

Index of audiotaped interview with Raymond L. Wyatt, Ph.D.,retired,
Wake Forest University faculty member, Biology Department
Interviewed by Anne R. Phillips on October 3, 2008
Index by Anne R. Phillips

Tape 1 or 1
Side 1

Raymond Lewis Wyatt grew up on a farm near Spencer, North Carolina. Learned how to work on the farm; the importance of manual labor.

Attended grammar school at Dukesville, where the Duke Power plant is now. Excellent teachers. Spencer High School in the town of Spencer. Knew from very early age that he would be a teacher. While he was still in high school, his teachers let him teach in the lower grades.

Influence of a typing teacher and a French teacher. To Mars Hill College. Mr. Ashworth, inspiring teacher. Then to Wake Forest College in fall of 1946. "Mostly girls" there post WW II. No space for boys because so many girls had been admitted.

Wyatt lived in town, as was the custom for most Wake Forest College men. Girls in Bostwick and Johnson dormitories on the old Wake Forest campus.

Dr. Bud Smith, later president of Wingate College, led Wyatt into study of botany. Graduate studies at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He feels he perhaps should have attended Duke for its superior standing in botany. The Chapel Hill campus was "overwhelming" -- so large in comparison to the Wake Forest community. "But I was prepared for that."

Things fell into place for him. "I've never asked for a job." Recruited by Mars Hill to teach after graduation from Wake Forest with a B. S. degree in 1948. Did not regret that job choice. On to Chapel Hill to complete master's and then the Ph.D. degree in 1955.

Asked to teach at Wake Forest in 1956. So he came to "a strikingly beautiful campus." Brick buildings with few campus trees, but views and expanse. Original Dutch elm trees died; diseased. Replaced with ash trees. Dutch elm disease started in Boston and worked itself south.

Mr. Larsen, architect of the new Wake Forest campus, had gone to Versailles, Mr. Wyatt thinks, and measured the distance between every elm there. Mr. Larsen duplicated that effect on the Wake Forest campus.

Dr. Grady Britt, Dr. Charles Allen, Dr. Bradbury, and Dr. Koch were all colleagues in the Biology Department. Classrooms were in the Chemistry Department until Winston Hall was built. Students were "mostly from North Carolina and mostly Baptists."

Teaching duties: two classes with laboratory sections every semester. No graduate students to teach the labs at first. At one time had as many as 100 students in beginning biology lecture classes. Only twenty-four students in lab. Many students headed to medical school.

Wake Forest was a place where “education was geared toward educating everybody.” Grounding in the humanities. Not that much emphasis in early years for Wyatt and his colleagues to do research. Vast difference from today.

Biology Department was first department to add doctoral students. Made the teaching load easier.

Faculty Drive for homes. Faculty Apartments supposed to be for new faculty—“sort of get their feet wet” until they chose other housing arrangement.

Salaries: Dr. Wyatt made \$ 4800. for nine months. “Salaries were slow being raised.” Significant increases in faculty salaries started when Dr. Scales came. Big change in the university to be more nationally recognized.

Faculty Apartments – rent less than \$ 100.00 per month. Possible \$ 60.00 for a two-bedroom apartment.

Mention of Dr. Davis and other colleagues in Biology. The John Carters. Lucille and Carl Harris, colleagues, had taught with Wyatt at Mars Hill.

With Dr. Hearn’s arrival, university kept growing. Changes within the university, changes in the town, larger numbers of students, changes with the Baptist State Convention, “a well-known university” and “steady growth.”

No animosity between town and gown Dr. Wyatt witnesses. “This was my town.” Welcomed by garden clubs as part of his teaching and community outreach. His involvement with Reynolda Gardens, which was operated by a committee—about seven people. Reynolds family control jointly with Wake Forest.

Katherine Reynolds’ vision for the Reynolda Gardens--essentially the same today as it was when the Reynolds family lived there. Mr. and Mrs. Babcock “engineered the gift and served on the committee.” Nick Bragg as member of the committee.

Outlying areas of native plants: oaks, redbuds. Some exotic plants in greenhouses near the entrance. Strict rules about what could be planted.

Dr. Wyatt’s happiest part of his life as a faculty member was teaching and working with students.

End of Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

The craft of teaching.

The Biology Department at Wake Forest University accepted Federal grant money; the doctoral degree in Biology was offered at about this time—“a big grant.” To be used for undergraduate and graduate training. Much opposition from the Baptist State Convention to the Federal grant funding; they asked the Biology Department to give the money back. The department said, “No, we will not.” That decision supported by the WF administration. [Anne Phillips understands that AAUP gave Wake Forest a special award for academic freedom as a consequence of this stand.]

“We took the grant and made good use of it.” This was beginning of the break with the Baptist State Convention.

The medical school had been accepting Federal money for many years before this.

Talk about fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist Convention. How did that happen? “The convention has always been fundamental. . . mostly the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention.” Other issues, such as No Dancing dancing on campus. Note Miss Lois Johnson’s liberal stand.

Fundamentalism was a progression—more to the Right. Issue of control, also, “Wake Forest was a big asset.” The first step was to get the trustee board changed: trustees no longer required to be Baptists. “I don’t know who gave in first. Wake Forest was not going to back down.” So agreed to disagree. Wake Forest “went independent.”

Refusal of Biology Department to return Federal money was key in WF break away from Baptist State Convention.

Large funds needed to run a topnotch science department.

Future medical students. “We had a committee—Biology, Physics, and Chemistry--to recommend students to medical school.” Medical school looked for grades and “the inner person. They knew what it took to be a doctor.”

Women into medical school in the 1950s and 1960s—more women applying. “We encouraged it, and it was just a trend.”

Other memories. “Some I can’t tell.” Dr. Wyatt liked his Systematics class, mostly juniors and seniors—trips to the coast.” Collections of native plants: Venus fly trap—different places to look for plants. Did not collect endangered species.

North Carolina has “completely different flora” from Piedmont or mountains.

Coastal areas: Southport, Green Swamp. Half day trips out from camp and then documentation of students’ plant findings. Latin names not required to memorize, even though Dr. Wyatt was required to do so. “I didn’t feel that was necessary.” Dr. W. emphasized plant families, and students had to be able to identify plants by a Latin name. Field trips gave students a chance to get much work done in short span of time.

Wyatt preferred undergraduates—“the ones I really take joy [in teaching.]” Honor society, Beta Beta Beta. Students did original research and presented papers at regional and national conventions.

Trends in the field of biology through the years: both Botany and Zoology changed drastically once DNA and RNA research began; biology “shifted strongly toward biochemistry.” Wyatt felt it a mistake that courses like Systematics “fell by the wayside.” His retirement in 1994. Felt he would have had to go back to school and take courses if he had not retired when he did.

Important that scholars recognize their own interests and energies. Make choices that are vital to each person.

Talk about students’ behavior. “I would never tolerate” students big yawn, especially with sound! Dr. W. would ask them, “Are you sleepy?” Students would answer yes. “Then go home and go to bed,” he told them. They thought he was kidding. No. I said, “I meant it. Go home and get your sleep.”

Compliment for Anne, “You’re a good interviewer. . . I was worried, frankly, about this, but once we got started---“ [everything was fine.]

At this point we discussed professors on old and new campus.
Mars Hill connections. Chat on tape. More on fundamentalism at Baptist seminaries.
Family influences on us as professors.

End of Tape 1, Side 2

End of Interview