

# NEARBY HISTORY: Winthrop founder

*Johnson's efforts helped college grow and prosper throughout its early years*

Jan. 10 was the 150th anniversary of the birth of David Bancroft Johnson, the founder and president of Winthrop for 42 years.

Winthrop College came to Rock Hill from Columbia in 1894.

Fifteen years later, when President David Bancroft Johnson filed his annual report with state school Superintendent John Swearingen, the college showed considerable growth.

In 1909, Winthrop had 669 students enrolled. Johnson could proudly write that this "makes Winthrop the largest educational institution in the State and one of the largest in the South."



Louise Pettus

If he were really bragging, he could have written that the Winthrop enrollment exceeded that of the University of South Carolina

and Clemson combined.

Of the 669 students, 611 were studying to be teachers. Fifty-five had taught school before enrolling - which tells us something about the low education level in the state.

An enrolling student had to be at least 15 years old. The average age of all the students was slightly over 18 years.

Johnson reported that the students were in good health, with all required to have outdoor physical exercise along with "regular hours ... plain, wholesome, well-cooked food ... good

hygienic conditions." He also noted that the resident physician acted as sanitary officer.

Sports available were tennis, basketball, volleyball, bowling, gymnastics and field hockey.

Bancroft Hall, a dormitory housing 200 girls, opened in 1909.

The building's cost, complete with furniture, was \$66,000. The state had appropriated \$48,000 and the Peabody Board gave \$18,000.

A contract was let for building a new dining hall and kitchen, which was to be named after Sarah Crosby Chappell McBryde, the first dietitian. The contractors had promised to have what Johnson called a "six month's job" done in three months.

The opening of the college was postponed twice. The state didn't appropriate enough money and the college had to borrow. Because McBryde Hall is a strikingly handsome room, it may surprise the reader that Johnson's 1909 comment was, "We have thought more of convenience and utility than of appearance."

The 144-acre college farm (which encompassed the area around present-day Winthrop Coliseum and the Cherry Park complex) was a working farm under the direction of a superintendent. There was a dairy herd of 78 cows to supply milk and butter for the college dining room. The farm also produced fresh vegetables and meat, especially chickens and eggs. And it ran a profit.

The cost of operating the college for a year was reported as \$88,954.95. This included all salaries, improvements and repairs. Johnson's salary was \$3,000, while faculty salaries ranged from \$600 to \$1,000. Johnson commented that his women faculty, especially department chairs, were grossly underpaid.

For the previous three years, Johnson had requested money with which to operate a summer school and had been refused each time. He argued that it was a waste of state money for buildings to stand empty one-fourth of the year when there were so many rural schoolteachers who needed additional training.

Johnson's wish list was long. Above all, he wanted to secure an additional \$10,000 for his long-awaited Training School. He had raised \$45,000 in money and \$45,000 in matching funds. There was a deadline on J.P. Morgan's offer of a contribution of \$25,000. Winthrop had secured the votes of a majority of the Rock Hill School Board to sell the present site of Withers-WTS and Dacus Library to the college, but a minority of the school board had brought suit for an injunction to prevent the majority from transferring the property to the college.

The case was decided by Judge J. Lyles Glenn in favor of the college. Morgan agreed to extend his deadline and Johnson was ready to move forward with his Training School plans.

Before closing his report, Johnson revealed additional wishes: a science hall with adequate equipment, a larger auditorium, a larger gymnasium, larger quarters for the growing music department, a greenhouse, "Air Cleaning Equipment," iron fire escapes for all the buildings, an astronomical observatory, a rural schoolhouse for practice teaching, more land for the farm, an organ for the auditorium and a tower clock.

Before his death, on Dec. 26, 1928, D.B. Johnson had reached all of his 1909 goals and more.