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ON THE COVER: Graduating senior Charles Mason turned a few heads with the homemade sign on the back of his gown. Exactly what did that sign mean? Probably not what you think. For an explanation of the sign and a profile of a most unusual alumnus, see page 21. *Photograph by W. Patrick Hinely, '73*

The Trustees' Statement on Coeducation

Resolution in Favor Passes by 17-7 Margin

On July 14, 1984, the Board of Trustees of Washington and Lee University approved by a 17-7 vote the following resolution:

Resolved, that Washington and Lee University shall admit qualified students, regardless of gender, to all of its degree programs commencing in the Fall of 1985.

Foremost in the Trustees' assessment and the central feature of our decision was the conviction that the educational benefits of the University should be extended to men and women undergraduates alike, and as a result, the quality of the University will be improved. In evaluating the opinions of alumni, students, and faculty on the future course of the University, the Trustees found unmistakable common agreement that Washington and Lee's most precious assets are its reputation for excellence and its long and distinguished history of service to the Commonwealth and the nation. This rich heritage and the traditions which support it are secure and will be as deeply appreciated and as proudly preserved by the young women who come here as by their male counterparts. It is our considered judgment that the education of tomorrow's leaders in the learned professions and in the corporate world will be strengthened by the presence in our classrooms and laboratories of men and women of talent, ambition, and character.

The resolution of the Board concludes a nine-month study of the University's undergraduate program directed by the Trustees through special efforts by our standing committees on academic affairs, campus life, finance, and planning and development. The study examined the likely consequences of remaining all male at the undergraduate level, as well as those of becoming coeducational in purpose. It attempted to measure the impact upon curriculum, upon the size and character of the teaching program, and upon the quality and range of the University's applicant pool. Further, the study examined the alternative impacts upon the University's cocurricular and extracurricular life—upon residential patterns, athletic competition, and the long-established fraternity system. The Executive Committee of the Board assumed the difficult but critically important responsibility of pondering the intangibles of the Washington and Lee experience, the traditions—especially the Honor System—which draw the loyalties and respect of all students and alumni, strong bonds connecting many generations and all ages.

The Trustees considered the successful manner in which women have earned degrees in the University's School of Law since 1972. We considered, as well, the gratifying experience that Washington and Lee has enjoyed in accepting limited numbers of exchange students each year from area women's colleges.

In conducting its study, the Trustees were, of course, mindful of the continuing decline in the number of the nation's high school



Charles Mason photo

Historic Moment



Rector Ballengee



Dr. Shannon (left) and President Wilson

of anticipation. They had arrived in Lexington by noon on Friday to convene the special meeting. They heard additional reports from committees on Friday afternoon, adjourned for dinner at the Keydet-General motel, and then resumed their discussions around the dinner table.

When they finally called a halt to the debate around 11 p.m., many Trustees still had not made up their minds on the issue.

One Trustee confessed he had not decided which way he would vote until 4 o'clock Saturday morning.

Reminded of that Trustee's remarks at the news conference, James M. Ballengee, rector of the Board, wryly observed: "Yes, I heard that Trustee up walking around out at the motel. I was awake myself!"

Clearly, the Trustees were not exactly sleeping on the matter.

The final session began at 8:30 a.m. Saturday. The administrative staff members who customarily attend Board meetings—the deans, treasurer, admissions director, university relations director, and assistant to the president—had anticipated an executive session of the Board, augmented only by the past and current presidents of the student body and the alumni association. Instead, the Trustees agreed to invite them to attend the historic session. "They had been involved in the process from the start," said Ballengee. "There was no sense excluding them at the end."

The motion came to the floor at 10:40 a.m. Rector Ballengee called for discussion, asking each Trustee for one final statement on the question.

For the next hour as they went around the table one by one, the 22 Trustees who attended the meeting* set out their positions one last time. Some spoke from prepared statements or notes, others made their remarks extemporaneously. All spoke words that were deeply personal, often highly emotional. Those who were in the room but not part of the vote were struck by the combination of can-

dor and thoughtfulness of those remarks, which reflected the care with which the Trustees had examined the issue.

At 11:45 a.m. the question was called. Secretary Whitehead read the roll. Two of the votes—T. Hal Clarke's from Ireland and J. Alvin Philpott's from North Carolina—were by phone.

Though the Board's rules call for only a simple majority on such votes, the Trustees had determined beforehand that this question would need to be resolved by more than a simple majority.

Explained Ballengee: "We determined in advance and by general agreement that this decision of such importance and significance could not be adopted by what one would call a slim majority, that it required something more than that."

And though he declined to say precisely what the Trustees had required for themselves, the 17 to 7 margin exceeded that bottom line. The motion carried.

After almost an hour during which a statement announcing the Board's decision was completed and news releases were prepared, Ballengee, President John D. Wilson and two Trustees—Dr. Edgar Shannon Jr. and Justice A. Christian Compton—left the library for a news conference in The Commerce School Building.

