

Chapter Six

Creation of Alumni Association Recalled

By Julia Snead Kingston

The cold, damp day of November 23, 1966 did not dampen the spirit of hundreds of students assembled in front of Bibb Graves Hall to hear an announcement that would forever enhance the value of a diploma from the institution. Dr. Houston Cole made the announcement, loud and clear, with the help of a megaphone, that Jacksonville State College had been elevated to university status by the State Board of Education and that from this day forward the school would be known as Jacksonville State University. This action gave North Alabama its first university. The faculty, administration and students were elated over the name change.

Dr. Cole stated, "I would like to make it clear that this change in status imposes greater responsibilities on us as an educational institution. The change in name came about primarily for two reasons: demands from our student body for master's degrees and pressure from junior colleges to help train their teachers."

Dr. Cole outlined his ambitious plan for developing an outstanding university for the future alumni of Jacksonville State University and offering greater service to Alabama. The enthusiastic crowd quickly turned into a spirited pep rally for the Jacksonville State University Gamecocks' departure for an appearance in the first annual Space City Football Classic in Huntsville.

The change to university status received much publicity throughout the state. The headlines in *The Gadsden Times* read, "University Status, Dr. Cole's Present" in reference to his birthday the following day. The elevation to university status was indeed Dr. Cole's great gift to future alumni and all of North Alabama. The event was emblematic of his determination to provide the finest education at the lowest possible cost to the students of Alabama.

The school was founded as Jacksonville Normal School, renamed Jacksonville State Teachers College in 1929, Jacksonville State College in 1957, and Jacksonville State University in 1966, thus creating the fourth category of alumni for the institution. The Class of '67 would be the first to graduate from Jacksonville State University.

Perhaps Ralph Callahan best expressed the feeling of many in a letter of congratulations to Dr. Cole:

"A word spoken in good season, how good it is" (Proverbs). Little did I think or know on that cold rainy day a quarter of a century ago in Montgomery that I would be writing you this note now to congratulate you upon twenty-five years of superb administration at Jacksonville. The fruits of your labors have created a bounteous harvest. Brick and stone rear their way toward the sky on Jacksonville campus, but I feel that your real monument will be in the hearts and careers of the young men and young women who pass through these hallowed halls of learning. As Calhoun County's first citizen. I congratulate you upon twenty-five years of service and wish for you and yours many more years of happy adventure in your chosen field.

The president of a university is the key person in creating academic and administrative excellence. In this respect, Houston Cole graded A-plus. Improvement was the objective of every move. The cornerstone in building a sound viable support system, among the many communities within a university, must be molded with trust, credibility, respect, integrity, capability — qualities attainable only through a hard, fair-minded work ethic. By 1966 University President Cole had earned the respect and confidence of educators throughout the state and the Southeast. Charisma and an unsurpassed ability as a public speaker gained Dr. Cole widespread popularity with the public as well.

In order to attain the goals which he had set, the President knew that expanded alumni support would be important to the growth and development of the University. Dr. Cole's approach to achieving the continuing support of alumni was to see that the needs of the students were met, and met with respect.

Knowing that a primary measure of the quality of a university is its alumni support. Dr. Cole laid the foundation for a system of

financial aid for students. The gratitude of these students was reflected in the steady growth of the university's alumni program. He was revered by graduates throughout the state, and numerous stories have been told of the assistance given by Dr. Cole to students who, long before the enactment of Federal aid, needed assistance to obtain the education which would enable them to have important careers as corporate executives, bank presidents, university presidents, master teachers — the list is endless and the stories heartwarming.

When Dr. Cole called upon the alumni and friends to be a part of an exciting drive for excellence, the response was enthusiastic. His state-wide network was impressive and effective. In 1967 the decisions to concentrate efforts toward expanding alumni activities and support of the university was made. At this time, a loyal alumni association was in place and was made up primarily of several hundred Jacksonville State Teachers College graduates and an active Normal School groups energized by Louise Tredaway.

The yearly functions focused on the Jacksonville alumni breakfast, held at the old Tutwiler Hotel during AEA, and homecoming on campus. The alumni board of directors met twice yearly and the alumni dues were \$1.00. Effie Sawyer, executive secretary to the president of the university, inherited the additional



The gathering of hundreds for the Jacksonville breakfast at the Tutwiler Hotel during AEA is now a part of history, but provides rich, warm memories for those who attend year after year.

duties of serving as secretary and contact person for the alumni association, which she performed efficiently and professionally. Solon Glover, Jacksonville State University business manager, served the association as treasurer and Miriam Haywood, assistant business manager, assisted with primary alumni functions. Clifford Coffee was responsible for alumni publication and news releases and Opal R. Lovett provided the pictures which accompanied the releases. Many others across campus assisted when needed, as did Lawrence and Hazel Hicks, who often chaired the homecoming committee, and Miriam Jackson Higginbotham assisted with student activities. Because of the change to university status and increased workloads, the staff did not have the time to devote to the expansion of the alumni program. Dr. Cole knew that the time had come to employ a director of alumni affairs whose primary responsibility was to promote alumni development.

