

Preface



THAT EACH AMERICAN university shares many features with all the others while also being in various ways unique is a truism. While the unique aspects derive from many things—such as location, mission, and origins—all of these are bound up and reflected in the institution's history. The early, nineteenth-century portion of Duke's history has been competently and fully covered in Nora C. Chaffin's *Trinity College, 1839–1892: The Beginnings of Duke University* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1950). From the modest school begun by Methodist and Quaker farmers in Randolph county in Piedmont North Carolina to the move of Trinity College to Durham, Chaffin recounts in a careful, scholarly fashion how the institution evolved from Brown's Schoolhouse to Union Institute Academy and finally, in 1859, to Methodist-sponsored Trinity College. Chaffin shows how the remarkable dedication, sacrifice, and leadership of one man, Braxton Craven, kept the small, struggling institution alive. Indeed, the most remarkable thing about Trinity College down to 1892 was that it survived.

Picking up the story where Chaffin stopped, Earl W. Porter, in *Trinity and Duke, 1892–1924: Foundations of Duke University* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1964), splendidly reveals how Trinity College gradually became a strong liberal arts college by the time of World War I and how under the leadership of three outstanding presidents—John F. Crowell, John C. Kilgo, and William P. Few—the institution finally began to solve its hitherto unending financial problems and came to be supported by Washington Duke and his family. Although a significant portion



of Duke University's history was rooted in and foreshadowed by Trinity's history, especially after 1892, there seemed to be no point in going back over ground that Chaffin and Porter have well covered. Thus this history focuses on the organization of a research university around Trinity College after December, 1924.

The term "research university" was not commonly used in the 1920s, and President Few and his allies talked of building a "major university" or a "national university." James B. Duke, the principal underwriter of the new university, spoke of his hope that the institution would attain "a place of real leadership in the educational world" and explicitly endorsed the plan of organization that Few had provided. Because "university" is and always has been a loosely used, imprecise word in the United States, I have chosen to use throughout the term "research university," since that was precisely what Duke was meant to be and quickly became.

Duke's history as a research university has a certain larger interest and significance partly because of timing. With the Johns Hopkins University leading the way in 1876, a group of older, private institutions in the Northeast and state-supported ones in the Midwest soon partially emulated the Johns Hopkins model and also became research universities. By the turn of the century these various universities had clearly established themselves as the premier educational institutions of the nation. Complex and expensive, they formed an increasingly important, elite segment of the nation's educational system.

Primarily because of persistent and widespread poverty, the South long failed to share in the revolution that reshaped much of higher education in the other sections of the country. State-supported universities in Charlottesville, Virginia; Austin, Texas; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, did, however, begin to arouse and gradually transform themselves in the early decades of the twentieth century. And Trinity's President Few had the audacity to hope that the college in Durham might become the nucleus or heart, as he preferred to say, of the first voluntarily supported research university in the South.

By the 1920s, when Few and J. B. Duke collaborated, the strengths as well as the hazards of the research-university model were quite clear. Duke, therefore, became such an institution in a more self-conscious, deliberate, and expeditious fashion than was true in most other cases. Few and his coworkers meant for Duke to be a different kind of research university in two particular ways. First, Few believed, quite correctly, that in the rush to emphasize research and the training of graduate and professional students, many universities had woefully shortchanged undergraduates and liberal education. He meant for Duke to be different and to keep its undergraduate colleges and their students as priority items right alongside the graduate and professional schools. The task would prove

to be difficult but certainly not impossible, and the university's development during its first quarter-century would show the largely successful realization of Few's plan.

President Few wanted Duke to be different in another way also, and that was in the area of religion. He believed that many research universities had for various reasons either downplayed or actually ignored the religious dimension of life and the place of religion in higher education. Without religious tests for either students or faculty, Duke, according to the plans of Few and his collaborators, would try to maintain its friendly but not constricting relationship with the Methodist church; to treat religion, both as a subject for study and as an aspect of life, with great respect and to provide for it supportive policies; and to afford every opportunity for students voluntarily to participate in religious activities.

The new university encountered many problems, of course, some to be expected, some unforeseen and growing out of special circumstances. Perhaps the most predictable problem, and one certainly shared with at least a few other research universities that strove for balance, was the tension between research and teaching, a tension that was reflected not only in various university policies and appointments but in the lives of individual faculty members and in the operations of their departments. Although Few himself had a mistaken notion that those faculty members who primarily taught undergraduates could be differentiated from those who dealt with advanced students, the effects of that shortsighted view were overcome, at least in most departments, by chairmen and senior faculty members who from the first tried to recruit scholar-teachers, that is, men and women who were capable of doing significant research as well as interested in and willing to undertake the teaching of undergraduates. Moreover, there turned out to be less money available for the university than was originally anticipated, and practical exigencies soon dictated that senior faculty members, including the most distinguished ones, had to share in the teaching of both undergraduate and graduate students.

