

Gulf Research Reports

Volume 4 | Issue 3

January 1974

An Address Made at the Dedication of the Richard L. Caylor Building at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, Ocean Springs, Mississippi, March 17, 1973

J. Fred Walker

University of Southern Mississippi

DOI: 10.18785/grr.0403.01

Follow this and additional works at: <http://aquila.usm.edu/gcr>

Recommended Citation

Walker, J. 1974. An Address Made at the Dedication of the Richard L. Caylor Building at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, Ocean Springs, Mississippi, March 17, 1973. *Gulf Research Reports* 4 (3): 323-327.

Retrieved from <http://aquila.usm.edu/gcr/vol4/iss3/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gulf and Caribbean Research by an authorized editor of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.



In recognition of his 19 years of service as head of the Department of Science at Delta State Teachers College and having served as the first Director of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, the above portrait of Dr. R. L. Caylor was commissioned by science alumni all of whom studied under him between 1931 and 1950.

The oil portrait was painted between January and July 1950 by Artist Karl Wolfe of Jackson, Mississippi. Dr. Jesse S. White, a professor of biology at Delta State at the time and a former student, colleague and friend of Doctor Caylor, drove him to Jackson for the series of sittings required for the portrait.

At Doctor Caylor's death, Doctor White succeeded him as head of the Division of Science which Doctor Caylor organized embracing the Departments of Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

The oil painting of Doctor Caylor currently hangs in the R. L. Caylor Science Hall at Delta State University. A photograph of the portrait reproduced here was made in June 1974 by Photographer John R. Dakin of Cleveland, Mississippi, and supplied for Gulf Research Reports through the courtesy and interest of Doctor White.

AN ADDRESS MADE AT THE DEDICATION OF THE
RICHARD L. CAYLOR BUILDING
AT THE GULF COAST RESEARCH LABORATORY
OCEAN SPRINGS, MISSISSIPPI, MARCH 17, 1973

by

DR. J. FRED WALKER
Professor of Biology
University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

In keeping with the high and laudable traditions of respect and appreciation established here, we are this 17th day of March, 1973, dedicating this superb marine research and teaching facility, this imposing building, to the honor and memory of Richard L. Caylor. Doctor Caylor was not only the first director of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory but the outstanding and peerless leader in the founding or establishing of this Laboratory.

Dr. Richard Lee Caylor was born on January 11, 1894, in Bullock County, Alabama. He first came to Mississippi as a student at Mississippi College where he received the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1922. In 1931 he received the Master of Arts degree from George Peabody College and the Ph.D. degree from L.S.U. in 1944. Doctor Caylor did additional graduate studies at George Washington University and at the Marine Biology Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass. During World War I he served his country as a member of the U.S. Navy. Doctor Caylor began his career as a college teacher at Clarke Memorial College. He shortly thereafter accepted a position at Mountain Home College in Arkansas. From 1931 until his untimely death in 1958, he taught in the Science Department at Delta State College and served as head of the department for the last twenty-one years of his life. He was an active layman in his church and served as a deacon of First Baptist Church of Cleveland, Miss. But Dr. Lee Caylor was more than an educator and scientist; he was also an outstanding promoter, executive and man of vision.

It was largely due to his exceptional abilities as promoter, executive and man of vision that this great center for marine research and education was brought into existence. In keeping with his faith in what it could and has become he initially designated it "The Gulf Coast Research Laboratory" when there was little visible evidence, indeed, of a research center. I do not mean to imply that he alone was responsible for the founding of this marine research center, for the leaders of the Mississippi Academy of Sciences and many dedicated science professors of the state played a big part in its establishment. However, it was Richard Lee Caylor who took the lead in mobilizing the forces of the Mississippi Academy of Sciences, the Gulf Coast political and business leaders and many self-sacrificing and dedicated university and college professors to work together to obtain the approval and support of the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning for the establishment of a marine research and teaching facility under the direct control of the Board of Trustees as an independent institution rather than operating as a branch



Figure 1. The Richard L. Caylor Building, completed in May 1971, was constructed with \$466,000 appropriated in 1966 by the Mississippi Legislature. The facility contains a total of 17,000 gross square feet. Usable space is occupied by The Gunter Library, that houses the Laboratory's extensive collection of literature in the marine sciences, by classroom and research laboratories and by large lecture rooms.

of any one state college. Great leaders with visions and worthwhile goals must face the practical problems and difficulties involved in achieving their objectives, for not many can accomplish a major task by ourselves. We must have support from others. It is quite apparent from what Doctor Caylor did that he recognized this fact. But worthwhile projects, such as this one, do not launch themselves. A person with something out of the ordinary is required to attract the support of others to make a project succeed. This something "out of the ordinary" Doctor Caylor had to a large degree. He knew the leaders, the individuals, whose support was practically indispensable to get the project off of the ground and he knew how to gain their enthusiastic support. He located critically needed materials and facilities and learned how to obtain them for this project at little or no expenditure of funds, which were extremely limited at that time. He apparently sensed the fact that there were many other influential and well meaning people whose aid would greatly strengthen the cause, but who had to be convinced of the benefits of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory in a very practical way before they would give their full support to the building of a first class marine laboratory. The best way to convince this group was to get a marine program under way, even on a very small scale, thus demonstrating its value by results achieved. This quite evidently was the course he chose to follow.

