1908-1920 John Melson

- Subsequent to the 1906 passing of the Perry Act, John H. Melson was appointed as the first principal of the Fourth District A&M School, a secondary school designed to better prepare rural youth for farm life.
- When the school opened in 1908 under his leadership, the region was in economic crisis, so several individuals and organizations defaulted on pledges to assist in financing the school. Melson’s wife, Penelope Stevens Melson, conducted a “book shower” among local citizens to provide the nucleus of a library.
- In 1919, Principal Melson asked 13 state governors to give to the school an oak tree native to their particular state. These were planted on front campus, which, until that time, had been a cotton field.
- “We Learn to Do by Doing” became the motto for the school.

1920-1960 Irvine Sullivan Ingram

- Irvine Sullivan Ingram was hired as principal of the A&M School in 1909. When the Board of Regents established a new junior college on the A&M site in 1933, Ingram became the first president of West Georgia College.
- In 1937, with support from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the institution launched a project that trained educators to teach in rural schools. The project attracted national attention, including publication of a series of drawings by Norman Rockwell made in one of the local schools. Ingram also added a lab, sociology classes and summer classes.
- In 1946, West Georgia College was restructured into four educational divisions: Language, Literature, and the Arts; Social Sciences; Science and Math; and Education, Health and Vocations.
- After WWII, when veterans flocked to the college due to the new GI bill, new dorms became an imperative addition to the campus. Five new residence halls were built and were named for alumni of the institution who had died in the war.
- In 1958, West Georgia College transformed from a Junior College to a Senior College.
- In 1960, President Ingram retired as president of West Georgia College after a remarkable tenure of forty years – 13 as principal of the A&M School and 27 as president of WGC.

1960 Row/Ingram

- William H. Row became president in 1960 after Ingram’s retirement but died from a heart attack nine months into his term. Ingram returned as interim president until James E. Boyd was inducted in August of 1961.
1961-1970 James Boyd

- James Emery Boyd, a scientist at GA Tech and a former member of WGC's original faculty, became president of West Georgia College in August of 1961. West Georgia College was then the fastest growing college in Georgia.

- As the college grew, the need for additional housing once again arose. During Boyd's tenure, nine new residence halls were built. They were: Cobb ('64), Stroud ('64), Gunn ('65), Boykin ('66), Prichard ('66), Downs ('69), Watson ('70), Bowdon ('71) and Roberts ('72). Most were named after the founding faculty of West Georgia College.

- The college also needed new academic buildings. Five were built under Boyd: The Health and Physical Education Building ('65); the Academic Center ('68), which included a library (now Ingram Library); the Social-Sciences Building ('68), now the Pafford Building; the Math and Physics Building ('69, now the Boyd Building); the Humanities Building ('70); and the Education Center ('70).

- To help the college continue to grow, WGC launched a scholarship and loan fund in 1962 with $18,772. By 1971, $1,711,650 in financial aid had been given to WGC students.

- With more students came expanding interests. Boyd added new majors including Chemistry/Sociology ('61/'62), Physics/Psychology ('62/'63), Economy/Political Science ('63/'64) and French/Spanish ('64/'65). He also implemented the first master's program in 1967 and increased the graduation requirements from 190 to 200 credit hours.

- The WGC Foundation was established in 1967 to work for the advancement of the college. Its first chairman was an alumnus of the A&M School and a prominent physician, Dr. Steve Worthy (1929).

- The Division of Graduate Studies was established (1967-68).

- During the challenges of the '60s, Boyd invited a young black woman, Lillian Williams, to attend WGC, thereby integrating the college without incident and without waiting for a court order.

- In 1969, Clara T. Reese became the first black secretary employed on campus, with responsibilities associated with the operation of four departments: History, Political Science, Geography and Sociology. That same year, the first black faculty member (Charles Wilson, formerly an Assistant Principal in Carrollton High School) joined WGC.

- Boyd left the college in December of 1970 to become a vice chancellor of the University System, and George Walker served as interim president during the spring and summer semesters of 1971.

- Dr. Ward B. Pafford, a literary scholar, became president in the fall of 1971 and remained until spring 1975.

- Under Pafford's administration, the divisional organization of the college was changed to a school structure, and a Faculty Senate was established. The Debate Team rose from regional to national prominence by qualifying for the national Debate Tournament for the first time. WGC instituted the Specialist degree in Education and the MBA, and established a standard instrument for student evaluation of courses and professors.
Dr. Maurice K. Townsend became president in 1975. A political scientist with expertise in government business and education, he felt it was important for a person in his position to interact not only with the faculty and staff, but also with the students, and he did so on a regular basis. He also reorganized student services in order to place the president closer to the students.

During his time at West Georgia College, enrollment climbed from 5,803 in 1975 to 6,351 in 1983. In 1980, West Georgia revived its intercollegiate football team, which had been dormant for 23 years.