The largest unforeseen problem, aside from the shortage of funds, that Duke encountered arose from the fact that the university had its own governing board of trustees, while the perpetual philanthropic trust that J. B. Duke established late in 1924, the Duke Endowment, had a separate board of trustees. Since down to World War II the university derived approximately half of its annual income from the Endowment, the fact that the trustees of the Endowment were empowered, under certain circumstances, to withhold funds from the university turned out to be a troublesome and dangerous matter for President Few and the university and one that, from the late 1920s until the mid-1930s, caused Few his greatest worry. While he finally worked out a solution to the problem that proved to be satisfactory, at least during his lifetime and during President

Robert L. Flowers's administration in the 1940s, the matter of potential conflict between the two boards was a most serious one.

By the early 1990s, the relationship between the Duke Endowment and Duke University had been maintained successfully for nearly seventy years. While the support that the university received from the Endowment grew steadily larger in dollar amounts over the decades, the proportion of that valuable, even indispensable support to the whole amount of the university's annual income shrank as income increased from tuition, the university's own endowment, and governmental as well as private agencies. Looking back from the early 1990s, therefore, one might be tempted to conclude that a smooth and largely happy outcome was inevitable, but that would be reading history backwards and would distort the sometimes painful realities and uncertainties of the early years.

Another problem that was unique to Duke as a research university was that it inherited from Trinity a strong, deep-rooted commitment to be of as much service as possible to North Carolina and the southeastern region. At the same time, Duke aspired to be a national university (and, later in the century, an international one). This double mission brought problems, especially concerning admissions and with the university's trustees and older alumni. In the main, Few and Flowers, aided by numerous others, managed to keep a balance and remain in pursuit of both objectives. It took considerable effort, however, and added another, distinctive theme to Duke's history.

The first quarter-century of the university's history forms a unit, therefore, not merely because it happened to coincide with the administrations of Few and Flowers but primarily because those were the formative and most critical years for the expanded institution. No other president of Duke has faced or will ever face quite the challenges and opportunities that came to William P. Few. He necessarily looms large in the pages that follow, although a vast number of other people assisted significantly in the building of the university.

When a troubled time came to Duke in the years immediately after World War II, the institution both suffered in certain respects and took various steps that better prepared it for the last half of the century. As Few once said, Duke was successfully embarked on a long journey.

This is not, in any sense, an authorized or official history of Duke's first quarter-century. Acting completely on my own, I began the research for it almost a decade ago and undertook the project because it needed doing and because, in one sense, it continued a story that I had begun to tell in *The Dukes of Durham* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975). There the focus had been on Washington Duke and his family, especially the two youngest sons, Benjamin N. and James B. Duke. While such a

family history naturally included considerable attention to the family's involvement in the tobacco, textile, and electrical power industries, a main theme throughout the book was the family's philanthropic activity and particularly the Dukes' creative entanglement with Trinity College from about 1890 onward. The philanthropic culmination came late in 1924, when James B. Duke established the Duke Endowment and made possible the organization of a new university around Trinity College. Those matters are dealt with in the last two chapters of *The Dukes of Durham*. In this study the focus shifts from the family to the university itself, and to President William Preston Few and his associates, who began to create the university that James B. Duke's gift had made possible.

Too many people have generously befriended me in this undertaking for me to risk the attempt to list them here. Nevertheless, I greatly appreciate all the help. A large number of active and retired members of the faculty kindly read portions of the manuscript that dealt with their own departments or schools. One group of friends and colleagues, however, critically read all or a large portion of the manuscript, so I particularly thank Frances Brown, Jeff Crow, Paul Escott, Charles Flynn, Bill Holley, Bill King, and Harold Parker.

My research was done largely in our first-rate University Archives, a treasure trove of data not only about Duke but also about American higher education—and myriad other matters—in this century. For graciously taking me on as practically a live-in researcher and constantly helping me in countless ways, I thank William E. King, the archivist, and his associates, Thomas Harkins and Doris Parrish.

In the history department, Vivian Jackson and Grace Guyer, as they have done for many years and other writings of mine, efficiently and graciously typed all the chapters. I am deeply indebted to them and value their friendship as well as their services.

Three chapters in this volume have appeared earlier, in somewhat different form, in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, and I am grateful to its publishers for permission to reprint them.

Anne Oller Durden, my wife, has patiently listened to more Duke history than she ever bargained for. Moreover, she has promised to help, as usual, with the onerous task of compiling what promises to be a whopping index. I can hardly thank her enough and, at the same time, I hope that she will share the mixed pleasures, Providence willing, of a future volume in Duke's history.

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