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The Many

In the 100 years since the founding of the Berry Alumni Association, tens of thousands of students have graduated from Berry – but not all from the same Berry.

The many

Different generations have experienced its various versions. Berry has offered such degree programs as grammar school, high school, junior college, college and graduate school and has used different names to represent different aspects of its educational identity. In its earliest forms, Berry's names reflected its emphasis on a practical education for boys and girls. For most of its history, the institution's inclusive name was The Berry Schools. Although the college program began in 1926, Berry College Inc. was only adopted as the institution's official name in 1982.

Over the years, the culture and traditions of the campus have changed surely and incrementally, as have its faculty, facilities and scope. Yet, something essential has endured through all the various versions: an identity that defines the Berry experience. At

its best, Berry inspires students to look above their present circumstances and do something of lasting value for others, and in so doing, for themselves as well. Through its emphasis on challenging study and work, and in a setting that inspires faith, Berry works to inculcate personal initiative and responsibility coupled with a heart for service.

Circa 1940

Remarkably, a handful of alumni are still with us who were students during Martha Berry's lifetime. Most of these students arrived at Berry with little more than what they carried. They were hungry for an education and a chance to succeed in the world. They arrived from farms and rural outposts scattered across Georgia and other parts of the Southeast. One tells of traveling to Atlanta on his way to Berry and seeing buildings taller than one story for the first time.

In this era, life at Berry was strictly scheduled and regulated. Moral and behavioral standards were specified in the Berry Code. Daily bells rang at 8 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Rooms were inspected every morning, and students were assigned grades for their rooms and their work as well as their courses. College students worked two days a week and went to class for four.

The campus was largely an insulated

community. All faculty members lived on campus. Students could not leave without permission and generally did not go home during breaks. They could not have bicycles, much less cars. There were no intercollegiate sports. Boys and girls were carefully segregated, with the exception of special events and Sunday calling at Ford Quadrangle.

Life at Berry was deliberately rigorous, but the stories alumni tell are full of gratitude and magic. One remembers meeting Henry Ford when he visited campus and having danced with him as a young girl. Others tell of making the Berry bricks that define many of the buildings on campus. We now honor these students as part of "the greatest generation." They arrived in the closing years of the Great Depression, and many of the young men left Berry to enter World War II. America was a different place after the war, and Berry was to change as well.

Circa 1960

In 1955-56, the Martha Berry School for Girls closed. The high school program for boys, later called the Berry Academy, continued on the mountain campus. The academy was part of Berry, yet separate in many ways. It had its own facilities, faculty and daily life. It had its own athletic teams. It had its own financial obligations.

Berry's maturation as a college was affirmed in 1957 when, culminating more than a decade of academic improvements, it

received accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Accreditation centered the college on the liberal arts and sciences and marked the college's movement away from an agricultural emphasis. Although 90 percent of students were still from the Southeast, admission to the college was no longer restricted to students from farms or rural towns of less than 2,500.

Restrictions on campus began to ease as well. After 60 years, Berry students no longer had to wear (and sew) the defining pink and blue uniforms. The work plan changed; students now paid tuition and were, in turn, paid cash for their work, which became optional but remained widespread. The tuition rate was guaranteed to remain the same for four years. A typical academic calendar replaced the historic mode of two work days and four school days.

Varsity athletics began to play an important role in campus life. Campus chapel remained mandatory, but other aspects of campus life were loosening. Women could travel into town and were allowed to use "the crack of opportunity," the path from campus to the Redmond Road bus stop. Men were able to escort women around Victory Lake on Sunday afternoons. While Berry held firmly to its core values, new doors opened at Berry as in the nation. President John Bertrand led the way as the first international and African-American students were admitted to the college.

Alumni from this era often convey a sense of amused affection regarding their days at Berry. Certainly they were pleased to retire their uniforms and enjoy the new social freedoms, but they respect Berry's having retained its commitment to a sound work ethic and the development of character through personal and civic responsibility.

Circa 1980

College enrollment approached 1,600 in the 1980s, and the college offered several

master's degrees. The composition of students was different: more suburban, more national and more international. The concept of work was broadened to include student leadership responsibilities. Most students still worked, but the policy of guaranteed tuition was ended and an extended program of financial aid was developed in its stead. Chapel no longer was required, and the religion-in-life program involved a number of faith-based student organizations. Berry now competed successfully in the NAIA and enjoyed several national championships.

A major change in the early 1980s was the controversial closure of Berry Academy. Of all the stories and memories recounted by Berry alumni, among the most poignant, hilarious and compelling are those related by the graduates of the Mount Berry School for Boys and its successor, the Berry Academy. The students who found their way to the school many times arrived, like their predecessors at the Gate of Opportunity, alone and in need of the structure the school provided. Some had no parents; others came because their rural town offered few options. Many lived and worked with their classmates year-round, and they grew as close as family.

For many who cared deeply about it, the closing of the academy seemed abrupt and secretive. Certainly, the financial strains of the times were considerable. State agencies were assuming an increasing role in providing and regulating social services, and it was not clear whether the academy could or should become a viable college preparatory school. Regardless of the merits of the decision, closing the academy regrettably hurt and alienated a group of alumni for whom Berry had been home in a profound way. The frustration that remains 25 years later makes clear just what an extraordinary and life-defining place it had been.

A year after the academy's closure, Berry formalized an arrangement with Truett Cathy that resulted first in the WinShape scholarship program to encourage Christian

leadership and subsequently in a range of ministry programs including foster homes, summer camping and a marriage retreat center.

Berry today

Over the last 20 years, Berry has attended carefully to the sometimes difficult task of remaining true to its heritage and founding principles even as its academic reputation and offerings as a college have expanded. Berry now is compared nationally among liberal arts colleges because of the quality of its programs. And still, most students work on campus in a program that encourages them to assume increasing levels of responsibility as they help manage campus enterprises and join in faculty projects. Firsthand experience, which has made a Berry education exceptional throughout its history, remains a celebrated cornerstone of our educational program and is blossoming in new and exciting ways. Today's faculty and staff – like those of the industrial school, girl's school and high school of earlier days – are dedicated teachers and mentors focused on helping Berry students find their way to lives of meaning and purpose.

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Berry is like a living organism that must be adaptive if it is to remain viable and healthy. Yet, Berry must also remain true to its essential nature, its own DNA, in order to thrive. The 100th anniversary of our alumni association is a perfect time for all generations of Berry alumni to join together as one in celebrating Berry as a whole – all that it has been, is today and will become.

Berry alumni have a right to take great pride in their school's unique and storied history, as well as in its continuing greatest achievement and founding purpose: the Berry student.



and the One