



North Carolina A&T State University: A Brief History to 1945

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Foundations for an Agricultural and Mechanical College

The North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University was established in 1891 as a land grant college. This foundation was made possible with the second Morrill Act, which was passed by Congress on August 30, 1890. The act provided for the “more complete endowment and maintenance of colleges for the benefit of agricultural and mechanical colleges now established or which may be established hereafter.”¹ \$15,000 a year was given to each territory or state for creation of such colleges.² The following year on March 9, 1891, the North Carolina legislature passed the law establishing the A(gricultural) and M(echanical) College For The Colored Race. The main objective of this new college was to “teach practical agriculture and the mechanic arts and such learning as related thereto, not excluding academic and classical instruction.”³ The college began in Raleigh as an annex to Shaw University. During those early years, there were 37 students. These students had four instructors, one in mathematics, horticulture, agriculture, and English.⁴

In 1892, the Board of Trustees began the search for a new site for the college. Six cities,

¹ Pitts, G. *North Carolina A&T Essay*.

² Gibbs, W. T. *History of the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College*, 3.

³ Agricultural and mechanical arts included agriculture science, military science, and engineering.

⁴ Brooks, F. E. & Starks, G. L. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: An Encyclopedia*.

Winston (now Winston-Salem), Durham, Mebane, Greensboro, Wilmington, and Raleigh applied as possible locations for the new college. On March 3rd, the proposal by a group of Greensboro citizens to locate the college to their city was voted upon and accepted.⁵ This proposal included the donation of 14 acres of land for the site with an additional \$11,000 in cash to contribute to the construction of the buildings. This amount was supplemented by an appropriation of \$2,500 from the General Assembly of North Carolina.⁶

Dr. John O. Crosby and the New College

On April 27, 1892 at a meeting of the Board of Trustees, Professor John O. Crosby of Salisbury, NC and a graduate of Shaw, was elected as the first president of the college with five of the eight votes. Crosby was instrumental in the foundation of the new school. He not only designed the original main building but also made the first brick of which it was built.⁷ The building was constructed by students enrolled in the department of industries and was completed in 1893.⁸ Under Crosby's leadership, the departments of agriculture and departments of mechanic arts formed.⁹ The student newspaper *The Register* and the first school catalog were first published in 1894.

Dr. James B. Dudley

Dr. James Benson Dudley became president in 1896 and served until his death in 1925. Dudley is said to be the leader to A&M, as Booker T. Washington was to Tuskegee, a slavery born, educated pioneer of education. Although Dudley was not the founder of A&M, he was perhaps the most instrumental individual in the college's growth. During

⁵ Pitts, G.

⁶ Pitts, G.

⁷ Spruill 2. The original administration building was destroyed by fire in 1930. Gibbs 9.

⁸ Brooks & Starks 115.

⁹ Brooks & Starks 115.

his presidency, the college increased from one building on 26 acres of land with less than 100 students to a 13 building campus on 100 acres with over 450 students.¹⁰ New courses at A&M included carpentry, horticulture, electrical engineering, domestic science, poultry raising, blacksmithing, dramatic arts, and music. No other person in the university's history has been as honored as Dudley.¹¹

In 1902, the board of trustees made A&M into an all-male college for multiple reasons concerning opposition to a co-educational campus and housing.¹² During that period, women were still enrolled in the summer sessions of the newly formed teaching department. The college reinstated female enrollment in 1926. In 1915, the state legislature changed the college's name to The Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina.

World War I

During the First World War, at least five faculty members (out of twenty-five) were serving overseas.¹³ A&T has a significant military history, which began during this time. The Junior Unit of Army R.O.T.C. was inaugurated in 1919 and a department of military science was established at the college by the War Department in 1920.¹⁴ There were three professors of military science between the two World Wars, one of whom was Warmoth T. Gibbs, later inducted as president of the college in 1956.¹⁵

¹⁰ Spruill 33.

¹¹ Named in his memory, there is the Dudley Memorial Building, Dudley Street, and the James B. Dudley High School.

¹² Wedin, C. *Encyclopedia of African American history, 1896 to the Present: from the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century*, 512.

¹³ Gibbs 44.

¹⁴ Pitts, G.

¹⁵ Gibbs 49-50. Gibbs was a history professor, served as the dean of men, and the dean of the School of Education and General Studies.

Ferdinand B. Bluford

Following the death of James B. Dudley in 1925, Ferdinand C. Bluford became the third president. Under his presidency, the University continued to expand with the addition of many of the still existing college buildings like Benbow, Curtis, Holland, Cooper, Campbell, Holland, and the present A&T Farm.¹⁶ The Agricultural and Technical College continued to receive national attention. A&T was given “A” certifications by the several national education associations. By 1939, the graduate school was established and offered degrees in agriculture, applied sciences, and technology.¹⁷ The fiftieth anniversary celebration of A&T began in the fall of 1940 and led up to an education conference held March 6–9 1941 to commemorate the General Assembly act of 1891.

The Aggies in World War II

With a military science program, an already nationally recognized band, and as a leading producer of mechanics and engineers, A&T was skillfully prepared for World War II. In 1942, about fifty percent of the college band formed a unit to serve as part of the U.S. Navy bands.¹⁸ They were originally stationed at the Naval Training Center at the University of North Carolina (at Chapel Hill).¹⁹ Their absence was a felt during the following college commencement. The college’s Reserve Corps members were called

¹⁶ Gibbs 67. The original A&T farm on East Market Street was sold is currently the location of the Lorillard Tobacco Company. The current farm is off of McConnell Road.

¹⁷ As of this writing, A&T currently offers 54 master’s degrees.

¹⁸ Gibbs 117. The band director at the time was Bernard Lee Mason, who received wide recognition for the band. According to Gibbs, the band came to the attention of the U.S. Navy when a recruiter saw them perform and wanted the whole band to join the Navy. Unfortunately some were too young, but the majority weren’t.

¹⁹ Gibbs 25. This center was also called a Pre-Flight Officers Training Unit.

into service in 1943, which removed many upper class scholars and leaders.²⁰

Unfortunately, some young servicemen from the campus lost their lives during the war.²¹ The absence of males led to some campus milestones for women, like Barbara Canada becoming the first female student government president.²²

Since 1920, civilian instructors had conducted the military drill programs of the Junior R.O.T.C. Now with the war emergency it was turned into a Senior Reserve Officers Training Corps or S.R.O.T.C..²³ After ten years, a senior Air Force R.O.T.C unit was established in 1951. The Army Basic Training Center (B.T.C) and later Overseas Replacement Depot (O.R.D.) was located in proximity to the campus from 1943-1946. Over 330,000 white and African American servicemen and women were processed there before the base was demolished.

A Legacy after the War

The end of the Second World War propelled America into a future of advanced sciences, nuclear fears, and the baby boom. This meant a growing demand for men and women who were qualified in science and engineering. Since the end of World War II, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, as it has been called since 1967, has emerged as one of America's leading producers of minorities with degrees in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, with over 100 different degree fields offered. The A&T legacy has been one of academics, industry, science, technology, and making history.

²⁰ Gibbs 153.

²¹ Among these men was James Reid '40, a horticulture instructor for whom the Reid Greenhouse was named. (Spruill *Historic Tour* 26).

²² Gibbs 153.

²³ The original military drill instructor in 1919 was B.W. Barnes who a civilian with some military training.

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