We cannot fully appreciate the present without knowing something of the past. We most certainly cannot appreciate this historic occasion and period without being cognizant of the tremendous and almost overwhelming problems and difficulties Doctor Caylor had to face and overcome to get this Institution organized and operating. There was no money available for salaries, buildings, equipment and materials, other than student fees. I think this fact would have stopped most

people, but not Doctor Caylor. The impossible was just somewhat more difficult. Shortly after World War II Doctor Caylor learned that there were several wooden barrack buildings including a cafeteria building at Magnolia State Park, which had been used by the British during the war, that were not then in use. They were in fairly good repair. He recognized that these facilities could be utilized at almost no cost to initiate a marine summer program of training and research. He proceeded to call a meeting on the Coast of representative members of the Mississippi Academy of Sciences and faculties of our state and church colleges to consider the possibility and feasibility of utilizing the Magnolia Park facilities that very summer for a marine center. The group agreed for him to proceed with the plan. In the summer of 1947 the first classes of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory were held in the Magnolia State Park facilities. The program was scheduled to fit primarily into the short period between the end of the colleges' summer schools and the beginning of the new academic year in September. As mentioned above, there was no money for equipment, boats, microscopes, illuminators, teachers' salaries, glassware, etc. It was under such apparently hopeless conditions that Doctor Caylor demonstrated his amazing abilities as an executive and promoter. All sorts of surplus commodities were obtained from government agencies; microscopes were borrowed from various colleges. The enthusiastic support of local political and business leaders was obtained during the summers of 1949 and 1950. The old Seafoods Commission made boats available for field trips to the islands. Even the local children were encouraged to collect mayonnaise jars and other glass containers for laboratory use, and they responded. Doctor Caylor was able to persuade several college and university professors of the State to come down to the Laboratory to direct a course or to give a lecture or two to one of the classes. The financial inducements were for all practical purposes nil. As an example of faculty compensations I am quite familiar with one such case, it was room and board for the three weeks plus a financial remuneration of \$25.00!! Visiting scientists from other states were utilized to the maximum advantage. A member of the L.S.U. zoology staff, the long time director of the L.S.U. Grande Isle Marine Laboratory, gave yeoman's service to the cause. These early instructors and the pioneer students labored under very primitive conditions. There was no air conditioning, no fans, no refrigeration of any sort except in the cafeteria. Much of the class work in botany and parasitology was done on large wooden tables under the oak trees. The gnats, hornets, bees and deer flies took a great interest in students and instructors alike. The hornets seemed especially curious about the specimens the parasitologists were investigating, and with it all was the humid, breezeless, summer heat. But the work progressed, large numbers of students from many colleges and states came to learn; a real marine institution began to take shape. For several summers toward the end of each summer term, Doctor Caylor would have the instructors and students prepare a display of specimens and materials collected during the summer for the local citizens, visiting scientists and political dignitaries to see and thus learn first hand of what was going on here. The day of the display was culminated by a banquet attended by the visiting dignitaries, students and instructors. Doctor Caylor recognized the value and desirability of events of this type as occasions to demonstrate what this institution could mean, even in its early days, to the Gulf Coast and to the State of Mississippi. This was just one technique he used to gain more enthusiastic supporters for the program and for his larger and more extensive plans for the future.

As your speaker recalls it was during the summer of 1947, that Doctor Caylor learned that the site now occupied by the Laboratory could probably be purchased for a very reasonable price. The property was owned by the editor of "Esquire" magazine and consisted of almost forty acres, a very large two story residence with a long pier extending out into the bay, plus a fairly large greenhouse. It was clearly an ideal location for a marine laboratory. Not many months thereafter Doctor Caylor requested that several of us meet with him on the Coast with Ex-Governor White, who was then chairman of the State Building Commission, in an attempt to persuade him to purchase this property for the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. We were successful in this effort and the property was purchased. During the Summer Session of 1949, most of the Laboratory's operations were still carried out in the Magnolia State Park facilities, the cafeteria and the student dormitories of the park continued to be utilized as were some two of the classrooms. But with the purchase of this property Doctor Caylor's dream of a permanent Gulf Coast Research Laboratory was almost guaranteed.

