



[Browse All Oral History Interviews](#)

[Oral History Program](#)

6-25-2013

Interview with Velma S. Polk

Velma S. Polk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/oralhistoryprogram>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Polk, Velma S., "Interview with Velma S. Polk" (2013). *Browse All Oral History Interviews*. OH 276.
<https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/oralhistoryprogram/192>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Program at Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Browse All Oral History Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. For more information, please contact bramed@winthrop.edu.

**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview OH #276
POLK, Velma**

POLK, Velma

Interviewed: July 15, 2013

Interviewer: Martha Manning

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 00:36:

Abstract: In her July 15, 2013 interview with Marth Manning, Velma Polk describes her two years at Winthrop until 1951. Addressed are rules and regulations, the Blue Line, and dorm life. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Rules and regulations, uniforms, Blue Line, room inspections, dorm mothers, dining hall

Interview Session (July 15, 2013): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview/Interviewer's Introduction*

00:01:01 *Question:* What years were you a student here at Winthrop? *Answer:* I enrolled in the fall '48 and I continued through until January of '51. I did not finish Winthrop; I had to stop due to an eye operation.

00:01:23 *Question:* Why did you decide to come to Winthrop? *Answer:* I just thought it was a wonderful school. I had heard so much about it and it was a girl's school and my daddy thought I should go to an all-girls school.

00:01:40 *Question:* And where did you live then? *Answer:* My freshman year I lived in Roddey dormitory. I grew up outside of Aynor, South Carolina down near Myrtle Beach.

00:01:54 *Question:* Did you know any other people that had been students here? *Answer:* Yes, my sister had come two years before I did. Helen [unclear] and she went two years and then she dropped out and then I came the next year.

00:02:15 *Question:* Did you have to take any kind of entrance test to come, for placement? *Answer:* My entrance to Winthrop was unusual. Due to the fact that '48 was the last year, no '47, was the last year that students in South Carolina graduated from the 11th grade and in '48 there was no graduating class. The first class to graduate through

12th grade was '49. Due to the fact that there was no graduating class throughout the state in '48 the colleges decided to give an entrance exam and the top 10 percent of each school was allowed to take an entrance exam. If you passed that exam you would be accepted into a college. So, my class was the smallest class that Winthrop had had in a good long while due to the fact that there was no official graduating class in 1948. I don't how many counties were like that but I know Horry County was. They entered the 12th grade in '48 and my class graduated in '49.

00:04:10 *Question:* I'm learning things that I haven't heard before, it's exciting. How did you come to Winthrop? How did you arrive? Did you come in a car, a train? *Answer:* My daddy brought me; he and mother drove up from Aynor and brought me to Winthrop.

00:04:34 *Question:* And what did you bring? *Answer:* Everything I brought nearly, except my underclothes, I made because it was a uniform college at that time. You could not go to town and buy dresses and suits or anything that was solid navy blue and solid white.

00:04:55 *Question:* So you made these before you came? *Answer:* I made them before I came because I took home economics in high school. So I was able to make my own clothes and I spent the entire summer making navy and white skirts, blouses and dresses so I would have something to wear. Winthrop issued us a form, navy blue suit, a navy blue dress and a navy blue—well the suit had a skirt and a blouse and then we had the dress and that was our uniforms.

00:05:35 *Question:* And if you hadn't sewn and brought yours and just depended on buying the uniform package, you wouldn't have had enough to live on? *Answer:* No, just receiving a simple white dress, a navy blue dress, a suit and a blouse.

00:05:50 *Question:* I saw that written somewhere the other day. Were you assigned a roommate? *Answer:* Yes, I roomed with a girl I was in school with.

00:05:58 *Question:* Did you know you were going to have her as a roommate? *Answer:* Yes, we had sent in our money for registration and everything and we requested a certain roommate—at that point you could.

00:06:25 *Question:* Did she make her clothes too? *Answer:* No, she didn't make them but someone did. She had someone to sew for her, but I was fortunate enough I knew how to sew so I made my own.

00:06:35 *Question:* Did you get to go home in between holidays? *Answer:* I did not go home until Thanksgiving.

00:06:40 *Question:* They came to get you? *Answer:* They did, they came and picked me up and

I went home.

