

Kansas City or Bust: The Methodist Plan to Relocate Baker University, 1927-1939

In early 1931, the quiet campus of Baker University in the small community of Baldwin City, Kansas was visited by a series of gentlemen tasked with assessing the school. The three men assigned to evaluate Baker represented the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the highest Methodist association in the nation. The organization, known as the Commission on Survey, published a document in July of that year entitled *Report of a Survey of Baker University*.¹ The report argued that Baker University should reconsider its chosen location in Baldwin City and move to a more advantageous location—Kansas City.² The Commission on Survey asked Baker University to consider moving for several reasons including the merger between Baker University and Missouri Wesleyan College, the threat of competition by surrounding schools, the Methodist concept of the Social Creed, and the hazardous economic effects of the Great Depression.

The Commission on Survey claimed their repetitive argument of relocation as a panacea for Baker University's challenges—the implications of the merger, outside competition, serving the Church, and maintaining economic stability—was aimed purely toward Baker University's preservation. However, it quickly becomes apparent that the push to change the location was primarily driven by the interest of the Commission on Survey in furthering the influence of the Church. This incident had implications for the relationship between the Methodist Episcopal Church and its member institutions as it provided an example of a small school whose loyalty to its denomination, its identity, and its community were tested by the interests of the broader Church authorities.

No previous scholarly writing exists concerning the Commission on Survey or their attempt to relocate Baker University.³ According to Frederick Norwood, writing for the

American Society of Church History, “the traditional unconcern for historical roots in the Methodist Episcopal Church still prevails sufficiently to help account for a less extensive program of historical investigation than that... of Great Britain.”⁴ Some notable exceptions to this trend are *Fire on the Prairie: Methodism in the History of Kansas* by Don W. Holter and *Methodism and Society Volume 2: Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century* by Walter G. Muelder. Both works detail the history of American Methodism during the early twentieth century and its investment in higher education; *Fire on the Prairie* especially emphasizes its role in Kansas and Baker University history.⁵

The motivations and outcomes of the suggestion to transfer Baker University were significantly impacted by the historical context. For this reason, context related to the founding of Baldwin City, Baker University, and the Commission on Survey are provided below.

The story of Baker University’s establishment in the 1850s reflects the fact that the history of Baker, Baldwin City, and Kansas Methodism are deeply intertwined. Motivated by the ongoing debate over slavery in Kansas, a handful of settlers founded the town of Palmyra, Kansas just north of where Baldwin City is today in 1854.⁶ The location of the town along the Santa Fe Trail brought income and people, including Methodists. On July 9, 1854, a small cabin north of Palmyra hosted the first Methodist sermon delivered to settlers in Kansas territory. Three years later, this same cabin witnessed a group of ministers deciding to establish a university named after the first bishop of the Kansas-Nebraska Methodist Conference, Osmon C. Baker.⁷ The Palmyra Town Association offered the ministers 800 acres of land in exchange for the establishment of the university in Palmyra—an offer they eagerly accepted.

To fund their project, the team in charge of creating Baker University sold some of the lots south of Palmyra and created a new town.⁸ This town was to be named after whoever made

the largest contribution.⁹ One of the ministers involved in the project, Reverend Nathan Taylor decided to name the new town ‘Baldwin City’ with the hope that this would encourage John Baldwin, founder of Baldwin-Wallace University, to donate to the cause.¹⁰ In late 1857, when a curious John Baldwin wrote to Reverend Levin B. Dennis in Kansas and asked why Baldwin City would fare better than other nascent communities, he was met with the following message: “1. A most beautiful situation 2. One of the most healthy 3. In midst of most populous portions of the Territory 4. Central location 5. Proximity to Missouri 6. We have already secured eight hundred acres of land, as yet incurred no debt.” By early 1858, John Baldwin was making arrangements to move from his home in Berea, Ohio to establish a mill in Baldwin City. According to historian Virginia Gatch Markham, “in [John Baldwin’s] mind he planned how he could again promote his dream of making available to youth a college education in a religious environment.”¹¹ From the beginning, Baldwin City was a town designed by Methodists to host Baker University.

Palmyra leaders urged citizens to buy the affordable Baldwin City land plots to support the growth of the university, diminishing itself in the process. The two communities eventually merged in the early 1860s. As a result, Baldwin City became the central community in the area with Baker University at its core.¹² When Baker University was established, its location in Baldwin City appeared exceedingly appropriate for the purposes of the school and the Methodist Episcopal Church. A publication from the Office of Baker University in 1863 described its location in the kindest terms:

Our town is improving rapidly, with a population remarkable for its high moral character. We have no liquor shops or gaming saloons, they being prohibited in our deeds of conveyance of real estate; and already we have one of the pleasantest villages in Kansas. The location is healthy, and the scenery pleasant, having variety of prairie and timber, so blended as to make the surroundings beautiful and picturesque. Our facilities for travel are as good as any interior town in the State.¹³

Besides the perceived moral character, beauty, and accessibility of the region, there was also hope among the school's founders that the town would one day become a major urban center along the Santa Fe Trail.¹⁴ All of these elements made Baldwin City a promising location for Baker University and its future seemed secure.

Baker University was fundamentally created to be an educational institution under the banner of Methodism. While the small school possessed strong ties with the Methodist Episcopal Church and shared its objective of delivering Christian ideals, it also had an additional commitment to academics. As a College of Liberal Arts, Baker University offered students a variety of subjects, including departments of Foreign Language, Social Science, Natural Science, and professional training in fields such as Business Administration, Education, and Music.¹⁵ By the time the survey recommended relocation, Baker University had operated in Baldwin City for seventy-three years.

