Creek Chief Ladiga and Trader Christie Green looked eastward toward the mountains when they heard the sound of horses and the rumble of wagons. A white man was riding up to the trading post.

The newcomer, James Crow, approached warily, but his excitement mounted when he saw Green, the first white man he had encountered since leaving the Carolinas. As the other riders and wagons pulled up, Indian men, women, and children gathered around. Trader Green and Chief Ladiga, in his broken English, assured the newcomers that the Indians were friendly.

While the men sat around Green's Trading Post, located on what is now known as the Square in Jacksonville, the Indian children came up closer to the white women to feel the cloth of their dresses. Princess Satoah, the chief's beautiful daughter, and the other women welcomed the travelers into their camp around the spring below the post.

The men talked about the fertile land, the abundant water and trees, and the enjoyable seasons that would allow them to grow crops and livestock. Yes, the women agreed, this might be a good place to settle. Mrs. James Crow perhaps planted the seed for an educational center in Jacksonville when she told the men that the women would be willing to stay if they would build a school for the children as soon as the cabins were completed. The men promised this would be done. Consequently, in 1832, according to local tradition, the Crow, Grant, Woodward, Harris, and Scott families began a settlement in the beautiful rolling hills of the lower Appalachian chain.

The location, climate, and beauty of Jacksonville and Calhoun County, Alabama, provide the setting for one of the largest universities in the state. The town spring bursts forth, one of the largest and purest limestone springs in the state. The town is noted for its healthfulness. Our students invariably improve in health while here.

The surrounding country is beautiful, as at this point the great Blue Ridge Mountains begin to break up into rolling hills and sheltered valleys. On the east side of the town, at a distance of two miles or more, the hills rise almost to the dignity of mountains — one peak, Chimney, being something over seventeen hundred feet above the level of the sea. The school is situated upon a hill and has an elevation of seven hundred and fifty feet above the sea.

At the foot of this hill the town spring bursts forth, one of the largest and purest limestone springs in the state. The town is noted for its healthfulness. Our students invariably improve in health while here.

The soil is deep red clay, with here and there a strip of sandy loam, especially upon the creek bottoms. The country is well watered and drained. No malaria or other swamp diseases are known.

The town of Jacksonville is noted throughout the state for the culture and refinement of its citizens. Five of the Christian denominations are represented here, and services are held every Sunday in some one or more of the churches. The tone of morality is high, and very few, if any, of the temptations of the cities are afforded here to the students. All of the citizens of the town unite in endeavoring to make the stay of the young men and women pleasant and profitable.

Although the potential was great, Jacksonville State University did not just happen.

In the early 1830s, homeseekers and speculators, some with substantial means, steadily moved into the area. The Creeks had begun to sell their land claims in preparation for removal farther west to a new territory. The first inhabitants of Jacksonville and Calhoun County were forced to yield to the aggressive civilization of the whites.

The promised school was built for the settler children. Early historical accounts mention "the Blab School." In a crude log cabin with puncheon benches, pupils began to learn to read, write, and cipher. As few books and writing material were available, necessity required oral recitation — hence the name of the school.

Armed with pioneer dedication and scholarly heritage, the families of Jacksonville soon established two academies, the Jacksonville Male Academy and the Jacksonville Female Academy.
Covered Wagon on the Square

Courtesy of John B. Nisbet, Jr.
The Old Tavern, built in 1838, is situated on the northeast corner of the Square. Now the site of Lou’s Dress Shop.

Courtesy of John B. Nisbet, Jr.
The Jacksonville academies are mentioned on page 323 of the ALABAMA HISTORY FOR SCHOOLS, 4th ed., by Charles Grayson Summersell:

"Jacksonville in Benton County (now Calhoun) was not too small to have two academies by 1838, Jacksonville Male Academy and Jacksonville Female Academy."

On January 9, 1836, in the same year in which the town of Jacksonville was incorporated, the Jacksonville Male Academy was chartered by the Alabama Legislature.

Many pioneer family names are included in the record of the first trustees: John H. Porter, R. D. Roland, William Arnold, Will B. Martin, John M. Coole, James Lyle, Nathaniel Gregg, E. L. Woodward, M. M. Houston, George Fleming, C. A. Green, John Rainey, Benjamin Hollingsworth, and John Nisbet. Joseph Wilson presided over the first session in the winter of 1836. The faculty had high standards and expected the students to have a clear understanding and practical knowledge of each subject before advancing. Mild but positive discipline prevailed.

