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'Zoo' Life, 1925-29

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Zoo' Life



1925-29

While Greenville Womans College struggled to overcome serious financial problems, Zadee Shuler and her classmates floated serenely above the storm.

When Zadee Shuler of Holly Hill, S.C., enrolled at the Greenville Womans College as a freshman in September 1925, she began four carefree years filled with classes, meetings, receptions and sports; bridge parties, YWCA retreats and May Day festivities; football games at Furman, Clemson, Wofford and South Carolina; telegrams and wistful letters from would-be suitors; candy, corsages, invitations and favors.

Zadee treasured every college memento, and after she graduated in May 1929 she pasted her collection of clippings, letters, pressed flowers, dance cards, ticket stubs, menus and commencement programs into an over-sized scrapbook. It speaks volumes about the college life of a pretty and popular young woman in the 1920s and provides a student's-eye view of a time when the Greenville Womans College was undergoing traumatic years.

Holly Hill, in rural Orangeburg County, was already feeling the impact of the boll weevil and months of drought when Zadee Shuler and her 191 classmates arrived in Greenville on September 8, 1925, to begin their college years. The temporary "downturn" in the state's cotton economy had not yet discouraged students from white middle class homes from attending college, but within a few years agricultural depression would bring devastating financial pressures and falling enrollment at the Womans College.

During Zadee's college years, President David Ramsay and the GWC trustees faced pressures for accreditation and "standardization." To be accredited by the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools

of the Southern States, the GWC needed to improve its library, increase faculty salaries and build an endowment of \$500,000. Furthermore, the Southern Association had ruled that pre-college work could not be offered at accredited institutions. For GWC, which had offered a preparatory course since 1855, eliminating high school classes further reduced income.

At the same time, the college faced concerns from the South Carolina Baptist Convention that supporting four colleges for women (Limestone, Coker, Anderson and GWC), however meagerly, was inefficient and "embarrassing." The Education Commission of the convention called it "an embarrassment of riches" and tactfully suggested a "systematizing of our educational interests."

Zadee seems not to have noticed.

Her world was ruled by the college handbook, regulated by bells and marked by examinations, holidays and celebrations. While she must have been aware of the college's financial problems — she saved a little yellow bag marked "sunshine fund" that the junior class presented to its members with the plea to place one penny for the endowment in it every day the sun shone during the summer of 1928 — there are no other references to economic depression or college crisis in her scrapbook.

The ordered world of the Greenville Womans College had changed little since Ramsay assumed the presidency in September 1911. Morning bells awakened students at 7, and breakfast was served in the college dining room at 7:30. After classes at 8:30 and 9:30, all students attended daily chapel at 10:30, then had two more classes at 11 and 12

before lunch at 1:10. An additional class period, an hour and a half long, was scheduled after lunch. Dinner was at 6. Monitored study hours began at 7:20 and ended at 10, after which students had 15 minutes of "visiting time" before lights were turned off at 10:20. As a freshman, Zadee enrolled in English, Bible, French, Mathematics and Biology. Morning classes met three days a week, including Saturdays.

Her life outside the classroom was as rigidly controlled as her daily schedule. "Privileges," conferred by Honor Roll status, obedience to the rules and seniority, were carefully spelled out. Students were classified as "in the Honor Roll," "Self-Governing," or "Privileged." As a first-quarter freshman, Zadee could shop once a week and attend a movie one afternoon (escorted by a chaperone). She could walk in front of the campus (wearing a hat and accompanied by three other students) on Sunday afternoons and could use the college telephone in the Dean's office once a week. She could not communicate or walk with young men on campus or in any public place. She could not cut a class, miss a meal or student government meeting, or receive guests.

Every breach of college regulations resulted in a penalty: a "Half-Minor" for being late to breakfast or dinner, a "Minor" for cutting chapel or walking within a block of Main Street without a hat, a "Major" for using a telephone in town.

By the time Zadee was a junior, privileges were conferred more generously. She could ride on a streetcar without permission, receive

callers approved by her parents twice a week or, even more daringly, attend a public entertainment or go to dinner with a young man if accompanied by a "mature chaperone." Seniors who had perfect discipline records throughout their college careers could shop, have callers and go to the movies as they pleased. They could make telephone calls from downtown phones and, with the approval of the Dean, could occasionally spend two weekends a month away from the college. Throughout their college careers, no matter what their class status, riding in a car at night with a man was grounds for expulsion.

