

When we left off, Dr. Groves, you had returned to Danville to Centre as president in 1947. Looking back over your years as president, what accomplishments or developments at Centre do you feel most proud of?

One thing that I felt we were most fortunate in was the development of a faculty during that period. I mentioned earlier how we had to expand the faculty to meet the postwar surge in enrollment. Then came the job of releasing some of those faculty people, which was, of course, a very difficult job. I was helped a great deal in this period by both Dean Jones and then later on, of course, Dr. Heck as Dean. When it first came to the job of reducing the faculty, naturally we were able to let go those who may be considered weaker members. But at the same time, one or two members that we lost in that interval were real strong members. One in particular comes to mind; he is now still teaching at Vanderbilt University. His name will come to me in a moment. During that period, for instance, Dean Hewlett was a big assistance for the first year or two, until his death. I've forgotten the year of Dean Hewlett's death. I had only been here a year or two when he had this serious heart attack and died.

It was during that period that we were able to bring Charles Hazelrigg back to Centre as a member of the faculty. On Dean Hewlett's death he became head of the department of English. Miss Sweeney was already here. Dr. McMullen had located two or three excellent men that come to mind. Dr. Walkup was one of them. West Hill was another one that I found here when we got here. Those two men stand out. On Dean Hewlett's premature death, as I think I've said, Dr. Hazelrigg was made head of the department. When I met Dr. Cantrell the other evening (last evening), I was reminded of the circumstances which brought him here. I had become acquainted with Dr. Philip Davidson, at that time Provost at Vanderbilt University, and he learned that we were looking for an instructor in the department of English. He called me long distance and said, "Don't engage anyone until you have seen the young man I'm sending up to you." It was Dr. Paul Cantrell. I had a good opinion of Dr. Davidson's judgment, and we ceased everything until Dr. Cantrell came and joined the campus. I've forgotten just when it was; I guess it must have been about 1948. Dean Hewlett must have been alive at that time. We were looking for someone to head up the art department, and I asked Dr. Kellam, I said, "Can you tell me the circumstances that led to your coming to Centre College of Kentucky." He said, "Yes. You came into the office of the teacher's college in Columbia University and said you were looking for somebody for the art department, and I was looking for a job." That's the way he put it. We had interviewed half a dozen before we saw Dr. Kellam. There was no comparison between him and the other prospects. Some of them were pretty far out, and I thought they would set Danville on fire if I brought them here. He fit in beautifully and has done a great job here, I know.

In order to strengthen the faculty we did all we could to encourage different members of the faculty, by leaves or one way or another, to complete their Ph.D. work. Among them was Dr. Sweeney and Dr. Hill, Paul Cantrell, I guess Roy Ellis in physics. Who else did we have? John Walkup already had his Ph.D. when he arrived. That's the group who come to mind. But we got to the point where we had a very high percentage of the faculty who had completed their Ph.D. degrees.

Dr. Hardin Craig, an alumnus of this institution, while he was living I guess was the greatest Shakespearean scholar of the English-speaking world. He told me one day that he thought we had one of the strongest departments of English that he knew of anywhere. He was a good person to express that kind of judgment.

We did well. I think Dr. Loetscher was already here when I arrived. His father had taught me church history at the Princeton Theological Seminary. I guess I knew Fred when he was a small boy and I was a student there in the Seminary. I certainly remember his father with much pleasure.

Well, as I say, one of the accomplishments was one by one building a pretty strong faculty. Of course we tried to build the Memorial Gymnasium. That was our big fund-raising effort of that period.

Another curious bit was the Weisiger building over on the old campus. That was quite a story. Mr. Nelson Rodes was a great asset for this institution. As I first was informed over the telephone that Miss Weisiger had died and had left some money to Centre College of Kentucky, I didn't believe it. I thought this was a fish story. Then as I came to know the facts, I could just see Mr. Nelson sweating it out with Miss Weisiger, and he finally got this bequest to the College. I can tell you the several conditions involved. One of them was that this building had to be located on the women's campus. It had to be located with the building line parallel to the other buildings on the campus, which of course was impossible, and a few conditions of that kind--not nearly enough money of course to build the building in addition. First we had to get a lien from the then judge, Judge Kendrick Alcorn. I think he was in Stanford, Kentucky; yes. He gave us--whatever the legal terminology is--he gave us the right to move the location slightly from Miss Emma's specifications.

