

Taylor University

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### Taylor University - The Legacy

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*Taylor University*

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Taylor University – The Legacy

Carey Collins

Taylor University

Imagine traditions like Silent night, Taylathon, Air Band, Lighthouse trips, Melon and the Gourde, Grace Olsen Pageant or Community plunge gone. Except for a few opportune happenings and dedicated people, Taylor University, the school that educates, nurtures and sends ambassadors for Christ into the world, would not exist. The compelling story of Taylor starts with a fascinating tale of one college from Fort Wayne, IN and God's provision throughout.

The miraculous story of Taylor University starts in the mid-19th century. This period in the United States saw higher education in the United States primarily serving the sons of wealthy white families. Taylor's beginning came during this time period in American history, but it didn't start with boys from wealthy white families. The story starts with women, even though at the time women didn't normally go to college and the prevailing attitude about women attending college was negative. For example, Henry P. Tappan, President of the University of Michigan, proclaimed letting women into school would "disturb God's order" and result in "defeminated women and demasculated men". (as cited in Ringenberg, 1996, p.5) Another clergyman asked, "Must we crowd education upon our daughters, and for the sake of having them 'intellectual' make them puny, nervous, and their whole earthly existence a struggle between life and death?" (as cited in Ringenberg, 1996, p.5)

Even with anti-female attitudes about women attending college prevalent in the public, the Methodists, who typically chartered colleges slower than many denominations, started Fort Wayne Female College (FWFC). The prevailing attitude with Methodists about education, especially higher education, created a barrier for the founding of colleges. Since mission work dominated the Methodist denomination and the general feeling was that missionaries didn't need to be educated, colleges remained on the back burner. Generally, the attitude was ministers didn't need formal education to preach, they needed the Spirit of God (Ringenberg, 1996, p.2-3).

After the Second Great Awakening (approximate 1795-1835) attitude towards higher education slowly changed. The Methodist church started to accept that education for preachers might help and not hinder their preaching ministry (Ringenberg, 1996, p.2-3). Even amid little care for education in the Methodist denomination and negative attitudes prevailing in the public about women going to school, FWFC started.

Young men went to fight the Mexican-American War in 1846 leaving women behind, creating a desire in women to want an education (Ayers, unpublished, p.5). The North Indiana Methodists (NIM) planned to open a women's college during the year of 1846 and sought bids from northern Indiana communities which resulted in a bid for \$13,000 and 3 acres of land from Fort Wayne officials (Ringenberg, 1996). NIM accepted the offer and at the third session of the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held at Lafayette, Ind., the Fort Wayne Female College was organized on September 28th, 1846 (Higher Education in America - Bureau of Education, 1891). The Indiana State Legislature approved the Articles of Incorporation on January 18th, 1847 which allowed the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church to move forward formally (Ringenberg, 1996, p.15). On June 19th, 1847, Fort Wayne Female College formally went under charter (Higher Education in America – Bureau of Education, 1891). The North Indiana Conference gave the following statement about its decision:

North Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church have determined upon establishing an extensive college institute for females...forever to be conducted on the most liberal principles, accessible to all religious denominations and designed for the benefit of our citizens in general (Fort Wayne Female College Local Laws, 1891).

The legacy of Taylor University began in Fort Wayne, but Fort Wayne Female College did not resemble Taylor of today. The Midwest in the 1840s had very few high schools since most primary schools stopped at eighth grade, consequently, many colleges housed preparatory schools, or academies, to cover the gaps in academic learning from the eighth grade to college (Ayers, unpublished, p. 5). FWFC did have help with bridging the curriculum gap from two private schools in Fort Wayne acting as pre-college institutions: Fort Wayne Female Seminary (founded in 1844) and St. Augustine's Academy (founded in 1846) (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 18). The first building used by FWFC, was a four-story, brick building measuring 160 feet by 80 feet (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 16).

The first president of Fort Wayne Female College was Alexander C. Huestis who served from 1847-48 (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 22). No president lasted longer than two years during the eight years Fort Wayne Female College existed (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 22). In the first year, 100 young women attended and paid a yearly tuition of \$22.50 for college level learning (News Article – Move from Fort Wayne). The young ladies attending Fort Wayne Female College were required to follow many rules meant to keep them safe and from creating trouble. Rules for the young ladies to follow from the 1853-54 school year:

1. The young ladies boarding in the institution will rise at the ringing of the bell in the morning, adjust their rooms, and be engaged in study until breakfast. And it shall be the duty of the Matron to see that this rule is complied with.
2. Collecting in any of the halls, boisterous talking and laughing, or the making of any unnecessary noise, in or out of study hours, will be considered a misdemeanor.

