

## **Trinity College Bell and Memorial Gazebo**

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The Trinity College Memorial Gazebo, located on the southwest corner of NC Highway 62 and Trinity College Road in Trinity, North Carolina, marks the site of Trinity College, a Methodist institution founded in 1859. The college was moved to Durham in 1892, and formed the core of what would become Duke University. In 1984, following a six-year fundraising effort, local organizers erected the gazebo and placed in it a bell donated by Duke that was used at Trinity College during its tenure in Randolph County. Supporting the roof of the gazebo are eight columns from the college chapel, and adorning the approach are two urns that marked the entrance to the college.

Trinity had its origins in Brown's Schoolhouse, a one-room log school erected by community fathers in the late 1830s. Even after a connected brush arbor was added, the growing number of students necessitated a larger structure. The Methodists of what was to become Trinity and the Quakers of nearby Bush Hill (now Archdale) joined together and formed the Union Institute, the name being adopted to note the union of the two denominations. The first principal, Brantley York (1805-1891), served until 1842; he was succeeded by his assistant, Braxton Craven (1822-1882). Both were from Randolph County, and both were Methodist ministers and educators. The Quakers, unhappy with the predominantly Methodist atmosphere of the school, pulled out and focused their monies and energies on the school at Springfield, a Quaker community in nearby Guilford County, and Greensboro's New Garden Boarding School (now Guilford College). It fell to Craven to find financial support for the school in order to sustain it. Beginning in 1849, he advocated for the school to become a Normal College, or teacher training institution, and control was turned over to the State. When the Normal College did not flourish, he sought support from the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1859, Trinity College was established as a Methodist institution with a liberal arts curriculum and Craven as president.

The college remained open during most of the Civil War and afterwards thrived, growing in enrollment and reputation, and graduating many men who rose to prominence in their communities and in the state. When Craven died in 1882, three Methodist businessmen – John Wesley Alspaugh (1831-1912), Julian Carr (1845-1924) and James Gray – took on the well-being of the college. In 1887, they recruited John Franklin Crowell (1857-1931), a Pennsylvanian and Yale graduate known as a progressive educator, as president. In Pennsylvania, Crowell had experienced the less than successful relocation of a school from an urban setting to a rural one. Arriving in bucolic Trinity, he feared for the college's future if it did not take root in a population center (he observed that one had to go to High Point just to get a haircut) and find a strong financial backer.

Crowell envisioned the college as a major university. He set about finding a new home for Trinity, while at the same time enhancing the college's performance and prestige, including the addition of intercollegiate athletics. Several cities vied to become the site of the relocated college, but Durham, with financial support from tobacco magnate Washington Duke (1820-1905) and land donated by Julian Carr, won out. Loss of the college was a blow to the residents of Trinity, and the cause of bitterness among some for years to come.<sup>1</sup> In Durham, the college was slated to begin classes in 1891, but the collapse of a key building while under construction delayed the move by a year. The name Trinity was retained. In 1924, owing to the support of

Duke's son James Buchanan Duke (1856-1925) and creation of the Duke Endowment, Trinity became a college within Duke University.

### **The Trinity Bell**

The Trinity bell provided by Duke University in 1984 was at least the third bell used at the college during its time in Randolph County. In 1876, the college's "old" bell cracked, "which destroyed its sound."<sup>2</sup> A replacement was ordered and arrived promptly. It weighed 1,700 pounds, according to reports, and could be heard eight miles away.<sup>3</sup> The Trinity bell returned to Randolph County by Duke is stamped 1879 and cast by the McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore, Maryland. McShane, founded in 1856 and now based in St. Louis, Missouri, is the country's oldest bell foundry and has cast over 300,000 bells.<sup>4</sup> The Trinity bell is estimated to weight 1,500-2,000 pounds.<sup>5</sup>

At Trinity, the bell hung on a wooden platform and was located on at least two sites on the Randolph campus. The college building stood facing west, directly behind the location where the gazebo now stands. The bell's primary location was between the building and the present NC Highway 62, coincidentally very near the site of the gazebo.

