognition of the Chinese Nationalist government by the United States, the presidential race between Herbert Hoover, Republican candidate, and Alfred Smith, the Democratic opponent, Amelia Earhart's achievement in being the first woman to fly across the Atlantic as part of a group in the seaplane "Friendship," among many other news items.<sup>178</sup> Thus, while there may have been some elements of isolation for a student attending Bluefield College at the time, if he or she took the time to read the *Collegian*, news about events beyond the campus was being reported.

Then, there were the sports now under the guidance of coach B.E. "Mullie" LeNoir, about whom some introductory comments were made earlier in the narrative. Mr. LeNoir was the sixth coach to serve the college, and while the school had enjoyed a measure of success in its sports previously, that success would be nothing like what lay ahead. The new leader made All-Southern and All-American in football at the University of Alabama and played, with success, other sports there. He spent a brief period playing semi-pro football, but he left it after deciding that he wanted to coach.

He spent three years coaching at Georgetown College, leading the football team to an 18-2 record, losing only to Vanderbilt and the University of Tennessee. In addition, he coached baseball, basketball, boxing, and wrestling. He came to Bluefield College in 1929 and served until 1940. During these eleven years, the football team won 79 games, lost 18, and tied 2, while the basketball teams won 121 games and lost 55. There was no record for the baseball teams of the era, but Stubby Currence, longtime Sports Editor for the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, asserted that the baseball teams were "good." Operating under the name "Rambling Reds," as well as "Red Raiders," the



FOOTBALL POSTCARD, 1934

football team went undefeated in 1933, notching nine wins for the season.<sup>179</sup> The team featuring the sensational backfield star, Pete Young, defeated Concord, Salem, Morris Harvey, Washington and Lee Freshmen, American University of Washington, Tennessee Wesleyan, Appalachian State, and two other schools. Young scored 128 points and missed additional ones because he was called back for infraction of rules. He would be heralded as the leading scorer in the nation.<sup>180</sup> Coach LeNoir's teams received much publicity throughout the nation. The achievements of Young inspired the popular singer/song writer, Rudy Vallee, to write the song "Mr. Touchdown, USA." The well-known correspondent Lowell Thomas visited Bluefield to interview Young and to present him with a copy of Mr. Vallee's song.<sup>181</sup> Young would go from Bluefield to Fordham University where he played football and scored the first televised game touchdown. He then played for the Tulsa Oilers in the old American Football League. Eventually, he felt a calling of a different type, one that led him to serve as a minister for thirty years before retirement. He called his time at Bluefield "good," as he reflected on those memorable days at the small Baptist institution.<sup>182</sup>

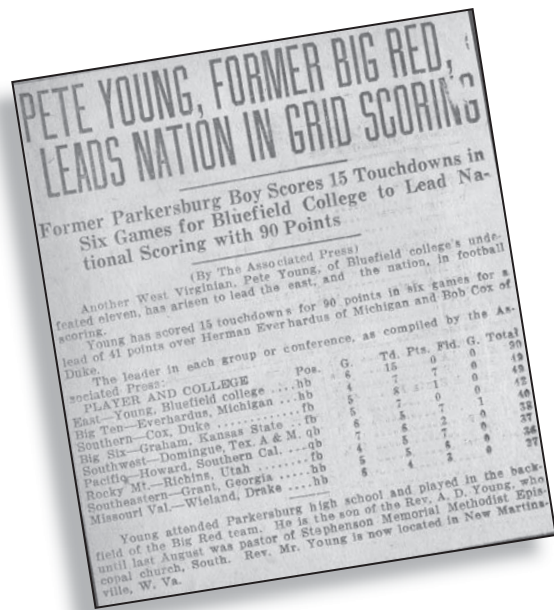
Bluefield College was champion of the Southeastern Conference of Junior Colleges in football for four of Coach LeNoir's first five years.<sup>183</sup> Mr. Jim Dudley, who played football under Mr. LeNoir, declared that junior colleges did not want to play Bluefield, and four-year schools hesitated about putting the college on their schedules lest they lose.<sup>184</sup> What was it about "Mullie" LeNoir that brought

such success to the sports programs? Stubby Currence described him as a "tough taskmaster" who would not tolerate laziness.<sup>185</sup> Mr. Dudley referred to him as a "tough little football player who wanted to win."<sup>186</sup> He added that the coach loved the game and knew it, and he loved the boys who played for him.<sup>187</sup> Mr. Currence stated that the coach knew how to get football players, and that, under his guidance, these players saw a man who lived by a high moral code. His integrity could not have been questioned, nor was it. His expectations for his players were to emulate him as a role model. Stubby Currence expressed respect for him as a man and as a coach, and would remember him in terms of "greatness," a "high class gentleman of integrity and a top football coach."<sup>188</sup>

President Stinson spoke highly of the coach, stating "Mr. LeNoir is a fine upstanding Christian gentleman and I have no man on the campus who has a finer influence over the men than he."<sup>189</sup> Apparently the Mercer County Board of Education sought to entice Coach LeNoir to accept the coaching job at Beaver High School. He did not accept. He had turned down other offers as well.<sup>190</sup> Unfortunately, when it appeared that Bluefield could no longer support football because of its financial condition, Coach LeNoir resigned. However, he did not go to another coaching position. He became a successful salesman and worked in this capacity for several years prior to retirement.<sup>191</sup>

An interesting story about the coach and his motivational skills goes as follows: following a practice session at the fairgrounds field near the college, as the team prepared for its upcoming game with Concord, someone, whether player or spectator, told the coach that Concord spies with field glasses were





hiding in the trees surrounding the field. The coach whistled for his players to gather around him and told them about the alleged spying taking place. He then instructed them to “go get” the spies. They immediately fanned out in the adjoining woods, fully intending to take care of the situation. No spies were uncovered, but the incident certainly motivated those players to give their best when they took on Concord in the upcoming game.<sup>192</sup> It should be added that Bluefield had not won any of its games with Concord until 1929. That year they posted a decisive 26-0 victory which led Stubby Currence to call the win “nothing short of a masterpiece in the way of football” and to declare that “the Lion was completely at the mercy of the Bluefielders.”<sup>193</sup> Captain Maurice Richlin scored Bluefield’s first touchdown, and it would be this gentleman who presented the college with the deflated old football on which the 26-0 victory is recorded. It rests, along with other trophies, in the display case located on the ground floor of Lansdell Hall.

Games were played at Wade Field for the greater part of the football life at the college. This field, located in the west end of Bluefield, West Virginia, had been named in honor of Dr. Edwin C. Wade who would become president of the college in 1934. On that

particular location, the sidelines were narrow, as were the end zones. Extra point kickers usually ended up putting the ball on top of the adjoining Feuchtenberger Bakery.<sup>194</sup> When Mitchell Stadium came into use following its construction during the “Great Depression” period, Bluefield’s games would be played there. Freshmen or “Rats” had to adhere to rules which were enforced by a Board of Control which met every Tuesday and Friday morning to take care of business. On Saturday prior to the opening game of the season, there was a “Rat Parade.” All Rats were to meet at the uptown post office, and march in formation to Wade Stadium behind “Kate,” one of the college mules. “Kate” has been described as possessing “all of the dignity and pomp necessary for the occasion.” Upon their arrival at the stadium, the Rats marched around it and took their seats in the college rooting section.<sup>195</sup> The *Collegian* of November, 1930, reported that the Concord game was the biggest test of the season, and if Bluefield won this game, all Rat rules would be dropped.<sup>196</sup>

The mid-1930’s witnessed the emergence of a duo on the basketball court who helped lead the college to outstanding victories. Gene Sheffield, a recruit from Maine, received praise as “one of the finest



THE WADE CENTER IN BLUEFIELD TODAY, FORMERLY WADE SCHOOL AND BEFORE THAT WADE FIELD, WHERE BC PLAYED ITS FOOTBALL GAMES.

## Pete Young Retains Place As Nation's Scoring King

Bluefield College Also Ranks Second In List Of Undeclared And United Elevens On Their Offensive And Defensive Record; Gains Wide Publicity

Bluefield college boasts the nation's leading football scorer in Pete Young, freshman halfback. Bluefield college also is standing second in the list of undefeated football teams of the nation. In six games, the local school has amassed 35 points to a mealy 7 for its six undisciplined opponents.

Young has lugged the ball across heavy goal lines fifteen times this season for a total of fifty points. Even before Saturday's game, Young was the outstanding scorer of the United States. He registered three touchdowns against Alfred Holbrook of Lebanon, Ohio, Saturday, establish a lead of 41 points over his closest rivals among the national leaders, Harmon Everhardt of Michigan, and Bob Cox of Duke. Young is playing his first year at Bluefield college. He came from Parkersburg, where he starred three successive seasons on the high school level.

**Son of Uplift Preacher**  
One might imagine that denominational lines are not drawn rigidly in a young man's family, for he is the son of a Methodist minister and is attending a Baptist college. The nation's high point man is 21 years old and tips the beam in his underwear at 175 pounds. Young's amazing record of touchdowns has been amassed in six games, all of which his team has won. He has been an important factor in Bluefield college's undefeated record this season. In Saturday's game, which proved to be a touchdown orgy for the home team, Young led all others in lugging the ball across Holbrook's goal line.

**College Gains Wide Publicity**  
Nation-wide publicity is coming to Bluefield college as a result of the record of being undefeated yesterday; newspapers all over the land are reporting these spectacular records to millions of readers.

Press service wires hurried today with word that the Bluefield backfield man had set himself up in the national hall of fame. Nothing short of a miracle, this late in the season, is credited him for clinching final score of the season. The leader in each group or conference, as compiled by The Associated Press, is as follows: East—Young, Bluefield college, 36 points; Dixie—Everhardt, Michigan, 49; Southern—Cox, Duke, 49; West—Graham, Kansas State, 47; Midwest—Dominique, Texas A. and M., 46; Pacific—Howard, Southern Illinois, 35; Rocky Mountain—Shinn, Utah, 31; Southwestern—Hill, Georgia, 28 and Missouri Valley—Wesland, Drake, 27. 25 Teams Unbeaten and United States Associated Press survey shows

25 college football teams neither beaten nor tied with League universities, of Pittsburgh, leading the parade with seven victories. Eleven of these teams are from the East, eight from the Midwest, four from the South and two from the Far West. The list (three or more games):

Teams	Won	Points For	Points Against
Bluefield college	6	35	7
Drexel	4	111	21
Casey & Hardy	4	102	21
De (Ohio) college	4	101	21
Fordham	4	101	21
North Carolina	4	101	21
Teachers	4	101	21
Ohio State	4	101	21
Army	4	101	21
Washington	4	101	21
Black Cross	4	101	21
Duke	4	101	21
Delaware (Chicago)	4	101	21
St. Cloud (Minn.)	4	101	21
Teachers	4	101	21
Princeton	4	101	21
Michigan	4	101	21
Mass. State	4	101	21
Illinois	4	101	21
Thomas (Pa.)	4	101	21
Georgia	4	101	21
Pres. (Ohio) State	4	101	21
Ark. State Techn.	4	101	21
Trinity	4	101	21
Moravian (Pa.) Col.	4	101	21

### D. AND E. STAR NEAREST PETE

New York, Oct. 26. (AP)—Another West Virginian, Pete Young, of Bluefield college, came out of semi-obscure during the past week to lead the individual football scoring in the East away from Winters of Davis and Elkins.

Young has scored 15 touchdowns in six games this season for a total of 50 points, leading Winters, who failed to improve his mark in Saturday's game against West Virginia. Winters has made eleven touchdowns and one extra point.

Three other Davis and Elkins stars will follow the Hurricane ace in the scoring table. Finbarry and Tinney are tied for third with 27 points each and Shelton has 48. "Whitey" Landour, Villanova captain, follows with 46 points, leading the scorers of the "big" colleges.

Player	Points
Young, Bluefield Col.	50
Winters, Davis-Elkins	48
Shelton, Davis-Elkins	48
Tinney, Davis-Elkins	27
Landour, Villanova	46
Danowski, Fordham	44
Stone, Salem	44
Myers, Backlund	44
McLean, Tufts	44
Finbarry, Rhode Island	27
Shenberd, W. Maryland	27

\*No data given and

players on the hard woods of the Virginias," and, according to Stubby Currence, this young man could play on "anybody's basketball team."<sup>197</sup> Along with another player, equally talented, Gene Studebaker, Sheffield helped to bring attention to Bluefield College's basketball program.<sup>198</sup> Of course, with the record achieved on the hardwood courts under "Mullie" LeNoir's guidance, it is apparent that all did not fall on the shoulders of the above-mentioned players. There was ample talent essential to producing a remarkable win-loss record.

One final bit of information related to Mr. LeNoir is that he lived on Augusta Street in Bluefield, West Virginia, until his wife died in 1972. He then went to live with his son and family in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was there where he died on May 11, 1979. His burial took place back in Bluefield. His son praised him as a "great Christian gentleman,

a wonderful husband and father, and a great model for his student athletes."<sup>199</sup> It is certain that this man's character and leadership will ever pervade Bluefield College history and remain an inspiration for those who know his story.

On October 25, 1930, the Trustees entered into a new contract with the Pocahontas Transport Company, the firm running the airport and providing the training course on the airplane for the college. At this same meeting, the body approved a right of way on the eastern boundary of the college property to construct a state highway.<sup>200</sup> By the fall of 1932, the enrollment had moved up to 206.

Trustees approved a Bluefield College-Virginia Polytechnic Institute cooperative arrangement to provide two years in all engineering courses. Dr. J. Walter Sparks would be hired to head the fund-raising campaign for the needs of the college.<sup>201</sup> The failure of this campaign in achieving its goal has previously been mentioned in a coverage of the financial matters.

From all indications, it appears that the college had determined to drop its football program in the light of its financial burdens. This step generated a great response which resulted in a committee made up of representatives from several civic organizations in the Bluefield area meeting with the Executive committee of the Trustees on April 21, 1933, to discuss a football program in 1933-1934. The group requested a reconsideration of the decision to drop the sport. President Stinson, who had a great love for the sport and offered avid support of it, even to the extent of traveling with Coach LeNoir to the New England area to help recruit football players, explained to the committee that economic conditions had led to this decision. No other factors had entered the picture. Following a time of discussion, the group set April 24 as a follow-up meeting time. At this particular gathering, Dr. Stinson announced that the college would continue the football program if the various clubs would furnish \$1000.00 and help to sell 1000 tickets for the next season. This meeting concluded with the agreement that the clubs would consider the president's challenge and respond accordingly.<sup>202</sup> While the exact response forthcoming cannot be provided, it is clear that there must have been a favorable one, for the Trustees, acting on May 19, approved a motion to retain football.<sup>203</sup> It is an appropriate place to remind the reader that the 1933 season was the undefeated one and the period of great achievement for Pete Young.

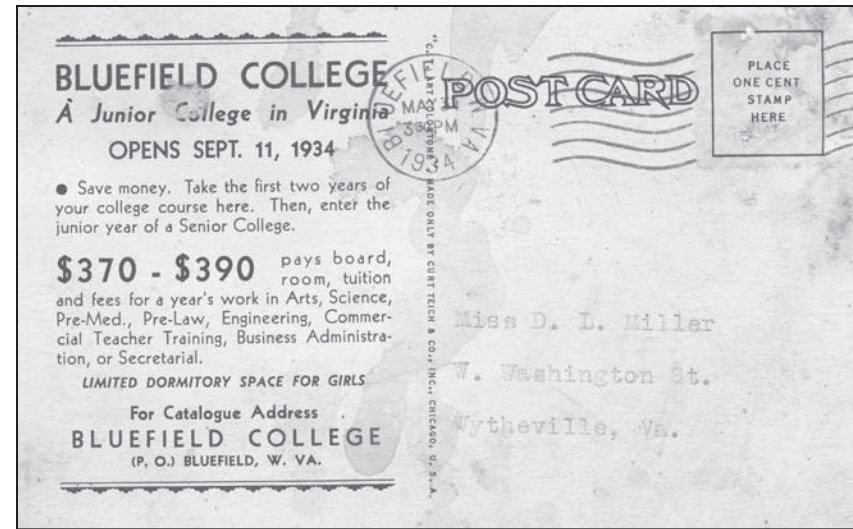
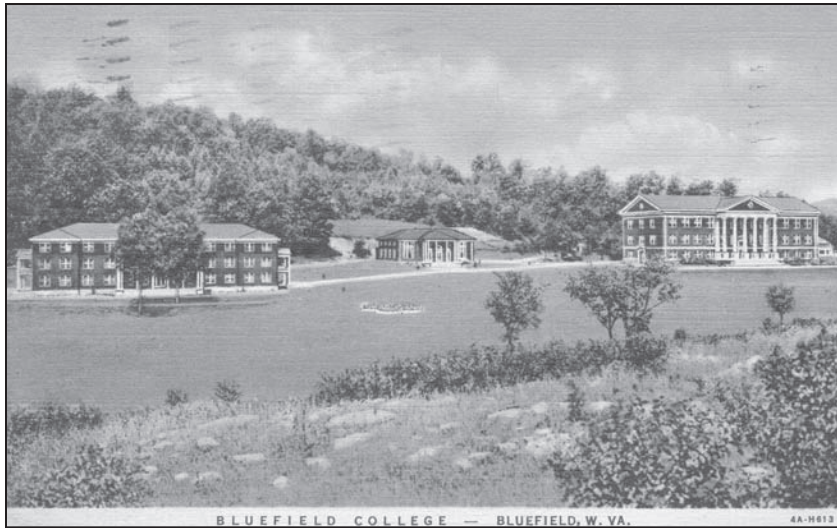
February, 1934, saw a renewed mention of financial problems as debts fell due and faculty and staff were due back salaries.<sup>204</sup> Dr.



Pete Young, son of a Parkersburg (W. V.) Methodist preacher, is so far ahead of the rest of the nation's backfield stars that he has clinched the top place on the list. In eight games he has made 15 touchdowns for 50 of the 55 points tallied by Bluefield college, Bluefield, W. V. He has one game yet to play. (Associated Press Photo)

*Milwaukee, Wis Journal Nov. 21, 1933*





Stinson had done a yeoman's job trying to deal with and to improve the financial picture. His daughter, Kathleen Williams, mentioned specifically that money was a major concern for her father. There was an extended period during this time when the faculty simply went without pay. Promissory notes would be given to them at the end of a school session, and if there happened to be any cash on hand, it would be divided among the employees.<sup>205</sup> Mrs. Williams also related just how close the faculty members were and how they sought to help each other. Many of them resided in the houses on "faculty row." There were visits to each other's homes on Christmas Day. Coach LeNoir and his family received a turkey and the trimmings as gifts for the holidays, probably sufficient food to keep them for several days. They proceeded to share these blessings with the other faculty members, an act which demonstrated the existing camaraderie and the concern for the needs of others.<sup>206</sup>

Dr. Stinson, described as having a "heart and soul dedicated to the college," saw fit to tender his resignation on March 29, 1934, as the prospect for a permanent president to be elected was favorable.<sup>207</sup> He

returned to his duties as pastor of First Baptist church of Bluefield and eventually moved back to Lebanon, Virginia, to serve the church which he had previously pastored.<sup>208</sup> Not only had this gentleman worked tirelessly on behalf of the college from its inception, he had, on two separate occasions, assumed the presidency of the institution under existing difficult circumstances and provided dedicated, caring leadership. During his administration, the college added a business program and gave strong support to the engineering program. He took on this task while he was still seeking to lead a sizeable congregation at the church. The importance of his interim presidencies and the time, efforts, and commitment which he so willingly gave to the task at hand can never be minimized. They were crucial to the success of the college. Dr. Stinson's dedication merits the profound praises of all who cherish Bluefield College's contributions to higher education. I wonder if all that he did has received adequate appreciation or recognition. I regret that I did not have the privilege of knowing this great leader personally. ❧

— CHAPTER THREE —  
SETTLING IN – STAYING LONGER: 1934-1988

To date, the college had experienced presidencies that had been relatively short in duration, Dr. Lansdell's period of close to six years being the longest tenure of those who had served. This pattern was about to change with the Trustees' approval of a recommendation by a special committee that Edwin C. Wade be elected president. The date was May 21, 1934. This gentleman appeared before the Trustees and accepted the position on the basis of the contract agreed upon by this body.<sup>1</sup> His election received the unanimous approval of the Executive Committee of the Baptist General Association.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of his election, Dr. Wade was no stranger to the people residing in the Bluefield area and even those in the wider area. He was well known in educational circles and was active in business, civic, and religious affairs of Bluefield. He had a pleasing personality, possessed and expressed high ideals, was a logical thinker, and spoke in a convincing manner. From all indications, he had the qualifications to be a college president. Born in Farmville, Virginia, he graduated from Hampden-Sydney College after completing his public school education. He had earned his Master of Arts degree from Columbia University in 1911 and completed his residency requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree at that institution the following year. He married Miss Ernestine Barger of Shawsville, Virginia, and the couple had two children, a boy of eleven and girl of two.<sup>3</sup>

The gentleman offered an impressive resume of work experiences. He had served as high school principal in Virginia, an instructor of history in New Jersey, and as headmaster of Cedarcroft School for Boys in Kennett, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. In 1917 he came to Bluefield where he spent four years before going to Florence, South Carolina to serve as Superintendent of

Schools for two years. An opportunity to return to Bluefield to serve as Superintendent of Beaver Pond District Schools presented itself. He did return and held this position for fifteen years. He then moved to the position of Assistant Superintendent of Mercer County, West Virginia, schools where he served for one year prior to accepting the presidency of the college. His experiences also included teaching summer school sessions at Winthrop College in South Carolina, Concord College in Athens, West Virginia, and Bluefield College.

In addition to these areas of career service, he was president of the Andrew-Crowell Company of Bluefield, President of Acetylene-Electric Welding Company, Vice-President of the Community Savings and Loan company, Vice-President of the Bluefield Building and Loan Association, a member of the board of directors at the Bank of Matoaka, a past president of the Bluefield Rotary Club, and a past District Governor for the twenty-fourth district of West Virginia Rotary, Rotary International.<sup>4</sup> Thus, not only was he experienced in the field of education, he also possessed a business acumen which would definitely be a genuine asset in leading a college fighting to attain financial stability. It would appear that the college had found a well-rounded person to lead it through the remaining years of the Depression era on into the next decade.

Dr. Wade differed from the men who had previously held the presidency of Bluefield College in that he was a Presbyterian, not a Baptist. While there may have been concern on the part of some regarding this difference, the very fact that the Executive Committee of the Baptist General Association had endorsed him unanimously spoke clearly in his favor and indicated no major hang ups with having a leader of non-Baptist persuasion at the helm. Mrs. Emily Greever, college librarian, in an article on the history of the college written in 1947, stated that the college was unique for several reasons, one of which was the fact that it was the only Baptist college that had employed a Presbyterian who served the school longer than any two of its Baptist presidents. Then, she added: "We hope that we have one who will match and better that record," little knowing at the



PRESIDENT EDWIN C. WADE

time that the gentleman who had been hired to succeed Dr. Wade would, in fact, be this very person.<sup>5</sup> She also noted that, in 1947, the enrollment at the college included more Methodists than Baptists.<sup>6</sup> This is a clear testimony to the fact that, while Bluefield operated under the Virginia Baptist umbrella of higher education, its doors were open to those of all faiths, even as Dr. Lansdell had said in its beginning days. A student attending the college in the late thirties attested to the faculty suffering because of the depression, while also adding that he grew through his association with students who were Jewish, Catholic, and other affiliations, as well as with students from areas in the North. He expressed the hope that school policies still allowed those of other faiths and of no faith to attend.<sup>7</sup> They did at that time and continue to do so in the present day.

As the school continued to make its way through the decade of the thirties, “Mullie” LeNoir’s teams captivated the attention of the campus and the community, but other things were going on as well. Students, aside from their studies, were dealing with the question of whether or not to have a yearbook. If sentiment favored this move, a minimal cost for each student would be involved – roughly one dollar per year – and the printing would be done by the Baptist Orphanage News in Salem, Virginia.<sup>8</sup> There would be a series of college broadcasts over Radio Station WHIS in Bluefield, West Virginia. Content of these broadcasts would vary, but it provided a great way for the institution to connect with the communities within hearing distance. In an economics class, each student received \$1000.00 in Confederate money (real or imagined is uncertain) to invest and to see how quickly he or she



1938 - FOOTBALL TEAM

could become a millionaire. An Atwater radio, one of the earliest radios, became a well-received addition to the lobby of the dormitory.<sup>9</sup> One must remember that while radio broadcasting had begun in the 1920’s, it was still relatively new and held an audience very closely. It is not hard to imagine students gathered around that set, listening to the various offerings of the day and being somewhat mesmerized by them.



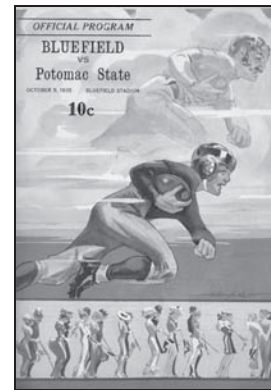
COACH MULLIE LENIOR, 1937

One student, Richard Hancock, was a late enrollee in September 1935. President Wade provided him with \$90.00 financial support per semester for which he worked picking up trash around the dormitory. He described the college as being like a cold glass of water dashed in his face as he made the transition from a public school setting. Teachers addressed students as Mr. and Miss, and those students had to learn to study and manage their time. This certainly was his experience. He found the honor system in use to be very impressive. He expressed regret that, after leaving the college to continue his education elsewhere, he did not return to thank professors for what they had done for him, mentioning in particular Mr. Louthan, Miss LeGrand, and Dr. Wade.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Hancock did return years later to serve as a Trustee.

The college choir performed in Richmond under the direction of Mr. Gibson Morrisey, a conductor who would go on to become renowned in the field of conducting worldwide. There would even be a broadcast of his choir over NBC from Richmond.<sup>11</sup> Sororities and fraternities, previously not allowed, were now part of the social life of the campus. Names such as Sigma Theta Sorority, Delta Beta Kappa Sorority, Sigma Tau Alpha, Eta Tau Beta Fraternity, and Kappa Omicron Alpha Fraternity were very prominent. The latter-mentioned fraternity, better known as KOA, was, from all reports, quite an active group with many of the men involved in its activities, including dances. Phi Rho Phi took part in a debating tournament at the college and engaged in other speaking activities.<sup>12</sup> Just as Bluefield engaged in sporting events with Concord College, the two schools would also come together in debates, the results of which are unknown, at least to this writer.

The KOA Fraternity planned its annual Easter Frolic at the West Virginian Hotel Ballroom, which was quite a showplace in its day. Kirkland Lodge was another favorite site for dances and get togethers. Dances were well attended. Mrs. Kathleen Williams remarked that since the girls were in the minority within the student body, they liked the arrangement.<sup>13</sup> Dances were also held in the dining hall, according to 1939 graduate, John Sproles.<sup>14</sup> Harold Hoback pointed out that he was the first man to be initiated into the KOA and that Professor Marible served as the sponsor of this organization.<sup>15</sup>

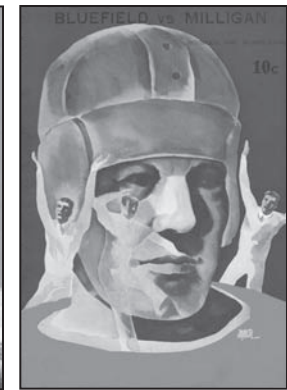
A Journalism class took over the task of publishing the *Collegian*. Its publication would require that two hundred students sign up to take the newspaper. The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* would do the printing. A May Festival was an annual event sponsored by the Junior YMCA. The Newman Club (Catholic) came back into existence following a four-year lapse. Intramural sports were being offered on a mass scale and promoted by the college for the first time, while being carried out under the direction of Coach A.T. Howard. Mr. Howard also coached the track team, while Tony Lotito, stepping in for the departed "Mullie" LeNoir, coached the Rambling Reds basketball team to a 12-4 record in 1941-42. He also coached football which would ultimately become a reduced activity during the war years. Ultimately, it would not be resumed as a sports program. Rumors were flying that football was on its way out of the sports agenda earlier, as finances played a role, along with the exodus of men to serve in the armed forces.



1935 - FOOTBALL PROGRAM  
POTOMAC STATE



1935 - FOOTBALL PROGRAM  
MILLIGAN



1935 - FOOTBALL PROGRAM  
VPI

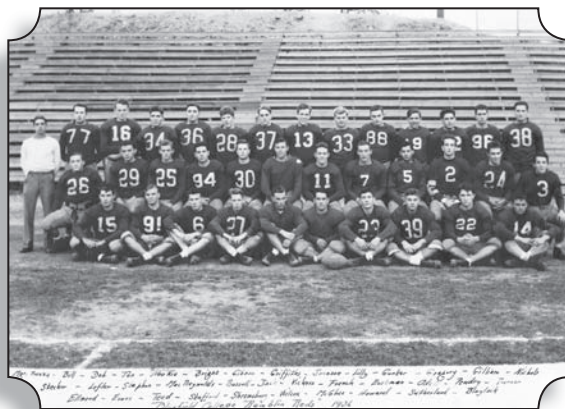
Sports writer for the newspapers, Michael Yowarsky, expressed the hope that the rumors about football were not true, pointing out that:

Under extremely difficult conditions and under unfortunate financial circumstances, the athletic board at Bluefield College has kept football going. They carried on when the going was rough.<sup>16</sup>

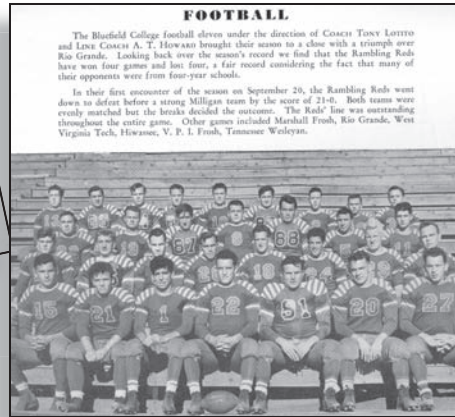
Only time would tell. Yowarsky concluded his comments by stressing the tremendous benefits that football had brought to the college and the public. His final plea was "Let's carry on."<sup>17</sup> Time and circumstances did bring an end to the football program. Only memories of those days when the Bluefield College Elevens won national recognition for their exploits on the field would remain. Even those memories have dimmed over the years. Hopefully, this story of the college will bring those days to light again.

From all of the insight into social and cultural affairs that has been provided, one must wonder about the spiritual life of the campus. Foremost in this realm would be the chapel services held every day of

every week. These services reminded the students that there was a basic component to every individual's education – a spiritual one in keeping with the purpose under which the college operated. Zane Grey Ross, a 1940 graduate, recalled the presence of a group of ministerial students who shared devotional times each evening after supper. They called themselves the "Master's Minority," and, in addition to their



1936 - FOOTBALL TEAM  
AND TICKET



devotional periods, they went to a goodwill center in Princeton, West Virginia, and held services there once a week.<sup>18</sup> Thus, spiritual affairs were not neglected.

Phi Theta Kappa, the National Junior College Honor Society, had a chapter on the Bluefield campus, and Professor Marvin Williams served as its faculty sponsor. He had, in fact, founded the chapter and served as its guiding hand for many years. Students who qualified were invited to

join, and, if they accepted, they would go through an induction ceremony.<sup>19</sup> This writer has fond memories of the organization when he joined it in the early 1950's – the camaraderie, the induction service, the Harvest Banquet, and other activities associated with the college chapter. It represented a special time within the context of college life.

After serving only eight months in his new position, President Wade presented to the Trustees a proposal for a four-year school and provided resolutions from several civic organizations supporting such a move. The Trustees, in response, enacted a resolution stating their approval of a four-year program with the effective date for its start on June 1, 1935. However, the proposal had to go to the Board of Missions and Education for their approval before such a change could be incorporated. It would be the role of an assigned

committee to take the resolution to the Board for consideration by its members.<sup>20</sup> Prior to dealing with what transpired in the meeting of the committee with the board, it would be best to take a look at the college as it began its life under Dr. Wade's guidance.

Advanced enrollment put the number of students just past the 200 mark.<sup>21</sup> Interest in the college seemed to be picking up as the new leadership went into place. Businessmen in the Bluefield community expressed confidence in Dr. Wade's leadership. J.P. Thornton, president of the Thornton Company, one of the leading retail businesses, said, "I believe that a splendid choice has been made and that the college will thrive under the supervision of this thoroughly trained man."<sup>22</sup> Harry Goodykoontz, vice-president of the Goodykoontz Drug Stores, Inc. declared that "under the able guidance of Dr. Edwin C. Wade, it [the college] will mean a great deal more...."<sup>23</sup> About Dr. Wade, he said that he was "fully capable" and with the assistance of community leaders, he would make Bluefield College "an outstanding institution in this country."<sup>24</sup>

Hugh Ike Shott, publisher of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* provided staunch support for the college, saying:

Bluefield College is the capsheaf (finishing touch) to the educational progress that the people of this section have accomplished, and it furnishes a facility that the two Virginias need and this area should cherish by their influence and enthusiastic support.<sup>25</sup>

The coverage of this newspaper went on to describe the appearance of the campus with its northside boundary of its one hundred acres backing up on the airport and its southern boundary meeting a paved highway. The dormitory already had fifty reservations, and it appeared that the college could do something that had not often been done previously – fill the dormitory. The campus had a dining room that could serve three hundred people. The social life of the campus was already experiencing a "new deal" under the new administration. Movies would be offered during the school year, and students were hoping that dancing would be allowed in the dining room, a hope that did materialize. Dr. Wade had promised no fewer than two student dances. Successive Arbor days had provided the campus with some fifty trees planted to add to those already gracing the grounds. Three trees memorialized three deceased students.<sup>26</sup>

The Administration Building had fourteen classrooms, a chapel-auditorium with seating for 276 persons, labs for Biology, Physics, and Chemistry, the President's suite, and six other faculty offices. There were fourteen members of the faculty, including the coach and librarian. Dr. Wade, in a letter to Friends and Patrons of Bluefield College, stated that if the school were to become a four-year college, it would offer an A.B. and two B.S. degrees, journalism and business administration. He urged the public to aid in making this transition possible and added that those at the college could not come up with any reason why the change should not take place.<sup>27</sup>

It would appear that Bluefield College was in a good position to make the transition from Junior to Senior College. The only thing that had to be considered was how the Baptist Mission and Education Boards would view such a change. On January 15, 1935, the Executive Committee of the Board received for consideration the plan of Dr. Wade for this move. Through an article that appeared in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, they learned of the president's announcement that the college had no debt. In the light of this revelation, the committee instructed its secretary to write to the president of the Trustees for information and, if it seemed necessary, to have the president appear before the Board in Bristol.<sup>28</sup>

On February 11, President Wade did appear before the full Mission and Education Board and presented to the body a resolution of the Trustees asking for the approval of the Board for some changes in the future plans of the college. In response, the Board decided to select a committee to go to the campus and investigate the situation and to report its findings at the annual meeting of the Board.<sup>29</sup>

Following its visit to the campus, this committee presented a report of its findings. The enrollment stood at 260, and other information about the facilities, potential student body and the requirements for a four-year program were included in this report. On the basis of all that the committee had learned during its visit, the members declared that it would be difficult for the school to operate a four-year program without a suitable endowment. Accreditation had a link to standards of agencies for equipment, salaries, and other essential matters, and the lack of a good endowment would make the task of operating a four-year program too difficult. If accreditation was lacking, the ability of the school to attract students would definitely be affected. The committee warned that it was, indeed, dangerous

to undertake a sub-standard educational effort. Operating costs for a stepped-up program would be substantially increased. Other arguments against such a transition were included in the report, with a major one being that both the Virginia Board of Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities might deny recognition to the college.<sup>30</sup>

As a result of its findings, the committee stated that a change at that time was not considered a favorable step. At least two more years of successful operation as a two-year college should be demonstrated. The college could certainly bring up the matter again at a later time. If this were to happen, a study should be done by a three-member, non-Baptist committee – one member representing the State Board of Education, a second member coming from a Virginia Tax-supported institution of higher education, and the third member representing a non-Baptist denominational institution of higher learning.<sup>31</sup> The Board gave its approval to those recommendations.

Obviously, the decision of the Board brought disappointment to Dr. Wade, the Trustees, the students, the community, and others who were excited by the prospect of Bluefield becoming a four-year school. Yet, the institution moved on and sought to arrive at a more solid basis upon which another effort for change could rest. By 1936, the president offered a report to the Trustees that provided this body evidence that things were improving. The president indicated that all current expenses had been taken care of or were covered by money in the bank. Faculty members had received seventy-five percent of



BLUEFIELD COLLEGIANS, 1936

their contract salaries for the past year. With such a positive picture in hand, the Trustees authorized Dr. Wade to renew the request for the approval to make the change to a senior institution.<sup>32</sup> Again, the proposed move met with strong opposition and failed to make the grade. As is true of many things in life, when proposed changes are suggested, they are premature in their timing. Bluefield College's bid to attain four-year status would realize success when all of the required factors involved would fall into place. The college had a forty-year waiting period before this would happen.

Thus, the school must continue its life as a Junior College and do all that it could to ensure that it would be the best in this category. The 1937-1938 session witnessed the school's largest enrollment to date. Its programs, academically, culturally, spiritually, were all doing well. Resident students were paying \$450.00 for the nine months, whereas day students paid \$150.00. The engineering program, in conjunction with that at V.P.I., allowed a student, after the two years at Bluefield, to enter Tech as a junior in any engineering curriculum and to graduate after two additional years, if all went well. The *Bluefield Collegian* now appeared as a section once a week in the *Sunrise News*, an evening paper put out by the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* company. The college was being described as a "young school, with progressive purposes and methods of training which characterize the newest in educational trends."<sup>33</sup> The enrollment continued to climb, reaching 306 for the 1938-1939 session.<sup>34</sup>

1942 - STUDENT NEWSPAPER



Dr. J.I. Rodgin stated that he found the teachers to be very concerned about and interested in the students during his time at Bluefield in the late thirties. Dr. Wade encouraged him to seek entrance to the Optometrist School at Columbia University and supported him in this venture.<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Virginia Byrd and Mrs. Helen Teague, both 1938 graduates, also had words of praise for the faculty and staff and commented on how the campus was like one big family. They also spoke of the fact that one student, reading about the Bluestone River having a branch that ran through the college property, brought his canoe all the way from his northern home to use on that body of water.<sup>36</sup> What a surprise and, perhaps shock, he must have experienced when the branch turned out to be only a small creek!

In order to help relieve its financial situation, the officials of the college received authorization to resell the airport property to the city of Bluefield in 1939.<sup>37</sup> Dr. Wade and the Trustees were seeking to bring Bluefield College to a more stable place in its financial condition. They were working diligently to lead the school from beneath a burden that had beset it from its very beginning period and remained persistent along the way. On December 1, 1939, the college made its first payment in retiring the bonded indebtedness.<sup>38</sup> While not being accomplished without great effort and sacrifice, the college could announce through its president that, by the end of 1942, it was free of debt and was able to direct a large sum toward equipment and improvement in various areas of its life.<sup>39</sup> The Trustees, not surprisingly, pleased with the work that President Wade had done and was doing, authorized that a five-year contract be renewed upon agreement by the Board of Missions and Education. Later, the president asked that his contract cover the period of 1944 to 1946, as he took a careful look at his future plans.<sup>40</sup>

A tremendous challenge confronted the school as the decade of the forties arrived. World War II brought the United States into global conflict, prompting the nation to send out its call for young men and women to enter the various branches of service. Like other educational institutions nationwide, Bluefield College felt the impact of the war. Enrollment in 1941-1942 was 244 compared with the previous year's figure of 283.<sup>41</sup> The difference in these figures might not seem all that great so as to merit concern, but the decrease in 1941-1942 was a sign of what lay ahead. In June, 1943, the Trustees requested that Frank Easley write to the Board of Missions and Education and make a

plea for a subsidy because of the lack of male students in the student body due to their departure to serve in the military.<sup>42</sup>

Venus Penn entered the college in 1943. She pointed out that the number of men on campus was small. Even so, Dr. Wade, operating under such difficult circumstances, did his job well. He coped with a serious financial situation. He designed ways to bring in students to help the college deal with this particular issue.<sup>43</sup>

According to the *Collegian* of May 22, 1942, seventy-five students graduated that spring. Margaret Murphy, a student of this era, states that in 1943, she was one of twelve persons in the graduating class. She remarked that President Wade held the college together at a truly demanding time, and faculty members did many things gratis. In spite of the hardships encountered, Miss Murphy referred to those two years as "special."<sup>44</sup> Jennie Kiely, a 1941 graduate, could also recall the financial issues faced by the college and expressed elation at the fact that Dr. Wade was president at the time. She admired the man and his leadership, and observed that he enjoyed the students and everyone loved him. She also mentioned that Mrs. Greever, sponsor of the sorority in which she held membership, had a sleepover for the young ladies in the little house on campus where she lived.<sup>45</sup> This action on Mrs. Greever's part obviously made a great impression on Mrs. Kiely (Miss French at the time,) and, perhaps, on the other young ladies as well.

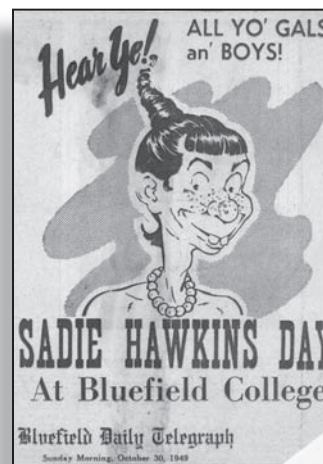
Mrs. Keily's sister, Ellen White Ratliff, and another Miss French at the time, had graduated in 1937. She also found the college environment at that time a happy one. She recalled Dr. Wade as a fine man and also remembered that he took students on speech and music trips. Her most memorable recollection was the religious atmosphere that existed on campus. She saw evidence of Christian love and positive influences during her two years there. She concluded her comments by stating that she was happy at Bluefield.<sup>46</sup>

Mary Beth Thomas, class of 1943, saw Mr. Wade as a leader who was very much in evidence on the campus, staying in touch with the students, and attending various functions. She found on campus friendly, intimate relationships and enjoyed her classes and teachers. She would be one of a number of female students who enlisted to serve their country during this time of war.<sup>47</sup> From the male perspective, Thurmond Scruggs had much to offer. He entered the college in September, 1942, and spent eight months at Bluefield prior

to his induction into the U.S. Army in 1943. It was a time of extreme uncertainty for him, as well as for all male students. He expressed it in this way: "We were full of patriotism and eager to face the enemy to defend our country. For an eighteen-year old it was a very serious time in our lives."<sup>48</sup> The young men spent much of their spare time discussing advantages and disadvantages of the different branches of service. Most of the young men in the sophomore class had already been called to active duty, so the number of men had decreased to the extent that they constituted a minority at the college. This was a far cry from many of the earlier years.

The year 1942, Mr. Scruggs remarked, was still operating in "the shadows of the depression," so most of his friends felt blessed to be at Bluefield College, a fine school in their home town, affordable and offering "an excellent faculty and Christian atmosphere."<sup>49</sup> He remembered the activity of fraternities and sororities in both the social and academic realms. There were socials and dances at the Bluefield Country Club with professors as chaperones. He recalled the good fellowship enjoyed in the so-called "slop shop" beneath the dining hall, where Mrs. Greever was manager and served as guidance counselor, mother, and disciplinarian to everyone who came there. He said "we all loved her and depended on her for advice and help."<sup>50</sup> June Grubb, in an interview, supported this picture of Mrs. Greever by calling her a "great, great lady."<sup>51</sup> Mr. Scruggs concluded his comments by stating that the "slop shop" was a "place for a refreshing soft drink and a break between classes."<sup>52</sup> I believe that what Mr. Scruggs had to say about the college when he attended would be fairly representative of what other male students who were there at the same time would have to say.

Thus, even in the midst of some mental anguish concerning what lay ahead of them, there still were moments of relaxation, fellowship, and fun for the students. Campus life was active. In the case of the freshmen failing to elect class officers because of verbal exchange between the dormitory



SADIE HAWKINS DAY, 1949



and town students, things can be said to have been too active, too confrontational. A different tone could be noted in the party given by the KOA's at Kirkland Lodge in honor of the Alumni who were entering the armed services. A good spirit was evident there. The 500 Club became another addition to the organizational life of the campus.<sup>53</sup> However, this club disbanded during the war period. All twelve members pledged to meet at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York on the first New Year's Eve after the war. Three of the group enlisted in the Naval Air Corps.<sup>54</sup> It would be interesting to know whether or not the men kept this pledge. Regretfully, I am unable to provide the answer.

