

II. June Newcomer

Pat Chickering: John Barker has a couple of questions for June Newcomer.

John Barker: Could you just simply describe or characterize Dr. McDonald for me?

June Newcomer: Dr. McDonald was a tall, fine looking, white-haired gentleman when I knew him; a very excellent public speakers, of the old type, the oratorical type. He was well respected in the community. He went on to become Kiwanis member in Charles Town and then a regional, district director of Kiwanis. Dr. McDonald was extremely interested in the Black people, but he had the respect also of the white people in the area. The Blacks sort of had him on a pedestal, and if he said something that was law, they agreed with it. He was a historian. He collected widely, historical materials, both furniture, fire arms, things pertaining to the armory and arsenal in Harpers Ferry. The, then he also collected newspaper clippings and articles on various people, and when I had when I helped sort out many of the records and things at Storer College when it was closed, we found packets of material left by Dr. McDonald referring to various Black leaders at that time in the country, and each little packet of material would be tied up with a note attached to it with Mr. McDonald's assessment of the person. I remember particularly the notes about Martin Luther King. He had numerous accounts of his speaking at various places, where he appeared, and he, his note to him, said "Watch this man, he has great potential for the future." And he encouraged, Dr. McDonald encouraged this type of thing from the Black people, and called their attention to Black leaders. I think that pretty well describes his general character.

JB: Would you characterize him as being rather strict?

JN: Yes, yes.

JB: That's the impression...

JN: Rather strict, and there was only one way to do something and that was his way. Yes. That was true.

JB: You talked about he had a lot of respect and a lot of interest in certain Black leaders. Did he urge the students at the college that Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King later on, those type of people, should be viewed as leaders?

JN: I think so, he had some important Black speakers on the cultural programs they had for the students; they had a good set of cultural programs for a small school. They brought in musicians, speakers, they used to call the "elocutionists" or something, then groups that, small groups that gave plays; and they were not all Black, he exposed them to both cultures, and that was the things the townspeople took part in, came to, to see because they found some peo... heard some musicians and so on that they would not otherwise have had a chance to hear.

JB: There's one person though that stands out in American history, and he also stands out in what happened here at Storer College and that would be DuBois, DuBois being a founder of the NAACP, and seen by many as being rather radical. I've got an impression from reading McDonald's letters that DuBois, McDonald, felt that DuBois was a little, maybe, off base,

wanted too much too soon, can you think of anything, or do you remember any certain attitude that McDonald felt towards DuBois?

JN: No, I never heard him mention him. But then I might not have.

JB: Okay, well, that's about all I have right now.

PC: You mentioned that McDonald was a great collector of artifacts and mementos. Do you happen to know what happened to his collections?

JN: What happened to his collections was very sad. I don't know what they actually made disposition of the guns, and powder horns and things of that sort; I don't know what happened to them. But a lot of the fine furniture he had collected was not appreciated by his family and was sold to second hand dealers. They sold a few things at auction, but they weren't the better things.

PC: How long did Mrs. McDonald live after he died?

JN: Oh, she lived many years after Dr. McDonald died.

PC: Well, did these things remain in...

JN: Yes, they were in the house, uh-huh.

PC: Then it was after she died that these things were disposed of.

JN: Yes. Many of the antiques in the family had come down from Mrs. McDonald's family in New England. She had some fine New England antiques. But the things that Dr. McDonald had collected around here, I don't think that the family we heard family members refer to it as "Daddy's junk." And I don't think they had any idea of the historical significance of it.

PC: That's a shame.

JN: Yes, it is.

PC: Can you tell us some things about the Storer College Women's Commission? We've read in notes that it was established in the 1930s. Can you tell us basically what they did?

JN: Well, they met regularly. They represented various church groups. I think probably all of the women on the Board probably belonged. One of them was Mrs. R.E. Olds, of the Olds automobile company. I remember her staying at our house several times; I'm referring to the Bird-Brady, old Newcomer, House. She was on, used to meet with the Commission; and they worked on various projects, like they would re-furnish so many rooms in Brackett Hall, or they would re-furnish the lobby in Brackett Hall, or whatever, whatever they saw; and one year I think they provided pots and pans and so on for the kitchen, completely, the stuff was in bad shape, and I think they gave them a lot of new... They would raise a certain amount of money through their churches, or through groups they were affiliated with. I don't know that they may have acted in an advisory capacity, I don't know.

