

A CENTURY OF CHANGE: THE HISTORY OF TWO-YEAR EDUCATION
IN THE STATE OF ALABAMA, 1866 - 1963

by

DUSTIN P. SMITH

STEPHEN G. KATSINAS, COMMITTEE CHAIR
KARI A. FREDERICKSON
WAYNE J. URBAN
NATHANIEL J. BRAY
ROBERT P. PEDERSEN

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about two-year education in Alabama during the governorships of George C. Wallace, but little about two-year education prior to his first inauguration in 1963. Yet nearly a third of the forty-three junior, technical, and community college institutions that eventually formed the Alabama Community College System had been established prior to 1963. This study reviews the major types of two-year colleges (historically black private junior college, public trade schools, and public junior colleges) established in Alabama from 1866 to 1963 by drawing upon case studies of institutional founding based upon primary document analysis.

Alabama's first two-year institution was Selma University established in 1878 by the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention. Selma University operated as a private junior college for the newly freed slaves hungry for education. The first public two-year institution was the Alabama School of Trades, founded in Gadsden in 1925, which offered vocational education courses. A second trade school was established using federal vocational aid money in Decatur to produce trained workers to support the World War II war efforts.

The first set of public trade schools created in Alabama followed the end of World War II with the passage of the Regional Trade and Vocational School Act of 1947, authored by freshman State Representative George C. Wallace, and endorsed by Governor James "Big Jim" Folsom. A third type of two-year college was established in 1961 when the Alabama Legislature passed a bill authorizing a public junior college in northwest Alabama.

The 1901 Constitution was a powerful factor in hindering two-year college development in Alabama. With unstable funding and an inability to raise local funds imposed by the

Constitution, school districts could not afford to operate public junior colleges. This led to two-year college development being controlled by politicians in Montgomery. The funding restrictions of the 1901 Constitution also meant that an institution legally authorized would be doomed without state funding, because the lack of local funding. It is therefore no accident that a broad two-year public educational system could not develop in Alabama prior to 1963 without a champion in the Governor's office.

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At the beginning of this dissertation process, my major professor, Dr. Stephen Katsinas, told me that the process was much like the story of the tortoise and the hare, and that the tortoise always wins. This is an accurate analogy to describe the process. The slow and steady progress pays off, but to endure, the student must receive support from many different sources, or will stall somewhere in this process.

I want to thank my wife, Cilia, for her support both during the coursework and the dissertation. She spent many weekends alone as I was attending class, without complaint, and constantly encouraged me to keep working. My family also played an important role in helping me through this process and has always supported my educational goals. Their belief in my ability to achieve anything I wanted to do has always been a source of strength. I want to single out my grandfather, Willie Smith, for instilling in me a love of history. This led me to select the topic for my dissertation, a subject that held my interest throughout the dissertation process.

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INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive history of two-year education in Alabama has never been written. Several studies exist, typically doctoral dissertations, which are usually very narrow in scope. For instance, Catherine Randall devoted a chapter of her 2001 dissertation on the unplanned expansion of institutions of higher education to the expansion of two-year colleges during the 1960s.¹ In his 1983 dissertation, David Rowland, former president of Walker College in Jasper, studied the decline of private two-year colleges in the state from 1960 to 1980.² Stephen G. Katsinas extensively reviewed Alabama State Board of Education minutes to examine the role that Governor George C. Wallace played in starting community colleges, and the politics surrounding the 1963 legislation that authorized the system, emphasizing the period of 1963 to 1977.³ Meakins and Van Horn both wrote dissertations, in 1967 and 1971 respectively, focusing on the history of public junior colleges from 1958 to 1970.⁴ These writings taken together represent small episodes in the life of two-year institutions in Alabama. Although they address

¹ J. Catherine Randall, "A Kudzu-ing of Colleges: The Proliferation and Balkanization of Higher Education in Alabama" (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 2001), 86-131.

² David A. Rowland, "A Study of the Decline in the Number of Private Junior Colleges in the State of Alabama (1960-1980) with Contributing Factors Leading to the Decline" (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1983).

³ Stephen G. Katsinas, "George C. Wallace and the Founding of Alabama's Two-Year Colleges," *The Journal of Higher Education* 65, no. 4 (1994): 447-472.

⁴ John R. Meakins, "State Controlled Public Junior Colleges in the State of Alabama" (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1967); James F. Van Horn, "A History of the Alabama Public Junior College (1958-1970)" (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 1971).

their respective subjects thoroughly, they do not present an early history of two-year colleges in Alabama.

A review of this literature reveals that almost nothing has been written about two-year education in Alabama prior to George Wallace's first term as governor, which began in January of 1963. There is extensive literature after this, but to put this in proper perspective, a history prior to Wallace is needed. For instance, both Randall and Katsinas examined the way in which the Alabama Community College System blossomed from ten authorized two-year institutions to a system that at one time included forty-three separately accredited institutions. They describe a system that expanded rapidly with little planning, but neither spent extensive time describing the institutions in place before 1963.

The most visible problem is duplication of services in some areas, and lack of access in others. The counties of Southwest Alabama, known as the Black Belt, demonstrate this lack of service. Only one community college is located to serve six counties while other areas of the state, such as Jefferson and Montgomery Counties have as many as two colleges per county, yet Montgomery got no lower division general education college and still has none. The lack of junior college transfer education for citizens in Alabama's predominately African-American Black Belt region in West Central Alabama is evidence of the lack of planning and attention to access for all students by the planners of the Alabama Community College System. It seems unbelievable that a state with forty-three post-secondary institutions could have areas without access to higher education.

The information that is often overlooked in the discussion of two-year college expansion in Alabama is the extent of the system that was in place prior to the Wallace administration. Table 1 lists the locations of the colleges and the founding dates of the colleges as well as the

subsequent mergers that have occurred in the Alabama Community College System. Institutions in italics were in operation prior to the 1963 authorizing legislation and became part of the forty-three institutions that existed prior to mergers in 1985.

As Table 1 indicates, many of these institutions opened prior to the 1963 legislation that created what would become the Alabama Community College System. At least ten technical colleges, one public junior college, two municipal trade schools, and two private junior colleges that would enter the Alabama Community College System were actually operating prior to 1963, Governor George C. Wallace's first term as governor. This number amounts to a third of the forty-three colleges mentioned by Katsinas and later Randall. This means that much fewer than the forty-three institutions that were part of the Alabama Community College System in 1985 were actually created during the Wallace administrations. By recording the history of these early institutions, this study adds further depth and breadth to the recorded historical development of the Alabama Community College System, and helps explain how it evolved into its current configuration.

Research Approach

The following is a list of major research questions examined in this study. It does not include minor questions answered by the documentation of the histories of these individual institutions.

1. What factors, if any, affected the establishment of private two-year colleges in Alabama during the period of Reconstruction?

Table 1: Establishment and Mergers of Post-Secondary Institutions in Alabama

Name	Date Established	Date Merged	Geographic Area of the State
Alabama Southern Community College Patrick Henry State Junior College Hobson State Technical College	1991 1965 1965	1991	Monroeville (SW Alabama) Monroeville (SW Alabama) Thomasville (SW Alabama)
Bevill State Community College Walker State Technical College Brewer State Junior College Northwest State Technical College Walker College	1992 1966 1969 1964 1938	1992 1992 1989 1998	Summiton (NW Alabama) Jasper (NW Alabama) Summiton (NW Alabama) Hamilton (NW Alabama) Jasper (NW Alabama)
Bishop State Community College Southwest State Technical Institute Carver State Technical Institute	1965 1950 1962	1991 1991	Mobile (SW Alabama) Mobile (SW Alabama) Mobile (SW Alabama)
Calhoun Community College Tennessee Valley State Technical School	1963 1941	1965	Decatur (N Central Alabama) Decatur (N Central Alabama)
Central Alabama Community College Alexander City State Junior College Nunnelley State Technical College	1989 1963 1963	1989	Alexander City (E Central Alabama) Alexander City (E Central Alabama) Childersburg (E Central Alabama)
Chattahoochee Valley Community College	1971		Phenix City (SE Alabama)
Drake State Technical College	1961		Huntsville (N Central Alabama)
Enterprise-Ozark Community College Enterprise State Junior College Ozark Aviation Institute	1963 1960	2003	Enterprise (SE Alabama) Enterprise (SE Alabama) Ozark (SE Alabama)
James H. Faulkner State Community College	1963		Bay Minette (SW Alabama)
Gadsden State Community College Alabama School of Trades Gadsden State Technical Institute Ayers State Technical College	1965 1925 1960 1963	1986 1986 2003	Gadsden (NE Alabama) Gadsden (NE Alabama) Gadsden (NE Alabama) Anniston (NE Alabama)
J. F. Ingram State Technical College	1965		Deatsville (E Central Alabama)
Jefferson Davis Community College Atmore State Technical Institute	1963 1972	1990	Brewton (S Central Alabama) Atmore (SW Alabama)
Jefferson State Community College	1963		Birmingham (N Central Alabama)
Lawson State Community College Bessemer State Technical Institute	1947 1965	2005	Birmingham (N Central Alabama) Bessemer (N Central Alabama)
Lurleen B. Wallace Community College Lurleen B. Wallace State Junior College MacArthur State Technical Institute	1967 1965	2003	Andalusia (SE Alabama) Andalusia (SE Alabama) Opp (SE Alabama)
Northeast Alabama Community College	1963		Rainsville (NE Alabama)
Northwest-Shoals Community College Northwest State Junior College Muscle Shoals State Technical College	1989 1961 1966	1993 1989	Muscle Shoals (NW Alabama) Phil Campbell (NW Alabama) Muscle Shoals (NW Alabama)
Reid State Technical College	1963		Evergreen (S Central Alabama)
Shelton State Community College Shelton State Technical Institute Fredd State Technical College	1979 1952 1963	1979 1994	Tuscaloosa (W Central Alabama) Tuscaloosa (W Central Alabama) Tuscaloosa (W Central Alabama)
Snead State Community College	1935		Boaz (NE Alabama)
Southern Union Community College Opelika State Technical Institute	1922 1963	1993	Wadley (E Central Alabama) Opelika (E Central Alabama)
H. Council Trenholm State Technical College Patterson State Technical College	1965 1961	2000	Montgomery (SE Alabama) Montgomery (SE Alabama)
George Corley Wallace State Community College Sparks State Technical College Dothan Trade School	1999 1966 1947	1999	Dothan (SE Alabama) Eufaula (SE Alabama)
Wallace State Community College-Hanceville	1963		Hanceville (N Central Alabama)
George C. Wallace Community College-Selma	1963		Selma (S Central Alabama)

Note: Institutions in bold are still in operation today. Institutions in regular font were merged into the bolded institutions.

2. What factors, if any, affected the establishment of post-secondary trade schools in Alabama following World War I and World War II?

3. What factors, if any, helped or hindered the development of public junior colleges in Alabama in the six decades prior to the Wallace governorships?

This study examined nine of the twenty-three institutions to provide a representative view of the two-year colleges in existence prior to the first Wallace administration in 1963. Of the nine institutions covered, one was a private junior college, Selma University. This institution represents two-year educational development that occurred during Reconstruction. Six postsecondary trade schools created after World War I and World War II are also examined. Reasons that no public junior colleges were established in Alabama prior to World War II are also examined. Finally, the study examined the pre-1963 public junior colleges, one of which was established at Phil Campbell (Northwest State Junior College), and one of which was authorized by statute but never opened. Table 2 provides a listing of all the twenty-three institutions with the eight proposed to be examined in italics.

In order to answer the research questions the author undertook extensive fieldwork. To document the early history of the private junior college begun at Selma in 1878, which today is known as Selma University, sources located at the Selma University Library were examined. Additional documents were examined on visits to the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) in Montgomery. Research on state-sponsored institutions also began with the ADAH. To answer questions related to dates and supporters of different establishment bills, ADAH records of all bills related to institutions covered in this study were examined. Stories about different bills from newspapers across the state were also gathered at the ADAH library.

Table 2: Two-Year Institutions in Alabama Prior to 1963

Institution/Year Est.	Sponsoring Agent	Host Town/ Region of State	Importance
I. Private Junior Colleges			
A. Traditionally White Junior Colleges			
1. Marion Military Institute 1842	Baptist	Marion (S Ala)	1 st two-year institution in state
2. St. Bernard Junior College 1893	Catholic	Cullman (N Ala)	1 st white denominational college
3. Southern Union Junior College 1922	Disciples of Christ	Wadley (SE Ala)	2 nd white denominational college
4. Snead Junior College 1935	Methodist	Boaz (NE Ala)	3 rd white denominational college
5. Walker College 1938	Unclear	Jasper (NW Ala)	AL's only secular private JC
6. Sacred Heart Junior College 1940	Catholic	Cullman (N Ala)	4 th white denomination college
B. Historically Black Junior Colleges			
7. Selma University 1878	Colored Baptist	Selma (S Ala)	1 st black, private junior college.
8. Lomax-Hannon College 1893	AME Church	Greenville (S Ala)	2 nd black, private junior college
9. Concordia College 1922	Lutheran	Selma (S Ala)	3 rd black, private junior college
II. Public Trade Schools, 1925-1961			
A. Traditionally White Trade Schools, Pre-WWII			
10. Alabama School of Trades 1925	State	Gadsden (NE Ala)	1 st public state trade school
11. Decatur Trade School 1941	City	Decatur (N Ala)	1 st municipal trade school
B. Traditionally White Trade Schools, Post-WWII (under the Regional Trade & Vocational School Act of 1947)			
12. Dothan Trade School 1948	State	Dothan (SE Ala)	1 st regional trade school
13. Tuscaloosa Trade School 1951	State	Tuscaloosa (W Ala)	2 nd regional trade school
14. Southwest Trade School 1952	State	Mobile (SW Ala)	3 rd regional trade school
15. Patterson State Trade School 1961	State	Montgomery (SE Ala)	2 nd trade school under 1955 Act
16. Ozark Aviation Institute 1961	City	Ozark (SW Ala)	Transition from city to state control
C. Historically Black Trade Schools, Post WWII			
17. Wenonah Trade School 1949	State	Birmingham (N Ala)	1 st black trade school
18. Carver State Tech Institute 1955	State	Mobile (SW Ala)	1 st trade school under 1955 Act
19. Gadsden Trade School 1960	City	Gadsden (NE Ala)	1 st black municipal trade school
20. Huntsville State Tech College 1961	State	Huntsville (N Ala)	3 rd black trade school
III. Pre-1963 Public Junior Colleges			
21. Northwest State Junior College 1961	State	Phil Campbell (NW Ala)	1 st public junior college.
Public Junior Colleges that Failed to Open			
22. Jackson & DeKalb Counties	State		Chartered in 1961
23. Talladega County	State		Chartered in 1962

Official authority to select the locations for many of the public two-year institutions including post-WWII postsecondary trade schools was given to the Alabama State Board of Education. It is important to remember that state legislators were clearly involved in the process, with some legislators even serving on the State Board of Education itself. Questions related to the location and selection process for the sites of many of the schools were found in the official minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education located in the State Department of Education in Montgomery. After the public records were examined for the institutions covered in this study, visits to local communities were conducted as necessary. For example, the author visited the Athens Public Library, the Decatur City Board of Education, the Cullman County Board of Education, and the Fort Payne Public Library to uncover information not found in the ADAH collections.

The fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the modern Alabama Community College System is approaching in 2013. This is likely to spark some interest in the history of the system, but for the most part this history is missing. Above all, the early history is completely absent from the literature. The story of the Alabama Community College System cannot be fully told unless the early events in two-year education are used to establish context. This study creates a needed history of early two-year education in Alabama based upon local events, and told from a local perspective. By using the historical record and local sources, this study attempts to create an accurate and logical history of two-year education in Alabama.

While relying on local sources to tell the story of two-year education in Alabama from a local perspective, this study will not ignore important regional and national trends that played a role in shaping this development. This larger history can then be used as background to understand other events in the development of two-year education in Alabama. Therefore, this

study will not only create a history of the early events in two-year education in Alabama, but will contribute to understanding Alabama higher education as a whole. This early history of two-year education in Alabama needs to be documented not only because it is absent in the literature, but also because it is also important to understanding the subsequent development of the Alabama Community College System.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGE HISTORY IN ALABAMA

The field of higher education has traditionally been resistant to change. The university is often seen as one of the most traditional institutions in American society. Revolutions in higher education occur very rarely, and few of these new ideas survive the test of time.¹ However, the twentieth century witnessed the birth and endurance of a revolution in American higher education. Few events have changed the landscape more than the creation of two-year colleges by bringing higher education within the reach of the average person.² Although two-year colleges were conceived in the late nineteenth century, the events of the twentieth century created a fertile environment for their growth and popularity. Societal and economic changes during the twentieth century provided favorable conditions that allowed these institutions to become a major part of the higher educational system in the United States.

The ever-increasing educational level of the American student, mainly because of the creation of public high schools, combined with the move away from the agrarian economy to help make education a necessity for economic security.³ The increasing financial ability of many families and the creation of federal aid programs, such as the G.I. Bill following World War II,

¹ Daniel T. Seymour, *Developing Academic Programs: The Climate for Innovation* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1988), 22-25.

² George B. Vaughan, *The Community College in America* (Washington, DC: The American Association of Community Colleges, 1982), 10.

³ Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer, *The American Community College*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 6-9.

made the once distant dream of higher education a very real possibility for millions of Americans. It soon became obvious that universities did not have the capacities to accommodate this increasing number of students. It was also apparent that many traditional universities did not suit some of these new students because of finances, locations, or program offerings. The unique situation created by the increasing number of non-traditional students desiring higher education required a unique solution. More often than not during the twentieth century, many states found the answer to this problem in the development of two-year educational institutions. These institutions offered additional education closer to home and at a lower cost. The colleges also met the needs of students who desired additional education beyond high school but not a four-year degree. In many cases, two-year institutions served to transition students from high school to the university or from high school to the workforce.

Although the pros and cons of these institutions are debated in the literature, it is clear that without them, many students would not have access to higher education. Early in their history, many two-year colleges were very different from each other, with some offering only vocational education. These colleges were often called trade or vocational schools. Other institutions offered only transfer courses and were usually called junior colleges. These functions have gradually been merged, and the resulting institutions are called community colleges.⁴ The American community college has extended higher education to many Americans previously underserved by four-year colleges. As Cohen and Brawer stated, for many community college students the choice is not between a four-year college and a two-year college; the choice is a two-year college education or none at all. Many attempts have been undertaken to document the

⁴ Cohen and Brawer, *The American Community College*, 440.

history of these institutions, but most have been from a national perspective.⁵ Yet as the name “community college” implies, these colleges are intensely *local* institutions. Several attempts to document a “national” history of two-year education in America have been written, but these studies typically rely on the analysis of national pronouncements or reports and often omit the local circumstances surrounding the founding and development of each college. A survey of the historical literature of community colleges reveals that the history of two-year institutions has seldom been documented from a local perspective.

The Lack of Local History

In his 443 page dissertation from Columbia University, *The Origin and Development of the Early Public Junior College 1900-1940*, Robert Pedersen lists two factors that may help explain this lack of local history. The first is a lack of records on early junior colleges. Many of the early junior colleges were operated as side programs to a high school with the major purpose of preparing elementary and secondary educators, who at the time required only an Associate’s degree to be certified. Pedersen argued that school boards spent very little time on the administration and governance of junior colleges during their meetings. School board members were elected to govern K-12 school systems, and therefore devoted more of their meeting time to these issues. In many cases, Pedersen found only a brief mention of the local junior college in school board minutes. Witt and Wattenbarger also identified this problem, and stated that retaining historical records was not a main priority for two-year colleges.⁶ An example of this neglect concerning history can be seen in Alabama, where the papers from a former community

⁵ Robert P. Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College 1900-1940” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1999).

⁶ Allan A. Witt and James Wattenbarger, *America’s Community Colleges: The First Century* (Washington, DC: The American Association of Community Colleges, 1994), 12.

college president were accidentally thrown out by the college library.⁷ The problem of missing records is familiar to historical researchers, but situations such as this make writing a local history of two-year education a challenge.

A second factor that Pedersen identified as contributing to the lack of local community college history was laziness on part of the scholars, which prevented them from examining local primary sources. He stated that this “reluctance to pursue other sources of reliable evidence has left them unable to ascertain even the most basic facts about the vast majority of early junior colleges.”⁸ Even though scholars such as Vaughan, Bogue, and Eells list Joliet, Illinois, as opening the first junior college in 1901, Pedersen’s examination of primary sources revealed that this institution was not a true junior college.⁹ At best, it had one or two courses offered at the high school. In his thorough review of the historical archives, Pedersen found no mention of the term “junior college” until 1912, and the term would only be mentioned in the records at Joliet after 1913.

A 1945 dissertation by one of the early members of the Joliet faculty may help put the issue to rest, as Pedersen quoted Roosevelt Bresler as writing: “Such expressions as “established,” “formed,” and “came into existence” convey a wholly erroneous impression concerning the conditions at Joliet. The writings of recognized authorities in this field give the impression that after due consideration the school authorities decided to establish a junior college at Joliet in 1902. In truth the college “evolved” – it was not “established,” “formed,” or begun at any particular date.” Therefore, the statement that Joliet Junior College opened in 1901

⁷ Debbie Waller (librarian, Central Alabama Community College), discussion with the author, June 22, 2009.

⁸ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 32.

⁹ Vaughan, *The Community College in America*, 16; Jesse P. Bogue, *The Community College* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1950), 54; Walter C. Eells, *The Junior College* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), 45.

is inaccurate. A more accurate description of the educational events at Joliet would be to state that the Joliet High School offered some college level courses in 1901.¹⁰

Bresler's writings demonstrate the inaccuracy of many of the claims by two-year college histories in regards to the establishment of early two-year colleges. Pedersen contended that this issue arises mainly from the reluctance to consult primary documents. For example, Eells, a Stanford University professor who served as the Executive Secretary of the American Association of Junior Colleges from 1938 to 1945 and the editor of *Junior College Review*, used a secondary source to support his claim that Joliet was established in 1901. He used an article written in 1930 by W. W. Haggard to support this claim; Haggard's article included a quote from J. Stanley Brown's speech at the dedication of a new building at Joliet. During this speech Brown stated, "Our own great University of Illinois, whose distinguished president addresses us this evening, admits our recommended graduates in the sophomore class without condition."¹¹ Joliet students graduated as *sophomores* instead of the traditional junior college transfer rank of junior. Brown's speech did not even include the term "*junior college*." Most subsequent historical works either cite a work such as Eells, or include no citation at all when referring to the establishment of the "first" junior college at Joliet.

John H. Frye, in *The Vision of the Public Junior College 1900-1940*, referred to this reliance on previous works by saying, "this outline is passed from author to author in those few introductory or survey studies of the junior college."¹² This process only serves to spread inaccurate information about the early events in the history of junior colleges by relying on inaccurate secondary sources. The works of Pedersen and Frye cast doubt on the accuracy of

¹⁰ Pederson, "The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College," 20.

¹¹ Eells, *The Junior College*, 54.

¹² John H. Frye, *The Vision of the Public Junior College, 1900-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 5.

some of the most commonly accepted versions of junior college history because these histories fail to consult primary source documents, and as a result, overlook many of the real historical events. The lack of consultation of primary sources not only creates an inaccurate chronology, it also leads to inaccurate claims concerning the motives for starting junior colleges.

According to Pedersen and Frye, two of the most common fallacies of those writing about the formation of early two-year colleges relate to the role that the desire for “democratization” and the influence of university leaders had in junior college establishment.¹³ The term “democratization” was first used by Leonard V. Koos as one purpose of early junior colleges in his 1924 University of Minnesota study.¹⁴ Democratization is the process by which two-year colleges make higher education available to all citizens. Because many histories of the junior college assume that the motivations for starting every junior college were the same everywhere and in all circumstances, the role played by the local community is almost totally ignored. Pedersen argued that the motives for starting a two-year college are as diverse as the communities that founded them.¹⁵ Therefore, a couple of national factors cannot fully, and often not even partially, explain the formation of any junior college. He contends that the factors that motivated a rural community in Mississippi to start a two-year college were not likely to be the same as in a city such as Chicago.

Pedersen’s main argument was that each college started in response to local conditions, and to understand those conditions, one must consult local primary-source information. The local sources often indicate that two-year college development was centered on the community rather

¹³ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 52; Frye, *The Vision of the Public Junior College*, 12.

¹⁴ Leonard Koos, *The Junior-College Movement* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1924), 35.

¹⁵ Pederson, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 55.

than a distant organization that lobbied for their establishment. Victor Hedgepeth, superintendent of the six-year high school at Goshen, Indiana, wrote in 1905 that the “six years work offered at Goshen High School is a result of real demand, rather than an experiment based on any academic discussion as to the advisability of such an extension.”¹⁶ His writing is just one example that exposes the holes in the “national” theory of two-year college development. Early sources such as this support the argument that two-year colleges arose in response to local needs and conditions. The efforts of some historians to connect the motivation of the grassroots effort for the forming of local junior colleges to the influence of a few university presidents, professors, and national organizations creates a history that is almost totally inapplicable to local circumstances, because it imposes a national model onto local situations. Instead of using a national model to write a history of early two-year education in Alabama, this study will create a bottom-up history of the development of two-year education in Alabama, using a local context provided by the local records.

Many writers of two-year college history list the democratization function as one of the key reasons for which the colleges were created. As early as 1924, Koos listed democratization as the second most important function of a junior college.¹⁷ Eells similarly referred to it as the “popularizing function.” It is clear that early junior college experts recognized this function as important, but was it really a factor that led to the establishment of two-year colleges in the early twentieth century? Although experts identify this function as important, Eells in a 1931 survey found that the early junior colleges had only limited success in democratizing higher education. Eells surveyed 3,058 junior college students in California. The students were asked, if there was no junior college where they lived, would they still be in school? Surprisingly, 85 percent

¹⁶ Victor Hedgepeth, “The Six-year High School Plan at Goshen, Indiana,” *School Review* 13, no. 1 (1905): 19.

¹⁷ Koos, *The Junior-College Movement*, 88.

responded that they would still be seeking higher education. These data indicated that democratization was not necessarily being achieved by the early junior colleges in California.¹⁸ Koos himself found that junior colleges were only a little more inclusive than state universities in regards to prerequisites courses and cost of attendance.¹⁹ He even criticized the institutions for failing to alter their programs to meet the needs of the academically weak.

It would then appear that although democratization was a goal of the academics, it was not a particularly powerful factor on the local level to support the early establishment of a two-year college, and would not become a major force for at least another generation. Boren described the achievement of democratization as “piece-meal, a bit at a time.”²⁰ Both Pedersen and Frye concluded that this function has been perpetuated without being critically examined on a local scale.²¹ A serious history cannot list democratization as a factor in two-year college establishment without examining the primary sources related to the formation of the colleges. One must examine the local history of each institution in order to identify the motives surrounding the formation of the local two-year institution. Only then can it be determined if the desire for democratization was a factor in establishment.

A second fallacy in the motives for starting a junior college relates to what Frye calls the “great-man theory.”²² This traces the motives for starting a junior college to the influence of a single influential person. Among the names often mentioned in the literature are William Rainey Harper, David Starr Jordan, Alexis Lange, and Henry Tappan. Harper was president of the

¹⁸ Eells, *The Junior College*, 99.

¹⁹ Koos, *The Junior-College Movement*, 94.

²⁰ Claude B. Boren, “Why a Junior College Movement,” *Junior College Journal*, 24 (February 1954): 346.

²¹ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 25.

²² Frye, *The Vision of the Public Junior College*, 8-12.

University of Chicago and typically receives most of the credit for inspiring the supposed junior college movement. This is mainly because he first used the phrase “junior college” when referring to the freshman and sophomore years of college. Most traditional histories ignore the fact that the context in which he used this term was very different from the junior colleges created during the twentieth century. Writers including Eells, Vaughan, and Hillway lead one to believe that these individuals inspired school boards across the nation to open junior colleges.²³ While it is possible that these men added publicity to the junior college idea, Pedersen found no evidence in the historical record for any college being opened as a result of direct influence of these individuals.²⁴ He argued that the independent and isolated nature of school districts made a coordinated effort of junior college establishment almost impossible. This autonomy would then make it difficult for a single individual, far-removed from local conditions, to inspire a group of citizens to spend their money and invest their time to establish new institutions whose future prospects were uncertain.

Earlier scholars support Pedersen’s conclusions. Writing in 1954, Boren concluded that it would be unlikely that the general public was well informed about the ideas of educational leaders such as William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago, who is often cited as the father of junior colleges. Earlier writers such as Angell in 1915 stated that “the immediate motivation to the present junior college movement has, however, not come from the universities.”²⁵ Although he acknowledged that the university leaders provided some “agitation of educational ideas,” he wrote that the motivation to start junior colleges came “from the

²³ Eells, *The Junior College*, 26; Vaughan, *The Community College in America*, 20; Tyrus Hillway, *The American Two-Year College* (Harper and Bros: New York, 1958), 10.

²⁴ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 42.

²⁵ James R. Angell, “The Junior College Movement in the High Schools,” *School Review* 23, no. 5 (1915): 293.

intelligent public that supports them.”²⁶ Brush in 1916 made a similar claim, stating that “the movement is of popular origin.”²⁷ Citations from early sources such as these are often missing from the most popular versions of junior college history. However, the claims of the early writers provide evidence for the local origin of junior colleges. From these writings one can reasonably conclude that it is much more likely that many junior colleges were opened in response to local needs rather than in response to any national pronouncements of “democratization” by a “great-man.” Yet for the most part, this local evidence is overlooked by popular community college histories because most are told from a “top-down” perspective instead of from the local, or even state, level.

This study acknowledges that local events do not occur in a vacuum and a complete reliance on them could create a misinterpretation of local actions. There is little doubt that national and regional factors affected local circumstances. However, there is a difference in the impact of national factors and a so-called national pronouncement or movements promoted by most two-year college histories. The “junior college movement” and the “great-man theory” are examples of national pronouncements and movements that had little impact on the local level according to the historical record. In fact, as Pedersen had demonstrated, these movements only seem to represent a “national” event in the writings of those who subscribe to the traditional view of two-year college history.²⁸ Most local histories contain little evidence to support these national claims. It appears that these events were national in name only. Although the claims that a few national factors led to the establishment of two-year colleges fall short of the test of history, other national events clearly had an impact on two-year education at the local level.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ H. R. Brush, “The Junior College and the University,” *School and Society* 4, no. 88 (1916): 357.

²⁸ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 48.

For instance, no treatment of educational history can deny the impact that the G.I. Bill had on two-year education immediately following World War II. This clearly national factor had a tremendous impact on the local level. The 1947 Regional Vocational and Trades Schools Act is an example of two-year college creation in direct response to this national event. However, as this study will demonstrate, the ways in which states and cities responded to the G.I. Bill varied greatly and were unique to each state, but unless the GI Bill is considered, the history of the regional trade schools is incomplete, if not inaccurate. This is just one example of national events that influenced the development of two-year education in Alabama.

CHAPTER II

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF FREEDOM: SELMA UNIVERSITY

The first type of two-year educational institutions in Alabama came in the form of private, denominational junior colleges. During the later part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, two-year education in the Southeast was accomplished mainly by private junior colleges, with a few high schools and lower-divisions of universities offering some courses. Most of these early junior colleges were church-supported; only a few were secular and none were public. Many were specifically created for the training of teachers and were occasionally called “normal schools” or “teacher’s colleges” instead of junior colleges. They also typically offered a high school curriculum, because universal high schools did not exist in most areas of the South.¹ Since two-years of higher education met the requirement to obtain a teaching certificate, the colleges often had a “terminal” function with little emphasis on what would later become known as the “transfer” function.²

The idea of the two-year college had been around for some years prior to the Civil War. Thornton traced the beginnings of the two-year college idea to the middle part of the nineteenth century, with Bogue arguing that the first junior college was established in 1835 in Godfrey,

¹ Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 117-118.

² Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 217.

Illinois.³ Others cite the early junior college in Goshen, Indiana.⁴ As noted in Chapter 1 of this study, the discrepancy in dates is common in the literature and is one reason for the present study.

Some of this ambiguity is created by the way in which one defines two-year colleges. For instance, Marion Military Institute was established in 1842 as part of Howard College, a Baptist institution located in Marion, Alabama. It is unclear if the institution offered a junior college program or was simply an early form of a Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) for Howard College, which later moved to Birmingham and eventually became Samford University. Similar problems relate to dating public institutions, as some writers have identified high schools as junior colleges if they offered only a few college-level courses.⁵ As late as 1950, Young found that some junior colleges were organized on a one-, three-, or even four-year model instead of the traditional two-year model that would later become standard. Even though some of these institutions offered a four-year program of study, the first two years consisted of high school work and the highest college course was almost always at the sophomore level. Thus, these institutions cannot be classified as anything other than two-year colleges.⁶ Having a wide range of programs was a hallmark of early two-year education, with many institutions still trying to form an identity. The diversity of organizational models makes the study of early two-year college history difficult because very different institutional types can be classified a two-year institution.

³ James W. Thornton, *The Community Junior College*, 3rd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1972), 21; Bogue, *The Community College*, 25.

⁴ Pedersen, "The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College," 29-30; James Ratcliff, "Shall We Forget William Rainey Harper," *Community College Review* 13, no. 4 (1986): 13-14.

⁵ Pedersen, "The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College," 75.

⁶ Raymond Young, "An Analysis and Evaluation of General Legislation Pertaining to Public Junior Colleges" (PhD diss., Colorado State Teacher's College, 1950), 5-6.

Depending on which source one examines, the number of private two-year colleges established in the 1800s ranges from the teens to more than sixty.⁷ Despite the discrepancy in numbers, it is clear that private two-year colleges preceded public two-year colleges, with the first private junior college, Monticello Seminary, opening at Godfrey, Illinois in 1835 and the first undisputed public junior college opening in Goshen, Indiana in 1910.⁸ Therefore, private two-year colleges predated public two-year colleges by seventy-five years in the United States.

In Alabama, however, the dates are even farther apart. The first private junior college established in Alabama, Selma University, opened in 1878 in Selma, while the first public junior college, Northwest Junior College, was opened in 1961 at Phil Campbell. Thus, for nearly one hundred years, private junior colleges were the only places to receive an academic two-year education in Alabama. Yet, very little has been written about these institutions and the education they provided to the students they served. A simple listing of the colleges and locations is extremely hard to find, and a search of the literature revealed only one such list, in David Rowland's 1983 University of Alabama dissertation. However, Rowland included only the private junior colleges that were in existence during the period of his study, from 1960 to 1980, and reviewed historical documents only for those institutions. The list lacks any private two-year colleges that closed prior to 1960, and therefore cannot be treated as a complete listing. Attention is now turned to a review of the history of the first identifiable private two-year college to be established in Alabama, Selma University.

⁷ Frederick L. Whitney, *The Junior College in America* (Greeley, CO: Colorado State Teachers' College, 1928), 14; Harry G. Good and James D. Teller, *A History of American Education*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 16.

⁸ Whitney, *The Junior College*, 12-15.

Selma University

The first three two-year private junior colleges established in the State of Alabama (there may have been more, but documentation could not be found) would today be defined as historically black institutions: Selma University, Lomax-Hannon Junior College, and Concordia College. All three of these colleges were denominational in nature, and all were sponsored by a major denomination. Two of these colleges, Concordia College and Selma University, were located in Selma, and were supported by the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention and the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, respectively, while one, Lomax-Hannon Junior College, which operated in Greenville, was supported by African Episcopal Methodists.

The opening of these three colleges for African-Americans preceded the opening of almost every other white junior college in the state. Selma University opened in 1878, Lomax-Hannon Junior College opened in 1893, and Concordia College opened in 1922.⁹ All three had preparatory high schools because universal access to public high schools did not come to Alabama until the 1950s.¹⁰ Only Marion Military Institute, which dates its opening to 1842, preceded Selma University, but its classification as a separate two-year institution is questionable until it formally split from Samford University in 1887. Saint Bernard College in Cullman, which opened in 1893 and was affiliated with the Catholic Church, was the only other college to precede Concordia and Lomax-Hannon.¹¹ This means that three out of the first five private junior colleges that opened in Alabama were historically black institutions. This chapter focuses on the

⁹ Ibid., 37-38. During the time period covered in this study, the terms “Negroes” or “Colored” were used instead of “African-Americans” or “black.” The terms “Negroes” and “Colored” will be used in this study in order to maintain historical accuracy.

