

FAIRFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH

Due to the fact that all records have been lost the following account of Fairfield Baptist Church history has been taken primarily from Mrs. Ollin J. Owens "Furman's Fairfield Days".

Among the members of Rock Creek Church was the Davis family of Monticello. Rock Creek Church ordained Jonathan Davis to the gospel ministry and in 1820 he organized Fairfield Church.

The site selected for the building of Fairfield Church was about three and a half miles south and west of the town of Winnsboro in the direction of Monticello. The church faced south. The membership increased rapidly and, because the community was made up of wealthy planters, the church soon grew to a position of strength and prestige. Baptists throughout the State came to regard it as one of the strongest country churches in the Convention.

The years Furman (now Furman University, located at Greenville, S. C.) spent in Fairfield County were so much a part of Fairfield Baptist Church history that some mention must be made here of that time. On December 17, 1835 at Charleston, Rev. Jonathan Davis was elected president of Furman's Board of Trustees. This board included on its list some of the ablest Baptists in South Carolina during that period.

Davis dreamed of moving the school to Fairfield and spared no effort to make his dream come true. Davis knew the ability of the Fairfield congregation. He was familiar with the fine displays of carriages, livery, horses, and drivers that arrived in front of Fairfield Church on meeting Sundays. The description of these is still handed down in Fairfield County to remind the present generation of the last splendor of days before the war. The Rev. Jonathan Davis realized his dream but the years Furman spent in Fairfield County were

hard ones. Due to a number of reasons, one, that no railway passed near the school, it was decided that it would be best to move. Soon after Furman left, Fairfield Church became involved in controversies. The exact cause of these is buried in obscurity, but some tradition claims that there were arguments over some property that had once belonged to the Institution. There is some documentary evidence to uphold this. At any rate, Rev. Jonathan Davis died in 1855 and shortly after the church burned down and (it is believed) all the church records were lost.

In 1858 all but two or three members of Fairfield Church withdrew and organized the First Baptist Church of Winnsboro. Following the War between the States old Fairfield Church went practically out of existence and no meetings were held until 1882. In that year a Rev. Mahon of Union came and held a revival meeting in the log school house about a mile and a quarter west of the original site of Fairfield Church. This school house was on the property of Andrew Young. Eight converts were received and Rev. Mahon found three women who had once been members of the old Fairfield Church. These, Mrs. Emma Young (wife of Andrew Young) and her two sisters, Mrs. Jane Gregg and Mrs. Geo. Robertson, met in Mrs. Young's home and voted in the new members. From that time on Fairfield Church has continued, though on a new site near where the log school building stood.

At the time the slaves were freed the white members gave them some of the church property - a small tract across what was then a Public Road - on which to build a church.

The Church property formerly consisted of 2 and 3 quarters acres conveyed to Fairfield Baptist Church by James Nelson (two acres) and John P. Shirley (3 quarters acre). Deed and Plat in Clerk of Court Office. A historical marker was placed in the old cemetery in 1954 by Mrs. Annie Tweed Young, wife of Archie Andrew Young.

4. Furman Institution Before Fairfield

"The State Convention of the Baptist Denomination in South Carolina" on December 20, 1825 received from the legislature an act of incorporation for the establishment of "an academical and theological seminary for the education of youth, generally, and of indigent pious young men, particularly, who may be designed for the gospel ministry." On January 15, 1827, with one instructor, the institution was opened in the village of Edgefield. Joseph Andrews Warne was this first instructor.

Thus there came into existence the school dreamed of by Oliver Hart in the middle of the 18th century and zealously agitated for many years by Richard Furman. Richard Furman died on August 25, 1825 without seeing his hopes fulfilled, but so closely did Baptists identify Christian education with their esteemed leader that they named the institution for him.

Having located Furman at Edgefield in order to be near their Georgia brethren from whom they expected joint support, South Carolina Baptists were disappointed when this support failed to materialize. By the close of 1828 the institution was on the verge of collapse.

To prevent this, the trustees gave up the classical school for the time being, and placing the three ministerial students then enrolled under the care and tutelage of the scholarly Jesse Hartwell, moved Furman to High Hills of the Santee, now called Stateburg. For five years the school, operated exclusively for ministerial students, remained in this location. Equipped at best with only a few frame and pole buildings and racked by discord between the two professors, Jesse Hartwell and Samuel Furman, it closed its doors at the end of 1834 almost swamped in debt. Those who had pledged their financial support simply failed to live up to their promises.

