



In Her Shoes: A Depression Era Walk through Woman's College

Welcome to “In Her Shoes,” the walking tour of Depression Era UNC Greensboro. This tour will take approximately 30 minutes. Before you embark on this trip, make sure you are wearing comfortable walking shoes. Please park in one of the visitor parking decks located around campus. Make sure that your vehicle is secured, and that you have a copy of the map with you before you begin. Please proceed to the first stop, which is outside of Foust. Foust is located on Administration Drive near the corner of College Avenue and Spring Garden Street. Please make sure you are standing in front of Foust Building. Foust is a three story brick building with two turrets on the front. Position yourself so that you are looking at the stone steps at the front entrance of Foust. Please continue with the tour when you arrive there.

You are now outside of Foust. In the next thirty minutes you will be transported back in time to the beginning of the Great Depression here at UNCG. The flowing traffic of Spring Garden Street and the sprawling new campus buildings are replaced with a condensed group of buildings confined mostly to College Avenue. We are not standing in the middle of a cosmopolitan university of more than 15,000 students. Instead, we are in the midst of a struggling school trying to maintain academic standards while facing budget cuts and a reduced enrollment of fewer than 2,000 students.

The year is 1932 and we are in the height of the Great Depression. It is a time of economic difficulty throughout the nation, particularly in the rural agrarian south. In an attempt to boost enrollment numbers and to stabilize the school budget, the Woman's College has admitted male students for the first time. While this experiment was not met with heavy opposition it greatly affected the educational, social and political dynamics of the campus. Let us now embark upon a journey of discovery as we explore the experiences of a female student as she progresses through the Depression Era Woman's College.

Foust

September – 1932. Imagine that you are a 17 year old high school graduate from Eastern North Carolina. Your parents are upper middle class shopkeepers, but the Depression has made it difficult to come by money. By this time, you have applied and been accepted into the newly renamed North Carolina College for Women. We are standing outside Foust, the administration building for the college. This building embodies the history and prestige of the College even during this difficult time. On radio and in newspapers you hear of the terrible things happening across the United States. There is hunger, intense poverty, and in January of 1933 the banks will begin to fail in your home town. Your parents' savings for your tuition has been lost because of these bank failures. Your neighbors have lost their farms and their homes, some have lost businesses, and others have lost jobs. Your parents have kept their business, but are struggling in

the face of the unyielding economic depression. Your parents and others will contact Dr. Foust, the president of the College, in hopes of receiving a deferment of payment. Many parents will be allowed to make payments in installments, or get a month deferment from the College in order to ease the financial burden of paying tuition. The College also offers work-study jobs where girls can work for the school while getting their education. Some lucky second-year girls may receive the task of working in the dining hall. This job is extremely competitive. Girls are required to undergo physicals to make sure they are not carrying typhoid or other communicable diseases. In July of 1932 there had been over 300 applicants for work in the kitchen and there were only 58 appointments made. This is one example of financial relief offered by the school towards students.

The institution and your family and friends have suffered from the same financial constraints. Enrollment dropped 31% at the college, in comparison with the national average which was 8%. Times were difficult for the school and such financial problems led them to consolidate with the North Carolina system. However, Consolidation did not provide any excess revenue to the school, but many believed it would make the education system more effective. Probably the greatest affect Consolidation had on the school was that it paved the way for a coeducational institution in the distant future. There was no economic relief to be had. As a result, the college was forced to close buildings that were not being used. There were cuts in other areas as well. Faculty salaries were being reduced, and several faculty members were let go due to financial constraints and reduced enrollment. In the fiscal year of '31-'32 there was a 10% salary reduction across the board. Foust's salary decreased from \$8,500 in August of 1931 to \$7,650 in August of 1932. Tuition with Room, Board and Fees in this year was \$339 for the entire year. This amount will stay stagnant until well into the 1940's.

Additionally, in February of 1932, the Superintendent of Grounds and Buildings sent a letter to the faculty informing them that they would have to reduce all maintenance services to only 1 or 2 days per week. However, during this time of want there was significant expansion of the college.

Please proceed up the pathway towards the steps of the Alumnae House (now the Alumni House) to conceptualize how the University has expanded over the past years and has moved from being a small woman's school, to being one of the major universities in North Carolina.

Please pause the recording, turn to your left, and walk up the sidewalk until you are standing in front of a small brick building with white columns. The words "Alumni House" are in gold lettering on the portico. When you get to the Alumni House, and are looking up the steps, resume the recording.