Accounts vary as to when the bell made its way to Duke, but the presumption is that the bell was moved with the college, in 1891 or 1892.<sup>6</sup> When the move took place, Trinity in Durham was freshly-built and appointed. Very little from "Old Trinity" in Randolph County made the journey.<sup>7</sup> The Trinity bell may have been intended to be the official bell at the new Trinity College, but another, perhaps new, bell was hung in the tower of the Main, or Washington Duke, Building.<sup>8</sup> The Trinity bell was placed on a sledge, as is evident in a contemporaneous photograph.<sup>9</sup> It apparently ended up in the hands of a fraternity, whose members used a hammer to ring it.<sup>10</sup> This would account for the degradation of the bell's rim, which shows significant abrasion compared to the photograph, and is cracked horizontally on one side.

When Duke Chapel was constructed between 1930 and 1932, the bell was reclaimed for a "Trophy Room," later the YMCA Tower Historical Room.<sup>11</sup> The space was intended to "preserve and display Duke's heritage from Trinity College." The room had to be built around the bell, which was its centerpiece. Use of the room as a museum, however, did not materialize. It became a storage space until the campus YMCA restored it as a museum in 1967 called the Tower Historical Room. The museum was short-lived; a combination of factors led to its closure in 1972.<sup>12</sup>

The bell remained in the former museum until the 1984, when Duke provided it for the Trinity College Memorial Gazebo.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Trinity College Memorial Gazebo**

In 1924, the 1855 Trinity College building was demolished to make way for Trinity High School. By 1977, it was time for a new high school and the old one was slated for demolition. Aware of the site's significance, Randolph County Schools Superintendent John Lawrence corresponded with Duke President Terry Sanford about commemorating the origins of Duke University at the location of Trinity College with some kind of marker.<sup>14</sup>

A group of Trinity residents wanted more of a memorial. By 1981, they had formed the Trinity College Association to develop a fitting monument and raise funds for it. Members were

W. Roland Albertson, president; Charles White, vice-president; Jane Haney, secretary; Nereus English III, treasurer; and Juanita Peace, historian.<sup>15</sup> The group began seeking Trinity College artifacts, and settled on a gazebo to mark the site. Archdale architect Dean Spinks agreed to design the monument at no cost.

The gazebo roof would be supported by ten columns from Trinity's original building. When the building was demolished, the fluted metal columns with lotus-leaf capitals were reused to support the balcony in the auditorium of the high school.<sup>16</sup> The columns were used in the chapel section on the second and third floors of an 1872 addition to the Trinity College building. They were the only architectural elements to survive demolition, and were saved again when the high school was torn down in 1981.

Also designated for the site were two stone urns that had denoted the entrance to the college. When the college moved to Durham, the urns were removed to Braxton Craven's former home and remained in the Craven family until the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> Hazel Hancock of Archdale came into possession of the urns from her nephew, a descendant of Craven, and donated them to the memorial.

The monument committee also negotiated with Duke for return of the Trinity Bell from its home in Duke Chapel. In early 1983, the Duke Board of Trustees agreed to provide the bell on permanent loan – though it would have to be extricated from the room built around it.<sup>18</sup> In exchange, Trinity provided two of the ten columns to Duke. The two columns were to be converted into lampposts at the main entrance to the Duke campus to commemorate Trinity College.<sup>19</sup>

Removal of the bell from Duke Chapel proved to be an engineering challenge. On February 9, 1984, a contractor, Dennis Equipment Company, undertook the job.<sup>20</sup> The bell was removed from its cradle and trundled to an elevator shaft on a dolly. The elevator car was raised to six feet above the chapel room floor. A motorized come-along was attached to the underside of the car and to the bell. The bell was hoisted into the shaft – it had to be tilted to make it through the door opening, even though the elevator doors had been removed. It swung underneath the car as the car was lowered to the ground.

The gazebo was built and landscaped at a cost of \$18,500 raised from donors in the Trinity area and others associated with Duke. It is situated on Randolph County School System property to the north of Braxton Craven Middle School, which sits near the former Trinity High School site, and is under the care of the school system.

