



Voices of Lycoming Oral Histories

Lycoming College Archives - Snowden Library

Oral History of

Mary Russell

Alumna, Class of 1933

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Mrs. Mary Russell

Class of 1933

Nov. 21, 1997

Danielle: Dr. Long often described the school as friendly in the newspapers. What type of extra curricular activities did the school have for students?

Mary: There were quite a few things. For instance one thing was a big affair every year was the chestnut party, maybe you heard of that?

D: I did read about that.

M: Well this was something that was done every year in the fall and it was held out in the country outside of Williamsport. I believe it was around Camp Kiwanis and of course all the chestnut trees were really gone by then, they were long gone, but nevertheless we still called it the chestnut party. So they would announce when it was going to happen and everybody would have the whole day off and they would transport the students out to the country, and then the kitchen people would provide the picnic. I guess some of the students drove their cars, the day students were allowed to do that. Of course the boarding students didn't have cars, but we would go out and just sort of walk around the woods and just do whatever we wanted to. They had games and probably pitching _ and baseball, and whatever they wanted to do they did. So that was something that people looked forward to. Of course they had a lot of athletics that the students could engage in. They had basketball for both the boys and the girls and football. I should have brought a brochure I had, it had the Dickinson players playing freshman from Syracuse so they must have played some other schools, the freshman teams. They had bowling and swimming and I remember we had archery, and I think the archery seemed mostly to be for the girls as I remember, and then we had tennis, we played quite a bit of tennis. Then there were other groups that they had. They had music groups, choral club and they had a double

male quartet which was a group of eight young men, and this group did a lot of singing under the direction of Mrs. Bates who was a voice teacher at that time. I was fortunate enough to be the accompanist for that group. So we had a lot of fun and we'd go out practically every Sunday night, that group would go out to some local church or a great many times to churches in the countryside surrounding Williamsport, and sing for their evening church service. So we used to have a lot of fun with that group. Then they had dramatic groups and they used to always give class plays, of course they don't do that anymore, and they even had a faculty play back in those days, each year, and that always provided a lot of fun for faculty up there entertaining. There was an activities committee that would arrange different programs and events on campus. Then of course we always had May day which was quite a long time ago, and that was always a big time too, we would have a queen and go around the may pole and have dances and all that sort of thing. There was another nice thing that happened each year, I suppose it was in the forties or fifties the director of the chorale music and voice, Mrs. Bates, would arrange a trip to New York to see the opera. That happened every year for quite a few years and that was really wonderful for the students to have a chance to see an opera and go to the big city.

D: Was that open to all the students or just the students involved in the...

M: Yes I think anybody who was really interested, seniors mostly, the students interested in music. It seemed the students mostly interested in the music groups that went as I remember. Then they had class trips, like the sophomore class, junior class whatever would have a trip every spring going someplace out of town. I remember once going to Rolling Green park and riding on the rollercoaster and that sort of thing. They used to do things like that. I think that's about it.

D: Did a lot of students become involved in these different activities?

M: Yes ah huh.

D: Do you think that was because they were good things you could do on campus that that was what you did in your free time?

M: Yes I think so.

D: I was reading through the catalogs and it seemed to me that the school had a lot of control over how students did spend their time. Did students do things that went against school policy and participate in activities that were outside what the school provided?

