

# Freshwomen: '89ers bring coed's debut

By MIKE ALLEN  
Executive Editor

"The women are coming. The women are coming," The Associated Press declared.

"A broken tradition," WSET-TV noted.

"Among sadness, there was joy," WDBJ-TV observed.

Boys and girls — going to school together.

A big, big story ... at least in the view of the wire service, three radio stations, three television stations and eight newspapers that Sunday took a break from Congress, South Africa and Pete Rose to chronicle the arrival — pink lace curtains, teddy bears and all — of Washington and Lee's first undergraduate freshmen.

From the reporters' dogged, breathless approach, you would have thought they were covering the SALT III talks:

- A Roanoke television correspondent convinced a student to take her clothes out of a dresser drawer and then put them back in for the camera. (The only problem with the unpacking motif was that the student had arrived Saturday.)

- A writer for a certain colorful national newspaper ventured into a women's restroom to verify a tip that the fixtures appropriate to male facilities had been covered with wooden boxes. (They were.) The reporter later told her student guide that she wanted "to see the old buildings." (She was standing in front of Lee Chapel at the time.)

- And a Roanoke radio reporter who said she was a graduate of Hollins College refused to believe dormitory counselor Kathleen Plante's contention that she transferred to W&L because of the academics. "You came here for the boys,

didn't you?" the broadcaster asked.

At a Lee Chapel meeting Sunday afternoon, University President John D. Wilson told parents that he was "quite astounded" by press interest in the July 1984 decision by the Board of Trustees to admit women undergraduates beginning this fall.

Wilson said that considering the barrage of coverage given that vote, he "shouldn't be surprised" by the fascination with move-in day, but added that he nevertheless found all the attention a bit "strange."

"I can't fully account for it," he continued, "unless the rumor I heard this morning is true and Brooke Shields has transferred."

Wilson repeated the line Monday morning for the freshmen. The parents laughed; the students didn't.

Following the president's talk to parents, he patiently fielded reporters' queries, mentioning only in passing that he was anxious to get back to the television coverage of the U.S. Open tennis championship.

Student Body President John Lewis, who took a break from his duties as a dormitory counselor to introduce Wilson to the parents as "Robert E. Lee's 8th successor," was himself one of the objects of the media's mania.

Despite the series of interviews Lewis went through, he never made it onto television; his girlfriend, a Sweet Briar junior, did — identified, of course, as a W&L freshman.

Lewis said Sunday evening that although coeducation is "exciting" and will add "a new dimension" to the school, some residual ambivalence remains among students.

He added that in some ways the switch is "tragic" and that many upperclassmen felt "betrayed."

"I think there's a desperate fear

# Media

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□ Continued on Page 1

that we'll become just another small liberal arts college in Virginia," Lewis said. "I was asked three or four times today if I'd have come here three years ago if the school was coeducational and I said, 'Hell no. No

way.' "

Associate Dean of Students Anne C.P. Schroer said the attention heaped on the 107 freshmen women was not completely inappropriate, explaining that there's a certain "pioneer spirit" among them.

Preparations for C-Day made the 1984 Summer Olympics look spontaneous. The gymnasium was renovated, the security staff was beefed up and uniformed, and \$50,000 in additional lighting was installed.

Seven dormitory halls were con-

verted for the women's use. Changes include locking hall doors that have a remarkable tendency to prop themselves open.

The feminization of Lexington extends even beyond the campus. A counter clerk at the Arby's on Main Street bragged that "we're the only fast-food restaurant in town with two women managers," and the 244-year old Lexington Presbyterian Church this summer hired a female assistant minister.

It is along the Colonnade, though,

that students continue to hunt for any signs of change, whether or not it is in fact related to coeducation.

This year's Letitia Pate Evans Dining Hall "point cards," for example, are printed on pink stock.

"If one more person asks me that," a dining hall employee said in response to the obvious question. "This is just what the print shop gave us."

One administrator chuckled when a student whined about the color.

"It's probably worth more on quiche day," he said.