On Sunday, October 7, 1984, a dedication of the Trinity College Memorial Gazebo took place with Duke President Terry Sanford presiding. Some 350 people attended the event.<sup>21</sup> In 1988, Duke kicked off its sesquicentennial celebration with a ceremony at the gazebo.<sup>22</sup>

### **Addendum: The Mystery of the Bells**

One newspaper report, penned in 1983, quotes university Secretary Roger Marshall as stating that the bell delivered by Duke for the gazebo remained in Randolph County in storage after Trinity's move in 1891, and was sent to Duke in 1930 for inclusion in a historical room in the new Duke Chapel.<sup>23</sup>

A bell was in place at Trinity's Randolph County site in 1917, when Rose Leach Johnson, daughter of the first graduate of Trinity College, the Rev. C. Dougan Johnson, visited the old campus and noted "the old bell": "I turned my eyes to the east, and there was the old bell hanging there, and looking like some grim sentinel, quiet and majestic in the pale moonbeams —

the old bell that rang up Trinity, rang the students at morning, tapped the recitations for the school day; rang out the lives of the people of Trinity! But the old bell was quiet now, and its quietude speaks of the past!”<sup>24</sup> She also refers to a feature “out near the bell.” This may have been a bell obtained for Trinity High School, which occupied the college building after Trinity moved until 1924, when the building was demolished and the new school built.

This bell may have been provided by Duke, or it may have been a secondary bell left when the college moved. In 1938, there appears to have been an attempt to reclaim the 1879 bell from Duke. A letter from F.D. McLeod of the Trinity Consolidated Schools to engineering and mathematics professor Robert Lee Flowers at Duke University – who had taught at Trinity when it was in Randolph County and who would serve as Duke president from 1941-1948 – suggests that Duke took a bell and left a bell when the college moved to Durham.<sup>25</sup> When the college building was demolished, a bell – perhaps the one observed by Johnson – apparently remained. “I feel sure the bell you have is the one used in 1891-92....,” McLeod says of the bell in Duke’s possession. Handwritten notes on the letter, apparently by Flowers, indicate that the bell remaining at Trinity hung in uprights in the yard on a stone base from four wooden pieces atop four stones, and had an 18-inch vertical crack from the bottom halfway to the top. McLeod states, “This bell is here now in the yard, and is useless as it has about an eighteen inch crack in it.” McLeod and other locals were not happy with the bell they had: “As stated before in my first letter to you, I was merely expressing the desire of the people here at Trinity, they want a bell, and are not exactly satisfied with the one left in place of the one you got.” There is no immediate indication of the fate of the bell hung at Old Trinity, but if it were no longer functional or useable as a school bell, it might have been scrapped by the school system.

If the 1983 newspaper account is true, and the Trinity bell remained in Randolph County until 1930, then the correspondence between Flowers and McLeod might refer to a more recent bell swap – Duke would have given Trinity a bell that became dysfunctional in trade for the 1879 bell that later came back to the gazebo. McLeod states in the correspondence that he conferred with Bruce Craven, Braxton Craven’s grandson, who “remembers the transaction of the bells quite well.” Bruce Craven, born in 1881, would have been ten years old when Trinity moved to Durham.

Stronger evidence, however, indicates that the 1879 bell ended up in Durham in 1891-1892.

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Mahan, “Gazebo’s contributors numerous,” *The Courier Tribune* (Asheboro, N.C.), 9 October 1984, B1.

<sup>2</sup> “The Commencement at Trinity College,” *Raleigh News*, 6 June 1876, 1.

<sup>3</sup> “North Carolina,” *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, 16 August 1876, 2.

<sup>4</sup> “History,” *McShane Bell Company* (<https://mcshanebell.com/history/>). At least one Duke account dates the Trinity bell to 1876, but it appears to be in error. See “Then and Now: Bells,” *Duke Magazine*, Winter 2002, <https://alumni.duke.edu/magazine/articles/then-and-now-bells>. The bell pictured here and identified as the 1876 bell appears to be stamped 1879 on close examination (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dukeyearlook/7605157716>).

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum, Abbott Lloyd to Roger Marshall, Duke University Archives. Lloyd was a Duke physical plant official and Marshall was university secretary.

