

History of the University.

IN the year 1784, the Legislature of Georgia passed an Act laying out the Counties of Washington and Franklin, including the territory now occupied by Clarke, and perhaps a dozen of the adjacent counties. These new counties were in an uninhabited territory, and the lands lying within their borders were considered as the property of the State, to be disposed of as the State authorities thought best.

There was at this time no school in the State which deserved the name of College or University. In consideration of this fact, the State Legislature thought that no more wise disposition could be made of the funds, arising from the sale of these lands, than to appropriate them for the support of a University, to be the property of the State, and for the benefit of her people. The result of this opinion was the passage of a bill, in 1784, conveying 40,000 acres of the lands above mentioned to the Governor and certain others, to be held in trust for the endowment of a College or Seminary of Learning. In the following year, on January 27th, a bill was passed granting to the persons holding the land, together with certain others, a charter as trustees of an institution to be called the University of Georgia.

In the bill granting the charter we find quite forcibly expressed the motives which actuated the founders of the University. They recognized the fact that nothing would more rapidly advance the interests of the people than education. Desirous of advancing these interests, they undertook to establish an institution where a thorough and complete education might be had. The first section

of the charter entrusts the general supervision and regulation of the literature of the State to two boards: the Board of Visitors, who are to see that the general intent of the institution is carried out, and the Board of Trustees, who are to appoint professors, prescribe courses of study and fill vacancies in their own Board. These two Boards united composed the *Senatus Academicus* of the University of Georgia, having power to enact all laws necessary for the government of the University, subject however to the approval of the Legislature. The charter provides that whatever public measures are necessary for the welfare of the University are to be laid before the Legislature by the trustees. All officers of the University must be of the Christian religion, according to the charter.

The endowment, consisting of 40,000 acres of land, provided no immediately available funds, and consequently the efforts of the Trustees were directed at first to raising some cash funds by leasing the college lands.

The first meeting of the Board of Trustees was held in Augusta on 13th of February, 1786. Perhaps it will be of some interest to mention the names of those who attended the first meeting of the Trustees ever held.

They were Abraham Baldwin, William Few, William Glasscock, John Habersham, Nathan Brownson, Hugh Lawson, and Benjamin Taliaferro.

At this meeting of the Trustees it was decided, in order to facilitate the disposition of the college lands, to lay out the town of Greensboro on a portion of the land. William Greer was elected Treasurer of the University, and several surveyors employed to divide up the college domain. It seems that the design of the Trustees was to raise the desired amount of money by leasing the lands and not by selling them.

Nothing besides leasing the lands was done until the year 1798. At a meeting of the Trustees in Augusta during that year, the Treasurer reported the funds of the University as amounting to \$7,463.76. This amount seemed sufficiently large to start the University into active operation.

The selection of a location for the University occasioned considerable trouble. It was very difficult in those days to get a quorum of the Senaticus Academicus, on account of the difficulty in travelling and the want of interest in the enterprise on the part of some members. Two or three meetings were held without determining the location. Finally, in the year 1800, on the 24th of November, the County of Greene was settled upon as the temporary site of the University. A committee was appointed to contract for a building to accommodate 100 students. Prof. Josiah Meigs of Yale College was elected presiding professor, with a salary of \$1,000 a year, and arrangements made for procuring books, and a limited quantity of philosophical apparatus. A course of study, to extend over six years, and embracing very nearly the same subjects as our present A. B. course, was arranged.

The next meeting of the Trustees was held at Louisville, in January of 1801. Professor Meigs was elected President of the University, with a salary of \$1,500.00 a year, and an appropriation of \$500 made to pay the expenses of his removal to Georgia. It seems that the school never went into active operation in Greene County. At this meeting of the Trustees, their action locating it in Greene County was reconsidered, and the County of Jackson selected as the *permanent* location. A committee of five was appointed to select the most suitable site in Jackson County, and to purchase the land including it, provided it did not lie within the College domain. Their investigation resulted in the selection of the site on which the University now stands. The Hon. John Milledge donated three hundred acres of land surrounding the site of the University to the Trustees, and arrangements were made for the erection of a College building, to accommodate one hundred students.

The City of Athens was not then in existence. A virgin forest covered the ground on which it now stands, and only one or two houses marked the spot.

The Trustees directed President Meigs to visit the various Academies in the State and select from the young men attending them such as he thought thoroughly qualified to become students of the University, and to give directions as to how they should be instructed until arrangements could be made for their accommodation at the University. The six years course was reduced to four years,—the scope of the course remaining very much the same.

A few log huts were erected in the College grove for the accommodation of President Meigs, and about thirty students whom he had collected by the method suggested to him by the Trustees. The instruction in the University commenced in the spring of 1801, all the work being carried on at first by President Meigs.

During the year 1801 the Trustees authorized President Meigs to ask the Legislature for a loan of \$5,000. This was the first aid ever *asked* of the Legislature by the University, and it was granted.

The building now known as the Summey House was commenced and pushed rapidly to completion in 1801.

In 1802 a donation of \$1,000 was received from Mr. James Gunn.

The number of students, in 1802, having increased considerably, the Trustees decided to appoint a Professor of Languages to assist President Meigs. William Jones was elected, with a salary of \$500 a year. During the same year a small frame building was erected, on the site now occupied by the Library building, for the accommodation of the students.

At a meeting of the Trustees, in November of 1803, President Meigs made his first report. From his report it seems that the students of the University were pursuing their courses of study with considerable diligence. At this meeting of the Trustees, it was decided to establish a grammar school at Athens to prepare students for the College classes. During the following year a

building was erected on the site now occupied by Professor Wilcox's house, and an instructor employed at a salary of \$600 a year. The school was an integral part of the college, and under the superintendence of the President.

On the 31st of May, 1804, the first commencement of the University was held. The degree of A. B. was conferred on the following eight students: Gibson Clarke, Augustin Clayton, Thomas Irwin, Jephtha N. Harris, Jared Irwin, William Jackson, James Jackson, Robert Rutherford and William Williamson. Two important features of the commencement, long ago abandoned, were the recitation of dialogues, and the delivery of Latin and Greek orations by members of the graduating class. In those early times only Seniors were allowed to speak at commencement. In fact the only commencement exercises were the speeches of the Seniors and the commencement sermon. The exercises were held in the grove in front of the building now known as the Summey House. We find no mention in the record of this first commencement of honors being awarded for high class stand.

By the end of the year 1804, the cash funds of the University amounted to \$30,000.

In May of 1805, the second commencement took place, only five presenting themselves for graduation. The general features of the commencement were much the same as in 1804. During this year Mr. Pettit De Clairville, of Savannah was elected Professor of French, with a salary of \$400 a year. The college building was nearly enough completed to be occupied by the students. The Trustees at a meeting in May, decided that this building should be known as Franklin College.

From the minutes of the meetings of the Senatus we would suppose that they carried out the object of the founders, by not only exercising a general supervision over the interests of the University, but over the educational interests of the entire State.