Sororities met once a month and provided their own entertainment. Women students helped the Red Cross efforts and wrote letters to the servicemen.<sup>55</sup> The KOA Fraternity members were seeking to organize a bowling team to provide another recreational outlet for students.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the first inter-fraternity-sorority spring formal would be held at the Bluefield Country Club with four Greek-letter groups serving as sponsors.<sup>57</sup>

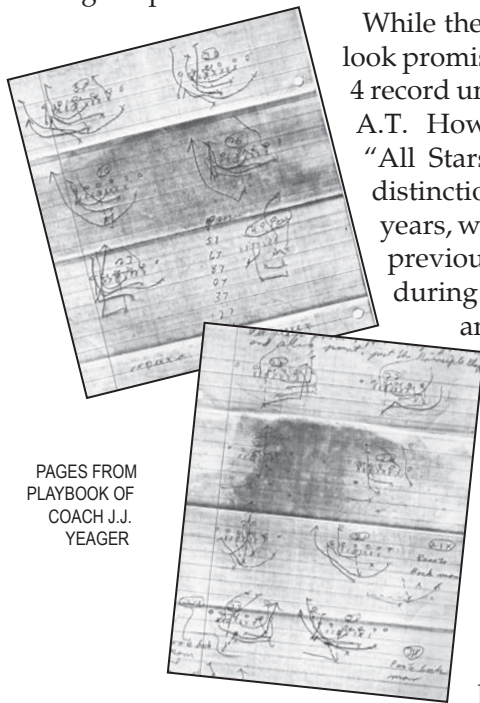
While the situation for football did not look promising, the team did achieve a 4-4 record under coaches Tony Loltito and A.T. Howard. The Bluefield College "All Stars," a baseball team, had the distinction of going undefeated for two years, winning twenty-four games the previous season and eighteen games during the current season (1941

and 1942). The team manager commented: "It hurts to see boys go, but Uncle Sam needs them more than I do."<sup>58</sup> The reality of war was showing up in a big way on this small campus. Ten students had entered the armed forces throughout the final half of 1942. Others had enlisted and were to be sworn in during the

summer.<sup>59</sup> Representatives from the various branches of the Armed Services came to the campus to speak to the students and to conduct recruiting. There were calls for women engineers and technicians. At the time, the college had only one female engineering student, Ann Johnston, who would graduate in March and transfer to V.P.I.<sup>60</sup>

The college sought to speed up the education process for the young men who expected to go into military service, following a pattern that was operating throughout the entire nation. The regular school session would be divided into three terms – September 22 – December 18; December 30 – March 19; March 22 – June 4. The cost would be \$50.00 per quarter for day students and \$140.00 per quarter for those living in the dormitory. The summer quarter would extend from June 23 until September 10.<sup>61</sup> Programs for the male students between the ages of 20-27 and who held junior status provided the option for enlistment in Call 1-A of the Navy and completion of their junior and senior years of college. After completion of their college program, they would be sent to one of the Naval training schools for a period of time and earn their commissions as Ensigns. The Navy V-1 program existed for students 17-19. Other programs existed for the other branches of service. The V-5 and V-7 also operated to allow young men to continue their education. Students who enlisted in the Enlisted Reserve Corps had to demonstrate that they were good officer material and would benefit from continued education.<sup>62</sup>

James E. McCoy, former professor, had joined the ranks of departures from Bluefield College. He held the rank of Captain and served as chief of the chemical warfare section of the Air Corps Service Commission in Washington, D.C. Bible professor Ray Tindall had been commissioned a Lieutenant J.G. in the U.S. Naval Reserves as a chaplain. He had served as Pastor of College Avenue Baptist Church for the past three years, while also serving the college. He was due to report to his station by May 1.<sup>63</sup> At the Baptist Student Union Banquet held at the church on April 19, Floyd LeSueur, ministerial student, had presented a Dopp Kit to Reverend Tindall.<sup>64</sup> The kit would aid in performing his chaplain duties. Syd Barksdale, Professor of Journalism and Editor of the *Sunset News* newspaper, received his commissioning as a Lieutenant J.G. in the U.S. Naval Reserves and his orders to report for active duty.<sup>65</sup> Gibson Morrissey performed what would amount to his final college duties when he led the music for the baccalaureate and commencement services. His



PAGES FROM  
PLAYBOOK OF  
COACH J.J.  
YEAGER



MONOGRAM CLUB, 1949

orders called him to report for military service by June 10.<sup>66</sup>

In connection with the two services at the college, while there were still men in the choir to go along with the young ladies, alumni members joined the choir to supplement its numbers.<sup>67</sup> In addition, the Alumni, at the Alumni Banquet, presented awards for the highest scholastic averages achieved by students in the sororities and fraternities.<sup>68</sup> The involvement of the alumni during these difficult days speaks well of their concern and desire to assist in meaningful ways.

While the focus has been on the male students and faculty members, it should be mentioned that a good number of female students also left the campus to serve their country. The Delta Beta Kappa Society had three of its members take the oath to serve in the U.S. Jr. Cadet Nurses Corps and to prepare to assume their duties in only a short while.<sup>69</sup> This move came during the final year of the war, but other women had entered various branches of service earlier. It is a credit to both men and women who would dedicate themselves to serve their country, and, at the same time, bring honor to Bluefield College through their service.

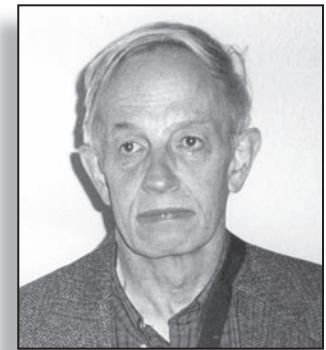
In the midst of times that were basically somber and serious, a light note could be found in the report contained in the *Collegian* of December 3, 1942. It stated that the northerners on campus "almost cried with joy when it snowed in Bluefield."<sup>70</sup> Two years later, the college newspaper featured an *In Memoriam* page and an editorial that provided a vivid picture of the atmosphere on the campus

at that time. Conversations among students had changed. They were now discussing international affairs. Social life had basically disappeared, and the students were devoting more time and effort to their subject areas and problems in the world, while discussing how to meet and deal with those problems. The writer of the editorial then added these words:

And we hope that this knowledge will stand us in good stead in the future....that the days at Bluefield would help the students go forward and take active roles in the newer brighter world of tomorrow.<sup>71</sup>

At this particular period, the faculty consisted of Dr. Wade and ten other members. In 1944, the Freshman class consisted of thirty-eight students, of which number twelve were men. The Sophomore class had fourteen students, all female. In the following year, the Freshman class had eighteen women and fourteen men, while the Sophomore class had only seven individuals.<sup>72</sup> In this 1945 class, Nobel Prize winner John Nash missed out on having his picture taken.

When one notes these numbers just given, it becomes very clear that Bluefield College's existence today has to be termed an absolute miracle. Its ability to continue to provide an educational program under the circumstances can only be attributed to the staunch faith of those men and women who served the college, along with the sacrifices that they had to make. It is also a tribute to those students who attended the college during those perilous days and to those parents or guardians who supported them.



JOHN F. NASH, JR.

There is one key factor that certainly played an important part in Bluefield's survival. In the May 11, 1944, issue of the *Religious Herald*, a picture appeared. In this picture, C.A. Lilly, Frank S. Easley, Edwin Wade, and David M. Easley - all significant individuals in the life of the college - were engaged in the act of burning the mortgage notes and bonds, an act which symbolized that the institution was now debt-free. Several months earlier, the Virginia Baptist Board of Missions and Education had assumed the debt of the college by the

purchase of all bonds. Contributions of the Women's Missionary Union to the denomination and receipts through the Cooperative Program took care of the obligations assumed by the Board. The Home Mission Board generously released the mortgage which it held against the college to the Virginia Baptist Board of Missions and Education.<sup>73</sup> God's hand could be seen at work here.



PROFESSOR E. M. LOUTHAN, 1942

A survey done in 1944-45 through the efforts of Dr. Wade, Professors Williams and Louthan, and Mr. George Works had, as its primary purpose, to provide a better understanding of the work and services of Bluefield College for the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Trustees, and friends of the college. It gave enrollment figures from the 1934-35 session through the 1939-40 year with the 1938-39 year leading with 306 students. The college's primary sources for its funds were through fees and gifts, and

its \$100,000 plus endorsement was invested primarily in residences rented to faculty members. Expenditures for faculty salaries amounted to approximately \$30,000 yearly. Increases for several major positions were imperative. The library and the labs needed greater funding. The college should spend at least \$25,000 over the next three years on existing buildings to put them in good condition. Everything in the total program should be brought to the level of Southern Association requirements. The churches should provide anywhere from ten to twelve thousand dollars in support yearly, while Bluefielders should give an equal amount.<sup>74</sup> This particular survey would prove to be very helpful in charting the course that the college needed to take in several major areas of its life.

In May, 1944, action would be taken by the Trustees in which they left the reopening of the dormitory and the dining hall to the discretion of President Wade and the Executive Committee. At this meeting, fourteen women graduates received trustee approval.<sup>75</sup> Dr. Wade's contract expired in June. The Mission and Education Board suggested that there be a closer cooperation between Bluefield College and the University of Richmond. There was an agreement to pursue this suggestion with the stipulation that the ultimate

control of Bluefield should stay with the Trustees.<sup>76</sup> Whether such a path would be followed in the months ahead cannot be verified by any material researched, but subsequent action by the Trustees leaves the impression that if it was, the ultimate determination to keep Bluefield a separate entity prevailed in the end. According to the December 17, 1945, Trustee minutes, this body asked Reverend Charles L. Harman to assume the presidency with a salary not to exceed \$4200.00 and a home.<sup>77</sup> Reverend Harman, later Dr. Harman by virtue of an honorary doctorate awarded by his Alma Mater, Lynchburg College, made his election contingent upon the Trustee acceptance of the platform that he would put into place if elected head of the school. On January 22, 1946, the Trustees voted to accept Reverend Harman and his platform.<sup>78</sup>

In September, 1946, when the college began its fall term, facilities closed during the war had reopened and 415 students, of which number 268 were veterans, received a warm welcome from President Harman, faculty, and staff. Now, they were to become acquainted with the platform that the president had stipulated must be accepted by the Trustees as part of his leadership of the college.<sup>79</sup> He would explain to the students through a letter that a thoroughly Christian college required certain standards, and, with the backing of the faculty, Trustees, and Baptists of Virginia, he felt the obligation and necessity of implementing these standards.<sup>80</sup> The platform which would be in effect included a ban on dancing, drinking, profanity, fraternities and sororities, anti-democratic groups, and smoking by the young women on campus. Chapel would be held four days weekly. There were hopes of organizing a Baptist Student Union. The overall aim of the school would be to operate as a Christian campus.<sup>81</sup> What a veteran who had attended the college prior to entering military service and now returned to the campus would find would be greatly changed from the campus under Dr. Wade's administration.

The changes reflected the new president's philosophy about Christian education. In his first annual report to the Trustees, he admitted that he had a "great lack of experience," but he accepted the position with "a great zeal for Christian Education and the firm conviction that real Christian Education could and should be present on the Bluefield College campus."<sup>82</sup> He would declare at a much later point in his career that a Christian college should seek "to assess and evaluate every activity and program in the light of Christian

truth."<sup>83</sup> This stance would be held throughout his twenty-six years of service.

The new president found great acceptance among Virginia Baptists. The Pastors conference of the Blue Ridge Association made the following statement at the time: "We further recommend him



PRESIDENT CHARLES HARMAN,  
1946

to his new field of service as president of Bluefield College as a wise executive, influential leader, and a consecrated Christian."<sup>84</sup> What, then, was the background of this new leader for the college?

Charles Lee Harman, native of Missouri, transplanted to Virginia as a result of his father's ministry calling to a Baptist church in Lynchburg, graduated from Lynchburg College with his undergraduate degree and from Georgia Tech with a graduate degree. He returned to his alma mater to teach for five years prior to his call into the ministry. At the college, he was professor of chemistry and math and was Head of the Physics and Math Departments.<sup>85</sup> He entered Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, to prepare for the ministry. There, he earned both his Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees. His first field of service would include churches in Narrows and Rich Creek, Virginia. Starling Avenue Baptist church in Martinsville, Virginia called him to become its pastor, a call which he accepted. He went there and served until his acceptance of the presidency of Bluefield College in 1946.<sup>86</sup>

Following an impressive inauguration ceremony held on October 24, 1946, during which he challenged the audience through a message entitled "That The World May Know" he continued his walk on an uncharted course begun several months earlier. It was uncharted, not in the sense of Reverend Harman not knowing under whose guidance he would lead the school, but, rather, in the sense that his role now called for him to enter new territory. Aside from his experience gained while at Lynchburg College, his work had been in church ministry.

Dr. George Modlin, newly-elected president of the University of

Richmond, provided the main address at the inauguration service. He urged his listeners that day to support an ever-growing program at Bluefield as Reverend Harman led the school.<sup>87</sup> The two men would be in close contact as they served their respective institutions for a quarter of a century.

The beginning years for Reverend Harman would have been challenging under the usual circumstances connected with an institution of higher learning. The campus did not experience the usual circumstances with the flood of veterans entering in both 1946 and 1947. Summer and Fall enrollments reached 502 in 1947 with 212 of this number being ex-servicemen, out of a total of 382 students, making up the fall figures. An amazing 150 of the student body were enrolled in engineering. While the college welcomed these G.I.s, it also came to realize that there would be a financial issue involved in having them. Until the money from the G.I. Bill program arrived at the school, the college had to operate on borrowed money. When the funds did come, it enabled the school to repay all of the borrowed money plus interest due by March of 1947. The problem eased eventually as the federal government came to realize the impact that its policy on payments was having on the educational institutions.<sup>88</sup> Other schools experienced the same issue, but the small colleges with limited resources would be the hardest pressed in maintaining their programs.

Aside from the financial issues, the college had to deal with the veterans themselves. Whereas the greater number of them conducted themselves well and were serious about their studies, there were some who did otherwise. Tyler Easley remarked that some played practical jokes and could get through any door on campus, even if it was locked. They took a Model T Ford apart, carried the pieces to the third floor Chapel, and reassembled them there at Halloween.<sup>89</sup> Robert Bruch, class of 1948, mentioned that many of the veterans were not too eager to follow the rules. They evaded Chapel services whenever possible.<sup>90</sup> Other veterans interviewed also spoke of this negative reaction to chapel services and the four times a week requirement. E.H. "Babe" Kensinger indicated that Mrs. Mann, English Professor, found the veterans hard to handle and encouraged some of those who offended her the most to get out and work and forget college.<sup>91</sup>

Mr. Mack Gynn, class of 1949 and a returning veteran who started at Bluefield College in June, 1946, pointed to a group of

ex-servicemen who were disruptive to a certain extent. They had been following orders and often had experienced so much while in the service, that it was a challenge for them to follow rules on the campus. He stated that the school administrators and faculty bent over backwards to be nice to the veterans and to treat them well. Few cases of disruptive behavior were dealt with severely. Many who had been among the troublemakers “pulled in their horns because they were treated so well,” according to Mr. Guynn.<sup>92</sup> He felt that Reverend Harman maintained a friendliness, along with decorum and handled the situation well.<sup>93</sup>

Luther Barrett, class of 1948, called President Harman one of the finest gentlemen that he had ever met. He had the school at heart. He knew the students. He did not try to impress anyone. He attended the ball games and mingled with the students. Mr. Barrett did add that he, along with other ex-servicemen, did get away with some things that they shouldn't have.<sup>94</sup> Buddy Caldwell, in attendance in the postwar era, expressed his feeling that the teachers were good to and understanding of the veterans.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, in viewing the situation at the time under Reverend Harman's guidance, it can probably be said that the new president weathered the test and demonstrated through his kindness and Christian love, joined with firmness where it was required, that he was in charge. Luther Barrett stated it this way in complimenting the president: [a president] “who really knew how to be a friend and yet maintain his status of college president.” He would add that “it took a special kind of man to be chief administrator” where there existed such a great difference between the returning veterans and the high school graduates. He saw Mr. Harman as the type of leader required for the time.<sup>96</sup>

A major problem with the library services at the college had stood in the way of the college being granted accreditation during Mr. Wade's administration. This was true even though the library had been moved from its original location in the administration building to a section of the dining hall. As the institution continued to face this problem under President Harman, it came to light that the federal government could provide such a facility. It would not be the easiest thing in the world to turn down an offer of such significance, but Reverend Harman and the Board of Trustees did decline it after receiving input from Baptist pastors throughout Virginia. The Trustees

gave the unanimous approval to this action and began to plan for this facility when Baptists and friends could provide sufficient funds to take care of this need. The college leadership expressed the belief that acceptance of the government offer of a library would violate the separation of church and state doctrine. While there would be critics of this position, there would also be many supporters. The Executive Committee of Trustees received authorization to take to the Baptists of Virginia the great and urgent need for a new library and to urge their support financially for it.

The college gained national attention for its stand on this issue. C.E. Bryant, Director of Publicity of Baylor University, wrote in the *Christian Century* magazine these words: “Only one church college in this nation – Bluefield, a Baptist institution in Virginia – refused to accept property offered to it.” His article was entitled “Churches in a Tax Grab.” An editorial appearing in the *Sunset News* newspaper several years later complimented the college for its position on this matter:

Frankly, we applaud the school for its efforts to operate the college on its own. By doing so it escapes some of the bureaucratic controls that come with every federal dollar. We hope that it will be able to operate as it wants for many years to come....

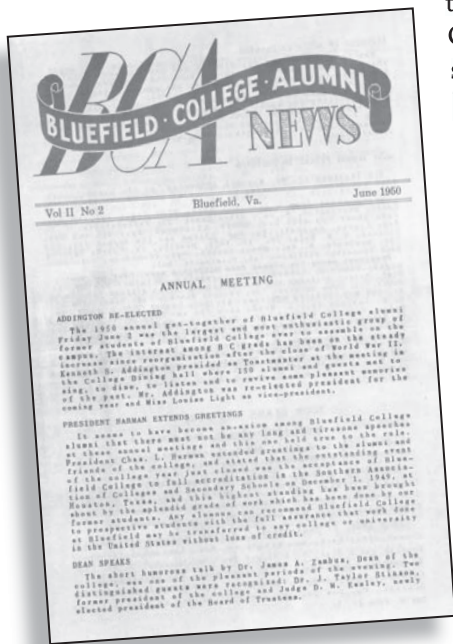
Bluefield College is unique, but pleasingly so in these days of the grant give away, and we are happy to be so close to it.



THE OLD GYMNASIUM, LONG SERVICED, 1947

The school had to wait patiently for nine years to be able to undertake this project, but, in 1955, the funds did become available. The administration and Trustees approved the plans and specifications. Bids began in March of that year with actual construction expected to get underway not too long following the bidding process.<sup>97</sup> Ground breaking actually took place in April. Two former Bluefield College presidents, Dr. J. Taylor Stinson and Dr. Edwin Wade, joined with Judge David M. Easley, head of the Trustees, to turn over the first piece of earth on the site. Four gentlemen who had been a part of the group going to Bristol from Bluefield in 1919 were also present for the occasion. These men were W.W. Kersey, Bass Perkins, Walter Perkins, and Isadore Cohen. What a blessing it was when this facility had its dedication on May 26, 1956, and opened its doors to offer the college space to house four times as many volumes as the old library. It also had the distinction of being the first building constructed since 1925. It was truly an occasion for rejoicing for the entire college family, community people, and Baptists throughout Virginia.

The library was certainly a vital issue with which the college had



ALUMNI MAGAZINE, 1950

to deal, but there were others. Chapel had to be held in two sessions when the student body was too large for the facility to accommodate the entire group. One half of the students met on Tuesday and Thursday, while the other half met on Wednesday and Friday. Still, another concern was that of having to turn away girl applicants because there was no dormitory for them.<sup>98</sup> Obviously, these were great needs for the school. Along with these problems existed a pressing need for a larger gymnasium to replace the “temporary” one that had now served the college

for twenty years. Rounding out the list of needs, there should be a greater number of Baptist teachers, additional financial support, and, last but not least, more prayers offered by Virginia Baptists in support of the institution.<sup>99</sup>

As fewer veterans attended Bluefield, the enrollment dropped, reaching 230 in the fall of 1948. In the following year, there was a further decrease, this time to 217.<sup>100</sup> While enrollment took a plunge, other things were looking up for the school. Thanks to the Virginia Baptist Women’s Missionary Union’s gift of \$5000.00, a new heating plant would be secured. A bus used by the Consolidated Bus Company for passenger service from Bluefield to the coal field areas came to the school at a reasonable cost. It made it possible to transport the choir and athletic teams to places where they would perform.<sup>101</sup> Other improvements were also being made to strengthen the college and enable it to carry out its mission more effectively. Costs of attending the school were on the rise with resident students now paying \$565.00 each school session for tuition, room, and board.<sup>102</sup>

1949 was a monumental year for the college. For three days – March 31, April 1 and 2 – Bluefield College would serve as host chapter for delegates from 115 chapters of Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society for Junior Colleges.<sup>103</sup> The convention meetings were held in Bluefield, West Virginia, at the West Virginia Hotel, a premier facility.<sup>104</sup> The chapter at Bluefield had been organized in 1937 under the sponsorship of Marvin Williams, professor of Biology at the time of this special national gathering.<sup>105</sup> In the final count, 131 delegates from 42 chapters across the country attended. Thus, approximately only one third of the chapters sent delegates. Yet, those who did attend received many benefits from their participation. Reverend Harman took the time to send one letter to those schools sending only one delegate, and another one to those sending more than one delegate. He expressed appreciation to each chapter for allowing the college to have fellowship with their delegate or delegates.<sup>106</sup> It definitely was a unique and special privilege for Bluefield to serve as the host chapter.

Another development in that year was the presence of a committee from the Baptist Board of Missions and Education, a committee from the American Association of Junior Colleges, and a committee from the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities on the campus

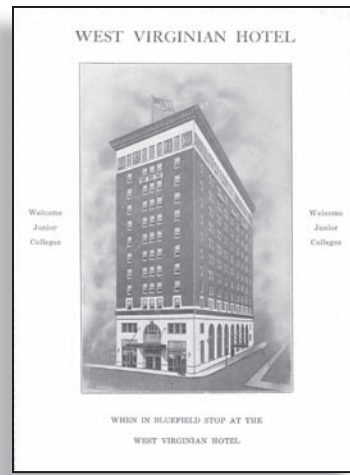
at various times to determine if Bluefield met the requirements for accreditation. SACS decision would be announced at the December meeting of the Southern Association.<sup>107</sup> The *Alumni Newsletter* of December proclaimed the outcome with the ringing message "Bluefield accredited!" President Harman and Professor E.M. Louthan attended the meeting. Former President Edwin C. Wade received recognition and much credit for his "tireless efforts on this matter."<sup>108</sup> He had laid the groundwork upon which his successor had been able to build successfully. The *Sunset News* spoke of a "sound foundation upon which the college could continue to develop and expand its influence" in the light of its newly received accreditation.<sup>109</sup>

The Baptist General Association, through its representatives, expressed appreciation to the teachers at the college for their part in helping to achieve the success of gaining accreditation. The Association also delivered these words:

We want to thank our Virginia Baptist men and women for backing this 'Light' which God has planted here high on this great Appalachian Plateau.<sup>110</sup>

It required teamwork to attain accreditation, and the team consisted of many components. The recognition of Virginia Baptists by the General Association was an appropriate action.

A third major development in 1949 was the approval of a motion to change the charter to make the college coeducational, this action being taken by the Trustees. This change would be approved but did not actually occur until 1951.<sup>111</sup> A fourth significant thing to happen for the school was the election of Dr. James Zambus to the position of Dean of the College, effective September 1.<sup>112</sup> He succeeded the beloved C.W. Owen who had held the post since 1923 and who would now be Dean Emeritus.<sup>113</sup> Dean Owen, by special approval,



THE WEST VIRGINIA HOTEL,  
A PREMIER FACILITY, 1956

continued to teach the courses that he had been teaching for a while longer.<sup>114</sup> This gave many more students the opportunity to know this gentleman and to experience his instruction in the classroom.

Students who were privileged to have Dean Owen for a class or classes have a strong remembrance of his uniqueness, especially in terms of the sayings that he used. It seems most appropriate to include and to enjoy a sampling of these words of wisdom in this story of the college, for he himself can be said to be an institution. One that every one of the students of my acquaintance can recall is "the better the association, the better the memory." Not only do they remember it, they vouch for it in their own experiences of learning. Another one that he used was from Winston Churchill, the great British statesman. It stated that "it is more important to live well than merely to live long." Another whose source is uncertain is "It is the set of the sails, and not the gales, that determines the way we go." Finally, "Education is what you have after you have forgotten what you learned in school."<sup>115</sup> Many of the sayings used by Dean Owen were taken from various sources, but he made them his own to pass on to the students. Neither they nor the man will ever be forgotten.

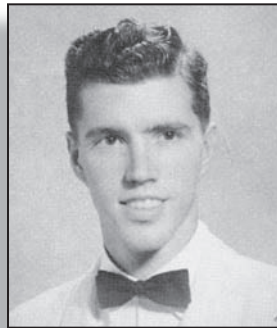
A sad note that must be injected into this story relates to the death of the Harmans' elder son, Charles Lee, Jr. He died of a brain tumor on August 12, 1950, at the University of Virginia Hospital. This writer had the privilege of being a classmate until Charles's transfer to Graham High School on the Virginia side.<sup>116</sup> His untimely and early death was a great shock to so many people, and it brought sadness to the campus. While the Harmans were devastated by their loss, they could express their faith in these words:

But we feel that God needed a drummer boy for the great symphony orchestra that plays continually before the Great White Throne in Heaven. He has called our boy to a greater task than he could ever have had on earth, and one day we shall see him again there in Heaven as he plays forever before the King to whom he had dedicated his life.

Their faith would serve as inspiration to others, and, so, the Harmans with their younger son, John, would continue their service to the college, the community, and to Virginia Baptists.

In 1951, the president received from the Trustees the authorization to divide the existing dormitory into male and female sections. In addition, he could hire a Dean of Women and a housemother. At the same meeting where these decisions were made, there was a focus on the enforcement of an enactment of 1950 which made retirement of a faculty member at the age of seventy a requirement.<sup>117</sup> The dormitory did convert to a divided residence hall to house the men in one part and the women in the other half of the building. Even with this change, the enrollment in 1951 dropped. Nevertheless, Reverend Harman would say in regard to the young ladies who did live in the dormitory that first year, that "the young ladies have added much to the life of our campus." No doubt, every male resident in the dormitory shared his view. The stories that students, female and male, who shared this housing arrangement can relate are plentiful, varied, and, definitely, colorful. Most assuredly, they are entertaining.

The Baptist Student Union, organized in the fall of 1947, was a dream come true for President Harman.<sup>118</sup> When this organization was up and running, it made splendid strides, attaining First Magnitude, the highest level possible, and becoming the first Virginia College to do so. It achieved this award several years in succession. Very early in its life, the president of this group would be elected state president and its faculty advisor



WILLIAM BILL TUCK, 1955

would be selected advisor for the state group. Helen Siner, class of 1954, went as a B.S.U. missionary to Jamaica that summer, whereas Bill Tuck, President of the college B.S.U., served as a missionary to Hawaii in 1955.<sup>119</sup> Other students would go out in the years to follow all the way up to the present day. B.S.U. has been a vital force for the spiritual life of the campus since day one. A large number of students were committing their lives to full-time Christian service, in some capacity. What



ALUMNA HELEN SINER WOOD, 1954

was taking place on campus in this fifties decade was a reflection of the purpose of the college to return to the denomination (not always Baptist) young men and women who had been given a "Christian interpretation of life..."<sup>120</sup>

As previously mentioned, the new library had its dedication on May 26, 1956. Its construction, coming some thirty-one years after the gymnasium had been built, brought a new spirit to the campus and served as a motivating factor for further construction. The Baptist General Association referred to it as "a tribute to the policy of separation of church and state."<sup>121</sup> Perhaps, the spirit realized in the building of the library caught on with the enrollment for the fall of 1956 climbing to 300. A new music facility took over the President's former home on campus.<sup>122</sup> The Harmans moved into a house across the main road in front of the college. This residence had been purchased in June, 1956.<sup>123</sup> It would be a lovely and comfortable home with spacious grounds to serve the needs, not only of the Harmans, but of later presidents all the way up to the present day. It was a wise and beneficial action on the part of the college officials. This home will now serve as office space for Instructional Advancement, Alumni Affairs and Public Relations. President Olive and his family live off campus.

The post office relocated from its old location in the Administration building to the "Sweet Shop" or "Slop Shop," depending on who was talking about the gathering place beneath the dining hall.<sup>124</sup> In doing this, it provided the students with the convenience of getting their mail and having their snack times in the same location. Another significant development that actually took place in 1953 was the awarding of an honorary L.L.D. degree to President Harman by his Alma Mater, Lynchburg College. Now, this writer, for the balance of the coverage of this administration, will refer to him as Dr. Harman when recounting the events and happenings of the remaining years of his tenure.

Other positive things happening at the college included the election of a second Bluefield College student as national president of Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society. This honor went to Ralph Patsel in 1957. Henry Martin had been accorded the honor in 1949.<sup>125</sup> Such achievements were a tribute to the quality of students these young men were, but they also served as a means of recognizing the Bluefield College chapter and Professor Williams who had organized





PHI THETA KAPPA, 1950

and sponsored the chapter for twenty years. Further distinction came to the school, when the "Rambling Reds" basketball team made it all the way to the national tournament in Springfield, Missouri, only to lose there. It was still a proud occasion for the college and merited it being highlighted in the President's Report of 1948. By 1957, Bluefield was involved in a cooperative arrangement with Radford College. A student could complete two years in Elementary and Secondary Education, then transfer and complete the process for a B.S. or B.A. degree in either field.<sup>126</sup>

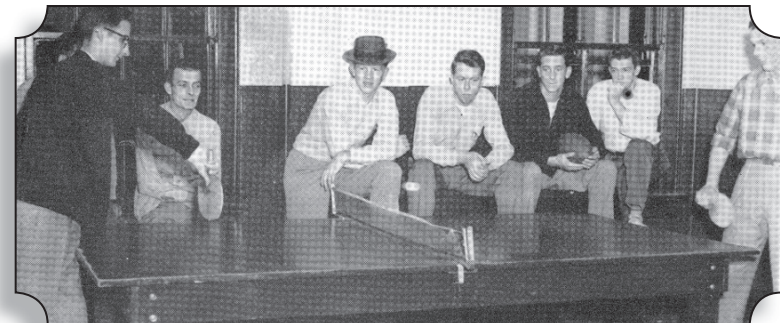
On May 1, 1957, a fund-raising campaign commenced under the direction of the National Fund-Raising Services, Inc. The goal was to raise one million dollars for the construction of three buildings – a women's dormitory, a chapel, and a science building. The campaign would be seeking to raise \$350,000 by September 1, 1957, with a concentration on the local area. Phase Two would move out into the states of Virginia and West Virginia.<sup>127</sup>

By the following year, over \$430,000 had been pledged. An architect was busy completing the plans for the women's dormitory, the first building scheduled for construction.<sup>128</sup> Bids for this facility opened on February 3, 1959, with a Roanoke contractor getting the job.<sup>129</sup> The work got underway on this much needed project. Fall enrollment in 1959 was 279, so the dormitory would definitely fill a need. Scholarships in the amount of \$100.00 each were going to those who

had chosen to go into full time Christian work. The Baptist Student Union continued to be a very important organization in helping to steer students into Christian vocations.<sup>130</sup>

The new dormitory would provide for more young ladies who had in mind already or were considering some phase of Christian service to come to the college. Of course, one also has to note that many students found their calling only after being at the college for a time and experiencing meaningful influences there. Thus, when the Women's Dormitory opened on September 6, 1960, to receive its first occupants, it was an exciting time. Built at a cost of \$385,000, the building had all outstanding bills associated with it paid.<sup>131</sup> This facility also included classrooms for the Business Department on the ground floor, so it was more than just a place to house young women.<sup>132</sup>

Now, with a strong view that dormitory space should be given to Baptist young people recommended by their pastors (sixty-two



RESIDENCE LIFE, 1951



GRONDBREAKING FOR RISH HALL, A NEW WOMEN'S RESIDENCE HALL

percent of the students were Baptist at this time), the next step was to work to fill both dormitories.<sup>133</sup> Lest this leaves the reader with the impression that the college catered to Baptists solely, let it be said that this has never been the case throughout the school's history. Catholics, Jews, Methodists, Church of Christ, Presbyterians, and a host of other groups have been well represented in the student body over the years. It has been this way from the opening days of Bluefield until this very day. Because it is a Baptist institution, many students of this persuasion do attend, and the college does encourage those young people affiliated with Baptist churches to consider it when they are selecting a college. On the same hand, the young people affiliated with other religious groups, or no religious group at all, also receive invitations to consider Bluefield.

Dr. Lansdell had said in those beginning days: Its doors will be open to young men of all faiths or no faith on the same conditions. All its advantages are for all its students with special privileges to none. A lighthouse cannot be partial in shedding its rays.

The name, W.A. Sutherland, should be considered synonymous with Bluefield College. He entered the Fitting School division, finished there, and began his college studies. He graduated in 1928, after serving as secretary to the president and giving up one year in school to assist with the One Million Dollar Campaign under Dr. Lansdell. He continued his service in the president's office from 1930 until 1942 when he left to serve in the Virginia Unemployment Commission in Richmond, Virginia, as that agency's Chief Disbursing Officer during the war. His love for his alma mater brought him back to Bluefield to take up the role of secretary to the president, then Dr. Harman, and to reactivate the work of the Alumni Association.<sup>134</sup>



BC's ALUMNI NEWS MAGAZINE, 1960



DEBATE TEAM WITH FACULTY ADVISOR, VELMA JACKSON, 1950

He worked diligently to create a useful file of alumni and continued in this effort for several years. However, in line with Dr. Harman's desire to improve public relations, especially in terms of contact with high schools, changes were in order in the Alumni office management and outreach. Thus, in 1961, Mr. Sutherland took retirement, and Ralph Patsel, former student and graduate, stepped into this position.<sup>135</sup> Mr. Sutherland, or "Doc" Sutherland, as many knew him, died on July 31, 1966. The *Alumni News*, in response to his death, stated that he was one who never sought the limelight and one who had a deep love for Bluefield College and a great loyalty to the institution. It also said about Mr. Sutherland that "to know him was to love him because of his genial, sweet spirit."<sup>136</sup>

Ralph Patsel, enthusiastic, energetic, motivated by his love for the college, and possessing good skills for the task, commenced a new avenue of reaching out for the college. "Road-running" became the tool in the effort to reach prospective students. He attended College Day and College Night programs in various high schools throughout Virginia primarily but, to some degree, in neighboring West Virginia schools as well. This particular approach enabled him to talk with prospective students, answer questions about the college, and distribute publicity materials.<sup>137</sup> This writer, having known Mr. Patsel for a lengthy period of time, can add that this ambassador for the college undoubtedly won over many students with his winsome personality and easy manner when he had the opportunities to work with them. His influence and tactics had a positive impact as more

alumni began to respond to contacts made with them. Another very helpful move was that of the Alumni Association and the college affiliating with the American Alumni Council, effective on September 1, 1961. All of this new activity would be extremely beneficial to the college.

The college also benefited from scholarships established in honor of two long-time faculty members who were scheduled for retirement at the conclusion of the 1961-1962 school year. Mr. Elijah M. Louthan had been with the school since its beginning. Dr. Claude W. Owen had been there one year fewer than his colleague.<sup>138</sup> Both had played key roles in the life of the institution. Mr. Louthan helped to coach the football team in its infancy, taught math, and served as registrar and treasurer and business manager. Dr. Owen had combined his teaching of sociology, education, psychology, and perhaps one or two other courses with his services as Dean. These men were, indeed, "giants" at the college, providing leadership and serving as wonderful examples or models of Christian love and concern both on and off campus. At a later time, a scholarship honoring Mrs. Velma Jackson, still serving the college at the time, came into existence. She, too, had been one of the long-serving faculty members, challenging many students who sat under her instruction in English. This writer was one of those students, and he vouches for the excellent teaching skills of Mrs. Jackson, even though he had papers returned with numerous red marks. She truly helped me and countless other students to hone their skills in all aspects of English. While she was not easy as a teacher, she cared for and wanted every student to succeed in her courses and in life. Basically this was true of most of the teachers at the college, and the same can be said of teachers throughout the years up to the present day group of men and women who serve.



ALUMNI NEWS FROM 1968

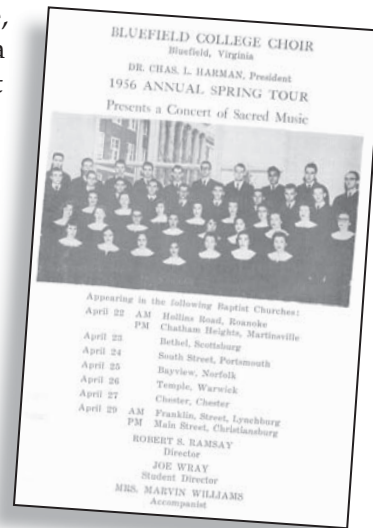
Alumni response to an appeal for a "Living Endowment" program that began in 1953 was good. In part, the letter sent out to the alumni announcing the program stated:

We feel it is now time to give our alumni a chance to have a part in the 'Christian Education' movement which is taking place in the United States...an opportunity to build at Bluefield College a lasting monument to God and to each of us who have a part in it.<sup>139</sup>

Mr. Sutherland, still Alumni Director, indicated the positive response, saying that he had been kept busy sending thank-you notes for the gifts sent.<sup>140</sup>

Before getting immersed in the affairs of the college in the sixties, there are several things related to the 1950's that should be mentioned. While I have in mind the goal to present the college story chronologically for the most part, I will reserve the right to slip back in time on occasion or to go forward in time.

Bluefield College's "Alma Mater" song resulted from the collaborative efforts of two faculty members. Dr. James Zambus, Dean and history professor, wrote the words, and Professor Frank Stovall of the Music Department provided the music. This song has resonated on the campus countless times since its creation during the 1950s, always bringing a thrill to the heart and, perhaps, on occasion,



SPRING CHOIR TOUR PROGRAM, 1956

a tear or two to the eyes. The words convey well the purpose of the institution and speak of its favorable location at the juncture of the two Virginias in the presence of the mountains.

Frank Stovall came to Bluefield College in 1952 with his infant son and wife. Dr. Harman had met him in Nashville that summer and had hired him without having him sing one note. Along with teaching all music courses listed in the catalog, he had to serve as Dean of Men and take care of the music for the chapel services. This would be quite a challenge for this twenty-two year old man with looks that would lead many to mistake him for a student. He stood in awe in the presence of “austere, seasoned teachers” – Dr. Harman, Dr. Owen, Dr. Kuhlman, Mr. Louthan, Dr. Zambus, and Mr. Helton and the “distinguished young ladies” – Mrs. Velma Jackson, Jessie LeGrand, and Mrs. Mann. He saw these teachers as “persons of learning and culture, who were seasoned in the way of academia who played their roles with dignity and wisdom.”<sup>141</sup> He found these people to be “warm and friendly,” operating in an atmosphere devoid of “competition, ill will and antagonism.”<sup>142</sup> He regarded Dr. Harman as being “very much like a father” and felt indebted to him in a way that could never be repaid. “Sara and I reverence his memory and that of his beloved Ossie,” he would say about these special people.<sup>143</sup> He and the president held in common the fact that both had suffered about the same degree of physical limitations as a result of polio. Dr. Harman also helped this young man by providing a means whereby Mr. Stovall could attain his Master of Arts degree at the University of Alabama. Professor Stovall would add to his duties the role of Minister of Music at First Baptist Church in Bluefield, West Virginia.

During his five years at Bluefield, the choir grew from eighteen to fifty. Mr. Stovall remarked that he “loved the choir from the very first day.”<sup>144</sup> His best singers and most cooperative and ambitious choir members were products of Elizabeth Shelton’s Bluefield, West Virginia, Beaver High School choirs. Her former choir members spoke of her with reverence and awe. He learned why this was true when he attended a performance by the choir under her direction. Paying tribute to the students who were in his choirs and classes, he said: “They taught me so much during my five years at Bluefield College.”<sup>145</sup>

His observations about Bluefield, West Virginia, when he and his

family arrived in 1952 are interesting. He referred to the city as a “boom” town. Housing was scarce for anyone seeking a place. One rarely saw a “home for sale” sign in a yard or a sign “to rent” on apartment buildings. The population hovered around 30,000. Of the college’s 350 students, approximately fifty percent were resident and the other half were commuters. For May Day, Sadie Hawkins Day, and commencement, the “faculty took these events very seriously and involved themselves in them to a remarkable extent.” Many faculty members donned “fantastic costumes” for Sadie Hawkins Day.

The Louthans took a shine to the Stovalls’ son, Francis, and spent time playing with him. They had the young couple in their home for entertainment since the Stovalls lived in one of the small white houses on campus. Mrs. Stinson, whom they regarded as one of their dearest and closest friends, also had a great interest in Francis and advised them concerning the child. The Stancils, who came to Bluefield a year or two after the Stovalls, were others who took the young family under their wings. She became the Dean of Women, and he became the teacher of religious subjects, replacing Mr. Helton. Because they were from Mississippi, as were the Stovalls, they invited the Stovalls to travel there with them to spend the holidays, entertained Francis, and sought to aid in keeping the infant happy and quiet as they traveled.

Dr. Stovall, as he became following his departure from Bluefield to take on a new position in Texas, also reflected on Frieda Siler who came to the college as Librarian after the Stovalls’ arrival in Bluefield. She was severely handicapped by childhood polio, being paralyzed from the waist down. She wore heavy leg braces and used two crutches to help with her movement. Yet, in spite of her great physical limitations, Dr. Stovall depicted her as a “victorious spirit



SADIE HAWKINS DAY, 1955-56

who was always ready to engage in informal conviviality."<sup>146</sup> She would remain an example of courage and determination to all who knew her and would serve the college well until her death.

The story of this young man who "grew up" while serving as Professor of Music at Bluefield College is, in my judgment, a remarkable one. The times spent at the college and in the area made such an impression on him that later in his life and career, he would recall those earlier days and would be able to share wonderful remembrances about faculty, the college itself, his experiences there, and the leadership provided by Dr. Harman.

Two additional stories related to the 1950's are in order. In 1957, Dr. Primitivo Delgado began his services as Professor of Bible, replacing Dr. Stancil. "Dr. Del," as he would come to be called by most who knew him, was a native of Cuba. At the age of twenty-two, he left his family and came to the United States to go to school. He graduated from Harrison-Chilhowee Academy in Tennessee, Carson-Newman College, where he attained the "cum laude" status by graduation, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he earned Th.M. and Th.D. degrees. He served as a "fellow" in the Department of Missions and Comparative Religions while at the seminary.

In 1947, he received a call to serve as pastor of Marion Baptist Church in Marion, Virginia. He accepted the call, came to Marion with his family, and served that church until 1957 when he left to serve Bluefield College. He had spoken in chapel services at the college, giving Dr. Harman the opportunity to get to know him. Thus, when the religion position became vacant, Dr. Harman knew where to turn to seek a replacement. It would be a good move for the college, the community, and Virginia Baptists.

In time, Dr. Delgado assumed the roles of Registrar and Academic Dean. He made a pact with Dr. Harman that he would serve as Dean for one year. If, at the end of that time, either he or Dr. Harman felt that it had not been a good move, he would step down. As it turned out, it proved to be a very beneficial move for both the college and Dr. Delgado. He served the college as Dean until 1975, at which time as the college was moving into a four-year program, he requested a return to the classroom. President Tyer granted his request, so, from 1975 until 1991, he was back in the classroom teaching several different courses.<sup>147</sup>

From 1991 on, he continued to serve in many ways his fellow man, always being an inspiration, a mentor, a friend, a servant, a dedicated husband and father. However, in 2005, he was the victim of a bizarre accident in a local grocery parking lot and spent the remainder of his life in hospitals and other health-care facilities. He passed away on September 14, 2006, at the age of 93, leaving behind his wife, Hazel, his daughter, Andrea, and his son, Lofton, and their families and grandchildren, along with countless friends who mourned the loss. A service celebrating his life was held in Harman Chapel on the Bluefield College campus on September 18. It was, indeed, a celebration of a life that had meant so much to so many and one which had brought untold blessings over the years. It was fitting that the service took place on a campus that he loved and where he served so well for thirty-four years. Bill Archer, with the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, referred to him as "a giant in our community," and Barbara Hawkins, with the same newspaper, mentioned his "legacy of love, kindness, and generosity of self," and called him "truly a Man of God."<sup>148</sup>

Linwood Custalow was a native American born on a reservation in Tidewater Virginia. That reservation had been established in 1644. He went to Cherokee, North Carolina, to receive his highschool education, but he transferred to Oklahoma to complete those studies. He wanted to go to college and wrote to several schools in Virginia with this in mind. Not hearing from any of these colleges, he turned to the pastor on the reservation for counsel. His pastor knew about Bluefield College and contacted the school. Bluefield accepted him, even though he was ill-prepared to enroll there. He found the student body to be warm and loving, but his first six weeks were disastrous in terms of his grades. He actually failed two classes. Things did not look very promising on the basis of this poor showing, but Mr. Louthan took him under his wing, provided assistance to help him with his school work, and things began to improve. His grades not only came up, but he did well enough to earn a place in the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. Following his graduation from



LINWOOD CUSTALOW, 1958



1962 ALUMNI NEWS MAGAZINE

Bluefield in 1958, he had hoped to transfer to the University of Richmond. His contacts with that institution brought no response. Dr. Harman expressed concern and interest and made contact with the university himself. He obtained an application which Mr. Custalow completed and returned. Through Dr. Harman's efforts, he did transfer to Richmond and did well in his studies. His next move was to the Medical College of Virginia where he received the training that enabled him to become an Eye,

Nose, and Throat physician who specialized in facial plastic surgery for twenty-five years in a practice in the Tidewater area.

Dr. Custalow credits Bluefield College with giving him a chance to have a future when obstacles seemed to be standing in the way of having any future at all. He had great feelings for the institution and for Dr. Harman's leadership there, especially as the president did so much on his behalf. Dr. Custalow would return to the college to serve as trustee and to give back to the school that had befriended him and taken him in to give him a chance.<sup>149</sup> His story will always remain an inspiring one.

On December 7, 1960, Dr. Harman and the Executive Committee of the Trustees made a motion that the Baptist General Association look favorably upon Bluefield College's transition to a four-year school. This motion went to the Virginia Baptist Board of Missions and Education.<sup>150</sup> This body made the decision to bring up the matter at the next annual session.<sup>151</sup> In the following year, a committee of six individuals who had been selected to look into the matter and consider the college's request presented its report. This report was the result of a unanimous vote of the committee members and stemmed from a visit to the campus, engaging in exchange with school officials several times, and studying the requirements of the Southern Association, the accrediting body under which the college operated.

Initially, the report dealt with some very basic issues concerning a transition for the college – the requirements involved such a change – new buildings, a larger endowment of at least \$300,000, (Bluefield had only \$120,000), an increase in the number of faculty members with a greater number having Ph.D.'s, greater salaries, and greater expenses in the overall picture. The committee also felt that what was happening at the college was of a "high quality." The school was providing college training for two years in a Christian environment at a low cost. Therefore, the recommendation was that the college remain a two-year school, at least for the immediate future. There existed a need for a junior college. The committee urged that Bluefield be supported and that Virginia Baptists encourage young people to go there. A sub-motion promoting the idea that the college would become a senior institution as soon as practically possible did not pass. The recommendation of the committee carried.<sup>152</sup>

In "Patsel's Panorama" in *The Alumni News* of July 1963, Mr. Patsel directed his comments at the transition idea, pointing out what the committee had stated about requirements involved in such a change. At the time, the school's enrollment stood at 330. After covering these points, he declared "let us be" and urged concentration on those steps that would lead the college to be the number one college in the nation in terms of academic excellence and Christian atmosphere. He then concluded his remarks with "then we shall see what the future holds!"<sup>153</sup> Thus, with this particular matter set aside for the time being, the school would continue to concentrate on its role as a junior college.