PC: I guess that was going to be the other part of my question. Was their activity as being relationship...

JN: They met with the, Mrs. Bird, who was Dean of women at the time I was here. They used to meet with her regularly, I remember. They were very active in getting the building built that was used as the Home Economics building, which is still standing, on the Campus.

PC: Are you referring to Cook Hall?

JN: Cook hall, yes. They were very instrumental in furnishing Cook Hall, getting nice furnishings for Cook Hall. Cook Hall was a beautiful project.

PC: From the material that we have seen, especially the material you provided us which we have copied and returned to you since then, it really appeared that they were primarily involved in, as you say, raising funds and for improvements in buildings, maintenance in buildings, or perhaps new construction such as Cook Hall. Were they involved in such basic policy things as developing guidelines for what students could and could not do on campus; smoking rules, what kinds of music they could play...?

JN: I don't remember.

PC: Did their influence extend directly into the lives of the students?

JN: I don't remember any of that after I was here. What they did before... but the College handbooks came out. Now I don't know who wrote 'em, probably Dr. McDonald, or Mrs. McDonald, or a cooperation, but there were very strict guidelines in these handbooks as to what they could do; they could go on walks if they organized them and got an instructor to go with them, a faculty member to go with them; there were certain calling hours at the dormitory, and the young men could call on the young ladies from five o'clock in the afternoon until dinner time and from seven till eight or something in the evening. Very strict hours as to when calling time was, and how late they could be out with their dates on weekends, and how late they could be there; they couldn't be out, off the campus, but when they had parties, what time they had to break up. There were very, there were voluminous and strict rules about that.

PC: There seem to have been an awful lot of fires. Rather, there were, seem to have seem, yes, that's the only way I can put it, quite a lot of fires, especially in dormitory rooms. We were wondering whether this was related to a lot of smoking on campus.

JN: I think it was more related probably to their cooking in the rooms. In the early, early days they didn't provide a common dining room, in the very earliest days they had little cookstoves and they cooked for themselves. And then after the dining rooms came into effect they still had their little hot plates and so on that they used in the rooms. I don't know, I don't know too much about the fires; but I was never... I came here in 1939 so I was late on your history, but I never heard of any campus smoking problems at that time.

PC: Tell us how the task of closing up the College fell to you.

JN: Somebody had to do it. There had been somebody of this family connected with that school from the day it opened till the day it... till it was put away, and I guess I was the last person that had charge of the records. I disposed, had to dispose of the records, and, and the, of course there was a Board of Trustees, and we got general guidelines from them, but... it was sort of a sad day, John felt it, he had been a, on the Board at the last of the College; his grandfather had started it and he'd been on the Board that voted to close it, which they had no choice, I mean, there was no money. But after, that loss of the West Virginia money was the big blow; but when Shepherd College opened to Black students in this area there was no excuse for the State to continue to support the Church school.

PC: You, that's interesting, was it still a quote unquote "church" school?

JN: Oh yes, it was Baptist. When they were looking for a new President after Dr. McKinney, after they finally couldn't live with Dr. McKinney, they would have no money left, no endowment or anything, if he'd kept on, they were trying to find another Black President. They had an excellent man, on their own campus, Leroy Johnson, and I remember asking one of the Trustees, I said: "Well, for goodness sakes, he's been acting like President, why don't you appoint him President, he's doing so well?" He said, "A Methodist, appointed as President of a Baptist School? They would never hear of it." And this is why Leroy Johnson was not appointed. They found this Dr. Terrell that didn't work out, either.

PC: How did the State of West Virginia constitutionally fund a religious College?

JN: I don't know. It was before there was quite so much fuss about religion in education and so forth as there is now. And it was just their way of providing... at first, you see, when Storer College was first funded, there were no negro high schools in the area. If they went to high school, they came here.

