

Talk to the 2001 Stewart Family Reunion

By William P. Jacobs, III

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Opening Prayer -

O, God, be with us today, as we think back in time to discover inspiration from those who came before us as we hear things we may never have known before.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of ALL our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

We pray in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Thornwell

It is a pleasure to be asked to speak to the Stewart Family reunion, to a family who loves Thornwell Home and School for Children.

William Plumer Jacobs founded Thornwell and was the energetic builder of Thornwell through its formative years. I assume I have been asked to speak of Thornwell because I bear William P. Jacobs' name. I'm afraid I don't do much to deserve that name. I revere it as much as those who admired his work, yet I can claim nothing beyond being lucky enough to descend from a great man and to have been the third to bear the name. The second was my father, who became President of Presbyterian College from 1935-45 and at the time of his death he had risen to the presidency of the American Cotton Manufacturers Association.

My only claim to fame was an event toward the tail end of World War Two. The Division of Infantry to which I was assigned was in Genoa Italy as the war ended in Europe.

Italians who sympathized with the United States were known to us as partisans. At the start of the war, they went to the grave of Christopher Columbus in Columbus Square in Genoa, removed what they claimed were Columbus' bones and hid them to keep the Germans from desecrating them.

When we breezed into Genoa they approached our Division Commander requesting that we furnish an honor guard at the reburial of those bones. He, of course agreed.

So, standing before you is a man who was an honorary Pall Bearer at Christopher Columbus' funeral.

Were you to drive south on Broad Street in Clinton, about four blocks from the Confederate Monument at the center of Clinton you would see on the right a beautiful campus, the campus of Thornwell Home and School for children, formerly Thornwell Orphanage.

There on the front campus is a monument. If you have ever been there, you know the inscription on the monument says simply THE CHILD. It is a monument to William P. Jacobs.

Inscribed on it are these words:

"Erected by men and women whose childhood was blessed by the founder and first President of Thornwell". It was unveiled in 1925, and I remember it well.

I was there that day, a boy of eight, sitting with his mother on a low granite wall which ran the length of the campus on Broad street, while Dr. Lynn, Thornwell president, my father and other dignitaries unveiled the monument.

Not too many moons after that I remember unveiling another memorial to my Great Grandfather, a bronze plaque, installed on the wall of the sanctuary of The First Presbyterian Church of Clinton. During an ice storm in 1929, due to an electrical short, that building burned down.

One of the few things saved from a fiery destruction that night was the plaque I had unveiled. As the wall collapsed the plaque fell flat on its face with the wall protectively on top, thus saving it from the fire.

We may never have the influence Dr. Jacobs had on so many children and we may never have a monument erected to one of us. But a kinsman of yours built a home for orphan children on the campus of Thornwell which stands now as a monument to J. W. Stewart and the Stewart family.

Mr. Stewart was an outstanding business man, born and reared in Fountain Inn. After high school he attended Presbyterian College.

It was said of him that he was a true gentleman with common sense, rugged honesty, dynamic energy, tenacity of purpose, and courage of his convictions. He was a person of profound religious convictions.

As you travel down Clinton's Broad Street past the Thornwell campus, near the middle of the front campus stands the Stewart Cottage, built as a home for boys. If you haven't seen it, you should run over to Clinton and ask someone in the Thornwell office to take you through it. It is a lovely home. The walls are granite, and the interior walls are paneled in knotty pine from nearby Thornwell property.

I know you have probably already been infected with the Thornwell Spirit by those who have

been there. Please be patient while I give you another dose.

There are several variations of the story of the little boy who gave the first money for the beginning of Thornwell. Not long ago I was shown an article which had been written in 1907 for the Columbia State newspaper by the Founder of Thornwell, It was reprinted in OUR MONTHLY, the little magazine that Dr. Jacobs published every month beginning in 1881.

Issues of this magazine have been bound and are now in the Founders Library at Presbyterian College. If you go to Clinton to visit Thornwell, go by PC and ask to view this room. It's in the Administration building of the college, and has been rebuilt essentially as it was when Dr. Jacobs died.

He learned the printing trade when he was a teenager in Charleston and one of the first projects started after he founded Thornwell was to build a print shop. Through their training there, many Thornwell children went on to become plant managers or owners of printing plants and related businesses throughout the southeast.

In this shop Dr. Jacobs printed leaflets and fliers telling of Thornwell's special needs. He also printed a small magazine called OUR MONTHLY which carried gardening hints and news about Thornwell and Clinton. This series of magazines has been preserved and now constitute the best recorded history of Clinton, PC, Thornwell and Laurens County. In it, in Dr. Jacobs words, can be found the story of Thornwell.

Several years after coming to Clinton, Dr. Jacobs received a call to New Hope, Alabama. He prayed about the call and a week later wrote in his diary, another source of Laurens County history, "I believe God has a purpose in locating me in Clinton. This little church may yet be a center of Presbyterian influence. I have declined the call to New Hope for Thee dear Clinton, let me labor with untiring effort".

Shortly after that he wrote,

"I have a project in my head, which like many projects, is I fear, to be unsuccessful. (He was always low-rating himself.) I propose to establish an Orphan Asylum in Clinton under the care of the South Carolina Synod".

