

TTU SET TO CELEBRATE CENTENNIAL OF ITS FORERUNNER -- DIXIE COLLEGE

TTU -- A marching band, faculty in period costumes and sealing of a time capsule all will mark Dixie College Day on Nov. 18, a day set aside for the centennial celebration of Dixie College, the predecessor of Tennessee Tech. The public is invited to attend the day's festivities. "We're delighted to share with everyone in the Upper Cumberland and across the state of Tennessee TTU's rich history and



accomplishments. There can be no better way to mark this occasion than by inviting the public to the celebration to say 'thank you' for their many years of support," said TTU President Bob Bell.

The University of Dixie, commonly called Dixie College, was founded on Nov. 18, 1909. Earlier that year, about 80 individuals signed financial pledges in amounts that ranged from \$25 to \$300 to establish a college to serve the people in Tennessee's Upper Cumberland region. Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, now called Tennessee Tech University, was established by then-Gov. Thomas C. Rye on March 27, 1915.

From a humble college in temporary quarters to today's comprehensive university, TTU's storied history will be feted with a several activities on Nov. 18:

- * 10:45 a.m.: The TTU Golden Eagle Marching Band will begin a procession from the Bryan Fine Arts Building down Dixie Avenue to Derryberry Hall, the original site of Dixie College.
- * 11:00 a.m.: A time capsule will be sealed in front of Derryberry Hall, followed by a reading of an excerpt from the charter for Dixie College and the reading of a brief TTU history.
- * Throughout the day: A display of historic photographs and a video presentation will be available for viewing on the second floor of Roaden University Center.

Today, TTU offers 44 bachelor's and 20 graduate degree programs within six academic divisions: Agricultural and Human Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, Engineering, and Interdisciplinary Studies and Extended Education.

Tennessee Tech University has been named one of America's 100 Best College Buys, earning designation several years in a row as one of the nation's best college educations for the cost. US News & World Report has chosen TTU as one of the Top Public Schools in the South on multiple occasions, and the university has been chosen as a "Best Southeastern College" by The Princeton Review for several years. Find out more about TTU's history and view photos of Dixie College's earliest students at <http://www.tntech.edu/dixiecollege>.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 8 November 2009

<http://www.ajlambert.com>



This year marks the centennial of the founding of the University of Dixie, more commonly known as Dixie College, the predecessor of Tennessee Tech. In honor of this anniversary, Tech is celebrating Dixie College Day on Nov. 18, 2009. This article is excerpted from The Search for Identity: A History of Tennessee Technological University by Harvey G. Neufeldt (former College of Education faculty member) and W. Calvin Dickinson, professor emeritus of history at Tech.

Springtime had come to the Upper Cumberland – a season for planting, for renewal of life, a time for looking toward the future. It was in the spring of 1909 that the groundwork was laid for the planting of a new college.

Its purpose, the founders declared, was to aid the Church of Christ. Approximately 80 individuals signed pledges that day, April 20. These pledges were to be paid providing members of the Church of Christ raised \$15,000 from its members at or near Cookeville and its supporters raised an additional \$10,000 from “its members and friends at other places.”

When Cookeville residents entered the 20th century they had an institution that offered programs beyond the elementary level, but none at the college level. Action of the men of Cookeville’s Broad Street Church of Christ to establish a college were hardly begun when the state government passed legislation to establish three state normal schools for white students, one in each grand division of the state, and one industrial, agricultural, and normal institute for black students. This law of 1909 temporarily halted the activities of the Cookeville group to set up their college, and efforts now shifted to lobbying the legislature to name Cookeville as the site for the normal school of Middle Tennessee. These failed and Cookeville lost to Murfreesboro. Once again members of the Church of Christ renewed their efforts to establish a college at Cookeville, and these efforts were rewarded when a charter was secured from the state on November 18, 1909.

Dixie College Chartered

The charter did not specify exactly what kind of school was to be established. It empowered the signees to “establish, maintain, manage and conduct a school or college or university” at Cookeville. As for the curriculum, it permitted “all branches of learning to be taught.” The charter also granted the institution “full power and authority to confer degrees and exercise all powers which are usually exercised by school college and universities.” Thus it was not clear as to whether the institution would operate as a high school or college or both.



The religious orientation of the school was recognized in several ways, including organization. The charter stated the the Bible should be taught “in a special or separate department, daily.” Another provision mandated that the board of directors must be made up only of “Members of the Church of Christ.” Board members, once appointed, should hold office “for life,” or as long as they remained “members of the church in good standing.” The charter called for the election of a president, secretary, and treasurer “within a

convenient time.” This was accomplished at a meeting on Dec. 21, 1909, in the Sloan Building in Cookeville. Jeremiah (Jere) Whitson was elected president, A. G. Maxwell, vice-president, W. B. Boyd, secretary, and Robert Farley, treasurer.

