



A Grand Entrance

The Class of 1989 Ushers in a New Era

The heat and humidity were oppressive. The television cameras and newspaper reporters were omnipresent. The questions and the answers were predictable.

Moving-In Day for Washington and Lee's Class of 1989 was, at least in some respects, less than typical.

And yet, in most respects, the University's first coeducational undergraduate class made a routine entrance on the second Sunday in September.

There were trunks to be carted up dormitory steps. And curtains to be hung. There were stereos to be installed.

And roommates to be greeted. There were bare walls to be covered with posters. And window fans to be purchased.

Had it not been for the media attention accompanying the occasion, the arrival in Lexington of 406 freshmen would have been remarkable primarily because it was so normal.

But the media representatives were hard to avoid, let alone ignore. When he addressed parents of the entering freshmen in Lee Chapel, W&L President John D. Wilson took note of the television cameras that were eavesdropping on

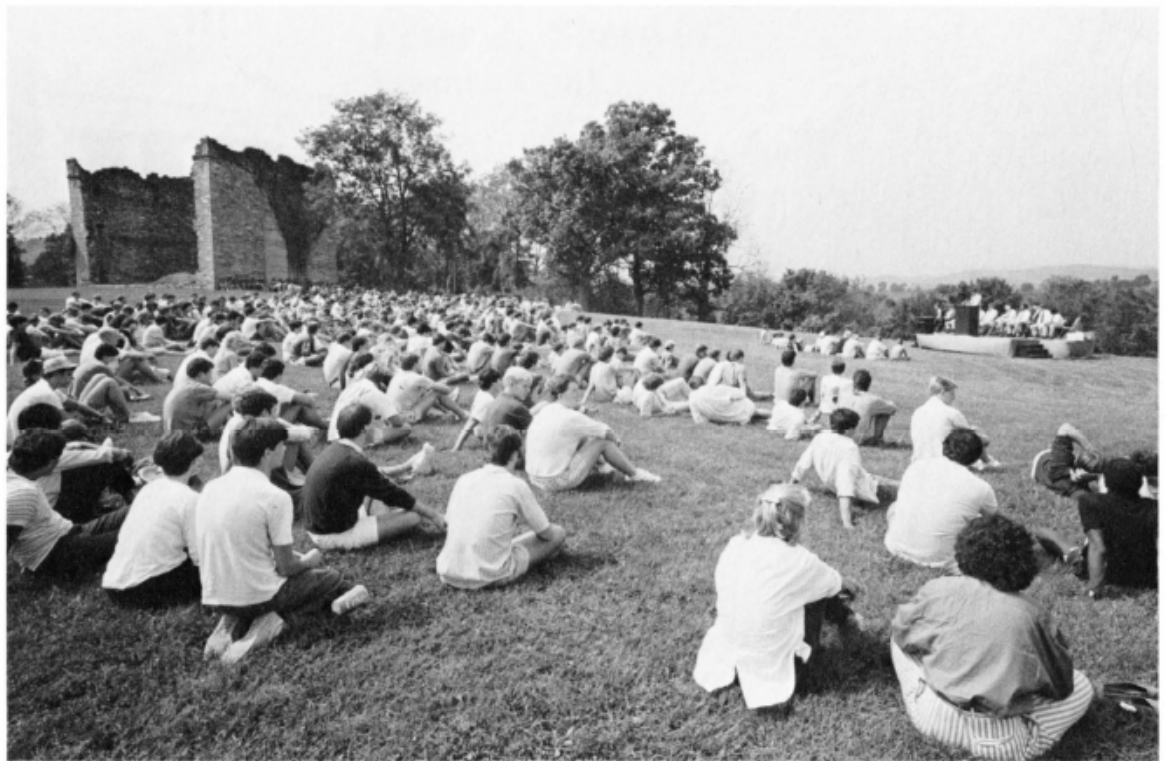
the proceedings and elicited laughter from the parents by telling them: "If you don't wish to comment on the historical significance of your 17-year-old going off to college, you don't have to."

By the first day of orientation some of the freshmen—particularly many of the 105 women students—had been interviewed (and photographed) so often they were as comfortable in front of the cameras and microphones as the interviewers.

In addition to the state and area media, the University's change was the subject of stories on the national wire



Freshman Katherine Nelligan (right) of Lynchburg is interviewed on Moving-In Day.



For the second year in a row freshmen were introduced to the University's Honor System in a session held near Liberty Hall.

services and in *USA Today*. (See box)

The attention had not been unexpected. When the W&L Board of Trustees made its decision in favor of coeducation on July 14, 1984, newspaper accounts of that event appeared as far away as Paris and London—a fairly clear indication that there was considerable interest in the transition.

In the 13½ months between the decision and the arrival of the first undergraduate women, the University experienced a remarkable increase in applications—a 76 percent jump over the previous year. Admissions officials traced some of that increase to the high public profile that the University enjoyed in the aftermath of the coeducation decision.

