



Macalester College Archives, DeWitt Wallace Library  
*Oral History Project*

**Interview with:** **Bill Flad**  
Class of 1936

**Date:** **Wednesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008**

Place: Bill Flad's home, St. Paul, Minnesota  
Interviewer: Kayla Burchuk, Class of 2010

Interview  
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**Interview with Bill Flad**

**Kayla Burchuk, Interviewer**

**July 23, 2008  
Macalester College  
DeWitt Wallace Library  
Harmon Room**

KB: My name is Kayla Burchuk and I am a current Macalester student, Class of 2010, conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today I am here in the house of George William Flad, a.k.a.—

BF: Junior.

KB: George William Flad, Junior.

BF: Junior, yeah... [laughter] That's where the William comes from.

KB: But you were known as Bill?

BF: Always.

KB: Always.

BF: My mother called my dad George, and she called me Bill, and that's stuck that way forever.

KB: Today's date is Wednesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008, and Bill Flad is Class of 1936 but he really spent more time with the class of '35. We are here at his home in Saint Paul on Highland Avenue, and we're going to begin our interview—

BF: Parkway.

KB: Parkway? Oh, Highland Parkway! I'm sorry, I didn't... [laughter]

BF: See the boulevard out in front, that's a parkway [laughter].

KB: So, just to begin, if you could tell me the year you were born, where you were born, and where you grew up, and then what year you came to Macalester.

BF: Okay, I was born in 1913. I was raised in Saint Paul in three different houses: 1007 Linwood, 950 St. Clair, and I went to Macalester in, what? '31... '31, I think. 1931. I graduated from—see, I was still seventeen years old when I went out there. I was younger than everybody else. My mother stuck me in school ahead of time. Of course, my sister went to Macalester for two years prior to the time I did, and my younger sister went four years after me. And the little one, my baby sister, went four years after that. So the whole family went there; so you wonder why I got there, how I got there, or why? It was just, folks said, "That's where you're going to go." Dad says, "You're going to go to college." Dad never made the eighth grade. Dad started out working when he was that young that he never got through the eighth

grade. He trained himself and did a lot of work to take care of everything, but he never got through the eighth grade, so he insisted that I go to college. I did not want to go. [unclear] Okay, you got that? Is that enough?

[02:34]

KB: Yeah, that's great. Growing up in the area, what did people think of Macalester? What was your idea of what Macalester was like before you came?

BF: I went to the House of Hope Presbyterian Church, Macalester was associated with that because of the founder and so it was just a natural thing. I didn't have any opinion at all other than the fact that it was a religious school.

KB: Right. And you talked a little bit about this before, but what was the application process like?

BF: Well, there was nothing to it [laughter]. I got in my car and I—by the way, when I went to Central High School I was the only person there that had a car. I parked it in front of the high school on the steps and walked right down, [laughter] no other cars bothered me! So I had a car to go to Macalester and when I went to Macalester I drove up, walked in, registered, paid them... Oh, just set everything up, the program up, which somebody sort of dictated to me, told me this is what I need to take. And of course it was just a Bachelor of Arts degree, not science or anything else, just Bachelor of Arts. So we just walked in, signed, went home, got the money from the folks, when I went to class I just brought them the money—\$90.

KB: [laughter] Wow... When you first set foot on campus in the early thirties how was the campus different than it is today?

BF: Well, there were only about four or five buildings on the campus. There was Wallace Hall, the girls' dorm; there was Kirk Hall, the men's dorm; there was the gym, which had a good basketball court and a circle around the top that you could stand and watch the basketball games, and had a nice swimming pool, which we spent a lot of time playing in; and Old Main and the Science Building [Carnegie Hall]. That's all there was.

KB: What did you think of the students when you first came to Macalester?

BF: I don't really have any idea. I don't remember anything particularly about it, except that four of us did get together: Walt **Petri [sp?]**, Johnny **McKnight [sp?]**, and Dick Smith, and myself. And we spent—almost all classes were the same, and everything we did was pretty much together. We cut class, we went out and played golf [laughter], we were in the pool swimming, playing tag, doing something constantly.

[05:32]

KB: What did you think of the professors?

