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Taylor University in the 1940's

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Taylor University in the 1940's

Taylor University in the 1940's was very exciting time, not just for the university, but also for America. World War II was coming to an end, the GI bill was passed, Taylor celebrated their centennial and was working towards national accreditation. During the 1940's, Taylor's location in Upland provided a haven for students to study during World War II. It remained that haven for students post war. Soldiers came back from war looking to continue in their education. Even today, almost 75 years later, Taylor is still a haven for students from all over the world to study in the "Taylor Bubble".

The 1940's was a time of celebration and of reflection for Taylor University as they achieved full accreditation and marked the centennial of the university. To give a full scope of where the university was in the 1940's, it is important to look back to where Taylor came from. In 1846, Taylor University "was founded as two separate institutions, one for women and the other for men, and it was not until 1855 the two colleges were united under one administration and named Fort Wayne College" (Newspaper: Grant Taylor University Full Accreditation, 1947). The first site of the university was in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Under the administration of Rev. Thaddeus C. Reade, the school was moved from Fort Wayne to Upland, named for being high land on the Pennsylvania Railroad. In 1891, the institution changed its name to Taylor University after Bishop William Taylor, the only layman in the Methodist Church ever appointed bishop (Newspaper: Grant Taylor University Full Accreditation, 1947).

1944: The GI Bill

Along with the rest of the country, Taylor University was coping with ramifications of World War II. A few of those ramifications were that Taylor did not have a yearbook or

newspapers published in 1943 and 1944 because of the paper shortage. Taylor also had to cut back on intercollegiate athletics due to the low male enrollment during the war. Then on June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the G.I. Bill into a law.

The G.I. Bill gave servicemen benefits, which allowed them to continue in their collegiate education, with tuition reimbursement, as well as receiving a stipend for the cost of living while in school. This Bill had a large impact on enrollment at Taylor University in the years following. Prior to World War II, the enrollment at Taylor University was 269 students in 1941-1942. During the war, enrollment dropped to 164 students in 1943-1944 and 149 students in 1944-1945. Post World War II, thanks to the G.I. Bill, Taylor University enrollment almost doubled when it hit 522 students in 1947-1948 (Dr. Tom Jones, personal communication, October 10, 2020).

The Gem-Echo Newspaper even wrote about the G. I. Bill with clarifications to Taylor students, stating that “G. I. readjustment allowances are not intended as summer vacation pay”. The article continued saying that “this means that in between school terms and during vacation periods veterans should make sure that their federal government school subsistence allowance payments have been discontinued before claiming readjustment allowances” (The Gem-Echo: May 7, 1947). These clarifications were necessary because the primary source students heard about news was from the school paper, the Gem-Echo. This was also very applicable since many students were about to attend Taylor because of this bill.

The G. I. Bill had a lasting effect not only on Taylor University, but on higher education as a whole. This bill made college accessible to more people, soldiers coming back from war were looking to further their education for the future. This caused a significant increase in enrollment at Taylor, along with every other college and university in America. The G. I. Bill is

a now a forever bill that has been adapted many times over the last 75 years. Today, there are still students at Taylor University that benefit from the G. I. Bill, whether it is from their own service or from a family member's service in the military.

1945: World War II ends September 2, 1945

All of America celebrated as World War II ended on September 2, 1945, and Taylor University was no exception. As Taylor transitioned back to its new normal, it did their best to provide outlets for students, which meant increasing athletics back to prewar numbers and adjusting PE courses. One PE coach named William Crawford during the war refused to use PE time to prepare soldiers. He wanted to offer students enjoyment and not preparation for a war (Dr. Tom Jones, personal communication, October 10, 2020). Now that the war was over, that was no longer an issue for Crawford.

During the war, the number of students each year “hovered around two-hundred mark; but with the entrance of nearly two hundred freshmen, the school is literally going to be ‘full and running over’” (The Gem-Echo: September 14, 1946). This was exciting news for Taylor students and faculty as they prepared for all the new students, many of whom were former soldiers. The Gem-Echo wrote of how thrilled the Taylor community was about the new students:

We especially extend a hand of welcome to approximately one-hundred ex-G.I.'s who are taking advantage of the opportunity given them by the government. Some of these fellows are old students who have returned to their Alma Mater to complete the education they started before Uncle Sam summoned their services. (The Gem-Echo: September 14, 1946)

These students were welcomed in as new residence halls and buildings that were constructed to support the influx of students. The construction was announced the following year as a part of the celebration of the centennial and accreditation of the university.

