

CHARLES McDOWELL

February 14, 1996

Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is February 14, 1996. I'm in Washington, D.C., at the National Press Club Building. I'm speaking with Charles McDowell, Jr.

You grew up on campus.

McDowell: I did, in the Hollow.

Warren: Describe the Hollow.

McDowell: The Hollow is the hollow. It's what a southerner would call a hollow. It is directly below--it runs from the KA House to the Beta House. It is eight or nine faculty houses, I think eight faculty houses, in a row backing on Main Street, fronting looking up the hill to, I remember, the house of Fitzgerald Flournoy, the new Alumni House that's up there, the Law School, the old law school, etc., and the Colonnade and the back of Lee Chapel are all visible from the Hollow.

Warren: Who were your neighbors?

McDowell: The neighbors. Let's start--and my memory is nil, but these go back so far, I can remember them, I think. Starting at the KA House side closest to Toby Agnor's grocery store, was a little grocery store at the bottom of the alley that goes from Main Street up to the KA House and comes out on Letcher Avenue. That's where we're starting and we're coming toward the center of town.

Dr. Bradley, professor French, with his wife and son Jim. Then in the magnificent white spectacular house, Dr. William Gleason Bean and his wife and

their two sons, Coleman and Bill Bean. Bill Bean's still living in Lexington, and Coleman living in Washington.

Warren: What did he teach?

McDowell: Dr. Bean--history. We're talking head of the history department and we're talking head of the French. Dr. Bradley taught French; did I mention? Dr. Bean, history.

Then the Hancock House, it was called, where the McDowells lived, but houses were usually known for their--in our case, we pretended, anyway, it was, "Where do you live?" "In the Hancock House." The Hancock House was--Dr. Hancock was, as I recall, maybe dean of the university, but when we moved in there, it was where, I guess, my parents moved.

We lived in three houses in the Hollow. Let me keep naming them off. The McDowells lived in the Hancock House, and that was my mother, who worked up the hill at the law school, and my father [Charles Rice McDowell], who taught up the hill at the law school, and me and my brother John.

Next door to that, Charlie Light, Charles Porterfield Light, who was a law professor, like my father, a graduate of VMI, which is very unusual in the W&L law school, and the son of the manager of the Willard Hotel that you're looking at. It's a small world. [Laughter] It's a very small world. And indeed, as manager of the Willard Hotel, he put into the minds of newspaper people who lived in a little row of shacks over here to invent the Gridiron Club, which was invented largely to fill a banquet room over at the Willard Hotel. I mean, it is a small world. No one in the Gridiron Club knows I knew Charlie Light and who his father was. I mean, that's all esoteric, but you and I would understand it; they wouldn't.

Next house. Lucius Junius Desha, head of the chemistry department, with his marvelous wife and his two or three daughters, led by Mary Desha and Lucia Desha and Julia Desha.

Warren: You get extra stars for that.

McDowell: Yeah, isn't that good? And they were older than I, and I was awed by all three of them. They were the first females I ever looked at, and they were so beautiful and awesome that I was scared of girls for many years, just on being so impressed with them.

Next to the Deshas, Annie Jo White. You know about her from the book.

Warren: No, but I want you to tell me about her.

McDowell: Annie Jo White was what was known as a maiden lady who founded Fancy Dress Ball, invented Fancy Dress Ball at W&L. She worked probably in the library for a lot of her life. I don't know where in the hell she was. But she was a marvelous intellectual and cranky woman who lived in the Annie Jo White House. How she got it in Faculty Row is also not clear to me.

She rented rooms to students, a lot of rooms to students, and the student that came out the best that lived there was [U.S. Supreme Court] Justice Lewis Powell. When I was eleven, twelve, growing up in the Hollow, playing baseball, out in the middle of the trees, we'd play baseball in the trees, and football, two hills, the hill that comes down from the KA House and the hill that comes sort of down from the Lee Chapel end make a real swale of a hollow, and that's where we hit baseballs out toward the KA House. But Lewis Powell lived in Annie Jo White's while he went to the W&L Law School, so he would walk up the hill from his room to his classes, and if we were playing some sport, he would tend to come down and throw a ball with us or hit one or move on. So I've known him since I was eleven, covered him when he was a justice, and covered his swearing-in at the U.S. Supreme Court. It's a small world, is all I'm saying.

Next to Annie Jo--oh, there's an anecdote about that that I'll tell real quick. Lewis Powell tells this story. He came to Annie Jo's house. As he started law school, he had gone through his undergraduate days as some kind of counselor in

the dorms, so he'd never had to maybe pay for a room or something. He negotiated some price with her, which I'm sorry to say I've forgotten, but it was very much like \$15 or \$7.50 a month or something, but they settled that after walking up the steps and looking at the room, and he said, "Perfect. I can walk right up to the law school." Annie Jo knew he was a good student. I think he'd been the president of the student body already, and he was a real good student.

As he stood saying good-bye to her in her little entrance hall, he looked behind her shoulder and realized he was looking at a Miley photograph of General Lee on Traveler, and he realized that there was a little bitty girl sitting in General Lee's lap on the horse, and said, "Who is that?"

She said, "That's me."

"You knew General Lee?" said Lewis Powell.

And she said, "Of course."

And he said, "And I know you?"

And she said, "Well, yes."

And he said, "I can't believe what a small world it is." [Laughter] So he and I are both taken with the small worlds.

Warren: Do you have any idea what happened to that photograph?

McDowell: No, but they'll know around the library. It's a famous photograph. Miley's stuff became classic Civil War stuff, and I would think--I know nothing about it, but my hunch is that a photograph of Annie Jo at three or four, sitting across the front of that saddle, must be somewhere. I mean, it would be hard to lose it. It was hanging in a University-owned house, rented to a lady on the staff. The Miley picture, God knows, but anyway.

All right, moving along our little row of houses, I'm at the end, and I've described all the houses. The Moffatts. My friend there was Joe Moffatt, and Mrs.

Moffatt was Lela, L-E-L-A, I guess, or Lelia, L-E-L-I-A. And Dr. Moffatt was head of English, and I can't say his first name.

Warren: Doctor.

McDowell: Doctor. But we can do a poem that will not appear in the history. At least I don't think I'll recommend it. But a member of the English department named Lawrence Edward Watkin, who went to Hollywood and became a great moviemaker and also wrote a fantastic book about Lexington, set in Lexington, called *On Borrowed Time*, and it's a marvel. I don't have one here; I've got one at home. It's decided to my mother and father and two or three other mothers and fathers around that were friends. But Mrs. Moffatt was the head of the UDC, United Daughters of the Confederacy in Lexington certainly, Virginia probably, and I think had been head of the UDC across the whole South. So there so near to the rear of the Lee Chapel, about the closest house to the grave of General Lee, lived the Moffatts, and Mrs. Moffatt was a UDC absolutist.

Larry Watkin's poem is a limerick that says:

"Leeland Nance Moffatt sat on a toffet under the UDC,
so busy thinkin' how stinkin' was Lincoln
he forgot about Robert E. Lee."

Warren: [Laughter] That's great.

McDowell: I have changed the opening words because I think of her son Joe, so I say, off the record, that the real poem begins "Old Miss Moffatt," like the limerick it's taken after, whoever, but "Old Miss Moffatt." I just changed it to "Leeland Nance Moffatt," because I just don't like to call her "Old Miss Moffatt." [Laughter] But that can go either way. I don't feel deeply about it, but if it's attributed to me, I remember it as "Leeland Nance Moffatt sat on a toffet."

All right. Then next to that was the Old Blue Hotel, which is gone.

Warren: Tell me about the Old Blue Hotel.

