

**CHRONICLES OF THE UNIVERSITY:
“ SHORT OVERVIEW OF HPU PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY”**

by

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The university is named in honor of the first major benefactor, Edward Howard Payne of Fulton, Missouri, the brother-in-law of Dr. John D. Robnett, pastor of Brownwood’s First Baptist Church, and, who, along with the Reverend Noah T. Byars, succeeded in turning Byars’ idea of a Baptist college in Brown County into a reality.

In 1883, the Baptist churches in the area organized the Pecan Valley Baptist Association. Each church elected one member to the Executive Board of the Association. This board would meet regularly on the fifth Sunday. At the Fifth Sunday meeting in Zephyr on March 30, 1889 the delegates unanimously favored the establishment of a school and adopted a resolution that invited all the churches of the association to send three delegates to a called associational meeting to be held at Liberty Baptist Church located in the community of Indian Creek in southern Brown County on June 29, 1889.

At the meeting in June, the delegates proceeded to implement the organizational process by electing a board of trustees and empowered that body to select a site for the location of “The Baptist College.” The meeting did not choose a permanent name at Indian Creek, and, in addition to the above name , several others were used over the next several months to include: “The Pecan Valley Baptist College” and, after the trustees selected Brownwood as the location, “The Brownwood College.”

Dr. Robnett, as a trustee, visited Fulton in October 1889. Soon after his return with a sizable sum of money pledged and raised by Payne and others, the Board decided to honor Payne by naming the college for him in late October, 1889.

The first session of the new Baptist college in Brownwood began on September

16, 1890 with 100 registering that day; students continued to enroll for the next 20 days. The first president, Dr. A. J. Emerson, who also taught Bible, had a faculty of eight. On the same day that the first classes were held, the cornerstone for the administration/classroom building (Old Main) was laid that afternoon by the Grand Lodge of the A. F. and A. M. of Texas.

Several charters of incorporation have been filed on behalf of Howard Payne University. The first charter, a handwritten document, was presented to the appropriate authorities on July 23, 1891.

HPC joined the Texas System of Correlated Schools in 1897. At that time the Pecan Valley Baptist Association surrendered its right to the Baptist General Convention of Texas to appoint the 13 trustees and, after 1901, when the class of 1898 had finished their degree courses, no further degrees were to be granted as a senior college, making HPC a junior college.

In 1914 HPC was restored to the senior college level by the BGCT with the requisite amendments to the charter “to again provide the ordinary branches of study through the full senior year of the recognized college course, both in the liberal and fine arts, and shall confer degrees pertaining to the same.”

Since 1953 the college has filed amendments to its charter in 1961, 1967, 1978 and 1985. In 1995 a revised charter was filed to replace the charter which had expired in 1991.

Emerson served as president until 1893 when Robnett was persuaded to serve as president. In 1896 Robnett left his duties as college president to accept the call to a pastorate in Dallas at the Gaston Avenue Baptist Church where he remained until his death June 23, 1898 at the age of 53.

HPC’s third president, Prof. James Harvey Grove, had actually directed the program of the college during the previous year while Robnett devoted all his energy to

finances. Grove resigned at the conclusion of the spring semester 1908; the trustees, for reasons not clear, chose not to name a permanent president and, instead, selected Dr. John Strother Humphreys, a member of the HPC faculty who taught ancient and modern languages, as acting president. Serving 1908-1910, the Trustees named Professor Robert H. Hamilton of Baylor University to the position of college president. For reasons not discovered, Hamilton left during 1911, probably after the end of his first year as president and before the fall semester was completed as his name appears in the 1911-12 catalog as president even though his successor is listed in the next catalog as being named president in 1911.

The trustees again filled the vacancy with Humphreys but this time they named him president, a position he held until 1913. After completing two years, Humphreys left the presidency. At that time Dr. James Milton Carroll was named president. He had previously served as financial agent for the board of trustees. At the end of the spring 1914, he resigned to undertake writing a commissioned work by the BGCT, A History of Texas Baptists, published in 1923.

With Carroll's sudden departure, the trustees appointed Dr. Anderson E. Baten to the position of vice-president and acting president; Baten served in that capacity for two years. In the spring of 1916, the board of trustees selected Dr. Judson Allen Tolman as the eighth president of HPC. Coming to HPC from Abilene, Tolman had chaired the Department of Latin and Greek at Simmons College (now Hardin-Simmons University). Tolman served until his resignation August 4, 1919 when he was named president of Oklahoma Baptist University.

Dr. Lee Johnston Mims became the ninth president of HPC in 1919, succeeding Tolman. Mims came to HPC from the pastorate of First Baptist of Brownwood. Mims's administration ran a deficit two of the three years he was president. A dispute soon developed between the faculty and president. Unprompted, the faculty undertook to

assume some of the more unpleasant duties of the president. Mims, never accustomed to delegating responsibilities, balked at the proposal even though the board of trustees approved the suggestion.

