

Thomas Clemson: An Original Thinker

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The opening of Clemson College in 1893 was the result of a set of fortunate circumstances. John C. Calhoun's estate lands, Thomas Green Clemson's dreams of a college for scientific agriculture, and Ben Tillman's rise to political power made up the right combination for the establishment of a different sort of college in South Carolina.

Thomas Green Clemson (1807-1888) was born into a well-to-do Quaker family in Philadelphia. He studied chemistry in Europe and received a diploma from the Royal Mint in Paris. As a student in Paris he also participated in the Revolution of 1830.

When Clemson returned to the United States, he was fluent in three languages and a prolific writer in learned journals. All the while he traveled for mining interests.

Clemson, an original thinker, met Anna Maria Calhoun, daughter of South Carolina Sen. John C. Calhoun on one of many trips to Washington.

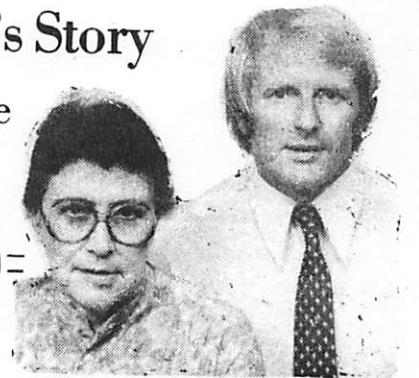
Anna Maria Calhoun inherited her father's intelligence and love of politics. Clemson, a striking figure of 6'6" and over 200 lbs, was 10 years Anna Maria's senior. He quickly won Calhoun's lifetime friendship and married Anna Maria at Fort Hill in 1838.

Thomas G. Clemson took over the management of Calhoun's plantation with the same enthusiasm and success he had given to his mining career. He also bought a 1,000 acre plantation in Edgefield District, known as "Canebrake." Horses and dogs (as many as 30 at a time) were Clemson's diversions.

It was during the first six years of his marriage, while devoting himself to scientific agriculture, that Clemson became convinced that South Carolina farmers needed scientific training above all else. Some time before 1844, the dream of Clemson College was born. It was a half century before the dream became reality.

South Carolina's Story

The making of a state



In many ways, Clemson emulated the Jefferson model. While serving his country abroad, the diplomat was seeking out new plants and observing agricultural practices abroad. In Clemson's case, President Tyler appointed him as charged d'affairs in Belgium. After receiving the French Legion of Honor, Clemson returned to set up an experimental farm in Maryland just outside of Washington, D.C. The farm grew into Maryland Agricultural College.

President Buchanan appointed Clemson to the office of first superintendent of agricultural affairs. In that office, Clemson laid the groundwork for the first U.S. Department of Agriculture.

With the eruption of the Civil War, Clemson resigned as superintendent of agriculture, left Anna Maria on the Maryland farm, and served the Confederacy as superintendent of Nitre and Mining Corps.

After the war, the Clemsons returned to Pendleton and for a time were dependent upon money solicited from their Northern friends. Clemson became more convinced than ever that the South needed scientific education.

Still absorbed with the idea of a college for scientific agriculture, Clemson invited Benjamin R. Tillman, spokesman for the Farmer's Movement in South Carolina, to Fort Hill. Anna Maria had died in 1875 and Clemson felt his grand-

children could make their way in the world. Clemson told Tillman he wished that his deceased wife's inheritance would become a gift to the state of South Carolina in the form of a college endowment. The gift was valued at \$90,000.

The South Carolina House accepted the donation easily, but the more conservative Senate was reluctant. Other educational institutions in the state objected. A Clemson granddaughter sued. Finally, in 1886, all obstacles were cleared. The cornerstone of Main Building was laid July 28, 1891, on a spot originally chosen by Mrs. Calhoun.

Clemson College, on 814 acres, was opened in 1893 with 446 students and 15 faculty. At that time it was the largest student body in the state.

Besides the Clemson bequest and student tuition, the college, in the beginning, was supported by a manufacturer's tax on fertilizers, cash sales from the college farm, and by the United States Congress through a land-strip endowment and the Morrill Fund.

An early boast of Tillman supporters was that Clemson, unlike South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina), was self-supporting and hence not a "burden" to the people of the state.