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"Heirs of Vision, Devotion, and Sacrifice"

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Macalester College Archives
Audio Reel #144
Founders Day Heirs of Vision, Devotion, and Sacrifice

[00:00]

Dr. Kagin is going to speak to us on this Founders' Day on the subject, "Heirs of vision, devotion, and sacrifice." Dr. Edwin Kagin.

[00:22]

[Applause]

[00:42]

EK: Mr. President, townsmen, faculty members, students, friends, and perchance those who may hear this broadcast this afternoon, Macalester alumni, greetings and good wishes from your alma mater. Thank you Dr. Rice for those, what shall I say, fine words. Some little fiction mixed up with it, but nevertheless appreciated. And one of the fine things in life is to be able to come back and address a student convocation such as this. It's about thirty-five years now since I attended Macalester College, and Macalester College is twined around my heart. I can truly sing "Dear Old Macalester." Dr. Rice and I should have gotten together before I got up here because he made part of my speech.

[02:08]

[Laughter] It was on March the 12th, which was Dr. Wallace's birthday, 1938 [laughter] when he was thirty-nine—eighty-nine years of age, we met here in this gymnasium and had a great

banquet. It was Grace D. Whitridge who had suggested the idea of Founders' Day, and the purpose was to refresh our minds and warm our hearts once more as we thought of the men and the women who had poured their lifeblood into Macalester College. We especially wanted to honor Dr. James Wallace while he was still living with us. We had a pipe band. They marched in with a cake with fellows dressed in Scottish garments. The former president's wife cut the cake. Dr. Wallace paid a tribute to Edward Duffield Neill, and I had the honor of paying a tribute to Dr. James Wallace. Now as you look back over Macalester College's history, there are two men that stand out above everybody else in the past of the college. The first is Edward Duffield Neill, and the second, Dr. James Wallace. Now Dr. Dupre has written a very painstaking account of Edward Duffield Neill as a pioneer educator. If you haven't read that book, I urge you to get it and read it and learn something of the background of Macalester College. At fourteen years of age he entered the University of Pennsylvania, transferred to Amherst College and graduated at the age of eighteen. He felt the call of the ministry and attended Andover College for a year, felt he was too young yet to go into the ministry, and went to go teaching in Virginia and then resigned his post in protest against the opposition that was developing in the town against the Methodist minister who preached against slavery.

[04:51]

Neill came to Saint Paul in April 1849, in the vanguard of a great flood of settlers that were moving into the new state or the new territory that had been created by Congress that spring. He found Saint Paul a small village crowded with new settlers, all the hotels and boarding houses were crowded. People were sleeping on the bare floors. The saloon keeper in town had a homemade bed on which he had spread a buffalo robe and he invited Edward Duffield Neill the

minister to share his bed with him. Now Edward Duffield Neill didn't have any belief in the saloon business, but he gladly accepted the hospitality of the saloonist and became his bed fellow for a period of time. And then he left for a while to go to the General Assembly and returned with his wife, Nancy Hall. Nancy had heard that Saint Paul was a dusty, dirty town, and when she got off the steamer and stepped on the shores of the Mississippi River, she came armed with a broom. She was gonna make war on dust and dirt. When she went up the hill and looked around, she said to the captain of the steamboat, "Take me back down the river again. The place is too dirty." But she stuck it out and Edward Duffield Neill built for her a brick residence which was the first brick house in the State of Minnesota. Neill was a man of enthusiasm and a dynamo of energy. He was in every good work that was being carried out in the town of Saint Paul and in the territory of Minnesota. He joined the volunteer fire department to help pull the fire truck and help pump the fire truck in the early days of extinguishing fires. He built the first church in town. The first Presbyterian church which stood about where the new where the public library stands now, facing Rice Square. The church burned down and the next spring he built a brick church which was a lovely colonial type church, situated where the women's exchange building is today in Saint Paul. When he came here he found a fellow alumnus of [Amherst?], Goodhue, setting up a printing press and getting ready to put out his first issue of the *Minnesota Pioneer*. He helped him do that. He opened the first legislature by offering prayer. In 1851, the legislature set up a public school superintendent office and Edward D. Neill was elected the first public school superintendent in the territory of Minnesota. He organized the public school system with university [unclear] and made provision for a Board of Regents who would be

responsible for the government of the university. And the Board of Regents elected Edward Duffield Neill as the first Chancellor of the university.

