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The Preservation of East Hall

By Fred Pullins

From the North American Regional Voice,

February 1990, Volume 11, Number 12.

Year after year those who traverse the campus of Oakwood College have been obliged to watch as East Hall, the oldest building on the campus, plummeted from her pedestal of honor and usefulness to infamy. What had once been the pride and flamed the hopes of suffering Blacks of North Alabama was slowly but steadily being attacked by greedy uncaring insects and the ravaging unrelenting elements. It appeared that the only way to salvage her waning glory was to tear her down, and let her once majesty and efficacy stand only in the fading memories of those who were privileged to be born at the turn of the century and are graced to still be among the living.

East Hall has contributed much since the hammers disturbed the Edenic-like stillness that characterized the hills of North Alabama in 1899. Her first assignment was to serve as a medical sanitarium for Blacks who were not yet welcomed to receive medical attention at white-patronized clinics and hospitals. East Hall was built out of pity and desperation, but fought to surface as a leader in the science and practice of medicine. The little known and less practiced art of using water in the treating of illness, what we now term hydrotherapy, was East Hall's hallmark. Her basement contained hydrotherapy treatment rooms where many miracles were performed daily by dedicated and skilled hands using water, selected medicines, and trust in Divine power to bring relief and restore vitality to the hundreds who funneled through her comforting doors.

I remember a story that was told by Elder Harry Dobbins, affectionately referred to as "Uncle Harry" to those who found time to sit at his feet and bask in his genius. He related that he had come to Oakwood as a youth and was soon diagnosed as having the dreaded and often fatal disease of tuberculosis. His lungs had been so ravaged by the merciless march of the disease that his very cough brought up blood and pieces of life-supporting lung tissue. Medical science was stymied, and death seemed imminent. Elder Dobbins testified that medical science's limitation was prayer's enabling to

once again demonstrate that Christ is the Great Physician. Though fading vision, Elder Dobbins perceived a particular form, and his feverish hearing responded to a familiar voice. It was the presence of Mother Cunningham standing by his bed and lifting her voice in prayer: “Dear Lord, please heal this little boy. Yes, he has been a bad boy, but that is because he lost his mother at such an early age. Please heal him, Lord, because I ask it in the worthy name of Jesus. Amen.” Uncle Harry departed this life in 1987, at the golden age of eighty-five.

Later East Hall became the residence of the college president, Elder J. L. Moran. He and his family occupied the first floor, and single faculty women resided on the second floor. The building also served in later years as the residence of Dr. Eva B. Dykes, the first black woman to qualify for the Ph.D. degree in the United States. During the many years that Dr. Dykes and her select group of boarding student scholars occupied East Hall, the building was revered as the nurturing place for aspiring minds.

East Hall has since served as a dormitory for academy young men, the office of the Oakwood College Federal Credit Union, the Behavioral Science building, the headquarters for Oakwood’s student missionary corps, the launching pad for campus ministries, and the office of the college chaplain. It was also the home for the writer of this article for the year he served as dean of academy young men.

The eroding influences of time have taken their toll on East Hall’s structure. She no longer stands straight and proud. There is now a sadness; a pale of foreboding that grips her countenance as passersby gaze upon her faded glory. However, her heart is still strong and the desire to stand proud once again echoes from her very walls.

It is nothing less than a miracle that years of siege by weather and neglect have not destroyed her. The same force that worked miracles within the walls of East Hall for hundreds of sufferers must be working a miracle of preservation for the building itself, East Hall stands strong!

The northern Alabama hillsides are once again being disturbed by the sound of hammers. East Hall is being restored. Little-by-little, as funds become available, the restoration process is taking place. Presently, the building has been stripped exteriorly and interiorly to expose the superstructure so the engineers can assess her soundness and formulate specifications for a quality restoration. The State of Alabama has also joined us in this restoration project. The State Historical Society has proclaimed East Hall to be a State Historical building. This recognition opened the door for the City of Huntsville to allocate \$20,000 toward the restoration project.