BF: I don't really know how to answer that. They were there and I was there to listen to them and I did, that's about all. I didn't really have any idea about them. Of course, Dean Jones was a

really fine guy, he was in the Chemistry Department, and... I don't know what to say about the rest of them.

KB: Are there any other faculty members in particular who you liked or—

BF: Well, Miss May taught Religion, which you had to have. And then you had to go to Chapel, and you had a seat in Chapel and if you did not sit in that seat they marked you absent.

Somebody took role everyday in Chapel and you had to go. There were—the German teacher, [laughter] she and I just didn't get along because I didn't do the work. So the next time I went back I told her I had to have that "A" and did that class over again and got along pretty good.

[laughter] But, I don't know... Ethics teacher, I couldn't understand him at all...

KB: Do you remember anything about President Acheson or Acheson [pronounced differently]?

I'm not sure how you say that?

BF: Acheson?

KB: Yeah, Acheson. What was he like?

BF: Can't really answer that. Didn't really have anything to do with him, other than the fact that he was president.

KB: He wasn't around much?

BF: No. Years later I sold cars to...ah, now that mind won't let me say that name... Doctor ...hmm, can't say it. But I used to give him a new car every year for \$350. A new car, every year, for \$350. Because we got some money back from the excise tax and stuff back from the factory, and some of the—he could only drive it for use for the school because it was a school use. So he got that money back from them, so actually we could trade him that car for just practically nothing. Gave him a new car every year for \$350 bucks, which worked out nicely for him and for us.

KB: Were most students from St. Paul or close to the college? Did people come from far away then?

BF: There were probably—you know, there was an Off-Campus Club, and that was in the basement of Kirk Hall on Lincoln. Lincoln went straight through, all the way through, and you could drive right down Lincoln and drive right straight through and go out in front of the Old Main and right out through the whole campus. And that was always open, and I used to park my car in front of the Off-Campus Club, which was in front of Kirk Hall on Lincoln. And the Off-Campus Club, probably there were fifty people in there out of the class. So that meant that half of the students were off-campus, and the other half were on-campus of that class, of that group. Well, maybe that isn't quite right either because there was more than one class in there...well, I don't know, but anyways there were a lot of people that were off-campus who went to school there. In fact, almost all those guys on that hockey team are off-campus.

[9:26]

KB: What did people do at the Off-Campus Club?

BF: Probably everything that we shouldn't be doing [laughter]; played cards, we brought our lunch and put it in there, and then went to class and at noon we'd come back and eat lunch there, and played a lot of cards, stuff like that. Not for money, nobody had any money. In fact, I think I had more money than most kids had because I had a lot of help in getting it. I would buy and sell used cars. I would buy a couple of cars the same year and they probably wouldn't run and I'd put them back together and sell one. I know one that I did, I worked a long time on, a couple of Oaklands, which is long gone. But anyways, I had those two cars and I put them together and sold them and I got eight bucks for all my work, [laughter] which was ridiculous...oh well. But I made some good money, too. I bought a seven-passenger Packard from Kemper [sp?], who used to sit out in front of his business on 7<sup>th</sup> Street and I would go up and sit there with him and try to get that car at my price. And after about a month or two I got it at my price, he had it long enough [laughter]. Took it home, put a new top on it, cleaned it all up, sold it, sold it to [unclear] in Stillwater, as a funeral director, made a ton of money, [laughter] a ton of money—for me. Probably four hundred bucks or something like that, which was a lot of money at that time. That took care of my tuition. The last year, you know, I didn't graduate with the class, I had to go back. So that last year I went back and Dad said, "Well," he said, "I paid for it for four years; you gotta pay for it yourself now." So I paid for that, that last year, which was a big deal—\$220 for the whole year. Where are we now?



KB: I was going to ask you about how many kids lived in campus. Did you spend any time in the dorms in Kirk at all?

BF: No, no, I didn't.

KB: Because you never lived in Kirk.

