

# Life by the Roaring Roanoke

A History of Mecklenburg County, Virginia

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Mecklenburg County, Virginia

In the 1830's the county proudly acquired an institute of higher learning—a college—a college worthy of the region in which it was located.

Definite steps toward the formation of this college had first been taken at the 1825 session of the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Church. Finally, in the summer of 1828, a committee appointed at the previous Conference met at Zion Methodist Church, Union Level, for the purpose of making definite plans for the college. Brunswick County offered subscriptions amounting to \$20,000 and requested that the college be located at Physic Springs, near old Ebenezer Academy, the first Methodist school in the United States. Mecklenburg, on the other hand, offered \$10,000 and land near Boydton at a very good price. With the influence of some prominent local men, the Boydton site was selected. According to Richard Irby, a graduate of the College who wrote its history, another reason for that selection was the proximity of the site to the Virginia-North Carolina state line, and that the site was

probably more accessible to the people of the two States at that time than any other eligible location, and was considered healthful, as well as the centre of a refined community. The county of Mecklenburg was one of the largest and wealthiest in the State, and its people and the people of the adjoining counties of North Carolina were friendly and homogeneous.<sup>72</sup>

On February 3, 1830, the trustees of Randolph-Macon College, named for John Randolph of Roanoke and Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, were incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly. Throughout the years of the College's existence in Mecklenburg, several Mecklenburg men served the College, as trustees, as Secretary of the Board, and as treasurers. Among the trustees were Beverly Sydnor (1834), Hugh A. Garland (1835), George Rogers (1842), Edward R. Chambers (1842), William Townes (1844), Richard B. Baptist (1846), Charles S. Hutcheson (1848), John G. Boyd, and O. H. P. Corprew (1859). Baptist served as Secretary of the Board, and John W. Lewis, Alexander Boyd, and Beverly Sydnor as treasurers.

William A. Howard and Dabney Cosby contracted with the Board of Trustees to raise the main college building. "The plan embraced a centre brick building fifty-two feet front by fifty-four deep, with wings east and west sixty-seven and a half feet each, making a total front of one hundred and eighty-seven feet, all four stories high."<sup>73</sup> The site on which this building was raised had been a race track, on land purchased from William Townes. Other land on the campus had been acquired from James Bruce, James Maclin, and Nathaniel Maclin.