

# *The Pearl River College Story*

a brief history of  
Pearl River County Agricultural High School  
Pearl River Junior College  
and  
Pearl River Community College

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# *Table of Contents*

<b>Laying the Cornerstone</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Where It All Began</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The College's Beginnings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Transition Years</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Military Years</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>After the War</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Building Years</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Hurricane Camille</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The New Transition</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The New Millenium</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Hurricane Katrina</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Superintendents and Presidents</b>	<b>21</b>

## *Laying the Cornerstone*

The glaring morning sun promised a blistering day, typical for July in south Mississippi. People stood around Poplarville's main street anticipating the day's events. Not only were the citizens of the town there, but people had come in on the train, by wagon, on horseback, and by foot for the occasion, by estimate, more than 3,000.

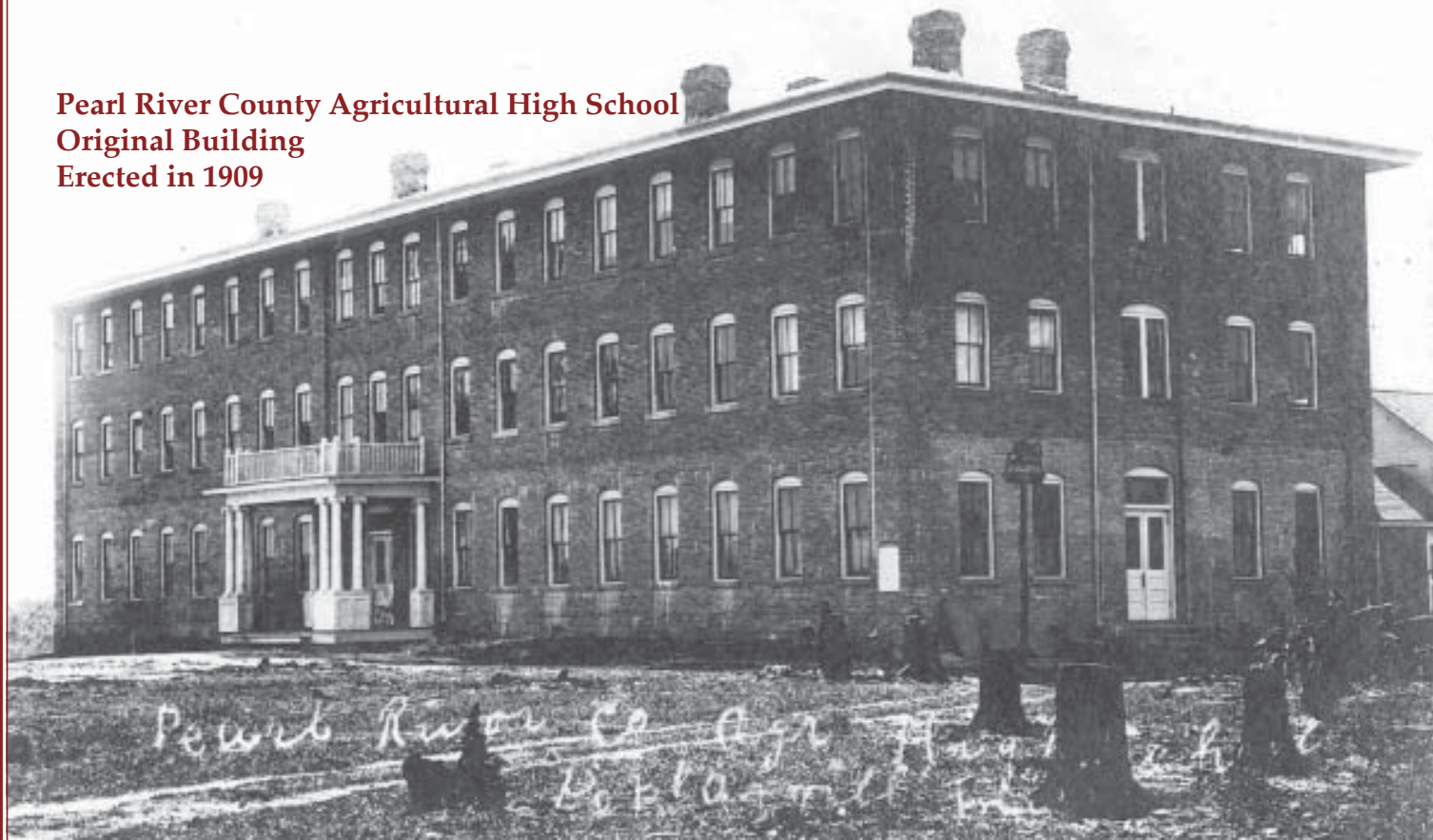
Band members milled around, adjusting and tuning their instruments, the glint from the polished brass instruments occasionally blinding one of the anxious crowd. In a few minutes, expectation heightened as the parade marshal motioned for the band to form up.

The band took its place in the middle of the street; the conductor raised his baton. A drum roll followed by four blasts on the drum major's whistle set the day in motion. The procession—the band leading the excited populace—headed down Main, turned to the left, and marched out to the piece of property donated by the city of Poplarville less than a year earlier.

Arriving at the cut-over site, the home of the newly formed Pearl River County Agricultural High School, the crowd, made up of the townspeople and probably as many visitors, made its way toward the platforms constructed for the occasion. The dignitary for the celebration, the honorable J. C. Hardy, president of the Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Mississippi State University) at Starkville, congratulated the citizens on their foresight for being among the first to take advantage of a new law creating county agricultural high schools in Mississippi.

The cornerstone laying ceremony was followed by another march, this time to the Poplarville School campus, where the crowd was served more speeches followed by lunch. The lunch, according to an article in *The Free Press* a week earlier promised "500 Loaves Bread, 2,400 Pickles, 4 Beeves, 15 Muttons, 27 Canvas Hams, 75 Large Pound Cakes, 2 Cases Fancy Cakes, 10 Gallons Vinegar, 100 Pounds Salt, 2,000 Wooden Plates, 500 Tin Cups, 40 Barrels Lemonade, 1,000,000 Gallons Ice Water from artesian well." Still more speeches followed lunch, and a baseball game between the local Poplarville team and the Fords of New Orleans capped the day as Poplarville's team won the game five to one.

**Pearl River County Agricultural High School  
Original Building  
Erected in 1909**



## *Where it all began*

Only one day less than a year earlier, the plans for the new school were under discussion at the County Superintendent's office. On that meeting's agenda was the location of the new Agricultural High School. That evening of July 6, 1908, Theodore G. Bilbo (later to become two-times governor and three-times U.S. Senator) and E. B. Ferris (head of the Experiment Station in McNeill) were elected trustees of the proposed high school. A motion was made to accept the proposal made by Poplarville citizens. Poplarville was willing to donate \$2,245 and ninety acres of land to the school's fund, providing the school was located in Poplarville.

On July 30, 1908 the board met again, this time to ratify the committee's recommendation that the board accept Poplarville's offer. This recommendation was opposed by M. G. Blackwell, who was a member of the board, and M. D. Tate who represented the small community of McNeill. Both men recommended that the matter be reconsidered, hopefully giving other communities in the county the opportunity to make similar proposals. The board decided in favor of the Poplarville proposal, and Leopold Locke, the chairman of the board, received a certificate certifying that the funds donated would be used to locate the school at Poplarville.

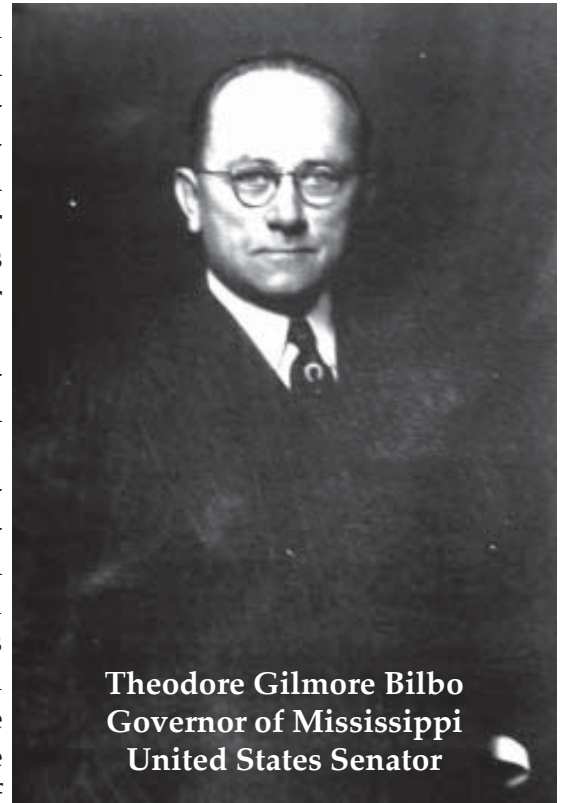
The agricultural high school law, passed in 1908 and brought back from Jackson by Bilbo who was serving his first term as a Mississippi senator, was found to be fatally flawed. No provision had been made for the African-American population; therefore, the law was declared unconstitutional. Some influential men of Pearl River County, however, wanted to continue with their plans until such time as a new agricultural high school law was passed. Several citizens borrowed money to fund the school for the interim.

On Wednesday, September 8, 1909, a year and a month after the board meeting, the school opened its doors to 42 high school students.

The first building (photo on previous page) was a three-story structure. This building housed the Pearl River County Agricultural High School, complete with living space for the original boarding pupils. The ground floor was used for class rooms, and the second and third floors were used for dormitory space. As ninth President Ted Alexander often humorously said, PRCC had the first co-ed dorm in the state, since the girls were located on the second floor and the boys were located on the third floor of the original building. This building was the size of present day Huff Hall, and served as the entire school the first three years, then as a boys dormitory until it burned in 1919.

Pearl River County Agricultural High School began classes with an initial enrollment of 42 (19 were boarding students). T. M. Kelly, principal and mathematics/history instructor, assisted by J. B. Anthony, Clara Stokes, Genevive Jacobs, and Callie Newton, began the long and established history of an institution that would become Pearl River Community College. Within three days, the enrollment increased by an additional 19 students, and by Christmas, 83 students had enrolled. In March of 1910, the new agricultural high school bill became law and this opened the doors for adding to the school.

After the first school year, in the summer of 1910, Theodore Bilbo and the trustees approved a contract to build a three-story brick school building. This contract was voided and it was not until 1911 that a new contract was let for the new administration, classroom and auditorium building. This building became Jacobs Hall and served the institution for the next fifty-eight years.



**Theodore Gilmore Bilbo  
Governor of Mississippi  
United States Senator**



Will Jacobs (after whom Jacobs Hall was named) replaced T. M. Kelly as principal in 1911. His administration saw the construction of two new buildings, a classroom/administration building (Jacobs Hall) and a girls' dormitory (Batson Hall).

Jacobs was known as a respected educator when he came to PRC AHS. It was under his direction that Pearl River County applied for and won a national grant funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Even though nine other counties had made bid on the "Model County School" program, Pearl River was selected over them by a panel of the state's most respected educators. The Model County School program provided for a county agent, home economist, a county school's doctor and nurse, an assistant County Superintendent of Education and office staff. This program also ran a yearly summer educational program that saw immediate success with a total enrollment of more than 1,000. Even though the Model County School program began in 1916, Jacobs only served a year. Jacobs was friends with newly-elected Governor Theo Bilbo, so when Bilbo, who was an education-minded leader, saw an opportunity to put a qualified man in charge of the newly constructed Columbia Institute of Industrial Training, he chose Jacobs. Jacobs submitted his resignation in 1917 and moved his growing family to the Marion County town. His vacated superintendent position was filled by Perkinston's Agricultural High School principal, James Andrew Huff (after whom Huff Hall is named).

The girls' dormitory was begun in 1912. This impressive three-story building stood for fifty-seven years as a girls' dormitory. It was named Batson Hall in the 1940s. In 1969, Hurricane Camille's high winds irreparably damaged Batson Hall, and it was demolished. The Office of Information Technology building stands where Jacobs Hall stood, and Marion Hall stands on the site of Batson Hall.

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**Batson Hall** (right) served as a girls' dormitory from 1912 until 1969 when it was destroyed by Hurricane Camille. This stately old building housed the Home Science classes in one-story west wing.



**First Class Photo** (1909) This picture of Pearl River County Agricultural High School's first class was taken on the front portico of the original building. This building first served as a multi-purpose facility from 1909 until 1911, containing classrooms on the first floor, girls' quarters on the second floor and boys' quarters on the third floor. This building burned in 1919.



**Jacobs Hall** (above) served as the high school building from 1911 until 1968 when it was demolished to make way for a new administration building. The bell that now hangs in the chapel bell tower and was used to call students to class hung in the south (left) bell tower in Jacobs. Jacobs continued to be used for high school classes until the high school department was moved to Poplarville High School in 1960.



Huff Hall began its long tenure as a boys' dormitory in 1919, shortly after the original building burned on April 27, 1919.