Before detailing the arguments in favor of a location change for Baker, a brief history of the Commission on Survey is warranted. This summary outlines the origins and scope of the Commission on Survey. According to the foreword in the *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, the impetus to create what would become the Commission on Survey began with a meeting of the Educational Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church in January of 1927. This organization was composed of volunteer members from the staff of Methodist colleges. At the meeting, the attendees read a paper that called for "scientific study of the member institutions" of the Church.¹⁶ On May 17, 1928, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church endorsed the idea of creating and administering a survey by ordering the formation of one or more commissions to achieve this end. According to the General

Conference, the information collected by the survey would be used in order to complete two vital elements of church-school relations:

First: To furnish the bases to determine the nature and quality of the service rendered the cause of Christian Education by our Educational Institutions, to appraise their work and suggest improvements in it, to co-operate in formulating a constructive, statesmanlike policy for them, to inform the Church so that it may be inspired to increased confidence and more generous support.

Second: The findings of the commission are to be taken into consideration by the Board of Education in making their annual appropriations, and utilized by the institutions as they solicit support.¹⁷

These goals explicitly demonstrate the level of authority delegated to the Commission on Survey; the Church empowered its new commission to decide which educational institutions were most worthy of financial support from the Methodist Episcopal Church based on their performance. In the upcoming Depression years, the economic leverage the Commission on Survey possessed would be an influential presence for any struggling institution and make the schools more persuadable to the given recommendations.

Following the initial authorization of the survey by the General Conference, the Board of Education appointed the Commission on Survey on February 1, 1929. The members of the Commission on Survey met for the first time on March 27, 1929 to elect officers from amongst themselves. The Commission determined that Dr. Floyd Wesley Reeves would act as Director of the survey.¹⁸ The Commission on Survey's base of operations became Chicago and the University of Chicago Press printed all of their publications thanks to Dr. Reeves' connection to the school.¹⁹ Loose outlines were drafted for the general objectives of the survey, which included the line: "The study of each institution should include specifically a history of the institution; its academic and business organization; its relation to regional and national associations, and to other educational institutions; its constituency; and the changes or reorganizations necessary to establish for it a suitable program and to make the program effective."²⁰ Even this early on, the

Commission on Survey was aware it would be analyzing the location of the university in relation to surrounding programs, schools, and constituencies, all elements which factored into their argument for transplanting Baker University.

In the summer of 1929, Dr. Reeves assembled a staff for the Commission on Survey.²¹ His selections included the three men who would eventually survey Baker University: Assistant Director John Dale Russell, the Associate Professor of Education for the University of Kentucky; Hugh C. Gregg, the Business Manager of Albion College; and L. E. Blauch, Professor of Education for North Carolina College for Women. On October 3, 1929, the Commission on Survey met to approve a detailed outline including sixteen questions to answer about each institution, of which number two was: “Is the institution well located with regard to competing institutions and service to its constituency?”²² At the same meeting, the Commission members also determined that the survey would cost between \$1,100 and \$1,500 per school; a fee to be paid by the institution.²³ The immense expenditure of financial resources dedicated to this operation becomes apparent when the price is multiplied by the thirty-five colleges surveyed.²⁴ The fact that schools pursued this costly evaluation from the Commission on Survey—during a time of economic crisis no less—indicates the value placed upon ensuring the efficiency of the Methodist higher education system.

After surveying several colleges in 1929 and 1930, the Commission on Survey arrived at Baker in January of 1931. According to the report, “Mr. Russell, Mr. Gregg, and Mr. Blauch, each made independent visits and spent a total of seven days at Baker University, inspecting the plant and conferring with university officials, members of the faculty, and students.”²⁵ It was during this period that the Commission on Survey concluded that Baker University’s location as an institution was unsuitable. Fieldwork ended in March, and by June of 1931, the survey report

was published. The following statement was among the suggestions for improvement: “it is recommended that those who have at heart the future of Baker University give serious consideration to moving the institution to a more favorable location.”²⁶

The merger between Baker University and Missouri Wesleyan College influenced the Commission on Survey’s assertion that Baker should move. Missouri Wesleyan College, once located in Cameron, Missouri, merged with Baker University in 1930. The decline of the school began in 1928 as it shifted from a four-year college to a two-year junior college, forcing twenty-five upperclassmen to move over to Baker University.²⁷ For the next two years, transfer students from Missouri Wesleyan made up the majority of transfer students.²⁸ While it might seem that the absorption of Missouri Wesleyan College was altruistic in nature, Baker University certainly benefitted from the merger. According to Don W. Holter in *Fire on the Prairie*, “a potentially serious financial situation at Baker in the beginning of the 1930’s was averted by the merger of Missouri Wesleyan College with Baker.” The president of Baker University at the time, Wallace Bruce Fleming, was working towards obtaining \$200,000 which would correspond with a \$100,000 pledge from the General Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The merger contributed to Fleming’s endowment campaign when Missouri Wesleyan’s endowment of \$179,000 was added to Baker’s funds.²⁹ Baker University had given Missouri Wesleyan some financial support in the past, meaning the merger garnered Baker University a net profit of about \$110,000.³⁰ This gift brought Baker University significantly closer to the completion of the endowment and began the next phases of the University’s development.

The possibilities enabled by the merger caused excitement at Baker University. President Fleming wrote in the 1929-1930 President’s Report that, “the consolidation of the educational interests of the Missouri Conference and of the Kansas Conference need not work to the

detriment of the youth of the Missouri Conference, but may, through the strengthening of Baker, work to the advantage of all.”³¹ Although Fleming’s remark may have simply been suggesting that students moving to Baker from Missouri Wesleyan would benefit from the financial gain the merger created for Baker, in the eyes of the Commission on Survey the merger represented a cause for relocation.