During 1835 and 1836 the school was closed, but by no means dead. Baptist leaders were active in their efforts to find a plan that would make the school succeed. N.W. Hodges was elected agent to solicit money.

5. Nicholas Ware Hodges

Inasmuch as Hodges played an important part in Furman's Fairfield years, the following facts about his life are in order.

Nicholas Ware Hodges was born in Abbeville District on January 1, 1797. He was baptized at Horn's Creek Church, Edgefield District in May of 1826. The church at Edgefield licensed him to preach in June of that year and a year later, on June 17, 1827 ordained him. From that time on he was a tireless preacher of the gospel and worker for Furman Institution.

In 1829 he became pastor of Mt. Moriah Church, five miles south of Greenwood, and remained there until elected an agent of Furman. He founded Hodges Institute in Greenwood "which served for many years the purpose of Christian education in that community."

Hodges, along with Judge Belton O'Neall and Basil Manly, Sr., was an ardent advocate of manual labor schools, and it was largely through his influence that the trustees gave it a trial in Fairfield.

Hodges died at Greenwood of consumption on Oct. 7, 1841, soon after the death of his second wife by the same disease. He is buried directly behind Mt. Moriah Church building which was erected in 1834 while he was pastor.

Other faithful men besides Hodges labored for Furman in Fairfield, but facts about them are either well recorded by Dr. McGlothlin and others or else are unknown to this writer.

6. Removal to Fairfield

On December 17, 1835 at Charleston, Rev. Jonathon Davis was elected president of Furman's Board of Trustees. This board included on its list some of the ablest Baptists in South Carolina during that period.

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of Fairfield Church on meeting Sundays. The description of these is set down in Fairfield County to remind the present generation of the lost splendor of days before the war,

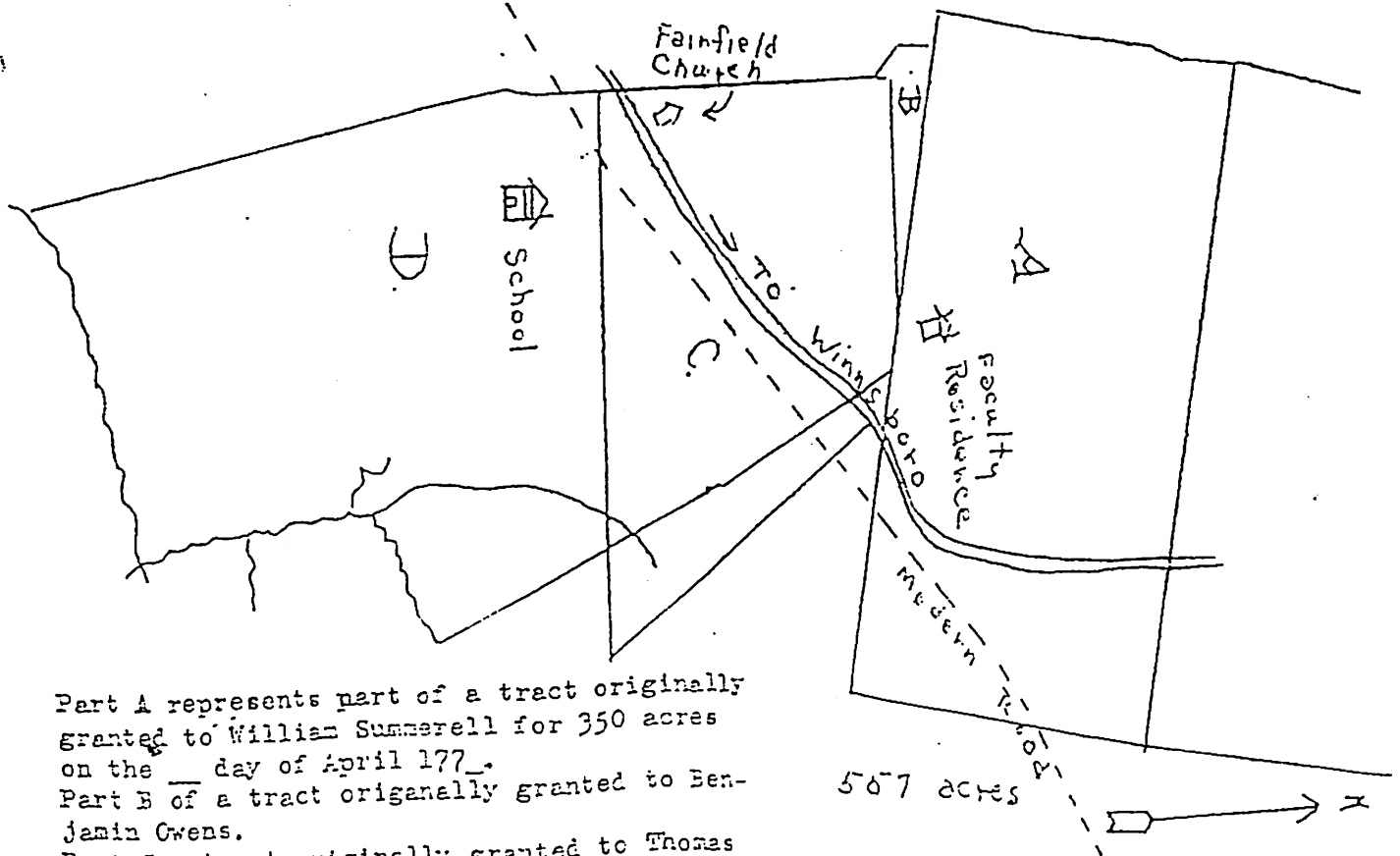
In a letter to his son-in-law in 1835, Mr. Davis wrote:

"I have made an effort as a commencement for a site for the Institution and have subscribed in the bounds of Fairfield Congregation \$3,000. Today the Committee have examined a site (Jesse Nelson's) fronting the church, highly delighted with the nicer situation and quality of the land, 600 acres, 300 of which acknowledged to be good for 30 bushels of corn to the acre, price \$5,000, which I think fully worth that sum. The committee (is) fully persuaded if the money can be raised without the old funds of the convention, that Fairfield will get the location, I think I can (pledge) Fairfield to raise \$5,000.

(The Life Work of James Clement Furman by Cook, pp. 51-52)

After further study of available land and after lengthy negotiations, Mr. Davis obtained 557 acres of land immediately surrounding the church (the same land described above) from Jesse Nelson for the sum of \$7,400. The deed to the lands was signed on March 8, 1836. It is registered in Deed Book MM, p. 502 in Fairfield County courthouse.

Accompanying the deed is the plot as traced below:



Part A represents part of a tract originally granted to William Summerell for 350 acres on the ___ day of April 177_.
 Part B of a tract originally granted to Benjamin Owens.
 Part C a tract originally granted to Thomas Woodward.

(only the church building actually appeared on the plot.)

7. Ups and Downs in Fairfield

A slight hill which commands a view of all the surrounding countryside was selected as the site for the building of the Furman Institution. A frame building, 120 feet long by 30 to 40 feet wide was erected on this hill facing the church. It housed the students, class-rooms, and library.

"The first session," according to Dr. McGlothlin, "opened the first Monday in February, 1837." By April there were 50 boarders and 13 local students. Each of these was required to work 2½ hours per day in the fields under the direction of a farmer and the faculty members were expected to go with them to the field.

The principal of the English and Classical school was Prof. W. E. Bailey. Leader of the Manual Labor feature was William Davis, assisted by N. W. Hodges. The theological department did not get started until the next year.

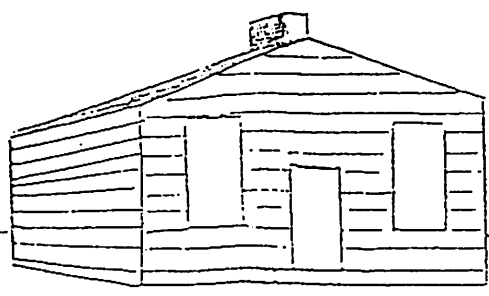
The best remembered single event of the Fairfield years was the fire which occurred on May 1, 1837. The school building, which also housed the students, was totally destroyed, along with its entire contents. The fire took the life of one of the students and he was buried on the hill near where the building stood. Local farmers took the students into their homes and fed and clothed them until other provision could be made for their care. Prof. Bailey refused to close because of the fire.