The ten men who signed the charter in November 1909 could all be classified as representative of the middle class. They had above average income and wealth. Politically they belonged to a group known as independent Democrats, a faction which split with the regular Democrats over the prohibition issue.

Leading the group and selected the first chairman of the board was Jeremiah Whitson. Whitson was born and reared in the Upper Cumberland region. He opened a business in Jackson County in 1872 but moved to Cookeville in 1890, where he opened the Jere Whitson Hardware Store. He was also involved in farming, real estate, and banking, and he made an unsuccessful bid for election to the state senate as an independent Democrat in 1912. He served as an elder in the Broad Street Church of Christ in Cookeville.

W. B. Boyd, the board's secretary, was born in 1876 in the Sequatchie Valley. An educator, he was the only one of the ten signees not engaged in a business enterprise. A graduate of Burritt College, he had also attended the University of Chicago. Boyd had been founder and president of Montvale College, 1901-1907, at Celina, Tenn., which had begun as an academy but later became a junior college. After the demise of Dixie College, Boyd served as dean of Milligan College (Tenn.) until 1924, when he accepted the position of associate editor of Farmers Federation News in Asheville, North Carolina. He also worked for a time for the Telephone Securities Company in Chicago. During the depression he was appointed as an organizer for the Civilian Conservation Corps camps in Tennessee, and later as Director of the State Information for the Tennessee Department of Information.

Maxwell, vice-president of the board, was a traveling salesman who previously had operated the rock City Spoke Company and had owned a grocery establishment in Nashville. He later organized the Tennessee Handle Company in Cookeville. The board's treasurer, Robert Farley, was born in White County and worked for a time as bookkeeper and cashier in the Bank of Cookeville. A member of Governor Thomas Rye's staff in 1915, he was later instrumental in getting the charter passed which established Tennessee Polytechnic Institute as a state school.

Although the charter clearly spelled out that the University of Dixie was to be controlled by members of the Church of Christ, other Cookeville citizens rallied to pledge their support. On April 20, 1909, some eighty Cookeville and Putnam County residents made pledges ranging from less than \$25 to \$300. Despite these pledges, insufficient funds delayed the opening of the school until 1912.

Problems from Within

There were problems, other than financial, that faced the new institution. One was a dispute within the Churches of Christ. Several members within the state were fearful that the Cookeville school project was led by men whose adherence to Church of Christ doctrine and practice was questionable. Particularly suspect was W. K. Azbill, who came to Cookeville from Ohio at the invitation of W. B. Boyd to help in building the school. Azbill lent his support enthusiastically, proclaiming that if the people had "faith as a grain of mustard seed," their project would succeed. He was ready to come "at a moment's notice;" all he required was money for his railway ticket. Azbill was hired, at least in part, to be fundraiser for the University of Dixie in Tennessee churches.

Azbill's association with the school, his faith and enthusiasm notwithstanding, led to criticism and opposition. On Aug. 18, 1910, the Gospel Advocate, official publication of the Churches of Christ, carried a letter criticizing its editors for supporting the Cookeville school. The writer was especially critical of Azbill's association with the school, arguing that Azbill supported "human religious institutions such as modern missionary societies" and the "use of instrumental music in the worship of God." He challenged the editor, E. A. Elam, to investigate the "Larimore-Lipscomb University" at Cookeville (both names were preferred at one time but never officially adopted) to determine "whether or not the school, when finally opened, will remain in the hands of the 'true and tried' Christians or will be taken charge of and run by the 'progressives' or 'disgressives' of the church."

Elam responded with some corrections and reservations. He pointed out that someone had approached David Lipscomb about permitting his name to be "connected with the school," but Lipscomb had declined. As for the Gospel Advocate's policy, its editors had published materials about the school and supported its establishment. Elam was convinced that the Cookeville people intended to keep the school in the hands of those who worshipped in the "true" New Testament fashion. He also reminded the writer that Cookeville's

goal was to establish a university and not a Bible school. Elam did acknowledge that he was concerned to hear of W. K. Azbill's association with the school because Azbill was known to have endorsed missionary societies and to have come down on both sides of the instrumental music issue. To employ Azbill, Elam responded, was both "inconsistent and suicidal." The University of Dixie board discussed Elam's criticisms, but decided not to dismiss Azbill.

The board had to decide on a name for the new institution. Some hoped to name the school in honor of Lipscomb, one of the editors of the Gospel Advocate. He turned down the request of the Cookeville school to use his name, and for a time he also turned down the same request from the Nashville school. The name "Larimore University" was also proposed for the Cookeville school. T. B. Larimore was an educator and preacher having been associated with a school at Mars Hill, N.C., in the 1880s. In 1908 he held religious meetings at Cookeville, beginning on Dec. 31 and continuing into the spring of 1909. There is evidence to suggest that the move to establish a school at Cookeville was an outgrowth of his work in the Cookeville area. By 1910, however, both Lipscomb's and Larimore's names were dropped in favor of the University of Dixie, more popularly known as Dixie College.