[08:57]

In spite of the fact that he was so closely tied up with public school education, Edward Duffield Neill felt that [there] should also be established a Christian college. A college—he felt that a perpetuity of the nation depended upon the character of the people as well as upon the education of the people. And so in 1853, as Dr. Rice has told you, he secured the first charter of a Christian school in the territory of Minnesota...Minnesota from the state legislature. And he called it the Baldwin School. First year it was attended largely by girls. The next year he founded Saint Paul College on a beautiful site down on Wilkins Street on a bluff overlooking the wide expanse of the Minnesota River. The College of Saint Paul for Men. And then in 1857 came with [the] terrific depression—someone said there wasn't one business house that stood after that depression. Everyone went to the war. And then[1861] when Fort Sumter was fired upon, and Alexander Ramsey, Edward Neill's close friend, Governor of Minnesota was in Washington, and he went to the Secretary of War with the offer of a regiment of soldiers from Minnesota to help preserve the Union. A patriotic wave swept over Minnesota, and Edward Duffield Neill, being a fervent patriot, was one of the volunteers who became the chaplain of that First Minnesota Regiment. He was in the Battle of Bull Run and he fled along with the rest of the troops, too. And he was in the Battle of Fair Oaks and Malvern Hill. He was about thirty-nine years old, and he was getting along in years for a man to be tramping around with an army. And then he took the chaplaincy of a military hospital in Philadelphia and he became one of the staff of Lincoln secretaries in the White House. He had an office in the White House. His

duty was to open all mail and to send it to the proper bureau where the business would be attended to. On the day that Lincoln was shot, Edward Duffield Neill went into his office and talked to him for a while of business matters. Mrs. Lincoln sent and asked him if he had tickets for the play *The Country Cousin* at the Ford Theater that night. No tickets had been sent him so he set out then for tickets for that play. And that night Lincoln was shot. Lincoln went on... Neill went on to his home in the suburbs. The next morning, he heard that Lincoln had been shot. He tried to get into the city. All the roads were blocked, but there was a single engine going into the city and he got permission to ride on the cowcatcher. And so he rode into Washington on the cowcatcher of an engine to the White House. And then when President Johnson took over, he told him to inform Mrs. Lincoln that she did not need to leave the White House right away and he called in Robert Lincoln and gave him the good news.

[12:54]

Well, while he was there, he was still thinking of Macalester College, and in the year of 1864 he got the consent of M.W. Baldwin, who was the president of the great locomotive works in Philadelphia, to expand the idea of the college into a great university. The charter then was changed of Macala...of Winslow, not Winslow, but what am I trying to say...Baldwin School. Baldwin School was now changed to Baldwin University and Saint Paul College was taken into the corporation, its obligations assumed, and its assets taken over. [Neill] was gone from Saint Paul for ten years. He heard of the death of Albert Barnes his pastor who was one of those who had helped in the founding of his schools. Baldwin died, left no money for the university. [Neill's] dream had collapsed, but he was still determined to found a college for Christian youth in the State of Minnesota. And in 1871 he was back here again; he found Baldwin School and

Saint Paul College had been sold, part of the money that had been invested was lost. He rented the Winslow House, which was a magnificent hotel over on the east side of St. Anthony Falls, a magnificent site for a college, and he opened up what he called Jesus College, as an adjunct of the university. And then when things were not going very well, he was losing his money, he turned to Charles Macalester. By the way, the committee had quite a feast in preparation for you this morning. We had asked DeWitt Wallace to be the speaker on this Founders' Day and I'm the pinch hitter. Well, I got a letter from DeWitt Wallace the other day in which he enclosed a letter from ambassador...[sounds of paper rustling] an ambassador friend of his who was Ambassador to Russia for a while...[paper rustling] Ambassador William Bullitt, who included an excerpt from a book that Bullitt's great-grandfather had written. And in that he tells of the character of that great man who lived in Philadelphia called Charles Macalester.

[15:55]

A great banker, the director the United States Bank, a wealthy millionaire, great philanthropist, and a man of great religious convictions. And so Neill persuaded Macalester to give up Winslow House. And he did with the condition that twenty-five thousand dollars be raised as an endowment fund for the president's salary. Neill did a thing that lost him prestige among the Presbyterian people: he joined the reformed Episcopal Church. [laughter] Now he did it he did it with the very noblest of intentions. While he was in Dublin, Ireland as Consul, he conceived the idea of the church of the future. The Protestant Church which... into which all the Protestant groups might come and unify, and where they would use a common ritual in worship. And so he joined this reformed Episcopal Church and was a clergyman there for sixty years. But it lost him his constituency. He couldn't get students and he couldn't get money. In 1880, the Presbyterian

Synod was about to establish a college, and the friends of Macalester urged that Macalester be adopted as the college of [the] Synod. And so the Synod agreed to cooperate with the trustees of Macalester College in speedily endowing it and calling it to the attention of the churches of the state for its support.

[18:01]

No students, no money, and then finally in 1885, after they had raised enough money to pay for the salary of a minister, preacher, president of the college, they called in T. A. McCurdy, the pastor the Presbyterian church near Wooster College. And when he came to Saint Paul in the fall of 1884, he found a brick building standing alone in a corn field. That was Macalester College. Three story, four story perhaps if you want to call it that. Building, no furniture, no endowment fund, no faculty, no post office, no streetcar, no nothing. At first he refused to consider the proposition, and then he decided that he would accept. And he came then and he tried to raise an endowment fund and failed. They had promised to open the college in September of 1885, and they felt that they would have to keep their promise. He gathered together a faculty of mature men, paid them a good salary for those days and gave them a residence. And the college, on September the 16th, 1885, opened with six freshmen and thirty six preparatory students and the preparatory school was called the Baldwin School.

