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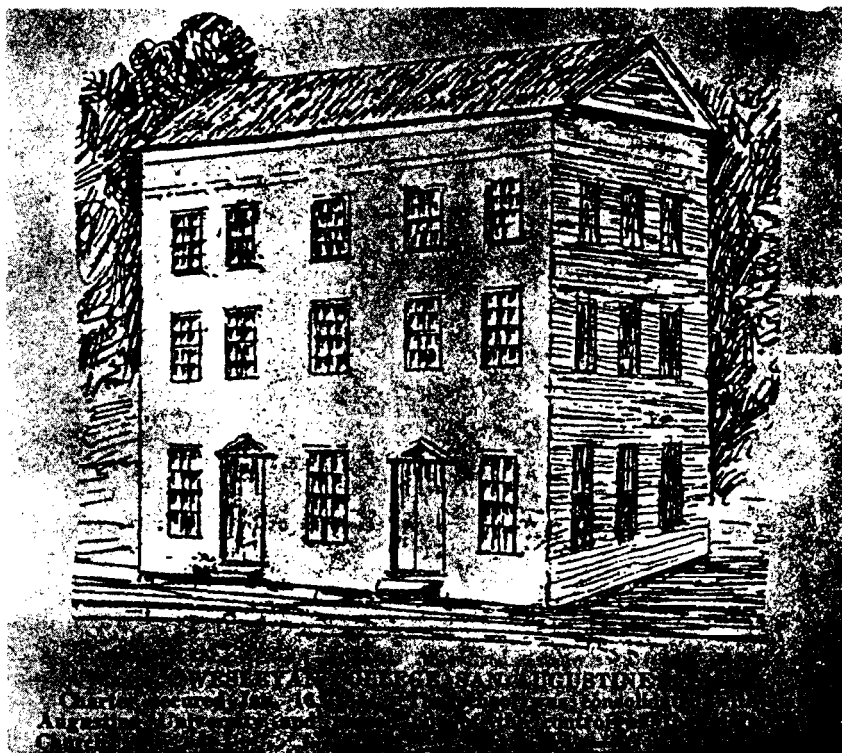
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WESLEYAN COLLEGE OF SAN AUGUSTINE

JOHN C. ENGLISH

On the grounds of the Elementary School, San Augustine, alongside Highway 21, the State of Texas has erected a monument marking the site of Wesleyan College. The curious motorist who stops to read the inscription finds these words:



SITE OF
WESLEYAN COLLEGE

Established in 1842. Incorporated January 16, 1844 by the Methodist Church. Named for John Wesley (1703-1791), the Founder of Methodism. A Successful School for a Brief Period . . . United With the University of San Augustine in 1847 To Form the University of East Texas, Which Shortly Expired

In this paper several aspects of this pioneer institution, the third college in Texas to be organized under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, will be described.¹

I. FOUNDING OF THE COLLEGE

The man who took the lead in organizing Wesleyan College was the Reverend Daniel Poe, a Methodist minister who had emigrated from Ohio to Texas in 1842.² A Committee of Direction was established, and plans for a two story building, occupying an area of forty by eighty feet, were drawn. James Perkins was appointed as contractor for its construction.³ The Masons of San Augustine, organized as McFarland Lodge No. 3, laid the cornerstone of the building in ceremonies held on August 26, 1843.⁴ On this occasion speeches were delivered by David S. Kaufman, former Speaker of the House of the Texas Republic, and Kenneth L. Anderson, a rising young lawyer who eventually became Vice President of the Republic.⁵ The organizers of the College hoped to occupy their new quarters on November 1, 1843.⁶ The College did not move into the building until March, 1844, however. Meanwhile, the "premises formerly occupied by Col. Campbell" had been purchased as a residence for the College Principal and for the use of the College's Female Department.⁷

After plans for the College had been drawn up and construction of its main building had begun, Poe sought the patronage of the Texas Annual Conference of the Church. He described his plans to the session of the Conference which met at the Robinson settlement, near Huntsville, on December 13, 1843. The Conference voted to take the College "under its fostering care."⁸ The Reverend Lester Janes was appointed College Principal by Bishop James O. Andrew.⁹