McDowell: I don't know much.

Warren: I am enchanted by this.

McDowell: Well, you're going to have to find someone who can tell you some history. It was a plain, good-looking building, it was very large, it housed scholarship athletes in my time, and now it's sort of a blank place. The Conoco station was just across the little road in the Beta House, but it filled a big chunk and it backed on to Main Street, and it had some kind of a rear porch with a drive-through under it for carriages, I'm sure is that it was. By that time, that was just kind of like a back porch behind a hedge, but it must have been a place where people drove their carriages in, and it must have been an old hotel in another century. I don't know how long. If I ever knew about it, I've certainly forgotten it.

But we had athletes in there. I remember Bill Ellis, an end on the football team, specifically used to take me in there, and we'd talk and all. He got me a job at Lee Chapel, showing tourists through the chapel part of it.

Warren: Who ran the Old Blue Hotel at that point? How did it function?

McDowell: W&L owned it and ran it.

Warren: Did they serve meals there?

McDowell: I think so, because I think they had to feed those football players. But it was full of the scholarship football players. I suppose they fed them, or they went to the--what do you call the place where students, the run of the student body eats their meals? Where, if not in a fraternity house? Over at the Beanery. Maybe they ate at the Beanery.

Warren: Is that what it was called then?

McDowell: Beanery. [Laughter] Put that down.

Warren: That I haven't heard about before.

McDowell: Well, whatever it's called. It used to be over near Harold Lock's print shop and now where it's over opposite the Episcopal church, it seems to me. If you

were a student who wasn't a member of a fraternity, you'd probably go there to eat. Well, anyway, they could have gone there. They could have eaten in the Old Blue. I don't remember a dining room in there, but I don't remember the Old Blue very well. I just remember the marvelous football stars that I would watch play.

Warren: Tell me some names.

McDowell: Joe Arnold was from Kentucky, who my mother and father knew very well, was a great star there for a long time. Then all the way up to my time, Andy McCutcheon and Joe McCutcheon were both starting players. They didn't live in the Old Blue; they lived in the Phi-something House, I've forgotten, the one opposite the Student Union. Corner Store at one end of the block by the post office. Then you come down the block to this fraternity house. But the McCutcheons, who are as close friends as I have, are the ones I remember from my own time.

Then I remember all the way back to, I think, Joe Arnold, when Tex Tilson was coach. Joe Arnold probably played there in the early thirties. I hung out around the football team a lot and saw hundreds and hundreds of games and went to practices and helped take care of the loose footballs. It was a good thing for a kid to do, and I was the ball boy for the basketball team, sort of, for a period. Then I played on it, which is the pride of my life. It was just an interesting place to hang out.

Remember that one of the best experts in all history on all this is Lea Booth in Lynchburg, and I'm sure y'all have got him as a prime interviewee, but get him quick, because he's old. I heard from him only last week, and he's just funny and still keen, but go while he's hot, because he can put together stuff you wouldn't dream of. He is amazing.

Okay. So much for that row of houses. I've carried us a long way. Gassy, gassy. [Laughter]

Warren: I'll be an early memory that you have, that I would love to have a first-hand account about, were you old enough to be aware when Tucker Hall burned?

McDowell: Oh, yeah.

Warren: Tell me what that was like.

McDowell: Well, Tucker Hall was a very big thing in our lives, remember my father's office was there.

Warren: Describe it before the fire.

McDowell: It was like an outrage. It was a total outrage. I mean, here was this Colonnade, famous across America, and at one end of it, where you expected to see sort of a matching building to the business school, as it was at the other end, was a mostly round, bulbous, ugly, ugly, ugly graystone thing, lump, sat there on it. And my father, the eager law professor and live wire, hated the building so, that when one of the jokes that went around was that he burned it down. I firmly believed that. And when I got old enough to have the nerve, asked him if he did, he was utterly astonished. "You really thought I burned it down?"

I said, "Well, you hated it, and everyone said you were the only one who got his own law books out of it." He went in when it was on fire and rescued a whole lot of stuff, including some of Raymond Johnson's books and teaching notes. So it was very dramatic.

Warren: Did you watch that? Did you see your father go in?

McDowell: I did not. What he did was go in and save what he could save, got his head into Dean Moorland's office. I don't know what he got out of there, but some stuff. A little bit out of Charlie Light's and Raymond Johnson's offices, and nearly all his own stuff, because he was the newest professor, I guess, and his was nearest the door or something. I don't know. But Mother didn't work there then, but she worked in the Alumni Office then, as I recall.

But what he did, he brought it out. By then, Mother was out there, and then they came home to where me and John had been asleep, and woke us up and took us out on the roof. From their bedroom, you could go on our porch roof. So John

and I were wrapped in blankets and sat out there to watch the law school burn. The flames by then were up to just one towering torch, and there was something wrong with the water supply or something, and they weren't getting much water on it. So we watched it burn. Then my father went back up there. But as my understanding is, he had done his brave mission and saved some stuff before he came home and got us up and said, "Now there's something to watch," and we watched. The Lexington Fire Department was there. If you grew up in that town, you even knew some of the firemen, which I did. I don't remember who they were. But it was an awesome thing, and we weren't sorry it was burning. At our house, we were fine.

Then I will not forget that within three days there was a law faculty meeting in our living room where that faculty began planning for the new law school, which I thought was awesome, a place where a faculty would dare to presume to plan. I don't mean the architecture, I mean, "Let's be sure we each have such and such a kind of office, and we'll need a much bigger library, and we'll need--" and they went around, and each took responsibility for something.

As it was built, my father was put--I mean, other people did more important things, I think, but he was put in charge of the furniture, what kind of desks, what kind of chairs. But that was members of the faculty putting together their--I think that was so awesome and admirable. But he found a man in Staunton. My wife will remember his name from when I used to tell this story or when my father used to tell it. The law school chairs are fairly famous. If you'll ask around there, you'll know that in the law school they have these chairs, designed, they're colonial, sort of, designed by a furniture maker in Staunton or thereabouts, Waynesboro. I'm not too sure.

Warren: So you're talking about Tucker Hall now.

McDowell: I'm talking about what then went up at the end of the Colonnade and was the law school from the thirties to the seventies or whenever you built that one over in the woods.

Warren: So how did everybody feel about the new building architecturally?

McDowell: They loved it. It looked like the Colonnade. It was made to fit. The architect from Lynchburg, whatever his name is--someone will know. The most famous architect in Lynchburg was a colonial nut, and he designed a law school that absolutely fit into the ancient plan, and it looked great.

Warren: That must have been such an event to see.

McDowell: And it's still sitting there, of course. I don't know what's in it now, what goes on in there. I've forgotten.

Warren: A lot of computer stuff is in there now.

McDowell: It's nice. It's nice. I always thought it was wonderful, and my father had the first office on the left as you went in. Then my mother moved from the Alumni Office, neither of them feeling any conflict of interest, and became the secretary to the dean, who had the other front office. The dean had it; she was the second door. So if you went to see your parents, your father was on the left and your mother was second door on the right. She was given a lot of sort of authority by deans who preferred to teach, and she did a lot of the routine administration of the little stuff. She didn't make policy. But there they were, both sitting there.

And I think it was somehow fairly typical of something that W&L was so good at. I never grew up thinking that women were held down or mistreated or treated arrogantly. I caught on as I got older, that they were, but not much at W&L, relatively, because there was my mother. As far as I could tell, she ran a law school. Miss Mary Barkley, as far as I could tell, ran an Alumni Office, which had Cy Young as its token leader, as I liked it. He was my favorite athletic coach anywhere in the United States ever, so I'm not putting him down. But women were running key

things all over W&L. When all the secretaries and librarians and everybody got together, you were looking at the core of the institution, I always thought. Even Dr. Gaines' secretaries, whose names I don't remember, were not just shrewd and dramatic, but knew they had power and didn't apologize for it, and helped run a college. I liked that. I didn't know that was going to be so different from how the rest of the world worked.