M: Yes they did. Sometimes they would do things that were against the rules and the rules were quite strict. For instance no smoking was allowed at all, even off the campus. If Dr. Long, who was the president at that time, and he was very strict and whatever he said that was the rule and he was quite strict and very authoritarian. I remember one, I don't know if you know Mr. John Graham. He taught English here for a number of years, but he and his wife, when he first came here to teach, which was in the late thirties or early forties, he tells about once in a while he would leave the campus. They lived in Old Main, he and his wife, and he would go down to an old corner store, down below the railroad of course the railroad track went below the school, and he would go down there to get a sandwich perhaps in the evening. The one day the proprietor of the store said, "Mr. Graham I wish you'd really make a little more noise when you come in here so we knew you were coming. Because some of the girls come in here and they like to smoke once in a while and so I know you would have to report them if you saw them smoking and so if you let us know we could avoid that." So after that he would rattle on the door a lot and make a big fuss when he would go in there. Of course we weren't really allowed to leave the campus during the daytime, school hours and so forth. I remember a couple of my friends just decided they were going to go down and cross the tracks to this little store one afternoon to get something. And I guess they thought Dr. Long might not be looking, so they had just got about half way down when Dr. Long came out of the building. He had seen them from his window in his office so he just called them right back. They came right back.

D: Did they get in trouble or did they just...

M: Well I don't think he did anything in particular he just reprimanded them.

D: That can be enough sometimes.

M: Then another story Mr. Graham told was that of course students were supposed to be in, they usually went to their rooms right after dinner and stayed in. At least if they had signed out for something special they would have to be in by ten o'clock and lights were always out by ten o'clock. So there was quite a bit of climbing in and out of windows at bedtime particularly down in Eveland Hall. That was down by the railroad, and they called it the Angel Factory at that time because that's where the ministerial students lived. So they were quite noted for going in and out of the windows at night. So this one episode that Mr. Graham remembered their quarters in Old Main were right inside the fire escape and their bedroom windows looked right onto the fire escape, so he said various times he would see people going up and down the fire escape. Another lady told me, who was here many years ago, that the boys used to go down, they would sneak down to the corner store in the evening for sandwiches. And then they would somehow get on top of the building, Old Main, and they would take a bucket with these sandwiches in it and lower it down to some of the girls rooms, so they could open their windows and get these things out of the bucket. Oh dancing, dancing was not allowed of course and even off campus, if Dr. Long found any of us at a public dance of any kind that was bad. Once in a while, when we wanted to do some dancing, we would go to the fraternity rooms which were on top of the old gym, which now is the art department, and we'd go up in these fraternity rooms and pull the blinds so nobody could see us. Then we'd put the records on the machine and dance hoping nobody would catch us. I don't ever remember getting caught. But that's what we had to do if we wanted to dance. Then the Elks building down here on Fourth St. they used to have dances on Saturday night, public dances, and so some of us would go to those sometimes. Even though we were day students we didn't want to get caught. So we'd go there and somebody would always be at the door watching for Dr. Long in case he'd come down there to check if any of us were down there dancing.

D: Did he ever come do you remember?

M: I can't remember if he ever did when I was there. Of course the boarding students weren't allowed to have cars. The day students of course did because they went home. I remember one boy who I knew very well kept his car in our

garage. Of course that was breaking the rules but they never found out about that.

D: I was reading through the catalogs and I saw that it said meeting and engaging in conversation by boys and girls is forbidden except when arranged by faculty. Did you find that they really enforced this?

M: Yes. We weren't allowed to socialize with the boys during class hours through the day. So there was one place where we found we could go and that was in some locker rooms down in the floor of Old Main. So we would often go down there. They did have some things that they called socials that they would definitely arrange in the evening. The boys and the girls would get together and they would have refreshments and things like that and somebody told me that they allowed you to sit in the chapel for a certain length of time with your boyfriend and a chaperone in the background some place. You could do that type of thing.

D: Speaking of the chapel, I saw that there was required chapel attendance, how did you feel about having to go?