WOMEN'S DORM COUNCIL, 1967



CAMPUS RENOVATION TO COVER THE BLUESTONE RIVER IN THE EARLY 1960s

Ever since the establishment of the college, a creek (tributary of the Bluestone River) had run through the lower field of the campus. It divided the area, making activity on the field somewhat of a problem. In 1962, the college had a culvert placed over the stream. The Executive Committee of the Trustees had given Dr. Harman permission to take this step and then to have the area graded.<sup>154</sup> The area would be filled and landscaped to provide a field suitable for softball and other events. Plans at the time envisioned a combination gymnasium-student activities center to be built on the site with an indoor swimming pool, basketball court, bowling alley, student lounge, and snack shop.<sup>155</sup> The fill dirt for the field came from the bank behind the dining hall, a step which resulted in additional parking spaces, always a need on a college campus.<sup>156</sup>

Faculty members who retired would be given the faculty rank of Professor Emeritus and his or her name would appear in the catalogs until death removed it. The retiree would be regarded as part of the Bluefield College academic community for the rest of his/her life.<sup>157</sup> These decisions came from the Trustees. A few months later, the Trustees spelled out the aims and objectives of the college. They were as follows:

1. To create "a campus where Christ is prominent"
2. to return to our communities and denomination young men and

young women who have a sound faith in God, in themselves, and in our country

3. to remain responsive to the denomination that gave us birth and sustains us.
4. to create a climate of learning where excellence is sought and achieved
5. to offer a broad program of education in a Christian environment.<sup>158</sup>

In recognitions of the fact that students should have organized activities planned and carried out under the leadership of a qualified person, the college hired its first Director of Student Activities, Miss Jennie Sue Johnson, in 1962.<sup>159</sup> At the time, the school enrollment was 355, a figure that indicated that more students were beginning to notice this junior college in the Appalachians. The addition of a new library a few years earlier and a new women's dormitory only two years earlier was undoubtedly a strong influence in the enrollment enhancement.

At the trustee meeting of May 26, 1962, a motion made and approved, authorized the Executive Committee to secure an architect, have plans drawn for a chapel facility, and to secure tentative cost figures for presentation to a called meeting of the full board. In addition, a proposed capital needs program called for a six hundred student enrollment, embraced a chapel, science building, gymnasium, student activities center, men's dormitory, and a remodeling of the administration building, the dining room, and the heating plant, all of these items for a price tag of \$1,200,000.<sup>160</sup> In June of 1963, the Board approved a motion to authorize the Executive

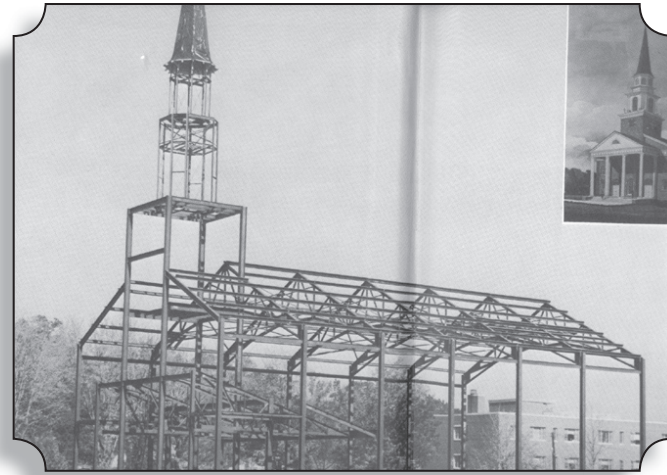


Committee to secure bids for construction of a chapel.<sup>161</sup> In June of the following year, the Executive Committee held a called meeting, at which time its members considered bids for the building of the chapel. The committee made low-bid awards for the chapel itself and for stage equipment.<sup>162</sup>

The construction got underway in late August, 1964, with a completion date set for late summer, 1965. The building would accommodate 800 as opposed to the existing chapel auditorium in the administration building that held only 264. Beneath the main auditorium, there would be classrooms, individual practice rooms, one large group practice room, and two studios for professors.<sup>163</sup> The building would be completed pretty much in line with the contemplated date, and, at last, the long-dreamed-of facility would be dedicated on May 27, 1966.<sup>164</sup> The *Junior College Journal* referred to the chapel-fine arts building as a “capstone” to the career of one “who has constantly aimed his institution toward the goal of service to his Christ and his church.”<sup>165</sup> It went on to say that this new building was a symbol of what Bluefield represented and a tribute to the one most responsible for this “unique blend of education and church.”<sup>166</sup>

The dedicatory address for the dedication of this new building was delivered by Reverend J. Walter Martin, Pastor of the Temple Baptist Church in Newport News, Virginia. Present for the occasion were three men whose combined years of service as chairpersons of the Board of Trustees totaled thirty-two years. They were Mr. Frank Easley, 1934-1952, Judge David M. Easley, 1952-1962, and Mr. Lon Rish, 1962-. Mr. and Mrs. Lon Rish provided for the installation of the Verdin Electronic Chimes in the steeple to be used to announce class changes, among other things.<sup>167</sup>

The matter of naming buildings had come up for discussion in the Trustees’ meeting, and, on May 29, 1965, as the culmination of their activities, the committee assigned the responsibility of considering this matter made its recommendation. They proposed that all buildings except for the chapel have input from alumni, trustees, and friends. The chapel should be named the Charles L. Harman Chapel. An oil painting of each individual to whom a building would be dedicated should be commissioned and unveiled at the dedicatory ceremonies. A motion made and carried at this meeting was to name, in addition to the chapel already designated, that the women’s dormitory be called Rish Hall in honor of Lon Rish and



HARMAN CHAPEL CONSTRUCTION, 1965

the library, the Easley Library in honor of both David M. and Frank Easley. At this same meeting, there was a motion made and carried that the administration accept applications without regard to race, color, or national origin.<sup>168</sup> This was in response to the need to have an official statement with the emphasis being placed on Civil Rights. A year later, the Trustees determined that the Administration Building would be named in honor of the school’s first president, Renaldo A. Lansdell.<sup>169</sup>

Following the dedication of the chapel, Ralph Patsel wrote in his “Patsel’s Panorama,” that there was “a new feeling on Bluefield College Campus this year, a feeling of a giant about to awaken from a deep slumber.”<sup>170</sup> The four hundred seats on the first floor of the chapel were completely filled by the largest student body in the history of the college except in 1946, when 415 students greeted Dr. Harman that first year of his administration. President Harman spoke of aiming for five hundred students as soon as possible and even going beyond this level if the college was in a position to handle the greater numbers. Faculty committees were busy looking at science facilities and needs, men’s residence housing, physical education, and student-activity facilities. An administrative council was looking at a dining facility replacement or renovation, the financing of other projects, and a campus master plan for growth and development in the future.<sup>171</sup>

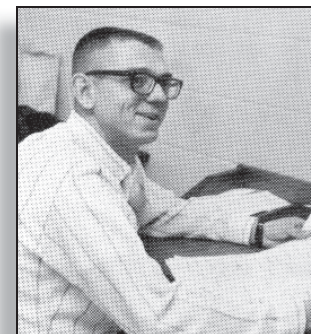


The music department moved from the former home of the president into its new quarters in the lower level of the chapel building without even having all that it needed yet in place. The chemistry lab and office had undergone remodeling without everything that was needed being available. The Alumni secretary moved to a new location in Lansdell Hall, but certain items could not be used because electrical outlets were not yet installed. Other changes were occurring on campus, and, while a number of things were either not in place or incomplete, Alumni Secretary Patsel sounded a note of cheerfulness in declaring "it all represents PROGRESS," making the inconveniences, frustrations, and delays worth accepting.<sup>172</sup> It must have been an exciting time on the campus to see the changes taking place and to note the good spirit that must have been present.

Ralph Patsel became the director of the college's new financial and gift program with a focus on estate planning. A fulltime Secretary came to the Alumni and Public Relations office to handle the growing demands of that office.<sup>173</sup> Ralph Patsel left the college to go to King College in Bristol, Virginia, where he would serve as the Director of Admissions. Bluefield College regretted his departure from its campus because he had demonstrated his versatility and proved himself an outstanding "road runner," a good servant in the church, and a fine young all-around person. He had done a good job in serving his alma mater. His wife, Jane, an alumna of Bluefield, had served proficiently in the Business Department and as sponsor of the college yearbook. Joe Wray, Jr., another graduate, returned to fill the post vacated by Mr. Patsel, after pastoring churches in Virginia and North Carolina and serving as youth director, minister of music, and as a high school teacher.<sup>174</sup>

While much has been said about academic buildings and Trustee actions, other things were happening on the campus of Bluefield College as well. The college engaged in sports activities, both in terms of intercollegiate play and intramural activities. Since football had passed from the scene following some wonderful years of the sport, basketball took center stage with the college producing some fine teams and enjoying the inspired performances of any number of excellent ball players. Two performers from the Fifties era became charter members of the Bluefield College Sports Hall of Fame. They were Dr. Dan Grabeel, class of 1955 and Dr. James McCoy, Jr., also the class of 1955. Two top-notch stars from the 1960's – Coach Rick French,

Class of 1965 and Coach Leon Yost, class of 1968 – were also among those chosen for the charter member group in 1981-1982.<sup>175</sup> Other outstanding athletes from the earlier eras would be inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame in future years, along with athletes participating in various sports in the later 1980's and the decade of the nineties. Outstanding athletes will continue to be recognized as the college operates in the twenty-first century.



COACH PETE HARMAN, 1968

Two players from the Fifties era drew some attention because of their height – Johnny Adams at 6'6" and Tom Savage, at an imposing 6'10". While James McCoy, Jr. was only 6'4" in height, he gained much press when he, just in his freshman year, score 485 points and hit seventy-five percent of his free throws in an eighteen-game streak. From 1953 through 1955, he averaged nearly thirty points per game. He would be named to the Converse Small College All-American team in 1954-1955.<sup>176</sup> In Converse's 1964 Basketball yearbook, one can find the name, Robert Daniel, listed as one of the top junior college scorers in the nation, averaging 39.9 points per game.<sup>177</sup> He scored 63 points in Bluefield's victory over Milligan's Junior Varsity squad.<sup>178</sup> It should be added that Rick French was the second leader in Junior College scoring in basketball in the entire nation in 1964-1965.<sup>179</sup>

More will be said about the Sports Hall of Fame later. Many outstanding performances on the gridiron, basketball court, and baseball diamond, plus coaches and special supporters would be recognized. After serving as a "temporary" gymnasium for basketball and intramural sports for forty-two years, the old structure would witness its last winning team in 1967.<sup>180</sup> In Dr. Harman's report of 1967 for Virginia Baptists, he spoke of the new gymnasium to replace the existing one. This new golden geodesic domed facility would have two regulation basketball courts, volleyball and other courts, men's and women's locker rooms, offices, exercise rooms, a 1200 seating capacity, and a stage for convocations and concerts.<sup>181</sup>

Ribbon cutting for this building took place on January 1, 1968, and its dedication occurred on January 27, 1968. The basketball team, still called the Rambling Reds with their red, white, and blue uniforms,

took the court under the guidance of Pete Harman, Jr. This initial game in the new facility had Bluefield hosting Virginia Southern College. They met on a court over which hung a new scoreboard donated by the Coca-Cola Company of Bluefield, West Virginia. They played on a court made of grantwood, the only floor of its kind in the area.<sup>182</sup>

Unlike the old gymnasium where people pressed together on the bleachers and teams played on a court that was not regulation size, this game took place in an arena that provided adequate seating. The sounds that reverberated here would be unlike those that characterized the old gymnasium. For those who had known the quaintness of the old facility as students, faculty, and/or community spectators, there was a certain sadness associated with this transition. Many good memories of the old gym still lingered in their hearts and minds. Yet, the new facility had so much to offer, and it, too, would come to have a special place as the "Golden Dome." The

old gym had simply outlived its usefulness. After all, it was only a "temporary" structure that had served the college for a long time.

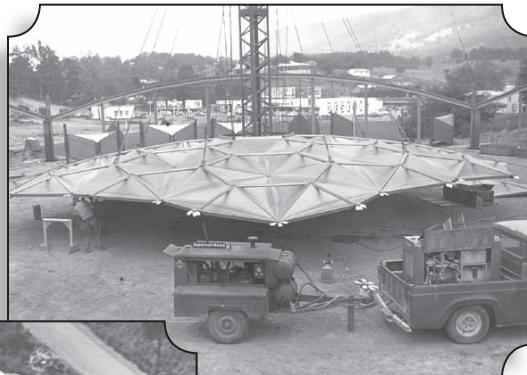
The new gymnasium concluded the building program under Dr. Harman's leadership. Much had been accomplished since he began his services at the college. A three phase master plan suggested by Boggs and Rehm, landscape artists, in 1967 provided a view of future possibilities, but what lay ahead would be under other guiding hands. Dr. Harman had led well, and the four buildings erected during his years had added much to the college to assist in its educational, sports, cultural, and spiritual programs.

Choral activities held a significant place in the student life at the college. Since the purchase of the old bus, as mentioned earlier, the college choir could do their touring for a number of years. Since I had the privilege of being in the choir under Mr. Stovall (now Doctor Stovall) in 1952-1953 and 1953-1954, and of going on the choir tours, I will make a few personal remarks. I enjoyed the wonderful fellowship that we had on those trips, felt blessed by the music that we shared with schools and churches, and certainly appreciated the lovely receptions that we received wherever we went. People were so kind to receive us into their homes and to serve as our hosts. In 1954, our tour covered areas throughout Virginia – Salem, Vinton, Bedford, Lynchburg, Appomattax, Altavista, Martinsville, Wytheville, Marion, Bristol, and back home – quite an extensive journey and a rewarding one!<sup>183</sup> Nine of the fourteen individuals from the fifties who responded to a questionnaire sent to them mentioned the choir as, at least, one of their fondest remembrances. George Blaylock, classmate of '54, called the choir tour a "terrific experience," and he went on to become a choral director himself.<sup>184</sup> Dorothy "Dot" Spoon Yarbrough, also a '54 graduate, stated that choir tours held the greatest significance for her. They were meaningful from the standpoints of learning the music under Mr. Stovall's guidance, having a nice break from school, having an opportunity to live



PLAY IN THE GOLDEN DOME, 1968

GOLDEN DOME  
CONSTRUCTION, 1968



THE COMPLETED  
GOLDEN DOME, 1968

closely with Christian friends, and experiencing Christian love through the homes opened to the students.<sup>185</sup> Finally, a student who attended the college in 1950-1951 shared that choir was the most meaningful activity at the college for her.<sup>186</sup> Choir tours have remained an integral part of the music program at the college, and scores of students have benefitted from them.

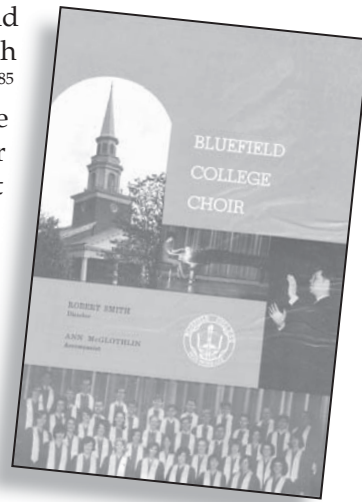
In 1969, a serious issue confronted the college as the Virginia Baptist General Association took a hard look at the future of the schools operating under its umbrella. Rumor even had it that Bluefield College might not survive as a result of this very careful assessment

of the funding of the several institutions. Many prayers and strong support for Bluefield marked the response to this crisis. The ultimate decision would be rendered at the November meeting of the General Association in Roanoke, Virginia. Representatives from the college and churches would attend to voice their feelings on this matter.

In the November 14 issue of the *Religious Herald*, a letter from the faculty and staff of the college responded to the outcomes of the meeting. It conveyed appreciation to those Virginia Baptists who voted to maintain the existing structure of educational institutions in the denomination. The letter declared the vote to be a firm belief in the soundness of allowing a school like our college to remain in existence and to stress the values of an education rooted in Christian soil.<sup>187</sup>

The letter spoke highly of Dr. Harman's leadership and his "consecrated, diligent efforts to provide a school firmly entrenched in Baptist tradition and in Christian principles."<sup>188</sup> It also expressed the view that it would be a "blight" upon the Virginia Baptist record to have had a vote that would have meant the closing of the college. In conclusion, it stated:

We sincerely trust and pray that the wisdom and courage as well as the great faith shown at Roanoke will prevail for years to come.<sup>189</sup>



CHOIR TOUR PROGRAM, 1967

What had been expressed so well in the letter found clear expression in the purpose of Bluefield College as stated in the 1968-1969 catalog:

It is the purpose of Bluefield College to return to our communities and churches young men and young women who have a sound faith in God, in themselves, and in our country.<sup>190</sup>

The school's motto of being "a campus where Christ is preeminent" provided a fitting accompaniment to this purpose.

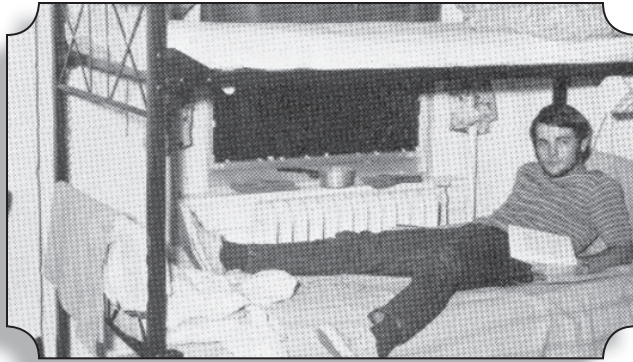
Aside from constructing new buildings, the college attended to other matters of importance. One step taken was the establishment of an Administrative Council composed of the President, the Deans, the Director of Public Relations, and the Business Manager.<sup>191</sup> This move would assist greatly in bringing more efficiency to the operation of the school. With the new Director of Student Activities in place, there was an expanded program of activities to meet the needs and desires of the students. The work going on in the office of Alumni and Public Relations had brought about greater interest and improved giving on the part of the alumni. For the first time in the history of the college, Alumni giving surpassed \$10,000 in 1970.<sup>192</sup>

The school took another major step when it employed for the first time, a Vice-President in charge of development. This individual would provide a full-time effort to cultivating and promoting giving to the college. Dr. Harman had committed countless hours and great energy to this task, but it was a task far too demanding for him alone. While he would still be involved in the effort, as is expected of a college president, he would now receive the assistance of one well-versed in fund raising.

Other steps taken to enhance the school included an enlargement of library holdings from five thousand volumes in 1947-48 to over 20,000 volumes by 1970-71.<sup>193</sup> New services were in place as well – photocopying, a loan system for art works, a larger phonograph records collection, among other things.<sup>194</sup> The shortage of space in the library was an issue



MAY DAY QUEEN, 1966



TO SLEEP OR TO STUDY, 1971

to which the college would have to direct its attention in time. Dr. Harman established a President's Council to allow and to encourage free dialogue involving administration, faculty, and students at a time when many college campuses were experiencing disorganization and division. This step occurred with relative ease.

A third degree program, the Bachelor of Applied Science, joined the existing Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degree programs. It made possible greater flexibility of course selections and permitted a greater number to graduate. A four-one-four semester plan came into operation in the 1971-1972 school year, meaning that there would be two regular semesters of four months each and a mini-semester of one month between them.

Bluefield had experienced an extremely good enrollment in 1967-68, only to take a decided drop the following year. Two factors seemed to play key roles in bringing about the reduction – Bluefield State College had in place a strong recruiting program that aimed at many of the same geographical areas as its Baptist neighbor, and Southwestern Virginia Community College, only forty miles to the west, could provide a two-year education at lesser cost for the students who enrolled there.<sup>195</sup> Another consideration was the fact that other community colleges within the Virginia higher education system and within areas from which Bluefield drew many of its students could also have a definite impact on Bluefield's enrollment figures. Still, even with these challenges confronting it, the college continued to hover around the 250 level and even exceeded this figure on occasion.

As in its past history, foreign students often played a role in the enrollment of the college. The 1971 report presented by Dr. Harman shared the news that fourteen such students were attending, these students being from Thailand, Korea, Japan, Iran, Spain, Liberia, and other regions in the world.<sup>196</sup> Having this number of foreign students on the campus was unusual but meaningful for the American students in terms of exchanges of the cultures of both groups. With the formation of an International Club in 1969, the students from abroad enjoyed the benefits derived from such an organization, and their food-tasting events provided the American students, faculty, staff, and community participants the opportunity to sample different cuisines and to meet the students who prepared the food..

Outings experienced through the efforts of this new organization included a trip to the Homestead located at Healing Springs, Virginia, and an extensive tour of Washington, D.C., and New York. College Avenue Baptist Church in Bluefield, West Virginia, set up an International House to care for several of the students during break periods in the college schedule. Other churches in the area also assisted these students in various ways. As Alumni Secretary, Joe Wray, stated in regard to this unique feature of the college:

Bluefield College is pleased to have this opportunity to minister to some of the brightest young people from around the world. We feel this will be a growing pattern of ministry as our world grows smaller and more students come to the United States to study.

The college did continue to receive international students over the years to come, providing them with training that they could put to use in their native lands or here in this country if they planned to stay. The college also shared with them the Good News of the Gospel in chapel sessions, in dormitory Bible study, through organizational experiences, and by way of individual students who shared their faith. In some cases, the international students did receive Christ into their lives. In other cases, some would give careful consideration to the challenge presented to them.

Community support continued to assist the college in fulfilling its mission. An official of a retail grocery chain, Acme, at the time it operated in the area, stressed the importance of a small liberal arts college in society and urged business and civic organization groups

to “establish priorities for the support of colleges which receive no tax support.” He went on to say that Bluefield College could “justifiably point with pride to past accomplishments,” and, if given proper support, could experience boundless service in the future. There would be some very favorable responses to this plea as the Presidents’ reports would indicate in the years to follow.

Two additional members of the “Old Guard” at the college left the ranks as the decade of the 1970’s began. Miss Jessie LeGrand, French, and Spanish Professor and, perhaps, other subjects as well at one time or another during her lengthy tenure, and Miss Frieda Siler, who served so faithfully as the college librarian, both retired with the ushering in of the new decade. Miss LeGrand, small in stature but large on discipline and stern with those who would seek to learn the languages in any manner except through careful study, spent thirty-nine years with the college. Miss Siler served for nineteen years, doing her duties as the librarian but also being an inspiration for the entire college family and others who knew her. Her infectious smile and winsome manner quickly made one forget that she did have physical limitations. The comment that Dr. Stovall used in describing her – “victorious spirit” – fit her so aptly.<sup>197</sup> The 1972 *Catalogue* described Miss Siler as a “woman of magnificent courage and indomitable spirit” with a faith in man and “a love of God that never wavered.”<sup>198</sup>

The loss of these two dedicated servants was a heavy blow for the college, but an even greater blow would be felt when Dr. Harman announced his resignation plans on May 29, 1971. In making his announcement, he said:

For twenty-five years I have had the great privilege and also the great responsibility of serving as President of Bluefield College. It has been a demanding job, but I have truly enjoyed it.

The college will always have a large place in my heart and I shall continue to work for her best interests as long as God allows me to live.

His resignation would take effect after July 1, 1971, and before January 1, 1972. While this news came as a shock to those at the college and to those outside of the campus community, the Trustees, understanding that the president was in earnest concerning his decision, set about the task of finding a new leader for the school. The Trustee president appointed two committees, one a smaller group to handle the nominations received and the second a larger group made up of representatives from the student body faculty, alumni, and interested friends of the institution to assist the smaller committee in this daunting task.

When Dr. Harman became the President of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in 1955, the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* focused on the fact that he was the first local person to be so honored. The article also underscored the “remarkable” advances that the college had made under his leadership, as well as the fact that the school was on the way to becoming one of the leading privately supported institutions. The *Religious Herald* had earlier stated that Dr. Harman had found at Bluefield College the place “to make his greatest contribution,” with everything that had gone before serving as a preparatory period for the responsibility of the presidency.

Dr. Harman actually stayed on a year longer than he had intended to allow the process to secure a new president sufficient time to do the job properly. The decision would be made on January 15, 1972, when the Trustees unanimously voted to accept the candidate selected by the committees, Dr. Charles L. Tyer. Since Dr. Tyer had to make the necessary arrangements required for the transition, Dr. Harman would continue to serve through the remaining months of the 1971-1972 school year. Thereafter, he would have the well-earned privilege of retiring to the home purchased for him and Mrs. Harman to spend time with his lovely first lady and to work in his workshop. As he left the college, he would leave behind a legacy that would remain strong and vibrant. Ralph Waldo Emerson provided fitting words that could be used to describe Dr. Harman’s service. Emerson said that “an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.” The college yearbook of 1972, dedicated to the president, declared that



PRESIDENTS CHARLES TYER (left)  
AND CHARLES HARMAN, 1972

his life was a “shining example of one who lived to serve and glorify God in every facet of life.”

Dr. Harman’s service would be recognized in many ways and by numerous people. In his final year, the Education Commission of the General Association of Virginia (Baptist) passed a resolution praising his leadership. Many things were expressed in the resolution, but two in particular deserve attention. First, it mentioned the impression that he made on others

as a man of deep devotion to his Lord, to the cause of Christ as implemented through Virginia Baptists and to the attainment of Christian maturity on the part of students under his administration.<sup>199</sup>

The second point had to do with Dr. Harman’s zeal in fostering a “warm, cooperative, harmonious relationship with Virginia Baptists and the Southern Baptist Convention.”<sup>200</sup>

During his final year, he received additional recognition as a distinguished alumnus of his alma mater, Georgia Tech, by being named an honorary alumnus of the college by the Alumni Association, by having the Honorary Doctor of Humanities Degree conferred upon him by Concord College where he delivered the Baccalaureate message, by having May 29, 1972, proclaimed as Charles L. Harman Day with the proclamation signed by the mayors of both Bluefields, by being named an Honorary Life Deacon by First Baptist Church where he and Ossie and their sons attended and where he served in many capacities, and, later in 1980, by receiving the President’s Medallion and, in 1981, by being awarded the prestigious Algernon-Sydney Sullivan Award. At the occasions when he received these recognitions, the audience arose and applauded this man, this dedicated leader, this humble servant who had given so much of himself through the years. The writer had the privilege of being present on both occasions and of sharing in the tributes paid to a very deserving past president.

Many qualities characterized Dr. Harman and the leadership that he provided – his humble spirit, his friendly manner, the enthusiasm which he expressed for Bluefield College, the dedication to making the college the best institution possible, his interest in the students and their successes, and his love of God and his desire to show that love in word and deed.

Only five years following his retirement, Dr. Harman lost the partner with whom he had shared his life for forty-five years. On June 29, 1977, Ossie Harman died after having suffered an apparent heart attack.<sup>201</sup> Dr. Harman spent some time alone, but he eventually re-married, taking as his second wife a niece of Ossie Harman. He lived to see and read his biography, *Dr. Charlie*, written by Dr. Jack Brown, Dean of Students at the college at the time, and David Armbrister, Associate Professor of History and Sociology at the time. Following his death on December 1, 1987, a procession of cars from Bluefield accompanied the funeral home vehicle bearing his body to Lynchburg, Virginia, where he would be laid to rest. It was in this city that his career had begun, and it seemed appropriate for him to be buried there at the conclusion of a well-lived life.



DR. CHARLES HARMAN REMARRIES

Even as the new president took over the leadership of the college, a letter from Grover Norris Lawson to Dr. Tyer arrived. In the letter, Mr. Lawson gave his pledge of support for Dr. Tyer and said to him:

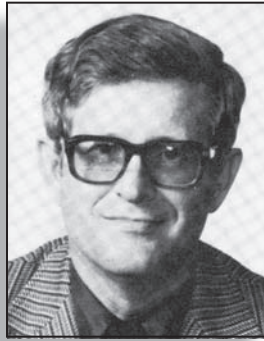
You are replacing not only one of the greatest men that I have ever known but the institution...Bluefield College. Dr. Harman left a deep impression on all of those with whom he worked.<sup>202</sup>

Dr. Tyer could possibly have felt some pressure upon receiving a letter praising his predecessor in such glowing terms. Yet, this was not the case, for Dr. Tyer admired Dr. Harman very much, and it was

he who presented the past president the awards of 1980 and 1981 and who commissioned the writing of *Dr. Charlie*. The two men had a warm and enduring relationship.

On October 31, 1972, Joe Wray, the college's Director of Public Relations, wrote the following words about the institution's new president: "On July 1 an energetic, auburn haired and youthful spirited new president succeeded Dr. Charles Harman to become the seventh president of Bluefield College."<sup>203</sup>

Wray went on to state that Dr. Tyer's plan was to visit each of the cities served by the college throughout the region. The responses to his visits to date had been positive. The president had taken a "Bluefield College Road Show" to many areas and made contact with Baptist churches in many places. "Bluefield College Days" had been started on the campus itself. Alumni groups had been formed through his encouragement and that of the Alumni office. Dr. Tyer placed himself in the mainstream through his teaching of Old Testament and a short course in Biblical Archeology. His educational background from Baylor, Vanderbilt, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary provided him with the expertise in Biblical Studies and general religion that enabled him to teach in these fields.



PRESIDENT CHARLES TYER

Previously, he had served as the Chairman of the Humanities Division and Head of the Religion Department at Mitchell College in Statesville, North Carolina. He then moved to Judson College, an all-female school in Marion, Alabama, in 1967, where he served until he went to Bluefield. At Judson, he held the position of the Dean of the College and taught one course each semester in Religion, Philosophy, History, or other areas in his experience and training background. Dr. Charles Martin, Chairman of the Trustee Committee rested with the responsibility of nominating Dr. Harman's successor, stated that "Dr. Tyer has a rich background of experience in the field of church-related colleges."<sup>204</sup> The committee had accepted him unanimously, and so had the Trustees.<sup>205</sup> Dr. Harman, in speaking about his successor, had expressed it this way: "I feel the Lord has led us in our search for this man."<sup>206</sup>

The new first lady was Ida Jean Tyer. Joe Wray described her as a "frequent companion in his (Dr. Tyer's) work for the college."<sup>207</sup> Together, they comprised an "effective team." She had earned her degree from Baylor University in Elementary Education and her Master of Arts from Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee. In addition, she had taken classes at the seminary while her husband worked on his degrees there and had done post Master's degree work. She had taught for twelve years in grades one through three in four edifferent states.<sup>208</sup> She was a great asset to the college according to Mrs. Ellen White Ratliff.<sup>209</sup> Her service to Bluefield College would be clearly noted by many, and she would also endear herself to many through her service at First Baptist Church, Bluefield, West Virginia, and her involvement in many activities in the area. Indeed, she was an asset.

Dr. Tyer held a commission in the United States Navy. He joined this branch of military service after college because he received the privilege of continuing his education during the Korean conflict. His assignments took him to the Arctic, Caribbean, and Turkey. Their first child, Linda, had already arrived during their college days, while Charles, Jr. came into the world in New York, just a little over two hours after Charles, Sr. had arrived home from the Caribbean. Six days later, he left his family again, this time going to Turkey following time at sea. He spent nine months there and found it to be a "chaplain's dream" because of the many historical sites related to the Old and New Testaments.<sup>210</sup> What an opportunity to add to his fields of study through seeing and relating the various sites to his already acquired knowledge!

In 1979 he received promotion to the rank of Captain in the U.S. Naval Reserves. At the time, he had served over twenty-four years in active and inactive Naval Reserves. He had acted as volunteer chaplain for the local National Guard Unit H.Q. and H. Q. Troop, 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 150<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry, and the local U.S. Army Unit, the 304<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company for the past seven years.<sup>211</sup>

Dr. Tyer's woodworking skills provided not only an enjoyable hobby for him but also a means of sharing the products of his skills with family members and others. He produced lovely cradles for the new babies of faculty families. He also had a great interest in music and shared that interest through his participation in church choirs, as well as on various occasions elsewhere. He maintained an interest in

sports, having been a track star at Baylor and even serving as a coach at an early period in his career.<sup>212</sup> In assessing this new leader of the college, one could certainly say that he was a well-rounded person with not only educational attainments to his credit but experiences in a variety of areas as well.

In speaking to the faculty at the commencement of his presidency, Dr. Tyer made the following remarks among others:

I look forward to becoming a part of the family of Bluefield College. I consider my work here at the college to be what we can do together. During my first year at Bluefield, I want to come to know this institution and its people. I am looking forward to getting to know the people of Virginia and becoming a part of the Baptist work here.<sup>213</sup>

In a special briefing for the General Board of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, he shared his thoughts about the college, both past and present, as well as the future. He focused on the nearly ten percent of the students who intended to enter some church-related vocation, while also pointing out that others who came ended up being led to this decision for their lives.<sup>214</sup> This brings to mind what the late Dr. Joe Burton, Alumnus, Trustee, and Trustee chair in his interview had to say about his own experience while a student. It was September 29, 1964, on the third floor of the men's dormitory that he felt the call to the ministry. It marked the culmination of a long struggle for him. Bluefield College had much to do with this decision.<sup>215</sup> The story that Dr. Burton shared had undoubtedly been the same for students in the past and would be repeated many times in the future. Dr. Tyer made it clear that Christian commitment remained a goal that the college had for all its students. The school continued its religious training through course work, required chapel attendance, Religious Emphasis Week, and the encouragement of personal and interpersonal relationships between students and faculty members.

Dr. Tyer stressed that Bluefield was more than an institution. It was a "family." College employees should be willing to share their lives with the students and the community. All faculty members would be chosen with such dedication in mind. The faculty had within its ranks several ordained ministers and lay ministers who

could supply, preach, and serve interim pastorates and assist with educational programs of the churches.

The 1972-73 fall enrollment was 360, exceeding the previous year's figure. However, the community college system established in Virginia had brought a challenge to "old-line institutions" like Bluefield. Innovative and imaginative programs and facilities were a must for Bluefield, along with the commitment to a continuing and growing program of student recruitment. In line with these needs, he proposed a two-phase program. Phase I aimed at a goal of 400 students, a \$1,236,000 outlay for a Science-Technical Building, complete reworking of the Men's Residence Hall, already underway and to be completed, a reworking of the kitchen area, a pipe organ for the Chapel, renovation of Lansdell Hall, a new adaptable "student wing" for the dining hall, and a gymnasium annex for an Aquarena, plus memorializing the names on the buildings. These things should be carried out over a five-year period. Dr. Tyer may have used the term "Aquarena" to refer to a swimming pool with extra features to accommodate not only recreation swimming but, perhaps, competitive swimming as well. Apparently, the term was his own creation.

Phase II, also geared to a five-year period, should address student service needs, including a two-wing dormitory, a Student Center Complex, academic facilities to embrace wings for the library and a "college-community cultural center," and a student body projection of 600. A senior-college status could be or might become a possibility or a reality in the midst of it all.

Dr. Tyer's proposal at the time was that the Trustees establish a committee at once to move toward the realization of Phase I and that this committee, once established, consider employment of a national agency to conduct a public relations and fund-raising campaign that would assist in this effort. The Trustees on September 16 had already approved five types of Income Gift Plans.<sup>216</sup> One can readily see that the new president was shooting high and far in his vision for the college.

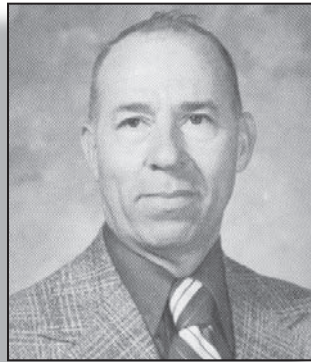
Prior to coming as president, Dr. Tyer had sought the assistance of the business manager at Judson College to aid him in examining the records of Bluefield College. He and his colleague saw the potential of the school, while, at the same time, they also recognized the major problems faced by the institution. It was a challenging offer



for Dr. Tyer to consider. Financially, he realized that Dan Parrish, Business Manager, and Dr. Harman had led the college in such a way as to keep the school financially sound. The reserves and endowment were minimal. Judson's business manager declared "I don't know how they do it."<sup>217</sup>

Dr. Tyer also took into consideration the fact that there would be a decided difference between the four-year women's college where he was serving with its traditions in place since 1832 and the two-year coed school at Bluefield founded in 1922. Yet, he had received positive and warm receptions in his visits to Bluefield. When he did arrive on campus following his decision to accept the presidency, Dr. Harman made him feel very much at home. No predecessor could have been any more congenial and supportive than was Dr. Harman to Dr. Tyer. He shared with his successor his joys and his frustrations regarding his service to the college. Dr. Harman said to his wife on one occasion after Dr. Tyer had come: "I don't have to go in today. That's Charles Tyer's problem now."<sup>218</sup> He shared his remark with the Tyers at a later date. Dr. Tyer, in his interview with this writer, indicated that, in his opinion, Dr. Harman was a "great man."<sup>219</sup>

Did he ever question leaving a good position in Alabama and going to Bluefield? Indeed, he did – about every two weeks. Yet, with the passage of time, he and Ida Jean came to feel that they were there for the duration. He never applied for any other positions and declined two offers which came to him. In his acceptance of the fact that he would be staying at Bluefield, he also realized and expressed his belief that there must be immediate goals with a view to the survival of the college. He became aware in time that there were several individuals at the school who entertained doubts about its survival. Thus, as an offensive strategy, new programs must be considered, the college must become more a part of the community and the community more a part of the college, and the Trustees must become more involved in the process. He had learned from Dr. Bruce



DAN PARRISH, BUSINESS MANAGER,  
1961-1994

Heilman, President of the University of Richmond, that the success of an institution rested upon the trustees and their commitments, not the president.

Thus, as Dr. Tyer established himself in the presidential office, he and the trustees did share the agreement that the school would operate in the black and that it would have no indebtedness. Still, he felt that there were some areas where church and state could cooperate. With trustee approval, he set out on the path to obtain some grants for the college, starting on a small scale. A small library grant did come to the college several times, while others that were sought were denied.<sup>220</sup> The Dean of Students sent to him a proposal calling for students to be allowed to participate fully in the federal programs of financial assistance to students – College Workstudy, National Defense Student Loan, Educational Opportunity Grant Program, along with the G.I. Bill, Federal Government Guarantee Loans, Virginia Assistance to Dependent Children, and Social Security Benefits for Children already in place.<sup>221</sup>

In his Status Report to the Trustees on September 16, 1972, Dr. Tyer shared what was happening at the college. He mentioned the "Try One Semester" with its appeal to students out of high school for ten years and no college work to date, the reorganization of Admissions, Adult Continuing Education, Academic-Community Internships, Travel-Study Program, the Divisionalization and Reorganization of Faculty and Computer Facilities. There would be three Divisions – Humanities, Science, and Social Science.<sup>222</sup> These divisions would not actually be approved until May 5, 1973, when the Executive Committee of the Trustees approved the arrangement.

In the September 16 meeting, the Trustees did approve a motion to enable the college to accept student-aid funds. Another major step taken was the restructuring of the Trustee By-Laws to establish committees within the body to handle different areas of the college life. This meeting also saw the establishment of priorities. A Science-Technology Building was first on the list, followed by a reworking of the Men's Dormitory, and the dining hall kitchen, securing a pipe organ for the Chapel to replace the old one, a reworking of Lansdell Hall, an Aquarena as an annex to the gymnasium, plaques on named buildings, and the bringing of other buildings up to standard and naming them.<sup>223</sup>

On March 10, 1973, two important decisions were made, the first being to employ an architect to draw up plans for a Science Center and the employment of C.W. Shaver and Company, Inc. to lead the college in a capital campaign effort. Dr. Tyer brought to the trustee meeting in April the proposal to employ Alex B. Mahood as architect for the proposed Science center and to authorize him to work with the administration and Building Committee to draw up plans. A motion to approve the proposal passed. Salary and ranking structures for the faculty also came up for discussion at this meeting.<sup>224</sup>

The operational life of the college under Dr. Tyer has been the focus for a time. Attention to life on the campus under the new administration deserves a look at this point. First of all, how did the students relate to the president? The 1973 Yearbook had this to say:

With a warm smile, quick wit, an aura of informality, Dr. Charles Tyer greeted the students as new president. The students have all learned to love and respect him in this short time. He makes a lasting impression on everyone who comes in contact with him...to forget his charming wife and family would be impossible, for they play an important part in the life of Dr. Tyer, President of Bluefield College.<sup>225</sup>

In the yearbook of the following year, the brief statement "Dr. Tyer... has created a progressive and spirited image at Bluefield College" reflects a positive assessment of the president and his leadership.<sup>226</sup> While Dr. Tyer was fully involved in his administrative duties, he certainly was no recluse on campus, hidden away from faculty, staff, and students. Neither was he remote from the community of outlying areas of Virginia and West Virginia. He and his family maintained an active involvement in First Baptist Church, Bluefield, West Virginia. He served through his membership in the Rotary Club of Bluefield. He sat down with faculty in the dining hall during break periods to have his Russian tea rather than coffee and to converse. He chatted with students on campus. One graduate stated that the president knew every student by name.<sup>227</sup> He mingled with local residents, as well as those in distant places whenever the opportunity was there for him to do so. His personal collection reveals that he filled the pulpits of countless numbers of churches as guest speaker, either in regular services or revival services. He spoke to various organizations about

the college and on other subjects as well. His military obligations involved both local and away assignments and put him in touch with different audiences than those that he usually addressed. His contacts can be said to have been far and wide.

Activities that had characterized the campus in previous years continued on for a time under the new administration. Sadie Hawkins Day, built around the Li'l Abner cartoon that used to be so popular, appears to have continued for at least a few more years, while the popular May day celebration probably continued through the 1974 school year. Things do change, as indicated with the advent of new activities. "Redneck Day," on which one's attire and manners fit the occasion, would be held for a time. The first Miss Bluefield College Pageant got underway in 1973 with Miss Virginia serving as Hostess. Valerie Vickers had the honor of being chosen the first "Miss Bluefield College" and representing the school in the Miss Virginia Pageant. This event would be held for several years before it was phased out. A "Mr. Bluefield College" contest would also be held for a while, producing some originality on the part of those who participated and evoking lots of laughter and fun. An International Club, as previously mentioned, was helpful to those students from other nations enrolled at the college. The Baptist Student Union continued to function as one of the most active groups on campus and one of the largest in terms of membership. A Fellowship of Christian Athletes played a prominent role on and off campus through the influence of its members.<sup>228</sup>

A look at school publications reveals that organizations such as Circle K, Sigma Phi Omega (Brothers), Omega Pi Iota (Pimas), Phi



FIRST MISS BLUEFIELD COLLEGE,  
VALERIE VICKERS



AROUND THE MAY POLE, 1970's

Mu Delta, a Christian group with both men and women, Suns, a co-ed group also, and of course, Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society with its long life at the college, were active on campus.<sup>229</sup> Musical activities and involvement remained an integral part of campus life. Not only was there the traditional choir which performed both on and off campus, but other groups came into existence. Mr. J.P. Jardine, who arrived on the campus the same year as Dr. Tyer was an enthusiastic, skilled musician who expected much of those who trained under him. Yet, he gave much to them beyond the musical skills that he honed for them. The Bluefield Singers, a select group chosen from the choir, was one of the new groups. Other groups that were oriented toward an evangelical message or one of the missions had names that spoke



PRESIDENT CHARLES TYER  
CROWNS HOMECOMING QUEENS.

to their reason for being. There certainly was diversity in the music programs with which students could align themselves.

Sports had a very important part in the overall picture of campus life. Both men and women participated, although the opportunities for women were not as available at the time as they were for the men.

However, things were changing, and programs for women were getting more attention. Dr. Tyer was a great supporter of sports and gave considerable effort to helping those programs at Bluefield to get full exposure and to become more competitive. Intramural sports operated very effectively at the Golden Dome, involving many young men and women who did not participate in varsity sports. Such



J.P. JARDINE

programs were extremely beneficial to the development of the students. Varsity sports included basketball for men and women, baseball for men, tennis and golf for men as the college moved to a four-year status. The new status would eventually open the door for more women's programs.

The Drama program produced performances of great quality and appeal, blending musicals with a variety of dramatic and humorous shows. Through the efforts of Dr. Michael Garrett, Head of the Drama Department and ultimately Chairman of the Fine Arts Division, beginning in 1980, the college offered a Summer Stock Theatre Program. For a time, it received funding from the Virginia Commissions on the Arts and Humanities. When those funds were no longer available, the program sought funding locally with some positive results.<sup>230</sup> This summer venture depended on the participation of students at the college, but it also encouraged the involvement of people from the surrounding communities. In doing this, it helped the school to achieve a goal set by Dr. Tyer of establishing better relations with the community and the community with the college.

The college improved its outreach through other avenues as well. For instance, many different types of programs made use of Harman Chapel – concerts, Barter Theatre performances, The Staley Distinguished Christian Lecture Series, Religious Emphasis Week, outstanding speakers like Dr. James Robertson, noted Virginia Tech Civil War Professor, historian, and writer, and Fred Anderson, Executive Director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society. In addition, there were several well-known Rabbis, a Navy veteran who had been a Prisoner of War for nearly six years in North Vietnam, and many other noted individuals.



COACH MARK BLEVINS  
INSTRUCTS HIS PLAYERS



BC CHEERLEADERS

The campus also opened its doors to groups offering special programs for varying periods of time – Centrifuge for Baptist Youth, Elderhostel, with offerings for Senior Adults, (began in 1981) High School Counselors and Supervisors, clinics for majorettes and band members, Open Houses for prospective students and their families, the Archeological Society of Virginia (the college formed a chapter), and a host of other groups.<sup>231</sup>

Beginning in 1974, “Mud Pig Day” came to the campus as an annual event in the spring. It provided the students the opportunity to relax and have fun before final exams commenced. While many different activities for the students, as well as faculty and staff who chose to participate, characterized this day over the years, the one constant and most looked-forward-to event that has marked the occasion has been the slide down a specially prepared hillside into the great mud pit – what a sight to behold! Most faculty members have opted out of this particular event, choosing to make themselves scarce lest they be tossed into the pit. Tee shirts with the Mud Pig logo and year noted on them have become treasured items over the years.<sup>232</sup>

One particular “Mud Pig Day” does deserve comment. In 1981, the Mercer County Humane Society took the college to task for allowing the game of chase in which students chased a “greased pig” in an enclosed area. This episode hit the headlines of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* and caused quite a stir both on and off campus. An editorial labeled “The Big Pig Fuss” covered this topic and concluded that it doubted whether any damage had been done to the image of the college by virtue of this activity. If there was any damage, then this was “regrettable.” It ended on this note: “Bluefield College is a fine educational institution, a credit and an asset to our community and an all-around nice place.”<sup>233</sup>

Although the criticism did not meet with any real favor as far as the college administration’s reaction, it did lead to a change in which the college decided that the pig would no longer be chased. Its only



MUD PIG DAY, A BREAK FROM CLASSES CREATED DURING PRESIDENT CHARLES TYER’S TENURE.

involvement in the entire day would be to become one of the main courses for the evening meal. While this incident has long since gone into the annals of history, it might, on occasion, come to the surface as a topic to be discussed by those who were there to experience that particular “Mud Pig Day.” Nothing like it has been experienced over the years to follow.