Warren: That is a really important and interesting story.

McDowell: That ought to be pursued.

Warren: How can I pursue that?

McDowell: I don't know.

Warren: Are any of those people in that generation still alive?

McDowell: No, but our librarian upstairs, I mean our law librarian, whatever she was, the Press Club librarian--

Warren: Barbara Vandegrift.

McDowell: Barbara has surely heard my mother talk about it, if I'm not crazy and have imagined it. I imagine that those two worked together when Barbara was very young. I could have her easily mixed up with somebody else. I don't remember asking her. She and I have gotten to be friends up there, but I think she knew my mother. She might have heard more in those days. But somebody there that could talk about Miss Mary Barkley, that's an important one in the Alumni Office, and then she had the house two doors from the post office on whatever that little street is that--

Warren: Lee Avenue.

McDowell: Yeah, it's Lee Avenue. Miss Mary lived in this grandest old house with her sister, a magnificent home, and she was, you know, with all the good old Virginia broad As and things. In fact, she was pretty much in charge of whatever

she was. I mean, these were fairly assertive women and they were given lots of responsibility by teachers.

Warren: Who was giving them that responsibility? The faculty or Dr. Gaines?

McDowell: Individual situations. I don't think women's rights or women's anything were probably ever discussed at W&L. I think when Cy Young, who was a basketball coach and an extraordinary coach of any of the main sports, wound up as alumni secretary and found this outspoken, forceful woman, he let her sort of take over. I think deans let my mother take over. I think it went on up and down that Colonnade, you know. Teachers like to teach. I mean, a lot of the thing that in business would be very prestigious to get to be in charge of whatever, making the schedules or whatever that is, I don't think a teacher thinks that's very interesting. I think teachers want to teach. So I'm not sure they meant to be as modern as they were being and saying, "Women can do this." I'll bet the women were paid a pittance to do it, I would bet, but the faculty wasn't paid much more. So I doubt if there was any big--I mean, the pay was remarkably low, but it was a good life.

Warren: And yet you were given a house.

McDowell: You paid token rent. I don't know how much the rent was. I may have this all wrong, but I think that we rented that house for \$60 a month, and it had five bedrooms. We rented out one or two of the upstairs rooms to students. Everybody did.

Warren: If you rented out rooms to students, you kept that money, even though the University owned the house?

McDowell: Yeah, damn right. Damn right. Yeah. I mean, they just set you up in the house and charged you a nice enough rent to be sure they took care of it and maintained it. A guy named Boss came and mowed the yard, a huge gasoline mower.

Warren: Who was Boss?

McDowell: Boss was a huge black man who ran the groundskeeping crew at W&L, and all us little kids got to know him. He was just one of the nicest people I've ever known, ever will know. I knew most of the others. But they'd rake the leaves in the leaf-raking time, and they mowed and they came and hammered nails if something went wrong in your house. And Boss was, I guess, head of them, because he was huge, among other things, an absolutely delightful man, good, kind man. You'd regard him as a very close friend.

That was another good thing about it. W&L had lots of black people employed there, and it seemed to me there was a wonderful, gracious--I'll bet those black people were patronized royally, but I wasn't aware of it, and I know that if I had said, "I went up town with Boss and we bought some stuff and then we went out and sat on the wall by Miss Mary Barkley's and drank our Cokes," the family would have thought, "Well, why are you telling us about it? What else happened?" I mean, it would be perfectly normal to do that.

Warren: It seems to me that in an institution of that size, there's just so many personalities that make it work.

McDowell: Oh, my God, yes.

Warren: And you were there long enough to be aware of that. So many students just move through for four years and they don't have any idea what makes the place tick.

McDowell: I never thought of myself as a student there. I was a faculty kid, which is a very special thing to get to be, both parents involved, both parents, partly because they were Kentuckians, very full of the folklore of the place, really interested in Boss and Miss Mary Barkley and Annie Jo White, who founded Fancy Dress and really was sort of a caretaker of some part of the tradition at W&L about social things. You'd talk to her about how do you protect these little Mary Baldwin girls and Sweetbriar girls and Hollins girls and all that come over here for dances. I think

maybe Annie Jo coordinated some kind of way that you advise our all-male college about how to have rules, about chaperones. I don't know. But anyway, it worked. But you were very much a part of an institution and you knew it.

My father was for a considerable period head of kind of the Professors Association. It's kind of union, and he was at cross-purposes with Dr. Gaines on many occasions for many reasons, but I still went up to the Gaineses' to play football on the side yard, and I was very close to Bobby and Edwin, who were my age area, and on rainy days we would set up in Traveller's stable and play checkers or funny games, roll dice and move men around. I don't know what all that was, but the fact that we were in Traveller's stable didn't strike us as very weird. [Laughter] But it was pretty weird. You know, you lived in the midst of great Confederate loyalties that Dr. Gaines kept pumped up.

Warren: Was that a big deal?

McDowell: Yeah.

Warren: Tell me about that.

McDowell: Well, someone ought to tell you better, because I came out of a prejudiced house. My father, a Kentuckian, was not a big fan of the Confederacy, nor my mother, out of Kentucky. So Dr. Gaines' ensoaring poetic speeches in tribute to General Lee, also after you've heard them from the time you were about two until you're twenty-two, you've heard a whole lot of Dr. Gaines' raving on and on and on about General Lee.

The faculty used to sit on the stage for convocations, and you can imagine a convocation could be held in Lee Chapel, I don't know how they got the students in there, but later in the gym, but when it was held in Lee Chapel, the faculty would be seated on the stage. My father has showed me personally, and other professors have said, "Yes, that's how he did it," my father, when Dr. Gaines' speech started, my father would sneak out. He would go down the--there's a set of steps that spiral

from the back of that stage, and he would sit near that, and as Dr. Gaines would get his ovation as he walked to the rostrum to deliver his Lee message, my father would go down those steps and take off his hat and coat and fold them up and walk across Letcher Avenue and home, or over to the law school. I mean, he didn't feel he had to sit through that.

What did you ask me to concentrate on, the Lee stuff?

Warren: The idea, the Confederate spirit of the place.

McDowell: There was a Lee spirit, and the faculty, I think, converted uncomfortable with too much Confederate. This is a pretty sophisticated faculty, and if you added up all the Yales and Harvards and such there, you weren't dealing with a bunch of square Confederates, you were dealing with some pretty learned people. They kind of converted it into a respect for Lee and his principles and his etc.. And Stonewall Jackson was colorful, and there was a lot of kind of Stonewall Jackson fans around, because he was such an old crank and interesting. They were part of your life.

My parents, my father got to be so senior on the faculty that they moved from the Hancock House to the Dean's House, as it's called, next to the President's House. It's the Lee-Jackson House. So from the time that Ann and I got married, her first visits were to the Lee-Jackson House.

Warren: That's pretty prestigious.

McDowell: That's pretty nice. That's where I remember going home. Dr. Shannon was, of course, gone but Edgar Shannon was president of the University of Virginia at the time, and he'd grown up in that house.

Warren: He did? He's one of the people I want to talk to.

McDowell: Oh, boy, do you need to talk to Edgar! Whew! He's great, too, and he's marvelous. But he grew up in the power structure. If you'll go look at that house, there's a funny place where there's a window. It's on the side, the second floor, there's a damn window. Dr. Shannon got up the nerve, as dean, to order a window

put in that house so his son would have a window in his room. Edgar had bitched about not having a window to look out of, so Edgar's window is there. Hedrick [phonetic] can tell you a whole lot of stories about the house and the marvels of it.

