

## Chapter Four

### Two Decades of Academic Progress

By Dr. Theron E. Montgomery

The academic program is the heart and soul of a college or university. Indeed it is this mental aspect that is "raison d'être."

Jacksonville State Normal School, later Jacksonville State Teachers College, then Jacksonville State College, and finally Jacksonville State University came into being with a mission to educate the population of Northeast Alabama. These people of Anglo-Saxon background, a goodly number Scotch-Irish, were respectful and respectable. Modest of means but never humbled by people of "position" or "wealth," they sought for themselves and their children opportunities to advance in life's scheme by work, honesty and prayer. Education was an obvious avenue for self improvement, to be of service to fellow man and to give one's children a better life. Their protestant orientation was to use their talents to serve God and country, and to give of themselves to their community. This philosophy, together with the modest means of their families, gave natural direction to the teaching profession and thus to the Normal School. A place to study, acquire a certificate, and through time advance as the educational opportunities became more affordable.

It was from this milieu that Houston Cole came. His kinsmanship with the region and understanding of the needs and potential of its people made it ideal that he come to Jacksonville State

Teachers College to have as his cause to fulfill the mission of his alma mater.

Disraeli said, "University should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning" (Benjamin Disraeli Speech to House of Commons, 11 March 1873). This returning alumnus was to become the "light." He had continued his education after Jacksonville at the University of Alabama and then Columbia University; a historian by discipline, he held positions in the public schools, the University of Alabama, and with OPA. Thus, with experience and education he commenced to build the institution which was a solid four year teacher's college into a broader institution of service and learning.

Although the 40's were meager for opportunities because of World War II, a Secondary Education major was added along with Business Education. Commencing with the return of the veterans came: Pre-Law, Basic Engineering, Pre-Med, Pre-Nursing, Pre-Dentistry, all to serve as an avenue for solid preparation for movement to the University. To facilitate this movement, he reached to an able faculty of dedication and commitment. His predecessor had during the depression years attracted men and women of superior education with degrees from some of the most prestigious institutions in the nation. At the core of this group were William J. Calvert, Ph.D., Harvard (an authority on Byron); Bascomb Mock, Ph.D., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Charles Cayley, Ph.D., University of Chicago; Frank McLean, Ph.D., University of Virginia; Robert Felgar, Ph.D., University of Texas; Frank Glazner, Ph.D., George Peabody College for Teachers; Loy Allison, Ph.D., George Peabody College for Teachers (a student of Peterson); Reuben Self, Ed.D., New York University; C. R. Wood, Ph.D., George Peabody College for Teachers (Dean for many years); James H. Jones, Le Doctorate, University de Sorbonne. Supporting these people with diligence were many fine people of talent and graciousness who gave a style to the institution.

It was reported in 1949 that the educational level in the South was below that prevailing in the rest of the country ("Economy of the South," U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington 1949). Although the region had made considerable improvement enabling the South to contribute to the armed services and factories during World War II, it had been relatively recent that compulsory school attendance and a full school term of adequate length had been realized.

Extensive exposure to other sections of the country and meeting with people of different educational background fed the minds of service men and women and factory workers. They returned to their native land with desires and ideas to partake of more educa-

tion and the opportunities it offered. Thus with the GI Bill (no fear of Federal interference with this aid to education) and more financial well-being, the enrollments rose both in full-time students and in extension centers and evening classes.

To develop the extension centers throughout Northeast Alabama, he secured Dr. Ernest Stone (later to succeed him as President) who traveled the section far and wide providing in-service instruction for teachers and evening opportunities for veterans. This was in addition to his duty as superintendent of the lab schools, a fundamental part of the Teacher Education Program. It would be impossible to name all the dedicated professional ladies and gentlemen who proctored, taught, and polished the fledgling young teachers. However, no child or student that had the good fortune to experience the learning of children will ever forget Mrs. Kitty Stone whom Dr. Cole brought from Tuscaloosa where she was a teacher in the Verner (Campus) School.

Another figure on the scene was Dr. Baskin Wright, a former colleague of Dr. Cole's at Alabama, who became involved in an evening school in Anniston. He developed the evening school later on campus together with structuring a Veterans Affairs office and eventually a financial aid assistance program.

Houston Cole with vision, aspiration and planning took the fifties as a time to move his Alma Mater to heights with broader areas of curricula, improved facilities and quality instruction.