M: Well we didn't really object to it because it just seemed like it was an accepted thing, part of our school life that every single day we had to gather together in the chapel, which of course was in Old Main at that time. Of course it wasn't much of a chapel compared to what we have now, but it was a little auditorium type place. We'd gather every single morning, and we just took it for granted that it was an expected thing so we really didn't object too much that I remember. They would have recitals in this chapel that is the music department. This was kind of an unusual thing I always thought. It was a small student body, maybe four or five hundred, and so students were required to go to these recitals. So you can imagine them objecting to that, because they were just student recitals and there weren't...sometimes we would have regular opening exercises and announcements, but maybe once a week we would have a local minister who would speak. Dr. Long always conducted the service. Before the war people didn't object too much to this but after the war we had a lot of veterans here on campus and they were older and they didn't like the restrictions. So a little later

on, the chapel was built in the thirties, we still had chapel every morning, but they had a new system where they would just require a certain number of times to go each semester. At one point one of the professors Mr. Shaffer attended a conference out of town somewhere, a Danforth conference, which was stressing religion in education. He was very impressed with this and when he came back he talked with Dr. Wertz who was president then, and so Dr. Wertz arranged that five thousand dollars would be provided to bring prominent speakers into chapel at least once a month. During that time we had wonderful speakers, they were internationally known people. It was very worth while. I guess some of the students didn't think so, but they were really fortunate in hearing these speakers. Some of them were Paul Tillich, he was a theologian...

D: We just talked about him in Dr. Guerra's religion class. Dr. Guerra went to his college.

M: David Reed was a well-known minister in New York City. Martin Luther King of course was here. Ralph Sockman who was a very famous methodist minister from New York City, so they were very fortunate they could hear these people and it's really too bad now that we don't have that privilege. When Dr. Long was running the chapel exercises and so forth it was very strict. Everybody had to be there. One day one of the professors decided he didn't want to go that particular day, faculty had to be there every time. We sat to the right section as you look at the stage, I was always playing the organ so I had to be there, anyway he didn't go, and later on he met Dr. Long on the campus. And Dr. Long said to him, "Well are you feeling better?" So the professor said, this was Mr. Graham by the way, he said, "Yes I am." And he said, "Well I noticed you weren't in chapel so I'm glad you're feeling better." That's the only way we ended up not going.

D: It seems like Dr. Long saw everything.

M: He did. He was an authority for every single thing. In fact somebody was saying the other day that in faculty meetings, if they have a committee, he would have a committee to study a certain question and come up with a decision. And so if they come up with the wrong decision he would say, "Well you know that's

not the way to do it." He was always in perfect authority, he was a wonderful man. He was very authoritarian.

D: I found a quote in one of the school newspapers that said, "We dislike the rules for they are too strict." Did most students find the rules were too harsh? Was there a lot of complaining?

M: Yes, but they didn't complain too much. When they didn't like a rule they just broke it secretly. So it avoided getting into trouble. Like this climbing in and out of the windows and all that sort of thing. I think they just did things they weren't supposed to do once in a while hoping not to get caught, but I don't think they ever really protested like they would today. They never went to the faculty. Another funny little thing I remembered the choral club had a, it was a choir by that time, had an annual dinner. We had it down at the village tea room. So for dessert we had rum pie and Dr. Long found out about that and he was really angry about that rum pie so he called the director and a couple of faculty members who had attended the dinner into his office and he gave them a lecture about it. He didn't want any liquor connected with it even in the pie.

D: As a day student, rather than as a student who lived on campus, were your rules different from the students who lived here?

M: No. We were supposed to act very properly when we were off the campus as well as when we were on it. I think one thing that the Dean of Women was very strict with the girls, dress and that sort of thing and she used to have little classes on etiquette and things like that so that we would know how to do things correctly. I can remember if we were to go downtown, we had to wear hats and gloves. Anyway we really didn't mind the rules too much. It provided a little fun at times to break them.

D: One thing that I saw that seemed a little different, a day student complained in one of the editorials in the newspaper that she didn't think that day students should have to sign in and out of like a study hall between classes. She had mentioned that she had to come in and explain where she was coming from and

when she left she had to explain where she was going. Did you find that restrictive?

M: I don't remember too much of that. But I suppose we did it. I don't remember protesting that but I'm sure that we did. Gripe about it now and then.

