

Historic Reports on OSU Building Names

ARNOLD DINING CENTER

Research Coordination and Introduction

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In August 2017, the Building and Place Names Evaluation Workgroup began the process of generating historical reports on four OSU campus buildings and their namesakes under consideration. These buildings/namesakes were Arnold Dining Center (Benjamin Lee Arnold), Avery Lodge (Joseph C. Avery), Benton Hall and Annex (Thomas Hart Benton), and Gill Coliseum (Amory T. “Slats” Gill). The purpose of these reports was to gather and analyze historical evidence to explore, reveal, and contextualize the lives and viewpoints of the namesakes, and the histories of the buildings.

Research Team

Dr. Stacey L. Smith (OSU history department) assembled a research team made up of scholars from OSU and the broader Oregon community and coordinated the research with the OSU Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC). The research team scholars were chosen for their extensive professional credentials in history or related disciplines, their strong record of high quality research and publication, and their expertise on the eras in which the building namesakes lived or the controversies surrounding them.

The research team included:

Dr. Thomas Bahde (Arnold Dining Center): Thomas Bahde earned his Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago, with an emphasis in the 19th-century United States and comparative slavery. He teaches in the Honors College at Oregon State University and is the author of *The Life and Death of Gus Reed: A Story of Race and Justice in Illinois During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Ohio University Press, 2014).

Dr. Stephen Dow Beckham (Benton Hall): Stephen Dow Beckham is the Pamplin Professor of History, Emeritus, Lewis & Clark College. A graduate of the University of Oregon (B.A.) and UCLA (Ph.D.), Beckham taught for 42 years. His courses covered U.S. History, the American West, Native Americans, and seminars in research methods. He is a former “Oregon Professor of the Year” and recipient of the Asher Distinguished Teaching Award, American Historical Association. He is the author of numerous books, articles, monographs, expert witness reports, and has served as the writer of museums exhibits and master plans from the Library of Congress to the Hong Kong Museum of History. Beckham and his wife reside in Lake Oswego. They are heavily involved in the Beckham Estate Vineyard growing and producing Pinot noir wines.

Dr. Marisa Chappell (Gill Coliseum): Marisa Chappell earned her Ph.D. in history from Northwestern University in 2002 and is an associate professor of history at OSU. Her expertise is in post-1945 U.S. history with an emphasis on politics, social policy, and the political economy of race and gender. She has published *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and co-authored *Welfare in the United States: A History with Documents* (Routledge, 2009). She is currently working on a book about the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), which organized low- and moderate-income Americans in the last third of the twentieth century.

Dr. Dwaine Plaza (Gill Coliseum): Dwaine Plaza earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from York University, Canada, in 1996. He is a professor of sociology at OSU and Associate Dean of the OSU College of Liberal Arts. His research expertise is on migration in the English-speaking Caribbean, and he has also conducted and published extensive research on immigrant communities in Oregon and the history of race and athletics at Oregon State University. He has received research grants from the Canadian International Development Research Grant and the Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigrants and Settlement. He is also the winner of the Oregon Innovators in Education Award (2000) and the OSU College of Liberal Arts Bill Wilkins Teaching Award (1999).

Dr. Stacey L. Smith (Avery Lodge): Stacey L. Smith earned her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2008 and is an associate professor of history at OSU. Her scholarship focuses on connecting the history of the U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction with the history of the North American West. She is the author of *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), which won the inaugural David Montgomery Prize in U.S. labor history from the Organization of American Historians. She has also published articles in the *Pacific Historical Review*, the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, and the *Journal of the Civil War Era*. She is currently working on a book on African American abolitionists and civil rights activists in the Pacific West.

Methods and Approaches

There is a great deal of information and misinformation circulating about each of these OSU buildings and their namesakes. For this reason, the researchers agreed to adhere to rigorous research standards. Whenever possible, they documented their claims with primary sources, first-hand accounts of historical events, including newspaper articles, oral histories, census records, diaries, letters, and official institutional or government documents. They drew extensively on primary sources in the holdings of OSU SCARC. Archivists Larry Landis and Natalia Fernandez, and graduate student assistant Michael Dicianna, provided invaluable help in locating these sources. Dwaine Plaza and Marisa Chappell also reached out to longtime OSU and Corvallis community members to collect oral histories about Amory T. “Slats” Gill. Susan Hayes, a Corvallis community member, donated her time, expertise, and research materials to help the research team reconstruct the history of the Benton County citizens’ fundraising campaign to build Benton Hall.