Encouraging all to participate in reaching for the stars, programs were brought forth. Solon Glover, a man of implicit honesty, restructured the financial area in order to keep accountability and sound financial practice. Seeing the advantages of military as a career, Solon, with Dr. Cole's blessing, brought ROTC to the campus. This area became a career opportunity for young men and later young ladies too. The concept of military participation was consistent with Dr. Cole's patriotism and in keeping with the constituency of the institution. It was to become a connecting link with Ft. McClellan and the Anniston Army Depot.

At the same time that ROTC was introduced, Miss Lucile Branscomb, who had been Dr. Cole's secretary when he was with OPA (he persuaded her to go to Columbia University for graduate work), developed the B.S. in Business. Miss Branscomb, with war surplus typewriters, having perfected secretarial education, pushed ever forward for a school of business. A diligent lady, she chartered the FBLA and was a delegate officer to the National Business Education Association. The annex to the business building is named in her honor. The development of this area of

academic interest was to continue to grow with Dr. Cole's encouragement and blessing.

Accompanying these aforementioned innovations came "The International House Program," a unique program — foreign students housed with American students sharing meals, experiencing cultural exchanges and language learning. Dr. and Mrs. Jones gave untiringly of their efforts. Houston Cole with many connections acquired funding of scholarships and gifts. Rotary connections which came with Dr. Cole, a past district governor, were and are a firm support of the program. Mrs. Stone with connections with the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs secured support in like manner through her good offices. There were a number of individuals who donated to this program.

Accompanying these developments came the realization that a style, a touch of grace needed to be placed in the learning of aspiring ladies, giving young men exposure and lifting faculty morale. It was with Mary Betty Lowrey, Home Economic Head, that came the teas, coffees, luncheons and pancake breakfasts, all with a sense of elegance. This informal aspect of education was a supportive part of his philosophy to give more than just classroom learning.

Always precise and wanting *accuracy* and friendliness in the Registrar's Office, Lawrence Miles was chosen as director (later Dean of Admissions) following Dr. Glazner's retirement to the classroom. Dr. Miles, a polished gentleman who had taught English, directed plays, so organized registration and records that he preceded the computer with total recall and guidance. Larry was an excellent recruiter, performer and team member. His mark at the University is a mark of accomplishment as one of Houston Cole's appointments.

The fifties saw a good enrollment with the school attaining one thousand, many still veterans. Fulfilling the liberty of a University, Dr. Cole had established an SGA which has been influential from the beginning. Serving as advisor was Dr. J. M. Anders, picked by the President because of his stature with faculty and students. The discipline committee, later Honor Council, was an important part of the structure that focused on student responsibility and learning.

In 1955 Dr. C. R. Wood, the long-time Dean of the College and indeed the first and only Dean to that time, took a leave to pursue another career.

Dr. Cole chose as an Acting Dean, later to become the Dean, Dr. Theron Montgomery. Dr. Montgomery imbued, with the liberal arts tradition from Wofford College and Duke University, sought to bring Dr. Cole's quality goals into reality.

The enlarged enrollments necessitated increased faculty, while inflationary trends were eating away at the dollar, causing many institutions to stretch the limits on accreditation. Dean Montgomery found the Institution "*under the gun*" so to speak. Teachers were teaching extension and evening classes for extra compensation, thus violating the contact hour limit and the teacher ratio standards. The number of faculty holding the bachelor's degree was extensive, the number of doctorates was small. These and several other items were the cause of concern. Much of this existed because of a sincere desire to serve the population in the region and also to assist all faculty with additional income by extra teaching and/or employing wives.

Confronted with the reality of conforming to standards and promoting quality, President Cole authorized the Dean to move with dispatch. This began a long and meaningful relationship with the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities. The institution made all necessary adjustments and strove to meet even higher standards than were required. This same approach was used with AACTE and later NCATE. The tone of quality was to be reflected in screening for Teacher Education, Advanced ROTC, and Nursing which was added some years later.

Montgomery was joining two stalwart members of Dr. Cole's executive staff, Lawrence Miles and Solon Glover. These three were to be known by some as the "Three Musketeers." Each of a different temperament and background had in common a respect and admiration for the President and love of the institution. Differences were voiced, disagreements existed, but nothing disagreeable or divisive in the unique relationship prevented the team from working for improvement and service.

Each of these men was encouraged to become active in his respective organizations. Their contacts and involvements gave impetus to innovations and lifted the horizons.