Despite these shortcomings, Mims was considered the best money raiser the college had ever known. He knew Baptist leaders and the denomination; his only mistake was trying to carry out the administration of a college without any prior knowledge or experience. Coupled with an increasing student body, Mims left the college on firm ground when he returned to the pastorate in 1922. He was replaced by Dr. William Robert Hornburg, who was appointed vice president and acting president.

Hornburg came to HPC from the pastorate of Coggin Avenue Baptist Church. He had an attractive personality and a wonderful speaking ability. Considered handsome, he was a great favorite with young people. He used many cowboy stories as illustrations in his sermons.

His first challenge as vice president and acting president was to heal the wounds resulting from the conflict between Mims and the faculty during the later stages of Mims's administration.

Hornburg gave the college a year of rest and healing. During the spring of 1923 the trustees considered electing Hornburg to the presidency; however, in February the Board postponed taking action and Hornburg resigned to accept the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Belton. Dean Thomas Taylor was appointed acting president until a president could be selected.

On July 7, 1923, the HPC trustees elected Dr. Edgar Godbold the eleventh president of HPC. He was holding the position of Corresponding Secretary of the Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention when he was named president of HPC .

Before Godbold arrived ,HPC was considered a “local” college by the BGCT. As

president, he devoted many hours to contacting and enlisting the aid of the Baptist State Executive Board on behalf of HPC.

Godbold left HPC in the fall of 1929 to accept the position as General Superintendent of the Missouri Baptist Association ,a position he held until 1942. At that time he was named president of Louisiana College, an appointment he held until his retirement in 1951. He died on November 21, 1952.

Thomas Hendricks Taylor, (AA degree HPC 1905) who served as dean of the faculty and taught economics and government, had been such an integral part of Godbold's administration, as well as his long term employment with the college since 1907, seemed, for the trustees, the natural choice for president. Taylor was the first alumni to serve as president of the college.

Taylor combined in his person the offices of registrar, dean of the faculty, and president thus saving the college the entire expense of the president's office. The Great Depression began during his second month as president.

During the Great Depression, Taylor administered the college in such a way as to keep the school from closing. In October 1930 at the Texas Baptist convention it was made apparent to Taylor that the BGCT would not be able to continue funding the college and actually had decided to close the institution. Upon his return to Brownwood, a faculty prayer meeting was held during which the decision was reached that HPC would be operated solely with the receipts and endowment interest without deficits.

He retired on July 1, 1955 after 26 years as president and 48 years of total service to the college. His last official act was to deliver the commencement address at the 1955 college graduation. In his retirement he collected his papers, wrote his autobiography, and a history of HPC. Dr. Taylor died after an extended illness on December 5, 1961.

In 1955 the Board of Trustees elected Dr. Guy D. Newman, special assistant to the president of Baylor, president of the college to succeed Dr. Taylor. Serving as president

for 17 years, Newman was named chancellor of the university in May of 1972 upon his retirement as president. He died July 4, 1988 at the age of 82.

In October, 1972 the presidential search committee met with Dr. Roger L. Brooks; a called board meeting in November elected Brooks the institution's 14th president. Brooks was to assume the duties of president in January of 1973. He came to HPU from East Texas State University where he had been dean of the school of arts and sciences. During his tenure the college was elevated to university status.

Faced with financial as well other unspecified issues, Brooks resigned on May 4, 1979. He was replaced by Dr. Charles Stewart, of the HPU art department as chief operating officer, pending the election of a replacement.

The board elected Dr. Ralph A. Phelps, from Dallas Baptist, as the 15th president on February 8, 1980. Phelps was not totally aware of the seriousness of the financial problem until after he was hired when the board charged him with eliminating the deficit and college debt. During his term, the debt was substantially reduced, although only through deep cost cuts. Near the end, there was a major conflict and dispute between Phelps and the faculty, members of the board and the community of Howard Payne over his leadership of the university.

His retirement in 1985 prompted the board to name Dr. Don Newbury, an alumni of HPU, to the post of president. His administration, 1985- 1997, accomplished the turn around for the college, ending the debt, increasing enrollment and adding to the physical plant. He was named chancellor in 1997 and was replaced by Dr. Rick Gregory, another HPU alumni, who came to the position of president from the vice presidency for student affairs at Dallas Baptist University.

Gregory's administration dealt primarily with physical plant issues; as a result of September 11, the stock market downturn and other financial uncertainties, his administration soon found the college in debt. In dealing with the debt, cuts were made

which members of the board, faculty and other supporters of the university disputed. The dispute ultimately led to Gregory's resignation in June of 2002. Dr. Russell Dilday was appointed interim president in August and served through February of 2003. Effective March 1, 2003, Dr. Lanny Hall, the institution's 18th president, took over the reigns of leadership at Howard Payne University.

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