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Albert S. Peeling

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Gettysburg College

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Interview with Albert S. Peeling, June 3, 1995

Description

Albert S. Peeling was interviewed on June 3, 1995 by Michael J. Birkner & David Hedrick about his years as a student at Gettysburg College in the class of 1925. Peeling discusses his memories of the faculty as a history major and life at the college at the time, such as living quarters and athletics.

Length of Interview: 57 minutes

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June 3, 1995

**Dr. Michael Birkner, David Hedrick, interviewing
Mr. Albert Peeling, Gettysburg College, Class of 1925**

BIRKNER: We're delighted to have you here. Your family is from York County. I am curious. Could you tell us a little bit about the first time you heard about Gettysburg College and how it came to be that your older brother would have enrolled in Gettysburg College?

PEELING: My late brother, Jim, was a graduate of the Class of 1920. After he graduated from Red Lion High School he obtained a position as teacher in the Windsor Township Schools. The term lasted for seven months, and his pay was forty dollars a month. His objective at the time was to earn sufficient funds to be able to attend college. I recall a warm winter evening kitchen conversation when my mother suggested that it would be a good idea for Albert to follow the same procedure and obtain a teaching position in the public schools of the township. My brother Jim strongly objected. He indicated that Albert would be going to Gettysburg next year. So Jim has always been very much of a role model. He figured that we could borrow the money; I could work and did so.

In my senior year in high school, in the dead of winter, I was able to take the train that no longer runs from York to Gettysburg, to visit Jim in his lush quarters of Cottage Hall, an old residence the college was using as a dormitory. I recall that there was a great interest in being helpful among the various residents in Cottage Hall. I was amused that their interests included the thought that shoes needed to be refrigerated. "Polly" Tom's shoes were filled with water and put into the refrigerator, which was the porch roof of the dormitory. The next morning everyone was very helpful in trying to find them and after a very intensive search the shoes, two blocks of ice, were found.

One of my earlier memories is the inauguration of President Henry W. A. Hanson. Between Brua Chapel and Washington Street they had erected a huge tent. The guests from the usual colleges in the East appeared, some of them on the program. Among those on the program was Dr. Wagner, who was Pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, the college church. He was called upon to give the mandatory prayer. The prayer went on and on. The petitions were accelerated in number. Finally he got to the point where there was an "Amen". From the rear of the tent, because students were assigned to the rear, there was a vigorous applause.

BIRKNER: What was your first impression of Henry Hanson?

PEELING: I was quite favorably impressed with him; I think most of us were so. In fact, I am sure we were. I recall that many of us tried to emulate the twang of his speech. One particular quotation stands out in my memory. When he went out to various congregations, various meetings, of course he was interested in promoting good old Gettysburg. He would say, "When you 'scrotch' the skin of a Gettysburg man you will

find underneath . . . a gentleman.” And of course we wanted to believe that he was correct in his appraisal.

BIRKNER: Did you go to daily chapel where President Hanson would preside?

PEELING: We went to daily chapel. Attendance was taken. We were allowed perhaps four cuts per semester. And, yes, chapel attendance was definitely obligatory.

BIRKNER: Was it something you endured or something you enjoyed?

PEELING: It was one of the requirements, so we did it.

BIRKNER: How was it that your brother Jim, the first Gettysburg College graduate in the family, had decided to go to Gettysburg College rather than, say, Dickinson, Elizabethtown, or Franklin and Marshall?

PEELING: In the first place, we had no awareness of an Elizabethtown. My father and mother and uncle were quite instrumental in building the Emanuel Lutheran Church in Freysville. My father was a master carpenter. The finishing work in that church, which we hope to visit tomorrow, was in large part completed by him. He was treasurer of the church, sexton, and of course he had three boys. They also became sextons of the church. So because of this particular Lutheran Church, I suspect that the Lutheran affiliation was one of the reasons why Jim landed here. He had completed only part of his college work when he was sent to a training station somewhere in Kentucky. He was assigned to train recruits for World War I. Jim was always strong on initiative. Following his service he returned to Gettysburg and graduated with the Class of 1920 with men like Dwight Putnam and Can Neal and numerous others.

BIRKNER: Did you know when you came to Gettysburg what you would study, or did you just assume that you would figure it out while you were here?

PEELING: I had the feeling that I wanted to be a teacher. I don't know when I established my major as history, but I did. Dr. Fortenbaugh was the man who dealt with me and encouraged me. He was very helpful in many ways.

BIRKNER: Tell us a little bit about Dr. Fortenbaugh. Describe him, his mannerisms and his way of teaching.

PEELING: He was very animated, enthusiastic with his subject. He was quite capable of encouraging students to dig a little deeper.

