UNCG CENTENARY PROJECT ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Edith C. Haight

INTERVIEWER: Richard Bardolph

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RB: If somebody went off to college then, it was assumed that he or she had some fairly firm vocational objectives?

EH: Well, not necessarily because some of them went and then got married immediately afterwards, and I think college was an opportunity to meet people.

RB: Would you project further and say that college was also thought of as a way of preparing to be a homemaker?

EH: Oh yes, definitely so, because they had great emphasis on the Home Economics Department because that's what they were teaching, a good many of them went into that type of work.

RB: Would anybody have harbored so sophisticated a notion as that an education would prepare one for values that are unrelated to that might have some substantial value for the rest of one's life? Or is that a more modern notion? Life would simply seem to be more interesting if your horizons were—

EH: Broadened, yes—I guess we all thought that was part of our job—to learn so that we could be more aware of what was going on in the world, because there was quite an interest in foreign language at that time, too.

RB: What would people do, read French novels? [laughs]

EH: Well, yes, that's true.

RB: Was there a conscious objective for taking a foreign language?

EH: Well, it just seemed fun to speak in a foreign language. I remember we had a French Club where we weren't allowed to speak anything except French.

RB: Now, when you arrived at Wellesley [College, Wellesley, Massachusetts], did you feel any handicap?

EH: No!

RB: The traditional wisdom is that people from the Northeast, who have additional years of school, presumably, have the advantage over stiffer competition and the advantage. But you didn't suffer at all?

EH: No! I didn't suffer! You see, I was in the health and physical education area, and that—our class was the first graduate classes that had been taken in. The person who was in charge of the school was a Victorian lady of great presence and when you went to your first interview with her, you went cautiously. And I remember so well the first thing she said to me. "Now Edith, you've come from the South, and you—I don't want you to seem provincial here," she said. "Your most favorable asset here is your smile, so smile a lot on this campus."

RB: [chuckles] Did that offend you?

EH: No, it didn't offend me. It surprised me so, I just thought it was a joke! [pause] But we had Miss [Sue May] Kirkland [lady principal] here, so we had the polish, too.

RB: You're saying anything they had there, we had here, too! [laughs]

EH: Yes. [laughs]

RB: Wasn't there still a fairly substantial religious aura, even in a state university in the South?

EH: I think so because the churches in the city, of course went out of their way to draw us to their churches on Sunday, and we were allowed to go wherever our inclinations took us. And there was a little chapel—think it's still just off the campus—a little Episcopal chapel—

RB: St. Mary's House, probably. On Walker Avenue.

EH: Yes. I used to take up the collection there.

RB: Were there any kind of devotions on campus that were specifically sponsored by the college?

EH: The college had a YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] secretary—Miss [Jane Taylor] Miller—and they had regular YWCA Sunday services, and the majority of students belonged to the YWCA. And most of us all belonged to the YWCA because that was the thing to do. It was an activity, and they had a little group that was called "volunteers," and they were the ones who thought they would be missionaries when they graduated. It was a very select little group. One of my class belonged to that, but she never got into the field.

RB: When you ate in the dining room, did somebody say grace?

EH: We had a member of the faculty or a senior at every table. I can't remember if we had grace or not. I think we did. I think Miss Kirkland used to say it.

RB: Was there a weekly chapel service or a mass meeting of the entire student body where everybody was expected to be present?

EH: No, we used to have mass meetings, but they were not religious. They were to get us together to give us instructions or ideas for various reasons.

RB: You know, even as late as my arrival on campus in 1944, there was still a weekly Tuesday lunch hour chapel service. It was called "chapel"—I think by that time the word "assembly" would have been more accurate. But under every seat was a hymnbook.

EH: We did have chapel services, that's right.

RB: Aycock Auditorium—was it there in your day?

EH: No, no. It wasn't there.

RB: Such mass meetings as you had would have been in my time what became the Students' Building on College [Avenue]. And since then it has been destroyed.

EH: There was a building where the Alumni House is, I think.

RB: A little to the north of that. But in fact, next time you're on campus, you look to confirm this, but the cornerstone still stands, about a hundred feet more from where the present Alumni House stands.

EH: Is north toward what used to be the forest?

RB: Yes.

EH: Yes, that's right. And then Guilford was first—Guilford Hall, which was a residence hall.

RB: And then another purpose that that students' building served was it was the headquarters for the several literary societies.

EH: Yes, two—the Cornelian and Adelphian—

RB: The Dikean then had been added then between the time you left and the time I arrived.

EH: We had only two, and everybody belonged to one or the other.

RB: It was not a matter of choice, as it were, every third person was assigned to the Cornelian?

EH: Oh, no. It was more difficult than that.

RB: Oh really?

EH: Each society had a committee and when the freshmen came in that committee visited the freshmen.

RB: Oh, like the rushing system for fraternities?