- 00:06:50 *Question:* And I remember something you told me some other time. What happened to the clothes in your closet? [VP laughs] Did you take anything home to wear? *Answer:* I did not take anything home to wear because I had clothes at home I thought. My sister had gotten a job and she needed a new wardrobe and she was smaller than I am, so my mother took up my clothes and gave them to my sister.
- 00:07:18 *Question:* She took them up? *Answer:* She took them up and gave them to my sister and when I got home I had nothing to wear, so my mother had to go to town and buy me a dress the next morning to wear and bought me some new material and I made a skirt.
- 00:07:30 *Question:* How did you feel? *Answer:* I was hurt because I had made some pretty clothes for me at that time. Some little clothes and some—
- 00:07:42 *Question:* And there wasn't any way that they could have gotten your permission through calling? *Answer:* We did not have telephones at that time.
- 00:07:45 *Question:* You didn't have a phone? *Answer:* We didn't have one—my mother and father did not have one. She did, she did what was right because my sister did need them because she went to work. She came back to Lancaster and worked at Springs Industry in Lancaster so she did need a new wardrobe.
- 00:08:15 *Question:* Did you keep that same roommate during your time here? *Answer:* No, my roommate only came one year and then she dropped out. I moved to Bancroft the next year and I roomed with a girl from Conway, a keen girl, her name was Irene King and we roomed together for sophomore year and part of my junior year. She was the only other roommate I had.
- 00:08:50 *Question:* And you said you were out because you had eye surgery? Was it something sudden? *Answer:* No, I was born with one of my eyes drawn in and crawling and crossed and I did it for cosmetic surgery. I wanted my eyes to look normal.
- 00:09:10 *Question:* Did it interfere with your reading? *Answer:* It did for a while, yes.
- 00:09:14 *Question:* You had a lot of reading to do when you got here. *Answer:* Yes, Winthrop required a lot of studying, a lot of reading and especially a lot of night reading and it did bother me. My eye bothered me for several years. It didn't bother me before I had it done, but I knew to have it cosmetically straighten it would cause some problems.

- 00:10:25 *Question:* Did you get homesick? *Answer:* Yes, I did and I got mad my freshman year because when I left to come to Winthrop my parents decided after I left, at least they did not tell me until later, when I left in September my mother, my father and my younger brother took a road trip and went to California to visit my aunt. I was very upset because I didn't go, so they did not tell me until they returned.
- 00:11:18 *Question:* When you were here did you have room inspections? *Answer:* Yes. Once a week. There were two persons to a room and all the dormitories except senior had a communal bath on each floor. You had to have your beds made up and your clothes picked up. They were very strict about your rooms. They had to pass inspection and they did the inspection once a week unannounced.
- 00:11:54 *Question:* So when you went to class, your bed had to be made? *Answer:* Your beds had to be made and your clothes picked up. You could not leave your clothes strung about the room.
- 00:12:05 *Question:* Did you have an early class? *Answer:* I always had an early class. Most of them were eight o'clock. Yes, I went to breakfast every morning because I liked breakfast. Our meals of breakfast were broken and your lunch was broken, but supper you had to sit at assigned tables.
- 00:12:30 *Question:* Oh you mean you could sit anywhere? *Answer:* Except for supper. You had to sit at an assigned table at supper. The last year, well the first year it was broken at lunch time and then we had to sit at the tables at lunch time, so breakfast was the only broken one and weekends we would have broken tables. On the weekends we didn't have assigned tables.
- 00:12:55 *Question:* Was the food good? *Answer:* The food was very good; I remember the ice cream was delicious. We had the dairy farm here and the farm that Winthrop had. Our food was delicious at that time because we had a lot of fresh vegetables, a lot of fresh dairy products. They made their own ice cream.
- 00:13:28 *Question:* Did you have fire drills? *Answer:* Yes, when they were... I don't remember, but they were about every month.
- 00:13:45 *Question:* Did you have a dorm mother that lived on your floor? *Answer:* Yes, we had a dorm mother and she was on duty and we had freshman were not allowed out after seven o'clock at night so we had—if we left campus at any time we had to sign out and sign in so they would know where we were. We got a telephone call that came in through the office and the message was posted up on a bulletin board so you went by each day and checked your bulletin board to see if you had any messages.

