

BIRTHPLACE OF COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY 1828 – 1830

The Columbia Theological Seminary was born in Lexington, Georgia when Rev. Thomas Goulding gathered five students to prepare themselves for the ministry.

Thomas Goulding was born in Liberty County on March 14, 1786.¹ He was baptized at the Midway Congregationalist Church on June 25 of the same year.² “Around 1804 Thomas Goulding went to New Haven, Connecticut to enter Yale College . . . He never entered college, but pursued his studies in private . . . in Wolcott, Connecticut . . . where he met Anne Holbrook, who became his wife on November 3, 1806. After the birth of their first child—a daughter—he returned to Georgia . . . To meet the expenses of an increasing family, he began teaching school, first at Sunbury in Liberty County, then at Bairden’s Bluff . . . in McIntosh County.”³ Toward the end of 1811, Thomas Goulding was received under the care of Harmony (S.C.) Presbytery as a candidate for the gospel ministry, by whom he was licensed in Augusta, Georgia, October 31, 1813. A few months later, he began preaching as stated supply at White Bluff Congregational Church. On January 1, 1816, Thomas Goulding was ordained and installed as Pastor of White Bluff, Chatham County, Georgia.⁴

Rev. Goulding, his wife and their four children traveled from White Bluff to Oglethorpe County, where he purchased a 368-acre farm on the waters of Big Creek on September 17, 1821.⁵

In 1822, Goulding, then a member of the Harmony Presbytery, accepted the position of pastor of the Lexington Presbyterian Church.⁶ The following month, on May 24th, he was received by the Hopewell Presbytery.⁷ “On the fourth Sabbath in July, [July 28, 1822] according to appointment, the holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was administered by the pastor to the church in Lexington . . . As a portion of the church and congregation resides in the vicinity of the Cherokee Corner, [including the Gouldings] it was also agreed that the Pastor should divide his services equally henceforth between that place and Lexington. And it was further agreed that for the present year, and until other arrangements should be made, the Pastor will be expected to preach at Centre Meeting house (*sic*) on every fifth Sabbath in the month. Notice was given of the arrangements, and the first and third Sabbath in each month was appropriated to the Church and Congregation at the Cherokee corner and the second and fourth Sabbaths at Lexington. The next Sabbath being the fifth in month was devoted to Centre church.

The first Sabbath in August, [August 4, 1822] the new place of worship erected at the Cherokee corner and called Union church was dedicated by the Pastor.”⁸ Upon the request of Elder Guy Smith, Goulding assisted at the dedication of Bethlehem Baptist Church a couple of miles east of Lexington.⁹

Outside of Goulding’s involvement in the local community, his network radiated beyond Lexington in that he served as secretary of the Georgia Educational Society.¹⁰ That society was organized at a meeting of the Hopewell Presbytery held on August 8, 1823, at the Chapel of Franklin College in Athens.¹¹ The mission of Georgia Educational Society was to support interdenominational education of future ministers in Georgia.

In 1824, Francis Goulding said his parents moved the family to “Lexington, the County-seat, where also he remained about six years, taking charge, for a time, of the academic interests of the place, but devoting himself primarily to his work as a minister of Christ.”¹² Rev. Goulding

leased a home and lot, later known as the Thomas Goulding / Maxwell house from the Meson Trustees in Lexington,¹³ The house was east of the church and across from the Female Department of Meson Academy,¹⁴ where he began teaching that same year.¹⁵

While in Oglethorpe County, Goulding developed a career based on leadership in his role as pastor, as an educator, and in other capacities. Goulding was quickly voted Worshipful Master of the local Masonic Lodge in Lexington.^{16 & 17}

Thomas Goulding, like so many of his contemporaries followed the long-standing tradition of ministers in general – and Presbyterian ministers in particular – acting as the educators of local communities. In support of this, Louis C. La Motte makes this statement: Before there were seminaries, “presbyteries began designating certain men to teach candidates and compensating them for the time so spent.”¹⁸

Goulding opened the Theological Seminary in 1828.¹⁹ In 1829, Goulding began instructing five students -- Hampden C. Carter, Isaac Waddel, Farwell Jones, James Beattie, and William Moultrie Reid ²⁰-- to become Presbyterian ministers in a house that was constructed a few years before his arrival in Lexington,²¹ across the street from Lexington Presbyterian Church. For about a year or more Thomas Goulding conducted classes at the Theological Seminary in Lexington. This time period constituted the birth of the Theological Seminary, which became the forerunner of the present-day Columbia Theological Seminary of Decatur, Georgia.