BIRKNER: This fits very well with what other people have told us about Dr. Fortenbaugh. I am glad to hear it from an earlier perspective, because we have been getting this from [19]30's and [19]40's and [19]50's. It is good to hear it from someone who knew him when he was quite young. So he was one of your favorite teachers?

PEELING: He was one of my favorite teachers. Dean Bickle was another.

BIRKNER: Tell us about Dean Bickle.

PEELING: Dean Bickle was near the end of his life at the time. With his close cropped white mustache, he made a most impressive appearance. I had him in Latin One and Two. He didn't always stay with the subject of Latin. Occasionally he would share some of his earlier experiences from back in his own student days. He was a student at the college I believe during the time of the Civil War. On the occasion of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address he told about the parade from the Square out to the point where Lincoln delivered his address. I suspect there was some miscommunication, because the students who brought up the rear of the parade were supposed to be located in the outer reaches of the then large crowd. However, because of the miscommunication, the lines opened up and the student group marched through the opening to a point directly in front of the platform from which Lincoln delivered his famous address. Dean Bickle was one of those directly in front.

BIRKNER: I take it he told you that story.

PEELING: He told that story himself.

BIRKNER: That's a remarkable little piece of information about the Gettysburg Address. You had Dean Bickle. You had Dr. Fortenbaugh. Did you have any other teachers who influenced you either for good or for bad, people you remember that you would like to tell us about?

PEELING: I had an English teacher, Dr. George Warthen. He nourished my appreciation for literature. He died relatively young. I was quite impressed with him. Dr. Milton Valentine, Bible and History, Dr. Thomas Cline, another English teacher, Dr. Frank Cramer, Education, are some of the names that bring warm memories.

BIRKNER: Did you have any science professors you remember?

PEELING: "Old Breidie", Professor Edward Breidenbaugh, introduced me to Chemistry. Our Chemistry lab was located in an old frame building where Weidensall Hall is now located. Charlie Sanders, Dr. Sanders. He was another.

BIRKNER: What did he teach?

PEELING: Philosophy, and allied subjects.

BIRKNER: How important was studying to a student at Gettysburg College when you were a student? Was it important? Was it more important to be doing the activities like the band? How did it all fit together for you, just a little of this and a little of that?

PEELING: Well, I think there was a general attitude of seriousness for studying and to do what we were supposed to do. We understood our objective in being on the campus. I was very fortunate in my freshman year to have as a roommate Dick Geiser who was rather on the serious side. He was very encouraging to me.

Horace Ports, who was a very dear friend of mine, lived on the fourth floor of Old Dorm. I was on the third, in a corner room with John Barnes. A group of us, including Horace, John and myself, agreed to compare notes after various classes. That was very helpful.

Following my first year of teaching in Tamaqua, in the coal regions of Pennsylvania, I accepted a teaching position in Roselle, New Jersey, where I would spend the rest of my public school teaching career. Two colleagues and I decided to enter Teachers College, Columbia University, to begin work on Masters degrees. There too after class we compared our detailed notes as a basis for a final draft of the notes. The three of us, under a very demanding Dr. Frank Briggs, fared well at examination time, only, I am sure, because of this procedure that we used.

BIRKNER: That you had learned at Gettysburg. You mentioned living in Old Dorm. Was Old Dorm a comfortable place to live?

PEELING: I thought so.

BIRKNER: Two people per room?

PEELING: Two people per room. The first year I was downstairs, Room 120, I believe it was, and for the next three years up in the corner in Room 301. It was quite comfortable.

BIRKNER: It was convenient to everything on campus?

PEELING: Oh, yes. I learned to take three and four steps at a time, either up or down.

BIRKNER: Clearly there was a lot of school spirit at Gettysburg in the twenties. In fact our Alma Mater was written by someone a little older than you, not much older. Do you remember the two fellows who wrote the Alma Mater?

PEELING: Fritz Reinartz and Paul Gilbert. Fritz Reinartz was one of the finest young men I had ever known. It was a privilege to know both men. My Alma Mater is very satisfying to me.

BIRKNER: We still sing it at every formal occasion at the college.

PEELING: I am sure . . . without question.

BIRKNER: Do you have any idea what inspired them?

PEELING: No.

BIRKNER: Did it catch on? Did people start singing it right away?

PEELING: I would say yes. Yes. It caught on right from the beginning.

BIRKNER: Part of the school spirit was clearly related to athletics. Do you have memories of football days or any other kind of athletic contests that excited the campus?

PEELING: Yes. "Snaps" Emanuel was one of our great football players. I think he didn't live long after graduation. Hen Bream, of course, was a notable figure in all sports. He went on to become a distinguished Coach and Athletic Director here at Gettysburg. Louise Dougherty Bream, his widow, and I are representing the Class of 1925, today celebrating our 70th Reunion.