If one looked closely at the wording of the school purpose in the 1974-1975 catalog and compared it with what appeared in previous catalogs, a notable change could be discerned. Under Dr. Harman’s leadership, the concept that the college was “a campus where Christ is pre-eminent” prevailed, Dr. Tyler’s administration brought a change by using the wording “within the Christian context” and having several main headings with a paragraph of explanation for each heading. The three headings were “A Christian College,” “A Junior College,” and “A Baptist College.” These changes were, in no way, meant to take away from Dr. Harman and his way of looking at things. As mentioned previously, Dr. Tyler held his predecessor in great esteem and viewed him as a mentor. He expressed his appreciation for Dr. Harman in a number of tangible ways. It was simply new leadership with new ideas and approaches that reflected the new leader’s philosophy of Christian Higher Education. Dr. Tyler’s philosophy embraced the view that such education had as its primary goals an increase in wisdom, an increase in stature or self-esteem, and an increase in the relationships that one had to God and his/her fellow human beings.<sup>234</sup>

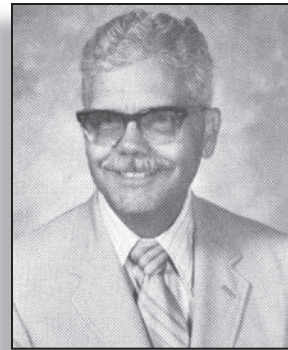
Dr. Tyler stated unequivocally that “there need be no apologies for the quality education, plus personal and religious atmosphere of Bluefield College.”<sup>235</sup> He also declared that he was convinced that Bluefield College was “God’s work” and felt that God had “great things for the college to do.”<sup>236</sup>

Undoubtedly, the hallmark of Dr. Tyler’s administration was the transition of the college from a two-year school to a four-year institution. The proposal had been made before during The Wade and Harman presidencies, but it had been rejected for a variety of reasons. Why, then, would Dr. Tyler hope to achieve a goal that had been turned down previously? He looked at this issue from at least three standpoints. The first consideration was the survival of the college in the light of its confrontation with tough competition. The second consideration had to do with his own tendency to think in

terms of a four-year school as better serving the community. The final consideration was that certain faculty members were limited at a junior college when they were capable of doing more. A four-year program would serve as an attraction for teachers to come to Bluefield. Some faculty members might have regarded the transition as a difficult move, and, therefore, preferred not to take this step.<sup>237</sup> Yet, the proposal this time, presented in a new era and under different circumstances, would find a more favorable response.

What was the starting point for such a tremendous change to occur in the life of Bluefield College? Dr. Tyer remembered well this process. First of all, the proposal went to the Administrative Council for its consideration. Then, it went to the trustees and faculty. Surveys served to gain input from different quarters. No really strong protests or resistance resulted, although there were some negative feelings expressed concerning the college taking such a step. By and large, the prevailing attitude was “to go for it.” Virginia’s Baptist input was essential to the process, and there did exist a certain amount of apprehension within these quarters. Discussion of the matter took place with the leadership of Bluefield State and Concord College (now Concord University). While there was a certain degree of concern about what the move might mean in terms of competitiveness, the responses from the two institutions were primarily those of acceptance.<sup>238</sup> Four-year offerings underwent review over a two-year period 1972-1973 and 1973-1974 with trustees, administration, faculty, students, community participants, alumni, and Baptist leadership involved in this process. Dr. Tyer expressed his belief that having a four-year program was the “only possible direction for the future of Bluefield College,” considering the developing community college programs and the dwindling college student population.<sup>239</sup> He cited the statistics for the college in 1964 when it had approximately 450 students enrolled, then again in 1972-1973 when the enrollment was 264, and, finally, for the 1973-1974 school year, when the expected enrollment would be around 300.<sup>240</sup>

Dr. Primitivo Delgado, Dean of the college at the time, related that Dr. Tyer worked diligently to attain the four-year status, doing a considerable amount of the work required himself. Charts, projections, securing information of every conceivable sort – all had to be done in order to determine if such a move was viable. The



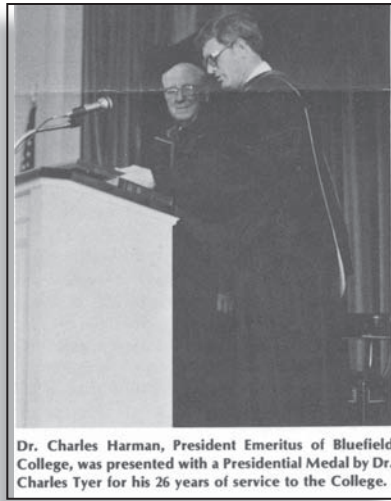
DR. PRIMITIVO DELGADO

president did turn to Dr. Delgado for his advice about the curriculum that would be essential to an expanded program. “Dr. Del” stated that Dr. Tyer “worked very hard for the college” in seeking this change that he regarded as so essential to the future of Bluefield.<sup>241</sup> Dr. Tyer himself acknowledged that the whole process “ended up as a one-person show” and “that’s not good.”<sup>242</sup>

It was, indeed, a challenging transition for an institution that had served its constituency as a junior college for fifty plus years. A “junior college mentality” would have to be dealt with and overcome if the venture was to be successful, according to Dr. Tyer. He wrote the documents for the four-year school, using materials that were on hand at the time. He did this on the Thursday and Friday before he left the campus to serve a two-week stint with the Navy. Interesting enough, this document became a model for four other institutions that were involved in the process of transition to four-year status.<sup>243</sup> In April, 1974, the Trustees received a report concerning the feasibility of a four-year program at the college and voted to authorize the president to move toward this goal, incorporating a limited number of fields of study and provided the Council of Higher Education of Virginia approved and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools had no negative or prohibitive notations for such a plan.<sup>244</sup> At this same meeting, Dr. Delgado presented the Program of Requirements for the baccalaureate degree, enumerating the fields of study to be offered. These fields were English, History, Religion and Philosophy, and Behavioral Science. Educational certification would be available in the Secondary area.<sup>245</sup>

In addition to these actions related to the four-year program, the Trustees also approved the creation of a Board of Advisors along with the By-laws under which this group would operate. The step served to provide a means of communication between the school and community, as well as serve other important purposes. The influence of this body would be “felt through the combined and individual wisdom and influence of its members.”<sup>246</sup>

Although Dr. Delgado elected to step down from the position of Dean, he remained as full-time professor and Chairman of the Religion and Philosophy Division. Prior to his change of status in 1975-1976, he had provided the trustees with information related to the plans for the initiation of the third year in 1975-76 and the fourth year in 1976-77.<sup>247</sup> The first baccalaureate class to graduate would do so in the spring of 1977. Other information included in the 1975-76 catalog included the fact that there would still be Associate of Arts and Science degrees for certain areas, even as the four-year degrees took hold. It also spelled out the grading system and the requirements for graduation in terms of semester hours and quality points. Chapel attendance changed from the requirement under Dr. Harman's presidency to a twice-weekly one during the Fall and Spring semesters. A student must attend eighty percent of the required number in order to receive credit.<sup>248</sup> By the 1979-80 school year, the requirement had changed to a Wednesday-only convocation with new guidelines for the students to meet.<sup>249</sup>



Dr. Charles Harman, President Emeritus of Bluefield College, was presented with a Presidential Medal by Dr. Charles Tyer for his 26 years of service to the College.

One development that would assist the college in its newly-gained status was the action taken on September 8, 1973, that allowed the administration to accept federal funds designed to aid in the development of instructional and equipment facilities. At this same time, there was a proposal for a new science building to be located south of the men's dormitory and west of the library. The proposal received approval from the Executive, Steering, and Building Committees that held this joint meeting.<sup>250</sup> As far as the students' benefit was concerned, the allowance of the CLEP, or College Level Equivalency Program, in several areas would certainly be a plus. There would be credit for courses, but no grade or quality points would apply in such cases.<sup>251</sup>

While these substantial changes were taking place in the academic area, significant changes were also occurring for the college

personnel. Claude Owen died before the third year started, while Velma Jackson (40 plus years), Walter Johnson, Jessie LeGrand (37 years), E.M. Louthan (40 years), and Marvin G. Williams (45 years) would all be listed as Emeriti Professors in the 1975-76 catalog.<sup>252</sup> Students missed the opportunity to sit under these outstanding and unique faculty members who had meant so much to the college over the years. Remembrances of these professors by those who experienced their classes abound. Mr. Louthan, viewed by many as hard in his expectations of the students and noted for his flinging of used pieces of chalk out the windows, was really a very gentle, caring man who did want the students to succeed and would help them to do so if they sought his help. He died on August 13, 1976, at the age of 91, having served the college as professor, registrar, and business manager-treasurer.<sup>253</sup>

Dean Owen, a true gentleman in every sense of the word, spoke his "um, um," addressed a student as Miss or Mr., and would not let a student into the classroom if he/she was late. Miss LeGrand, diminutive in size, expected the students to produce and stood up to the tall basketball player and put this fact straight to him. She left her classroom in a hurry after the 12:30 classes to rush down to her small campus home to catch her favorite soap "As the World Turns."<sup>254</sup>

Velma Jackson, known for her red marks on student papers to emphasize their mistakes, was a grand teacher who inspired students to reach for the stars. No, she was not easy, but she cared, and she sought to bring out the best in a student. This writer knows, because he was one of those students. She received the Alumni Distinguished Service Award in 1974 and the Mary Mildred Sullivan Service Award in 1979. She had the distinction of being the first woman to be granted a B.A. degree at Davis and Elkins College in West Virginia.<sup>255</sup>

While these faculty members departed from the ranks, new ones arrived on campus, especially with the requirements introduced by the conversion to a senior institution. The demands of the new status would be great as far as faculty course loads and large enrollments in certain classes went. While the four-year program initially had the three divisions, in time the Division of Fine Arts would be created, along with the Division of Education. Gerald Clay, who had come to the college as a teacher of foreign languages, took the helm of the new Education Division. His diligence and solid efforts in this position put this fledgling area of study on the road to becoming



BC's FIRST STUDENT TEACHERS

one of the leading programs at the college and in the entire state of Virginia. It served the local areas, as well as distant ones, as well-trained young women and men entered the teaching profession and, in many cases, earned high honors in their respective fields of service. Mr. Clay, a man of impressive stature physically, took on this Herculean task in a remarkable manner, and, with the assistance of different colleagues, put Bluefield College on the map as far as the caliber of student teachers it committed to the teaching profession. He would be recognized for his good work in a number of ways during his career at Bluefield, a career that lasted thirty-six years until his retirement in 2006. It was the writer's privilege to serve on the Teacher Education Committee for twenty years and to witness first hand the tremendous challenges and rewards that characterized the work of the Education Division and Mr. Clay's positive leadership of it.

In looking back on his decision to become a four-year program, Dr. Tyer never had a question about the transition. He saw it as the "right thing to do" at the time and in subsequent years. The real question at stake was whether the college could have endured had the change not occurred. He expressed the thought that even if it had been able to survive as a junior college, it would not have had the impact on the community and Virginia Baptist students going to the seminaries.<sup>256</sup> He expressed satisfaction with what the college was able to do during the first decade of the new status even with

the reservations of SACS that were encountered. The college made do with what had been done to increase the size and capacity of the library as he, Dan Parrish, and Alex Mahood, Architect, came up with a design that worked so well. Actually, SACS expressed surprise at the renovation done.

Dr. Tyer also paid tribute to a good faculty and their efforts and the good potential that the new four-year program had. As an added source of encouragement, Dr. Harman supported him in the transition, stating that it was the thing that needed to be done. Dr. Harman's position on this matter helped to sway some trustees who hedged somewhat. This very fact represented a key move to get the process on track and moving.<sup>257</sup> At a special Trustee meeting with the president, the body passed a resolution to spend \$80,000 to develop the library holdings, a key element in any SACS look at an institution of higher learning.<sup>258</sup>

In the midst of all of the changes taking place, Dr. Tyer brought a strong plea to the Trustees to take the initiative in carrying out the proper functions of setting college policy, recruiting good students, giving financially, and seeking out and developing prospective corporate givers and being personal givers.<sup>259</sup> Dr. Tyer expressed overall disappointment that the school did not have a Trustee Board who felt that the future of the college should be their responsibility. He held that there was a failure in building what he called a "participatory" group, and expressed the feeling that there was a lack of "follow through" in many cases.<sup>260</sup> On April 19, 1975, the president had informed the Board that the Saver, Inc. firm hired by the college to work with the development program had cited a deficiency in the initiative taken by the Trustees and their involvement in the total life of the college. While the president used the firm's conclusions to urge the trustees to become more involved, he also had to report that Shaver, Inc. had mixed reviews of its performance in the overall picture, and that it was a poor choice that could not be recommended to anyone.<sup>261</sup> Still, he held to his comments concerning the lackluster performances of the trustees.

Fund raising for the college during the decade of the seventies and on into the eighties did not come easily. Dr. Tyer spoke of the difficulty of trying to convince SACS that programs and funding could be built in a parallel fashion. The campaign begun by the college had early on been unsuccessful. A campaign for the twenty-first century had

been shelved by the trustees. Thus, Dr. Tyler personally assumed the responsibility of doing the fund raising, feeling that Development would not get the job done. Taking on this particular task required more and more of his time to do it as he felt it should be done. The college did not seem to be benefiting in the best way possible, so he sought to correct this problem.<sup>262</sup>

Changing the position of the Director of Alumni and Public Relations to Director of Development, Dr. Tyler concentrated on visitation with pastors and churches for financial support, general support and student recruitment and visitation with financial institutions, businesses and foundations, primarily in Virginia.<sup>263</sup> Funds did come from a variety of sources, with foundations and trust supplying a good share. The college had to resort to additional funds to carry out specific projects. The Cruise Hall renovation received a \$10,000 grant from the Marietta McNeill Morgan and Samuel Tate Morgan, Jr. Foundation of Richmond for this purpose with the requirement that the college raise \$20,000 in matching funds.<sup>264</sup> A Jesse Ball DuPont Religious, Charitable, and Educational Fund grant of \$50,000 called on Bluefield to raise \$220,700 within two years in order to receive the grant.<sup>265</sup> Other Foundation gifts received made it possible to develop the Fine Arts Center and Student Center in the basement of Rish Hall, to build a new dormitory below Rish Hall, refurbish Cruise Hall, improve the faculty, to offer a "Distinguished Professor Award," to improve the Athletic program, to add a new wing to the library, to engage in the renovation of the Golden Dome, and the renovation and expansion of the dining hall.<sup>266</sup>

The Trustees had approved the "Distinguished Professor Award" at the April, 1983, meeting in recognition of long and distinguished service to the college of carefully selected individuals. Dr. Delgado and Professor Will Gordon were appointed Distinguished Professors in their respective fields.<sup>267</sup> The policy for Honorary degrees also received approval, and the body selected an Endowment Committee as a standing committee. It would consist of Trustee Chairman, Finance and Facilities Committee Chairperson, Foundations, Alumni, and Public Relations Committee Chairperson, and two trustees appointed by the Chairman.<sup>268</sup>

The school became the recipient of its largest grant to date when the Hugh Ike Shott, Jr. Foundation awarded it one million dollars for the dining hall renovation that would include a Student Union area.

Mr. Shott, in a prepared statement, said:

Great contributions to the community should be rewarded. Since 1922, Bluefield College has been training minds, preparing students to go out into their communities and serve for the benefit of all. Indeed, several members of my own family have benefitted from their Bluefield College education.<sup>269</sup>

It should be mentioned that Mr. Shott had been one of the leading supporters of the college in advocating that it be located in the Bluefield area.<sup>270</sup>

Groundbreaking for the new facility took place in Harman Chapel on March 3, 1986. A portrait of Hugh Ike Shott, Jr., unveiled by his nephew, Scott Shott, Sr., was to be placed in the foyer of the new building when completed.<sup>271</sup> The dedication took place on April 11, 1987, and Business Manager Dan Parrish reported that the work had been completed at a cost of \$1,237,970.<sup>272</sup>

The Exxon Educational Foundation awarded the college a \$25,000 matching grant to be used to expand educational uses of computer technology and to help implement in the best possible way computer equipment use in the different academic programs.<sup>273</sup> Several months later, the college announced that Dr. Tyler and two trustees had been able to raise \$40,000 of \$50,000 sought to upgrade the computer technology. This served to broaden the use of computers on campus considerably.<sup>274</sup> The computer age had truly arrived on the Bluefield College campus, and students, staff, faculty, and administration would share in the benefits of this marvelous development.

It should be noted that from the beginning of 1985 until the fall of the year, approximately 190 foundations had been contacted concerning possible contributions to projects on campus. Particular attention went to renovating the three original buildings on campus. During the 1986-87 fiscal year for the college, \$1,036,709.00 in gifts and grants came to the school. 1987 marked the first year for Bluefield to reach two million in annual operating income. Dr. Tyler commented: "We are indebted to all our donors for their confidence in us and for their level of support."<sup>275</sup>

In writing to an old Nashville days friend, whose estate, in greatest part, would be going to Yale University, a "top institution," Dr. Tyler mentioned that he and Ida Jen were planning to give to Bluefield

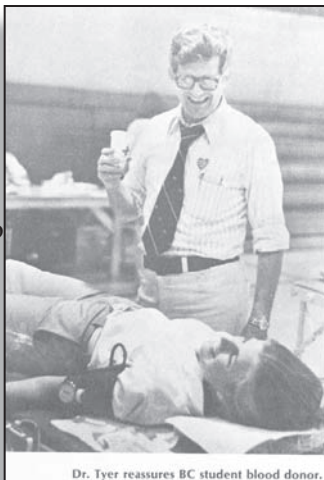


College in their estate plans. Bluefield needed the funds, and a gift of five or six figures, while small to large institutions like Yale, would be to Bluefield College a "Lifegiving Commitment." Dr. Tyer suggested that the friend give consideration to placing his funds where they would make a "real life and death difference." He, then, asked his friend if his letter said anything to him and where could the greatest impact be felt? He concluded by stating that he knew of no place that his friend's impact would be greater than at Bluefield College.<sup>276</sup>

Whether or not the friend listened in this case and gave to the college is uncertain, but the letter showed very clearly that the Tyers had a heart for Bluefield College and were prepared to support it through their own giving. The president expressed his desire and hope that others would share in the future of the college. He did not hesitate to urge even an old friend to think about the possibility of giving to Bluefield, even though committed to Yale. Perhaps, some would consider the president a bit too forward in doing this, but he was a person who was not afraid to go after things for the college. While this approach would not have been acceptable to everyone, no one could deny the fact that Dr. Tyer had his heart in the right place in all things related to the welfare of the college.

There was more than fundraising to consider. There was the act of giving blood, and, for Dr. Tyer, this was a favorite project. In 1981, he made his 92<sup>nd</sup> blood donation and continued to add to this

number every year.<sup>277</sup> He encouraged students, faculty, staff, and others on the campus to donate whenever the Bloodmobile came to the campus and elsewhere in the Bluefield area as well. He could be seen making his way around the Golden Dome, speaking to the various donors as they lay on the cots to give blood or as they rested following the experience, or, even as they waited their turn. He led others by example, encouraging others to aid their fellowman. He had a real passion about this particular commitment, but he also had other passions as well – his family, his church, his military



Dr. Tyer reassures BC student blood donor.

career, archaeological interests, wood- working, and various other interests.

He was in demand as a speaker in churches, Naturalization ceremonies, Baccalaureate and commencement services, for military occasions, for civic groups, revivals, seminars, conferences of many types, and many more occasions. He would gain a wider audience when he threw his hat into the ring to challenge incumbent Danny Bird for a seat in the Virginia Senate in 1979.

He gained the Republican nomination at the party's 38<sup>th</sup> Senatorial Convention in Pulaski.<sup>278</sup> If elected, he would be representing the counties of Bland, Craig, Giles, Pulaski, Wythe, and Tazewell. Former State Senator George Barnes became the Chairman of Dr. Tyer's campaign committee.<sup>279</sup> The president proceeded to establish the balance of his campaign machinery and set out on his course to win the election. He gained the support of Governor John Dalton and Representative William Wampler.<sup>280</sup> He ran his political ads, featuring himself as "an experienced college president," and used such terms as "knowledgeable," "dynamic," "capable," and "commanding," in some cases, while using the words "practical" and "efficient" in other instances.<sup>281</sup> George Barnes spoke of Dr. Tyer keeping Bluefield College in the black during all but one of the seven years that he had led the institution. He also spoke of Dr. Tyer's service in the U.S. Naval Reserve and the fact that he attained the rank of Captain, being one of only six men nationwide to be so honored in 1979.<sup>282</sup> The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* ran an article on him in which the paper mentioned his services as a commissioned officer in the Chaplain Corps of the U.S. Navy since 1955 and described him as "an experienced and dynamic man blessed with a keen mind, an articulate tongue, and a forceful personality."<sup>283</sup>

Dr. Tyer made his top priority in the contest the economy of the Commonwealth of Virginia and of the nation.<sup>284</sup> He ran hard, and he reached out with his message whenever and wherever he had the opportunity, but he faced a man whose strength as an incumbent made victory an almost insurmountable goal. Still, he gave it all that he could. When the smoke cleared and the votes came in, Mr. Byrd had won the election by a 3-1 margin, but, in doing so, he spoke of Dr. Charles Tyer as a "worthy opponent" and a "fine man" who was doing a good job at the college. Then, he declared: "I've been working hard to keep him at Bluefield College."<sup>285</sup> Thus, even in

defeat, the president had waged a strong run for office and earned the respect of his opponent and many others along the way. It would be a memorable time and experience for Dr. Tyler and for Bluefield College since no other president had run for political office while serving as head of the school.

In terms of enrollment, the college did achieve some gains as the third and fourth years of the new four-year program fit into place. By 1980, it was around 420 students, representing an increase of over nineteen percent. The president paid tribute to admissions personnel, faculty, staff, and others for their help in bringing about this increase.<sup>286</sup>

The new residence hall on the north side of and below Rish Hall was in use for the school year, aiding in housing the larger number of resident students. Bluefield College students were over shadowing larger institutions in the number of its graduates attending seminaries. This was a pleasing matter for the president, for it served to help students realize that God does have an interest in vocational choices.<sup>287</sup>

The 1978 yearbook spoke of Dr. Tyler's persistence and guidance in leading the college to become an accredited senior college. Student leadership recognized the fact that much effort had gone into the transition and that Dr. Tyler had been at the forefront of this process. The yearbooks of the next decade highlighted the things that were taking place on the campus. The Student Education Association was

now in its second year, and the Education program was gaining momentum.<sup>288</sup> The Virginia State Board of Education awarded the college's Teacher Education Program a five-year accreditation. Every graduate in this program would receive automatic certification in Virginia. There would be certification reciprocity in thirty-five states and the



DEEP IN STUDY.



STUDENT LEADERS, 1978

Department of Overseas Schools. Bluefield College became the first college in Virginia to have its program evaluated under the new state regulations made effective in July, 1982.<sup>289</sup>

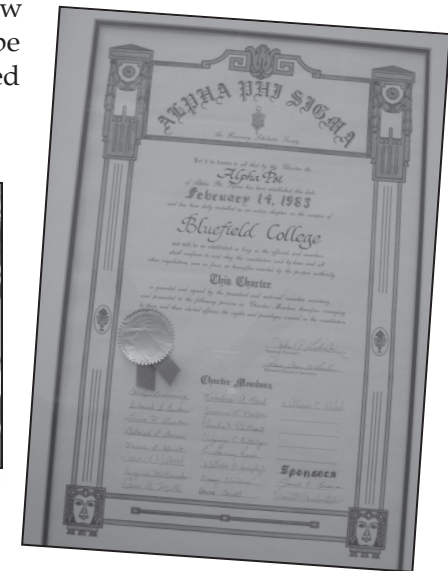
The Baptist Student Union expanded its ministries through the addition of a puppet ministry, appropriately called HIS Puppets. A clown ministry also became a part of the BSU outreach. A national theatre honor society, Delta Psi Omega, came into existence to accompany a successful drama program under Dr. Garrett's capable direction. A new honor society, Alpha Phi Sigma, arrived on campus through the efforts of Dr. Jack Brown, Dean of Students, to serve the four-year institution. Seventeen students became its charter members. Dr. Brown and Professor Armbrister served as sponsors of this organization. For many years, the school had Phi Theta Kappa under Mr. Williams' and then Mr. Addington's leadership. Now, it would become a part of Bluefield's past and be replaced by the new organization. Yet, there would be many good memories associated with Phi Theta Kappa.



PUBLICITY ON THE ROCK



ALPHA PHI HONOR SOCIETY INDUCTIONS, 1980's



BC CHARTERS THE ALPHA PHI SIGMA HONOR SOCIETY, 1983



A WINNING COMBINATION

In 1980, the men's basketball team had its first winning season since the 1973-74 season. The basketball team went to the National Little Collegiate Athletic Conference's national tournament as a result of its 1983-84 success on the court. In 1983, the Lady Rams won the volleyball championship of their regional conference and went to the National Little Collegiate Athletic Association's conference tournament in Wisconsin.<sup>290</sup> Early on no first-place trophies made it back to the campus, but the teams reaching the national tournaments experienced invaluable lessons. In 1985, the men's basketball team did reach the runner-up level in the national tournament. By 1988, the team had reached the semi-finals for the fourth year in a row.<sup>291</sup> In 1986, the college became a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics or NAIA.<sup>292</sup>

The Fine Arts School got underway in 1978, offering only music at first but expanding to include art, modern dance, ballet, and interpretive dance in time.<sup>293</sup> It met the needs of many off-campus people, along with those on campus. The college chapter of the Student Education Association received an Award for Excellence for an outstanding local chapter from the Student Advisory Committee of the National Education Association, becoming one of only six chapters to attain this honor.<sup>294</sup> Julie Hull, Bluefield College basketball star, reached a school-record 1001 points, and, for the second consecutive year, received the honor of being named to the NAIA Women's Basketball Academic All-American teams with a 3.966 Grade Point Average, the only athlete in the history of the college at the time to be selected.<sup>295</sup> She would also be selected for

the NAIA All-American team for her basketball playing, making her the first recipient of both honors. Rob Wills, pitcher for the Rams baseball team, and blessed with a tenor voice that would knock one out of his seat, won All-American honors for his sterling baseball performances on the mound.<sup>296</sup>

Many significant happenings related to the college occurred during the decade of the eighties beyond the ones already mentioned, but there are six which merit special attention. First, there was the incorporation of a Sports Hall of Fame in 1981 with ten charter members being recognized.<sup>297</sup> Coach Mullie LeNoir, outstanding in his services from 1929-1940,

was the first person to be inducted posthumously into the membership of this select group. His son, Mullie Jr., accepted the award on behalf of his father.<sup>298</sup> A number of outstanding athletes would be inducted in the years to follow, representing men and women's basketball, women's volleyball, men's baseball, and other varsity sports. This has been a good avenue to reward the exceptional talents of many young women and men who have excelled in their respective sports and represented the college well.



WOMEN'S BASKETBALL, 1984



SPORTS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES, 2003

The second item has to do with a man whose life seemed destined to go the wrong way until Bluefield College entered his life. Cam Mills had committed an armed robbery in Bluefield. While lodged in the Mercer County jail, he met John Ross Hill, a student at the college and part-time Chaplain at the jail. At forty years of age, through the witness of John Hill, Cam Mills received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of his life. He became a freshman at the college when released and completed three years there before being sent to prison in West Virginia to start serving the sentence that he had been given. After eight months in prison, the West Virginia Governor reduced his sentence to the one year that he had served. He had been able to keep up with his work through the assistance of Professor Tom Farrar and the support of those at the college and, thus, he was able to graduate with his class. He attended Southeastern Theological Seminary and graduated from there. In 1987, he returned to the college to speak in Chapel. At the time, he was serving as Clinical Chaplain at the Western Correctional Center in Morganton, North Carolina.<sup>299</sup> It was very meaningful for the college audience to hear from a man whose life had been changed through the work of one of its own. Indeed, the college, as a whole, played a key role in helping Cam Mills reorient his life and become a productive citizen and spokesman for Christ to others who, like himself, had gone astray and needed to find new direction in their lives. Cam Mills' family also benefited greatly from this man's conversion and his decision to come to Bluefield College.

The third item centers on a young man who came to the college to study and to play baseball. He performed well on the field. However, things would turn very ugly for Darrell Booth on the night of November 3, 1980. He was working part-time as a clerk at the local 7-11 store at the eastern end of College Avenue. Around 9:15 p.m., a man carrying a shotgun entered and demanded the money in the cash register. Darrell gave him the money, but the man still shot this young man squarely in the face. He then left the store and escaped, ultimately to be captured in Washington State. Darrell Booth would be taken to the hospital where his life hung in the balance. The fact that, in the Emergency Room, the doctor had inserted a trachea tube actually enabled him to live. Ultimately, he would be transferred to Montgomery County Hospital and closer to his home and family. He remained there in ICU for twenty-three days. His injuries resulted in the loss of eleven teeth and other facial destruction and

the loss of thirty-six pounds. He had to undergo four surgeries and learned, in the course of his treatments, that he would never be able to play baseball again. This news was absolutely disheartening, but Darrell was not one to give up easily. Gradually, he resumed play, determined to prove the doctors wrong about doing baseball again. He served as a pinch hitter mostly. During his two seasons with the Rams, he stole thirty-one bases out of thirty-two attempts. His teammates provided him with great encouragement.

Darrell viewed his survival as a miracle and expressed appreciation to the people at the college whose daily prayers and get well cards provided him encouragement and hope. He still had challenges ahead of him at the time, but the fact that he came back following such terrible injuries spoke volumes.<sup>300</sup> He returned to visit the college sometime later, and while there was still evidence of the injuries that he had suffered, his condition had greatly inspired the entire campus family and brought forth words of thankfulness from every heart. Darrell was a very brave young man who showed everyone his unbelievable courage, determination, and faith. His story is certainly one that deserves to be incorporated into the history of Bluefield College.

The fourth item has to do with a humble man who served as custodian at the college, off and on, for twelve years. Earl Frankenfeld's assignment was to take care of Cruise Hall. While he was at the college, he painted religious scenes on the walls of the boiler room. His paintings would ultimately embrace some 160 panels on two walls. When wall space gave out, he used oil drums for his canvas. His paintings depicted scenes from both the Old and the New Testaments. He did all of this without the benefit of format training. Each square presented the artist's interpretation of the particular scene. His knowledge of the Bible aided the students on various occasions. One student, commenting on Mr. Frankenfeld's achievement, said that Earl painted "to please the Lord only."<sup>301</sup> He really didn't care about how others evaluated his work. He died in 1979, and his work regrettably perished when the men's dormitory underwent renovations.<sup>302</sup> Sadly, the work of this man did not become known by many on or off campus. This writer had no knowledge of its existence until a newspaper article showed up during his research. It is a shame that Mr. Frankenfeld's work did not find a greater audience before its destruction.

A fifth item has to do with two women who began their studies on a small scale at the college in the late 1980's and went on to graduate. Thedia Harris, retired and a grandmother, began with two classes in a special program known as "Try One." The year was 1987. She continued on, gradually becoming a fulltime student and completing the requirements for graduation. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and proved that an older person could pursue studies and do well. She proved to be an inspiration for the younger students, and they also were helpful to her.<sup>303</sup>

Cleta "Maggie" Francis, born on August 30, 1922, only a few days before Bluefield College opened its doors for the first time, followed the same course as Mrs. Harris. Starting under the "Try One" plan, she continued taking courses until she earned an Associate degree in 1993 at the age of 70. She then set



MAGGIE FRANCIS GRADUATES AT AGE 70.

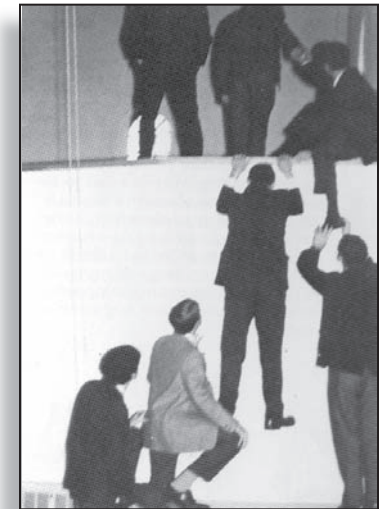
about the task of completing the requirements for a Bachelor's degree. She took care of this through the assistance of professors who sought to help her in any way possible. She found a niche in the field of art and, under the guidance of Art Professor, Walter Shroyer, she made her way. She, too, inspired students and faculty and received their support and encouragement in return. She made her days count and always spoke of having nothing to do with a "pity party." She earned membership in Alpha Phi Sigma Honor Society and sewed a quilt for the organization to help it earn money for its treasury. She, along with Mrs. Harris, will be remembered by those who taught them and the students who were in class with them. Sadly, Mrs. Francis died on June 27, 2006, at the age of 83.<sup>304</sup>

The sixth item has to do with a mysterious group that existed on the campus for a period of time. It identified itself as the Secret Seven. Only recently did I see a picture taken of seven individuals with their backs to the camera. These supposedly were the group so identified. While it operated on campus a number of years ago, its reputation has carried up until the present day. How this group started remains a

secret, although the writer would suspect that there are other alumni of the day who probably know all about the group. In any event, it certainly has been a topic of conversation over the years.

The group engaged in both mischievous and beneficial activities. Nora Lockett, class of 1972, recalled that these individuals set tables on top of each other in the library, switched the card catalogs around, and left a large, unabridged dictionary opened to the page where the word seven was located and circled in red. Dr. Harman laughed at this indication of the identity of the culprits and credited them with a certain amount of ingenuity. They also took the bottoms out of the seats in the Harman Chapel and stacked them on the stage. They changed signs around in the Administration Buildings so that a rest room became an office, etc.<sup>305</sup> Professor Will Gordon recalled that the group had somehow picked up Professor Bill Daniel's Renault automobile, transported it into the library, and left it on the floor in the middle of the building.<sup>306</sup> Can't you imagine the looks on the faces of the library staff when they found the car there and on Professor Daniel's face when he found his car missing?

On the other side of things, these individuals went into the President's office during the Christmas season and set up a Christmas tree. They also decorated the second floor of the Administration Building. Perhaps one of the most interesting and captivating things that they did was in connection with a Bluefield College Homecoming parade. Their car was part of the procession, but it had slits for openings so that they could see out, but no one along the parade route could see inside the vehicle. They were, indeed, a clever group of individuals who caught the imagination of many, along with the ire of some. One has to wonder if they spent as much time with their studies as they did in planning and carrying out their diverse activities. Of course, only a professor (or should I say retired



SECRET SEVEN



PROFESSORS DAVID ARMBRISTER (left) AND JACK BROWN (right), AUTHORS OF "DR. CHARLIE," A TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT CHARLES HARMAN (center).

professor) would ask such a question. They had ready access to every building on campus, so maybe one or more of them aspired to lock picking as a chosen career. In the end, it can probably be said that they remain an intriguing part of the college history. Maybe some day, a confession or two, or maybe even seven, will be forthcoming.

George Young, freshly out of the army, entered the college when he was twenty-six years old. Because of his maturity, he would be appointed to serve as Acting Dean of Men in 1968-69. The Secret Seven had just begun their ventures, and since he knew most of its members in 1967-1968, it placed him in an awkward position with Mr. Richard Foil when he became Dean of Men to replace Mr. Young.<sup>307</sup> Mr. Young, would you provide the names that all interested alumni want to know? No, probably not.

The Tyer era included the addition of two new divisions in 1983. They were the Division of Education with Gerald Clay as Acting Chairperson, already mentioned previously, and the Division of Business with Professor Hugh Cole as its Acting Chairperson. The Division of Library Services received the approval of the trustees at the same time. At this trustee session, a recommendation to study the possibility of a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing received approval.<sup>308</sup> This study moved through an initial phase where considerable study would be given to discern the feasibility of such

a program. The results obtained were not favorable to advancing to the next phase, and, thus, the trustees voted not to take this step.<sup>309</sup>

In 1986, the college received trustee approval to add a Bachelor of General Studies Degree, along with an Education program and an Honors program.<sup>310</sup> The trustees agreed to the deletion of the policy of "no borrowing funds" from the proposed recommendations under Fiscal Policies in the Long Range Planning Commission Report prior to its acceptance.<sup>311</sup> Trustee minutes reflect that there was a continued focus on renovation of facilities, a strong emphasis on admission efforts with a consideration of providing a video to assist in these endeavors, and a proposal to create the position of Assistant Director of Admissions as a way of freeing the Director for devoting more time to recruiting.<sup>312</sup> In addition, the college held its first "open house" in late April, 1986, to give prospective students and parents the opportunity to visit the campus, meet college personnel, and get acquainted with the programs being offered, and the school's facilities.<sup>313</sup> While a number of alumni had returned to teach at the college, Dr. Wayne Massey, class of 1959, had the distinction of being the first to have earned a doctoral degree and returned.<sup>314</sup> He would join the ranks of the other alumni serving the college and help provide a strong endorsement of an education received at Bluefield.

Two other developments along the way had been the action taken by the college in naming Mr. Dan Parrish, already in place, the Business Manager-Treasurer as a followup of a SACS' recommendation.<sup>315</sup> The second development was of an entirely different order. Miss Robin Kealey became the first female athlete to be awarded an athletic



2002: GOLF CONFERENCE CHAMPS

scholarship. She participated on the women's volleyball team and the men's golf team. She expressed a sense of accomplishment in being part of the building of a women's sports program.<sup>316</sup> In the midst of the things going on at the college, Dr. Tyler was being named "Man of the Year" by the Greater Bluefield Jaycees in 1984, earning this honor and tribute for the work that he did at the college but, also, for the various other areas of concern to which he devoted time and attention.<sup>317</sup>

During the mid eighties, there seemed to be a groundswell of concern about whether or not the college was still the religious school that it had been at one time. The administration of the school defended it by stating that there was a strong religious atmosphere present on the campus. First of all, there were fifty-nine students committed to religious vocation, a figure that represented sixteen percent of the fulltime student body. In addition, thirty-one of the graduates from the college were, at that time, in various seminaries, exceeding both Averett and the University of Richmond. There still remained a positive expression that the campus was one "where Jesus came first."<sup>318</sup> An even greater number of graduates had been in the seminaries in the past years, surpassing all Virginia Baptist colleges. It might well have been that some of the criticism being directed at the college had to do with Dr. Tyler's approach as Senior Religion Professor. He readily admitted that he did expose his students to a broader scope of Biblical studies. He did not focus solely on fundamentalism and conservatism. Consequently, there did arise a certain level of negative reactions to his positions. Yet, he could add that he cared for his students, and that some of them stayed in touch with him. Others visited him from time to time. Even some of the parents of students whom he had instructed remained in touch with him.<sup>319</sup>

Dr. Tyler expressed great concern about the battle being waged within the Southern Baptist Convention and the effects that this conflict was having on state conventions. He saw Bluefield as being



RESIDENCE LIFE, 1990s

the most vulnerable of Virginia Baptist educational institutions and cautioned those at the college and many elsewhere to be on their guard. He used a little saying, one familiar to many people, to put across his point.<sup>320</sup>

He drew a circle that shut me out,  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to float.  
But love and I had the wit to win,  
We drew a circle and took him in.<sup>321</sup>

While the religious issue was getting attention, the college was involved in seeking designs for the renovation of Cruise Hall and Lansdell Hall. Dr. Tyler was busy working with foundations in close to ten states with some results achieved. He expressed the feeling that endowment money was the hardest to raise as providers looked for a visual confirmation of what they were supporting.<sup>322</sup> Things remained busy at the college, but, underneath, currents of unrest were present. While renovations were important, steps were being taken to secure a campus minister, a recruitment video had been approved, and the trustees were paying for a new and attractive brochure to aid in the recruiting process; concerns were being expressed by students and faculty and brought to the attention of the Trustees who had only recently voted to give the president an increase in his salary of ten percent of his base salary.<sup>323</sup>

It is not the intention of this writer to mention the multi-layered aspects of this issue, nor does he consider it his place to do so. He does not intend to cast aspersion in any direction. He simply states that there does arise, at times, in life's experiences, a need for change based on a number of factors. Bluefield College had, by all indications, reached that point by 1988, and, therefore, on April 25, Dr. Charles Tyler tendered his letter of resignation to the Trustees. When it was not accepted as submitted, he sent a second letter on April 29. This one did find acceptance.<sup>324</sup>

The *Religious Herald* of May 5, 1988, reported that "during the current school year...differences in policy and direction" had arisen between Dr. Tyler and a majority of the Trustees. In the April 16 meeting, the board had indicated that they felt a change of leadership was needed. They based their determination on the report and recommendations of a special committee of the trustees authorized to determine the present and future needs of Bluefield College as seen by the faculty,

alumni, administration, community leaders, and Virginia Baptists. The resignation of the president was to take effect immediately. Gary Garner, Academic Dean, became Interim C.E.O. by action of the Executive Committee of the Trustees and the approval of the full board. Dr. Tyer would remain at the school through the semester to complete the classes that he was teaching.<sup>325</sup>

In a letter to the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, dated May 4, 1988, Dr. Tyer shared his version of the situation. While he had understood the desire and request for his resignation, in communications with those in charge, he had not received a written document requesting his resignation. He awaited the arrival of such a document and legal notice concerning the request. He concluded by stating:

I have tried to live my presidency on the basis of up front openness and honesty. I would not wish my friends in the community to feel as that presidency comes to an end that I was involved in an incorrect statement.<sup>326</sup>

Previously, in a statement given to *The Marketer* several months earlier, Dr. Tyer, beginning his sixteenth year at the college, had spoken these words: "There's no place more beautiful than right here. With that mountain out there and this campus – no place more beautiful."<sup>327</sup> The Texas native expressed pride in having planted his roots in Virginia and declared his intention to stay in the area for years to come.<sup>328</sup> The Tyers had purchased a house across the main road in front of the college, east of the home in which they lived while he served as president. His sudden and unexpected departure was a shock for many and not well received by all who learned about it either by way of the media or word of mouth.

The family had to determine their plans for the future within a relatively short period of time and under circumstances that were not the best. Their plans would ultimately involve their sojourn to the far away state of Maine where their daughter, Linda, and her family, lived and practiced medicine. Their son, Charles, Jr., would be close at hand in that area as well, and their grandchildren would be there for them to enjoy. The transition would certainly not be easy, but the Tyers adapted to their northern environment and became beloved citizens of Belfast, Maine. There, they found a warm welcome and were provided with many opportunities for service. American Baptist churches of the area would call upon Dr. Tyer

for many educational endeavors. Mrs. Tyer was a busy substitute teacher in the public school system. They would discover a diverse group of people to whom they could introduce their good southern hospitality.<sup>329</sup> In visiting the Tyers in November, 1995, to conduct an interview with the former president, the writer and his wife observed the respect given to Dr. and Mrs. Tyer and the bonds of friendship which had been forged with the people of Belfast.

That interview of November 20 was a meaningful one in which Mr. Tyer graciously provided many responses to the questions asked. In his closing thoughts, he remarked that Bluefield College, by and large, was a very good and positive experience for him and Ida Jean. He also spoke of his positive experiences in Maine, pastoring Belfast Baptist Church, teaching at Bangor Theological Seminary and an interdenominational school, and being involved in many other activities of an educational nature, as well as religious and civic activities. He became bedridden following a long illness and passed away in June 2003. Mrs. Tyer remains in the home where they were residing at the time of his death.<sup>330</sup>

The Tyers left behind much that was positive in the life of the college. Dr. Robert Shackelford, alumnus and former pastor of First Baptist Church of Bluefield, West Virginia, called him a "tireless servant of Bluefield College who believed in the college and worked vigorously to promote it."<sup>331</sup> He went on to say that Dr. Tyer cared for the people at the college. His assertive style of leadership did not suit some people, yet, "what happened about his resignation should not cloud his leadership at the college."<sup>332</sup> Both Rita Blevins and Carrie Camden, alumnae of Bluefield and still employed there as staff persons, remembered Dr. Tyer's kindnesses to them in the context of their association with him while he was president.<sup>333</sup> There were those from the community who voiced their admiration of him and the services that he rendered to the college and to the community and the area.

In any assessment of Dr. Tyer's presidency, first and foremost in the mind of this writer and many other people as well, is the fact that his decision to change Bluefield College's status to a four-year school undoubtedly saved the college from having to close its doors. He did his homework well when it came to sharing with the Trustees and others who would be involved with the process. He provided sufficiently strong grounds for taking such a step. He also led the



college in a program of badly needed renovations to help bring facilities up to a good level. He was instrumental in helping secure a number of strategic grants to assist with the renovations and other essentials for the programs at Bluefield. The tremendous boost that the Shott Foundation gave to the college that made it possible to produce the new complex of Shott Hall was an enormous measure of success. A new dormitory arose on campus to fill a need. Many other initiatives took place under his leadership. The Tyers purchased a beautiful set of Syracuse China and a nice silverware set to be used by the college. These dishes remain in use today. The Tyers donated the funds and commissioned a new portrait of Dr. Harman to be hung in the gallery of Presidents in Lansdell Hall. He initiated the placing of appropriate plaques in the building already named, but where outside identification was lacking. Yet, outside identification

was lacking. The dedication ceremonies to accomplish this goal were very meaningful. There may well have been other things that he alone, and with Mrs. Tyer, did that no one knew at the time or will ever know.