The Minutes of the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia provide this clarification:

“It was not until December 15th, 1828, the Synod resolved to put the Seminary into immediate operation. The Rev. Thomas Goulding, pastor of the church at Lexington, Oglethorpe County, Georgia, was elected Professor of Theology, with liberty to retain also, for the time, his pastoral charge. During the following year, 1829, there were five students under his instruction, who seem to have pursued, for the part, a course of preparatory study.”²²

In his role as Professor of Theology, Rev. Goulding was asked by the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia to relocate the Theological Seminary from Lexington, Georgia, to Columbia, South Carolina.²³

Several of Goulding’s personal letters indicate his trepidation about the move.²⁴ In a letter to William A. McDowell dated January 7, 1830, that he was essentially resigned to the inevitable move:

“I will continue my journey to Columbia...with the hope that God smiles upon me and my brethren approve and will sustain me, I am prepared to do anything, be anything, and go anywhere. Our great business on Earth is to get to Heaven. And Columbia is as near Heaven as Lexington. The only choice is in what path and from what spot on Earth will it best please God for me to go to Heaven.”²⁵

Despite Goulding’s reservations, the Southern Recorder (Milledgeville, GA) documents that on March 17, 1830, at the Presbyterian Church in Columbia, “...the Board of Directors of the Theological Seminary of the Synod of South-Carilina [*sic*] and Georgia, inaugurated the

Reverend Dr. Goulding as Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government....”²⁶ In November of 1833, the first graduating class of the Theological Seminary at Columbia included the following eight students: James M. Adams, James Beattie, Francis R. Goulding (son of Thomas Goulding), John C. Keeney, James L. Merrick, William M. Reid, J. Leighton Wilson, and William B. Yates.²⁷ Both William Reid and James Beattie were among Rev. Goulding’s original five students, whom he taught at the Seminary in Lexington. Of the graduating class of 1833, two of his students became missionaries. James Merrick became missionary to Persia.²⁸ (Iran) Leighton Wilson and his wife Jane became missionaries to Cape Palmas, (Liberia) Africa, where they established schools and translated the Bible, among other endeavors, which laid the foundation for African Christianity.²⁹

The Theological Seminary at Columbia remained under Rev. Goulding’s leadership until 1835, when he became pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Georgia.³⁰ Following his departure, the Theological Seminary continued in Columbia until 1927, when it moved to Decatur, Georgia, and was renamed ‘Columbia Theological Seminary’, where it exists today.

ENDNOTES

1. James Stacy. *History and Published Records of the Midway Congregational Church Liberty County, Georgia*. Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1987, 94.

2. Ibid.

3. Francis R. Goulding, “Memorial of Thomas Goulding, D. D.” George Howe. *Memorial Volume of the Semi-Centennial of the Theological Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina*. Columbia, S.C. Printed at the Presbyterian Publishing House, 1884, 181 - 182.

4. James Stacy. *History and Published Records of the Midway Congregational Church Liberty County, Georgia*. 94

5. Oglethorpe County Deed Book M 1829, 47-48, Thomas W. Golding and his wife Susan, sold a farm on the headwaters of Big Creek to “Thomas Goulding of the County of Chatham in the State aforesaid” on September 17, 1821. The deed was not recorded until 1826/1827. Located in the Clerk of Court Office, Oglethorpe County Court House, Lexington, GA.