This article appeared in Poplarville's second newspaper, "The Free Press", on Thursday, May 1, 1919:

**Boys Dormitory at A.H.S. Burned  
Building Completely Destroyed, and Contents Practically So.  
School Continues Uninterrupted**

*Last Saturday about two o'clock the Boys Dormitory at the Pearl River County Agricultural High School was completely destroyed by fire which originated from an overheated stove in the bath room.*

*The fire had made considerable headway before it was discovered and this, coupled with a high wind and poor water pressure, destroyed the building.*

*The school folks and large numbers of town people who answered the alarm took the task of getting the property of the boys out of the burning building, and they were successful for practically all their possessions were saved, though much of the furnishings were destroyed.*

*That the school work might not be interfered with this near the close of the session, the faculty and the boys converted the Fair Building into a dormitory and have it comfortably arranged. Electric lights and shower baths have been installed, the rooms floored and everything made homelike and comfortable.*

*The building was fairly well insured and this, with the \$5000 recently provided for repairs, will replace it.*

*We understand that the matter of a plan and the letting of a contract will be undertaken immediately so that, if possible, the new dormitory may be ready for the opening of the next session of the school.*

The contract for a new boys' dormitory was let to Wetmore & Priester, Contractors out of Meridian, Mississippi, and Huff Hall was built on the site of the destroyed building. Recent renovation work on Huff Hall uncovered the original building's foundation. Huff was built approximately five feet to the east and twenty five feet to the south of the original building. Pictures of Huff Hall just after it was built can be found in the J.A. Huff Collection. Huff Hall is described in the 1923 catalog as "one of the most beautiful as well as serviceable buildings of its kind in the state." The account goes on to say that the first floor contained several bedrooms, guest rooms, a large reception room and dressing room, and the second and third floors contained 36 bedrooms and bathrooms.



This photo of the school taken about 1920 shows the three stately buildings as they appeared to the citizens of the area. For this and other reasons, the AHS was called the "college" by local residents. Batson is located on the left, while Jacobs is in the center and Huff Hall is on the right. The original photo is a part of Pearl River Community College Museum archives and a large copy of the photo is located in the museum's lobby.

## *The College's Beginnings*

Almost a year before supporting legislative acts were passed, Pearl River County Agricultural High School began offering freshman college courses. On September 28, 1920, the board of trustees authorized the addition of these courses beginning with the 1921-22 school year, making Pearl River College the first publicly-funded two-year college in the state.

The 1923-24 catalog states:

*This school has complied with all the laws of the State of Mississippi, the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education governing Junior College work; and by the opening of next session will have met the requirements of the Association of Mississippi Colleges.*

*Six students who did their Freshman college work with us during the session of 1921-22, entered our Mississippi Colleges last session, were allowed full credit for all college work done in our Freshman College year, and without single exception maintained themselves creditably, only one falling below a general average of 84 per cent for the entire session; and we challenge the records of the colleges in and out of Mississippi to show a single instance where students holding our entrance certificates have failed to maintain themselves on account of preparation.*

According to The World Almanac and Book of Facts, Pearl River Community College is the oldest publically-funded two-year institution of higher learning in the state and the 16th oldest in the nation, making PRCC an innovator in education.

By January 1922, the state Department of Education met with Superintendent Huff; Board President C.E. Bass; and Board member and Governor Theo Bilbo (in between his two terms as Governor), in reference to the Junior College Bill:

*On motion J. A. Huff, C. E. Bass, and Theo G. Bilbo were appointed as a committee to confir with the State Department of Education relative to the Junior College Bill. (PRCAHS Board of Trustees Minutes, April 9, 1910 to December 4, 1923.)*

Obviously, having already been teaching freshman college curriculum for the first semester, PRCAHS would have interesting comments about their experiences. The Board of Trustees were evidently committed to offering a Junior College to the community, because on August 1, 1922, they decided to add Sophomore courses:

*On motion the Board authorized the putting on of Sophomore College work for session of 1922-23 and meet such requirements as the Law demands for such work. (PRCAHS Board of Trustees Minutes, April 9, 1910 to December 4, 1923.)*

Of course, due to circumstance not known at this time, the school did not add college level sophomore courses until the 1925-26 session. At that time, the 10th grade of high school students were transferred back to the county schools, making PRCAHS a two-year institution while adding two years of college work to the Junior College division.

Legislation passed in 1922 (Senate bill No. 251) stated that any county agricultural high school located not less than twenty miles from a state college could add freshman and sophomore years of college work to their curricular offerings. Pearl River led the way for all the other agricultural high schools by offering college freshman courses in 1921. It is unsubstantiated, but the liklihood is very high that Pearl River was very instrumental in the formation of the first state-funded junior college system in the nation.



In 1921, a contract was awarded to the C. O. Eurie Company for a brick combination dining room and dormitory. This building served as the dining hall from its completion until January, 1994 when the new cafeteria was completed. This building was later named Crosby Hall after local philanthropist and timber man, L.O. Crosby, and stands today as the second oldest building on the campus.

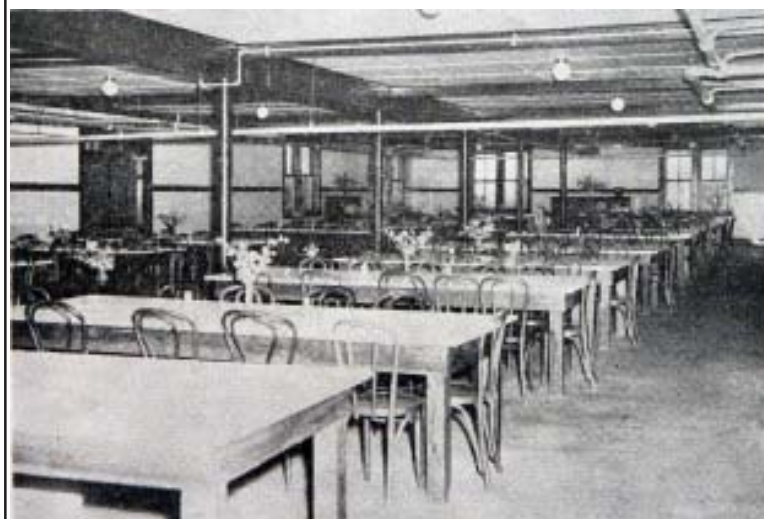
The dining hall had a seating capacity of 300. Most food served in the Dining Hall was grown or raised on the high school farm, with most of the work done by students. With little modification, the dining facility served from 1923 until 1995 when the new cafeteria annex was added at the rear of Crosby Hall.

The building's second floor served as a dormitory, filling in when enrollment exceeded existing dormitory space. It was sometimes used as a girls' dormitory, and sometimes as a boys' dormitory.

By the end of the 1923 school year, Pearl River County Agricultural High School had grown from its modest beginnings to include five buildings: the school administration/classrooms building, two dormitories, a combination dormitory/dining hall, and the superintendent's home. The school offered high school classes and a freshman year college curriculum with an enrollment of 250 students.



Crosby Hall (above), built in 1921, served as a dining hall/dormitory until 1995 when the new cafeteria addition was located off the west of the building. The photo below shows the dining hall as it appeared shortly after the hall was built.



**Early Football Teams** at Pearl River were generally regarded with great respect by their opponents. On two occasions, in 1914 and again in 1921, the "Aggies," as they were known then, would not only go undefeated in regular season play, but they were also unscored against. The 1921 team was truly one for the record books. Under the leadership of the school's superintendent, J. A. Huff, the Aggies faced such opponents as USM (winning 41-0), Jones (winning the first match 34-0 and the second match 91-0), and others. This set the hallmark for future Pearl River College Wildcat football teams. This Hallmark is one the Wildcats have met again and again. For the past 80 years of MACJC play, the Pearl River Wildcats have garnered almost one-quarter of all MACJC championships. With two national championships to their credit, the Wildcats are generally in the national spotlight.



## The Transition Years

The years from 1924 to 1960 marked a transition period for the agricultural high school and junior college. With the addition of college curriculum, the administration had to make decisions. The first order of business was classroom space for the new classes and the faculty to teach those classes.

It was not until 1922 that legislation was added to the state's laws establishing two-year college programs added to the agricultural high schools' curriculums. This law, Senate Bill No. 251, was introduced by Dr. Julius Christian Zeller Yazoo County Senator, and it authorized what Pearl River AHS had already initiated a year earlier. Although Pearl River added college freshman courses in 1921-22, it was not until 1925-26 that college sophomore classes were added, and Pearl River College became a two-year, publicly-funded institution.

Hinds followed Pearl River in 1922-23 offering freshman courses and in 1925-26 offering sophomore courses. In 1928 legislation was passed setting up a governing commission to control the new group of institutions that were being birthed by the county agricultural high schools and funding for these new institutions. The new Mississippi law created the first state-funded junior college system in the United States.



James Andrew Huff



College (Moody) Hall, 1926

The classroom problem was solved with the completion of the new College Hall (now Moody Hall), a building of over twenty-two thousand square feet, with administration offices, classrooms, and a large (1,000 seat capacity) gymnasium/auditorium. This building was officially opened on September 7, 1926. The building cost \$65,000. J.A. Huff led the school from August 1, 1917 until February 3, 1926 when the superintendent/president's position was assumed by S.L. Stringer. In May of Stringer's first year, the Junior College graduated twelve students.

The next building erected on campus, White Hall (see photo on next page), was built in 1928. This two-story brick structure was built for the college girls and has been continuously used for that purpose except for a brief period in 1935 when it was used by the city as a temporary hospital while the town's new hospital (current day Justice Court Building) was being built.

During the early years, Huff Hall housed high school boys while Crosby Hall housed college boys and White Hall housed college girls while Batson Hall continued to be the residence for high school girls. In 1933, Pearl River Hall was constructed as a college boys' dormitory. The two story structure originally housed eighty students with two apartments for faculty.

Prior to the depression of 1929, hard times had already come to Pearl River County brought on by the clear-cutting of the county's timberlands. Timber was a chief source of income for the county, and Pearl River College depended largely on the county tax revenues for its support.

Pearl River County had largely been virgin pine forrests when the settlers first came to the area. After the New Orleans and North Eastern railroad built a line through the county in 1884, timber barons from Michigan and other timber-rich northern states bought up all of the public lands. Sawmills sprang up along the rail line and spur lines dug deep into the county's back woods. With these sawmills came timbermen and laborers by the thousands. Sawmill towns grew along the rail lines and the revenue the timber companies produced filled the county's coffers. When this source of wealth ran dry, so did the county's tax funds, bringing on hard times for the county's schools.



Clockwise from top left: Photo of the class of 1917 standing in front of Jacobs Hall. Crosby Hall about 1949. 1949 photo of Pearl River Hall. Joseph Forrest (Rat) Stuart, Pearl River Junior College's third president. Simeon Lafayette Stringer, Pearl River Junior College's second president. Photo of the girls' reserves about 1922.



## The Military Years

S.L. Stringer served as superintendent and president for the first six years of the transition period. He was followed by Joseph Forrest Stuart in 1932. Forrest "Rat" Stuart, as his fellow students knew him, was the first A.H.S. graduate to become president. He came back to PRC AHS shortly after college in 1925, taking "Goat" Hale's position as football coach and history professor. Stuart served as the school's president for four years. He resigned May 4, 1936. Arthur Benjamin Nicholson followed Stuart, but only served sixteen months before resigning. Nicholson had been an employee of the college for several years prior to his presidency, and after resigning, he remained with the college serving as dean and registrar. He was followed by Professor Robert Edward Lee Southerland on July 8, 1937, and Southerland was followed by R.D. McLendon on July 1, 1942.

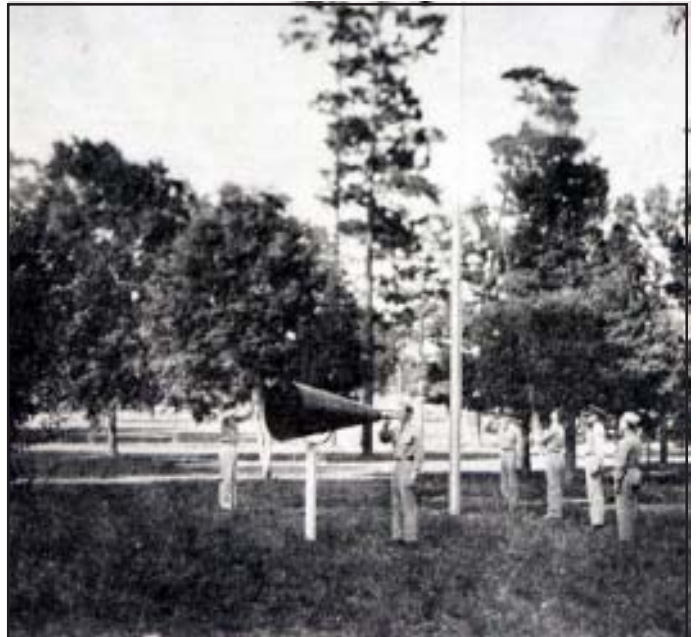
On July 1, 1935, Pearl River Junior College made application to the War Department for the establishment of a Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (R.O.T.C) Unit. This program had not been assigned to a junior college before and approval was difficult to obtain. However, approval was granted and on August 19, 1935 the first R.O.T.C unit was formed.