The research team also relied on secondary sources, accounts written by historians. They avoided non-scholarly secondary sources such as anonymous or crowd-sourced websites, blogs, or non-scholarly history books without thorough citations. They depended, instead, on scholarly books with extensive citations. The researchers also tried to address apocryphal or unsubstantiated information circulating about each namesake. Finally, the research team extensively documented their own research with detailed footnotes. The team strongly encourages readers to examine the footnotes carefully for more information about the historical sources on which the reports are based.

Historical Interpretation, Contextualization, and Conclusions

History is an interpretative discipline. Historians gather as many primary and secondary sources as they can about a given topic. They then analyze these sources and read them against each other to construct interpretations of what happened in the past. For some topics, primary source evidence simply does not exist or it is very incomplete. For other topics, primary sources are abundant. Primary sources that survive from the past often have problems: they can be biased, one-sided, filled with inaccuracies, or silent on important issues. Some primary sources may directly contradict other primary sources. For this reason, historical research is not aimed at uncovering incontrovertible truths about the past; instead, the historian's job is to make well-reasoned conclusions based on a limited and often problematic pool of available primary sources. Historians evaluate which kinds of sources are likely to be more reliable than others. They make informed speculations, educated guesses, based on the quality and quantity of primary source evidence that they find.

The types of interpretations historians make, and the kinds of primary sources they look at, also depend on the time period in which they conduct their research. For instance, at the turn of the twentieth century, during the height of Jim Crow, few professional historians examined primary sources produced by African Americans or accorded African Americans much role in U.S. history. This changed during the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s. Scholars began to seek out accounts by African Americans and to argue that black civil rights activists were critical to remaking national politics. All historical scholarship is, then, a product of its time. Our interpretations of historical figures change over time as community values and ideals change. Historical scholarship is generally not aimed at evaluating whether a historical figure was mostly “good” or mostly “bad.” Rather, historians seek to contextualize individuals’ lives, to determine what views they held, why they held them, where they fit in the broader societies in which they lived, and what repercussions these views had for their communities (past and present). In seeking to contextualize the views and actions of historic building namesakes, the historical researchers attempted to address the following questions identified by the Building and Place Names Evaluation Workgroup:

- 1) Actions taken vs. viewpoints held: Do the historical figure’s actions differ from expressed viewpoints? Are these differences significant and meaningful?
- 2) Public vs. private persona: Did the figure express or act on exclusionary or racist views in public life? Or, did such acts or views primarily shape their private life?
- 3) The progression of an individual’s viewpoints and life as a whole: Did the figure’s actions or views change substantially over time? Did the person recant or attempt to rectify past behavior later in life?
- 4) Broader social/institutional context: Historical figures are shaped by the cultural values of the time in which they lived. Can you comment on whether the person’s views or actions aligned or did not align with the mission of OSU or the broader society of the period? It might help to consider whether the person’s views were widely held by other Americans, Oregonians, or OSU community members during their lifetime, or whether they were an outlier in their community. Comparison with other important or well-known figures of the period may be helpful.

The historical reports on OSU building namesakes show that people who lived in the past were complex. In some cases, it may not be easy to make cut and dry conclusions about whether these building namesakes held or acted on exclusionary views. The lack of primary sources, disagreement among sources, and contradictions in individuals' own behaviors, result in many “grey areas” where the evidence is inconclusive.

The research team members refrained from making recommendations about building names. It will be up to the OSU community—faculty, students, staff, administrators, and Corvallis residents—to discuss and debate the legacies of these historical figures. It is our hope that the historical reports will generate an honest, open dialogue about the past, and about OSU's present mission and values.