3. The young ladies will at no time be permitted to visit the Post Office, nor will anyone be permitted to go to town oftener than once a week, and then only in the company with some member of the faculty, or someone appointed by some member of the faculty.
4. The young ladies will not be permitted to make calls, except by permission of some member of the faculty. Or go attend any ball or party or engage in any amusement forbidden by the faculty. (Fort Wayne Female College Catalogue, 1853)

Fort Wayne Female College functioned for three years as a single sex entity, but it wouldn't stay single forever.

As the Mexican-American War concluded and young men came home, they desired an education and the plans for a school for men started to form. Discussions began in March, 1849 and the board approved allowing men in September, 1850 (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 26-27). In the 1850-51 school year, the Collegiate Institute for Men joined the Fort Wayne Female College for the first time and functioned as a branch of FWFC (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 26-27). Classes met in the same building, but genders remained separated (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 26-27). In 1853, the Collegiate Institute separated from the women and became the Fort Wayne Collegiate Institute for Men giving it separate status from the Fort Wayne Female College (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 26-27). The Collegiate Institute still rented rooms from FWFC and the two schools published a catalogue together for the 1854-55 school year (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 26-27). The “living arrangement” with two schools under one roof worked for a time, but as Ayers (unpublished) explains:

Neither institution was legally, as an entity, coeducational; but if those founders were good interpreters of human nature, they would surely see that they would soon be “co” even if they did have all-girl classes and all-boy classes. As boards they soon began a

very sensible courtship, and thought, as most couples do, that there would be a great economy in living expenses if there were really a marriage. (p.3)

Therefore, on Oct 10, 1855 “Fort Wayne Female College” and “Fort Wayne Collegiate Institute for Young Men” consolidated to become “Fort Wayne College”, an early coeducational school with both genders in the same classes (Memorial Founding of Fort Wayne Female College, n.d.). With the “marriage” of the two colleges, Fort Wayne Female College agreed to assume the Collegiate Institute’s debt (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 26-27).

Fort Wayne College had seven presidents during its thirty-five years in existence. Two of those presidents, Reuben D. Robinson and William F. Yocum account for twenty-six years of service (Ringenberg, 1996. p.26-27). R.D. Robinson, a medical doctor turned prominent clergyman, fought debt issues to keep the college open during his tenure as president and in many ways is the main reason the college did stay open (Ayers, unpublished). He took over a debt of \$8,000 in 1855 and reduced the debt to \$2,000 by 1858 (A History of Taylor University from Journalism class, 1927-28). During Robinson’s presidency, for some unknown reason, the Indiana Conference tried to return Fort Wayne College back to a first-class female college in 1863, but to no avail (A history of Taylor University from journalism class, 1927-28.).

The beginning of the “marriage” proceeded well. Boys attended Fort Wayne College to attend school with girls and girls willingly attended Fort Wayne College to attend with boys (Ayers, unpublished, p. 6). Students created literary societies on campus which were typical of colleges at the time. The women started the El Dorado Society and the men founded the Thalonian Society (News Article – Move from Fort Wayne. n.d.). Girls began attending meetings of the Thalonian Society in 1870 and eventually the El Dorado ceased operating separate from the Thalonian Society in 1878 (News Article – Move from Fort Wayne. n.d.).

Debt was always an issue and enrollment remained small but consistent during most of the years from 1855 - 1890. However, in the late 1870s to the early 1880s enrollment dropped. Course offerings accounted for much of the enrollment decline. Freshman level courses were the highest level classes offered and students then transferred to Asbury College to finish college courses (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 39). To combat slipping enrollment, Fort Wayne College offered non-traditional courses such as vocational training, teacher (“normal”) training, business and music courses, attempting to attract students (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 41).

President Yocum took office amidst declining enrollment in 1877 (A History of Taylor From Journalism class, 1927-28). As president, Yocum improved enrollment and established Fort Wayne College as a good school to attend. His success came, in part, by his advertising campaign. In an advertisement, Fort Wayne College listed five reasons for attending the school: 1) Reasonable cost (\$2.60-\$3.00 per week), 2) Exceptional teaching at FWC, 3) Recitation in every class every day, 4) The city life of Fort Wayne as important for cultural growth, and 5) Scheduling flexibility allowing students to take courses when it was convenient for them and also allowing students to graduate sooner (The Fort Wayne College Index, 1885).

Advertising worked so well that enrollment increased enough and plans for an addition to the original building began. The plans were approved in May, 1884 and construction began almost immediately (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 58). Unfortunately, the addition turned into a poor long-term plan. Debt, in 1884, was \$600. After the addition and additional expenses, debt reached \$20,000 in 1890 (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 58). The end of Fort Wayne College loomed in the near future.

This huge debt crushed the small college. Enrollment didn’t grow enough to help reduce the debt and local Methodist preachers attempted to raise money to reduce debt with little

success since the people were paying for new houses, new schools and new churches already (Ayers, unpublished, p. 8). Appeals sent to the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church resulted in minimal help. At one point the North Indiana Conference prepared to depart with Fort Wayne College as reported by the symposium:

At the last session of the North Indiana Conference the report of the committee on education, which was adopted, directed the institution to close with the college year, the property be sold, and whatever remained after the payments of the debts to be invested wherever a conference institution might be located. (The Symposium, 1898).