One thing made me very proud of my father. Tourists would come literally knock on the door and say, "Is this the Lee-Jackson House?" and if my father was there, he would show them through it. Sometimes he'd be taking his afternoon nap and just have a bathrobe pulled around his pajamas. He would show them the house and explain to them that Lee lived in it more years than he lived in the Gaines House next door, and he would show them where Stonewall Jackson's room was that he rented in that house, for how long. My father gave a good, no-knocks-on-Lee tour to tourists. He thought that was a fair thing to do. He was honorable about that and spared them his feelings that Lee was pompous and Dr. Gaines was double pompous and all that. Leave all that out of this; it's off the record.

[Laughter] Dr. Gaines was always marvelous to me, by the way.

Warren: Tell me about Francis Pendleton Gaines.

McDowell: He was striking, sort of handsome. He was short, always carried a cane. That's the main thing you remember. Any kid would say Dr. Gaines always carried a cane. When you went to the house to see the boys, as I often did, inside the main front door was, I guess, an umbrella tall receptacle, as I recall, made out of some dramatic copper or something, and in it maybe forty canes. He carried his canes.

From his house to his office was--well, you know the walk. It goes around past McCormick statue, curves, gets under the Colonnade, goes. He made that walk in the morning and then home to lunch and back, then home, maybe down to the chapel if there was something. But he didn't use the cane; he spun the cane, he flipped the cane. He didn't twirl it like a baton, but he did all kind of--he threw it way up in the air with each stride and would catch it and sometimes turn it that way as it came down. Very dramatic. I thought he was awesome.

He was very congenial and very nice to all the little kids, would welcome you there, "Stay for lunch," and all that. That was done all over the campus, if you were somewhere, somebody would say, "Stay for lunch, Charley Boy." That was my name, Charley Boy. "Stay here and eat lunch." He was nice that way, and the faculty's complaints about him was that they weren't too sure how concerned with substance he was. They thought he was concerned with tradition and being gracious and all that, good qualities, but they weren't so sure he was trying to get their pay increased or get some more books into the library, stuff like that. But there were people who were, and they took the lead themselves.

Warren: Who were those people?

McDowell: Well, professors and people. There you could get professors fired up about a library, and the librarian was always a crucial person. You could make an argument that Gaines would then take to the Board, sort of as your messenger, that, "We need to really beef up our British 15th through 18th century stuff. It's weak and it's going to make us look bad in the next ratings," or something.

Warren: Who was the librarian?

McDowell: I can't remember. I'm just sitting here searching for librarians and trying to avoid it.

Warren: This Annie Jo White was a librarian.

McDowell: She must have been.

Warren: I don't know which years.

McDowell: I would say the earliest part. I would put her down, if that was right, then let's say she would have been the librarian in the twenties and thirties.

Then there was a marvelous Middle Western kind of a guy, a little guy who came in and took over the library, and you could feel it go pow, pow, pow, start going. He started moving it. And he was a great friend of Larry Watkin's and my father's, and used to gather with the group that would gather and drink bourbon in

our living room. And a lot of them wrote books, too. Larry Watkin wrote books and my father wrote two. Larry wrote four, many Hollywood productions, and then Disney movies.

But there would be "Hig" [John Higgins] Williams, Ollinger Crenshaw, who wrote the W&L history, and Hig Williams I don't think ever wrote any books, but he was a marvelous teacher in political science. And Dr. Desha would join them sometimes, and Monk Farentholt [phonetic], he had been to Oxford, I remember that. They were proud to have a Rhodes Scholar there. I'm not sure what the hell his subject even was, but he was a marvelous, funny man. He would be in our living room. Me and my brother John would get up out of bed and come sit on the landing of the stairs and listen to them talk. It would be like going to a Broadway play they were so funny, and they were all storytellers, and they would tell the most incredible tales, and laugh until the room shook.

We had a student who lived there, a first baseman named Harry Fitzgerald, who was an outstanding, great W&L athlete, Harry Fitzgerald, maybe in the thirties, and sometimes they'd be so loud downstairs on Saturday nights and he'd get up, too, and come sit on the steps with us and listen to them talk. [Laughter] They were just marvelous, just incredible.

I have to take time out. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Certainly fun to do, and long winded.

Warren: You just mentioned a name, a gentleman I feel like I'm walking in his footsteps, Ollie Crenshaw.

McDowell: Oh, boy.

Warren: Tell me about Ollie Crenshaw. I've never talked to anybody who really knew Ollie Crenshaw. Well, Frank knew Ollie Crenshaw, but I want to hear about him.

McDowell: His wife lived an awful long time. She was marvelous. He didn't get married until very late in his life. He got married very late in his life to a marvelous woman who'd been by herself around Lexington for a decade or two. In any case, he was very tall and very thin and very angular. I think he was a tennis player; I know he was a tennis player. He's always reminded me of Bill Tilden. If you saw a picture of Bill Tilden, you'd get a pretty good look at Crenshaw, since he got gray early. He spoke superbly well, spoke in whole sentences, like he writes, and was hilariously funny, told anecdotes.

All these people, Watkin, Crenshaw, Hig Williams, Farentholt, my father especially, Charlie Light, and others, they would take over and entertain a room, and they would entertain for, say, fifteen or twenty minutes, and others would ask set-up questions. I mean, they knew what to ask and to get this response and move on to the next storyteller. They were marvelous, and Crenshaw was just very, very good at that.

All I remember about him was how charming he was and how Marge, was his wife's name, how everyone liked her so very much, and how long it took him to write a book. The going joke was, "Well, our grandchildren will see a book and will read it, won't they, Ollie?"

"Well, I hope I get it done." [Laughter] But that was just a one-joke thing. I don't know that he was particularly slow, but it seemed slow.

I don't remember much more. He didn't have children--yeah, he did, too. Albert. Albert Crenshaw works at the *New York Times* in the business section, a major player there. That or the *Wall Street Journal*, and if he is at the *Times*, he came from the *Wall Street Journal*, but you can find him easy. He's immensely bright, and I think the sort of child born when his parents were 52. I don't know where. His father was older, because I missed him entirely. I mean, suddenly there was little Albert Crenshaw around after I was gone off to work. I mean, that's my

memory. My memory's weak. But the Alumni Office can find you. In your nice book there somewhere is Albert Crenshaw's address. He's well worth talking to about what it was like. He's really a super reporter and he will remember a lot, and it's one-half generation after me.

Warren: A different time period.

McDowell: And would really be able to pick up, it seems to me. We left Lexington, just for the record, we left Lexington during World War II when my father rejoined the Navy, and we moved from W&L in my--I started my junior year in high school in Jacksonville, Florida, so we could count back to the year. If I was born in 1926, and if you couldn't start first grade 'til you were seven in Lexington, Virginia--that was a very famous problem in Lexington. You had to be seven instead of six because a nutty school principal thought that was how you ought to do it. We could figure out when it was I would have moved to Jacksonville, Florida.

And just to be sure that everyone understands what a small world it is--and Lewis Powell and I talk about that at all times, "Got a new small world for you"--we moved to Jacksonville, and in the area where we lived, the high school was the Robert E. Lee High School, and the school song to which I played basketball was "The Washington and Lee Swing." [Laughter]

Warren: It goes without saying it would be "The Washington and Lee Swing."
[Laughter]

McDowell: Yes, yes, it does go without saying.