Benjamin Lee Arnold and Arnold Dining Center

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Introduction

This report presents and contextualizes historical research conducted on Benjamin Lee Arnold (b. 1837/39, d. 1892), second president of Corvallis College/Oregon Agricultural College (1872-1892) and namesake of Arnold Dining Center. Arnold was raised in a slaveholding family in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, he studied slavery (among other subjects) at college, and he served in the Confederate army during the Civil War. He began a career in higher education after the war and was selected as the second president of Corvallis College in 1872 by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which incorporated the institution in 1868. He served as president for two decades until his death in 1892. Arnold Hall was built in 1971-1972, part of a “President’s Complex” of residential buildings in the south part of campus. This report details Benjamin Lee Arnold’s family ties to slavery, his service with the Confederate army, his postwar religious and institutional affiliations, and his tenure as president of Corvallis College/Oregon Agricultural College.¹

Early Life & Arnold Family Slaveholding, 1837/39-1857

Benjamin Lee Arnold was born in Mecklenburg County, Virginia in either 1837 or 1839. His father was Jonathan J. Arnold, his mother was Elizabeth (maiden name unknown). In 1850, when he was either eleven or thirteen years old, he lived for an unknown period of time with Hartwell Arnold (also in Mecklenburg County, probably an uncle), a Methodist minister who hired a schoolmaster to teach his own children. Benjamin probably received his education alongside Hartwell’s children for at least a few years, perhaps throughout his adolescence. According to the 1850 slave schedule, recorded during the 1850 federal census, Hartwell Arnold owned fourteen slaves while Benjamin lived with him, including six children under eighteen years of age, all of whom were listed in the 1850 federal census as “mulatto.” Benjamin’s father also owned seven slaves in 1850: a thirty year-old man, a twenty-two year-old woman, a twenty year-old woman, an eight year-old girl, a six year-old girl, a three year-old girl, and a one year-old girl. According to the 1860 census, Hartwell Arnold continued to hold eight slaves, while Jonathan Arnold apparently no longer held any slaves.²

The Jonathan and Hartwell Arnold families were not unusual in the extent of their slaveholding. If the 1850 slave schedule recorded a typical number of slaves for the two families, they would have been middling slaveholders, but even their modest holdings marked them as fully invested, quite literally, in the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of slavery. There were 12,000 slaves in Mecklenburg County in 1850, about sixty percent of the 20,000 total residents. Theirs was not a society with slaves, but a slave society, in which social, cultural, political, economic, and even religious values expressed and reinforced the slaveholding social order. Although poor and middling whites engaged in daily interactions with slaves and free blacks, which they later characterized as benevolent and peaceful, racial tension and increasingly virulent rhetoric characterized the 1840s and 1850s, as did intensifying polarization of pro- and anti-slavery religious and political thought. Benjamin

¹ Due to the brief timeline for this report, extensive research in primary sources was not conducted. Some information drawn from secondary sources may need to be confirmed by further historical research, especially concerning Arnold’s Confederate Civil War service. I have made clear where I have offered informed speculation and where there remain gaps in information or unconfirmed apocryphal information.

² Manuscript federal census for Mecklenburg County, Virginia, 1850, 1860 [accessed via Ancestry.com, August 23, 2017]; manuscript federal census slave schedules for Mecklenburg County, Virginia, 1850 [accessed via Ancestry.com, August 23, 2017].

Arnold grew up in a world pervaded by the daily reality of slavery, and by open debate, discussion, and dissent regarding the past, present, and future of slavery as an institution. Although he may not have held slaves himself due to his age, he directly experienced and benefitted from the institution of slavery.³

Studies at Randolph Macon College, 1857-1861

Benjamin Arnold also studied and thought about slavery as a student at Virginia's Randolph Macon College between 1857-1861. The college was then located in Boydton, seat of Mecklenburg County, and associated with the Methodist Church. Arnold took a wide range of classes during his college years and obtained an impressive range of "proficiencies," including in "Political Economy and Domestic Slavery." The course of study involved attending lectures by college president William A. Smith, also a professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy. The textbook was Smith's own recent *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, as Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States; with the Duties of Masters to Slaves* (1856). More substantial than the title implies, the volume is more than 300 pages of densely argued and wide-ranging theologically informed moral philosophy on both the idea and practice of slavery. Smith made clear in the first pages: "The position I propose to maintain in these lectures is, that slavery, *per se*, is right; or that the great abstract principle of slavery is right, because it is a fundamental principle of the social state; and that domestic slavery, as an *institution*, is fully justified by the condition and circumstances (essential and relative) of the African race in this country, and therefore equally right."⁴