Fort Wayne College stood at the precipice of extinction.

Fortunately, a local preacher and surgeon, Christian B Stemen, introduced the Local Preachers organization to Fort Wayne College. After lengthy negotiations between the college and the National Association of Local Preachers, NALP, a deal was reached at the end of 1889 (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 60-61). Unfortunately, the deal fell through (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 60-61). It wasn't until 1890 the school received a firm offer from the NALP and then the purchase could be finalized (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 60-61). As part of the deal the NALP required four items: Taylor University would be the new name of Fort Wayne College; The location of the school would remain in Fort Wayne: NALP would select one-third of the trustees, and the Fort Wayne District of the North Indiana Methodist Conference would choose a similar number, and finally the new corporation would assume ownership by paying the outstanding debt of Fort Wayne College. (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 61-62)

The NALP chose the name Taylor University for a purpose. The school name honored William Bishop Taylor, Bishop of Africa (Ayers, unpublished. p.4). The name of William Bishop Taylor garnered respect from all parts of the country in and outside the Methodist church.

Many people equated the name Taylor with the concept of a “full gospel for the whole world” (Ayers, unpublished. p.9). The term university conveyed a vision beyond on ordinary college. Together Taylor University commanded respect from its namesake and vision for a grand future.

Appropriately, Christian B Stemen became the first president of Taylor University for the 1890-91 school year. Curricular changes came with the purchase as Taylor University added Hebrew and Arabic languages, Biblical studies, and History of education to Fort Wayne College’s curriculum (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 62). New departments, psychology and sacred music, appeared in the catalogue and Taylor also dropped business classes but maintained a relationship with the McDermott and Whiteleather Business College (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 62). Board and lodging for ladies staying in the building (men weren’t allowed to live in the building) cost \$2.70 per week, and, tuition for college levels courses equaled \$8 for ten weeks (Announcement of Fort Wayne College Name Change to Taylor University, 1890). Fort Wayne College of Medicine also became part of Taylor (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 63). An advertisement from 1890 describes the mood at the time:

The Taylor University begins its history under very favorable circumstances. With its inspiring name, its aggressive management, its able and experienced faculty, and its favorable location, it sends greetings to all young men and young women, who contemplate attending a good school and asks them to consider its advantages.

(Announcement of Fort Wayne College Name Change to Taylor University, 1890)

After the 1891 school year Thaddeus C. Reade became president. Reade had received a more lucrative offer to be president of another college, but he chose Taylor due “to the pervasive Christ-life of the institution” (Ayers, unpublished. p.9).

The arrival of President Reade brought change quickly. After his second year, Taylor moved south from Fort Wayne to a tiny town called Upland, where Taylor University is currently located. Many factors influenced the move. The board realized that the debt was too much for the college and the mortgage was too high to continue to pay for a building that needed repairs and was landlocked (Ayers, unpublished, p. 9-10). Land in Fort Wayne was expensive, President Reade liked country living, and Upland sat in the country near natural gas reserves (Ayers, unpublished, p. 9-10).

How President Reade decided on Upland as the new location for Taylor remains uncertain, Ashley Chu, archivist at Taylor University describes two stories that exist from a time he spoke at the Upland Methodist church as a guest speaker. Chu tells the stories in the movie, “Now Entering Upland”: one story that Reade was riding in a train and saw Upland and instantly knew he wanted to move to town, and the other story says the pastor of the Upland Methodist church, Rev. White, knew that Reade was looking for new location and he invited Reade to come and see Upland (WIPB TV, 2018). Regardless of the accuracy of either story, both stories agree that White and Reade negotiated the move with the Upland Land company. Taylor received an offer of \$10,000 and 10 acres of land to move to Upland (WIPB TV, 2018). So, Taylor University sold its property in Fort Wayne and moved to Upland for the 1893-94 school year (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 71). As a result of the sale of Fort Wayne property and the move to Upland, on January 1, 1898 Taylor University went completely debt free (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 74)

Through its existence, Taylor claims many notable people and events. The faith and determination of the first board to charter a female college in an era dominated by male colleges set the tone for university as a school willing to stand against the culture when necessary. Many

people gave time and money to keep Fort Wayne College functioning over the years and the faith and foresight of President Reade and the board to move Taylor and subsequently alleviate Taylor's debt show God's hand moving in Taylor University's history. Taylor's many wonderful attributes today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century come from the faith and dedication in the past. Burt W. Ayers described the exceptional culture of Taylor when he first taught in the late 1800s, when he said, "Taylor life was simple, sacrificial, friendly, happy, and wonderfully Christlike" (Ayers, unpublished. p.12). In many ways it still is today. Taylor legacy lives on in the lives of the students, staff and faculty.

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