Participants in the War Between the States who received all or part of their education at the Jacksonville Male Academy were General William H. Forney, John T. Morgan, Major John "the Gallant" Pelham, Colonel Peter Forney, Colonel H. L. Stevenson, and Colonel James B. Martin.

Augustine Dean "Gus" Edwards wrote in a master's thesis for the University of Alabama, "Economic Social History of Benton County, Alabama," in 1941, page 59:

"The Male Academy was located on South Pelham Road on the bank of the Big Ditch, where the home of Frank Wilson now stands."

O'Riley's Restaurant is now located on this site. Other locations of the Male Academy have been mentioned in various articles on the history of the school as 202 South Church Street and the site of Hames Hall on the Normal School campus.

A paper "Jacksonville's Male and Female Academies," written by Donna Blackwood at Jacksonville State University in 1977, pages 3 and 4, includes the following information on the Male Academy:

In the 1860s the academy had a very well-structured Commercial Department. The instruction in the Commercial Department included a thorough course in penmanship, bookkeeping (double and single entry), commercial calculations, and lectures on commercial law. Students could attend a combination of the departments of the academy, or if they desired, they could attend a single department.

Upon completion of the Commercial Course, the students received Certificates of Graduation which aided them in securing occupational situations.

Expenses per session of twenty weeks were as follows: First Class $25, Second Class $10, Third Class $15, Fourth Class $30, Commercial Department (if taken extra) $15, Commercial Course (full course) $50, Contingent Expenses $1.

The following advertisement appeared in the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN in several issues:

POLYTECHNIC ACADEMY
2nd Session Begins 4th Mon. in July, 1868
20 wks. $15 to $30
Instructors: John H. Forney & H. A. Rutledge

The Jacksonville Female Academy started with a single course taught by a Miss Thompson and was

The Female Academy
202 South Church Street, Jacksonville, Alabama

Courtesy of Clarence W. Daugette, Jr.
incorporated by the Alabama Legislature on June 28, 1837. Miss Thompson was quite modern in advocating abolition of the rote method, and the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN said she was well qualified to head "the finest literary institution in the country."

The Female Academy added teachers and courses; three departments emerged. The first department included English, mental arithmetic, and writing, with a tuition of $10; the second one, reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, modern geography, history, and delineation of maps, with a tuition of $15; and the third, ancient geography, political history, algebra, astronomy, logic, rhetoric, elocution, natural and moral philosophy, and composition, with a tuition of $20. Extra subjects could be taken with an additional charge for each subject. Botany and chemistry, Latin and Greek, French painting, fancy work and chenille, and music were offered.


The Female Academy was located at 202 South Church Street and is now the home of Mrs. Fancher Adams.

Teachers sometimes taught in both institutions, going from school to school. Traditionally, boys and girls were not supposed to receive instruction together. Among the early teachers were John H. McAuley, Mr. and Mrs. James M. Burt, Colonel John H. Caldwell (later a member of Congress), Mary D. Caldwell, Carrie Woodward (who became the wife of F. T. J. Brandon and the mother of Governor William W. Brandon), Colonel Samuel H. Lockett (a West Point graduate), Clem Snow, Colonel Horace Lee Stevenson, and Colonel S. Fouche.

The academies were never financial successes. A strong individual would establish a one-teacher private school and draw students from the academies. In an effort to improve the situation, the academies would attract instructors from the private schools; at one time, the two academies were combined in one building.

The citizens again took community action. The JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN on December 4, 1869, announced a stockholders' meeting for the organization of Calhoun College. Thirty-two citizens bought 216 shares of stock. Some of the stockholders were Thomas A. Walker, E. L. Woodward, Major Peyton Rowan, William Henry Forney, Sam W. Crook, John H. Caldwell, H. L. Stevenson, John Nisbet, William M. Hames, and James Douthit.

The first Calhoun College trustees were General William H. Forney, president; E. L. Woodward, Thomas L. Walker, James Crook, Colonel John H. Caldwell, G. B. Douthit, Major Peyton Rowan, and William M. Hames, secretary. Forney became the ex officio president of the college, and S. Fouche and W. W. Richardson, the first elected professors.

