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Benson and Cone families donate historical documents to University

DECEMBER 1, 2006

Exactly 100 years to the day that it was founded, Georgia Southern University kicked off its Centennial celebration by accepting a unique and irreplaceable collection of historical documents from two Bulloch County families.

Robert Benson III formally presented Georgia Southern officials with legal papers, personal letters and photographs that help to tell the story of the early years of the University.

Featuring the original deed to the land on which Georgia Southern was built, the documents will be housed in the Special Collections of the Zach S. Henderson Library.

“These are significant documents relating to the University’s history, and we are very pleased to add them to our Special Collections,” said W. Bede Mitchell, the dean of the Henderson Library who took possession of the gift on Friday, Dec. 1.

The documents came from the private collections of the Benson family and the Cone family. Both families have longstanding ties to Georgia Southern, which was known as First District A&M School when it was founded in 1906.

Benson III is the son of Dr. Robert Benson Jr. Dr. Benson is the grandson of Maude Moore Benson, who served as the dietician at Georgia Normal School, which is what Georgia Southern was called in the mid to late 1920s.

Dr. Benson’s father, Robert Benson, married Martha Cone, who was raised in the Bulloch County community of Ivanhoe. Benson was a land appraiser, real estate broker and owner of Charles E. Cone Realty Company.

Howell Cone was one of Martha Cone Benson’s cousins. An attorney, he served in the state senate and the state house of representatives for many years.

In 1924, while representing Bulloch County in the senate, Howell Cone advocated changing First District A&M School into a two-year teacher’s college, or normal school. Five years later, he led the charge to elevate Georgia Normal School into a four-year institution known as South Georgia Teachers College.

Howell Cone died in 1952, but Georgia Southern honored his memory by naming a residence hall for him in 1954. Today, Cone Hall is undergoing a renovation that will transform it into the home of the University’s Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health.

The documents in the Benson and Cone collection span from 1905 to the 1950s. The list of items includes mortgage and loan documents from Sea Island Bank, personal correspondence from South Georgia Teachers College President Marvin Pittman, and photographs from Robert Benson's scrapbooks.

'Some of the financial documents really underscore the depth and breadth of the community's commitment to the school,' said Georgia Southern historian and professor emeritus Del Presley. 'A popular local refrain, repeated by Howell Cone and others for more than 40 years, was, this is the people's school.'

'These documents help to show why the community would not let it fail.'

Dr. Benson and his son discovered the documents back in the 1980s while they were cleaning out an abandoned office that used to house Charles E. Cone Realty Company. The office was located in what is known as the old Cone Building on North Main Street in downtown Statesboro.

'I found it ironic that the documents we discovered proved that Sea Island Bank was the financier for some of Georgia Southern's original property,' Dr. Benson said, 'and now Robert is working at Sea Island Bank.'

Presley relied on parts of the collection to write 'The Southern Century: Georgia Southern University 1906-2006,' the recently published book that chronicles the first 100 years of the institution.

'Some of the papers and photographs were invaluable resources as I researched the early history of Georgia Southern,' Presley said.

For more information on the University's Centennial celebration, visit www.georgiasouthern.edu/centennial .

Who created Georgia Southern's Centennial logo?

DECEMBER 1, 2006

Once Georgia Southern University's Centennial logo was unveiled, the question on everyone's lips was, 'Who designed it?' The answer came from Connie Palfy, assistant to the Vice President for Business and Finance.

'The administration was very impressed with the work of Eric Rickabaugh of Rickabaugh Graphics in Columbus, Ohio, and selected him to create the logo," said Palfy. 'We met Eric through the International Collegiate Licensing Association (ICLA), and he's created logos for many universities, for sports teams and leagues, and for celebrities. His work is well-respected."

Rickabaugh spent nearly two days on campus and talked with more than 70 people, including faculty members and students in the classroom. He met with University historian Del Presley to gain a sense of what has been symbolic of Georgia Southern over the years.

The column design of the logo reflects the facade of the Pittman Administration Building, a building that has symbolized Georgia Southern for most of the century. It had round columns for many years before its renovation. The logo combines the traditional look of the historic campus with the modern Avant Garde typeface, which is also used in the University's main logo. Reproduced in the University's colors of blue and white with an accent of gold, the logo has both a standard version and a version that incorporates the Centennial theme, 'A Century of Progress, Pride and Promise."

For more information about Rickabaugh's work, go to his Web site at <http://home.columbus.rr.com/rickabaughs/TOC.html>.