The increase in enrollment had a large impact on Taylor University, as much of the funding for private colleges comes from student enrollment. Faculty, professors and administrators needed to come back to work in full swing to accommodate the growing number of students that returned after the war.

1946: Taylor University Celebrates Centennial

Taylor University was founded in 1846 and celebrated its Centennial in 1946. Coming off the enthusiasm of the end of the war, Taylor students and faculty were ready to celebrate 100 years of the university's existence. After 100 years as an effective Christian college the next chapter would be just as exciting. That next phase included a new college president. In October of 1946, the Gem-Echo wrote about the inauguration of President Dr. Clyde W. Meredith, better known to the Taylor community as "Prexy". President Meredith would be the 8th president of Taylor University, and Bishop Cushman was the guest speaker for the inauguration. As the centennial celebration continued, Bishop Cushman wrote that, "All in all, the inauguration promises to be a 'high tide' in the second century of Taylor's history" (The Gem-Echo: October 30, 1946).

In other exciting news at the time, new construction and buildings were needed because of the peak in enrollment, not just with students but because the "staff personnel now are back to the pre-war level when the student body numbered a few over 300" (Board of Directors, 1946). The Gem-Echo shared about the remodel on the college store and welcomed seven new

professors. These changes to Taylor were important as enrollment grew, “the residence halls are being filled to capacity, and every bit of spare space is being utilized as we start this new year of ’46 and ’47” (The Gem-Echo: September 14, 1946).

President Clyde W. Meredith along with fifteen members of the Board of Directors from across Indiana came together to commemorate the occasion. During the celebration, Taylor broke ground for the new library building. The announcement of the construction of the Ayres Alumni Library was important to capture the imagination of Taylor’s Constituency and was the most urgent material needed for Taylor University’s Centennial Program (Centennial Program, 1946). Later on, during the program, President Meredith spoke of Taylor’s standards and how they have never wavered after all these years:

Taylor University stands very definitely for the finest and best of academic standards, and with this teaches a blessed, personal relationship with Jesus Christ in the hearts of her young people. The administration and the faculty of the University feel that there is no conflict between science and religion; science bears out the truth of the Word of God. (Centennial Program, 1946)

These standards of excellence have remained the pillars for Taylor even still today. The integration of faith and learning remains an important distinction for the university.

Despite all the changes at the time, Taylor wanted to ensure students, alumni, and faculty that Taylor was remaining true to its core values and beliefs. As the founders of Taylor University were Methodists many of the alumni, faculty and students wanted to guarantee faith stayed at the center of Taylor’s focus. The board emphasized that “what we believe to be our God-given task in making education effectively Christian” (Academic Objectives and the Spiritual Traditions of Taylor University, 1940’s). Despite the war and the hundred years since

Taylor University was founded, faith was still the foundation and their students “must be brought to an appreciation of the fact that our concept of a Christ centered curriculum is assured in an actual implementation for the realization of a truly Christian education. To us religion is not compartmentalized.” (Academic Objectives and the Spiritual Traditions of Taylor University, 1940’s).

Many colleges and universities after the war began to secularize. The soldiers were coming back from war and were attending school for the sole purpose of getting an education to better their future. Taylor University felt it was of the upmost importance to remain true to their original foundation in the church. That emphasis on faith and Christian foundation remains an important part of Taylor pillars and community. This is still a major factor at Taylor today, almost 75 years later, as Taylor University is still focused on faith and has a firm implementation of the integration of faith and learning.