Later on there was another matter and we tried to get Judge Alcorn to make another change. He said, "I've already done one, I can't do another." So we were stuck, and we struggled to try. I remember I went to the famous Charles Horn, who at that time was one of the three trustees of the famous foundation--oh dear, I know them well, one of the sons has a plantation in Albany, Georgia. Olin! Franklin W. Olin. One of our trustees, Mr. Lisle Baker, told of this Olin Foundation, and I started working on it. I found out that the leading character in this new foundation was this certain Mr. Charles Horn of St. Paul (or was it Minneapolis?), Minnesota. But in any event, I didn't go up there; but I made contact with him in Palm Beach, Florida. Mr. Horn was hard of hearing. Apparently he could hear reasonably well in one ear but not the other ear, so I knew on which side to sit. I started yelling in his ear, and he started yelling back at me, "What do you want?" I said, "We want the balance needed to build a fine arts building at Centre College of Kentucky." He said, "There are too damn many fine arts buildings now." And that was it.

Later on we did get some help. Mr. Horn helped us two or three years in a row, eliminated our deficit for us. I've learned one thing about Mr. Horn; I'd have never gotten my foot in the door had it not been for the fact that I, in my undergraduate days, had been a member of SAE Fraternity. Mr. Horn was a member of SAE. That was the only way you got in the door to see Mr. Horn.

When I was finally inaugurated here, there was a picture of three SAEs: myself, the president of Lafayette College who was a close personal friend of mine, and then a certain Dr. Philip Hench, who was best man at our wedding and

who won the Nobel Prize for the discovery of cortisone in 1948. The three of us were in line. I sent that picture to Charlie Horn and that cemented the relationship. I continued correspondence with Mr. Horn even after we left here. I could go on considerably about him--quite a character!

Mr. Cowles, I think his name was--C o w l e s--the editor over several newspapers--

Gardner Cowles?

Yes. He was the one that told Mr. Baker. He said, "He's always asking me for books to recommend him to read. The trouble is he reads them and I haven't. So the second major job was trying to raise some money.

The third job in that interval was to try to get a proper alumni fund going. We had a very miserable fund. The situation as I analyzed it was over the years several of the more well-to-do families in Danville and Kentucky had made bequests to Centre College, and the general impression was that Centre College didn't need any money. Nor did Ephraim McDowell need any money. And both of us were in the same situation; both of us needing money and the community not understanding. They were sure that we were wrong, we just didn't need money. I think I'm not far off base when I say there had not been any concerted effort to raise money among the alumni. Thus when we raised as much as twenty or twenty-five thousand a year we really accomplished something. But of course all that, thank goodness, has changed. I don't suppose we were any different from any other colleges. I remember my own college, Lafayette; we didn't have that much of an alumni fund. I never understood why President McCracken, who was president of Lafayette, and here I was a youngster in college, gave financial reports of the College to the students. I would look at those darn things and they didn't mean "boo" to me. You can imagine giving a financial report to Centre College. Well, I think as I look back, I realize that Dr. McCracken was trying to get across to the general public what a college like Lafayette needed, and so that was the story. But the possibility, as I said earlier this morning, was there. It was only a question of time until that change would take place. That's why I think President Spragens has done such a remarkable job. I'm not sure that I could have done at all what he has done. He knew the way to go about it and that's what it takes.

So I would say the faculty and the raising of necessary support for the College and the development of the alumni fund were three of the major undertakings of that period.

Looking back on your years as president, we talked about the highlights. Is there anything that happened that you wish could have been different?

Yes. I think I am by nature a little bit too impetuous; and I can look back on some of the things that we did during that period that had I been able to go back and do them again, I would surely have done them differently.

We had a man here, Chief Myers. You probably have gotten a little bit of Chief Myers' story. Chief was brought back here; it happened just before I got here. I think the idea was that Chief was going to attract many students and would be a good student promotion person. Chief had a way of dealing with young men that was superb. I came to understand how he was able to bring those young fellows up from Ft. Worth, Texas, to make that 1920-21 football team what

they were. I don't know whether this is part of the story or not, but I remember talking to one of them in Ft. Worth when I was down there; "How did you fellows ever come to come out of one high school and become the football team that you did?" His answer, without hesitance, was, "Well, Chief Myers told us if we did what he told us to do, he would send us up to Centre College of Kentucky, and we'd become the best football team in the nation. And we did."

