

# Fukien Christian University

## *Fujian xie he da xue*

福建協和大學

[Fuzhou Shi](#) (Fujian Sheng, China)

Fukien Christian University (Fujian xie he da xue), established in 1915, was a union venture of the Church Missionary Society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the Reformed Church in America, and the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1920, land was purchased on a spur of Drum Mountain, about five miles south of Foochow (today Fuzhou, Fujian province) and building began. Two temporary buildings made of mud and lath housed not only six classrooms but also the chapel, laboratories, a library, a social room, the offices for the president, dean, and treasurer, the dining hall, kitchen, and dormitories.

Not surprisingly the student body was in a celebratory mood when the cornerstone for a new dormitory building was laid in 1923. The Fukien Star reported: "On November 22, during the forenoon, there was celebrated on the campus an event which may be regarded as one of the greatest occasions in the life of this University - the laying of the cornerstone of the Gardiner Hall (Jr) Memorial Dormitory. The event was celebrated with an academic procession from the campus to the new building, where fitting exercises were held, including addresses by Bishop Welsh of Japan and Governor Sah; the presiding officer was Bishop Hind, of Foochow, who also laid the stone, receiving for the purpose a silver trowel, from President Gowdy's hands, which will be sent to America to the donors of the building.

One can only imagine the distress of the university community when less than five years later the Gardiner Hall, Jr. Memorial Dormitory went up in flames. Most faculty and students were at a social meeting in the chapel on the evening of May 28, 1928, when the call of fire was heard. As reported, "By the time we reached the top of the hill the blaze was already coming out of the roof and the whole attic was filled with smoke and flames.... [The fire] descended to the next floor, and then down to each floor in succession until the entire building was consumed by the flames by 12:00 midnight.

When the rebuilding after the fire began, it was decided to redesign the Gardiner Hall, Jr. building as an Arts Hall rather than a dormitory. Faculty residences were converted into dormitories for the men and a women's dormitory built in 1932. In addition to offices for the administration, the Gardiner Hall, Jr. Memorial Arts Hall had eight class rooms, six offices for the teaching staff, and a library with seats and tables for more than 100 students at one time. By 1932 the library contained nearly 10,000 English books and 13,000 Chinese books, as well as numerous periodicals. The chapel in the Arts Hall could seat more than 400 people and was used for general meetings and concerts as well as religious services.

The Jones Memorial Science Hall was named after Fukien's first president, Edwin Chester Jones. Jones was of Methodist background and had degrees from Wesleyan University and Yale University. He taught Chemistry at the Anglo-Chinese College for several years before Fukien Christian University was established in 1915 and he became its first president. In 1923, Jones contracted encephalitis, or sleeping sickness, and resigned the presidency to return to America for medical treatment. Jones was succeeded by John Gowdy, who served from 1923 until 1927 when C. J. Lin became president.

Much of the campus at Fukien Christian University was used for agricultural purposes. Students tested various types of seeds and planting procedures on small plots. The College of Agriculture specialized in mountain agriculture, due to the geographical character of much of Fukien Province.

In 1937, the threat of Japanese invasion made it necessary for the University to leave its Foochow campus and reestablish itself on a "refugee campus" in Shaowu, 250 miles inland. Nearly a decade passed before FCU was able to start holding classes on its original campus again in May 1946. When it was found that several of the smaller buildings on the Foochow campus had been destroyed, several temporary wooden buildings that had been used in Shaowu were placed on rafts and floated down over the treacherous rapids of the Min River to the home campus.

Returning to Foochow did not mean the end of disruption and upheaval. FCU treasurer Eva Asher reported in her diary in October 1946: "I spent the day at the office, but things move slowly there. Dealing with inflated currency in the millions instead of thousands does not make sense. We have no budget and I do not know how to make any... What a great day it will be when daily life returns to something resembling normalcy. With this inflated bubble, people feel uneasy and restless, and cannot give their best to their work..."

Foochow was occupied by the Communist army on August 17, 1949 but Fukien Christian University was able to carry on in a fairly normal fashion until 1951. The new People's Government in China was particularly supportive of academic courses that would prepare students for service to the community, an emphasis that coincided well with FCU's traditionally strong departments of agriculture and education.

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### **Further reading**

Scott, Roderick. [\*Fukien Christian University: A Historical Sketch\*](#). New York: United Board for Christian Colleges in China, 1954.