The new R.O.T.C. program began to place a new emphasis on the campus. By 1939, the program was growing and was comprised of two companies of cadets. When Pearl Harbor was attacked on Dec. 7, 1941 and America entered World War II, the military influence on campus skyrocketed.

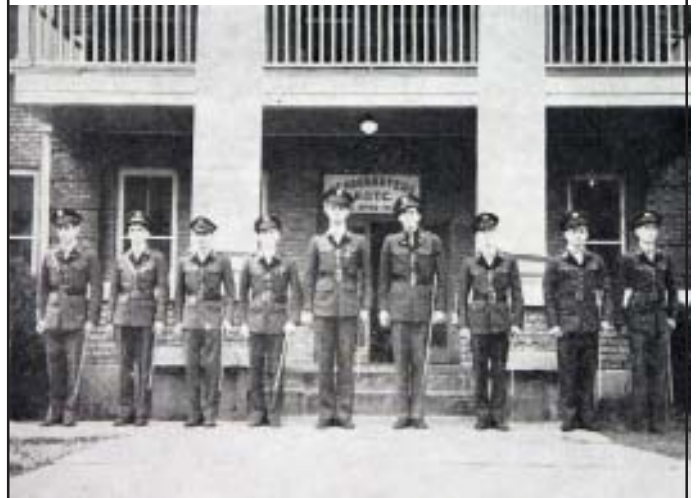
The entire look and "feel" of the campus took a drastic change. Every male student was required to be enrolled in the Military Department. Students wore their uniforms daily, and were rarely seen in civilian clothing. The female students, not to be left out, organized a unit of the Women's Auxiliary Corps and also wore military uniforms. They marched on the drill field (located on the present day site of the Science and Mathematics building).

According to former PRJC students who were here during these years, the cadets were responsible for cleaning their dorm rooms military style. They had to stand daily room and personal inspection. Their assigned rifles were inspected daily also, and if they passed inspection, they were allowed to go to the movies in town, but they would have to march in a unit to get there.

Pearl River Junior College produced many excellent soldiers during World War II, but the most decorated was a former PRJC basketball player. Shelby Speights of Baxterville was a graduate of Purvis High School. He enlisted, leaving PRJC too early to graduate with his classmates. The school had



Cadet blows reveille while the color guard raises the colors. This was a daily event on the PRJC campus during the military years.



Cadet officers stand inspection in front of the Huff Hall "barraks" during the military years. Marvin Ross White, who would later become PRJC president, was a cadet prior to enlisting in the United States Army.



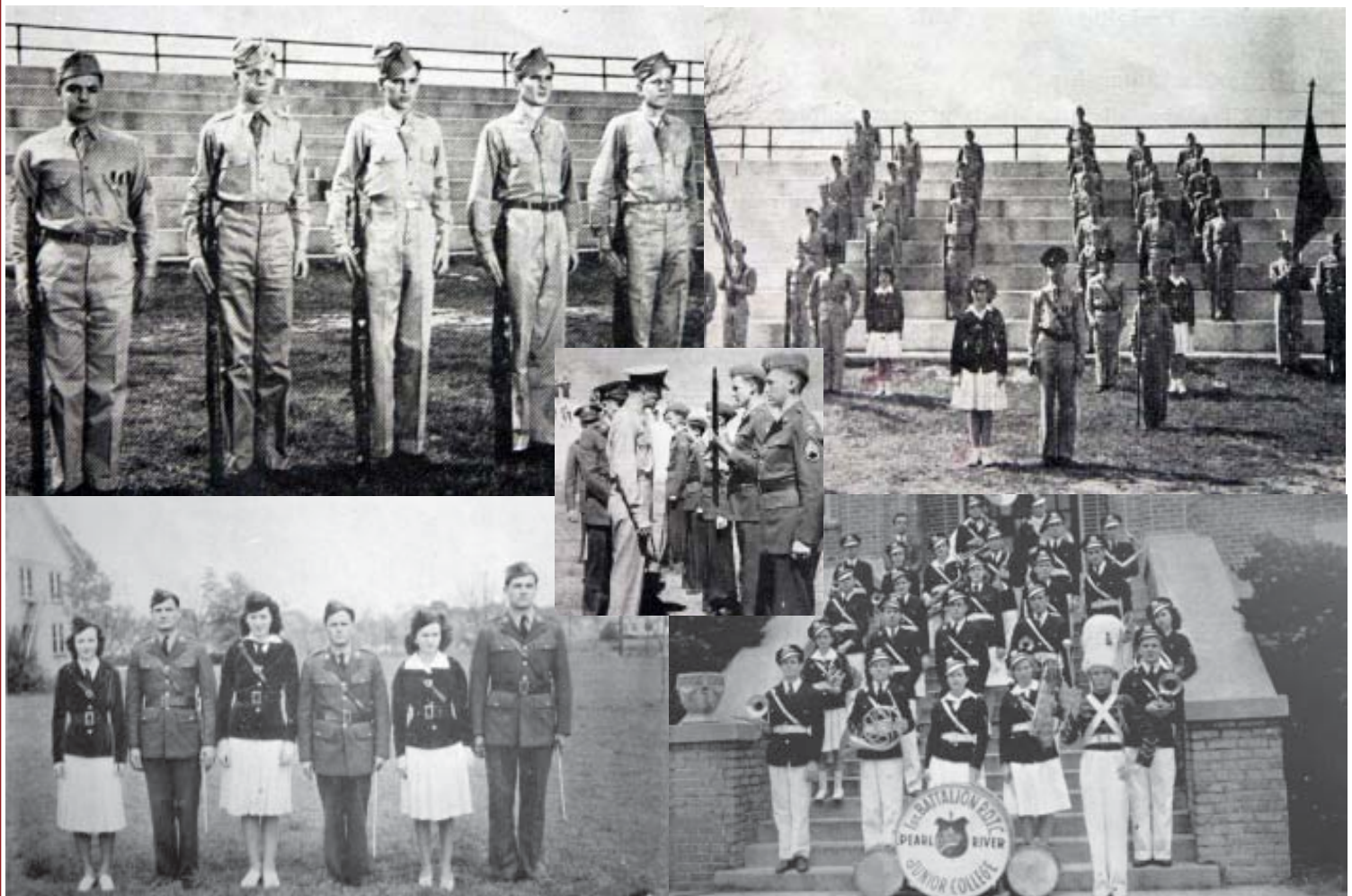
to send his diploma to him. Speights was sent to Italy with the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry where his duty was mule skinner on a mule train, transporting supplies through the mountains to the front and bringing the bodies of Allied soldiers back from the battlefield. Speights felt he could better serve his country on the battlefield, so he acquired a transfer to the front. Approximately 70 days later, Sergeant Speights had been awarded five Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, the European Campaign Medal with five battle stars, a bronze arrowhead, unit citation, French Croix de Guerre with Palm, a good conduct medal and received a battlefield commission to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. Speights served in the Invasion of Italy and the Invasion of Southern France. He was one of many PRJC-trained soldiers to receive special citations for their service.

The R.O.T.C. program was housed in Jacobs Hall (High School Building). According to the 1944-45 catalog, the R.O.T.C. armory and classroom was located on the ground floor, while a model R.O.T.C. Supply Room was located in a classroom on the first floor. The drill field was located where the current building housing Mathematics and Science now stands. During this time, Huff Hall was known as the Cadet (high school) Barracks while Pearl River Hall was named the Freshman Barracks.

According to PRJC alumnus Ott Brockman, the R.O.T.C. program was discontinued in 1948 when the program was transferred to the Mississippi National Guard. The local unit, then the Ambulance Company of the 106<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion, later saw action during the Korean conflict.



Lt. Shelby Speights



Clockwise from top left: Cadets stand inspection. Company B stands at attention for their photo for the 1939 "Critique" (PRJC annual). 1939 PRJC's 1st Battalion Band. Battalion officers and female "sponsors" stand for photo. Center, U. S. Army officer and Military Department Head inspects the troops.

## After the War

During the war, all male college-age students were serving the country, so the 1942 football season was called after the first four games and the entire season was cancelled in 1943. After the war and during Reese Dermont McLendon's term, several buildings were added to the campus, among them, Bilbo Hall, an apartment building for married veterans, was erected from an army surplus prefab building.



Bilbo Hall, 1949

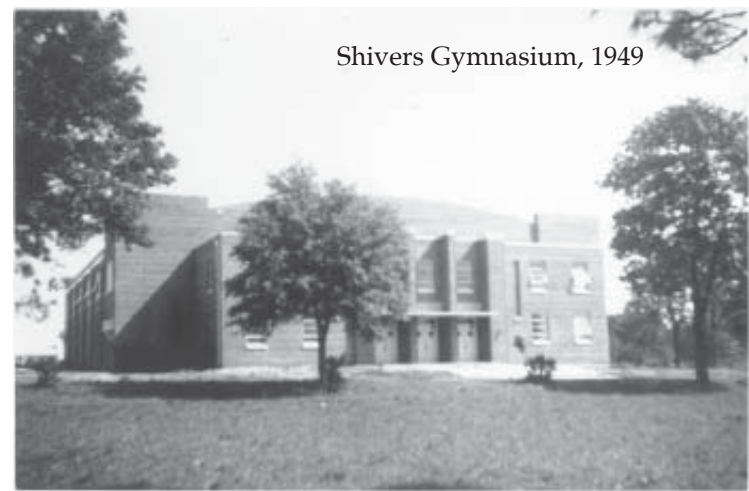
In 1947 another prefabricated building was obtained from the government. It was erected by vocational students at little additional cost to the school. It became Jefferson Davis Hall and was first used as the science building. A pond was added to the farm. Shivers Gymnasium, named for Judge J.C. Shivers, was completed in 1949, while the gymnasium/auditorium in College Hall (Moody Hall) was renovated and converted for use strictly as an auditorium.

McLendon continued to lead the college into new areas with the implementation of a transportation program initiated in January 1951. The initial two school buses grew to a fleet and transportation of students to and from home continued until 1996 when the program was deemed no longer necessary and was discontinued.



Jefferson Davis Hall, 1949

In 1953 Garvin Howell Johnston was elected president of the college. Johnston was the first graduate of Pearl River Junior College to serve as its president. Johnston served the college from 1953 until 1967 when he was nominated as the Democratic Party's candidate for State Superintendent of Education. Johnston closed out the era when the agricultural high school and junior college was a combined institution. Pearl River County Agricultural High School and Junior College became Pearl River Junior College in 1960. Severing its ties with the high school and transferring students to the Poplarville Special Separate Municipal School District, Pearl River College closed a fifty one year era.



Shivers Gymnasium, 1949





# The Building Years

During Garvin H. Johnston's presidency, the college began an unprecedented building program which began in 1963 with the construction of a new Student Center. This was followed by Science and Mathematics building and a new stadium (the Dobie Holden Stadium) in 1965, a vo-tech building (Career-Technical Education Building, library (Garvin H. Johnston Library) and academic building (Seal Hall) in 1966. (Note: Although the library and academic building were initiated during Johnston's term, they were seen to completion by his successor, Dr. Marvin Ross White.)

On October 12, 1967, White was elected president of Pearl River Junior College. White was the only graduate of both the A.H.S. and the junior college to ever serve as president. Before taking the president's position, White was serving as dean of the college, and since Johnston's resignation was contingent on winning the state election, Dr. White did not officially take office until January 15, 1968. His term of office would span eighteen years and mark unprecedented growth. During his term, the college's enrollment doubled. White increased emphasis in academic work and pushed toward a more comprehensive program for vocational, technical, and industrial education.

Building during White's leadership was extensive, beginning with the completion of the two buildings begun by Johnston. In 1969, following Hurricane Camille, a new administration building was begun. During that period, federal funding was plentiful for new construction. Remodeling funding was difficult to find, and because of that, a great many historic old buildings across the country were demolished for new construction. One of those victims was Jacobs Hall, built in 1911. Two items remain from the old building. The bell that called students to class for fifty-one years is now housed in the bell tower of the Malone Chapel on the west side of the campus, and the cornerstone from the old building is located in the Pearl River Community College Museum.