PC: Yes.

JN: And so there was, you know, great justification for funding, to give them a school.

PC: Even though it had this definite religious bent.

JN: Yes.

PC: has the Newcomer family remained in the Baptist church? Or...

JN: They never were in the Baptist church.

PC: Never were.

JN: Well, now his mother was. The Bracketts were, his mother was. But she joined the Methodist church with her husband when she married.

PC: I know you've answered this before, but we'd like to get it on the record. What happened to the books?

JN: The Storer College books are stored at Shepherd College, that is, the academic records. And that's a whole story in itself because they did that, it wasn't until in the 1930s that they had the

records as we use them, well not now because they're supplanted by computers, but in those days a student had a record for his whole time at the college, regardless of how long it was, he had one record compiled for him. In the early days they were compiled in great large ledgers, and a new ledger taken out, started every time a previous ledger was filled, so you had students that ere scattered over 3 or 4 books. SO many of these students came to Normal School and went out to teach, and came back summer after summer after summer after summer until they got a degree, and they, it was real hard to get a transcript out for a student who had been here 20 different times, to get their degree, and sometimes you missed, you didn't find them in certain places that you thought, or they were wrong on the date that they were there, and it was really... so we had to make, we did that whole job of getting the records all per student rather than per ledger book.

PC: Oh my.

JN: But the original, ledgers and everything, are all stored at Shepherd College. We furnished the cabinet to store them in, and Shepherd get out transcripts for any of the students. Now that was the request of the Alumni. The school officially merged with Union University in Richmond, and, but the Alumni did not want the records to go to Union, and so they asked they be put at Shepherd. I think Union has computerized transcripts of them, as does West Virginia University.

PC: Library books. There has just been an ongoing project in the Lockwood House of cataloguing a lot of, I guess they've catalogued all the books that were in Lockwood and they're making detailed lists of some of them.

JN: Was this the group of books that Storer College gave to the Park Service?

PC: I gather. What other books were there?

JN: I don't know. The Park service was given first choice of any books that were in the Library. They could send whomever they delegated to look over all the various books. Well, actually they got first choice after Union University got what they wanted. But Union University was not interested in historical material. The Trustees said they could have anything that pertained to the history of the area, anything that pertained to the flora and fauna of the area, any general interest books that pertained to the area. And they could select.

PC: This "they" is the Park Service.

JN: The Park Service, uh-huh. After Park Service got their choice, then the local libraries, the local school libraries got their choice. Then West Virginia University got anything they wanted. The rest were given to Shepherd College. But they said there were 15,000 books in the Library. That was catalogued books. But I think there were 15,000 more than were catalogued. Park Service got several hundred books, that Al Mongin picked out and designated as the ones that he wanted.

PC: I want to ask Mike a question. Mike, approximately how many books do you think that Dave Wallace has been working on this summer?

Mike Jenkins: It's my understanding he's been working on the books that were at Shepherd, in other words, the leftover books that went to Shepherd is what Dave Wallace has now.

PC: They've been in the Lockwood House?

MJ: They were previously stored at Shepherd for some 20 years.

PC: I see, and then they came back...Picking up again. Back up, totally off where we were. Tell us the Bette Davis/ Morrell story. What's the connection?

JN: Reverend Morrell was Bette Davis's grandfather. I don't know much of the story, but, and I don't know that she was ever here. I don't know about that. But her father had been here, I know I had heard. That her father had visited his father's grave, which is in the little churchyard there at...

PC: Her father then...

JN: Her father would have been a Davi... his father, no, back up, her mother married a Davis, Morrell's daughter married a Davis, and they had been here, I had heard.

PC: I don't really have too much else. DO you have any comments you would like to make on things your husband was telling us?