But while the admissions office was busier than ever selecting the first coeducational undergraduate class, committees on the campus were equally busy planning for its arrival.

Physical changes to the campus were held to a minimum: locker-rooms were remodeled in the gymnasium, lighting was improved on the campus, adjustments were made to the dormitories.

Many of the changes were less visible. Among those was a revised orientation program. Although not quite a return to the bygone days of freshman camp at Natural Bridge, elements were added to the week-long orientation in an effort to build a sense of class identity and to instill an appreciation for the University's rich history and traditions. The revisions in orientation had been planned for some



As usual, registration was a process of standing in lines and filling out forms.

time; it was a happy coincidence that they were implemented this year.

One new feature was a historical sketch by University Historian Taylor Sanders. Addressing the class from in front of the Lee Chapel, Sanders used four campus landmarks—Ol' George, the Cyrus McCormick statue, the tomb of Jockey John Robinson, and Lee Chapel—to illustrate the various phases of Washington and Lee's development.

Concluded Sanders: “. . . our University, like our campus, continues to evolve. Like a crusty old snake beside a



Freshmen examine The Ring-tum Phi at the Alumni Association's picnic.

stone wall, we seem constantly to be sloughing off old skin and emerging something new, yet still basically the same. The core goes deeper than mere tradition. We remain an independent small school, a friendly school, but with the broad offerings of a university. We champion academic achievement and competition, but always shaped by collegiality and courtesy. We encourage independence among students, whom we expect will excel in all areas of life as alumni. . . . And at our very heart is honor.”



University Historian Taylor Sanders presented a historical sketch of Washington and Lee at one of the sessions during the orientation program.

From the Press Clippings

Roanoke Times & World-News

September 9, 1985

"I didn't really choose the school because Dad went here," Cathy Boardman said of her father, John K. Boardman Jr., '51. Rather, she said, it was because W&L's admissions staff made her feel more "comfortable" than those anywhere else. She wanted a small school. "The campus is gorgeous, the people are nice. It just felt right."

Richmond News-Leader

September 9, 1985

Robert H. Manson, a freshman from the Richmond area, said he likes the decision to admit women, but "it didn't have any bearing" on his attending W&L. "It's much more relaxed than just with guys," said Manson, a graduate of Douglas Southall Freeman High School in Henrico County. "It will be interesting to have girls around. It will be interesting to see how it works out the first year."

The Washington Post

September 16, 1985

"I toured all over the East Coast: UNC, Duke, Dartmouth, Harvard, Vanderbilt, U-Va," said freshman Lucy Anderson of Houston, great-niece of a former trustee. "I wanted a rural campus because the urban ones are so ugly; I wanted a small school, because there is more personal attention; I wanted good academics and I wanted that sense of history . . ."

USA Today

September 16, 1985

Alumnus Bill Ford of Atlanta, Class of 1961, has mixed feelings: "I said to the school, 'Don't do it, but if you're going to do it, hurry up in time for Dec.'" They did, and this fall his daughter, Delia, enters as a freshman.

Another feature added to this year's orientation was a freshman class picnic, which was sponsored by the Alumni Association and featured remarks by Trustee A. Christian Compton, '50, Virginia Supreme Court Justice, who described the intangible concept he called "the Washington and Lee Experience" to the new students.

"This so-called 'Experience' is unlike any that you could have at any other college in America. The experience is real and not illusory. It will have a positive, lasting effect on your lives," said Compton.

Central to that experience, Compton said, is the Honor System, which is "a viable force that is central to every student relationship; it is not a mere platitude."

Compton told the freshmen that, "as a direct result of the rich intellectual development that you acquire here . . . you will have an intellectual self-esteem that is unique to graduates of Washington and Lee. This will not manifest itself in an air of superiority as you relate to others with whom you come in contact. Instead, it will be a personal sense of satisfaction with your intellectual and social experiences here—a sense of well-being, if you will, as the result of having received a superior liberal arts education that can serve as the springboard for any future endeavor."

There were other innovations in this year's orientation program—a "Mocktail Party," part of the University's ongoing alcohol awareness program, an Adventure Weekend of activities such as spelunking and hiking sponsored by the Army ROTC program, and a series of "initiative games" to build camaraderie.

Those activities were interspersed with the more traditional orientation fare—registering with faculty advisors, taking placement tests, and receiving an introduction to the Honor System.

By mid-week the 90-degree temperatures and the reporters both departed. Cooler fall weather and upperclass students returned. Fraternities began their annual rush activities; freshmen started selecting their classes; the tranquility of a Lexington summer quickly gave way to the comparative bustle of the school year.

And by the first day of classes, the questions turned from coeducation to the drop-add procedures.

Finally, the fanfare had ended for the Class of 1989, and their lives as Washington and Lee undergraduates had begun.