BF: No. In fact, I probably was only in there once or twice for somebody to ask something. I don't remember...and of course you couldn't get into Wallace Hall. Nu-uh. [laughter]. No guys allowed in there at all! In fact, Marge Schaeffer [sp?], Marge...I can't remember her name, but she married **Bim Schaeffer [sp?]**, he lived in the dorm. And one night they were out doing a scavenging hunt and he knew where something was in the dorm when they went in there and on the way out, Ed **Kepky [sp?]** caught him coming out and reported him, and they kicked him out of school. They did not kick Marge out, but they kicked him out of school, but Marge told me this whole story later on, after the night. Then the most peculiar part about that, Ed **Kepky [sp?]** went to work as an accountant for FOKs ([unclear] and Kirk). **Bim Schaeffer [sp?]** was the president, he worked for him! [laughter] Which is a real turn-around. Isn't that terrible? Poor guy kicked him out of school and now he's got to work for him. [laughter] So I don't know anybody in the dorm really except the people that were in class with me, but I wasn't in the dorm, didn't go through that. However, the Off-Campus Club put on the first dance that was ever held at Macalester College, they would not allow any dancing in the school. But on this fall, we applied for it and got permission—from Acheson, I suppose [laughter]—to have the first dance. So we went in there and we went to some farm down here and cut down a tree and stuck

it right in the middle of the gym [unclear] and tied leaves all across the top of that gym to cover it up so it was no longer—it was just like out in the forest [laughter]. And we had a great big yellow sign up here with a moon with a light behind it, and we came in [laughter] the people who were being chaperons said, “Nuh-uh, we’re turning on the lights.” We said, “Come on, we got this all set up!” They still turned on the lights. I was in charge of getting a band, and I got a girl to go with me because I didn’t know anything about music, I still don’t, and she picked out the music, but she didn’t go to Macalester so she didn’t get to go to the dance [laughter]. Terrible.

[14:43]

KB: Wow...it sounds like Macalester used to be very strict.

BF: Oh terribly strict, terribly strict. You couldn’t...what goes on now is just not possible, just not possible.

KB: Was there any dating allowed on campus?

BF: Oh yes, oh lots of it! A lot of guys dated, sure, sure, a lot of them. Evie and her roommate always double-dated with us, her friend... and I would pick them at school and we’d go out to a lot of places, did a lot of things...yeah...

KB: Interesting. What activities were popular?

BF: I don't know. There were societies up there, of course; there were not several of them. Evie belonged to a different one, the girls had one, the boys had a couple, and I can't remember the name of them—

KB: In the yearbook it said you were part—

BF: Eulogian.

KB: Yeah, Eulogian. Do you remember that?

BF: Sure I remember that, but we didn't really do anything.

KB: Was it just like a fraternity, what was it?

BF: It was just a group of guys that got together and I tell you for what they did, was nothing. It was a big disappointment! I thought it was going to be something fun! [laughter] It didn't amount to very much and neither did the other one that Dick Smith belonged to.

KB: Do you remember anything about, at that time was there Homecoming or Snow Week or anything like that?

BF: There was Homecoming. In fact, four of us got together in my old Packard Touring car with the top down and each of us had a gallon of gasoline in a paint can, full, in a paint can so

that you could dump it instantly. And the four of us got out at Hamline and threw each a bucket of gasoline on their Homecoming fire, and they lit it, and by the time they lit that thing I couldn't light mine, it was already lit [laughter]. So we went back and jumped in the car and went back and nobody ever knew what happened. Dick Smith was kind of in charge of everything and the Dean got a hold of Dick and talked to him about it and Dick didn't know a thing about it, but he was there [laughter]. So we never got caught, but the rest of the kids from the dorm went over to burn the thing and they really got in trouble. They put paint on the sides of their cars and everything, they really got in trouble, but we were home sleeping by that time.

[17:47]

KB: What did people like to do on the weekends?

BF: Well, I don't know, I was home and not there.

KB: Did most people who lived off-campus live with their families?

BF: Sure, sure. Probably all of them did. So they all went home and although we got together and went to the lake or out someplace and swam or something like that, but the people that were on campus, I have no idea what they did.

KB: How big were classes? For example, like a science class, how big would that be?

BF: I would say that every seat was filled and probably thirty, thirty in a class, something like that. There weren't so many professors as they have now, you know, and they only had one class for each thing that you were taking, each subject you took there was only one class. And some of those were four times a week and some were three times a week and whatever.

KB: What were graduation requirements? Were there any required courses?