Warren: We need to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

McDowell: ... all these purposes, because that meant that my mother started being a legal secretary in Jacksonville, my father was at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station and ultimately in Saipan for many years. I was back in W&L, having been in the Navy myself and come home, and my father was still in Saipan. My mother and

John and I lived in the SAE House on the second floor, which was a rooming house. Most people were not back from the war. I was back early because I was in the Navy flight program, and they discharged a jillion of us as soon as the war was over, because they didn't want to train a whole lot of fliers they didn't need. So I was home early. I mean, I was home just like that.

My father was still in Saipan. I think he served six or seven years in the service. So did lots of W&L professors. My father and Larry Watkin drove to Richmond the week after December 7 [1941], Pearl Harbor, and volunteered to go back, my father to go back in the Navy, and Larry to join. Then Larry was made an officer, and my father had been in World War I in the Navy, a flier, so it all made sense.

Warren: Was Larry Watkin the one who became a recruiter for the Navy?

McDowell: Yes, I'm sure he did.

Warren: And that's why a lot of W&L people wound up in the Navy.

McDowell: Yeah.

Warren: Oscar Riegel told me that story.

McDowell: Oh, God, I'd love to talk to the Riegels. Put the Riegels both into that circle in that living room, because they were always in it, and they were marvelous.

Warren: Delightful people.

McDowell: My father was always a little troubled at Dr. Gaines and his administration, but there wasn't much administration there but Dr. Gaines. They found it inconvenient that faculty members resigned and went off to be in the Navy. Because I can't verify this, this has to be off the record, but you ought to ask somebody, that when a lot of them that were in the service heard from W&L toward the end of the war, it was, "Hope you can find work elsewhere, because we don't expect W&L to be itself again for many years." They couldn't foresee the rush of students. But it was an outrageous thing, and some people took it awful hard. But

I'm not an authority on that, and I can't prove that, and I don't remember any first-hand information about that. I just remember that wicked thought being loose.

Warren: Tell me about that decision to go to school at Washington and Lee. There were lots of schools in the United States. Why did you choose it?

McDowell: I just thought it was absolutely marvelous, and I thought seriously about how there were all those other schools, but here was a place I--I'd just been away, you know. If you'd never been anywhere, but I'd been to Jacksonville, I'd gone to this high school, I'd played basketball in a good basketball league, I'd worked at the naval air station in the ship's service store, I had then been sent by the Navy to the University of Miami and I'd attended the University of Miami for a year as a V-5/V-12. Then off to Iowa State for pre-flight training, Iowa State University. Then I was discharged out of there. So I felt like I'd been to school elsewhere.

I got the fun of getting to go to my college, which I loved, you know. Then the benefits were amazing. I received the full G.I. Bill. Sons of faculty got to go free anyway, so we accepted the G.I. Bill and gave it to W&L. Then they even paid a piece of your rent for your room. And I think this has to be checked, that my mother got \$35 a month or something as my landlady, as I employed the G.I. Bill to go to college. I think that's correct. And if so, fine. But I didn't want to go off anywhere. I knew that I'd go to graduate school, which I did. I went to Columbia when I got through at W&L. I had already been away.

Warren: So did you go for four years to Washington and Lee?

McDowell: Yes. Well, three, really, because it was enough credits from the University of Miami. Three.

Warren: And were you a journalism major?

McDowell: No, English major.

Warren: Well, good. I'm an old English major myself.

McDowell: I knew to be an English major, and my father would never have let me be a journalism major, and that was difficult, because Tom Riegel was such a good friend, but my father said, "We want you to just have a major that requires history, a lot of English, a lot of basic courses, but don't go over there and learn how to write." So I took four or five journalism courses, took all of Tom Riegel's courses, I mean, they were so superb, but I was an English major. And if my father had had his way, I would then have gone to law school and then gone into the newspaper business. He said, "If some of you newspaper guys could just learn the law, it would improve newspapers four hundred percent," and all that, but I didn't do that.

All right. I don't know where we were, but that's--

Warren: We're embarking on your student career.

McDowell: All right.

Warren: So tell me about being a student at Washington and Lee.

McDowell: Well, it was a very good period to be a student, because, for instance, I played basketball on the same squad--I was then a second-teamer--by the time stars of the teams I had known as a kid were back.

Warren: Were back?

McDowell: Back to play basketball. They had gone away early in the war. People I remembered watching play were back to finish up their college, so I knew lots of interesting people, played with people I'd thought of as another generation, loved having all the interesting people that were there at once.

I wrote down somewhere the other day for somebody, but by sort of bringing together a whole lot of different people you had a--I don't know what it has to do with anything, but you had a school in which we had Roger Mudd and Fielder Cook, who went on to do Hollywood movies and many of them in Broadway shows. He was a marvelous director. And Roger was, I thought, the best of television journalists in his time. And Ed Jackson, who was a real star journalist for

the UP [United Press]. And Tom Wolfe, the writer, there he was. It just goes on and on and on, people who have been successful. Linwood Holton and John Warner, and we had a host of politicians, many of them from West Virginia, you know, that became politicians. It was a really outstanding class of people that were around there, some of them seniors younger than some coming to W&L for the first time, after having been in the service. It was married students around, students with babies, a whole field full of apartments growing up out by Lexington High School and another field of them out behind the Shelley's house. Dr. [Henry Vogel] Shelley taught Greek, and his son Dana was my best friend. That's up by the grammar school, like you're going to Buena Vista. There are now two or three fraternities out there and the SAE House.

Warren: Davidson Park?

McDowell: Yeah. Well, is that Davidson Park, where the SAE House is and the grammar school, which is now the City Hall, sort of like the city office building? I don't know where I was.

Warren: City Hall was the grammar school?

McDowell: Well, if it's that building out there on that street just before you bear right to Col Alto, yes, that's where I went to grammar school.

Warren: I didn't realize that.

McDowell: That was the Ruffner, fourth through eighth grade.

Warren: I didn't realize that.

McDowell: There you are.

Warren: You are a wealth of information.

McDowell: [Laughter] I didn't know it.

In any case, the student body was impressive. And into my second year there, Charlie Rowe came home from the service, and he owns the Fredericksburg paper now. And Joe Rowe, his brother, and a whole host of people. I met Harrison

Kinney there, who just wrote the biography of [James] Thurber that weighs fourteen pounds, costs \$40, too. It's the biggest book in the history of the world. Have you seen it?

Warren: No.

McDowell: Well, Harrison was in our class, and his Thurber biography is so much too long you don't believe it. I want him to meet Ken Burns, who made the baseball series too long, because they'd love each other. [Laughter] They're both good, too. I liked everything about Burns' series, and I like every page of Kenny's book, but it's too long for the average citizen.

But we had a very interesting class, very lively, interesting, fun class. It was fun to watch it develop.

Warren: Were you still "Charley Boy" to the faculty?

McDowell: Oh, some, and they tried not to do it, you know. They tried to be careful. Then I was "Footnote" to some others. My father, being a law professor, his students called me "Footnote." A footnote is big in law. I don't know whether I was just one of the footnotes in his life, but I was called "Footnote."

Another small-world thing that I forgot to tell you, when we went to Florida and lived in that house and he went to the naval air station every morning and I went to Robert E. Lee High School, what we did on weekends was go to the beach at Jacksonville Beach and stay, with an open invitation to come anytime you can--we tried not to stay the night every time--with Margaret Ann Moreland, dean of law school's daughter, and Jack Ball, star student from the W&L Law School, who was already rising to be a leading lawyer in Jacksonville. So we moved to the children and student of among the dearest friends my parents had ever had. I mean, nothing was hard. W&L made everything easy wherever you were, whatever you were doing.

