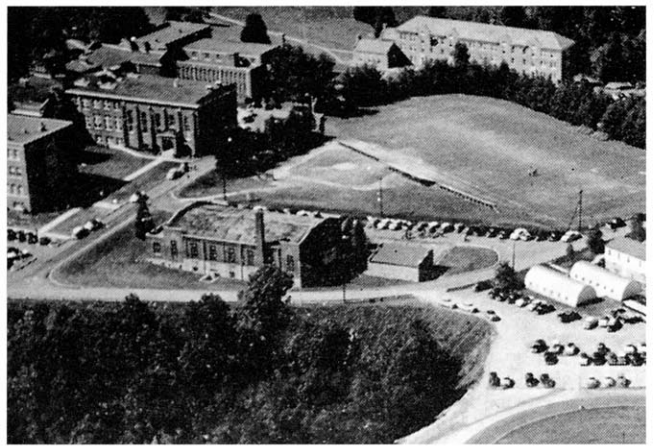


# Childhood in Athens FOREVER INTERTWINED WITH CONCORD

BY NETA FERN WHITE THORN '65



I consider myself the luckiest person in the world to have enjoyed my childhood in Athens, West Virginia influenced always, by my interactions with Concord College. My earliest memory of the college was when I was three years old. I was small enough to ride in the front seat of the car, standing beside my father. We were on our way to pick up my grandfather, Quincy Dean White, who worked as a cook in the cafeteria at the women's dorm. This was my first time to be on campus and I couldn't wait to see it. Every time I

visited any of my relatives and asked where someone was, they would always answer, "at the college." Several aunts, cousins, and my father, Q.D. White, had attended Concord. It was dark as we drove through the small student parking lot. There was my grandfather,

standing in front of a wooden basement door in the glow of a light bulb. So this was that great place that everyone visited? Needless to say, I was disappointed, but my first impression was soon forgotten as my world began to expand and become a part of "The Campus Beautiful."

I looked forward to the weekends because my great aunt, Verlie, would take my sister, Kay, my

great grandfather, Greeley White, and me to the basketball games at Concord. The gym stood between the faculty parking lot and where is now University Point. We sat in the balcony, right above the basket on the western end of the bleachers. We were not allowed to move around during the games so by the third quarter, we were usually lying on a pile of coats sound asleep.

Eventually the time came to enter the first grade at Concord Training School. Student teachers were trained here, in our classrooms,

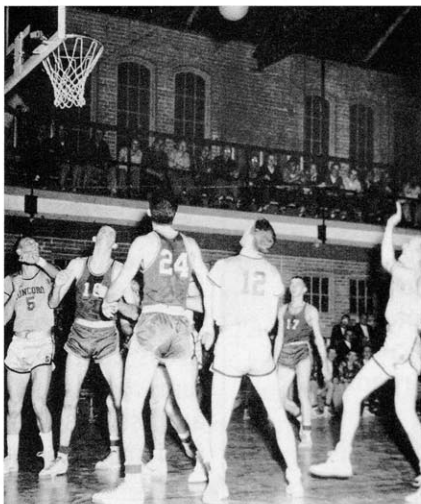
every semester. The future teachers, who took educational psychology, were sent to the fourth and fifth grades to do case studies. Well, I soon learned that the student who was observed would get a home visit, a coke at Bradley's Drug Store and maybe a free movie at the local theatre.

Those of us who had no pride (or maybe too much) worked hard for the privilege of being interviewed. I planned my approach early. First, I had to get their attention, so I would walk by their desk, smile and maybe speak. A side glance every 15 minutes eventually would indicate to me, who they were observing, as they looked at individual students and took notes. By lunch time, we usually knew who had been

selected. I enjoyed several home visits, one movie and some cokes at Bradley's. Now as I reflect on how we all competed to be the case study, I would love to read those observations that recorded our many antics in order to be "the chosen one."

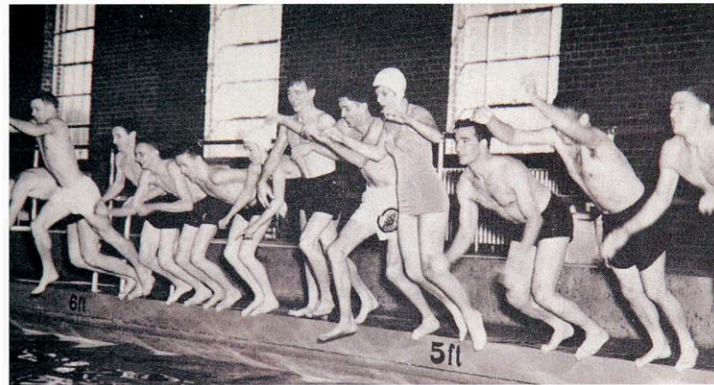
Every year on May 1st, the college celebrated May Day. One year my sister and I were invited to participate in the May Pole Dance. This event took place in the valley. The student union, where it is now, did not exist. A beautiful stand of pine trees grew there instead. Citizens of the town and college families would sit on the hillside and watch the coronation of the May Queen and the dance. One year, my mother, Ennis White, made me a beautiful lavender dress of organdy and lace. Kay's dress was bright red. We wore white lace socks and black patent leather shoes. Everyone watched as we wound our rainbow-colored ribbons in, under and around the pole. I was always so happy that no one tripped and our ribbons never tangled.