Career-Technical Educational Building



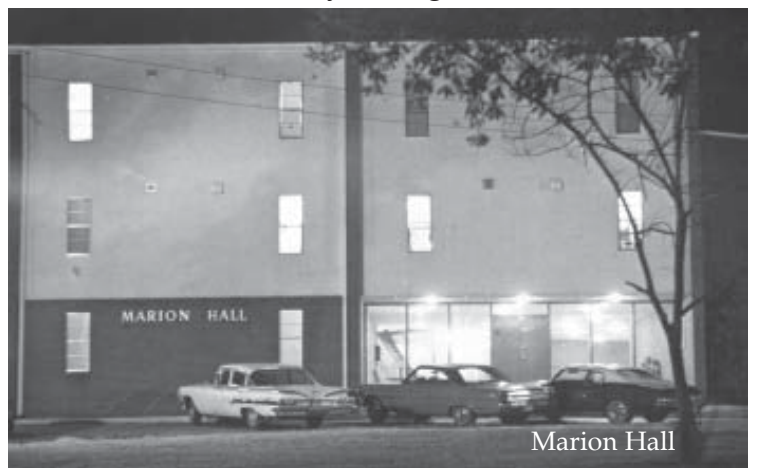
Science and Mathematics Building



Student Center built in 1963



Administration Building



Marion Hall



# Hurricane Camille

In August 1969, Hurricane Camille devastated the Mississippi Gulf Coast. As winds clocked at almost 200 miles per hour pounded the coastal counties, torrential rain, winds, and storm-spawned tornadoes swept through the six-county Pearl River Junior College district. All six counties in the district were declared disaster areas. Many buildings on the campus sustained considerable damage, but the oldest building, Batson Hall, suffered the most damage. With the roof blown off, the interior ruined, and severe structural damage, Batson Hall was a total loss. The rest of the campus suffered roof, window, and water damage. All building fund money was transferred to a repair fund. Damage was estimated at three-quarters of a million dollars.



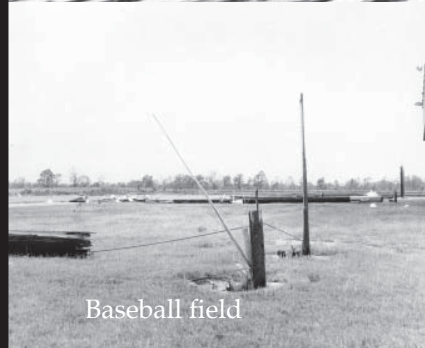
Batson Hall



Batson Hall



Huff Hall



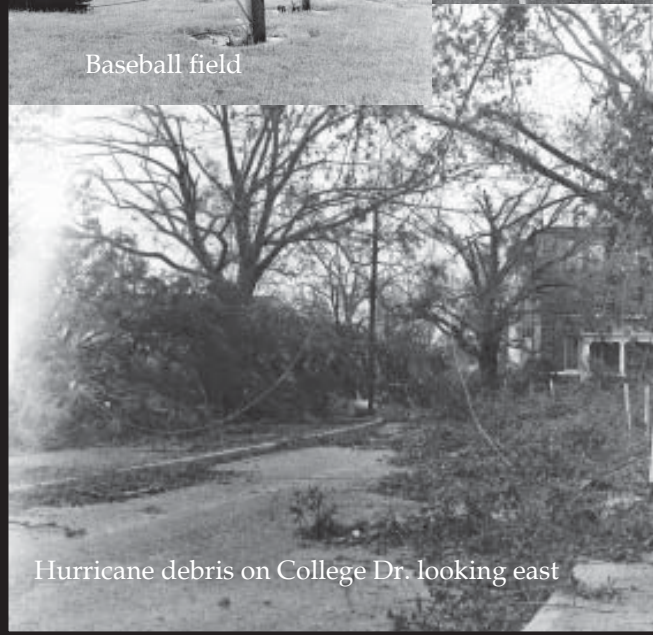
Baseball field



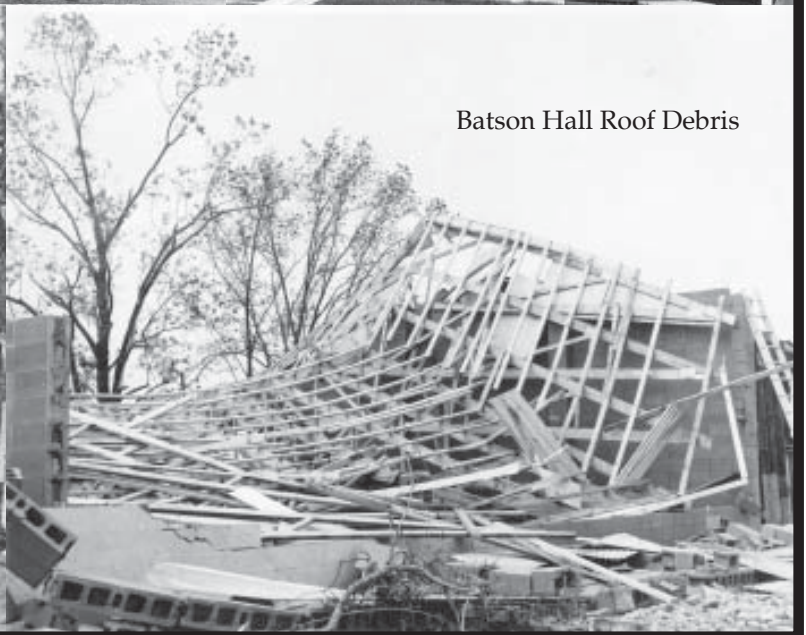
Front entrance



Faculty Housing



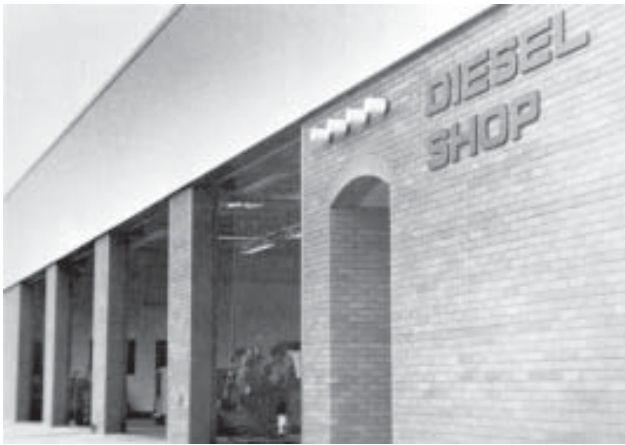
Hurricane debris on College Dr. looking east



Batson Hall Roof Debris

In September, 1969 a contract was let for the construction of the Pearl River Junior College Vocational-Technical Center in Forrest County, just south of Hattiesburg.

The 1970s were marked with continuous construction. Marion Hall, an innovative girls dormitory that replaced the hurricane damaged Batson Hall was built in 1970. Renovation work began on Jefferson Davis Hall and Moody Hall in 1970 and a new annex was built in 1973. The annex (Band Hall) was located next to Moody Hall with facilities for band and choral rehearsal. Moody Hall became the new fine arts center for the college, and the old fine arts building (built in 1953) was converted into offices for public relations and classroom space. In 1974 the athletic needs of the growing college were met with the construction of the Marvin R. White Coliseum. In 1975 a new facility was constructed for the Diesel Mechanics program, followed by a building for the Masonry program in 1976. In 1978 a building was constructed to house the growing Auto Mechanics program. A new president's home was planned and approved just before White retired in 1986.



Diesel Shop on North end of Poplarville Campus



Marion Hall replaced Batson Hall as the new girls' dorm

In the spring of 1986 Dr. Ted J. Alexander was elected president. Alexander's vision and untiring effort were rewarded by the growth the college experienced during his term. Wide scale construction and renovation was a hallmark of his administration. Since 1988, more than \$17 million was spent on construction and renovation on the two campuses. During a four year period (1988-92), Pearl River Community College provided more newly constructed and newly renovated floor space (175,000 square feet) per student per square foot than any other community college in the southern United States. The construction, under Alexander's administration, began with the completion of the new President's home. With its completion, the existing president's home, constructed in 1923, became the Alumni House housing the Alumni Association and the Development Foundation.



Pearl River Junior College Presidents (left to right): Arthur Benjamin Nicholson (1936-1937), Robert Edward Lee Sutherland (1937-1942), Reese Dermont McLendon (1942-1953), Garvin Howell Johnston (1953-1967), Marvin Ross White (1968-1986)



The Technology Center was the next building constructed during Alexander's administration. Completed in 1989, the building contains more than 44,000 square feet. In 1990 the Men's and Women's Honor Dormitories were built, followed by the Allied Health Center built at the Forrest County Center in 1992. Next, a half million dollar learning resource center was added to the library in 1992, a new cafeteria addition to Crosby Hall was completed in early January 1994, and a complete remodel of Crosby Hall was completed in 1995 with the addition of a bookstore, a grill, security offices, post office, and counseling center. In August of 1997, Senator Thad Cochran cut the ribbon on a \$ 3.7 million Nursing and Wellness Center located on the north side of the campus. The new administration building was built on the site of the old Student Center and the \$1 million building was



Ted J. Alexander (1986-2000)

completed by the winter of 1999. The old administration building became the center for Data Processing and Computer Services, housing the campus' mainframe computer, Internet servers, and the new fiber optics telecommunications system that was installed in the spring of 1998.

Under Alexander's administration, a Development Foundation was instituted. The Development Foundation was organized as a non-profit branch of the Alumni Association. Its purpose was to raise funds through private sources. Begun in 1988, the foundation raised more than \$4 million in its first ten years of service. Another source

of funding instituted for the college during the Alexander administration was Research Administration/Grant Proposal Development. Initiated in 1989, this department was responsible for adding more than



Allied Health Building at the Forrest County Center

\$50 million in programs and funding to the college in its first ten years of operation (from 1989 to spring of 2000). This department was responsible for securing local, state, and federal funding for such improvements as the new water tower, the energy management system, the learning laboratory addition, landscaping, new mainframe computer system, 143 personal computers, as well as the Clinical Counselor, Professional Development for the faculty, Student Support Services, Tech Prep, and numerous other programs around the campus.



Ted J. Alexander Administration Building





## *The New Millenium*

On July 1, 2000, Dr. William Lewis became Pearl River Community College's tenth president. Lewis began his presidency by seeing through the completion of the Huff and Pearl River Hall renovations. Lewis placed special emphasis on the student, stressing this importance to the faculty and staff. Lewis saw the growth potential in Pearl River's six-county district and saw the need for a comprehensive plan of action for the college to follow. He hired a consulting firm to create a master plan for construction and remodeling on both the Poplarville campus and the Forrest County Center. The first project on the plan was traffic, and to alleviate the congestion problems of cars arriving on the campus, a four-lane boulevard was constructed between Shivers Gym and the Career/Technical building on the east side of campus facing Highway 11. Eventually, the boulevard would go through the campus and exit on West North Street, providing easy access to the campus for a smooth flow through the campus.

As a result of the September 11, 2001 attack on America, Lewis saw a need for a place of spiritual refuge for students on campus. After an extensive campaign headed by James Ginn, an alumnus and bank vice president and Donna Lee, PRCC Development Foundation Director, more than \$750,000 was raised for the construction of a chapel on the west end of the Poplarville campus. The campaign was kicked off by a \$400,000 gift from former Pearl River alumnus, Sidney Malone, a businessman from Hattiesburg, in memory of his son.

In April 2003 the long-awaited construction began on the new Student Life Center addition to Crosby Hall. The center had money appropriated for the construction since early 2000, but the plans and paperwork were held up at the state level. After plans were finally approved, construction began, but not before the book store was relocated to a rented site off campus. Construction was finally completed in the spring of 2003 and the new "great hall" was opened to students. The addition also included a 200-seat conference center located on the west end of the Olivia Bender Cafeteria.



William A. Lewis (2000- )



Malone Chapel



Great Hall, North Entrance

In the spring of 2002, the baseball team took state and regional championship titles. Winning the regionals gave Wildcat Baseball its first berth in the Junior College World Series.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the Ethel Holden Brownstone Estate bequeathment totaling almost \$5 million was announced. The money was earmarked for a new performing arts center. That same year, Pearl River Community College again made history when its men's athletic teams won state championships in all four major men's sports. The Men's soccer team set the pace by winning its championship in late October, followed by the Wildcat football team in November. In the spring, men's basketball took the state title followed by the baseball team. Lewis and the coaches were recognized at the state capitol when the Legislature declared a "Pearl River Community College Day at the Capitol."

2004-2005 was another incredible school year for the college. The term began with the announcement of the largest enrollment in the college's history,



Wildcats celebrate win

a record 4,156 students. This was followed in November with a ribbon cutting on the long-awaited Lowery A. Woodall Advanced Technology Center. The center was named in honor of Hattiesburg businessman, Woodall, who was instrumental in convincing the state Legislature to fund the center. Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour was the principal speaker at the Nov. 16 event. Less than a week later, the #2 nationally ranked PRCC Wildcats met defending national champions Butler Community College Grizzlies in the NJCAA National Championship game at the Dalton Defender's Bowl in Coffeyville, Kansas, where they won their second National Championship on Nov. 21, 2005. Then, on Nov. 31 the new Hancock Center officially opened its doors to the Waveland-Bay St. Louis cities in a 6,000 square foot facility located in the newly-renovated shopping mall. The year was completed with the dedication services for Malone Chapel on April 28, 2005. The 4,238-square foot facility offered a place of refuge to students. With seating for 200, the facility would be used for recitals, concerts, special events, weddings, and memorial services.