Undaunted by this disaster, plans for rebuilding were begun at once. Between May of 1837 and January of 1838 small one and two-room cabins were erected on the hill to house the students. These were paid for by individuals. They were arranged in a semi-circle about the site of the original building and eventually numbered about a dozen. On the site of the burned building the new building was constructed. It was made of brick with tall ceilings, thick walls, and was three stories high.

Across the road leading to Winnsboro and about a quarter of a mile distant, a two-story brick residence for the faculty was erected at the same time the new school building was built. It was in this home that the first Mrs. Furman died in 1849. Her death was dramatically described by her husband in a letter to members of the family and has been preserved on pp. 110-118 of Dr. Cocke's biography of James C. Furman.

When the theological department opened on January 1, 1838 with Dr. Hooper in charge, Rev. J. S. McGinnis was elected to give half of his time to the theological department and half to the classical. From the start the theological department did better than the other departments because of the financial support which South Carolina Baptists gave to their ministerial students.

Single cabin, reconstructed from description in minutes of Board of Trustees and that of local citizens who remember seeing them.



Specifications: 18 feet long, 16 feet wide, 9 feet ceiling, 1 foot from ground, 1 door, 2 windows, 1 chimney, foundations of stone. Position of windows uncertain.

Problems began to plague the school afresh, however, The manual labor feature did not succeed as the students became rebellious and shirked their work. The school operated at a loss. Land and equipment for the manual labor division had been bought on credit and now debt began to harrass the institution again.

In 1839 the trustees authorized the sale of all property such as horses, stock, provisions, all moveables (reserving 2 mules, an ox cart and oxen with provender for their sustenance.) This marked the beginning of abandonment of the classical school and the manual labor feature.

Even liquor shops in the neighborhood contributed to the demoralization. The session of 1843 was shaken by a quarrel between the faculty and the steward over price of board. The faculty, after investigating prices charged by other schools maintained that \$10 per month per student was too high to pay for board. They determined to elect a steward who would board the students for no more than \$8.50.

Several neighbors in 1844 sent a courteous petition to the school to repair fences around the steward's hall because some of their cattle had wandered through the broken gates and fences and been killed by (presumably the steward).

Funds were so scarce during this period that a petition to make repairs on the faculty residence was turned down.

In 1845 the faculty passed several regulations of interest. They declared that no student who had not entered the course in theology could "make any engagements for preaching statedly." Those in Junior and Middle classes in theology might have a regular monthly appointment for preaching and those in the Senior class might "preach statedly two Lord's Days in each month." Any student, however, might preach occasionally at the discretion of the President of the faculty.

A program for morning and evening prayers was set up. Morning prayers were held at sunrise every morning and conducted by students in alphabetical order, each student taking his turn for a week. The leader was required to call the roll, and absentees had to present excuses in writing at the end of each week. Faculty members conducted evening prayers which were held at a half hour before sunset each afternoon. Friday nights were reserved for devotional exercises and literary discussions.

In 1846 for the Institution James C. Furman was sold 619 acres of land on Little Cedar Creek in Fairfield County, some miles from the Institution campus, for \$5 by Christian Entzinger. This gift was followed by others of money and time by Mr. Entzinger whose descendants are still prominently identified with the Baptist cause.

Members of the Fairfield Church in 1846 asked the Board of Trustees of Furman to release James C. Furman from all teaching outside the theology department in order that he might become their pastor. They offered him \$400 per year and told the board that the Institution could thereby be saved that much expense. The board agreed to the proposition and reduced Dr. Furman's salary to \$600.

Dr. McGlothlin in his Baptist Beginnings in Education has described the rapid turnovers in faculty and administrative officers during the Fairfield era. This indicated the lack of stability which characterized the entire period.

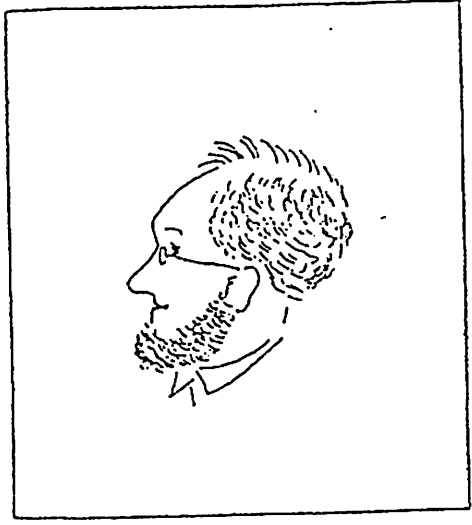
It is safe to say that the Fairfield years were unsettled and unhappy years. In spite of this, however, Dr. McGlothlin says that the theology department grew to be the strongest Baptist theological school in the South during the tense forties and in December 1849 the classical department was reopened.

