

## HISTORY OF EXISTING STRUCTURES

### 3.2.7 CARPENTER HALL

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees on 20 May 1937, Major Reed D. Walser, the Superintendent,<sup>1</sup> reported that due to increased enrollment the dormitories had become very crowded and that additional dormitory was needed.<sup>2</sup> A committee was appointed to look into the matter and report. On 9 July 1937, Major Walser reported to the Board about enrollment projections, saying that that the expected enrollment for the upcoming term would be at least 78 and possibly as many as 90 or 100 students. In order to address this issue, Eugene S. Enochs of the property committee reported "that he had obtained from Mr. [Frank H.] Parsons a tentative draft of floor plans and elevations for a new dormitory sufficient to accommodate 32 boys and properly equipped with water and sanitary equipment." Mr. Enochs was asked to obtain complete plans and specifications and an estimate of the cost.<sup>3</sup>

On 24 July 1937 the Board discussed the proposal to build a new dormitory and the issue of how to pay for it.<sup>4</sup> A week later, on 31 July, the Board approved plans prepared by Frank H. Parsons for the proposed new dormitory [which would later named Carpenter Hall], and authorized the secretary to advertise for bids.<sup>5</sup> Attached to the report of the minutes is a copy of the advertisement for bids, clipped from a newspaper, which is transcribed here:

**NOTICE TO BUILDING CONTRACTORS**

Sealed bids will be received at office of the undersigned by Trustees of Jefferson Military College up to 4:00 P.M. August 11th, 1937, for the construction at Washington, Miss., of a one-story sixteen room Dormitory with four Bath Rooms. Outside walls to be Concrete. Inside walls to be Hollow Tile and Plaster. Plans and specifications can be obtained from Architect Frank H. Parsons, Natchez, Miss., upon receipt of \$10.00 deposit for safe return of plans. Right reserved to reject any and all bids.

GERARD BRANDON  
Secretary, Natchez, Miss.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Major Reed A. Walser served as Superintendent from May 1926 until 1941. He was the brother of Col. Prospere's wife, Bertie Walser Prospere (1881-1966). Mrs. Prospere had continued the administration of the school after her husband's death, and, with the consent of the Board, had asked her brother to come to Jefferson College and help her. The dates of Major Walser's tenure as superintendent are from a list of the Superintendents of Jefferson Military College filed in the MDAH Subject File folder, **Jefferson College, History of.**

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, (filed in Box 9 of an unprocessed accretion to the Jefferson Military College Papers, Z/U/1994.034), page 225.

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 226.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 227.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 228.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 228.

It is puzzling that the plans for the new dormitory were prepared by Frank H. Parsons, for he was apparently neither a practicing architect nor a building contractor, but was, instead, a teacher at Natchez High School.<sup>7</sup>

On 16 August 1937, the Board selected T.F. Graves as the contractor. The Board also asked F. A Ketteringham to serve as construction superintendent on behalf of the Trustees.<sup>8</sup> The building was completed in December 1937 and formally accepted by the Board at its meeting on 15 December.<sup>9</sup>

Funding for the construction of the new dormitory came largely from a substantial bequest to Jefferson College made by Miss Agnes Z. Carpenter in her will, upon her death in 1934. Although a member of her family contested the will, the final settlement of the estate provided the College with a gift of over \$50,000. In appreciation of this bequest, the Board decided, on 16 August 1937, to name the new building Agnes Z. Carpenter Hall.<sup>10</sup>

Carpenter Hall was designed as a dormitory, originally consisting of sixteen dormitory rooms arranged in four suites, with a bathroom in the center of each suite. Later, the suites at the north and south ends were converted to faculty apartments.

In folder 847 of the Jefferson Military College Papers is an illustrated promotional booklet about Jefferson Military College from about 1950-55. One of its photographs shows the interior of "a typical cadet room," which appears (from the placement, size, and configuration of the windows) to be a corner room in Carpenter Hall.<sup>11</sup>

Jefferson College closed in 1964, and not long afterward its buildings and grounds were conveyed to the State of Mississippi in exchange for paying off the institution's debts.<sup>12</sup> The property was initially placed under the management of the Mississippi State Building Commission, which, having no use for the property, simply boarded up the buildings and abandoned them. For a period of seven years the unattended buildings were subjected to extensive theft and vandalism.<sup>13</sup>

Initial plans for the preservation of Jefferson College as a state-managed historic site made no provisions for the preservation or even the retention of the twentieth-century buildings, which were considered to have no historical or architectural value. A report presented to a meeting of the Mississippi State Building Commission on 14 October 1970, by Mrs. R.L. Schuchs, chairman of the Jefferson Military Academy Historical

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<sup>7</sup> Information from various sources found on the Ancestry.com web site, including the 1939, 1941, and 1950 Natchez city directories.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson College on 16 August 1937, in the Transactions of the Board of Trustees, 1937-1941, currently retained at Historic Jefferson College.

<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson College on 15 December 1937, in the Transactions of the Board of Trustees, 1937-1941, currently retained at Historic Jefferson College.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson College on 16 August 1937, in the Transactions of the Board of Trustees, 1937-1941, currently retained at Historic Jefferson College.

<sup>11</sup> Jefferson Military College Papers, Z/0059.001, Box 75, Folder 847.

<sup>12</sup> Blain, *Education in the Old Southwest* (1976), p. 132.

<sup>13</sup> The abandoned and deteriorating condition of the property can be seen in numerous photographs accompanying an article, "Jeff Academy's Fate: State Park or Ruins?" that appeared in the *Clarion Ledger* (Jackson, Miss.), 20 October 1968. A xerographic copy of the article is filed in the Subject File, **Jefferson College: Preservation and Restoration, 1964-1972**.

Committee, proposed an “architectural restoration, professionally performed, according to National Park Service standards” of the older buildings, but recommended not only tearing down the “center section of main building” [i.e. the Gymnasium] but also tearing down the “existing 20<sup>th</sup> century dormitory buildings” as well. <sup>14</sup>

In August 1971 the Jefferson College property was placed under the administration of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). One of the first actions taken by MDAH regarding Jefferson College was to arrange for the older buildings to be examined by noted preservation architect Charles E. Peterson of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Peterson made a visit to Jefferson College on 15 December 1971 to assess the condition of its older buildings and make recommendations for their preservation. His recommendations were written in a report, dated 21 January 1972. <sup>15</sup> Peterson’s report makes no mention of Raymond Hall, Prospere Hall, or Carpenter Hall, which were evidently all considered to be of no historical interest. His only reference to their existence is a recommendation that quarters should be provided “in one of the modern buildings so that an employee will be on the place at night.” <sup>16</sup>

Carpenter Hall has not received any significant preservation or rehabilitation work and is currently used mainly for storage.

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<sup>14</sup> Outline of a report titled “For Presentation to the Mississippi State Building Commission,” dated 14 October 1970, no author cited. A xerographic copy is filed in the Subject File, **Jefferson College: Preservation and Restoration, 1964-1972**. The presentation and the outline of the report are recorded in the Minutes of the State Building Commission, Book 28, pp. 740-743.

<sup>15</sup> This report is currently filed (inappropriately) in Official Records Series 125, the “Education in the Old South West”: Editors’ Files, 1972-1976, in a folder labeled “A memorandum on Jefferson College, Washington, MS, 1971-72.”

<sup>16</sup> Charles E. Peterson, report on his visit to Jefferson College, dated 21 January 1972, page 3, filed, at present, in Official Records Series 125.