

The Ring-tum Phi

VOLUME 85, NUMBER 1

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

SEPTEMBER 12, 1985



By Cotton Puryear/The Ring-tum Phi

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

Three freshmen women of the W&L Class of 1989 are interviewed by a TV crew upon their arrival in Lexington Sunday

Spring may bring first coed commencement

Dormitory counselor Kathleen Plante may join diploma line with this year's seniors, making this graduation the school's first coeducational commencement ceremony.

Plante admits, though, that many of her classmates aren't exactly overjoyed by the prospect.

"I think there are a fair amount of guys that don't like me to graduate the following year," she said Sunday. "I think that they went to an all-male university and want to graduate from an all-male university."

"Rather than being the first of an era, they want to be the last," she added.

Plante, 20, noted that although graduating in June would be "very interesting" — "I've never made history before" — she has not yet made a definite decision.

An English and East Asian Studies major, she said extra work in the latter field may cause her to postpone her graduation until the 1986 academic year.

Plante, a resident of Great Falls who last year was W&L's homecoming queen, attended the

school for the last five terms as a transfer student from Hollins College.

She said W&L allowed her to transfer 90 percent of her Hollins credits, which she said was "better than I expected."

Plante said that before the trustees' vote she felt "a lot of anti-coed" sentiment, but recently she's been hearing "pretty much positive stuff."

"The guys in general are being very gentlemanly about it," she said. "Now that it's gone coed, I think the student body loves Washington and Lee enough to support it."

□ See Media, Page 4