

The Founding of the University

Converse University had its beginning on March 22, 1889, when thirteen of Spartanburg's leading citizens met to explore a proposal to establish a college for women. Among the men present was Dexter Edgar Converse, a pioneer in South Carolina's cotton textile industry. A native of Vermont, with a daughter of college age, he was keenly aware of the need in the South for a college for women which would provide a thorough and liberal education.

These citizens agreed to form a stock company and raise enough money through private subscription to buy the site and main building of old St. John's College. Within 18 months these goals were achieved, and on October 1, 1890, the College, named for Mr. Converse, began its first academic session.

From its opening, Converse was operated as a private stock company supported mainly by Mr. Converse. On February 25, 1896, however, the stockholders voluntarily relinquished their stock and claims upon the property and the College, by special act of the South Carolina legislature, was incorporated as a non-profit institution with a self-perpetuating board of trustees. Thus, Converse University was established as an absolute and permanent gift to the cause of higher education for women.