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THE SOUTH FLORIDA MILITARY INSTITUTE (BARTOW)

A PARENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

by SAMUEL PROCTOR

As was true of most of the institutions of higher learning taken over by the State at one time or another, the South Florida Military and Educational Institution had operated first as a private school. In 1894 Major General Evander McIver Law, a teacher of long and varied experience, and a Confederate veteran of distinguished service, founded a military school in Bartow, which eventually became one of the constituent parents of the University of Florida.

General Law was born on August 7, 1836 in Darlington, South Carolina. In 1854, at the age of eighteen, he entered The Citadel in Charleston, and two years later was graduated as a third lieutenant. During his last year at The Citadel he was an assistant teacher in belles-lettres, and literature remained one of his important interests throughout his life. Early in 1857 he accepted a position as professor and assistant principal of King's Mountain Military Academy. Three years later he moved to Macon County, Alabama, where he helped found the Tuskegee Military Institute.

In the early spring of 1861 he was commissioned a captain in the Confederate army, and was authorized to recruit a company of men. He was stationed first at Pensacola, and was later transferred to the Army of Virginia where he was wounded in the action at First Manassas. Law was promoted first to lieutenant-colonel, then colonel, and on October 31, 1862, he was appointed brigadier general, in Hood's division. At Gettysburg and at Chickamauga, when Hood was wounded, Law, as senior brigadier, commanded the division.¹ In 1863, at the age of twenty-seven, Law was made a major-general and served on the staff of General Johnston. He was in charge of the

1. Richard O'Connor, *Hood: Cavalier General* (New York, 1949), 157.

military forces in Columbia, South Carolina, when the Union armies under the command of General Sherman attacked the city.²

After the War, Law administered the large plantation and railroad holdings which he had inherited from his father-in-law, William A. Latta. Later, he resumed his connection with King's Mountain Military Academy. After teaching there several years, he moved his family to Bartow, Florida in 1893, and in the following year he organized the South Florida Military Institute, patterned in curriculum and discipline after The Citadel, the Virginia Military Academy, and the United States Military Academy.³

General Law in manner and dress was the personification of the traditional southern gentleman. A quiet, dignified man, his features were expressive and his manners courteous. Although he was experienced in classroom procedure, he was not a thorough scholar, but revealed a deep interest in the classics. Paternal in his attitude toward his students, and cooperative in his relations with his faculty and Board of Trustees, General Law was the most popular man ever associated with the Institute. He always wore his Confederate army uniform, and commanded a large measure of respect throughout his life.⁴ When he resigned from the Institute in 1903, he became editor of the *Bartow Courier-Informant*.

The extension of the railroads into South Florida during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the discovery of river pebble phosphate deposits in the Peace River in 1885, stimulated a rapid growth of population in that area. Bartow, which had been a small village in 1880, grew to be the thirteenth largest city in the state by 1895.⁵ Conscious of its new

2. Information on Law's military record was furnished the author by the Secretary of the Florida Board of Pensions, December 7, 1951.

3. Biographical data secured from the alumni files of the Association of Citadel Men, and from *Makers of America, Florida Edition* (Atlanta, 1909), III, 76-81.