It is estimated that approximately \$150,000 to \$200,000 will be needed to restructure East Hall to its 1899 appearance. This means that alumni and friends of the college are asked to assist us financially in making our dream to preserve East Hall a reality. Donations are greatly needed and respectfully requested so that the work already begun in faith may continue to a quality completion.

East Hall has meant much to the Black community of North Alabama and to the hundreds of college students who have entered her doors. It is a monument to hope and accomplishment. It is our desire to preserve East Hall to inspire present and future generations of young people who will see this white-frame structure and ask about her glorious past. Please help us keep this symbol of our past to serve as a reminder of what God has done for us as a college and as a unique people. East Hall will also stand as a herald of miracles yet to come.

The Presidents

Black and White together, they built a campus here on which to carry out God's plan. Noted for its world-wide educational mission, erecting thousands of schools and colleges across God's earth, the Seventh-day Adventist Church tackled the problem of bringing God's Word and work to the Black people in the South. Ellen G. White and her son took especial interest in the Oakwood mission.

Oakwood College president's photographs tell us more than words can. The eyes have it: dedication, direction and determination. Each man fulfilled his mission. Dr. Reaves' work continues to magnify the school's role.

Erecting buildings is only one way presidents have pursued the College's mission. Maintenance and preservation are on-going, as is the pursuit of knowledge.



Oaklawn, Presidents Home in the 1920's

President's Home in the 1940's.





James I. Beardsley
1917-1923

Graduated from Union College in 1908. The first graduation exercises were held in this era.



Joseph A. Tucker
1923-1932

Graduated from Union College in 1917. The ACORN (school paper) was first published in this era.



James L. Moran
1932-1945

Moran Hall is named in his honor. During his administration, the first Baccalaureate Degree was awarded.



Frank L. Peterson
1945-1954

The first black graduate of Pacific Union College. Peterson Hall is named in his honor. He promoted the largest grouping of industrial training programs in our college.



Garland J. Millet
1954-1963

Graduated from Pacific Union College in 1934. During his administration, Oakwood became accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.



Addison V. Pinkney
1963-1966

Received his B.S. from Morgan State University in 1925, and M.S, degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1965. The college became a member of the United Negro College Fund during his administration.



Frank W. Hale, Jr.
1966-1972

He was a student at Oakwood College in 1944. Received his Ph.D. degree from Ohio State University in 1955. He instituted many “firsts” during his years of service: Office of Student Affairs, Office of Development, Alumni Homecoming Weekends, and the Oakwood College Advisory Council.



Calvin B. Rock
1971-1985

During his administration, enrollment increased 132%, international students increased 66%, faculty membership increased 85%, doctorates increased 184%, and the college achieved national recognition as one of the premier institutions in America



Benjamin F. Reaves
1985-

During his tenure, Dr. Reaves has turned around an enrollment decline and established a trend of enrollment increase up to institutional capacity. The Placement Office operation has expanded, and the “Second-Mile Service” program for customer service has been initiated. The academic excellence of the College has been enhanced through the credentials of the faculty reflected in awards and the national accreditation of the Social Work Program. The new women’s dormitory has a capacity of 348, and the renovation of the historical East Hall represents a step in the master plan of restoration of the campus.

MISSION STATEMENT

Oakwood College, a historically black liberal arts Seventh-day Adventist institution founded in 1896, has as its fundamental purpose quality Christian education . Its mission embodies access to educational opportunity, academic excellence, and spiritual development for persons reflecting demographic, economic, cultural, and educational diversity. Therefore, programs and activities are Christ-centered, designed to integrate faith and learning, encourage a vibrant spiritual experience, prepare individuals for the proclamation of the second coming of Christ, and provide an atmosphere for appreciation of oneself and affirmation of cultural diversity. With its emphasis on excellence in career preparation, the institution continues to be “Today’s College for Tomorrow’s Leaders.”