As an indication of the interest that had been generated in the issue, the lecture hall was almost filled with media. W&L's campus radio station, WLUR-FM, broadcast the news conference live. Since the conference was designed for

*Trustees T. Hal Clarke of Atlanta and J. Alvin Philpott of Lexington, N.C., were unable to be on the campus for the meeting, but both voted in absentia by telephone—Clarke from Ireland, Philpott from North Carolina. Tom Wolfe, who was elected to the Board in January, has been unable to attend any meetings because of deadline pressures from his book. He has not yet been sworn in as a Trustee and did not participate in the special meeting or the vote.



Reid Hall audience awaits the word.



WLUR-FM's live coverage

media and the room was not large enough to accommodate others, arrangements were made to show the event live on television monitors in nearby Reid Hall. *The Ring-tum Phi*, the campus newspaper, had summoned a skeleton staff back to the campus in order to publish a special "Extra" edition which would go in the mail to all students two days later.

Ballengee's announcement came at 12:50 p.m.:

"The Board of Trustees of Washington and Lee University today approved by a 17 to 7 vote the following resolution: 'Resolved, that Washington and Lee University shall admit qualified students, regardless of gender, to all of its degree programs commencing in the fall of 1985.' "

Those watching on the TV monitors in Reid Hall cheered the news. Several of the students who had opposed coeducation shook their heads sadly.

The word was out. And it spread quickly. The University switchboard, which was opened just to answer inquiries, was flooded with calls for the next four hours.

After reading the Board's entire supporting statement, Ballengee opened the floor to questions. And for the next 35 minutes, the media probed the decision and its ramifications, asking many questions that had been anticipated but some that had not.

Primarily those questions were: Why? And, how? First, the whys.

The Board statement had stressed a "foremost" conviction that "the educational benefits of the University should be extended to men and women undergraduates alike." The statement went on to say that "the education of tomorrow's leaders in the learned professions and in the corporate world will be strengthened by the presence in our classrooms and laboratories of men and women of talent, ambition, and character."

But the reporters wanted to know the role that demographics had played in the deliberations. They asked

how coeducation might alter W&L's appeal to prospective students. And they were told the national pool of applicants is shrinking and will continue to shrink. By remaining all-male, Washington and Lee would continue limiting itself to half the available pool.

Moreover, one important element in the Trustee study was a survey of 400 high school guidance counselors. In that survey the counselors made it clear that a large majority of the male students in those secondary schools refused even to consider Washington and Lee because of the all-male policy.

Noted Ballengee: "Not very long ago there were maybe a couple of hundred all-male schools in this country with 80,000 students. It's down to five now with no more than 8,000 in total. That looks like a product that isn't very much in demand to many people."

But as Wilson observed in response to a question, the issue of demographics, though certainly a part of the discussion, was by no means *all* of the discussion—perhaps not even the major part.

"We were looking at the total future health, vitality, and character of the University as measured against . . . changes in the larger society," Wilson said.

Those changes had been mentioned in the Board's formal statement which referred to "the widening responsibilities assumed by talented women in our time."

Too, Wilson stated his belief that the University would benefit as much from the presence of women as women would benefit from their presence at the University—an extraordinarily important observation.

"We do have something special here," said Wilson. "I don't think it is self-serving to say that. . . . There is a spirit alive on this campus, a spirit of humaneness. We do cultivate notions of integrity and honor and character here that are very, very important, it seems to me, to match up with our superior teaching and learning program. We

Historic Moment



Rector Ballengee (left) listens to Justice Compton's remarks.

believe that these values that are so important to Washington and Lee can and will be enjoyed by women equally and that they will help to contribute to sharpening them and to making them as much a part of our future as our past."

Throughout the debate and the Trustees' study there had been constant references to the "intangibles" of the Washington and Lee experience. In his remarks at the news conference Wilson made it plain that neither he nor his fellow Trustees had taken the notion of such "intangibles" lightly.

"I confessed to the Board that as late as last night I had sleepless hours in testing what might be gained and what lost (by coeducation)," said Wilson. "There are intangibles, as you know, that are hard to wrap language around. But the spirit, the magical quality of life here, the way the faculty open themselves up to students and student needs and are accessible day in and day out, careful attention to teaching, accompanied by a commitment to scholarship—these are the valuables that live here and that we fully expect will be attractive to women and will be contributed to by the women we admit here."

Quality was always the key issue—the quality of the students, the quality of the educational process, the quality of the environment.

That is not to say there was agreement that coeducation would assure that quality. Within the Trustees as within the alumni, the students, and the faculty, there were opposing viewpoints. Justice Compton spoke of those when he told the news conference that he had voted against the proposal because he felt "we have in place at this University a fine-tuned educational machine which is providing a high quality education in a single-sex atmosphere."

And yet Compton quickly added that the Trustees' announced statement of unified support for the decision was accurate when he said:

"The decision has been made. There is no appeal. Those of us who love and support Washington and Lee . . . will work just as hard to make coeducation another positive factor as we worked against the proposal to coeducate."

