

**SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH
CAROLINA, TOGETHER WITH A
CATALOGUE OF OFFICERS AND
STUDENTS, 1789-1889**

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Sketches of the history of the University of North Carolina, together with a catalogue of officers and students, 1789-1889 by Various

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PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY.
1889.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA,

CHAPEL HILL, N. C., *April* 8th, 1889.

I wish it to be understood that the following sketches of the University of North Carolina are not intended as a grave history for the public, but chiefly for the gratification of the students, old and new. I have been compelled to prepare them hastily, even hurriedly, while much engrossed with other duties. I have not hesitated to use extracts from my published addresses, now out of print. Fragmentary and imperfect as the sketches are, I venture to hope that they will be of interest, not only to those for whom they are especially designed, but to all friends of our University.

KEMP P. BATTLE.



OLD EAST BUILDING - UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA.

BY PRESIDENT KEMP P. BATTLE.

It might be claimed that the Centennial year of American Independence was likewise the Centennial year of the University of North Carolina, although the charter was not granted until 1789.

In December, 1776, a Convention, then called Congress, of enlightened men met at Halifax to form a Constitution for the new free State of North Carolina, under whose protection the people could maintain the Independence they had declared a few months before.

Without an army or navy, they had entered on a war for existence with a nation powerful, populous and wealthy, having the tradition of invincibility, which had, under Marlborough, within the century, broken the power of the Great Louis of France—had, with heavy hand, crushed the fortunes of the Pretender at Culloden—had sent Wolfe to storm the Heights of Quebec; had swept the seas with her fleets. The Revolution, if it failed, was Rebellion. The penalty of defeat was the doom of traitors. The State had barely two hundred thousand inhabitants, widely scattered and badly armed, and divided in sentiment. But notwithstanding these odds, this Congress, with wisdom unparalleled and faith approaching sublimity, provided for the interests of unborn children. They knew that those children would not be capable of freedom without education. They knew there could be no education without

teachers. They knew that teachers could not be procured without colleges, and they made the requirement of the University a part of the fundamental law. In the month of December, 1776, in the Constitution of the new State, then first adopted, are found these golden words, written amid storms and thunderings, to be made good when the sun shone on a free and united people: "ALL USEFUL LEARNING SHALL BE DULY ENCOURAGED AND PROMOTED IN ONE OR MORE UNIVERSITIES."

It was an act of sagacity and courage and far-seeing statesmanship, prompted by the bold men of Mecklenburg, who, smarting under the repeal of the charter of Queen's College, instructed their delegates, John Phifer, Robert Irwin, Zaccheus Wilson, Hezekiah Alexander, and lastly, but most prominent, Waightstill Avery, when cannon were booming and banners were flying and soldiers marshalling for the great death-struggle, to use all their endeavors for the establishment of a University and its endowment and maintenance.

The Revolutionary Fathers went to their honored graves. Generation after generation grew up and passed away. The old Constitution, after conferring the blessing of good government for many decades, was amended to suit the wants of a growing West. A great civil war desolated our land and destroyed institutions woven into the fabric of society. A race of slaves was suddenly made a part of the governing voting element of the State. A Constitution, superseding the old Constitution of 1776, was adopted to carry into effect this great change, and by a singular coincidence, exactly one hundred years after the adoption of the old Constitution, the people of the State amended the new, giving it a shape which will probably remain essentially unchanged to a distant period. But in all these vicissitudes and changes, showing the settled determination of the people of North Carolina, which no anxieties or disasters could banish from their minds, is still the substance of those golden words of 1776; or rather the execution of the mandate of the old Constitution, *in part*, is assumed, and the General Assembly is directed to go on and provide for rearing up, to the full magnitude of its usefulness, the University of the State.

While the Revolution was progressing, as might be anticipated,

the mandate of the Constitution lay dormant. *Inter arma silent leges.* When Caswell was beating McDonald at Moore's Creek Bridge, and Campbell, Shelby, Cleveland, Sevier, Williams and McDowell were capturing Ferguson's forces at King's Mountain, and Cornwallis and Greene were wrestling for the victory at Guilford, and Fanning was carrying as prisoner from Hillsboro the Governor of our State, and the momentous question whether our ancestors were patriots or traitors was still undecided, there was no time for erecting universities. And after the war, industry must have time for restoring plenty to wasted lands and statesmanship to form a settled government in the place of a nerveless confederacy. In the month of November, 1789, our State, after first a stern refusal and then a coy hesitation of a year, entered the American Union. In the next month of December, as if forming part of a comprehensive plan, the charter of the University, under the powerful advocacy of Davie, was granted by the General Assembly. The Trustees under the charter comprised the great men of the State, the good men of the State, the trusted leaders of the people.

The first named and chairman was Samuel Johnston, who, in legislative, executive and judicial station, in war and peace, left the impress of his wise conservatism on the State. There were James Iredell, one of the earliest Judges of the Supreme Court of the United States, and Alfred Moore, his successor in this high office. There were the first Federal District Judge, Colonel John Stokes, and John Sitgreaves, his successor. There was Hugh Williamson, the historian, and signer of the Constitution of the United States, a delegate to the Convention of 1787, and a long array of men who were to become Governors: Samuel Ashe and William Richardson Davie and Richard Dobbs Spaight, Benjamin Williams and Benjamin Smith. There were military men, who had been conspicuous fighters in the Revolution: General Joseph Graham, scarred with wounds in the defence of Charlotte under Davie, the father of the revered statesman, William A. Graham, the last exertions of whose honored life were spent for the revival of the University; General Thomas Person, whose hatred of injustice began with the disastrous struggles of the Regulation. There were Colonels William Lenoir and Joseph McDowell, who aided in thwarting the plans of Cornwallis by the capture of Ferguson at King's

Mountain. Of the State Judiciary we find the three Judges under the Court law of 1777—Samuel Spencer, John Williams, and Samuel Ashe, already mentioned, whose name is worthily represented by his descendants, Thomas Samuel Ashe, of Anson, and Samuel A. Ashe, of Raleigh; and of others distinguished in the history of the State—Archibald McLaine and Willie Jones, bold and active patriots, Stephen Cabarrus, long Speaker of the House of Commons, and John Haywood, the popular State Treasurer. Of the national House of Representatives, were Charles Johnson, grandfather of the late distinguished physician, Charles E. Johnson, of Raleigh, Joseph Dixon, James Holland and Alexander Mebane.

At the same session the General Assembly granted to the University all escheats and certain debts due by tax collectors during the Revolutionary war, called arrearages. All sheriffs realize that claims nearly ten years old of the nature of these arrearages were likely to remain in a state of suspension for many years and so indeed they have, even to this day.

The grant of escheats under the act of 1789 was of real value, and by the energy and good management of the Trustees, after a long period was the source of the endowment of the University. Many denizens of foreign birth left no heirs, citizens of North Carolina, and under the law as it stood until 1871, their lands escheated to the State; and in like manner obscure soldiers, to whom land warrants were granted for their services in the war, died leaving no heirs to inherit their claims. Of course the revenue from this source naturally diminished as the years rolled away from the Revolution, and it was still further diminished by acts of the Legislature giving the lands to a remoter heir, being a citizen, when the next heir is an alien, and giving the widow all the estate if her husband should die without an heir. At this day the chances of an escheat are worth but little, as an alien stands on the same footing with a citizen in regard to the possession of real estate.

It was not from parsimony but hard necessity that the long services of our patriot-soldiers, in hunger, and thirst, and cold, and nakedness, were paid for in a paper currency, like that of which the conquered Confederates have had such bitter experience. To this meagre dole was added for faithful service warrants for land