



- *Educator*
- *Founder*

TIMELINE

1902 – Establishes Boys Industrial school

1909 – Establishes Martha Berry School for Girls

1920 – Awarded Doctor of Pedagogy, University of Georgia

1926 – Establishes Berry Junior

Martha McChesney Berry

1866–1942

Inducted 1992

Martha McChesney Berry was a rare combination of opposites. Born in 1866 into an affluent plantation family, she had access to wealth and social prestige, but she devoted her life completely to providing educational opportunity in the midst of poverty in the Georgia mountains. Martha had the highest ideals while being very practical. In her educational program, mountain children could pay their own way through work. In this way, she attacked poverty through self-help, giving her students self-respect as well as an education.

In the 1890s, Martha returned home from finishing school in Boston. One Sunday afternoon while sitting in a log cabin where the books and toys from her childhood were kept, she was singing to herself some favorite hymns and noticed three little boys peeking in. Drawing the boys into the cabin, she read Bible stories to them. Without a Sunday school, church or public school to attend, the boys had wandered a long way over mountain roads to listen. Their fascination at the Bible stories inspired Martha to begin teaching. That inspiration lasted a lifetime.

Martha invited the boys to come back the following Sunday. They returned, and brought many more children with them. Before long, Martha opened a Bible school in an abandoned church in Possum Trot. She soon realized that she must offer these children more than religious training, and within a few years she was operating several schools in mountain communities where public education had not yet been established.

Martha came to believe that children needed more than just a few hours of instruction a week. In 1902 she dedicated her family inheritance—83 acres of land—as the site of a boy's industrial school. The school was a self-supporting farm where boys paid their way through construction work. In 1909, Martha opened a similar girl's school, with a dormitory built by the boys. In 1926 the complex became a junior college; by 1932 the school was a four-year college.

“Not to be ministered unto but to minister.”
– Berry College motto

College

1930 – Transforms junior college into four-year college

1930 – Listed by Ida Turbell as one of America's 50 greatest women

1931 – Voted one of America's "12 Greatest Women" in Good Housekeeping Magazine

1932 – Appointed first woman member of University of Georgia board of regents

1937 – Appointed first woman member of Georgia State Planning board

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As the schools grew, Martha worked tirelessly to raise an endowment. Her unique blend of idealism and practicality enabled her to win support from prominent individuals such as Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison and Theodore Roosevelt. As a result, the property of the college grew to more than 25,000 acres of farmland and pine forest. Students were taught forestry, conservation and advanced farming methods, along with traditional arts and sciences. They graduated with job-training and life-support skills and with the self-respect of people who have earned their way.

Martha Berry died in 1942, but her mission of study, work and worship lives on in the college that bears her name in Mt. Berry, Georgia. Her modest school has grown to become a nationally recognized liberal arts college, which today remains dedicated to academic achievement, religious values and practical work experience in an environment of natural beauty.

Honors Received

Although she was never a college student, Berry was awarded honorary doctorates by eight colleges and universities:

Bates College in Maine, Berry College, Duke University in North Carolina, Oberlin College in Ohio, Oglethorpe University, the University of Georgia, the University of North Carolina, and the University of Wisconsin.

During her lifetime she also received honors from the Georgia General Assembly, the (Theodore) Roosevelt Memorial Association, Pictorial Review, the Colonial Dames of America, Variety Clubs of America, American Institute of Social Sciences, and numerous others. She was appointed to the initial Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and was chosen in a Good Housekeeping magazine contest as one of America's 12 greatest women.

Additional Resources

Martha Berry Museum/Oak Hill
Mount Berry, GA 30149
(800) 220-5504
(706) 291-1803