BF: You had to have a major. I had a major in Chemistry, Math, and Physics. I had enough credits in each one for a major. And then you had to have a minor, which of course would be German, or English, or History, or some darn thing. And I don't remember what my minor was but I do remember I had a lot of majors. But you had to have, sure, you had to have so many credits and you had to have at least one honor point for each credit, and I was short honor points, which is the way—that's why I didn't graduate. I had enough credits to graduate but not enough honor points.

[19:44]

KB: And were all the sciences classes held in the Carnegie Science Hall?

BF: Yes, there was Biology, Physics, and Chemistry, and Math, all in the Science Hall. Old Main had German, Religion...gosh, I don't know what else. I can't remember.

KB: Were religion courses required?

BF: Oh absolutely, you had to take Religion. Had to take Religion, had to take some English or German or something like that, had to take German—some other class.

KB: Was physical education required?

BF: Don't know, don't really remember that. Can't answer, I don't know whether we had to take physical ed or not... I'd always spend a lot of time in the gym swimming and stuff like that.

KB: What activities were you specifically involved with on campus?

BF: None, other than hockey.

KB: Oh. What was hockey like?

BF: Well, we had a good hockey team, we had a good hockey team. It was a good hockey team when I started and—until Devans, he's the last guy in that picture there, he's on that end, he was trying to be goalie along with me and he—the puck would be over there and the guy would dive right out straight at it like that and everybody thought he was going to get his head cut off with somebody's skates, but he never did. And of course we had no helmet, we had no mask; we had no helmet or any mask, all we had was pads on your shins and big gloves. And I invented the fact that I would take a baseball... from the baseball team and use that chest protector from that and then I also invented getting a garter belt to hold my socks up. Because I had three sisters, and they had garter belts! [laughter] So I used the garter belt to hook up my socks and my socks

would stay up and I could put the pants on [laughter] and I was pretty well organized. But nobody else had them. [laughter] But we had a good team, every year we had a good team. We were very close to being the best in every year that I was there. I've got three letters, I think...yeah, three letters, I had three stripes on my arm, my sweater.

KB: What schools did you guys play?

BF: Mankato, St. Cloud, Hamline, St. Thomas...Northfield? I don't know...yeah, Augsburg, I guess. Augsburg? Yeah. Augsburg, that was the state and that was just the champion of those few state schools is what we were. We weren't champion of the world or anything.

[23:16]

KB: Did you have a specific rival school?

BF: Well, of course, Hamline was always the biggest rival. But then St. Thomas had a good hockey team and St. Cloud did, too. And we would go up there and they would come down here, we would go back forth. St. Olaf would be in [unclear] Mankato, wouldn't it? Yeah. St. Olaf, that was another one of them.

KB: Who was the hockey coach?

BF: I got his picture but I can't tell you his name.

KB: Oh, that's alright.

BF: I can't say his name...

KB: Don't worry about it.

BF: But originally...who was the old gym—ran the gym for years? He's in those pictures that you gave me.

KB: I don't know his name...he was like an athletic director maybe?

BF: Yes, he was in charge of everything.

KB: Was he also the hockey coach?

BF: He was at the beginning. Then they hired this guy on this picture here, and I can't say his name either. [pause] See, the old memory is not as good as it ought to be.

KB: It's impressive though. Were athletics popular in the 1930s on campus?

BF: Did anybody come to watch it? No. We played hockey out on the rink down there and practiced down there and played hockey and nobody came to watch. Well, maybe four or five people would—the guys that were playing had a girlfriend [laughter]. But nobody came to



watch. The same with football, although I went to some football games. They were not just jammed, the stands were not just jammed, they had a lot of vacant seats for football. Basketball we used to stand around the top of the track up there in the old gym. You don't remember that do you?

KB: I saw it once before it got torn down.

BF: Did you? You weren't inside of it, huh?

KB: A little bit, but no.

BF: Well, there was a ring all around the top and there was a track, you could run on that track. And it was cork too, it was a real nice thing, but you could stand up there and watch the basketball game and it was a good place, you could see everything going on. I went to a lot of basketball games, probably because Evie liked basketball. Evie was five foot, she said two, but I doubt it. And she had the champions of the school, high school that she was in, the group that she was in, they were champions. She's five foot two, you know, how'd she get along today? [laughter] But there's that picture on the wall in there of that basketball team. I don't know, I don't think anybody paid much attention to the guys who were playing. We thought we were doing a good job, but I don't think anybody really were worried too much about it.