Thereafter, the sponsors of the College approached the Congress of the Republic of Texas and petitioned for a charter. President Sam Houston approved the charter on January 16, 1844.¹⁰ A board of thirteen trustees was authorized; the first members of the board were named in the charter. (Curiously fourteen names are listed in the document.) The trustees included such persons as Henry W. Augustine, major in the Cherokee War and member of the House in the Fifth Congress of the Republic; Travis G. Brooks, commander of the militia in the Regular-Moderator War; J. Pinckney Henderson, sometime minister of the Texas Republic to England and France; John G. Love, appointed collector of customs at Gaines Ferry on the Old San Antonio Road in 1837; and three Methodist ministers, Littleton Fowler, Frances Wilson, and Daniel Poe.¹¹

II. FINANCING THE COLLEGE

The founder of the College, Daniel Poe, died in July, 1844, shortly after the College moved into its new building.¹² The job of raising funds to support the school was given to the Reverend Francis Wilson, who was appointed Financial Agent of the College. Wilson had emigrated from Ohio to Texas in 1839.¹³ In 1840 he had become the first Methodist minister to be stationed regularly in Nacogdoches. He had moved to San Augustine in 1841.¹⁴

Wilson travelled throughout East Texas, seeking donations for the College. In his first report to the Board of Trustees after having been appointed Financial Agent, he outlined the itinerary which he had followed. From San Augustine Wilson travelled south to Jefferson County, over to Liberty, and then on to Houston and Galveston. Then he made his way back to Houston and returned home via the Trinity River.¹⁵ Among other donations received on this trip, Wilson recorded the gift of a sixth of a league of land on the Colorado River by "the Honourable M. Cartwright";¹⁶ a gift of one league from "the Honourable General Baker";¹⁷ and a gift of one thousand acres of land on the San Jacinto River by General Davis.¹⁸ By the time the first regular session of the College got underway, the school had received a total of twenty thousand acres of land.¹⁹

The College needed not only land but also hard cash. In order to raise money, Wilson returned to the United States. His travels took him as far as the state of Ohio, from which he had removed to come to Texas.²⁰ As he went, Wilson delivered lectures on the Texas Republic, in which he extolled the Republic's fertile soil and mild climate as well as "her political and moral economy."²¹ "The land along Texas rivers produces good crops of cotton, rice, sugar cane, corn and tobacco," Wilson declared. Figs and all sorts of melons do well. He describes the people of Texas, estimating the population of Republic to be 200,000 persons, of which 120,00 are "white American." Wilson concludes his lecture with remarks concerning the state of religion and education in the Republic. The two Methodist colleges in Texas are Rutgersville and Wesleyan. The latter school, Wilson reports, had a faculty of seven and a student body of one hundred fifty-five during its first session.

Wilson's efforts as Financial Agent were well rewarded. Not only did he secure gifts of land, such as those previously mentioned; he is also credited with having raised twenty thousand dollars for the College.²²

III. ACADEMIC ORGANIZATION AND CURRICULUM

Wesleyan, like many other nineteenth century colleges, was not only an institution of higher education, but an elementary and secondary school as well. The institution was divided into Primary, Preparatory, Collegiate and Female Departments.²³ In the Primary Department the beginning student studied reading, writing, geography and arithmetic. These studies were continued in the Preparatory Department; other subjects were added, including algebra, bookkeeping, American history and ancient mythology. The course also included the study of Greek and Latin, practice in English composition and the delivery of declamations. "A thorough training in elementary and introductory studies" was a prerequisite for admission to the Collegiate Department.²⁴

The student in the Collegiate Department continued his study of Greek, Latin and mathematics, progressing in this latter subject through differential and integral calculus. Three new fields of study appeared in the collegiate curriculum, namely, natural science, English literature and the

"intellectual and moral sciences," that is to say, philosophy and religion.²⁵ Contrary to what one might expect in a denominational college, the Bible was not studied extensively. The Greek New Testament was one of several texts used in the collegiate classes in the Greek language; this is the only reference to the formal study of the Scriptures in the College. The student was introduced to several branches of science; he was expected to study text in botany, chemistry, geology, mineralogy, and anatomy. No laboratory work in these subjects was offered. The visiting committee appointed by the Conference of 1847 lamented the fact that the College had no "apparatus" which might be used to illustrate the lectures in science; it hoped to purchase this equipment soon.²⁶ The study of English literature included a considerable amount of work in history. In the 1840's the study of history in college was unusual; Wesleyan College in this regard was somewhat in advance of its time.²⁷

