

History of the Brown-Hawthorne House and its Furman Institute Structural Components

The facts about Furman Institute's 14 year operation in Fairfield County (February, 1837 to February 1851) are taken here from a document that was copied from the Furman University Library in Greenville and given to me for our document files here in the Fairfield County Museum. Unfortunately, the volunteer failed to copy the title page containing the author and date of publication. The typewritten paper is called "Furman's Fairfield Days." The bibliography for the paper lists these sources: Records in the Fairfield County Courthouse; Minutes of the Furman Board of Trustees, 1825-1851; Minutes of the Executive Committee, Furman Board of Trustees during the Fairfield period (incomplete); Minutes of the Furman Faculty Meetings during the Fairfield period (incomplete); The Baptist Encyclopaedia, William Cathcart, Everts, 1883; Baptist Beginnings in Education, W. J. McGlothlin, Sunday School Board, 1926; The Life Work of James Clement Furman, H. T. Cook, Alester G. Furman, 1926; Lest We Forget, J. S. Dill, Broadman Press, 1938; Centennial issue, The Baptist Courier, December 8, 1921; History of Fairfield County, Fitz Hugh McMaster, State Pub., 1947; Two Centuries of the First Baptist Church of South Carolina, H. A. Tupper, Woodward and Co., 1889; and "interviews."

The background for development of the Baptist congregations in early Fairfield County history began as early as the 1760s when Philip Mulkey established a nearby church called Congaree, the first Baptist church in the up-country of SC. It was Mulkey's follower Joseph Reese who baptized Richard Furman for whom Furman Institute, later University, was named. In 1833 Furman's son James Clement Furman married Harriet Davis, the daughter of Rev. Jonathan Davis, whose Fairfield County plantation establishment was located in Monticello. In 1820 Rev. Davis had organized Fairfield Church near the spot where Furman Institute would be located in 1831.

In 1825, The State Convention of the Baptist Denomination in SC incorporated the establishment of an academic and theological seminary which opened first in the village of Edgefield. After it failed to thrive, Furman Institute was moved to High Hills of the Santee (present day Stateburg). After five years, the school had failed again, and by 1835, under the influence of Nicholas Hodges, it was decided to move the school to Fairfield. Rev. Jonathan Davis was elected president of Furman's Board of Trustees and obtained 557 acres near Fairfield Baptist Church for the campus.

Fairfield County Deed Book MM, p. 502 shows a plat for the deed (signed March 8, 1836). Fairfield Church is shown in the north central area of the plat just east of the old road from Monticello to Winnsboro. The road and its straightened-out modern representative SC State Highway #213 divides the Furman campus about in half. It shows the easternmost placement of the Faculty Residence, a brick two-story building which still stands and is occupied presently by Herman Mattox. Across the road on the west is located the school structure on a high hill. The first Institute building was a frame structure 120 feet long by 30 to 40 feet wide, and it housed the students, class-rooms, and library. At its opening in February of 1837, there were 50 boarders and 13 local students. Each student was required to work 2 ½ hours per day in the fields under the direction of a farmer and the teachers were expected to go with them to the field.

The principal of the English and Classical School was Professor W. E. Bailey. Leader of the Manual Labor feature was William Davis, assisted by N. W. Hodges. The theological division was started the following year.

Tragically, on May 1, 1837, a fire destroyed the building along with its entire contents, taking the life of a student. Undaunted by this, plans were made to rebuild. By January of 1838 a dozen small one and two-room cabins were erected on the hill in a semi-circle to house the students. They were paid for by individuals and erected around the burned site. A new three storied brick classroom building, assumed to be fire proof, was constructed on the site of the previous building. A quarter of a mile east of this arrangement the brick "teacherage" was built, and it was in this home that the first Mrs. James C. Furman died in 1849. In January of 1838, the theological department was opened with Dr. Hooper in charge and Rev. J. S. McGinnis split his teaching duties between the Classical and Theological departments.

The author of this paper has inserted a crude drawing of a single dormitory cabin, "reconstructed from the description in minutes of the Board of Trustees and that of local citizens who remember seeing them." This single cabin was described as being 18 feet long, 16 feet wide with 9 ft. ceilings. The structures sat one foot above ground (on stone piers), had one door, two windows, and one chimney. The author's drawing suggests that clapboard siding covered the frame buildings.

Following the story, it appears that problems had begun to affect the school already. The manual labor department was plagued with rebellious students who shirked their work. The school operated at a loss, and in 1839 the trustees authorized the sale of all property such as horses, stock, provisions, and all movables except two mules and an ox cart and oxen. This marked the beginning of the abandonment of the classical school and the manual labor feature. Local liquor shops were contributing to the demoralization of older students and there were complaints about the boarding prices charged for students. In 1844 several neighbors petitioned for fences to be repaired and insinuated that the school steward had killed some of their cattle. There was a rapid turn-over of faculty members and administrators, and James Furman was offered \$400 a year to divide his teaching time with preaching at nearby Fairfield Baptist Church. Another nineteenth century writer claimed that there was general complaint among the teachers that the boys of Fairfield were only interested in running barefoot and tending to farm animals, and that they were generally "unteachable." By 1841 there was discussion about moving the school to another place in a more "salubrious climate where there was a larger proportion of white people, cheaper living conditions, and a denser Baptist population." The failure of the Columbia to Charlotte railroad to locate a segment or spur closer to Furman and a strained relationship with Mt. Zion Institute in Winnsboro are also given as possible reasons for the decision to close the Institute in Fairfield. By 1850, plans were being made to move to Greenville. Preparations were made for the immediate removal of the school as 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." By January of 1852, the move was complete.