[26:33]

KB: One thing I wanted to ask you about is what was freshman initiation?

BF: I don't remember any—

KB: Oh, because there's some stuff in the records about, I wasn't sure...

BF: There is? However, there was initiation for the M Club. You carried around in your back pocket a paddle with "M" on it, like that, with a handle on it. And any other club member could tell you to bend over and take your paddle and paddle your butt! [laughter] Which was not very comfortable at times.

KB: What exactly was the M Club again?

BF: The M Club was the athletic club. You were an M Club member when you got a letter. So the first letter I got I had to carry that paddle around with me, so did Dick Smith [laughter] and Walt Petri [sp?], we all carried our paddles. The three of us got our butts paddled every once and awhile.

KB: Do you remember anything about pushball?

BF: No, there wasn't any. I can't remember anything about that, but there was no pushball.

KB: How did the Great Depression affect life at Macalester?

BF: I really don't know, I always had a little money. Not much, but I always had enough for gas. Of course gas, you could buy gas for eleven cents a gallon if you bought Stanolene [sp?], otherwise it was about twenty...something like that for probably regular. And in that old Packard, if I put Stanolene in it, it knocked to beat the dickens. I had start it very quietly in slow gear just to get going, otherwise it'd just pound those pistons something terrible, so I didn't use much of it. But when I was broke I used Stanolene, standard oil blue, it was blue gas. But, the Depression, I can't tell you how it affected the people up there, but everybody made their own fun. You didn't go out and buy anything because you didn't have any money to. And with the other kids that were there, I think Johnny McKnight [sp?], I'm sure that he was very hard-pressed, and Walt Petri lived with his mother, so he was pretty hard-pressed for money. Dick Smith, his dad was a minister so I don't suppose they had a lot of money, but the four of us went where we wanted to, just about. Made our own fun though, we'd go swimming, play golf, stuff like that.

KB: What was the neighborhood around the college like? What businesses, for example, did students like to go to?

BF: Well, there was a beer joint over on Grand Avenue just east of Snelling and the guys used to go over there and they would get the alcohol out of the chem lab, and the alcohol out of the chem lab was ninety-five percent, which meant it was a hundred and ninety proof. It was all alcohol. And they'd take that deer beer or that stuff and they'd take a little sip out of it and fill that neck up again and then go back and forth like that and drink it. Now I didn't because I couldn't stand beer to start with and I never drank alcohol, it was just not in me—I had a car and I always was

driving and I never, never drank when I was...at that time, I didn't. A little later I did [laughter]. So...but Rudy drank that stuff and he really got in bad shape. They found him in the dorm one night, laying in the bathroom and nobody did anything about it, but he did come through finally. He was passed out when I got there. But that was the other thing that was wrong, is that they would take that alcohol out of the lab. There were a lot of people that offered me money to bring them that alcohol out of the lab, I wouldn't do it. I just thought it was going to hurt somebody, which it does. One of my biggest problems is alcohol. I had fifty employees down at **Cherry** **[unclear]** Brothers Motor Car Company and that was the big problem, is to get the guys to take the money home instead of going over to Brass Rail and drinking and stuff like that. That was the biggest problem I had. So where are we? About done?

[31:41]

KB: Yeah, are there are more, you know, specific students, faculty members, administration members or any stories that you want to tell? That just come to mind?

BF: Didn't I just tell you about everything? [laughter]

KB: Yeah, pretty much.

BF: I thought I told you everything.

KB: Let's see. Well, I have kind of a—you don't have to answer this if it's personal, but, when you were a student at Mac, how do you think other people thought of you? Like what was your reputation on campus?

BF: Well, little lady, I had the car and any girl I asked to go out with me would be glad to because she didn't have to ride the bus or the streetcar or have to walk to the movie. I had a car! And I would take 'em. And if we went to Minneapolis or something to some show or something over there we parked at the **Daytons [unclear]**, and the guy didn't start my car because I went up to start it myself because it had to be cranked! The battery wasn't good enough to keep it going, so I had to go up and start my own car. But I had a car. It had side curtains on it and it had a hole in the side here that you put your arm out to signal, no signal lights, of course. And no heater, so I had an old blanket that I used to put over the girl's legs and stick it up [laughter] towards that little heater that came along the **manifold, a little aircaid launderer [unclear]**, so she was not comfortable, but she was not bad off. Colder than a son of a gun...