The institution set in place a procedure for selective admissions and retention. Modest at first, it came to be meaningful in that for those students the institution was not equipped to teach, they could seek training and education elsewhere. Always aware of the institution's needs to serve, there were summer programs for admission and retrieval for borderline cases.

In 1957 the graduate division was added under Dr. Reuben Self's direction. This program, added at a time the school was under pro-ration, placed a burden upon its resources. Always a man with connections, Dr. Cole called on his friend, Dr. John R. McClure, Dean of the College of Education, University of Alabama, for advice. This fine gentleman gave encouragement and assistance. The graduate

council, together with Dr. Self and Dean Montgomery, put in requirements, many later relaxed, to assure a quality product as suggested by Dean McClure.

It was imperative that the Master's Program not weaken the undergraduate program nor that the standards for the graduate degree be a fast, easy access to more pay. Although these requirements kept the program small even with the scope of the degree widened, it was well in keeping with the philosophy of integrity and higher standards that were symbolized by Jacksonville State College.

In 1960 the institution volunteered to be among the first institutions to undergo the self-study and reaffirmation process. In 1961 a team of distinguished educators came and investigated the institution with intensity. Everything was put forth and everyone was made available. It was a credit to Dr. Cole that the self-study report was presented by faculty committees as a dedication to him in appreciation of the spirit in which it was done.

The reaffirmation with suggestions that the institution continue in its direction and goals was indeed a reward to all.

While many institutions in the sixties were experiencing marches and demonstrations, JSU was spared that because of the open door. The students were heard, but they also listened.

The institution became aware of the programs and funds being provided by the federal government. The National Education Defense Act came into being, as did Title III for developing institutions and Title V also. The Title V monies were funded to institutions through State Departments of Education.

Jacksonville State was able to give increasing assistance to students with the National Defense Education Act of 1958 providing funds.

Title VI funds through the State Department encouraged expenditures in audio-visual materials. The Instructional Media Program grew and expanded with the first t.v. (closed circuit at the time) facility. Other materials and equipment were acquired and used extensively in support of teaching. These items included films, projectors, recordings, and record players.

Dr. Alta Millican, who returned to JSU upon the completion of her doctorate, took charge of this ever expanding area. She was later to become the Dean of the School of Instructional Media and Library Science. A dedicated teacher and administrator, she served as chief librarian of the twelve-story Houston Cole Library for a number of years. This edifice, named for Dr. Cole, was an appropriate recognition for him as he always was among the best read on the campus.

In addition to assisting students with National Education Defense funds, the institution was able to secure audio-visual equipment, the first television station, and upgrade its radio station.

The nature of the Developing Institution Act required unique proposals. JSU presented a program to upgrade and challenge its faculty by paying their salaries and expenses (tuition, etc.) for them to attend Duke, Emory, or Vanderbilt. This program was referred to as "DEV."

The "DEV" program was specifically designed to send faculty members to established, prestigious institutions. Many of the JSU faculty were graduates of JSU who had master's degrees from the University of Alabama and Auburn University. Although well prepared at this level, the need for further education and a more diverse experience was the basis for this proposal. The replacements for them during that period were teaching fellows sent primarily from those institutions. All this was paid with federal funds. Although not all of the faculty who participated in the program completed it, they all benefitted by the exposure to these outstanding institutions.

During this period and in time to follow, a diversity of backgrounds was sought for the faculty. The cooperation with Duke, Emory and Vanderbilt was possible in part because of the Dean's connections and friendship with Dr. Frank de Vyer of Duke, Dr. Jake Ward of Emory, and Dr. Emmett Fields of Vanderbilt. Accompanying this phase of Title III, the University was able to secure Dr. Edgar T. Thompson, Professor of Sociology, for a semester as a visiting professor, and bring to the campus for lectures and visits with faculty forums Dean Fields, Dr. Frank de Vyer and others.

1967 was a busy year. The college had been named a University and now the task of fulfilling the measure of such fell to all concerned.

Mr. Hugh Merrill, Chairman of the Board, together with his cousins, (Walter and Fred) long-time friends of Gov. Wallace, secured a special appropriation and the establishment of a School of Nursing. It was named in honor of the governor's recently deceased wife.