By the time of the survey in 1931, the merger was already complete; Baker University was starting to experience the beneficial effects of the decision. The endowment was successfully expanded and the Missouri Conference adopted Baker University as its own official college.³² However, this adoption caused a problem from the view of the Commission on Survey staff. According to the survey report, “Baker University is fairly well located from the point of view of the Kansas Conference. It should be borne in mind, however, that following the merger of Missouri Wesleyan College and Baker University, the Missouri Conference has accepted the latter as its institution. From the point of view of the larger constituency, the University is not ideally located.”³³ The survey utilized the connection to Missouri Wesleyan to argue that Baker University should migrate to Kansas City. This proposed location would have allowed the University to be close to both constituencies rather than just the Kansas Conference.³⁴ The relocation of Baker University, in these terms, was framed as a tug-of-war between the Kansas Conference and the Missouri Conference since both considered it to be their own official college.

Besides using the merger to justify their recommendation of relocation, the Commission on Survey also contended that Baker University’s location threatened its ability to retain students coming from afar because of nearby competition. They defined “competing institutions” as “...any educational institution offering work of the same level, for similar vocational or cultural objectives, and so situated as to recruit students from a portion of the area served by the college

under consideration.”³⁵ Although Baker University prominently proclaims its position as the oldest university in Kansas, many schools developed in proximity to Baker University and threatened to lure prospective students away from the isolated campus in Baldwin City. This was the argument of the Commission on Survey when they wrote:

Baker University is located in an area which is well supplied with institutions of higher learning. Within fifteen miles is Ottawa University (Baptist), and within sixteen miles is the University of Kansas. Washburn College (non-sectarian) is located within forty-five miles, and Park College (Presbyterian) at Parkville, Missouri, is within sixty-five miles. At Emporia, within eighty miles of Baker University, are the College of Emporia (Presbyterian), and a state teachers college. Other four-year institutions of higher learning which offer distinct competition to Baker University are the Kansas State Agricultural College at Manhattan and the State Teachers College at Pittsburg. Seven public junior colleges in the eastern part of Kansas also help to create a problem for Baker University.³⁶

According to the Commission on Survey, this competition highlighted the inadequacies of Baker’s location. The report has this to say regarding Baldwin City:

This location of the University offers serious handicap to it, since there can be no large community interests outside the institution. The social opportunities for the students and the faculty are distinctly limited. It is very difficult to provide much outside employment for students. There is little or no opportunity to study social institutions at first hand, except at considerable expense. The small population makes difficult the provision of adequate practice facilities in the teacher training program.³⁷

The survey staff argued that Baldwin City’s small population size and relative isolation was a detriment to the school. Even though many students proved their willingness and interest in traveling to Baker because they attended the school from distant areas, the commute would purportedly increase their chances of being driven away by the problematic location.³⁸ The small community was framed as a deterrent to potential and current students. This concept was based primarily on the transportation facilities available to reach Baldwin City. The survey report states that, “the University was erected on its present site on a famous trail, before Kansas was well developed. Great changes have taken place since the establishment of the University, with the

result that the institution is now off the main lines of communication and consequently is seriously hampered in its service.”³⁹ Although there was a train station in Baldwin City, the survey report noted that, “it is not on the main line of a railroad, but a branch between two main lines affords Baldwin City daily train connections. Students who travel by train must change trains in one of two towns, Lawrence or Ottawa, in each of which is located an institution of higher learning.”⁴⁰ From the perspective of the Commission on Survey, Baker University was in desperate need of access to a large population with more available modes of transportation and fewer competing schools nearby.

The interest in acquiring closer vicinity to a populated part of the state was also linked to the Church’s concept of the Social Creed. This code of belief for the Methodist Episcopal Church that was aimed at initiating friendly labor relations in order to broaden the appeal of the Church among the poor as well as improve conditions for those less fortunate. During the 1930s the creed was further developed, expanding its commitment to ensuring “the fullest possible development of every child, especially by the provision of proper education and recreation.”⁴¹ This suggests that in the 1930s, the principal goal of the Church’s educational institutions was to provide a means of upward mobility for the working classes and to disseminate Methodist moral teachings within that population.

With this directive in mind, the Commission on Survey’s emphasis on relocating Baker University can be interpreted as an extension of the Social Creed’s national mission. As the survey report explains, “the outstanding center of population in the eastern part of the state which is without a four-year college or university is Kansas City. At various times in the past efforts have been made to establish an institution in that center, but so far they have not been successful.”⁴² Relocating Baker University to Kansas City would ensure the Methodist Episcopal

Church could reach the largest untapped population of Kansans in need of educational opportunities. Baker University's prominent reputation would have made it a particularly esteemed candidate for such work. The Church's expectation that educational institutions should seek to occupy the most advantageous position in the program of the Methodist Social Creed was alluded to by the Commission on Survey when they included in their report that, "it is difficult for an institution as isolated as Baker University to reach the number of people which its resources warrant. In other words, an isolated institution finds it difficult to live up to its obligations to society."⁴³

During the early 1930s, the Methodist Episcopal Church perceived many obligations to society, especially to America's youth. In an article for the journal *Religion and American Culture*, Thomas E. Bergler wrote that, "during the 1930s and 1940s, the Great Depression and the rise of communism and fascism in Europe convinced a broad spectrum of Americans that they were living through a prolonged 'crisis of civilization' with real potential to destroy all they held dear. Meanwhile, they saw evidence that these global problems put young people especially at risk for immorality, loss of hope, and political subversion."⁴⁴ Undoubtedly adding to this "crisis of civilization" were the prior horrors of the Great War and the Influenza Pandemic. Bergler connected this perceived crisis of civilization with the behavior of the Methodist Church stating, "anyone attending a Methodist youth conference in the 1930s could not have missed the note of urgency and the call to sacrificial service in an hour of world crisis."⁴⁵ This attitude, that the posterity of America was at risk and the Church could serve an important function in saving it, undoubtedly spilled over into Methodist policies regarding educational facilities. The role of higher education as a tool for elevating youth was now more important than ever, and each school's place in the Methodist educational world would need to fill a position of maximum

efficiency to serve this greater moral purpose. Walter G. Muelder agrees with this statement in *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century* when he claims, “The Great Depression provided the principal background for the domestic social policies and legislation proposed by the churches in the thirties.”⁴⁶ During this period, the movement to save the young people of the United States from Depression-era despondency and the Methodist Church’s effort to survey the efficacy of its member institutions inevitably intertwined.