While Dr. Charles Tyer, Sr.'s presidency did not end on the note that he had hoped for nor did his plans to stay in the Bluefield area following retirement work out, his legacy at the college should always be deemed significant. His sixteen years at the college concluded that period which began in 1934 with Dr. Edwin Wade who served twelve years and continued with Dr. Charles Harman who held the presidency for twenty-six years. It, indeed, was a time of settling in and staying longer – fifty-four years as compared with the fourteen years of the institution's first three presidents. 🍀

— CHAPTER FOUR —  
CHANGING COMPLEXION: CAMPUS IN MOTION – 1989-1996

At the October 15, 1988, Trustee meeting, the full board approved, ratified, and adopted the actions of the Executive Board in requesting and accepting Dr. Tyer's resignation and approved the press release related to this action. Dr. Garner had assumed the position of CEO on an interim basis for the 1988-1989 school year. The trustees also adopted the Statement of Goals drawn up by the Search Committee previously appointed and made them their own goals. They acknowledged the services of Mr. Jim Dudley through the enactment of an appropriate resolution and authorized the home used by Dr. and Mrs. Harman for sale and appraisals for review by the proper trustee committee. The Executive Committee also reported that the college would apply for a campus minister to be placed on the campus for the 1989-90 school year.<sup>1</sup>

Founders Day began in November, 1988; Dr. John Tresch played a major role in getting it implemented and presided at its first session. David Armbrister shared with this first audience his message "Looking Back to Look Ahead." Its primary purpose was and remains "to celebrate Bluefield College's rich tradition and to honor its founders."<sup>2</sup> It would provide the students insight into and evoke appreciation for the college.<sup>3</sup>

The Search Committee which had gone to work following its appointment in April, 1988, brought its report to the Trustees on January 14, 1989. This report contained five basic items. The first of these was to elect Dr. Roy A. Dobyms as the new president, effective February 1, with negotiations to be completed. The second item was a proposal that the Finance and Facilities Committee be authorized to renovate the president's home, using reserves and

replenishing them from funds obtained through the sale of the Harman house. Thirdly, the report recommended that the present Chairman of the Board and Chairman Elect, appoint a President's Advisory Committee to assist in the transition of the new president. Fourthly, it called for a special committee to be appointed to plan for the inauguration of the new president. As a final item, the committee called for funds to be set aside from transition funds to employ a consultant in the areas of recruitment and enrollment to provide immediate counsel in enhancing those areas for the president. All five of the recommendations received the approval of the body.<sup>4</sup>

Other actions taken at this time included an expression of appreciation to Dr. Gary Garner for his services as Acting CEO since April, 1988, and a request that he retain the position until February 1 when Dr. Dobyms would assume the presidency. A letter of appreciation to the administration, faculty, and staff for their faithfulness and positive spirit throughout the transition was yet another action taken. Mr. Jim Dudley, by trustee vote, would receive an honorary degree, a step that recognized the fine contributions of this alumnus, trustee, and trustee chairperson. President Elect Dobyms met with the Board at this time and talked about his excitement in looking at the challenge that he faced. He pledged total dedication and commitment to the office that he would soon be holding.<sup>5</sup>

A new era loomed on the horizon for Bluefield College as Dr. Roy A. Dobyms, eighth president of the institution, left his previous work at Carson-Newman College in Tennessee to begin his services at Bluefield. At Carson-Newman, he was serving as Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the college, and Professor of Math. His previous appointments were at Clayton State College in Georgia (1973-1975), Professor of Math and Department Chairman at Georgetown College in Kentucky (1968-1973), Professor of Math at McNeese State University in Louisiana (1958-1968), and Assistant Professor of Math at Louisiana College in Louisiana (1956-1958). He graduated from Carson-Newman College with his Bachelor of Arts degree in Math, and from the George Peabody College of Vanderbilt



HISTORICAL MARKER DEDICATION

University with his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Math. He married the former Kathryn Williams, and they had three sons, Roy Jr. and his wife Robin; John and his wife Carol; and Joe, along with three grandchildren.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Dobyms offered these comments concerning his new position:

I am excited about the potential of Bluefield College and stated as his goal to meet the needs of students in the Bluefield area, the Appalachian region, and among Virginia Baptists.<sup>7</sup>

Trustee Chairperson, Jim Dudley, declared that the college was entering an exciting era with the election of Dr. Dobyms. He went on to say about the new president:

He shares trustee goals that anticipate a new era of growth for the college and of service to the Bluefield communities and surrounding region. The Trustees look forward to working with Dr. Dobyms.<sup>8</sup>

What were those goals established by the Trustees? They were as follows:

1. Doubling the enrollment with a target of 750
2. Increasing faculty salaries
3. Expanding the library, dormitory, and classroom renovations
4. Invigorating a student life outside the classroom by new cultural, social, and athletic activities<sup>9</sup>

In order to accomplish these goals, Dr. Dobyms indicated that he would pursue aggressive student recruitment and utilize innovative development plans. What he had taken on as chief administrator was, indeed, a terrific challenge. He admitted that when he walked on the campus during those beginning days of service, he actually experienced depression. He had doubts about whether or not he had done the right thing in accepting the presidency and leaving behind a good career at Carson-Newman. He was happy there. Yet, as he considered the situation, he determined that, rather than dwell on it, he would simply roll up his sleeves and get to work. While he had come to realize that it was a greater challenge than he had thought earlier, he had made the decision to accept it. In addition to the Trustee goals previously mentioned, there was also that goal of raising seven and one-half million dollars in a capital campaign.<sup>10</sup>

Confronted with these daunting tasks, he began to make his way toward a new day for Bluefield. He would meet them head on and seek to succeed in dealing with them to the best of his ability. While his presidency was well underway, his official inauguration did not take place until October 20, 1989. Preceded by an Inaugural Concert on the previous evening and an Inaugural Breakfast for community leaders that morning, the Inauguration Convocation proved to be a very impressive affair. Representatives of the student body, faculty, the Bluefields, the alumni, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, former institutions where he served, and trustees assembled for the occasion. Dr. Thomas E. Corts, President of Samford University, presented the main address. Dr. Dobyms received the Presidential Medallion from Trustee Katherine Tierney, following his introduction by Mr. James Dudley, Past Trustee Chairperson, and installation by Dr. T. Keith Edwards, the current Trustee Chairperson. Dr. Joe Burton, Vice Chairperson, offered the prayer of dedication.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Dr. Corts, in his remarks, said that God had brought “the two of you together – Bluefield College and my friends, the Dobyms....”<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Dobyms shared his remarks in response to all that had preceded, the entire audience sang the Alma Mater, and Dr. John W. Tresch, Jr. offered the closing benediction. It was a fitting ceremony with a large crowd gathered in Harman Chapel to share those special moments with Dr. Dobyms and his family.<sup>13</sup>

With the words of Mr. Dudley echoing in the halls of the administration building and in the ears of those who heard him speak of Dr. Dobyms as “a man for the time,” Dr. Roy Dobyms had started from day one on February 1 to initiate the process of moving the college forward.<sup>14</sup> The Trustees approved a budget exceeding the previous year’s by twenty-five percent and including funds for development and student recruitment. Cruise Hall renovations



PRESIDENT ROY DOBYMS

were completed, and the enrollment of 437 students topped the previous fall number by nineteen percent.<sup>15</sup> Dr. Dobyms brought in Mr. Russell Bridges as the new Director of Development. Mr. Bridges arrived at Bluefield with eighteen years of experience in institutional development and with Dr. Dobyms's confidence in his fund-raising abilities.<sup>16</sup> The president emphasized the combination of the Christian viewpoint and values, pointing out that "no person is fully educated unless their studies have brought them to the truth which God revealed in Christ."<sup>17</sup>

The college was in the initial stage of an unbelievably tremendous acceleration mode. No one could have predicted what would take place on and off the campus over the years following Dr. Dobyms's commencement of his presidency. Mr. Dudley had spoken about the anticipation of a "new era of growth," but no one could really foresee how that growth would actually take place. When the Trustees met in October, 1989, the president shared development to date: Cruise Hall renovation completed and its costs met, a new switch board and information center on the second floor of Lansdell Hall, redecoration of the Admissions Office, painting of Rish Hall, and directories for Lansdell Hall offices on the first and second floors. He also called attention to the need for a new and permanent sign for the front of the school.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Trustees had already established an endowment program under Dr. Tyer's leadership, the Board, at this time, focused on making the "Living Endowment" program a major feature of the new direction being taken by the college. A great boost to the financial picture came from a bequest of \$100,000 from Mr. George Cruise's will and also through a two-million dollar gift from the George M. Cruise Foundation to provide scholarships in southern West Virginia and southwest Virginia.<sup>19</sup> Through the Dwight D. Eisenhower Math and Science Education Title II Program, applied for by the college's Education Division, the school received a grant of \$39,000 to provide training to improve the teaching of math in southwest Virginia public schools. A gift of over \$50,000 provided scholarship funds preferably to students from Tazewell, Buchanan, and Dickensen counties in Virginia.<sup>20</sup>

This funding would benefit the college greatly and aid the enrollment efforts. The Fall, 1990 enrollment reached 523, marking an overall thirty-nine percent increase from 1988-1990.<sup>21</sup> The Education

Division received a \$60,000 grant from the same Title II Program that had provided earlier funding. This larger grant enabled the college to extend the training for math teachers in additional counties in southwest Virginia. The Division was achieving additional outreach through other avenues as well.<sup>22</sup>

The president sought authorization from the Trustees to establish a Strategic Planning Committee to be comprised of students, administration, faculty, and trustee representation. Receiving this authorization in 1989, the committee, once in place, set out to develop a document that would address the possibilities for the future, the requirements associated with those possibilities, and a road map that would help achieve them. Dr. Dobyms emphasized the need for a science building to provide additional space for classes, Lansdell Hall being far too limited in this respect.<sup>23</sup> In doing so, he echoed the call of previous presidents for this facility.

The committee's plan received the approval of the Trustees. It entailed the construction of several new buildings, an enrollment of 750, significant investments in the faculty and students, two new parking lots, the new science building, new campus roadway, renovation of Lansdell Hall, the expansion of Shott Hall's Student Activities Center, among other things with the investment totaling over \$6,000,000. The Director of Development, Russell Bridges, and Dr. E. Bruce Heilman, Development Consultant, were at work putting together a fund-raising proposal for the Trustees to consider and, hopefully, approve.<sup>24</sup>

A new program that would play a tremendous role in moving the college ahead in meeting its enrollment goals, as well as additional income, commenced on October 30, 1990. On this red-letter date, Bluefield College and Spring Arbor College in Michigan signed an agreement allowing Bluefield to purchase an educational curriculum for adult learning. The Management of Human Resources Program became a reality for the college.<sup>25</sup>



STUDENTS IN THE ADULT DEGREE-COMPLETION PROGRAM.



ANITA LYLE (center), A GRADUATE OF THE ADULT PROGRAM.

This program would allow working adults to complete the requirements in fifty-five weeks, meeting each class for four hours one night every week. The demands of the program were definitely not easy, but the program met genuine needs and prospered right away.<sup>26</sup>

The initial group of fifteen students met for the first time on March 3, 1991, and by the latter part of 1992, six groups with eighty-five students were busy at work, with a seventh projected to begin in January, 1993. An October commencement saw twenty-five students graduate as the first group to do so.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Garner, Director of Alternative and Continuing Education which embraced the MHR program called the MHR program a "wise move" and stated that the anticipated income over expenses would likely be \$100,000. Those who were in charge of the program described the students as "enthusiastic, apprehensive, eager, scared, but, above all else, excited."<sup>28</sup> A student received up to thirty semester hours of credit for what would be termed "experiential life learning" since high school and not under the supervision of a college or university. Dr. Garner expressed the view that this program addressed the president's concern in a "very tangible way" and showed that Bluefield was:

providing an effective vehicle for working adults to return to academia and complete a baccalaureate degree which has relevance to personal and professional growth.<sup>29</sup>

Students participating in the program were very high in their praise. Mr. Tom Sawyers stated that it was an "excellent program" that provided the only way that folks like himself could complete college and earn a degree.<sup>30</sup> John Davidson regarded it as "one of the best things going for working people," and, like Mr. Sawyers had stated, it was the only way that he could finish his college degree.<sup>31</sup> Undoubtedly, similar remarks were offered by others in the program.

On August 6, 1993, Alpha Sigma Lambda, national honor society for adult learners in continuing higher education, announced the formation of the Theta Pi Chapter for Bluefield College. Four faculty members and seven students constituted the charter members of this organization.<sup>32</sup> This development was but one of many that were taking place on the campus of this small southwestern Virginia college.

The Trustees approved the site for the proposed science building. With a projected cost of 2.5 million, the president received the necessary authorization to seek competitive funding for a low-interest loan for 2.25 million.<sup>33</sup> The time frame set originally would be changed the following year (1991) to twenty plus years as the maximum time to pay off the loan, and the Facilities and Finance Committee and President would be authorized to proceed with negotiations for a loan for the science building.<sup>34</sup> The goal set for the beginning construction was the summer of 1991.

Money from George M. Cruise was to be used to renovate Cruise Hall, a project begun in the previous administration. Mr. Greg Sink, alumnus, came to the college as Director of Alumni and Church Relations. "Bluefield College Comes to Town" programs would be held in various locations to inform and recruit. The Bluefield College Envoy Program went into place, establishing an envoy for each of the forty-four Baptist Associations in Virginia. Its primary purpose was to keep a meaningful relationship between the college and each association. It provided a mode of getting and giving information.<sup>35</sup>

In his 1990-1991 annual report, Dr. Dobyms spoke of a year that had "witnessed the generation of a sense of momentum and potential" and the fact that this sense had "lifted the spirit of the campus."<sup>36</sup> The Capital campaign to meet the goals of the Strategic Plan approved was underway, ground breaking for the new science center had taken place in July, six new faculty positions had been added, and greater financial aid had been provided for the students. In the midst of such growth, he stated that there was one constant - "Bluefield's belief in God and commitment to Christian education."<sup>37</sup>

He stressed the fact that the college maintained strong ties with the Baptist General Association of Virginia.<sup>38</sup> The trustees had approved the working draft of a covenant agreement with the BGAV.<sup>39</sup> At the behest of the faculty in a unanimous vote, the phrase "Christian context" was a desired change in the Purpose Statement of the

institution. The Trustees received this request for consideration, and, in a matter of time, the Statement of Purpose with the amended phrase would be approved.<sup>40</sup> It seemed that academic and spiritual matters were receiving the proper attention.

The academic programs experienced a major boost with the addition of the Freshman Seminar in 1990 under the guidance of Mrs. Mickey Pellillo. It consisted of two sessions weekly in the fall semester with faculty and staff members serving as mentors/advisors to assist the students in experiencing a more positive transition to college life.<sup>41</sup> It would become an invaluable tool in the retention process, even though there were some negative feedbacks from student participants. As with most new approaches, there would be the need for some revisions to attain the best program possible. The 1993-1994 catalog was the first one in which the Freshman Seminar was actually listed. Along with this change came a new program of giving recognition to faculty and staff through honors bestowed yearly at a Recognition Banquet.<sup>42</sup>

Dr. Ben Barrus had taken over the duties of Academic Dean when Dr. Delgado returned to the classroom fulltime under the four-year status. While he performed those duties well, along with his classroom teaching, Dr. Barrus had serious health issues that grew worse over the course of his tenure, eventually forcing him to resign this position. Dr. Gary Garner had succeeded Dr. Barrus in this office and, as indicated in earlier coverage, carried out those duties, along with other significant ones until he left the college for other employment. Two new divisions, Division of Alternative and Continuing Education and the Division of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, had come into being, making a total of eight divisions now under the Academic Dean's office.<sup>43</sup> Dr. Paul Beasley began his services as Vice President for Academic Affairs for the college on August 1, 1991, and served effectively until his retirement in 1998, when he stepped down to teach history at the school for a time. He would help to see the college through a very difficult period that will be discussed at a later point in this history. At his retirement, the students awarded him two plaques for his dedicated service and for the great interest that he had expressed in the students and their being successful. He had demonstrated this interest in many ways, while also attending to the needs of the college faculty.<sup>44</sup>

In the academic area, it should be noted that the names appearing in the catalog listing of Faculty Emeriti were dwindling as former professors died. In 1981-1982, five names appeared on this list, while by 1992-1993, there were no Faculty Emeriti at all. Elizabeth Clark was the last one listed, this being in the 1989-1990 catalog. Many outstanding teachers who had helped shape the course of the college, as well as that of many students who attended there, were gone. Yet, their names still echo in the annals of the college history. There are no Faculty Emeriti listed in the current catalog.

In December, 1993, the college had its accreditation reaffirmed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This resulted from the tremendous effort put forth by everyone on campus. As always, a team effort gets the job done. SACS did recommend, among other things, that the college establish an Institutional Effectiveness component. The college responded by setting up this office and appointing an individual to be the first director of this work. Although this person would be responsible for the final report in each case, the entire college family would be involved in an effort to achieve the greatest effectiveness possible.<sup>45</sup>

Changes were everywhere. Admissions had become Enrollment Management. The Academic Dean was now Vice President for Academic Affairs. The head of the Enrollment Management area was a vice-president, while the Business Manager was Vice-President for Finances and Business. Spring, 1992, witnessed the kick-off dinner for the Capital Campaign, following the successful achievement of



PRESIDENT ROY DOBYNS AND HIS WIFE, KATHRYN, DURING BC'S REAFFIRMATION PROCESS WITH SACS IN 1993.

twenty-five percent of the goal. Trustees, Board of Advisors, and foundations already accounted for 1.8 million of the 7.5 million goal set. The symbol chosen for the campaign was the diamond because of the relatedness of its multi-facets to those of such a campaign.<sup>46</sup> Leadership breakfasts at the college in November and December, 1991 provided information concerning the campaign to community leaders in the Bluefields. A six-member campus committee helped to solicit \$100,000 in cash and pledges from those on the campus. Mr. Don DeBorde commenced his services as the Director of the Capital Campaign on January 2, 1992, coming to Bluefield from his previous employment as Director of Planned Giving for the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children.<sup>47</sup>

Aside from the campaign activities, life went on at the college. The 1990-1991 school year had been affected by Operation Desert Storm which took from the ranks of faculty and students alike. B.A. Starnes, faculty member and Captain in the U.S. Army Reserves, answered the call, and Dr. Michael Garrett, Major in the U.S. Army Reserves, was on standby. Terry (Sarge) Mullins and others left their student lives behind for a time to serve their country. Yellow ribbons appeared on campus in support of the troops.<sup>48</sup> Yet, in spite of such diversion, enrollment figures continued to climb, far exceeding anyone's expectations, and, certainly, bucking the general trend of enrollment during the period. Bluefield experienced its first year of intercollegiate soccer play in 1992, moving up from a club sport status.<sup>49</sup> In the following year, this sport would receive a tremendous boost with the news of plans to build a soccer complex by the East River Soccer Association. The facility would serve several soccer programs in the area.<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to know that the soccer team adopted the motto "Bound by a Common Cause," and one of the team members, Zach Roberts, designed a sweatshirt to be worn by team members.<sup>51</sup>

Additional developments included the honor bestowed upon the college Student Education Association when it received the "ultimate" award of the Chapter Standards Award at a convention held in Roanoke, Virginia, in April, 1993.<sup>52</sup> Along with this, the President and Dr. Beasley traveled to London to discuss a program with the officials of International Enrichment, Inc. that would allow the college to send students to London for study, and, hopefully, would allow a faculty member to go in 1995.<sup>53</sup> The first year for the



LONDON SCHOLARS PROGRAM, 1995

school to send a student was 1993, and, then in 1995, this writer had the privilege and honor of being the first faculty member to go to London for a semester and teach at Imperial College of the University of London. What a marvelous experience it was, and how proud the writer was to begin a tradition that has since sent other professors there! Many other students have been blessed through their participation in the program which, as related to the campus, is under the direction of Dr. Wayne Massey.

Bluefield's enrollment growth during the first half of the nineties was unprecedented. Telemarketing came into use as one means of gaining in its student population.<sup>54</sup> A student-manned phonathon in 1995, Bluefield's first, raised a total of \$2,365.00 to go towards the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary goal. The college became one of only three Virginia private colleges to be selected for a pilot program for graduates of community colleges who transferred to the college. One hundred grants of \$3500.00 each would be divided among the three participating schools.<sup>55</sup> A Writing Center co-directed by Mickey Pellillo and Mimi Merritt was another feature added to the college instruction program when it began in 1995. Faculty tutors assisted students in learning how to do required writing for their classes in terms of fundamental skills.<sup>56</sup> A Bachelor of Christian Ministry degree became a part of the Adult program offering, a step that would reap solid benefits for the college and those in this particular degree program. As these

and other developments occurred, enrollment continued to grow, reaching 850 by the fall of 1995 with the largest freshman class to date. This all added up to a forty-three percent increase and marked the seventh consecutive year of enrollment increase for the college. Dr. Dobyms credited the entire college family with helping to make this achievement possible.<sup>57</sup>

For the faculty, "Writing Across the Curriculum" got underway in 1995, providing every faculty member the opportunity for training that focused on the importance of written work in every discipline. Mickey Pellillo was the co-ordinator for this program, teaching the faculty and having them share their own experiences in relatively small group work.

How did all of these dramatic changes impact the students? Faculty reports to the trustees indicated a boost in morale and the amazement at the progress made. Did the students share these feelings? Apparently they did, as student representatives addressing the trustees mentioned the pleasure of the students at what was taking place on campus. They were especially delighted by the new Science Building and its facilities. At the Trustee meeting of October 16, 1993, the Student Government Association representative credited the excitement and increased involvement of the students to the "strong leadership of Dr. Dobyms."<sup>58</sup> An editorial in the school newspaper, *The Rampage*, appearing in the September 27, 1995, issue, spoke of the "small, close knit community of students" offering every student the opportunity to make life-long friends with whom he/she could keep in touch for years to come. It went on to describe Bluefield College as a "haven for friendly faces and interesting personalities" and commented on the personal relationships with administration, faculty, and staff.<sup>59</sup>

The editorial declared that Dr. Dobyms, along with the Trustees, acted "swiftly and wisely" to address the problems and needs of the students. Finally, it stated that by whatever means a student might have learned of Bluefield College, that student was "in the right place." Then, the article added that Bluefield College had "so much to offer its students and to the community."<sup>60</sup> SGA president, Bobbi Stroupe, stated that the students were excited about what was happening at the school. Miss Stroupe had the honor of being the first female SGA president. A former student, serving in the Admissions Office at the time, praised the staff, noting the many

tasks that they performed and the fact that they were not simply seeking numbers.<sup>61</sup> She felt that they cared about the individual and were there for the students. She concluded by remarking that staff patience and thoughtfulness seemed "endless."<sup>62</sup>

It must be said that the growth of the college and the many changes occurring did come with such speed that it was difficult for many on campus to absorb it all. It might be said that it was even more difficult for those off campus who primarily gained their information through the media. Yet, what was reported and either read or heard was happening, and the college that had seemed to be in slow motion was moving and changing so quickly. In some instances, there were questions about just how healthy this unbelievable transition was. Was this a boom period that might suddenly go away? Should the brakes be applied to bring about a slowing-down process? Was there time to catch your breath? However this might have been, the pace seemed to continue, gaining momentum in many ways. Trustee Jim Hughes pointed out that relationships with the community had never been better.<sup>63</sup> In stepping down as Trustee Chairperson, Dr. T. Keith Edwards stated that Dr. Dobyms was a fine person with whom to work, while Jim Dudley, at the same meeting, expressed his view that the president had done a fine job.<sup>64</sup> Thus, from all indications, the school was experiencing good leadership that was getting things done.

As a service to all who used Lansdell Hall from its first floor to the third, an elevator would be installed through a generous gift from the estate of a former Bluefielder, William Burchfield. Blind from birth, Mr. Burchfield had experienced a successful career in Washington, D.C. His funds also provided interest to be used for scholarships for students with disabilities. It should be mentioned that a plaque in regular print and Braille adorns the wall beside the elevator doors on the first floor, acknowledging Mr. Burchfield's gift. On this plaque are the words of II Corinthians 5:7 – "For we walk by faith, not by sight," a fitting thought for all to see and consider.

In 1992, Freshmen students had the privilege of being the first at Bluefield to be in a computer-oriented English class. For a brief period, the Division of Education had a minority professor, the first to be employed by the college. A new Admissions/Financial Aid suite came into use at the western end of the second floor of Lansdell Hall. New personnel also went along with these new quarters. Registration would be made easier through the use of a new guide.



A new board room, the Chandler Board Room, on the third floor of Lansdell Hall, began its life. It honored Dr. A.C. Chandler, alumnus, trustee, successful doctor, and financial supporter. Along with this addition, there were new restrooms, a new copyroom, new lighting, and a refurbishing of the Business and Registrar offices.<sup>65</sup> Bluefield College was getting a new makeover in many areas.

The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Capital Campaign had moved from a local to a regional concentration in Virginia and on into North Carolina and Georgia. New alumni chapters were formed, with Roanoke being the first official Alumni Association formed. Chapters in the New River Valley and Richmond joined the ranks. The Alumni office personnel planned particular activities in the different areas, often taking along long-time employees of the faculty and staff with Alumni staff to chapter meetings to renew ties with alumni. In a three-month period, the college made contact with every high school in Virginia through a Virginia College Day/Night Program. Counselors from community colleges attended a Bluefield College Articulation Conference on campus, while high school counselors from regional school districts attended a workshop held on the campus. The Noel-Levitz Center for Enrollment Management had representation at Bluefield to provide an enrollment analysis as a consulting firm.<sup>66</sup> Elderhostel continued to be an attractive summer feature offered by the college, drawing people from several areas of the nation.



BC's NEW SCIENCE CENTER, 1993



PROFESSOR DAVID ARMBRISTER WITH BC CHINESE STUDENTS YONGSHU & HUI LI

The new Science Center had opened in 1992, and the plaza between it and Lansdell Hall had been named the J.P. Jardine Plaza in honor of the beloved music professor whose service at the college spanned the twenty years between 1972 and 1992. This lovely area was the gift of alumnus Richard Norman. He stated that Professor Jardine "symbolized the fine attributes of many who influenced students' lives at Bluefield College."<sup>67</sup> 1992 saw Professor David Armbrister go to China as a member of a nine-person team to teach English as a second language to students who came to Yantai University in Yantai, Republic of China from many sections of the country. This initiated the program of exchange that would ultimately bring Jongshu and Hui Li to Bluefield College for studies and send Professor Craig Flowers to another area of China to teach. This program proved to be very favorable on both ends. One of Professor Armbrister's students handed him a note toward the close of the time spent at Yantai, and on it were the words "It's a small world, and we do have friends all over the world." Jongshu and Hui would achieve admirable academic records at the college, earn membership in the Honor Society, and, foremostly, they would surrender their lives to Jesus Christ.

Drs. Gene and Jane Duremedes, physicians in Princeton, West Virginia, established a \$30,000 endowment fund to provide speakers for an annual Christian Emphasis Week. This week now bears their names as part of the title in honor of their generous gift. They had met years ago on a Christian campus in their native country, the

Philippines, and their dream, in providing the financial assistance, was that young minds would be touched and, in turn, touch others. At the time of their contribution, she was serving as a trustee and he was on the Board of Advisors.<sup>68</sup> This special week has continued to bless the campus with its impact through the years.

In 1994, the Board of Trustees honored F. Tyler Easley for twenty-five years of service on the board, naming him "Trustee Emeritus" and a lifetime member of the board. His father, Frank, had been one of the group of Bluefielders who was selected to work on behalf of the community to secure a Baptist college for the area. He sold the original sixty-five acre tract of land to the Baptist General Association for the location of the college. The stones, some ninety wagonloads, dug from this land, went to build the stately Easley home on College Avenue in Bluefield, West Virginia. Frank and Judge David Easley, Tyler's uncle, served on the Board of Trustees for many years. Tyler remarked that from the very beginning of Bluefield College, an Easley had been associated with it.<sup>69</sup> How true and what a blessing they have been!

The college held its first Science Day on March 4, 1994, with forty-one junior and senior high school students in attendance. After being tested in biology, chemistry, mathematics, and physics, those students who placed first and second in each of the four categories won scholarships of \$1,000.00 and \$500.00. Altogether, nine students earned a total of \$7000.00 in scholarships. This special day would become an annual event for the school.<sup>70</sup>

The Management of Human Relations program continued to move forward under a new director. This would be the final year for the college to pay Spring Arbor College the Franchise fee for this program. The school was receiving attention from other colleges who desired copies of Bluefield's *Handbook for Institutional Effectiveness* to guide them in preparing their own handbooks. Enrollment in the fall of 1994 increased for the sixth year in a row, reaching 815. According to President Dobyms, the student body had caught the spirit of growth and change and appeared to be participating in campus activities and governing opportunities. Renovation of student activity facilities had proved to be a great help to campus life.<sup>71</sup>

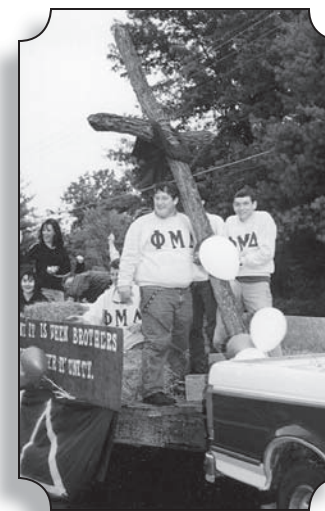
A Homecoming parade, a first for the college in this period, generated much interest and involvement on the part of the students. Sports continued to be a vital part of the school's efforts to

get students involved in terms of both varsity play and intramural activities. Students were called upon to assist in the Capital Campaign in various ways and responded with great enthusiasm.

Those students entering Bluefield College in the fall of 1994 missed the opportunity to meet and know one of the college's greatest servants. Dan Parrish served as head of the business office for thirty-three years before he retired at the end of August, 1994. Mr. Parrish left one of Bluefield's leading wholesale business firms to become the Business Manager and Treasurer of the college in 1961, succeeding Mr. Elijah M. Louthan who had held these positions from the school's earliest days. It was a challenging task that he assumed, especially considering the fact that, although there was a fine system in place, all records were kept by hand. The office had little in the way of mechanical devices, making record keeping time consuming and leaving students with a lack of daily account information.

As a means of updating the system, Mr. Parrish introduced a bookkeeping machine which improved things considerably. With the passage of time, more elaborate bookkeeping equipment would be incorporated to facilitate accounts payable, accounts receivable, and payroll. In the 1980's, the college moved to a computerized business system. During the presidencies of Dr. Harman, Dr. Tyer, and Dr. Dobyms, he witnessed many developments on the campus. He performed his duties as Business Manager and Treasurer, manager of the bookstore, supervisor of the maintenance staff, and other duties with a smile and pleasant greeting to those whom he served. Students could count on him to treat them politely and with respect as he went over their financial matters. However, he went beyond their finances in serving them. He answered many types of questions for them and for others in the college family.

When he commenced his service, the budget was \$500,000. When he retired, it stood at \$6.7 million. In his first thirty-one years, he did



HOMECOMING PARADE, 1998

not miss a single day of work. His work was not confined to daytime hours. He often spent hours in the evening carrying out his duties, and, on many occasions, took his work home. He was a dedicated servant of the college in every sense of the word.

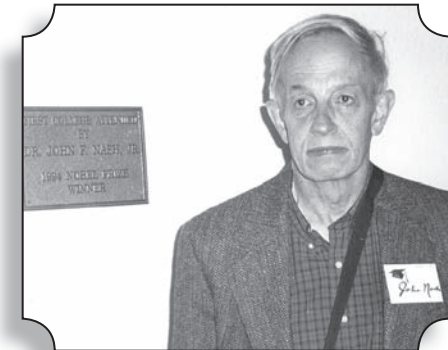
Dan Parrish regarded the college as an extension of his family. As he drew near to his retirement date, he felt good that the policy of maintaining a reserve fund was still intact to meet the needs any time that enrollment might not meet expectations. That fund still existed when he did step down.<sup>72</sup> In recognition of his distinguished service, the college held a retirement dinner for him in October, 1994. At this dinner, he received a book of personal recollections written by the many friends whom he had known over the years. The Chairman of the Trustees, Reverend Joe Burton, said of Mr. Parrish on this occasion: "He's been loyal to the college year in and year out, through good times and bad times, and has seen the college grow." Burton added that, in all of his years of service, Mr. Parrish "never lost sight of the most important aspect of Bluefield College" and went "above and beyond the call on behalf of the students."<sup>73</sup> Reverend Burton could vouch for this because he was one of those students served by this humble servant. Dr. Roy Dobyns referred to the retiree as a "man of integrity, dedication, and loyalty to Bluefield College."<sup>74</sup> Replacing Mr. Parrish would be Mr. Paul Glaser who came to the college from Kentucky State University.<sup>75</sup>

At the midway point in the 1990s, the college was still experiencing growth under Dr. Dobyns' guidance. His desire to do his best "to make Bluefield College the best institution" that it could possibly be remained strong. He could cite the continuing success of the adult education program, the participation of the college in this Private College Consortium for International Studies, the meeting of various student needs, the extension of Admissions outreach to new locations, the introduction of new admissions strategies, and a new system to the Business Office to improve their services, and the completion of a connector road. The cost of this latter project had been substantially reduced because of the contributions of David Skidmore, Trustee, through the firm that he headed. MHR had become OMD, Organizational Management and Development.<sup>76</sup>

Other developments during this period included the commencement of experimental broadcasting by the on-campus radio station WRAM and the introduction of a Rams Athletic Boosters Club with

a membership of thirty-five members who secured nearly \$10,000 in funds and arranged for the donation of two new vans for the college and new padded team bench seats for the Golden Dome.<sup>77</sup> A new Board Room would be dedicated and named in honor of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur C. Chandler. Dr. Chandler was a member of the first graduating class in 1924 and served on the Board of Trustees from 1965-1985. The Chandlers had provided funds for several campus projects.<sup>78</sup> The Bachelor of Christian Ministry had its first class meeting in January, 1996.<sup>79</sup>

On May 11, 1995, the college participated in the celebration of John F. Nash, Jr. Day. Dr. Nash, Nobel Prize winner in Economics the previous year, had attended Bluefield College during his junior and senior years of high school in Bluefield, West Virginia. While he was unable to attend, his sister, Martha Legg of Roanoke, Virginia, stood in for him. Eva Easley, representative from the Nash Day Committee, presented the college a plaque to place just inside the main entrance of Lansdell Hall. The plaque reads: "First College Attended by John F. Nash, Jr., 1994 Nobel Prize Winner."<sup>80</sup>



NOBEL PRIZE WINNER JOHN F. NASH, JR.

Dr. Nash actually attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology and went on to earn his doctorate at Princeton University at the age of twenty-two.<sup>81</sup>

The Archives Room in Lansdell Hall at the college contains an impressive display of memorabilia related to the life and career of Dr. Nash. It includes items pertaining to the film "A Beautiful Mind" and the book which inspired the film. It is a tribute to this ex-Bluefielder and his unusual story, a fraction of which actually had to do with his experiences at Bluefield College. Yet, the college has pride in the fact that it did play even a minor role in the life of this prominent individual. That pride is reflected in the Archives' display.

Another reminder of Bluefield College's past came in November, 1995, when family members of Lt. Robert Lee Longworth, Jr., class of 1941 at the school and former member of the Blue Angels, presented

to the Alumni office a commemorative painting of the World War II Navy veteran who died in 1950. He had enlisted on June 10, 1941, and had become one of the Navy's greatest air aces.<sup>82</sup> This painting hangs on the wall at the eastern end of the second floor in the Easley Library. Lt. Longworth, along with many students of his day, served this country during those dark days of WWII.

In recognition of Dr. Doby's leadership and the great progress made by the college during his presidency, the Board of Trustees approved and offered him a three-year contract rather than a year-by-year contract as had been done previously. Chairman Joe Burton stated that it was "the Board's way of thanking Dr. Doby's for a job well done."<sup>83</sup> Reverend Burton also praised Kathryn Doby's for all that she had done for the college.<sup>84</sup> *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph* pointed out that Dr. Doby's and his wife had "truly been an asset to Bluefield College, the Bluefield community, and all of the Virginia Baptists who support the college."<sup>85</sup> Further growth and success lay ahead.

Dr. Doby's reaction to this surprise move was that of declaring that his years at the college had been positive and much had been accomplished because of the fine faculty and staff. There were still projects to be undertaken and completed, and he looked forward to "working hard" in an effort to make the college "an institution of which everyone could be proud."<sup>86</sup> In his annual report, he called his years at Bluefield "the most rewarding years of his professional career."<sup>87</sup>

Responses by many individuals to an interview question about Dr. Doby's successes basically echoed each other. They ranged from "a new spirit" to "remarkable" progress to "amazing" to "tremendous" to "extraordinary" to "a fabulous job" and similar remarks. The report was that the college's image had been greatly enhanced.<sup>88</sup> Tim Havens, Assistant Director of Enrollment Management at the time, as well as an alumnus of Bluefield, pointed out that Dr. Doby's leadership brought a new vision. Many people were not even aware of the existence of this southwest Virginia school. This changed under Dr. Doby's leadership.<sup>89</sup> Mr. Jim Dudley, alumnus and past Trustee Chairman, declared that "Roy Doby's was the smartest thing we did as a board" and called him a "man for the time."<sup>90</sup> Alice Sumpter, former trustee, stated that Dr. Doby's took the plans given to him by the Trustees and went to work. He opened some doors that had

been closed to the college and opened others that the college did not know.<sup>91</sup>

There were other comments made about this phenomenal growth and the man behind it, but, as a closing thought in this particular area, Dr. Joe Burton stated that Dr. Doby's leadership, vested with those skills to get the people under him to respond positively, had made a tremendous difference in the college. It had gained for the president great respect across Virginia.<sup>92</sup>

The year that followed gave every indication that the upward trend would continue. The March, 1996, issue of the *Southern Baptist Educator* magazine featured Harman Chapel on its cover. It spoke of the fact that over five million dollars in gifts and pledges had been received in the \$7.5 million 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign. Enrollment had soared to an all-time high of 853 students with a forty-three percent increase in the Freshman class. It indicated that the college was "quietly making some very big waves amid Virginia's sea of private colleges and universities."<sup>93</sup> The article concluded with the announcement that the college would be hosting the annual meeting of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools at West Virginia's well-known Pipestem Resort State Park.<sup>94</sup>

In *The Observer* newspaper of March 7, Dr. Doby's provided the public with news about achievements in several areas of the college. He mentioned the more than one hundred donors who were new in their giving to the college in 1995. There were several major contributors, including the Lettie Pate Whitehead Foundation, the



DEDICATION OF NEW JUNE OBLINGER TENNIS COMPLEX, 1996

estate of James E. Greever, '38 alumnus, and June Shott, a long-time supporter of the college.<sup>95</sup> Mrs. Shott's gift made possible a new tennis complex with six courts that would officially be dedicated on October 18, 1996.<sup>96</sup>

There is no question of just how invaluable the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign had been since it began. Beyond the fact of the funds received or pledged, it had accomplished even more in the extent of its impact. More than 850 donors, the largest number ever to participate in a Bluefield College cause, constituted wonderful results.<sup>97</sup> According to Dr. Joe Burton, the campaign provided the college with the highest degree of visibility that it had ever experienced.<sup>98</sup> Henry Whitlow, Director of Library Services at the time, stated that the image of the school had improved across the region and among other Baptist schools.<sup>99</sup> There were those who felt that the campaign served to create an awareness of the college. Dr. Gwynn Davis, Director of Family and Christian Life Development for Virginia Baptists at the time, stressed its importance in making the college known.<sup>100</sup> Dr. Reginald McDonough, then Executive Director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board, commented that alumni involvement had been greatly strengthened and the campaign had helped put Bluefield College on the map.<sup>101</sup> Finally, Dr. Nat Kellum, Treasurer for the BGAV and Virginia Baptist Board, remarked that alumni had been reminded of the role that the college had played in their lives.<sup>102</sup>

The future seemed to be assured with Bluefield's largest graduating class in the spring of 1996. Dr. Primitivo Delgado, now retired, received the first Professor Emeritus Award granted by the college, acknowledging his "distinguished and conspicuous service." Mrs. John Oblinger, "Jackie" to her friends, received recognition for her nineteen year tenure at the college. The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign



CELEBRATING OUR 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY, 1997

reached Florida. Mud Pig Day had its usual uplifting effects on the campus, touching students, many faculty and staff members, and other campus observers or participants. Spring court, a tradition at the college, celebrated the election of Queen and King and their royal attendants. It was one of the highlights of the year. A sad note that interrupted the good flow of things was the death of Dr. Arthur G. Chandler in May and the fact that, at the time, he was the oldest living alumnus of the college.<sup>103</sup>

Since Dr. Dobyms had taken office, Bluefield College had been experiencing an unprecedented period of growth and development. There seemed to be a momentum that simply would not stop. The air was filled with excitement and expectation. Yet, the bubble was about to burst, as an "uncertain climate" appeared to take hold and a concern about the ongoing life of the college came to the trustees via the faculty representative.<sup>104</sup> Communication on the campus seemed to be undergoing some difficulties, causing unrest and a certain amount of confusion. President Dobyms, whose diligent efforts had helped bring the college to a new day and a new level at which it appeared to be operating that spring, suddenly had his retirement as president and CEO of the school announced. The May 2 issue of *The Observer* featured an article that focused on financial problems at the college.<sup>105</sup> Charles Paschall had provided a revelation to the trustee body at the April 20 meeting by stating that, for the past several months, payment had been deferred on accounts because of inadequate funds.<sup>106</sup> Bluefield College hit a snag in the progress that it had been enjoying for several years. Things had gone awry in the system. The Trustees called in a local accounting firm to assess the situation and to help determine what changes were required in the school's policy of collecting tuition. There would be significant changes made in personnel in certain areas.<sup>107</sup>

Admittedly, it was a somber time on the campus of Bluefield College following the revelation of financial problems and other issues. Several positions had to be eliminated as a result, and the



HITTING THE MUD, MUD PIG DAY, 2005

budget underwent a sharp decline, thus impacting everyone on campus. Tim Havens, who took over the position of Director of Enrollment Management at the time, stated that the college suffered from a negative image in the wake of all the happenings, and Admissions took a real blow with financial aid on hold, resulting in an adverse effect on recruitment.<sup>108</sup> Confidence on and off campus would be hard hit. Teresa Stanley, Director of Alumni Affairs, took this position “under a cloud,” but, even with this being true, she witnessed faith in God coming out during this period.<sup>109</sup> Dr. Kim Farmer, then Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, felt that everyone on campus felt the effects of the crisis. She expressed concerns about the ability of the college to continue to operate under the circumstances. She also stated that people in the community had voiced these concerns as well.<sup>110</sup> There is no question that this was one of the most difficult times faced by the college, although in its past there had been moments of financial instability and uncertainty. What would it take to weather the storm?

Dr. Dobyms and Mrs. Dobyms did not leave Bluefield without receiving recognition for their services to the college. Even in the midst of all that had happened, a special tribute would be paid to the couple at a retirement dinner. At this gathering of family members, people from the college community and region, and others, Dr. Joe Burton, former Trustee Chairman, offered these words of praise: “You built in us a sense of pride. You put back into the hearts of Virginia Baptists the idea that Bluefield College is a place where students can get a quality Christian higher education.”<sup>111</sup>

Henry Whitlow, Director of Library Services, delivered words of praise to Mrs. Dobyms, describing her as a “lady with class” who



THE COLLEGE'S NEW ENTRANCE SIGN, 1990's.

worked to improve the college landscape through her “grace and dignity.”<sup>112</sup> This was a reminder that Kathryn Dobyms had led the efforts of a Beautification Committee formed early in her husband’s administration to plan and carry out a variety of beautification efforts on the campus.

Thus, while the Dobyms were receiving their tributes and good-byes, there remained that significant question of how the college would pick itself up from such a heavy blow and continue its role of educating young men and women. Would it even be able to do this in the coming days? ❁

— INTERLUDE —  
1996-1997

God provided the answers. He did it through the appointment of Dr. T. Keith Edwards, long time Trustee and former Chairman of this body, to serve as the Interim President. His service of more than twenty years on the board and of two terms as its chair reflected the confidence of that body in his leadership. He had spent twenty-five years as a practicing physician in Bluefield, and, previously, he and his wife, Alice, had served as medical missionaries in Nigeria. The Edwardses had five children and an adopted son, Abel Solademi, an Operating Room nurse at Bluefield Regional Medical Center. Dr. Edwards was the author of many articles in professional journals, devotional materials, and Baptist Sunday School literature. From every standpoint, it appeared that this man was the right choice for a very daunting task. The college family and the wider community awaited the leadership of Dr. Edwards to express itself as he took over as interim head of the school.

As he stepped into a new role in his life, Dr. Edwards felt some anxiety concerning the responsibilities he was assuming. However, with the assistance of faculty, staff, and students, he found relief from any fears that he might have.<sup>1</sup> Keith Edwards also could claim a strong faith that had been honed on the missionary field of service and in his practice of medicine. This faith



DR. KEITH EDWARDS

would support him in this new endeavor and give him strength and the means to meet the challenges that were abundant. He began his work on July 1, 1996. While Dr. Edwards would not comment on his work as Interim President, those who had experienced his leadership in this capacity were pleased to do so.

Teresa Stanley felt that his presence brought about an elevated morale. He helped to lift the cloud hovering over the college and demonstrated leadership and character to help pull a fragmented family together.<sup>2</sup> Tim Havens regarded his appointment as “divine” at a pivotal time in the life of the school. Dr. Edwards’ personal integrity served to enhance Bluefield’s reputation. He was instrumental in keeping the doors of the college open at a critical

time.<sup>3</sup> Ranae Bailey, Secretary to the Dean of Student Services felt that Dr. Edwards did much to build the confidence of the faculty and staff. She said: “We knew that we would continue to exist and grow.”<sup>4</sup> Amy Havens, Office Manager for Development, expressed her belief that Dr. Edwards’ strong leadership abilities and strong faith in God served to provide confidence and brought everyone together during a very difficult period.<sup>5</sup> Chris Shoemaker, from his public relations perspective, felt that Dr. Edwards was exactly the person whom the college needed at the time. His knowledge of the college through his years of trustee service and his Christian leadership helped to put the institution back on track.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Scott Bryan expressed to the trustees, in his role as faculty representative, that Dr. Edwards had been “a beacon of light during a time of darkness,” and described him as a “man of integrity and honesty” whose leadership has brought renewed excitement.<sup>7</sup> Eva Easley’s statement that “he held the college together until a new and permanent president could be found” may well summarize what



PROFESSOR BOB RANDALL

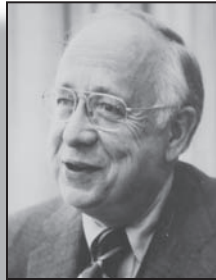
Dr. Keith Edwards meant to Bluefield College in the aftermath of an extremely upsetting series of events on the campus.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Robert Randall, Chairman of the Science Division at the time and longtime faculty member, added another element when he said “our lives were made richer because of Keith and Alice Edwards.”<sup>9</sup> Alice was a helpmate to her husband in many ways during that year and deserves recognition in her own right.