There was a good bit of truth to that. He had an influence with young fellows. But he didn't turn out able to do the job which the trustees who had brought him back expected. As I look back, we should have pensioned Chief. But the trustees insisted that since they had engaged him, they were the ones to deal with the problem; and I let them do it. But as I look back, I shouldn't have let them do it. I should have insisted that we pension Chief. We were so hard up financially that was a difficult suggestion to make, but nonetheless it should have been done. I feel that was one of my mistakes.

When we had to cut back when this lean period of enrollment came, our finances became very precarious. If I have high blood pressure today, it's because of my job of letting one or two of the key people go who we couldn't afford to keep any longer.

You mentioned several people already that you worked closely with. I wonder if you could give us a few brief descriptions or characterizations of those you worked most closely with, you know, as if you were talking to someone who had never met these people. How would you describe some of the ones you were close to?

Among the trustees the man who helped me most was Mr. Watts, Fred Watts, of the Lexington Herald-Leader. He was an excellent counselor. I could go to him with any problem, personal or otherwise. He had gone through a serious health problem; and so when my wife had a health problem, Fred was the one to counsel me on that. When it came to financial problems, Fred knew what to advise me on that. Of course Mr. Ike Lanier, the chairman of the board, was a real help, too. We had some pretty good men on the board. I suppose I should mention others, too, but those two in particular; naturally, the chairman of the board. Dr. Cowan, of course. Dr. Cowan--this time I will not mention any names--had a serious problem with one of the members of the board, and he came to me to unburden his soul and I sided with the good Doctor. He felt much relieved that I was on his side. Dr. Cowan was in many ways "Mr. Centre College", there's no question about that. His devotion to this institution--and the other men on the board knew it--in his quiet way he was the leader of the group. I used to be a little bit amused, but I don't believe they ever crossed him. When Dr. Cowan gave his opinion on a subject, that ended it; and without being bullheaded--that wasn't part of his nature at all. He just was a man of quiet, considered judgment, a real Christian gentleman. My son had occasion to work with him when he was in Lafayette. When he came back, he knew he was going to be a doctor and he worked out at the hospital. Dr. Cowan was still operating, and an operation was scheduled, and my son was what I guess you'd call a "scrub nurse." I don't know whether he was even that, but anyhow, he had to help prepare. Dr. Cowan didn't appear at the moment that they thought he would. My son Bob said, "Where is Dr. Cowan?" And the nurse said, "Don't you know?" My son said, "No." "Why," he said, "he's off having a prayer before he performs this operation." That was Dr. Cowan.

So I've mentioned those. There were others: Jesse Herrmann, who was pastor of the Second Church and a good person; Bob Miles, the pastor of the First Church; Lisle Baker, I certainly counseled with him again and again when I was in Louisville.

I almost have to run down the whole list. I felt that I could go to any one of them, but those men I guess I did go to more frequently.

I'll just throw out a name here and there, and you can just tell me what comes to mind when I say it.

Dean James Hewlett.

Dr. Hewlett was, in my book at least, a real scholar. Well, when we spoke of that English department being as strong as it was, you have to give him much of the credit. After all, I guess Dean Sweeney came here during his period. He had a Charles Manning here who was a very strong professor. He was the one that had the bee on Dr. Hazelrigg. I'm not sure that Dr. Hazelrigg would've ever come back here had it not been for Dean Hewlett. No, there's no question about it. He ran a good ship as dean. I always got along with him well enough. Bob McMullen, my predecessor, didn't always do so. I felt that we had a good man there. I've often wondered, though. You see, the presidency became vacant several times during his period of deanship, and I couldn't help but wonder whether the fact that he was passed over, shall I say, not once but several times, may not have had a little effect on his attitude. But as far as he and I, our relationship was perfectly amicable. And I certainly will never forget the blow it was when he had this serious heart attack and ultimately died. We all felt that was a real loss to the College.

Albert Porter--Dean Porter.