Warren: Well, that's true even today.

McDowell: Sure it is.

Warren: This network seems to be everywhere. Tell me about what that's meant in your adult life.

McDowell: Well, in my adult life, I've never been anywhere where there weren't W&L people. They look out for each other. It's not very conscious, like "We Harvards have lunch every two weeks together." We W&Ls don't, I don't think, but we take care of each other and see each other. There's plenty of W&Ls, you know, around.

Gee, I was just thinking of the people that I see every day. I mean, not every day, but as the weeks pass. Bob McNeil, who was at W&L with me, from Blacksburg. Andy McCutcheon, he's in Richmond, but we moved up here when he was here. He was a congressional assistant. And I could name five more that we just still see a lot of because we knew them in Richmond when we were on the *Times Dispatch*. When I moved from Lexington to go to work in Richmond, I moved into a place called Twin Maples, which was a bunch of unmarried people, but among them were Bob McNeil and Andy McCutcheon. They ultimately both came to Washington. They both worked on the Richmond newspapers, then they both came to Washington to be congressional assistants. I came to Washington to be a newspaper guy, and we keep up and we see each other routinely like a bunch of brothers and sisters. It's marvelous. We've followed each other, when someone pioneers these things.

Warren: Have you ever considered how one would go about spelling W&L?

McDowell: No, it's a good one. No one gets it.

Warren: I'll be my transcriber out there in California says, "W&L? What's W&L?"

McDowell: W&L. When I write it, I find that I do something that I don't do in any other--and you made me think about it--I wrote "W" and here's an "&"--

Warren: Ampersand.

McDowell: Ampersand. "L." Without spaces.

Warren: That's the right way to do it.

McDowell: W&L. I mean, that says to me, W&L.

Warren: Frank puts the spaces in.

McDowell: No, no.

Warren: And I have to go in and take them out.

McDowell: Take 'em out. [Laughter] That's exactly right.

Warren: The official way to do it is, it's Washington and Lee. You always spell out the "and."

McDowell: That's all nice. I certainly do. But W&L.

Warren: But never use the ampersand with "Washington."

McDowell: Ignore spaces. I mean in W&L. Right. Good for you.

Warren: Doesn't it sound like a word?

McDowell: It does to me. W&L. And I've never heard anyone shorten it or find any other thing to call it.

Warren: What else would you want to call it?

McDowell: I don't know what you would do.

Warren: But there's a challenge for you.

McDowell: Well, VMI, you can say "the Institute." No one says "the College." No one says "the University." They say W&L. VMI people a lot say "the Institute." "The Institute will be heard from today."

Warren: What was the relationship, as you were growing up, with VMI? How about the VMI faculty kids? Did you play with them?

McDowell: Yeah.

Warren: Or was it a different world?

McDowell: It was a little different world, but if you were close enough to see them in the course of the day, there wasn't much difference. Bobby and Eloise Knox were

dear friends of ours. They lived two doors from me. KA House, four doors from the KA House on Letcher Avenue. We knew somebody, I've forgotten who, across the street.

I didn't know a whole lot of VMIs, but I knew the ones that were close. Bill Swann, whose father was a teacher there, lived across the street from the Knoxs. Kept up with those people. My folks knew the superintendent at VMI for a long time. He was kind of a friend. I don't remember what his name was. Sorry. And my folks went to parties at the Knoxs', and the Knoxs came to my folks' parties, so there was connections. If you made the connection, you made the connection.

There was a man named old Colonel Letcher that had lived at VMI, and he must have dated back damn near the Civil War, but he had a cane and he was old, and he would walk through the Harmony Hollow. We called that Harmony Hollow, by the way. It was a joke, because had been times when there was so little harmony among the faculty members down there, that Harmony Hollow was funny to some of the old-timers. But it was very harmonious as far as I could tell. They were mocking when they said Harmony Hollow. But Governor Letcher, known as "Gov," I doubt if he'd been governor, but he--

Warren: Yes, he was.

McDowell: Was he? Okay. "Gov."

Warren: Or his father was.

McDowell: That's what I think. Whatever, there sure was, but "Gov" would walk through with a cane and sort of wave it at us boys. We had a community with only the Desha girls, everyone else were boys. The Desha girls were older, so the whole youth group was boys in the Hollow. But "Gov" would say hello to us and all, and he'd walk through and then walk back. We would go to dress parades and we would go down to the stables and watch the horses, see them play--they tried to play polo down there sometimes. It was fun to see them try to do that. We attended

VMI things. The library was open to us, and I remember by high school we would sometimes use the VMI library for something we wanted. Different people down there were nice. Everyone was nice to us.

There was just no connection between the two places except Charlie Light, who'd been to VMI and now was next door, and he didn't marry 'til late, so he was our bachelor buddy and babysitter for me and John when the folks would go away. Charlie Light would come and sleep over or do something, kind of look out for us kids and tell us marvelous stories of VMI.

See, I'd never heard about how it was to be there, even, and I learned that a tradition at VMI that's perfectly reasonable is that at night, with those strict rules, the student officers who presided through the night were supposed to check every room at 11:30 or some such hour and be sure everyone was in there with the lights out. But the rule was, somebody had to be in the bed; it didn't have to be the VMI cadet. So VMI cadets, if they were going to sneak out, they were taking a considerable risk that they'd be caught coming in or going out or whatever, but if they wanted to sneak out, they'd pay someone a quarter to sleep in their hay, as they called it. I only ever did that once, but I made my quarter and I wanted to have done it. I remember the door was opened and then it was closed. There was some body in the bed. Under VMI's rules, that's what you did. You didn't have any waking anyone up. All that gets a little complicated. But you just didn't bother anybody. I remember that well.

I can remember the awful time that--gee, it's a long story and I don't ever remember it real well. The Betas stole a cannon from VMI. Is that widely known? Is that in your stuff?

Warren: Yes.

McDowell: Do you remember the cannon's name? Those cannons all had names. I don't. But the four cannons had names and they stole one.

Warren: Quite a while ago you mentioned a place that I really am showing that I didn't grow up in Lexington.

McDowell: Good for you.

Warren: The Corner Store. Was that a landmark?

McDowell: An awesome, awesome landmark.

Warren: Take me into the Corner Store.

McDowell: All right. The Corner Store, absolutely directly opposite the post office, catty-cornered from the post office, across the street from the Ann Smith School, across the street from Liz Ship's [phonetic] house, who I went to high school with. The Corner Store was a place that there may not be other colleges that have a place that lucky. It was a place where students and faculty relaxed at once, not with each other, but together. I mean, there would be two booths full of faculty and six booths full of students, and everybody knew each other. They didn't mingle and socialize, but they went to the same club at night.

Warren: Was this a store or a restaurant?

McDowell: It was a drugstore. No, no, not at all a drugstore. It was a counter that served Cokes and sandwiches.

Warren: A soda fountain?

McDowell: A soda fountain. Pardon me. That's exactly what it was, known as the Corner Store, and it had two or three famous owners, one of whom lived up in Monroe Park, and I can't think of his name, and one of whom ultimately bought the clothing store next door and ran the Corner Store and the clothing store sort of as a joint venture. I'll tell you who knows all about that is the Mish family, because Bobby worked in the clothing store and can tell you everything you'll ever want to know about the Corner Store. But Jabo was a character in the town, and he ran the pool hall above the Corner Store.

