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WESLEYAN FEMALE COLLEGE
C. R. JENKINS, D. D., PRESIDENT

MACON, GA. Mch. 20, 1916.

Miss Ida Tarbell,
132 E. 9th St.,
New York, N. Y.

My dear Miss Tarbell:

We have always claimed to have conferred the first Bachelor's degree upon a woman in America, because Wesleyan College was chartered in 1836 to provide a course of education for young women on equality with the best courses offered to men in the colleges of the South. This purpose is expressed not only in the charter, but in all of the public discussions and speeches of its founders. For this reason the State of Georgia gave $25,000 toward its establishment, notwithstanding the fact that it was to be a denominational school.

In the spring of 1839 the college work began under the presidency of Dr. Geo. F. Pierce, a graduate of the State University of Georgia. He had associated with him several of the most eminent educators in the South, among whom was Dr. William Ellison, one of the greatest of his day. The catalogues published at the time were burned up, but we have a list of the subjects taught and they studied as good college curriculum as could have been found at that time. Of course, the great emphasis was laid upon the classics.

Three college classes entered the day the

institution opened - Junior, Sophomore and Freshman. At the end of fifteen or sixteen months, in June, 1840, twelve young ladies were graduated, receiving the Bachelor's degree. The twelve young women who were graduated had come from the best secondary schools of the South - there were several excellent seminaries in Georgia at that time and several in South Carolina and Alabama, and from them the Juniors came in the spring of 1839. Two of the schools of special note were at Culloden and Talbotton, Ga., and were even called colleges.

When Latin, Greek and mathematics were the chief courses of study in the Southern schools very many students entered the Junior class. They did so at Emory and the University, coming from secondary schools at least until 1895. Of course, they entered by examination. You doubtless know that a great many of the school teachers in the South before the war came from the Northern universities and were well equipped to teach the classics and mathematics. The Northern teachers usually come now to our colleges and these supply teachers for the secondary schools. I have frequently talked to two women who entered the college in January, 1839, and they have assured me that they could have entered quite as well at any college for men in the South if they could have been admitted at all.

The only question that has ever been raised at all about our having conferred the first Bachelor's degree, is that the degree is written in English and in-

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stead of the usual language being used it declares itself to be the first degree conferred upon a woman. However, the twelve graduates were published, and have always been published, as A. B. graduates in the catalogue, and the Master's degree was obtained by some of them afterwards while some of the same men who were at first connected with the college were still at least members of the Board of Trustees, who had to pass on the conferring of the Matter's degree. The college had a great fight for its very life at first because it proposed to confer the Bachelor's degree upon women, and I suppose it was in the pride of victory that they called their first diploma the first degree. Bishop Pierce, Dr. Ellison and other co-laborers were men whose scholarship and ability were recognized all over the continent, and they did not dream that it would ever be questioned that they were giving the first Bachelor's degree to women. They had made a great fight for ten years for the privilege of conferring it. This fight was described to me by an old Methodist preacher - Dr. George G. Smith, who was a young man at the time and a participant in it.

The people of Georgia were willing for the women to have about a two year's course in a seminary and were building at Talbotton, LaGrange and Culloden schools for this purpose, but many of them did not believe, and said so with great emphasis, that a real college course would make them better wives and better cooks.

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#4- Miss Ida Tarbell -

The Wesleyan undoubtedly conferred the Bachelor's degree upon the young women who had completed a standard college course in June, 1840, and if no other institution had done so before that time,(and we have never been able to find one that had) we are entitled to whatever honor that deserves. Miss Catherine E. Brewer, whose name came first of the twelve on the roll, was handed her diploma first and that diploma is still in our possession - declaring itself to be the first degree conferred upon woman.

Cordially yours,

J/P

C. R. Jenkins

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