JN: Well, you were telling me about the Doran's store, and how long they operated. They were still operating Doran's store when I came here in 1939, and they operated for several years afterwards. And they did have going out of business sales, and I understood that at one time, when they had these 3 buildings full of everything, that a movie properties company came in and bought a great, great deal of the merchandise; high-button shoes, and straight razors, and razor straps, and all sorts of things of that kind; they bought great quantities of the upper regions of the 3 buildings. But one of the, I don't know whether she was, the one who was sister of the DeLauder girl, who was, now was that Billy's, Billy Doran's daughters?

PC: Okay. Billy Doran had 3 children.

JN: 2 daughters and a son, then.

PC: Mary Cecilia, Josephine and Bill, Billy, William.

JN: Josephine was Mrs. DeLauder, and Mary Cecilia was the one who was still in the store. But Miss, I think I remember Miss M. E. coming to the store. I think I saw her in the store.

PC: She died in 1946.

JN: Well, I saw her in the store, then. You verified that. I was sure I had seen her, and not just pictures of her, in the store. She would be in the store occasionally with Mary Cecilia.

PC: So Mary Cecilia would have been running the store then?

JN: She seemed to be, she was always there.

PC: Do you recall that she had some sort of physical problem?

JN: I don't remember that. I know the DeLauders had one child with some sort of problem, that would have been Josephine.

PC: We have a photograph of 2 DeLauders children standing in front of the Master Armorer's House with Mr. and Mrs. DeLauder. There's a boy and a girl.

JN: Mr. and Mrs. Doran or Mr. and Mrs. Deaud...

PC: No, no. Mr. and Mrs. DeLauder.

JN: Okay.

PC: We also, we have a lot of material that we were loaned by Mollie Staubs.

JN: Okay. Yes. John DeLauder's daughter.

PC: And we have established that they did, the DeLauders did live in that House. Apparently Mary Ellen who owned it, she either verbally or in fact gave it to the DeLauders as a wedding present, however that worked, I really don't know. It was their home.

JN: But we knew John, John DeLauder.

PC: What sort of business was he in?

JN: [asks John Newcomer] What did John DeLauder do? Lived out in Bolivar when we knew him.

John Newcomer: He worked for somebody, didn't he?

JN: I think, I don't think he was in business for himself.

PC: You say he lived up in Bolivar. Didn't live downtown?

JN: This is the younger, the son.

PC: The son of Josephine and John?

JN: No, no, Josephine's husband, Jo DeLauder. Probably moved up after some of the floods.

PC: Okay. Maybe they didn't live in the Master Armorer's House after the 36 flood, then.

JN: Maybe no, I don't know.

PC: That's very interesting, very, very interesting. In other words, I don't want to put words in your mouth...

JN: I knew Mollie as a child; and also Eloise Dale, who was the wife of Mack Dale, who was Superintendent here for many years, was a College chum of Jo DeLauder. They both went to Mt. St. Joseph's in Thurmond... Emmitsburg.

PC: Okay. You knew Mollie as a child. You came here in 39. How old do you think Millie was then?

JN: I don't know. One of the DeLauder boys, a brother of Mollie's, trained for the priesthood. He was a classmate of our daughter. So that places him pretty well.

PC: What I'm trying to do is date this photograph of them standing as a family in front of the house. I had put it to mid to late 30s because of the clothes.

JN: Well, how old were the children?

PC: 7 and 10, or something like that.

JN: Mid 30s would be before the 36 flood.

PC: Maybe these pictures are just before the 36 flood. I was born in 38. So I'm 53 right now.

JN: You're just a child!

PC: Would Mollie be older than I?

JN: I don't think so. Oh now wait a minute. Mollie? Mollie Staubs?

PC: Yes.

JN: No, no she's not older than you. Mollie Staubs is married to Hampy who worked for us all through high school, and Mollie's younger than he is. And after we had the restaurant out here, which wasn't until the 50s, Mollie's husband, Hampy Staubs, worked for us. For years, as did his mother.

PC: In the 50 he was working for you?

JN: 50s to 60s.

PC: Well in the 50s I was only in my teens.

JN: Well, he was in his teens, too. He was in high school. So he's about your age, I'd say.

PC: Maybe the thing to do is go up and ask Mollie Staubs when they stopped living in the Master Armorer's House! I think we would really like to know that.