Lowery A. Woodall Advanced Technology Center



Hancock Center ribbon cutting in Waveland

Also in the fall of 2004, the PRCC Board of Trustees announced an agreement between a holding company headed up by Hattiesburg businessman and PRCC alumnus Sidney Malone for construction of two dormitories. The innovative approach to dormitory financing saw the company leasing the footprint where they would place the residence halls. Construction for a boys' hall with 132 beds and a girls' hall with 162 beds were finished in the fall of 2005. The two buildings, costing \$11 million, were leased back to the college for the students' residence fee. The buildings would go back to the college at the end of a 30-year lease.



# Hurricane Katrina

A week after the 2005 fall semester began, on Aug. 29, 2005, the most devastating hurricane to ever strike the United States made landfall at the mouth of the Mississippi River in lower Louisiana. The massive storm made its way toward the city of New Orleans, then veered to the east where it went ashore at the mouth of the Pearl River. Bringing the largest tidal surges ever recorded on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Bay St. Louis and Waveland saw tides as high as 30 feet. The storm totally destroyed everything south of the railroad, about a mile inland. Water was pushed inland as far as Kiln.

After heading north along the Pearl River, the storm veered off to the northeast, but not in time to spare Pearl River Community College. By the time the storm reached the Poplarville campus, its intensity was clocked at 120 miles per hour sustained winds. With embedded tornadic activity, it pounded the campus for more than 6 hours.

The following day, with no electricity and no cellular phone service, the college administration went about the massive job of trying to get the campus and two centers cleaned up so that the semester could be salvaged. On the coast, the newly-opened Hancock Center located on Highway 90, more than a mile from the beach, had received 8 to 10 feet of water. Nothing remained of the college's fixtures. They had been swept away and everything was a total loss. At the Poplarville campus, with the entire county at a standstill, things were not much better. Forrest County had fared better than any PRCC location with only minor wind and water damage.

A week into cleanup, the college administration was informed that the state would use the Technology Center to stage a meeting with local officials from the seventeen hardest hit counties in the state. The meeting, hosted by Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, was scheduled for Sep. 6, 2005. On the appointed day, Secret Service agents swarmed the campus, tying down all entrances and placing agents in the woods and around the Technology Center. President George W. Bush arrived at the campus at approximately 1 p.m. and addressed the assembly. This was the first time in the history of the college that a sitting president ever visited. The main point of his visit was to assure the local leaders that even though national attention was on New Orleans after the levees had failed, flooding the city, that "Mississippi is on my mind."

Two weeks after the storm, the Forrest County Center opened, and a week later, the Poplarville campus opened. The Hancock Center did not reopen until trailers were placed at Stennis International Airport almost a month later.

The Poplarville campus swarmed with insurance



Large pieces of Moody Hall auditorium's roof lie between Moody and Jeff Davis Halls (top), and the damage inside (above). White Coliseum (below) in ruins. Demolished Transportation shop (bottom).



representatives, FEMA and MEMA personnel, engineers, and contractors. First estimates put the damage at between \$40 and \$50 million. Engineers deemed the Marvin R. White Coliseum sports arena to be damaged beyond repair. After extensive consultation, it was decided that Moody Hall's auditorium wing was damaged beyond repair. Rooms were damaged in Marion and Huff dormitories reducing the number of rooms available. Since nearly every room on campus had been filled before the storm, this produced a problem of too few rooms for the resident student population. Students, however, pulled together and three persons were placed in rooms designed to hold only two. Lamar Hall's roof was almost completely gone. Seal Hall's roof had major damage. Almost every roof on campus saw some damage, many had major damage. The bus barn was completely destroyed by one of the many tornados that came with the storm.



(top). Trees and landscape on campus destroyed (above). Holden Stadium press box lost its roof (below) as did the covered seats on Wildcat field (bottom).



In spite of the damage to both the campus and many instructors' and students' personal homes, spirit on campus was positive. During the football season, which was shortened to eight games, the Wildcats played with the excellence Wildcat fans had grown to expect. The team fought hard and won the state championship for the third year running. Because the Mississippi season had been delayed three weeks and only shortened by two, they were behind the nation's other junior college teams by one week. Before the storm, the Wildcats were ranked at the #1 position by the NJCAA. After the storm, they dropped to fifth place without playing a game and remained there throughout the season. After a loss to Perk (MGCCC), a chance for the state title, much less a national one was dampened. The team did not give up though, fighting through the remaining season and the playoffs, and winning the state championship for a third straight year in spite of losing their training facility (White Coliseum) to the storm. Even though the NJCAA delayed the season by a week, the Arizona team that held the #1 position made bowl choices before PRCC won the state championship, cutting the Wildcats out of a second bid for the national title.

.....Even though roofs were repaired and money was paid for mold remediation, the major questions of funding to replace White Coliseum and money for a new performing arts center were still on hold.

Some of the changes on campus, a direct result of Katrina, were demolition of White Coliseum and Moody Hall's auditorium wing, a pitched roof on Seal Hall, new roofs on the Technology Center and the Nursing and Wellness Center, extensive mold remediation (complete removal of all interior walls and cleaning of studs, rafters and floors)



in Moody Hall, Huff Hall, White Hall, Marion Hall, Technology Center, Nursing and Wellness Center, and Olivia Bender Cafeteria.

At present, the college administration is still hoping that insurance will extend to replacement of Lamar Hall, which was severely damaged in the storm.

For the fourth straight year, the Wildcat football team took the state championship, tying Hinds for the record of most consecutive state titles. This win put the Wildcats' total state championships at an unprecedented 18, more by four than any other team in the MACJC, and with a total of just under a quarter of all the state championships won since the state's junior college athletic association was established in 1926. After one surprise loss to Copiah-Lincoln Community College's Wolves, the #2 ranked Wildcats faced Blinn College in East Texas for the national title. The game was nationally televised by Fox Sports South, the first time the Wildcats had played in a televised broadcast. Although the Wildcats fell to the Blinn team, they still maintained the #2 position at the beginning of the 2007-2008 season.



# Superintendents and Presidents

*T. M. Kelly*

1909-1911

T.M. Kelly served as superintendent of Pearl River County Agricultural High School from its founding until his resignation in 1911. Beyond his name and the period he served the high school, nothing is known about Kelly.

*Will Jacobs*

1911-1917

Will Jacobs, Sr. was born in Waterbury, Tennessee, on May 28, 1880. Jacobs, a teacher, married Cornelia Grissom Bass of Linwood, Tennessee. Jacobs had previously accepted a position in Laurel, Mississippi, when he asked for Miss Bass' hand in marriage. After they were married on Aug. 29, 1906, they left for Mississippi and Jacobs' job as principal of West End School. Jacobs stayed in Laurel for only one year when he was offered the Superintendent's position at Louisville City Schools. Jacobs stayed there from 1907 until May 1911 when he accepted the position of Superintendent of Pearl River County Agricultural High School (PRCAHS).

Jacobs, at 31, came to Poplarville at the end of a long, dry spell. When the agricultural high school law was declared unconstitutional in 1909 because it did not provide equal accommodation for African American children, PRCAHS was put in a difficult place. Poplarville businessmen came to the new school's rescue, signing a banknote for enough money to last the school until a new agricultural high school law was passed. When the new law was passed in March 1910, the Board of Trustees began looking toward the future by hiring architects to design a much needed administration/classroom building and a girls' dormitory. Construction was begun on the administration/classroom building (later named Jacobs Hall) in 1911, and the girls' dormitory was let for bid the following year.

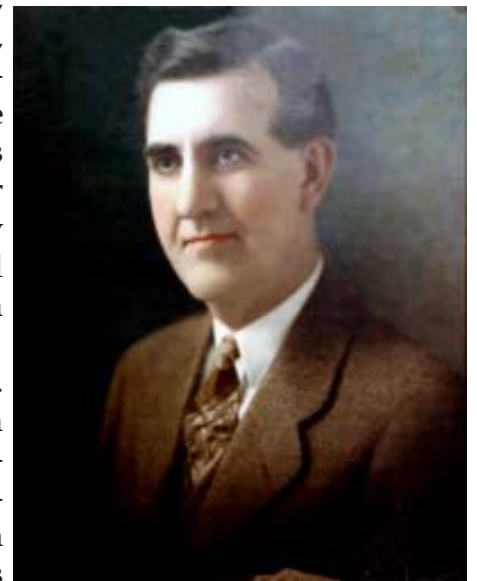
When Jacobs was announced as the new superintendent, Board of Trustees member M. N. McCoy received a letter from J. C. Hardy, President of Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College (present day Mississippi State University). He wrote:

*I have just learned that Prof. Will Jacobs of Louisville, Miss., has been elected as principal of your Agricultural High School there.*

*Your pupils are to be congratulated on securing the services of such a man as Prof. Jacobs. I was in his school at Louisville two weeks ago and made a thorough investigation of his work.*

*I regard him as one of the best school men in the state.*

This was certainly not the last recommendation of note that Jacobs would receive. Jacobs had been superintendent for less than a year when the school was visited by Dr. Phalindar P. Claxton, the United





States Commissioner of Education, the equivalent to the present day U. S. Secretary of Education. The Poplarville *Free Press* newspaper's explanation for Claxton's interest in PRC AHS was, "... this visiting was brought about by our great State Supt. Of Education. Mr. Powers said that he met Dr. Claxton in Jackson, and asked him where he was going. The Doctor said that he was going over to the A. & M. College to study our system of Agricultural Education. Prof. Powers told him if he wanted to study an agricultural school that was reaching right out to the people, for him to just come right down to the Piney Woods of South Mississippi and visit the Pearl River County A. H. S. This Dr. Claxton agreed to do provided Mr. Powers would come with him, and to this Mr. Powers readily agreed." ("A.H.S. Notes." *The Free Press*, April 11, 1912)

In an address to the students, Claxton, a farmer himself, was reported to have said that the time had come to fit the school to the child rather than the reverse. Powers said that of the state's 19 agricultural high schools, Pearl River was the best.

These accolades would not go unnoticed. Leaders in Jackson became aware of the tremendous institution that Pearl River County Agricultural High School was becoming.

Something of particular importance occurred during Jacobs' third year and the school's fifth session. Pearl River County had begun the task of consolidating its county schools in 1911. Prior to consolidation, students were receiving their first eight grades in one room schools scattered throughout the county. This was not a problem confined to Mississippi rural schools but was prevalent throughout the United States in the early twentieth century. Consolidation had been tried in some parts of the country, but with little success, so it was notable that Pearl River County had a working system of consolidated schools as early as 1914, and only 24 years after its founding. These consolidated schools were situated in new buildings, many of them brick, and under the leadership of a principal who was college educated, which was unusual in that day.

By consolidating the schools, the county developed a progressive system of education that benefited the students, placing them in centers of learning where they were taught by better trained teachers under the leadership of a college educated principal. Transportation to and from school was provided. Wagons and later "trucks" were used to transport the children. This consolidation program earned the county national interest from the nation's educators. The State Superintendent of Education was particularly proud of Pearl River County's progress, and he often brought national visitors to see the county's system of schools.

The success of this county-wide system of consolidated schools and the county's progressive agricultural high school could largely be attributed to the forward-thinking residents of Pearl River County. Not only did they support this program, they fostered it. The agricultural high school was the talk of the local residents; they took great pride in its accomplishments and the success it was having in the lives of their children. They willingly took on the extra tax burdens in order that the county's children could have a better life through education. This type of thinking speaks volumes about the progressive attitude of the responsible adults in the poor county.

The students followed in the footsteps of their parents, yearning for a quality education and the rewards they knew such an education would bring. Jacobs and his teachers were more than ready to accommodate these students. One example of the desire to improve himself through education was exhibited by John Lumpkin. When Lumpkin came to PRC AHS, he was older than his peers by several years and had received little prior education. The first graduation held May 23, 1912 included a declamatory (speech) contest that was held the morning of the graduation exercises. John Lumpkin earned the first prize, a gold medal, and John Napier took second. Poplarville's newspaper, *The Free Press*, had this to say, "... it might be well to state that Mr. Lumpkin was practically grown and having little education when he entered this school, had the pleasure and distinction of carrying off the first gold medal ever offered a pupil of this institution." ("A.H.S. Closes Term, Six Graduates Receive Diplomas, Brilliant Exercises Held." *The Free Press*, May 23, 1912.) This desire to learn did not go

unnoticed by the interested educators who came to Mississippi to observe the educational advancements the southern farming state was making.

One such visit was paid by the Secretary of the General Educational Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, who visited in early April 1914. Dr. Wallace Buttrick would write an article for the magazine, *Outlook*, concerning what he observed that spring day. The article, some three pages in length, would praise the foresight of the people of Pearl River County and Mississippi officials for their encouragement.

University of Mississippi professor, J.C. Fant, in a letter requesting that Will Jacobs attend the High School Conference at the University in mid-June wrote in a post script: "Dr. Buttrick is praising your school throughout the nation, and of Miss Rowan he is unstinted in her praise. I wish you could have heard him eulogizing your school at Louisville, Ky., last week." A week after visiting Pearl River's agricultural high school, Buttrick appeared at the Southern Educators Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, and highly praised the educational system at PRC AHS. Buttrick "stated publicly that he had visited schools in most every state in the Union and in other parts of the world but that our school came nearer the Ideal School than any other school that he had ever seen." ("A.H.S. Notes." *The Free Press*, April 30, 1914.) Buttrick was not only impressed with the A.H.S. but with the consolidated schools in the county as well. The newspaper article's author proudly editorialized, "It seems to us, if our judgment may be trusted, that we have one of the finest school systems to be found anywhere. People have come into our county this year from most everywhere to study our educational progress." (Ibid.)

