

Linfield University

By Frederic Ross

Linfield University received its charter from the Oregon Territorial Legislature on January 30, 1858, as the Baptist College of McMinnville. The institution's heritage lies with the northern Baptists, spiritual descendants of Roger Williams of Rhode Island, for whom freedom of conscience was paramount.

The first decades of the institution were fraught with financial and leadership challenges. Because McMinnville leaders had invited the college to occupy an existing school building near the center of town, however, the struggling institution could depend on the support of the community. Pioneer Hall was completed in 1883, built on land donated by Samuel and Mahala Cozine, among the earliest founders of McMinnville. It remains in use today and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The college awarded its first bachelor's degree in 1884. In 1898, the board of trustees filed new articles of incorporation, changing the name to McMinnville College. The name changed again in 1922 when Frances Ross Linfield donated a considerable portion of her assets to the college. Linfield had moved to Spokane, Washington, after her husband, the Rev. George Fisher Linfield, died. She became a successful businesswoman there and was recruited to serve on the board of trustees of McMinnville College. She and her husband had decided before he died that they would endow a school if they had the opportunity, and McMinnville College was the recipient of that largess.

The campus on which Pioneer Hall was constructed, now Linfield College, covered seventy-eight acres and included what became known as the Old Oak, a large valley oak tree that was hundreds of years old. The tree became the symbol of the college.

The Linfield Research Institute was established in 1956 to involve Linfield faculty and students in applied physics research. In 1982, Linfield College absorbed the Good Samaritan School of Nursing in Portland. Emily Loveridge had opened the school in 1890 to train nurses at Good Samaritan Hospital, built in 1875. The Linfield College/Good Samaritan School of Nursing is now a division of Linfield College. The Division of Continuing Education (DCE)/Adult Degree Program, established in 1975, now teaches nearly all of its courses online and enrolls students from all over the world.

Linfield College began an exchange program in 1975 with Kanto Gakuin University in Japan. It gradually expanded its international studies program to offer students the opportunity to study at eleven overseas sites and to take international travel courses during its January inter-term. Linfield now enrolls 1,700 students at the Arts and Sciences campus in McMinnville, 350 students at the Portland campus, and over 500 students through the Division of Continuing Education. Between 1998 and 2000, Linfield more than doubled its campus in McMinnville when it acquired 115 acres that had been home to a division of Hewlett Packard.

Long known for strong athletic programs for both men and women, Linfield boasts the longest continuous streak of winning football seasons of any college of any size in the country (beginning in 1956), as well as multiple national championships in football, baseball, and softball.

Notable Linfield graduates include Chief Joseph Medicine Crow (1938), recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009; Dr. John C. Frazee (1967), clinical professor of neurosurgery at the University of California Medical Center; Gale Castillo (1973), president and founding member of the Portland Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce; Scott Brosius (1987), New York Yankees third baseman; and Theresa Stichick Betancourt (1991), professor at the Harvard School of Public Health and director of the Research Program on Children and Global Adversity.

Linfield College became Linfield University in 2020.

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