



12-29-1971

## **Charles A. Dukes (December 29, 1971)**

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. CHARLES A. DUKES

December 29, 1971  
Durham, North Carolina

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

- ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Charles A. Dukes. A, middle initial, stands for Aubrey. What is your position with Duke University, Mr. Dukes?
- DUKES: I am Assistant Vice President Emeritus at the present time. I served as Director of Alumni Affairs up until the time I became Assistant Vice President. And before that I was in the Department of Alumni Affairs from the time I graduated in '29 until I retired in '63. Is that what you wanted?
- ARENA: Yes, I am particularly anxious to know what your position was at the time President Nixon was a student in the law school, which as you recall was the period 1934 through 1937.
- DUKES: At that time I was Assistant Director of Public Relations in the Department of Public Relations and Alumni Affairs. And I later became Assistant Director of Public Relations and Alumni Affairs.
- ARENA: When you say later, that would have been after 1937?
- DUKES: After 1937. In 1944 I became Director of Alumni Affairs and served in that capacity until 1963, when I became Assistant Vice President, in which capacity I served until 1967, at which time I retired.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you when and where you were born?

DUKES: I was born in Woolford, South Carolina, August 19, 1907.

ARENA: Thank you. What was your contact, as you recall, with President Nixon during this period when he was a student on campus?

DUKES: As a matter of fact, it was fairly limited. I knew him along with Charles S. Rhyne and Lyman Brownfield, with other law students who were here at that time. The law school, of course, as you know had a new building in 1930, with the rest of the west campus which was moved into in 1930, and we began to put together a university in the true sense of a university by bringing together colleges and schools into the complex. The law school was one of these which we developed.

Because of the depression which hit us in 1929, and which we continued to feel for a period of several years, we had a very interesting cross section in the student body, many of whom were pretty put upon in order to find funds to get an education. We offered a considerable number of scholarships to students. According to my recollection, Nixon, Brownfield and Rhyne all had scholarships. And many of these students found it necessary to supplement the scholarship by working at odd jobs of one kind or another. I know that Charlie Rhyne worked as a construction worker at odd times during the college years while he was here. Whether Nixon worked or not, from my personal knowledge, I do not know, but probably he did in some way supplement his income.

ARENA: I believe that the written record shows that he had some NYA assistance. Would that have included a job as well?

DUKES: Yes, it required a job because the NYA was a work program.

ARENA: And will you remind me what those initials stand for?

DUKES: National Youth Administration.

ARENA: That was one of the New Deal programs for helping students. Would this be just on the college level, from your recollection?

DUKES: Of course, there were other programs that helped young men. I say young men because it also had a program for young men in what we called Youth Camps that were scattered around the country. My personal relationship with the National Youth Administration was for college students.

ARENA: Excuse me. Did you have an official function in connection with the program, too?

DUKES: Yes. I worked in our department--at least I supervised in our department--a considerable number of students in this program. It was founded by the Federal government. They did such things as handle mailings in bulk, student messenger services and chapel ushers. This program also applied to libraries. Our libraries in various schools had student assistants, and I'm not sure, but it seems to me Nixon was employed at one time either in the law school library or the general public library. Now these records, I think, could be verified by going back. I'm not sure that we kept detailed records on every student that was employed. But in that connection, Dean Horack, who was Dean of the law school . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. Dean Horack would be his full name?

DUKES: Dean, I'm not sure about his first name, H. Claude Horack. And Dean Horack came up with the idea that he needed an inexpensive place where his law students could be housed because of the financial situation, and where they could be together when they were away from the classes. This would help to unify the student body, a cohesiveness that he wished for his students. And there were at least two--and there may have been three--log cabins that were built and the students made application to be housed in these.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, you are going to check a source which will contain some written articles about these houses, Sir?

DUKES: Yes.

ARENA: And even though we'll get that later--possibly have xeroxed copies of the articles--to the best of your recollection, would you describe their construction, if it comes to mind, estimates would be fine, their cost, the source of the funds and the cost to the student?

DUKES: Unfortunately, I can't give you the cost to the student because I do not remember. However, this could be checked by referring to the catalog, the law school catalog of that period, and also by checking probably with Miss Helen Kendall. Miss Kendall was the private secretary of Dean Horack and she also was the recorder for the law school, and was serving in that capacity at the time Nixon, Rhyne, Brownfield and others in the classes of 1934, '35, '36, '37 were here as students.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if she is still living in this area?

DUKES: She is living here. She is now the recorder for the Duke University Divinity School. She is to retire in June of

this year. I beg your pardon. That is not June but in September. I suggest that you not mention this to her because on this point she is very sensitive.

ARENA: Most people who are about to retire are. Mum's the word.

DUKES: All except me. But Miss Kendall will have very personal knowledge, not only of the charges for the rent, I expect, of the housing. If she does not know, then I would suggest you talk with Mr. W. E. Whitford, who was in charge of the building and grounds during this period and is now partially retired but serves as consultant in the area of buildings and grounds and maintenance to the university.

ARENA: Excuse me. Actually both Miss Kendall and Mr. Whitford are with Duke University at the moment?

DUKES: Yes, at the present time. Mr. Whitford has an office in the Allen Building, which is the general administration building and he is listed in the faculty telephone directory. He would know about the cost of the buildings and perhaps would know a great deal about the details of the buildings.