College life fell into a well-defined rhythm of classes, church services, receptions and special events. Students arrived early in September, checked into one of four dormitories, registered and were "classified" on the basis of preparation and achievement. They attended formal opening exercises with welcoming speeches by college officials, ministers and local dignitaries.

The fall semester was marked by parties, the first meetings of the Alethian and Philotean literary societies, class "stunt nights," a pre-Thanksgiving basketball tournament between the Odds and Evens (the freshman and junior classes versus the sophomores and seniors), a one-day Thanksgiving holiday with church services and a special dinner, Christmas vacation, and semester examinations in January. May Day, with the queen and her court elected by the student body, and Senior Class Day were the highlights of the spring, which concluded with a four-day Commencement Weekend in June.

By the fall of 1925 the college's ivy-covered buildings had attained the patina of age, and GWC facilities were in their prime. Huge trees shaded the front lawn and its flower-bordered curving drive, and Mrs. Ramsay's rose garden near the new Fine Arts Building became the site for outdoor weddings. The college dairy and vegetable garden



While President David M. Ramsay improved and enlarged facilities, increased enrollment and income, and set substantially higher academic requirements during his 19-year tenure (1911-30) as president of the Womans College, he was unable to attain accreditation for the institution.

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This aerial view of the college, taken in 1948, provides a sense of its surroundings as well as the campus layout.

at the rear of the eight-acre campus supplied milk and produce for the campus. Tennis courts and playing fields were behind the college buildings, and the gymnasium and swimming pool provided additional athletic facilities.

The Ramsay Fine Arts Building featured a 1,200-seat auditorium, with facilities for music and home economics on its lower level. The Judson Library, occupying the refurbished Orr house (once the main building of the Greenville Male Academy), was improving dramatically because the Southern Association required accredited colleges to have at least 8,000 volumes. The addition of a thousand volumes a year, many donated by concerned alumnae, had increased holdings from 2,750 books in 1921 to 6,800 by fall 1925.

The college's central buildings — Main, Townes, East, West and North — had recently been repainted and their roofs repaired. Three-story "connections," with classrooms and

dormitory space, and an arcade linked the college complex to the Fine Arts center. (The one-story arcade evidently allowed agile and daring young women to crawl out of second-floor dormitory windows and climb down the latticework to meet illegal dates.) At the southwest corner of the campus, the old wooden academy classroom building, surrounded by a crumbling stone wall covered with roses, had been refurbished to become the "Little Red Schoolhouse," where lunches and teas were served.

Standards for both students and faculty had improved. The 558-student body included 341 full-time college students, 30 11th-graders (almost all from rural Greenville County), 14 "irregulars," and 175 taking only art, music or expression. All freshmen had earned 15 high school academic units, equivalent to graduation from a four-year (eighth through 11th grade) high school. The attrition typical of the school throughout its history is indicated by

the class distribution: 36 seniors, 48 juniors, 57 sophomores and 192 freshmen.

The faculty numbered 26, 16 of whom had degrees from accredited colleges. Most had master's degrees; several of the 16 had the two years of additional study beyond the baccalaureate required by the Southern Association but had not yet earned a second degree. The others were graduates of GWC or other unaccredited colleges. All were Christians and most were Baptists, as were many of the students (285 of the 559). Tuition was \$55 a semester.

All college faculty were women, except for music professors J.O. Miller, who taught voice, lived on campus with his wife, and earned \$2,000, and G.H. Schaefer, the director of the School of Music. He was a pianist and organist, lived off campus and earned a princely \$3,600. The seven music faculty members earned an average of \$1,764, compared to \$1,600 for the literary

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faculty. Their salaries may reflect supply and demand or the college's long-term commitment to its music program — and its income.

In December 1924, the South Carolina Baptist Convention had appointed a committee on the Future Maintenance and Development of South Carolina Baptist Schools and Colleges. The charge of the "Committee of Twenty-Five" was to study all educational institutions under convention auspices and make recommendations about their future roles.