¹⁰ Rowland, “The Decline of Private Junior Colleges in Alabama,” 115-131; Stephen G. Katsinas and Harold L. Bishop, “A Report of Educational Progress in Alabama from 1940 to 1980 and Implications for Educational Policy Makers,” *Capstone Journal of Education* 7, no. 2 (1987): 61-62.

¹¹ Since there were virtually no African-Americans living in Cullman County, the home of the post-Civil War Ku Klux Klan, this institution was clearly designed to serve whites.

history of Selma University to answer the first research question because the establishment of this institution coincides more closely with the period of Reconstruction. Selma University was also chosen because early records of Lomax-Hannon Junior College, another institution started for newly freed slaves, and St. Bernard Junior College, a college established for Catholics, are not available. Selma University was also the largest and most influential historically black two-year college during this period.

Selma University was thus the first private, denominational college started in Alabama. The idea for the college was first introduced during the 1873 meeting of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, but the college was not opened until 1878.¹² The college eventually became a leading institution for African-American education in Alabama prior to the twentieth century. The college grew out of the need for education among colored Baptist ministers and teachers during Reconstruction. As the former slaves wrestled with the responsibilities and problems of freedom, they recognized that education was of the utmost importance in securing their place in society. The story of Selma University is one of triumph in the face of almost unimaginable circumstances.

The period of Reconstruction was a difficult time for all parties in the South. Nearly 500,000 slaves lived in Alabama at the end of the Civil War. Almost all of them were illiterate, owned no property, and had no means of supporting themselves other than farming.¹³ When the Civil War ended, these former slaves immediately found themselves free, but the luster of freedom soon became tarnished by the realities of poverty. Although the hope of freedom had been a source of motivation during the dark days of slavery, many African-Americans found that

¹² Wilson Fallin, *Uplifting the People: Three Centuries of Black Baptists in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 8.

¹³ Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 175.

their condition immediately after the Civil War was little better than before. One of the early Alabama Baptist leaders, Charles Octavius Boothe, vividly describes the days immediately following Emancipation in his 1895 book, *The Cyclopedia of Colored Baptists in Alabama*. Boothe recalled that once the initial feelings of joy and triumph wore off, a bleak reality began to set in. He stated that “everyday, for weeks, shoeless and hatless men and women, with half-naked, hungry, children, passed through the little town where I lived, not knowing wither they went, what were their names, nor what they sought.”¹⁴ This condition was surely a familiar scene all across Alabama. Boothe goes on to write, “we were at first lost in wonder, but then slowly became aware of our needs.” He stated that he “longed for great colored men to assume leadership in matters of religion and education, but I waited in vain.”¹⁵ The leadership that Boothe longed for would eventually come, and it would rise from the ranks of the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention.

The colored Baptist church supplied much of the educational and religious leadership for African-Americans in Alabama during Reconstruction. This was mainly because an overwhelming majority of Alabama's African-Americans were members of Baptist churches. In his book *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*, noted Alabama historian Wayne Flynt estimated that by the end of the Civil War, half of all Alabama Baptists were black. He further estimates that there were at least 400,000 colored Baptists in the states that made up the Southern Baptist Convention.¹⁶ The reasons for the high number of colored Baptists are

¹⁴ Charles O. Boothe, *The Cyclopedia of Colored Baptists in Alabama* (Birmingham, AL: Alabama Publishing Company, 1895), 32.

¹⁵ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Colored Baptists*, 32-33.

¹⁶ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 133-141.

subject to debate, and may have been at least partially related to the large number of white Baptists in Alabama, but the large numbers of African-American Baptists is beyond debate.

In his 1998 history of black Baptists in Alabama, Wilson Fallin, Professor of History at Montevallo University and former Selma University president, highlighted certain aspects of the Baptist faith that may have been more attractive to slaves than other denominations. For example, he states that “the theology of Baptist evangelicals blended better than any other denomination with the sacred cosmos of the West African religion slaves brought with them.” A spiritual conversion, the Holy Spirit, and water baptism were all concepts that had a similar appearance in the religions of West Africa. Fallin argued that these similarities combined with the democratic nature of Baptist church governance made the Baptist denomination more appealing to slaves than other American denominations. Other historians attribute the large number of colored Baptists to less noble reasons.

Beginning in the 1840s, Baptists in Alabama began to increase the evangelism of slaves in an effort to convert them to Christianity.¹⁷ Flynt traces this increase in evangelism among white Baptists in Alabama to the split of American Baptists and the subsequent creation of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Baptists in the North had been highly critical of slavery for several decades prior to the 1840s, but when the Northern-based Home Mission Board refused to allow a slaveholder from Georgia to serve as missionary, the rift in the Baptist denomination was beyond repair. Delegates from Southern states met in 1845 at Augusta, Georgia and formed the Southern Baptist Convention.

At the time, the only significant difference in the beliefs and practices of Southern and Northern Baptists was on the issue of slavery. Delegates to the first Southern Baptist Convention,

¹⁷ Fallin, *Uplifting the People*, 32.

held in 1845, insisted that the Bible condoned slavery and believed that it gave them the right to own slaves. Prominent Southern theologians, many from Alabama, argued that God had allowed the Africans to be slaves in the South, so that the Gospel could be preached to them. Flynt states that the “conversion of Negroes became a central justification for slavery.”¹⁸ This argument seems to have resonated loudest among white Alabama Baptists, perhaps in an effort to soothe their consciences after continued attacks on the morality of slavery by Northern Baptists.

The response to these attacks was that many white associations began to employ full-time missionaries to preach to slaves on plantations across Alabama. Therefore, when the largest denomination in Alabama began to strongly evangelize a captive audience, a large number of converts likely followed. Flynt stated that this push for the evangelism of slaves was directly responsible for doubling the number of Baptists in Alabama from 1845 to 1860, and may have even led to black majorities in many churches.¹⁹ While concern for the spiritual welfare of slaves may have been a motivation for Baptist missionaries, it may not have been the sole motive for slave owners to seek the salvation of their slaves.

In his 1972 book *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, Eugene Genovese made popular the argument that religion was a way for the slave owner to better control his slaves. He argued that the effort to evangelize slaves was born out of the paternalistic desire to impose social order on slaves rather than true religious zeal.²⁰ Flynt also acknowledged this possibility in his book on Alabama Baptists. Although Flynt insisted that some of the motivation was likely generated by sincere feelings of paternalism on behalf of Alabama Baptists, he stated that “at worst this religious concern was cynical and manipulative.” Flynt argued that by converting

¹⁸ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 99.

¹⁹ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 100.

²⁰ Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1972), 232-235.

slaves, a slave owner could reduce problems such as violence and disorder among slaves and also increase their production. Faced with such prosperous possibilities, few slave owners objected to evangelism on their plantations, and many supported the practice financially.²¹ This prosperity through religion would almost certainly have made this “religious” movement a very appealing prospect to slave owners.

Partially explaining the high number of former slaves who were Baptists is that fact that when slave owners sought to evangelize their slaves, they would more than likely have sought it from within their own denomination. Because Baptists were the largest denomination in Alabama, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of slave owners were Baptist, and the paternalistic nature that governed master-slave relations prior to the Civil War would have made it likely for the master to impose his denomination upon the slave.²² Flynt cited an 1856 resolution from the Central Baptist Association that described the master-slave relationship as equal to a parent-child relationship. It encouraged masters to take their slaves with them to church, and make sure their behavior was appropriate.²³ Because Baptists have never had a strong reputation for tolerance of other denominations, it seems highly unlikely that a slave would have been allowed to oppose the religious preference of his master. When Baptist zeal combined with a “sacred” duty to care for the souls of their slaves, Baptist slave owners would almost certainly have tried to expose their slaves to the Baptist faith, if not impose the faith upon them.

It is likely that no single reason explains the large numbers of colored Baptists in Alabama at the end of the Civil War. Reasons for support of evangelism among whites would

²¹ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 101.

²² Fallin, *Uplifting the People*, 20.

²³ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 101.

have ranged from sincere to selfish. Likewise, reasons for acceptance of the Baptist faith on the part of slaves would also have varied. However, what is clear is that by the end of Civil War the largest and best organized group of African-Americans in Alabama was the colored Baptist church. It would only be logical that this organization would provide the leadership, finances, and vision to improve the lives of African-Americans in post-Civil War Alabama.

In September 1868, three and one-half years after the end of the Civil War, a call for colored Baptists to meet in Montgomery to form a state-wide organization was carried in newspapers across the state. Fitts attributes this announcement to fifteen people from the Montgomery area convening a meeting for the purpose of forming an organization to evangelize freedmen. He also stated that efforts at religious organization among African-Americans were very common in the years following the Civil War. By 1868, four Southern states-- Kentucky, Virginia, Arkansas, and North Carolina-- already had state-wide colored Baptist associations. Colored Baptists from other states in the South would follow suit.²⁴ These actions of fellow Baptists in neighboring states no doubt had an influence on colored Baptists in Alabama. It would only make sense that state-wide organization and cooperation could allow for greater success in areas important to newly freed African-Americans.

The first meeting of the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention was hosted by the Columbus Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, and twenty-seven colored Baptist churches were represented.²⁵ Fitts estimated that there were about fifty colored Baptist churches in Alabama in 1868, thus slightly over half of the separate colored congregations across the state

²⁴ Fitts, *Uplifting the People*, 36.

²⁵ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 16.

were represented at the first meeting.²⁶ Absent from the convention were churches from North Alabama and Mobile, but Boothe attributes this uneven distribution to travel difficulties and lack of communication. This uneven distribution is also reflected in the hometowns of the delegates. The majority of the delegates were from the Black Belt, and none were from locations more than one hundred miles from Montgomery. Later meetings would include delegates from all over the state, and the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention would quickly become a truly statewide organization.

The first order of business for the new Alabama Colored Baptist Convention was to adopt a constitution for the organization that included the convention's mission. The mission stated, "it shall be the object of this convention to propagate the Gospel of Christ, and to advance the interest of his kingdom, by supplying vacant churches as requested; by sending ministers into destitute regions within our reach; and by planting and building up churches wherever a favorable opportunity offers, and also to promote the *educational interests* of the destitute." This mission made it clear that from the very beginning of the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention that the education of African-Americans was a major goal. Because virtually all freed slaves were illiterate, the number of "destitute" would include the vast majority of the black population.

The need for education was clear. Charles Boothe recalled that at the end of the Civil War, there was only one colored Baptist preacher in Alabama who could honestly be called "educated," and he would leave the denomination to become a Methodist minister.²⁷ During an 1877 sermon to the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention, another founding member recalled that at the first convention in 1868, there were only three men who could write well enough to

²⁶ Fitts, *Uplifting the People*, 38.

²⁷ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 45.

take minutes.²⁸ It is therefore not surprising that many of the early founders of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention would have seen the need for education by simply looking in the mirror.

The need for literacy instruction is reflected in the high school programs that were often operated alongside the college program in the early years of historically black two-year colleges. All three of the black two-year colleges in Alabama offered high school courses as well as college courses.²⁹ The high school at Selma University produced as many graduates as the college program for the first ten years that Selma University was in operation.³⁰ Other historically black colleges also offered high school courses during their first years of operation. Even institutions that eventually became four-year universities offered a high school program early in their history. Such was the case of Fisk University and Tuskegee University. This high school emphasis is reflected in Booker T. Washington's title of Principal when he took over Tuskegee in 1881. High school-level education was needed for African-Americans during this time, and since there were few public options to attain it, private colleges were compelled to include it in their curriculum.³¹ In his book *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study of Cotton and Steel*, Horace Mann Bond, stated there were at least five schools operated by the Freedman's Bureau in 1866. However, none of these schools were located in the Black Belt area (the Black

²⁸ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 11, 1877, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

²⁹ Rowland, "The Decline of Private Junior Colleges in Alabama," 115-131.

³⁰ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 89.

³¹ Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 36; W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 638.

Belt area was the location of the largest population of colored Baptists and most of the Convention's leadership lived in this area.)³²

Yet, if education was so important, why did it take the Convention a little over ten years to open its first school for colored Baptists? The same question could be asked about the first Convention meeting. If freedom occurred as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, cemented by Union troops and the military governments they brought throughout the South following the end of the Civil War in 1865, why did it take several years for colored Baptists in Alabama to organize a state convention? The answer seems to lie in the slow separation of black and white churches.

As noted above, in the years prior to the Civil War, it was not uncommon for blacks and whites to be members of the same Baptist church. The degree of integration varied dramatically, with some churches holding separate services on different days, while other churches although few in number, offered full membership rights to African-Americans. Charles Boothe recalled that one of his earliest memories was of a "little Baptist church where blacks and whites worshipped together."³³ Flynt cited many examples that show that these integrated churches were quite common. This integration did not end immediately with Emancipation or the fall of the Confederacy, but it was a gradual process that occurred from 1865 to 1874. In some churches it was initiated by blacks and in other churches by whites.³⁴ This gradual shift can be demonstrated by examining membership and church numbers from the 1860s.

³² Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 79-80.

³³ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama*, 46.

³⁴ Fallin, *Uplifting the People*, 23.

Flynt stated that in 1860 there were 297,000 Baptists in Alabama, and approximately half of this number were African-Americans.³⁵ Using these calculations, there would have been a little fewer than 150,000 colored Baptists in Alabama in 1860, but Fallin stated that there were only three known colored Baptist churches in existence prior to the Civil War. Obviously, a huge number of blacks and whites belonged to the same congregation. The same can be seen in 1868, the year in which the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention was founded. Fallin stated that there were around fifty colored Baptist churches in Alabama in 1868. If these churches accounted for the entire colored Baptist population, each would average a membership of over 3,000 people. Clearly, this could not have been the case; the Columbus Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, recognized as the largest church in that state, had a membership of just 200 to 250 people in 1868. Therefore, a substantial portion of African-Americans were likely still part of white churches in 1868, and this factor may have limited the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention's ability to take on a serious and costly project, such as building a new college or school. According to Fitts, the gradual separation of black and white Baptists would continue to occur until 1874, when the separation became almost entirely complete.³⁶

The minutes of the first five meetings of the convention would tend to support this claim. The addition of new churches is a common occurrence in the Convention's minutes from 1868 to 1874. The number of new additions tapers off during the late 1870s. This lack of unified, independent colored Baptist churches can also be seen in the actions of the first meetings of the Convention. Although the desire to educate people was evident in the constitution adopted at the first meeting, and the Convention even formed a standing committee on education, very little

³⁵ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 103.

³⁶ Fallin, *Uplifting the People*, 12-16.

action was taken.³⁷ No ambitious project was adopted by the organization from 1868 to 1872. The first five meetings of the Convention were relatively uneventful in regards to education issues. While lamenting the lack of educational opportunity for blacks, the Convention was not able to do anything about the situation. The best that could be done was to establish Sabbath (Sunday) Schools in their churches. However, these were poorly attended by adults, and did little to immediately remedy the situation.³⁸ The first mention of a theological and normal school would occur in November of 1873 at the Convention's Sixth Annual Meeting. By this time, the gradual separation of 150,000 colored Baptists was almost complete, and the number of colored Baptist churches had increased to several hundred, with many boasting membership numbers comparable to white Baptist churches. Collectively, the Convention had grown large enough to support such an ambitious undertaking.

The active formal involvement of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention in the education at the statewide level for adult African-Americans began at the Sixth Annual Meeting in 1873. It was held on November 25, 1873 at Zion Methodist Church in Tuscaloosa, the largest colored church in the area. At this meeting Reverend William McAlpine offered the following resolution:

Whereas, we are desirous to promulgate the Word of God, and to instruct our people more thoroughly in doctrine, discipline and Gospel truths; therefore, be it resolved by the Colored Baptist Convention now assembled in the city of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, that we plant in the State of Alabama a Theological School to educate our young men. Be it also resolved that every Baptist Church, Association or private member be requested to raise

³⁷ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 8, 1868, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

³⁸ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 106.

all money in their power to aid in building this school. Each member of a Baptist church in Alabama is requested to give one dollar a year.³⁹

The importance of this motion to the convention was best described by Charles Boothe in 1895. He wrote that “this threw life and aim into the convention and the signs of activity immediately appeared.”⁴⁰ After five years of meeting to promote religious matters and discuss issues relevant to the denomination, the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention had begun to address the social and educational issues that affected the daily lives of its members. As evidenced by Boothe’s statement, this was a time of excitement and a renewed sense of purpose prevailed among the members. The prospects of a seminary and college for African-American Baptist ministers would also have stirred African-American ambitions, given their newly freed status. This motion would largely define the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention in the era of Reconstruction. The motion also placed the mantle of leadership on the shoulders of both Boothe and McAlpine.

Reverend William McAlpine was born in Buckingham County, Virginia in 1847. He was brought to Alabama, along with his mother and brother, by a slave trader in 1850. He was sold to an elderly Presbyterian minister, Robert McAlpine. Upon the death of his master in 1855, young William was sent to live with his former owner’s son, who was a wealthy doctor. During this period, at only eight years of age, William was separated from his mother, whom he would not see or hear from for the next nineteen years.⁴¹ At his new residence, William served as a nurse to the doctor’s children from 1855 until the end of the Civil War. This was a common position for

³⁹ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 25, 1873, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

⁴⁰ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Colored Baptists*, 39.

⁴¹ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 43.

young slave boys during this time, and it allowed him privileges not offered to other slaves, being kept inside both day and night and not required to work in the fields. Being in close proximity to the wealthy white children also gave William educational opportunities that were rare during this time, even among most white citizens. The wife of William's master insisted on hiring private tutors to instruct her children, and young William was instructed in reading, math, and geography alongside the white children.⁴² Thus, at the end of the Civil War, on his eighteenth birthday, William McAlpine was likely among the most educated African-Americans in Alabama. This fact may well have cemented his commitment to education, and his place of leadership in the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention.

McAlpine was converted to Christianity in 1865 largely through the efforts of John D. Renfroe, pastor of the predominately white Talladega First Baptist Church. Reverend Renfroe had served in the Confederate army as a chaplain, and was well known for his efforts at leading revivals in Virginia while stationed there with his unit, the Tenth Alabama.⁴³ Renfroe broke from many Baptists in that he believed sermons should be carefully prepared and studied. This level of preparation could only be accomplished by a minister with an above-average education.⁴⁴ His influence on McAlpine perhaps partially explains his lifelong commitment to building an educated clergy. Even though McAlpine felt God's call to the ministry shortly after his conversion, he refused to be licensed until he was better educated. Later in life, he would resign the presidency of Selma University in favor of a more educated president.⁴⁵ He attended Talladega College from 1866 until 1873, but lacked sufficient finances to finish pursuit of his

⁴² A. W. Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools* (Springfield, IL: Willey and Company, 1892), 327-332.

⁴³ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 46.

⁴⁴ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 110.

⁴⁵ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 40-41.

degree, leaving Talladega just two semesters short of a degree. In 1869, after likely having achieved more formal education than most of the colored Baptist ministers in Alabama, McAlpine was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Talladega First Baptist Church, and was ordained a full minister of the Gospel two years later in 1871 by the same church.

McAlpine's energetic work on behalf of Selma University was well-recognized by his peers. Pegues wrote in 1892 that McAlpine "had done more for the school than any other colored man."⁴⁶ After the 1875 meeting of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, Boothe remarked that "every eye was on McAlpine as their leader."⁴⁷ At only twenty-six years of age, McAlpine introduced and defended the need for a theological college for colored Baptist ministers in Alabama. In 1874, he would be one of the first five members of the board of trustees elected for the new institution.⁴⁸ McAlpine was elected financial agent of the board, and served as the chief fund-raiser for the institution from 1874 to 1879. In 1876, he raised a little over \$1000 for the college, a large amount of funds at the time.⁴⁹ In his report to the 1877 Convention, McAlpine stated that he had "visited six associations, twenty churches, and six Sunday Schools; written over 500 letters, and traveled about 1,387 miles."⁵⁰ Without McAlpine's herculean fundraising efforts, it is possible that Selma University may never have opened.

Another early leader of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention and supporter of Selma University was Charles Octavius Boothe. Although not present at the first few convention

⁴⁶ Pegues, *Our Baptists Ministers*, 601-605.

⁴⁷ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 62.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 6, 1874, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 10, 1876, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 11, 1877, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

meetings, Boothe would play an important role in the convention for many years to come.

Boothe was born a slave in 1845 in Mobile County, Alabama. His earliest memories were of an old white woman who treated him very well, but upon her death he went to live with the family of Nathan Howard. In an experience quite similar to McAlpine's, he served as a nurse to children. It was during this time that Boothe was taught to read and write by his master's tutors. During his teenage years, he served as a clerk for lawyer James Terrell in Mobile. Boothe received most of his education by reading the books in Terrell's law office. He enjoyed a modest amount of freedom during these years because, as he put it, "Mobile was the most liberal city in Alabama concerning the treatment of slaves."⁵¹ Like McAlpine, Boothe was one of the few black men of his time with enough education, formal or otherwise, to lead the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention.

The first mention of Boothe in the Convention's minutes occurs in 1874 when, along with four others, including McAlpine, he was elected to serve on the board of trustees for the new college and seminary proposed by the convention.⁵² In 1875, he and McAlpine were singled out for the responsibility to select a location for the college.⁵³ Although not as active in fund-raising for the new college as McAlpine, Boothe's commitment to furthering formal educational opportunities for the newly freed slaves is clearly seen at the 1874 convention meeting. A resolution he introduced at this meeting offers one of the clearest examples of the Convention's commitment to education. Prior to being elected to serve on the Board of Trustees for the new college, Boothe introduced the following resolution: "Resolved, that it is the sense of this

⁵¹ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 8.

⁵² Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 6, 1874, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

⁵³ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 8, 1875, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

Convention that a man will not be licensed to preach the Gospel who cannot read. Be it also resolved, that this Convention shall do all in its power to assist men who desire to preach the Gospel in learning to read.”⁵⁴

This resolution clearly shows the sentiment of the Convention toward education in the early 1870s. First, the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention was highly committed to hosting an educated clergy. This would seem strange, given the fact that some white Baptist churches licensed and ordained illiterate ministers well into the twentieth century.⁵⁵ Why did the colored Baptists in Alabama perceive illiteracy as an important enough issue to disqualify a man from the ministry? One possible explanation can be found in the 1875 minutes of the Convention. Elder N. G. Spurlock of Athens, Alabama addressed the Convention on the issue of a theological school in Alabama, stating that it should undertake “the building of a theological school in Alabama for the education of Colored ministry, in order that we may better defend ourselves against heresy.”⁵⁶ The main concern that had bothered white Baptists about their colored brothers was their tendency to incorporate unorthodox practices into their church governance and worship. Reverend J. D. Renfroe, who had a strong influence on William McAlpine, complained that the colored churches were “careless and lax in receiving members” and allowed “very foolish things” in their meetings.⁵⁷ Clearly, this was not the case for all colored Baptists, and men such as McAlpine and Boothe were praised by the white community for their strong doctrinal beliefs. It is quite possible that the efforts to support the establishment

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 6, 1874, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

⁵⁵ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 15-16.

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 8, 1875, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

⁵⁷ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 145.

of what became Selma University may have represented an attempt on behalf of Convention leaders to eliminate what they saw as false-teaching in their churches. Whether these efforts were aimed at gaining respect among white Baptists, or for the sincere love of pure Baptist doctrine, remains unclear.

A second insight to the mind of the 1875 Convention that this resolution provides is the strong commitment to provide education for future colored Baptist ministers. In a time when most of the colored population was totally illiterate, this was a bold step on the part of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention. Such a requirement of literacy could eliminate a large portion of the population, if not the majority, from the Gospel ministry. Although public education for African-Americans had blossomed in the early years of Reconstruction, the Democratic gains in the 1872 and 1874 elections would move funds away from black schools.⁵⁸ By 1874, it was clear that unless the Convention took direct action itself to provide for the education of black ministerial candidates, there would be a shortage of literate ministers. Boothe's motion thus elevated the level of commitment for education from "talk" to "action," and by doing so he helped ensure long-term future financial support for the new college from the Convention.

Although the resolution to open a colored Baptist theological school in Alabama had many supporters, the idea did not have universal support. Opposition and discouragement immediately came from both within and without the leadership of the Convention. Many colored Baptists who believed that the Holy Spirit "inspires" and "speaks" through preachers rejected the idea that an educated clergy was necessary to preach the Gospel. Charles Boothe stated that "the question whether God needs help in preparing His men for ministry--the question that had

⁵⁸ Fallin, *Uplifting the People*, 8-10.

agitated the white convention fifty years before--was now stirring the souls of black men.”⁵⁹ One of the hallmarks of the Baptist denomination was clergy coming from “the bosom of the people” and not an educated elite.⁶⁰ Although the formal debate over the resolution is not recorded, the question itself has been a source of an extended debate among Missionary Baptists, both white and black.⁶¹

White opposition to the school took a very subtle form. Baptist churches had led the state in evangelism and education of blacks from the 1840s to 1860s, but as Flynt states, “by 1869 Alabama Baptists had largely lost interest in evangelizing or educating African-Americans.” When the northern-based Home Mission Board called on the Southern Baptist Convention to cooperate with them in educating blacks in the South, some local Baptist associations in Alabama threatened to withdraw from the Southern Baptist Convention unless correspondence with the North was stopped. Most Alabama Baptists did not oppose education for African-Americans; they simply refused to cooperate with Northern “Yankee” Baptists to bring it about.⁶²

Alabama white Baptists’ attitudes toward black education came in two forms. One was simply to ignore the importance of education, which reflected the prevailing Southern attitude

⁵⁹ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 31.

⁶⁰ Fallin, *Uplifting the People*, 12.

⁶¹ Although virtually the same during the nineteenth century, white Missionary Baptists today differ from white Southern Baptists. These differences are mainly in church governance, with the Missionary Baptists preferring more local autonomy. The theological differences are small and more times than not relate to issues surrounding Calvinism and Eschatology. One of the largest Missionary Baptist Associations remaining in Alabama is the Blount County Missionary Baptist Association. The association is made up of forty-eight churches located in Marshall, Blount, Cullman, and Etowah Counties with a total membership of over 7,500. The prevailing school of thought toward education among Missionary Baptists today is almost certainly similar to the thoughts of their forefathers. Most think that education is not required for preaching because God “speaks” through the preacher. Many ask the question, why should a preacher waste his time on education when God can equip him with all the knowledge and words that he needs to preach? While this question undermined support for the school from within, other forces worked against the school on the outside.

⁶² Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 134.

toward education prior to the twentieth century. Historically the South, especially Alabama, has had a severely underfunded and inadequate system of public education. Why should the education of African-Americans be a priority among whites when the education of their children received so little of their own attention? The failure of whites to act on behalf of black education was at least partially based on the prevailing attitudes toward education during this time.

The more aggressive form of white opposition to the plans for a colored Baptist theological school seems to have been based on the paternalistic attitudes that prevailed prior to the Civil War. While debating McAlpine's resolution to start a theological school in Alabama, the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention formally sought the advice of the white Alabama Baptist Convention. As fate would have it, both conventions happened to meet in Tuscaloosa that year. The colored convention sent a committee to request advice from the white convention on how to proceed with the college. The white convention sent a committee to the colored convention, and recommended against establishing a school.⁶³ The details of their opposition and the debate that followed are not recorded in the minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist Convention. However, in his 1892 history of colored Baptists' involvement in education, Dr. A. W. Pegues discussed the details of this opposition. Since Pegues's history includes a biography of many colored Baptist leaders composed almost exclusively by direct correspondence, his information may have very well come from McAlpine himself.

Pegues states that the white Baptist committee advised the colored convention "to give what money they had to them, and they would send to school such young men as the colored convention thought deserving, as it would be unwise to undertake to establish a school."⁶⁴ At

⁶³ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 39.

⁶⁴ Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers*, 330.

best, the members of the white convention were convinced they could make better educational decisions for colored ministers than the colored convention. At worst, it was a subtle attempt to prevent black higher education in Alabama. Evidently, the paternalistic view towards African-Americans was still a powerful force for white Baptists even ten years after Emancipation. Given the fact that the white Baptists had done nothing at all for black education in the aftermath of the Civil War, the concern expressed by the white convention in 1873 was clearly hypocritical.

The white Alabama Baptists had ignored black education and refused to cooperate with Northern groups to provide education for African-Americans in Alabama.⁶⁵ Now suddenly, when the colored Baptist convention proposed to take meaningful direct action in regards to education, by establishing what would become Selma University, the white Baptist convention demonstrated deep, although less than credible, concern for black education. This “concern” was the basis of their advice not to pursue a separate school for colored Baptists in Alabama. Intentional or not, this advice--perhaps better called opposition--could very well have derailed the colored Convention’s dream for a college, by allowing the white Baptists to take the lead in providing for black education. According to Boothe and Pegues, William McAlpine persuaded the convention to proceed. The minutes from the 1873 Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention do not record McAlpine’s defense of the plan, but Pegues states in 1892 that he “succeeded in making his brethren see that it was their duty to at least attempt to establish the school.”⁶⁶

After the initial opposition had been defeated, the daunting task of starting a new college was apparent to all. The first problem at hand was to secure funding for the college. The difficulty of this prospect can be seen in the fact that even though the resolution passed in 1873,

⁶⁵ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 133.

⁶⁶ Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers*, 330.

the funds for the college were not sufficient for it to open until 1878. Although the initial resolution called for every member of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention to give one dollar a year to fund the college, many African-Americans (and likely most whites) could not spare one dollar during the mid-1870s. The Panic of 1873, which began with the collapse of banking giant Jay Cooke and Company, started a depression that some economists believe lasted until the twentieth century and is considered by many to be the longest depression in American history. The depression did not reach bottom until 1878, when over 10,000 American businesses went bankrupt. The effects the depression had on agriculture were even more severe, as many farmers, both large and small, found themselves unable to pay their debts or their workers. The price of cotton declined by 50 percent from 1872 to 1877, and was very near to the minimum price required to break even. Crops such as sugar, tobacco, and rice also declined in value, and many farmers were forced to live in extreme poverty. This situation led to a rise in tenant farming, or share-cropping, among both whites and blacks. The situation became so bad for African-Americans in the South that one government official reported before Congress that they had owned more property as slaves than they did as tenant farmers.⁶⁷

The prospects of funding a college in such terrible economic circumstances presented a major challenge for the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention. The economic crisis of the 1870s almost certainly explains the five-year gap between the approval of the resolution establishing the college and the date in which the college opened. Again, Reverend William McAlpine would be the leading force on behalf of the college. McAlpine was appointed the financial agent for the school for the year 1874, and raised \$200 for the college.⁶⁸ The results

⁶⁷ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 512-515.

⁶⁸ Pegues, *Our Baptists Ministers*, 330.

from 1875 were not as encouraging, as McAlpine only reported raising \$90 for the school. The economy was so bad that the convention could not afford to pay McAlpine's traveling expenses, resulting in only six months of fund-raising in 1875. This success, although meager, seemed to have encouraged the Convention, however. At the 1875 Convention, Charles Boothe and William McAlpine were selected to find a suitable location to establish the college and to seek assistance from Northern Baptists.⁶⁹ Although they recommended Marion as the location in 1876, the Convention ignored this recommendation and took no action. After struggling with the task of raising funds for the college, the year of 1876 brought much-needed success. McAlpine raised more than \$1,000 for the school from within Alabama, but the establishment of the college faced yet another obstacle.

Three delegates from the Georgia Colored Baptist Convention attended the 1876 meeting with a letter requesting that the Alabama Convention abandon its plans for a college in Alabama. The Georgia delegates proposed instead that Alabama assist them in establishing a similar school at Atlanta. A letter from the Northern Home Mission Society was also read that discouraged the convention from establishing a school in Alabama. Boothe and McAlpine had been authorized in 1875 to seek the support of this group, but the letter declined to support the Alabama Convention's effort to establish a college in Alabama. The Northern Home Mission Society's letter also recommended that the Alabama convention join with the Georgia convention in building a college in Atlanta.⁷⁰ The Alabama convention took no action on this proposal, however, and the minutes of the 1876 meeting do not record any debate of this issue.⁷¹ However,

⁶⁹ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 40.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 10, 1876, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

it would appear that this proposal represented the final obstacle that faced the establishment of the college, and from this point forward, it appears that the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention was clearly resolved in its commitment to the establishment of a college in Alabama.

By its 1877 meeting, enough funds had been raised to finally open the school. The board of trustees, established in 1874, gave a report to the Convention that requested they be empowered to conduct all business related to the “organization, incorporation, opening, and conducting” of the school. The board also recommended that the school be located in Montgomery. A motion by Reverend A. H. Curtis to replace Montgomery with Marion failed to pass. Curtis then made another motion to strike out Montgomery and insert Lowndesboro, but this motion also failed. A. H. Curtis was one of the most respected and successful African-Americans in Alabama. He served in the General Assembly and the State Senate during the 1870s. He lived in Marion, and a desire for a local college for African-Americans probably led to his motion for Marion. The reason for his support for Lowndesboro remains unclear.⁷²

After Curtis’s motions failed, E. K. Love offered a motion to replace Montgomery with Selma as the location. Love was born in Marion and served as a regular field slave prior to the Civil War. He had little education prior to Emancipation, but attended Augusta Institute in Augusta, Georgia during the 1870s and earned a degree in theology. His support for Selma remains a mystery, because he seems to have no ties to the area and spent most of his life ministering in Georgia.⁷³ This motion passed the Convention by three votes.⁷⁴ The school was

⁷² Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 132.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁴ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 11, 1877, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

thus located in Selma and was named the Baptist Normal and Theological School. The name would later be changed to Selma University in 1885.

After the 1877 meeting, the new board of trustees immediately began searching for a building in which to house the college. When the board met in December of 1877, they still had not located a building that could be rented for less than \$27 a month--and the budget for rent had been set at \$15 a month. The St. Phillip's Street Baptist Church in Selma provided a solution for the problem by offering to let the college use its facilities until a suitable substitute could be found. On May 30, 1878, the board of trustees purchased the old Selma fairgrounds, just outside of Selma, for \$3,000. The board paid \$1,000 down for the land, leaving the college with a debt of \$2,000. The college admitted its first students in the fall of 1878, and support from Northern Baptists began to arrive. At the 1878 Convention meeting, \$545 of support from the North was recorded. By the 1879 Convention, the college paid another \$1,000 toward the land, and 112 students were enrolled in the college. The minutes stated that eighteen of these students were studying for the ministry and none were in the primary grades. The rest were either secondary level or were studying for a teaching certificate.⁷⁵ By the 1881 Convention meeting, the school was debt-free on the thirty-six acre campus. Nearly \$2,400 in donations had been received from churches and individuals. The American Home Mission Society pledged \$2,000 to the school, and William McAlpine had raised nearly \$2,000 as well. In less than ten years the school had gone from a dream to a debt free college with a comfortable budget.

Although the college enrolled over one hundred students in only its second year of operation, the first student would not graduate until 1884. Many students started college and were then forced to leave because of economic circumstances. Boothe's writings from 1895

⁷⁵ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 7, 1879, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

confirm this problem. He calculated that a little over 550 students had been enrolled in the school and that about one hundred had graduated from the college.⁷⁶ That represents a graduation rate of less than 20 percent. At the 1879 meeting of the convention, Howard Woodsmall, the first President of Selma University, urged churches to send money to support the students financially so they could continue their studies.⁷⁷ Donors were found to help alleviate this problem, and it would not be long before the college had a major impact on black education in Alabama. In 1892, A. W. Pegues stated that “in 1881 more than 80 former students were teachers in the public schools of Alabama.”⁷⁸ Not all of these had graduated, however, as this was prior to a formal licensure degree requirement for teachers in Alabama. However, the presence of Selma University provided these teachers with educational opportunities that would have been unattainable without the institution.

Boothe calculated that about half of Selma University students were enrolled in the teaching program and about half were enrolled in the theology program. Records do not exist showing how many adults received education in literacy, but the 1878 motion for the school to be placed under the control of the board of trustees stated that literacy education was among the purposes of the college. This “mission” provided much-needed education for former slaves and resembles the modern two-year college mission of adult education and remediation.

The impact Selma University had on the educational status, and more importantly, the hopes of African-Americans in Alabama during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction era can best be seen in Boothe’s reflections on the University in 1895. Although Boothe was likely

⁷⁶ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 245-246.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, November 7, 1879, Selma University Library, Selma, AL.