EXAMINATIONS AND COMMENCEMENT

At the close of the school year, each student enrolled in the College was examined orally by his teachers, in the presence of a committee appointed by the Methodist Conference. The report of the visiting committee for 1847 presents many interesting details of the examination procedure. The examinations were spread out over the better part of a week. On the first two days, July 26 and 27, the girls of the Female Department were examined. Each of the thirty-five girls was individually questioned by her teachers, Reverend and Mrs. R. W. Kennon. The committee reports that the class in chemistry was especially notable. The examination of the fifty boys and young men enrolled in the College began in the chapel on the 28th and continued through the 29th. First "the junior classes," a phrase which apparently refers to the Preparatory Department, were questioned both by their teachers, R. M. Blades and Warren Coles, and by "other gentlemen present."²⁸ "The higher classes," or the Collegiate Department, were then examined in history, mathematics, philosophy and the languages, by the President of the College, the Reverend F. H. Blades, and the Professor of Mathematics, the Reverend W. N. Harmon. The committee reports, "We were delighted with the examination of the class in geometry, also with the class in natural philosophy."³⁰ The program for the fifth and last day of the examination week, Friday, July 30, included the delivery of declamations and of original speeches by students, an address on education by "Mr. Frazier of Marshall, Texas" and another by professor Harman.³¹

Wesleyan College granted only two degrees during its short existence. Both of these degrees were awarded in February, 1846. The recipients were J. S. Dixon and F. B. Sexton. In later life Dixon entered the medical profession.³² Sexton read law in the office of J. P. Henderson and O. M. Roberts, and was admitted to the bar in 1848. He represented Texas in the Confederate Congress and later became prominent in Masonic activities in the state.³³

V. RELIGION AND MORALITY

Wesleyan College was founded not only in order to provide instruction in academic subjects but also to encourage morality. This intention is clearly stated in the report of the Committee on Education to the 1847 session of the Methodist Conference.

Education, without moral instruction, is a misnomer. To educate the head without a refinement of the moral feelings; to instruct the mind and leave the heart untrained, in the great morals of christianity, would be to arm an enemy, and render him efficient in the execution of crime. The obligations of the church, therefore, on the subject of education are easily deduced.³⁴

Formal instruction in ethics was a part of the College curriculum, but this was not the only means employed to direct the students in the way they should go. The members of the faculty were expected to keep a close watch over the young people committed to their care; the College visitors assured the parents of prospective students "that the morals of the students are strictly guarded, and are safe here."³⁵ The citizens of San Augustine were felt to be the sort of persons who would set a good example for the young to follow. One committee which visited the College declared enthusiastically, "We think that there is no place in Texas that excels this town, either in religion or morals."³⁶

Both the faculty and the students of the College participated in the religious revivals and camp meetings held in the vicinity. Evidently the ministers on the College faculty helped to lead these services. "It was truly an interesting sight," observes H. H. Kelsey in 1847, "to see the teachers who had been engaged during the day in the school room, instructing their pupils in the principles of science, engaged at night in the altar, 'pointing them to the blood of the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world.'³⁷

True to the spirit of John Wesley, the College authorities tried to distinguish between the basic principles of evangelical Christianity and the particular doctrines of Methodism. They encouraged the students to accept the former and disclaimed any attempts to impose the latter. The representatives of the Conference declared roundly "that no sectarian influence is exerted, in any denominational point of view, in this institution. The teachers labor to raise the standard and promote good morals, and persuade their pupils to be Christians, but not Methodists exclusively."³⁸ This policy was characteristic of southern Methodist colleges during the 1840's.³⁹

IV. CONCLUSION

In 1847, both of the colleges located in San Augustine, Wesleyan College and San Augustine University, were closed; each of them had lost the financial support needed to maintain its operations.⁴⁰ The citizens of San Augustine hoped that one institution might succeed where two had failed. The legislature was asked to charter a new school, to be called the "University of East Texas"; the charter was approved on March 8, 1848.⁴¹ The trustees of Wesleyan College, over the protests of the Methodist Con-

ference, transferred the property of the College to the new school.⁴² Thus Wesleyan College disappeared as a separate entity. Even its building disappeared in September, 1870, when it burned to the ground under mysterious circumstances.⁴³

FOOTNOTES

¹The Texas schools under Methodist auspices which antedate Wesleyan College are Rutgersville College, located near La Grange, and McKenzie College (Institute), in Clarksville (John H. McLean, "Our Early Schools," *Texas Methodist Historical Quarterly*, II [July, 1910], 63-64). In 1844 the northern and southern sections of the Methodist Episcopal Church separated. Wesleyan College then passed under the jurisdiction of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

²"Daniel Poe of the Eastern Texas Conference, 1833-1844," *Texas Methodist Historical Quarterly*, II (July, 1910), 75.