The committee's report was published in the *Baptist Courier* late in November 1925. Only two of the five colleges, Coker and Furman, were accredited. The others needed massive infusions of funds to reach the standard \$500,000 endowment. Furthermore, the report said, the state's Baptist colleges lived in "chronic poverty" only partially relieved by "periodic begging." Because the three Upstate women's colleges were so near each other, their enrollments overlapped and they competed for students and funds. All were small and emphasized their intimacy and home-like atmosphere, but, the committee noted, the "strongest advocates of small colleges are bending every nerve to make them large ones."

The committee's controversial proposal was that Furman — accredited, endowed and a beneficiary of The Duke Endowment — be the head of a statewide system of Baptist colleges, and that the university establish a college for women "in every way equal to the men's college." The Greenville Womans College would become that college, providing its students with a stronger education and a recognized diploma.

The chairman added in separate comments that in the case of GWC and Furman the committee was not proposing coeducation. GWC would not be coordinated with Furman, and it would keep its "name, identity, splendid traditions, and glorious history." He didn't explain how that goal would be accomplished.

President David Ramsay responded with a blast of passionate rhetoric. He argued that GWC should continue because the school's graduates were "superb products" and the college developed "beautiful womanhood." Coeducation did not, he said, contribute to a good and safe education during "the mating period"

(the teen years). Furthermore, "high grade members" of each sex did not like coeducation, and most coordinate colleges ultimately became coeducational. Mingling in classes and hallways would "knock off the fine edge of admiration and reverence for the opposite sex." He termed the Womans College's relationship with Furman from 1855 to 1908, when the institutions separated, "a dismal failure."

By the time the convention met in December, it was a foregone conclusion that the committee's recommendations would not be accepted. The chair of the Committee of Twenty-Five announced



Rosa Paschal, dean of the Womans College from 1919 to 1930, went on to serve as acting president for nine months after David Ramsay's retirement.

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that undefined “additional information” had been received, and the committee would not, therefore, present its already published report. Thus discussion centered on the question of whether the committee should continue its deliberations. More than 500 people, one of the largest gatherings in the convention’s history, heard Chairman William Ball speak in favor of doing so, and Ramsay, President White of Anderson and President Garberry of Limestone speak against the proposition.

The convention then voted overwhelmingly to dismiss the committee — thus maintaining the

status quo. Ball summarized his feelings with three words: “Hired. Fired. Tired.” The result, as Limestone College historian Montague McMillian put it, was that “the colleges were left to work out their own salvation with or without fear and trembling.”

*I*n spite of all the external controversy, Zadee Shuler’s freshman year was serene and successful. Ramsay told trustees that student behavior during 1925-26 had improved greatly. In addition, Dean Rosa Paschal called

attention to the superior academic work of the freshman class. Both Ramsay and Paschal noted that the health of the student body was generally excellent. (That five students had been hospitalized with appendicitis was dismissed with the comment, “This, as you know, is a school girl’s disease.”)

Ramsay detailed the college’s financial situation with a combination of pride and defensiveness. Although the session had been the “most strenuous” of his 15-year presidency, the year had ended with a balanced budget, its faculty salary budget had climbed to over \$60,000, and new equipment had been purchased for



When the David M. Ramsay Fine Arts Center was completed in 1923, it was the finest arts facility at a Southern woman’s college.

advanced biology classes and to support the new premedical program. He requested that trustees refinance the college's debt of \$57,000 through a bond issue not to exceed \$100,000, secured by a mortgage on the campus.

While Zadee and her friends were undoubtedly pleased that the college was nearing accreditation, the events of Commencement Weekend in 1926 were probably of far greater importance. Although final examinations concluded on the first Thursday in June, all students remained on campus for the ceremonies that followed.

On Friday came the annual joint banquet of the Philotean and Alethian literary societies. Saturday was Class Day, with the seniors in their "rainbow-hued" gowns and sophomores in white dresses carrying the 190-foot daisy chain they had risen at dawn to prepare. After the ceremonies, class members processed to Springwood Cemetery, where they laid the daisies on the grave of Miss Mary Judson, revered lady principal of the Greenville Baptist Female College from 1878 to 1912. Sunday was given over to religious services, and on Monday a reception on the college lawn followed Commencement exercises in Ramsay Hall.