ALUMNAE HOUSE

Careful! Look out! You're standing in the middle of a two way thorough-fare through campus. You're standing in the middle of College Avenue, automobiles and the occasional horse drawn carriage are passing you. The road is dirt and gravel; it will not be paved until the late 1930's. So until then, you'll have to watch your step. In the next 10 years, many buildings will begin to appear on the landscape. Some of these new buildings are courtesy of the Works Progress Administration, an attempt by President Roosevelt to ease the pains of the Depression and stimulate economic growth – especially in the hard hit south. The Alumni House is one of the many new WPA constructions that would appear on campus in the next few years.

Turn to your right; you are now looking down College Avenue.

The 1932 landscape looks nothing like it would in 70 years. Remember, you are looking back in time as you are looking down the street. To your immediate left is Guilford Hall, a residence hall demolished to make way for the construction of the Alumni House. The next building up on your left is the Student's Building, a Victorian building, similar to Foust in appearance, which was razed to build the Elliott University Center. Midway down College Avenue there is a stone bridge crossing the street at a sunken intersection. If you crossed that bridge you would be standing in front of Forney, the library. Further down the street on the left is Spencer Residence Hall and across the way are the playing fields. Other buildings existed at this time, but they are not visible from your location.

The decade is a period of expansion for the college; however expansion does not take off until the late 30's. Relief from the strain of the Depression is still years away, and it is only a faint glimmer on the horizon. Hoover is still president of the United States and his domestic policies do not favor government welfare. There is a presidential election coming up in November and questions about the fate of the country are circulating throughout the campus; however the outcome is uncertain.

You should already be facing down College Avenue, please walk down College Avenue until you see a large stone block in front of some bushes on your left. Across the street on your right is Forney Building (the word "Forney" is engraved on stone above the front entrance.)

STUDENTS BUILDING

If you've made it from the Alumni House without getting horse manure or mud on your shoes, you can join us in the Students Building. You are looking at the cornerstone. The words "Student's Building, 1902" are engraved on the block. In the 1930's this was a tall and stately Victorian building that greatly resembled Foust. It was torn down in the 1940's to make room for the Elliott University Center. This cornerstone is all that remains of the Students' Building.

1932 was the first year that boys were admitted into the school as day students. Since they were only day students they did not live on campus and were not fully integrated into student life. While they did not have formal social groups like their female counterparts, they did have a Male Student Association that met in McIver, which is located behind Forney. They took the same courses as female students, but male students were not required to take a hygiene course, instead they were required to take an extra science. Male students played active roles in the newspaper, literary journals, and sports. Despite the fact that men were not living on campus, they did have an impact on life during their brief stay. They also tended to pull pranks for their own entertainment. In 1932, two male students made a bet on the outcome of November's presidential election. They wagered that the loser would dress up in Woman's clothing for the class picture. After the election Franklin Roosevelt won, the loser of the wager dressed up and was photographed. The resulting photo is visible today in the 1933 year book; he is located in towards the left of the back row.

However, the boys would not have had a lounge and study hall in the Students' building. Their facilities were located in old McIver, which was behind Forney and Foust. The female day students did not have their lounge and study hall in the Students Building either, theirs was located in Foust. So the Students' building was not for all students, just for the full time girls who lived on campus. This brings up an interesting question, why did the school still separate all

of these groups in the midst of the Depression when they already were suffering from budget cuts? A simple answer could be that each of the buildings were already in use during the Depression, but that neglects the question of *why* they were separated. Does this indicate some sort of social stratification? What do you think?

The literary societies were located in the Students Building. Many girls joined one of the four literary societies: Adelpian, Dikean, Alethian, and Cornelian. These societies are the predecessors to future sororities. Two of these societies had offices based in this building. Most female students were part of the literary societies, these groups were very secretive and few details of their inner workings remain. Dikean initiation rites lasted 7 days, one of the most interesting rites was that girls were to “cuckoo” every time a bell rang. This must have provided for an amusing show for those on campus. Since it was so secretive, very little additional information remains.

Regardless of affiliation with the literary societies, there were class distinctions as well. The junior class girls were given the chance to run a small sundries shop on campus. This practice was well established by 1930, and in 1931, tables and chairs were installed so the shop could serve sandwiches and drinks. This would be especially convenient for students who did not have ready access to transportation and opportunities for shopping downtown. This shop historically was located in either the student’s building or in the basement of the administration building. The Depression may have caused the store to do more business than it normally would have during this period, as students did not have the money to go into town.

The Students Building also had another use in 1932; it served as a temporary library holding all the books that survived from the fire in the Forney library. The fire broke out on September 15, 1932 shortly before 3 a.m., the total amount of the damages to the building and collection totaled \$25,000. Most of the damage was done in the reading and library science rooms. No one knows what caused the fire.