As the Great Depression settled in, Baker University certainly began to feel the stress brought on by financial hardship. President Fleming’s report for the 1929-1930 school year reads, “progress has been made in Baker’s finances as will be shown by the treasurer’s report; however, the sudden depression in the financial world has made it extremely difficult to secure gifts... We are hoping that conditions in the business world may improve for the second half of the present year in such a way as to enable us to secure the [Rockefeller] grant in full.”⁴⁷ The Commission on Survey also made note of the Depression’s effect on Baker, “In 1929-1930 the enrolment... increased. For the first semester of 1930-1931 there was, however, a decrease. Undoubtedly the economic depression has been partly responsible for the situation during the past year.” The Great Depression indeed correlated with a marked decrease in enrollment at Baker University going from 520 students enrolled during the 1930-1931 academic year to just 390 students the following year.⁴⁸ Clearly Baker University and the Commission on Survey staff were aware of the threat the Great Depression posed on educational institutions.

However, while President Fleming sought to acquire monetary gifts, the Commission on Survey suggested relocation would remove these financial difficulties. In the survey report, they wrote, “the small enrolment within commuting distance is due in part to the fact that the University is not located in a large center of population.”⁴⁹ In their report, the Commission on

Survey constantly used the relocation plan as the ultimate solution regarding separate constituencies, competitors, fulfillment of the Social Creed, and financial difficulties. With the school struggling and receiving pressure from the Methodist Episcopal Church to consider resettlement, the odds were seemingly against Baker University remaining in Baldwin City.

Before recounting Baker's reaction to the Commission on Survey's argument, it should be noted that this is not the first time Baker University's location was questioned. In the early 1870s, a legal suit for \$580 brought by a Mr. Joseph Chamberlain created financial difficulties for the school. This episode triggered a tumultuous era in which Baker University property was auctioned away to try and meet the \$580 sum. During this time, Homer K. Ebright's book *The History of Baker University* states that, "a committee came from Olathe and offered to help the college by a gift of \$50,000 if the school could be moved to Olathe."⁵⁰ However, the suggestion only destabilized Baker University further and an investigating commission from the Kansas Annual Conference determined the concept was unviable. According to the Baker University Catalogue of 1873, "the question of removal, which had injured the College during the past collegiate year, has been settled by the commission appointed by the Kansas Conference. This commission have [sic] reported that the removal is not only unwise, but utterly impracticable, on account of prohibition of the charter."⁵¹

The second instance of a significant attempt to move Baker University in 1901 is described in Don W. Holter's *Fire on the Prairie*. According to Holter, "during President Murlin's tenure there was an attempt made by some people in Topeka to get Baker moved to their city. Real impetus was given to this when Mrs. Eliza Chrisman of the capitol city left \$100,000-\$150,000 for a 'Methodist University' in Topeka."⁵² The idea, hatched by executors of the Chrisman bequest, was that Baker would move to Topeka and then collect the fund set aside

for the Topeka institution. The backlash against this scheme was swift, attendees of a town meeting in Baldwin City adopted a resolution which stated: “The citizens of Baldwin, in mass meeting assembled, wish to publish to the world, once and for all, that Baker University shall never be removed.”⁵³ In the end, the Topeka relocation plot did not come to fruition.⁵⁴ These two instances reveal that Baker University was a veteran of attempts to remove the school from Baldwin City and possessed a resolve to remain there. For Baker, relocation was not a new question. However, the Commission on Survey’s recommendation was the first to come directly from a division of the Methodist Episcopal Church and therefore the first to test the allegiance of Baker University as a denominational institution. In the end, Baker University did not concede to the Commission on Survey’s proposal; the school’s leaders resolved that Baker would remain in Baldwin City. Baker was not receptive to the Commission on Survey’s suggestion for historical, infrastructural, and community reasons.

First, there was the historical aspect to Baker University’s location. The year 1931 was just three years away from the Diamond Jubilee year at Baker, commemorating seventy-five years of its educational program in Baldwin City. According to *The History of Baker University*, “in spite of the great depression which struck the whole nation in 1929, Baker people looked forward with confidence and enthusiasm to the celebration of the seventy-fifth birthday of the old school.”⁵⁵ In this way, the celebration of Baker University’s historic nature carried them through the turmoil of the Depression era and negated any suggestion of altering the historic location of the campus. Relocating would be tantamount to abandoning that history.

In addition, Baker’s historical location was irreversibly tied to Baldwin City for legal reasons. The Commission on Survey even admitted when making their case for relocation that, “...the survey staff has not gone deeply into the question of the legal difficulties which might be

encountered in moving the University. A change of location would probably require a change in the charter, inasmuch as the charter of the University states that the University ‘shall be, and hereby is, permanently located at Baldwin City in the territory of Kansas.’ The disadvantages of the present location are very important, however, and would justify an effort to change the charter.”⁵⁶ The Commission on Survey showed a complete unwillingness to accept the contract of the charter which stipulates Baker University must be located in Baldwin City—the exact same argument used against relocation to Olathe in the 1870s. Since the charter stipulated that Baker was tied to Baldwin City, to move to another location would be to create an entirely different school from scratch. The Commission on Survey’s willingly overlooked the historical reasons why Baker was unable to relocate.