When Zadee returned in September 1926, majoring in the new Social Science department, the college had satisfied all Southern Association requirements except the necessary endowment. GWC was classified as an "approved non-member" and could boast that it was now a "standard" institution, and its graduates were certified to teach in schools accredited by the association. Zadee and friends studied in the Judson library, now open ten-and-a-half hours a day under the supervision of a trained librarian and four student assistants, and made use of the collection that had finally reached 8,000 volumes.

The young women at the "Zoo,"



The former Greenville Male Academy was sold in 1869 to the Orr family, who made substantial renovations. The college reacquired the building (plus three acres of land) in 1912 and converted it into the Mary Judson Library.

as Furman students were now calling the college, had conflicting loyalties, as the men at Clemson, the University of South Carolina and Wofford competed with those at the school across town. Clemson, then a military school, was particularly popular, perhaps because, as the student newspaper suggested, girls had "an innate love for uniforms and brass buttons." Pep rallies seemed to end with as many cheers of "Go Clemson" as "Go Furman."

Girls decorated themselves, their rooms and their halls in purple and orange or purple and white. They made crepe paper "jazz dolls" in the colors of the two colleges to sell at the Thanksgiving game between Furman and Clemson.

One avid Clemson fan agreed to marry her Tiger beau "three minutes after the game" if Clemson won. Luckily for her (or not), Furman scored a 30-0 victory.

College life was carefree, but the economy was worrisome. At the trustees meeting in May 1927, Ramsay warned that colleges, being "semi-philanthropic institutions," were vulnerable to depressions and that GWC could no longer operate on tuition alone. It needed an additional income of \$10,000 a year to maintain a balanced budget. He once more called for a campaign; the trustees



The college dairy, at the rear of the eight-acre campus, provided fresh milk and butter for students from 1897 to 1931.

again hesitated. In the January *College Bulletin*, Ramsay passionately pleaded his case: “G.W.C. is more than an institution made up of brick and mortar; it is an entity, an identity, housed in Blood and Mortar; — and it pleads for Immortality.”

By the fall of Zadee’s junior year, enrollment had dropped to 487, with only 337 full-time students. The art department was eliminated because of low enrollment, and its studios were converted to dormitory rooms. But the college had hired its first Ph.D., a chemist with a degree from Columbia University, and a few faculty members even received raises of \$50 or \$100. On the whole, though, conditions were so bad that Ramsay included a note in the college catalogue, telling students that they would be “greatly handicapped” if they did not own textbooks and that they should plan to bring \$10 to \$15 to pay for them.

During the summer of 1928, driven by “complaints of hard times and drastic business conditions,” Ramsay, English instructor Virginia Thomas, alumnae secretary Ethel Simpson, and other faculty and staff traveled across South Carolina to recruit students. Nevertheless, enrollment fell again (to 438) in September, with 20 fewer students from the low country, which had

been beset by cyclones. Every possible dollar was pared from the administrative budget, and debt collections were assiduously pursued.

When Zadee and the 59 remaining members of the Class of 1929 returned for their senior year, they noticed few changes, since routine maintenance had been deferred and library allocations had been reduced to \$200 a year. Zadee and her friends spent the week before classes at a YWCA retreat under the supervision of Eula Mae Stockman, the Director of Religious Work. They discussed the “religious and social problems of the college,” but the photographs in Zadee’s scrapbook indicate that they also had great fun.

When school began, “Zeke,” as her many male correspondents called her, was a campus leader. She served as vice president of Philotean, was an officer in the International Relations and Education clubs (she was planning to teach), and was vice president of the Honor Board and president of the Athletic Association. She played varsity basketball, volleyball and tennis and was on the YWCA cabinet, which hosted the “rat” reception for entering freshmen. For 600 Furman and GWC students, it was a night of “promenading” around the hall until 10:30, when the boys were dismissed.

With the new freedom allowed

by senior privileges, Zadee and her friends Bootsie Johnson and Hester Richardson went shopping, to the movies, or walking nearly every afternoon. (They were not guilty of a breach of decorum so serious that Ramsay reported it to the trustees and the convention: four young women out for an early morning walk had met young men in cars and driven with them to “the aviation field to see the planes take their flight.” He took comfort, however, that no students had fallen to the “perils of night-riding in cars with boys or cigarette smoking.”)