<sup>6</sup> See “YMCA Tower Historical Room,” unsourced typescript, Duke University Archives. This account rings true, as it includes an explanation for the degradation of the bell’s rim: until 1930, it was in the possession of a fraternity whose members rang it with a hammer. A 1983 newspaper report, however, quotes university Secretary Roger Marshall as stating that the bell delivered by Duke for the gazebo remained in Randolph County in storage after

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Trinity's move in 1891, and was sent to Duke in 1930 for inclusion in a historical room in the new Duke Chapel. See David Boul, "Duke University to Lend Historic Bell to Randolph," *Greensboro Daily News*, 13 March 1983, n.p.

<sup>7</sup> See John Franklin Crowell, *Personal Recollections of Trinity College, North Carolina, 1887-1894* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1939), 168. "Movables" included "several thousand' literary society books, records and the college safe. A railroad freight car was hired for the purpose. Crowell does not mention the bell.

<sup>8</sup> "YMCA Tower Historical Room." Newspaper accounts note that "Trinity College's new bell at Durham, N.C., weighs 3,000 pounds" (*Charlotte Democrat*, 8 April 1892, 3), and "The college clock and the big bell were placed in the tower of Trinity College yesterday, and the latter has been letting itself be heard from today" ("The Bell is Raised," *Durham Globe*, 17 March 1892, 1). Nora Campbell Chaffin, in her history of Trinity, states that the both the bell and the clock were moved from Randolph County and placed in the Main Building tower, and as a result subsequent reports have perpetuated this assertion, but her own citations and these contemporaneous news accounts do not support her statement. See Nora Chaffin, *Trinity College 1839-1892: The Beginnings of Duke University* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press), 513. The new bell was destroyed when the building burned in 1911, and was replaced with a bell nicknamed "Marse Jack," named for the Trinity College president at the time, Dr. John Kilgo. Barron Mills, "For whom the bell tolls at Trinity," *The Randolph Guide* (Asheboro, N.C.), 3 April 2002, 3.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dukeyearlook/7605157716>.

<sup>10</sup> "YMCA Tower Historical Room."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Valerie Gillispie, "Retro: The Chapel's Secret Room," *Duke Magazine*, Winter 2002 ( <https://alumni.duke.edu/magazine/articles/retro-chapels-secret-room>).

<sup>13</sup> "YMCA Tower Historical Room." There is an alternative account to some of this history. When the bell was removed to Trinity in 1984, an official of the Duke Physical Plant told university Secretary Roger Marshall that the bell was moved "from a storage space on East Campus to the history room in 1967 or 1968" (Memorandum, Abbott Lloyd to Roger Marshall, Duke University Archives. The memo is on Physical Plant letterhead). Most other accounts have the bell built into the history room when the chapel was constructed, although it is possible that it was moved when the room was converted to storage, and returned when the history room was redeveloped in the 1960s. The bell was in the Trophy Room in 1943, according to an inventory of items in the space (inventory document, 13 October 1943, Duke University Archives).

<sup>14</sup> Mahan.

<sup>15</sup> Greg Brown, "Monument Fund Group is Formed," *Archdale-Trinity News*, 26 November 1981, 1 and 10.

<sup>16</sup> L. McKay Whatley Jr., *The Architectural History of Randolph County, North Carolina* (Asheboro, N.C.: City of Asheboro et. al., 1985), 59.

<sup>17</sup> Gina Brooks Maddox, "Urns Part of History," *Archdale-Trinity News*, 22 November 1984, 1 and 3.

<sup>18</sup> David Boul, "Duke University to Lend Historic Bell to Randolph," *Greensboro Daily News*, 13 March 1983, n.p.

<sup>19</sup> Barron Mills, "For whom the bell tolls at Trinity," *The Randolph Guide* (Asheboro, N.C.), 3 April 2002, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum, Lloyd to Marshall, Duke University Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Mahan.

<sup>22</sup> Jim Schlosser, "The Town Duke Left Behind," *Greensboro News & Record*, 17 October 1992, D2.

<sup>23</sup> Boul.

<sup>24</sup> Rose Leach Johnson, "Sketches of Historic Places in Old Trinity," *Trinity Alumni Register*, III (October 1917), 201.

<sup>25</sup> F.D. McLeod to R.L. Flowers, 14 January 1938, Duke University Archives.