Julia Snead of Centre, Alabama, served on the alumni board of directors for two terms prior to being elected president of the alumni association for two terms. In accepting the challenge, Snead said:

In the spring of 1967 Dr. Cole asked me to take the position as the first full-time director of alumni activities. After several discussions with Dr. Cole in August of 1967, I accepted the challenge to



Julia Snead directs student assistants in the mail-out of the Alumni News just before homecoming — an exciting time.

channel alumni resources and promote Jacksonville State University as an outstanding institution of higher learning. The staff consisted of the director and one Work-Study student and many volunteers.

It was an exciting period for the university. Literally hundreds across the campus spread the word that Jacksonville State University was on the move. Again Dr. Cole's impeccable timing was on target. Alumni clubs were organized in Huntsville, Atlanta, Montgomery, Birmingham and in the fifteen surrounding counties. The mailing list increased from hundreds to thousands, and the alumni staff was increased by the addition of several Work-Study students. Homecoming activities were expanded and attendance grew.

On homecoming day, five to six hundred alumni and friends gathered at Leone Cole Auditorium for the annual alumni awards luncheon where they enjoyed the fellowship of the grand occasion. Rudy Abbott, sports publicity director, and Jack Hopper, public relations director, gave extensive media coverage to university activities. JSU alumni and fans came from far and near to enjoy James Haywood's fabulous luncheon buffet, to hear Dave Walter's celebrated Marching Southerners and to yell for Charley Pell's unbeatable Gamecocks. They came for the sheer joy of spending



JSU Alumni from the Lanett area take time to pose for a picture before the banquet.



Everyone in Lanett knew the JSU folks would turn out in full force for their Alumni chapter meeting.

an autumn day on a beautiful campus with friends. It was a happy time. The University grew and prospered. Houston Cole was proud.

During the late sixties and early seventies, with limited staff and budget, but unlimited volunteers, the alumni activities continued to grow and flourish. Of great importance to the university was

the beginning of the active involvement of young university graduates, who combined with the core alumni group and the State Normal School Club to boost the off-campus financial support above the \$300,000 mark.



The main business at those long ago popular seated luncheons on homecoming day was eating before the exciting afternoon football game which we never lost.



A few of those Alumni pause for a smile during the luncheon on homecoming day.

A first for Jacksonville State University was the organization of a seven hundred member parents' club. With the help of the alumni executive board members, the Jacksonville State University Foundation was established, an action that many felt to be crucial for future university development. It was an independent organization governed by an off-campus board, specifically designed to receive contributions designated for upgrading the university by meeting the needs of the many academic facets. Three young members of the alumni executive committee giving strong support and assistance to this ambitious undertaking were Dale E. Powell, Sperry Snow and Charley Waldrep. Once again, caring volunteers played an important role. The Jacksonville State University Foundation continues to channel scholarships and contributions to every department of the university.

One day in 1941, as Superintendent of Education of Tuscaloosa County Schools, Houston Cole delivered a commencement address and gave a diploma to a quiet, sandy-haired, young lady named Lurleen Burns, later to become Governor Lurleen B. Wallace. It was with special pride that President Cole invited the first woman governor in the history of Alabama to deliver the commencement address to the first full-term graduating class of Jacksonville State University on May 27, 1967.

The message of the petite governor to the two hundred and eight graduates in Paul Snow Stadium was *BE ACTIVE, CARE, BECOME INVOLVED*. Long before Governor Lurleen Wallace sent out the cry: be active, care, become involved, it had become a way of life with Houston Cole, a 1921 graduate of the Jacksonville State Normal School. Under his dynamic leadership as President, his alma mater flourished and grew. He was awarded every honor given by the Alumni Association. In 1956, he was given the first alumnus of the year award which was inscribed as follows:

In recognition of distinctive and unselfish service to Jacksonville State College. Exemplification of the highest ideals of citizenship and leadership in many fields of endeavor, the Jacksonville State College Alumni Association proudly presents the First Alumnus Award.
— 1956 — Solon Glover, Alumni Secretary; Malcolm Street, Alumni President.

In May of 1970 at graduation, the University Board of Trustees presented Dr. Cole with an honorary doctorate of letters in recognition of his leadership at the institution for the past twenty-eight years. The doctorate of letters read: "With imagination, initiative and untiring labor, Houston Cole has built his alma mater into a great university." The three hundred eighty graduates joined a large audience in a standing ovation of appreciation to the Dean of

University presidents and to Jacksonville State University's most prestigious alumnus. Dr. Cole put into motion the current alumni development program. No truer words apply to Houston Cole than those written by Ralph Callahan: "The fruits of your labors have created a bounteous harvest."



Hugh Merrill, chairman of the Board of Trustees, confers the Honorary Doctorate of Literature on Dr. Houston Cole as Col. C. W. Dauge, trustee, looks on.