It became the Dean's responsibility to facilitate the mission set forth. First came the cooperative effort with the existing Diploma School of the Anniston Hospital (later Regional Medical Center). This was made possible and pleasant because of the cooperation and assistance of Dr. White, Mr. Walter Merrill, Mrs. Charles (Juliette) Doster, and Mr. Morgan who were the trustees of the Diploma School. A search was conducted and, with much assist-

ance from the above and others, Dr. Mary Margaret Williams of Emory University Nursing School was employed. She served first as consultant to Jacksonville and later as Dean of the School of Nursing (her duties at Emory were such that she could serve first as a consultant and then join JSU full time).

A School of Law Enforcement came into being as a full program and was headed up by Malcolm Street, Jr. (now Judge Street). Dean Street, who had started with a law enforcement program, was to develop the College of Criminal Justice.

It was in the area of faculty and student behavior that Dr. Cole had to exercise patience with the Dean. The Dean, with students, wanted probation and special probation to regulate student behaviors. Always willing to dismiss when necessary, there was in both men compassion.

Several occasions with faculty must be recounted for their interest. A very distinguished professor of Foreign Languages was somewhat cosmopolitan. Calhoun County being dry, he went to Cave Springs, Georgia for an outing. Being of the nature that he was, he dressed up in a Scottish outfit, drove over in his convertible, and proceeded to consume the brew. In due time he was arrested. He made his allowed call to the Dean who then had the local sheriff to arrange his release and return. As fate would have it, a nearby newspaper wrote up the incident. Reading about it, the President summoned the Dean. When asked if he knew about this, the Dean replied that he had arranged for him to be released. The following discussion about dismissal was interesting. The President was concerned about the image and reputation of the institution, and the Dean valued this very able teacher. This professor was teaching overloads, had students waiting to get in his classes (not too common in foreign languages) and was carrying out a language program in the elementary school. Being generous in his attitude, the President kidded the Dean about his liberality and allowed him to keep this professor.

There were other occasions when the President stretched his limits to afford the Dean the opportunity to allow some difference in behavior than had been the expectation or rule for some years. The Dean had given permission to an English teacher to work on weekends as a waitress at the Fort to supplement her income. It was of some consternation to her colleagues who were retired military to experience her as a cocktail waitress. These and other events were always handled confidentially and in a spirit of honesty. Dr. Cole, always moral and a Christian, was never negative in his attitude toward his colleagues. Although he enjoyed challeng-



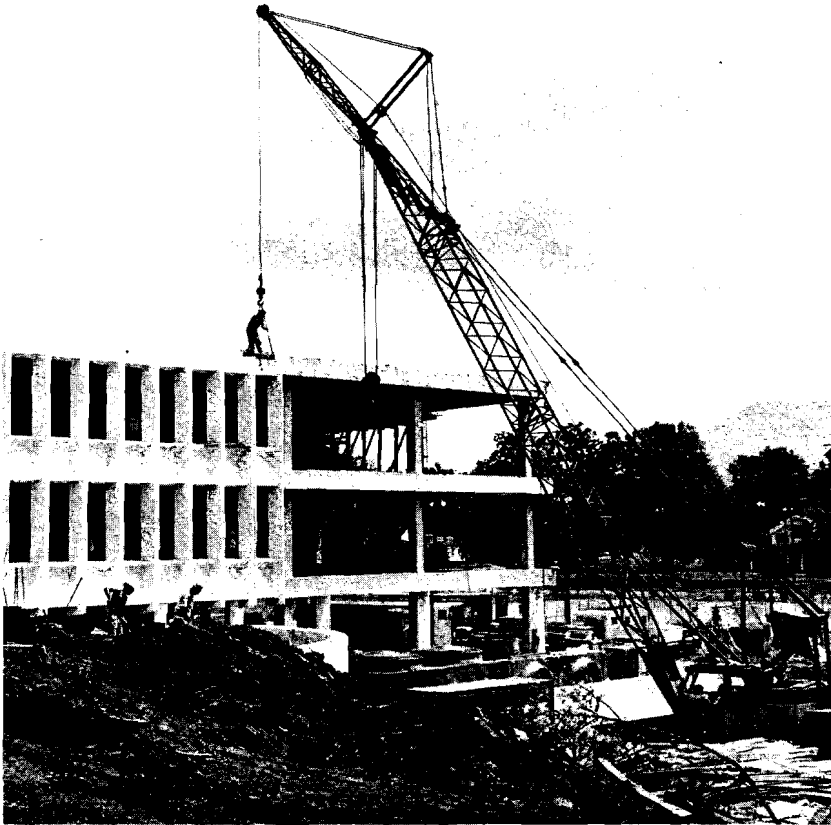
ing his staff to give of their utmost, he was reasonable in his demands.