For the first four summers Doctor Caylor had no State funds to support the operations of the Laboratory. As far as your speaker has been able to learn, the only money available, as mentioned above, for operating expenses came from student fees. At last in 1950, the Board of Trustees did make available \$35,000 to obtain and move the present cafeteria building from the federal work's agency at Pascagoula to its present site. The Magnolia State Park cafeteria building burned to the ground toward the close of the 1950 Summer Session. It was not until 1951 that the Board of Trustees approved the granting of \$1,000 to each of the four major state colleges (University of Mississippi, Mississippi State, Mississippi Southern and Delta State) for the specific purpose of supporting instruction and research at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. During these first five years of the Laboratory's existence Doctor Caylor gave an enormous amount of his time and energy to promoting and strengthening the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. Wherever he traveled he talked about the Laboratory and the things going on down here and thus helped to attract more and more people from an ever widening area to come and see and participate in its activities. Doctor Caylor instituted the holding of annual meetings of representatives of the faculties of the senior colleges with the chief officers of the Mississippi Academy of Sciences at Jackson in the Board of Trustees Room of the State Office Building with the executive secretary of the Board to plan each summer's program. This practice emphasized in a very impressive manner that the summer programs here were for all the colleges, an opportunity and place for students and faculty members of all the colleges to carry on marine studies and research. I think this practice also emphasized and underscored one of the original, fundamental and basic objectives and intents of those responsible for the founding of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory; namely, that this marine laboratory was never to be a branch of any one of the state colleges or universities, but rather it was to always be an independent center of marine research and training for use by all the universities and colleges of the State.

By the summer of 1950, the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory had become quite well known in several states as a good and convenient center for marine studies and research. During the 1950 Summer Session the New Orleans *Times Picayune* sent one of its gifted feature writers and a photographer to make a rather de-

tailed study of what was going on here in marine work. The visit resulted in a profusely illustrated four page article in the September 10, 1950, *Times Picayune* magazine "Dixie." The front cover of this issue carried a color picture of a large number of marine forms, especially various types of fish, collected in the surrounding waters, with a caption beneath calling attention to the feature article inside. This was excellent advertisement for the then very young marine laboratory over a multistate area. Toward the close of this article by Miss Dianne Farrel, she quotes a statement made to her by the captain of the Seafoods Commission boat the Laboratory was using that summer. The captain was quoted as saying: "They tell me that these folks are going to do a real job helping shrimpers get better hauls, and I think that's a fine thing." The article ended with an answering statement from Doctor Caylor as follows: "When this fine thing happens, when they get better hauls, when the big things happen, Doctor Caylor says it will be the victory for the guys who slept out in blankets on the beach, and the little girls who collected all those mayonnaise jars." This statement, it seems to me, reveals or reflects the spirit of the man Caylor. It is indicative of the faith of the man in his greater vision of what this Laboratory would mean to the people of our State. But isn't it also a very fine expression of his appreciation for all the little things done by the pioneer students, instructors and volunteer helpers under primitive and trying conditions, toward the establishment and progress of this marine center? And some of "The Big Things" have already happened here, but to fully realize his dreams for this Laboratory demands the rededication of the members of the Laboratory staff, present research students and those to come in subsequent years, and the citizens of Mississippi to the greater practical objectives of his dream. We still look forward to that day when our fishermen "get the better hauls" and repeated better hauls because of the research done here.

By 1951 it was becoming very evident that the Laboratory needed a full time director. Again it was Richard L. Caylor who located an outstanding and widely experienced marine scientist, a world authority on the oyster, who might be obtained to fill this position, the late Dr. A. E. Hopkins. Doctor Caylor recommended him for the position to the Board of Trustees and his recommendation was acted upon favorably. In 1952, Dr. A. E. Hopkins, a well known and able marine scientist, became the first full time director of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. He served with distinction in this position until his untimely death in 1955. With the employment of a full time director for the Laboratory, Doctor Caylor's dream was realized, his vision had become substance. The so apparent near impossible objective had been attained within a remarkably short period of time. And now lest some who come after us should forget what this man has done for this marine facility and for the State of Mississippi, a plaque bearing his name is placed upon this magnificent building designating it as the "Richard L. Caylor Building" which will serve to keep his name and memory alive for years to come on these grounds which he loved so dearly and to which he gave so much of himself. It is then most appropriate that with a deep sense of gratitude for what he has done for higher education in Mississippi and for marine research and training in this part of the fabulous "Golden Crescent" of the Gulf that we honor him today in this manner. The good he has done will live on and we have good cause to believe that the fruits of his labors here will bless generations to come.