JN: That would be good.

PC: Because, if the 36 flood did that much damage downtown... it didn't do enough damage to put the Dorans out of business...

JN: Well, they just moved, cleaned everything out and moved to another... another part... what I understood they did. And then there was a real good little store downtown that had been an A&P. On the corner next to the Master Armorer's, and we dealt at that store after I came here, and that was run then by Cassel, plumbing, well they didn't for a few years, and Boody Smith, Briscoe Smith, and then Briscoe ran the store at that point and Daddy Cassel ran the plumbing and heating business. That went on for a long time after that, that store. Came back to life after that flood, and probably went through the flood of whatever it was in the 40s there.

PC: The town, then, didn't die out completely/

JN: Well that was the only store still downtown at that point, besides Miss Molly's. Miss Molly Murphy was still there. After I came, which was 39, Molly Murphy was still in business. There was something still in the Dittmyer building. I think. I'm not sure about that. But I remember being in Molly Murphy's; and we used to frequently go to Cassel's; in fact Cassel's put plumbing in for us out at the Motel, the first motel, first cabins and things we had out there; first heat we put in our house out there Daddy Cassel put in, I remember well.

PC: Were there still people living in, further along Shenandoah Street, further west?

JN: They lived upstairs in the buildings, over the, above flood level. And of course the Dorans were still in their store.

PC: How about on the north side of Shenandoah Street?

JN: I don't remember anybody over there.

PC: When did the movie theater stop?

JN: I don't know.

PC: I'm sure there's lots of things I haven't thought of. Anybody else have anything else?

MJ: Hilltop.

PC: Hilltop, yes. I wanted you to tell us what you were telling us while the tapes were changing.

JN: You were asking about the provisions for the summer boarding houses. Well, Hilltop was a famous hostelry, and had an excellent reputation. You got the best food, and every morning they had a team of light horses with a spring wagon that came out from the Hilltop Hotel, went out in the countryside to get fresh eggs, fresh cream, fresh butter, fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, and brought it back to the hotel for the day's supplies. And, their reputation was excellent.

PC: Now, what time frame period are you talking about?

JN: Well, this I've only heard about, so this would have been back in the 20s, I would assume.

PC: I understand that T.S. Lovett, the original owner, no longer owned it after 1926.

JN: Well, it could be, I don't know...

PC: So would this be during the tenure of Lovett.

JN: It would be before...

PC: During Lovett's tenure?

JN: Yes.

PC: That's interesting.

JN: And some of the best help that we had at our Motel had worked at and been trained at the Hilltop.

PC: Were these white or Black people?

JN: Black.

PC: They were all Black?

JN: Yes.

PC: Was all the staff at the Hilltop Black?

JN: I think so; Lovett was. I don't know about that. The Hilltop was closed at the time that we started our Motel, in fact it was for sale and we contemplated buying that rather than starting a Motel. And then it was sold the same year that we started, it was sold and reopened, after having been closed a number of years.

PC: Was that when Mr. Kilham...

JN: No, that was a Mr. Thompson, wasn't it? [asked of Mr. Newcomer] You took coal down to him in Washington.

John Newcomer: I don't know.

JN: I think it was Thompson. I'm not sure.

John Newcomer: Yes.

JN: No, there was another one in between there. This man, was ahead of Thompson. He closed it. He probably got it from Lovett, and closed it. But then there was another man, the people from down in Newport News, that stayed with us for a long time while they were getting it renovated and ready to start up again, and then they sold it to Mr. Kilham, no they sold it to Forsyths.

PC: I remember the name Forsyth.

JN: And then he sold it, I think to Mr. Kilham. I think he was the one that sold it to Mr. Kilham.

MJ: The Morrell grave; did she say anything about that?

PC: The Morrell Grave.

JN: I don't know anything about it. Except I understand he's buried in the little church yard at the Curtis Memorial Church, that's where the stone is; but I don't know that he's actually buried there, but I think he is.

John Newcomer: I've always understood so.

PC: I think that's it.

[End of Interview]