If you turn around, you will see the repaired version of the library, it looks the same as before. The reconstruction simply repaired the top floor to the way it had been.

Please pause the recording, turn to your left and continue down College Avenue, until you reach Spencer Dormitory which will be on your left. Spencer is a large brick building, with two towers by the front entrance. Please stop when you are in front of the two towers and resume the recording.

SPENCER

You are standing outside of Spencer; the sprawling dormitory in front of you was one of the main housing facilities on the campus. This building is the original Spencer; disregard the uncovered awning, which is a late 20th century addition. The building is expansive and houses a dining facility as well as rooms for residential students. Three of the other dormitories on campus have been closed due to the drop in enrollment. The remaining dormitories were not at full occupancy. The closure of the other dormitories forced the girls to live in closer proximity to one another. This led to some humorous cultural clashes. For example, during the 1930’s one girl noted that it was past 10:00 and one of her neighbors had not turned out her light. When she went to confront the girl about this, the poor country girl said that she had tried to blow it out, but the light wouldn’t go out.

However, there is always one thing that will unite people no matter where they are from: food. The dining hall for campus was also in Spencer. Healthy eating habits were stressed by the faculty and nutritionists were on hand to monitor the students' consumption. Dinners were served in a banquet style with individual side dishes and entrées presented at each table. Food was bountiful at the school, and the girls did not go hungry. Essentially, the school had its own dairy offering ready access to milk and cream throughout the year. There were vegetable gardens to provide fresh vegetables. Unlike people in other areas, you would not go hungry at the College. Students were resourceful, especially in this time of want, they would save orange and grapefruit peels and sneak sugar from the dining halls. In their rooms, they would caramelize the sugar on hotplates with the rinds and make candy to eat. Dining rooms also hosted dancing every evening after meals. However, despite the gaiety of nightly dancing, times were not easy.

Letters to the editor in the *Carolinian* indicate that times were dire during this period. One letter complains of how many luxuries had been cut out by November of 1932, including having telephone privileges revoked in many of the dormitories due to cost. This particular student scolded her fellow classmates for leaving lights on while they were in class and damaging the floors and school facilities. She complained that her fellow classmates increased the school's expenses by being so wasteful. Another letter from January of 1933 complained that the heat was turned off nightly at 9 p.m. She acknowledged that concessions needed to be made to make ends meet, but she also worried that the lack of heat is bad for her health.

It is interesting that neither student mentioned the laborers who worked for the school. They are curiously omitted from photographs as well. Very little documentation exists to tell us who would have been repairing the damage left by the girls. However, it is likely that there would have been African American custodians and maids since there had been during previous years, and there will be in future years. There are a few photographs from earlier, and a few from later – however there is nothing that speaks directly to the period of labor on the campus during the Great Depression. The laborers would have been employed here during the height of the Jim Crow South, and likely were peripheral in the view of the white women who lived here. However, the white women would not be peripheral in the world-view of those who labored on this campus. They have been left almost entirely out of documentary evidence from this time, perhaps an indication of how little value the social structure of the time placed upon them?

Despite these hardships, the girls spent on average \$1.84 per week. Pantyhose were by far the most popular item bought by girls at the Woman's College, they averaged spending \$6.82 per year on hosiery alone! To put this into perspective, they spent approximately \$4.48 per year on eating at restaurants and cafes. Other than shopping, the girls also had other interests to pass the time, many girls would go to town during their spare time to go shopping downtown. They also would go to movies. There were strict codes of behavior for girls. Freshmen and sophomores needed chaperones if they were to go on an evening date with a gentleman. Seniors were allowed to go to a Saturday movie with an escort, or in groups of three. Every night but Saturday all students were required to be in their rooms by 10:30 p.m., freshman and sophomores had to have their lights out by 10:30!

However, even though the regulations for lights out were strict, many of the girls did not abide by the rules. Some examples of these rules are: There are reported incidents of girls being kicked out of school for drinking. One mother appealed to Dr. Foust to allow her daughter to return, citing that at least she hadn't committed "immorality." Other girls, may have ventured closer to "immorality" with night-riding, or in other words, being out after curfew to visit with boys, especially the ones at Guilford College. In one instance a girl did not come back until the

following morning. Other girls got caught hitchhiking their way to town and were reprimanded by the Student Paper. Evidence shows that these actions were not typical of the majority of girls on campus, but they were not uncommon, much as “rule-breaking” is prevalent in today’s college life. However, there were other more wholesome activities that the girls partook, such as sports.

Please pause the recorder and proceed across College Avenue to the Petty Science Building, please go down the steps and into the lower grassy area to resume the tour.