4. R. A. Gray, a former student, to author, March 3, 1953.

5. J. E. Dovell, *Florida: Historic, Dramatic, Contemporary* (New York, 1952), II, 610.

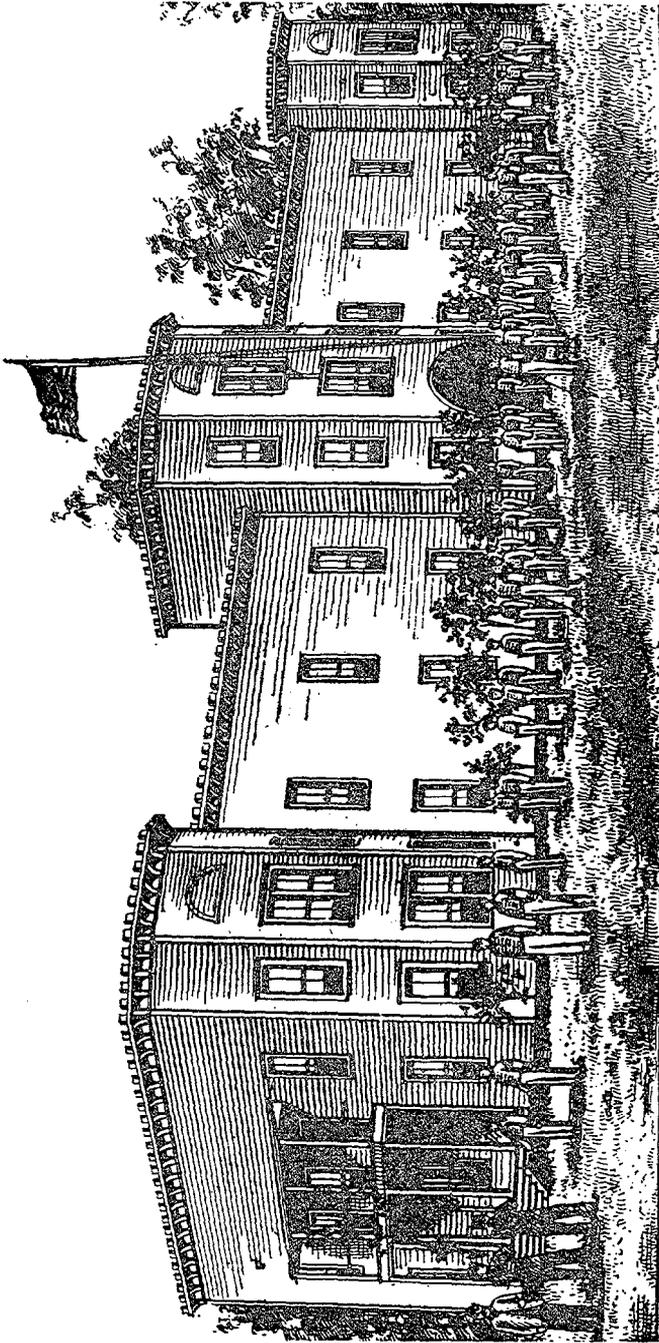
importance, South Florida resented the fact that all the tax-supported institutions of higher learning were located in the northern part of the state. It was expensive to send students to school in Gainesville, Lake City, Tallahassee or DeFuniak Springs where the state supported schools were located. Thus the citizens of Bartow realized the need for a college in their own section of the state and recognized the prestige value of having that institution in their own town.

Shortly after the great freeze of 1894-1895, which dealt a severe economic blow to the agricultural economy of Florida, a delegation of citizens from Bartow, Lakeland, and the surrounding communities, headed by General Law, appealed to the legislature for state support. Cognizant of the increasing political importance of the counties in South Florida, the House and Senate appropriated \$6,400 to aid the institution and directed that the South Florida Military and Educational Institution be placed under the direction and control of the State Board of Education.⁶ Governor Henry L. Mitchell on May 29, 1895, approved an act appointing a local Board of Trustees, "whose duty it shall be to provide a suitable building, and to perform such other duties as may be prescribed hereafter, when rules and regulations for this institution may be adopted." The high quality of the membership of the Board reveals the care of the Governor's selections. He appointed M. H. Johnson, J. W. Boyd, C. C. Wilson, J. H. Tatum, and H. L. Davis of Bartow; William H. Reynolds of Lakeland and E. A. Cordery of Fort Meade.⁷

By the terms of the act creating the South Florida Military Institute, each state senator was permitted to nominate upon competitive examination one cadet, who had to be a resident of his senatorial district. The appointment was for the five year period of instruction. In 1897 the legislature made the

6. *Laws of Florida*, 1895, Chapter 4334, 96.

7. Florida State Board of Education, *Minute Book Number Two*, February 11, 1883, to October 4, 1895, 367.



SOUTH FLORIDA MILITARY AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE, BARTOW, FLA

county rather than the senatorial district the unit for scholarships, and the number of scholarships was increased from thirty-two to forty-five.⁸ At the beginning of the first session, Sept. 25, 1895, there were 31 scholarship, or "state" cadets registered, and the remaining vacancy was filled in October. There were also eight other students in the garrison, and fifteen "day students" whose parents resided in Bartow, enrolled at the Institute. According to General Law's report, the school operated successfully during its first year; "there were no suspensions nor expulsions and no serious breaches of discipline."⁹ Enrollment at the Institute was never large, the average attendance during its ten year history was fifty-five.¹⁰ During its last session there were 64 students registered.

