

Bishop Polk's Letter to Southern Bishops

Bishop Polk is shown seated at his writing desk in New Orleans. For twenty years he had been accumulating data about European and American universities. He wrote a 4,000 word letter dated July 1, 1856, to his fellow bishops in the South, telling them that the time had come to build an Episcopal educational center.

Bishops Issue Manifesto

At the general convocation in Philadelphia in October 1856, the southern bishops gathered for a special meeting in response to Polk's letter. Present were James Hervey Otey of Tennessee, Leonidas Polk of Louisiana, Stephen Elliott of Georgia, Nicholas Hamner Cobbs of Alabama, William Mercer Green of Mississippi, Thomas F. Davis of South Carolina, Francis Huger Rutledge of Florida, and George W. Freeman of Arkansas. Texas at the time was diocese, but it did not have bishop. Virginia was not included because it had a seminary and other schools of its own. The Rt. Rev. Thomas Underwood Dudley finally brought in Kentucky as an owning diocese in the 1880's. Nine bishops, therefore, gathered to read and discuss Polk's letter and finally sign a manifesto endorsing it. Independence Hall can be seen in through the window in the background.

Founding Meeting of the Board of Trustees

The pageantry of the Lookout Mountain meeting July 4, 1857, was carefully planned. A wooden stage was set on the edge of the mountain, overlooking Moccasin Bend. Future Bishop Henry Champlin Lay is taking minutes. Otey, the Chancellor, made the principal address. A moment of high drama passed when the American flag, which had been hanging idly at its staff, wrapped itself around the principal speaker just as he proclaimed that the new university would be national, not sectional, in character. Col. Albert Miller Lea of Knoxville, marshal of the procession, stepped forward to unwrap the flag.

The University Domain

On the invitation of President V.K. Stevenson of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, a group of Sewanee Trustees and friends met at Cowan to visit the proposed university site in Sewanee in 1857. They detrained and mounted horses at Gipson's Switch and rode to the various views and springs. Shown here are Samuel F. Tracey, then president of the Sewanee Mining Company, Arthur St. Clair Colyar, a succeeding president, Francis B. Fogg, Nashville attorney, Wallace Estill, member of a pioneer family of Franklin County and Bishop Polk.

Planning the Campus

In a simple mountain log cabin in 1859, four men gathered together to look at maps of the domain. Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont, a civil engineer, is seated at right. Standing to the left of the table is John Castleberry. Seated next to Hopkins is Bishop Leonidas Polk, second Chancellor, and at the rear is the University's first engineer, West Pointer Charles R. Barrey, who had just finished building the railroad up the mountain from Cowan. The cabin is described in a letter, which Bishop Hopkins wrote to his wife in the winter of 1859.

Laying the Cornerstone

Bishop Stephen Elliott, the third Chancellor, is shown placing the prayer book in the cornerstone on October 10, 1860. On his right is Bishop Polk, also a principal and an acolyte in the ceremony. On the other side of the six-ton piece of pink marble is the Rev. John Freeman Young, a future Bishop of Florida, who led the singing of the vested choir.