6. Lexington Presbyterian Church Minutes, January 22, 1822, Book A, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA, 2,

7. (Rev. Thomas Goulding became the pastor of the church, preaching 2nd & 4th Sunday in Lexington. Rev. Goulding preached his first sermon in Lexington April 21, 1822.) 7. Hopewell Presbytery Minutes.

8. Presbyterian Church at Lexington Minutes, August, 1822, 3.

9. Genealogical Abstracts from the Georgia Journal (Milledgeville) Vol. 1 & II, 1819–1823, July 2, 1822, 667.

10. Minutes of the Hopewell Presbytery, August 8, 1823.

11. Ibid.

12. Columbia Theological Seminary Digital Collections, Board of Directors Archives, Vol. 1, # 642, 643, 644; Thomas Goulding writing from Lexington, GA to William A McDowell, D.D. concerning his possible move to South Carolina, letter dated January 7, 1830; item # 644, line 13, Goulding mentions “decline renting my house and Lot in Lexington Delay in on (sic) them will be unpleasantness and even something more.” (Last accessed June 5, 2019.)

<https://cdm17323.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p17323coll10/id/4361/rec/3/>.

13. Oglethorpe Co. Deed Bk. N, page 97 – 98. Feb. 20, 1830. (Deed for land east of church); Oglethorpe Co. Deed Bk. N, page 254 – 255 March 12, 1831. (Lease for land from trustees)
14. Ava Rodgers. *The Housing of Oglethorpe County, Georgia 1790-1860*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1971, 31, 72. (Female Academy, later Weaver house).
15. “The Constitutionalist”, Augusta, GA, April 5, 1825, Image 4. (Last used June 10, 2019). (Ad for Meson Academy signed by Goulding Dec 29, 1824)
16. Oglethorpe County Deed Book L, 1823-1826, 7, “July 1, 1823, Land sale between Mechanics Lodge Number Seventeen, Officers (Thomas Goulding and others) and Thomas Miller & John Anthony, all of Oglethorpe County.” Clerk of Court Office, Oglethorpe County Court House, Lexington, GA.
17. “Augusta Chronicle and Georgia Advertiser”, Augusta, GA, 1822-1831, November 15, 1823, Image 2; “The Missionary”, November 3, 1823, Mt. Zion, Hancock County, GA. (Last accessed June 10, 2019.).
18. Louis C. La Motte. *Colored Light. The Story of the Influence of Columbia Theological Seminary 1828- 1936*. Richmond: Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1937, 29-30.
19. Wilson, John. *Necrology, the Dead of the Synod of Georgia*. Atlanta: Franklin Printer, 1869, 31-32.
20. Francis R. Goulding, “Memorial of Thomas Goulding, D. D.”, *Memorial Volume of the Semi-Centennial of the Theological Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina*. 183, footnote.
21. Ava D. Rodgers. *The Housing of Oglethorpe County, Georgia 1790-1860*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1971, 31, 72.
22. Rev. James Stacey, D.D. *History of the Presbyterian Church in Georgia*. Newman, GA: S.W. Murray, Printer, 1912, 279.
23. W. M. Childs Robinson. “Columbia Theological Seminary: A Historical Sketch.” Bulletin: Columbia Theological Seminary. Vol. XVII October, 1925, No. 2, 15. (Columbia Theological Seminary Library No.: BV 4070.C7946 R6.)
24. Columbia Theological Seminary Digital Collections, Board of Directors Archives, Vol. 1, # 734. (Last viewed June 13, 2019).
25. Columbia Theological Seminary, # 733.
26. George D. Howe, *History of Presbyterian Church SC*, 143.
27. The Southern Recorder (Milledgeville, GA) March 27, 1830, (Image #3), <https://>
28. Ancestry.com U.S., College Student Lists, 1763 – 1924 [database on-line]. 2012 (Citation about Seminary student Merrick)
29. Erskine Clarke. *By the Rivers of Water: A Nineteenth Century Atlantic Odyssey*. New York: New York, Basic Books, 2013, 201.
30. Francis R. Goulding. “Memorial of Thomas Goulding, D.D.”, 190.

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