

The History of USC Aiken

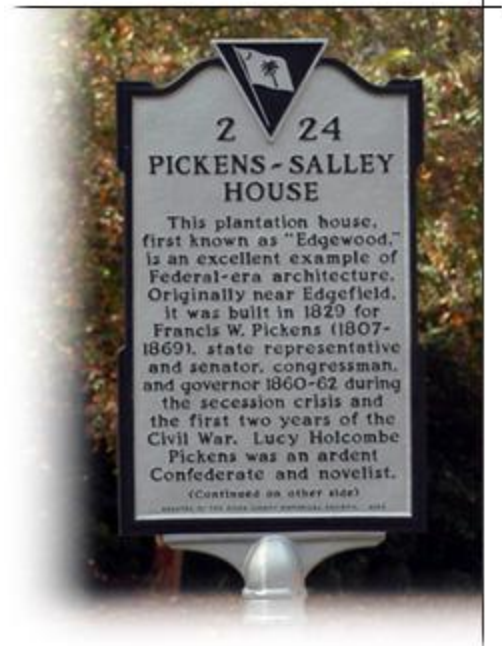
Under authority granted by the South Carolina General Assembly, the Aiken County Commission for Higher Education entered into an agreement with the University of South Carolina in 1961 to establish a two-year, off-campus center of the University in Aiken County. A small cadre of faculty and staff was assigned the mission of establishing a college community with acceptable operations and standards. The campus opened its doors in September 1961 with 139 students, three full-time faculty members, and a secretary. Mr. Chris Sharpe served as the first Director of the University of South Carolina Aiken Center, which was housed in Banksia, a renovated mansion in the City of Aiken. In 1962, Mr. Bill Casper was appointed Director of the Center.

Initially, the Center offered only freshman and sophomore-level courses. In 1968, the Center underwent an institutional self-study and was accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award associate degrees as a branch of the University of South Carolina and as a junior college. The first associate degrees were awarded in June 1968.

In 1968, the South Carolina General Assembly authorized a bond issue to purchase a new site for the campus. After an extensive search, the Aiken County Commission for Higher Education purchased property from the Graniteville Company in 1970 for a new campus location. The campus moved from Banksia to the present site in 1972, occupying 144-acres. All educational and student life programs were initially housed in one large, multi-purpose administration/classroom building, renamed the Robert E. Penland Administration and Classroom Building in 1999. The building features an open courtyard with a sculpture by artist Charles Perry. The sculpture, "Double Knot," was designed as a symbol of the University's close ties with the local community.

In 1972, the Gregg-Graniteville Foundation and the Swint Foundation contributed \$400,000 to establish a library on campus. This was the largest contribution ever made to a library in the state at that time. The Gregg-Graniteville Library was completed in 1975.

When full-time equivalent student enrollment reached 1,066 in the fall of 1975, the Aiken Branch was permitted to plan senior-level courses, as well as to create a number of baccalaureate degree programs. A new agreement between the Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina and the Aiken County Commission for Higher Education provided for direct involvement of the Aiken faculty in the development of academic programs. In 1976, the Student Activities Center, housing a gymnasium, bookstore, and food service facilities, was completed. In September 1976, the Board of Trustees granted academic autonomy to the Aiken campus. The



institution was fully accredited as a senior college by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and granted its first baccalaureate degrees in 1977.

In 1977, a classroom-office building, later named the Humanities and Social Sciences Building, was completed. An operations/maintenance building for auxiliary services was completed in 1978. The 1980s marked a change in leadership as Mr. Bill Casper announced his retirement as Chancellor of the institution after 20 years of service. Dr. Robert E. Alexander was named Chancellor of the University of South Carolina Aiken in 1983.

The 1980s and 1990s included the completion of a number of construction projects on campus. An addition to the Gregg-Graniteville Library was completed in 1983. Pacer Downs student housing was completed in 1984 by a private developer and acquired by the University in 1999. The Etherredge Center for the Fine and Performing Arts was completed in 1985. The Sciences Building was completed in 1989. The historic Pickens-Salley House, home to a former governor of South Carolina, was moved to the campus in 1989. The Children's Center was completed in 1990. The Ruth Patrick Science Education Center was completed in 1991 and expanded by 30,000 square feet in 1999. The Business and Education Building was completed in 1994. In 1995, the campus expanded to 453 acres through a donation/purchase from the Graniteville Company. As part of the Student Activities Center, a natatorium was completed in 1997. The Alan B. Miller Nursing Building was completed in 1999.

In 1994, USCA began offering its first master's degree, the Master of Education in Elementary Education. USCA currently is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools at level III institutional status to offer baccalaureate degrees and master's degrees in selected areas/disciplines. In 1998, USCA began offering its second master's degree, the Master of Science in Applied Clinical Psychology. In 2002, USCA began offering a third master's degree, the Master of Education in Educational Technology. Through the USCA Graduate Office, more than 500 students each year pursue postgraduate degrees on the Aiken Campus through USCA graduate programs or the University of South Carolina's Extended Graduate Campus.

In 1997 and in 1998, the National League of Nursing (NLNAC) reaffirmed accreditation for the School of Nursing programs at the associate level and baccalaureate completion level for eight full years. In 1999, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) granted national accreditation to the School of Education's undergraduate and graduate programs. In 2000, AACSB International - The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business granted national accreditation to the School of Business Administration.

In 2000, Dr. Alexander announced his retirement after 17 years of service. Dr. Thomas L. Hallman was named Chancellor of the University of South Carolina Aiken in 2001. In 2003, USCA dedicated the Roberto Hernandez Baseball Field and Stadium. Hernandez is a former Pacer baseball player who donated \$1 million for the stadium project. The campus completed construction of a new student residence hall, Pacer Commons, which was dedicated in August 2004. The USC Aiken Convocation Center, a 100,000 square-foot facility with a seating occupancy of 4,000, opened in 2007 as the University's newest facility. It is the home of Pacer

Athletics, provides gathering space for University ceremonies, and is a venue for community and entertainment events.

Today, the college is comprised of more than 3,200 students and 371 permanent faculty and staff members. USCA awards baccalaureate degrees in 35 major areas of study and master's degrees in three areas. In addition, the institution offers a varied program of non-credit continuing education courses for the surrounding and extended community.