All cadets, both "state" and "pay", had to be unmarried, not less than fifteen years of age and five feet in height, and be physically qualified for military service. They were required to pledge themselves to continue their connection with the school until graduation or regular discharge. They agreed not to join any secret organization or engage in hazing, and obligated themselves to attend chapel each school day and church on Sunday.¹¹ A cadet to be admitted to the school, had to prove his "ability to read English with facility," and show his knowledge of the elements of English grammar, descriptive geography, arithmetic and American history. The annual tuition fee for a "pay" cadet was \$200, one-half to be paid at the beginning of each term. A contingent fee of \$10.00 was also charged.¹²

Prior to the reorganization program in 1903, the curriculum of the Institute was based on a five year program. The last

8. *Laws of Florida*, 1897, Chapter 4568, 112.

9. *Message of Governor and Other Documents*, 1897, Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1896, 133.

10. Thomas E. Cochran, *History of Public School Education in Florida*, (Lancaster, Pa., 1921), 161.

11. *Catalogue of the South Florida Military College*, 1904-1905, 14-16.

12. Charles L. Crow, *South Florida Military College* (Unpublished manuscript in University of Florida Archives), 2.

year consisted of a post graduate course. Cadets studied English grammar, geography, algebra, American history, reading, writing, and spelling during their freshman year. Algebra, English composition, ancient history, mythology, physiology and physical geography were added in the sophomore year. Trigonometry, geometry, surveying, modern history, inorganic chemistry, Latin, bookkeeping, and elocution were the curriculum for the third year; and seniors studied analytical geometry, astronomy, organic chemistry, English literature, civil government, and advanced elocution, composition and Latin. The graduate course included classes in differential and integral calculus, civil engineering, commercial law, moral philosophy, English composition and elocution. It is open to question whether one should admire more the talents and application of the four instructors who, at least by inference, pledged themselves to teach so many subjects, or to marvel at the industry and brain power of the students who were supposed to master them all.¹³

In 1903, state legislative action changed the name of the institution to the South Florida Military College and granted it authority to confer collegiate degrees.¹⁴ Shortly afterward, the college administrators reorganized the curriculum into separate courses of study: an engineering course, "designed to fit men for the practice of the profession in this State," and a literary scientific course, "designed for the purpose of insuring a broad and general education." The schedule for engineering students during the junior and senior years were loaded with courses in mathematics, chemistry, physics, geology, mineralogy, astronomy, and civil engineering. Four years of English, mostly the study of composition and rhetoric, and two years of Latin, were required. Students registered for the literary-scientific course took a number of courses in chemistry, physics, and mathematics, but most of their work was in English literature, English and American history, Latin, political

13. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

14. *Laws of Florida*, 1903, Chapter 5286, 283-284.

science and either French or German. The foreign language department was established in 1904 and courses in French, German and Spanish were offered. The political science curriculum was divided into four courses: constitutional history, principles of American government, Florida history and civics, and the law of commercial relations.

The original faculty of the school when it opened in 1895 seems to have been somewhat of a family group. General Law taught belles-lettres and ethics. Lieutenant Colonel E. M. Law, Jr., who had graduated in civil engineering from The Citadel in 1886, was professor of chemistry and physics, and served as quartermaster. His brother, Major William Latta Law, taught mathematics and acted as commandant of the troops. The only member of the faculty who was not related was Captain Thomas W. Gary, a graduate of Patrick Military Institute, who was professor of Latin and English, and assistant in physics. After 1900 General Law's sons resigned from the Institute, and T. W. White, Jr., was appointed commandant of cadets and professor of chemistry, and John B. Hutchings, who had received his bachelor of science degree from Kentucky State College, was named professor of civil engineering and physics. In 1904, P. J. Brucker-Haegy, who had been trained at the University of Paris and the University of Geneva, was made professor of modern languages. In addition, the military staff in 1904 consisted of a chaplain, a surgeon and bursar.