³San Augustine, Texas, *Red Lander*, August 5, 1843; George L. Crocket, *Two Centuries in East Texas; A History of San Augustine County and Surrounding Territory from 1689 to the Present Time* (Dallas: Southwest Press, 1932), 307.

⁴George L. Crocket, History of Red Land Lodge #3, Crocket Collection, East Texas Historical Collection, Stephen F. Austin State College Library.

⁵William R. Hogan, *The Texas Republic: A Social and Economic History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), 152; *Handbook of Texas* (2 vols.; Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), I, 45, 939.

⁶San Augustine *Red Lander*, July 13, 1843. Plans for the building were modified in the course of construction, and the completed structure consisted of three stories instead of two (Lecture on Texas, Francis Wilson papers, Crocket Collection, East Texas Historical Collection, Stephen F. Austin State College Library). A color sketch of the building is to be found in the Crocket Collection.

⁷Advertisement of the Committee of Direction, San Augustine *Red Lander*, December 2, 1843.

⁸Macum Phelan, *A History of Early Methodism in Texas, 1817-1866* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1924), 220, quoting the Annual Report of the Board of Missions. In May, 1844 the Texas Conference was divided; that portion of Texas which lay east of the Trinity River was assigned to the newly established East Texas Conference (Phelan, 231). After this division Wesleyan College passed under the patronage of the East Texas Conference.

⁹"Ordained Methodist Ministers Who Participated in an Educational Ministry," *Wesleyan Quarterly Review*, I (November, 1964), 209. Janes resigned in 1846; Foster H. Blades succeeded him as President of the College.

¹⁰H. P. N. Gammel, ed., *Laws of Texas, 1822-97* (15 vols.; Austin: Gammel Book Company, 1898), II, 934.

¹¹*Handbook of Texas*, I, 78, 220, 795; II, 85.

¹²"Daniel Poe," 77.

¹³Autobiography, Francis Wilson papers, Crocket Collection, East Texas Historical Collection, Stephen F. Austin State College Library.

¹⁴*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the Year 1867* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870), 186. Wilson died on October 8, 1867.

¹⁵Report to the Board of Trustees, Francis Wilson papers, Crocket Collection.

¹⁶Perhaps this is Matthew Cartwright (*Handbook of Texas*, I, 304).

¹⁷Perhaps the general to whom Wilson refers is Moseley Baker (*Handbook of Texas*, I, 100).

¹⁸This donor may be James Davis (*Handbook of Texas*, I, 470).

¹⁹Lecture on Texas, Francis Wilson papers, Crocket Collection.

²⁰Crocket, *Two Centuries*, 307.

²¹Lecture on Texas, Francis Wilson papers, Crocket Collection.

²²McLean, "Schools," 64.

²³San Augustine *Red Lander*, December 2, 1843.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Advertisement, Nashville, Tennessee, *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, April 10, 1846.

²⁶Nashville, Tennessee, *Nashville Christian Advocate*, September 3, 1847, 2.

²⁷Clarence Moore Dannelly, "The Development of Collegiate Education in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1846-1902," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1933, 39.

²⁸San Augustine *Red Lander*, December 2, 1843.

²⁹Report of Committee to Visit Wesleyan College, *Nashville Christian Advocate*, September 3, 1847, 2.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*

³²B. W. Martin, "History of Another East Texas College Presented," *Interscholastic Leaguer*, VII (February 15, 1924), 6.

³³*Handbook of Texas*, II, 594.

³⁴*Nashville Christian Advocate*, May 14, 1847, 1.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Nashville Christian Advocate*, September 3, 1847, 3.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Italics in original (*Ibid.*).

³⁹Dannelly, "Development," 24-25.

⁴⁰Crocket, *Two Centuries*, 308-9.

⁴¹Gammel, *Laws of Texas*, III, 365.

⁴²Crocket, *Two Centuries*, 309.

⁴³George L. Crocket, notes on the history of Methodism in San Augustine, Crocket Collection, East Texas Historical Collection, Stephen F. Austin State College Library.