

**Oakland College** was a [Presbyterian](#)-affiliated four-year college reserved for whites; it operated from 1830 to 1871 near [Lorman, Mississippi](#). After years of closure during the [American Civil War](#) of 1861-1865, it was closed down.

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The property was sold to the state. The legislature renamed the institution as [Alcorn University](#), after the Republican governor of the state, and established it as a [land grant institution](#) and [historically black college](#). This was the first black land grant college in the nation. After the Reconstruction era, the legislature renamed it as Alcorn Agriculture and Mechanics College, to express their emphasis that it should train students for their roles in the rural and largely agricultural state.

In the 20th century, it developed new programs and graduate studies, and was renamed as [Alcorn State University](#), gaining university status in 1974. Some historic buildings and a cemetery of the 19th-century period remain.

## Location

The college was located in [Jefferson County, Mississippi](#), seven miles away from what became known as the town of [Lorman](#).<sup>[1][2]</sup> It spanned 225 acres of land.<sup>[1]</sup> It was near [Rodney](#) and [Port Gibson](#), and was 40 miles from [Natchez](#). These historically significant towns had large plantations owned by members of the Southern elite.<sup>[1][3]</sup>

## History

The college was founded in 1830 by leaders of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>[2][4]</sup> They hired Reverend [Jeremiah Chamberlain](#), a Presbyterian minister educated at [Dickinson College](#) and the [Princeton Theological Seminary](#), as the first President.<sup>[2][5]</sup> Chamberlain had served as the President of [Centre College](#) and [Louisiana College](#).<sup>[2][5]</sup> More recently, he had served as the pastor of [Bethel Presbyterian Church](#) in nearby [Alcorn, Mississippi](#).<sup>[6]</sup>

The college was endowed by planters such as [Rush Nutt](#) of the [Laurel Hill Plantation](#), [Smith Daniell](#) of the [Windsor Plantation](#), and [Isaac Ross](#) of [Prospect Hill Plantation](#), as well as [David Hunt](#).<sup>[2][7][8]</sup> Moreover, [John Ker](#) donated US\$25,000 for a Professorship in Theology.<sup>[8]</sup> The land, spanning 250 acres, was donated by planter [Robert Cochran](#).<sup>[9]</sup> The [Oakland Memorial Chapel](#) was built in 1838.<sup>[10]</sup> (The wrought iron staircase was moved from the Windsor Plantation to the chapel in 1890.<sup>[2][10]</sup>) It served not only as a chapel, but also as a library, with additional space for classrooms and offices.<sup>[2]</sup> The chapel became a [National Historic Landmark](#) in 1976.<sup>[10]</sup> Over the years, more buildings were erected, such as a president's house, three professor's houses, and fifteen cottages, which served as dormitories for students.<sup>[2][8]</sup>

The first class took place on May 14, 1830 at the private residence of Mrs [John E. Dromgoole](#), the wife of a [slave trader](#),<sup>[2]</sup> with three students attending.<sup>[2]</sup> Six months later, twenty-two students were enrolled.<sup>[2]</sup> Over the years, more than a thousand students were educated at the college.<sup>[2]</sup> According to historian Mary Carol Miller, its alumni pool included "twenty-one ministers, thirty-nine attorneys, and nineteen physicians."<sup>[2]</sup> John Chamberlain taught English and Mathematics.<sup>[8]</sup> In 1837, Reverend [Zebulon Butler](#) became Professor of Theology.<sup>[8]</sup> He was later replaced by Reverend S. Beach Jones.<sup>[8]</sup>

The first student to graduate in 1833 was [James M. Smiley](#); he went on to serve as Vice Chancellor of the state of Mississippi.<sup>[2]</sup> Notable alumni include [Henry Hughes](#), who developed the economic notion of 'warrantism'.<sup>[11]</sup> Another notable alumni was [James S. Johnston](#), later a bishop of the [Episcopal Church of the United States of America](#) and the founder of [TMI — The Episcopal School of Texas](#), a private school in

[San Antonio, Texas](#).<sup>[12]</sup> [Hiram B. Granbury](#), an attorney who served as a Brigadier General in the [Confederate States Army](#) during the Civil War, was also an alumni.<sup>[13]</sup>

Tensions arose regarding slavery in the early 1850s. President Chamberlain was a Unionist and an abolitionist.<sup>[3]</sup> President Chamberlain was stabbed to death by [George Briscoe](#), a pro-slavery local planter. Briscoe apparently felt remorse and committed suicide a week later.<sup>[14][3][15]</sup>

The college stayed open until the [American Civil War](#) of 1861-1865, despite financial difficulties.<sup>[2]</sup> The second President was [Robert L. Stanton](#), from 1851 to 1854.<sup>[8]</sup> The third President was [James Purviance](#) (1807-1871).<sup>[8]</sup> In 1860, [William L. Breckenridge](#) (1803–1876) became the fourth President, serving until the Civil War.<sup>[8]</sup>

The college closed during the war, as students and faculty either joined the [Confederate States Army](#) or were slain for their pro-Unionist views.<sup>[2]</sup> The campus was used as a military camp and its infrastructure was badly damaged.<sup>[2]</sup> Shortly after the war, Reverend [John Calvin](#) became the fifth President.<sup>[8]</sup> He died shortly after being appointed, and the college fell into abeyance again.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Legacy



The cemetery in 2009.

In 1871, in the aftermath of the war and during the [Reconstruction era](#), the campus was sold to the state of Mississippi for US\$40,000.<sup>[16][17]</sup>

The legislature renamed the campus as [Alcorn University](#) in honor of [James L. Alcorn](#), Republican Governor of Mississippi.<sup>[15][17]</sup> It established this as a [land grant institution](#) and [historically black college](#). It was the first black land grant college in the nation. Congress required states with segregated educational systems to establish black land grant colleges so that all students had opportunities in order for the state to qualify for gaining land grant benefits.

After the Reconstruction era, the Presbyterian Church established [Chamberlain-Hunt Academy](#) in 1879, a military private school located in [Port Gibson, Mississippi](#). It was named in honor of minister and educator Jeremiah Chamberlain and planter David Hunt.<sup>[12][16]</sup>

The cemetery is still located on the western end of the campus. , is still there, alongside a historical marker.<sup>[18]</sup> Burials include Jeremiah Chamberlain, his wife, and his four daughters, among others.<sup>[2]</sup> On the Chamberlain tombstone, one may read, "the beloved father of Oakland College."<sup>[2]</sup> A memorial obelisk was erected in honor of Chamberlain.

Two reports about Oakland College from the faculty the trustees and the Presbyterian synod of Mississippi are preserved at the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library on the campus of the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) in [Chapel Hill, North Carolina](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

The curriculum is preserved at the [Mississippi Department of Archives & History](#) in [Jackson, Mississippi](#).

## References

1.

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Oakland Memorial Chapel

<b>Type</b>	Four-year college
<b>Active</b>	1830–1871
<b>Affiliation</b>	<a href="#">Presbyterian Church in the United States of America</a>
<b>Endowment</b>	US\$100,000 <a href="#">Jeremiah Chamberlain</a> <a href="#">Robert L. Stanton</a>
<b>President</b>	<a href="#">James Purviance</a> <a href="#">William L. Breckenridge</a> <a href="#">John Calvin</a>
<b>Location</b>	<a href="#">Lorman, Mississippi, United States</a>