The dedicated plans for developing Baker University’s infrastructure conflicted with the plan to relocate. In its report, the Commission on Survey made numerous recommendations for ways that Baker University could renovate and upgrade its facilities and buildings. However, they made the condition that, “before extensive improvements are made in the physical plant the desirability of locating the University, or part of it, in a large center of population should have full consideration.”⁵⁷ This impediment contradicted the University’s personal goals for developing its campus at the time. An article in the *Baker Orange*—the official university newspaper—dated February 3, 1931, declared the achievement of a successful endowment campaign and the shift of focus onto a new building program. According to the article:

The first to go up will be the central heating plant... The college is collaborating with the town’s people in erecting the new church, so it, too, can be included in the building program... The building of the church necessarily puts off the erection of the Presser Music Hall. This hall will contain a modern chapel with an ample stage... Following it will come a dormitory which will house a hundred men. Next will be another women’s dormitory and finally the Stadium project. It is the aim of the University to have this program completed by the Diamond Jubilee in 1933.⁵⁸

With such an ambitious building project and strong momentum to complete it before the Diamond Jubilee, the suggestion of abandoning Baker University's campus and starting over was an unpopular notion. The infrastructural development of Baker University could not be delayed for the sake of the Commission on Survey's cavalier plan to relocate.

Despite the fact that the Commission on Survey denounced the small community of Baldwin City as an impediment, the town was intrinsically attached to Baker University after more than half a century of coexistence. The survey report suggested, "possibly, if a decision is reached to relocate, a junior college division could be maintained for several years in the plant at Baldwin City. This plan would utilize the present plant and would serve to lessen the shock of moving on the local community."⁵⁹ By making this statement, the Commission on Survey admitted that the residents of Baldwin City and Baker University were linked; removing Baker University would be traumatic for Baldwin City.

For their part, the residents of Baldwin City recognized their strong connection to the University with a full-page advertisement in the aforementioned February 3rd issue of the *Baker Orange* which celebrated the successful endowment campaign.⁶⁰ The message from local business owners in Baldwin City says:

The announcement Saturday that Baker had reached its goal of \$400,000 in increased endowment to secure the gift of \$200,000 of the Rockefeller money from the General Education Board is cause for rejoicing in Baldwin. That fact means much to Baldwin and Baker. It means that \$36,000 has been added to Baker's annual income-money which will largely be spent in Baldwin. It means that the college can now turn to the erection of Presser Music Hall and a new heating plant for the campus and a new church—projects which will bring men and money into Baldwin. It means that, with better instruction and more adequate equipment, more students will be attracted to Baker and Baldwin... It means, in a word, an assured future. A new Baker, improved in every way, and a finer Baldwin.⁶¹

The enthusiasm of Baldwin City is expressed as solidarity, that Baker University's success is also Baldwin's success. While the advertisement stresses how Baker's presence in Baldwin helps

the town, Baker University advertisements were quick to point out how the university also benefitted from its location in Baldwin City. In the records of the Kansas Annual Conference, the advertisements for Baker University during President Fleming's term listed positive and unique aspects of Baker University. Between the years 1926 and 1930 and in 1932,⁶² one of the principal items on this list described their location: "Baldwin is an ideal college town. It has all the conveniences of a city without the usual confusion and distractions. Its influences are refining and uplifting."⁶³ In the years between 1933 and 1936, the advertisements contained a different phrase expressing a similar idea, "Baldwin and Baker are almost synonymous. Baldwin is an ideal college town. It has all the conveniences of a city without the usual confusion and distractions."⁶⁴ In these advertisements, President Fleming argued that the same elements which the Commission on Survey considered a handicap to the University's educational program were actually advantageous.

Baker University's mutually beneficial relationship with Baldwin City points to the fact that the school embraced its identity as a small institution. *The History of Baker University* mentions attempts at "standardization" among educational institutions during the early twentieth century; Ebright laments that this standardization movement often pushed schools to conform to a single standard—mirroring larger institutions at the sacrifice of what made each school unique.⁶⁵ Later in 1938, the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church recognized a report of development plans for Baker University, "stressing the essential nature of Baker University as a small college of liberal arts, through building a program fitted to its own objectives rather than by imitation of the large universities."⁶⁶ Baker University embodied an identity which could not be removed from the school as a small institution located in a small community.

The Kansas Annual Conference's Board of Education agreed with this assessment in their 1939 report. In a statement which almost seems to directly address the survey's suggestion that Baldwin City was a "handicap" to Baker, the report states: "We could remind this conference of the strategic location of the college in the very heart of a Methodist constituency of approximately 400,000, residing in a territory less than 150 miles wide and 200 miles long and comprising eastern Kansas and some twenty-five miles of western Missouri. The small village in which the college is located is not a handicap but makes for security against dominance by local interests and gives assurance of a student body drawn from a wide range of territory. The situation is ideal for a program of education controlled by the wider interests of the church in behalf of religious ideals."⁶⁷ Surrounded by dedicated contributors and supporters, Baker University had no logical incentive to abandon its present location.