⁷⁸ Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers*, 601.

quite partial because of his love for the institution, one cannot doubt the sincerity, emotion, and pride in his words. His words sum up this chapter better than any comments made from today's perspective. He wrote, "the Selma University, with one exception, is the source of our greatest blessing. It is simply impossible to estimate the good that has come to Alabama Baptists out of this institution. What it has done is beyond the power of calculation. Only Omniscience can reckon up the good effects of its power upon the people. God be praised for Selma University!"⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Boothe, *Cyclopedia of Alabama Baptists*, 245.

CHAPTER III

A SCHOOL FOR THE POOR WHITE BOYS: ALABAMA SCHOOL OF TRADES

The establishment of the Alabama School of Trades in 1925 represents the first involvement in public two-year education by the State of Alabama. While it took many decades before Governor Wallace would pass legislation to bring universal access to postsecondary two-year college education to Alabama, establishment of this institution represents a milestone in the history of the development of two-year colleges in the state. Yet virtually nothing is recorded as to the history of the School of Trades. Even simple events associated with key individuals involved with its founding, its opening date, and original location appear to be missing from historical records. This is unfortunate, given the prominent place that the Alabama School of Trades should occupy in the history of Alabama two-year education. This basic lack of information appears to have led to inaccurate statements in the literature. For instance, Randall stated that this school opened in 1925 in Gadsden, Alabama, and was authorized by an act sponsored by George Corley Wallace, the father of Governor George C. Wallace.¹ Although this is commonly accepted in the literature, one cannot find any primary-source documents to support these conclusions. Evidence from other legislation and newspapers of the time cast doubts on some of these claims.

The rising popularity of vocational education, combined with the progressive mentality of

¹ Randall, "A Kudzu-ing of Colleges," 25-26. Both Governor George Wallace and his father shared the middle name Corley. However, neither of the governor's parents liked the idea of junior being added to their son's name. In order to distinguish them, Governor Wallace was called "George C." and his father "George Corley."

the early 1900s, fostered efforts to create the Alabama School of Trades. Newspapers and journals of the time were abuzz with articles calling for the creation of vocational education courses and programs. The number of published articles reflected the high level of interest in vocational education on the part of educators, businessmen, and laypersons. Supporters of vocational education had many different motives. Social workers, educators, and child labor reformers often saw vocational education as a way to improve the lives of people who dropped out of education before entering high school. Writing in 1951, Hawkins, Prosser, and Wright saw “vocational education as a way to reduce the scrap heap of human life.”² To this group of largely progressive ideologically, driven scholars and advocates, vocational education could reach the masses and democratize education. This vision of vocational education proved to have a profound effect on the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades.

Economists and business leaders saw vocational education as a way to increase production, improve human capital, and lower the price of consumer goods. This argument was also appealing to businesses and corporations. Hawkins, Prosser, and Wright listed at least nine national industrial and labor organizations that strongly advocated for the creation and expansion of vocational education in the United States. These included the very conservative, pro-business National Association of Manufacturers and the more liberal American Federation of Labor. In separate resolutions supporting vocational education, both organizations lamented the waste of human ability caused by the large number of students not entering and finishing the nation's high schools. This number was about 50 percent of the total school population in the early 1900s,

² Layton Hawkins, Charles Prosser, and John Wright, *Development of Vocational Education* (Chicago: American Technical Society, 1951), 50.

before state and national laws limiting child labor, when it was quite common for students as young as fourteen to leave school and enter the workforce.³

In 1912, The National Association of Manufacturers estimated that the lack of some form of education beyond grammar school cost the United States \$250 billion in the form of undeveloped human resources. Obviously, manufacturers could benefit from a labor force partially trained at the public's expense in a vocational school. Although some unions strongly opposed state-supported vocational schools, fearing that they would flood the labor markets with anti-union graduates, the American Federation of Labor lobbied for federal involvement in vocational education. This union group was able to recognize that vocational education could tremendously improve the economic status of lower-income citizens.⁴ Both sides argued that vocational education would benefit both business and American workers. Statesmen and politicians saw vocational education as a way to rival European dominance in education and the world markets.⁵ Clearly, vocational education had many powerful friends in the early 1900s. The power of these supporters made the vocational education lobby widespread and powerful in the years prior to and immediately after World War I.

Massachusetts was the first state to take action to provide vocational education for its citizens. In 1905, the legislature authorized Governor William L. Douglas to appoint a committee to study the current delivery of vocational education and to recommend changes that would improve it. Called the Douglas Commission, named after the incumbent governor, it criticized public education for largely ignoring current trends in trades education, and questioned the

³ Ibid., 53.

⁴ National Association of Manufacturers, "Our Human Capital," in *American Education and Vocationalism: A Documentary History 1870-1970*, eds. Marvin Lazerson and Norton Grubb (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1974), 92.

⁵ Hawkins, Prosser, and Wright, *Development of Vocational Education*, 52-54.

effectiveness of the current curriculum to prepare students for the industrial world. The most radical and most controversial recommendation of the commission was the creation of separate trade schools that would operate independently from the existing public K-12 systems. The Douglas Commission based this recommendation on its conclusion that the best way to preserve the “cultural” function of public high schools was to separate vocational training from them entirely. In the commission’s proposal, the K-12 system would educate along academic lines and the vocational system would provide education in the trades. Supposedly, this system would preserve the academic integrity of high schools.⁶

By 1911, five states, including Massachusetts, Wisconsin, New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey had already created a statewide system of vocational education. However, just two states--Massachusetts and Wisconsin--opted to completely separate K-12 education from vocational education. Although Alabama’s “system” included only one school, it was organized and administered separately from the general education system in the state, similar to Massachusetts and Wisconsin. It is no stretch of the imagination to conclude that the Douglas Commission’s report probably influenced the design of the Alabama School of Trades. In 1911, The National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education circulated an annual bulletin that summarized new legislation across the country, including the work of the Douglas Commission.⁷ National publications, business associations, and newspapers easily could have transmitted the Douglas Commission’s proposal to interested parties in Alabama.

The creation of the Alabama School of Trades was also closely related to the Progressive movement. The Progressive movement dominated American politics during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Progressives desired to return improve the lives of the working

⁶ Hawkins, Prosser, and Wright, *Development of Vocational Education*, 34-35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

class and to provide equal opportunities for all citizens. The Southern version of Progressivism differed in its definition of all citizens because “all” did not include African-Americans.⁸ The popularity of the movement is reflected in the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, both ardent Progressives. These men were perhaps the most popular and most powerful politicians of their time, at least in part because their agendas reached out to the average citizen. Their success can be measured in the significant level of change brought to the political, economic, and social landscapes during their presidencies. Some of these accomplishments include the direct election of senators, the Pure Food and Drug Act, and federal aid to vocational education. Some of the early goals of Alabama Progressives included abolishing the convict leasing system, regulating railroad rates, and starting an industrial school for delinquent boys and girls. Although the success of these goals was limited in Alabama, they are evident that the Progressive movement in Alabama was broadly similar to the national movement.⁹

Vocational education was a cause that fit the Progressive movement well, because it appealed to both the common citizen and the political leaders. Many Progressives saw vocational education as an opportunity to finally meet the goal of equality cited in the Declaration of Independence.¹⁰ Although Pedersen argued that the desire for the democratization of education was not an influential factor in founding junior colleges, this desire clearly had a stronger effect on the establishment of vocational education institutions early in the twentieth century.¹¹

President Theodore Roosevelt identified vocational education as a priority in his 1906 State of

⁸ William Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 102.

⁹ Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 142-145.

¹⁰ Hawkins, Prosser, and Wright, *Development of Vocational Education*, 127.

¹¹ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 39-43.

the Union Address. He said that “it should be one of our prime objects as a Nation, so far as feasible, constantly to work toward putting the mechanic, the wageworker who works with his hands, on a higher plane of efficiency and reward, so as to increase his effectiveness in the economic world, and the dignity, the remuneration, and the power of his position in the social world. Unfortunately, at present the effect of some of the work in the public schools is in the exactly opposite direction.”¹²

Roosevelt’s statement clearly identified bringing educational opportunities to the working class as an important priority. The statement also indicated his belief that vocational education could bring about equal opportunities for the common worker, which was an important Progressive goal. Although some legislation in favor of vocational education passed during Roosevelt’s administration, it would be more than ten years before Congress would pass significant legislation related to vocational education in 1917.¹³ While the Progressive movement stalled during the Taft administration, Progressivism found new life with the election of Woodrow Wilson, which reenergized the call for vocational education.

In 1914, Congress created the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education to study issues related to vocational education. Composed of nine members appointed by President Wilson, its members appear to all have been ardent supporters of vocational education, and included senators and state vocational directors. Sixty days after its authorization, the Commission produced a five hundred page report with a final section proposing legislation that would later become the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. Lazerson and Grubb refer to this report as

¹² Theodore Roosevelt, 1906 State of the Union, December 3, 1906, in The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29547#axzz1kmQKYj34> accessed October 12, 2011.

¹³ Arthur F. McClure, James Riley Chrisman, and Perry Mock, *Education for Work: The Historic Evolution of Vocational and Distributive Education in America* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1985), 55-58.

“the most influential document of the vocational education movement.” The first two sections of the report provided information about vocational education and sought to win support for the proposal. The report stated that “widespread vocational training will democratize the education of the country.”¹⁴ This influential document expressed on a national scale the Progressive goal of democratization through vocational education. This goal would quickly come to Alabama and serve to guide the creation of the Alabama School of Trades in 1925.

The idea for the Alabama School of Trades originated locally with Watt Brown of Ragland, in Northeast Alabama. Watt Brown was one of the most powerful and wealthy Alabamians of his time, and appears to have done more for the Alabama School of Trades than any other individual. His efforts were so influential that at the ceremony laying the cornerstone for the new school, Gadsden Mayor W. E. Wier referred to Brown as the “daddy of the trade school idea in Alabama.”¹⁵ Brown was born into a family with average finances in Talladega County, Alabama in 1865, and received his education in the public schools of Talladega and Calhoun Counties. His father was a farmer of modest means, and no records can be found that indicate Brown ever attended college. From humble beginnings and with little education, Brown would begin a remarkable business and political career that spanned three decades.

Watt Brown’s business career began at the age of eighteen when he began Watt T. Brown & Company in Greensport, Alabama. He sold his stake in this company in the mid-1890s to form the Ragland Coal Company with his brother. In 1896, he became president of the Ragland Coal Company and managed the company with great success. In 1911, he formed the Bank of

¹⁴ Vocational Education Commission, “Findings of the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education,” in *American Education and Vocationalism: A Documentary History 1870-1970*, eds. Marvin Lazerson and Norton Grubb (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 1974), 116-117.

¹⁵ “Great Ceremony Dedicates Fine New Building,” *Gadsden Times* (Gadsden, AL), July 23, 1925.

Ragland and served as its President for many years. He began his political career in 1891, serving as an alderman in Attalla. He served as an alderman in Ragland for fourteen years, and served one term as mayor of Ragland. Brown was then elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1902 and served there until 1906. In 1910, Brown was elected to the Alabama Senate.¹⁶ He served in the senate until 1930, when an unsuccessful bid for governor ended his political career.

Brown's career in the State Senate was marked by two legislative priorities. The first was to provide for the care and pensions of Confederate veterans in Alabama.¹⁷ He introduced several bills raising the minimum pensions for disabled and poor Confederate veterans, as well as the funding of Confederate retirement homes. Brown's second legislative priority was the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades. Brown's commitment to the institution even when faced with setbacks and delays are a testament to his belief in the importance of this project.

The original legislation authorizing the Alabama School of Trades was first introduced by Senator Brown in January 1911. This event predates noted junior college scholar Walter Crosby Eells's claim that the first general legislation dealing with a two-year college in Alabama was in 1922.¹⁸ The event also contradicts the claim that George Corley Wallace, the father of future Governor George C. Wallace, first introduced the bill. Despite these claims, the senior Wallace

¹⁶ Alabama Department of Archives and History, *Alabama Official and Statistical Register, 1919* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1919), 92.

¹⁷ Brown married Liza Inzer in 1902. She was the daughter of Colonel John Inzer of Ashville. Colonel Inzer was the youngest member of Alabama's Secession Convention and served in the Confederate Army the entire length of the war. Inzer was the last surviving member of any state Succession Convention dying at age 93 in 1928. His influence on Brown was likely responsible for Brown's support of Confederate Veterans.

¹⁸ Eells, *The Junior College*, 136.

never served in the legislature or held political office.¹⁹ Therefore, he could not have possibly introduced a bill that could be passed, as some claim. In fact, no evidence exists that the senior Wallace had anything at all to do with the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades. The documentary records are conclusive that the major proponent of the Alabama School of Trades was Senator Watt Brown, with little to assistance from other political officials in Alabama.

Senator Brown clearly articulated what he saw as the need for the institution in a 1914 speech. Speaking before a joint session of the Conference for Education in the South and Southern Educational Association, he identified two reasons for his support of the trade school. First, he stated that “education to be effective must be practical in its bearing upon the home, farm and factory, and national in outlook. Our schools are face to face with the stern duty of preparing the youth of our land for social efficiency, and if we would derive the best results we must give the kind of education the children need.” He went on to say that “ninety percent of the boys of our land never enter the high schools, but each year pass into the world to join the vast army of workers, and the majority of them must earn a living by the work of their hands, yet we force them through an eight year course of study which only leads to the high school and college, neither of which they will never enter. This seems to me, is an ill directed effort. Teaching only along theoretical lines and leaving off the practical side, is of little value.”²⁰

These statements reveal Brown’s beliefs on education generally, and vocational and trades education specifically. Although he acknowledged that everyone needed “a common school education,” he was clearly against an academic curriculum for *all* students.²¹ Obviously,

¹⁹ George Wallace, Jr., *The Wallace’s of Alabama* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1975), 12.

²⁰ Watt T. Brown, “Training Leaders for Rural Life” (speech, Southern Conference on Education, Louisville, KY, April 8, 1914).

²¹ *Ibid.*

Brown felt that all students did not need a college education to be successful, and felt that a technical education was sufficient to equip most Americans for their future occupations. To “force” students into courses and programs that prepared them for college was a disservice both to the society and the students. However, Brown's remarks do not appear to vent a hatred for the existing education then available, but rather an emphasis (some could argue an overemphasis) on the practical. Brown's speech clearly shows that the need to expand practical educational opportunities was a clear motivation for him to push for creation of the Alabama School of Trades.

A second major reason Brown cited for creating the school was the desire to give more students an opportunity for higher education. Brown said that,

no state can better invest its money than in helping to develop manly and womanly characters of its citizens, preparing them to think and act for themselves and to better meet the responsibilities of a life and at the same time help to develop its own resources. Schools and colleges are not always established by the States from a standpoint of charity for the poor and ignorant, but from the motive that it would add strength, happiness, and prosperity to the commonwealth. It is common sense business acumen and wisdom for the state and nation to foster and encourage all educational institutions which are for the uplift of its citizenship, and no better investment can be made. Give the youth of the land an opportunity to secure a practical education and training and in a few years it will return in a manifold way. The state of Alabama is leading out along this line and has located the Alabama School of Trades and Industries at Ragland, where white boys will be given practical education and training.²²

²² Ibid.

In these statements Brown argued for both federal and state involvement in extending educational opportunity to all white citizens, a progressive position for a wealthy Southern Democrat. He also identified the Alabama School of Trades as Alabama's attempt to extend these educational opportunities to all white citizens and offered it as an example of proper state government involvement in education. Brown also cited the fact that Alabama already had vocational education opportunities for African-Americans at Tuskegee University, which was receiving public subsidy, but had virtually no opportunities for poor whites. He argued that the State needed this type of educational institution if Alabama hoped to prosper economically in the twentieth century. These statements reflect the influence of the two main priorities of the Progressive movement in Alabama.

Such progressive influence was not unprecedented in Alabama prior to 1914. Hackney stated that Governor Joseph Johnston saw "education was not only a sure way to material progress, it had the added feature of moral progress and better citizenship as well."²³ Although Hackney later states that the "moral" aspect of Progressivism never became a significant factor in the movement, it is clear that some Progressive Alabama leaders, like Johnston and Brown, were influenced by this factor. Hackney stated that the drive for equality through economic development was the most significant force in the Alabama Progressive movement. Brown's 1914 speech heavily emphasizes the need for vocational education in order to promote industrial development in Alabama.²⁴ Although it is difficult to identify which factor was the most important for Brown from his speech, the term "poor" would later become commonplace when referring to the purpose of the institution.

In 1921, the *Anniston Star* referred to the institution as being established "for the purpose

²³ Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism*, 143.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 338-343.

of giving the poor white boys of Alabama a chance to get an education regardless of the fact that those deserving lads have little to no money with which to pay for their education and have not sufficient schooling to enable them to enter the regular state institutions of college and learning.”²⁵ Although the newspaper article had seven years to more eloquently articulate purposes for the institution, Brown’s ideas in 1914 were clearly along the same lines. When the original dormitory was dedicated in 1925, the first line of the newspaper article read, “friends of the poor white boys of Alabama had another inning today when the cornerstone of the Alabama School of Trades and Industries was laid.”²⁶ When faced with the historical record, one cannot doubt that the desire to extend two-year education to the poor and uneducated was a prominent factor in the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades. Therefore, this statement is in apparent contradiction with Pedersen’s claims that democratization was not a factor in the founding of early two-year colleges, as many two-year historians claim.²⁷ However, when one considers the differences in the Alabama School of Trades and junior colleges referred to by Pedersen, the contradiction is minimized, if not erased.

The Alabama School of Trades was not an academic institution, but was a technical institute. No evidence exists that the institution offered any academic classes or transfer credits. Pedersen’s claim against democratization dealt mainly with academic junior colleges whose main purpose was academic transfer to a four-year college for the purpose of obtaining an undergraduate baccalaureate degree. Therefore, the apparent desire for democratization

²⁵ “Ragland School to be Aided by Exchange Club,” *Anniston Star* (Anniston, AL), September 23, 1921, 5.

²⁶ “Great Ceremony,” *Gadsden Times*, July 23, 1925.

²⁷ See Chapter 1.

associated with the Alabama School of Trades is different from the desires that traditional junior college histories ascribe to the founders of junior colleges.

Senator Brown and the media of the time were very clear that the “poor white boys” the institution would serve did not need, nor could they attain, an academic education.²⁸ The motives for the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades were never to provide access to a four-year degree, but to provide access to technical education. No contradiction exists between Pedersen’s findings and the finding of this section because the subjects addressed by both studies had significantly different goals in mind in regards to the purpose of the institutions.

The bill authorizing the Alabama School of Trades easily passed the legislature and was signed by Governor Emmet O’Neal on April 12, 1911. The 1911 legislation stated that the institution was established for the “education and training of white boys and young men in all the useful and industrial occupations and in the arts and sciences.” No specific curriculum is identified for the institution. A portion of the legislation hints at a Populist influence. The end of Section 1 states, “to enable the students of such institution to acquire the education and training by employing a part or portion of their time, if necessary, while in school to pay all or in part of their board, lodging and tuition for themselves.”²⁹ This statement is very similar to the Populist ideal of the land-grant colleges that allowed students to work off their tuition. This principle seems to have been put into action at the Alabama School of Trades. In 1930, the entire dining services were worked by students, presumably in order to pay for tuition and board.³⁰ The legislation authorized the board of control to purchase a site for the school in Ragland of “not

²⁸ “Ragland School,” *Anniston Star*, October 13, 1921, 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Opportunities at the Alabama School of Trades,” *Gadsden Times*, March 12, 1930.

less than one hundred acres.” The *Anniston Star* stated in a 1921 article that “the state owns the school site at Ragland.”³¹ However, it is unclear when the site was purchased.

The weakness in this legislation related to the way in which the Alabama School of Trades was to be funded. The 1911 legislation authorized a one-time allotment of \$50,000 for the construction of buildings and purchase of equipment. The legislation also authorized a \$5,000 annual appropriation for the Alabama School of Trades. The problem with the legislation was the way in which these funds were to be released. The legislation stated that “the sum hereby appropriated shall be paid only on the approval of the governor, as, in his opinion, the state of the treasury may warrant.”³² For some reason, these funds were never released to the board of trustees. In his speech at the 1925 ground-breaking ceremony for the Alabama School of Trades, Watt Brown simply stated that “the funds were never made available.”³³ The Alabama School of Trades failed to open under this 1911 legislation primarily for this reason. No elaboration as to the reason for withholding these funds has been located, but the responsibility the 1911 legislation placed upon the governor to release the funds based upon his judgment of the state treasury was left out of the subsequent legislation dealing with the Alabama School of Trades.

Although his 1911 legislation had formally chartered but failed to establish and fund the Alabama School of Trades, Senator Watt Brown introduced very similar legislation in 1919 in an effort to revive the prospects of establishing the institution. The 1919 legislation was also similar to the 1911 legislation regarding the purpose and control of the institution. There are two notable differences in the 1911 and 1919 legislation. The 1919 Legislation placed the Alabama School of

³¹ “Ragland School,” *Anniston Star*, October 13, 1921, 5.

³² *Journal of the Alabama Senate*, reg. sess., 1911, 153.

³³ “Great Ceremony,” *Gadsden Times*, July 23, 1925.

Trades under the control of the state superintendent of education and state board of education after the school had opened. The 1911 legislation had provided for a board of trustees to serve rotating terms and be appointed by the governor, but did not put the new institution under the control of the superintendent and state board. The second difference in the 1919 legislation deals with funding the institution.

The 1919 legislation authorized the board of trustees to “accept from public or private sources the sum of \$30,000.” The legislation also stipulated that “when the full sum of \$30,000 shall have been placed to the credit of the board of control the special legislative appropriation of \$30,000 to be used for the construction and equipment of the necessary school building shall be available.”³⁴ The wording of this legislation obligated the state to release funds for the school when the conditions were met. Instead of the funds being released based on the judgment of one individual as the 1911 legislation called for, the funds would be released when an established criterion was met. However, raising the required funds would present more of a challenge and take longer than the supporters of the Alabama School of Trades envisioned.

Newspaper articles from the period indicate that many thought the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades was imminent. The headline of an article in the *Anniston Star* from 1921 read, “Ragland School for Poor White Boys Assured.”³⁵ At this time, the establishment of the school was far from “assured.” It would take another four years before the required \$30,000 was raised on behalf of the school. Leading the fund-raising efforts were the Exchange Clubs of Alabama. The Exchange Club of America was founded in 1911 in Detroit, Michigan. The national website for Exchange Clubs lists the early purpose as providing a place for civic leaders

³⁴ *Journal of the Alabama Senate*, reg. sess., 1919, 646.

³⁵ “Ragland School,” *Anniston Star*, October 13, 1921.

to “exchange” ideas on how to make their communities better. One of the activities that Exchange Clubs sponsor that is relevant to the Alabama School of Trades is to “benefit, award, and develop America’s youth.”³⁶ The Alabama School of Trades would have been a good candidate for this organization’s support.

At the beginning of the fund-raising efforts, the Exchange Clubs sought to raise the money simply by soliciting donations from individuals and businesses.³⁷ However, this plan did not bring much success. The largest donation recorded was a \$54 dollar donation given by the mechanics of the U.S. Cast Iron Pipe and Foundry Company.³⁸ Surprisingly, no record of large business support for the institution can be found. All mentions of donations that have been located seem to have come from private individuals. This lack of large donors slowed the fund-raising efforts of the Exchange Clubs. At their state convention held on September 14, 1921 in Anniston, the group adopted a different strategy for raising money. The Exchange Clubs distributed coupon books to be sold for one dollar among their members. By October of 1921 the clubs had sold “a large number of the books.”³⁹ Although the effort sold many books, the Exchange Clubs did not fully raise the \$30,000 until 1923.⁴⁰ This date was much later than the supporters of the institution predicted and emphasizes the importance of state support without burdensome conditions.

³⁶ “National Exchange Club History,” National Exchange Club, accessed December 1, 2011, <https://www.nationalexchangeclub.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?webcode=History>.

³⁷ “Ragland School,” *Anniston Star*, October 13, 1921.

³⁸ “Boys’ Trade School Planned for St. Clair,” *Anniston Star*, September 23, 1920.

³⁹ “Ragland School,” *Anniston Star*, October 13, 1921.

⁴⁰ “Great Ceremony,” *Gadsden Times*, July 23, 1925.

After the money had been raised for the Alabama School of Trades, another issue arose that further delayed its establishment. In his speech at the ground-breaking ceremony in 1925, Senator Watt Brown stated that “the question was seriously raised as to the suitability of Ragland as a location. It was the consensus of opinion that a town with a greater number of inhabitants and a diversity of industries would add greatly to the success of the school.”⁴¹ The 1920 population of Gadsden was 23,269, compared to Ragland’s population of 1,814. A bill was introduced to the legislature that gave the board of trustees the authority to select a new location for the institution. The bill also required that any funds donated by citizens of St. Clair County be returned to them upon request. The bill passed the legislature and was signed into law on September 29, 1923. The refunding of some of the donations combined with the selection of a new location further delayed the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades.

Issues relating to location and refunds to donors were resolved by the spring of 1925, and the building of the Alabama School of Trades proceeded at a rapid pace. The City of Gadsden had been selected as the new location for the Alabama School of Trades and had donated a 112-acre site in East Gadsden. Its large population and abundance of diverse industries made it a more suitable choice than Ragland. Its proximity to Ragland, less than thirty miles north, made it acceptable to citizens of St. Clair County and possibly helped decrease the amount of donations that would need to be refunded. On April 3, 1925, Senator Watt Brown, who would serve as the first chairman of the board of trustees for the Alabama School of Trades, issued a call for bids for the construction of the dormitory building of the new institution. The article that published the call for bids stated that the Board of Trustees had \$60,000 in cash for the building program. This would clearly indicate that the supporters of the institution had raised the \$30,000 required for the release of the additional \$30,000 of state funds and that these funds had been released.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The plans called for a two-story red brick building to be built on the 112-acre site donated by the City of Gadsden. The proposed building appears to have been of very modern design for the year 1925. It included steam heat, hot and cold running water, and modern plumbing and would house up to sixty boys.⁴² The building contract was awarded on April 15, 1925. Carey Elder of Boaz was the low bidder with a bid of \$36,000.⁴³ This figure was below the estimated cost of \$40,000 budgeted by the Board of Trustees. The contract stipulated that building must be completed by September 1, 1925, in order for classes to begin that fall. Classes would be held in three wooden buildings already on the site. Slight remodeling over the summer of 1925 would make them sufficient until a trade building could be constructed. The board of trustees then turned its attention to hiring a director for the new institution.⁴⁴

The director of the trade school would oversee the construction of the buildings and prepare for the arrival of students by securing equipment and hiring instructors.⁴⁵ This issue was pressing because none of the trustees could personally supervise construction. The board of trustees selected Logan Fuller of Greensboro to be the first director of the Alabama School of Trades in late April. Fuller had previously been the superintendent of a vocational school operated by the federal government in Greensboro. The vocational school in Greensboro served to train disabled World War I veterans; by 1925 had completed its purpose and was shut down. A *Gadsden Times* article of April 22, 1925, stated that Fuller “was well trained for the place and had experience in vocational schools.” Fuller began the job in early May and served as director until 1930 when it was discovered that he owed the school more than \$5,000. He was forced to

⁴² “Bidding for Alabama School of Trades Construction Opens,” *Gadsden Times*, April 3, 1925.

⁴³ “Trade School Lets Building Contract,” *Gadsden Times*, April 22, 1925.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

resign and surrender some personal property to cover the debt.⁴⁶

On July 23, 1925, a large ceremony was held to lay the cornerstone and dedicate the new dormitory. The *Gadsden Times* reported that scores of state and local officials as well as hundreds of citizens from all across Alabama attended the event. The ceremony consisted of speeches by Watt Brown, Senator J. C. Inzer of Gadsden, and Dr. John Abercrombie, state superintendent of education. Senator Brown devoted his speech to detailing the history of the institution and to highlighting the need for technical education. The attitude of the day was perhaps best reflected by Senator Inzer's bold prediction about the future of the institution. He stated that with "the right kind of support the Alabama School of Trades would someday be as great as Auburn."⁴⁷ Although a little too ambitious for a trade school with no path to a bachelor's degree, his statement shows the local excitement and hope that surrounded this institution.

Applications for enrollments were available in July of 1925, and by the end of August, twenty white boys had applied. The headline announcing the availability of applications read "Is Open to All," in keeping with the theme for the institution. The institution offered five courses of study during its first academic year: printing, cabinet making, pattern making, and applied electricity.⁴⁸ Students could also take a "try-out" course for one year. This course allowed students to sample each of the trades for one year and decide which one fit them the best. Not surprisingly, this course often had the largest number of students.⁴⁹ By 1929, the curriculum had expanded to include auto mechanics, masonry, sheet metal, and welding. Cabinet and pattern making had been combined into woodworking.

⁴⁶ "The Trade School," *Cullman Democrat* (Cullman, AL), August 14, 1930.

⁴⁷ "Great Ceremony," *Gadsden Times*, July 23, 1925.

⁴⁸ "Applications Accepted for Trade School: Is Open to All," *Gadsden Times*, August 28, 1925.

⁴⁹ "Trade School Opens Monday: Prospects Good," *Gadsden Times*, September 15, 1925.

Classes began on Wednesday, September 16, 1925 with an enrollment of forty-two students. A few more students were expected to enroll after the cotton harvest. Most students were local, but one student came from Mississippi to attend. All of these students lived in the dormitory, but the institution would later include local students who commuted to class.⁵⁰ These students were called “day students,” and by 1929 they made up 20 percent of the enrollment. By 1929, the enrollment had more than doubled since 1925, with 108 students enrolled in classes. Students were charged \$20 a month for boarding, but no mention is made of the tuition costs.⁵¹ Students were allowed to work at the school or contract through private individuals in order to pay for their education.

The Alabama School of Trades would remain a vital part of technical education in Alabama until its merger with Gadsden State Community College in 1985. The Great Depression severely challenged the existence of the Alabama School of Trades, however. Enrollments would again flourish during and after World War II. During the sixty years of its operation, the institution educated tens of thousands of students, many of whom would have never had access to higher education. The path to establishment of the Alabama School of Trades was a testimony to the long perseverance of Watt Brown and other legislative leaders, and the institution appears to have helped institutions better their lot in life.

⁵⁰ “Alabama School of Trades Begins Classes,” *Gadsden Times*, September 20, 1925.

⁵¹ “Alabama School of Trades Begins Fifth Year,” *Gadsden Times*, September 12, 1929.

CHAPTER IV

LACK OF PUBLIC JUNIOR COLLEGE ESTABLISHMENT IN ALABAMA

Around the same time that Alabama was struggling to establish its School of Trades, other states were already establishing junior colleges. Public experiments with junior colleges had begun nearly twenty years before the Alabama School of Trades was established. Many states, including some in the South, had rather extensive two-year college systems prior to World War II. In his study of junior colleges in 1948, Charles Sims found 235 public junior colleges operating in twenty states. Although Southern states, including Mississippi, Florida, Kentucky, and Texas, were operating junior colleges prior to 1925, no public junior college existed in Alabama until 1961.¹ What caused this delay? What factors made public trade schools a more appealing option for Alabama policymakers than public junior colleges?

Many different issues contributed to the emergence and growth of junior colleges during the first half of the twentieth century, and no single factor appears to have led to junior college establishment. The most probable scenario is that several factors came together to make junior colleges a popular and effective educational option. In the early part of the twentieth century, the American economy and society were in transition. In his 1950 dissertation that comprehensively reviewed state junior college enabling legislation across the then-existing 48 states, Raymond J. Young made the case that new technology and changing social patterns helped fuel the growth of junior colleges. Young cited the U.S. Census Bureau data that showed that technology had

¹ Charles W. Sims, *The Present Legal Status of the Public Junior College* (Nashville, TN: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1948), 14.

caused the productivity per man hour to increase by more than 100 percent in the five largest economic sectors from 1909 to 1939.²

The growth in productivity outpaced the growth in production and eliminated many manufacturing jobs. This resulted from the development of better production methods and machines. However, the technology that was responsible for this increase in productivity did not require extended training. In fact, Young found that the amount of training time for the manufacturing industry decreased significantly with the advent of new technologies. He stated that an average new worker in automobile manufacturing could be at full production in just three days. Young concluded that these factors may have partially contributed to very high unemployment numbers from the late 1920s to the late 1940s. The high unemployment not only created a supply of workers who needed retraining, it also made it very difficult for high school graduates, and those with less than a high school diploma, to find a job.³ Boren writing in 1925 made a similar claim that an “increasingly complex social life, and the need for education that will fit the individual for direct entry into employment” created the need for junior colleges.⁴

The development and application of new technologies also affected the agricultural sector. In 1860, almost 59 percent of Americans were employed in agriculture, but by 1940 this number had fallen to less than 18 percent.⁵ Increased farm productivity had decreased the need for agricultural workers, and the mechanization of agriculture increased the productivity of large farms to a level in which farming was not profitable for most small family farmers. This had a dramatic effect on the Southern population because the average small farmer found it even

² Young, “An Analysis and Evaluation of General Legislation,” 12-20.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Boren, “Why a Junior College Movement,” 351.

⁵ United States Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1945) 344.

harder to earn a living. Also the increase in farm machinery virtually eliminated the tenant farming system that had supported, although meagerly, the majority of Southern farmers. These unemployed farmers began to seek employment in an already crowded job market. Nicholas Lemmon documents the fact that 4 million African-Americans from Deep South states, including Alabama, migrated to the industrial cities of the North and Midwest between 1940 and 1960, following the invention of the mechanical cotton-picking machine.⁶ Although a little later than the time examined by Young, these findings indicate the results of the loss of low-skilled jobs.

The decrease in the need for farm workers and the formation and expansion of public high school opportunities appears to be other major factors involved in boosting the demand for junior colleges. These two events made it possible for the children of farmers to stay in school longer and thus become eligible for some form of higher education.⁷ Nationally, the school attendance rate for fifteen to twenty year old students rose from 26.9 percent in 1900 to 49.2 percent in 1940. These school attendance patterns also reflect a new emphasis on education. Boren wrote that “the desire of parents to give their children a better start in life” also contributed to increased education.⁸ Many parents realized that a changing economy would require that workers be more educated than ever before. When high school graduation rates increased, the demand for higher educational opportunities increased with it because more students than ever before were eligible for higher education.

Although the numbers of potential students and the desire for education increased, most students still could not afford, or attain, a professional degree. The changes in the economy and

⁶ Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1991).

⁷ B. Lamar Johnson, “Junior College Trends,” *School Review* 52, no. 1 (December 1944): 606.

⁸ Boren, “Why a Junior College Movement,” 352.

society of early twentieth-century America created new forms of employment that required a mid-level of education. These occupations required more training than a manufacturing job but less than a professional career. In 1916, Brush labeled occupations requiring this level of training as “semi-professions.”⁹ He stated that “there is increasingly a demand for training which is above the level of trade training but is not as far advanced as that for the professions. It may be called for convenience semi-technical or semi-professional.”¹⁰ During this time period, occupations such as nursing and teaching were considered semi-professions. The rise of these professions can be tied to the economic prosperity that created a demand for more jobs in the service, healthcare, and educational sectors. These jobs provided employment for the increasing amount of high school-educated individuals who could no longer find employment in agriculture or manufacturing. The occupations impacted education because the training for these jobs could be accomplished in a local junior college instead of a university.

In the early twentieth century a more educated population of workers faced an unprecedentedly tight job market. With no means of attaining a professional degree the situation would have been dire without the emergence of the new “semi-professions.” These jobs provided educated workers with the ability to break free from the restraints of a sluggish job market. Young and Boren argued that the junior college was the educational avenue that emerged due to these economic and social changes. Assuming that these arguments were at least partially responsible for the development of junior colleges, why were no junior colleges established in Alabama? Was the Alabama economy and society behind the rest of the nation, and thus, the need for junior colleges not as great, or were other factors responsible for the delay? A comparison of Young’s national occupation and education data to the data from Alabama can

⁹ Brush, “The Junior College and the University,” 357.

¹⁰ Ibid.

help to identify whether the economic and social forces for junior college establishment existed in Alabama prior to World War II.

The occupational data Young reviewed to demonstrate the loss of unskilled jobs came from the United States Census and covered the period from 1890 to 1940. The data were compiled from tables reporting the distribution of gainfully employed workers by occupational group. Table 3 uses the same Census reports to compare national employment changes to employment changes in Alabama. Table 4 compares the percent of fifteen to twenty year olds enrolled in Alabama schools to the percent enrolled nationally.