In 1988, a WGC - Newnan location was established using borrowed rooms at Newnan High School. Classes moved to the Shenandoah Industrial Park in 1990 and the Newnan Center officially opened.

Dr. Townsend’s love of reading led him to increase the size of the library. In the course of his presidency, he personally donated 6,905 volumes to the library. His first major construction project was expansion of the college library, which in 1980 was renamed for and dedicated to former President Ingram. The following year (1981) Ingram passed away.

While Ward Pafford was president, a new food services building was built and finished in 1974 but never opened. Townsend opened this building in 1976, and it was called the Z-6.

The drama and music departments flourished during Townsend’s presidency, especially from 1974 to 1984. Townsend initiated the building of a performing arts center, which was dedicated to him posthumously in 1994.

In 1986, Townsend introduced the four-year nursing degree, one of UWG’s most successful degrees. In 1993, construction began on the new education complex. The cost was $3,250,000 and, once completed in 1995, it housed nursing and education classes.

On May 16, 1993, Townsend died after serving for 18 years – longer than anyone else in the administration, excluding Ingram’s combined time as principal of the A&M School and president of West Georgia College. The Townsend Center for the Performing Arts and the Townsend Memorial Garden are lasting tributes to the college’s 5th President.
1994-2013 BEHERUZ N. SETHNA

• After Maurice Townsend died, Dr. Bruce Lyon (Vice President of Student Services) served as acting president for fifteen months.

• In 1994, Dr. Beheruz N. Sethna became the first person from an ethnic minority to head a predominately white or racially-integrated institution in Georgia when he was named President of West Georgia College. Originally educated as an engineer, Dr. Sethna held a Ph.D. from Columbia University and a bachelor’s degree with honors from the Indian Institute of Technology in Bombay and an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. He had also gained considerable experience in marketing while working for Lever Brothers and Proctor & Gamble.

• When Dr. Sethna took the job in 1994, the belief was that he would be a dynamic president—and he was. Among other things, he helped more students into the residence halls in September of that year. He often worked close to eighteen-hour days, even emailing people at 3 a.m.

• Enrollment continued to climb under Sethna’s presidency, dropping only in 1996 when standards of enrollment were raised. The institution adopted the motto: “Educational excellence in a personal environment.”

• The first of its kind in the state, The Advanced Academy of Georgia opened in 1995, giving exceptional high school students the opportunity to take actual college classes and live on campus. Academy graduates have gone to the best universities in the world, such as Yale and Oxford, and have been awarded Goldwater and Marshall Scholarships; one Advanced Academy alumnus graduated May 2012 with his MD—at age 21.

• On June 12, 1996, West Georgia College became the State University of West Georgia. The McIntosh stone logo, the first symbol of UWG, was replaced by a logo symbolizing the torch of knowledge. Three undergraduate units became colleges rather than schools with this transition.

• In 1996, the university granted its first honorary doctorate to Ray Richards, Jr., CEO of Southwire Company. In 1997, UWG granted the second honorary doctorate to Julian Stanley, renowned educational psychologist and 1936 alumnus of West Georgia Junior College. Through the remainder of Dr. Sethna’s presidency, 12 more honorary doctorates were awarded.

• In 1998, the university received approval for its first doctoral program (Ed.D. in School Improvement). Three additional doctoral programs followed, including the university’s first Ph.D. program. In 2012, UWG graduated the first Ph.D. in the history of the University System of Georgia outside of the four Research Universities.

• In 2008, UWG graduated the youngest Bachelor’s degree graduate in the history of the University System.

• Under Sethna’s leadership, the university obtained approval for classification as a SACS Level IV institution, its highest certification level, and implemented Georgia’s first Honors College.

• Sethna taught a sole-instructor course every year as President and even as interim Senior and then Executive Vice Chancellor, and, over his career, was personally recognized seven times for instructional innovation by the Decision Sciences Institute. He was also elected Honors Professor of the Year by UWG students.

• Campus facilities expanded significantly during Sethna’s tenure. Examples include the Coliseum (’10), a new Bookstore and University Stadium (’11), the Center Point Suites (’12), renovations to the Library (’12), additional seating areas across campus and the Visual Arts Building (’12) and the Nursing building (’13). Residence and dining facilities opened on the East side of campus in 2013-14.

• In January of 2005, by a vote of the Board of Regents, The State University of West Georgia became The University of West Georgia.

• In September of 2005, UWG housed more than 200 people displaced by Hurricane Katrina, ranging in age from two months to the mid-eighties.

• In 2006, due to several considerations including pressure from the NCAA to eliminate the use of team names associated with Native Americans, the university changed its mascot from the Braves to the Wolves.

• During Dr. Sethna’s tenure, UWG increased its enrollment by about 50%, increased its land holdings by more than 70%, more than doubled its square footage, more than doubled the number of degrees awarded, and increased its endowment to more than ten times its 1994 level.

• In total, Dr. Sethna served as President for 19 years, the longest tenure of any president aside from Dr. Ingram’s combined service.