Dr. Edwards did not have the luxury of sizing up the situation before he really went to work. Ranae Bailey mentioned that he gave much time and effort to fund raising during the year.<sup>10</sup> Chris Shoemaker concurred in this assessment as Dr. Edwards helped bring about the best year of fund raising while he served.<sup>11</sup> During the year, gifts totaled more than 1.6 million, greatly strengthening the college’s financial status and helping to make possible major renovations that were needed. By the end of the final year, 6.3 million

had been given or pledged. The year 1996-1997 finished in the “black,” a remarkable achievement considering the financial issues faced by the school. A new roof graced the seventy-five year old Cruise Hall, a new tennis complex existed on campus, new computers were on hand to improve the computer technology on campus, and gifts for a new \$300,000 art complex had been secured. Outside of the financial realm, a new Church Music Concentration was now available in the Music Department, and a record number of Mellon Fellowships had been awarded to faculty members.<sup>12</sup>

In regard to the art complex, Walter Shroyer, Chairman of the Fine Arts Division and Art Professor, gave considerable credit to Dr. Edwards for his assistance in helping the Art Center become a reality. He referred to the Interim President as a “passionate, loving personality.” Imagine this! The college’s old Boiler Building that had provided heat for the campus for so many years had become a discarded relic. Who could ever envision any use whatsoever for the building located at the southwestern corner of the campus? Walter Shroyer saw its potential to house a fine arts program which had outgrown its space elsewhere on campus. Mrs. Peggy Sutphin, alumna who had been in Mr. Shroyer’s art program, graciously pledged \$80,000 over a four year period to begin the process of making the dream become a reality. She promised to pay the first \$20,000 toward renovation if the building would be dedicated to a Fine Arts Complex. Donald and Maria Cox then agreed that if the college would raise \$50,000 for this project, they would donate \$250,000. The Trustees approved this challenge from the Coxes, contingent upon studies of feasibility.<sup>13</sup>

In an interview with Mr. Shroyer, the writer learned that while the college was going through difficult times, the art center project served as a focal point. It offered hope in a dark period and provided a measure of assurance that the college would continue on in spite of its financial crisis. He stated that after the seed money had been secured, he gave the project to God.<sup>14</sup> What a great triumph for God and the college when the center gradually emerged in the shell of that old boiler building. Even as times of uncertainty had to be reckoned with, the project got underway. The completion date would hopefully be in the fall of 1998, and the complex would be called the



DONALD COX

Donald and Maria Cox Visual Arts Center.<sup>15</sup> It would provide six thousand square feet of space as compared to the two thousand in the old facility. A ceramics and sculpture studio, plus a painting and drawing studio, would exist on the second floor. Professor Shroyer’s office would also be on the second floor.<sup>16</sup>

This new facility did not come as quickly as Professor Shroyer and others would have liked, but when it did open for business in 1999, it would be the answer to many prayers, reflect the labor given voluntarily by many campus people, and it would give students an unquestionably fine facility to develop their artistic talents or, possibly, to discover them. It also stands as a testament to the fact that dreams can come true. Mrs. Sutphin’s generous contribution to the project would be recognized by a garden being developed outside of the new complex. Without her gift of the seed money and the challenge that it represented, the center might not have been realized at all. Much appreciation is due her for this act of faith and love.

Bluefield College truly owed Dr. Edwards a great debt of gratitude for stepping into the leadership role at such a crucial time. He played such a key role in helping those at the college, as well as those outside the institution, to find renewal and to realize that, despite what the college had experienced, it was going to be okay. It would continue in its quest to reach generations of students and leave its imprint upon their lives. In addition, Dr. Edwards’ service, as Amy Havens stated, made Dr. MacMillan’s succession to the presidency much smoother.<sup>17</sup>

The college held an Appreciation Dinner for Dr. and Mrs. Edwards on June 12, 1997, at which time family members, school personnel, community friends, and others gathered to pay tribute to him for a job well done. A scholarship would be established in the name of T. Keith Edwards and Alice Edwards as one avenue of appreciation.<sup>18</sup>



DEDICATION CEREMONY FOR THE NEW COX VISUAL ARTS CENTER



## ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE: MOVING ON – 1997-2006

Dr. Dan MacMillan was a unanimous choice of the trustees to become the eighth president of Bluefield College, taking office on July 1, 1997.<sup>1</sup> The number in the line of sequence always takes into consideration the fact that Dr. J. Taylor Stinson held the position on two separate occasions. Dr. Edwards described the man chosen as his successor as one “deeply committed to Christian higher education.”<sup>2</sup> He added that he was confident that faculty, staff, students, alumnae, and friends of the college would come to appreciate Dr. MacMillan as president of the college.<sup>3</sup> The Student Government Association President reported that feedback on Dr. MacMillan had been very positive. The faculty representative reported to the trustees that the faculty desired to get through the tough times, “gain back some lost ground and move forward.”<sup>4</sup> Moving on – this was the challenge confronting the new president.

Daniel G. MacMillan, native of Marietta, Georgia, spent the greater part of his early years there since his father served a Southern Baptist ministry in that location. He earned his Bachelor’s degree in Health, Physical Education and Recreation from Carson-Newman College, his Master’s degree in these areas from Tennessee Technological University and his Doctoral degree in Education and Recreation from the University of Alabama. His career had included a period of high school teaching and coaching, service as Minister of Recreation for a Georgia Baptist Church, service as Director and Professor of Church Recreation for Samford University in Alabama, and fourteen years with Palm Beach Atlantic College in Florida where he served in several positions. His position at the time of his departure from the school was that of Director of Community Relations.<sup>5</sup> He and his wife, Sandy, have a daughter and son.

Dr. MacMillan admitted that he never thought that he would be a college president someday, but he did feel that God had prepared



PRESIDENT DAN MACMILLAN

his life for such a transition.<sup>6</sup> He had submitted his resume after a friend had encouraged him to do so and following much prayer with his wife. When he received word that he had been selected, he accepted because he did feel that God had called him to this post. Dr. Edwards had helped make his path much easier. Dr. MacMillan fully believed that his predecessor had brought a stability to the college that no one else could have. His reputation in the community had served to ease the uncertainty that gripped many of the college personnel, as well as the community people.

Dr. MacMillan regarded Dr. Edwards as his mentor, and in the latter part of his presidency when he learned that he had a serious health problem, he and Sandy turned to Dr. and Mrs. Edwards. He held Dr. Edwards in such high regard that he believed that his counsel was the right way to go.<sup>7</sup>

The official inauguration for the new president came on November 10, 1997. It was a meaningful occasion with representatives from other institutions of higher education, the campus, the community, and the Baptist General Association of Virginia in attendance. Dr. T. Clark Bryan, President of Truitt-McConnell College, gave the Inaugural address, and the Investiture included Reverend John Ragland, Chairman of the Presidential Search Committee; Charles C. Paschall, Chairman of the Board of Trustees; Dr. T. Keith Edwards, Interim President, 1996-1997; and Dr. Joe E. Burton, past Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Dr. MacMillan gave the Inaugural response.<sup>8</sup>

During the proceedings, Dr. Paul R. Corts, President of Palm Beach Atlantic College, said to the man who had previously served under him: “Your friends know you as a magician. We expect you to perform wonders, not because you are a magician, but because



THANKING DR. KEITH EDWARDS AND HIS WIFE, ALICE.

you are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup> Among the several emotional moments that marked the ceremony was that special one when Dr. MacMillan stepped down from the stage to give red roses to his wife and his mother. In presenting the rose to his mother, he



expressed to her and the audience that he wished his father, then deceased, could have been present to share this special occasion.<sup>10</sup>

As he began his work, Dr. MacMillan expressed a firm belief that God still had a purpose for the college, and he shared what he felt needed to be done. He mentioned the continuation of the commitment to Christian education, in a strengthened way, the continuation for the commitment to academic excellence, the maintenance of a

deep commitment to provide a quality of life for the students that extended beyond the classroom, and the recognition of an obligation to pursue growth and change as a mean of surviving the modern technology.

He let the college family and those outside the campus know that he would be spending several weeks at the beginning just “listening, reading, and trying to get a sense of where we are.”<sup>11</sup> His initial objective was to get to know the people of the college. He felt that what he would do during his tenure would be directly attributed to the men who had previously served the institution as presidents, as well as to many other individuals.<sup>12</sup> He regarded the people as the college’s greatest resource, while his own personal resources included a great love and compassion for people, the ability to listen, and organizational skills. He desired that the college continue to serve young people and to help them grow mentally, physically, and spiritually in a Christian atmosphere, both warm and caring.<sup>13</sup>

At the spring trustee meeting preceding Dr. MacMillan’s starting date as president, Dr. Kim Cyrus, faculty representative, shared an impassioned message with the group. She stated that “despite budget and personnel cuts, we have kept our chins up.... We’re here because we love this school, and we love our students.”<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly, Dr. “Mac,” as he would come to be known by many, had probably read these words as he examined school documents either prior to or after his coming. They may have been instrumental, along with

his own observations, in leading him to say that the college people constituted the school’s greatest resource. While many things were unknown factors for the new president, he could count on this one.

That first year was busy, and while it offered many challenges, it also brought rewards. In the first move of its kind for a Virginia private college, Bluefield College reduced its tuition twenty-five percent. No longer would the school use increases in tuition to fund financial aid.<sup>15</sup> This was an unheard of development in higher education circles, but the college wanted to let students know that it really cared about the cost of getting an education. It was a bold move, but, for the moment, it proved successful. Founders’ Day, now a tradition of the school, had alumnus Joe Tatum as speaker. His words were thought-provoking and inspirational. He declared that “had it not been for Bluefield College, I wouldn’t be standing here today.... I am thankful for what Bluefield College did for me.”<sup>16</sup> The writer recalls Mr. Tatum as a shy young man, afraid to talk in front of a group of his own peers. What a turnaround he evidenced as he spoke to the audience on that special day!

Among the student body at the time was a poor young man from Ecuador. Alberto Valencia met former Bluefield College professor Tom Farrar who had gone to Quito, Ecuador to serve as a missionary pastor for the First Baptist Church in that city. Reverend Farrar suggested that Alberto go to Bluefield College and set about the task of securing the necessary resources to enable him to take this giant step. Such love and support moved the young man to tears. He expressed the belief that God had made it possible for him to attend Bluefield and would use him in some way.<sup>17</sup> Alberto successfully completed his course of study, graduated, and moved on to seminary from which he also graduated. God would find an avenue of service for him. This story is a tribute to the witness of a caring individual and an institution that nurtured a young man, as well as to the financial and other kinds of support made available to him to ensure him the education he received.

On September 30, Bluefield College acted as the host school for the Shott Lecture Series, a program utilizing three campuses – Bluefield State, Concord, and Bluefield College – in alternating fashion. This particular program was the third in the series and featured former Vice-President Dan Quayle who served under the senior George Bush. Following his speech to the larger audience gathered in the

Golden Dome, Mr. Quayle participated in a student forum with outstanding students from the three colleges plus Yeager scholars from Marshall University and West Virginia College of Graduate Studies and Foundation Scholars from West Virginia University. Dr. MacMillan expressed appreciation for the program and its sponsorship by the Shott Foundation. He then added:

We at Bluefield are excited about the opportunity to be a part of this event and to be a part of the contributions the Shott Foundation makes to the betterment of the region.<sup>18</sup>

For the record, the two previous speakers had been former United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and Dr. Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State.

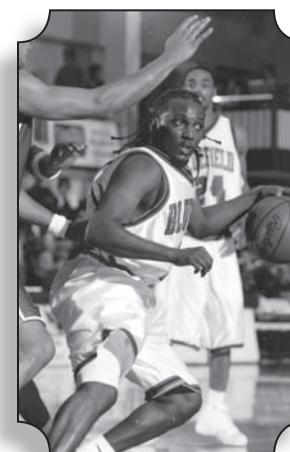
When Dr. William Carrell, faculty representative, spoke to the trustees at their October 18, 1997, meeting, he pointed out that the campus was different from what it was two years ago. Optimism and joy abounded, and morale was improving with the improved rapport and trust level that existed. He expressed appreciation to Dr. Edwards for his good services and to Mr. Roger Kieffer, financial officer, for being up-front with the faculty about the financial picture of the college and building trust level. Then, he thanked Dr. MacMillan for "his wisdom built of years in this kind of setting and for his true Christian spirituality and humility."<sup>19</sup> He also thanked Sandy MacMillan for her involvement in prayertime on Monday mornings. He praised Robert Lowry for leading the DACE (Division of Adult Continuing Education) program and stated that this program had a "tremendous effect" on its students.<sup>20</sup> Positive things were happening on the Bluefield College campus and its satellite campuses.

As he offered his first annual report to the trustees, Dr. MacMillan spoke about the Purpose Statement being reviewed with an eye to reevaluation of values and beliefs. Deferred maintenance issues had been addressed. A new Dean of Students, the first since 1995, had been employed. Residence halls had been upgraded and other steps had been taken to address the needs of the students. The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign held its culmination dinner in December, 1997, with Dr. Bruce Heilman, Chancellor of the University of Richmond and consultant for Bluefield College, as the keynote speaker. Awards

went to donors and volunteers. The best news heralded to those in attendance was that the college had been successful in achieving over one thousand donors and pledges.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the college was moving on and leaving behind those days of uncertainty and confusion. Dr. Dobyms had, without question, given the college a tremendous boost through his leadership. He had set it on a new path. Despite what happened to cut short his time at the college, he deserves much credit for positive achievements. Now Dr. MacMillan had picked up the torch and had given the school new direction. As a result of the campaign, the Science Center stood as its centerpiece, offering the campus a truly well-designed and serviceable facility. Yet, it was not the sole benefit – far from it. There was the new tennis complex, new roads and parking spaces, Lansdell Hall renovations, faculty and staff salary and benefits increases, new athletic programs, academic offerings, and other developments.<sup>22</sup>

An annual fund, later changed to the Bluefield Fund, would be started to help strengthen the college's financial situation. Admission services underwent an expansion with more territories being developed for recruitment. In the sports arena, good things were happening. The women's volleyball team posted a solid win-loss record of 37-8, giving the sport its best record in school history. The team went to the conference tournament where it earned the runner-up position. Three of its players were named to the All-Conference team, while Mary Clements also earned All Mid-South Region honors. The men's basketball team won over twenty victories and had its own O.J. Williams named player of the year in the Tennessee Valley Athletic Conference, as well as a first team selection All-American in the NAIA conference. Jimmy Semple earned the honor of being the leader in assists in the nation, having twenty-four in one game and an overall average of ten plus per game. The men's golf team won the TVAC championship and finished eleventh in the NAIA tournament. Men's baseball recorded a best-ever thirty-two wins and ten losses, while the men's



MEN'S BASKETBALL, 2005

tennis team was runner-up in the TVAC conference tournament.<sup>23</sup> The Lady Rams basketball team made the first ever trip to the TVAC Conference Tournament but lost the first game.<sup>24</sup> All in all, it was a very good year for Bluefield College sports. Their successes brought to their school another basis for pride and a positive note.

During the spring semester of 1998, the college honored two longtime professors, naming them Senior Professors. Will Gordon with thirty-six years of service and David Armbrister with thirty years at the school received this honor at a ceremony held in Harman Chapel, followed by a faculty-staff luncheon in Shott Hall.<sup>25</sup> The Trustees had selected these men and approved the granting of the title Senior Professor to both of them. Both men had served as Division Chairpersons, and both had received the Distinguished Faculty Award.

The adult program continued to grow and became even more of a factor in Bluefield's enrollment, as well as its financial picture. MHR had undergone important changes along the way, becoming the Division of Adult Education or DACE. By 1997, it was experiencing extensive growth, so much so that the first DACE branch office opened in Richmond, Virginia, with a staff of three. The first class in the Tidewater area began in Newport News in May, 1997. The second Bachelor of Christian Ministry class started in Roanoke that April, and a second branch office opened in Roanoke in June. This same month, the new Bachelor of Administration of Justice degree program became a part of DACE, beginning in Roanoke. Expanded certification programs with the Society for Human Resource Management went to Raleigh, North Carolina.

In the light of such a rapid development of these programs, it became necessary for a planning retreat involving the Bluefield, Roanoke, and Richmond offices to take place to take a careful look at the past successes and to make plans for the future. By the end of April, 1998, retired police lieutenant Kelly Walls had been hired as a fulltime Admissions Counselor for the BADJ program, and the first class started in Richmond with other classes beginning at later dates. At the spring commencement in 1998, DACE students comprised more than sixty percent of the graduating class.<sup>26</sup>

At the April 19, 1997, Trustee meeting, the report of the Faculty and Facilities Committee mentioned the phenomenal growth of DACE and declared that "the Lord had put this program in place"

and allowed it to become a "safety net" for the school's financial situation.<sup>27</sup> Its enrollment had increased by eighty-six percent and its revenue had gone up one hundred percent during its span of life.<sup>28</sup> Dr. Tim Crawford, Chairman of the Division of Christian Studies, emphasized just how much of the college's budgetary needs depended on the Adult program. It truly undergirded the traditional program and filled a sizeable gap when it started and continued to expand. As time passed, it began to encounter greater competition which necessitated a self-examination. Still, it remained a very viable program in helping adults in their career pursuits.<sup>29</sup>

Concern for the traditional program was not lost in the college's satisfaction with the performance of its adult program. In the spring of 1997, the Board of Trustees heard a report stating that Admissions was working with a firm to produce a viewbook, a full-color brochure to go out to prospective students, pastors and others interested in the college. Fifteen thousand of these were to be produced for this purpose.<sup>30</sup> A year later, the report of the Student Recruitment and Retention Committee expressed the view that the new tuition plan was beginning to show results. The school had experienced its largest Open House to date with 450 reservations and 300 prospective students attending. The Teagle Foundation was giving the college three years of support for admissions at \$50,000 each year.<sup>31</sup> Things did appear to be looking up for the school in this area. Yet, there was still the fact that whereas the DACE office used seventy percent of its revenue for recruitment, the traditional program used only one percent for this purpose.<sup>32</sup>

In the light of this information, the trustees approved a recommendation to allow the administration to utilize automatic authority to increase the advertising for the traditional program if a surplus surpassed what actually was needed. By the fall of 1998, the report on recruitment was much more favorable, inquiries having



ALUMNUS AND TRUSTEE EMERITUS TYLER EASLEY (left)  
WITH ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT SHARON KNICK.

doubled from the previous year and applications and acceptances ahead as well. Admissions was now exploring secondary markets, making contacts by phone as a new approach, and a new Admissions Counselor had been employed.<sup>33</sup>

The college was getting attention as indicated in its selection as one of "America's Best Christian Colleges" in 1999 and also being listed as one of "America's Best College Buys" in both 1998 and 1999.<sup>34</sup> Two faculty members, Mickey Pellillo and Dr. Maggie Glasgow, won two of five "Cutting Edge Awards" at the first annual Technology Summit of the Appalachian College Association held in October, 1998.<sup>35</sup> Along with these developments, there came the report that seventy-two percent of the faculty now held earned doctorates. In addition, there was in progress the development of "A Framework and Process for Strategy 2000" that would result in a new and strong strategic plan for the twenty-first century. January, 1999, saw the largest fund-raising effort in the school's history exceed the 7.5 million dollar goal.<sup>36</sup>

A new Mission Statement, developed at Dr. MacMillan's suggestion and with campus input, would read as follows:

Bluefield College provides a quality, career-oriented liberal arts education that enables effective service for God and humanity and encourages personal commitment to Christian faith and the free exploration of academic truth for students of diverse backgrounds and stages of adult life.<sup>37</sup>

Along with this stood a set of Core Values and Beliefs: Educational Excellence, Christian World View in an educational setting, Development of a Community of Learners, and Appreciation of the Southern Appalachian Heritage.

The college, over the years, had used a vast array of noted speakers from a variety of professions as commencement speakers. This had become the traditional pattern. A look at the records reveals that outstanding Baptist leaders, congressmen, governors, university presidents, business executives, and those from other fields had delivered commencement addresses to graduating students. Dr. MacMillan felt that a new approach was in order. He would have student speakers, one from the traditional graduating class and one from the Adult Completion graduating class, along with a faculty

member chosen by the students, to bring messages on the occasion. This has been the approach throughout the past several years.<sup>38</sup>

The college's bookstore, thanks to the generous gift of Mrs. June Shott, completed a renovation process and held its dedication to its benefactor in April, 1999. Two of the athletic teams – men's golf and baseball – won their respective conference play and qualified for NAIA national tournament participation. The May graduating class had 187 graduates, making it the largest number to date in the school's history. A new accredited Bachelor degree program, "Degree in Three," came into effect, allowing students to complete the requirements in three years.<sup>39</sup> That April of 1999, trustees learned, among several things, that Career Services had received a grant to assist in its work, as well as assisting the Learning and Writing Centers. They also learned that the Business Office had done remarkably well in dealing with the budget under Pam Sarver's direction, and that things were in motion to integrate DACE with the traditional program as a result of SACS's visit to the campus and its recommendations to the school.<sup>40</sup>

What did this integrative process mean to the college and what was involved in putting it into effect? Tim Havens, Director of Enrollment Management, shared this information in an interview. He described the move as achieving a "new level of cooperation and energy" and producing a "new spirit." Heretofore, the Adult Program had been an entity in and of itself, or, as he put it, a "disconnect" from the rest of the college.<sup>41</sup> The process had begun in 1998 and realized its completion in 2001. Both people and resources would be used in a more efficient manner, and the college's message and identity would be "streamlined." All in all, it should be regarded as a healthy move for the school.

DACE had now become the Bluefield College Adult Degree Completion Programs. The adult students themselves would have to look at things differently, while personnel working with the adults had to undergo training in order to provide the best services possible. Adjustments were necessary on all sides. Now it came down to the fact that an adult student would be a student at Bluefield College, and his or her contact must be with the college. In the admissions and financial aid offices, counselors underwent crosstraining as a means of giving them a working knowledge of both the adult and traditional programs. The size of the full department had changes

from five persons in 1990 to twenty by 2005. Eastern operations that included areas from Charlottesville east came under a director in Richmond and those under his supervision, while western operations embracing Roanoke and Lynchburg and areas to the west came under the supervision of a Western Region Coordinator housed at Bluefield. An Administration Assistant in Bluefield would work with both coordinators, while a Director of Traditional Admissions served with admissions counselors, two secretaries, and an office manager at the college in Bluefield.<sup>42</sup> Mr. Havens expressed satisfaction with the way in which the integrated system was working.

At one time, the college did have individuals who acted, in part, as campus ministers, but other responsibilities did not allow them to devote much time to this role, nor would they be officially designated campus minister.

Efforts to secure a campus minister had been ongoing for several years. The students expressed a need to have a person serving in this role fulltime on campus, and their wishes were supported by the faculty. The initial step in this direction came when Dr. Ken Lyle became Campus Minister in August, 1998. However, Dr. Lyle held responsibilities as an Assistant Professor of Religion, and, therefore, could not be expected to take care of the assignment full time.<sup>43</sup> Still, he served well, providing positive leadership in a variety of projects, including planning chapel programs, prior to his departure in 2003 to take a teaching position at Hardin Simmons University in Texas. The school went back to work to secure a replacement.

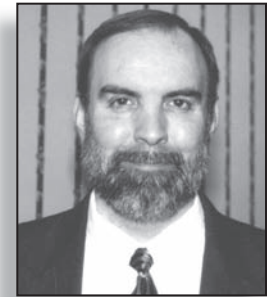
A great need that had existed for many years was that of air conditioning for the college library. This need would be met when the William A. and Phyllis P. Wolfe Foundation provided a gift for the required renovation of the library to add a cooling system. This gift would be paid in installments over a period of five years.<sup>44</sup>

At the fall meeting of the Trustees, Dr. William Carrell, faculty representative, spoke of a faculty engaged in "reviewing,

working, hammering and trying to rebuild."<sup>45</sup> He went on to say:

This is a hard-working institution born of a vision and we want a Christian institution, not just in words but in integrity of programming, in the love that you find between people, in the hard work that you see. We need to believe and trust that Bluefield is going to make it and it's going to be something good.<sup>46</sup>

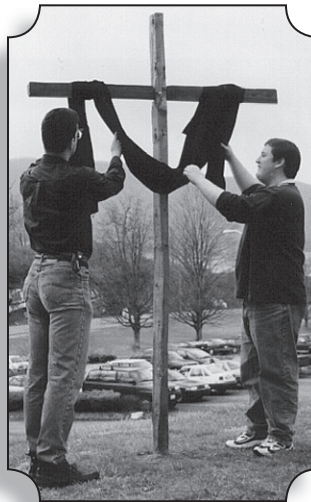
Following such a challenge, Dr. MacMillan informed the Board that the school had what he termed "dynamic," a program of institutional planning in place. Eight divisions now constituted the academic area. DACE had become OMD or the Division of Organizational Management and Development, and the Bachelor of Christian Ministries Program had become the Christian Studies Program. The Division of Liberal Arts embraced the fields of English, Journalism, Creative Technical Writing, Literature, and Communications. Other divisions had been reshaped, and new programs were being considered in the Division of Exercise and Sports Science.<sup>47</sup> The Division of Christian Studies provided majors for the traditional student and for the Adult degree completion students, in addition to two minors.<sup>48</sup> Dr. William Carrell had played a key role in designing and creating the Bachelor of Christian Ministry degree program for Adult education. In 2000, he received the Distinguished Faculty Award and the Academic Dean's Award for service as assistant to the Academic Dean.<sup>49</sup>



DR. WILLIAM "BILL" CARRELL

This meeting also revealed that a feasibility study to determine if the college could conduct a ten-million dollar campaign was underway. A new Convocation attendance policy that would allow more flexibility had been put into place. Dr. Ken Lyle received praise for his work as Campus Minister.<sup>50</sup>

With Dr. Paul Beasley's retirement as Vice President of Academic Affairs following several years of dedicated service, Dr. Paul Sorrells came to the college in this capacity for a relatively brief stay before moving on to another position elsewhere. The popular and capable Dr. William Carrell received a request from the President that he consider filling this post on an interim basis. Dr. Carrell made the



GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE

decision to take this “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” accepting the challenge because he would be serving a faculty whom he regarded as very committed.<sup>51</sup> He began his work on April 17, 2000. It would go from an interim situation to a permanent one as the transition took place very smoothly. Dr. Carrell brought to this post his experience as a faculty member, along with certain administrative experience, and an ability to manage well. He also had the confidence of those who worked on the staff directly under his supervision and the entire faculty. He would assist the president at the May commencement when 196 graduates received their diplomas, representing the college’s largest graduating class in its history.<sup>52</sup>



DR. PAUL BEASLEY

The academic year had been a productive one in many ways. Donita Richardson, the reigning Miss Bluefield College and first runner-up in the Miss Virginia Pageant, told the audience at the commencement that Bluefield College influenced her belief in right and wrong and led her to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord.<sup>53</sup> Eleven students took a fall weekend to go on a mission trip to Waterbury, Connecticut, under the leadership of Dr. Lyle. There, they had engaged in a number of meaningful services that enabled them to bring good memories back to the college. Again that spring, Dr. Lyle and Assistant Professor of English, Mickey Pellillo, led fifteen students on a mission trip to Poland that resulted in memorable spiritual experiences for all. Dr. Rob Merritt traveled to England as part of the International Enrichment program and the college’s

faculty representative to teach at Imperial College in London, taking along his entire family to share in the experiences of a nation that had so much to offer.<sup>54</sup> Under the auspices of the Staley Lecture Series, the college brought



BC CHOIR

Mr. Ken Medema, blind singer, song writer, and an outstanding Christian, to the campus in word and song. As he witnessed to a campus which he described as “an awesome place” where everyone was “incredibly open and friendly,” he brought to the campus an electrifying presence.<sup>55</sup>

Dr. Carrell announced that the college was one of several Virginia institutions of higher learning to support financially the Roanoke Higher Education Center scheduled to be located in the old Norfolk Southern Building Complex.<sup>56</sup> The college had been fortunate to gain the use of a new facility in Lynchburg, the Virginia Department of Transportation building, at no cost contingent upon a certain number of VDOT employees being present in the group meeting there. As it turned out, eight of the twelve students in the class that began in February, 2000, were employees of the department.<sup>57</sup> Aside from these good pieces of news about the Adult degree Completion Programs, the college was experiencing other good things as well. A Gallery of Distinguished Alumni had been started in Lansdell Hall.

Dr. John Tresch was in the process of a mission to secure the library of James Barbour, former governor of Virginia, U.S. Senator, and a personal friend of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.<sup>58</sup> Some three hundred books from the early 1800’s, constituting Barber’s personal library, would make up this treasure.<sup>59</sup> Certain pieces of furniture would also be a part of this wonderful collection. While some time would be required to obtain these historical objects, Dr. Tresch was successful in doing so. They are now on display in the Archives Room in Lansdell Hall on campus. The securing of this collection was a marvelous and exciting achievement for the college and a tribute to the efforts of Dr. Tresch.

Funding for the new Visual Arts Building reached its completion, and the college was busy addressing nineteen of the fifty-two recommendations that SACS had made regarding the Adult Degree Completion Program. Harman Chapel had now become Harman Chapel and Performing Arts Center, and Admissions continued



ALUMNI JUDGE JEROME KATZ (left) AND W.H. SUTHERLAND (center) WITH INTERIM PRESIDENT KEITH EDWARDS.



ARCHIVES FROM THE  
JAMES BARBOUR LIBRARY

to expand its outreach, going to college fairs in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, and areas in West Virginia.<sup>60</sup> The school was busy recognizing various individuals who had rendered services to the institution over the years. The first Dudley Philanthropy Award went to Mrs. June Shott. Dr. J. Taylor Stinson, Marvin, and Kathleen Williams were honored by having a campus road named in their honor as

Stinson-Williams Drive. Ralph VanDyke, a long-time trustee and that body's chairperson plus a strong financial supporter along with his brothers, Claude and William, had the VanDyke Circle named in their honor. The late Melissa Kiser Stinson received recognition for her beautification work on campus. In 1931 she enlisted the aid of students in the planting of saplings which developed into strong maple trees along the sidewalk leading from an area near the dome to Rish Hall.

Professor David Armbrister, Assistant Professor of History completed thirty-two years with the college, retiring following the completion of the spring semester, 2000. His service had included Interim and fulltime Chairmanship of the Social Science Division, a twenty-year stint on the Education Committee, and various other committee assignments. His services in China and England have previously been mentioned. The writing of this history and service on the Alumni Council as member and in officer positions have kept him in close touch with the college, while other responsibilities have added to a busy schedule. However, yes, he has enjoyed retirement.



PRESIDENT DAN MACMILLAN (right)  
HONORS RETIRING PROFESSOR  
DAVID ARMBRISTER.

It seemed that, on the whole, the new century would mean good things for the college. Faculty confidence had come a long way, and, as Dr. Crawford reported, morale was at a high level because of the leadership

of Dr. MacMillan and Dr. Carrell. Both of them were regarded as "gentlemen of quality, character, and integrity."<sup>61</sup> Dr. MacMillan indicated that he felt the school was moving in the right direction with a strong four-year program. The college did need a strategic plan, and its endowment should be a minimum of ten million dollars as the goal, along with a debt-free status. The ten-million dollar campaign was on a delayed status as was the establishment of a Long-Range Planning Committee. The Adult Program had some concerns with which SACS and the school were dealing. Enrollment in the program was up, as David Skidmore remarked, largely because of the "tremendous contributions of Bill Carrell."<sup>62</sup> However, there was an urgency for the school to break away from its dependence on the Adult program income to offset that of the traditional program. The Board approved a five-year plan for this purpose.<sup>63</sup>

The school year 2000-2001 brought a celebration of twenty-five years for the Teacher Education Program. By the summer of 2001, the *Alumni News* reported that the program could count three hundred graduates, its first state accreditation in 1982, a Mentor-Teacher program, a Teachers Hall of Fame, and an active Student Education Association.<sup>64</sup> The Don and Maria Cox Visual Arts Center was in full swing with its new facilities providing students a means of doing many types of arts. Bluefield's "Teen Living for Christ" brought in 250 youth on a weekend in February, 2001.<sup>65</sup> The graduation in the previous December had a record 204 students receiving diplomas.



DIVISION OF EDUCATION, 2000

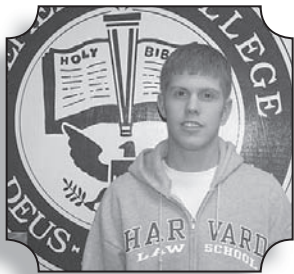
A gift from the Frances Anderson Stallard estate of one million dollars became the largest one-time gift ever received by the college. Mrs. Stallard's husband, Beecher, had been an alumnus and trustee. Ruth Blankenship, the first fulltime director of fundraising for corporate and foundations relations, reported an increase of twelve percent over the amount of the previous year. A concert held in December had collected over six hundred pairs of shoes and over one thousand dollars for donation to the Bluefield Union Mission.<sup>66</sup> The 2000-2001 school year brought a record fundraising figure of



\$2,720,813.<sup>67</sup> Speaker Bill Irwin, the only blind man to complete the Appalachian Trail, shared with the audience in convocation his conquest of both physical and spiritual blindness.<sup>68</sup>

Tommy Brown, Bluefield's basketball coach, captured the Coach of the Year Award in the Appalachian Athletic Conference. His team posted a 22-12 record during the 2000-2001 season. He also took over the men's golf team when its coach left the college and led the team to a fifth straight conference championship, a feat that earned him his second AAC Coach of the Year honor.<sup>69</sup>

Alumni James Lesnett and Sara English received attention for unusual achievements. He became the first Bluefield College graduate to be accepted to Harvard, earning a high score on the law school entrance exam. His achievement



JAMES LESNETT

placed him among the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile in the entire nation. This was definitely no small feat! Sara became a member of the Triad Angels, a professional women's football team that later became the Carolina Cougars in the Continental Football League. She tried out for the team and made it.<sup>70</sup> At one point, Sara, starting center for the college's women's basketball team, had been a sports reporter for the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* and had performed well in that position. Then, there was the amazing accomplishment of alumnus Kenneth Massey, whose father and mother, Wayne and Ann, are on the college faculty and a brother, Jason, who is a staff member. Ann took retirement at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. In an Honors project that he undertook while at Bluefield College, Kenneth had devised a math formula for rating college football teams. The National Collegiate Athletic Association, (NCAA) informed him that his formula had been accepted as one of eight formulas to be used in determining the



DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARD WINNER DR. WAYNE MASSEY (left) AND DISTINGUISHED STAFF AWARD WINNER TIM HAVENS, 2002

of this history, Ohio State and Florida will be battling on this very evening for the BCS Championship.

The end of the 2000-2001 school year brought the announcement of Mr. Will Gordon's retirement, although he would remain for at least one more semester. The report stated that this professor's "warm-hearted soul could charm anyone...."<sup>72</sup> Will Gordon had begun his career at the college in 1962, making his tenure the longest of any current faculty member. While he may not have been certain about just how long he would serve, Bluefield College grew on him and he grew on the college. He, in fact, became virtually a legend through his years of teaching math, economics, and other related courses and his mentoring a countless number of students who found the courses difficult. He always did this in a kind and understanding way, hoping to get them on a good path to complete the work. He endeared himself to many who came under his instruction and realized that he cared whether they made it in the courses. Troy Perry, retired CEO for Heilig-Myers Company, attributed much of his success to the motivation derived from Mr. Gordon's teaching and support.<sup>73</sup> The spring issue of the 1983 *View from Bluefield* stated that Professor Gordon had earned the praise of nearly everyone associated with him. Stuart Reed, class of 1981, declared that Mr. Gordon was "like a father to the students." The *View* went on to say that while this professor demanded respect and expected a student to work, he would do anything that he could to help.<sup>74</sup>

Will Gordon also made quite a name for himself through his achievements on the softball field and the longevity of his involvement with the sport. Many at the college and at Trinity Methodist Church, his church, applauded his performances and perseverance. They also, along with his opponents on the field, praised his good sportsmanship. While this writer did participate with Mr. Gordon from time to time on the field of play at the college and in the church league, he will leave the remarks about Mr. Gordon's softball career for others more qualified to make them. As far as his collegiate career is concerned,



SENIOR PROFESSOR WILL GORDON

this writer can personally attest to the dedication of his colleague to his teaching and to other requirements for his services at the college.

In 2001, Bluefield College became a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, an organization which promotes Christ-centered higher education.<sup>75</sup> It held its second Media Appreciation Day, and at the annual Founders Day program, three alumni challenged the students in terms of the values of



BC's MEDIA DAY, 2005

receiving an education at Bluefield College, while sharing their experiences from the standpoint of their current careers. The college also added to its curriculum a karate class for men and women under the direction of faculty member Doug Minnix, a fourth-degree black belt and experienced

through fourteen years of teaching and twenty years of training in this art. The class schedule called for a twice-weekly meeting with one practice session each week, along with a Thursday night Bible study. Mr. Minnix was seeking to teach self-discipline through two avenues and that spiritual strength is vital, along with physical strength. He also included in his plans Christian karate teams for both women and men and competition involving these teams. In the physical education area, an Athletic Training Education Program was to get underway in the Fall of 2001.<sup>76</sup> Plans were also underway to field a Women's soccer program in the near future.<sup>77</sup>

Student enrollment stood at eight hundred plus combining campus students in the traditional program and those wherever the Adult programs operated. Endowment stood at \$4.2 million with a goal of increasing the fund by twenty-five percent each year. The Jessie Ball DuPont Foundation



BC's FIRST WOMEN'S SOCCER TEAM

had given the college a grant for strategic planning, and an Atlanta firm would be working to produce a broad-based planning document with a five-year time frame. Drawings for the renovation of Harman Chapel were being done through a gift provided by the Bluefield Area Foundation. This would



RENOVATED HARMAN CHAPEL

be the first major restoration since the construction of the facility in 1965.<sup>78</sup> Eventually, over \$100,000 would be raised to meet a \$50,000 challenge from the Mary Parsons Foundation for this project.<sup>79</sup>

Self-study would begin in 2003, but the college was already at work to get the wheels turning in preparation for this effort. Admissions had been pushing hard in its recruitment program. President MacMillan and Mrs. MacMillan aided this cause as they represented the school at seven college fairs in Florida over a three and one-half day period in October, 2001. Dr. William Carrell's work in seeking to satisfy SACS on the Adult program was a great asset to the school. In addition, Pam Sarver, as Director of Business and Finance, received praise for her work in that office. She had come to Bluefield College from the firm of Brown-Edwards and Company in 1996 to help at a time of great financial difficulty for the institution. Dr. MacMillan declared that Mrs. Sarver had "an incredible heart for God." He also had words of praise for the work of Diane Shott in the President's office and his wife, Sandy, whom he called an "amazing lady" for her efforts on behalf of the college.<sup>80</sup>

In response to the terrible terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, the college held special services on two separate occasions. The 2002 yearbook devoted two pages to the dedication to the memory of all who lost their lives that day and in honor of "those who fight for the freedoms of a country that stands united in the face of adversity."<sup>81</sup> As was true of every place in America, the campus of Bluefield College was a somber place in the aftermath of that day. Students were facing a reality that they probably never even considered possible.

The Strategic Plan, on which work had begun in 2001, saw two

committees functioning in the process. One was a Core Planning team, while the second one was a Strategic Planning Committee. Following the development of the plan, it went to the trustees for their consideration in the spring of 2002. The body approved the plan by a unanimous vote. Ten initiatives resulted from this campus effort. They were as follows:

1. Enhance existing academic programs and explore new ones in both the traditional and nontraditional areas.
2. Develop an academically sound program that would bring socialization, integration of faith and learning, and career exploration in order to aid in the adjustment and retention of freshmen.
3. Study, design, and implement a comprehensive plan to integrate faith and learning college wide.
4. Develop the financial resources needed to support a strong academic and student educational experience and long-term growth.
5. Develop a Christ-centered community by which the campus is known for its passion for God and compassion for one another.
6. Create a student life atmosphere and programs that provide students with an active, stimulating, balanced college experience.
7. Enhance the strength of the Board of Trustees through recruitment training, and enhanced opportunities for involvement.
8. Develop a competency for measuring and evaluating key outcomes on a continual basis that results in better management of the college.
9. Develop among Bluefield College constituents the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the institution's academic programs, services, and activities to foster growth for the school.
10. Develop and implement a comprehensive technology plan, including the implementation of a fully integrated campus wide computer system, which results in better administrative and student services and which enhances instructional technologies to meet the needs of both on-campus and off-campus faculty and students.

This plan represents a careful look at all phases of the college so as to be able to provide for its future in the best possible ways. It would be a challenge to implement it. Yet, its importance was enough to lead those responsible to put their best foot forward.

A newly organized Heritage Club recognized donors who made planned gifts to the college. Twenty-five individuals made up the charter membership.<sup>82</sup> A campus improvement committee made up of students, faculty members, and one trustee existed to seek any needed improvements to the campus and point them out to the proper individuals. John Tresch, faculty representative, shared the fact of just how much the faculty appreciated the new Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Elizabeth Gomez. Dr. Gomez had the distinction of being the first woman to hold this post in the history of the college. Dr. Tresch spoke of her as having a "listening ear."<sup>83</sup> Her importance to the school would be especially noticed in the course of doing the Self-Study in a short while, although good results were already apparent due to her presence.

A very significant part of Bluefield College history would be lost when the old gymnasium, or "Old Barn" as some knew it, burned to the ground on April 18, 2002. While the cause of the fire was unknown for a time, the ultimate determination was that it was due to an electrical problem. Considerable maintenance and ground work equipment were lost in the fire, but, alongside the material losses were those vivid memories of a facility that served the college until the construction of the Dome gymnasium. Any person who had experienced the old gym could recall a floor that was not regulation size, a chalkboard that served as a scoreboard, team benches so close to the sidelines that players sitting on them had to keep their legs close so that players on the floor would not trip over them, and other things that made the place unique.<sup>84</sup> With the insurance money received, the cost of equipment lost would just about be covered. The Trustees approved the



DEDICATION OF NEW DOME ROOF, 1999

construction of a new shop, and, through the efforts of Trustee David Skidmore, materials were obtained to use in its construction. The new shop had a new location just above the tennis complex and its name honored Mr. Skidmore for his generous help in its building.<sup>85</sup> The sign now reads Skidmore Facility Management Center. In 2002, the Trustees approved a motion to allow President MacMillan, as agent for the Board, to secure the services of an architect to do a conceptual design, including cost and location, for a Student Activities Center and to share a report with the Board at its spring, 2003 meeting.<sup>86</sup> The importance of having this facility cannot be overestimated. Present-day Director of Student Activities, Jessica McDaniel, expressed her belief that such a facility would benefit the college greatly and certainly would serve the needs of the students. Dances, concerts, and other types of activities could be held there, and students could use it for a variety of things. She emphasized that its construction should be a priority to help bring students to the college and to keep them there.<sup>87</sup>

Ruth Blankenship, Interim Vice-President of Institutional Development at the time of her interview, describes the plans for this building, labeling it a “beautiful facility with many good features. It has much to offer the campus.” Plans were made possible through funds provided by the Tierney Fund. In order to be able to take the plans, original or altered, the college must first find an individual or foundation willing to provide a large initial gift. Then, the next step would involve going public as a means of securing the balance of the funds required for construction and the furnishings to make the building serviceable.<sup>88</sup> Hopefully, there will be a positive response from every standpoint to allow the school to add a badly needed facility.

Within the scope of serving in a better way the needs of the college, there have been changes in the names or titles. For example, Student Life became Student Services and Retention, while the trustee committee, Student Recruitment and Retention, became the Enrollment Management Committee.<sup>89</sup> It is not unusual to have name or title changes to reflect more appropriately the purposes intended. Yet, while names have changed, basic purposes remain pretty much the same. The Self-Study, which looks at everything on campus, can often be an instigator of name change if it seems to make more apparent a function or functions. In looking at the Self-Study underway, Dr. Tim Crawford shared with the Trustees that this

study “rises above the compliance document to show that we really know what we’re doing and have a vision of where we’re going.”<sup>90</sup> The time and effort that go into a Self-Study would be difficult for the person outside the college community to comprehend. Yet, the goal is to take what is learned through the process and make it beneficial to the entire college community. It can serve not only to keep things current but also to direct the path to the future.<sup>91</sup> Having experienced several Self-Studies while at the college, this writer appreciates what Dr. Crawford had to say about it.

Even as Self-Study was in progress, the campus was moving on. A new Vice-President for Institutional Advancement, Mr. Tom Carr, began his duties in August, 2002. Mr. Carr was a very affable person with a proven track record in fund raising. He would be of great service to the college in this area, except his stay at the college was not as long as hoped or desired. Primary duties would fall once again on Ruth Blankenship until Mr. Harold Hazen, a man well-versed in fund raising, came to assist. It should also be said that Mrs. Amy Havens and the other personnel in development did an exemplary job in keeping things going in the absence of a person in top command. Their work had been greatly helped through the addition of new software that integrated the campus and a new telephone system. New computer equipment made it possible for the entire Development/Public Relations/Alumni Complex to send e-mails to Alumni.<sup>92</sup> These changes fit in with the Strategic plan item pertaining to technology on the campus.