At first glance, the data in Table 3 seem to indicate that the decline in agriculture was not as significant in Alabama as it was in the rest of the nation. However, an examination of the data shows that the decline in agricultural jobs was more severe and rapid in Alabama than it was in the rest of the nation. In 1910, two-thirds of Alabamians made a living in agriculture, as compared to a little under one-third in the rest of the nation. The high number of agricultural jobs available from 1890 to 1910 reflects the important role that agriculture played in the Alabama economy. The delay in the decline of agriculture indicates that Alabama farms were mechanized a few decades later than farms in other parts of the country, likely because of the presence of small family farms. Flynt stated that in 1900 the average farmer in Alabama had invested only \$35 in farm equipment compared to \$170 in Kansas and \$253 in Iowa.¹¹ On the surface the high numbers of agricultural workers seem to indicate that Alabama did not need junior colleges because people could make a living on farms with little or no formal education. While this was probably true for the years from 1890 to 1910, the decline in agricultural jobs in Alabama after 1910 was more than twice the national rate of decline.

¹¹ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 116.

Table 3. Percent Distribution of Gainfully Employed Workers in the United States and Alabama, 1890-1940.

	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Agriculture						
National	42.6	37.5	31.0	27.0	21.4	18.5
Alabama	68.7	67.6	67.1	55.6	48.0	39.0
Forestry and Fishing						
National						
Alabama	.8	.7	.6	.6	.6	.2
	1.5	.1	<.1	<.1	<.1	<.1
Extraction of Minerals						
National	1.9	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.0	2.0
Alabama	1.5	2.4	2.9	3.9	3.4	3.3
Manufacturing and Mechanical						
National	23.7	24.8	28.5	30.3	28.9	23.4
Alabama	16.6	18.1	10.8	16.6	18.0	17.3
Transportation and Communication						
National	6.0	6.7	7.1	7.3	7.9	6.9
Alabama	<.1	<.1	3.4	4.6	5.6	4.3
Trade						
National	8.8	10.6	9.7	10.0	12.5	16.7
Alabama	6.7	6.7	4.3	5.5	8.3	10.0
Professional Service						
National	3.8	4.1	4.6	5.1	6.7	7.3
Alabama	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.8	3.9	4.4
Public Service						
National	.9	1.0	1.2	1.7	1.8	3.9
Alabama	<.1	<.1	.5	.7	1.0	2.3
Domestic and Personal Service						
National	9.6	9.7	10.1	8.0	10.1	8.9
Alabama	13.3	13.4	7.6	7.8	9.7	10.5

Source: United States Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945*, 340-347.

Table 4. Percent of 15-20 Year Olds Attending School, 1900-1940.

Year	National	Alabama
1900	26.9	24.2
1910	32.9	34.4
1920	34.0	37.8
1930	44.1	40.3
1940	49.2	43.3

Source: United States Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945*, 120-128.

During the period from 1910 to 1940, the number of people employed in agriculture declined by 28 percent in Alabama while the national decline was about 12.5 percent. This decline amounted to about 150,000 fewer agricultural workers statewide in Alabama in just the ten years between 1930 and 1940 alone. The dramatic decline in agricultural employment was not followed by rapid growth in other occupation groups. Manufacturing jobs, mainly in the low-paying textile industry, gradually came to Alabama, but not fast enough to alleviate the unemployment or poverty problem.¹² Therefore, similar economic conditions that, according to Young, prompted the establishment of public junior colleges in other states appear to have existed in Alabama. In fact, from 1910 to 1940, these conditions were even more pronounced in Alabama than in much of the nation. Yet, no junior colleges were established in Alabama prior to World War II.

The creation of public high schools is also often listed as a factor that promoted the growth of junior colleges. In 1924, Leonard V. Koos, who wrote the first major book-length study of junior colleges, pointed out that many junior colleges required virtually the same high school prerequisite courses as did universities.¹³ This meant that junior college students needed as many high school credits as university students. Therefore without public high schools, and the increased attendance of the overall high school age population, there might have been little demand for junior colleges. As the number of students attending high school increased, so did the demand for a junior college. Table 4 shows that the percentage of students ages fifteen to twenty attending school in Alabama was higher than the national average from 1910 to 1920. The percentage was only slightly lower between 1930 and 1940. The school attendance data

¹² Ibid., 109.

¹³ Koos, *The Junior-College*, 88.

from 1900 to 1940 show that Alabama was very competitive with the rest of the nation in the percentage of fifteen to twenty year olds attending school. These data seem to indicate that a lack of high school attendance was not a factor in delaying the development of public junior colleges in Alabama prior to 1940.

The period of decline in unskilled labor and rising high school attendance rates coincided with what can be considered the birth of junior colleges. In his 1930 *Directory of the Junior College*, Doak Campbell listed 178 public junior colleges in the United States.¹⁴ Almost all of these colleges were established in the years between 1910 to 1930, when jobs requiring unskilled labor, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and domestic service declined rapidly. That means that just less than ten junior colleges were started per year across the nation, some in the neighboring states of Mississippi and Florida, from 1910 to 1930. This represents the first wave of junior college establishment (the second wave occurred during the 1960s to accommodate the baby boom generation). The comparison of national occupational and educational data leads to the conclusion that Alabama faced economic and social stresses similar to those plaguing the rest of the nation during this era. The lack of junior college establishment in Alabama cannot be attributed to any difference in the economic and social status of Alabamians during the initial wave of junior college establishment from 1910 to 1940.

The early junior college movement faced many different forms of opposition. This opposition came from state governments, other educational institutions, and occasionally from local citizens. As has been noted, opposition to junior college establishment was quite common in the early twentieth century. Pedersen states that “school historians have consistently understated the extent, intensity, and effectiveness of the resistance with which the early junior

¹⁴ Doak Campbell, “Directory of the Junior College, 1931,” *Junior College Journal* 2, no. 1 (1931): 223.

college was met.”¹⁵ Although scholarly junior college advocates such as Koos and Eells concluded that the junior college was an inevitable, unstoppable force, local forces significantly delayed junior college establishment in many states.

The historical record shows that public K-12 educators, university presidents, and even governors and attorneys general opposed junior colleges. Pedersen describes this opposition as “broad-based and quite vocal.” These types of opposition have been documented quite extensively in other states, but little documentation has been done within the State of Alabama.¹⁶ If Alabama faced similar economic and social pressures that helped foster junior college development in the early twentieth century, then other factors must be responsible for the lack of public junior college development in Alabama. Some opposing force, or forces, must have acted to hinder junior college development in Alabama.

The most powerful opposition to junior colleges in the early twentieth century appears to have come from state governments. The legal status of the public junior colleges across the states in the early twentieth century was diverse and often uncertain.¹⁷ Most of the early junior colleges were established on a “bottom up” basis by local school districts, often through an approval process by regional accrediting agencies, operating for a number of years prior to being granted formal legal authority from the legislature. This was especially true of the earliest public junior colleges, but these “extra-legal” colleges persisted in some states as late as the 1940s. In 1929, E. Q. Brothers counted 150 publicly-controlled junior colleges operating in twenty-four states.¹⁸

¹⁵ Robert P. Pedersen, “State Government and the Junior College, 1901-1946,” *Community College Review* 14, no. 4 (1987): 49.

¹⁶ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 320-322.

¹⁷ Young, “An Analysis and Evaluation of General Legislation,” 14.

¹⁸ E. Q. Brothers, “Legal Status of the Publicly Supported Junior College - - June, 1929,” *School Review* 38 (December 1930): 738.

Yet only twelve of these states had passed legislation that authorized the operation of junior colleges. The vast majority of these colleges, 149 according to a 1932 study, were operated locally by local school districts, usually below the radar of state officials.¹⁹ In his survey of states with extra-legal junior colleges, Brothers found that most state superintendents of education felt that the law already granted the departments of education sufficient authority to operate junior colleges. Others felt that junior colleges were legal because the law did not *expressly prohibit* their establishment. The responses to Brothers's survey indicate that state departments of education were typically unwilling to oppose locally supported junior colleges.²⁰ Pedersen concluded that this reluctance did not come from a commitment to the junior college as an institution, but was due the small size and lack of organization of the Departments of Education in the early twentieth century. However, as state departments of education became more organized, they often became more vocal in their opposition to junior colleges.²¹ This apathy on the part of state education officials was rivaled by the inaction of state legislatures.

Many of these early colleges enrolled fewer than thirty students and funded educational services through tuition. The only use of public resources was the occupation of a classroom in the after-school hours, so most state legislatures were content to ignore the junior colleges because of their small size and limited use of resources.²² No legislator wanted to make enemies back home by opposing an institution that was typically seen as very favorable among local constituents, yet few were willing to risk political capital by championing another expensive

¹⁹ J. A. Clement and Vivian Smith, "Public Junior Colleges in the US," *University of Illinois Bulletin* 29, no. 58 (1932): 19.

²⁰ Brothers, "Legal Status of Publicly Supported Junior College," 742.

²¹ Pedersen, "The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College," 365.

²² Pedersen, "State Government and the Junior College," 49.

state institution. The typical path for dealing with these “extra-legal” junior colleges was to simply ignore them until their size or demand for resources drew enough attention, at which time legislation could be passed to give them formal legal status. This delay was particularly pronounced in a few states. In Illinois, the legislature authorized local junior colleges in 1937, but local school districts had been offering college-level courses as early as 1901. Texas had at least twenty-one junior colleges in existence prior to first enabling legislation in 1929. Clearly, this process of legalization often occurred years after the initial establishment of the junior college and in some cases was damaging to local efforts to establish junior colleges.²³ Raymond J. Young, whose career included the authorship or co-authorship of studies that led to the establishment of sixty community and junior colleges in nineteen states between 1955 and 1976, observed that when he came to Illinois in the mid-1950s, he learned that there had been no formal legislative authority to authorize Joliet Junior College, which was initially started in 1901 and is often considered the first public junior college.²⁴

In some cases, the failure of state legislatures to formally authorize junior colleges through statute enabled other state government officials to oppose junior colleges. This is the reverse argument of “it’s legal unless it is expressly prohibited;” from this point of view, establishment is *expressly illegal unless* legal statutory authority has been formally granted through specific legislative action. The key actors requiring expressed legal statutory authority were most often found in the executive branch offices of state government, and in some instances

²³ Ibid., 322.

²⁴ Stephen G. Katsinas, “Remembering Raymond J. Young and the Grass-Roots Development of Community Colleges From 1950-1976,” *Community College Review* 35, no. 4 (2008): 346-348; Raymond J. Young, “From Persuasion to Accommodation in Public Two-Year College Development,” *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 26, (2002): 561.

this opposition was the source of the strongest, most damaging efforts to impede junior college development.

Surprisingly, it was not governors who took to the lead to oppose early public junior colleges, although some openly did.²⁵ The most damaging opposition often came from state attorneys general. Starting in 1915 with California, Pedersen cited four examples of negative attorney general opinions related to the establishment of junior colleges. In some cases the opinions were unpopular with the public and prompted the legislature to take action before the existing junior colleges were closed. Such was the case in the California, when the legislature passed a junior college enabling law in 1917 in response to a restrictive 1915 attorney general opinion. This allowed junior colleges to continue to operate in California. In other states, the legislature did not act to authorize junior colleges after restrictive or prohibitive attorney general opinions were issued. The effects of this inaction varied among and across the states.²⁶

The effects of a negative attorney general opinion and the lack of any legislative authorization depended largely upon the state. In Illinois, Attorney General Oscar Carlson in 1927 ruled that local boards of education had no authority to establish junior colleges. According to Pedersen, this ruling was largely ignored, and junior colleges continued to operate. Three factors possibly contributed to the ability of some local governments to ignore Carlson's opinion. The first was the inability of state authorities to enforce the ruling. Many junior colleges at the time were either tuition-based or subsidized with local funding, and most important, did not rely

²⁵ Pedersen cites one example of a Governor opposing junior colleges that occurred in 1929 in Washington State. Governor Roland Hartley vetoed legislation authorizing junior colleges and creating a standard process for their creation stating that education spending was out of hand and would lead to higher taxes.

²⁶ Pedersen, "State Government and the Junior College," 49.

upon state funding such that the threat of a reduction in state funds did not scare the local school districts.

A second reason was a strong tradition of localism. In states with a strong tradition of local governance and constitutions that supported this principle, state attorneys general and other state officers had little effect in slowing the “bottom up” establishment of junior colleges. However, local boards of education in states with a more centralized form of state government faced a larger challenge when opposed by state officials. Such was the case in the states of Alabama and Ohio.

A third factor that allowed some states to ignore the restrictive wishes of state governments was the fact that many junior colleges were initially established without seeking state permission. Most state officials lacked the motivation to oppose educational institutions that had been in operation for years. When Illinois Attorney General Carlson issued his opinion in 1927, Joliet Junior College had already been operating for twenty-six years having been started in 1901. The political risks simply outweighed the rewards. However, when permission to operate a junior college was sought *prior* to establishment, state officials were much more likely to deny approval and prevent the establishment of junior colleges.²⁷

The most commonly cited example of a negative attorney general opinion stopping the establishment of junior colleges occurred in Ohio in 1928. Many Ohio cities were interested in starting junior colleges, and a 1927 report from the Ohio College Association endorsed the establishment of junior colleges in the state. A state agency responsible for oversight of state facilities requested an opinion from the state attorney general on the legality of proposed junior colleges. In what Pedersen calls the “single, most damaging blow to the fortunes of the early junior college,” Ohio Attorney General Edward Turner strongly denied the right of local

²⁷ Ibid., 49-53.

communities to operate junior colleges.²⁸ He argued that the term “junior college” had no legal meaning and could not define any class of institution. Turner cited an Ohio Supreme Court ruling that stated, “boards of education, and other similar governmental bodies, are limited in the exercise of their powers to such as are clearly and distinctly granted.”²⁹

Turner then cited fourteen sections of the General Code of Ohio that limited the power of local boards of education to elementary and high schools. Turner summed up his argument by saying, “inasmuch as boards of education are limited in their powers to those granted to them, and no authority has been granted to them to establish and maintain schools other than one year of kindergarten, eight years of elementary schools, and four years of high school, I am of the opinion that they have no authority to establish schools of the grade of a college, either of high or low degree, whether such proposed school maintained from public funds or from tuition fees charged to attendants.”³⁰ Turner’s opinion denied local school districts the authority to operate junior colleges even if the institutions were fully supported by tuition or by local funding. No evidence exists that any school district ignored this ruling and started an extra-legal junior college program.³¹ Although Turner’s 1928 opinion has received a fair bit of attention in the literature, it was not the only example of an attorney general opinion that hindered junior college establishment.

Another example occurred in Alabama during the late 1920s. At its regular meeting on May 31, 1929, the Cullman County Board of Education discussed the prospects of establishing a

²⁸ Ibid., 49.

²⁹ Opinions of the Ohio Attorney General, *Annual Report, 1928* (Columbus, OH: Office of the Ohio Attorney General, 1928), 1015.

³⁰ Ibid., 1018.

³¹ Pedersen, “State Government and the Junior College,” 49; Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 377.

junior college in connection with its local high schools. The minutes indicate that each board member had discussed the plan with leading citizens in their districts, and found that public sentiment was unanimously in favor of a public junior college being established in this rural, near 100 percent white populated county. The county superintendent of education was formally authorized to explore the legality of using public local taxpayer funds to establish and support a junior college in the county. The Cullman County Superintendent of Education then sent a letter to Alabama Attorney General Charlie McCall requesting an opinion on the legality of such an enterprise.³² A copy of the superintendent's letter was not included in the minutes or in the State Department of Education archives, but the reply from the attorney general includes a section specifically referring to the letter.

The letter from the Cullman County Superintendent stated that “a two-year college would be very desirable for Cullman County because numerous students are attending school elsewhere.”³³ Although this “elsewhere” is not specifically identified, it takes little imagination to identify this institution. In 1928, only three white privately-controlled junior colleges were operating in Alabama: Snead Seminary in Boaz, Bethlehem College in Wadley, and St. Bernard (male) in Cullman. Because Wadley was a little over one hundred and fifty miles from Cullman, it was likely not receiving many students from Cullman County. Although Snead Seminary in Boaz could have possibly gotten some students from Cullman County, it is most likely that the institution referred to by the Cullman County Superintendent was St. Bernard College for males. The institution was sponsored by the Catholic Church and served a good portion of Cullman County's Catholic population. As was the case in many of the privately controlled, church-

³² Minutes of the Cullman County Board of Education, May 31, 1929, Cullman County Board of Education, Cullman, Alabama.

³³ Opinions of the Alabama Attorney General, *Biennial Report 1928-1930* (Montgomery, AL: Office of the Attorney General, 1930), 497.

related, two-year colleges in Southern states, the junior college operated both a preparatory high school and the first two years of college studies.³⁴ Because Cullman County had a relatively high Catholic population, it may be that the public schools were losing a large number of students to these institutions. It is also likely that the Protestant residents of Cullman County desired the same educational opportunities for their children, and the interest in a Cullman County junior college was a manifestation of this desire. The attorney general's opinion in practice would hinder this desire for nearly forty years.

On June 26, 1929, Alabama Attorney General Charlie McCall issued an opinion very similar to the one issued in Ohio by Attorney General Edward Turner a little more than a year earlier. McCall's opinion denied local boards of education in Alabama the right to establish junior colleges. McCall cited three sections the Alabama School Code that restricted the duties of the County Board of Education to K-12 activities. The opinion states, "it appears on consideration of the law applicable to the duties of the county board of education that its duties are confined to the management and control of public schools in the county. It is provided that these public schools shall include elementary schools, that is, from grade one to six inclusive; junior high schools, grade seven to nine inclusive; and senior high schools, that is grade ten to twelve inclusive." The attorney general then concluded that the Cullman County Board of Education had no authority to operate a junior college.³⁵

Attorney General McCall's ruling could have been nullified by legislation authorizing junior colleges; however no enabling legislation was passed in Alabama prior to 1961. In light of the previously mentioned strong local support for a public junior college, the question begs: Why was junior college legislation not passed until 1961? Alabama's 1901 Constitution only called

³⁴ Rowland, "The Decline of Private Junior Colleges in Alabama," 115-131.

³⁵ Opinions of the Alabama Attorney General, *Biennial Report 1928-1930*, 497-498.

for the legislature to meet every four years, and this meeting occurred in the first year after the election.³⁶ This meant that the legislature met in 1927, but would not meet again until 1931. The attorney general's opinion could have prompted legislation, but a little over four months after McCall's opinion was issued, the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929. Black Tuesday would be followed by the worst period of economic decline in the history of the country, and strain both federal and state budgets. During the Great Depression, the average income in Alabama was 48 percent of the national average.³⁷ The economic situation became so bad in Alabama that by 1931 the continued operation of public education in Alabama was in doubt, and the creation of a new educational institution was not remotely possible. Although this financial strain was clearly made worse by the Great Depression, chronic underfunding has plagued Alabama education for over a century.

This lack of funding for education has been a common occurrence in Alabama history and can be traced to the 1901 Constitution. In his 602-page history, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, Auburn historian Wayne Flynt listed three goals for the delegates to the 1901 Constitutional Convention: first, to disenfranchise blacks and poor whites; second, to keep property taxes artificially low; and third, to remove power from local governments.³⁸ All of these goals were achieved, and arguably all have been harmful to the long-term development of the state, but the tax policy has likely done the most long-term harm to education over the past hundred years.

According to Flynt, the 1901 Constitutional Convention was dominated by two groups, the industrialists and the planters. Both groups wanted to ensure that property taxes remained

³⁶ The quadrennial meetings were changed to biennial meetings by a Constitutional Amendment in 1943.

³⁷ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-25.

low. Therefore the 1901 Constitution capped property taxes at five mills, which is five-tenths of a cent. Not only does the 1901 Constitution cap property taxes, it also makes it extremely difficult for local governments to raise *any* local taxes, except for regressive sales taxes. For almost any local tax increase in Alabama to be approved, a bill must be introduced in the Alabama legislature to amend the state's constitution. If a single "no" vote is cast in the legislature, the amendment must appear on a statewide ballot. The amendment must then pass *at both* the local and state levels, which means that voters in Baldwin County in far south Alabama are voting on local legislation in Gadsden, Decatur, or Huntsville (in 1901, with more limited transportation, such a trip could have taken days if not weeks to make, underscoring the clear intent of making "bottom up" local taxation for public education and other purposes difficult if not impossible). This difficult process combined with a cultural opposition to higher taxes virtually ensures low property taxes and low levels of public services, including education, as a fact of life in Alabama. Over time, property taxes have remained low, except in affluent areas of the state that include a majority of college-educated citizens, including the suburban cities of Hoover and Vestavia Hills near Birmingham, and areas hosting colleges or universities or major research instillations such as Auburn and Huntsville, who can afford to lobby statewide to get their local bills and amendments approved.³⁹ Artificially low property taxes in other areas, however, force local school districts to rely on other much less stable sources of funding.

Mostly, these funds came in the form of sales taxes because local governments under the 1901 Constitution can raise these regressive taxes without legislative approval.⁴⁰ Thus, over the past century, school districts in Alabama have come to increasingly rely upon sales taxes to support local education. The process of raising property taxes is just too difficult, and thus they

³⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24.

have virtually never been increased. Flynt notes that this is exactly as the 1901 Constitution authors intended, because many of them lived in urban areas yet owned large tracts of rural land on which they never wanted to pay property taxes.⁴¹ However, as local education budgets increased their reliance on sales taxes, the instability of their budgets also increased, because sales taxes are notoriously unstable and are magnified by economic fluctuations. Inaccurate budget projections are inevitable, a major reason why the State of Alabama has declared proration—across the board budget cuts—in the education budget fourteen times from 1949 to 2001.⁴²

Furthermore, since under the 1901 Constitution only the governor can declare proration, the system effectively encourages the state legislature to be fiscally irresponsible. State legislatures in practice are incited to approve budgets that they know are out of balance, effectively “kicking the can” down the road, so that the sitting governor takes the political heat for declaring proration, not them. Prior to passage of an amendment to allow gubernatorial succession, the 1901 Constitution prohibited governors from serving more than one consecutive term. The practical effect of this was to make the governor a “lame duck” after his first year in office, again to make state action difficult, and to ensure a more limited set of funded state government functions. By relying on sales taxes as the main—and for most areas of the state, the sole—source of education funding, and by bypassing more stable funding through property tax revenues, the 1901 Constitution has built into the system a great amount of regularized uncertainty regarding the sustainability of any educational program in Alabama. This uncertainty and instability likely played a part in delaying the process of “bottom-up” formation of public

⁴¹ According to Horace Mann Bond, the resistance on behalf of the rich to pay for the education was of the poor hindered the development of public education prior to the Civil War. It appears that by 1901 this attitude had changed very little.

⁴² Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 26.

junior colleges in Alabama, for the very process itself under the 1901 Constitution substituted state power over local home rule.

The tradition of limiting the power of local governments at least partially explains the rationale as to why school districts like the Cullman County Board of Education would seek state approval prior to establishing a junior college. Under its 1901 Constitution, Alabama state government simply does not work the same way as state governments do in many other states. It seems strange for a state that has championed the right of local governance to have such limited power at the county and municipal levels. This anomaly can again be traced to the 1901 Constitution that stripped local counties and municipalities of the right to control their own affairs. The delegates to the 1901 convention were still feeling the sting of the Populist movement of the 1890s, in which a Populist governor would have been elected had it not been for election fraud in the Black Belt counties. The mostly rich Bourbon Democrat delegates feared the taxes that these Populists (mostly poor whites and blacks) might impose upon them and their fellow elites if left unchecked. To counter this threat, local authority was severely limited and power was transferred to the legislature and governor. This meant that the numerous local elections carried very little weight, and the state could be controlled by focusing on races for the legislature and governor. This conserved resources and made it much easier for the wealthy to control the state by influencing the outcomes of important elections.⁴³ To accomplish anything of significance, a local community had to have state approval. Such approval was largely controlled by the planters and industrialists, thus guaranteeing that their interests would be protected.

⁴³ Ibid., 10.

Another consequence that developed out of this lack of local rule was a lack of local initiative and innovation. After the ratification of the 1901 Constitution, local governments were hamstrung and consistently forced to look to Montgomery for leadership. By the late 1920s, the practice of looking to Montgomery for answers and permission was deeply rooted in both law and tradition or custom. Therefore, it is not surprising that Alabama county boards of education would formally ask for state permission prior to opening a junior college.

In many states, early pre-World War II public junior colleges started as extensions of secondary schools that operated using the same facilities and, often, the same instructors.⁴⁴ Many communities chose to levy new taxes to financially support these new institutions.⁴⁵ In a state unable to easily levy new local property taxes to support these programs like Alabama, it is easy to understand the reluctance of local boards of education to spend already scarce educational money on any more than the bare necessities of K-12 education. It is also important to note that many of the early junior colleges were financed by severance taxes on extractive natural resources in a given area. The seven public junior colleges established before World War I in northeastern Minnesota, and the nine public junior colleges in southwestern Kansas were financed by severance taxes on mining and oil, respectively. Alabama's 1901 Constitution made the local issue of severance taxes a state issue, deliberately making it difficult to tax these industries.

The artificial barriers that the 1901 Constitution placed to make it difficult for local units of state government, including county and city boards of education to raise funds, the instability of state budgets financed by regressive sales taxes, and the tradition of state-rule combined to discourage local communities in Alabama from starting junior colleges. Any or all of these

⁴⁴ Young, "An Analysis and Evaluation of General Legislation," 52-53.

⁴⁵ Pedersen, "The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College," 156.

factors can explain why the Cullman County Board of Education chose to accept and not ignore Attorney General McCall's 1929 opinion prohibiting their school district from starting a junior college. When faced with a set of circumstances such as these, no local community could afford to take the risky step of establishing a junior college. In Alabama at least, the junior college idea was not automatically destined for success. Pedersen cites numerous examples of junior colleges that failed shortly after opening. Apparently, no local government in Alabama was willing to risk the creation of a fledgling institution on their own. Local educational leaders statewide took a common approach to this situation; wait on the legislators in Montgomery to take action. However, when the time came for legislative action, state budgets were soon feeling the full effects of the Great Depression, and state legislators would be unable to take action on junior colleges for over thirty years.

The constant lack of revenue and the inability to easily generate more revenues, both imposed by the 1901 Constitution, combined to intensify the effects of the Great Depression on Alabama education budgets. In fact, the situation became so bad that the Alabama Education Association entitled a 1932 bulletin "The School Situation in Alabama: Will Our Schools Open Next Session?" The details of the report are astonishing. At the end of the 1932 fiscal year, the state owed teachers over \$6 million in back salaries, and county boards of education were owed an additional \$5 million. Local boards of education were forced to borrow money on a monthly basis in order to operate. The report also indicated that every county in the state was at least a month behind in teacher salaries. In some counties, such as Winston, Cherokee, Randolph, Crenshaw, Marion, and Clay, teachers had not been paid for over six months. Higher education fared only slightly better, with delinquent payments ranging from two to seven months. Obviously the Depression caused most of this budget crisis, but the 1901 Constitution's

provisions hamstringing local governments from raising temporary taxes also contributed to magnify the crisis.⁴⁶

Alabama collected only 5.83 percent of the total income in the state during the 1929 fiscal year. This ranked tenth out of the twelve Southern states, and looks quite small when compared to 17 percent collected in Florida and 9.82 percent collected in Mississippi. Even in the midst of the Great Depression, some states actually imposed new taxes that went directly to their education budgets. Missouri, North Carolina, Georgia, Oklahoma, and Mississippi levied new income taxes that went directly to education. Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida created a new tax on gasoline that partially went to education. Mississippi imposed a new sales tax that generated over \$4 million for education, and Arkansas placed a new tax on cigarettes to support schools.⁴⁷ Clearly, it was possible to in most Southern states to pay for education with taxes, even in the middle of the Depression. However, the difficulty of levying new taxes under Alabama's 1901 Constitution prevented any kind of substantial statewide tax for education.

In this environment, local school boards in Alabama lacked the funds to successfully sustain and operate a K-12 program, much less a junior college extension. In such a financial crisis, the junior college would have been seen as taking funds away from K-12 educational programs. In his widely read book, *The Junior College*, Walter Crosby Eells reported that in 1930 a committee from the Alabama Education Association recommended against the establishment of junior colleges in Alabama until funding for elementary and secondary education was made sufficient.⁴⁸ Although a copy of this report could not be found by the author,

⁴⁶ Alabama Education Association, *The School Situation in Alabama: Will Our Schools Open Next Session* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Education Association, 1932), 5-10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

⁴⁸ Eells, *The Junior College*, 126.

the quotation from Eells fits with the events of this period as well as similar statements in other states. This argument was often used by opponents to junior colleges, and would be advanced again by Auburn University and the University of Alabama to oppose Governor George C. Wallace's effort to establish new junior and community colleges and trade schools in 1963.⁴⁹

Summary

This chapter has revealed that although some conditions were right in Alabama for the development of junior colleges, many obstacles delayed junior college establishment. The opposition by an attorney general, while detrimental, was not necessarily a death blow to junior college establishment. Many states overcame similar opposition and established junior colleges, but some unique factors contributed to Alabama's relatively late start in establishment. The 1901 Alabama Constitution virtually ensured that local communities could not take independent action without the approval of Montgomery. This effectively eliminated the "bottom-up" development of junior colleges that was the most common method by which early junior colleges were established prior to the "baby boom" of the 1960s and 1970s. This is the reason that no junior colleges grew from high school extensions in Alabama, and that no municipally funded and controlled junior colleges were established in Alabama. Without statutory legislative approval, local communities simply could not take action in Alabama.

The artificially low tax structure in Alabama already provided for an inadequate system of public education. Without the ability or desire to raise taxes, another class of institution was not sustainable in Alabama, especially in years of proration that coincided with the 1920s and the Great Depression that followed. It is important not to overlook the role that poor timing played in delaying junior college establishment in Alabama. Unlike other states that opened junior colleges in the roaring twenties, Alabama communities were feeling the impact of depressed cotton prices

⁴⁹ Katsinas, "George C. Wallace and the Founding of Alabama's Two-Year Colleges," 462.

that followed the end of World War I, prices that did not recover throughout the 1920s. This was then followed by the Great Depression. By the time the Alabama legislature might have acted to authorize junior colleges, the country was in the middle of the worst financial decline in history and the Alabama education budget was only a shell of its former self. The effects of the Great Depression were so long lasting that it would not be until the 1950s before the state budget would recover enough to reconsider the issue of public junior college establishment.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR-TIME MUNICIPAL TRADE SCHOOL IN DECATUR

The Decatur Trade School began in 1938 as a high school vocational program that was operated by Decatur's Riverside High School. During its first year the program enrolled only eighteen students, but after going through many transitions it finally emerged in 1964 as the largest two-year institution in Alabama. The institution was started when Superintendent W. W. Benson of the Decatur City Schools sought state approval and funding for a vocational program in 1937. Benson's proposal was approved, and the first vocational classes began on February 1, 1938. State and federal funds were used to go to pay the salary of the coordinator of the program under the provisions of the George-Deen Act of 1936. The City of Decatur provided classrooms, books, and instructors' salaries. The Decatur Trade School is an example of the benefits of cooperation between the state and federal governments. A review of the documentary evidence strongly indicates that during its first twenty years of operation, the institution could not have continued without the financial support of the federal government.

The George-Deen Act of 1936, which increased funding for vocational education and introduced funding for distributive occupations programs, was very similar to the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. And while only a few differences existed between the two laws, they were significant to the development of the Decatur Trade School. The George-Deen Act originated during a meeting of agricultural educators in Atlanta in 1935. The group petitioned United States Commissioner of Education John Ward Studebaker for better funding of agricultural education.

The commissioner referred the matter to the powerful American Vocational Association (AVA) for further consideration. The AVA drafted its own legislation and presented it to Senator Walter George of Georgia. Senator George had already emerged as a senior member of the Senate, and one of the strongest supporters of vocational education during his long tenure, which spanned over three decades. A lawyer by trade, George was not born into a privileged background. He was the son of a tenant farmer in Georgia and spent the early part of his life working in vocational trades. Senator George introduced the bill drafted by the AVA during the first session of Congress in 1935.¹ George would also become famous by easily surviving President Franklin D. Roosevelt's efforts to "purge" recalcitrant, conservative Democratic senators out of office during the 1938 off-year primary elections.²

The Senate took no action on the bill during this session, and it was not until the second session in 1936 that the Senate passed the bill. The House of Representatives also passed a similar bill during the same session introduced by Braswell Deen, also of Georgia. Both bills increased the total federal allotment for vocational education to \$14 million, almost double the amount allotted under the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. Of the \$14 million, \$12 million was to be divided between agricultural and industrial training, and \$1 million was to be allocated to train vocational teachers. A new provision of the George-Deen Act of 1936 was the allocation of \$1.2 million to fund distributive vocational programs. The vocational program at Decatur was funded mostly as a distributive vocational program under the provisions of the George-Deen Act, although some funds for industrial training in welding were also provided by the Act's industrial provisions.

¹ Herbert Kliebard, *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876-1946* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1999), 195-197.

² Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 440-445.

Distributive occupations include retailing, wholesaling, commission buying and selling, and merchandising. These types of occupations were increasing rapidly during the 1930s as the American economy continued to transition away from its agrarian roots. In a 1937 article in *School Life*, Charles Arthur stated that “the distributive occupations constitute a comparatively new field for which little or no public vocational training has heretofore been provided.” Arthur went on to state that about one out of every six people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five living in a large city was employed in a distributive occupation. He also pointed out that most young people began their employment in the distributive trades, but prior to the George-Deen Act had not received any vocational training for these careers. The George-Deen Act was the first federal law that authorized the funding for training in these types of occupations.³ The merits of vocational training for distributive occupations are debatable, but their inclusion in the bill applied directly to the opening of the Decatur Trade School.

It was the matching funds provisions of the George-Deen Act that provided favorable conditions for the beginning of a vocational school in Decatur. Unlike the Smith-Hughes Act, which required a 100 percent match of federal funds on the part of the state or local governments, the George-Deen Act required only a 50 percent match. This was especially significant in states that chose to pass the burden of funding vocational education on to local communities, which often had low revenues. Clarence Lehman found that in Fiscal Year 1926-1927, only eleven states contributed more money to vocational programs than did the local communities. This meant that a large portion of the costs of a vocational program was passed on by the states and thus borne by the local communities.

Obviously, this type of funding structure put economically poor communities at a

³ Charles Arthur, “George-Deen Act and its Implications,” *School Life* 22, no. 5 (1937): 133.

disadvantage. Lehman argued that although the states had observed the letter of the law, this shifting of responsibilities violated the spirit of the law.⁴ Even as President Roosevelt signed the act into law, he questioned the funding structure of vocational education in an article in the *Phi Delta Kappan*. Roosevelt wrote that the funding structure tended to increase educational inequalities instead of shrinking them, by requiring matching funds and minimum allotments by local communities.⁵ Although Roosevelt's criticisms were justified, the George-Deen Act was in fact more democratic than its predecessor, by reducing the matching funds requirement to allow poorer communities to expand their vocational programs. The creation of the vocational program at Decatur High School immediately following the passage of this bill is a good example of the effectiveness of relieving the unintended funding burden created by the Smith-Hughes Act.

Although the George-Deen Act sailed through Congress with large majorities in both houses, a small but vocal resistance attacked the bill. The first basis of attack was based on the bill's cost. Fourteen million dollars was an unprecedented amount of money to spend on vocational education, especially in the midst of the Great Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had only requested a \$3 million allotment in order to reduce the size of the budget.⁶ Others criticized the distributive occupation funding. Many Congressmen admitted that they did not understand what qualified as a distributive occupation. Others, perhaps attempting to clarify the problem, stated that distributive occupations would teach people how to sell gasoline at filling stations.⁷ Statements like this clearly questioned the need for training in distributive occupations, but their inclusion made possible the creation of the vocational program at Decatur.

⁴ Clarence O. Lehman, "How the Smith-Hughes Act Affects Vocational Expenditures," *The Nation's Schools* 7, no. 5 (1931): 42.

⁵ Kleibard, *Schooled to Work*, 197.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷ McClure, Chrisman, and Mock, *Education for Work*, 83.