I remember Dean Porter well, of course. He had some of the characteristics of Chief Myers in his influence with young men, and shall I say, especially with those who were athletically inclined. Dean Porter knew how to handle those fellows. It isn't that I don't remember him; I remember him well. But the thing that I can't recall is his death. I think he died--well I'm sure he did--two or three years after I got here. It was due to his death that we found Alden Vaughan to take over the classical languages, Latin and Greek. He of course was an excellent addition, too, Dr. Vaughan. At least in my book Dr. Vaughan was more of a student than Dean Porter.

Along in that same period we were able to bring Dr. Misch here in the department as a German Professor. Our engagement of him is one of the--I don't know how to describe it. We had to interview one person after another trying to find a professor of German. I had a contact through my experience in Iran with a man in New York who had organized the Committee of Immigrant Scholars, Dr. Leeland Rex Robinson, and I appealed to him for help in this business. He turned me over to the secretary of that organization, and she in turn turned up half a dozen different candidates. I went up to New York on this occasion, and I must have interviewed one after another of these refugees from Germany and elsewhere. Not one quite fit the bill. Dr. Knott back here had advised me, "Don't get a German because they are too militaristic in their attitudes and too strict, and I've never known a native German to be a good teacher to American students." So naturally I had that little counsel and advice of Dr. Knott in mind as I talked to these fellows, and I found in two or three instances that Dr. Knott was dead right. I could recognize that these fellows could never handle a group of American students. So I gave up. And the good lady said, "Well, I have one more man, but he's busy all through the day and I can't get him until this evening." I had an alumni meeting coming up at eight o'clock that evening, and I said, "Well,

I could get back to your office at seven o'clock. Do you think you could get this fellow here? She said, "Yes, I think I can." And I went back there at seven o'clock, and this gentleman walked into the room. Before he said a word, as he walked toward me I said, "This is our German professor." Just one of those intuitions. Dr. Sweeney studied some with him when she was preparing for her Ph.D. examination. She came to my office and said, "I have had language teachers at Tulane, Columbia, and elsewhere; this man is by far the best teacher I've ever sat under." So that was Dr. Misch.

Has anybody given you anything of his life history--Dr. Misch? The year that Hitler came into power his book, the title of which was The Deviltry of Hitlerism (I'm giving you the English title) came off the press in Germany. Naturally Dr. Misch and his wife had to leave Germany right now. They got as far as Paris. During the war years he was editor of the German newspaper that was published in Paris. Prior to that he had been on the Bolshe Se Sikan (Sp.?). I think he was the general editor of the Bolshe Se Sikan (?), which in my student days I had been told was the liberal newspaper of Germany. Well, then when the Germans came all around France, once again Dr. Misch had to flee for his life. He told me this. He and Mrs. Misch fled southward to the Spanish border with a suitcase. Normally they were letting people across the boarder, but with a suitcase the border guard, I guess a Spanish soldier, said, "Where are you going?" "We're going on a picnic." "With a suitcase?" "Well, yes and no." So they never got across. They went back to wherever they were staying, left the suitcase behind, came back in the afternoon without anything but the clothes on their back, got across the border, and finally (I think it was Lisbon), they ultimately got to Lisbon.

Dr. Misch's name was on the list of the American Council of people to be given help if they should appear anywhere in the War. So he did go to the American Council. I think he had enough money to pay his passage on the ship for himself and his wife, but that was it. He got to New York and he didn't have five cents for a taxi fare. But he was a newspaper man and he knew how to get along with taxi drivers and people of that nature. So he just called a taxi, and he had the name of a hotel in New York, and he asked the taxi (driver) to take him to this hotel, which he did. And then he went to the clerk and registered in this hotel and said to the clerk, "Will you pay that taxi man and put it on my bill?" Because he didn't have any money. And the clerk obligingly did it that way. In the interval I guess Dr. Misch found some friends among, I guess maybe M ? and others who knew who he was, you see. They got enough money to pay his hotel bill and pay the taxi driver.

Then he was engaged by our government to rewrite the history textbook for German schools under our military government there, which, shall I say, told the story of Germany rather than the kind of textbook that Hitler people would put across. He had already produced a history of Germany. We had a young instructor here by the name of Young who went back to Chicago to complete his doctorate at the University of Chicago. When I saw him in Chicago some time afterward he told me that Dr. Misch's two-volume history of Germany in German was the most dogeaten book on the shelves of the University of Chicago. It was the history of Germany. He had interviewed all the-- When he started teaching European history, he was a great help to Dr. Heck. He not only knew the book, but he knew the people the books were talking about. He had interviewed all the modern characters of the leading countries of Europe. He had seen so much of the rough and tumble of life that the quietness of Danville was just a kind of heaven for him. I don't think we could have held him here otherwise; he was so well-known.