SACS came to Bluefield, went over the Self-Study, and checked things out with positive results. Whatever might need to be revisited

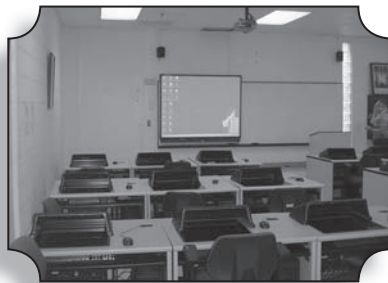
by the college would be taken care of with the objective being to have it all in place by December when SACS would announce its decision on recertification. Dr. Gomez indicated that the meeting with SACS was clearly a positive one. The visiting committee had praised the college and stated that its recruiting plan was the best



MISSION TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA

that it had ever seen. In addition, it wanted to use Bluefield's plan that it had followed in integrating the Adult program as a model.<sup>93</sup>

In the area of finances, Bluefield would be the beneficiary, along with four other colleges, in receiving an annual gift of \$200,000-300,000 for thirty years from a Testamentary trust given to the Virginia Fund to be dispersed upon the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Guy Beatty. In addition, through the work of Tom Carr, the school had gained \$1.5 million in estate and planned gifts.<sup>94</sup> The Algernon-Sydney Sullivan Foundation provided \$24,000 to be used for financial aid in 2002-2003. The endowment received additional funding. Youth Works partnered with the college to establish an annual scholarship



BC's NEW SMART TECHNOLOGY CLASSROOMS

for a five-year period for students interested in Christian studies or missions. Bluefield served Youth Works by giving the use of its residence halls, lavatories, and food service to those young people who came to Bluefield under its auspices.<sup>95</sup> This was set up as a five-year agreement.<sup>96</sup> In looking at finances, an additional bit of information is that the college elevated Mrs. Pam Sarver to Vice-President for Administration and Finance in recognition of her services in selecting and implementing the new administrative hardware, developing a detailed five-year financial plan for operating the school, and managing a \$650,000 budget for the 2001-2002 fiscal

year. The college also received complete re-roofing of faculty housing at very little cost because Dunford Roofing in Tazewell provided the services on a very generous basis.<sup>97</sup>

The year brought a continuing focus on improvements, a home for the Sports Hall of Fame on the balcony area of the Dome, another publication of the *Bluestone Review*, a wonderful publication featuring literary talents of young to older contributors, the acceptance of the

campus as a site for LSHT, testing required for admission to law school and Dr. Kim Farmer as teacher for the prep course for taking the test, witnessed the work of development, under Tom Carr's leadership, touching places previously unreached, and received the news that the college was financially sound. The school received a \$5000.00 gift from the Jessie Ball DuPont Foundation to send someone of their choice to the campus to do a feasibility study on the technological upgrade for "Smart classrooms," teleconferencing, and laptops and projectors for each academic department. If this study proved favorable, other monies would be forthcoming.<sup>98</sup>

A new chapel foyer, made possible through the gifts of Douglas and Janice Hawks, as primary contributors, had its dedication in April, 2003. The foyer would be named in honor of this couple. The change involved converting a smaller foyer inside the main entrance doors. This spirit of giving extended into that summer when five employees and their families traveled to Jamaica to do mission work on that island for a period of time.<sup>99</sup>

While many good things were happening that brought satisfaction to the college, bad news entered the picture as well. Dr. John Tresch Jr. died on September 14, 2003, following a time of battling with a serious illness. At the age of sixty-six, Dr. Tresch had decided that at the end of the 2003-2004 school year, he would retire. At the time of his death, he was serving as Chairperson of the Social Science Division, faculty president, professor of history, and Interim Pastor of First Baptist Church in Bluefield, West Virginia. He had arrived on the Bluefield campus in 1988 to serve as Dean of Students.

Dr. Tresch held a Master's Degree in history from Texas Christian University and a Master of Divinity Degree from Vanderbilt University and a Doctorate in history from Oklahoma State University. He filled various other roles in addition to his teaching and administrative duties. Dr. Primitivo Delgado, retired Professor and Dean from the college, called Dr. Tresch a "dedicated person in many ways" and one certainly dedicated to his students.<sup>100</sup> His appreciation for all faiths and cultures received acknowledgement from those of faiths other than his own Christian faith.<sup>101</sup> Faculty president, Dr. Rob



DR. JOHN TRESCH

Merritt, stated that Dr. Tresch's death was a "great loss to the college and to the faculty in particular."<sup>102</sup> He pointed out two memorable legacies of Dr. Tresch – he always kept learning, and he bridged divides. Dr. Merritt expressed the thought that the "openness" that Dr. Tresch had should serve as a model for everyone.<sup>103</sup> The Trustees unanimously approved a motion to have a letter of appreciation for what Dr. Tresch did for Bluefield College written and a copy sent to his wife.<sup>104</sup> He left behind his wife, Beverly, and his sons John David and William Kyle.<sup>105</sup>

The service held at First Baptist Church was very moving, made even more so by the singing of the Hallelujah Chorus by the college choir. This writer acknowledges the visit of a seriously ill man to his hospital room in August, 2003. John Tresch was performing his duties as the Interim Pastor of First Baptist Church that day. He came, shorn of his hair, to uplift me and my wife, Catherine, at a time when I was ill. That visit will not be soon forgotten nor the courage and faith of the man who made it.

Dr. MacMillan referred to Dr. Tresch as "an inspiration to students, faculty, and staff."<sup>106</sup> In preparation for Dr. Tresch's retirement in the spring of 2004, the president had planned on including these words in a tribute: "His presence will be felt for many years after he retires. He truly exemplifies the best of scholarship and teaching at Bluefield College." Sadly, he ended up saying them at the time of John's death.

While sadness lingered, it was back to work for the college. Only a few days after Dr. Tresch's death, the college received and dedicated a new oil portrait of Dr. Charles Harman that would hang in the "President's Gallery" in Lansdell Hall. The late Dr. Charles L. Tyer, successor to Dr. Harman, and his wife, Ida Jean, commissioned the portrait and paid for having it done. They wished to honor Dr. Harman with the "creation of a similar, more majestic painting."<sup>107</sup> Gerald Clay, Chairman of the Education Division, and his wife, Audrey, provided the funding for the frame. Dottie Pierce, formerly of Bluefield, was the artist. Dr. Harman's son, John, and his wife, Pat, were present at the dedication, as was Mrs. Tyer. Dr. Tyer had died the previous June. The new painting replaced a watercolor portrait designed initially to hang in the Harman Chapel.<sup>108</sup>

This positive note came alongside other good news about the college being ranked in the top 50 "Best Comprehensive Colleges in



the South" by *U.S. News and World Report*. Dr. Elizabeth Gomez, Vice President for Academic Affairs, responded: "We are pleased to have received this nationally recognized stamp of approval."<sup>109</sup> President MacMillan stated that he felt that the designation helped to confirm what the college believed about its programs. Previously, the school had been recognized as "Virginia's only private college affordable for low-income students," as being "Among America's Best Christian Colleges," and as one of "America's Best College Buys" in other national surveys.<sup>110</sup>

In his annual 2003-2004 report, Dr. MacMillan indicated that the 2003 enrollment was the best since 1995. The school had an eighty-nine percent retention rate that fall.<sup>111</sup> Dr. Rob Merritt, faculty representative, shared with the Trustees words of praise for Dr. Elizabeth Gomez. He said that she "had done much to make the faculty feel professional and part of the academic community in a way not previously done."<sup>112</sup> He added that she had worked hard to help with the development of the faculty and to provide resources for conferences. She displayed professionalism and offered a comforting hand in helping to get the college through SACS. The faculty viewed her as the best person that the college had had in that position in the last fifteen to twenty years. Dr. Merritt pointed out the improved technology on campus. Dr. MacMillan added to the praise of Dr. Gomez by saying that she was the finest Academic Vice President that he had worked with, mentioning that she continued to "push, encourage and work with the faculty."<sup>113</sup> He also announced that the Jesse Ball DuPont Foundations had provided a \$100,000 grant for technology.<sup>114</sup>



CARRIE CAMDEN

The admissions issue continued to be an ongoing one as the college explored various avenues of recruitment. A task force led by longtime staff person, Carrie Camden, came into existence to look at this matter in depth. Marketing would be proactive, special efforts would be exerted to reach Baptist General Association of Virginia

churches in which more than fifty Bluefield College graduates served as pastors. New programs would benefit both traditional and adult students. The college was seeking to be the “flagship” Christian college of the BGAV. A small group of faculty and staff worked with the president to develop a new covenant that would state clearly the college’s relationship with the BGAV.<sup>115</sup> Other steps were being taken to promote the college and enhance its enrollment.

Faculty promotions went to Dr. Greg Kerr and Gerald Clay. Mr. Clay’s peers, on his behalf, supported a promotion on the basis of his outstanding credentials, his thirty-three years at the college, and the fact that he held an ABD in terms of degree attainments. He also became Dr. Clay through the honorary degree bestowed on him by the school. Mr./Reverend David Taylor, a 1990 graduate, became the fulltime Campus Minister for whom the college had been searching. Much praise went to Chris Shoemaker for the outstanding work that he was doing with the public relations area which constitutes such a vital part of the effort to get the college out where the public can see it, as well as know it.<sup>116</sup>



DR. GREG KERR

A fitting conclusion to 2003 was the achievement of reaffirmation of accreditation by SACS at its session in December. This came following the school’s Self-Study and a visit from a SACS committee the previous spring. Dr. Gomez called this milestone the “result of hard work from the entire campus community” and added that SACS was recognizing the quality education offered by the college.<sup>117</sup> She



RELIGION PROFESSORS (from left) TRACEY STOUT, TIM CRAWFORD, SCOTT SHAUF

praised Dr. Tim Crawford and Eddie Stepp for their work as co-chairs of the Self-Study Committee. These professors, in turn, expressed gratitude to faculty, staff, students, and friends for their invaluable input. “Thank goodness,” all say about the next Self-Study not coming until 2013.<sup>118</sup>

The college once again gained further recognition

by being included in *U.S. News and World Report’s* Top 50 “Best Comprehensive Colleges in the South” in its “America’s Best Colleges: 2005” report. This meant that the school was selected from 324 comprehensive colleges in four regions of the country to join the select group.<sup>119</sup> This was no small achievement, and it represented a real tribute to the college.

As a new marketing tool, the college put into operation a motto “Live the Challenge” that resulted from the school working with Workflow, a Christian consulting firm. The firm came to the campus, spent time getting information and observing, and putting things together. Thus, there began a number of new initiatives that, hopefully, would bring students to the college. Dr. MacMillan expressed the hope that a student would choose Bluefield on both an aspirational and inspirational basis. He put it this way:



THE BC FAMILY “LIVES THE CHALLENGE.”

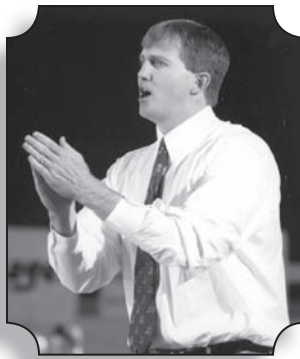
We want students to see Bluefield College as a challenge, a challenge to find out what they were created for and run after it or a challenge to achieve their personal best. Our challenge then is to fulfill the promise that we will help the students meet their challenge.<sup>120</sup>

As Bluefield College continued its march into the twenty-first century, it had to face and deal with some old issues such as finances and enrollment, but it made great strides in many areas. Fall, 2003, saw a retention rate of 89%, up five percent from the previous year and 16% from 2001. A Master Facilities Plan drafted by the school administration included renovations, a new sports complex and a new Student Activities Center.<sup>121</sup> Alumni Hall would be demolished and additions would be made to Cruise and Rish Halls. The college property would be fully utilized, even the land owned on the south side of the road in front of the school.<sup>122</sup>

The Homecoming Scholarship Auction netted \$5000.00, and new scholarships were in place, thanks to Reverend and Mrs. Roger Roller,

both graduates of the college. Now involved with the Roger Roller Evangelistic Association, Reverend Roller professed that he could not have made it without Bluefield College. The school gave him a chance, and it also enabled him to meet his future wife there.<sup>123</sup>

In sports, the men's basketball team came up with a 21-12 record and went to the national tournament. Coach Tommy Brown earned "Coach of the Year" honor in the AAC Conference. Plans were established to convert the old president's home on "faculty row," used for a variety of things over the years, into a Missionary-in-Residence home. The Shott Foundation contributed \$200,000 toward the \$600,000 goal set for renovating Harman Chapel. Alumna Catherine Payne and her mother, Betty Corte, established the Corte-Payne Scholarship for Adult Learning, the first scholarship specifically designated for the Adult Program.<sup>124</sup> A video conferencing facility became a reality in a classroom in the Science Center. It had the capacity to connect with three other academic sites at one time and had a special suitability to the adult programs. "Smart" classrooms became a part of the innovations that were being put to use by the college. Two new majors joined the existing programs – Theatre Major with concentrations in general Theatre and Christian drama for the traditional students and a Behavioral Science Major for adults in the accelerated program. The latter was Virginia's first such program to be taught in a format designed for adult learners.<sup>125</sup> Professor Michelle Newton-Francis, Chairperson of the Adult Degree Completion Program for Criminal Justice, became one of eighteen women through the nation to be selected for the Leadership Development Institute for Women held in Seattle, Washington, in the summer of 2004. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities made the selections.<sup>126</sup> Dr. Dusty Anderson, Assistant Professor of Information Technology in the Business Division, traveled to the University of Bahrain to teach under a Fullbright Scholarship in 2004.<sup>127</sup>



COACH TOMMY BROWN



NEW VIDEO CONFERENCING FACILITY, 2005

Dr. MacMillan, his sister Judith, and his brother Timothy, established the Walton L. and Winston Payne MacMillan Scholarship at the college. Students in Christian Studies, music, ministry, science, or history could benefit from this scholarship. The college's phonathon brought in \$39,000 in gifts and pledges, a tremendous increase from those beginning days of this avenue of fund raising.<sup>128</sup>

The college library, under the leadership of Ann Massey, Director of Library Services, upgraded its services in several ways. Databases and electronic books grew in number. The facility added books related to Appalachia. Changes made it possible for adult students to have easy remote access to the library's resources. Other important steps were taken to provide better services for all of its users. Mrs. Massey gave credit for these improvements to her experienced and dedicated staff.<sup>129</sup>

A school newspaper plays an important role in the life of the institution. This had been true from Bluefield College's earliest days. In the present day, *The Rampage* newspaper handles this assignment for the college, serving as a vehicle for the students to express themselves but relating to other members of the college community as well. It is a means of information for the entire campus. While there had been an earlier *Rampage*, the one today had the advantages of modern techniques and equipment to do its job. One of its stories had to do with a student who sent a golf ball soaring through a window in the Admissions Office. This resulted from a bet that he couldn't drive the ball to the top of Lansdell Hall. Well, he didn't make it. Thus, as he was on his way up to the Admissions Office to apologize, he met Dr. MacMillan and told him what he had done. As

the explanation concluded, and he indicated that he had used a number nine-iron club, Dr. MacMillan responded "Well, son, that was a pretty good nine-iron."<sup>130</sup> No one in the office suffered injury as a result of the young man's actions, and the window would be replaced, but those in that office might have adopted a defensive position thereafter and worn helmets just in case another ball crashed through the window. This turned out to be a humorous story, but, in reading different issues of the paper, one finds a great variety



of articles dealing with many subjects. The campus had its own version of "Survivor" called "Survivor Bluefield." Seven students selected by the Baptist Christian Ministries engaged in a seven-week program to "outlive, outpray, and outchallenge" each other.<sup>131</sup> The students who put the newspaper together do an excellent job. They do it responsibly under the guidance of Mimi Merritt, Faculty Advisor, and with the desire to provide the campus with a quality product.

Erin Losey, SGA president, came to the college because of its Christian environment and also because people were willing to answer her questions. She had been provided with opportunities that she would not have had in a larger school. When she said "Bluefield College is a great place to be," she did so because of her experiences.<sup>132</sup> Similar feelings would be echoed by another SGA president, Jamie Hobbs, in 2006, two years after Erin made her remarks. Jamie mentioned that there were so many things to do on campus and so many ways to express her Christianity.<sup>133</sup> It should be mentioned that Jamie served as Managing Editor of *The Rampage* during her senior year and brought to her role the same type of enthusiasm that she revealed in her interview.

In 2004, for the first time, the Admissions Department had a full staff, and things were going pretty well on the whole. Morale on campus was positive for the most part. The campus had a new person in charge of maintenance operations. Blair Taylor was no stranger to anyone who had served the college for a while. He had been with the maintenance staff for many years and had provided good service, along with a smile and personable manner in doing so. While the new maintenance building was still under construction, the Trustees decided to go ahead and name it in honor of David Skidmore who had played such an important role in its building. It would be the Skidmore Facility Management Center, as indicated previously.

In the financial picture, giving was up fifty percent over the previous year. Total gifts exceeded \$1.8 million dollars, and various projects had received funding from various foundations. Sufficient funds had been raised to complete the renovation of Harman Chapel and the area below the chapel. The next major area to which attention would be given would be raising funds needed for planning the Student Activities Center. The endowment stood at \$4,143,284 at the end of March, 2004.<sup>134</sup>

While this news sounded so good, Dr. MacMillan had to point out that while the deficit in the budget would be covered by \$1.5 million credit, the school could not withstand another year like the current one. The school could make it through the coming summer, on borrowed money, but it was counting on Workflow's marketing plan to produce a greater enrollment, and the Students Activities Center had to be built. The State Department had said that it would be a tragedy if the school's education program ceased to exist.<sup>135</sup>

That fall did bring increase enrollment in the traditional programs, while the new Behavioral Science major in the Adult Degree Completion Program recruited more students than expected. The new technology on campus brought remarks such as "exciting" and "cutting edge." The new "smart rooms" were ready for use. How this writer wishes that they had been available when he was teaching. What a benefit they would have been! Yet, he rejoices with those professors who now can enjoy those benefits.

Attention was being devoted not only to repairing those problems that existed with faculty housing but to those things that would promote satisfaction for faculty and staff. The Mission Statement that had been adopted served as the guiding force for whatever took place. It reads as follows:

Educating promising students for a life's work.  
Connecting Christian principles and learning.  
Changing the world one graduate at a time.



The new motto "Live the Challenge" gave the school a fresh approach to its recruitment efforts. The BSU, now the Baptist Christian Ministries or BCM, did its part by providing weekly Bible studies which drew some sixty to seventy students each week. Mission work, involving the BCM, the performing arts team Ransomed, and the Variations and Praise Singers, took students and faculty members to Poland, China, Austria, Italy, and the Czech Republic. These trips brought a new dimension to the participants and to the college.

This spiritual uplift did not diminish the financial issue that was always present. Yet, there seemed to be a bright spot there, too. Endowment was on the rise, tuitions resulted in additional income, alumni giving reached the ten percent level with twenty percent set as a future goal, and the annual fund budget exceeded its goal by more than \$15,000.<sup>136</sup> Increasing faculty salaries remained a concern for the administration and the trustees. The desire was to get these salaries in line with their peers, but external factors had stood in the way of this desire and commitment. This would remain a matter that needed to be addressed. In addition, the Trustee Finance Committee had issued a statement that the building of a student center should be the “number one priority in



CHINA MISSION TRIP, 2005

order for the college to be sound and stable.”<sup>137</sup>

Trustees did address the matter of upkeep of school property by passing a resolution that a sum not to exceed \$300,000 of unrestricted endowment assets be used to take care of existing problems in Cruise and Rish Halls. In the future, ten percent of any surplus funds was to be directed to the repayment of funds used from the endowment. That fund had been reduced from the March figure and stood at \$4,088,273 by the beginning of 2005. There was also a decision to sell the college’s remaining interest in property in Bluefield that had been left to the college. The school had also been left a house in Massachusetts.<sup>138</sup>



CONSTRUCTION (above) AND COMPLETION (below) OF BC’s NEW MISSIONARY-IN-RESIDENCE HOUSE.

Pam Sarver brought attention to the concern that she had in regard to the financial situation of the college. She expressed her belief that the next five years would be critical to the institution’s survival.<sup>139</sup> While this news was not what trustees or anyone else associated with the college wanted to hear, Mrs. Sarver’s openness in providing this information must be respected. It would be imperative that all resources be directed at doing whatever was necessary to turn things around as a means of ensuring survival. An immediate step would involve



BC’s NEW MISSIONARY-IN-RESIDENCE HOUSE

planning for the Student Activities Center. By that fall, the cost for such a facility would be revealed as approximately six million dollars and its location would be in the parking lot areas of Alumni Hall (previously New Hall). The small white cottages that run down the back road to the campus and were brought to the campus during Dr. Harman’s administration would have to go in time. A committee from the college would visit student activities facilities on other campuses to gain information and ideas that might help with Bluefield’s project. Then the school would undertake to secure start-up funding before engaging in a broader campaign.<sup>140</sup> This was a tremendously important undertaking and also a very challenging one for the institution.

The 2004-2005 school year saw the men’s basketball team win the conference championship for the second year in a row and repeat its trip to the national tournament. In seven seasons as head coach of the team, Tommy Brown had achieved a 147-89 record, earned four national tournament bids, and been selected Coach of the Year in the conference twice.<sup>141</sup> The college had been fortunate to secure the services of this young man who not only



MEN’S BASKETBALL CONFERENCE CHAMPS, 2005



BLUEFIELD COLLEGE PRESIDENT DAN MACMILLAN (left) AND BLUEFIELD STATE COLLEGE PRESIDENT ALBERT WALKER SIGN A DEAL TO RENEW THE TWO SCHOOL'S BASKETBALL RIVALRY.

coached well but always presented a strong witness for Christ. However, a call to another place of service came to Coach Brown, one that he could not turn down.<sup>142</sup> He certainly would not be forgotten in the annals of Bluefield College basketball history. His successor, Mr. Jason Gillespie, would have his work cut out for him, but confidence had been expressed in his ability to carry on the program.

The men's soccer team had a phenomenal year as well, going to the U.S. Collegiate Athletic Association national tournament and coming back to Bluefield as the national champions in the sport.<sup>143</sup> This was a great honor for the team and for the college. The Lady Rams soccer team was in the rebuilding mode, but perhaps the time would come when the young ladies would post a solid record and earn a trip to the nationals.

The students at the college were excited about the achievements in the sports arena; they were also busy responding to the devastation brought by Hurricane Katrina. They engineered drives to obtain monetary gifts, food, water, clothing, pet supplies, and a host of other useful items.<sup>144</sup>



MEN'S SOCCER NATIONAL CHAMPS

The Archives Room became a repository for the many boxes that accumulated as a result of these efforts. The goods eventually were taken by trucks to those areas where they could be put to good use. The response of the campus to this disaster was overwhelming and demonstrated the caring attitude of the participants.

The campus took note of the events going on overseas as American men and women served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Former student Sergeant Jayton Patterson from Wakefield, Virginia, served with the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit. He had attended the college from the fall of 1996 until the summer of 1997. He was on the baseball team. Prior to his service abroad, he had served as part of the White

House security detail for four years. He died in Iraq only a little over two weeks before his tour of duty would have ended.<sup>145</sup> Mention of his death appeared in both the student newspaper and the *View from Bluefield* that came out of the Public Relations office.

Faculty members gained the spotlight during the year. Dr. Rob Merritt earned an ACA Mellon Fellowship that took him to Salzburg, Austria, in July to participate in a seminar there. Professor Mickey Pellillo traveled with four students to Austria to participate in the seminar "Global Citizenship, America and the World."<sup>146</sup> Assistant Professor of Business Dee Shoemaker was the selection of the students to speak at the Winter Commencement in 2005, at which time 105 students graduated.<sup>147</sup> Cathy Matherly, who had given up the position of Registrar at Bluefield to take a job at Concord University, returned to the college to resume her role as Registrar. She remarked that convenience wasn't the answer for her when she went to Concord. She had to come to the decision that "you have to love what you do."<sup>148</sup> When she realized this, the return to Bluefield was the only way to go. The staff in the Registrar's office welcomed her return, as did the college as a whole.



PROFESSOR MICKEY PELLILLO

Homecoming of 2005 was one of the best the college had ever experienced. In addition to the usual recognition of the classes of special years, the occasion offered an auction through which the Alumni office gained \$10,000 for scholarships for student assistants. Dr. MacMillan had to agree to place a unique modernistic picture on the wall in his office for the next year if an individual agreed to give a certain amount for the picture. He did agree, and that picture hung in a conspicuous place in the president's office until the next auction would be held. The president's good-natured acceptance of this arrangement ensured a record collection at the auction.

For the first time, an alumni choir presented a concert on Saturday afternoon. Under the direction of Dr. Timothy W. Sharp, alumnus, and professor of choral music at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, the group engaged in this very enjoyable and entertaining event. Hopefully, at some point in the future, this event will be repeated. The evening affairs included a dinner-dance and entertainment by

the comedy duo, Bean and Bailey. Graduates of Carson-Newman, they joined forces after holding other jobs. This would become their profession, and by 2000, they had become a campus attraction nationwide.<sup>149</sup> They were truly good entertainers. The evening also saw couples who had met at the college being recognized. The entire Homecoming Weekend was a memorable time and certainly deserved the plaudit of “well done” for those who were responsible for the preparation required.

A sad note that sounded on the campus was the decision to replace the yearbook, *The Rambler*, with a student directory to be put together by the Student Activities office. The 2004 yearbook was the final one to be issued to the students. The decision for this change rested on the feeling that finding students with the time required to prepare a yearbook was becoming more difficult all the time. This came from Jessica McDaniel, Director of Student Activities for the college.<sup>150</sup> In the light of this action, *The Rampage* offered an expression of regret and questioned if there might not be some way of saving the yearbook. A directory would have certain advantages, but it would lack that “personal touch” that a yearbook provides.<sup>151</sup>

This writer agrees with this sentiment, having looked through numerous yearbooks as part of his research. The yearbook is part of a school’s history with its record of people and events and of a dedication to a special person. Students will be missing a significant part of any college experience by virtue of the absence of a yearbook. Yet, much effort is required to produce one. There is no easy solution. I am just glad that I have the yearbook record of my years at the college, and I feel bad for the students who don’t have yearbooks for their years.

In the fall of 2005, Dr. Craig Flowers, faculty representative, singled out the school’s technology as a source of envy for faculty persons at other schools. Yet, there existed a concern about recruitment, and faculty members were engaged in brainstorming to come up with some ideas about this particular area. Sixteen of the thirty-two fulltime faculty members had been with the college for ten years or more. They had a passion for teaching, and they desired that a good situation exist at Bluefield so that other faculty members would consider long-term commitment.<sup>152</sup> The May, 2005, commencement saw 148 graduates receive their diplomas. This number included students from ten states and two foreign nations.

During the year, the OML program, Organizational Management and Leadership, a new program, had gotten off to a good start, along with the new Behavioral Science program. Students from the Phi Beta Lamda and students in Free Enterprise business student organizations competed at the state level, were successful, and moved on to the national level, achieving honors along the way.<sup>153</sup> These successful ventures spoke well for the college. Yet, the old issue of too few traditional students brought further concerns and, in turn, resulted in new steps to address this problem. Athletics were moved to Enrollment Management to ensure better recruitment and achieve the established quotas for this area; in addition to sending correspondence to churches, visits would be made by the president and student groups using music and drama; trustees would engage in a more active solicitation on behalf of the school; new brochures, the website, and parent newsletters would be employed; Mr. George Campbell, alumnus working in Enrollment Management, would serve as the director of traditional enrollment.<sup>154</sup> *The Rampage* referred to Mr. Campbell as the “heart of the Bluefield College campus.”<sup>155</sup> The school had made a huge difference in his life when he was a student. It helped by providing a good education that prepared him for career opportunities following graduation. In addition, it helped this young man to “grow spiritually and develop the strong Christian foundation” that he had in his life.<sup>156</sup>

Tom Carr’s departure from the campus and his position of the Vice-President of Institutional Development was a real blow to the college. He had done an excellent job in the time that he had served the school. The staff picked up the slack and continued to work hard to carry on the work of that office. They were experienced, well-organized, and dedicated, and committed themselves to doing whatever was required. Funds raised were still basically good. Alumni giving had reached a twelve percent level, but the hope was to elevate it to twenty percent eventually. The Trustees accepted the President’s challenge to adopt a particular goal for the Bluefield College fund.<sup>157</sup>

The auditing agency for the college issued to the school a directive to “reengineer the college.” This meant giving close attention to fund raising and enrollment. It would entail getting the right person to come to the college to help raise funds, as well as getting a firm commitment to the mission of the school of the part of all who served

there. One avenue to be explored for the dual purpose of enrollment and income is that of instituting a football team at the school by the fall of 2007. A steering committee would be appointed by the Trustee Chairman to study the feasibility of such a move. This study is actually underway at this writing.<sup>158</sup> What the outcome will be remains unknown. There are those who would like to see the return to the campus of a sport that had made some major impacts for a number of years before the school dropped the sport. Time will tell how this consideration will go.

This history, thus far, has covered many aspects of life at Bluefield College. Yet, one of the unheralded groups who work from day to day to ensure the appearance of the campus and to keep all parts of it working properly are the maintenance people. There are those who will still remember Mr. Leonard Wyatt who served as head of maintenance during the Harman era. He devoted twenty-seven years to this role and brought to the campus far more than his maintenance skills. The 1970 yearbook dedicated that issue to him, citing his devotion, duty, and diligence.<sup>159</sup> Blair Taylor, now maintenance chief, started at the college in 1984, serving faithfully and well under the supervision of others until he received a well-deserved recognition that gave him the top position. The 1999-2000 yearbook honored him with its dedication, stating that Mr. Taylor represented exactly what Bluefield College stands for and this man loved the college and went above and beyond the call of duty in the performance of his work. He always could be counted upon to give his best.<sup>160</sup>

Clay Wagner joined the maintenance crew in 1980, and his wife, Pon, started three years later. This husband-wife team has done excellent work over the years, taking care of their respective assignments and sharing their positive and friendly personalities with those on campus. Clay received special recognition in November, 1998, when Service Master honored him as its Service Partner of the year.<sup>161</sup> This was quite an honor for Clay and the college.

Other diligent workers have come and gone over the years. Paul Grigsby, Blair Taylor's predecessor as head of maintenance, did a very commendable job. Earl Frankenfield has already been mentioned. There were others in the past who deserve recognition. This writer is not acquainted with the present-day maintenance employees except those that I have mentioned. Yet, altogether, these

women and men have been an integral part of campus life and have rendered good services, attending to upkeep inside and outside, doing repairs, often large in nature, responding to various needs as they have arisen, and just simply going about their business, while the other people on campus were attending to their responsibilities. They certainly deserve recognition for their loyalty and hard work, as well as their politeness and friendliness to those on the campus and visitors to the college.

New developments took place as the college moved into the second half of its 2005-2006 academic school year. Pam Sarver left her post early in the new year to return to her former employer, Brown-Edwards and Company. She had performed well in the business office to which she had come in 1996 at a very critical time in the life of the college. Later that semester, Mr. Jerold Meadows was appointed as the new Vice-President for Administration and Finance. Mr. Harold Hazen arrived on campus to serve as Interim Advancement head. His excellent credentials would enable him to be of great service to the staff in that office. While he would be in the office only about ten days each month, he would be available to the staff through e-mail and other means. In presenting the Advancement report, trustee Richard Norman paid tribute to Mrs. Ruth Blankenship for her "tremendous" job as the Associate Vice President for Institutional Advancement and her display of enthusiasm and professionalism in all of her efforts.<sup>162</sup>

Mr. Norman indicated that the Bluefield College Fund was well on its way to reaching its goal, citing the largest amount yet raised for the fund. He also credited Dr. MacMillan's tenure with raising over thirteen million dollars for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary campaign; twice as much as the previous amount had been accomplished with half of the staff as the earlier efforts. He expressed the view that such an attainment was "a tribute to everyone involved," including the president. Now, as the school moved toward a new campaign to begin in June, 2006, and conclude in June, 2012 (a unanimously



ALUMNUS DOUG HAWKS (left)  
AND HIS WIFE, JANICE

approved venture), trustees must do their best to attain one-hundred percent in their giving. Foundations and potential donors would expect this when approached for donations.<sup>163</sup> He mentioned a potential donor who told him to convey to the trustees this message: "Support Dan MacMillan. That man is doing a great job."<sup>164</sup>

In May, 2006, another large class in the history of the college, some one hundred eighty students, would graduate. The majority of this class were adults. Jamie Hobbs was to be one of two speakers representing the traditional program at graduation exercises. Miss Hobbs had to be away on a volleyball team trip. Jesse Flowers, son of Dr. Craig Flowers, Chemistry Professor, and Mrs. Flowers, challenged the graduating students through his remarks. Janice gave her prepared comments to Carrie Camden to present on her behalf. Among those comments, she expressed her feelings about the college, saying that the love that she felt for the college and its faculty and staff would be with her forever. The college had given her confidence to face the future and had fostered "the students' walk with God."<sup>165</sup> In an interview that this writer conducted with this young lady, she spoke of the encouragement that she had received to convince her to run for president of the Student Government Association. She praised the college for its Christ-centeredness and commended the faculty for their positive influence as mentors. When asked if she planned to be active as an alumna, she said "yes." She would help in any way that she could.<sup>166</sup> These comments constituted quite a dynamic testimony by this young lady. There had been one "London



VARIATIONS, 2005



STUDENTS-IN-FREE ENTERPRISE (SIFE)

Scholar" sent from the college, two students had been named "Citizen Scholars" by the Appalachian College Association, twenty Bluefield students in the choral group "Variations" and accompanying faculty members participated in a concert at Carnegie Hall in January, and eleven students in the Phi Beta Lamda business society had achieved honors through competition at the state level and had two of its members elected to state offices. As previously cited, nine students of SIFE had competed at the national level and gained honors there.<sup>167</sup> For those who did not know about the small Baptist college in southwestern Virginia, the achievements of the various groups were bringing about awareness and insight concerning the school.

The retention rate for the college for full and part-time students had reached 93.7% with the rate for freshmen being 86.2%. Students were busy pushing the idea that the new Student Activities Center being proposed would make a substantial difference in how students viewed the campus. Visits to other campuses had resulted in the committee determining that the plans for the college facility did represent a suitable size. Thus, the new SAC remains a "hot" topic on the campus, and students express an impatience regarding getting the facility built and put to use.<sup>168</sup> From all indications of what it will be like, you can't blame them for feeling this way. We all need to pray that this project will be accomplished.

Admissions underwent a change when the college outsourced its traditional admissions to Dagley and Associates as of March 1, 2006. Mr. Tim Havens became the Dean of Student Services with

responsibilities in admissions, financial aid, and the area of athletics. The enrollment goal set for freshmen in the fall of 2006 was one hundred seventy-five. Deposits indicated that things were running ahead of the previous year. The spring figures showed adult enrollment at two hundred fifty-three with the goal being three hundred thirteen.<sup>169</sup> Financial aid awards were sent out under the direction of a new Financial Aid Director. Home visits and church contacts had been integrated into the recruitment process, and Dagler and Associates put much emphasis on the development and training of the staff in Enrollment Management.<sup>170</sup> A \$193,000 grant from the Jessie Ball DuPont Charitable Fund came to the college to assist in developing a new student recruitment system whose foundation would be significant market research and the new financial aid packaging plan.<sup>171</sup> In addition, the college was employing an approach that made information much more personalized for the students considering the college. It was also using cutting-edge strategies and a revamped website to assist in its outreach.<sup>172</sup>

Professor Walter Shroyer, his wife, Linda, and four students experienced a ten-day trip to Italy to study artwork there, thanks to a major grant from the Appalachian College Association.<sup>173</sup> Comments pertaining to the benefits of this trip were very favorable. Professor Mickey Pellillo achieved a milestone in the summer of 2005 that she would not have even considered possible, or, perhaps, even inviting several years earlier. She completed hiking the Appalachian Trail after beginning her first hike on it in 1997, counting it a great adventure. She declared that she never would have accomplished this fact "without God and other people."<sup>174</sup> Professor Wendy Beavers became one of eighteen college professors to be selected by the Appalachian College Association to participate in a travel-study program to Greece in the summer of 2006.<sup>175</sup>

The academic year saw the college receiving financial grants for several projects. Grants exceeding \$100,000 for scholarships came from the Lettie Pate Whitehead and Algernon Sydney Foundations, while the Hugh I. Shott, Jr. Foundation provided \$100,000 for Lansdell Hall renovations. Smart technology was made possible by the Verizon and Jessie



THROUGH THE MICROSCOPE

Ball duPont Foundations, and the Verizon Foundation also made possible the new production facility in the library. Other grants came to assist with other needs on campus.<sup>176</sup>

The Trustees, in their April, 2006, meeting, passed resolutions praising the extraordinary length of service and quality of service to the college by Dr. Gerald Clay who announced his plans to retire at the end of the 2005-2006 school year and the endowed scholarship



PROFESSOR GERALD CLAY (left)  
RETIRES

given to the college by Drs. Gene and Jane Durmedes to help Mercer County students attend Bluefield College.<sup>177</sup>

In the course of its efforts to move forward following the April meeting, the Trustees, in June, learned of Dr. Mac's intention to leave the college and to take a position in Dallas, Texas. Whether or not this came as a surprise to the trustees and those on campus is a fact about which this writer is not sure. It did come as a surprise to him and community members. My thought had been to have Dr. and Mrs. MacMillan around at the time of Bluefield's celebration of its eighty-fifth year of service and Dr. Mac's tenth year of service. This had all changed. The writer will address this matter in chapter six.

While financial issues at the college were by no means resolved, the new man in charge of the school's finances, Mr. Jerold Meadows, sounded a voice of optimism. With additional endowment and an



CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD DAN GRABEEL (right) RECOGNIZES THE SERVICE OF  
PRESIDENT DAN MACMILLAN (center) AND HIS WIFE, SANDY.

extension of the local banks' line of credit to two million from one and one-half million, the signs were positive. Mr. Meadows had studied the financial situation of Bluefield before he came. He pointed out that assets exceed liabilities, and the indebtedness was declining. He cautioned that it was wrong for anyone to say that the college stood in danger of closing its doors. When an audit took place, the college measured up well to the standards used. Care is still required in the operation of the school. Good management and good decisions are required. Vigilance is a requirement at all times. There is a challenge to lead the administration to accept a new way of handling things. Yet, the college is very strong, and the challenge that Mr. Meadows has accepted is that of making it stronger. The collection of outstanding debts will help with the situation, and developing a way of avoiding this situation in the future is a must. He indicated that what had already been collected had kept the school from having to borrow from its credit line. He sees the college as only a short span away from "blossoming" with a wonderful mission to be pursued. He feels that people should see it as God honoring the college to allow it to take on this challenging mission, and he is excited to be able to do his part in the administrative end. He referred to the college as a "blessed place" and he felt blessed to be a part of it.<sup>178</sup>

With a new Accounts Receivable Action Plan in hand, the approval of changes to the office of Institutional Advancement Fundraising Policy, a line of credit to aid in meeting the rough times, and a firm belief in its mission for this new century, Bluefield College appears to be looking ahead with vision, confidence, resourcefulness, and a genuine belief in itself. The experience of eighty-five years to be attained in 2007 serve as a reminder that, as Tim Havens had put it: "I firmly believe God placed here (this school) for a very special reason, and we've not seen the fulfillment of that yet."<sup>179</sup>

The school year concluded with a Faculty/Staff Appreciation Breakfast, during which Dr. Gerald Clay retiring with thirty-six years of service and Dr. Craig Flowers, Chemistry Professor, received Distinguished Faculty Awards. The service provided by both men made them deserving of this special award. Mrs. Diane Shott, Assistant to the President, received the Distinguished Staff Award in recognition of her fine work in this office. Individuals received recognition for their years of service, ranging from twenty-five years down to five years of service.<sup>180</sup> These individuals represent a strong

loyalty to the institution and a commitment to its mission. Those who are relatively new to Bluefield and those standing between the five-year period for recognition join with those who were honored to constitute a stable force that will be so important in the life of the school. Dr. MacMillan will be gone, but there will be someone in his place, first an interim president, then a permanent one.

Retired professors David Armbrister, Will Gordon, and Ethel Haughton, who returned from Louisiana to help honor Dr. Clay in his retirement, were in attendance at the annual Honors Convocation to recognize student achievements. In addition, students presented Dr. Cindy Bascom, Associate Professor of Communications, the Student Choice Educator of the Year Award.<sup>181</sup>



THE RETIREES: (from left) ARMBRISTER, CLAY AND GORDON

While the school, as a whole, gave great thought to whom the college would get to replace Dr. MacMillan, they were also thinking about someone else – the beloved Dr. Primitivo Delgado. The retired professor, dean, and Division Chair had been seriously injured in a bizarre accident in the Food City parking lot on December 14, 2005. Flown to Roanoke Memorial Hospital, he remained there until his family had him moved to a nursing facility in Ohio. He was in the thoughts and prayers of people everywhere for many months. His story has been told in Chapter Three, so while there is no need to repeat it here, let it be said that Dr. Del was, in so many ways, the true spirit of Bluefield College as long as he was able to function. It is terribly sad that his time had to be shortened.



A final note concerning the 2005-2006 year has to do with the establishment of the Dr. Charlie Faith Fund. It was done in a way to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of his inauguration and the one hundredth year of his birth. It is a part of the overall Bluefield College Fund for Scholarships designed to 1) advance the vision and preserve the memory of this one time BC president 2) while providing vital scholarship assistance to Bluefield College students. One earns membership in this Fund by providing an annual gift of \$1000 or more, by promoting the college among friends and family, and by praying for the college.<sup>182</sup>



ARMBRISTER TO DELGADO

In the writer's 2005 interview with Dr. MacMillan, the president emphasized his belief that God had pursued him and called him to be the leader of Bluefield College. He cited two things that he felt were primary developments under his leadership – the attainment of authenticity as a Christ-centered institution and the provision of a Christian world view for the students.<sup>183</sup> Amy Havens spoke of the president's commitment to bringing the college back to a Christian basis, having made it a top priority.<sup>184</sup> Chris Shoemaker underscored Amy's statement in saying that this truly was an attainment through Dr. Mac's leadership.<sup>185</sup> The person probably closest to him through her role as his assistant, Diane Shott, expressed her opinion that the college was moving in the right direction and evidenced a stronger Christian emphasis. She also mentioned that the president considered very carefully any decisions to be made and prayed about them.<sup>186</sup> One only had to be around Dan MacMillan for a short while to realize his dependence upon God for leadership and his firm belief in the value of a committed prayer life.

Dr. Mac enumerated other things which he felt had been accomplished during his time at the college. The achievement of accreditation was certainly a major one, along with devoting attention to deferred maintenance on the campus, including new roofs on a dozen buildings, improvements in Rish Hall, the renovation of Harman Chapel with air conditioning for both the main auditorium and the lower floor facilities, plus other changes as well, and the

renewed focus on Appalachia in keeping with the college's purpose statement. When asked if he intended to stay at Bluefield until he retired, he answered in the affirmative and added that he would remain as long as the Lord wanted him there. At the time, he did express a desire to be involved again in classroom teaching in the leadership area and to spend time with the students before he retired.<sup>187</sup>

Perhaps, Dr. Mac was cluing me in to something at the time. In any event, just a little over ten months later, Dr. Dan MacMillan announced his resignation and his plans to leave the area in mid-August, 2005. He would be taking a position at Dallas Baptist University where he would be doing some teaching, serving as Director of the Gary Cook Graduate School of Leadership, and acting as an Administrative Assistant to Dr. Gary Cook, the school's president. Close to five thousand students attend the university. Previously known as Decatur Baptist College in Decatur, Texas, for a seventy year period, in 1965, the school relocated to Dallas and underwent a change of its name. Dr. MacMillan felt that the move offered him a great opportunity to serve.<sup>188</sup> This certainly sounded like what he would like to be doing before he retired, so, perhaps, he had been thinking about the change for sometime. God had led him to Bluefield, given him nine productive years and a wealth of insight into leadership in ways that he had not experienced previously. God certainly could lead him to his new roles, and this is what Dr. Mac believed when he and Sandy made the decision to go. He expressed to this writer in conversation following his announcement that he felt confident that God was calling him to Dallas University.

Returning to Dr. Mac's 2005 interview, in addition to the achievements already mentioned, he spoke of expansion in the areas of both traditional and adult educational programs and fundraising.<sup>189</sup> Previous mention of the amount of over thirteen million dollars raised during Dr. MacMillan's tenure had been made by Trustee Richard Norman. Ruth Blankenship, serving as Interim Vice President of Institutional Development, pointed out that between 1998 and 2005, the endowment had grown from one and one-half million to four and one-half million dollars. Estate gifts, planned giving, and gifts from foundations had increased considerably as well. Grants were on the rise, and the possibilities for improvement in this area seemed endless. Alumni support had risen to twelve-percent with a twenty

percent level set for a near future time. The college was also engaged in the process of exploring certain faith-based grants for future use.<sup>190</sup> Thus, fundraising had been one of the accomplishments of the MacMillan era.

While Dr. Mac played a key role in the successes of his administration, he did not credit himself with all of the accomplishments. He remarked that “no one person is responsible for our success. I have been blessed to have been part of a great team here at Bluefield College.”<sup>191</sup>

Dr. Dan Grabeel, Trustee Chairman, declared that “Bluefield College will benefit from his leadership for years to come.”<sup>192</sup> An editorial in *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph* stated that Southwest Virginia’s highest education system was losing “one of its greatest leaders.” Many students had received a “strong, quality Christian education” at Bluefield College during the years that Dr. MacMillan had served the school. This article’s concluding words were that the community owed the departing president “a sincere thank you for his dedicated and tireless service” in educating the local young people and adults.<sup>193</sup> Dr. MacMillan’s departure would leave a void, and the trustees would have a real challenge in finding someone to fill the role of Interim President, while a search committee selected by them would get underway in its quest to find a permanent president to lead the college. Prior to moving on to the efforts to find an interim administrator, the writer will provide space for comments from campus people regarding Dr. Mac’s leadership. There were some who felt that he had not measured up to expectations, but many saw it another way.

Amy Havens felt that the return of the college to a strong Christian basis served as an aid to securing community support and appreciation of the college.<sup>194</sup> Diane Shott remarked that Dr. Mac had gone out of his way to ensure that the community’s attitudes toward the college grow increasingly favorable. She saw him as a good man who came to the college on faith. She observed as he and Sandy faced and met head on a threatening illness that required periodic



PRESIDENT DAN MACMILLAN

travel over a period of several months to the University of Virginia Hospital for treatments.<sup>195</sup> This was a particularly difficult period for the MacMillans and a very stressful time that impacted his leadership at the college. Mrs. Shott had to bear greater responsibilities during those times when the president was absent from his office. Recovery did come, and the president resumed a fairly normal schedule as his health improved.