8. The Removal to Greenville

Soon after the closing of the classical and manual labor departments in 1841 discussion began over moving the Institution. The open country was fine for a manual labor school, but it was no place to train preachers. After lengthy discussion of removal, complicated by the question of opening a general seminary, Greenville, Anderson, Greenwood, and possibly other places bid for the school. Dr. McGlothlin says, "It was generally agreed that the institution should be removed to this section (upper part of the state) because of the more salubrious climate, the larger proportion of white people, the cheaper living conditions, the denser Baptist population, and the great number of streams providing water power for future manufacturing developments."

Although the foregoing reasons were the deciding factors in removal from Fairfield, local tradition claims that there were two others. This writer cannot document these, but merely states them as surviving traditions. These were: the failure of the railroad to pass by the institution property and a strained relationship between Furman and Mt. Zion Institute which had been in Winnsboro since 1777. It was inevitable that Furman should encroach upon Mt. Zion's constituency. Greenville was chosen as Furman's new home and \$70,000 was set as the minimum sum necessary to make the move. At the meeting of the convention at Pendleton in December 1850, \$30,000 had been subscribed through only two agents. Convinced that the remainder could be raised easily, preparations were made for immediate removal. The expense of moving was only a "little more than \$500 since there was not much to move---the library, the furniture, the household goods of the professors, and little besides."

There were only three professors in 1851, Drs. Furman, J. S. Mims, and Peter C. Edwards. On an old minute book of Furman faculty meetings held during the Fairfield days some unknown doodler drew a number of clever sketches. None are identified by name and the writer could not recognize but one, a reasonable likeness of James C. Furman. This rough sketch, giving some idea of how Dr. Furman looked about this time, is copied herewith.



In answer to the demand for a college or university which could offer a complete and finished education, the institution, upon removal, was re-chartered as "The Furman University" with plans for addition of law and medicine to the classical and theological departments. The first classes in Greenville were conducted on the first Monday in February, 1851.

On March 10, 1851, H. W. Pasley, agent of the State Convention of the Baptist Denomination in South Carolina sold to John R. Shurley of Fairfield District for \$2,500, 317 acres of land. This was all the land on the south side of the Winnsboro road and opposite Fairfield Church. On it was located the school building and cabins.

On the same day Pasley sold to Rev. Carolus Folder of Fairfield District for \$2,800, 233½ acres. This was all the land on the north side of the road and beside Fairfield Church. On it was the faculty residence.

The 619 acres of land on Little Cedar Creek given by Christian Entzinger had already been sold on Jan. 11, 1850 for \$2,000. W. B. Johnson, agent of the convention, sold it to Thomas Nelson.