After school ended for the summer, the college pool became my favorite place to hang out. The pool stood where the parking lot is now, beside the fine arts building across from the stadium parking lot. Mr. Kyle was always at the front door to take our 15 cents, which gave us the privilege of swimming from 1:00 to 2:30. The dressing room consisted of one large concrete room with lockers and one shower in a stall that was damp and slick. We had to be very careful not to slip and



fall, as we ran up the steps to take our first plunge in the pool. I spent my first two summers in the four foot section and eventually built up enough nerve to jump off the high dive. It was an indoor pool, so everything echoed. If underwater, when someone dove from the board, I could hear a loud metallic sound, followed by a slow rumble. I soon got used to it and spent many good times there swimming with my friends.

Since I only lived a mile from the college, Kay and I were allowed to walk to the college each day for our swim and we anticipated our trip back just as much because we got to stop at the student union and buy ice cream. The student



*(Left to right) Concord students enjoy a dip in the college pool; Fern Thorn attends the 2011 Homecoming Alumni Banquet; sister Kay as Homecoming Queen in October of 1964*

union was in the basement of the ad building under the auditorium. We approached it by way of the baseball field, which is now the front lawn of the fine arts building. As we opened the two big double doors and descended down the wide concrete steps, there was always a cool rush of air to meet us. I could hardly see through the blue haze of cigarette smoke that permeated the lounge where the students sat, playing cards, chatting, listening to the music blaring from the jukebox, reading or sleeping. We were headed to the snack bar to get our ice cream cone, which was a daily ritual that made the walk back home so much more inviting. Our heads were just even with the top of the counter, where I paid for my lemon cone and Kay paid for her raspberry. I enjoyed the walk across

campus because it was always a hot day and we felt so cool. First of all, we had our ice cream to enjoy, our hair was wet and dripping down our back, and we could stroll through the pines which reached from the girls' dorm to the library. Our ice cream lasted until we were almost to where the post office is now.

I always looked forward to two October events in Athens - the homecoming parade and the street carnival. When we were very small, my mother wouldn't let us leave the house until we heard the fire siren clearing the streets to let us know the parade was starting. It was held first, in Princeton and then rushed to Athens and lined up again in front of Basil Shumate's and Perry

costumes and prizes were given to the winners of various categories. There were vendors from the schools and different organizations in town, apple bobbing, and a contest for a Halloween Queen - one penny per vote. As a small child the most exciting event was the appearance of the Phi Delta Pi. They approached the carnival from the direction of the college, in a convertible with the headlights off. The officers rode in the car with the inductees walking on either side of it. This was the night of their initiation. They appeared out of the darkness. A drummer walked in front tapping out a very slow cadence. On the hood of the car were placed two or three



Martin's filling stations. People were lined all the way up State Street and Vermillion Street. The floats were on large flat bed trucks decorated by each sorority, fraternity, religious group and athletic team. In October of 1964, Kay got to ride on one of the floats as Homecoming Queen. There were many bands from all the surrounding areas and lots of clowns. I stood in front of White's Cash Store, which is now the town hall, with my grandmother, uncle, and aunt, who owned the store, and the rest of my neighbors. There was no candy thrown from the parade - just lots of happy memories.

A few weeks later, the town held their annual street carnival. The street was blocked off from the bank to where Homer Ball's store used to be beside the present post office. Adults and children dressed up in

hideous looking jack-o'-lanterns. I anticipated their appearance with fear and anxiety but couldn't wait to see them. For several years I thought they appeared at the carnival because their colors were orange and black.

As I left grade school and entered high school, there were many other positive ways that Concord University entered my life and filled it with intrigue and wonderment. My early memories of living in Athens and also being a part of Concord can never be separate but always intertwined. I never once questioned if I would go to college. I knew I would attend and graduate from Concord when I saw my grandfather standing by the wooden door in the glow of the light. At that moment, I felt my destiny.