In 1871 the Male Academy merged with the newly established Calhoun College. Historical data compil-
ed from "Northern Alabama" by R. Liston Crow in 1948 included the following:

The Male Academy was a long wooden structure, a room on each end connected by a long hallway. This building was torn down soon after the War Between the States and a brick building was erected, which is now the east wing of Hames Hall (formerly the Administration Building of the State Teachers College). The name was changed from Jacksonville Male Academy to Calhoun College.

An advertisement in the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN, dated July 29, 1871, offers this information:

Officials include Gen. W. H. Forney as president, Capt. Wm. M. Hames as secretary, and Peyton Rowan as treasurer. Construction of the "College Building" has been completed. The college is proud of its pure water and healthy, bracing mountain atmosphere. It is located in full view of the Selma, Rome, and Dalton Railroad.

Major Peyton Rowan was a stockholder when Calhoun College was established in 1869. In an advertisement in the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN, dated July 29, 1871, Major Rowan is shown as treasurer of Calhoun College.  

Colonel Horace Lee Stevenson, who had attended the Male Academy, was a member of the board of directors of the State Normal School from 1883 until 1887. Stevenson was elected Mayor of Jacksonville in 1875, and was in office until 1907. In 1910, he was reelected without opposition, to serve a total of some twenty years.  

Two years later the following advertisement appeared in the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN of August 16, 1873:

Jacksonville, Calhoun County, Alabama
TO BECOME A GREAT EDUCATIONAL CENTER
On Monday, September 1st, 1873 Will be opened by the undersigned CALHOUN COLLEGE As a Polytechnic School of high grade for young men And The Jacksonville FEMALE ACADEMY For young Ladies Two fine schools under one administration — offering all advantages, and escaping the risks of the mixed school system.

Courtesy of C. W. Daugette, Jr.
John Nisbet is listed as one of the trustees of the Male Academy when it was chartered by the Alabama Legislature in 1836. In the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN, dated October 6, 1869, J. Y. Nisbet is shown as a trustee of the Female Academy. Shown above is Dr. John Y. Nisbet, member of the board of directors of the State Normal School in the first years, 1883-1888. State Normal School minutes of the board of January 27, 1888, state: “Upon motion of Jno. D. Hammond, Wm. M. Nisbet was elected a member of this board to fill the vacancy caused by the death of his brother, Dr. Jno. Y. Nisbet.” Dr. John Y. Nisbet was born on April 24, 1823, and died on January 23, 1888.

Courtesy of John B. Nisbet, Jr.

On July 13, 1878, the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN advertised the Calhoun County Grange College for men and women. W. J. Borden was listed as principal and teacher of mathematics. The notice mentioned that textbooks had improved and so had the teaching of mathematics. Special instruction in practical branches of “Theory and Practice of Teaching” was offered in the advertisement. The Calhoun Grange College was short-lived; however, Calhoun College and the Jacksonville Female Academy were in existence until the State Normal School was founded by the Alabama Legislature in 1883.

The history of this university begins with the Normal School; however, had it not been for the dedicated and concerned people of the town in the early 1800s, the school probably would not have been located in Jacksonville.

In the first years of the Normal School, the presidents served for short periods of time. Establishing the school presented many problems, but these presidents were men of vision and consistent in their efforts. The Normal School continued, and the best training possible was provided, as was individual concern and care for the students.

The following chapters present profiles of the presidents who have served throughout the first century of Jacksonville State University. A narrative of each period includes some of the highlights and the people involved.
Our First Home. The old Calhoun College building. This building, located on the State Normal School campus, was built by the issuance of stock and valued at $16,000 when the property was given to the State Normal School in 1883.
James Gazaway Ryals, Jr.
1883-1885

The State Normal School Board elected James G. Ryals, Jr., as the first president in 1883. He was born in 1855, the son of the Rev. James Gazaway Ryals. He grew up on a farm in Bartow County, four miles west of Cartersville, Georgia, receiving his early education in his father's school for young men. At eighteen, Ryals joined the Racoon Creek Baptist Church near Stilesboro.

After completing a two-year course at Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, he was graduated with distinctive honors in 1877. He farmed for a year and taught in his father's school for a year. In the fall of 1879 he entered the University of Virginia, where he spent four years taking A.B. and M.A. degrees. Dr. Francis Smith, a member of the faculty of the University of Virginia, highly recommended Ryals to the board of trustees of the Normal School.