Mrs. Misch is still living up in New York City, you know. She was a character. She accepted a job with the new Corning Glass Works, sorting out light bulbs. They recognized out there that this was a real educated woman. Why should she be out there sorting light bulbs. They tried to get her into the office. She wouldn't go. She said she was learning about American life in associating with these women from the small towns around there. So they were a real addition in every way to the campus here.

What can you tell us briefly about the relationship of the Women's College during your years?

As they say, that's a good question. I brought up the question once with our then board of trustees (very early) about uniting the two campuses. I was tromped on so emphatically that I didn't bring it up again. Meantime I asked Dean Sweeney to see what the students thought of the matter. She took a whole year. When a student would come in, whatever the problem was, without arousing any expectation on the students, she'd try to sound them out as to how did they feel about joining the two campuses. She's speaking to women students now. At the end of the year Dr. Sweeney said to me, "I think I can give you the reactions of the women students." She summed it up in about two sentences. Number one was they did not want to move over to join with the men's campus. "We have our own show here and we're very happy. If we moved over there we'd be under the domination of the men." I mean that was their reaction. Number two, "The men are near enough so that when we want them, we can have them." So that was it. Not only had I run into this opposition-- Then meantime I consulted with the president of Mary Baldwin College on the subject. She said to me, "I think you have the ideal situation for women's education; I would not move to bring the two campuses together." So there you have it. I also went, in a way, into the financial situation. How much would you save? I didn't come up with a very large figure of savings, as a matter of fact. I think Dr. Sweeney's investigation lasted over a year, and I think she talked with nearly every woman student over there. In that generation they weren't very strong for it. Of course the women of today have never had that other experience, so they have nothing to compare themselves with. It would be interesting to know whether the present generation would feel as apparently the women of that day felt.

As I look back, we had some queer circumstances. In my day, if a woman student married, she automatically was out of college. She couldn't stay there. I don't think that law was in the books anywhere, but I think we had one student marry while I was here, and she knew she'd be asked to leave. She didn't wait. The setup was totally different.

Pretty strict visitation and all that to visit the campus?

Yes, it was strict enough, but we had panty raids and things like that. When you try to regulate relationships of that kind, you might as well forget it. We had the regulations, but I'm not sure they were much help.

What can you tell us about the relationship between Centre and the Presbyterian Church during that time? Were there any changes during your years as president?

No, we didn't have. The one thing that I felt was a good thing (some of my colleagues were not so sure of it); in my day, you see, we had the alumni

trustees; they were elected by the Alumni Association, of course. Then the other trustees were divided--I've forgotten the proportion now. Certain trustees had to be approved of by the Northern Presbyterian Church, certain trustees by the Southern. That always looked like a rubber stamp operation because whenever we proposed a person to the Synod--either Synod--there was never (I don't remember ever) any opposition. But at the same time I felt that it was a good thing because what it meant was that we never proposed anybody that we didn't think would be approved. To me it was a mild kind of a break. I believe the present trustees, as far as I know them, would be approved by the Synod were that regulation still in effect.

We had a good old Dr. Sweets who was an alumnus. Dr. Henry Sweets was one of the leaders of the Southern Presbyterian Church. He liked to boast, and I joined with him, that we were the oldest organic related Presbyterian college in the country. He was very proud of that. He'd go before the Southern Church with that without any hesitance. I may have been wrong on that point. I know my good friend (long-time colleague, friend, and everything) who was president of Lafayette while I was president here thought I was wrong; that our relationship with the church was too close. He was a Presbyterian minister like I was. We went to school together and all the rest of it, but he had different views on that subject than I did. I thought there should be a place for a real Christian college in the best sense of the term. I wasn't interested in a fundamentalist Christian college or anything of that nature or a Bible college. But I did believe that there was such a thing as a Christian liberal arts college.

Tape 1, Side 2 (Part 2) Dr. Walter Groves Interview (continued)