- 00:14:20 *Question:* And your mail came every day? *Answer:* We had a mailbox and we could check our mailbox.
- 00:14:32 *Question:* You had to be in your rooms at seven o'clock? *Answer:* Well, you had to be on campus at seven.
- 00:14:38 *Question:* How about study time? *Answer:* We had a two hour quiet time and it was from 8 to 10 I believe. I don't remember exactly, but we did have a quiet time period, two hours at night. You could go to the library during that quiet time, but if you went to the library at night you had to sign out that you were going to the library. Until eight o'clock you were allowed to roam the campus and you didn't have to be in your room, but you could not leave the campus. While I was there you could not go on the front campus with shorts, lattices or pants. You had to wear a dress if you were on front campus. We were taught to be ladies. Now occasionally they would let us go to the hut out on the lake, but we had to go down side campus. We went out the Roddey entrance and down the street and then across. We would walk to the lake.
- 00:16:03 *Question:* Tell me about Sunday morning. *Answer:* Well the first Sunday morning we were there we had blue line and the president, Dr. Sims, and his wife lead the blue line. We all dressed and walked and all of us had aching feet because most of us had never worn heels before. But we had to dress in our navy blue suits.
- 00:16:34 *Question:* Did you walk to different churches? Or did you all go to one church? *Answer:* No, you were allowed to go into any church. I choose Park Baptist because when my sister was there she went to Park Baptist and she liked it and I wanted a smaller church. I had been used to a smaller church and Pastor Hawkins would come to Winthrop and pick us up.
- 00:17:10 *Question:* How many were in your group going to that church? *Answer:* There was anywhere from three to six or eight and if there was more someone in our group would call and tell how many were going on Sunday morning and if it took two cars someone else would come.
- 00:17:30 *Question:* Isn't that accommodating? *Answer:* It's very accommodating, but if we wanted to go anywhere, either Sunday or any other day we just dressed and walked out on the street corner and stood there and someone picked us up. But you were very safe. My two and a half years I never heard of anybody being mistreated or anything by a driver and the young people picked us up and the middle aged people—everyone picked up a Winthrop girl if they were on the corner and they were going to town. Everyone.

- 00:18:47 *Question:* How about girls who hadn't been going to church that came to Winthrop—they started going to church? They had to didn't they? *Answer:* No, we were not required. It was not required, but it was suggested that you go to church, but me going to church all of my life that was one of the first things that I did.
- 00:19:10 *Question:* How about PE class? *Answer:* Oh, I loved it. First thing I did was swimming. I took archery and I took that for a whole year, two semesters. I loved it. I took square dance and I really enjoyed that, but it messed me up because we had no boys so I got—I was tall.
- 00:19:40 *Question:* You were doing the lead? *Answer:* And I had to do the leads and it messed me up dancing, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. PE was one of my better classes [laughter].
- 00:19:52 *Question:* Tell me about the uniforms you wore to PE. Did they issue those? *Answer:* No, you could wear most any kind of shorts. They preferred you were a navy blue pair of shorts but you did not have to so.
- 00:20:10 *Question:* How about the bathing suit? *Answer:* They had bathing suits and they requested that we buy them. They were...
- 00:20:20 *Question:* One piece? Uniform like? *Answer:* With the kind of boxy legs, no high cuts.
- 00:20:35 *Question:* Tell me about guest speakers and things like that that were invited to come to the campus. Do you remember any? I know it has been a long time. *Answer:* It has been a long time, but I thoroughly enjoyed our guest speakers and we had some of the best bands, we had the military band to come, but we had concerts—classical as well as...we didn't have any contemporary, but we had just regular, the big band, we had the big bands that came. We were required to go to all of the lecture series. You could only miss one or two a year. You paid for it so you had to go. They were required, but most of them were very interesting and especially the concert things. It was, it was required that you go. Now they don't require them but it was required. We had juggler acts to come. We had different kinds of acts to come, so it was not all music. A lot of it was lectures and some of it I liked and some of it I didn't, naturally. We had political speakers that spoke occasionally. It was a real well-rounded education. It was something for everyone. I thoroughly enjoyed it.
- 00:22:15 *Question:* That's good. Did you have once a week meetings where the student body had to meet? *Answer:* We met—they required meetings—seems like it was once a week. We did, we had assigned seats.

- 00:23:05 *Question:* Were you a member of any kind of club? *Answer:* No, I didn't join any clubs.
- 00:23:17 *Question:* I know it's been a while but can you remember any professors that stand out in your life? *Answer:* Yea, I liked economics and I liked Dudley Sturgis. The rest I don't remember their names really but I enjoyed my math classes. I always liked math and I think I would have liked to have been an accountant.
- 00:23:55 *Question:* So you were working towards a degree in accounting? *Answer:* Yes, business accounting. I always liked numbers. That was my specialty.
- 00:24:17 *Question:* What was your favorite class? *Answer:* I think my math class was my favorite class.
- 00:24:24 *Question:* What kind of math was this? Business math? *Answer:* Business math.
- 00:24:26 *Question:* Did you have to take algebra or trig or anything like that? *Answer:* No, I didn't take algebra trig in college. I had taken it in high school, but in college it was just business math. I liked accounting and bookkeeping. I was more interested in that than anything else and I enjoyed that.
- 00:24:45 *Question:* How about a foreign language? *Answer:* I hadn't taken a foreign language. I took French in high school.
- 00:25:20 *Question:* Were you allowed to date here on campus? *Answer:* Yes, on Saturday night we could have a date until 9:30.
- 00:25:35 *Question:* But how would you find a date? No boys on campus, it was all girls. *Answer:* Well, you met people at church.
- 00:25:45 *Question:* Church? Ok, good. I'm thinking back and that's what happened to a lot of ministers at Wofford. They met their wives at church. *Answer:* The way I met my husband was my Sunday school teacher.
- 00:26:05 *Question:* Here at college? *Answer:* When I was at college my Sunday school teacher down at Park Baptist invited, and she had a habit—she was a transplant to Rock Hill, she did not grow up here and she was a school teacher—and she invited Winthrop students to her house for lunch on Sunday.
- 00:26:30 *Question:* And Nolan was there? *Answer:* After a couple of Sundays I met him. Her husband invited him and so we met at her house. She was matchmaking.

