

# Perspectives

## Dear Old Wake Forest University's past lives on at Wake Forest Historical Site

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With so many returning alumni on campus last weekend, many students were reminded of the those who tread these halls long before the classes of 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002.

These students of past generations see this campus as only a recent development in Wake Forest history.

For the surviving members of the classes of 1930s, '40s, and '50s, their college experience did not lie in Winston-Salem but farther east at the birthplace of the Wake Forest collegiate experience.

"It was a place of Southern refinement and culture. This was a very tight, strong, warm, caring environment. Everyone spoke to each other, the professors knew you by name," Gerry Sims Kehm of the class of '49.

The original campus was built in 1834 in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

"There are 6,600 alums of that campus, known to them as 'Old Wake Forest.' They retain a fierce loyalty to the college, and to the place, though most cheer proudly the modern Wake Forest University, since 1956 the incarnation of Wake Forest College which accepted an endowment and a relocation from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in the early 1950's," Jim Jenkins, columnist for Raleigh's *News and Observer* wrote in his article "Going 'home' to Old Wake Forest."

Many of these alums are still living today, in 1996 over 1000 graduates of classes of the 1930s, 40s and '50s gathered at the old campus for a grand reunion.

"Some of the older alums are moving a bit slower now, perhaps, than they were all those years ago, when Wake Forest College embraced them like a second mother, and taught them the ways of the classics, the sciences, and life. But their Deacon spirit still soars. Baptist kids many of them were, away from home for the first time. Many scripped by, working for college or at odd jobs in the tiny norther Wake County town," Jim Jenkins wrote.

Although, today most students are far from scrimping by in this land of Abercrombie and Mercedes Benzes, these ghosts of the university's past share many of the same aspects of college life with the present students.

"Wake Forest nurtures loyalty as only a small school can. Lines between generations blur," Jenkins wrote.

Although college life at this university is an individualistic experience, many of the same places, influences and pastimes cross the ages.

Students at the old campus often met at Shorty's for a cool drink, or just to hang out or grab a bite to eat.

According to Jenkins, many alumnis hold fond "Memories of Shorty's, the downtown place with famed hotdogs, where a broad-shouldered youngster named Arnold Daniel Palmer used to hang out when he wasn't hitting golf balls."

Yes, the old campus had its own athletic heroes. Consider Arnold Palmer the Tim Duncan of his college days. In fact the old campus was home to another college sports star: H.A. Rabenhorst kicked the longest punt in football history of 105 yards at in 1919 against N.C. State.

"The ball traveled 85 yards in the air, hit a State player and went five yards deep into the end zone where Wake Forest recovered for a touchdown," Amy Andrews, a reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal*, wrote in her article "Wake alums make the trek to old campus for reunion."

Beyond Shorty's, other scenery remains the same from the old campus to the new. Wait Chapel was designed to mimic the original Binkley Chapel on the old campus. The brother chapels' appearances cause a double take when aligned side by side.

Also, the magnolia trees endemic to this campus were brought from the old.



**Top left: The "Old Wake Forest" campus still stands in Wake County as the home of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Center: The Old Well at the original campus was bustling student hang out. Bottom Right: This 1956 picture shows the new, Winston-Salem campus during its opening year.**

Photos courtesy of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library Baptists Collection

"In 1904 ... the campus was landscaped ... over 400 trees were planted, making *magnolia grandiflora* almost synonymous with the Wake Forest campus," Perry wrote.

The isolation and debates over the lack of ethnic diversity on our campus mimics the campus atmosphere post 1942, when the first women were admitted to the college.

With continued debate over campus diversity, hopefully the ethnic diversity on campus will grow like the female population on campus which has blossomed ever since the university's gates were first opened

to women.

Today the university is a pioneer in the use of electronics in the classroom instigated by the class of 2000. This campus was the first in North Carolina to issue ThinkPads to all its freshmen.

The university has long been an educational catalyst in this state. Wake Forest College held a key role in the history of education in North Carolina, and the university's changes and developments have rippled throughout the state.

"North Carolina was known during the

19th century as the Rip Van Winkle State because of its backwardness. The surge to improve education was begun at Wake Forest. ... After the college was founded, others were formed, including Davidson," Andrews wrote.

In 1832 the Baptist Convention bought the home of Calvin Jones and the surrounding 600 acres of farm land for \$2,000. In 1834 the first class of 16 students was lead by its college president, Samuel Wait, in prayer, studies and agricultural work.

"The Baptists, who had regarded the

manual labor principle as a partial means of financing the institution, abandoned the idea after five years, and the school was rechartered in 1839 as Wake Forest College," Percival Perry wrote in his historical work *Bulletin of Wake Forest University*.

The campus grew quickly, by the end of the first year 72 students were enrolled.

Nor is construction a modern phenomenon at this institution. Over time four academic and residence halls were constructed on the old campus, and the original home of Calvin was moved four times.

The home, known as the 'birthplace' of the college, can still be seen today, rebuilt after a tragic fire in the 1930s.

"The restored 'birthplace' of Wake Forest College, a two-story frame house where Samuel Wait first opened the training school for pastors in 1834," *Wake Weekly* magazine reported in its article "Oh hail to Wake Forest's colorful history."

"Local residents have worked for more than 30 years to preserve artifacts of that history at the Calvin Jones House, ... the place where a 12-year-old was the first to cross its educational threshold," *Wake Weekly* reported.

After surviving the trials of the Civil War and the financial instability of reconstruction in the south, university officials decided to move the campus to Winston-Salem.

"The college was facing a host of problems that could have taken it under. ... The school had never recovered from financial pressures dating from the Depression, or from a series of arsons in the 1930s that ruined three campus buildings. So when the Reynolds offer came in April of 1946, Wake Forest trustees had little choice but to accept," said Susan Brinkley, the director of the Wake Forest College historical site.

The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation offered the college \$350,000 a year and 300 acres of land with the stipulation that the campus be moved to Winston-Salem.

"That offer later increased to \$500,000 a year, and now the foundation gives \$1 million a year to the university," Andrews wrote.

"It's a grief that endures for many former students and residents who still miss the bustling campus life that abruptly ended in 1956, when the Baptist school moved 110 miles west to Winston-Salem," *Wake Weekly* reported.

This school's move had an enormous impact on the town of Wake Forest.

"Can you imagine the deflation, the student energy emitted in a college town, gone from one weekend to the next? This town has been in a profound period of grief ever since," Brinkley said.

The emptied buildings were reminiscent of the civil war, only this time the silence was permanent.

"The town emptied. On some blocks, only a family or two stayed behind. The others loaded up moving vans for the trip west," *Wake Weekly* reported.

Today the old campus still stands and new students grace its halls.

"Today the Wake Forest College buildings are now home to the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary," *Wake Weekly* reported.

The seminary offers numerous degrees in theology and philosophy.

However, tucked away in the recesses of the Seminary campus lies the remains of the university's history. The Jones historical home has been rebuilt and houses an array of university memorabilia.

"Information about the first students at Wake Forest; a portrait of the founder, Samuel Wait; and items from the early medical school days are some of the exhibits at the birthplace," Andrews wrote.

Admission is free and the home is open from 3 to 5 p.m. on Sundays.

"This house and its contents are a Wake Forest resource that needs to be used by those mighty familiar with the Wake Forest story, and more importantly those hearing of the story for the first time," reported the *Wake Weekly*.