As the sixties moved to their close, the college became a university. One can say Dr. Cole was its creator in spirit and fact.

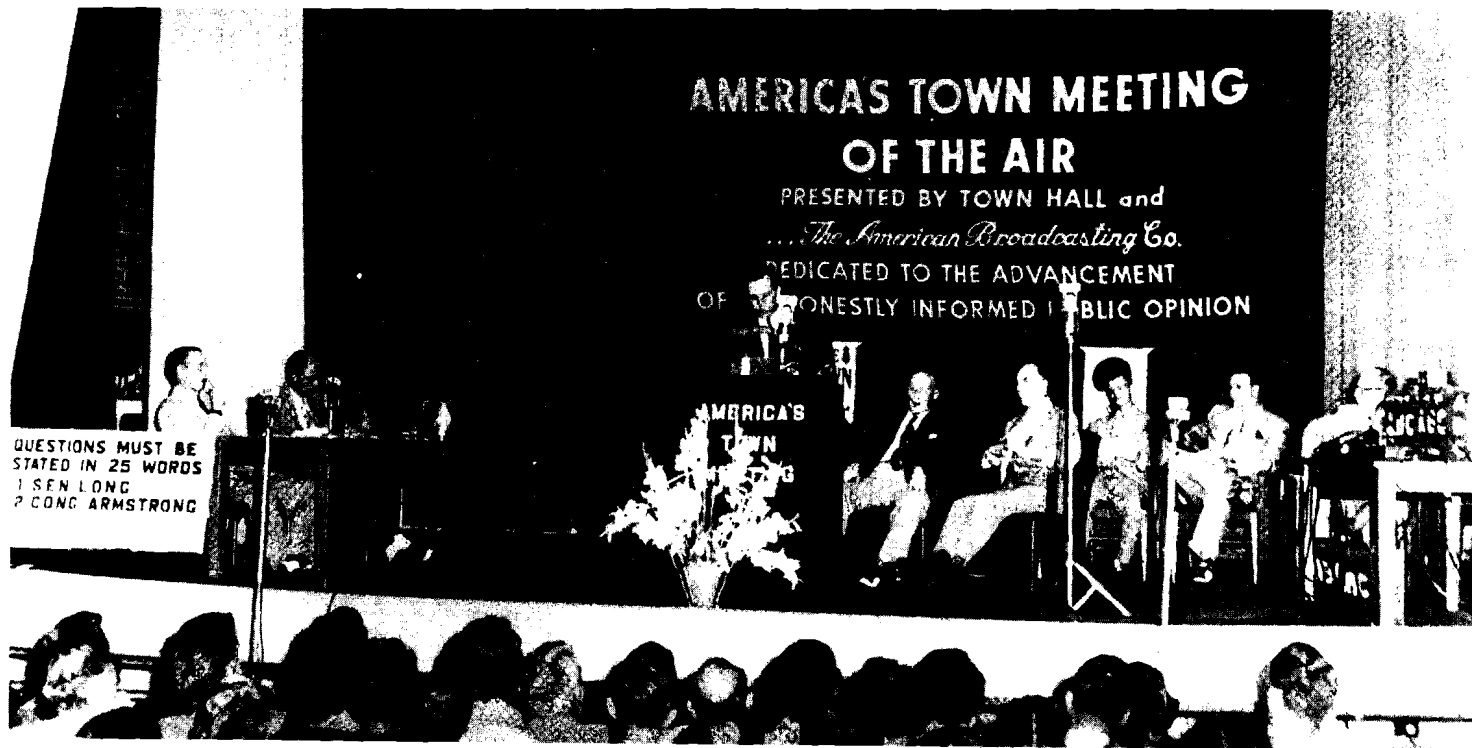
The appropriate reflection of this period can best be summarized:

There are those who are the candle that give the light and there are those who are the saucer and reflect the light. Houston Cole was the light. We, all, were the saucer reflecting the light.

This contributor is indebted to a number of persons, articles, etc. for information herein included, but especially to a vivid memory of "The Man."



*During Cole's years many buildings were added to the rapidly growing campus. Here we see the Theron Montgomery Student Commons Building under construction.*



"America's Town Meeting" held in the Leone Cole Auditorium was begun as a forerunner of the popular television program, "Sixty Minutes."