That same year, at the Educator's Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, Mississippi State Superintendent of Education W. H. Smith recommended that the conference foster a Model County School program as an experiment in progressive rural education. Buttrick spoke up and offered that the Rockefeller Foundation would fund such an experiment but suggested that it be held in Mississippi. It took better than one year for the details of the experiment to be ironed out, and in the fall of 1915, nine counties bid on the experimental Model County School program—including Hinds, Jones, and Harrison. The Pearl River County delegation was led by Professor Will Jacobs. Two weeks later, Pearl River County was named the Model County School.

The Model County School program began on Jan. 1, 1916. The Rockefeller Foundation program provided for a county agent, home economist, a county school doctor and nurse, and an assistant superintendent of education. The program was run out of the county courthouse and the agricultural high school. During the summer of 1916, a summer program was undertaken. In two-week segments, corn clubs and tomato clubs were held, culminating with a two-week adult continuing education camp. The first year, the agricultural high school's dormitories were used to house the campers, who numbered more than 1,000.

In the midst of this wonderful Model County School experiment that was gaining national attention, Will Jacobs answered the governor's call to another position. Theo Bilbo became governor for his first term in 1916. He was an education-minded governor who had his ear toward progressive thinking, so he turned his attention toward providing for the orphans and the state's young offenders with the Mississippi Industrial and Training Institute in Columbia.

Jacobs stayed at the Columbia school for seven years, from 1918 until 1924. By this time, the Jacobs household had grown. When the fourth child was born in 1918, the Jacobs family had to struggle to make it on an educator's salary. When a fifth child came in 1921, it put a greater burden on Jacobs' salary. In 1924, Jacobs decided to better provide for his growing family and moved to Jackson, Mississippi to take a job as a general agent with the Great Southern Life Insurance Company.

For a three year period, Jacobs worked with the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), serving as the state office's head for a year and a half.

During Jacobs' lifetime, he became a Mason while in Poplarville, was Chairman of the Board of Deacons at First Baptist in Poplarville, made Shriner while in Columbia, was a charter member of the



Columbia Rotary Club, and was on the Baptist Hospital Board for 30 years. He was also on the Board of Trustees of the Children's Home Finding Society and the Board of Trustees of the Salvation Army. In Jackson, he became a life member of the Board of Deacons of First Baptist Church and was a member of the Board of Trustees of Universities and Colleges of Mississippi.

The Jacobs had nine children: Mattie Sue (born June 30, 1907), Will, Jr. (born April 27, 1909), Kathrine (born January 9, 1912), Roland Bass (born September 13, 1918), Harry (born October 1, 1921), Frank (born July 18, 1924), Sarah Elizabeth (born April 11, 1929), Robert and Rebecca (born September 23, 1930).

The Jacobs family lived at 936 Morningside Drive in Jackson. Will and Cornelia celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary there in 1956. Will Jacobs died in March 1957.

*(Background information provided by Sarah Jacobs Woodrow, Rebecca Jacobs Barlow, and Robert Jacobs.)*



Will Jacobs left his mark on Pearl River County Agricultural High School. The "high school building" was named Jacobs Hall. This building was demolished in 1968 to make way for a new administration building.

## *James Andrew Huff*

**1917-1926**

James Andrew Huff, Pearl River Community College's first president, was born on July 22, 1868 in Jasper County, Mississippi. The son of Francis Duckworth and Phillip Huff, he was the youngest of nine children.

The son of a prosperous farmer, Huff was educated in a private school, completing his early education at Sylvarena Academy in Smith County. (Sylvarena Academy was a tuition supported school established by William Harris Hardy in 1856.) He then enrolled in Mississippi A. & M. College, then, later, at the University of Mississippi, and finally, at the University of Illinois. After he finished his undergraduate degree, he enrolled in a six-year correspondence course in education.

On September 16, 1891, Huff married Julia May McCurdy of Claiborne (Jasper County), Mississippi. Five children were born to the Huffs: James Hatton, Lillian May, Howard Payne, John Charles, and Virginia McCurdy.

He went back to his alma mater at Sylvarena Academy as his first teaching assignment as an assistant there. From 1892 until 1896, Huff was the county superintendent of education for Smith County. His salary was \$18 per month. In 1896 he served as principal of Raleigh High School in Raleigh Mississippi. By 1898, he had become the superintendent of schools in Forest, Mississippi where he remained until 1912. During this time (1903-1916) Huff was engaged by the state department of education in institute and normal work. In 1912 Huff accepted the superintendent's position at the newly formed Harrison County Agricultural High School in Perkinston, Mississippi.

In 1917, Huff accepted the superintendent's position at Pearl River County Agricultural High School. Huff was instrumental in helping organize Pearl River Junior College, and served as the first president of the College from 1921 until 1926.



During World War I, Huff acted as food dispenser of Pearl River County and also sold Liberty Bonds. While at Forest, Mississippi, Huff served as both mayor and alderman. He also served on the board of directors of the Farmers & Merchants Bank of Forest. He served as alderman of Poplarville as well. While serving in the alderman's position, Huff was involved in an accident with the Sheriff of Pearl River County while in pursuit of a bootlegger. The incident appeared in the Friday, February 15, 1924 edition of the *Gulfport Daily Herald*:

***Huff Injured in Auto Wreck***  
***Former Harrison County School Man gives Chase to Booze Car With Serious Results***

*Poplarville, Miss., Feb. 14—Professor J. A. Huff, superintendent of the Pearl River Agricultural High school, is in the Pearl River county hospital in a serious condition from the loss of blood as a result of injuries caused in an automobile accident in which Arthur J. Smith, sheriff of Pearl River county, also was a victim but who only received minor injuries.*

*Sheriff Smith received a message notice that a booze car was coming through Poplarville. The sheriff got his auto ready and deputized Professor Huff, who is also a member of the board of alderman of town of Poplarville to go with him. On the failure of the alleged booze car to stop, the sheriff pursued it in his car and for six miles the wild chase went on.*

*Shots from the sheriff's revolver failed to stop the suspects and on rounding a curve about six miles from Poplarville one of the tires of the sheriff's car blew out and the sheriff who was driving the car lost control of it and it smashed into a pine tree with such force that it threw Mr. Huff through the windshield, cutting him up badly about the face, fracturing one of his ribs and mangling one of his hands while the sheriff, holding tight to the steering wheel, came up with cuts and bruises on his face. The tree, which was about ten inches in diameter, was torn up by the roots and split nearly half in two half why (sic.) up. The auto was demolished. The booze car got away.*

Huff was an active member of the Baptist church, serving as deacon and Sunday School teacher. He was a member of the Poplarville Chamber of Commerce and the PTA. When he lived in Forest, Mississippi he was a Royal Arch Mason and served as Master of the Lodge and High Priest of the chapter. He was a member of the Woodmen of the World and the Knights of Pythias as well. For a period of time, he served as the superintendent of Pearl River County Hospital.

Huff found time to venture into business enterprises, owning and cultivating one of the "desirable farms of the county and has made investment in two business blocks in Poplarville." (History of Mississippi: The Heart of the South, Chicago-Jackson, The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1925.) Huff was also the director of the Pearl River County Canning Company, whose plant was located in Poplarville.

Huff was an active Democrat, serving on Smith County's executive committee from 1895 until 1898. In 1924 he was a delegate to the state Democratic convention. After 36 years of marriage, Huff's wife Julia passed away. Two years later, Huff remarried. Huff's



Early picture of Huff with first wife, Julia. Huff was known as a pioneer Mississippi educator.



second wife, Lucille Page of Covington, Louisiana remained with Huff until he died in 1931. This article appeared in the *Stone County Enterprise* on Thursday, July 2, 1931:

***J. A. Huff, Educator, Dies After Long Period of Illness (sic.)***

*Poplarville, Miss—J. A. Huff, 63, native of Smith county, died at his home at Poplarville following a long illness. Funeral services were held at the Huff home, the Rev. J. P. Culpepper officiating. Burial was in the Poplarville cemetery with Masonic honors. G. W. Holloway of Carson, district grand lecturer of Mississippi Masons, acted as worshipful master.*

*Mr. Huff's life's activities were in the field of education. When a young man he was elected superintendent of education of Smith county. For 14 years he was superintendent of the schools at Forest and was the mayor of Forest for 12 years. Later he was superintendent of the Harrison-Stone County Agricultural high school. He came to Poplarville in 1917 as president of what is now Pearl River Agricultural college. For the last five years he was engaged in other business activities.*

*In his young manhood he married Miss Julia McCurdy, who died here in 1927. To this union were born two sons and two daughters, Charles Huff of Poplarville; Hatton Huff of Crystal Springs; Mrs. J. S. McKewen of Yazoo City, and Miss Virginia Huff of Poplarville. In March, 1929, Mr. Huff was married to Miss Lucille Page, of Covington, La. To this union was born one daughter, Jimmie Lucille. Besides his widow and children he is survived by one brother, Dr. John Huff of Pineview, and one sister, Mrs. James Horne, of Bay Springs.*

*Huff's two sons (Howard Payne died at 13 months), James Hatton and John Charles both earned Ph. G. degrees from the University of Mississippi and returned to Poplarville where they opened a drug company (Huff Bros.). Lillian May, attended the Mississippi State College for Women, graduating in 1916, earning a Bachelor of Science. Virginia McCurdy was still a resident of Poplarville when Huff died in 1931.*

It was during James Andrew Huff's tenure that the board of directors decided to add freshman college classes, and in 1921, the first public junior college in Mississippi and the 16th in the nation was born. Huff served as president from 1921 until his resignation in 1926. During this time, Huff Hall, Crosby Hall, the President's home, and College Hall (Moody Hall) were built. Huff has been honored as an educational pioneer in Mississippi.



One of Huff's sons (left), sitting in front of a building at the University of Mississippi campus. His two sons owned a drug store in Poplarville (Huff Bros. Drug Co.) Huff and his young family (right) in Forrest, Miss.

(Photos courtesy of Pomeroy Huff Lowry)

## *Simeon Lafayette Stringer*

1926-1932

Simeon Lafayette Stringer was born October 22, 1879 at Bay Springs, Mississippi, the son of Fannie Flanagan and Joseph C. Stringer. He was educated at the Lake Como Academy, earning his high school diploma in 1896. After graduation, he entered Southern Normal University in Huntingdon, Tennessee where he received the L.I. and B.S. degrees in 1899. Stringer then enrolled in the Western Kentucky State Normal College and earned his bachelor in arts degree in 1902. Later, Stringer would spend a full year (1928-1929) at the University of Mississippi as a graduate student earning his Master's degree.

Stringer began his teaching career at the Macedonia school in Perry County, Mississippi. After serving a term there, he went to the Petal Consolidated School, serving as superintendent from 1903-1904, and Bay Springs Consolidated Schools from 1904-1905. In 1905, Stringer served as superintendent at the Louin Separate School District, remaining there until 1911.

In 1908 he married Shellie Estelle McNair of Brandon, Mississippi. They had no children.

From 1911 until 1919, Stringer served as superintendent of the Richton Schools. During 1919-1920, he was superintendent of the Webb-Swann Lake Consolidated School.

In 1920, Stringer served at the Picayune City Schools. In 1926, he went to Pearl River County Junior College where he served as President for six years.

During Stringer's term, White Hall (for college girls) was constructed. With the previous construction of College Hall, Pearl River now had two buildings devoted primarily to the junior college.

In 1932, Stringer assumed the president's position at Clark Memorial Junior College at Newton, Mississippi, remaining there until 1935. In 1935, Stringer organized the Crosby Special Consolidated Schools, and as "commissioner" directed the school until 1941.

Stringer served for 13 years (during the summer term) in the capacity of extension representative of Mississippi Southern College. He served as one of the early presidents of the Mississippi Junior College Athletic and Literary Associations. Stringer was very instrumental in the growth and development of the Mississippi Education Association, serving in various capacities on committees, the board of directors, and as president (1940). Stringer was also a life member of the National Education Association.

Stringer was a member of the Baptist church, serving as deacon and Sunday School teacher. He devoted thirty-eight years to the Rotary Club, was a member of the Woodmen of the World, was a Mason, a Knights Templar, and a member of Phi Kappa Alpha.