On January 1, 1903, General Law resigned as superintendent of the Institute and the Board of Trustees appointed Harry Porche Baya, an excellent selection not only because of his training and experience, but also because he was a native Floridian. Born in Lake City, in 1870, Baya at the age of eighteen, had graduated from the Virginia Military Institute. Although his family had donated part of the land for the original campus of the Florida Agricultural College, and his father served on its Board of Trustees, Baya's high scholastic record at V.M.I. entitled him to his appointment as professor

of mathematics and engineering in the Agricultural College in 1889. He left this position in 1896 to accept the chair of mathematics at a military school in Ossining, New York. In 1898, he was named professor of natural sciences at the State Normal College at DeFuniak Springs, and he was teaching there when he accepted the presidency of the South Florida Military College. In later life, Baya became one of Florida's best known practicing attorneys and played an active part in Florida civic affairs.¹⁵

General Law's resignation had been prompted by a series of personality clashes, which had begun early in 1902, with members of the Board. The news that he was leaving the school was withheld from the student body and public until just before his resignation was to take effect. The announcement was received with incredulous surprise by the cadets, and immediately after the Christmas holiday they held a mass meeting to consider the matter and protest the General's action. Several students wrote letters to Governor Jennings and other state officials, but there was little that could be done in the face of the Board's opposition to Law. Upon the suggestion of Cadet Robert A. Gray, the senior class petitioned the State Board of Education for permission to graduate at the end of the fall term, 1903, rather than wait until the spring term, so that General Law's name would appear on their diplomas. When the Board refused this request, because it believed that the cadets could "put in five months more of very profitable study before earning their diplomas," all but three of the seniors resigned from school and returned home.¹⁶ It was not until 1927 that the Florida legislature passed a special act

15. Biographical data on Baya secured from Mrs. H. P. Baya, Sr., Tampa, May 6, 1952, and from the alumni files of the Virginia Military Institute.

16. Florida State Board of Education, *Minute Book Number Three, October 8, 1895, to April 9, 1909*, 431.

which authorized the University of Florida to confer degrees upon these men.¹⁷

The campus of the South Florida Military College was located on a thirteen and one-half acre tract, about three-quarters of a mile from the center of the town. During the summer of 1895 contracts had been let for the construction of the first building, a two-story wooden barracks with a central three-story tower. Although not all the plumbing had been installed, the building was finished enough for use when the session opened in September, 1895. When the cadets arrived on opening day they found piles of lumber stacked outside in the yard, and they had to thread their way around the deep beds of sand which the workmen had piled up around the foundations of the unpainted barracks. Only about half the furniture had arrived, and large packing crates crammed with beds, desks, books, and other paraphernalia were not yet unpacked. The barracks contained living quarters for the cadets and also the administrative offices, the chapel, and some of the class rooms, which were located on the first floor of the building.

In 1901 the legislature appropriated \$3,500 to enlarge and repair the barracks, and to complete the installation of electric lights. Two years later the building was repainted and the rooms were refurnished with iron cots, new mattresses, and enameled copper washstands. The chemical and physical laboratories and the departments of civil engineering were housed in a separate wooden building. The chemistry laboratory according to the college catalogue, was "supplied with water and gas," and was furnished with "a dozen individual tables for extended work in chemical analysis." A large lecture room adjoined the laboratories, and there was sufficient space in the building to house engineering equipment. A small wooden

17. *Laws of Florida*, 1927, Chapter 12443, 1447-1448. The eleven men who received their diplomas in 1927 were: J. P. Carter, R. A. Gray, V. D. Hamilton, Cleveland Johnson, I. N. Kennedy, S. M. Matthews, George Miller, A. B. McMullen, L. A. Raulerson, J. Summerlin, and C. N. Tucker.

mess hall, and a gymnasium constructed in 1904, completed the campus buildings. The college officials boasted that the gymnasium was one of the finest in the South, since it contained a large playing gym, in addition to four bath rooms and tubs, "and two splendid shower baths."¹⁸ A small library and reading room was opened in 1904, but students were allowed to use it only during their leisure hours.

Cadets were required to wear uniforms in the mess hall and classroom, and special dress coats and hats were used for church services, parades, and social functions. Uniforms included a blouse, dress coat, trousers, dress cap, campaign hat, two blue flannel shirts and a belt, and cost \$31.50 each.¹⁹ Military routine and discipline regulated the schedule and activities of the cadets. Reveille was sounded each morning at ten minutes to six, followed a few minutes later by assembly on the parade ground in front of the barracks. Breakfast came at 6:40 and the first class call was sounded at 8:10. Drill was scheduled every afternoon, except Sunday, followed by a retreat parade. Tattoo was blown at 9:30, and taps at 9:45 p.m.