Ramsay continued his efforts to build the endowment, which had reached nearly \$133,000, even though some members of the board thought it was time to investigate a relationship with Furman. He told the board at its May 1929 meeting that “friends of the college” had floated the idea of coordination with a few Furman trustees earlier in the spring. “It became quite clear in this private conference, in the judgment of those participating, that there would be no coordination relation of the two institutions, and the only suggestion for combination would be to convert the woman’s college into an annex of the men’s college.”

Rumors of change began to circulate. The *Greenville Piedmont* reported that GWC students were

This article is excerpted from *Academy and College: The History of Furman University's Women's College*, by Judith G. Bainbridge, director of educational services and professor of English at Furman. The book will be published this fall by Mercer University Press. Bainbridge says, "I am deeply grateful to Caroline Williams Plyler for allowing me to use her mother's scrapbook."

firmly opposed to coordination. *The Homet's* annual "April Fools" parody featured an article headlined "Furman and G.W.C. Will Be Merged." The staff "reported" (with more foresight than the youthful humorists could have imagined) that the new college would move to Caesar's Head, and that there would be "two main classroom buildings, a number of dormitories, a large dancing pavilion, tennis courts, golf links, football gridirons, swimming pools and several hot dog stands."

The GWC yearbook, *Entre-Nous*, celebrated the college's Diamond Jubilee year and included a history that emphasized its need for endowment. Even though he could not directly solicit funds in Baptist churches, Ramsay arranged to have his four "Songbirds" — Lucille, Edna and Lillie Belle Reams and Nellie Cannada — accompany him on visits to congregations in nearby communities. They would sing and he would speak on the education of young women, focusing on the needs of the Womans College.

The seniors' final college days were filled with traditions and celebrations. They sat at "Senior tables" in the dining hall, planted the customary ivy sprig for the future, sang the "Ivy Song" at Class Day, and participated in their final May Day. "Skip Day" for seniors was celebrated at the State Fair in Columbia.

On Saturday, May 26, Class Day brought the announcement of the seniors' gift to the endowment — \$750, or the value of a one-carat diamond. On Sunday the Class of 1929 heard Edwin McNeill Poteat, former president of Furman, preach the Baccalaureate and Vespers sermons. On Monday they attended the annual college concert and the President's Reception for the Graduating Class, and on Tuesday they received their diplomas.

Zadee Marguerite Shuler had earned her Bachelor of Science

degree, had found a teaching job at Mauldin High School, and was ready to embark on new adventures. The Greenville Womans College, however, would confront continuing problems and its greatest crisis as the nation sank into the Great Depression.

GWC's ongoing financial woes would lead to coordination with Furman in 1933, with one board of trustees and one president.

Zadee Shuler married John U. Williams, who had graduated from Furman in 1927, on December 12, 1933, and moved to Summerville, S.C., where he was principal of Summerville High School. They had three children — Caroline, Marguerite and Fred (Furman, Class of '63). Later John and Zadee moved to Springfield, S.C., where she taught school and was active in her church and community. She died in 1962.

Womans or Woman's?

In 1914 President David Ramsay was finally convinced by the Alumnae Association and the arguments of his suffragist daughter, Eudora, to change his school's name from "the hated" (by alumnae) Greenville Female College to Greenville Woman's College.

He announced the change to the Alumnae Association in 1913, and while they preferred "Mary Judson College," in honor of the school's beloved longtime Lady Principal, they voted "to keep silent."

The board of trustees agreed to the name change, and board chair B.M. Shuman proposed to the South Carolina Baptist Convention in December 1914 that the school's name become Greenville Woman's College. The convention approved unanimously.

The 1915 catalogue, the college stationery, the *Baptist Courier* and the new charter, authorized by the South Carolina General Assembly in 1916, all use the apostrophe in Woman's. And then, suddenly, it disappears. From 1916 to 1930, when Ramsay retired, the name on all literature is Greenville Womans College. Even the college seal (above), which today resides over the entrance to Judson Hall, lacks the apostrophe.

Evidently this was done at Ramsay's insistence, because after his retirement the apostrophe was sporadically reinstated. By 1933, Greenville Woman's College was once again grammatically correct. After consolidation and merger with Furman, it became the Woman's College of Furman University.

In *Academy and College: The History of the Women's College of Furman University*, I have referred to the college as its officials did. It seemed wrong to correct or to [sic] Ramsay's style.

— Judith G. Bainbridge