Smith's book, and the lectures on which it was based, critiqued the practice of slavery in the United States, especially with an eye toward correcting what he believed were misrepresentations of its horrors and brutality. He admitted and condemned some abuses, but dismissed the possibility of emancipation and emphasized the duties of masters to their slaves. To argue for the moral correctness of African slavery, Smith asserted: "the African are a distinct race of people...decidedly inferior to the whites in point of intellectual and moral development," placing him firmly within the paternalist camp of proslavery thought. It seems Benjamin Arnold read Smith's book closely, attended his lectures regularly, and passed his examinations with high enough marks to achieve proficiency in the subject. We do not know that Arnold shared all, or any, of his professor's opinions, but they must have shaped his thinking on issues of slavery and race.⁵

3 Census data for Mecklenburg County in this paragraph from Alfred L. Brophy, *University, Court, and Slave: Proslavery Academic Thought and Southern Jurisprudence, 1831-1861* (Oxford University Press, 2016), Chapter 2 "Pro-slavery Academic Thought in the 1840s and 1850s" [ebook accessed via Oxford Scholarship Online, August 28, 2017]. More than half of all slaveholders in Virginia in 1860 held five or fewer slaves, while less than one percent owned more than one hundred slaves. Historical data from *Historical Statistics of the United States*, presented in table form online at: http://faculty.weber.edu/kmackay/statistics_on_slavery.htm [accessed September 13, 2017].

4 Randolph Macon did not use a letter-based grading structure, instead awarding certificates of proficiency to students who satisfactorily completed each course of study. *Catalog of Randolph Macon College for the Collegiate Year 1857-58* (Richmond: Chas. H. Wynne, 1858), 14 [accessed via Ancestry.com, August 23, 2017], shows Benjamin L. Arnold in the freshman class, and *Catalog of Randolph Macon College, Session 1860-61* (Richmond: Chas. H. Wynne, 1861), 7 [accessed via Ancestry.com, August 23, 2017] shows Benjamin L. Arnold in the graduating class with proficiencies in Mechanics and Astronomy, Mineralogy and Geology, Moral Philosophy, Political Economy and Domestic Slavery, and German. Both catalogs list Professor Smith's course and book as required for the proficiency in Political Economy and Domestic Slavery. William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, as Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States; with the Duties of Masters to Slaves* (Nashville: Stevenson and Evans, 1856), 11-12. For the place of slavery studies in the Southern academy before the Civil War and the impact on proslavery jurisprudence and Southern legal thought, including a section on William Smith and Randolph Macon College, see Brophy, *University, Court, and Slave*.

5 Smith, *Lectures*, 208.

Confederate Civil War Service, 1862-1865

We also do not know exactly what Benjamin Arnold felt about the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860 and the secession of the first Southern states to form the Confederacy. Virginia seceded from the Union on May 23, 1861, about the time that the Randolph Macon class of that year would have graduated. Many of Benjamin Arnold's classmates probably joined the Confederate army immediately, but it seems that Arnold did not, apparently waiting over a year and a half to enlist in November 1862. It is unclear what he was doing during this time, or why he did not join sooner. He apparently avoided conscription after the first Confederate draft was authorized in April 1862, so perhaps he enlisted to avoid the ignominy of entering the army as a late conscript.⁶

The details of Benjamin Arnold's service remain somewhat unclear due to the incomplete nature of Confederate military records and subsequent histories; only a basic outline is possible. Arnold initially enlisted in Captain Epes' Battery of Johnston's Artillery Battalion (some sources indicate heavy artillery, as would be used in fortifications, while others indicate light artillery, as would have seen field combat with infantry and cavalry). Arnold mustered-in to service on November 18, 1862 at Fort Drewry in Virginia. He enlisted as a private, but may have been promoted to captain later in the month. Arnold served with Epes' Battery for about sixteen months, until he was transferred to Company F, 14th Virginia Infantry in March 1864. He mustered in and out of that regiment as a private, serving about a year until the surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865.⁷