Tim Havens, who would be leaving the school before the 2006-2007 school year got underway, credited Dr. Mac with introducing the process to refocus the mission of the school as a “Christ-centered” college. He stated that families now sought the school with this purpose or mission in mind. Before this was true, the college seemed to be trying to be different things to many different people.<sup>196</sup> Chris Shoemaker expressed his feeling that many good things were happening at the college at the time of his interview in the fall of 2005. Dr. Mac’s tenure had been instrumental in bringing about those things in alliance with the other good leadership at the school. All of this was very uplifting for him.<sup>197</sup> As Dr. Mac prepared to step down, Mr. Shoemaker had other comments to make. He believed that Dr. Mac’s services helped the college to grow academically, physically, and spiritually. He also stated that the reception given for the MacMillans was “symbolic” of the man that Dr. Mac is. He closed his remarks in this way:

He is not only loved by the students, faculty and campus, but he is truly a member of this community. Though we regret his leaving, he has positioned us to grow through his commitment here.<sup>198</sup>

Walter Shroyer stated “I love Dr. Mac” and added that he regarded the president as a “great person.”<sup>199</sup> Finally, Dr. Tim Crawford called Dr. Mac a “strong Christian” and a “good person,” good at meeting people. Over the years that Dr. Mac was at Bluefield, he became more acclimated to his role as college president.<sup>200</sup>

In summary, Dr. Mac’s nine years had gained the love and appreciation of those at the college, in the community, the region, Virginia, and beyond for the kind, gentle Christian spirit that he evidenced. They also came to love and appreciate his wife, Sandy, for her sweet nature, friendly manner, and her beautiful singing voice. When she sang, she always did so with feeling, and she caused

emotions to well up in one's soul. Dr. Mac and Sandy relied on their faith to get him through his back trouble and his cancer.

As he left the college, Dr. Mac left behind a legacy of good leadership, heartfelt in all respects, and a strong Christian foundation upon which a new president can build. He took with him the well wishes for his new position and the new location where he and Sandy would live. He would be missed! Because he commissioned this writer to do this history, it certainly would be appropriate for him and Sandy to return to the Bluefield campus when the book is published and be recognized for the role that he played in the process.

Mr. Tim Havens will be missed as well. He had spent sixteen years at his alma mater, moving from admissions counselor on the road much of the time to assistant in the Enrollment Management area to the head of Enrollment Management. This writer had the privilege of interviewing several Counselors at schools served by Tim as Admissions Counselor. Tim had made a good impression on all of them. They spoke highly of him and regarded him as a good representative and ambassador for Bluefield College. His final position was as Dean of Student Services with multiple responsibilities. He had rendered faithful and dedicated service to

each level in which he served. He was a role model from the very beginning, always displaying professionalism, presenting a good appearance in dress and manner, and, above all, representing well his faith in Jesus Christ. These are the words of this writer who followed Tim from his student days to the position which he last held.

Let others speak about Tim. Crystal White said:

Bluefield College will not be the same without him.... I feel that it will be difficult to fill his shoes, but the staff in Enrollment Management has trained well under him and will strive to work and live up to his example of character, integrity, and leadership.<sup>201</sup>

*The Rampage* described Mr. Havens as having been "such a positive force on our campus"...and as "a very capable man who is very gifted in his area of work."<sup>202</sup>

Now, as Mr. Havens seeks to take the knowledge and skills honed in the course of his service at the college and apply them to his insurance business, we wish him well. He will be as committed to doing the best for his clients as he was in seeking the best for the students at Bluefield College. 🍀

— CHAPTER SIX —  
ASSESSING THE PAST: CONSIDERING THE FUTURE

The past has not always been easy for Bluefield College. There were moments when it appeared to be hanging by a thread, financially speaking. However, the faith to deal with the most critical of issues was always there from its earliest days. Women and men of extraordinary dedication have denied themselves at times in order to ensure that the college programs would continue to be there for the students. Even while struggling, the school has touched countless lives and given them not only a good education but the spiritual moorings to go along with the knowledge acquired. This is as true today as it was in 1922 when the college began.

It will be eighty-five years this year since Bluefield College opened its doors to that first band of one hundred students. Its enrollment today stands between seven and eight hundred, counting both the traditional and the adult programs. There is a contrast between the appearance of the college today and its appearance in 1922, and, yet, an alumnus or alumna returning to the campus can still see familiar landmarks. Those employed at the college – faculty, staff, administrators, and others – are very much greater in numbers, but their education is as vibrant as that of the small group working there in the beginning. Their faith also is reminiscent of that which characterized the early band. Throughout the whole of Bluefield’s life, there has been a Christian focus on campus. Perhaps, it has not been as strong in some periods as others, but there has always been the thread of a Christian atmosphere running through the life of the school. This writer feels that it is important that the past be given the opportunity to express itself before there is a look at the future. The best way to reveal the past is to hear from those who have experienced it. Interviews conducted in the course of doing research have provided insight into the impact that Bluefield College has had over the years, as well as feelings related to the future. Some comments have been gleaned from other sources. They involve both faculty and staff, as well as administration, students, and others.

Dr. Joe Blackstock spoke of being a scared little kid from Halifax, Virginia, who found warmth and feeling at Bluefield. He would

never again experience this same comfort at another educational institution.<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Oblinger, an alumna, staff person, and professor at the college, spoke of how the school had taught her to care about people in addition to providing a good education. She found enjoyment in working and being with those who worked and taught there.<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Hoback proudly shared that the college helped to produce a “born again” person, totally changing her life



KATHRYN HOBACK

at a time when she was already a young adult going back to school.<sup>3</sup> She showed her love for the college through her activities on its behalf, doing so up until her untimely death. Her husband Harold, an alumnus, prior to his death, established the Kathryn Hoback Scholarship Fund for Education in her memory and honor. He stated that “Kathryn was always doing something to help Bluefield College. All someone had to do was ask. She created a legacy, and this scholarship will continue that legacy.”<sup>4</sup> He went on to say that he wanted to take this step because of “Kathryn’s love for Bluefield College. This place was her life. She would have wanted me to do something like this.”<sup>5</sup>

Many students, past and present, expressed the deepest appreciation for those professors who had played such vital roles in their lives. The list is extensive, and this writer has chosen to mention only those who are specifically mentioned by the individuals interviewed and by those who responded to questionnaires. It can be said that the list included professors from the earliest days of the college to the present day, women and men who showed their love for the college through their teaching and in other ways as well. Tributes were paid to other school personnel as well – staff persons, administrators, maintenance people, and school cafeteria workers.

Many students credited the college with aiding in their motivation as individuals. Many found their spiritual moorings there. The late Dr. Joe Burton had experienced a genuine struggle in his life until

that September 29, 1964, when he felt a calling into the ministry.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Robert Shackelford had planned to become a basketball coach, a natural outgrowth of his own athletic abilities as a top-notch basketball player. He would, in time, be named to Bluefield's sports Hall of Fame. His experiences at the college changed the direction of his life. He, too, felt God's calling into the ministry. He also asserted that his bond with Bluefield College had always been greater than that with any of the other schools that he attended. Part of his heart will always remain at the college.<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, the stories of these two men can be repeated by many students who discovered God's will for their lives at Bluefield.

Dr. J.I. Rodgin, Bluefield Optometrist, even today, can recall Dr. Wade's encouragement and support to go to the School of Optometry at Columbia University. He also remembers the personal interest shown by faculty members and their willingness to help students if they needed the help.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Charles Paschall, bank executive, pointed out that he was better prepared in writing skills and basic subject knowledge than the other students at schools he attended following Bluefield. He also mentioned that the college had provided a wonderful foundation in the social skills, especially in regard to a young man who was backward and quite shy when he entered the school.<sup>9</sup>

This is not a chronologically ordered presentation, so the next student who will share her comments is Jamie Hobbs, 2006 graduate. Miss Hobbs rated Bluefield's Christ-centeredness at the top of her list and spoke of the positive influences provided by her professors as they served as mentors.<sup>10</sup> Reverend Garry Moore, class of 1993, considered the professors as more than past professors. They were his friends, and he said about them: "They don't just teach – they minister to you, they care about you."<sup>11</sup> He went on to say that they go beyond the work that a student does by being "genuinely concerned" about the individual.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. William A. Boothe addressed the students at the Winter, 1994, commencement. He had a job at an aircraft factory in California, and, at the time, he was shy and self-conscious. He was very successful in his work, but, because of his success, his plant manager told him he must leave and get an education in order to utilize his talents fully. Dr. Boothe entered Bluefield College at the age of 23, did well in his studies, graduated and went on to do graduate work. He said the

following to the students on the occasion:

I thank God for Pastor J.P. Gully and for my mother and for Dr. Charles Harman for whom this chapel is named and this wonderful Bluefield College and the faculty that believed in me.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Boothe's experience with the college brings to mind that of another alumnus, Dr. Linwood Custalow. While his story appeared in an earlier chapter, it seems in order to share his final thought about the college. He knew that the college that had treated him so well and given him hope would "stand and move forward" despite growing pains.<sup>14</sup> His love for the college has remained evident throughout the years that have passed since he graduated.

Three of Bluefield's graduates spoke at the Founder's Day program in 2001. Keith Cox '78 shared that he probably would not have graduated at a large university. Bluefield College provided a small community where he felt very much a part. Julie Hull Johnson '88 said that when she stepped on the campus as a student, she knew that she was "home." The college taught her a high level of integrity and principles. She said that Christians are needed in all areas of life. Finally, Jennifer Rutledge Payne '95 declared that Bluefield had helped her form her foundation for life and prepared her to deal with many things.<sup>15</sup> While the writer did not get to attend this special occasion and hear the speakers, his knowledge of them as students lets him know that their commitments that began then were still intact.

Voices from the past have continued to speak favorably of the college. Peter M. Watts, President of Pettin, Inc., in Fredricksburg, Virginia, stated: "I look back on my experience at Bluefield College as one of the high points of my life."<sup>16</sup> He described the teachers of his day as a "marvelous collection of concerned men and women."<sup>17</sup> Walter J. Woolwine, Retired Lieutenant General in the United States Army, indicated that without the foundation that he received at the college, he would not have survived the academic program at the military academy.<sup>18</sup> Donald M. Cox, deceased Retired Director and Senior Vice President of Exxon Corporation, former trustee and benefactor of the college, along with his wife Maria, declared that the education that he received at Bluefield was a "very instrumental factor" in his career.<sup>19</sup> These three men who attained top rank in

their respective careers were willing to offer their tributes to a small Baptist institution that had made a difference in their lives.

Nora Lockett (Nora Wright `72) appointed as head librarian in the Library Division in 2007 following the retirement of Ann Massey who held that position, could have gone to college anywhere with her academic record at Bluefield High School. She chose Bluefield College and has never regretted the decision. Her only regret was that the school was not four-year at the time. Yet, she did have the satisfaction of seeing her son Jed attend the school with its four-year program and graduate. He participated in many activities during his four-year stay. Nora indicated that the college remains in her prayers on a daily basis.<sup>20</sup> Floyd Coburn II `91 spoke of his pride in being an alumnus of the college. His experiences while there helped him to become a well-rounded person, while his studies played a big role in determining his future.<sup>21</sup> Carrie Bradshaw `89 saw Bluefield College as the place where she was supposed to be after completion of high school in Christiansburg, Virginia. She worked with Dr. Jack Brown to create the campus newsletter, *Campus Action*, a name that she suggested. An internship in her senior year led to employment with Tazewell County, a position she held for four years until she married.<sup>22</sup>

Greg Sink, who served as Director of Alumni and Church Relations for several years, gave this eloquent testimony about the college in an interview:

I love Bluefield College because it served as a very significant stepping stone in my life. I had flunked out of the previous college that I attended. I got the chance to go to Bluefield College. I came to see education as important and was able to succeed at Bluefield College.<sup>23</sup>

He concluded his comments by stating that the environment at the college made it possible for him to achieve the goals that he set for himself.<sup>24</sup>

The writer contacted a selected number of alumni and some individuals who had attended the college during different periods. Written interviews were enclosed with a letter requesting their responses. Thirty-five of them did respond, for which I was very grateful. Other efforts were made through the assistance of the Alumni and Public Relations offices to seek any input that graduates and those attending for any length of time might have. Responses

were limited. Needless to say, I was disappointed because there's a wealth of information to be shared, both positive and negative. It would have been very helpful to this project.

I have drawn thoughts and feelings from several of these written responses. An attender in 1950-1951 for three semesters remembered her time there as "some of the happiest" of her life. The family atmosphere met her needs.<sup>25</sup> Dorothy (Dot) Spoon Yarbrough `54, a classmate of the writer, shared that the college had a "wonderful" effect on her, allowing a poor girl from a small town to be admitted and helping her to feel good about herself. It led her to know that she could be somebody. She gained many truths from her classes which she indicated were taught by extraordinary professors. Choir tours were a special recollection – the old bus used, experiences with fellow students, singing in churches and schools, and staying in private homes. Because the previous men's dormitory was now divided to house women on one side and men on the other, if the young men wanted to get in touch with the young women, they would stand below the windows and whistle "Love Lifted Me." Singing this song today always evokes memories and brings a smile.<sup>26</sup> What wonderful memories! If space allowed, she had more to share.

Another of my classmates, George Blaylock, likewise spoke fondly of his experiences in the choir, serving as student director, and winning the music award. He labeled the two years at Bluefield the "best years of college" for him. While "growing up" there, he gained a background that enabled him to succeed at Carson-Newman College.<sup>27</sup> Joyce Gentry `58 will always remember the friendly atmosphere between faculty and students. She met her husband there, and both of them established friendships that have lasted over the years.<sup>28</sup> A classmate, Janet Leslie Meadows, shared similar thoughts, saying that the friendship between the students and faculty held the greatest significance for her. She also had strong remembrances of the professors, especially Dean C.W. Owen and Mrs. Velma Jackson and their enthusiasm for their students.<sup>29</sup> Still another 1958 graduate, Dr. C.P. (Buddy) Young had this to say about his alma mater.

The small school environment, individual help and high academic standards launched many college professional careers for many students that may have been denied the opportunity elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

He also said that he and many other former students had a unique opportunity to study at the college level because of Bluefield College.<sup>31</sup>

Helen Siner Wood, class of 1954, classmate of mine, had this to say regarding the college:

I came from a small high school and a 'secluded' background and found at Bluefield an environment that was nurturing and caring in which I could develop leadership skills and broaden my goals and my world.<sup>32</sup>

She added that Bluefield had a formative influence on her entire career of ministry, stating that:

As a woman I found a total acceptance of my call into ministry, without any negative limitations on that call. I made lifelong friendships not only with peers but with faculty who kept up with me throughout their lifetimes.<sup>33</sup>

She also stated that Bluefield College remains one of her "life interests."<sup>34</sup>

Classmate Julia Nixon '54 shared that she gained "success as a student and as a human being" after spending her high school years "being a complete nobody."<sup>35</sup> While she had graduated from four universities and taken classes at several others after leaving Bluefield, she had not experienced the close relationships with any of the faculty that she had with Bluefield's faculty. She learned as much from their lives as she did from their classes. Memories of many great teachers will remain with her forever – Dr. Zambus, Dean Owen, Miss LeGrand, Mrs. Jackson, Mrs. Mann, Mr. Stovall, etc.<sup>36</sup>

James F. Shrader '55 complimented several professors as he stated his continuing love for the college. He called Dean Owen "one of a kind – a beloved gentleman," Mr. Louthan "an amazing math teacher" and a "loving man," Mrs. Jackson as a "true inspiration" and probably the "finest English teacher" he had anywhere.<sup>37</sup> He said of her that no one else came close in undergraduate or graduate school. To him, she was a "dynamo and inspiration."<sup>38</sup> He still retains his love for the college. This writer shares the sentiments of these whose words have been shared. The class members of the fifties provided the greatest number of responses, and their feelings certainly match

mine, so I do not need to provide any comments of my own. There were responses from individuals in other decades, some of them being woven into the previous chapters. Still, there are other voices that should be heard.

Rodney Hale '60 spoke of lasting friendships formed while at Bluefield. He said that the college has provided a "predictably steady influence" through a conscious effort "to present itself as a community for unapologetic moral and spiritual biblical principles."<sup>39</sup> He stated that the quality of its academics speaks for itself as attested to by the broad spectrum" of alumni successes.<sup>40</sup> James Grisso '69 offered one simple but meaningful statement when he wrote "Will Gordon inspired me."<sup>41</sup> What a testimony on behalf of the forty-year veteran professor! There were probably others who felt this way, too, and did not get around to expressing it.

Carmen Copenhaver, wife of Professor Jim Copenhaver, earned an Associate Degree in 1968 and then returned to the college in 1977 to work on a second B.A. in Music Education. She completed the requirements and graduated in 1980. She acknowledged that she loved the campus and the people associated with it, mentioning in particular Ann McGlothlin and Bob Smith in music and George Van Devender in English. All of these professors encouraged her to believe that she could do anything to which she put her mind. They helped her to believe in herself.<sup>42</sup>

Linda Wyatt '70 knew the campus well because of her father's long tenure as head of maintenance. She would always speak highly of the school. Her childhood and college days were filled with wonderful people. Dr. Harman would always be special and was like a grandfather to her. Dr. Baker's history course raised her awareness to the end that she eventually ran for political office and won. At the time she returned her responses, she was serving on the Roanoke City Council.<sup>43</sup>

Beth Turner, class of 1974, talked about the relationships with the faculty and staff, indicating that their availability and personal concern for her as an individual remain as positive remembrances. In addition to receiving an excellent academic education, she experienced an excellent demonstration of Christian love which she, in turn, has sought to model to those around her. It was humbling to me to have my name included in connection with this demonstration.<sup>44</sup>

Cynthia Carter '75 met her husband-to-be at the college and became one of so many to receive this blessing. Beyond meeting Don, her mate for life, Mrs. Carter expressed that the two years spent at Bluefield were, perhaps, the "most wonderful" two years of her life.<sup>45</sup> Joe Dillon, class of 1977, also met the young lady who would become his wife at Bluefield College. He felt that he could never really express what the college meant to him during his three and one-half years there. Joe was the first student to finish a four-year program and had to enter seminary on a probationary status since his graduation would not actually occur until May. The situation cleared for him when he did graduate.<sup>46</sup>

Several graduates of the eighties sent in their responses. Wanda Eames '82 had the college recommended to her by Joe Dillon.<sup>47</sup> Students remain the best public relations agents that the college has. Coming to Bluefield with low self-esteem, Wanda found herself at the college, as she received recognition for her accomplishments and became involved in organizations on campus. She credits Mr. Ed Sorrells, cafeteria manager and her boss as a work-study student, Dr. Delgado and Mr. Clay (now Dr. Clay) with playing major roles in her life. The encouragement that she received led her to earn her Master's degrees in Elementary and Middle School Administration and to participate actively in school and church activities. The years at Bluefield were some of the best years of her life.<sup>48</sup> William Welstead III '81 participated in many activities while at the college and stated that he never "had so much fun and more to do" than when there. It provided a strong foundation of growth and maturity for his business career. He termed his experience at Bluefield as "rock solid." He was able to find his true calling without a lot of distraction and confusion.<sup>49</sup>

Cynthia Dunaway '82 spoke of the concern of faculty and the one-on-one attention given to students who needed help. She mentioned friendships made there and which have endured.<sup>50</sup> John Hamm '85 stated that, as a seminary student, he went head to head with Ivy League graduates and felt well-prepared to handle the challenges at that level of study. Through his involvement with the Baptist Student Union and student-led revivals, he caught a vision of how God could use him and other young men and women in His work.<sup>51</sup>

David Larimer '92 regarded Bluefield College as an overall great experience in his life. The academic program provided the kind of

background that enabled him to do a variety of things with his life and career. Faculty and staff were excellent and dedicated and very helpful to him. They showed interest in the students, especially those who cared about their academic performance.<sup>52</sup> Carrie Laughlin '93 gained her introduction to Bluefield through a college fair and an enthusiastic admissions representative, Jimmy Whittaker. When she stepped on the campus, she fell in love with its beauty. She knew that her home for the next four years would be at Bluefield College. She became involved in various activities and organizations through which she realized strong, enduring friendships. It was through her participation in theatre that she learned to overcome her lack of self-confidence. Her experiences helped her to gain leadership, organizational, management, and people skills. She concluded her responses with the following words:

I would never change the fact that I attended Bluefield College and will always talk highly of the opportunities that it has to offer. It may have been where I went to school, but in my heart it will always be a place I consider as home. I gained another family through the school. It gave me new friends, not only through the students but professors too. I will always look forward to coming down Route 460 and seeing the Harman Chapel's steeple peaking over the trees, a sign that a warm, friendly place lies ahead. Bluefield College has a special place in my heart and always will.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, there are Dawn and Brent Brewer who met at Bluefield and graduated in 1994. Brent stated that the college prepared him for life after college in both a personal and career-oriented sense. Dawn felt that Bluefield prepared her by providing the experience and knowledge needed for her future endeavors and by giving her the best four years of her life.<sup>54</sup> There is no doubt that students who were at the college in the late 1990's and on into the current century would be able to offer praise for faculty members who served then and now. I know personally several of the faculty who, no doubt, would be so honored.

Students have shared a wealth of comments about the college. Faculty and staff members and trustees have their thoughts to share as well. In some cases, individuals in this group have been students



as well. The first group consists of those who have left the college through retirement, relocation, or other reasons. Then, we will move to those who are still there.

Mrs. Marvin Williams, graduate in the first class of 1924, died peacefully in her home in Bluefield, West Virginia, a few years ago. Her husband, Marvin, had given forty-five years to the college in the way of service. Her father, Dr. J.T. Stinson served twice as president of Bluefield College. She taught in the Fitting School of the college and accompanied the college choir for many years. Mrs. Williams loved the college and supported it in a variety of ways until her poor health prevented her from participating in the activities. There was no question about her feelings for Bluefield College.<sup>55</sup>

Richard Berry, faculty member from 1959-1968, felt the Lord's leading from a pastorate to the college. It was a "turning point" in his life and opened for him what would become his life's work-teaching. He stated that the school would always have a special place in his heart and in the hearts of his family members. They had often spoken of the campus as "Shangri-La," that very special place where happiness prevails. Friendships made at the college have lasted, and many experiences there are remembered. As he put it, "there was a sense of common purpose in Christian education which gave our lives a greater than ordinary purpose."<sup>56</sup>



FORMER SERVANTS OF THE COLLEGE (from left)  
CHARLES HARMAN, PRIMITIVO DELGADO, E.M. LOUTHAN

Richard Foil, Dean of Men and Psychology Professor for two years and Dean of Students for seven years, served under Dr. Harman. He recalled the wonderful spirit of friendship which characterized relationships involving students and faculty. Something that he said

more than once was "we did not work at Bluefield College – we lived Bluefield College."<sup>57</sup> Frank Stovall, Choral Director from 1952-1957, had a tough decision to make in considering an offer that would take him and his family away from Bluefield. He and Sarah had a genuine attachment to the college. He owed much to Dr. Harman who was very much like a father to him. Whenever he returns to Bluefield, he is reminded of the joy of those days spent at the school and among so many fine people from whom he learned so much.<sup>58</sup>

Betty Fisher, deceased, served as the postmistress and bookstore manager from 1973-1976. She stated that the years spent at the college were "the most enjoyable and satisfying of all my working experience."<sup>59</sup> She regarded the faculty and staff as "one big happy family," and she especially loved working with the International Club and foreign students who comprised it. News about the students and their achievements made her feel a bit like a "proud parent."<sup>60</sup> Martin Harman, or "Pete" as he was known to most people, served as professor of health and physical education, and basketball coach from 1967-1975. He could still recall the warmth and caring attitude of faculty and students and the family-like atmosphere that existed on campus.<sup>61</sup> Dr. Jack Brown, retired army chaplain, came to Bluefield College to serve as the Dean of Students from 1979-1988. He remembered a "beautiful campus in a beautiful setting," lasting friendships, good traditions, Dr. and Mrs. Harman, a "Christ-centered environment," and dedicated faculty, staff, and trustees.<sup>62</sup>

Dan Parrish, Business Manager for thirty-three years, did not immediately realize what an impact Bluefield College would have on his life. He came to realize that he could not have had any more meaningful period of service than he had at the college. He was grateful for the opportunity to serve.<sup>63</sup> June Shott, Trustee and benefactor of the college on many occasions and in many ways, stated simply that Bluefield College had been a "great institution" from her point of view.<sup>64</sup> Charles Paschall, trustee and alumnus, complimented the caring teachers who helped encourage and motivate him while he was a student. The greatest impression made by the college had to do with those teachers and administrators committed to a high quality education in a Christian atmosphere. He recognized the sacrificial commitment that they were making to be involved in Christian education.<sup>65</sup> Dr. Keith Edwards, retired physician, trustee and trustee chairman, and acting president for a year, not only

supported the school financially and through his services, he went beyond the call of duty in providing solid Christian leadership and a loving personality. He and his wife, Alice, loved Bluefield College and demonstrated their love in remarkable fashion. Their deeds far outweighed any words that they might have shared.<sup>66</sup>

Dennis Yena, who served as a professor of Political Science, Public Relations person, and Institutional Effectiveness director prior to leaving the college, found the people with whom he worked at the school nice, helpful, and willing to listen. He found a sense of community where relationships were lasting. There was an openness in sharing the Christian faith that undergirded the school. He noted that the faculty were interested in mentoring students and in providing a pleasant atmosphere for learning. He witnessed the human touch at work.<sup>67</sup> Mr. Yena, now retired, gave many years of good service to the college, especially challenging students under his classroom instruction. Eva Easley, so active in the life of the college, said: "...we are so blessed to have Bluefield College here and that it has provided leadership not only to Virginia but all over our country..."<sup>68</sup>

Both Dr. Charles Poe and Jacqueline Oblinger emphasized the caring professors who served on the campus. Dr. Poe taught Psychology and chaired the department, while Mrs. Oblinger worked in admissions, career counseling, and taught in the area of communications.<sup>69</sup> Will Gordon, former professor in business and a friend to countless students during his long career, pointed out that the college had highly dedicated faculty and staff committed to Christian education. He came intending to stay a couple of years, but he wound up doing forty because he had discovered something at the college that led him to stay. Dr. Delgado made the greatest impact on his life and remained important to him during his time at the college.<sup>70</sup> Carrie Camden, longtime staff person who has served in several positions over the years, met the young man who would become her husband when they were both students. She has found her work and career at Bluefield to be fulfilling. She held other jobs prior to coming to the college, but she has found her greatest satisfaction at Bluefield.<sup>71</sup>



PROFESSOR WILL GORDON

Comments made about the college by Tim Havens appeared in *The Rampage* article dealing with his departure from the college. They are as follows:

I will always value the impact Bluefield College has had on my life, both as a student and as an employee. This institution has been such a part of my life. I will be taking the sense of purpose, drive, and values instilled in me as a student and employee here.<sup>72</sup>



Tim's wife, Amy, serves as Office Manager for Advancement. She is part of an office complex that gets things done through teamwork, amazing teamwork. She expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve the college and described it as a great place to work. Amy believed that community support for and appreciation of the college would grow as the school moved more to a Christian basis.<sup>73</sup> Ruth Blankenship, a coworker in this complex, shared a positive attitude about working at the college, as well as what was going on in the Development area. She could hardly contain her excitement in giving figures related to giving and in talking about the proposed Student Activities Center. It is not hard at all to see that she has the college at heart in what she does.<sup>74</sup>

Chris Shoemaker, still another member of this complex, provided a positive stance on the college in the course of providing information about what's happening on campus. Around 1993, there were only a half dozen media outlets contacted, whereas, in 2005, the number had more than doubled. He has remained at the college because good things are happening. As he has observed people at the college investing their lives there over the years and those currently doing so, the results for him have been an uplifting experience and the production of a stronger motivation in the performance of his own work.<sup>75</sup>

Teresa Stanley is a part of the Development complex as Director of Alumni Relations and Bluefield Fund. She and her sons graduated from the college. She came to her present position during a difficult time for the school, but her faith in a positive outcome anchored her.

Her support for Bluefield is obvious in all that she does. The best testimony comes from her own words.

God just opened the doors for me at Bluefield College. Once I was accepted, I realized what a gold mine this institution is, what an asset it is to the young people, not only of this community but to any college-bound student, and I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to work here.<sup>76</sup>

Betty Carroll, also in this complex, has moved to a new role, relinquishing her former post to Vanessa Scruggs. She has remained at Bluefield for a while for two basic reasons: 1) being impressed by the faculty and staff, 2) because of her own commitment to the college mission.

She also remarked that the positive influences of the four persons in the complex have been meaningful to her as she has interacted with them.<sup>77</sup> Rita Blevins, alumna and Office Manager for Academic Affairs, experienced a personal touch and strong support as a student. Her twenty-five years' employment at the school have involved several positions until she took her current one which she has held for several years. She stated that the college has become "home" for her and that she appreciates the Christian atmosphere and the special group at the college. There exists a common bond that links people in a special way.<sup>78</sup>

Dr. Wayne Massey, alumnus and English professor, attended the college from 1957-1959. He found at the college an atmosphere that was winsome, warm, and comfortable where a person could relatively easily find his or her niche. He found Dr. Harman to be a man who loved the students and had concern for them. He found faculty who were warm, loving, and concerned. Now, as a faculty member, he enjoys his association with the other faculty members and gets special enjoyment from seeing students succeed. His desire is to remain at the college as long as he can.<sup>79</sup> Cathy Matherly, mentioned earlier, expressed appreciation for the Christian focus and the family atmosphere of the college. These were certainly factors that she considered in making the decision to return to the college. She has also found great satisfaction in watching students whom she has helped as registrar do well and "make it."<sup>80</sup>

Dr. Tim Crawford, Chairman of the Division of Christian Studies, has found the college a good place to work and has enjoyed the people.

The rapport between the older faculty members and those more recent to the campus has been good.<sup>81</sup> He has found a comfortable and enjoyable niche at the college. Judy Vannoy, Bookstore Manager, serves all of the college community in her position and has established a bond with most of them. She loves the college and its close-knit family atmosphere. She finds it very meaningful. She anticipates the day when the bookstore will inherit the present SAC space when that area moves into the proposed SAC.<sup>82</sup> Ranae Bailey, Secretary to the Dean of Student Services, alumna with two sons who graduated and one who attended one year, loves the college. Her lengthy stay has brought about a strong relationship with the school and the people.<sup>83</sup>

Diane Shott experienced a great deal of satisfaction in serving as Dr. MacMillan's Administrative Assistant. She believes that she served a good man during the period of his presidency. She has an appreciation for the Christian emphasis which he fostered.<sup>84</sup> Jessica McDaniel, alumna and Director of Student Activities, while faced with the difficult task of coming up with programs that satisfy the students, enjoys those times when satisfaction is apparent. She looks forward to a new SAC and its impact on the campus. She loves her work, and she loves the college. She is where she wants to be.<sup>85</sup> Dr. Kim Farmer, Professor of Criminal Justice, an alumna, has enjoyed her classroom teaching and the interaction with the students. She appreciates the challenge of being a role model for them.<sup>86</sup>

Dr. Gerald Clay retired as Chairman of the Education Division in May, 2006. Under his leadership, the program realized tremendous success, and students went out to join the ranks of public school teachers, college teachers, principals, and other roles connected with education. He has always considered himself to be where he was supposed to be during his time at the college. He viewed his services as a calling.<sup>87</sup> Walter Shroyer feels that the college is a special place to be and sees it as a mission. He appreciates the association with a faculty who are willing to go the extra mile to help the students.<sup>88</sup> He has been a very



PROFESSOR GERALD CLAY

strong spokesman for the college through his work there but also through his presence in the community.

Ann Looney, Academic Coordinator in the Adult Degree Completion Program, finds her work at the college fulfilling. She appreciates the Christian environment, and believes that God placed her at the college for a purpose. She thanks God every day for this.<sup>89</sup> Dr. Robert Randall, Biology Professor and Chairman of the Science Division for many years, felt that the Lord had led him to Bluefield and passed up other opportunities to do so. He believed that he was fulfilling something of a mission that he could not fill somewhere else.<sup>90</sup> Students loved and respected him, and he was an excellent classroom teacher. The 1978 yearbook, dedicated to him, said that he represented Bluefield College in ways surpassing his duties as a professor.

The feelings of college personnel have been shared as a means of giving a sense of the ties that each person had for the college. At this point, the writer has chosen to share comments of six individuals who held or had held positions of importance with Virginia Baptists at the time of the interview. Dr. Reginald McDonough, former Executive Director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Virginia Baptist Board, regarded Bluefield as a “shining star” in terms of Baptist and Christian work in Southwest Virginia. He expressed gratitude for the college’s services as a Baptist school and for the good relationship that the BGAV and the college have.<sup>91</sup> Dr. Gwynn Davis, former Director of Family and Christian Life for Virginia Baptists, attended Bluefield for a year and one-half but did not graduate. Bluefield was “the school” for Virginia Baptists during the fifties and sixties. There was a gap for him until the school experienced resurgence under Dr. Dobyns. With this president at the helm, Bluefield gained a “public face” that it had not had for some time. The Capital Campaign that had been conducted gave exposure to the school.<sup>92</sup>

Dr. Nat Kellum, the Treasurer for the BGAV and Virginia Baptist Board, married a young lady who attended Bluefield from 1963-1965. It was a life-changing experience for her. He felt that the college had played a significant role among Virginia Baptists, meeting the needs of countless students with its unique atmosphere and closeness and through providing a nurturing process. The quality of the vast number of pastors, staff persons, and other denominational workers

that the college has produced can be said to be commendable.<sup>93</sup> Dr. Charles Nunn, retired Executive Director for the Richmond Baptist Association and a former pastor of Bluefield’s First Baptist Church, felt that Bluefield College constituted an invaluable asset to Southwest Virginia. Very little thought had been given to the void that would be created should it ever go out of business. He held Dr. Harman in great regard, citing his integrity and the esteem in which he has been held throughout Virginia. He liked Dr. Tyler and felt that he was a good servant in the church, serving as teacher and Deacon. Dr. Roy Dobyns was at the time providing a leadership that was a big plus for the college.<sup>94</sup>

Dan Agee, former Director of Evangelism Development for Virginia Baptists and a 1971 alumnus, provided a big thanks for the college as he reflected upon the contributions that it made over the years. He praised it for being the only college for a number of years to set up a recruiting station at the annual Youth Evangelism Conference.<sup>95</sup> The thoughts of Rodney Hale, alumnus and another member of the Virginia Baptist leadership team, have been presented earlier in this work. Fred Anderson, Executive Director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, in a written interview of 12-11-95 stated: “...Bluefield offers a unique ministry by purposely serving a group of young people who need a basic under-graduate education within a small, nurturing Christian environment.”<sup>96</sup>

Through the comments of these individuals, the writer hopes that the reader will gain an understanding of or a more complete insight into the place that Bluefield College has held and still holds in their hearts. Many more voices could have been heard if space had permitted. What I would hope is that if there are things about the college that people need to say, that these things will not go unspoken. An e-mail, a phone call, a note, or a visit to the campus can deliver a message. There are so many others from whom the college would be delighted to hear.

Having given this little pep talk, the writer will move to the last consideration in this chapter. It has to do with the future of Bluefield College. No one can say for sure what lies ahead in any area of life, but, in as far as is possible, things will be said about the future of the school. When Dr. MacMillan left, there was a concern on the part of those interested in the school’s welfare about what lay ahead. Who would step in to run the school during that period between Dr.

Mac's departure and the arrival of a new permanent president? It is an important time and calls for someone with experience, a desire to serve, and a heart for the work demanded of an interim person. Fortunately, the Trustees were able to secure a leader who meets and exceeds all of these requirements.

While the search committee does its job, Dr. Charles Warren will be doing his. Dr. Warren is a Bluefield native, having graduated from Bluefield High School in 1957. He earned both his bachelor's degree and master's degree in biology from Virginia Tech. He then went on to get his doctorate from the University of Florida. He has to be a happy man with Florida winning both the basketball and football championships. His career has included thirteen years at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, fourteen years with the State University of New York system, serving as dean, provost, and president of the Plattsburg campus, and his final years at Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, Virginia, retiring in 2001. He has had two ventures out of retirement, Bluefield College being the second one.

His wife, Nancy, graduated from Bluefield College, and her father was the young man who brought his canoe from up north to the campus because he found out that the campus was located at the headwaters of the Bluestone River. He must have been disappointed when he discovered that there was only a small stream running through the campus. No matter, because he married Nancy Cole Warren's mother, Mary, and Dr. Warren had the joy of marrying their daughter. From this marriage have come two sons, both married and having families. Living close to both families, the Warrens are able to enjoy their company reasonably often. His mother, Hazel, still resides in Bluefield, while his father is deceased.

In his role as Interim President, Dr. Warren feels that it is important that he support those leaders of the college who are in place and the plans that they are pursuing. He does concentrate on helping to expand communication so that everyone on campus will be included. He regards, as one of his greatest challenges, the maintenance of vigor and vitality already existent on the campus and to increase them as much as possible in preparation to receive the person appointed permanent president. He is lending a hand to the Enrollment Management area wherever he can assist in their work and is also working with the Development office. He and his wife have attended alumni functions in Salem and Richmond, and



INTERIM PRESIDENT CHARLES WARREN

he has called on some alumni in the Richmond area and worked with a team locally. He has found Harold Hazen and Ruth Blankenship to have a "very focused and dynamic" agenda.<sup>97</sup>

He has been pleased to come to the college and the area where he spent his early years. It is a special thing for him and Nancy to return to a place where many friends still live and to resume ties with the First Christian Church, which he earlier attended with his family. He feels privileged to be part of the Bluefield College family, and, from what this writer has learned, they feel equally privileged and blessed to have him. Dr. Warren feels that Bluefield College, with its Christ-centered campus and education, is more important than ever in what he terms a "fractured world." He believes that the college is ready to make a "quantum leap" as it goes forth in this century.<sup>98</sup>

Dr. Linwood Custalow felt that while the college would experience "growing pains," it would stand and move forward.<sup>99</sup> Dr. Delgado expressed his faith that the college has a contribution to make in this new century and urged the school never to lose the "soul" of the institution and to always hold on to the "I care about you" attitude.<sup>100</sup> In his 2005 interview, Dr. Del stated that things look good for the college. Public relations are good, and the community offers positive comments.<sup>101</sup> Tim Havens stated that he felt that God had placed Bluefield College in its location for a very special reason which he felt had not yet been fulfilled.<sup>102</sup> Rita Blevins expressed the thought that the college has much to offer, but there is a need to find new and innovative ways to make what it offers seem fresh and new.<sup>103</sup>

Ranae Bailey indicated that, although there are those who have had some concerns about Bluefield's staying power, she has never

doubted its continued life and service to students in the years ahead.<sup>104</sup> Kim Farmer expressed optimism about the future of the school.<sup>105</sup> Walter Shroyer put it in a different way when he stated that he believed the college to be a “gem waiting to be discovered,” at which time it would “shine and sparkle.”<sup>106</sup> Dr. Nat Kellum declared that the best years could be ahead for the college.<sup>107</sup> Dr. Elizabeth Gomez, Vice President for Academic Affairs, in viewing the years ahead, felt that an acceptable goal for traditional students would be 650, based on the current facilities and the size of the faculty and staff. Any greater number would require greater facilities and an enlarged faculty. There would also be a risk that the college would lose its personal touch in terms of relationships that exist because of its size. This is one of its greatest assets.

Dr. Gomez pointed out a new major in Theatre for traditional students, a Behavioral Science major for the Adult Program, and the OML or Organizational Management and Leadership program for Adults. Other programs that she mentioned as being presented to the trustees for consideration and which have been approved are graphic communications, online teacher licensure, and youth ministry for traditional students, plus E-Business and Entrepreneurship for adults. She has been a catalyst for faculty development, encouraging a “focus on excellence” and helping to develop a greater “culture of accomplishment” where faculty members strive to remain professionally active and take a more active role in encouraging accomplishments by the students and recognizing them for it. In doing so, the school is expressing its desire to provide the best education and the best experience possible for the students that God brings to the college. For both faculty and staff, Dr. Gomez has become, as the late Dr. Tresch put it, the “one who has the listening ear,” helping them in various ways. She maintains an optimism that “Bluefield College will soon be perceived as the quality institution it is.”<sup>108</sup> Janice Bishop, Acting Registrar at the time of her interview, pointed out that the college is making changes and is constantly working to improve its services throughout the school. These are good moves to ensure the future.<sup>109</sup> On November 4, during Homecoming activities, the college dedicated its Missionary House, formerly the home of President Charles Harman. The project will be a blessing for many years to come.<sup>110</sup>

In the course of conducting interviews, the writer posed the question about how large an enrollment would be suitable for the college. Almost everyone answered one thousand and expressed the feeling that any greater number would jeopardize the closeness that characterizes the school now. Another question had to do with whether a liberal arts program remains viable in today’s education market. Nearly everyone responded in the affirmative. This is good because Bluefield College is a liberal arts college. It is geared to providing a student a well-rounded education, not simply getting him or her ready to earn a living, although this factors into the picture as well. The overall outlook for the school rests on the positive side. With Dr. Warren ably filling the president’s office and fulfilling its duties until the new permanent president is named, the school is in good hands. In addition, the school is manned by other good administrators, staff, and faculty people. The maintenance staff is top notch, and those who take care of the bookstore and dining hall are capable and productive. Bluefield College will continue to do what it has been doing so well for eighty-five years – providing a solid education and rounding it out through the presentation of the Gospel in word and deed. While it will do well, our college still requires the prayers and the support of all who appreciate and love it. A new president could be in place by the time that this history is published.

The words of Mr. Fred Anderson, Executive Director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, are appropriate as this book draws to a

**Descendants return to Sanders House for dedication**

By **BILL ARCHER**  
*Bluefield Daily Telegraph*

**BLUEFIELD, Va.** — Several descendants of the Sanders family came back home to Bluefield, Va., on Sunday to participate in the grand opening of the Sanders House Center and Railroad Museum.

“It was a great place to grow up in,” Dr. Walter McDonald Sanders III, said as several of his family members roamed through the front yard of the old family home that is now a visitors center/museum.

“I was an only child and I received a great deal of attention from my grandmother and aunts when they visited,” Sanders said. Sanders now lives in Athens, Ga. “I also learned a lot about the farm and I learned how to ride ponies.”

The entire Sanders family pitched in to help the Graham Historical Society.

**Sanders at home...**  
From left to right: Emily Rea, Nina Sanders Rea, Stephen Sanders, Brian Sanders, Walter M. ‘Sandy’ Sanders IV, Dr. Walter McDonald Sanders III, and Walter M. ‘Mac’ Sanders V.

Staff photo by Bill Archer

Sanders, A-3



MEMBERS OF THE SANDERS FAMILY, WHO GAVE LAND TO HELP ESTABLISH BLUEFIELD COLLEGE, RETURN TO BLUEFIELD IN 2007.

close. He said: "America needs small private colleges with a religious undergirding and America needs Bluefield."<sup>111</sup> To broaden the scope of its outreach, let's recall words spoken during the sessions of the Baptist General Association in November, 1922: "The whole world will feel the influence of this school." The world has, indeed, felt the influence of Bluefield College over the years. It will continue to exert its influence in the years ahead, serving both God and man, ever seeking to keep that balance between the acquisition of knowledge and awareness of God's call to service, no matter the career choice. The "lighthouse on the hill" has sent out its beam for eighty-five years, guiding the lives of those who have come to its doors and sought the knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual influence that it has offered. These benefits continue to be available to the students of today. They can help in keeping the light burning brightly and steadily. Bluefield College will be there for future generations of students. Its light will beckon them to share in the blessings that thousands of women and men have received over these eighty-five years of service. Hopefully, they will respond in the affirmative to the invitation extended by the institution whose light shines from atop the hill in Bluefield, Virginia.

Even as this book is involved in the publication process, Dr. Charles Warren, Interim President, has relinquished his post to the newly elected president Dr. David Olive. Dr. Warren, according to

those to whom this writer has spoken, has led the school well during his one-year stay. He has not simply been an occupant of a seat in the president's office. He has been an active participant in the life of the school, offering leadership to guide it forward and to enhance its role in the area of higher education in Virginia. He and his wife, Nancy, have been an integral part of Bluefield College, and their departure did not come without a certain measure of sadness on the part of the people affiliated with the college and others in the Bluefield area and throughout Virginia.

As Dr. Olive begins his tenure as the ninth president of the college, there is a sense of excitement and expectation. In his fifteen years of service in higher education, he has experienced a diversity of experiences. He expresses high hopes for the college in the future and believes that Christian education offers much of great benefit to society, providing great opportunities to young people and adults through its programs that integrate faith and learning.<sup>112</sup> Welcome Dr. Olive and best wishes for a meaningful and successful tenure as president of a wonderful institution! 🍀



PRESIDENT DAVID W. OLIVE

(ENDNOTES)

CHAPTER ONE

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- <sup>34</sup> *Minutes*, Report of Education Commission, November 16-19, 1920, p.78.
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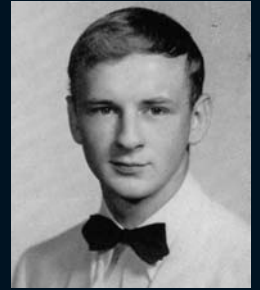
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David M. Armbrister is a native of Bluefield, West Virginia. Educated in the public school system, he then attended Bluefield College from which he



graduated with an A.A. degree. He transferred to the University of Richmond and earned his B.A. degree and M.A. degree with History as his major. While at the University he met Catherine Blair, who attended and graduated from Westhampton College of the University. They celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on August 3, 2007. To their marriage were born four sons. Blair and Kenneth, both retired from the United States Coast Guard, are the two living sons. Their wives are Mary and Tessa, respectively. Craig and Glenn Kevin are the two deceased sons. Grandchildren are Cara, Rob, and Tricia. The last degree obtained was the Master of Theology from Southern Baptist Seminary. Since then, David has served in the ministry, taught in the public schools of Kentucky and Virginia, and spent thirty-two years as professor at Bluefield



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