There are no available comments of faculty or students regarding the proposed move. In fact, an article in the *Baker Orange*, a student publication, summarizing the report's findings is strangely silent on the question of location.⁶⁸ This indicates that either very little about the removal suggestion was communicated to students and faculty or their expressed opinions on the suggestion went unrecorded. The closest we have to a written response from the school is President Fleming's report following the survey. Fleming wrote in his report, "I have had opportunity to look over the report in its preliminary form, and while at a number of points its statements and recommendations may be questioned, yet on the whole it will prove stimulating and helpful."⁶⁹ Another less direct response might be seen in a March 1931 article in the *Baker University News-Bulletin* entitled "Home of Baker University the Ideal College Location." In part, the article states: "Baldwin, the home of Baker has for many years been known as Beautiful Baldwin, because of its location, hundreds of shade trees, fine homes, excellent college

buildings, well kept lawns and campus, and the general attractiveness of the city of thirteen hundred inhabitants... while many colleges are located in larger cities, none can boast of more modern conveniences than can the home of Baker University.”⁷⁰ Despite the lack of more concrete responses, comments such as these suggest that the population of Baker University generally felt a sense of loyalty to Baldwin City and disagreed with the Commission on Survey’s position that the school was inappropriately located. The historical, infrastructural, and community factors that kept Baker University in Baldwin City also deterred any chance of the Commission on Survey actually succeeding in relocating the University to Kansas City. Ultimately, their suggestion to transfer the school never progressed further than just that—a mere suggestion.

Although there were many reasons for Baker University’s immobility, the Commission on Survey’s arguments for relocation were compelling; the suggestion placed the onus upon the school to decide between the interests of the Methodist Episcopal Church or local interests. This pressure from the Commission on Survey reflected the belief that the odds were against Baker University if they chose to remain in Baldwin City. Regardless of these odds, Baker University stood firm in its convictions and remained in Baldwin City. In the end, the decision to stay was a prudent one as Baker University thrives today and continues to operate out of Baldwin City, Kansas.⁷¹

The Commission on Survey believed it presented a solution to Baker University which would also further the goals of the Methodist Episcopal Church to increase its influence in Kansas City, yet Baker University firmly resisted the pressure. These findings have significant implications for the true authority of the Methodist Episcopal Church over its member institutions. Although the Methodist Episcopal Church founded the colleges that it surveyed, its

recommendations clearly were not treated as mandatory by Baker University. The Commission on Survey's suggestion was prompted by legitimate concerns such as merger politics, surrounding competition, the Social Creed, and the Great Depression. However, despite the Commission on Survey's insistence, historic, infrastructural, and community elements prevented the plan from receiving serious consideration. Ultimately, the fact that Baker University remained in Baldwin City and continues flourish is a testament to the faith Baker's leaders placed in their location and the strong ties between the University and its small town.

THE MERCHANTS AND BUSINESS MEN OF A FORWARD-LOOKING BALDWIN SAY:

Congratulations Baker

ON THE SUCCESS OF THE \$600,000 ENDOWMENT DRIVE

Facing The Future



PRESIDENT WALLACE B. FLEMING
To President Fleming must go a great share in Baker's victory. He has labored unceasingly and with unquenchable faith toward a goal beset with difficulty. Baldwin knows him well, admires him, and is proud to claim him as a citizen.

The announcement Saturday that Baker had reached its goal of \$400,000 in increased endowment to secure the gift of \$200,000 of Rockefeller money from the General Education Board is cause for rejoicing in Baldwin.

That fact means much to Baldwin and Baker.

It means that \$36,000 has been added to Baker's annual income-money which will largely be spent in Baldwin.

It means that the college can now turn to the erection of Presser Music Hall and a new heating plant for the campus and new church—projects which will bring men and money into Baldwin.

It means that, with better instruction and more adequate equipment, more students will be attracted to Baker and Baldwin.

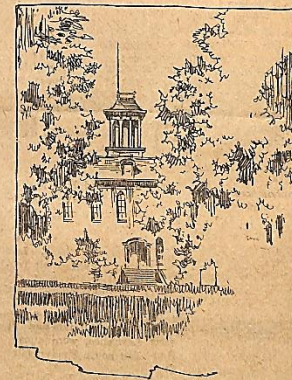
It means that a new stadium may be expected within a few years.

It means that the entire program of Baker, excellent now, can be bolstered until the school will be one of the finest small colleges in the country.

It means, in a word, an assured future.

A new Baker, improved in every way, and a finer Baldwin, as glimpsed in the Rotary Club five year plan, have come infinitely closer through this achievement which was made possible by loyal sacrifices on the part of the friends of the school.

Baker has stepped from the past into the future:



OLD SCIENCE HALL

The Baker of the past is symbolized by old Science Hall and Centenary Hall, just as Mulvane Hall expresses the spirit of a new Baker. Centenary marks the link between Baker and Baldwin. It has served Baldwin as a place of worship and assembly, just as it has served marching generations of student feet.

—:— A NEW DAY DAWNS —:—

Our Best Wishes, Baker—Your Success Is Our Rejoicing

WHAT THE ENDOWMENT MEANS TO BAKER

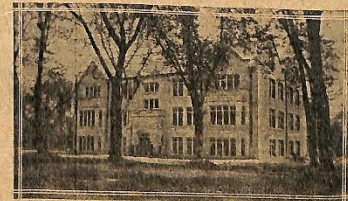
DIRECTLY:

\$36,000 more income annually
Assured financial future
Better instruction
Up-to-date Equipment
Higher Academic Rank

INDIRECTLY:

More Students
Expansion of Program
New Buildings
Greater Influence
Increased Gifts

Purity Lunch
Sandwich Inn
Eitner Studio
F. S. Hardin
College Cafe
Service Motors
Welfley's Market
Perry's Barber Shop
Oakleaf Jewelry Co.
Union Public Service
Ives-Hartley Lumber Co.
The Baldwin Lumber Co.
Allderdice Hardware Co.
Baldwin Department Store Inc.
Vaughn & Stover Chevrolet Co.

