ABAC Namesake One of Two Georgians to Sign Constitution 227 Years Ago

TIFTON—The namesake for Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College penned his name on one of the most famous documents in the world 227 years ago. Abraham Baldwin was one of only two Georgia signers of the United States Constitution, which was signed by 39 men on Sept. 17, 1787.

Dr. Joe Njoroge thinks we should have fireworks.
“It’s really incredible that we don’t have fireworks,” Njoroge, head of the Department of History and Political Science at ABAC, said. “The signing of the Constitution is something we ought to celebrate, commemorate, and remember.”

Born in Kenya but now a United States citizen, Njoroge doesn’t take lightly the words of the Constitution.

“These principles and truths that have helped to create possible the richest and most advanced society that human beings have ever known cannot be taken for granted,” Njoroge said. “When you come from another country, you get to really appreciate the freedoms and opportunities that are available in the United States.”

Constitution Day celebrates the event, which took place in Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Fifty-five men attended the four-month long Constitutional Convention which resulted in the 4,543-word document, the oldest and shortest national constitution. Nine of the 13 states were required to ratify the Constitution.

The ABAC School of Liberal Arts and the Department of History and Political Science will feature a lecture titled “Civil Rights and the Constitution” on Sept. 17 at 6 p.m. in Room 108 of the Health Sciences Building. W. Frank Wilson, Executive Director of the Albany Civil Rights Institute, will be the speaker. The public is invited to attend.

ABAC President David Bridges said Baldwin was a key figure on the national level as well as in the history of Georgia.

“We are proud that our college is named for an individual who set the stage for higher education in Georgia and then helped to shape a document on the national level that has now
lasted 227 years,” Bridges said. “One of our historical exhibits in Tift Hall honors Abraham Baldwin and his many accomplishments.”

ABAC Director of Public Relations Ashley Mock said the Baldwin exhibit is one of several historic panels on the lower floor of Tift Hall. Other panels focus on Tifton founder Henry Harding Tift, ABAC alumnus George T. Smith, and the history of the college from 1908 to present day. All the exhibits are open to the public. Tours can be arranged by calling (229) 391-5055.

Baldwin was born on Nov. 22, 1754 as the son of a Connecticut blacksmith. He enrolled at Yale University at the age of 14 and completed his degree four years later. He then studied theology at Yale and became a minister. He served on George Washington’s staff as a chaplain during the Revolutionary War before beginning a study of law. After being admitted to the bar, he moved to Georgia in 1783 to set up a law practice near Augusta.

“He was a highly educated man,” Njoroge said. “He came to Georgia with an interest in education but he was also interested in politics.”

One year later, Baldwin was elected to the Georgia House of Assembly. In 1787 he represented Georgia as a member of the Constitutional Convention where he was one of the signers of the United States Constitution. Of the Georgia delegates, only Baldwin and William Few signed the document.

Baldwin was also the architect for an educational plan for both secondary and higher education in Georgia. Because of his leadership in this area, the state approved a charter for the University of Georgia in 1785. Baldwin served as the first president of the University of Georgia from 1785 until 1801, prior to the time students actually attended the institution.
Baldwin never had a wife or children but had strong convictions about the importance of a quality education for the youth of Georgia. He believed Georgia should “place the youth under the forming hand of Society, that by instruction they may be moulded to the love of Virtue and good Order.”

Beginning in 1789, Baldwin served Georgia for five consecutive terms as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He was then elected for two terms in the U.S. Senate, one of those as president pro-tem. Baldwin passed away on March 4, 1807 while serving in the Senate. Baldwin County is named for him.

On July 1, 1933, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia opened the institution known as Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in his honor.

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