Records from Epes' Battery have not been located, but according to a recent regimental history of the 14th Virginia Infantry, Arnold was on sick leave and in the Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond for perhaps five to seven months with two separate ailments (spermatorrhea and chronic diarrhea) during his year with the regiment. He was apparently still suffering from his last ailment when he was paroled in late April 1865. His 1892 obituary notes that he experienced "an interval of invalid

⁶ Basic information on Benjamin Arnold's two enlistments in the Confederate military is available at the National Park Service's Online Soldiers and Sailors Database: <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>. Unfortunately, Tom Bennett, "The Civil War and OSU," *Oregon Stater*, June 1994, 9-14, 21, provides a great deal of unverified information concerning Arnold's enlistment and subsequent illness, much of which is repeated in "Carry Me Back: A History of Oregon State University (1856-1999)" [<http://www.osualum.com/s/359/16/interior.aspx?sid=359&gid=1001&pgid=1224>, accessed September 7, 2017]. Another problematic source is Randol B. Fletcher, *Hidden History of Civil War Oregon* (The History Press, 2011), which gets Benjamin Arnold's regiment wrong and invents for him a Civil War career he did not have, including service with the 38th Virginia Infantry at the battle of Gettysburg. Fletcher makes much of the relationship between Arnold and another Corvallis College/OAC faculty member, Benjamin J. Hawthorne, who appears to have graduated from Randolph Macon College at the same time as Arnold, and who did enlist in the 38th Virginia. The apocryphal story of Arnold and Hawthorne fighting together at Gettysburg is also related by Tom Bennett.

⁷ There is also some uncertainty regarding whether Arnold held the rank of captain. Captain Branch Epes apparently served throughout the war as commander of his battery; it is unusual that Arnold would also hold that rank within the same unit. The information on Arnold's promotion to captain comes from a database record at Ancestry.com: Historical Data Systems, comp. *U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2009, but the original source for this information is ambiguous. The NPS Soldiers and Sailors Database does not specify a rank for Arnold in Epes' Battery, nor does "Virginia, Civil War Service Records of Confederate Soldiers, 1861-1865," database at *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:3HX-HVJ>): 5 December 2014), Benjamin L Arnold, 1863; from "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia," database, Fold3.com (<http://www.fold3.com>: n.d.); citing military unit Capt. Epes' Co., Heavy Artillery (Johnson Artillery), NARA microfilm publication M324 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1961), roll 293. A summary of Benjamin Arnold's service is also included in Edward R. Crews, *14th Virginia Infantry*, The Virginia Regimental Histories Series (H.E. Howard, 1995), 84.

life at home” at some point during his wartime service, but does not specify the nature of the illness or when exactly it occurred. Without more detailed documentation it is difficult to determine the specific service Arnold performed or which battles he directly participated in, since he seems never to have written or spoken publicly about his wartime experiences, motivations, or ideals.⁸

Institutional & Religious Affiliations, 1865-1872

Benjamin Arnold apparently hoped to begin teaching after he graduated from college in 1861, and may have taught briefly before his Confederate enlistment in late 1862. The only known source of information about Arnold’s career during this period is his 1892 obituary in the *Corvallis Gazette*, which provides a great deal of incomplete and apparently erroneous information. At some point after he returned from the war in 1865, Arnold may have taught at a college, academy, or preparatory school in North Carolina. His obituary claimed that he also taught at Emory and Henry College in Virginia, an institution affiliated with the Methodist Church, but there is no record of him there. By the summer of 1867, he was teaching Physical Sciences at West Tennessee College in Jackson, affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention. He was there until at least July 1869. He then served as the principle, and perhaps sole instructor, of the Bolivar Male Academy in Bolivar, Tennessee until at least autumn 1871.⁹

Slavery and secession precipitated an identity crisis for Southern Christians, especially Methodists and Baptists, whose core religious doctrines were often used by antislavery advocates to argue for the fundamental cruelty and hypocrisy of slavery. However, institutions like Randolph Macon College, and professors like William Smith, demonstrate that even Methodism could be manipulated to serve a pro-slavery agenda. The 1844 schism within the Methodist Church over the theological implications of slaveholding (discussed below) signaled a hardening of religious sectionalism, but the religious affiliation of small colleges in the South after the Civil War was not necessarily indicative of the doctrinal prejudices or pedagogical practices of individual faculty members.