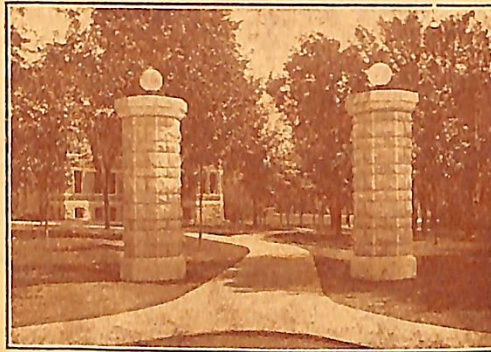


Mulvane Science Hall—Newest Baker Building—
The success of the Endowment Campaign opens the way for several more new buildings.

Fig. 1—Advertisement, "The Merchants and Business Men of a Forward-Looking Baldwin Say: Congratulations Baker on the Success of the \$600,000 Endowment Drive," *The Baker Orange*, (February 3, 1931). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

BAKER UNIVERSITY

BALDWIN, KANSAS



LOCATION. Baldwin is an ideal college town. It has all the conveniences of a city without the usual confusion and distractions. Its influences are refining and uplifting.

EQUIPMENT. Baker's paid up endowment is almost a million-and-a-half dollars. Her buildings are modern. She has a splendid library of more than sixty thousand volumes. Her laboratories are unexcelled.

STANDARDS. Approved by the North Central Association and the Association of American Universities. This means that Baker's work is accredited and her students admitted to graduate standing in universities throughout the world.

GOALS. Baker graduates are trained as moulders and directors of public opinion. They are given an intensive type of intellectual training and are aided in maturing strong Christian characters. The outstanding successes of Baker graduates in every worthy life work are the clearest demonstration of the wisdom of her plans.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES. Strong, clean athletics; glee clubs and other musical organizations; dramatic clubs; Christian associations; happy student friendships;—these are some of the influences that make the golden years at Baker among the happiest years of life.

For Free Catalogue, address—

WALLACE B. FLEMING, President
BALDWIN, KANSAS

Fig. 2—Advertisement, Wallace B. Fleming, "Baker University," Keve, Wiley A., Kansas Annual Conference 1932. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

ENDNOTES

¹ This shortened name for the document is used in place of the gratuitously lengthy actual title: “Report of a Survey of Baker University Under the Auspices of The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.”

² Reeves, Floyd W., Russell, John D., Gregg, Hugh C., and L. E. Blauch, “Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University” in *Report of a Survey of Baker University Under the Auspices of The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1931), 16. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

³ The impetus for this research subject is derived primarily from analyzing the original 1931 *Report of a Survey of Baker University* found in the Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives. It can be hoped that this research inspires further investigation into the 1928-1932 Commission on Survey and how their actions relate to the relationship between the Methodist Episcopal Church and their denominational schools.

⁴ Norwood, Frederick A. “Methodist Historical Studies 1930-1959 (Part II),” *Church History*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1960): 74-88, 74.

⁵ Muelder, Walter G., *Methodism and Society Volume 2: Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century*, (Abingdon Press, 1961), 126-142 & Holter, Don W., *Fire on the Prairie: Methodism in the History of Kansas*, (Methodist Publishing House, 1969), 187-193.

⁶ Webster, Arthur W., *Palmyra*, 1935. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

⁷ A marker at this location today reads: “The site of the Kibbee Cabin where Rev Wm. H. Goode on July 9, 1854 preached the first sermon under the authority of the Methodist Episcopal Church to white settlers in Kansas Territory. Text Matt. XXIV 14. Later the site of the Barricklow Cabin where on April 17, 1857 it was decided by a convention of ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church that Baker University be established at Palmyra—now called Baldwin...” Ebright, Homer K., *The History of Baker University*, (Baldwin City, KS, 1951), 32, 37, 338.

⁸ “The Baker University—The First College in Kansas,” *Quindaro Chinadowan*, November 7, 1857 & Graziano, Katherine B., *Baker Lands: The Struggle to Start a School and a Town on the Santa Fe Trail*, (Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, 2008), 49. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

⁹ Markham, Virginia G., *John Baldwin and Son Milton Come to Kansas*, (Lawrence Printing Service, 1982), 11-12. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

¹⁰ Graziano, 50

¹¹ Markham, 23-24, 26

¹² Ebright, 29. “It was a parable of life, the old dying that the young might have a more abundant life.”

¹³ Schofield, William H., “Circular,” Office of Baker University, September 14, 1863, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916, Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

¹⁴ Ebright, 40.

¹⁵ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, “Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University” in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 1-2 & Ebright, 225-226.

¹⁶ Reeves, Floyd W., Russell, John D., Gregg, Hugh C., and L. E. Blauch, “Foreword” in *Report of a Survey of Baker University Under the Auspices of The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (The Commission on Survey of

Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1931), vii. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

¹⁷ *General Conference 1928*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1928), 664. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

¹⁸ Additionally, they elected for Chairman Thomas Nicholson, the Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church; for Vice-Chairman they chose John L. Seaton, the President of Albion College; for Secretary they voted Joseph P. MacMillan. *General Conference 1932*, 1,464. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

¹⁹ Dr. Reeves was a professor of education at the University of Chicago. Reeves, Floyd W., Russell, John D., Gregg, Hugh C., Brumbaugh, A. J., and L. E. Blauch, *The Liberal Arts College: Based upon surveys of thirty-five colleges related to the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), vi.

²⁰ *General Conference 1932*, 1,464.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 1,465.

²³ Ibid., 1,466.

