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Interview with Margaret Williamson

Margaret Williamson

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LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview #065
WILLIAMSON, Margaret

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Undergraduate, Assistant Dean of University College

At Winthrop: 1972- 1976, 1980,

Interviewed: October 2, 2014

Interviewer: Rebecca Nave

Index by: Breion James

Length: 30 minutes

Abstract: In her October 2nd interview with Rebecca Nave, Margaret Williamson speaks of her time at Winthrop University during its transition into a coed institution. She talks of her involvement in various student organizations and athletics. She also talks of the changes in Winthrop, diversity wise, from when she was a student in 1974 to an employee at Winthrop today. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Winthrop University, Diversity, Student Life, Coeducation

Interview Session (October 2, 2014): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview*/Interviewer's Introduction

00:00:25 *Question:* When did you attend Winthrop? *Answer:* Undergraduate, 1972-1976

00:00:33 *Question:* Did you attend anything after undergraduate? *Answer:* Yes, got Master's at Winthrop in 1980.

00:00:39 *Question:* Why Winthrop? *Answer:* Senior English teacher was great and attended Winthrop. I wanted to go south to play golf because of the weather. I wanted to major in Communications and Winthrop had that major. I liked the campus and people when I did my college tour.

00:01:20 **[no question]** You studied communications. *Answer:* Yes

00:01:27 *Question:* What was your minor? *Answer:* Political Science

- 00:01:33 *Question:* Has the image of Winthrop changed since you studied here as an undergraduate? *Answer:* Yes, tremendously.
- 00:01:41 *Question:* What are the top things that changed? *Answer:* Coeducation and diversity
- 00:01:56 *Question:* When you mean diversity, what would say typically is the rule of thumb for the change? *Answer:* Mostly white females from South Carolina
- 00:02:10 **[no question]** Now you would say it's all over the board. *Answer:* Racially in terms of sexual orientation, gender identification, completely different institution
- 00:02:30 *Question:* Do you think that if it were this way you time here as an undergraduate, it would have been better? *Answer:* Probably
- 00:02:43 *Question:* What is your current role and Winthrop? *Answer:* Assistant Dean of University College. I work with undeclared majors, students who are on academic probation, and faculty and staff send emails in regards to students not coming to class, not turning in assignments, etc.
- 00:03:25 *Question:* Did you participate in any athletics on campus? *Answer:* Golf freshmen and senior year
- 00:03:46 *Question:* Did you play sports before and after coeducation? *Answer:* Golf was before, but wasn't affected by coeducation because it was an all female's golf team.
- 00:04:15 *Question:* Were you allowed to date on the weekends? *Answer:* I was too involved, we were all just friends.
- 00:04:50 *Question:* What were the dating rules and regulations at that time period? *Answer:* You had to stay in the lobby, sign out, and there were curfews. You had a house mother your freshmen year.
- 00:06:17 *Question:* Who was president of Winthrop when you attended? *Answer:* Charles Vail
- 00:06:24 *Question:* What was your impression of him? *Answer:* At that time enrollment was low and residence hall were needed to be closed. I had meetings with him and the impression I got was that he did what he needed to do.
- 00:07:30 *Question:* What would you say was his priority of it? *Answer:* I'm not sure how to answer that.
- 00:08:00 *Question:* What did it mean to you to be a student at the college at the time you were

- there especially with you being so involved? *Answer:* I loved Winthrop. I had a wonderful experience. When Winthrop became coed, I developed a lot of friendships with males. It was a big difference between the residence and commuters. Commuters weren't as involved with campus activities and organizations.
- 00:08:53 *Question:* How bad would you say enrollment had gotten during coeducation issue? *Answer:* It was really bad.
- 00:09:36 *Question:* How did you all decide which residence halls to close? *Answer:* It was based on numbers and to get everyone on one side of campus.
- 00:10:11 *Question:* What was the food like? *Answer:* It was cafeteria style.
- 00:10:25 *Question:* What was your stance on the coeducation issue? *Answer:* I was a realist. It was a practical solution that helped us stay alive.
- 00:10:39 *Question:* How did you feel about guys coming on to campus, and did the absence of males sway your decision to attend Winthrop? *Answer:* I don't remember choosing Winthrop because it was all females. I chose it because I liked the campus and the people. A lot of people were concerned about males being admitted because they felt standards would drop, and there would be a lot of change.
- 00:12:34 *Question:* How did the older generation feel about you being on campus with a bunch of guys? *Answer:* The decision to come to this college was purely my own and I don't remember my parents having an issue with me coming here.
- 00:13:25 *Question:* With your friends at Winthrop, were there any issues with men influencing their social lives? *Answer:* It surprised me of how many of my classmates went home on the weekends.
- 00:14:32 *Question:* Who did you feel to be the most important actors in opposition to coeducation and working in favor of coeducation? *Answer:* Lynda Loy, Class of 1974, who was student government president at the time. There were a lot of students against because they were worried about traditions. The board was in favor of.
- 00:17:09 *Question:* What was your experience with coeducation, its impact after it happened on enrollment? *Answer:* There weren't a lot of men that enrolled. There weren't any men sports so they came gradually.
- 00:18:05 *Question:* Do you remember when men's sports became a part of Winthrop. *Answer:* It was in the late 70's.
- 00:18:38 *Question:* From the time you graduated, from working in admissions, did you notice