Benjamin Arnold’s employment before arriving at Corvallis College in 1872 suggests that he was more interested in his vocation as an educator than in the consistency of his institution’s religious affiliation. However, his religious upbringing was probably heavily influenced by his slaveholding

⁸ Crews, 14th Virginia Infantry, 84.

⁹ A search of Emory and Henry College catalogs between 1865-1870 conducted by the college archivist confirms that Arnold did not teach there after the Civil War; Jane Caldwell to Thomas Bahde, email correspondence, September 7, 2017. Additionally, George J. Stevenson, *Increase in Excellence: A History of Emory and Henry College* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963) does not mention Arnold among the faculty, nor does David Sullins, *Recollections of an Old Man: Seventy Years in Dixie, 1827-1897* (Bristol, TN: The King Printing Company, 1910), 356 (Sullins was an alumnus and later president of Emory and Henry College). Benjamin Arnold’s obituary in the *Corvallis Gazette*, February 12, 1892, also states that he served as chair of mathematics at West Tennessee College, and ambiguously notes that he was “called to the president’s chair in Trenton, Tennessee,” and from that position appointed as president of Corvallis College, but there is no evidence that he was ever in Trenton, or that he ever held a college presidency before arriving at Corvallis College. An advertisement for West Tennessee College in *Memphis Daily Appeal*, July 14, 1867 lists B.L. Arnold, physical sciences, as well as B.W. Arnold, professor of language, and two other faculty members: W.M. Shelton, president, and W.M. Cameron, mathematics. Arnold is listed as faculty at West Tennessee College in several other newspaper advertisements in the late 1860s, including one for “Hall’s Copper Scroll Lightning Rods,” in *The Tennessean*, July 13, 1869, in which he is listed as a professor of physical sciences. West Tennessee College merged with other institutions in 1874 and the institution is today Union University. In 1870, the *Bolivar Bulletin* newspaper identified Arnold clearly as Benjamin L. Arnold, but beginning in early 1871, printed advertisements for the Bolivar Male Academy listed B.F. Arnold as the principle, presumably a typesetter’s error. He is not mentioned as principle after the fall term of 1871, although a newspaper advertisement for the Bolivar Male Academy indicated that he would be engaged as principle for the entire academic year; see *Bolivar Bulletin*, September 8, 1871. The school was under different management beginning in the summer of 1872; see *Bolivar Bulletin*, July 12, 1872.

uncle's vocation as a Methodist minister and by his Southern Methodist collegiate life. His continuing affiliation with religious institutions in the South after the Civil War suggests a conservative stance on racial issues, but these are not subjects that Arnold seems to have written or spoken about publicly. Like his early home life, education, and Civil War service, Benjamin Arnold's religious activities and institutional affiliations in the early part of his teaching career are only suggestive of his personal views.¹⁰

President of Corvallis College and Oregon Agricultural College, 1872-1892

Benjamin Arnold's tenure as president of Corvallis College and Oregon Agricultural College is by far the best-documented period of his life and career. Because much is already known about Arnold's presidency, this summary primarily contextualizes his activities as president with regard to issues of race or his potential Confederate/Southern sympathies, and his relationship to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. But again, Arnold does not seem to have spoken or written publicly about these subjects during his time at Corvallis College/OAC.

Arnold was appointed to the presidency of Corvallis College in 1872 by the college's trustees, all members of the Columbia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The denomination arose from a theological dispute over slavery within the Methodist Episcopal Church, which caused the church to split in 1844. The MECS was initially the proslavery faction and was later associated with pro-segregation policies. The MECS maintained that slaveholding was consistent with Christian, and especially Methodist theology, a position it maintained even after the end of slavery. It was a popular denomination in Oregon and elsewhere until the Methodist church reunited in 1939. In addition to Corvallis College, the MECS was responsible for the founding of the theology & divinity schools at Vanderbilt, Duke, Emory, and Southern Methodist University.¹¹

