

Four Founders

Southern Wesleyan University

L. G. Clayton

Dr. Lawrence Garvin Clayton was a family physician in the town of Central, but he was hardly the stereotypical country doctor. Born in 1854 and raised on the family farm which straddled the line between Pickens and Anderson counties, he learned to read the Greek New Testament at his mother's knee and received a classical education on the dirt floors of nearby Thalian Academy. After medical training at the University of Virginia and the University of Maryland, with additional study in Philadelphia, Dr. Clayton set up practice in Central and became a leader in the community. He served as president of the county medical society for more years than anyone else before or since.

Lawrence Clayton had the reputation of being a man of strong convictions. If he believed something was the right thing to do, his friends (and occasional opponents) agreed, there was no turning back or backing down. It was that steely determination that led him to make house calls on horseback in his younger days, regardless of the weather. It took him to Ramsey's Woods late one evening in the 1880s when he heard rumors of a lynching there on what is now part of the Clemson campus, and it prompted him to cut down the young black man and take him back to his office in a futile attempt to save his life. It kept him practicing medicine until he was 80 years of age.

And it brought him to the Wesleyan Methodist Church, where he answered a call to preach. Ordained at the relatively late age of 43, he served as South Carolina Conference president for eight years, including the decisive period in which the site for the school was selected, all the while maintaining his medical practice. Throughout his life he preached the importance of ministerial education, declaring in an article for the *Wesleyan Methodist* that the two greatest barriers to the spread of biblical holiness in the South were ignorance and fanaticism. A Southern school providing ministerial training in the Wesleyan tradition was his dream, and he approached the task with the same intensity that made him an outstanding physician. When Dr. Clayton moved his wife and eleven children from their home in Central to a house he had built on the edge of the new campus, it symbolized his commitment to the venture. Building a holiness school was the right thing to do, and there would be no turning back or backing down.