THE NAMES BEHIND THE BRICKS

With Caruthers Hall coming down in anticipation of the new Guerrieri Academic Commons, the SU Magazine staff realized that as older buildings make way for the new, the legacy of the people for whom the buildings were named will soon be lost to the newest generation of Sea Gulls. Who among the recent flock of the past decade have even heard of indomitable “Miss Ruth,” for whom Powell Dining Hall – removed in 2000 to make way for Henson Science Hall – was named? To provide a little history lesson and to honor our University’s founders, we provide a brief biography of the people for whom some of SU’s buildings were named.

(Halfpage for this article was excerpted from Salisbury: From Normal School to University 1925-2001, a comprehensive history of the University written by Sylvia Bradley ’61, M’67, assistant professor emeritus of history.)

Holloway Hall • Opened 1925

Dr. William J. Holloway was the first principal of the newly opened Salisbury Normal School (which would evolve into Salisbury University) in 1925. A Salisbury native, he was Maryland’s assistant superintendent of schools when he began promoting his idea for a normal school in Salisbury to state legislators in 1922. Once realized, Holloway was absolutely dedicated to his goal of making Salisbury Normal a recognized and respected teacher-training institution and was very involved in campus life. He frequently addressed student assemblies and wrote columns for the school paper, personally drove students to appear in programs at high schools or before civic clubs all over Maryland’s Eastern Shore, conducted faculty meetings, and even helped plan architectural details for the building and landscaping for the grounds.

“When I was there, that was a long time ago,” said Madge Thomas ‘28, as she thoughtfully examined Dr. Holloway’s photo in her senior yearbook, Evergreen. Thomas, who turns 105 in October, was a member of the third graduating class and is believed to be SU’s oldest living alumna. Her smile, dubbed “radiant” in the yearbook, still shows her fondness for the institution – and the people – that helped start her 43-year teaching career.

– Madge Thomas ’28

Caruthers Hall • 1955-2014

Dr. Thomas Jefferson Caruthers joined Salisbury’s original faculty as instructor of mathematics and supervisor of Rural Practice Teaching. During his 30 years at Salisbury, he wore many hats. In addition to teaching math, he taught psychology for a time, was temporarily principal of the Elementary School, and in 1935-36 was acting principal of the college. He was also an accomplished cellist, often playing in the college orchestra.

“I was a day student at Maryland State Teachers College and never had Dr. Caruthers as a professor; however, I do remember he was a quiet and soft-spoken person, a gentleman in every sense of the word. His attributes were of the highest order and he was well respected by the campus student body.”

– Ellen Greig Bloodsworth ’36
Dr. & Mrs. Wilbur Devilbiss

“Miss Ruth” Powell

“Miss Ruth” Powell was the one person on the original faculty who more than any other became the real “spirit” of the school to most students. For the first few years, she taught science and served as social director, a position she kept until her retirement in 1946. Later she also served as the school’s dietician and nurse. Students’ morals were scrupulously supervised by Miss Ruth, with her measuring couples at school dances to be sure they were at least two feet apart and requiring her students to introduce their boyfriends to her. One of Miss Ruth’s most cherished legacies was the Candlelighting Ceremony, which was held the night before students left for the holidays.

“[Miss Ruth] carried a large ring of keys and one would know her presence by the sound of them hitting against her side as she walked the halls. She managed our dining facility and taught us our social graces. There was a strict dress code and she made sure we followed them. I served as her assistant social director for two years and she definitely was well respected by the students and made a real impact on our lives.”

– Margaret Laws Engle ’31

Maggs Physical Activities Center • Opened 1977

Benn Maggs, or “Coach” as he was known, was hired as athletic director, conductor of the orchestra and seventh grade teacher in mid-year 1933-34. Within just one year, he had organized the orchestra – composed of students and local musicians – and expanded its size. Coach Maggs’ arrival coincided with the admission of the first sizable number of male students, so he exponentially grew the almost non-existent men’s athletic program. His office, known as “The Cage,” quickly became the gathering spot for most of the male students on campus. A photographer of professional competence, Maggs continued to provide photographic services to the school even after his retirement in 1976.

“Coach Benn Maggs was Salisbury State College when I arrived in the fall of 1971. If you played soccer, you wanted to play for Coach Maggs. Players just loved to play hard for this likeable, easy-going coach. I can still see him walking across campus. He would give you an opportunity to prove yourself and for that I can say it was an honor to play soccer for the Sea Gulls.”

– Hondo Handy ’75

Blackwell Library • Opened 1957

Dr. Jefferson Davis (J.D.) Blackwell came to the school when the State Board of Education determined the college would lengthen its curriculum to four years for elementary teacher-training. With his background with U.S. Office of Education and three states’ Departments of Education, he was well equipped to meet the academic needs of teacher training and general higher education. During his tenure from 1936-1955, Blackwell saw the college through the last years of economic depression, engineered the development of a junior college curriculum, managed the social changes that came with the switch to a coed campus and steered the school through the war years.

“Dr. Blackwell visited many high schools in Maryland in hopes of recruiting future students to attend the college. I recall he visited my home on Front Street in Pocomoke City, and while sitting on our front porch, he explained to my mother and to me the advantages of my enrolling in STC. My recollection of Dr. Blackwell was that he was well informed and sincerely supported the college’s importance to Maryland.”

– Catharine Appleton Tyler ’41

Devilbiss Hall • Opened 1967

Dr. Wilbur Devilbiss helmed the Office of the President from 1955-1968. The early years of his tenure represented a complete reversal of his predecessor’s move toward more general education. Reacting to a shift in state policy, his mission was to elevate the emphasis on teacher training. By the end of his presidency, the school had shifted its focus once again from a teachers college to a liberal arts college. His years at the school were a time of enormous growth, both in the size of the campus and the scope of its programs.

“… [Dr. Devilbiss] ‘ran a tight ship’ … As president of the Class of ’58, I wanted our spring formal dance to be held at the Elkins’ home … and he vetoed that idea. … When I assured Dr. Devilbiss that alcohol would not be available, he relented. Upon leaving the office, my advisor whispered to me that he had never seen anyone challenge Dr. Devilbiss and get him to change his mind. … That meeting demonstrated Dr. Devilbiss’ fairness and unwillingness to accept the social changes beginning to occur.”

– Dr. Wayne Smith ’58

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