The first class of what became the Decatur Trade School in 1938 consisted of eighteen students, two females and sixteen males. Four of these students were enrolled in a distributive occupation course such as auto parts sales, retail store management, and grocery store management. The rest were enrolled in traditional industrial courses such as welding, machine operating, and drafting. The following year the enrollment increased to twenty-five students and the number of students receiving training in distributive occupations increased as well.⁸ The vocational program in Decatur seemed destined to exist as merely a high school side program serving a small number of students. However, the onset of World War II propelled this high school-level program to a prominent position in two-year education in Alabama.

Early in 1940, with the war raging in Europe and the prospects of US involvement increasing, national leaders became convinced that a significant increase in the production of war materials was essential to national security. However, there was a limited supply of skilled labor necessary to support such a huge increase in industrial production.⁹ On June 27, 1940, Congress passed Public Law 668 to increase the training of vocational workers. The bill was introduced, passed, and signed into law in less than one month, thus demonstrating the broad support for expanded vocational education. This law provided \$15 million for states to expand their already existing vocational programs for the training of defense workers. The law created the Vocational Education for National Defense program, which would often be referred to as the VEND program. An article in the March 1942 edition of *Education for Victory* stated that “vocational training for defense work was authorized by Congress beginning July 1, 1940, to refresh skills of

⁸ Carlton Kelley, “History and Development of Diversified Occupations Program in Alabama” (master’s thesis, University of Alabama, 1945), 4.

⁹ Oakley Furney and Kenneth Beach, “Vocational Education for National Defense,” in *The Forty-Second Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education: Part I – Vocational Education*, ed. Nelson Henry (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1943), 186.

workers which had become rusty during the depression.”¹⁰ Although the program did “refresh” the skills of many defense workers, the law was essentially a test program to evaluate the effectiveness of using public vocational programs to train defense workers carried out in July and August of 1940. The program was deemed successful as over one hundred thousand workers were trained in six weeks from July 1 until August 15, 1940.¹¹

The defense training program was renewed and expanded in October of 1940 by the passage of Public Law 812. The law allocated an additional \$26 million for two types of training courses. The first type was called “supplementary” training, and provided training to workers already employed in the defense industry. These classes gave workers the opportunity to move to higher skill levels and thus higher-paying jobs in industries. Public Law 812 also provided specific training related to defense work. For instance, many general electricians took classes to prepare them to serve as ship electricians.¹² The legislation also provided training for workers wanting to learn new skills. These courses were referred to as “pre-employment” courses and were available to individuals not yet employed in the defense industry.¹³

In his 2007 history of education and World War II, Charles Dorn stated that the VEND program created by Public Law 668, and expanded and refunded by subsequent legislation, provided a total of \$375 million for vocational training during the war.¹⁴ If not for expanded and better-funded vocational training programs, it is highly unlikely the United States could have produced enough materials to sustain the American military campaign for the length of the war

¹⁰ “Vocational and Technical Wartime Training,” *Education for Victory*, September 15, 1943, 7.

¹¹ Edwin Lee, “Vocational Education and the War Offensive,” *School Board Journal* (April, 1942): 26.

¹² Furney and Beach, “Vocational Education for National Defense,” 186.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁴ Charles Dorn, *American Education, Democracy, and the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 77-78.

because of the shortage of labor. The early recognition by government officials that the supply of materials was the key to winning the war may have saved the country from a much longer war, or even defeat. The Decatur Trade School, along with hundreds of others, was funded by the VEND program from the middle of 1940 until the end of World War II. Although this supply of money does not represent the first time the federal government funded vocational education, it does represent the largest and most effective effort at promoting vocational education.

The federal government had been involved in promoting vocational education since the Morrill Act of 1862, so this type of federal involvement was not new. In fact, one could argue that prior legislation dealing with vocational education contributed to the success of the VEND program. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 provided federal funds directly to states in order to offer vocational education at the secondary level. The law provided \$7.2 million annually, but what is significant to the success of the VEND program was its organization and governance. The Smith-Hughes Act required states to create vocational boards at the state level and to hire local coordinators for vocational programs.¹⁵ In contrast, the VEND program utilized many parts of the existing vocational education system, allowing its expansion to be implemented quickly because the infrastructure and organization for its administration were already in place. This presence and use of this infrastructure saved valuable time because the creation of a new and separate bureaucracy was not required. According to Dorn, the VEND program was intentionally similar to the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, in order to make use of the already established vocational boards in each state.¹⁶

¹⁵ M. D. Mobley, "A Review of Federal Vocational-Education Legislation, 1862-1963," *Theory into Practice* 3, no. 5 (1964): 167.

¹⁶ Dorn, *American Education*, 78.

Although the VEND program was similar to previous twentieth-century vocational legislation, a few differences did exist. The most important difference was in the amount of money appropriated for vocational education. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 began with a total allotment of \$7.2 million. The George-Deen Act of 1936 that permanently authorized vocational funding increased the annual allotment to \$14 million. The VEND program began with an appropriation of \$15 million that was increased rapidly. If placed on an annual scale, the VEND program received an allotment of about \$100 million annually,¹⁷ dramatically increasing the ability of states and localities to deliver vocational education. A second major difference was in the requirement of matching funds.¹⁸

Both the Smith-Hughes Act and the George-Deen Act required the states to provide matching funds for vocational education. In poorer states like Alabama, this often required local communities to partially fund vocational programs because the state could not or would not provide all of the matching funds.¹⁹ In the 1926-1927 academic year, seventeen states supplied only 15 percent of the matching vocational education funds in their respective states, while the local school districts supplied over 50 percent in almost every instance.²⁰ The VEND program did not require any matching funds, thus freeing the states, and more importantly, local school districts from budget constraints. By removing the requirement of matching funds, the VEND program gave hundreds of local communities the ability to provide vocational training for defense workers needed in local plants. If matching funds had been required by the VEND program, neither the states nor the local school districts could have matched the large amount of

¹⁷ Mobley, "Review of Vocational-Education Legislation," 168.

¹⁸ Dorn, *American Education*, 78.

¹⁹ Kelley, "Diversified Occupations Programs," 51.

²⁰ McClure, Chrisman, and Mock, *Education for Work*, 84-86.

money supplied by the federal government. The effectiveness of the VEND program stems largely from these two differences.

By utilizing a system of vocational education that was already in place and injecting it with substantial new appropriations, the federal government virtually ensured that defense workers could find training programs near home. However, one cannot ignore the role that an unsurpassed spirit of cooperation and singleness of purpose that dominated life during the war years played in the success of the program. The “War Policy for American Schools,” drafted by the Educational Policy Commission and issued in early 1942, contained a statement that exemplifies these two traits. The policy begins by stating, “when the schools closed on Friday, December 5, they had many purposes and they followed many roads to achieve those purposes. When the schools opened on Monday, December 8, they had one dominant purpose- complete, intelligent, and enthusiastic cooperation in the war effort.”²¹ The creation of the VEND program is a remarkable example of foresight on the part of the United States government, and its administration is a good example of making use of resources that are already in place. Its success was due to a combination of brilliance in design and a supportive public. A little more than a year after the creation of the program, the United States would find itself involved in a global war and face two problems on a larger scale than ever before.

The entrance of the United States into World War II removed millions of young men from the workforce. The 1944 and 1945 *Statistical Abstracts of the United States* reported that between the fourth quarter of 1941 and the fourth quarter of 1942, a little over 1.1 million males between the ages of twenty and twenty-four and about seven hundred and fifty thousand males

²¹ National Education Association, *A War Policy for American Schools* (Washington, DC: Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association and the American Association of School Administrators, 1943), 3.

between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four left the workforce for the military.²² Nearly 2 million experienced male workers had left their occupations for the battlefield in less than a year's time. These employment shifts would grow more pronounced as the war lengthened. By the fourth quarter of 1944, a little over 5.5 million men between the ages of twenty and thirty-four had left the labor force.²³ These figures also do not account for the numbers of men eighteen to twenty who bypassed the workforce altogether (including previously unemployed workers) to enter the military, and thus did not replace absent workers. A shortage of skilled workers would soon manifest itself at local and state levels.

A total of 321,000 Alabama men volunteered or were drafted for service in World War II. This number represented one-third of the adult male population of the state.²⁴ The exodus of men led to a shortage of workers in many industries in Alabama. Especially troubling was the loss of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector which was needed to make materials for the military. Ships, tanks, bullets, and weapons were needed to sustain the war effort, but the loss of skilled male workers was dramatic and rapid. In his book *American Education, Democracy, and the Second World War*, Charles Dorn states that the need for war materials combined with the number of men drafted into the military created "the most severe labor shortage in the history of the United States."²⁵ In locations in which major defense industries operated, the situation bordered on a national emergency.

One such situation in Alabama occurred at Decatur, due to its importance in wartime

²² United States Bureau of Census, *Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1944-1945* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), 127.

²³ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁴ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 384.

²⁵ Dorn, *American Education*, 7.

shipbuilding. Although Decatur seems an unlikely place to build large ships, its location on the Tennessee River, which had been made navigable through the Tennessee Valley Authority in the 1930s, and its relatively secure inland position made it an ideal place for the construction of certain types of vessels during World War II. Two major companies built ships in Decatur during World War II. The largest and most well-known was Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation. Ingalls Shipbuilding was a branch of Ingalls Iron Works, which opened in Decatur in 1937. By 1938, the company realized the limitations of its Decatur site and located a second shipbuilding operation in Pascagoula, Mississippi. This branch began building ships in 1940, and the Pascagoula branch, still in operation today, is the largest manufacturer of ships for the United States Navy.²⁶ Between May of 1942 and April of 1945 the Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation at Decatur built at least sixty-one vessels for the Army. All of these vessels were barges or cargo boats designed for military support purposes. During the same period, the company also produced six tug boats for the US Navy.

The Decatur Iron and Steel Company, a lesser-known company, also built ships at Decatur during World War II. Although the company did not build any ships prior to and ceased ship production immediately following the war, it contributed a significant number of ships during the war years. In 1942 alone, the company made thirty-three landing craft for the Navy. During the remainder of the war, the company shifted production and made thirty-nine tugboats for the US Army. Between 1942 and 1945, at least 139 vessels were produced for the military at Decatur.²⁷ Production numbers like these would not have been possible without federal

²⁶ “Northrop Grummen Fact Sheet,” Northrop Grummen Corporation, accessed December 8, 2011, http://www.huntingtoningalls.com/about/assets/Gulf_Coast_Facts.pdf.

²⁷ “Decatur Iron & Steel,” Shipbuilding History, accessed November 11, 2011, <http://www.shipbuildinghistory.com/history/shipyards/4emergencysmall.htm>.

intervention in vocational training to prepare workers for the shipyards.

In his memoir, *The History and Development of John Calhoun Community College*, Carlton Kelley stated that during this period these two companies “desperately needed trained workers, but skilled workers were not available in North Alabama.”²⁸ Kelley was the first director of the Decatur Trade School and supervised the school’s defense worker program. The Superintendent Walter Jackson of Decatur City Schools was contacted by the War Production Board in early 1942 and asked to allow the vocational department of the Decatur High School to offer welding instruction in order to provide welders for the shipbuilding companies in Decatur. The War Production Board was created by Executive Order 9024 on January 16, 1942, and was charged with managing the production of war materials. Among the duties assigned to the board was to help secure a sufficient labor supply for industries.²⁹ The funds for the additional vocational training at Decatur were provided by the VEND program. The program allowed the Decatur Trade School to become what amounted to a two-year trade school, similar to the Alabama School of Trades, by providing funds for the training of adult workers and thus eventually elevating the institution from a high school extension to a stand-alone trade school. Although the courses were technically at the two-year level, during the war, many of the training programs took less time than two years to complete.³⁰ The need and desire to support the war effort, combined with a generous federal funding mechanism that precluded any need for additional state support, allowed the Decatur Trade School to proceed with a minimum of state interference that had characterized prior pre-war trade school establishment efforts in Alabama.

²⁸ Carlton Kelley, *The History and Development of John C. Calhoun State Community College* (Decatur, AL: Greene Publishing Company, 1974), 4.

²⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 9024 Establishing the War Production Board January 16, 1942, in The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16297>, accessed November 12, 2011.

³⁰ Kelley, “Diversified Occupations Programs,” 2-3.

Three experienced welders from Ingalls Shipbuilding served as the first instructors at the Decatur Trade School. Classes were taught five days a week and offered in three eight-hour blocks, meaning that welding was taught twenty-four hours a day at the Decatur Trade School during 1942 and part of 1943.³¹ The twenty-four hour classes were not uncommon during the war. An article in a 1942 issue of *School Board Journal* states that “hundreds of trade schools went on a twenty-four hour basis, adopting as their motto: we will not close until the war is won.”³² This determination was characteristic of the prevailing attitude of many United States citizens during the war years.

The Decatur Trade School offered other classes needed for the war effort. Subjects included blueprint-reading, radio, machinists, and pipefitting were taught at Decatur. The trade school operated at maximum capacity until July, 1943, but the number of potential trainees began to decline because of the draft and the effectiveness of the training program. By September 1943, the lack of trainees threatened the continued operation of the trade school. The War Manpower Commission, which had been assigned the labor responsibilities previously assigned to the War Production Board, along with the Works Project Administration, managed to find enough trainees to sustain most of the classes until late 1944. However, by late 1944 the shortage of new trainees had forced the Decatur Trade School to cancel most of its classes. The trade school only offered four classes by October of 1944, with two in welding, one in shipfitting, and one in machinery. The trade school continued to operate until June 30, 1945, when the appropriations for the Vocational Training Program for War Production Workers expired and

³¹ Kelley, “History and Development of Calhoun State,” 11.

³² Lee, “Vocational Education,” 26.

Congress did not issue a new appropriation for the VEND program. The school officially closed on June 30, 1945. and shipped its equipment to a Gadsden warehouse.³³

Like many other vocational schools across the nation, the Decatur Trade School was crucial to the US war effort. The VEND program trained over 11 million defense workers from 1940 to 1945.³⁴ The workers provided food, clothes, weapons, and machinery for the American troops. These new trainees made possible the huge production numbers of the war years. Of these 11 million workers, a little over seven thousand workers were trained at the Decatur Trade School under the VEND program. About two thousand of these workers went to work in plants in Decatur.³⁵ Without these newly trained workers, it is very unlikely that the shipyards in Decatur would have had enough manpower to operate at the capacity needed to supply the needs of the American military.

The prospects of reopening the Decatur Trade School looked grim at the end of World War II, however. The Decatur Board of Education barely had enough funds to operate a K-12 system, much less operate a school for vocational training for adults. The passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill, helped to resurrect the institution. As early as April 1945, the State of Alabama began making plans for the education of returning veterans. J. F. Ingram, State Director of Trade Education, met with local coordinators of veterans' training throughout Alabama, and authorized them to begin trade classes in cooperation with local K-12 superintendents. Instructors would be the employees of the local school systems, and classes would be held in local school facilities (very similar to the "bottom

³³ Kelley, "History and Development of Calhoun State," 12.

³⁴ Mobley, "Review of Vocational-Education Legislation," 168.

³⁵ Kelley, "Diversified Occupation Programs," 2-3.

up” method by which most of the pre-World War II municipal junior colleges had been established). The federal government would make payments to the Alabama Department of Education under the provisions of the G.I. Bill. The State Department of Education would then forward the payments to the local K-12 boards of education. Classes had to enroll a minimum of fifteen veterans to be offered. After nearly a year of closure, the Decatur Trade School was back in operation, as classes resumed on June 1, 1946.³⁶

The classes were offered at the exact same location as the original War Production Training classes. Only four courses were offered during 1946, partially due to space constraints and partially due to lack of enrollees. The courses were auto mechanics, electricity, radio, and machine shop. The problem of low enrollments would soon remedy itself as more veterans returned home from Europe and Asia. The problem of capacity, however, required action on behalf of the Decatur Board of Education. A lesser-known provision of the G.I. Bill allowed for local institutions that could prove a shortage of educational facilities to request the federal Bureau of Community Facilities to provide educational facilities for the education of veterans. The lack of facilities was evident at Decatur, and a solution was proposed by the board of education that significantly expanded the size of the institution.

The federal government owned an airport known as Pryor Field on the outskirts of Decatur. During the war, the airport served as a flying school for pilots, but after the war most of the facility sat empty. On November 8, 1946 the Decatur City Board of Education authorized Superintendent Walter Jackson to submit an application to the federal government requesting that Pryor Field be transferred to the Decatur City Board of Education in order to provide

³⁶ Kelley, “History and Development of Calhoun State,” 4; Minutes of the Decatur City Board of Education, July 11, 1947, Decatur Board of Education, Decatur, AL.

facilities for veterans' training.³⁷ With the assistance of United States Senators John Sparkman and Lister Hill, most of the property was transferred to the Decatur City Board of Education in December 1946.³⁸ The property that was transferred included thirteen buildings on thirty-two acres of land. The Decatur Trade School began operations at Pryor Field in January of 1947. The added facilities and space combined with higher enrollments allowed the curriculum to expand to include five more subjects in 1947; ten additional subjects were added by the end of 1952.³⁹ Although the Decatur Trade School had high enrollments and sufficient facilities, financial problems were a constant issue during this period.

The first evidence of financial problems appeared in minutes of the Decatur Board of Education on July 11, 1947. The following is a resolution adopted and passed by the board.

Whereas, the City Board of Education, Decatur, Alabama, has been using funds to conduct a veterans program consisting of continuation classes for both White and Negro Veterans, on-the-job training, and a trade school the combined payrolls of which have been \$18,000 and \$20,000 per month, and Whereas, reimbursement has been three or more months late and although the state Department of Education has promised for a year that funds would be reimbursed correctly, the situation is no better than it was a year ago, and Whereas the credit and efficient administration of the Decatur Schools are being hampered, Therefore, be it resolved, that the superintendent of schools notify the state superintendent of education that the city school board, Decatur, Alabama a) will have to be paid back funds and be put on current reimbursement basis or b) this not being

³⁷ Minutes of the Decatur City Board of Education, November 8, 1946, Decatur Board of Education, Decatur, AL.

³⁸ Carlton Kelley, "History and Development of Calhoun State," 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

possible the Decatur board should like to be certified by the Veterans Administration for a direct contract or c) the Decatur Schools will have to close the veterans program for lack of funds.⁴⁰

There is no evidence that the author could find in his review of Decatur City School records to indicate that the federal government was late in making its tuition payments to the state. The resolution had even asked state officials to allow the City Schools to enter into direct contract with the federal government so the city could receive the needed operational funds. The delay in funding seems to have totally been the fault of the State of Alabama. The conclusion indicated by the historical documents is that the Alabama State Department of Education was using or holding G.I. Bill funds before transferring the payments to the vocational schools. The wording of the resolution also indicates that this problem had existed for a significant period of time and that the state was three months behind on payments. After the adoption of the resolution, no further mention of delayed funds exists in the Decatur City Schools' records. The resolution also reveals the priorities of the Decatur City Board of Education. The board valued the K-12 program of the city higher than the trade school, as reflected by the fact that the resolution indicates that if the trade school began to hamper the operation of the K-12 program, it would be closed.

The board minutes of the Decatur City Board of Education do not indicate that the trade school ever faced internal opposition, but rather that the trade school was viewed as an ancillary support program. The attitude reflected in the resolution shows that the board members of the Decatur City Schools saw the continued operation of the trade school as an educational priority, but not in the same league as its elementary and secondary school operations.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Decatur City Board of Education, July 11, 1947, Decatur Board of Education, Decatur, AL.

Shortly after the passage by the Alabama Legislature of its 1947 Regional Vocational and Trade Schools Act, which was authored by freshman State Representative George C. Wallace, the Decatur City Board of Education met to discuss what this Act might mean for the Decatur Trade School. No specific details are given in the minutes from the October 9, 1947 meeting, but the board would soon formally seek to transfer the institution to the operational control of the State of Alabama.⁴¹

The 1947 Regional and Vocational Trade School Act included a specific provision to allow the adoption of the Decatur Trade School into the state system, but only after the four new schools authorized under the bill were opened. This did not stop the Decatur City Board of Education from trying to have the Decatur Trade School adopted earlier than allowed under the law. The minutes from the Decatur City Board of Education meeting on September 9, 1949 contain a letter from Dr. Austin Meadows, Alabama State Superintendent of Education. Dr. Meadows's letter was in response to a request from the Decatur City Board of Education to have the Decatur Trade School placed under state control in 1949. Dr. Meadows's letter stated: "Recently I tried to find some way legally to recommend that the Decatur Trade School be made the third state vocational trade school. After considerable study and some discussion with the staff here and with the author of the trade school Act, I concluded that the law prohibits me from recommending the Decatur Trade School as either the third or fourth trade school." The board's reaction is not listed in the minutes.⁴²

The future of the Decatur Trade School was discussed in the Decatur City School Board minutes again in July of 1951. The superintendent notified the board that all students who wished to take advantage of the G.I. Bill must enter school by July 25, 1951. It was assumed that about a

⁴¹ Minutes of the Decatur City Board of Education, October 8, 1947, Decatur Board of Education, Decatur, AL.

⁴² Minutes of the Decatur City Board of Education, September 9, 1949, Decatur Board of Education, Decatur, AL.

year from this date, the trade school would lose funding from the G.I. Bill. Without federal student financial aid provided by the G.I. Bill, the financial situation of the Decatur Trade School deteriorated rapidly after the summer of 1952. The institution opened for classes during the academic year of 1952-1953, but by the February 1953 meeting of the board of the Decatur City Schools, prospects for another year of operation were slim. The minutes of the February 9, 1953 meeting refer to the existence of the Decatur Trade School by stating that “it is realized that it cannot last past summer without state funds.” The board discussed a survival strategy by either having the trade school adopted by the state, or securing a separate state appropriation for the institution.

Again Decatur Superintendent Walter Jackson contacted State Superintendent Meadows for advice. On April 10, 1953, State Superintendent Meadows sent a letter to the Decatur City Board of Education that stated, “I have discussed the matter of the Decatur Trade School with the finance director, the budget officer, and with the legislative advisors on the budget, and we all agreed that if the state can secure a title to the Decatur Trade School properly, there should be no hitch in getting an appropriation comparable to that of the other trade schools, and have said school designated as the state vocational trade school for the Tennessee Valley area.” The board discussed the matter, and adopted a resolution transferring the Decatur Trade School to the State of Alabama with the exception of some shop items.⁴³ On June 30, 1953, the Decatur Trade School became the property of the State of Alabama and was renamed the Tennessee Valley Trade School. The institution would become a community college after the passage of the Junior

⁴³ Minutes of the Decatur City Board of Education, April 10, 1953, Decatur Board of Education, Decatur, AL.

College and Trade School Act in 1963, and would eventually be renamed John C. Calhoun State Community College.⁴⁴

Summary

The Decatur Trade School is an example of how local needs and national events can combine to create a two-year institution. It is clear that the Decatur Trade School did not arise from a national pronouncement of democratization or from a so-called “movement” occurring across the country. It was created because industries in Decatur needed trained workers and the local education officials were interested in the vocational education of their students and citizens. However, one cannot ignore the instrumental role that the federal government played in expanding the operations of the Decatur Trade School. Although the institution was born out of the needs of local industry prior to World War II, funds from federal vocational programs contributed to its operation from the beginning. Regardless of the desire of local citizens, without the operating funds no educational institution can exist. It is highly improbable that the Decatur Trade School and hundreds of other similar institutions could have opened without federal financial assistance. The Decatur Trade School is an early example of the pattern of state and federal government relations regarding higher education that would dominate the middle part of the twentieth century. When the local area provided the demand and desire for institutions of higher education, the federal government would help supply the money to build them.

⁴⁴ Kelley, “History and Development of Calhoun State,” 6.

CHAPTER VI

EXPANSION OF TWO-YEAR EDUCATION: REGIONAL TRADE SCHOOLS

The development of public two-year education in Alabama stagnated after the creation of the Alabama School of Trades in 1925. With its 1901 Constitution limiting the development of a truly comprehensive educational system through the requirement of forcing statewide approval for local action, and its funding mechanizations that created a dependence upon regressive, highly volatile sales taxes, it is hardly surprising that local officials had to ask Montgomery for permission to initiate public two-year college establishment—and it is not surprising at all that Attorney General Charlie McCall’s 1929 opinion effectively barred "bottom up" establishment by local school districts.

Not a single public institution was created until the Decatur Trade School was opened in 1940, and it is arguable that, as an extension of its existing vocational program totally supported by federal and local funds, with no funding from the state, it may have operated below Montgomery’s radar (given its close relationship to prominent local businesses, there was little need for locals to complain). Although World War II had supplied enough demand for two-year vocational training to spur the creation of the Decatur Trade School, no one expected institutions created especially for the war effort to survive after the war’s end. The development of two-year education in Alabama seemed destined to remain in the same pattern as existed in the pre-WWII Depression era, because the state's poor finances made educational expansion virtually impossible. However, in 1947 the Alabama legislature passed the first piece of legislation that

created a state system of two-year education. And as described below, the reach of that state legislation would not have been possible without federal intervention in the post-war period in the form of the G.I. Bill.

The Regional Vocational and Trade Schools Act of 1947 called for the creation of four publicly supported trade schools in Alabama. It also incorporated the two existing trade schools in Decatur and Gadsden into the state system. The legislation also provided a yearly appropriation of \$75,000 to each school from the State of Alabama.¹ Although the Regional Trade School Act is mentioned briefly in some publications, it is difficult to find a single work that lists the names of all the trade schools. Very little is written about the bill itself, and even less is written on the legislative history and circumstances surrounding it. Other than the fact that State Representative and future Governor George C. Wallace sponsored the bill with the support of the administration of Governor “Big Jim” Folsom, little is recorded as to the history surrounding these institutions.² While it was not the first example of public involvement in two-year education, the Regional Vocational and Trade School Act was by far the most extensive public involvement in two-year education ever attempted in Alabama.

Federal Student Aid to Veterans Spurs Two-Year College Establishment in Alabama

Passage of the Regional Trade School Act in 1947 was a direct consequence of arguably the most transformative and successful piece of federal legislation ever to pass the United States Congress. The G.I. Bill of Rights, passed in 1944, changed American education and society. Its impact on two-year education in Alabama was dramatic and long-lasting. The G.I. Bill provided the demand and, more importantly, the money in the form of tuition that Alabama needed to

¹ Regional Vocational and Trade Schools Act, Ala. Code 1975 § 16-60-193 (1947).

² Katsinas, “George Wallace and the Founding of Alabama Two-Year Colleges,” 451.

form its first statewide system of two-year education. Like the Alabama School of Trades at Gadsden, these institutions would provide technical education for Alabamians who could not attend a university. In the years immediately following World War II, many of these students were veterans who chose not to use their G.I. Bill benefits at a university, but rather at a trade school. Although less documented than the 2.2 million veterans who attended college under the G.I. Bill, over 5 million veterans received some form of vocational or occupational training at institutions of this kind.³ Thus, nearly half of the 14-plus million World War II veterans were directly impacted by the G.I. Bill's education and training provisions.

The story of the regional trade schools in Alabama is another example of how federal funds and national events can impact events at the state and local levels. Although state leaders ultimately made the educational decisions for Alabama, their actions were enabled by the G.I. Bill. The G.I. Bill indirectly provided tuition funds for the new regional trade schools to operate, and in doing so helped Alabama overcome the financial burdens of an oppressively low tax structure and an impoverished population. The motivation to create new educational opportunities sprang from two sentiments. The first sentiment was a sincere feeling of debt to the veterans of World War II who had freed the world from tyranny. This feeling of gratitude was more popular among the public than it was among government officials, although many officials did acknowledge the debt that the nation owed to its veterans. Therefore, the feeling of gratitude was somewhat limited in its power to shape federal policy and extended little beyond political talking points. The most significant factor leading to the creation of the G.I. Bill was a legitimate fear of a post-war depression worse than that of the Great Depression during the 1930s. This fear was a powerful motivator for both federal and state leaders to create an adequate plan for the

³ Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

period after the war.⁴

The fears of a post-war depression were grounded in the events following World War I. The veterans of World War I had returned to a country in turmoil. Michael J. Bennett stated that the WWI veterans returned to a country in the “middle of a nervous breakdown.”⁵ Racial tensions, fears of communism, and acts of domestic terrorism gripped the country from 1917 to 1922. In addition to the very volatile domestic situation,⁶ the problem was compounded by the lack of benefits for most returning veterans. To avoid the excesses and abuses of the pension system that emerged after the Civil War, a very meager benefits system for the WWI veterans was created. Returning WWI veterans received \$60, a train ticket, and suit of clothes upon discharge.⁷ Only a few veterans disabled in the war were given pensions, while other disabled veterans were given vocational training. The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1918, the legislation that authorized the discharge payments, omitted the word “pensions” in favor of “compensation.” This wording clearly implied that the payments were compensation for loss rather than a debt owed to individuals for their service to the nation.⁸ Many veterans of World War I would not receive further compensation from the government until 1924.

Congress passed the Adjusted Compensation Act of 1924, which would be known popularly as the “Bonus Bill.” This Act provided an individual account that included \$1 a day for home service and \$1.25 a day for foreign service. These accounts earned 4 percent compound

⁴ Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1996), 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷ Dixon Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1944), 312.

⁸ David Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* (New York: Columbia University, 1969), 21.

interest, and were not redeemable until 1945, twenty-one years later. The bill was supported by the American Legion and had broad support in the House of Representatives. Opponents of the bill, including President Warren G. Harding, who vetoed the bill in 1922, argued that the bill's cost was more than one-sixth of the federal budget and was too costly. Although the House overrode Harding's veto, the Senate could only muster a majority in favor of the bill, failing the required two-thirds override number by four votes.

In 1924, the bill was again passed by both Houses of Congress and vetoed by President Calvin Coolidge. This time, both Houses voted to override Coolidge's veto and the bill became law.⁹ One of the most important developments surrounding this bill was the reason Coolidge gave for his veto. He felt that giving veterans "special" treatment violated the principles of democracy and fair government. While this argument has long since been discarded, it plagued legislation for veterans for the next twenty years, even being repeated by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 when he told the American Legion that "no person because he wore a uniform should be placed in a special class of beneficiaries, over and above all other citizens."¹⁰ Although the bill had good intentions, in retrospect it may have harmed the cause of veterans more than it helped them.

The most immediate failure of the Bonus Bill was to deliver any significant readjustment aid to veterans decades after the war ended. Benefits were delayed for most veterans until 1945, more than twenty-five years after they had been discharged. After returning home from the war, many veterans found themselves without work, mostly because of the 1920 to 1921 recession. Unemployment jumped from a low of 1.4 percent at the end of the war in November of 1918 to

⁹ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 58.

¹⁰ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 19.

just below 12 percent in 1921 and the Gross National Product fell by 17 percent.¹¹ Many supporters of the G.I. Bill would later argue that this was largely because the United States had no plan for demobilization of World War I soldiers.¹² While this theory oversimplifies the situation a bit and ignores the recessions in Europe following the war, adequate planning for the domestic aftermath of World War I would have made the transition much smoother for both veterans and citizens alike. The European recessions were caused mainly by deflation, something that the post-WWII Marshall Plan directly addressed by giving them power to purchase American goods, keeping our economy up while their economy transitioned. Well-known stories exist of returning veterans peddling apples on the streets or waiting in breadlines, concerns Franklin D. Roosevelt directly referred to in his 1944 campaign speeches. Although the economic boom of the middle 1920s soon brought relief for many veterans, it was not evenly spread throughout all areas of the country—and in particular, rural agricultural areas like Alabama. Further, the Great Depression caused many of the World War I veterans to endure sustained poverty. The promise of a substantial “bonus” due in 1945, when WWI veterans found themselves in the midst of a terrible and persistent Great Depression, brought great unrest among World War I veterans.

As early as May of 1932, World War I veterans began to assemble in public parks, empty buildings, and dumps around Washington, DC. All were incredibly poor and many brought their families with them.¹³ Most journeyed to Washington with the hope of receiving an early payment of the bonus promised them in 1924. A testament to the despair that drove the veterans to

¹¹ Thomas Woods, “Warren G. Harding and the Forgotten Depression of 1920,” *Intercollegiate Review* (Fall 2009): 22.

¹² Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 89.

¹³ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 61.

assemble in Washington was the great distances they traveled to protest for their bonus money. *The Dothan Eagle* reported the status of what would become known as the Bonus Army on June 2, 1932. Five hundred veterans from across the nation were already in Washington and the same numbers had left New Jersey. The report also stated that two hundred and fifty veterans had left both Louisiana and Florida, and two hundred had left both Tennessee and South Carolina. Groups of veterans were gathering in Texas, Chicago, and New York.¹⁴ The treatment of these veterans would become one of the most shameful moments in United States history.

The Bonus Army was largely portrayed in a negative manner in the newspapers. The veterans were called communists, un-American, and bums. Many, including President Herbert Hoover and General Douglas MacArthur, doubted that the majority of the group was made up of veterans. These doubts were voiced in spite of the fact that a Veterans Bureau survey found that more than 90 percent of the marchers were indeed veterans. Although the marchers found little sympathy in the administration, many in Congress were more inclined to meet their demand for early bonus payments. In 1931, Congress raised the borrowing limit on the bonus payments from 33 percent to 50 percent. An astonishing 90 percent of World War I veterans took advantage of this increase. Even the ability to borrow half against their 1945 payments was not enough to sustain veterans for very long, and by 1932 they wanted the ability to borrow 100 percent of the value.

As thousands of veterans gathered in Washington throughout the summer, the situation became more volatile. Events reached the boiling point in late July of 1932, when a confrontation with Washington City Police led to the shooting deaths of two veterans. The incident prompted U.S. Attorney General William D. Mitchell to issue orders to General Douglas MacArthur to remove the veterans from government property. Despite orders of caution from President

¹⁴ "Idea of Veterans Marching to U.S. Capital Spreads," *Dothan Eagle* (Dothan, AL), June 2, 1932.

Hoover, General MacArthur effected a total and violent eviction of the veterans' camp, complete with a cavalry charge and gas grenades. Two infants were killed in the process reportedly from the gas grenades. After the removal of the veterans, their camps were doused with gasoline and burned. Witnesses reported flames dancing in the air as much as fifty feet high. Newspapers quickly turned on Hoover, and this appeared to many, including Franklin Roosevelt, to seal his defeat in the 1932 election.¹⁵

The crushing poverty that reduced thousands of World War I veterans to beggars was still fresh in the minds of many Americans at the beginning of World War II. Likewise, Americans still vividly recalled the horrific treatment of the Bonus Army at the hands of the government they had defended. When it came time to plan for demobilization after World War II, leaders and citizens agreed that the country could not survive if it treated veterans of the Second World War the same way it had treated veterans of the First. Many leaders voiced fears of a revolution if veterans returned to economic and social conditions similar to those following World War I. Prominent New York Republican Congressman Hamilton Fisk stated that he believed that if World War II veterans came home to the prospect of apple-selling on street corners, like World War I veterans, there would be "chaotic and revolutionary conditions in America."¹⁶ Others feared a move toward socialism or dictatorship. Even Eleanor Roosevelt wrote that veterans would be a "dangerous pressure group in our midst."¹⁷ Giving credence to these fears was a National Resource and Planning Board report that predicted an unemployment rate of 8 to 9 million after the war. That number represented slightly more than half of the 16 million veterans

¹⁵ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 62-63.

¹⁶ Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 28.

¹⁷ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 129.

of the war.¹⁸ The Labor Department's estimates were less optimistic. The Labor Department projected that 12 to 15 million people would be unemployed, creating an unemployment rate of 20 to 25 percent. These estimates would have mirrored, if not exceeded, those of the Great Depression.¹⁹ Fearing a high unemployment rate and the power of the huge number of veterans returning from the war, government leaders began to draft a plan for the post-war period.

As early as July of 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized a Post-War Manpower Conference to study post-war issues. However, Roosevelt instructed the commission to keep its actions quiet to avoid diverting the public's attention from winning the war, a still uncertain prospect in the middle of 1942. The commission met several times, but accomplished little in the way of a demobilization plan.²⁰ Sticking firm to his pre-war belief that veterans did not deserve special treatment because of military service, Roosevelt opposed wide-ranging benefits that only applied to veterans. Suzanne Mettler describes the Administration's plans for veterans as "strikingly restrictive," attributing this to Roosevelt's opposition to special treatment of veterans and his focus on winning the War. The original plan Roosevelt submitted to Congress in June 1943 included education benefits that were narrow in scope and elitist in nature. The FDR plan allowed every serviceman who served for six months to attain one year of education or training. Only a small number (around one hundred thousand) of students with exceptional ability would be assisted in attaining a college degree through a combination of grants and loans.²¹ These exceptional students would be identified mainly by using IQ tests. The rest of the veterans would

¹⁸ Olson, *The G.I. Bill*, 37.