The college offered little in the way of social activity. The Phi Delta Sigma Literary Society held meetings on Saturday evening, and although there were conflicting opinions from the cadets, the College faculty insisted that the organization gave the students "the best kind of literary training, speaking on the floor and becoming familiar with the rules and laws of parliamentary practice."²⁰

On rare occasions, a closely chaperoned evening dance was held and the cadets were allowed to invite dates from Bartow and Lakeland. The cadets found no lack of lighter amusements in the vicinity of Bartow. Swimming, boating and fishing were popular. For all those who could afford the price of shot and shell, there was sufficient opportunity on Saturday afternoon to hunt squirrels, rabbits, and quail.

18. *Catalogue of the South Florida Military College, 1904-1905*, 8.

19. *Ibid.*, 12.

20. *Ibid.*, 15.

Athletics “under proper regulation” was encouraged by the college administrators, and the cadets prided themselves on their baseball and football teams. A regular baseball diamond was laid out on the campus in the fall of 1900, and a baseball club under the supervision of Captain T. W. Gary was organized. For the most part, games were played among the student body, and it was not until after 1903 that any attempt was made to schedule games with other state college teams. Football also remained largely a local sport, and spirited games were played by the campus teams. To measure up to the enthusiastic spirit of the teams, the student body adopted a number of college football yells, the most popular of which announced:

Rah! Hoo! Rah!

Rah! Hoo! Rah!

Who are we! Who are we!

S-F-M-C! S-F-M-C!

The most widely indulged physical activity at the College was drill, whose “beneficial effects,” according to the catalogue, “are unchallenged. It develops the man, insures in him an individual responsibility, and gives to him an ease and grace of carriage which will last throughout his after life.”²¹ Each spring the cadets were taken on a four day encampment trip away from the campus. In 1904 Tampa was selected as the camp site, and the cadets won the fifty dollar prize offered by the Tampa Festival Association, as the best-drilled cadet company in the state. Although the company was a well-drilled organization, the fact that it was the only team in the competition undoubtedly influenced the decision of the judges.

By the close of the spring term 1902, the college had graduated forty-four cadets. It was decided that these graduates should form an alumni association, and an organization was founded with the appointment of E. L. Wirt of Bartow as

21. *Ibid.*, 20.

president, and Barney R. Colson of Gainesville as secretary-treasurer.²²

Although the total number of graduates from the South Florida Military College could not have exceeded fifty-four, according to the statistics published in the last catalogue issued by the school, it is interesting to note the generosity of the state appropriations. During the 1889-1900 session the East Florida Seminary with 149 students had an income of \$7,500, while the South Florida Military Institute with a much smaller student body had an income of \$9,000.²³ This annual appropriation continued through 1904. In addition, the state by 1903 had appropriated \$76,300 for building, maintenance, and for the purchase of grounds and buildings owned by General Law. In 1904 the school was allotted \$2,000 to purchase books and equipment for the library.²⁴

In his annual report to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, President Baya, in 1904, announced that in terms of activity and interest the South Florida Military College was flourishing. The faculty had increased, all the buildings were in good condition, new departments had been created, and the enrollment was increasing. It was little wonder that the President described the cadets as "the equal at least of the student body of any college in Florida," and the "condition of the College excellent."²⁵

Under the meaning of the Buckman Act, which the legislature passed in 1905, the South Florida Military College was merged into the University of Florida. The college properties were advertised for sale by the State Board of Education, to be sold to the highest bidder. On April 6, 1906, the Board accepted the bid of \$2,610.50 made by W. B. Swearingen, and

22. Barney R. Colson was later president of the University of Florida

23. Rowland R. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida* (Atlanta, 1902), I, 405.

24. Report of H. P. Baya in *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, 1910-1919.

lic Instruction, 1904. 182.

25. *Ibid.*, 180.

a deed was executed in his favor.²⁶ The library, laboratories, and apparatus of the institution were all turned over to the newly created Board of Control for the use of the institutions under its jurisdiction.

Although the South Florida Military College as a separate institution had passed from existence, the College itself was not dead. Its graduates were authorized by the legislature in 1909 to receive diplomas issued by the University of Florida, and their names were duly enrolled on the alumni records of the state university.

The work that was begun at the institution was continued in the laboratories and classrooms of the University of Florida at Gainesville.

26. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1906*, 205.