So you had a clothing store, very male clubby clothing store, where you'd actually go sit around and talk, and further down the same block was Tolly's Toggery, where Don Huffman worked as he was growing up, and it was the same. My father hung out at Tolly's Toggery. You went into the shoe department and sat in the chairs where they tried on shoes, and talked, talked to whoever was around. It's where the townspeople and the faculty crossed paths, was at Tolly's Toggery. Don Huffman, who I think now is chairman of the Republican party of Virginia, of all things to be, but he sold shirts and suits there as a kid growing up and going to high school, and he moved on up to the next-door place, whose name I can't think of.

One of the owners of the store next to the Corner Store went on and opened branches in Richmond and Roanoke and was hugely successful, chain store, men's clothes operation. I'm just ridiculous not to think of his name.

But the Corner itself, the people behind the counter, I don't think they came to your table. I think you went and got your stuff at the counter and went over and sat at the table. There was a clock so you could tell when it was class time. People would go over there between classes instead of to the co-op. But the faculty would be there.

When I was a little boy growing up, we had a maid who we paid \$7 a week, and the going price was \$5 a week, and Mother had to answer to that a lot. "Why do you pay Emma \$7?" I don't recall why, but my father had these notions about unions, labor, and help. When Emma finished washing the dishes from dinner, we'd put Emma in the car, and me and my father and usually my little brother John would drive Emma home up at the other end of town. You went to the Mayflower Hotel and turned left and went out, a remote area.

Then we would come back to the Corner, and there a faculty kid was quite well admitted to a place where there would be students drinking beer. I think that

would have been one of the secrets. The faculty didn't drink beer in front of students. As I recall, that was a matter of principle. But they'd drink Cokes. Students would be there having a good time, talking. Often an exchange between faculty and students. The faculty might stand by students' table and talk, wouldn't sit down.

Then there was my generation, a couple of little boys hanging around there. I used to go outside on nice times, and there was a nice sidewalk out there, and sit around and talk to people, or I used to run around the block. I've never been sure why that was, but some professor put me up to it. "I'll time you. You run around the block." So for years I'd run around the block and look and see how long it took. It was just a pleasant way of life, again, again. A very pleasant way of life.

One of the professors that my parents liked very much rented a room in the house between the Corner Store and the fraternity house, and he would come over to the Corner Store nearly every night. It was really key. It was the W&L hangout, period. I mean, there was no competition.

McCrum's is where my mother and Miss Mary Barkley would go for their Cokes in the morning, mid-morning, and there would be a lot of the women that worked at W&L would walk up to McCrum's. But the Corner Store was faculty and students. I'm trying to think. My brother still knows the guy that had the store next door. He lives in Williamsburg, and he and my brother see each other. He could tell you some stuff. I'll try to get you--I'll just call John and get his name and pass it to you.

Warren: How about up on Main Street or other streets?

McDowell: McCrum's was fundamental. That was where everyone bought their pharmaceuticals, their newspapers, magazines. That was the magazine store, sit-around-and-talk store, more for townspeople, but a lot of us went in there anyway. Then there was a pharmacist that did a land office business always. It was the bus

station. Out the back was the bus station; the front was McCrum's. Adair Hutton was the basic clothing store in the town. Then you'd come to McCrum's. No, then you'd come to the hardware store. Adair Hutton's, hardware store where you bought any hardware that you would ever need, McCrum's, Woolworth 5 & 10, some kind of little store. You're working your way up toward the bank. I don't know which bank it was, but it was the bank. The bank was on two corners when you got up to whatever that street is.

Across the street was the courthouse and a men's clothing store run by a famous guy whose name I can't remember, but he was really very famous, but he had real fancy clothes, real good clothes. Then the old hotel. What was that hotel's name?

Warren: Robert E. Lee.

McDowell: Robert E.

Warren: Silly question.

McDowell: How dumb. So that's where you had functions of various kinds. And the Mayflower was sort of out of it. I don't know why, but it was too far out or something. But the Robert E. Lee always had some action. Grocery store next to the Robert E. Lee. McCrory's had stores on two corners, one block away, two McCrory's stores.

Warren: Two?

McDowell: Two McCrory's groceries, one down next to the--

Warren: McCoy's was a grocery store?

McDowell: Yes, two McCrory's groceries. One was at--if you came up from the Beta and the Phi Kap House, and what's the old marvelous old hotel where Fred Perry lived when he was visiting W&L? It's got an "old" in it. Inn.

Warren: Alexander Withrow House?

McDowell: No. It had a hotel sound to it, a hotel name, the Old something. Old hotel. But there was McCrory's grocery below that. There was a hardware on up that street. Then there was a McCrory's store up catty-cornered from the courthouse. There was enough business that there could be two McCrory's stores. No one's entirely sure why. And across Washington Street from the courthouse was the old pharmacy that was sort of historic for the old. It was some ancient pharmacy that had a name out of the history books, and there was an ancient old man in there when I was very young. He died. I don't know, the store gradually closed. I'm lost in some of that. I don't know what that's about.

What else?

Warren: Something you've mentioned numerous times, fraternities. Were you in a fraternity?

McDowell: Yes.

Warren: Did you go into the fraternity houses?

McDowell: Uh-huh, yeah.

Warren: Describe fraternity life for me.

McDowell: Well, fraternity life was not like now. I mean, there was nobody damaging the buildings or tearing them up. They were where you lived at W&L. I joined because it was cheap to be a member of the SAE House and stay home and live at my house, so I paid some very small monthly thing for which I got lunch and a membership, but I'd just eat lunch there.

Warren: What did that membership get you?

McDowell: Social order in your life. You belonged to something. You had a place to go and a place to--I don't know what it did. I didn't feel very devoted to the SAE concept, but everybody did it, and I didn't have the nerve not to. So I was just an SAE, went to meetings once every two weeks or three, ate lunch, and there was always somebody from there who was going down to Mary Baldwin, where I had a

girlfriend, and we'd take turns with a car or whatever. It was a place that had little house parties sometimes, and then during dances it was a place you'd have events at.

W&L looked to me vaguely uncomfortable without a fraternity, but I knew plenty of people who weren't members of any, and they were fine. But my father had been an SAE at Centre College in Kentucky, and he did not object to my being one, and I sort of enjoyed it, really. I'm not too sure why, because I don't like exclusivity or any of that crap.

Warren: When you were a child, would you have gone into fraternity houses?

McDowell: Into the KA House. I had been in there three or four times because it was a neighbor house, and I guess some nice student walked me in or out. They weren't evil places at all. There was nothing. They had house mothers who lived in a very prominent part of the house, not lost somewhere. But usually off the main hall in the main part of the fraternity house was this house mother, and she was going to keep that an orderly place. See, now we wouldn't stand for that, I guess, but that made it all go in those days.

Girls from any of the girls' colleges would come to the fraternity house and know that they were minimally protected there. I mean, that woman was going to be around. They weren't going to go up any steps. They could go in the big lounges and downstairs into where the drinking took place. Those girls could do that, but they were accounted for, sort of. It seemed to work. I think it worked.

Warren: Drinking is an important thing at Washington and Lee.

McDowell: Yes. It was important in my house. My folks both drank.

Warren: And they thought it was fine for the students to?

McDowell: They didn't drink with students. [Laughter]

Warren: But they knew students were drinking?

McDowell: They knew students drank, yes, they certainly did.

Warren: And all through Prohibition, that was going on?

McDowell: I assume so.

Warren: Were your parents there during Prohibition?

McDowell: Well, when was Prohibition? My parents were there from 1926.

Warren: That still would have been Prohibition.

McDowell: Yeah.

Warren: But you probably wouldn't remember.

McDowell: I don't remember, but I bet you that they did. I mean, my folks would not have objected to bourbon whiskey drinking any time. They would have been with that. They did observe whatever those rules were and not drink with students, but if the students wanted to drink, bless their hearts. Now, what the different rules were that those house mothers worried about, I don't know, but my hunch is they didn't pay any attention. That was something they let slide past.

