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Interview with Paulina Forwood, former Women's Residence Hall Director, on June 7, 1973, by Rebecca Button.

Q This is an interview with Mrs. Polly Forwood, who was one of the first residence directors for women of the university after the war. The interview is conducted by Rebecca Button. Polly, when did you come to Delaware as a staff member?

A As a staff member in 1948. Prior to that time the college had not used residence hall directors. Members of the faculty, the women's faculty, lived in the three dormitories which then existed. It was felt that there was definitely a need for residence hall directors. And at that time a Miss Amy Rextrew became Dean of Women. There were three residence hall directors at that first year. I was assigned to Sussex Hall, which was I think the newest, or the next to the newest, of the three. For that first year I continued to live in Sussex Hall, and during that time the organization of the relationship to residence hall directors became established. Things moved rather smoothly at that time because the faculty members who had resided there had been as efficient as it was possible to be. However, the students did notice a lack in the communication within the dormitory and contacts with the outside were also very limited. However, the need for space was vital. It was planned that we temporarily should use some old Army barracks on Academy Avenue. They had been abandoned by the World War II G.I.'s, and they were in very bad shape. However, it became absolutely necessary to use them. We fixed them up as well as possible, and moved one group of girls into one of those barracks at the last semester...the first semester of the year '49-'50. At that time, Dean Daugherty was in charge of housing on the campus, and he took a very dim view of the idea. As a matter of fact, I remember his walking out and saying, "The whole situation is yours. I have no responsibility for it." We realized that there were to be great problems ahead. The one which concerned me most immediately was confronting the parents who would bring these new students to the campus with these very rustic barracks in which their daughters would be expected to live. However, the parents did adjust very well. The girls more or less got a kick out of it. To some of them it reminded them of vacation they had spent on ranches--the rustic atmosphere in the buildings. They were very flimsy buildings, in the first case. One night I remember a girl running to my door, saying, "Mrs. Forwood, there's a man in our room in a car." I went down and sure enough he had come right through the wall of the building and was sitting in his car. He was one of the boys from the barracks next door making an attempt to park between the two buildings. The thing that amazed me was that this girl's roommate was still in her upper bunk asleep. Of course, Dean Daugherty's problem was more of a personnel problem. He doubted whether we could set up an establishment wherein girls lived in a barracks a few feet from the men in two other barracks. This turned out to be no problem at all. We cultivated the friendship of those boys. They were there to protect us, to help us out in difficulties, and they never presented any problem whatsoever to us, which I'm sure was a comfort to Dean Daugherty as it was to me. Our problems were mostly those of survival...seeing that we got heat, seeing that we got water, because the plumbing was very poor, seeing that things were repaired, and so forth. There were no closets in the rooms--there were simply hooks. There were no desks. There were simply boards which protruded from the wall on which they could write or keep their books or one thing or another, but no desks. The bathroom was one huge room with no privacy whatever. We did get some curtains strung up there finally. As time

J. Fenton

Street

went on, we adjusted to these problems as best we could, but results began showing. Finally at mid-year, the cumulative indices were shown. When we looked at this we saw that of the three temporary dormitories-- I should really say four, counting Hanover--the indices were as follows: Hanover ranked 19 on a list of 22 living groups; that included dormitories and fraternities. Its scholastic average was 2.19 as contrasted with the average for the entire university of 2.47. And this includes the other three freshmen dormitories for women. Those other three dormitories averaged 2.60, 2.44, and 2.30, leaving Hanover 2.19. This was sufficient to stir the interest of all of us who were concerned, and it was planned that we should take the matter before the legislature. In preparation for this, I wrote a letter to Dean Rextrow, telling of all of our problems, and Dean Rextrow attended a meeting of the legislature; I think Mrs. Frame also attended this.

Q Who was Mrs. Frame?

