

Tift bloomed in the 1970s

In just nine days, long-dormant Tift College will open for business in its newest incarnation as the headquarters for the Georgia Department of Corrections. To get ready, the Reporter has been looking back at Tift's roller-coaster history. This week, former Tift College English professor and administrator Dr. Cathryn Futral describes life on campus in the 1970s, with help from the Reporter archives.

BY DR. CATHRYN FUTRAL

The 1970's for Tift College began with optimism and ended with division. It foreshadowed the 1980's

Dr. Robert W. Jackson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dalton, was named president of Tift in 1969. The Trustees followed the tradition of choosing a Baptist minister for the position. Dr. Jackson was a good choice in many ways: he was well educated, he was sincerely spiritual, he had a desirable cultural level of sophistication, he had an attractive wife and two sons, he was very interested in higher education, and he had an appealing, interesting vision of what Tift College could become.

The 1971 yearbook, *The Chiaroscuro*, noted that in September 1969, Dr. Jackson had said that he would strive for a better relationship between the Administration and the students with a program allowing students to take part in the governing functions of the campus.

The Tift tradition marking the beginning of the school year was the ceremony of Investiture. There was a formal procession of the faculty in academic regalia, special music and prayers, and a welcoming and inspiring speech. Then the Dean of Students awarded each senior her cap and gown. The new president was the speaker, and he challenged the students to "To Go with the Wind."

That same year, at the request of the students, the first official dance was held at Tift College. The Lottery, a band from Atlanta, performed, and a new tradition was added.

Traditions were always important at Tift. Some disappeared because of changes in the campus complex. Because of the new dining hall, meals were no longer served family style to students assigned specific seats; no longer did seniors eat in a section separated by glass doors, an atmosphere too rarefied for mere juniors, sophomores, and freshmen.

In the 1940's Tift College seniors in their full academic regalia marched from the campus in almost perfect cadence to the First Baptist Church, Forsyth. But in 1970 such a ceremony would have been labeled at best strange and at worst passe. Perhaps most ceremonies and traditions have always seemed so to some.

Many students valued their importance and gained grace from Tift

traditions: their values, their uniqueness, their camaraderie. Students' minds and hearts and ideals and talents were sometimes stretched and strengthened and molded.

In a 1972 Symposium on "The Future of Tift," Monroe County Bank president Karl Hill said that Tift raises the cultural and educational level of the community of Forsyth. Hill became Chairman of the "Dimensions for a new Decade" campaign, a plan to build a three-story classroom, administration building and to renovate Columbus Roberts auditorium. The goal was \$4 million.

That goal was not reached, but the classroom, Administration Building and the renovation of Columbus Roberts Auditorium, including a new Schantz pipe organ, the gift of Tift graduate Mrs. C.O. Smith and her husband, were accomplished in the 1970's.

President Jackson and Dr. I.W. Bowen, long time Professor of Religion, joined town and gown on regularly scheduled trips to Europe.

The world outside of Tift came to the campus through concerts, plays, and visiting speakers, such as Mrs. Rosalyn Carter, the Moscow Folk Ballet, Norman Vincent Peale, Hal Holbrook, the National Players, Dr. Joyce Brothers, Gov. Jimmy Carter and Mrs. Betty Talmadge.

In addition to the Thomas F. Staley Distinguished Scholar Series, Dr. and Mrs. Carey T. Vinzant established a trust to provide for a Vinzant Lectures Series.

During this decade, Tift began a consortium with Mercer University for the Master of Education degree; half of the courses would be taught at Tift and half at Mercer. Tift also began a joint enrollment program with Mary Persons and with Monroe Academy in which qualified seniors could take limited freshmen courses taught by college professors.

There were other innovations studied by the Trustees and the Administration. The financial situation was always a challenge. The endowment was never larger than \$7 million, and many of the students came from families of ministers, from small town fathers who wanted a fine education and safety for their daughters, from an occasional missionary kid. When daughters no longer would agree to go to a small, rural, single sex college, enrollment began to falter.

There were discussions about the possibility of coeducation, discussions about incorporating a convention center, and finally, an agreement to develop an extended education program with coeducational campus centers in nearby towns without colleges. The first program was a sister relationship with a Baptist Junior College, Brewton Parker, offering their students the opportunity to complete their last two years while still in residence at the junior college. Then programs



were established in Thomaston, in Douglas county, in Perry, and in Griffin.

The enrollment in these off-campus centers alleviated the financial difficulties of a student body that had shrunk from 500 to 250, and the enrollment reached 800.

Because of the diversity of programs, the dependence on the external programs, and the sad failure to attract sufficient numbers of young women who had been the heart of the institution, Tift evolved into a different entity.

The founding core of the extended education program had come from the establishment of an Evening Division concept to be offered by Tift College professors in prison settings to guards and qualified inmates who wanted to complete their college education. That program lasted only one year because the Trustees, at the behest of some alumnae and friends, eliminated it from Tift in 1979. That prison program was immediately incorporated by Mercer University. The Monroe County Reporter noted that some current students thought the elimination was right, and some others thought it was wrong.

There was also dissension at Tift in 1976, when the Macon Telegraph reported on its front page that Tift would have open house in the dorms on Sunday afternoons from 3-6. The Trustees were concerned that such a policy could tarnish the reputations of the young women. A visiting brother, father, or friend would have to sign in and leave his driver's licence at a front desk. One house mother resigned to protest the policy.

It was in the 1970's that a Tift student was arrested in the biggest drug raid in Monroe County history. Her sentence was later reversed by the Appeals court, but that sad reality made headlines in the Monroe County Reporter.

Some cultural changes are so gradual that they are hard to recognize, and other cultural changes are so abrupt that the differences are too painful, too obvious. That relentless, hard task master of cultural change was found at Tift College in the 1970's.

Dr. Cathryn Futral was an administrator and professor of English at Tift College, and lives in Forsyth.