The beginning of this dream is inspiring. He often told this story. "I once saw a little boy run over by the wheel of a carriage in Charleston.

"A passerby asked, 'What boy is this?' "

The answer came, 'I don't know.'

"The passerby said, 'I'm sorry,' and hurried on.

"This", Jacobs said, "is the way of it, the world runs over little children and is sorry, and then the big world goes on about its business.

"Now, I'll tell you about two little boys who ran over me," Dr. Jacobs goes on, "Back in the seventies (that's the eighteen-seventies to us) a little boy came to my door. He knocked and I opened. And there he stood, It was cold and snow was on the ground.

"Well lad, I asked 'What can I do for you?' His answer took my breath away!

"I wish you would give me a home, for I have none.'

"Don't stand there talking, little man, come in." I said.

"I haven't gotten over that little boy and it was 36 years ago when he said, "I want a home."

"I thought about that little boy for a whole year and at last I said softly to myself, 'It can be done. GOD helping it can be done!'

"About a year later I was in a widow's home out in the country from Clinton. There was a bright little ten year old lad in the room named Willie, her son. His name appealed to me because I too was called Willie." (Jacobs' wife Mary Jane always called him Willie).

"I had just finished telling the story of the wanderer and hinted about a home for such children. Willie drew near to me and laid his hand on my knee. His little hand was shut tightly over something and his eyes were earnestly looking into mine.

"My boy, what is it you have in your hand?"

"He opened his fingers and there was a bright silver half dollar.

"You are rich", I said, "what do you plan to do with it?"

"He replied, "I am hoping to give it to you to build a home for orphans."

On hearing of Willie's gift, Florence (Jacobs' daughter) gave him her savings of fifty cents, which completed a dollar."

This he took as the answer to a prayer he had made, "Lord if you send me ONE dollar this month for the promised building of an orphanage, I will take it as your sign of approval.

Actually God didn't send the dollar to him the first month, or the second month, but Dr. Jacobs kept extending the deadline until six months later he had the dollar.

So the fifty cents which Willie Anderson gave was the beginning. Soon it was followed by other gifts, each one dutifully entered in the little red ledger book which he always kept.

Later a tract of land was offered for \$1500, and all the money donated was saved for the day when

there would be enough to buy it.

By August 1873 they had \$1200 saved in a bank in Laurens. When the owner of the land stated he would give title that day for \$1500 or the agreement was off; a check was offered, which he refused. A trip to Laurens was made to withdraw the cash. Someone lent them the money and the deed was signed. Later that week the bank closed its doors in bankruptcy. No one doubted that God's hand was present in that transaction.

For three years money was collected and stone was hauled in from Mr. Kit Young's quarry near Clinton.

As the granite from the quarry began to pile up, they realized that no one in Clinton knew how to build with stone. Originally it was thought to use brick but it was not free, and the granite was.

About that time Clinton received a contingent of 48 emigrants; the only such group who would ever come to Clinton. Among these 48 were two stone masons.

Many people urged that the project be abandoned. One man even offered \$10 on the condition that he would be repaid \$20 if the home was not built.

Others were more supportive, and just about everyone in Clinton helped, giving money, materials or labor. Every week during construction was an act of faith. "We began each Monday with no dollars," he said, " We knocked off every Saturday with no debts. The ravens brought it in."

On October 1, 1885 they moved into the first building on the campus the Home of Peace, which, as you know, still stands. They were Dr. Jacobs, His wife Mary, their four children, plus ten other children, five boys and five girls.

All the children had chores, but there was also hired help. One day one of the girls came and asked,

"How much does it cost to feed us?"

"About \$50 a year" was the answer.

"And how much are we paying old Mama, our cook?"

"About \$60 a year and I suppose her food costs another \$60."

"Well then, we girls will do the cooking and you can take in two more children."

The boys made a similar proposal. Everyone worked together.

This is where the idea of a children's Thanksgiving offering originated; children helping other children with their pennies and dimes, a regular, dependable source of income.

Here is a footnote on the story of Willie Anderson.

In June, 1922, a man who had been elected to the Board of Trustees of Thornwell appeared and was enrolled. The chairman of the board introduced this man, Mr. William P. Anderson to the members present. Mr. Anderson told the story of having given the first fifty cents to Thornwell. He had earned it pulling fodder. This gift was everything he had. He had been touched by the appeal.

So there we have it.

A story of two men from Clinton's early days, Willie Jacobs who had the vision, the faith and the determination, and Willie Anderson who shucked corn and gave all he had. They were each essential.

Your family is tied in with these two Willies, by your J. W. Stewart who loved children, too, and did something about it.

William P. Jacobs worked to bring about his vision, and he did it with the help of people like Willie Anderson and J. W. Stewart.

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May we pray?

Lord God, may the examples of William P. Jacobs, Willie Anderson and J. W. Stewart be inspiration to all of us in today's fast computerized times, inspiration urging us to take long enough to think of those less fortunate than we who are saying to us, "I wish you would give me a home, for I have none".

In Jesus' Holy name,

Amen