[19:55]

Edward Duffield Neill came over as a senior professor—a Professor of Literature and a Professor of Political Science, and then later on as a Professor of History. In his old age he was embittered, disillusioned, disappointed. The college he had established as a men's college after the pattern of Amherst, had become a co-education institution. He refused to see young women

in his classes and when the president of the college at that time, A. W. Ringland, went to call on him and plead with him to return and take up his work. Soon after Dr. Ringland left, Edward Duffield Neill collapsed of a heart attack and died. But he leaves behind several great mementos of his career. Behind me is the enlargement of the seal of Macalester College—the product of the brain of Edward Duffield Neill. The vision this man had of Macalester College and its task in the world. The woman on my right with a telescope in her hand and the compass at her feet symbolizes natural science, the investigation of the world in which we live. The sky that's all above us. Neill said we accept every fact that's fairly proved. Over on my left sits a woman modestly clad with a book in her lap reading the word of God and then engaging in friendly discussion with her twin sister, the woman that represents science. And so Neill said that natural science and revealed religion are heavenly twins. They have no quarrel, they work together for the building of a new world. Friends of Neill in Philadelphia sent out a bell and that bell was to be used for Baldwin School and Saint Paul College. It was hoisted in the cupola of Saint Paul College, and it called the students to their classes. And later on he offered it to the city of Saint Paul as a fire bell and it was put on a platform at the fire station near where the post office is now, the old post office. And there it called the volunteer firemen to fight the fires in the city. Then when the new House of Hope was built on Fifth and Exchange, a fine stone building—Neill had founded the House of Hope—as one of the churches he had founded, the bell was raised in that cupola, the steeple of the church, and it called people to worship. Then when that building was torn down about 1915, the bell was brought out to the Macalester campus, put into one of the closets in the basement of [the] science hall and there rested for

fifteen years until the Classes of 1927 and '28 had a little cupola bell tower built in front of the library and there the bell hangs today.

[24:08]

One of the oldest things in Saint Paul. And as you pass by that bell, remember that it is the link between Neill's Baldwin School, Saint Paul College, and the great Macalester College of today. Though it's dead, maybe someday somebody will bring it back again to life so that it will strike the hours for the college. Neill left behind a thousand books which he gave to the library and became the nest egg for the great library that we have today. He left behind...Neill left behind him the *History of Minnesota* and the Macalester College collections and other collections. I have spent most of my time on Edward Duffield Neill. The other man that stands before us is James Wallace, the son of a Scotch-Irishman and a Scotch woman from Scotland who had a farm down in Wayne County, Ohio. And he came here and threw his life into Macalester College in the days when the Saint Paul Trust Company was trying to throw it to the hands of receivers, when it was floundering in debt, and when some of the students left because they didn't think that a diploma from Macalester College would be of any value. There was no graduating class in 1892 because the seniors in 1891 failed to return to the college. But he bled for Macalester College. In the forward to my book which Dr. Rice had told you of, DeWitt Wallace who wrote that forward said that it was a saga of suffering, acute and prolonged, and he could not understand why his father did not go away, why he chose to suffer himself, why he chose to let his wife suffer, and why he chose to let his children suffer.

[27:04]

The reason of course why James Wallace stayed at his post was this: he was writing to Rufus Jefferson and he was urging him to put up a hundred thousand dollars as a challenge to other givers in order that they might raise two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Or he urged him to raise, to put up two hundred thousand dollars so that they might raise three hundred thousand dollars for an endowment, but nothing came of it. And in writing to Mr. Jefferson he said this, and this is the answer to DeWitt Wallace's question, "Why?" He said, "I cannot urge my example for anyone's guidance or inspiration. But I have felt in these trying years as I have stood face to face with this great opportunity, that God would not hold me guiltless if I shrunk from any sacrifice of time, talent, or means that I could justly make. But after all the truth seems to me not that this is sacrifice but the best investment for the kingdom of Christ that we can make."

[28:35]

Now I have set before you very briefly the story of your heritage, a vision of a great university out in the future promoting knowledge of this world and its inhabitants, fostering the worship of God, and building a character in young men and young women that would help this democracy live down through the ages. This was their vision. They bled for it. They passed the torch on to you. The past is the preface for the present and the present reaches out to the future. Years ago when Fred Bigelow, who was formerly the President of the great Saint Paul Farm Union Insurance Company took over the presidency of Macalester College, he went to go see DeWitt Wallace and he said to Mr. Wallace, "Now I've had a chance in building up one of the finest insurance companies in the Northwest. I am going to devote the rest of my life to making Macalester College the finest college in the Northwest." And DeWitt Wallace grabbed his hand

and said, “Bully for you, I’ll help ya.” And today DeWitt Wallace is pouring his millions into Macalester College, which has become one of the great colleges of this country. Macalester College has always had the vision of the world from the first graduating class that went out, and today we gather young men and young women from various parts of the world who have come to study with us.

[30:54]

The torch is put in your hands. Keep it ablaze. Walk into the future with courage and with faith and make Macalester College great and greater because of the contribution that you make with your day and generation.

[31:24]

[Applause]