Arnold taught a wide variety of subjects in his first years as president, including physical sciences and moral philosophy, and enthusiastically organized a cadet corps and military science curriculum. His enthusiasm for this work, and the selection of cadet grey for the color of the uniforms, has led to speculation that Arnold continued to hold Confederate sympathies, but there is no evidence of this. An 1872 photograph of the cadets, apparently taken before the uniform standard was implemented, shows mismatched frock coats and slouch hats. The imposition of a uniform standard was in keeping with the practices of other college cadet corps, and grey was a popular choice both before and after the Civil War (it remains the regulation uniform color at West Point). There is, however, some indication that the continued use of grey uniforms during his tenure as president was not necessarily Arnold's choice. In November 1888, Arnold conveyed to the Board of Regents the unspecified

¹⁰ For the divided loyalties of the Southern Christian academy, see Brophy, *University, Court, and Slave*; for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, see W. Fred Kendall, *A History of the Tennessee Baptist Convention* (Brentwood, TN: Executive Board of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1974).

¹¹ Columbia Conference Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Collection (MSS Columbia), Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon. The MECS acquired and re-chartered Corvallis College in 1868, but was not immediately successful at reversing the institution's fortunes. In 1872, the education committee of the Columbia Conference admitted that the college was "not...entirely free from debt." On the post-Civil War proslavery theological stance of the MECS, see Luke E. Harlow, "The Long Life of Proslavery Religion," in Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, eds., *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 132-158.

“dissatisfaction” of an unknown party with the uniforms the students were required to purchase and wear. The issue was apparently out of Arnold’s hands, as the board responded that they specifically “wish the gray color to be maintained,” which seems to have closed the matter.¹²

The institution eventually prospered financially under Arnold’s presidency, but the sale of land grant lands proceeded slowly and the endowment formed with the funds from those sales generated little income. The college mortgaged its farm and/or leased out most of it in the 1870s and early 1880s to generate income. Arnold’s leadership through this early period of financial uncertainty and sporadic state support also extended into the turbulent period between 1884 and 1888. These were the years when the college was being separated from the MECS and the state assumed full control. Arnold walked a fine line of allegiance to both the church and the state. He was reaffirmed as the president of the public college by the new state-appointed board of regents once they took control in 1888. Arnold also oversaw implementation of curricula required by the 1862 Morrill Act—the federal law which created the land grant system that funded the college—despite a lack of financial and pedagogical resources. Until alumnus Edgar Grimm was added to the faculty in 1883, Arnold and some of the other faculty took it upon themselves to begin agriculture instruction and research, even though none of them had expertise or formal training. Arnold took responsibility for writing the college’s first agriculture research report in 1874, despite his own lack of training in this field.¹³

The 1870s and 1880s saw increased enrollment, larger faculty, a wider variety of subjects, the enrollment of female students, and hiring of female faculty. During the same period, Corvallis College assumed control of the state’s agricultural college, beginning a lengthy and acrimonious relationship between the two entities that finally resulted in a schism. As early as 1874, the MECS education committee censured the faculty for allowing students to be absent from Sunday services, “free to roam wherever their inclinations may lead them”; and in 1875, Arnold asked the church to excuse Professor Joseph Emery, professor of mathematics, from “pastorial labors.” Although Arnold was probably a religious man, it does not seem that he ran a particularly strict religious institution.¹⁴

12 The early history of Corvallis College and the MECS is most recently told by William Robbins, *The People’s School: A History of Oregon State University* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, forthcoming). Photograph of cadets located at “Corvallis College Building and Cadets, 1872,” *Special Collections & Archives Research Center*, accessed September 12, 2017, <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/items/show/9261>. Wallis Nash to B.L. Arnold, November 19, 1888 and November 22, 1888, President’s Office Records of B.L. Arnold, Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon.

13 Lawrence A. Landis, *A School for the People A Photographic History of Oregon State University* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2015), 24 – 26; and Robbins, *The People’s School* (forthcoming).

14 MSS Columbia. In 1886, Benjamin Collins, affiliated with the Siletz Tribe, graduated from the college, as did his brother James in 1888, the first Native American graduates. See “Chronological History of OSU,” [<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/chronologicalhistory/chronheader/introduction/>], accessed September 12, 2017.