KB: Did many students have cars or just you?

BF: There were...I don't know, there were maybe two or three. None ever parked at Wallace Hall and there may have been one or two back at the Old Main that used to park back there, but that, that's about it. There were not many people had cars, not like today. Do you know Kristin Riegel?

KB: Yeah, I do actually!

BF: She is my sister's granddaughter.

KB: Oh, okay, yeah.

BF: I'm her mother's uncle.

KB: Yeah, she's in my grade.

BF: She's very, very ambitious. Does a lot of stuff. Like you, she's doing all kinds of stuff. Goes down to the church and takes care of the kids while their parents are in, different things.

[34:11]

KB: I was going to ask you, did you attend your graduation ceremony?

BF: Yes. My father said, "Come to work." And I said, "No, after all of this I'm going to at least graduate." [laughter] And I did, but the next day I was down working.

KB: What was the ceremony like.

BF: [pause] Eh...it was nothing that you would have kept in your mind the rest of your life.

Some guy got up and talked, [laughter] you know, and you walked up there and got your

diploma and walked off, but at least you had your cap and gown and looked like you cared about it a little bit. As long as I had to pay for it I was going to at least graduate.

KB: Over the years, after you graduated, did you keep in touch with a lot of your friends from school?

BF: Yes, yes the four of us did a lot of stuff together... Yep, the four of us were pretty close. In fact, Johnny McKnight, which is the last one that died, and he... I used to go out and take him and his wife out to eat. Even after Evie died, I'd go out and take them out to eat at least once a month or something like that, just to keep in touch with them. I went back and saw Happy...her name is Gladys Simmons, and Johnny McKnight married Gladys Simmons and I nicknamed her Happy, or Happy [unclear], Glad...[laughter] Couldn't quite finish that, could I? But you got the point.

KB: Yeah, I get the joke.

BF: So, I named her Happy, and she just stuck [laughter]. Johnny always called her Happy, everybody did.

KB: Have you visited Macalester recently?

BF: Yes, I was at the Fifty Year Reunion.

KB: Oh, what did you think?

BF: Fine. I...I was the oldest guy there, although I take my sister Betty, Betty Tiffany who was Betty Flad when she was up there. But I take her, I pick her up and do the best I can for her. She has a little dementia, and I pick her up and take her up to those things. She has more money than I got though [laughter], lots more, fifty times more.

KB: What was reunion like?

BF: You mean up there, fifty year?

KB: Mmhmm.

BF: Well, I'm seventy years and everybody, these new fifty year people come in and they walk up and get their badge and name thing. And everybody else has got a great big name thing over like this, you know, and a big brown badge like that—I got a little round thing like that that says fifty years on it. Just put it in my lapel, it's about that big [laughter]. But it's okay, it's what they gave at that time. But all those people that are fifty years, out of school for fifty years come up and get a thing, and president shakes their hand and they go sit down. Then we all go over and eat at a luncheon which we pay for.

KB: Does anyone from your class ever come to those?



BF: They're all gone. Whose left? There are some people from '35 and '36, but I don't imagine they're walking around, most of them are in some home someplace, don't you think?

KB: Yeah... Looking back, do you think Macalester influenced you in your life?

BF: Oh yeah, oh definitely. You know, being a college graduate has a certain air about it that people think you're better than you really are, I think. Don't they? Don't you think that's true? They think you know more than you do. And I don't really feel that way, 'cause I went to school 'cause I had to.

KB: That's interesting... Well, I think that we're at the end of the questions, so if there's anything else that you'd like to say, to get on the historical record?

BF: I don't think so, I think you've covered everything.

KB: Okay, great, well, thank you so much. Bill, this was wonderful, we really appreciate your contribution.

BF: Well, I hope it does you some good.

KB: Oh, I think it will.

BF: A lot of it's interesting, but just to me. Most of it is just interesting to me.

KB: No! Very interesting to me too. Thank you again.

End of interview [39:08]