## *Joseph Forrest Stuart*

1932-1937

Joseph Forrest Stuart, who graduated from Pearl River County Agricultural High School in 1917, was known to fellow class and team members as "Rat." He earned his nickname as a respected member of the Aggies football team. After graduating from PRC AHS, Stuart attended Mississippi College, where he earned his Bachelor's degree. He came back to Pearl River in 1925 as the new college's History professor and football coach. Stuart had big shoes to fill as the college's football coach, following legendary coach, Edwin W. "Goat" Hale. Stuart led the Wildcats to their first state championship, one year before the Mississippi Junior College Athletic and Literary Association (now the Mississippi Association of Community and Junior Colleges) was established in 1926. Stuart relinquished his coaching duties the following year, and during the 1926-1927 school year, he began doing graduate work through Missouri University. That year, he began teaching Social Sciences, including Economics, Sociology and Education. In 1927 Stuart left Pearl River to assume leadership of the Taylorsville City Schools. He continued his ties with the PRC AHS Alumni association, and in 1932, the Board of Trustees voted to make Stuart the third Pearl River Junior College president. (Currently researching. If you have any additional information about Stuart, please contact: Ronn Hague at 601-403-1316)



## *Arthur Benjamin Nicholson*

1936-1937

Arthur Benjamin Nicholson, Pearl River College's fourth president, served in that capacity only sixteen months, the shortest term of any PRC president. Nicholson, a Pearl River County native, served as the county's Superintendent, and served in several offices in the college, both before and after his term as president.



## *Robert Edward Lee Sutherland*

1937-1942

Robert Edward Lee Sutherland was born on May 1, 1878, in Booneville, Mississippi, the son of Dr. W. W. Sutherland and Annie Naomi Nelson Sutherland. He graduated from Boonville High School and received his Normal Degree from Peabody College (Nashville, Tennessee) in 1905. He earned his Bachelor of Science in 1929 and his Master of Arts in 1930. Sutherland married Ollie Wallace on October 16, 1910.

Sutherland began his career in education in Pisgah High School. The following year (1906) he taught at Wheeler High School. From 1908 until 1916, he served two terms as the Prentiss County Superintendent of Education. (Editor's Note: There is a discrepancy here concerning time as Superintendent of Education. Since this biography was edited from information in *The Mississippi Public Junior College Story* (©1978) by Young and Ewing, we will use their dates until research is done and revisions are made.) In 1917 he became the superintendent of Alcorn County Agricultural High School at Kossuth, Mississippi, where he served for two years. During this time (1918-1922), he served a four-year term in the Mississippi Legislature, and served as the chairman of the education committee.



Sutherland was appointed to the faculty of the Smith-Hughes High School (later known as Hinds Agricultural High School) in 1917 (see Editor's Note above). In the spring of 1918, the superintendent of Hinds AHS resigned due to illness in his family and Sutherland was appointed acting superintendent and later was elected to the position. It was under the guidance of Sutherland that Hinds added college course work to its curriculum.

1930 found Sutherland as president of the Mississippi State College for Women in Hattiesburg where he served for the next two years. During this same time period, he was a member of the Board of Trustees for the Mississippi State Teachers College (USM) in Hattiesburg. In 1932 he served as superintendent of Wheeler High School. In 1934 he was a district supervisor of adult education in Tupelo, Mississippi.

In 1937, Sutherland was elected president of Pearl River Junior College, where he served until 1942, at which time he retired. His retirement was short lived, however. When he returned to Prentiss County, he served his third term as Superintendent of Education (1948-1952). Upon his second retirement at age 74 he was honored by the state Department of Education at a special ceremony for his 50 years of service to education in Mississippi.

Sutherland was a member of the National Education Association, the Mississippi Education Association, and Kappa Delta Pi. Sutherland was also listed in *Who's Who of America* in 1936 and in *Leaders in Education* in 1941.

Sutherland died in Prentiss County in 1961 at the age of 83.





## *Reese Dermont McLendon*

1942-1953

Reese Dermont McLendon was born May 23, 1905 to Rosier Alexander McLendon and Mary Ann McLemore McLendon. He was educated at Clark County Agricultural High School, graduating there in 1924. He received his B.S. from Mississippi Southern College in 1929 and his Master's Degree from the University of Texas in 1938. In 1938, he married Corinne Hipps.

McLendon began his career in education as coach and principal of Leakesville High School in 1929, where he remained until 1931 when he took the same position at Waynesboro High School. He was coach and principal of Madison High School from 1933 until 1936 when he became Superintendent of Lumberton City School, staying there until 1941. From 1941 until 1942 he was the Superintendent of Woodville High School. Then in 1942 he became president of Pearl River Junior College, serving until 1953.

McLendon served at Pearl River during World War II. After the war, the college took advantage of war surplus buildings, adding Jefferson Davis and Bilbo Halls to the campus. Bilbo Hall was an apartment building erected primarily for returning veterans and their families. After the war, many returning servicemen sought to use GI benefits to gain a better education. General Equivalency Examinations (GED) for high school work were offered at the college along with numerous vocational training classes to prepare the massive influx of young men for the workplace.

In 1953, McLendon resigned as Pearl River College's president to become president of Northwest Mississippi Junior College where he served until he retired on July 1, 1974.

McLendon gave 45 years of service to the education of Mississippi students. During this time, he served two terms as President of Mississippi Junior College Association, a member of the Editorial Board of the American Association of Junior Colleges, and a member of the Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher learning for sixteen years.

He was a Methodist lay leader and Sunday School teacher and a member of the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce. He was honored to be selected as a charter member of the Hall of Fame from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1987.



## *Garvin Howell Johnston*

1953-1967

Garvin Howell Johnston was born on November 17, 1909 in the Hub community just outside of Columbia in Marion County. He received his education in Marion County Schools and attended Pearl River Junior College. Johnston went on to earn a degree in mathematics at the University of Southern Mississippi. He later earned his doctorate at the University of Alabama.

After graduating from USM, Johnston began his career as a mathematics teacher in Poplarville. In 1937, he became the principal of Poplarville High School. After serving as a first lieutenant in World War II, Johnston became the principal of Sylacauga Schools in Alabama. He returned to Mississippi as the state high school supervisor with the Mississippi Department of Education.

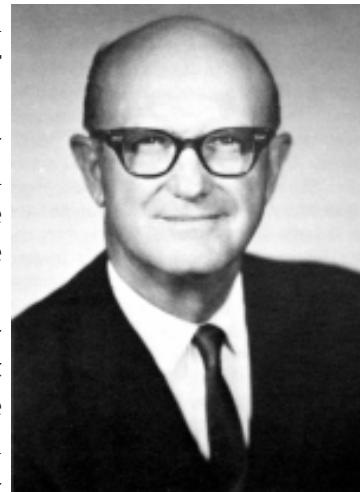
Johnston became Pearl River College's seventh president in 1953. During his term here, he brought with him fresh ideas concerning the development of vocational and technical education. Under his presidency, he oversaw the termination of Pearl River County Agricultural High School as he transferred the junior and senior high school classes to the newly formed Poplarville Special Separate Municipal School District. This move ended a 50-year institution, but allowed the administration to focus its complete attention toward moving Pearl River Junior College ahead and into the second half of the 20th century.

While Johnston was president, an unprecedented building boom began. In 1957, Johnston addressed the college's vocational-technical needs by constructing a building for the metal trades. This building currently serves as the Visual Arts Building. In 1961 he addressed the need for more dormitory space by building Lamar Hall. This building was followed by providing the students a place to gather when he built the student center, which, after remodeling, became the new Alexander Administration Building. He addressed the college's academic needs by building a new science building, which is now the Science and Mathematics building. He provided Wildcat football fans with a suitable home for athletic events when he built Dobie Holden Stadium in 1965, and he again addressed the growing vocational-technical needs when he built the 44,000-square-foot Vocational-Technical Education building that same year. Before he left, he began the groundwork for construction of a new library and a new academic building.

In 1967, Johnston was nominated by the Mississippi Democratic Party to run as the party's candidate for State Superintendent of Education. Johnston submitted his resignation to Pearl River College, contingent on his being elected. Johnston took office in 1968 as the state's 15th Superintendent of Education.

Johnston faced a troubled situation the year after he took office. Token desegregation was being practiced in the south. Hard line segregationists in power fought hard to maintain a separation of the races. With the United States Supreme Court's Alexander decision, Mississippi was made the testing ground for sweeping desegregation. This immediately put the state's white population in a panic. Private academies sprang up overnight and threw the state's public education program into complete chaos. Segregationists in the state Legislature threatened to withhold funding from the Department of Education and, according to Johnston, the state's public education system hung by "a slender thread."

Johnston immediately went to work. First, he convinced the majority of white parents that a poor state like Mississippi could not survive without a strong public education system. Next, he went to the legislature, which had threatened to "starve public schools". The Legislature was convinced that white students would "flee public education in droves." Johnston convinced the Legislature that this would not





happen and managed to convince the Legislature to fund public education. When, in 1971, white enrollment reached 92% of the previous year's enrollment, the hard-won battle was over, but the war to "scuttle" the public education system went on for years.

Johnston was honored over the years for his public service. He was twice president of the Pearl River County Education Association, President of Mississippi Association of Colleges, Poplarville's Citizen of the Year in 1967 and the PRJC Alumnus of the Year in 1965.

Johnston died January 27, 1978, at the age of 68.

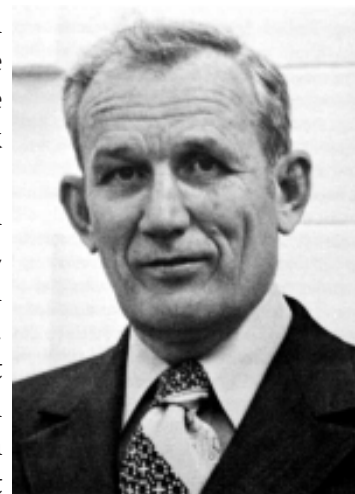
*(Quotes from "He Saved The Schools" by Bill Minor, Editor of Capitol Reporter, Jackson, Mississippi)*

## *Marvin Ross White*

**1968-1986**

Dr. Marvin Ross White was born in Poplarville, Miss. on Aug. 6, 1921. He attended school at Poplarville Grammar School, Poplarville High School, and Pearl River County Agricultural High School. After graduating from high school, he enrolled in Pearl River Junior College. While at PRJC, White played football and was the captain of the football team his sophomore year. He was also a member of the college's Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) unit and achieved the rank of Cadet Major.

Because this was a time of war for the United States, White, along with his classmates, was encouraged to enlist in the Inactive Enlisted Reserve Corps, which he did. White graduated from Pearl River Junior College in 1942 on a Sunday and was at Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg for active duty on Monday. White was shipped to Fort Eustice, Va. for his basic training and then on to Fort Stewart, Ga., for training with the anti-aircraft corps. He was dissatisfied with the unit's inactivity and wanted to see action like many of his friends from college. Hoping to become active, White enlisted in the infantry and was sent to Fort Sumter, S. C. A bulletin board flyer asking for volunteers for the paratroopers caught White's attention, and he immediately signed up. He was sent for training to Fort Benning, Ga. After completing his training, he was sent to Fort Bragg, N. C., with the 13th Airborne Division.



White's unit was shipped overseas to France, where he served for nine months. After Germany surrendered, White's unit was shipped back to the U. S. to await orders for the Pacific theater. However, the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima during his 45-day furlough, and Japan surrendered. While he was on furlough, White married his sweetheart, Marjorie Lee Daniels on Sept. 2, 1945.

Now a family man, and with the war ended, White looked to further his education. His wife worked while he attended Millsaps College in Jackson, Miss. using his G.I. bill to pay for his education. While at Millsaps, White played football and majored in mathematics. He graduated from Millsaps and began his career in education by going to work teaching five mathematics classes and coaching football and basketball at Ocean Springs, Miss. A year later, he and his wife returned to Poplarville, where he also taught math and coached at Poplarville High School. In his second year at Poplarville High School, White received a message from the Armed Services commanding him to report to Fort Hood, Tx., for duty in Korea. His initial enlistment in the Inactive Enlisted Reserve Corps had unexpectedly placed him on the rolls for service.

Besides having his career disrupted, White had to leave his wife and 2 month-old daughter, Lyda Sue, who was born August 15, 1950. He reported for duty and trained for 10 days, but instead of going to

Korea, the Army sent him to Ft. Myer, Va., because he had training and experience in teaching. From there, he was sent to Ft. Belvoir, Va. He was only on active duty there for nine months when he was honorably discharged. At Ft. Belvoir, his son, Calvin Ross, was born on Dec. 5, 1951

White continued teaching methods courses at Ft. Belvoir but in a civilian position, when he received a call from Garvin Howell Johnston, then-President of Pearl River County Agriculture High School and Junior College. Johnston offered White the principal's position in the high school department and White readily accepted.

White remained as principal for six years. During this time, White earned his Master's degree in school administration from the University of Mississippi. Then, the city of Poplarville made plans to build a new high school complex and transfer the 11th and 12th grades to the new school. For the first time in 59 years, there were no high school students on the Pearl River campus. White became registrar of the college and was later appointed to the academic dean's position. He occupied that position for six years.

When Johnston was nominated by the state's Democratic Convention to run for State Superintendent of Education, the college's Board of Trustees elected White the new President of Pearl River Junior College.