The partial records of the Columbia Conference of the MECS housed in the Special Collections and Archives Research Center at OSU also contain an ambiguous reference from 1881, in a report by the education committee. Arnold may not have been involved, but the passage is worth quoting in its entirety, although the context is currently unknown:

In this Report we wish to correct an impression which has gone out that some of the ministers of this Conference desire that the destructive doctrines of our Church be taught in Corvallis College. This we believe to be contrary to desire or wish of any member of the Conference. But on the other hand, we believe it is the duty of the Columbia Conference the founder and guardian of Corvallis College to see to it (in the language of the President of the Board of Trustees) “That no Science *falsely so called* shall be taught which contravenes any of the fundamental truths of our holy Christianity.”¹⁵

It is possible that the phrase “destructive doctrines of our Church” here refers to proslavery or racist views, but the substantial ambiguity in this statement makes it difficult to parse the condemnation of false science that follows. Further research may clarify the context of this intriguing assertion and the extent to which Arnold was involved, if at all.

The precise nature of Benjamin Arnold’s relationship to the MECS remains conjectural, including specifically why he was selected for the presidency of Corvallis College. Once in office, he seems to have been willing to relax the spiritual discipline of the institution, but this alone does not signal the extent of his affiliation with, or commitment to the doctrines of the MECS, nor does it indicate how his religious beliefs may have informed his views on slavery or race during his time as president.¹⁶

Naming of Arnold Dining Center

Arnold Dining Center, originally Arnold Dining Hall, was planned and delayed for several years beginning in the mid-1960s, with construction finally beginning in 1971. The building was meant to be part of the “President’s Complex” that included Finley and Bloss residential halls in the south campus. The extent to which Arnold’s Confederate Civil War service was considered at the time of naming is unknown, as Arnold was not often the subject of university publications after his death. A 1934 article in the *Oregon State Monthly* misstated his education, claiming that he studied at the University of Virginia, but briefly mentioned his service in the Confederate army under Robert E. Lee. This would still have been considered a point of pride in 1934, a connection to a major historical

¹⁵ MSS Columbia.

¹⁶ In a 2013 history of Corvallis, Roy Bennett charged that Benjamin Arnold “introduced the anti-Catholic color of orange, to replace the silver and blue which was previously the school’s color.” See Roy Bennett, *Corvallis, a Streaming Narrative: An Unauthorized History of the City and its University* (Corvallis: Corvallis Community Pages, 2013), 133. Bennett provides no documentation to support this statement, and primary source evidence shows that this claim is incorrect. An article in the *Corvallis Gazette*, July 01, 1892 (six months after Arnold’s death) reports that: “According to the suggestion of Prof. Bloss, the students of the agricultural college have adopted as their colors orange and black, and all those connected in any way with the institution are easily known by the bow worn on the breast.”

figure. However, only four decades after Benjamin Arnold's death, the article bemoaned the fact that it had to rely on the "faded record" of a speech given in the early twentieth century for the scant (and erroneous) biographical details on Arnold, already slipping into obscurity. After another four decades, the somewhat incomplete details in his biography had given way almost entirely to conjecture, apocrypha, and neglect.¹⁷

Summary & Conclusion

As the second president of Corvallis College/Oregon Agricultural College, and the administrator under whom control of the institution transitioned from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to the state of Oregon, Benjamin Arnold was a significant figure in the early history of the university, and could even be considered the father of the institution in its public form. His upbringing and education in Virginia, including his family's slaveholding, his service in the Confederate army during the Civil War, his postwar religious affiliations, and his educational career in the South suggest that Arnold *may* have held some version of the broadly white supremacist views common to whites of his era, but because he did not speak or write publicly about his views on either slavery or race, it is impossible to say with certainty precisely what they were, or how they evolved over the course of his life. Arnold was admired and respected during his two decades as president of the Corvallis College/Oregon Agricultural College, but he was largely forgotten when Arnold Dining Hall was built and named to honor him in 1971-1972.

¹⁷ "The President's Complex," Facilities Services Records (RG 193), Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon. "Former O.A.C. President," Oregon State Monthly, Volume 13, Number 11 (May 1934), 13.