²⁴ Based on information from the Bureau of Labor statistics, this quantity in October 1929 would be the equivalent of between \$16,339 and \$22,280 per school, or \$571,878 to \$779,834 combined total today. "CPI Inflation Calculator," (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Accessed February 7, 2020). https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

²⁵ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Foreword" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, ix.

²⁶ Reeves, Floyd W., Russell, John D., Gregg, Hugh C., and L. E. Blauch, "Chapter XIII. A Program of Service for Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University Under the Auspices of The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1931), 7. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

²⁷ Holter, 192.

²⁸ "Many Students Enroll at Baker This Year from Other Colleges," *The Baker Orange*, September 23, 1930. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

²⁹ Holter, 192-193.

³⁰ "College is to Receive Full Amount of Gift of Rockefeller Board," *The Baker Orange*, February 3, 1931. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

³¹ Fleming, Wallace B., "President's Report" in *Reports of the President and Treasurer of Baker University 1929-1930*, (Baldwin City, KS, 1930), 7. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

³² Holter, 192.

³³ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 14.

³⁴ As the Commission on Survey phrased it: "this position would be central for Baker University from the point of view of its enlarged constituency." Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 16.

³⁵ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, Brumbaugh, & Blauch, *The Liberal Arts College*, 34.

³⁶ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 15.

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- ³⁷ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 14.
- ³⁸ Homer K. Ebright noted the willingness of students to travel great distances to attend Baker in his *History of Baker University*: "many have wondered why young people from Kansas City are so glad when September comes and they can return to Baldwin. Why do students come from Chicago, and New York, and California to this little town?" Ebright, 2.
- ³⁹ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter XIII. A Program of Service for Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 6.
- ⁴⁰ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 13-14.
- ⁴¹ Muelder, 141.
- ⁴² Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 15-16.
- ⁴³ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 15.
- ⁴⁴ Bergler, Thomas E., "Youth, Christianity, and the Crisis of Civilization, 1930–1945," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2014): 259-296, 259.
- ⁴⁵ Bergler, 264.
- ⁴⁶ Muelder, 130.
- ⁴⁷ The Rockefeller grant refers to a sum of \$200,000 made available by the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation provided that Baker University raise \$400,000 on its own first. Fleming, 5 & "College is to Receive Full Amount of Gift of Rockefeller Board," *The Baker Orange*, February 3, 1931.
- ⁴⁸ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 7.
- ⁴⁹ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 13.
- ⁵⁰ Ebright, 84-85.
- ⁵¹ *Annual Catalogue of Baker University, Baldwin City, Kansas. 1872-73*, (Lawrence, KS: Journal Steam Printing Establishment. 1873), 20. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.
- ⁵² Holter, 165.
- ⁵³ The Lawrence Journal chimed in with the following statement: "Baker University at Topeka, or at any town besides Baldwin, would be as a shell after the oyster has been removed." "Baldwin Meets the Test: A Rousing Mass Meeting Declares for City Improvements—A Committee Named to Meet the Educational Mission," *The Baldwin Ledger*, March 29, 1901 & "The Journal's View of Baker," *The Baldwin Ledger*, March 29, 1901.
- ⁵⁴ Although Baker University decided not to change location, the Kansas Annual Conference decided to gift the residue of the Chrisman money to Baker University in 1911. *Kansas Annual Conference 1911*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1911), 43. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.
- ⁵⁵ Ebright, 238.
- ⁵⁶ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter I. History and Service of Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 16.
- ⁵⁷ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter XIII. A Program of Service for Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 6.

⁵⁸ "College is to Receive Full Amount of Gift of Rockefeller Board," *The Baker Orange*, February 3, 1931.

⁵⁹ Reeves, Russell, Gregg, & Blauch, "Chapter XIII. A Program of Service for Baker University" in *Report of a Survey of Baker University*, 6.

⁶⁰ See Figure 1 for advertisement.

⁶¹ "The Merchants and Business Men of a Forward-Looking Baldwin Say: Congratulations Baker on the Success of the \$600,000 Endowment Drive," *The Baker Orange*, February 3, 1931. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

⁶² See Figure 2 for advertisement from 1932.

⁶³ Keve, Wiley A., *Kansas Annual Conference 1926*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1926). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives; Keve, Wiley A., *Kansas Annual Conference 1927*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1927). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives; Keve, Wiley A., *Kansas Annual Conference 1928*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1928). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives; Keve, Wiley A., *Kansas Annual Conference 1929*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1929). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives; Keve, Wiley A., *Kansas Annual Conference 1930*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1930). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives & Keve, Wiley A., *Kansas Annual Conference 1932*. Page numbers inapplicable, advertisements are located on inside of cover page.

⁶⁴ Keve, Wiley A., *Kansas Annual Conference 1933*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1933). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives; Pruitt, L. B., *Kansas Annual Conference 1934*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1934). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives; Pruitt, L. B., *Kansas Annual Conference 1935*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1935). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives & Pruitt, L. B., *Kansas Annual Conference 1936*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1936). Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives. Page numbers inapplicable, advertisements are located on inside of cover page.

⁶⁵ Ebright, 218.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 254.

⁶⁷ Pruitt, L. B., *Kansas Annual Conference 1939*, (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1939), 294. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

⁶⁸ "Methodist Church Survey Shows Baker Fills Place in World of Education," *Baker Orange*, September 14, 1931. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

⁶⁹ Fleming, Wallace B., "President's Report" in *Reports of the President and Treasurer of Baker University 1930-1931*, (Baldwin City, KS, 1931), 5. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

⁷⁰ "Home of Baker University the Ideal College Location." *Baker University News-Bulletin*, March 1931. Baker University Kansas United Methodist Archives.

⁷¹ "Meet Baker University," Baker University, Accessed December 23, 2020, <https://www.bakeru.edu/meet-baker-university/>.