~~Clarence~~

A Mrs. Frame was Chairman of the Committee on Education for Women--I think the State Committee, it was called. She was interested, had been for many years, in bringing women to the university and in helping them in every way she could. This meeting took place shortly after the end of October in 1950, and it didn't take long for the legislature to realize that there was an imperative need, so the building of Smythe Hall began. That was to house about 300 women. The work was started on January 22 of '51. That sounds like a long time, but it took a long time to get all the interests together and make the financial arrangements and so forth. So that this building was built--I think it was the largest women's dormitory, probably is now, on campus--housing the 300 people. Finally, in 1953, Smythe was being finished, and we expected to move in there at any time, but there was a building strike, a steelworkers strike, which held things up for quite a while. And we again had to move the girls into the barracks, even though it was temporary. Shortly before Christmas we did move into Smythe Hall. Surprisingly enough, there were a lot of regrets from the girls, and we even noticed a few tears as they left those dilapidated old barracks. We had set up an organization before we moved whereby the dormitory was divided into three units in order to make less of an adjustment for the girls. It made about 100 girls to each unit. We had already provided assistants for me in the building, and we set up housekeeping shortly before Christmas. Of course, there were the usual finishing touches. Closets that did not work, electricity that did not work, and so forth. There was also an influx of visitors. We had people coming every day to see the new building. Naturally this meant that they must be conducted through the building, and it was very time-consuming. In fact, it was a very busy year. I remember one special occasion when Dr. Perkins, entertained the legislature. We had everything all polished up to the nth degree, and the building looked beautiful. The night before the legislature planned to arrive, one of the freshmen crossed the beautifully polished foyer with a bottle of polish remover in her hand, and dropped it on the floor, right inside the front door. As a matter of fact, outside the door of the men's restroom. We got down and tried to do what we could to pick it up, but it picked up the polish from the floor and made a stain right by the entrance to the building. However, we tried to overlook it. The men arrived in the afternoon and Dr. Perkins was there to welcome them. But before welcoming them, he went down to the men's room, and guess what he saw. Right away--he

never hesitated a minute, "What happened to the floor in the foyer?" However, he took it in his stride, and returned to receive the guests, and everything went off pretty well from then on. But it was a succession of people from all over the state who came to see this very fine and very large building in which we had housed our freshmen. We were manned by a corps of junior counselors and also the three assistants. So things went pretty well except that we did attract a lot of attention. It was shortly prior to the panty raid craze, and I think that some of the things that happened there were more or less a prelude to the panty raid spirit. One thing that happened was the fire alarm went off in the middle of the night. I knew that I hadn't put it off. My assistant hadn't put it off. So she went to one end of the dormitory and I to the other to see where the fire was. On my side I noticed that the fire drill working perfectly, the girls coming out with their coats and shoes and not making any disturbance, and I said, "Where is the fire?" They didn't know, but, "There's a duck down there." I went in pursuit of the duck, and sure enough there was a huge goose at the back entrance. It was soaking wet, flapping its wings and flapping water all over the basement floor. One of the boys had gone to a lake somewhere, gotten this huge goose, and in some way had gotten a key that belonged to one of the maids, and we had been hunting for that key for two or three days. They let the goose in the door, and immediately set off the fire alarm. Of course there's no use playing a trick if you don't have an audience, so they got the whole dorm down. And the goose was flapping around, and none of us had the courage to approach it, except the red setter dog which belonged to one of the fraternities was brave enough to attack the goose, and he came out with a lump on his head that I think he had as long as he lived. But it took three of the maintenance men to get that goose out of that building. That was just one of the evidences of the attention we attracted; whether or not we appreciated it...Miss Alice Smythe for whom the building was named was still living at the time of our opening, and she came and visited us one day. Of course we really looked forward to that and made a lot of preparation. I made a final inspection of the dorm at noon, and all the furniture from the third floor lounge--from the second floor lounge--was out on the sun deck. There was no furniture in the lounge, but it was all out on the sun deck, and it was indoor furniture. The girls had decided that they would make use of the sun and this nice spring day. So we had to hustle that furniture back in before Miss Alice Smythe arrived. But she was a lovely person and it was a great experience to have her see that dormitory while she still lived. At the end of three years in Smythe Hall, I decided that I would like a more quiet life for a while. So I moved into nice comfortable little New Castle Hall, where I stayed for I think about four years. After that time, as new dormitories were built, I moved several times and had the dubious pleasure of opening the new dorms. This went on until within my last four years on campus I moved into Warner Hall, where I had lived as a student, and that was really the greatest pleasure that I have experienced on campus, because Warner Hall always seemed the most beautiful of the women's dorms to me.

TAPE ENDS HERE.