The hows were less easily answered. How much will it cost? How much will the physical plant have to be altered? How many women will be enrolled? How will various areas of the University—athletics, fraternity life—be altered? How will the University set out to unify its constituencies in light of a decision on an issue that had so clearly been divisive?

For starters, the Trustees have asked that a Committee on Coeducation be established on the campus. That committee will be composed of members of the administration, faculty, and student body (both law and undergraduate) and will work closely with the Trustees' Executive Committee. Many of those unanswered questions as well as questions that are sure to arise will be addressed by that committee.

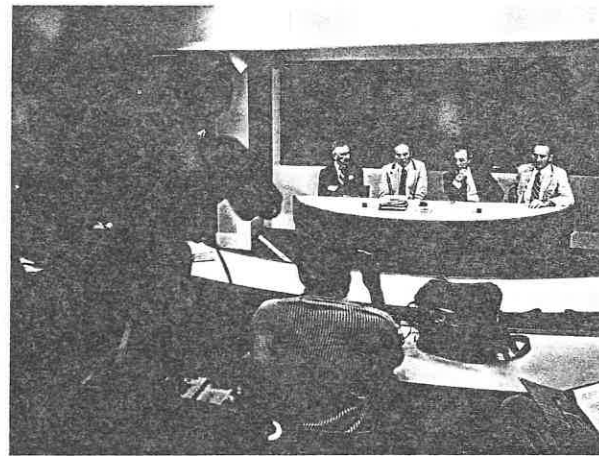
At the outset, plans are to aim for about 80 women students in the class that enrolls in the fall of 1985.

Wilson referred to "an evolutionary development" during which "we have as a primary value the intimacy of our academic environment. We are not anxious to see this undergraduate enrollment expand very markedly. So we've had a kind of working idea that between 1,350 and 1,500 undergraduates would be as far as we'd want to go by the year 1995, let us say. Within that general target, again to be refined, we would hope to see as many as 500 women in residency by the end of that decade. Then we'll take another look as an administration, a faculty, and as a Board finally to see what evolutionary steps beyond that need to be taken."

As for facilities, the major concerns will be the construction of a new residence hall—a project under consideration regardless of the coeducation decision—and renovation of gymnasium locker room facilities. Those,



Executive Committee President Cole Dawson



A room full of media at the news conference

noted Wilson, represent the major capital undertakings with preliminary estimates of about \$4 million for a dormitory with 200 beds and \$150,000 for gymnasium renovations.

Wilson said that "we do not expect any diminution in our men's varsity athletic commitments, but we do anticipate an evolutionary development of women's inter-collegiate sports. And that will probably require our moving up on the schedule the installation of one or two more outdoor playing fields."

In terms of personnel, the athletic department would require the most adjustment with the possibility of three additional staff members.

Asked specifically whether the University plans to add additional women faculty members, Wilson said: "I very much hope that our recent successes in attracting talented women to the faculty will continue. We will have to do that obviously in special ways to meet our policy commitment today. . . . Though we don't anticipate serious dislocations of enrollment between fields because men and women today are as apt to share an interest in premedicine or pre-law or commerce and journalism as well as the liberal arts and sciences. But nonetheless, as faculty vacancies open we're going to be even more acutely committed in the future, as we have been in the past, to attracting women."

On the subject of fraternities, Wilson said that the University does have a commitment to the fraternity system. Though he declined to predict whether coeducation might result in a reduction of the number of W&L's 17 fraternities, he admitted that was a possibility, "but it would be only through natural attrition, not through policy."

One of the Trustees' primary concerns throughout the study involved the acceptance of coeducation by the University's primary constituencies. Ballengee noted that the Trustees' survey of alumni opinion had played a signifi-

cant role in the study, particularly the general alumni feeling that the University's academic standards must not be allowed to deteriorate.

Added Ballengee: "We think that strong reservoir of love and affection for this place will override (the alumni's) emotional feeling that 'we'd like Washington and Lee to be the way it was when I was there.'"

As for the student response, Wilson said he would rely heavily on the leadership of the student government, especially Executive Committee President Cole Dawson of Houston, in the coming year.

Dawson was a participant in the Trustees' final deliberations on the subject and made a strong statement in favor of coeducation during the special meeting, admitting that his thinking on the issue had changed dramatically during the discussions.

In a letter to the student body in the special issue of *The Ring-tum Phi*, Dawson wrote that he is "confident that admitting women is a positive move and one that will make W&L a stronger institution in the future." He also told his fellow students: "We have so much to gain with a positive attitude."

When the formal news conference ended, the participants lingered outside the Commerce School Building, chatting casually with faculty members and students who had been watching the proceedings on the nearby TV monitors.

Thirty minutes later the campus was as quiet as it always is on summer Saturdays, deserted except for the occasional tourists who wandered, guidebooks in hand, from the Lee Chapel to the Colonnade to the back campus.

One set of tourists, a husband and wife from Colorado, had been made aware of the historic events of the afternoon. Asked her reaction to that news by a reporter, the wife said: "I think I'm going back to college and enroll here in the fall!"