BIRKNER: Do you remember any big games with our arch rivals like Dickinson College or Franklin and Marshall College?

PEELING: Franklin and Marshall especially. That was a really big game, and to take a defeat was rather difficult to swallow.

BIRKNER: If you had a victory on the home field against them, did President Hanson give you a day off from classes? Or did you have any other kind of celebration?

PEELING: There might have been one day off in my four years, but other than that I don't recall. The Glatfelter bell was rung continuously after a home victory of course.

BIRKNER: Was Hen Bream a player while you were at college?

PEELING: Hen Bream was a player while I was at college and a remarkably excellent one. His stature made it difficult to believe that he could be capable of his numerous achievements. We really had more than our share of victories under his leadership. There was Hips Wolfe, later Director of Admissions. Wonderful man.

BIRKNER: Did he play football?

PEELING: Yes. He was a tackle on the football team, big boy. Earl Ziegler, also from Freysville, was the big basketball player and of course later was a member of the Mathematics staff here at the college. He came from a very interesting family.

HEDRICK: Eddie Plank finished his playing career at about that time and was back in Gettysburg. Do you recall seeing Eddie?

PEELING: Yes. Eddie Plank, who is in the Baseball Hall of Fame, was the coach of our Baseball team. I was interested in baseball, and those were exciting games to watch. He was a spirited coach.

BIRKNER: He was very nice to the college kids.

PEELING: Eddie was very friendly.

BIRKNER: When he passed away he was rather young. They built the building which they named after him. That was probably a popular decision.

PEELING: Yes, it was.

BIRKNER: What did you do when you weren't studying, for fun? What are some of the things that stick out in your mind when you had some free time? Obviously, you were in the band, and that must have taken a good deal of your time. Can you tell us how you came to be the clarinet player and do things with music?

PEELING: Well, I was a member of the local band in Red Lion, Pennsylvania. I had no money for an instrument, but they had instruments available for the use of prospective players. The son of the director lived in York and gave clarinet lessons. They loaned me one of the town instruments, the clarinet, and permitted me to take it to Gettysburg. That's how I became a property manager, if you please. The band did very little traveling. I remember going to York one time when Gettysburg was playing Villa Nova. The band paraded on the streets of York. Occasionally the band was able to obtain an outside assignment for pay. Eventually they were able to get enough money together to buy a new bass drum.

BIRKNER: Did you have a band leader from the college who put you through your paces, or was it just students?

PEELING: Don Doub was the one who had us playing together.

BIRKNER: Was he a good man?

PEELING: A senior, and a real good man.

BIRKNER: He knew his music?

PEELING: I wouldn't be prepared to judge that. Those were the days when we made do. I think he had the capacity to handle that.

BIRKNER: Were you involved in other activities besides the band? Did you do other things on campus, or was that your main one?

PEELING: I belonged to the Kappa Delta Rho fraternity. I was assistant basketball manager. I was in a number of societies, the names of which I don't recall now. I do remember a famous visit to the college by David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of England.

BIRKNER: Tell us about it.

PEELING: I have little to tell except that he addressed a goodly crowd of people while standing on the cast iron steps on the south side of Old Dorm, and that I was one of the fortunate ones to hear those remarks from about five or six feet removed from him. I do not recall the reason for his visit to Gettysburg, but it was a really important event.

BIRKNER: Would it be right to think that President Hanson himself would have made the introduction?

PEELING: This might well have been during my freshman year, and I don't think that Hanson became president until maybe my junior year.

BIRKNER: Who was running the college? Was Granville still here?

PEELING: Granville was here when I came.

BIRKNER: Then you must tell us what you remember about President Granville.

PEELING: There I'm very shadowy. He was a large man and made a very impressive presence. He was a notable mathematician. My recollections of Doc Granville are on the dim side, I am afraid.

BIRKNER: That's O.K., but you do remember him. He left while you were a student at Gettysburg College. Let's talk again about this business of how you spent some of your free time. What were you doing on the weekends, for example? Did you go back to York County or Freysville?

PEELING: Oh, no. I didn't go to Freysville very often, because there were no cars available. The trip would have involved a train and that would have cost money.

We did a lot of traveling over the Battlefield, groups of us, four, six, eight. We went to Little Round Top, Big Round Top many, many times. During my first year about thirty of us had our meals at a Boarding Club near the main entrance to the college, off Washington Street. After dinner perhaps six, eight or ten of us would walk to the eastern end of town, along the busily traveled Lincoln Highway. On signal, the group would stop and stare at a fixed point in the sky for a period of time. Curious motorists slowed or stopped so that they too could try to see the non-existent phenomenon we were observing. That, we thought, was fun.

BIRKNER: So you would do things in a pack of friends? There were a few women on the college campus but not too many at the time?