an enrollment trend or diversity increase? *Answer:* Definitely, more gender than anything.

00:18:58 *Question:* Were there any impact on race? *Answer:* I'm sure there were but none that I know of. There certainly weren't any from a diversity stance.

00:19:36 *Question:* Were they accepted and were there any problems with black men and white women type of things? *Answer:* Not that I am aware of.

00:19:49 *Question:* What about the men's impact on the workforce? *Answer:* No real impact, there were male faculty members. Tom Web was Director of Student Activities.

00:20:28 *Question:* If men had not been here, do you feel as though your experience would have been impacted? *Answer:* I doubt that it would have changed the experience.

00:21:08 *Question:* Do you feel as though the college lost its conservatism, the way they dressed or their behavior? *Answer:* Some students started dressing better when the guys came.

00:21:50 *Question:* With the males coming, did they act less conservative or did things to get the males attention? *Answer:* There were some but not really.

00:23:00 *Question:* Do you have some speculation as to why it did take so long for coeducation at Winthrop? *Answer:* South Carolina is a very conservative state.

00:23:12 *Question:* Do you feel like its conservative in the way of gender? *Answer:* In every way. Back then families wanted places they could send their daughters and not have men around.

00:23:52 *Question:* Do you have any specific experience or memory that stuck with you after all this time about coeducation? *Answer:* Mike Ludey and Dale Gill were great guys and got involved in class activities.

00:24:22 *Question:* Was there ever a controversial event? *Answer:* No

00:24:31 *Question:* What would you say is the overall impact in how it influenced Winthrop today? *Answer:* Just the fact that we are a coed institution, it was inevitable and was going to have to happen.

00:25:15 *Question:* What do you think was the opening to the door of how diverse we are? *Answer:* After I graduated, things changed dramatically, classes went away, traditions changed and it was hard to see because we had enjoyed our experience so much. It became more of sports etc.

- 00:25:56 *Question:* On two sides of a scale to what you lost as far as tradition and gaining of men, would you say they balanced out or one greater than the other? *Answer:* I'm glad I was here when we had the traditions and classes.
- 00:26:36 *Question:* What was your favorite previous tradition that got lost? *Answer:* There were two classes' night and follies.
- 00:26:47 *Question:* What was that? *Answer:* Classes' night, you skits, make costumes, and write your skits to go with it. You would compete against the other classes. It was a big thing in Byrnes. Follies was just a big production the junior class did in the spring.
- 00:27:26 *Question:* During this time, were there any religious undertones or general rule, religiously? *Answer:* There were a lot of southern Baptist.
- 00:28:06 *Question:* Do you think that as a religious aspect, was that reflected directly in the traditions of your everyday life or did you have to go to Sunday Chapel? *Answer:* No
- 00:28:39 *Question:* As far as what you did for coeducation, did anybody have any opposition towards you and what you were doing? *Answer:* Not that I remember.
- 00:29:19 *No Question:* The greatest change you've seen here at Winthrop other than the diversity? *Answer:* The entire student body, obviously the buildings have changed, the academic programs, it's a very different institution.
- 00:29:40 *Question:* Do you think Winthrop does more for the community now? *Answer:* Yes, I would say that. The students are more involved in outreach to the community than we were.
- 00:29:55 *Question:* Why do you think that is? *Answer:* I think that it's because of a push from Winthrop, their beliefs and community service, service learning and that wasn't as big of deal back in the 70's.
- 00:30:12 *Question:* When do you think that change happened? *Answer:* It wasn't while I was here.
- 00:30:34 ***End of Interview***