I don't remember drinking being too big a deal with the students. I can remember that at dance set time there would some too much drinking, but I don't recall that if you went to the SAE House in the evening there was any drinking going on. There might have been, but if it wasn't a party, I don't think it was much of a factor.

Warren: We haven't really talked about parties. Tell me about some memorable Fancy Dress.

McDowell: Well, there I--well, Fancy Dress. I don't think I ever attended but one as a student, and I'm trying to figure out why. I dated a girl, the same Lexington girl, at Mary Baldwin, and then one other a little bit. I went to Mary Baldwin enough--this has just come back, because I forgot. I also wrote a column on the paper, *Ring-tum Phi*, I got a men's room put in Mary Baldwin College. That's my claim. For two years they had a little sign, said McDowell Memorial Bathroom. I wrote columns about saying that to go to visit a girls' school and to have to go across the street to a

police station to go to the men's room was an outrage. And Mary Baldwin finally instituted a men's room.

But I'm trying to think why Fancy Dress has never been big in my life. I went to so many of them as a kid.

Warren: Did you sneak in?

McDowell: Oh, you didn't even have to sneak. Just go in and wave to whoever was on the door and go up in the balcony and sit and watch.

Warren: What did you see?

McDowell: We saw people in these Hollywood outfits. It was magnificent. It was marvelous. You know, we stayed forty minutes; that's enough, because also you saw very famous bands. God, all the--I mean, it was nothing to see Kay Kaiser. I mention him because I particular liked his band and how funny some of the members were and how they put on a show one afternoon and it was just hilarious comedy they did besides the band. But all the well-known bands of the era, both Dorseys and all of them, came to W&L. W&L hired the best. They paid whatever you had to pay to get these big bands, and they'd have about three dances on the weekend. It was amazing. You'd have two nights and an afternoon, and it would be very festive. Fancy Dress Ball was fun because Miss Annie Jo White had told us how great it was, and you would go get those suits. But I'm trying to think why would I have shied away from Fancy Dress Ball.

Warren: Where did the costumes come from?

McDowell: A rental agency came with the biggest truck you ever saw, and parked it, and you went over there three, four, five days ahead, and picked a costume that would fit, and tried it on and paid your rent for it.

Warren: Did the girls come up days ahead of time?

McDowell: You're going to be able to find all that out. Damned if I know. But I think you had their dimensions and you got them--but that wouldn't be very

satisfactory. Those girls would take them a long time to get them adjusted just right. So I'm drawing a blank, and I don't understand it. It may have been that it was all too much for me, and I was shy about it and didn't go. I remember once, and it went fine, but I don't remember but the one. And how we got Mary Sue the right dress, I do not know, except she lived in Lexington, and my hunch is that her mother participated and had the thing sitting in her room. But what happened to a girl from Sweet Briar who came over there and was going to be dressed as a Southern belle with a hoop skirt, how she got organized for the hoop skirt is beyond me. You've got to ask somebody.

Warren: I'll find a Sweet Briar girl.

McDowell: Out of three kids, I have two who are psychologists, therapists, and I will tell them that I can't seem to remember anything about Fancy Dress, and see if they'll tell me what that tends to betray, but I don't know what it is. I don't know what it is.

Warren: You have just been absolutely wonderful. I'm done with my list. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to say?

McDowell: Lexington. Lexington. I find, for instance, that other people, my contemporaries in the news business and in politics, when I covered politics so long, don't really understand the delight of a very small, pretty town with two educational institutions, as tradition-soaked as VMI and W&L, and as reputable. I find that people can't dream of how much fun it was to go see a VMI game in the afternoon and a W&L game at night, and to watch the VMI cadets march to church in those white pants and those gray-tailed coats they wore on Sundays to march. They'd march across Letcher Avenue and down the hill past the Beta House. I find people don't get the drift of that, or how interesting it really was to have that many well-educated college faculty people that were the center of the town. I don't find

many people that know how fun Lexington would be. They would think, "It's a little country town, isn't it? Good God, no." [Laughter]

I mean, Judas Priest, I'll bet, growing up, I knew more athletes, I'll bet I knew more Rhodes Scholars, I'll bet I knew more future generals. I mean, it was an amazing place. The two libraries, the idea that by the idea you were seven or eight years old, you could go over to the library and get yourself a book, and that you were encouraged to do exactly that, and one of the librarians would come say, "Charley Boy, what can I do? What do you want to read now?" You know, God! Wow! And Harold Lock, I went to school with Harold, and his father Harold ran the printing press where the *Ring-tum Phi* was printed, and you'd go watch a press turn out newspapers. I'm sure that had an effect on me. Very accessible, you were welcome in there to do that. You were welcome in the library. You were welcome anywhere in the school. A gymnasium to hang out in and watch any of the sports. Lee Chapel. My Lord!

I'll tell you one more anecdote. A guy named Bill Ellis was an athlete, and he worked Saturdays showing tourists through Lee Chapel, and I'm sure other athletes did. I don't know. They were paid some tiny sum or whatever. But the lady in charge of Lee Chapel was Mrs. Flournoy, I guess the mother of Professor Flournoy, not the wife. I have down that it's the mother. So I could always walk into Lee Chapel without paying or anything, just say hi. But when I was ten or eleven, I started going up there and helping Bill Ellis on Saturdays. One time he told me, "Now, Charley Boy, next week I've got to be away." On football season, he was a great football player, so he wouldn't have been doing it, but this couldn't have been football season. He says, "You know enough about showing people." He showed me how to do the little spiel, and I could show you through Lee Chapel today, and I'd remember most of the spiel.

But Traveller--you know this story?

Warren: No.

McDowell: Traveler was not in a case then. Traveller was not even stuffed. Traveller was a skeleton, just a skeleton. The buildings up at the head of the walkway up to Washington Hall were being rebuilt, and some kind of little biology lab or something that wasn't over in the chemistry building was then in the Colonnade, had a little skeleton of a little Australian horse, and a lot of its stuff was stored in Lee Chapel. Somebody put the little skeleton out around kind of like around the corner. Here sat Traveller, the skeleton, with the carvings on the tailbone and all, and people's names and hearts drawn and all. Students had been mistreating Traveller's bones for years. Then around the corner was this little thing, but the tourists could see the little thing if they stepped over there.

So Bill Ellis said, "Here's how you describe that," and I did it the next day for eleven or twelve tourists in different times, and only one set of tourists challenged me on it. Bill Ellis said, "Tell them this is the skeleton of Traveller, General Lee's great war horse, who, in the Civil War, was as well known to his Army as his troops, a magnificent gray war horse. And this is Traveller when he was a colt."

[Laughter]

Warren: And only one person questioned? [Laughter]

McDowell: One person out of eleven or twelve that morning questioned that that was right. They'd look at you. And Bill Ellis said, "They won't say a word."

[Laughter] I thought it was the most remarkable thing I'd ever seen.

Warren: What a great story.

McDowell: I think it is, too.

Warren: I want to tell you something that's happening in Lexington today for those of us who love being there, as much as you loved being there. A friend of mine has made up tee-shirts that say, for those of us who live there, "I'm Living the Dream I'd be Having if I Were Living Somewhere Else Making a Lot More Money."

McDowell: Oh, God, that's marvelous. Oh, that's marvelous! That's Lexington. It's so good that people recognize that, and they always did, I thought. We're the luckiest people in the world, everyone would say. We say, "We know that." But that's right. It's awesome, and I think it's held most of its own. I don't see it all corrupted.

Warren: That's why I'm there. I'm going to stop the tape.

[End of interview]