¹⁹ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 194.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

²¹ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 19.

receive vocational training.²² Although this plan offered more benefits than World War I veterans had received, it was far below the level of benefits the public and many members of Congress felt was necessary.

By the time Roosevelt sent his plan to Congress, over six hundred bills related to post-war conversion had been introduced into Congress. In the summer of 1943, it seemed likely that any post-war plan would be delayed because there was no clear front-runner among the plans. A single plan that could pass Congress and get Roosevelt's signature had not been identified, even as the amount of legislation on the subject was growing almost exponentially.

The involvement of the American Legion in late 1943 helped break the stalemate and move a post-war veterans plan forward. The American Legion was started in the aftermath of World War I under the influence of Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the son of the former president who himself would become an Army General who landed on Normandy on D-Day in 1944, and future Senator Bennett Clark of Missouri. The group was designed to be governed by enlisted men of the war, and not merely be an officers' organization, to champion veterans' rights and social improvement in America. In the decades after World War I, the Legion Halls served mainly as social gathering places, as local chapters lobbied for local reforms. By the 1930s, the American Legion was the largest veterans group in the country with over 1 million members and over 10,000 local chapters across America. This size, and its penetration across the country, made the organization a powerful, potent national force. Their support for other civic causes, such as the Boy Scouts, Lion's Clubs, and education, made them popular with the general public. By the beginning of World War II, the Legion was one of the country's most important national

²² Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 86.

organizations because of its size and pervasiveness in the local communities.²³

Although noted as being a socially conservative organization mostly because of its anti-labor views and its failure to give full support to bonus payments for World War I veterans, the American Legion took a very progressive position in its support for the G.I. Bill. At its annual Convention in 1943, the Legion voted to create a committee to develop a comprehensive plan for the end of the war that would cover issues that included housing, education, and health care. The committee began meeting in November 1943, and had the bill drafted by mid-January. It originally named the bill the “Bill of Rights for G.I. Joe and G.I. Jane,” but later shortened it to “G.I. Bill of Rights.”²⁴ The G.I. Bill was introduced into the Senate by Senator Bennett Clark of Missouri, one of the founders of the Legion after WWI. The sweeping provisions of the bill led to some dispute over which congressional committee or committees would have jurisdiction of the bill as it was deliberated. However, the American Legion, supported by the powerful Hearst newspaper chain, waged a very effective public relations campaign to pressure reluctant members of Congress and a reluctant President to support the bill.

Most of this media campaign focused on the treatment of wounded veterans who were already arriving home to few benefits and a sea of bureaucratic red tape that prevented many from utilizing what few services were available. American Legion National Commander Warren Atherton brought stories of over 1,500 disabled veterans collected by local Legion chapters before Congress in late 1943. These stories gave a human picture to the debate over post-war G.I. assistance plans. During Congress’s 1943 Christmas break, newspapers across the country--

²³ Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, 10-11.

²⁴ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 20-21.

especially those operated by William Randolph Hearst--ran stories of the struggles of the newly disabled WWII veterans.

Hearst's newspapers were not the only ones that reported the struggles of disabled veterans. *The Dothan Eagle* featured a story in February 1944 of a young veteran from Oklahoma who had lost both legs in combat. The soldier was living with his widowed mother and four younger siblings in a one -room cabin. Although having been discharged for nearly a year, the disabled soldier had been denied veterans' compensation.²⁵ Stories such as these made it clear that unless something was done, the peacetime injustices of World War I could easily be repeated and in fact were already beginning to take place. The stories also compelled public support for the G.I. Bill, and made opposition to it a politically dangerous position. Yet some members of Congress did oppose the G.I. Bill mainly over jurisdictional, financial, and racial reasons. In retrospect some of these grievances seem petty, but it is important to remember that the provisions of the G.I. Bill made it one of the largest and most wide-ranging federal laws ever to be passed by Congress.

When introduced, the G.I. Bill included six titles, of which the second title dealing with mustering-out pay was dropped when a separate bill passed Congress. The first title covered hospitalization and disability claims for veterans. This title sprang directly from the stories of the struggles of disabled veterans who had already returned home. The third title included the education benefits that have become so famous, and will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs. The fourth title provided generous home and farm loan provisions to returning veterans. The loans were government-backed and provided up to 95 percent of the property value, and also had a low interest rate of 4 percent. The last two titles dealt with employment and unemployment. The employment title essentially created a job placement service for veterans. The administration

²⁵ "Story for War Complainers," *Dothan Eagle*, February 7, 1944.

of this provision led to some debate in the House of Representatives.

The employment title became known as the “52-20” plan, and would be the lightning rod for most of the opposition. It provided unemployed veterans \$20 a week of unemployment compensation for up to a year after discharge.²⁶ Many opposed this provision, and to a lesser extent the education provision, because it provided equal benefits to black and white veterans. Representative John Rankin of Mississippi almost single-handedly derailed the bill in the Education and Labor Committee he chaired because he felt that Negroes, and many whites, would abuse the benefits. In hindsight, these fears were proven to be false because the average time a veteran received the benefits was fourteen weeks.²⁷ This argument was mainly to mask deeper, unvoiced fears that the G.I. Bill would start a movement for equal rights in the South. While all of these titles would provide important types of support to returning veterans, it is the enduring legacy of the title dealing with educational benefits for veterans for which the bill is most popularly associated today, some sixty-five years later.

The G.I. Bill provided any veteran younger than twenty-five who had served at least ninety days in the military after September 16, 1940, with one year of higher education or training. Extra education of up to forty-eight months was provided equal to the amount of time served in the military. Under the bill, the government would pay up to \$500 a year for the costs associated with education. The tuition payment would go directly to the institution on behalf of the veteran. If the tuition amounted to more than \$500 a year, the veteran was liable for the difference. The generous tuition provisions allowed many veterans the ability to afford expensive Ivy League universities that without G.I. Bill benefits would have placed these institutions

²⁶ Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, 100-102.

²⁷ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 50.

beyond the range of low-income students. In addition to the cost of education, veterans attending college would also receive a monthly payment of \$50 for unmarried veterans and \$75 dollars for married veterans.²⁸ These monthly payments were instrumental in enabling married veterans, especially those with children, to attend college.

Under the G.I. Bill, the student was given free choice of which institution to attend. This differed significantly from Roosevelt's original proposal to limit college education to a select few. The pathway advocated by Roosevelt simply required too much government involvement for conservative Democrats and most Republicans, so his approach was rejected in the final draft of the bill. In a speech to the House of Representatives, John Rankin of Mississippi said that "under the provisions of this bill no federal agency or bureaucrat will have the authority to dictate the selection of school or course to be pursued."²⁹ Republican John Vorys of Ohio voiced similar sentiments. He said, "either the veteran gets his choice or with such guidance and advice as he will accept, or the Government and the States make his choice for him. If he has no choice, the Government may make mistakes, according to the veteran's opinion."³⁰ These statements reflect the value that many Americans placed on freedom of choice provisions contained in the G.I. Bill. The postsecondary education and training provisions of the G.I. Bill in today's terms acted as a voucher, which recipients could spend as they chose; this feature is likely why a number of leading "free market" economists, including the late Milton Friedman, so strongly supported the Pell Grant program, which also operates as an educational voucher.

²⁸ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 99; Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, 118.

²⁹ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 157.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

There would prove to be stronger opposition to the G.I. Bill's expansive support of higher education for veterans from elite university educators than from government officials. Doomsday predictions soon came from university presidents, including the University of Chicago's Robert Maynard Hutchins, that the influx of veterans would decrease the admission standards and lower the academic quality and liberal arts emphasis of higher education. Many predicted the end of higher education or a system so diluted as to be worthless. None of these fears became reality, and the mature veterans proved to be among the best students colleges and universities had ever seen.³¹ By providing money directly to the students and giving them full control of their education, the G.I. Bill permanently moved higher education from a privilege of the elite into the realm of reasonable possibility for middle-class Americans.³² Although the story of veterans who used the G.I. Bill to attain a four-year degree is well documented, the impact of the G.I. Bill on veteran's vocational and trade education is less well known.

Mettler stated that "though more than a third of all World War II veterans... benefited from such government programs, to date we have known little about their experiences."³³ She attributes this lack of knowledge to the small amount of attention the popular press of the day gave to these students. Likewise, very little about these programs was mentioned in congressional hearings or government reports of the era. Modern scholars have chosen to largely focus on the veterans receiving college education under the G.I. Bill in spite of the fact that 5 million veterans received vocational education through the program. This number was over a million more than those who used the G.I. Bill to go to a college or university. An additional 1.4

³¹ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 67-69.

³² Clark Kerr, "Expanding Access and Changing Missions: The Federal Role in US Higher Education," *The Educational Record* 75, no. 4 (1994): 27.

³³ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 79.

million received on-the-job training and seven hundred thousand more received agricultural training. The inclusion of vocational and apprentice-like programs arose from training programs that had been around since the turn of the century.

The insistence that the choice of the institution be left up to the veteran was closely tied to the inclusion of trade and vocational schools in the Bill. During the debate over freedom of choice of the institution, the issue of diversity of occupations came up. Although John Rankin of Mississippi would later try to derail the bill over its unemployment benefits to African-Americans, he and other conservative minded representatives defended the right of veterans to choose their institutions as well as their careers. Their main concern was that new schools, schools with unconventional methods and African-American schools not accredited by the states, would be excluded from the G.I. Bill.³⁴

In a throwback to the arguments for vocational education in the early 1900s, Representative Rankin stated that many “of these little schools that teach boys how to make their livelihood would probably be overlooked by some brass-hats in some of the higher-up educational institutions that dominate states.” He was referring to trade or vocational schools that had been popular with the working class for several decades. Rankin also brought up Antioch College in Ohio, with its unconventional work-study program, as a school that might be excluded from the G.I. Bill benefits. While the notoriously racist Rankin would never have stated this, the ranking Republican on the World War Veterans Legislation Committee, Edith Rogers, was also concerned that some schools might be overlooked as “a matter of prejudice.”³⁵ To avoid the exclusion of institutions in these categories, the bill gave the Department of Veterans Affairs

³⁴ Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 167-170.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

(VA) the right to approve universities, colleges, and trade schools eligible for G.I. Bill recipients to use. Therefore, schools outside of the educational establishment could bypass the state boards of education certification process and appeal directly to the VA for certification. This allowed many schools to receive students from the G.I. Bill that would have been otherwise ignored by the states. The provision of the G.I. Bill that extended education benefits to cover education at vocational and trade schools is significant, if not causal, to the development the Regional Trade Schools in Alabama.

The Regional and Vocational Trade School Act of 1947

Early in the legislative session of 1947, freshman Representative George C. Wallace introduced legislation that would establish four regional trade schools in Alabama. In 1947, Wallace was a young representative only recently discharged from the military due to spinal meningitis that left him partially deaf.³⁶ Yet he would write the first legislation authorizing a formal, permanent state role for two-year education. In a speech to a group of politicians at Dothan in early 1948, after the bill had been passed and signed by Governor James “Big Jim” Folsom, Senator Guy Hardwick stated that Wallace “is the daddy of it and entitled to all the credit.”³⁷ Wallace’s idea for regional trade schools in Alabama seems to have originated during his time in the military. Like many others, Wallace’s wartime experience broadened his view of the world. World War II veterans served with men of many different cultures, ethnicities, and religions. Mettler reported that one veteran she interviewed called the military “a great equalizer,” because people with very different backgrounds shared a very common experience.³⁸

³⁶ Stephan Leshner, *George Wallace: American Populist* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994), 11.

³⁷ Clarence Streetman, “Trade School Site at Napier Inspected by State Officials,” *Dothan Eagle*, February 5, 1948.

³⁸ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 31.

While not necessarily promoting the value of tolerance in Wallace, this broadening allowed him to compare events in Alabama to the rest of the nation, and would eventually lead to the legislation that created the regional trade schools.

In the same speech in which he called Wallace the “daddy” of the trade schools, Senator Guy Hardwick went on to state that Wallace “conceived the idea for the schools while he was in the Army, and saw the difference in the amount of skilled workers from the South and from the East.”³⁹ Vocational education had been widespread in the Northeast, and to some degree the upper Midwest, since the early part of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Wallace probably served with men who had received vocational training in some of these institutions. Improving the economy of the South through industrial growth was also a common theme throughout Wallace’s political career, and a supply of trained workers would help entice industries to locate in Alabama. Although this statement is not in Wallace’s own words, it is probably the best available account as to the origin of the Regional and Vocational Trade Schools Act.

Adding to the veracity of Senator Hardwick’s account is the justification for the Act outlined in the preamble that was authored by George Wallace. The preamble listed some of the reasons for establishing new trade schools, noting “the development of facilities for training youth in handicrafts, industrial arts, and trades has been long neglected, and as a consequence thereof the South has not kept pace with other sections of the Nation in industrial development, and whereas the promises to veterans for vocational and rehabilitation training under the G.I. Bill of Rights have not been fulfilled due to the lack of adequate and properly located facilities.”⁴¹

³⁹ Streetman, “Trade School Site at Napier,” *Dothan Eagle*, February 5, 1948.

⁴⁰ Hawkins, Prosser, and Wright, *Development of Vocational Education*, 5-11.

⁴¹ *Journal of the Alabama House of Representatives*, reg. sess., 1947, 980-981.

This statement indicates that Hardwick's account is likely true, because Wallace's knowledge of educational facilities in the rest of the nation was likely attained through his wartime experience. The legislation makes it abundantly clear that Alabama did not have the capacity at the available vocational schools to accommodate the basic needs of its citizens, much less the thousands of prospective students who could benefit from postsecondary trade schools with G.I. Bill aid. The prospect of many veterans missing out on the benefits of the education provisions of the G.I. Bill because they did not have access to higher education was unacceptable to the public as well as to politicians. The G.I. Bill thus provided the impetus to end the pattern of neglect described in the legislation.

Although 1947 seems late for state legislation to be influenced by the G.I. Bill, the establishment of new educational institutions, especially below college level, was common throughout the nation. Roughly 5,600 vocational schools were established across the country after the passage of the G.I. Bill. This great need would seem to indicate that a general nature of being reactive instead of proactive to providing vocational education opportunities was the norm among legislatures in many parts of the nation. The delay to 1947 and 1948 in creating vocational education opportunities for veterans did not necessarily present a major crisis because the demand for vocational education did not peak until 1950, two years later. Instead of pursuing their education immediately after discharge, many veterans who attended vocational schools utilized their G.I. benefits a few years after they returned home. The spike in 1950 likely represented a large number of veterans using the benefits before they expired in 1951.⁴² It seems that Alabama's efforts to establish state supported trade schools may not have been that far behind those of other states and regions, with the possible exception of the Northeast and California.

⁴² Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 62.

The state of vocational education outside of the high school in Alabama, and in much of the South, was abysmal in the decades leading up to World War II. The G.I. Bill might not have had as much of an effect on the establishment of new trade schools in Alabama had the state created additional institutions prior to the war. Largely because of this failure to establish schools, Alabama needed more vocational institutions to accommodate the returning veterans. In 1947, there were ten public universities or colleges in the state and only two public trade schools, and of these twelve institutions only two were for the education of African-Americans. In a state traditionally resistant to higher education, and in some cases even high schools, the lack of vocational training excluded untold numbers of WWII veterans from some form of post-secondary education. Whether or not Alabama may have had enough capacity at its four-year colleges and universities to accommodate the veterans is an issue that lies beyond the current study, but action was clearly needed to establish sub-baccalaureate public trade schools for those veterans who did not want to attend four-year institutions.

The Regional Vocational and Trade Schools Act was signed into law by Governor Folsom on October 9, 1947. The Act called for the establishment of four new trade schools in Alabama. One school would be built per year during the fiscal years of 1947-1948, 1948-1949, 1949-1950, and 1950-1951. Funds to build the schools in the amount of \$750,000 each came from the Alabama Special Educational Trust Fund Surplus Account. Each school would then receive a yearly allocation of \$75,000. The Act also included a provision that allowed the Decatur Trade School to become the fifth trade school when its contract with the Veterans' Department expired; a \$75,000 yearly allotment for operations was extended to it as well. The legislation stipulated that each school should be located in a different section of the state, and that no more than one school be located in a single congressional district. The goal was that

every part of the state would be located within a “reasonable” distance from a trade school. The trade schools were to be “similar to the Alabama School of Trades at Gadsden,” which meant that they would include housing for students and cooperative work opportunities to help pay for tuition. The Act placed the new trade schools under the control of the Alabama State Board of Education, and gave the State Superintendent of Education the authority to recommend the locations of the new trade schools and the order of their establishment to the board for its consideration and approval. The events that followed demonstrated Alabama politics at their best... and/or worst.⁴³

From its creation in 1923 until the educational reforms of the Brewer Administration, the Alabama State Board of Education consisted of eleven members with one board member from each of Alabama’s nine congressional districts, the Governor, and State Superintendent of Education. The board members were appointed by the governor to six-year terms, and they very often held other positions in state government. For instance, in 1948 the two state senators and one state representative listed as members of the State Board of Education had all been appointed by Governor Folsom. By the time the Alabama State Board of Education debated the final two trade schools in 1950 another state representative, H. B. Larkins, had been added to the board. Members who were not currently holding another office were no less politically connected, as the 1948 board also included Handy Ellis, whose term as Lieutenant Governor ended in 1947, and Joe Starnes who lost reelection to the U. S. House of Representatives in 1946.⁴⁴ Table 5 lists the members of the Alabama State Board of Education in 1948 when the first two trade schools were established, and Table 6 lists the membership of the Board in 1950 when the final two trade

⁴³ *Journal of the Alabama House of Representatives*, reg. sess., 1947, 1589-1594.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, May 14, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

schools were established.

These dual offices added to the board's already politicized nature and resulted in many apparent conflicts of interest among board members. Many times political interests seem to have been put ahead of the best interests of education in Alabama. Perhaps the most damaging fact was that the sitting governor was able to dominate the Board by stacking it with his supporters, on which he served as president and presiding officer, and as a voting member. The final member of the board was the state superintendent of education who was elected in the general election. The superintendent was the only member of the board who came close to being independent of the governor. This political dynamic made for a complex series of events during the selection of sites for the new trade schools.

Table 5. Voting Members of the Alabama State Board of Education, 1948.

Name	Appointed By	Congressional District	Affiliations
C. M. A. Rogers	Sparks	1	
Handy Ellis	Sparks	2	Immediate Past Lieutenant Governor
H. L. Upshaw	Sparks	3	
Harry Ayers	Sparks	4	
Joe Starnes	Sparks	5	Congressman from 1938 to 1946
Roy Nolen	Folsom	6	
Rankin Fite	Folsom	7	State Senator from Marion, Winston, and Franklin Counties
John Snodgrass	Folsom	8	State Representative from Jackson County
Donald Comer	Sparks	9	
James Folsom			Governor
Austin Meadows			State Superintendent of Education

Table 6. Voting Members of the Alabama State Board of Education, 1950.

Name	Appointed By	Congressional District	Conflicts
Joseph Langan	Folsom	1	State Senator from Mobile County
James Kitchens	Sparks	2	
H. B. Larkins	Folsom	3	State Representative from Coffee County
Harry Ayers	Folsom	4	
Forney Daugette	Sparks	5	
Handy Ellis	Folsom	6	Immediate Past Lieutenant Governor
Rankin Fite	Folsom	7	State Senator from Marion, Winston, and Franklin County
John Snodgrass	Folsom	8	State Representative from Jackson County
E. J. Lamberth	Folsom	9	
James Folsom			Governor
Austin Meadows			State Superintendent of Education

Establishing the George Corley Wallace Trade School in Dothan (1948)

To determine the locations for the new trade schools, State Superintendent of Education Austin Meadows appointed a committee to survey the state and assist with recommendations to the Board. The committee consisted of six members, besides the superintendent, including J. F. Ingram, an outspoken advocate for vocational education in Alabama. The committee visited eighteen locations throughout the state and ranked their suitability based on eleven evaluation criteria. The details of one of the first community visits were recorded in *The Dothan Eagle* on February 5, 1948. Members of the survey committee had traveled to Dothan to survey Napier Field, an airport abandoned after the war. The community hosted a banquet for the committee that evening, and local legislators presented their case as to why Dothan should be chosen for the first location.⁴⁵ This type of treatment of the survey committee by local communities vying for a trade school was common during the selection process.

On May 14, 1948, the survey committee presented its findings to a meeting of the Alabama State Board of Education. Superintendent Meadows informed the State Board of the visits to the communities and stated that he was ready to recommend the locations for the first two trade schools. His recommendations were delayed until committees from seven locations present at the meeting were given a chance to speak. Each committee tried again to state the case as to why their community deserved a trade school. These arguments included everything from political considerations to nuclear warfare.⁴⁶

The most extreme reason given came from the Clayton delegation, headed by Representative George Wallace, author of the bill. Former state Representative Charlie Weston

⁴⁵ Streetman, "Trade School Site at Napier," *Dothan Eagle*, February 5, 1948.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, May 14, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

of Clayton said that a trade school should be located at Clayton because “the possibility of atomic warfare should be considered. The big cities would be the first target and Clayton is not worth bombing.”⁴⁷ Evidently, he felt that Clayton’s population of 1,800 would make it an unsuitable target for a nuclear weapon. While probably true, the argument did little to persuade State Board members to locate the school at Clayton.

After each committee had been given a chance to speak to the State Board, Superintendent Meadows recommended that the first trade school be established at Napier Field in Dothan. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board. Many factors contributed to the unanimous choice of Dothan as the site of the first trade school.⁴⁸ The first factor was that it was located in the Third Congressional District, the home district of George Wallace, who had authored the bill. State Senator Guy Hardwick of Dothan formally represented the Third District before the State Board of Education, and in fact argued that it deserved the first trade school because the author of the legislation was from that district. Even representatives from other areas agreed that the Third District deserved the first college. Representing Camden in the Second Congressional District, State Senator Bruce Henderson said that “courtesy demands that the first trade school should be built in the third district.”⁴⁹ Not hurting the push to locate the school in the Third District was the fact that Governor Folsom was born in Coffee County and lived in the District for the first thirty years of his life.⁵⁰ Many of Folsom’s supporters in the Senate were also from the Third District.

⁴⁷ “Dothan to Get First Trade School,” *Dothan Eagle*, May 14, 1948.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, May 14, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

⁴⁹ “Dothan to Get First Trade School,” *Dothan Eagle*, May 14, 1948.

⁵⁰ Folsom moved to Cullman, Alabama in 1938 to take a job with his brother’s insurance company. He would live in Cullman until his death in 1987.

Dothan also had some significant advantages over the other three communities seeking the trade school from the Third District. The other communities were Seale, Clayton, and Enterprise. Although Seale and Clayton had quite a bit of political clout as the homes of Senator A. L. Patterson and Representative George Wallace, respectively, their small size and geographic isolation made them unsuitable for the trade school. The population of Seale was just 343 and the population of Clayton was only 1,813, both considerably smaller than Dothan's population of 21,584. Although citizens from Seale sent several letters to Governor Folsom strongly criticizing his lack of support for a trade school there, the community was simply not large enough.⁵¹ The situation was similar at Clayton. The unsuitability of these two communities narrowed the choice of location to either Dothan or Enterprise. Dothan's population was nearly triple the size of Enterprise, but two other factors likely helped Dothan obtain the new trade school.

The presence of the now empty Napier Field had much to offer in favoring the Dothan bid. Napier Field had been the municipal airport of Dothan prior to World War II, and had been constructed by the federal Works Project Administration in 1936.⁵² In 1941, the airport began to be operated by the Army Air Corps as a training field. It was named Napier Field in honor of Alabamian Major Edward Napier, who was among the first flight surgeons during World War I.⁵³ After WWII, the airport was returned to the City of Dothan, giving it over two hundred and fifty acres of unused land and several buildings to donate to the state for a trade school. The criteria used by Superintendent Meadows's survey committee to assess the suitability of a site placed a good bit of value on the availability of a site near the city center, with buildings already

⁵¹ "Dothan to Get First Trade School," *Dothan Eagle*, May 14, 1948.

⁵² "But Not Quite," *Dothan Eagle*, March 13, 1936.

⁵³ "About Dothan Regional Airport," Dothan Regional Airport, accessed January 12, 2011, http://www.flydothan.com/about_dhn.html.

in operation. Thus, the availability of Napier Field further strengthened Dothan's case for the first trade school. The advocacy of Senator Guy Hardwick from Dothan also helped tip the scale in the community's favor over Enterprise. According to former Governor Albert Brewer, Folsom did not have many friends in the senate and tried to take care of the ones he had. Brewer recalled that Hardwick was a strong supporter of Folsom, and believed his support likely played a role in Dothan getting the first trade school.⁵⁴

In August of 1948 R. L. Turner was hired to be the first director of the Dothan Trade School. Although Superintendent Meadows hoped classes would begin in October, the first classes did not start at the Dothan Trade School until January of 1949, when 158 students began their classes.⁵⁵ While the school did not open as soon as had been hoped, the presence of functioning infrastructure at Napier Field allowed it to open faster than had new building construction been needed. A contractor from Phenix City was able to make small adjustments to the present building and turn them into functioning classrooms. The only new building that was constructed was a dormitory for students. Enrollments climbed to two hundred in the academic year of 1950-1951 and rose to 265 during 1952-1953. The enrollment jumped to 952 students during the 1953-1954 academic year, and remained at 872 students in 1954-1955.⁵⁶ This is likely due to the G.I. Bill offered to returning Korean War veterans. This bill capped the amount of tuition paid on behalf of the student and did not provide monthly compensation to students attending school. This lack of finances forced Korean War veterans to favor trade schools with

⁵⁴ Albert Brewer, (Governor of Alabama, 1968-1971), interview with author July 30, 2011.

⁵⁵ Alabama Department of Education, *State Educational Institutions Reports 1949-1959* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama State Department of Education), 272-282.

⁵⁶ Alabama Department of Education, *State Educational Institutions*, 272-282.

their shorter academic programs over universities with their four-year plans.⁵⁷ The lower enrollment of 338 students in 1955-1956 perhaps signaled that the Korean War veterans had cycled through their G.I. Bill eligibility.⁵⁸

The Dothan Trade School was officially named after George Corley Wallace, the father of Representative George C. Wallace, on November 14, 1950. The resolution passed by the Alabama State Board of Education stated that this honor was bestowed “in recognition of Representative Wallace’s singular and outstanding contribution to the program of trade school development.”⁵⁹ The State Board of Education was prohibited by Alabama law from naming the institution after a living individual because only the Alabama Legislature possessed that authority. Yet, naming the school in honor of Wallace’s father, who shared the exact same name, virtually accomplished this feat. The George Corley Wallace State Vocational Trade School thus came into being; it would later become a comprehensive community college and join the Alabama Community College System after passage of the Alabama Trade School and Junior College Act in 1963. Today George Corley Wallace Community College still operates at the original Napier Field location, on the north side of Dothan.

Establishing the Wenonah Trade School for Negroes in Birmingham (1948)

Wenonah Trade School was the second trade school to open under the Regional Vocational and Trade Schools Act of 1947, but the vote on the location was not nearly as easily accomplished as was the vote creating the George Corley Wallace State Vocational Trade School in Dothan. The survey committee appointed by Superintendent Meadows had considered just one

⁵⁷ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 80.

⁵⁸ Alabama Department of Education, *State Educational Institutions*, 272-280.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, November 14, 1950, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

location for a Negro trade school out of the eighteen locations that it had visited, in the Wenonah-Powderly area of Jefferson County. Of the seven groups from communities across Alabama that appeared before the State Board of Education on May 14, 1948, only two lobbied for a trade school for Negroes. One group, from Montgomery, had the support of its local Chamber of Commerce. The other group consisted of only one person, State Representative Lawrence Dumas of Jefferson County.⁶⁰ The presence of historically black Alabama State University in Montgomery meant that African-Americans in that area had at least minimal access to higher education. This may have eliminated Montgomery from consideration for a trade school for African-Americans, because there were no public higher education opportunities for African-Americans in the Birmingham metropolitan area, the state's most populous region. Even though Jefferson County African-Americans had severely inadequate access to higher education, some Alabama State Board of Education members would oppose establishing a new trade school for Negroes.

A move and second were secured at the May 1948 State Board meeting to adopt Superintendent Meadows's recommendation that the second trade school be established for Negroes at the Wenonah-Powderly area in Jefferson County. State Senator Rankin Fite from northwest Alabama, who was well known for securing state largesse for his district, immediately offered a substitute motion that no trade school for Negroes be established before the four white trade schools had been started under the 1947 Act.⁶¹ Fite stated that he felt that the need for a

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, May 14, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

⁶¹ Rankin Fite was from Hamilton, Alabama and may very well have been the most skilled Alabama Legislator of the twentieth century. Fite was a World War II veteran who flew more than 50 bomber missions over Europe. He was elected to the Alabama Senate in 1946 and worked closely with Governor Folsom. Fite was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1950 and was chosen as Speaker of the House during Folsom's second term in 1955. Fite lost his bid for reelection in 1959, but regained his seat in 1962. He was chosen as Speaker Pro Tempore

trade school for Negroes was not as urgent as the need for a school for whites.⁶² It would be easy to assume that the motivation for Fite's opposition to a colored trade school may have risen from racism, but that would be in contradiction to the rest of his political career in the Alabama legislature.

Former Governor Brewer, who served with Fite in the Alabama legislature for many years, recalled that Fite "did not play the race card."⁶³ Fite's reputation as the "pork-barrel king" is a better explanation for his opposition to establishing a trade school for African-Americans, one more consistent with his long legislative career. According to one legislator, "Fite wanted everything to go to Hamilton," his hometown.⁶⁴ If one school for African-Americans was located in Jefferson County, Fite's chances of securing a trade school for Hamilton could be diminished. After a lengthy debate, Governor Folsom, as President of the State Board and presiding officer, called for a vote on Fite's amendment. The amendment failed to pass, seven to two, and the original motion to locate a trade school at Wenonah for African-Americans passed by the same majority.⁶⁵

In all truthfulness, there may have been fewer educational opportunities for citizens of Rankin Fite's mostly white district of rural Northwest Alabama than there even were for African-Americans in Jefferson County. Miles College, a privately controlled historically black college,

of the House by Governor Wallace. Fite served again as Speaker from 1969 to 1971. He retired from politics in 1974 due to complications from Parkinson's Disease.

⁶² Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, May 14, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

⁶³ Brewer, interview.

⁶⁴ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 282; Katsinas, "George Wallace and the Founding of Alabama's Public Two-Year Colleges," 458.

⁶⁵ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, May 14, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

had been operating in the Birmingham area for many years. Although opening a trade school for African-Americans prior to schools promised for whites in the state's largest metropolitan area could have been very unpopular in the 1940s, the threat of federal intervention made it expedient to include a school for African-Americans among the first of the new regional trade schools. During the debate on the Fite's amendment, former Congressman Joe Starnes stated that "the state must do something for Negro education before the Supreme Court forces action."⁶⁶ For many white Alabamians, the only thing worse than opening a new segregated school for African-Americans before other white schools was the integration of white campuses. Alabama already had two state-supported four-year colleges for African-Americans in Montgomery and Huntsville, and the presence of another would not create much of a stir, but as the 1960s would demonstrate, the forced integration of college campuses could have created an extreme public backlash. Forced integration and the resulting societal upheaval were the events that the State Board of Education was trying to avoid by creating Wenonah Trade School in 1948.

Although not specifically referred to by name, the Supreme Court ruling in *Sipuel v. Board Regents of Oklahoma University* was probably the case that State Board member Joe Starnes referred to in arguments for establishing a Negro trade school at Wenonah.⁶⁷ This case stemmed from a policy at the University of Oklahoma Law School to not admit African-American students. The plaintiff, Ada Sipuel, was denied admission to the school solely based on her race. The court ruled that Sipuel was "entitled to secure legal education afforded by a state institution."⁶⁸ This ruling did not strike down the "separate but equal" doctrine, but required

⁶⁶ "Dothan to Get First Trade School," *Dothan Eagle*, May 14, 1948.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Sipuel v. Board of Regents*, 332 U.S. 631 (1948): 585-586.

Oklahoma to either allow African-American students to attend white law schools or establish law schools at historically black colleges. By creating the Wenonah Trade School for Negroes, the Alabama State Board of Education hoped to deflect a future lawsuit. If all of the trade schools were established only for whites, the same situation would exist with vocational education in Alabama as did with legal education in Oklahoma. The Supreme Court's ruling in the *Sipuel* case forced Alabama to establish at least one trade school for African-Americans, or be forced to integrate a white trade school. Not unlike many other Southern states, Alabama chose to establish a stand-alone, segregated institution instead of integration. This decision established the pattern of educational establishment that Alabama would follow well into the 1960s, even if it practically meant establishing duplicate institutions to serve the same state-assigned geographic location.⁶⁹

Unlike Dothan, Jefferson County did not offer to donate public land for the trade school at Wenonah. A member of the community donated land to the school, however its location was deemed unsuitable for building, so on November 4, 1948, the Alabama State Board of Education approved the purchase of twenty-five acres adjacent to the donated land. The price of \$10,000 was to come out of the one-time appropriation by the legislature of \$675,000 to establish the school.⁷⁰ On April 27, 1949, Superintendent Meadows recommended Theodore. A. Lawson to serve as the first director of the trade school. The salary of \$4,800 a year was exactly equal to that of R. L. Turner, head of the Dothan Trade School. At the time of his appointment, Lawson served as a shop instructor in the Jefferson County schools. He would lead the institution for the

⁶⁹ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 343.

⁷⁰ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, November 4, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

next twenty-two years, retiring in 1971.⁷¹ The institution was renamed Theodore A. Lawson Junior College in his honor in 1969, and is today Lawson State Community College, with two campuses in Bessemer and Birmingham.

The Wenonah Trade School opened in January of 1950 with an initial enrollment of seventy-five students. Enrollments grew to 304 students during the 1951-1952 academic year, making Wenonah the second largest trade school in the state behind the Alabama School of Trades at Gadsden. Like the other trade schools in the state, Wenonah saw an enrollment jump during the 1953-1954 academic years. However, the increase at Wenonah was not as great as the near 100 percent enrollment jump that occurred at Dothan and Gadsden. It is likely that reduced G.I. benefits of Korean War veterans affected the traditionally poorer African-Americans more adversely than white veterans. Enrollment at Wenonah also dropped faster than at the white trade schools in 1954-1955, which may signal issues of persistence among African-American veterans because of the limited benefits.

The documentary evidence of state funding reveals that Wenonah Trade School was never far behind the funding for the white trade schools. From 1951 to 1956, the Wenonah Trade School received about \$85,000 in annual appropriations from the state. This figure was less than the \$100,000 appropriated to George Corley Wallace Trade School and the Alabama School of Trades during the same period. However, the amount allotted to Wenonah was always greater than the amount appropriated for the trade schools for whites established at Tuscaloosa and Mobile. And in terms of dollars per student enrolled, Wenonah actually averaged more dollars

⁷¹ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, April 27, 1949, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

per student than any other trade school in the state.⁷² This equitable funding was likely provided to deflect possible lawsuits over unequal facilities for whites and African-Americans.

The Establishment of Mobile and Tuscaloosa Trade Schools

At the May 14, 1948, meeting in which State Superintendent Austin Meadows recommended Dothan and Wenonah as the locations for first two trade schools, he stated that he was not prepared to recommend the remaining two locations because further study was needed to determine the best placement of the schools.⁷³ Exactly how much additional study was conducted remains unclear, as no records of an additional study exist in Superintendent Meadows's papers, which were examined by the author. The location of the two remaining trade schools was not brought before the Alabama State Board of Education again until January 10, 1950. At this meeting, delegates from several communities again appeared before the State Board to lobby for a trade school to be established in their community. The situation was similar to the 1948 meeting, because several small communities, such as Clanton and Dixon Mills, competed against delegates from Mobile and Montgomery. After hearing all the committee presentations, Superintendent Meadows transmitted his recommendation to the State Board in a typed letter, indicating that the lobbying effort did not have much impact.

Superintendent Meadows's letter stated that "the recommendation for the location of third and fourth state trade school is being made after a careful study of the entire state with the assistance of the survey committee of the state Department of Education on trade education needs." The members of the survey committee listed in the letter were identical to those listed on the committee in 1948. This letter does not list the criteria of a new study, but does indicate that

⁷² Alabama Department of Education, *State Educational Institutions*, 272-280.