For many years, Pearl River Junior College was primarily an academic institution, offering a nearby and inexpensive alternative to the higher costs required by the first two years of a four-year degree. Many fine leaders had begun their college experience at Pearl River, including Johnston and White. The college's inexpensive cost, individualized instruction, and commitment to excellence had been a reason for many collegians from Pearl River's six-county supporting district to begin their college education there.

During Johnston's term, the college began redirecting its efforts toward vocational education. With the return of World War II veterans at the close of the war, industry had a need for trained manpower to run the nation's factories. As the nation turned toward its educational system to provide the necessary training, Mississippi turned toward her junior colleges. This new training was the precursor to today's careers technical training.

Johnston began by placing a state and federally-funded vocational education building on the front of the college's campus. This new building was completed under White's term. Also begun during this time of growth were a new library and academic building. White also oversaw the completion of these structures.

During White's term, a number of events changed the face of the college forever. One of those changes was integration. As with most public schools and colleges in the south in the 1960s and 1970s, Pearl River Junior College was faced with federally mandated integration. White faced this crisis without incident during his first year, 1968, due in part to excellent cooperation of the College Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, students, and the community. The first year of African-American attendance saw an outstanding black athlete on campus. Willie Heidelberg, a charter member of the PRCC Sports Hall of Fame, helped to break the ice by endearing himself to white Pearl River football fans.

Another campus-changing event that occurred during White's term was Hurricane Camille. When Camille struck on Aug. 17, 1969, Pearl River Junior College reeled under the storm's 190-mile-per-hour winds. White, who stayed in the President's home (present-day Development Foundation/ Alumni building) during the hurricane, walked out during the storm's calm to find Batson Hall's roof sitting in his front yard. Winds and wind-driven rain inflicted roof damage to every building on the college's campus, as well as other destruction. The final bill for the destruction was more than three-quarter million dollars.

Over the next several years, renovation and reconstruction sounds were heard all around the campus. Moody Hall, dedicated as College Hall in 1926, underwent renovation. The auditorium windows were sealed and a new stage and balcony added. This remodeled building was rededicated as a

fine arts and nursing complex. A new sports arena was added in 1974 at a cost of \$810,000 and was dedicated in honor of White at his retirement. Huff Hall, the campus' oldest building, was also renovated in 1974. A new Automotive complex was added on the north end of campus in 1975. Over the next three years, the Diesel Mechanics shop and the Masonry shop were added. In 1976, an addition to the Library provided space for a viewing room, remedial laboratory and study rooms. From 1972 until 1982, a total of \$4,874,360 was spent on construction, renovation and satellite centers. In addition to all the changes made at the school, White made time to return to school himself, earning his Doctorate in Education with an emphasis in College Administration at the University of Southern Mississippi.

In 1970, White answered Forrest County's need for a vocational-technical center in Hattiesburg, the district's most industrialized area. At this time, Forrest County was assigned to Pearl River Junior College by law, but did not provide any revenue for the college or have any representation on the college's Board of Trustees. The Forrest County Board of Supervisors agreed to pay the college "X" number of dollars to build and operate a high school Vo-Tech and adult education center. The educational programs at the Forrest County Center grew rapidly, with facilities for academic programs, health related programs, Workforce programs, administrative offices and continuing education programs. The Forrest County Board of Supervisors put in place tax millage in support of Pearl River College and received two active board seats on the Pearl River Community College Board of Trustees.

The Forrest County Vocational-Technical Center was built on a 12-acre campus, two miles south of Hattiesburg. Also during this time, centers were added in Hancock, Lamar and Marion counties to provide high school educational assistance in the career-technical arena.

In 1986, White retired from the longest tenure (18 years) of any Pearl River College president. After serving the college as high school principal, college registrar, academic dean, and finally as president, he ended a 33-year career at Pearl River Junior College.

The greatest compliment that could be paid was that White served his college well. His activity did not stop there. He also held memberships in clubs and organizations, including Mississippi Junior College Registrar's Association, four years, president, one year; Mississippi Junior College Dean's Association, six years, president, one year; Mississippi Junior College President's Association, 18 years, president, one year; Poplarville Rotary Club, 34 years, president, one year; Poplarville Lions Club, three years, president, one year; Pearl River County Republican Party, three years, president, one year.

White currently resides with his wife Marjorie in Clinton, Miss. where their daughter, Lyda Sue, and her family live. Lyda Sue is a sixth-grade teacher in the Clinton Public Schools. Their son, Calvin, resides in Ada, Ok., with his family, where he has a veterinary practice.





## *Ted J. Alexander*

1986-2000

A native of Scott County, Alexander graduated from Central High School in Jackson, attended Millsaps College where he was a talented athlete, and began his career in education as a classroom instructor at Murrah High School in Jackson.

A year later, he moved to Meadville where he served for 10 years as a teacher, coach, counselor, and principal.

Having completed his work on a master's degree in education, Alexander was chosen as the state's second Hardin Foundation scholar, a program sponsored by the Phil Hardin Foundation of Meridian which funds doctoral work for promising young professional educators.

Alexander received his doctorate in educational administration from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1972, at a time when he was serving as principal of Pascagoula High School.

From Pascagoula, Alexander accepted the post of Superintendent of Education of the Newton Public Schools in 1973, and he was named Superintendent of Schools in the McComb District in 1976, a post he held for 10 years.

During his time at McComb, the district was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a National Model School for America.

Dr. Alexander came to Pearl River as president in 1986 from McComb. During his term as president, he introduced many new ideas to the college. In 1986, he instructed the public relations office to produce a magazine for the alumni and friends of the college. The magazine was called RiverSide. In 1987, junior colleges across the state took a 10% cut in funding from the state. Spring semester saw a 12% increase in students.

Alexander served two years as chair of the Mississippi Association of Community and Junior Colleges and he is also a board member of the Mississippi Economic Council, and past chair of the Mississippi Humanities Council. In 1987, Alexander was cited as one of the nation's 100 outstanding school administrators in the nation by the Executive Educator for his work in McComb.

In July 1987, Alexander instituted a development foundation and alumni association. This organization would eventually be responsible for raising millions of dollars and funding thousands of scholarships. Alexander also added a grants development office to administration, and over the next years, more than \$50 million in grants helped fund numerous buildings and programs at the college.

While Alexander was president, he oversaw the addition of numerous buildings to the campus, including the Technology Center (1989), two dormitories for honors students (1990), an addition to the Science and Mathematics building (1990) that almost tripled the building's space, Allied Health Center at the Forrest County Center (1992), Learning Laboratory added to the library (1992), a major renovation to Crosby Hall (1994), the addition of a cafeteria wing to Crosby Hall (1995), a new nursing and wellness center (1997), and a new administration building (1999).

Alexander was also responsible for numerous additions and renovations on the campus, including renovations to Huff and Pearl River Halls, a new water tower, and renovations to the campus' landscape.

During Alexander's presidency, enrollment doubled and the budget went from \$7 million to more than \$30 million.

For a more detailed account, see Alexander's Biography, and the Alexander Timeline.



## *William A. Lewis*

2000-

William A. Lewis, a native of Clinton, MS earned his bachelor's degree from Mississippi College in 1968. He received his master's degree in Educational Administration from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1972. In 1984, he earned his doctorate in Educational Administration from USM.

Lewis received advanced training in the Superintendents Academy from the University of Southern Mississippi. He also attended the Leadership and Educational Associates program at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, N.C.

Lewis began his career in education as a basketball coach and biology teacher at Harrison Central High School in 1968. In 1971 he became assistant basketball coach and biology instructor at Gulf Coast Community College in Perkinston. In 1974, he moved to Copiah-Lincoln Community College as head basketball coach and physical education instructor. He assumed additional duties as the financial aid director in 1976, and he also won the state championship that same year in men's basketball for Co-Lin. By 1979, Lewis was named administrative assistant to the Dean of the School of Nursing at USM. Then in 1981, he advanced to USM's Director of Off Campus Credit Programs for the Division of Life Long Learning. In 1989 he became Director of Programming for USM's Life Long Learning.



Lewis was superintendent of Petal Schools from 1991 until 1997. During his tenure at Petal the school district achieved Level Five Accreditation and developed a successful parenting center model for the district. Petal was recognized as a Clarion Ledger Top Ten School in 1995, 1996 and 1997. In 1997, Lewis became the executive director of the Public Education Forum of Mississippi.

On July 1, 2000, Lewis began his job as Pearl River Community College's tenth chief administrator. When he began, the college was facing massive Legislative cut-backs. Lewis jumped into the job of making adjustments so the college could operate on the reduced state funding. This would become a year-by-year battle as the Legislature continued to under-fund the state's community colleges until 2006.

Lewis placed special importance on the student, stressing this emphasis to the faculty and staff. He saw the growth potential in Pearl River's six-county district and saw the need for a comprehensive plan of action for the college to follow. Lewis hired a consulting firm to create a master plan for construction and remodeling on both the Poplarville campus and at the Forrest County Center. The first project on the plan was to alleviate the congestion of cars arriving on the campus, and a four-lane boulevard was constructed between Shivers Gym and the Career/Technical building on the east side of the Poplarville campus, facing Highway 11. Eventually, the boulevard would go through the campus and exit on West North Street, providing easy access to the campus and a smooth traffic flow through the campus.

As a result of the Sept. 11, 2001 attack on America, Lewis saw a need for a place of spiritual refuge for students on campus. After an extensive campaign headed by James Ginn, an alumnus and bank vice president and Donna Wilson, PRCC Development Foundation Director, more than \$750,000 was raised for construction of a chapel on the west end of the Poplarville campus. The campaign was kicked off by a \$400,000 gift from Pearl River alumnus, Sidney Malone, a businessman from Hattiesburg, in memory of his son, Kelly.

In 2004, a new Student Life Center addition to Crosby Hall was completed. The new addition provided additional textbook store space, a great hall for students to relax and study, an expanded grill area, study rooms, a small conference room. All this was located in the new construction between Crosby

Hall and Olivia Bender Cafeteria. The cafeteria also got a facelift with the removal of the permanent and inadequate stage on the east end. A portable stage was purchased and new lighting and sound equipment were installed. The cafeteria also received a new 300-seat conference center on its east side.

2004-2005 was an incredible school year for Pearl River Community College. The term began with the announcement of the largest enrollment in the college's history, a record 4,156 students. This was followed in November with a ribbon cutting for the long-awaited Lowery A. Woodall Advanced Technology Center. Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour was the principal speaker at the Nov. 16 event. In less than a week, the #2 nationally ranked PRCC Wildcats met defending national champions Butler Community College's Grizzlies in the NJCAA National Championship game at the Dalton Defender's Bowl in Coffeyville, Kansas, where they won their second national championship on Nov. 21, 2004. Then, on Nov. 31 the new Hancock Center officially opened its doors to the Waveland-Bay St. Louis cities in a 6,000-square-foot facility located in the newly-renovated shopping mall. The year was completed with the dedication services for Malone Chapel on April 28, 2005. The 4,238 square foot facility offered a place of refuge to students. With seating for 200, the facility would be used for recitals, concerts, special events, weddings, and memorial services.

During the fall of 2004, plans were finalized for the new boys' and girls' residence halls. Lewis, who was faced with the difficult problem of providing more residence space for the growing number of students on campus, was also faced with continued under-funding at the state level. Limited state funding was coupled with limited availability of state bond money, and each county in PRCC's district was already paying off bonds for buildings financed in previous years. Seeking a solution to the crisis, Lewis began to look at creative ideas for funding the necessary residence halls. He found a new program that had been implemented at several western colleges and universities which provided very attractive buildings without any financing from the colleges. This program leased college acreage to a holding company, which, in turn, constructed large halls. These halls were then turned over to the college for management and student dorm fees were directed to the holding companies. At the end of 30 years, the two new halls would become the property of the college. These two new halls, with an additional 282 rooms providing space for 564 additional students to live on campus, were completed in time for fall 2006 classes.

The 2005-2006 year began with continued growth in enrollment. Then, on Aug. 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit, causing \$50 million damage to the main campus. With no electricity and no telephone service of any kind, Lewis attempted to assess the situation with the Plant Director at his side. Two days after the storm hit, Lewis walked through the washed out Hancock Center in Waveland, finding a white trout in the hallway. The center was washed out by the 30-plus-feet of tidal surge that flooded the area depositing more than eight feet of water in the center's leased building.

Lewis immediately went to work, meeting with FEMA, MEMA, insurance adjustors, contractors and architects to determine the amount of damage and assess what needed to be done before students could come back to classes. Within three weeks, students were back on campus. Many students were anxious to return, since their homes had been washed away by the storm.

Lewis would do battle with the insurer, Zurich, for an extended period of time.

In the spring of 2006, after almost a year of construction, the new library-classroom addition and facelift to the front of the Forrest County Center's buildings was completed. The new facility tied together the two oldest buildings at the center and gave them a renovation. The new construction was located in the space between buildings one and five, providing several needed classrooms and a large new library and learning laboratory. In fall 2007, more than a year after Hurricane Katrina, the new Hancock Center was dedicated. Located in the space the original center occupied, the center was able to move out of the temporary trailer housing into the new facility.