PEELING: Most of them lived in or near the town, like Madeline Deal, who later married Gus Borleis. Madeline Deal, a classmate, was one of the "Town Girls". Her home was near the outskirts of town on Hanover Street. Classmate Gus Borleis developed a romantic interest in Madeline and made increasingly frequent visits to her home. His friends became concerned about the physical drain on Gus brought about by these trips. They were determined to be helpful and concluded that it would be easier for Gus if he changed his residence to the Deal home. One night these "friends" gathered all of his worldly belongings -- furniture, clothing, books . . . everything -- and transferred them to the Deal porch. The problem was solved.

BIRKNER: The women students boarded and lived off campus and would just come in for their classes?

PEELING: Right. They were a minor portion of the student body, but it was during my years in the college that there was an interest in increasing the number of women students.

BIRKNER: Did they succeed?

PEELING: To a fairly decent degree I would say yes.

BIRKNER: I guess one of those women would have been Mrs. Bream, Louise Bream?

PEELING: Hen Bream's wife, Louise Dougherty. When I came back for my 65th Reunion five years ago she was here, as was Ethel Grace Allison. The three of us were the only ones from my Class of 1925.

HEDRICK: I have one question for you, sir. You went on as an educator. Did you direct some of your students to Gettysburg College?

PEELING: Yes, there were three or four of them who came here with a little push. One of these, Ernie Kruse, Class of 1952, who graduated from our high school in Roselle, New Jersey, later became a Trustee of the College. My son, Bob, and another Roselle classmate of his, John David Evans, graduated with the Class of 1953. My daughter Betty ('54) also attended Gettysburg.

BIRKNER: Did your brother Horace come to Gettysburg because you and your older brother encouraged him?

PEELING: Yes. As I noted earlier, Jim got the ball rolling when he insisted that Albert should attend Gettysburg in the fall of 1921. There was no question then, four years later, when my brother Horace graduated from Red Lion High School that he would attend Gettysburg directly.

BIRKNER: Did Horace go into teacher training?

PEELING: He became a junior high math teacher in Scotia, New York. He remained in that school system until he retired.

BIRKNER: Your older brother went on to teach Sociology at Butler University, and he became department chair there. He must have gotten further education?

PEELING: Following his graduation from high school Jim obtained a position at Storm King School, a very exclusive boys' school in the Hudson Valley of New York State. He was there for at least one year, perhaps two. I remember that I was quite impressed when he came home at Christmas time and showed us a Christmas present that he had received from one of the students. In those days silk shirts were popular, very expensive silk shirts, and he had received one of those.

By that time he had made up his mind that he was going to move on to the University of Chicago with Dr. Morrison and major in history. He got his degree, his Doctorate, from Chicago. He first took a position at Teachers College of Indianapolis, which later became Butler University. He had taken a great deal of sociology work along the line, and that became his field. He did a great deal of work in the city of Indianapolis, sociological research studies, he and his students writing reports and such.

Jim was really quite a man, and his brothers are aware of that, because he set the stage for us. My mother was a very dedicated lady in Freysville, very loyal to her church and very much determined that her boys should have an opportunity to go to college. She was all for the idea. In her older years she made four or five trips by train to Indianapolis where she was "queen of the ball" for the faculty parties that Jim and his wife attended.

BIRKNER: Would you like to comment at all on what you took out of your college experience? What was good about spending four years here? What lasted? What was important to you?

PEELING: The "Gettysburg Hello". Students and faculty were expected to exchange this greeting when they passed each other as they moved across campus. Just yesterday, shortly after our arrival on campus, Al Stadler, my grandson-in-law, an Ohio State University graduate, was especially impressed with this tradition. "Everybody is friendly here. They all say hello to us!" It pleases me that this old tradition continues.

BIRKNER: Is there anything else we should hear about?

PEELING: There were two gentlemen, Merv and Joe, who were custodians. I don't know whether they were the only ones who serviced these dormitories. Merv and Joe lived on the campus near the power house and took care of supplying the heat for the various buildings. They were helpful to students in so many ways. Small in stature,

perhaps short in academic credentials, they really had much to give. They were philosophers of the highest capability. They would have much advice for the various students along the way. Merv and Joe were very much a part of the student body. Really from my point of view they were part of the staff.

I think I should tell you about Dr. Stahley. Dr. Stahley was the health officer of the college. It was his responsibility to see that the boys took proper care of their dormitory rooms and kept them in good shape, neat, tidy and clean. Once a week Dr. Stahley, who was a professor of Biology, would go through the dorms and on a piece of paper he would write a note advising us that thus and so needs to be done. It became a game where we had a contest to see who could collect the greatest number of these advisories.

HEDRICK: We have to stop.

BIRKNER: We want to thank you. This has been a lovely hour and very, very helpful. Thank you for being with us.

PEELING: You are very welcome.