⁷³ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, May 14, 1948, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

the recommendations were based on the original 1948 study, in which a very thorough instrument was used to rank the communities' submissions to host new trade schools. Meadows's letter goes on to recommend that the third trade school be located at Montgomery and the fourth trade school be located at Mobile. Board member and former Lieutenant Governor Handy Ellis moved that the recommendations be adopted, but Senator Rankin Fite offered a substitute motion that called for the matter to be delayed until a committee composed of State Board members could make a study of the areas that might best serve the state. Fite's substitute motion passed with only Superintendent Meadows and Ellis voting against it.⁷⁴

Governor Folsom appointed five members of the State Board to a committee for the purpose of carrying out this study. Fite's motivation is relatively clear-- he wanted a trade school in his hometown of Hamilton, and Superintendent Meadows's recommendation did not accomplish this. The puzzling part is what motivated the other Board members to vote for Fite's motion. For instance, Senator Joseph Langan of Mobile and James Kitchens, Jr. of Montgomery voted for Fite's amendment. It is unclear why both men voted to delay the establishment of a school in their communities with apparently nothing to gain unless they were both trying to appease the powerful Fite. As the debate over the location of the third and fourth white trade schools progressed, it is possible that both men regretted their votes.

The next discussion of the locations of the final two trade schools came on September 28, 1950. It is unclear what kind of study the new committee conducted, but it did recommend that Superintendent Meadows's original recommendation of Montgomery and Mobile be rejected by a margin of six to four. The opposition included Senator Joseph Langan of Mobile, former Lt. Governor Handy Ellis, James Kitchens of Montgomery, and Superintendent Meadows.

⁷⁴ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, January 10, 1950, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

Apparently, Kitchens and Langan came to realize that the chance of securing a trade school for their respective cities was in danger. Governor Folsom voted with Senator Fite, Representatives Snodgrass and Larkin, E. J. Lamberth and Forney Daugette to defeat Meadows's recommendations. Interestingly, all the members of the majority were appointed by Folsom. After the recommendation to establish new trade schools in Montgomery and Mobile had been rejected, both Senator Langan and James Kitchens made appeals to the Board on behalf of their cities. Both argued that North Alabama did not need another trade school, because the region had three already in operation at Gadsden, Decatur, and Birmingham. Both felt that Montgomery and Mobile were the only major industrial areas left without a state trade school.⁷⁵

Governor Folsom then called for Superintendent Meadows to make yet another recommendation for the locations. Meadows reasserted that the original survey committee had unanimously decided that Montgomery and Mobile were the best choices, but because the Board had rejected this initial recommendation, he would propose the next most suitable locations in accordance with the committee's findings (here it is worth remembering that at the time, Alabama had nine congressional districts, but funding for only five to receive trade schools had been appropriated under the 1947 Act). Meadows then recommended that the third trade school be located at Tuscaloosa. Senator Fite moved that this recommendation be accepted, and the motion passed seven to three, with Senator Langan, James Kitchens, and Superintendent Meadows voting in opposition to the location. Meadows asked that the minutes carry his statement that even though he recommended Tuscaloosa, he felt that Montgomery and Mobile were the best locations for the school. He then stated that he was not prepared to recommend the

⁷⁵ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, September 28, 1950, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

location of the fourth trade school at this time.⁷⁶

The vote by the Alabama State Board of Education on the location of the fourth trade school did not come for another two months, on November 14, 1950. Since Tuscaloosa received the third trade school for whites, the stage was now set for a showdown between the communities of Mobile and Montgomery to land the last remaining white trade school. Both communities brought large delegations to the meeting. Mobile's delegation was allowed to speak first because of the distance they had traveled to Montgomery. Senator Langan spoke for the delegates from Mobile, and read a resolution from the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Alabama. The resolution listed several reasons for a trade school in Mobile, including the lack of any trade education in Southwestern Alabama, the growth of the Mobile area, and the number of veterans living in the region without access to vocational training. Senator Langan also reminded the Board that the City of Mobile had offered a very suitable site, overlooking Mobile Bay, on which to build the institution. In all, fifteen members of the Mobile community spoke on behalf of Mobile as the fourth location of a trade school. The Montgomery delegation consisted of five individuals who presented the industrial advantages of Montgomery.⁷⁷

After the delegations had finished their presentations, Governor Folsom called on Superintendent Meadows to make his recommendation for the final trade school location. Understandably, Meadows voiced his confusion as to how the Board wished to proceed since both Montgomery and Mobile had previously been rejected, yet were now the only two communities to present at the current meeting. Meadows then made a motion that the final trade school be located at Montgomery. His motion was seconded by James Kitchens of Montgomery,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, November 14, 1950, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

but Senator Fite then made a motion to reject the Superintendent's recommendation. Fite's motion was approved by the Board by a margin of seven to four. Colonel Harry F. Ayers, Handy Ellis, James Kitchens, and Meadows voted in the opposition. Again, all seven members who voted in the majority were Folsom appointees.

Governor Folsom then asked Superintendent Meadows to make another recommendation for the location of the final trade school. Meadows then recommended that the final trade school be located at Mobile as an alternative to Montgomery. Senator Langan made a motion to accept this recommendation, and the motion passed ten to one with only James Kitchens of Montgomery voting in opposition. Superintendent Meadows then recommended that the Alabama State Board of Education pass a resolution encouraging the legislature to authorize an additional trade school for Montgomery due to the great need for industrial education in that area. The records do not show that the Board acted on this recommendation. And no reason was given as to why Montgomery was rejected by the Board. Superintendent Meadows's statements clearly indicate great need for a trade school in Montgomery. Some Board members may have been insulted by the small delegation from Montgomery, especially since the Board was meeting there. It is also possible that some political deal had been worked out between the governor and some of his appointees on the Board. With all of the members now deceased, it is likely that the exact motive will never be known.

The Regional Vocational and Trade Schools Act of 1947 was the largest piece of legislation dealing with two-year education passed in Alabama during the first half of the twentieth century. The institutions had an immediate impact on the education of young Alabamians. The 1953-1954 academic year was the first year that all four regional trade schools were in operation. The Decatur Trade School had also been placed under state control, and was

counted as a regional trade school for the first time. During this year, the trade schools enrolled 3,499 students.⁷⁸ The vast majority of these students would not have received any educational training beyond high school had it not been for the newly established public trade schools. Typically students who attended vocational trade schools could not go to a four-year college because of grades, finances, or domestic demands. Without the existence of a local trade school, many of these students may not have received any education beyond high school.

It is also important not to overlook the impact that the new trade schools had on the education of women. The 1954-1955 academic year was the first year that enrollment at the trade schools was reported by gender. During that year, women represented nearly 15 percent of the enrollment at the six state trade schools. The student body at Wenonah Trade School had the highest percentage of women, at nearly 30 percent. By the next school year, women made up almost half of the student body at Wenonah.⁷⁹ With the few educational opportunities available to women in 1950s Alabama, the trade school played an important role in helping women secure some economic power. Again, many of these women would have had no education beyond high school had it not been for the regional trade schools.

The legacy of the regional trade schools is twofold. The first is the impact the trade schools had on personal lives by providing access to education to thousands of Alabamians. Without the trade schools, many Alabamians would not have been able to secure profitable careers. Their establishment also allowed Alabama to accommodate World War II and Korean War veterans who did not wish to use their G.I. Bill benefits at a four-year college. The presence of the trade schools gave these individuals another educational option that was previously not available. The human impact of the trade schools would be impossible to quantify. A second

⁷⁸ Alabama Department of Education, *State Educational Institutions*, 272-280.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

legacy of the trade schools impacted the state as a whole. The Regional Vocational and Trade School Act of 1947 established a precedent for state support of a two-year educational system. The Act was a small-scale “pilot” of the junior college legislation that would eventually pass in 1963. The positive impact the trade schools had on many Alabamians cast two-year education in a positive light and gave supporters of a junior college system an example to use in the fight to establish junior colleges in the state. The regional trade schools also helped “break the ice” for significant state support of two-year education in Alabama.

Additional Trade Schools Created in 1955

In 1955, legislation authorizing the creation of five additional trade schools was introduced in the Alabama House of Representatives. The bill stipulated that the new trade schools would be funded and operated under the provisions of the 1947 Regional Vocational and Trade School Act. The legislation stated that the goal of the bill was to make trade schools “conveniently accessible to all areas of Alabama.” The five existing trade schools did not provide sufficient access to vocational education for many Alabamians, both white and black. The creation of five additional trade schools would help meet the demand for vocational education in Alabama for both races. The Act was sponsored by over sixty members of the House of Representatives, and passed the chamber with only seven opposing votes. It is also worth noting that Governor James Folsom, who was Governor when the 1947 legislation had passed, was reelected in 1954 and put his support behind this bill. Folsom’s endorsement carried substantial weight in the House, but was not as influential or effective in the Senate.⁸⁰ At this time Alabama Governors effectively chose the leadership of the House, and the Lieutenant Governors chose the leadership of the Senate.

⁸⁰ *Journal of the Alabama House of Representatives*, reg. sess., 1955, 940-941.

Opposition to the measure focused on the cost of the bill, and the possibility that some of the trade schools would be used for African-Americans. The additional trade schools were to be paid for by part of an educational bond issue passed as a separate piece of legislation. In the political wrangling to pass the bond issue, the number of trade schools was reduced to three in the Senate.⁸¹ This brought the total number of trade schools to nine, one for each Congressional District. The Senate passed this revised version of the trade school bill unanimously. The Senate version then passed the House on September 9, 1955, and was signed into law by Governor Folsom two days later. Although less expansive than the version he had previously proposed, the addition of the three trade schools significantly extended access to vocational education in areas of the state with little or no access at that time, as well as to African-Americans shut out of local white trade schools because of segregation.

Budget woes, however, delayed the formal opening of the three additional trade schools during the late 1950s. They would not open until the early 1960s.⁸² The first trade school to open under the provisions of the 1955 legislation was located in Montgomery. Montgomery had been rejected twice as a site for one of the original trade schools after two contentious votes by the Alabama State Board of Education. The original survey committee that visited potential locations for the trade schools during 1948 had recommended that Montgomery receive the third trade school because of the need for vocational education in the area. State Superintendent Austin Meadows had lobbied for a trade school at Montgomery during his first term, but his recommendations were rejected by the State Board.⁸³ A trade school in Montgomery for whites

⁸¹ "Attempt to Issue Education Bonds," *Anniston Star*, August 12, 1955.

⁸² Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 125.

⁸³ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, November 14, 1950, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

was opened in 1961, and was later named Patterson State Trade School in honor of Governor John Patterson. The final two trade schools to be opened would both be for the education of Negroes in Huntsville and Mobile, areas that already had trade schools for whites. This would begin a process of duplication of services based on segregation that would continue into the 1960s.

Although *Brown v. Board of Education* had established that segregation was unconstitutional in 1954, many in Alabama still held onto the notion that the federal government would simply ignore segregation in the South. A number of decisions made by the State of Alabama during this time were made in order to keep the old system in place.⁸⁴ This can be seen in the location of the final two trade schools, and later during the establishment of the junior colleges in 1963.

The second trade school to be established under the 1955 legislation, which was delayed by several years due to shortfalls in the state budget, was located at Huntsville. The Huntsville State Vocational Technical College was established in 1961 and opened in September 1962. The Huntsville area already had the largest trade school in the state, located just thirty miles away at Decatur, but that institution was only for whites. This meant that African-Americans living in the Huntsville-Decatur area had no access to vocational education. Court decisions had already made it clear that unless efforts to provide separate but equal educational access for African-Americans were undertaken, the process of integration could be forcefully quickened by the federal court decrees. The Huntsville State Vocational Technical College was established as a segregated institution, making it the second public institution devoted to the vocational education of African-Americans in Alabama. The college's name was changed to J. F. Drake State Technical

⁸⁴ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 343.

Trade School in 1966 to honor Joseph Fanning Drake, President of Alabama A&M for over thirty-five years. It became the first desegregated technical college in the State of Alabama in 1967.⁸⁵

The final trade school to be established under the 1955 legislation was located at Mobile. Mobile, like Huntsville, already had a trade school for whites established as the fourth trade school under the 1947 legislation. A lawsuit filed in U.S. Federal District Court by two African-American citizens of Mobile, Ernest L. Koen and Frank E. Lee, challenged the constitutionality of their exclusion from the white trade school operating in Mobile. Again, the State of Alabama faced a choice: to establish a separate institution for African-Americans at Mobile, or to allow the federal government to integrate the existing trade school. Apparently, still in denial of the inevitable, Carver State Vocational and Technical School was opened in Mobile for the education of African-Americans in 1962.⁸⁶ This institution would be merged with Bishop State Community College in 1991.

Summary

The period following World War II to the launch of Sputnik was perhaps the most significant period covered in this study. For the first time, Alabama made a significant state commitment to public two-year education in the form of trade schools. Although these schools were not academic institutions, and perhaps did not provide as much long-term value as junior colleges, their creation indicates that leaders in Alabama recognized the changing demands of an industrialized economy. These changes eliminated the idea that only a small percentage of the population needed education beyond high school. During this period, Alabama realized that no

⁸⁵ "Trade School Named," *Huntsville Times*, September 21, 1962, 5.

⁸⁶ Minutes of the Alabama State Board of Education, November 17, 1961, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Montgomery, AL.

longer could the masses farm and the elite attend college, a point underscored by the more expansive titles given the newly established institutions. The five institutions created by the Regional Trade and Vocational School Act of 1947 were called "trade schools," while the Huntsville institution, the last created by the 1955 bill, was formally titled a "Technical College." The need for more postsecondary two-year options underscores the reality that the old arrangements could no longer work in the mechanized economy that was slowly emerging across the state. The creation of the trade schools was an early effort to establish some middle ground in the educational system in Alabama. These efforts would continue in the post-Sputnik era, in an attempt to make Alabama truly equal to the rest of the nation regarding access to two-year education.

CHAPTER VII

PUBLIC JUNIOR COLLEGES COME TO ALABAMA

Introduction: The Baby Boom and Sputnik

In the two decades after the Second World War, Alabama leaders made the decision to create publicly supported trade schools, but not public junior colleges. Alabama had six state-supported trade schools by 1957, but not one public junior college. Events during the end of the 1950s began to convince Alabama leaders that junior colleges were a necessity for the state. Beginning in the period of 1958 to 1963, state leaders explored the idea of public junior colleges. While little progress in establishing junior colleges was made during this five year period, the most significant development was a general change in direction of two-year education in Alabama. Instead of maintaining the half-century-old approach of establishing trade schools for the poor, and increasing funds to universities for the privileged, Alabama leaders began to consider the merits of public junior colleges to provide more universal public two-year postsecondary opportunities to Alabamians. That this discussion occurred at all, in light of the aforementioned challenges with financing and governance associated with the 1901 Constitution and the many years it took to establish nine trade schools and technical institutes by 1961, represents the beginning of a major shift in the attitudes toward junior colleges and public higher education in Alabama.

The development of a new attitude toward junior colleges in Alabama was largely brought about by two events in the late 1950s. The first event was the coming “baby boom,”

which started immediately following World War II in 1946. The "baby boom" would not have an immediate impact on higher education, in that it took time for the first baby boom children whose waves forced expansion first of elementary, then secondary school opportunities. But the fact that the wave was coming was well known.

Yet there were inaccurate predictions about the scope of the baby boom, and if the challenges were not properly identified, in a state traditionally financially pernicious in education spending, like Alabama, inaccurate predictions could be used to justify inaction. Many demographers and social scientists did predict a surge in post-war birthrates, but some expected it to be short-lived and not last longer than two or three years following the war. They predicted that this short-term increase would be followed by a sustained decline in the population.¹

These predictions were grounded in evidence from the Depression era. The parents of the baby boomers, whom television journalist Tom Brokaw would later term the "greatest generation," were actually the smallest generation ever born in the history of the United States. The economic situation of the Great Depression and the increased urbanization of the American family made extra children more of a liability than a needed resource. Instead of being beneficial on the farm, children born in the city added little to a family's income. Also, the poverty brought on by the Depression made an extra child a burden on families, so many families had fewer children.

At the end of World War II, the U.S. population had been in decline for nearly two decades, and some experts were concerned about a massive decline in population. In 1946, the head of the U.S. Census Bureau predicted that the country's population would not reach 163 million until the year 2000 (the United States population would reach that 163 million figure in

¹ Landon Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Coward, McCann, & Geoghegan, 1980), 10-12.

just seven years, in 1954). Even the internationally famous economist John Maynard Keynes predicted a declining population for the next twenty to forty years in a speech to the Galton Institute in 1937.² Predictions of population decline were also featured in influential nonacademic publications such as *Life* and *Atlantic Monthly*.³ In August of 1947, United States Senator Sheridan Downey of California warned that the country was facing “race suicide through falling birth rates because the American people are not reproducing themselves.” Downey went as far as to propose an increase in immigration to help stabilize the population.⁴ Downey's warning was carried in a feature in *The Anniston Star*, and in many other regional newspapers. These stories and media attention combined to make the notion of an inevitable decline of the American population conventional wisdom in the late 1940s. Neither the academics nor the public had yet grasped, let alone predicted, the extent the post-war “baby boom.”

When the number of births began to decline slightly from all-time highs during the years of 1948-1950, many experts felt that their predictions of a population decline were sure to be correct. As it pertains to higher education planning, because of the veterans' desire to make up for lost time in service, an enrollment bulge was observed at nearly every college and university in the years immediately following the war. Ralph Roberts, Director of Vital Statistics for the State of Alabama, predicted that a “leveling off of birth rates that would continue for the next decade.”⁵

² John Maynard Keynes, “Some Economic Consequences of a Declining Population,” (speech, Galton Institute, London, England, February 16, 1937).

³ Jones, *Great Expectations*, 21-22.

⁴ John L. Steele, “Senator Asks Close Check Up on Immigrants,” *The Anniston Star*, August 23, 1947, 7.

⁵ Hal Boyle, “Alabama Birth Rate Hits Skids After Two Boom Years,” *Dothan Eagle*, December 22, 1948, 6.

The decline proved to be more temporary than the boom, however. Many experts had failed to recognize that even though the number of births declined during these first three post-WWII years, the number of births was still higher than in any year prior to World War II. The number of births nationally crept up again in 1951, and by 1952 it had reached an all-time record number of 3,889,000. This rise was due in part to the veterans who had used the G.I. Bill to better their skill levels, and were now earning good pay upon entering an expanded middle class. This meant that they could afford to have children, in that with good jobs, they did not have the negative financial circumstances children would bring that families faced in the Great Depression years. Thus, the number of births still did not decline when this trend might have naturally run its course. The birth rate remained high, at over 4 million each year from 1954 to 1964, before finally beginning to subside in 1965. The crest of the baby boom finally reached its peak, but more than 75 million Americans under the age of eighteen were left in its wake.⁶

It is only logical that the elementary schools were the first parts of American society to feel the effects of the baby boom. The number of students entering school was larger than the graduating senior class by an average of 1.5 million students in the seven years from 1958 through 1964. This pattern did not end until the first baby boom children graduated from high school in 1964. The stress that this increase placed on the physical plants of the public schools created major problems. When combined with the low number of teachers and low educational funding in states like Alabama, the American public education system was under severe strain. Much of this stress could have been prevented had the predictions of a prolonged rise in birth rates been made, and their implications well understood by policymakers with regards to long-term planning. The belief that the astronomical birthrates were a passing fad led to inaction on the part of some political and educational leaders. The results were overcrowded, understaffed,

⁶ Jones, *Great Expectations*, 45.

and unprepared schools. Landon Jones sums up the situation by saying, “it is not, I think, overstating the case to say that the arrival of the baby boom was an educational disaster for the United States.”⁷ Although there were some exceptions, most of the new WWII veterans who were now parents, whom Mettler called the “civic generation,” understood that their elementary, middle, and high schools were doing the best they could and tried to pitch in by forming Parent Teacher Associations, and raising money for the schools.⁸ This understanding attitude changed almost overnight in October of 1957, when the news arrived of the successful Russian launch of the Sputnik satellite.

It is difficult for younger generations of Americans to understand the sense of fear that shrouded the childhoods of many baby boomers in the 1950s. The symbols of American peace and prosperity were often overshadowed by very real fears of nuclear war. The baby boomers grew up in an era of fallout shelters and bomb drills that served as constant reminders that their lives could end with a flash of light and a wave of intense heat. The launch of Sputnik reinforced these fears and in some ways created a public panic. At 184 pounds, the beach ball-sized Sputnik satellite was primitive by today’s standards, but its psychological effects were huge.⁹ Newspapers carried stories of Russian supremacy in technology, and even included speculations by some of a “hypersonic space bomber that could bomb any place on earth from space.”¹⁰ Stories such as these helped to increase public panic, and shattered the prior post-war sentiment of American superiority. It was now clear to the public that the United States, with all its prosperity was behind the Russians in science as the world entered the space age.

⁷ Ibid., 51.

⁸ Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 90.

⁹ Jones, *Great Expectations*, 60.

¹⁰ Lewis Gulick, “Reds Study Ultimate Space Arm,” *Anniston Star*, November 10, 1947.

As often is the case in times of national panic, some group or groups are made scapegoats. The first victims of the public outrage were the educational intuitions.¹¹ In his book on the history of the National Defense Education Act, Wayne J. Urban states that “the launch of the satellite was translated into a story of educational deficiency for the American public by the media.”¹² The targets of the criticism ranged from progressive educational methods to the lack of science and math education in high schools. One of the main points of criticism was that Russian scientists focused almost exclusively on science, math, and technology during their education, which gave them superior training when compared to American scientists who received a more traditional liberal education. Although this argument was dismissed by some experts, including Wernher von Braun, who was working on the Saturn rocket at the time in Huntsville, Alabama, it became one of the most popular attacks on American education.¹³

While the criticism was uncomfortable for educators and in some ways quite unfair, it did strengthen the case for those supporting a program of massive additional federal aid for education. The groundwork for federal intervention had been laid prior to the Sputnik launch by the efforts of Senator Lister Hill and Representative Carl Elliot, both of Alabama. These efforts had been previously met with resistance from conservatives in the House and Senate, and in the Eisenhower Administration, who did not want to increase federal involvement in education. The public outcry generated by the Sputnik launch provided the momentum for Congress to pass the National Defense of Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, a landmark bill that significantly increased the federal government’s role in education. Given the public fear and outrage over perceived

¹¹ Jones, *Great Expectations*, 62.

¹² Wayne J. Urban, *More Than Science and Sputnik: The National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 116.

¹³ Jim Becker, “More Shocks Due, Von Braun States,” *Anniston Star*, November 10, 1957, 1, 10.

“failures” of American education, opposition to federal support for education was made much more difficult. Fear of being labeled as unconcerned about the Russian threat practically removed many of the traditional opponents to expanded federal support who otherwise would have opposed the NDEA.¹⁴ Alabama was already seriously considering new directions when Eisenhower Administration officials encouraged each state to host its own state-level conferences on the future of postsecondary education, to which attention is now turned.

The Alabama Education Commission of 1958

The Alabama Education Commission was established by an act of the legislature during the final days of the 1957 legislative session.¹⁵ A bill to create an Alabama Education Commission was introduced in the 1955 legislative session by Representatives Rufus Lackey and J. K. Edward, both of Jefferson County. This legislation failed to become law largely because the proposed commission did not include any educator among its twenty-four members. When the bill was reintroduced in 1957, it included educators on the proposed study committee, and had the endorsement of State Superintendent of Education Austin Meadows.¹⁶ In its final form, the legislation established a twenty-one member commission consisting of business leaders, educators, and state officials. Dr. D. P. Culp, President of Livingston State College was appointed Executive Director. The Commission met for the first time on October 15, 1957, and was divided into six committees with some members serving on more than one committee. These committees included a committee on junior colleges, finance, personnel, buildings, and transportation, and many were further divided into subcommittees. The overall purpose for the

¹⁴ Urban, *More than Science and Sputnik*, 80-81.

¹⁵ “Education Unit Plans for Survey of Schools,” *Anniston Star*, October 5, 1957, 2.

¹⁶ “Introduced Bills” *Anniston Star*, May 10, 1957, 10.

commission was to comprehensively survey the problems facing the Alabama educational system.¹⁷ Alabama's efforts already underway would take on greater urgency following the Sputnik launch.

The Alabama Education Commission was planned to serve as Alabama's comprehensive response to the baby boom. But the launch of Sputnik just eleven days before its first meeting allowed it to be more expansive in its approach. At the time in which the Commission was authorized, the problem was mainly accommodating the baby boom children at all levels of education. The stress that the baby boom had placed on the Alabama education system was similar to the strain in the rest of the nation, but was even more pronounced due to Alabama's historic neglect of education funding under its 1901 Constitution. The impact of the Sputnik launch on the Commission can be seen by the inclusion of a committee on junior colleges. After all, if America was going to catch up with Russia in the space age, access to higher education was a must for the baby boom children.

Access to higher education in Alabama was in fact far below the national average during the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1960, Alabama ranked last among the fifty states in college enrollments.¹⁸ Taylor Smith, editor of *The Anniston Star*, warned in 1956 that the increase in the number of prospective students could allow colleges and universities to become very selective in their admissions, and deny many otherwise deserving students educational opportunity. In his opinion, the only way to remedy this situation was to increase the state's overall capacity in public higher education.¹⁹ The owner of *The Anniston Star*, Col. Harry Ayers, had been a

¹⁷ "Probe Started on Education Commission," *Anniston Star*, December 13, 1957.

¹⁸ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 240.

¹⁹ Taylor Smith, "Too Much Selectivity," *Anniston Star*, June 5, 1956, 4.

member of the Alabama State Board of Education for many years, and likely shared his editor's position. *The Anniston Star* had actually warned of the consequence of the baby boom on education as early as the summer of 1947, advocating for the development of comprehensive statewide educational plans. That warning, like those in many other parts of the nation, was ignored because of the supposed temporary nature of the baby boom.²⁰ By the late 1950s, no one could deny that the baby boom was temporary, and it was clear that Alabama had to plan and act to accommodate the ever-increasing number of students.²¹

The Higher Education Committee of the Alabama Education Commission was divided into five subcommittees and each issued a sophisticated and detailed report and recommendations. While five of these reports are outside the scope of this study, the report from the subcommittee on junior colleges directly relates to the development of two-year education during this period. Of the eight members of the Junior College Subcommittee, four were among the most qualified educators in the state. Membership included Dr. R. E. Cammack, who had served as Director of Vocational Education in Alabama since the 1940s, and had also served on State Superintendent Meadows's study committee to locate the regional trade schools after the 1947 act was passed. Also on the committee was Virgil McCain, President of Snead Junior College, a private church-related two-year college located in Boaz, a small town in the north central part of the state. Two other members were the Superintendents of Education for Birmingham and Mobile City Schools. The Junior College Subcommittee produced a report well-grounded in the literature of the time, which included information on junior college efforts across the nation.

²⁰ Edwin T. Brinkley, "Birth Rate and Education," *Anniston Star*, July 5, 1947, 5.

²¹ Alabama Education Commission, *Report of the Subcommittee on Junior Colleges* (Montgomery: Alabama Education Association, 1958), 133.

The Junior College Subcommittee's report spent very little time trying to establish the fact that a surge in enrollments was coming. This would indicate that the impending enrollment bulge was an accepted fact by most Alabamians. The report simply stated that a higher percentage of high school graduates were attending college in 1958 than in past years, and that the class of 1964 would begin a trend of graduating classes that were unprecedented in size.

The Junior College Subcommittee proposed five solutions to the rising enrollments that would soon stress public higher education institutions then in existence in Alabama. The first proposed solution was to enlarge the present institutions of higher learning. The Subcommittee was receptive to this idea, but referenced a study in Florida that said the maximum size of a state university should be around ten thousand students. Thus, to rely on the existing institutions alone to meet the enrollment growth would likely take enrollment at several universities beyond this desired range, as the University of Alabama already had over 6,800 students and Auburn University enrolled over 8,500.

The second proposed option was the establishment of additional four-year universities. In the subcommittee's opinion this should be limited to Huntsville, Birmingham, and Mobile, the state's largest urban areas, which had no public universities for whites. The Subcommittee also stated that this could not be the sole solution due to the aforementioned maximum size constraint of 10,000 they believed should be in place for public universities.²²

The third proposed option was to further develop the extension centers that the University of Alabama and Auburn University were already operating around the state. At this time, the University of Alabama operated extension centers in Birmingham (associated with its medical school), Huntsville, and Gadsden. Auburn University also operated an extension center at

²² Alabama Education Commission, *Report of the Subcommittee on Junior Colleges*, 132.

Montgomery. Interestingly, the Junior College Subcommittee's final report did not discuss this option beyond making a basic reference.

The fourth proposed option was to recognize that the state would not or could not significantly expand its system, and adopt a screening process based upon high entrance standards to allow only the best and brightest entry into college. The Subcommittee noted that "we suppose there would be few in Alabama who would favor a more rigid screening of applicants for education beyond high school with a view of merely holding down enrollments." Such an approach would have been in contradiction to the democratic ideals that were becoming the dominant force in American education, and would no doubt have brought about comparisons to the Soviet educational system. The Subcommittee likely included this option to serve as a reminder of the cost of inaction.²³

Although the final report included these four options, the Subcommittee did not deem any of them sufficient to handle the stresses of the coming enrollment or to suit the needs of the majority of Alabama students. The Subcommittee felt the best long-term solution to the enrollment problem was to create a statewide system of community colleges in Alabama. The report states that "we believe that the trend this way throughout the Southeast and the United States has solidly persuasive reasons and that the time has come for Alabama to recognize them."²⁴ The first benefit the report listed for a community college was very similar to Young's argument for community college development across the nation as described in Chapter Three.²⁵ The Junior College Subcommittee reported that the shift in the Alabama economy from

²³ Ibid., 132-133.

²⁴ Ibid., 135.

²⁵ See pages 65-74.

agriculture to industry was not complete, and the development of a “new economy” depended on the availability of skilled workers. According to the Subcommittee, the type of worker necessary for this transition needed training above the trade school level but below the four-year college degree. It was the opinion of the committee that community colleges could help transition Alabama into an industrialized economy.²⁶

The second benefit of community colleges listed by the Subcommittee was that education would be brought “closer to where the people live.” The report stated, “there can be little question that barriers exist in our present system which are preventing perhaps half of the youth in upper quartile of ability and perhaps two-thirds of the total number of qualified youth from seeking further education.” The Subcommittee argued that community colleges would remove many of the financial, geographic, and even psychological barriers to higher education. This statement indicates that the Subcommittee recognized that geographic access to higher education was a problem across much of Alabama. The Subcommittee also recommended community colleges because they would be the cheapest alternative for the state. The report cited a study out of Maryland that stated that community colleges without dorms cost half as much to create as universities that housed students.²⁷ This argument indicated that the committee was aware of the strain of the Alabama budget that began in the 1956-1957 fiscal year. The budget crisis lasted the entire length of the Patterson Administration, and would have been a significant factor in determining Alabama’s response to the enrollment issue.²⁸

The community college approach advocated by the Subcommittee was very detailed and appears to have been based on the best known practices of the time. The report recommended

²⁶ Alabama Education Commission, *Report of the Subcommittee on Junior Colleges*, 135-136.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁸ “Supts, Say School Revenue Picture Not So Rosy,” *Franklin County Times* (Russellville, AL), July 8, 1962, 1, 4.

that the state create a statewide advisory committee of educators to determine the program offerings based on accessibility across the state. This committee would serve as a statewide coordinating board for the community colleges in Alabama, separate from the governing board, which is a step that Alabama still has not taken in the second decade of the twenty-first century, some sixty years later. The report urged the legislature to authorize local counties to form community college districts by special election. The Subcommittee urged that these districts be large enough to sustainably support a community college. Perhaps the most controversial suggestion was that the legislature should propose a constitutional amendment that would allow local districts to levy special taxes for supporting the community college. Given the historic resistance to taxes embedded in the 1901 Alabama Constitution, it is little wonder that this has never come to pass.

The report also included recommendations for the governance, operation, and funding for the community colleges. The community colleges proposed by the Subcommittee would be locally controlled by the existing board of education from the county or from a combination of county boards if the district included more than one county (which was likely to occur in sparsely populated rural areas). The potential colleges would be funded mostly from local taxes and tuition. The Subcommittee recommended that state allocations make up less than one-third of the college's budget. The report stressed that each community college should have its *own* faculty, campus, budget, and equipment. This eliminated the possibility that the community colleges could operate out of a high school, as many did in the first decades of the twentieth century. The report also recommended that the community colleges investigate the accreditation process prior to opening in order to secure accreditation as quickly as possible.²⁹ The type of

²⁹ Alabama Education Commission, *Report of the Subcommittee on Junior Colleges*, 145-146.

community college described by the Junior College Subcommittee differed significantly from the community colleges that would be established during the Wallace administration.

Community college districts to this day have never been established in Alabama. To this day, it is an open issue how "community" oriented Alabama's community colleges are, in light of the fact that local communities need make no financial investment in them. Under the Wallace-era bill, the Alabama Trade School and Junior College Authority Act of 1963, no local financial support was required to start a community college. The recommendation of a board of local governance was also ignored. Instead, governance and coordinating control of all Alabama trade schools, technical institutes, technical colleges, junior colleges, and community colleges was assigned to the Alabama State Board of Education. Alabama's current system of community colleges bears little resemblance to the system the members of the 1958 study committee had in mind.

In fact, very few of the recommendations made by the Junior College Subcommittee were adopted in Alabama. Taylor Smith, editor of *The Anniston Star*, proved prophetic when he stated that "we sincerely hope, however, that this study will not meet the fate of scores of others – on a local as well as a statewide scale– be given the once over and then consigned to basements of the several buildings on Goat Hill."³⁰ History indicates that this was exactly to be the fate of the report of the Junior College Committee of the 1958 Alabama Education Commission.

Pork-Barrel Politics and the Establishment of Northwest Alabama State Junior College in 1961

The bill authorizing the first public junior college in Alabama was introduced into the Alabama Legislature on July 22, 1961. The co-sponsors of the bill were Representatives Emmitt Oden of Russellville, Pete Ray of Haleyville, and Pete Self of Hamilton. Oden and Ray were

³⁰ Taylor Smith, "Fine Choice for the School Study," *Anniston Star*, November 17, 1957, 4A.

long-time representatives of Franklin and Winston Counties, respectively. Pete Self was a one-term representative from Hamilton who had upset the incumbent Speaker of the House, Rankin Fite, in the 1958 election.³¹ Although these men were listed as the bill's sponsors, former Governor Albert Brewer, who at that time was a member of the Alabama House of Representatives, was certain that the bill actually originated with Rankin Fite. Brewer said that Fite would often write a bill and have Emmett Oden introduce it if the bill was going to be controversial.³² Supporting Brewer's claim is the fact that Fite was the mastermind behind the 1963 legislation that established junior, technical, and community colleges across Alabama. Governor Brewer also felt that the state appropriations for the private Walker College in nearby Jasper may have encouraged the legislators in that area to push for a state-funded public junior college.³³

The bill authorizing Alabama's first public junior college was passed unanimously by both houses and signed into law on September 8, 1961, by Governor John Patterson. The bill specifically authorized the creation of a junior college in Winston, Marion, or Franklin Counties. The legislation did not specify the exact location of the new college, leaving this decision up to the institution's newly appointed twenty-four-member Board of Trustees. The board was extremely large, and included the governor and state superintendent of education (as did every other board of the Alabama public higher education institutions at the time, and still do today). Other members included state senators and representatives, county commissioners, and local superintendents of education from Winston, Franklin, and Marion Counties. Even United States

³¹ Mae Streit, "Junior College Bill Introduced in Legislature," *Franklin County Times*, July 24, 1961.

³² Brewer, interview.

³³ Katsinas, "George C. Wallace and the Founding of Alabama's Two-Year Colleges," 454.