EH: No, well they didn't talk it up to the incoming freshmen. What they did was match them up as to abilities and then they matched, so they got two sets of what they considered equal opportunities, and you waited eagerly to know which one you were going to be in.

RB: And once assigned, you quickly accumulated a sense of loyalties?

EH: Oh, by all means.

RB: You had your own jewelry, as I remember, and they each contributed their quota of marshals for public meetings and concerts, and they would be elegantly gowned with a sash of their literary club identifications—I think they had special colors.

EH: No, they used the class colors then.

RB: Oh yes, I suspect you are right. Another pleasant custom that has since fallen to dis-use is the Daisy Chain at commencement. I never did know where they got all those daisies. They were very heavy ropes woven together. You just couldn't gather a few armfuls of daisies and have your daisy chain.

EH: And the seniors would go through the daisy chain.

RB: And there was a lake in Peabody Park, a small pond.

EH: I don't remember the pond. I remember we had summer Shakespearean plays in there; the Centennial.

RB: There was a terraced hillside, people sat on it as I remember.

EH: Yes, but mostly it was just trees, and I can remember some of us before breakfast would go down and wander through the park or bird watch every morning. It was just lovely woods.

RB: Some of that survived, you know.

EH: Not much. In my day, just beyond the end of Spencer [Residence Hall] were three steps going down into the woods, and there was just woods down there.

RB: Did the school year begin in September?

EH: Yes. I don't really remember much about the first week except Dr. [Anna] Gove [college physician] got all the freshmen together in the auditorium and taught us how to make our beds.

RB: Did she have a model?

EH: Yes, she had a model up there, and she showed us, and then she had some of us come up to see if we had learned it.

RB: [chuckles] You were tested in front of all those people? Incidentally, speaking of Dr. Gove, did you have a health service on campus?

EH: Yes, the hospital was somewhere in back of what is now Elliott Hall.

RB: Yes, that was the Gove Infirmary—it was still very much in service when I arrived in 1944, prior to being replaced by Elliott Hall.

EH: And we each had to have a physical exam with Dr. Gove on arrival.

RB: Were you ever turned back?

EH: I don't know about that! Then we had to have another physical exam in the physical education department, to see how our posture was, and so on.

RB: And if you had correctible deficiencies?

EH: They had a correctible class.

RB: When I arrived there was another practice that I would say has fortunately been eliminated. Every student would be given a speech test and if in the judgment of the people who ran things your speech was too provincial—too richly southern—you were required to take Speech 101 and have those deficiencies remedied. Do you remember anything like that?

EH: No, they didn't have anything like that.

RB: There was a fairly well developed program for recreation.

EH: Oh yes, at five o'clock every student had to open all her windows, go out on campus and they would either walk or engage in a sport, while the room was being aired. Summer and winter, yes! I didn't spend much time walking, I was more interested in the games. The hockey field was right across from Spencer, and there was a lot of activity on it.

RB: Would that be south of it, where the new library stands?

EH: Yes, there was an embankment there, about three or four steps down, then a lovely, flat hockey field. On the other side were the two Spencer Halls, North and South. It was a senior privilege to be housed on the north wing of Spencer. Our class was the one which started student government, so then they felt the senior sought to take part in the supervision of the underclassmen, so they parceled us out to all the areas. And my roommate and I spent our senior year in the same room we went to as freshmen, the tower of Guilford Hall.

RB: You say your class introduced student government?

EH: Yes, I don't know how it got underway, but I'm sure it was with conferences.

RB: You don't think it was something that was sold to the students by some progressive-minded faculty members who thought it would be a good thing?

EH: I doubt it. I know that we were the ones that implements its first year, and I'm sure it was some of our active people who must have had the idea.

RB: I suppose it must have been some kind of draft constitution that laid out the general configuration of the student government?

EH: Yes, oh, we were very particular about *Robert's Rules of Order*.

RB: And was the plan of student government submitted to the general student body for approval?

EH: That part I don't know.

RB: And of course another critical element in the establishment of student government is the degree of authority that the college's governing body is willing to concede. Did it give any kind of rule-making power to the student government?

EH: That part I don't remember the details of it, but I do know that we formulated certain regulations—yes, I'm sure we did.

RB: Did its authority, if that isn't too strong a word, extend to such things as the honor system? Were examinations typically proctored by the instructor staying in the room?

EH: Yes. Well, you see, with only six hundred students, your class instructor was just with you when you were in class or in an examination.

Another thing we started was the hot lunch program in the training school, for the children. I guess it must have been some in the home economics department who originally initiated it. I know we all took our turns going over and ladling out soup at the noon hour. I think possibly it was to avoid children bringing their lunches and instead giving them hot meals.

RB: Implicit in that probably was the assumption that if they brought their lunches, they didn't bring the best diet with them.

EH: Yes, and often children swap.

RB: And you all ate in the dining hall?

EH: We all ate in the dining hall, the whole six hundred.

RB: The only exception to living in the dormitory were people who were—

[End of Interview]