Fund Raising Efforts

Finding money to finance Dixie College proved to be more difficult than finding a

name. In September 1909 W. B. Boyd and W. K. Azbill embarked on a fund-raising trip to Jackson County. The outcome of this trip was to "be taken as measurably the standard in its success or failure for the whole country and should determine somewhat the course in the future."

The trip must have met with at least some success, since the board continued to make more plans. By the spring of 1920 the board entered into agreement with William R. Ittner's architectural firm in St. Louis to draw up plans for a campus. The plans were ambitious, including at least eight major groups of buildings. There were the buildings of general utility, including the administration building, power and light plant, general assembly hall, library and art gallery, gymnasium and club house for field sports, sanitarium, and garage. Also included were the liberal arts, fine arts, engineering, metallurgy mining, and agricultural and horticultural buildings.

Lack of finances made it impossible to implement most of these plans. A financial crisis in Cookeville led to the demise of two banks in 1910, the Bank of Cookeville and the People's Bank. But on March 11, 1911, Jere Whitson and his wife deeded a tract of land to the school and construction finally began.

Dixie College Opens

Efforts to open the school began in earnest in spring of 1911. A number of Cookeville businesses closed their doors from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. on May 16, 1911, so people could attend a meeting on the Dixie schoolground. The board planned to set aside Labor Day, Sept. 4, 1911, as a day of celebration and for the laying of a cornerstone.

The school opened in 1912 in temporary quarters in West Cookeville with some hundred boys and girls. The Dixie board entered into an agreement with President Boyd and another individual, Professor T. K. Sisk, to lease the school buildings for two years with an additional three-year option. In return the professor agreed to waive tuition and all contingent fees for ten students who came from impoverished homes and were willing to work for the school.

The board planned to build a dormitory housing eighty boys by the spring of 1912, to be followed by a dormitory for girls and a gymnasium. First, however, a classroom-administration building had to be constructed. This was described as an "elegant three-story building with some fifteen classrooms, situated on a beautiful site of twenty acres, exactly the proper distance from the business part of town."

Jere Whitson reported in the summer of 1912 that the building was being finished “in the most modern and comfortable manner known to modern science,” and that the board was ready to begin construction of a boarding house for male students. The board was also ready to begin construction of a bible school and home for a young minister as soon as additional contributions were received. Several thousand dollars were already in hand, so it was not difficult for Whitson to end his report on an optimistic note. Acting as a booster for the school and the town, he wrote,

Many people have come and are coming to Cookeville where they not only have the advantage of the Dixie College for their larger and more advanced children, but also the opportunity to send their smaller children to one of the best public schools free, and where they find electric lights, city water, and nearly all conveniences to be found in the city.

The board envisioned a strong vocational department along with the more traditional academic program. At the June 14, 1910, meeting the board agreed to erect in the near future a “permanent factory building for the woodwork section of the Vocational Department.” This would enable boys and young men with limited finances to procure work in either the woodwork factory or in the “dairy farm and truck patches.” The board also agreed to construct a domestic economy building providing a “lady of means under consideration” were to furnish the money. Should the money not be forthcoming, plans were formulated to construct a less costly building housing a shirt and shirtwaist factory on the ground floor and a cooking and boarding section on the second floor to provide work for girls and women with limited finances.

Finances dictated which buildings were to be built and the simplicity of their design. W. K. Azbill, who was the appointed superintendent of the vocational department in 1910, informed the architect of this fact. “What we want,” he wrote Ittner,

and aim to produce is a modern practical equipment for the training of young men for life work. We are aware that there is an educational value in architectural effects, but we have not the money to secure the best of this. We must put up with what is indispensable. We must build as we are able and enabled to build.

Along with construction of buildings came the need to recruit a faculty. The faculty was to be organized into five areas: School of Art, School of Expression, Commercial School, Literature School, and School of Bible. The 1913-1914 catalog listed a faculty of nine, three males and six females. The men all had academic degrees and were given administrative duties along with teaching responsibilities.

The End of Dixie College

Dreams notwithstanding, financial realities dictated otherwise. In 1914 the campus boasted only one completed building, which served both as an administration and a classroom building today known as Derryberry Hall. The same year two teachers and one business firm sued the college, attempting to recover payment for wages and supplies. In 1914 the Dixie College board entered into an agreement with the Putnam County High School Board to have the college serve as a four-year high school for the city. One year later the trustees transferred ownership of the college to the State of Tennessee. If Cookeville did not have a college, at least now it had a four-year high school.

In the end, Dixie College did not survive, dying because of lack of finances. The dream, however, of bringing a college to Cookeville was not dead. Where private and church related efforts failed, political lobbying succeeded. What emerged from the dreams was not a church but rather a state institution.

<http://www.tntech.edu/dixiecollege/home/>