

Thornwell Orphanage (known today as Thornwell Home for Children)

By Edwin Eugene Ott

20160110

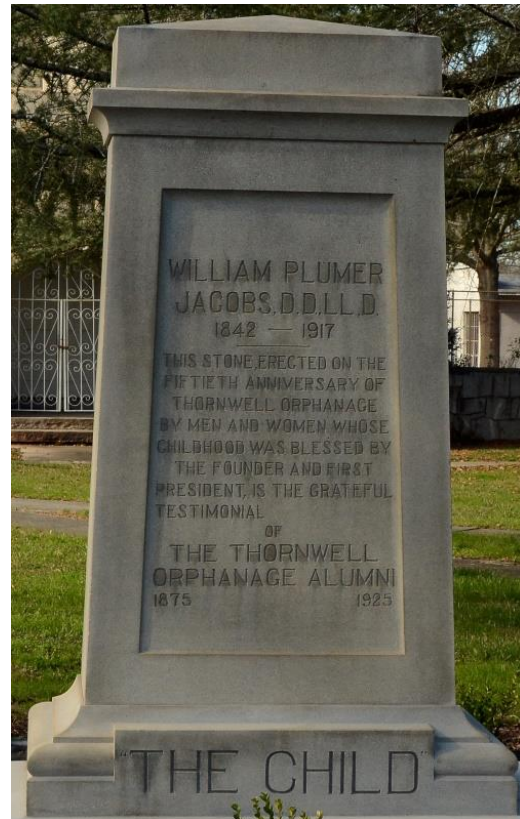
Thornwell Orphanage is a jewel in the City of Clinton, the County of Laurens, and the State of South Carolina. Thornwell Orphanage was formed in the small village of Clinton in the midst of poverty.

Clinton was a crossroads called Five Points that began to grow when the railroad came to it in 1850. The Town of Clinton was incorporated in 1854. After the Civil War the Laurens Railroad Company ceased operation and declared bankruptcy. Clinton, like most of South Carolina, was filled with poverty during the Reconstruction Era (1863 – 1877). In 1864, William Plumer Jacobs (1842 – 1917), a newly ordained Presbyterian minister, became the first pastor and the only resident minister of the only church in the village. Under Rev. Jacobs' stewardship, the church grew.

Although Jacobs' father was a slave holder, at the age of 16 Jacobs wrote in his diary, "I have come to the conclusion that slavery at best is a diabolical practice." A year later when reporting on the raid at Harper's Ferry, he writes, "I was awfully a Secessionist but now I am a strong Unionist. I would not see one quill plucked from the wing of that proud bird which is emblazoned over our Senate hall." While Jacobs was in study at the Columbia Seminary, Dr. James Henley Thornwell, a great leader of Presbyterian thought of his day, was one of his favorite teachers. Dr. Thornwell was a fire-breathing proponent for taking up arms against the North. Jacobs writes that Thornwell delivered one the most stirring patriotic addresses he had ever heard urging that "every man to take his gun, and if he had no gun, his pistol, and if he hadn't that, his hatchet, his hoe, 'anything that will kill,' and go and defend their wives, their daughters and their sisters." Rev. Jacobs was clearly torn by the rising cry for war. Thornwell Jacobs, his son, writing in his book, *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM PLUMER JACOBS*, says "But when his state seceded and battle came with the customary stories of horrible atrocities, his heart and prayers followed his new flag."

William Plumer Jacobs was declared medically unfit for military service due to amaurosis of the eyes, and so Jacobs continued his religious studies. He was introduced to Laurens County when his father accepted a position at the Laurensville Female Academy in 1861. As a seminary student he preached just the second sermon of his life at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Laurens County in 1862.

In October 1872, Rev. William P. Jacobs drew up the plan for an orphans' home, naming it the Thornwell Orphanage in memory of Dr. James Henley Thornwell. With the blessings of the First Presbyterian Church and with the help of the citizens of Clinton and strangers, the money and other means of construction were gathered. In January 1874 construction on the first building for the

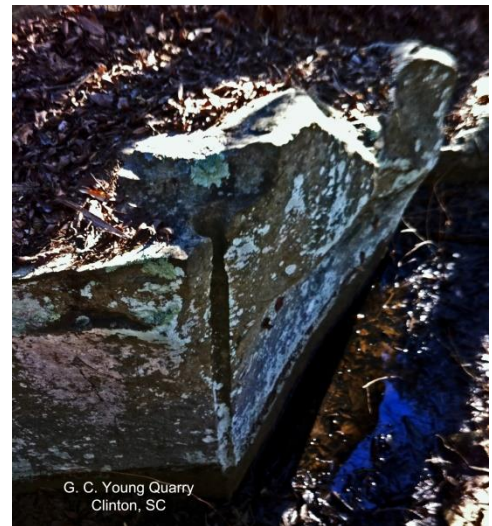


orphanage was begun, and in May 1875 the cornerstone was laid. The building was completed and opened on October 1, 1875. The building stands today and is named the 'Home of Peace.' (See image right.)



William Plumer Jacobs was never a man to rest upon his laurels. On the tenth anniversary of his pastorship (1874) at First Presbyterian Church, he resolved to construct a male college in Clinton. Today this institution is known as Presbyterian College.

A prominent member of the First Presbyterian Church and Trustee of Thornwell Orphanage, George Thomas Christopher Young (also known as G. C. Young) donated the stone for the Home of Peace and many following buildings at the campus from his granite quarry. George, who was affectionately known as 'Kit', married Nannie Elizabeth Blakely. A history of Thornwell Orphanage written in 1925 for its 50th anniversary states, "No building on the campus bears the name of the longtime friend and faithful trustee, Mr. Young, yet every granite building, except the church, Silliman Cottage and Mayes Memorial might well have his name attached. From his quarry located about a mile from town came most of the granite used with the exception above noted." A plaque is found on the Home of Peace today that reads, "To the glory of God and in loving memory of Kit and Nannie Young who gave the native stone for the erection of this building, 1875". Young's abandoned quarry can be found today on a hillside behind the Presbyterian Communities of South Carolina in Clinton. The granite from Young's quarry is distinctive by orange/brown color, which is probably due to its high iron content.



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