

The Battle for Valley Forge

In 1978, I wrote about Valley Forge Christian College's landmark lawsuit versus Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. The story (shown below) actually won an award the following year from the Evangelical Press Association for best reporting. A recent visit to the Assemblies of God college in Pennsylvania reminded me of this, and I wanted to share it with you. [Click here](#) to download the article as a PDF.



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monwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Military Affairs which promised to turn the hospital into a veterans geriatric center, and to Chester County which promised to use part of the land for a park.

But the property lay dormant for two years while the Pennsylvania legislators debated appropriating money to renovate the facilities which were by then becoming pretty run-down. The Chester County supervisors began counting the cost of making it and maintaining it as a park. They finally told the government they didn't want the land. The legislature never appropriated the money for the geriatric center. So the Use Study Committee reopened the hearings.

Meanwhile Dr. Obie Harrup was facing an impossible situation. His tiny college at Green Lane, Pa. was bursting at the seams. When he had become President of Northeast Bible Institute in 1972, its 20 acre campus and one building was adequate for its 197 member student body. But by 1974 the enrollment had swelled to 424. The college needed to build. But local officials wouldn't give them the needed permits.

Then Dr. Harrup read about the surplus army hospital in Phoenixville. Something inside said, "That's your campus." He talked to several people, made phone calls and wrote some letters. Everyone discouraged him from even applying for the land. He applied anyway and was turned down.

But Harrup kept his eye on that property. He says he kept praying for a miracle. "I kept saying to myself, 'I know God wants us to have it,'" he says.

When the Use Study Committee reopened hearings, Harrup and several leaders made a presentation on May 26, 1976, on how he could put the property to good use. A reporter for the *Evening Phoenix*, the local newspaper, wrote that Harrup's enthusiasm in the presentation "caught on by the end of the college's one hour allotment, (so that) even the committee members were inadvertently referring to the site as 'the campus.'"

One month later the Use Study Committee voted unanimously to recommend that the 77 acres and 70 buildings be donated to Northeast Bible Institute. The federal government agreed. Renovation began almost immediately and the college moved its campus on December 16, 1976. On January 3, 1977 the newly renamed Valley Forge Christian College began classes on its new campus.

The campus is made up of row after row of neat military-looking buildings. Most are faced with red brick, so it has a

sort of "campus" appearance. The hospital rooms transferred easily into dorm rooms. There was a cafeteria, classrooms, a small auditorium, and a building that made into a nice student lounge. The facility seemed almost ready-made for a college.

But there have been a lot of renovation costs. The buildings are old; extensive remodeling has been necessary in some instances. There are many buildings that are still unused including a theatre, bowling alley, indoor olympic-size pool and buildings that will become

dormitories and married student housing. The college has a current enrollment of about 500. The facilities can accommodate 10 times that number once all the buildings are remodeled.

When the decision to move was made, some of Harrup's own constituents in the Assemblies of God objected. They would have preferred to let the college remain in obscurity at Green Lane forever. They either couldn't catch Harrup's vision for a major first-rate college at the new facilities; or, they just objected to the cost of relocating, the cost of renovation



Dr. Obie Harrup, president of Valley Forge Christian College.