Representative Carl Elliot, whose congressional district spanned the new college's state-assigned service area, was included on the board. Although the board was quite large, it did meet the definition of a local governing board as recommended by the 1958 Alabama Education Commission.³⁴

At its board meeting on December 6, 1961, Phil Campbell was chosen as the location for the new Northwest Alabama State Junior College. Two factors appeared to have helped Phil Campbell secure the location for this college. The first was that Phil Campbell's geographic location was the most central for the counties to be served by the new College. A second factor was that a citizen of Phil Campbell offered to donate forty acres of land if the college was located there.³⁵

The legislation authorized local communities to appropriate funds for the College and allowed the county boards of education to use public funds to support the college. However, the legislation did not include any provisions for the creation of special taxes for the junior college, as the 1958 Alabama Education Commission had suggested. The legislation stipulated that the College should open no later than September 1, 1963. If this deadline was not met, the legislation would expire.³⁶ This date provided a little less than two years to organize the College. After selecting the location for the college, the Board of Trustees appointed James Glasgow as President on January 15, 1962. Glasgow had previously served as Principal of Phil Campbell High School. Although Glasgow remained as president for several years, his appointment was very much a matter of convenience. The Board of Trustees realized that a separate campus could

³⁴ *Journal of the Alabama House of Representatives*, reg. sess., 1961, 1397-1102.

³⁵ Mae Streit, "Phil Campbell Chosen Site for Jr. College," *Franklin County Times*, December 6, 1961.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

not be constructed in time to meet the deadline of September 1, 1963. Therefore, plans were made to operate the junior college at Phil Campbell High School until separate facilities could be built. This action likely saved the College by allowing it to meet the deadline specified in the 1961 legislation.

Northwest Alabama State Junior College began taking applications for students on July 1, 1963. Classes started on September 1, 1963, with sixty students and twelve faculty members. The first students came from six local counties: Lauderdale, Franklin, Colbert, Winston, Walker, and Marion.³⁷ Prior to its opening, students residing in these counties had virtually no access to public higher education. Northwest Alabama State Junior College was added to the other public junior colleges created by the 1963 Trade School and Junior College Authority Act. The 1963 Act left the Board of Trustees in as an advisory board, and transferred real and effective control of the new College to the Alabama State Board of Education. In 1989, the College was merged with Muscle Shoals State Technical College, and renamed Northwest-Shoals Community College. After the merger, the main campus was moved from Phil Campbell to Muscle Shoals to accommodate the larger enrollment in the Muscle Shoals area. The Phil Campbell site is still operated as a branch campus. The establishment of Northwest State Junior College marked the first time that the State of Alabama created a public junior college. By breaking the barrier of public support for junior colleges, the establishment of Northwest State Junior College helped pave the way for the subsequent establishment of more public junior colleges in Alabama.

Public Junior Colleges That Were Chartered But Failed to Open

A week after legislation was passed authorizing the new Northwest Alabama State Junior College, a similar bill was passed authorizing a junior college in DeKalb or Jackson Counties.

³⁷ Mae Streit, "Junior College Classes Begin," *Franklin County Times*, September 5, 1963.

This bill was introduced on September 15, 1961, by Representatives Robert Harris of Fort Payne, and Wallace Gross and Bernard Cabiness, both of Scottsboro.³⁸ The legislation is identical in wording to the legislation authorizing a junior college in Franklin, Marion, and Winston Counties with the exception of two items. The first difference was the change in the names of the counties to DeKalb or Jackson, and the second dealt with state appropriations for the new College. The junior college for Franklin, Marion, and Winston Counties received a \$6,250 appropriation from the Alabama State Education Trust Fund.³⁹ The Jackson and DeKalb legislation did not include a state appropriation. Despite this important difference, the two bills were too similar to have been developed by independent parties.

During the 1961 legislative session, there was a close alliance of North Alabama legislators in opposition to the congressional redistricting plans proposed by legislators from the Black Belt in south-central Alabama, and the industrial areas of the state. It is likely that this alliance also included the exchange of ideas, and the Northeast Alabama legislators picked up the junior college bill from legislators from Northwest Alabama.⁴⁰ Even though the legislation was mostly identical, the colleges did not have the same level of success.

The college that was authorized for Jackson and DeKalb Counties failed to open. The reasons for this are not clear in the historical record. Likely explanations include the lack of state appropriations, but may include additional reasons as well. The location proposed for the new College by Rep. Robert Harris was the Powell Crossroads area.⁴¹ This location was among the most central, but was five miles from Rainsville and the nearest existing school facility. Unlike

³⁸ *Journal of the Alabama House of Representatives*, reg. sess., 1961, 2095-2099.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2136-2138.

⁴⁰ "Harris Says Governor Can, Should Push Through Reapportionment," *The Times-Journal* (Fort Payne, AL), June 15, 1961.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Northwest State Junior College, the college to be located in Northeast Alabama could not use the facilities of local high schools due to its location. This meant that all facilities would need to be constructed prior to the college's opening, a major challenge given the September 1, 1963, deadline imposed by the legislation. The logistics of establishing a college from the ground up with no state funding would be a daunting task in such a short time frame.

Another apparent difference between the two Colleges was the level of community support. The author reviewed newspapers in Marion, Winston, and Franklin Counties that regularly included front-page stories about the progress of the College. Other than the account of the college in Representative Harris's column in the *Fort Payne Times-Journal*, no other mention of the Jackson-DeKalb College could be found in the newspapers of the area. This may indicate that the community support for the new College was lower than in the Northwest. Not only did the proposed college appear to lack community support, it also apparently lacked support of the local school districts. The DeKalb County schools had recently issued a large bond issue to construct new high schools, and were currently in the middle of this construction when the legislation to authorize the new Northeast Junior College was passed. The Jackson County schools were not financially able to offer any support to the College, however. Ben Forrester, the Superintendent of Jackson County Schools who later would become the President of Enterprise State Community College recalled in a 1964 speech at Auburn University that "we could not help them finance a junior college when we could not meet a payroll with the people we had employed already."⁴² Without the support of the local school districts this school was likely doomed from its creation.

⁴² Ben Forrester, "Developments and Directions in Junior College Education in Alabama" (speech, Alabama Association of School Administrators, Auburn, AL, April 27, 1964).

Summary

The failed junior college in Northeast Alabama is a reminder of the difficulties faced by supporters of junior colleges in Alabama. The difference in support and excitement about the junior college appears to have been much greater in Northwest Alabama than in Northeast Alabama. The level of community support needed for a junior college is very important to its success, and without local support, the establishment of a successful junior college was unlikely. The chronic lack of funds for education at every level made any expansion in Alabama difficult. Unless an institution received a special appropriation from the education budget, it was unlikely to be successful. A special state appropriation is what Rankin Fite and his colleagues were able to obtain for Northwest Alabama State Junior College, and the failure by the legislators of northeast Alabama to obtain one likely spelled eventual doom for their new College.

Even after the initial authorization and funding of one junior college, many in Alabama were still not willing to spend additional state resources on junior colleges. The across-the-board budget cuts through the proration process that the state experienced in the late 1950s clearly dampened enthusiasm for new public two-year colleges. In the late 1950s, there were several years where Alabama public school teachers were paid with script (IOUs).⁴³ The argument "how can we start new institutions when we cannot adequately fund those institutions we already have?" would be voiced by officials from the University of Alabama and Auburn University in opposition to Governor Wallace's two-year college legislative package in 1963. It would take the better economic times of the mid-1960s that produced better Alabama Special Education Trust Fund balances, coinciding with a new governor with interest in the issue before Alabama was could make a significant commitment to junior colleges.

⁴³ Katsinas, "George C. Wallace and the Founding of Alabama's Two-Year Colleges," 466.

The period from the Sputnik launch to the Wallace Administration is not significant because of the number of two-year colleges established in Alabama. The era is significant because barriers, both psychological and fiscal, were removed from the path of junior college establishment. Although much of their report was ignored, the Junior College Committee of the Alabama Education Commission brought awareness to the educational plight of Alabama students. The Commission also brought significant publicity to junior colleges and gave their supporters political ammunition to fire at the critics. The establishment of Northwest State Junior College finally destroyed the attitude of educational apathy for the middle-class student, and allowed the public and politicians to see a local junior college in action instead of reading about them in a newspaper. This first public junior college eased the transition from no public junior colleges to the massive system created under Governor George C. Wallace.

CHAPTER VIII

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The time period covered by this study begins with the formation of historically black institutions that evolved into private junior colleges shortly after the Civil War and ends with the inauguration of Governor George C. Wallace on January 14, 1963. This study found that although Wallace significantly expanded two-year educational institutions in Alabama during his terms as governor, a large portion of what would become the Alabama Community College System was already in place prior to the first of his four inaugurations. When Wallace first took office, Alabama had ten public trade schools, one public junior college, and nine private junior colleges. Two of the private junior colleges, Snead Junior College and Southern Union Junior College, would eventually be placed under state control. While this study has shown that access to public two-year higher education in Alabama was not readily available prior to the Wallace era, the developments that did take place were important in influencing future developments in two-year college establishment and should not be overlooked.

Factors that Influenced the Development of Historically Black Two-Year Colleges

This study sought to answer three broad research questions relating to the development of two-year education in Alabama. The first of the questions was to identify the factors that affected the establishment of private white and historically black two-year colleges in Alabama during Reconstruction. The history of Selma University was used to help identify these factors for privately controlled, historically black colleges. The investigation found that one factor that led

to the development of Selma University was the desire of the newly freed slaves for education. Prior to Emancipation, the education of slaves had been forbidden by law, and after the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, these laws were enforced with new zeal. This meant that almost every freed slave was completely illiterate. In his book, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, W. E. B. DuBois estimated that of the 4 million emancipated slaves, less than 5 percent were literate.¹ Relying on Charles Boothe's firsthand accounts of his first years of freedom, it is likely that the percentage of literate slaves was even lower than this in Alabama. The huge number of individuals almost totally void of education of any kind was one of the most basic factors that led to the establishment of private two-year colleges in Alabama during Reconstruction.

In Alabama, over 400,000 slaves now had their freedom. The large number of freed slaves who needed education did not guarantee that they wanted education. However, the desire of the freed slaves for education was profound. As Du Bois stated, "the eagerness to learn among the Negro was exceptional in the case of poor recently emancipated folks. Usually, with a protective psychology, such degraded masses regard ignorance as natural and necessary."² DuBois offered a few possibilities that might have fostered this desire for education on the part of the former slaves. He stated that the feeling of inferiority forced upon African-Americans by slavery might have fueled a desire "to rise out of their condition by education."³ This desire to rise above a condition that was forced upon them may help explain why poor African-Americans strongly desired education and poor whites typically did not during this era. African-Americans had been intentionally denied education, but the poor whites had opportunities for education just not the means of attaining it. Because of their close association with wealthy, educated plantation

¹ DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 638.

² *Ibid.*, 637.

³ *Ibid.*, 638.

owners, the former slaves knew the power and benefits of education even more strongly than poor whites. After they were free, the former slaves would naturally desire these same benefits for themselves and their children and seek to attain education as a symbol of their freedom..

Freed slaves wanted and needed education on many different levels, with most needing training even in the most elementary skills. Nearly all needed literacy instruction, and even the elderly wanted to learn to read the Bible. These strong desires for education combined to drive the formation of Selma University and other private, historically black two-year colleges during Reconstruction. The lack of public education for African-Americans in Alabama also influenced the development of these private two-year institutions. Prior to the Civil War, public education in the South was very limited and few whites had any desire to change this after the War. The wealthy Bourbon Democrats were resistant to paying property taxes -- or any taxes-- that would contribute to the education of the poor-- be they white or black. The average working class white citizen did not see the need for education and did not support it at the polls. Flynt stated that the only kind of education the white working class cared about was “the rudimentary education necessary for the low-skill jobs available to them.”⁴ Public education beyond this was simply not a priority for white citizens of the South.

During Reconstruction, Republicans, including African-Americans Republicans, had control of state governments in the South, and substantial gains were made in public education. The 1868 Alabama Constitution provided for a system of public education, established a State Board of Education for the first time, and dedicated a fifth of the Alabama budget to public education.⁵ However, this progress was short-lived as the gains that were made in public

⁴ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 221.

⁵ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 653.

education during Reconstruction were largely reversed when the white Democrats regained control of the state legislature. In Alabama, these reversals included the abolition of the State Board of Education, which would not be reformed until 1923. Severe reduction in funding for public schools which Flynt describes as “draconian” also took place in Alabama.⁶ While the actions of the legislature affected the education of both races, African-Americans were determined to provide education for themselves and their children.⁷ When the opportunities to provide public education for themselves evaporated, the former slaves had no other option than to turn to private institutions.

Their ability to establish these colleges came from a combination of self-sacrifice and the philanthropy of Northern religious groups. In the case of Selma University, the major benefactor was the American Home Mission Society, which was a branch of the Northern Baptist Convention. The funds provided by groups such as this allowed African-Americans to establish colleges and provide higher education for ministers and teachers. Without the support of groups from outside the South, it is probable that these private institutions would not have existed. A discussion of the consequences of this would be mere speculation, but such consequences would have been detrimental to the future of both races because, schools like Selma University offered high school work and remedial education for adults as well as post-secondary education. The education of Emancipated African-Americans in Alabama was conducted mainly at these private institutions until the middle of the twentieth century. Without the education provided by private colleges similar to Selma University, African-American education in the Alabama would have remained limited for an indefinite period.

The establishment of private two-year colleges during Reconstruction was driven mainly

⁶ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 222.

⁷ Fallin, *Uplifting the People*, 32.

by the desires of former slaves for education, and the need for educated teachers and clergy was the main factor leading to the establishment of two-year colleges in Alabama during this period. The absence of public education was another major factor that influenced the development of private two-year colleges in the state. The demand for education was so powerful that when the return of the white Democrats to power made public education impossible, African-Americans chose simply the only educational option for African-Americans in Alabama—to create and obtain support for their own colleges. The support of groups from outside the state was the final factor that helped bring about private two-year colleges because without this support the colleges could not have come to fruition. The desire of African-Americans in Alabama for education and the willingness on the part of philanthropic groups to aid them in this pursuit, combined with the total lack of public educational options, served to foster the development of private two-year colleges in Alabama.

Factors Hindering the Establishment of Public Junior Colleges in Alabama

The second research question sought to identify the factors that hindered the development of public junior colleges in Alabama prior to World War II. Koos documents between eighty and one hundred public junior colleges as of 1924. Some Southern states, including Texas and Mississippi, had statewide systems, while other states, such as Florida and Louisiana, had municipally funded junior colleges at the local level prior to 1940. Alabama was one of the last states in the nation to establish public junior colleges, starting its first one in 1961. Key social and economic factors that are commonly attributed to the rise of junior colleges during the early part of the twentieth century were examined in earlier chapters of this work. Comparison of key economic and social factors found that the delay in public junior college establishment in Alabama did not occur because of any major difference between these factors in Alabama and

the rest of the nation.

One economic factor that is commonly cited as giving rise to public junior colleges is the national decline in agricultural employment. A dramatic decline occurred in Alabama, although it trailed the rest of the nation by a couple of decades. This study found that the percentage of agricultural jobs lost in Alabama was more than twice the national average from 1920 to 1940.⁸ High school attendance for Alabama students was very similar to the rest of the nation. The percentage of fifteen to twenty year olds attending school in Alabama was actually higher than the national average from 1910 to 1920. This would indicate that roughly as many students in Alabama, with no public junior colleges, were academically eligible for college work as were students in states with public junior colleges. By comparing these factors to the rest of the nation, the study found that the lack of public junior college development in Alabama cannot be explained by any social or economic difference between Alabama and states with public junior colleges. The delay in establishing public junior colleges in Alabama was likely caused by other factors unique to Alabama.

Several factors specific to Alabama contributed to the delay in public junior college establishment in the state, all of which are tied to the 1901 Constitution. The 1901 Constitutional Convention was dominated by the Black Belt planter class and the wealthy industrialists of central Alabama many of whom did not live in the state. The writers of the document used the Constitution as a way for this minority group to effectuate permanent control of the state. Flynt identified three major goals of the 1901 Constitution, each of which relates to the slow pace of public junior college development in Alabama. One goal of the 1901 Constitution was to disenfranchise poor whites and all blacks. This goal was largely accomplished and by doing so

⁸ This period coincided with the initial wave of junior college establishment in the United States.

effectively removed the political power of these voters to push for any bottom-up kind of educational advancement. Yet two final goals of the Convention were even more detrimental to public junior college development in Alabama.⁹

According to Flynt, the authors of the 1901 Constitution wanted to create an artificially low tax structure and make it very difficult to raise state and local taxes of any kind. This was especially true for property taxes, because both the planters and the industrialists often owned large tracts of land and wanted to pay as little tax as possible on these physical assets. Because of the fact that property taxes are often a chief method by which education is funded, Alabama's extremely low property tax structure, and the 1901 Constitution's provisions that required state action to raise local taxes, local boards of education were forced to look for other ways in which to fund education. In Alabama, local boards most often turned to regressive and volatile sales taxes because sales taxes could be raised locally without a statewide constitutional amendment. One consequence of this reliance on sales taxes for educational funds was a "boom" or "bust" budget situation. In times of economic growth and prosperity educational budgets expanded rapidly, but the slightest economic distress brought financial woes to public educational systems through "proration," the constitutionally required across-the-board budget cuts needed to bring legislatively approved expenditures into line with available revenues.

The dominant sentiment surrounding educational institutions in Alabama was uncertainty. No one knew from year to year what levels of funds would be available, and with such high uncertainty, establishing new kinds of public institutions was not an attractive option. While several consecutive years of economic growth during the "roaring twenties" gave some local school districts enough confidence to discuss the possibility of starting a junior college, the Great Depression almost caused a total collapse of the entire public educational system in

⁹ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 14.

Alabama. Without the ability to raise taxes, educational funding languished during the 1930s. Expanding educational opportunities to include public junior colleges was not possible given the strain on the state budget. Although some local boards of education might have found the funds to create a junior college, the third goal of the 1901 Constitution prevented this course of action. The argument of “how can we establish new institutions, when we cannot adequately fund those we already have?” would be heard year after year and decade after decade in Alabama.

Flynt stated that the authors of the 1901 Constitution were still feeling the sting of the “Populist revolt” of the 1890s, in which many local and county elections in Alabama were carried by Populist candidates.¹⁰ To negate the effects of future elections that did not favor the interests of the elite, the 1901 Constitution severely limited the power of local governments. Nearly every local initiative required legislative approval prior to enforcement, and if a single opposing vote was cast in the legislature, the issue had to pass as a statewide constitutional amendment. This meant that local governments could accomplish virtually nothing without the approval of the politicians in Montgomery. This process of seeking the approval of Montgomery for local initiatives eventually became part of Alabama culture, and was clearly a key factor in preventing the “bottom up” establishment of junior colleges in Alabama.

Thus, when the Cullman County Board of Education wanted to start a junior college in 1929, it felt that it was necessary to get approval from Montgomery prior establishment. In other regions of the country, a local school board could seek approval from a regional accrediting body and begin to offer classes.¹¹ No evidence was found that the desire of the Cullman County Board of Education to start a junior college was influenced by the two most common motives listed in

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹¹ Pedersen, “The Origins and Development of the Early Public Junior College,” 115.

many leading junior college histories for the establishment of junior colleges such as Wattenbarger, Vaughan, and the leading American Association of Community Colleges versions. In particular, there is no evidence at all that the desire for democratization of education was a reason that a public junior college was discussed in Cullman County. Further, there is no evidence that the “great-man theory” was a factor in the establishment of pre-1963 junior colleges in Alabama.¹² The names of famous educators, including William Rainey Harper, Henry Tappan, David Starr Jordan, Leonard Koos, Walter Crosby Eells, and Alexis Lange, do not appear in any of the historical documents from Cullman County, Alabama. The desire to start a public junior college in Cullman County was likely related to the presence of the private Catholic colleges in the area. Regardless of the desire of the people of Cullman County, the culture of Montgomery rule as embedded in the 1901 Constitution dictated that when Alabama Attorney General Charlie McCall ruled that junior colleges were unconstitutional, local officials had to drop the matter. The possibility of ignoring a directive from the state government was not an option in Alabama as it was in many other states.¹³

The lack of public junior college development in Alabama can almost totally be traced to the effects of the 1901 Constitution. By creating a funding system that is uncertain at best, the 1901 Constitution prevented the State of Alabama or any local educational board from opening a junior college because of the uncertain revenue streams required for its continued operation. The lack of funding for education brought on by artificially low taxes and the difficulty to enact even small increases prevented junior college establishment in Alabama. Finally, the tradition of state rule hindered local establishment of junior colleges. Instead of starting as experiments or initiatives of local boards of education, the local educational boards would not, or could not

¹² Frye, *The Vision of the Public Junior College*, 8.

¹³ Pedersen, “State Government and the Junior College,” 49.

even, *attempt* the establishment of junior colleges in Alabama without legislative approval. This tradition of “waiting on Montgomery” helped delay “bottom-up” public junior college establishment in Alabama until 1961.

Factors Influencing the Development of Public Trade Schools in Alabama

The third research question proposed by this study has two parts. The first part sought to identify factors that influenced the establishment of the post-secondary trade schools after World War I, and the second part sought to identify these factors following World War II. Because of the difference in motives of establishment, it is necessary to discuss these sections separately. The first institution to be discussed will be the Alabama School of Trades established at Gadsden in 1925 for the education of poor whites.

The Alabama School of Trades legislation was originally passed the Alabama Legislature in 1911, but the funds to open the institution were never released from the State Treasury. Legislation that reauthorized the Alabama School of Trades passed the legislature in 1919. The only significant difference in these two bills was the way in which the funds for the institution were to be released by the State of Alabama. The 1911 legislation left the timing and amount of funds up to the governor, whereas the 1919 legislation stipulated that the funds be released when matching funds had been raised on behalf of the institution. During this time, there were two popular movements in the country that directly influenced the establishment of the institution. The most well-known of the movements, was Progressivism, the dominant political movement of the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Progressives sought to improve the lives of the poor and working class citizens, supporting causes such as education, fair business practices, and safe food and drug legislation. Progressive politicians also emphasized the importance of bringing economic equality to working class citizens. This concern for economic empowerment

of the worker gave rise to a second factor that influenced the development of the Alabama School of Trades.

Looking for a fast, effective way to improve the economic standards of the working class, some educators and politicians began to advocate for vocational education. Vocational education prepared students to become workers in Alabama's fast-growing manufacturing industries. By preparing these workers as students, their earning power was increased immediately after the completion of their training. Vocational education allowed millions of students who had no hope of going to college to attain enough education to provide economic security for themselves and their families. Naturally, expanded vocational education programs and courses fit well into the Progressive cause, because of the near immediate impact it had on the lives of the working class. Advocates of vocational education often pitched the idea in phrases that reflected the Progressive influence on the movement. For example, the headlines that refer to the Alabama School of Trades as a school for the "poor white boys of Alabama" in part indicate the impact that the Progressive movement had on vocational education in Alabama.

Another factor that led to the creation of the Alabama School of Trades was the support of Senator Watt Brown. Here, a key individual actor obviously made a difference. Senator Brown pushed long and hard for the establishment of a vocational school that would aid poor white boys in Alabama. He authored legislation in 1911 and again in 1919, after the school authorized by the 1911 legislation was not funded, but the matching funds requirement of the legislation delayed the establishment of the school until 1925. Senator Brown's persistence in support of this institution is a critical factor that cannot be overlooked given his influence in Montgomery. Brown championed the cause of vocational education for poor whites in his area,

and worked to overcome setbacks and delays so as not to derail his goal for expanded educational opportunities for poor whites in Alabama.

A final factor that influenced the establishment of the Alabama School of Trades was the lack of funding. The choice to operate the institution as a stand-alone trade school meant that the institution did not qualify for federal funds under the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. Although state funds were eventually provided, they could only be released when the school had raised \$30,000 in matching funds. The difficulty in establishing this institution was evidenced by the fifteen-year gap between the initial authorization in 1911 and establishment in 1925, which is a reminder of the financial obstacles to education in Alabama under the 1901 Constitution. Even though Gadsden was a large industrial community by Alabama standards, it took almost five years to raise the \$30,000 matching funds requirement that was necessary to trigger the release of the matching state funds. The Alabama School of Trades highlights the difficulty of local communities to establish public post-secondary trade schools or junior colleges without new state or federal support. That significant public trade school establishment and expansion would wait until the labor shortage of World War II only underscores this point.

The establishment of the Alabama School of Trades in 1925 was mainly the result of a political movement to better the lives of the poorest Americans. This movement emphasized a relatively new type of education that focused on the practical more than the theoretical. This vocational education prepared students to become skilled workers in the workforce and to earn higher wages. In Alabama, Senator Watt Brown expressed views consistent with the Progressive movement in advocating for expanded vocational education opportunities in the state. The establishment of the Alabama School of Trades can almost totally be traced to his support and persistence. By establishing this school for “poor white boys,” Alabama extended educational

opportunities beyond the traditional academic options that then existed, and laid the groundwork for future institutions to be created.

The second part of this research question was to identify the factors that led to the establishment of public post-secondary trade schools in Alabama following World War II. The main factor that led to the creation of these institutions was the G.I. Bill. Although over 2 million veterans used their G.I. benefits to secure an academic education, more than 3.5 million used the benefits to attain vocational education.¹⁴ Generous student vouchers created an increased level of demand for vocational education in Alabama that the existing institutions in the state did not have the capacity to meet. More importantly, the G.I. Bill provided federal funds for these new institutions in the form of tuition. Without this revenue stream of payments on behalf of veterans, financial issues would likely have again prevented the development of the regional trade schools in Alabama.

Similar to the Alabama School of Trades established after World War I, the post-World War II trade schools would also have the support of a powerful legislator. Future Governor George C. Wallace authored and introduced the legislation as a freshman State Representative in 1947. Because Wallace served successfully as Governor Jim Folsom's campaign manager in Southeast Alabama, his bill was strongly supported by the new and popular governor. The support of the governor was invaluable when it came time to select the locations of the new institutions because the process was dominated by typical Alabama politics.

The authority to select the locations for the new trade schools was given to the Alabama State Board of Education under the provisions of the 1947 Regional Vocational and Trade Schools Act. From the passage of the 1901 Constitution to 1968, nine of the eleven members of Alabama State Board of Education were appointed by the governor with the governor serving

¹⁴ Mettler, *Citizens to Soldiers*, 78.

both as President of the Board and a voting member. This meant that the governor could control virtually every decision made by the Board. By 1950, when the locations of the final two trade schools were to be chosen, seven of the nine board members had been appointed by Folsom. The process was highly political, and Montgomery, which badly needed a two-year institution, did not get one because of politics. Although politics slightly marred the site selection process, the passage of the legislation represents a profound and pivotal moment in the history of public two-year education in Alabama. However, this legislation does not necessarily reflect the brilliance and foresight of Alabama leaders.

The Regional and Vocational Trade Schools Act of 1947 was passed because Alabama politicians realized that without new vocational schools, many Alabama veterans would not be able to use their G.I. benefits. This reaction indicates the kind of response typical of Alabama government in regards to education. The State of Alabama consistently followed a *reactive* course of action when dealing with public two-year education, and did virtually nothing until it was absolutely necessary. Instead of charting its own proactive educational path, Alabama reacted to the problems and conflicts that came its way. It took a near crisis to secure the public support to significantly expand two-year educational opportunities in the state. Had state leaders not been disturbed by the possibility that World War II veterans might not be able to use their G.I. benefits because of a lack of local institutions, it is likely that the legislation authorizing the regional trade schools would not have passed the legislature.

Factors that Influenced the Development of the First Public Junior Colleges in Alabama

The establishment of the first public junior college in Alabama reflected the reactive course of action typical of the history of Alabama two-year education. Efforts to start public junior colleges in Alabama gained momentum during the end of the 1950s. This period coincides

with the widespread realization of the effects the impending baby boom would have on institutions of higher education. Beginning in 1964, the graduating classes of U.S. high schools would be larger than 4 million students each year, and this trend would continue for at least twelve more years. Alabama leaders began to realize that unless something was done to expand the existing number of institutions, the larger numbers of graduates would overwhelm the higher education system in the state then in existence.

The 1958 Alabama Educational Commission, created after the Sputnik launch, thus included a Committee on Higher Education. The Higher Education Committee was further subdivided into subcommittees, including one that dealt with junior colleges. The Junior College Subcommittee issued a report calling for the creation of a junior college system in Alabama in order to handle the coming enrollment boom. The Subcommittee suggested the creation of junior college districts that would house a locally controlled and funded junior college. In the Subcommittee's opinion, junior colleges were the most desirable way for Alabama to deal with the baby boom enrollment crisis. Although the report was sophisticated and grounded in the literature of the time, few suggestions included in the Subcommittee's report were used in the 1963 legislation that created what would become the Alabama Community College System.

The Subcommittee's report led to legislation authorizing three junior colleges in Alabama. The first of these colleges was authorized in September of 1961 and came to be known as Northwest Alabama State Junior College. The combination of local support and a small amount of funding provided by the legislation allowed this college to open in August of 1963. The college closely resembled the recommendations of the Junior College Subcommittee in that a junior college district consisting of Winston, Franklin, and Marion Counties was created. The institution was also under local control and had a governing board that included members from

all the counties in the district. This institution would become the first public junior college in the State of Alabama.

One of the other two colleges authorized prior to 1963, which did not open under the initial legislation that authorized it, was also examined by the researcher was the junior college authorized for DeKalb and Jackson Counties, in the far northeastern corner of the state. Reasons for its failure to open seem clear, when comparing it to Northwest Alabama Junior College. The authorizing legislation for the junior college in Jackson and DeKalb Counties did not include any state appropriations, requiring the college to be started from local funding alone. The procurement of local funding seems to have been a problem because of an unenthusiastic public in the two counties. The public school systems in both counties were operating with very limited budgets, and the DeKalb County School District was in the middle of building two new high schools. Without the ability to raise new taxes as a consequence of the 1901 Constitution, these counties simply lacked the funds to start a junior college on their own. In contrast, Senator Rankin Fite, a key player in the mid-century Alabama Legislature, saw to it that state funds were appropriated to start Northwest Alabama Junior College. It would take several years and additional state legislation before Northeast Alabama Junior College would be started to serve the people of DeKalb and Jackson Counties.

Again, "bottom up" efforts to start public junior colleges were hindered by the 1901 Constitution. The model of establishment proposed by the Junior College Subcommittee in 1958 was based on sound research drawn from the experience of other states, but these recommendations could not be adopted in Alabama due to the limitations on local governments imposed by the 1901 Constitution. The case of Northwest Alabama State Junior College and the junior college that failed to open in DeKalb or Jackson County indicates that even when a local

junior college district was created, the district still did not have authority to levy new taxes to support the junior college. Such authority would require a constitutional amendment approved after a statewide ballot; thus a locally funded and controlled junior college system in Alabama was not possible without significant changes to the 1901 Constitution. Instead of making the changes needed to create a system of junior colleges that could be operated in keeping with recommendations from across the nation, Alabama leaders created a system prior to 1963 that was controlled, funded, and coordinated by the State of Alabama.

Conclusions

At least one major conclusion can be drawn from the research conducted in this study: The 1901 Constitution has been a major hindrance in the establishment of two-year education in Alabama. By removing local control and limiting local tax levies, the 1901 Constitution almost completely prevented the local establishment of public two-year colleges. This caused the establishment of two-year colleges to be started by Montgomery instead of local communities who were usually more open to the idea of a local two-year college. The 1929 attorney general's opinion that denied Cullman County School the right to start a junior without state approval is an example of this state-centered control. The institutions that were established in Alabama under the provisions of the 1901 Constitution reflect the very state-centered type of government imposed by the Constitution. All were officially governed by the Alabama State Board of Education with little to no local control.

The funding for these institutions was also provided by the state, with few communities contributing to the college budget. In a state with limited finances this obstacle to local funding was an added burden on the finances of public two-year colleges prior to 1963. It is also worth noting that significant development in two-year colleges did not begin until federal funds began

to flow into the State from the VEND program and later the G.I. Bill. Nearly half of the public two-year institutions prior to 1963 owe their origins to federal funds. Flynt claims that the removal of local control and local power to levy taxes was a major goal of the 1901 Constitution. This study found that these goals were accomplished in regards to the development of two-year education in Alabama and severely restricted their development.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is the need for a powerful champion at the state level in order for a new educational institution to be successful in Alabama. This study found that a state-level champion not only had to push through the authorizing legislation, but also had to secure funding if the institution was ever be opened. Due to the limits on all state government action in the 1901 Constitution, legislative authorization by itself was for all intents worthless without legislative appropriations, due to the chronic lack of educational revenue. For instance, the main failure of Senator Brown's 1911 legislation authorizing the Alabama School of Trades was its failure to provide state funds to operate the institution. Although legally authorized, it would not open until 1925 because state funds were not available, and the 1911 legislation did not require the appropriation. Had Senator Watt Brown not have continued to serve in the Alabama Senate for so many terms, it is likely that the institution would never have opened.

The need for a state-level champion to secure operating funds was evident again in both the establishment of trade schools after World War II and in establishing public junior colleges in the early 1960s, prior to George C. Wallace's first term as Governor, which started in 1963. The years after WWII saw the first state action to create public two-year institutions--trade schools that quickly evolved into technical institutions and then technical colleges. While freshman State Representative George C. Wallace authored the Regional Trade and Vocational

School Act of 1947, the strong support during the two terms of Governor James "Big Jim" Folsom was even more decisive. As Governor, Folsom chaired the Alabama State Board of Education, which had a critically important role in selecting the sites for the trade schools approved in 1947, and a second set of institutions in 1955, as his second term began. The choice of expanding the separate but equal system of postsecondary education in Alabama - the state already had a black normal college (Alabama State) and a black land-grant college (Alabama A&M) when creating state-operated white and black trade schools was clearly to forestall possible forced integration efforts by the federal government through the courts. Thus, this too predates the Wallace governorships. Again, the need for a state-level champion was vital, and two-year colleges had them in the personage of the self-described "little man's big friend" (Folsom was 6'8" tall).

A state level champion to secure operating funds was needed again in 1961, when the first publicly controlled junior college was established in Alabama. Legislation authored by Senator and former House Speaker Rankin Fite authorizing two public junior colleges was passed, authorizing one public junior college in northeast Alabama and in his legislative district in northwest Alabama. The only difference between Northwest Alabama State Junior College in Phil Campbell and the failure to open the legislatively authorized junior college in northeast Alabama was that the bill included operating appropriations for one and none for the other. The legislative delegation in northwest Alabama had a powerful champion--former House Speaker Rankin Fite, whose political prowess secured funds to operate Northwest Alabama Junior College. Again, without powerful friends in Montgomery, an institution legally authorized to be established would be doomed, because the lack of local funding to support the institution meant state funding was necessary. It is therefore no accident that a broad two-year public

system of junior, technical, and community colleges could not develop in Alabama prior to 1963 without a champion in the Governor's office.

Recommendations

This study has attempted to establish a comprehensive history of two-year education in Alabama before 1963. Although the study makes no claims to have covered all institutions or events during this time, every effort was made to include the events that changed the course of two-year education in the state. Prior to this study, the history of two-year education in Alabama prior to 1963 was virtually unrecorded. Thus, the overarching goal of this study was to document and record the early history prior to 1963. This history has not been recorded from a national perspective but from a local standpoint focusing on Alabama people and events. In spite of the effort to be thorough, some institutions were left out of the study. Only half of the institutions created prior to 1961 were examined, but this does not mean that the others are not worthy of study. Although a history of some of the institutions omitted by this study has been written, the history of the majority has not been recorded.¹⁵ The six white denominational junior colleges established in Alabama between 1890 and 1940 represent an area that needs additional study. Because they all were sponsored by a major Christian denomination, the records of each institution should be attainable through the archives of the respective sponsor.

A secondary goal of this study was to provide a background for understanding the post-1963 development of two-year education in Alabama. This study serves as the first half of a comprehensive history of two-year education in Alabama from Reconstruction to the twenty-first century, but the second half has not been written. Although some events of the Wallace era have been recorded in the literature, a comprehensive history of the Wallace era has yet to have been

¹⁵ A history of Snead Junior College prior to 1940 was written in 1940 by Alta Millican, and a history of Concordia College titled *Light in the Dark Belt* was written by Rosa Young in 1951. Other than these two examples, the author knows of no other histories of the remaining institutions.

written. The way in which public junior colleges and trade schools were established after 1963 needs more attention. Also, there is almost no record of the mergers that occurred after 1985. The mergers need to be documented in order to understand the way in which the Alabama Community College System evolved into its current form. When a thorough history of the events during and after the Wallace era is combined with this study, a near complete historic account of two-year college development in Alabama will exist.

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