- 00:26:45 *Question:* Record player I've known her awhile. So what happened when you went back home? *Answer:* I got ready for the next year, but when I left Winthrop I did not go home. I got a job here in Rock Hill with Western Union and they promised me a six month course but I didn't get it, but after for about three or four weeks, a month, they sent me to Clinton, South Carolina as office manager on maternity leave. The lady was about to have a baby and I stayed in Clinton, South Carolina for seven weeks. Well, it was in January I think, I got out of school in January. We had to go back after Christmas to finish up the end of our semester by the end of January.
- 00:28:00 *Question:* Then you got a break? *Answer:* Then you got your break the last of January so when my break came up I moved out and went to work for Western Union. They gave me a months training and then they sent me to Clinton, South Carolina as a manger of that office.
- 00:28:14 *Question:* You had a car? *Answer:* No, I did not have a car. I went by bus and you had to get a room. I roomed in a boarding house with a lady that run a beauty shop and she let her employees live with her, but she made an exception and let me live with her. That was right across from PC College [Presbyterian College] so it was interesting.
- 00:28:55 *Question:* Who was the president here at Winthrop when you were here? Do you remember? *Answer:* Sims.
- 00:29:00 *Question:* Sims? Yes, we talked about that earlier, with him coming to those meetings and relaying what was happening. Would you recommend Winthrop to your friends or anybody? *Answer:* Most highly. I think Winthrop is a very good school and has a very good education department. They're branching out with other things now, but as you said earlier it's mostly a teaching college. When I was there, all the teachers taught Winthrop Training School. It was a training school very much in use at that time. Dan Anderson was a member at the Training School. A lot of us children here in Rock Hill did attend that school because it was highly recommended because it was so highly supervised because students taught there and they were supervised.
- 00:30:15 *Question:* Have you heard that Winthrop was first established in Columbia? *Answer:* No.
- 00:30:40 [no question]: I don't know what you paid to come to Winthrop but I read in the history books they gave me to read—the first students that came here paid \$129 dollars a year. *Answer:* I don't know what it was but I know that it was not very much. Yes, because my dad did not discuss money with me and he paid my

tuition and I did not have to work while I was in school. A lot of the students did work. We had to buy our books, but that was included in our tuition and the only thing you had to have actual money for was for your cosmetics and your personal items and then anything if you wanted to go eat or get drinks. There was a soda shop across the street, but very few students went due to the fact that not many of us had money. Because if you went to Winthrop you didn't—ten dollars a month was a great amount of budget for most college students at that time because their food was good, we got plenty to eat so we did not have a reason. Yes, but just small school supplies was all we had to buy and our books were furnished. We could get it with or without books. My dad paid for my books and my tuition.

00:32:50 *Question:* I know you've driven through Winthrop recently and you see how different it's changed. Wouldn't it be some comparison to what you had when you came? *Answer:* Yes, it is. Both of my girls went to Winthrop.

00:33:05 *Question:* Wonderful, did they live on campus? *Answer:* No, neither one of them did. My oldest spent her first few years at Winthrop but she lived at home and then she transferred to Lenora Ryne in Hickory, North Carolina. My youngest one went to Tech and got a secretarial degree and then later in life she went back to Winthrop and graduated Summa Cum Laude. She enjoyed Winthrop.

00:34:10 [no question]: Some of the students who got college, depending on their diploma, got a letter—most recent ones that graduated—did they want a new diploma with university imprinted and the ones I've talked to, not in this deal here but on the outside said no. They went to a college then, they wouldn't want it changed. *Answer:* No, the universities are wonderful. Closeness. I thoroughly enjoyed the smallness of Winthrop. It was a big college and my class was the smallest class they had had in a little while.

00:35:09 *Question:* Anything else you'd like to share? *Answer:* No, I think that about covers it. I've enjoyed it. I appreciate it and I hope this helps someone else maybe that will decide they'd like to come to Winthrop. I think it is a wonderful school.

00:36:06 *End of interview*