Respected and loved by the townspeople, Professor Ryals had surpassed their expectations and was considered one of the most learned men in the South by the time of his death. The JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN, on April 25, 1885, gave this notice of his death: “Died at Jacksonville, Ala. at 3:45 p.m. on Saturday, April 18th, 1885, James Gazaway Ryals, Jr., President of the State Normal School at Jacksonville, age thirty years, ten days.” He was buried in Macon, Georgia.
J. Harris Chappell
1885-1886

The following article from the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN, April 25, 1885, was reprinted in the JACKSONVILLE NEWS in "Annie Forney Daugette Memoirs" on July 11, 1956:

"In a meeting of the Board of Trustees, subsequent to the death of Prof. Ryals, Prof. Chappell, a member of the faculty, was unanimously elected to fill the place made vacant by his death until the end of the present term. Mr. Chappell is a gentleman of fine education and rare accomplishments, and was, anterior to his acceptance of a position here, a member of the faculty of the Columbus (Ga.) Female College. He will doubtless fill the position to which he has been assigned with credit to himself and the entire satisfaction of the Board of Trustees and the patrons of the school.

Chappell delivered diplomas to the first graduating class in 1886. He left Jacksonville at the end of the school year to become president of a girls' school in Milledgeville, Georgia."
Carleton Bartlett Gibson
1886-1892

Carleton Bartlett Gibson, the son of James S. and Antionette Julia Powers Gibson, was born in Mobile, Alabama, on September 18, 1864. His father, then eighteen, had come to the United States from Scotland in 1824 and settled in New York. His mother, a native of New York, was of English extraction. In 1846, his father moved to Mobile, where he was engaged in the commission business.

Carleton Gibson grew up in Mobile and was graduated from the University of Alabama in the A.B. class of 1884. The next year the same institution awarded him an honorary A.M. degree. After having taught school at Mulberry, Autauga County, Alabama, for about one year, he then became a member of the faculty of the Jacksonville State Normal School. Gibson was elected president of the school in 1886 and served until 1892.
J. B. Jarrett
1892-1893

Serving as president for only one year, Professor J. B. Jarrett advertised the school sessions in several issues of the JACKSONVILLE REPUBLICAN in 1892 and 1893. One notice that he was ill and would be late for the opening session was sent from Byhalia, Mississippi. (His name is also spelled “Jarrett” and “Jarrat” in some newspaper articles.)
Jacob Forney IV
1893-1899

A member of the first graduating class of the State Normal School, Jacob Forney, became president of the school in 1893. Forney, the son of Major General John H. Forney and Septima Sexta Middleton Rutledge Forney, was born in Jacksonville, Alabama, on October 8, 1868. He attended the Dallas Academy, Selma, Alabama, for three years. After he was graduated from the Normal School in 1886, he attended the University of Alabama and received an A.B. degree with honors in 1889 and an honorary M.A. in 1892.

Forney was principal of Noble Institute for Boys, Anniston, from 1890 to 1892, and was assistant at the Normal School and teacher of mathematics for a year before becoming president in 1893.

He and Kathleen Burt McLaughlin of Springville, Alabama, were married on June 7, 1899. Serving as president of the Normal School until 1899, Forney left to become the first appointee to the Chair of Psychology and Pedagogy in the School of Education at the University of Alabama.

Jacob Forney died at Springville, Alabama, on December 24, 1902. Forney Hall, a men’s dormitory on the State Normal Campus, was named in honor of President Forney and Mary C. Forney. This building has now been leased to local businessmen and is rented as apartments.
Captain William Mark Hames, was president of the board of directors of the State Normal School for the first eighteen years. Capt. Hames was born in Hancock County, Georgia, in 1820. A brilliant lawyer, he was Captain of Company A, Second Alabama Regiment, in the War Between the States, and was Worshipful Master in Hiram Lodge No. 42 F. & A.M., Jacksonville, Alabama. The State Normal School building, when remodeled and enlarged in 1908, was named Hames Hall in his honor. The cornerstone of the remodeled building was laid by H.S.D. Mallory, Grand Master of the Masons of Alabama. Capt. Hames died on February 8, 1911.

Photography courtesy of Hiram Lodge No. 42 A. & F.M., copied by Opal R. Lovett