1947: National Accreditation of Taylor University

The last few years had been thrilling enough at Taylor, but nothing could top the enthusiasm felt when Taylor University finally became nationally accredited. Dr. Milo Rediger was the dean of the university at the time, being a graduate of Taylor University in 1939, and holding a Master of Arts and a Doctor of philosophy degrees from New York University (Newspaper: Grant Taylor University Full Accreditation, 1947). Dean Rediger and President Meredith presented their case to “the school after the association evaluated the school’s curriculum, condition of the school grounds, educational background of the faculty and the business administration” (Newspaper: Grant Taylor University Full Accreditation, 1947). The Gem-Echo posted an article on April 2, 1947 titled “Taylor granted full accreditation by North

Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools!” The examiners who reviewed their findings to “the Board of Review of the North Central Association of Colleges on the occasion of our accreditation paid high respect to the correlations of our academic objectives and our religious emphases when they said: ‘it thus has a constituency in nearly every denomination, but no legal relation to any denomination’” (Board of Trustees, 1950). The article explained what occurred in the accreditation process as “President Meredith and Dean Rediger appeared before the board, and having successfully presented the school’s cause, received the favorable report at precisely 3:46 pm, Wednesday March 26, 1947. The bell on the Administration Building was ringing the victory at 4 o’clock” (The Gem-Echo: April 2, 1947).

Taylor University was given accreditation by the North Conference association of Colleges during the annual meeting of the group in Chicago (Newspaper: Grant Taylor University Full Accreditation, 1947). The homecoming of President Meredith and Dean Rediger from Chicago with the news of accreditation sent all the students, faculty, and community into a buzz. There was a reception waiting for Rediger and Meredith at the Upland train station compete with a parade (The Gem-Echo: April 2, 1947). Everyone was eager to watch the train come from Chicago with news of the accreditation. The parade that welcomed Rediger and Meredith was an incredible spectacle that drew a large crowd.

Mr. Marion E. Witmer was a large factor in North Central accrediting Taylor University. Witmer was a businessman who “cooperated in making possible a balanced financial budget and has increased the stability of the financial foundation of the institution” (The Gem-Echo: April 2, 1947). All the details of accreditation were written out and edited by Don Klopfenstein in the Gem-Echo newspaper on April 2, 1947. The newspaper laid out the history of Taylor University leading up this moment. “Accreditation—Taylor University is a college of Liberal Arts,

accredited by the Board of Education of the State of Indiana. Its credits are accepted at full value in leading universities of the United States.” (Centennial Program, 1946). This much anticipated event was crucial for the long-term success of Taylor University. The accreditation gave Taylor a positive reputation that would help with enrollment and funding even still today.

During the celebration at the baccalaureate program, Dr. Milo Rediger presented the plans that “call for the construction of a new \$135,000 library, which will be located just west of music hall. Majority of funds for the building will be derived from donations from alumni and last year an additional \$5,000 was contributed by students at the institution” (Newspaper: Grant Taylor University Full Accreditation, 1947). A few years later, President Clyde Meredith wrote a letter on August 2, 1949 to Dr. J. C. Miller from Christian College Columbia, Missouri about Taylor University’s centennial. Meredith shared about the week’s events that would be happening on campus, as well as the prospective build of Ayres Alumni Library (Meredith, 1949). Many colleges and universities at the time were going through this period of growth and adding new buildings to accommodate an enrollment boom post-war. These buildings represented a new chapter at Taylor University and all the events that were to come. The upcoming 175-year anniversary of Taylor brings continued excitement and anticipation to see what the next century will bring.

Conclusion

The 1940’s were a pivotal time in Taylor University history. In 1944, the G. I. Bill was passed that covered the cost of soldiers to get their education. Then in 1945, World War II ended bringing the influx of students to the university. In 1946, in celebration of the centennial and the war ending, new buildings were proposed and the projects broke ground.

Then in 1947, after much effort Taylor University received full national accreditation. All these events have had a lasting impact on Taylor University. The university's accreditation has allowed thousands of students to graduate with a bachelor's degree and go on to bigger and better things.

The Board of Directors sent a letter to the faculty committee on January 20, 1950 to discuss the student body. After all the Taylor University community had gone through in the 1940's, the Board of Directors wanted to encourage everyone that Taylor's beliefs and core values remain the same. "Taylor's student body is not drawn from any specific area or denominational group. Since the school is interdenominational in character because of its unique religious emphasis, students come from every state of the union and many foreign countries" (Board of Trustee's, 1950). The Academic objectives and the spiritual traditions of Taylor University remained intact.

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