PETTY

Note how the ground slants here into a large flat area. This area, now the home of the Petty Science Building, once housed the Athletic Fields. The landscape still shows its previous use. This place is more than just sloping ground, it is a contested space. It was here that a battle was waged between the female and male coeds at the Woman’s College. Female students were allowed to participate in sports, however it was limited to the intramural level. This presents an interesting dichotomy; a previously all female school granted extended rights for athletic competition to first year male students while simultaneously denying women students the right to elevate their club sports to the collegiate level. A letter to the editor of the Carolinian in November of 1932 complains of this perplexing development. The hostility behind the girl’s words indicates that she felt anger towards the preference the boys were given in athletics. This may also speak to the larger issue of gender roles during this time. Perhaps, the administration was not open to allowing female intercollegiate sports because the idea was counter to the perceived gender roles of the time period? Perhaps, aggression and overt competition did not show the feminine virtues that many young women of this time were striving to attain. While intramural sports were competitive, this competition was not visible to the outside world. So the appearance of lady-like behavior would still be intact. The boys, however, were allowed to play football – a very aggressive and competitive sport, and were allowed intercollegiate privileges almost immediately upon their arrival at the newly coeducational school. The competition would have been visible to the outside world.

The boys may have been allowed intercollegiate sports, but they were not allowed to have male swimwear in University facilities. Despite the fact that the school gave the boys the privilege of playing football, they were not allowed the simple courtesy of being able to wear male swimwear. The boys at the Woman’s College were required to wear Woman’s bathing suits when using the swimming facilities on campus. Certainly the girls who were alienated by their inability to play collegiate sports must have had a good chuckle at the boys wearing ladies’ swimwear. Fear not, though, swimwear at this time was not as revealing as it is in the twenty-first century; it covered most of the body, much as a leotard and soccer-shorts would today.

It was not all hostility between the girls and boys on the campus. Many times the girls and boys would play tennis together on the tennis courts, and often would attend dances and social events together.

Our next tour stop will be Aycock Auditorium. Please proceed ahead to the end of College Avenue until it intersects North Drive. Turn right onto North Drive, pause the recording until you get to Tate Street and walk on the sidewalk alongside the street until you get to the intersection with Tate Street. Resume the recording and take a right at Tate Street and

walk up the sidewalk until you reach the corner of Tate Street and Spring Garden Street. Aycock Auditorium will be on your right. When you are standing by the front steps of Aycock, please resume the recording. You should be on the Tate Street side of the building. Aycock is a large brick building with a flat roof. It has columns by the street side entrances.

AYCOCK

You are standing in front of Aycock Auditorium. Built in 1927, this building was fairly new in 1932. It was, and still is, the artistic and cultural center of campus. Many world class dancers, musicians and guest lecturers came to speak at the school. One of the most famous guests of Aycock Auditorium was Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt visited the college while her husband was campaigning for the Presidency and promising a New Deal for American people. Surprisingly enough, her appearance garnered mixed reviews. Most of the female students were ecstatic to learn of the visit and harbored great admiration for her activism, but many of the male students publicly jeered her. This emotional and ideological clash between males and females further supports the notion that women students were trying to free themselves from the gender roles of the time while men were attempting to maintain them.

In addition to being the center of cultural life on campus, Aycock Auditorium was the departure point for girls who were leaving the relative stability of life at the Woman's College and entering the uncertainties of the outside world. Aycock was the site of graduation ceremonies for many years. Many of the graduates pursued careers in teaching; others became homemakers, utilizing their degree in home economics. Relatively few girls entered the business world or pursued graduate degrees that did not lend themselves to traditionally female occupations. Despite the ideas of independence, liberation, and capability that were fostered in the classrooms of the Woman's College, few graduates actually went on to apply them in their futures. Many pursued typically female occupations, such as teaching, nursing and homemaking. But what seemed to be glaring deficiencies in the educational system were overshadowed by the numerous successes. The Woman's College offered women the opportunity to gain a classical education and pursue a number of areas of interest. While on this educational journey they were also exposed to world class artists and speakers, fostered friendships that often lasted a lifetime, challenged typical views of the role of women, and were temporarily shielded from the harshest aspects of the Depression. After the 1932-33 school year, the experimentation allowing male students onto the campus ended. They would not return until the 1960's.

This concludes our walking tour of "In Her Shoes: A walk through Depression Era UNCG." If you would like additional information about the life of students at UNCG please see the University Archives in the Jackson Library. A general history of the campus can be found in Alan Trelease's *Making North Carolina Literate*. We thank you for joining us in this tour, and hope that you visit the other tours hosted by the UNCG Public History program.