9. Since Furman Left

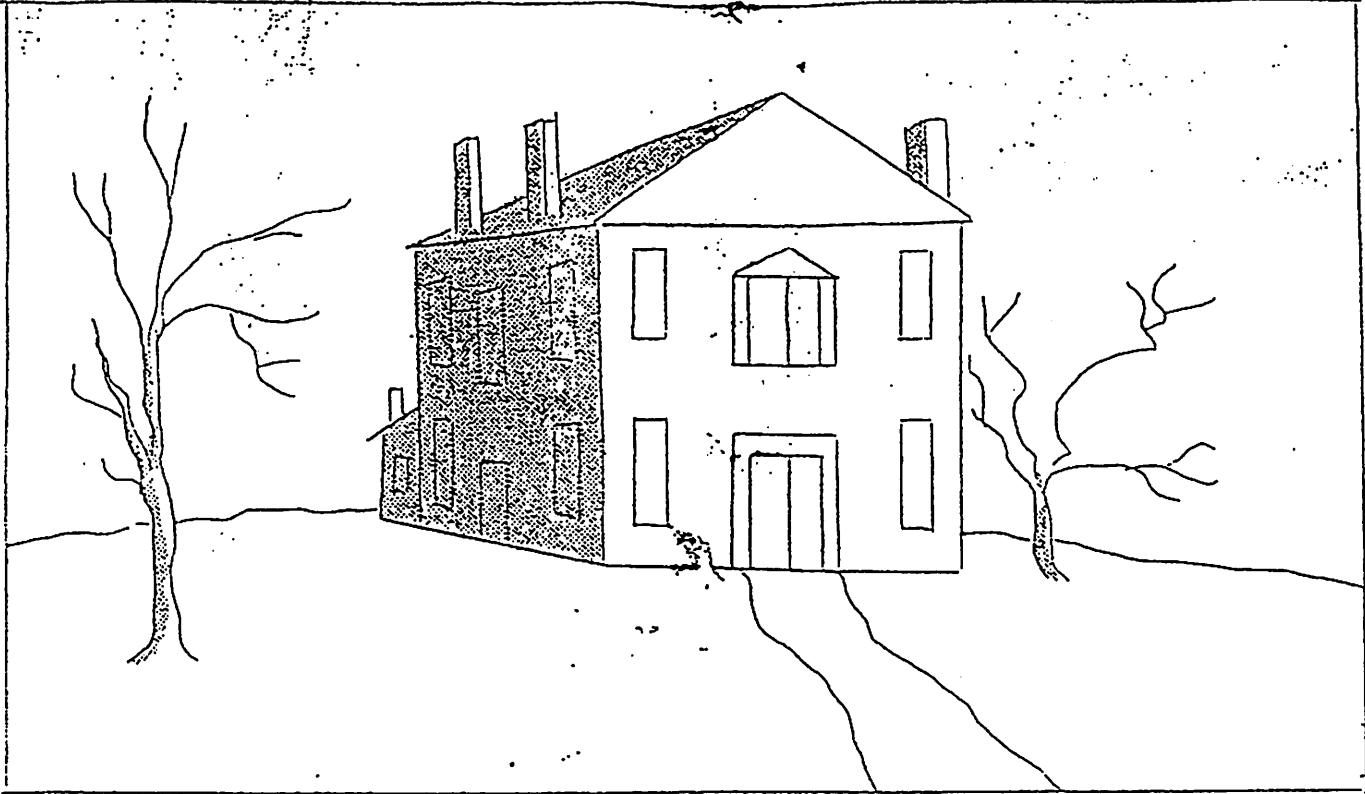
Soon after Furman left, Fairfield Church became involved in controversies. The exact cause of these is buried in obscurity, but some tradition claims that there were arguments over some property that had once belonged to the institution. There is some documentary evidence to uphold this. At any rate, Rev. Jonathon Davis died in 1855 and the quarrels increased after his death until someone burned down the church, together (it is believed) with all the church records.

In 1856 all but two or three members of Fairfield Church withdrew and organized the First Baptist Church of Winnsboro. Following the War Between the States old Fairfield Church went practically out of existence and no meetings were held until 1882. In that year a Rev. Mahon of Union came and held a revival meeting in the log school house about a mile and a quarter west of the original site of Fairfield Church. Eight converts were received and Rev. Mahon found three women who had once been members of old Fairfield Church. These, Mrs. Young, Mrs. Gregg, and Mrs. Jeffries, met in Mrs. Young's home and voted in the new members. From that time on Fairfield Church has continued though on a new site near where the log school building stood.

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The earthquake of 1886 caused so much damage to the school building, then and ever since used as a residence, that the owner removed the third story and used the brick thus discarded to build a small addition in the rear.

The old groves that once surrounded this building are gone. Gone too are the small buildings, the fences, and gates. The building, shorn of its porches, still commands the hill and can be seen for a long distance in every direction.



Across the road the faculty residence, also remarkably well preserved after 98 years, still stands, shaded by its ancient cedars.



People of the community bought up the cabins and some claim today that the sills of their present homes are laid of material taken from the cabins. The only reminder of old Fairfield Church of Furman days is a group of grave-markers in the abandoned cemetery.

Long since gone from Fairfield is Furman Institution. Gone are those who remember when it was here. But the blessing that Furman left behind will be felt forever in Fairfield.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y :

Records in Fairfield County Courthouse

Minutes Furman Board of Trustees, 1825-1851

Minutes Executive Committee, Furman Board of Trustees during Fairfield period (incomplete)

Minutes Furman Faculty Meetings during Fairfield period (incomplete)

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Two Centuries of the First Baptist Church of South Carolina, H. A. Tupper, Woodward and Lothrop Co. 1889

Interviews