D: The catalog said that punishment was the withdrawal of certain privileges. They didn't explain which ones those were do you remember what some of them were?

M: We used to have a system of demerits so that when you would do these infractions of the rules you would get so many demerits. They would keep track of those so if you got too many then I guess you might be sent home. I know if you were caught smoking they would send a student home.

D: Same with drinking?

M: Oh yes.

D: Do you remember any specific times when disciplinary action was taken against a student?

M: I remember one time it was a girl that signed out, I think she was a sophomore or junior, she was really a good student and she was a good music student so it made me feel really bad. She signed out to a friend's place and she wasn't supposed to stay over night but she did and so she was discharged from school. Some of us went to that for her and tried to get a little more leniency for her because of the type of student she was. We liked her so much and everything.

D: What were some of the things that you remember about coming here as a freshman as a new student here on campus?

M: Just mostly these things that I've been talking about. I noticed we had quite a bit of classes on etiquette and we were told how to dress if we were going downtown. We had some very nice things after recitals, of course I was always involved in the music part, and after these they would always have a very nice

reception and it was usually in Rich Hall. They had a grand piano and everything very beautiful in the lounge at that time and so that was always a nice affair. Then every year we would have what they called the president's reception and this was a time when parents would come and all the students would attend and everybody dressed formally, that is the faculty particularly was formal. The faculty was really responsible for setting up the reception and doing all the work during the reception. It's not like now when the kitchen takes over with everything. I remember I was on the committee to set up the tea table and get the silver service and decide what we were going to serve. And also line up all the different women faculty members who would take charge of keeping the tea table supplied with all the stuff, the mints and the cookies. Usually we would invite several wives of the board of directors to pour the tea and coffee. Then they would have different shifts during the evening and take turns doing that. So then those of us who were keeping the table supplied were so busy we were just running back and forth all the time supplying all these nuts, mints and cookies and by the next day our feet were so tired. Then the men would have certain men students take people down the receiving line. They had the president of course and his wife, the dean and some other people in the receiving line. The students who were asked to take people down the line would take them down and introduce them to every single person in the receiving line. Then the girls had different duties like taking care of the coats. Everybody was really mixed into it. The kitchen really just supplied the food, but we did all the work that was connected with it. It was always a wonderful affair, but it was a lot of work.

D: I read a lot about the rules that the sophomores gave to freshman. They had to wear green bows in their hair, no make-up and they couldn't have dates. Do you remember going through this?

M: I don't remember much about this. I remember there was something about clothes. Wear something one day and something else another day and I can't remember a lot about that. I know they did certain things.

D: Maybe the papers just made more out of it than the students did. So you didn't feel the sophomores were being too hard on the freshman?

M: No I don't remember any harsh treatment at all.

D: I just have a couple general questions then. Are there any special things that you remember about the buildings on campus or events that occurred here. I know we talked a little bit about the things.

M: Well in those early days when I was a student here I guess there were only four buildings. Old Main, Bradley Hall, Eveland which was called the Angel Factory by the railroad, and the gym which is now the art department. So there were four buildings that we had, so they had classes in Old Main, and Bradley Hall held a lot of things. The library was there, the music department and the art department, and the practice rooms. There was a wonderful piano studio there. It was just a huge big room with a couple of pianos. It was a lovely building. Of course the inside of it worn out and they took it down. It was so interesting outside, I don't know maybe you've seen pictures of it, but all around the outside of the building there were busts of famous people like literary authors or musicians or just famous people. Plus I often wondered what happened to those when they tore the building down, they should've preserved them but I don't know if they did or not. Any way Bradley Hall where I had my first piano studio, I was on the second floor, where I first taught. Then later of course the building on Washington Boulevard which was a residence, which they took over and that was the music building and also the art building. Then the other building on the corner was where the president lived.

D: I think that's the Admissions House.

M: Yeah, then they tore the other one down. So now the music is in Clarke Chapel. And of course the football field was in the center; that was a little field.