ARENA: The living conditions. . . .

DUKES: The living conditions and everything of that type. As a matter of fact, they were constructed probably under his direction. However, Mr. A. Carl Lee in Charlotte, North Carolina, was the chief engineer for the university during the construction period and continued to serve in an advisory capacity up until a few years ago. He was in charge of all the buildings on this campus when the original buildings were built and served probably as consultant in the construction of the log cabins. So if you wish additional detail, you might well get good information from him as well as Mr. Whitford. However, all of this was handled through Mr. Whitford's office.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you what other alternatives there were for students during that period, '34 through '37, besides the log cabin housing?

DUKES: There were dormitories, and all students attending Duke University at that time were required to live on the campus, except for very special circumstances or conditions, or except with very special permission. And we had sufficient houses to take care of the students, but we did not have any graduate or professional school dormitories at that time. The purpose, primarily, for the log cabins was to bring about a unification of the law school student body to some degree, as well as to furnish inexpensive housing for those who might feel financial pressure because of the depression or financial difficulty. These houses were built just as any log cabin.

ARENA: When you say log cabin, you really mean log cabin.

DUKES: I really mean log cabin. [Laughter] They were built to look like log cabins and were built out of logs.

ARENA: Would the inside be rough, say, with no plaster or no wallpaper, from your recollection? These details could probably be found in the article, but certainly from the outside they gave the appearance of being rustic.

DUKES: Oh, yes, they were very rustic.

ARENA: And, oh yes, before I forget, are there any standing now, as a matter of curiosity?

DUKES: No, they only lasted for a short period until the economic situation of the country began to change, and also the economic conditions of the students. We then went into a new period of time in which more people had more ready funds for education, and we had other dormitories built, like graduate dormitories, to fill a very specific need. So the primary two purposes--the financial situation and the lack of cohesion or personal relationship between a particular school's student body or group of students--were filled in another way with other dormitories.

ARENA: Actually, of course, the building of the cabins indicates a concern of the school for the welfare of the students, as you have mentioned. I was just wondering, it had the option, of course, of having no concern at all. Was there a time that that situation did prevail? In other words, before the log cabins it was up to the law students themselves to shift for themselves, or were there dormitories in existence for them?

DUKES: There were dormitories available but law students were spread throughout the housing facilities for all students.

ARENA: Right, and there was no segregation, in the loose sense of the word, no segregation which was desired for the law students so they could share common problems and common interests.

DUKES: That's right. You see, the medical students had unity because they were in the medical center, and the hospital was not completely used and we housed the medical students on the third floor of the hospital in wards that were not yet filled. Graduate students in the arts and sciences, and the law students and others did not have special facilities. Therefore, they were put in with the others. We did not have as many married students in those days, and therefore we didn't have the need for married facilities that developed later.

ARENA: As compared with the situation today, even undergraduates are marrying more commonly, let alone graduate students. Do you mind if I ask you to clarify as much as possible the question of your direct contact with the President during these years, as casual as it was? What do you recall about it, as clearly as you can, even though it was very limited, as you say? Did he happen to see you on a normal basis?

DUKES: No, I had no regular relationship with him whatsoever, only as we dealt with the students. And then, of course, when it became time for them to become alumni, it was my responsibility to work with them in groups and not as individuals. For example, when the law school class of '37 became seniors, we met with them a number of times in order to indoctrinate them into becoming alumni, or inform them about their relationship with the institution after they left. At least, our hoped-for relationship with them.

ARENA: Do you recall, or do you know, if the university has a kind of automatic alumni--I'm thinking for example, I am an alumnus of Penn [University of Pennsylvania], and if I'm not mistaken, I was automatically enrolled as an alumnus, or does the student have to make a direct application in some way himself?

DUKES: No, a student is automatically enrolled. Any student that registers at Duke University and completes work towards a degree is automatically an alumnus. Now, he has certain other statuses that enter into the picture, but it is too complicated at this point, I think, to be of interest.

ARENA: Do you happen to recall, while we are on that point, if President Nixon ever had any role, any office in the Alumni Association at all?

DUKES: Not as far as I know. However, I do know this, that there was not any time in which he did not indicate an interest. If he was asked to participate in any activities, or if he was asked to come to the campus for any purpose to serve Duke he always responded, if possible, just as Brownfield, Charles Rhyne or others did. But I was not impressed with the fact that he had any feeling other than a fine, wholesome, good feeling about the university. And as far as my own personal relationship with him, again, it was limited but very pleasant.

ARENA: Do you recall speaking about this contact, the fact that his mother and grandmother drove all the way from Whittier, California to attend the graduation? Do you happen to have any recollection of seeing two elderly women or meeting them at that time?

DUKES: No, I did not.

ARENA: Did you come across that knowledge later, perhaps, and possibly meet either his mother or his parents in subsequent years?

DUKES: No, I never met them at all, so far as I know. At the law school we asked the law school to set aside a period of time in which we went in and talked to the members of the senior class. And they were asked to be present, and as a matter of fact, the faculty urged them to be present. I know in the case of Dr. [Malcom] McDermott who was here at that time, I don't know the particular year, but there were a number of times he held his class at 12 o'clock and all senior students were required to be in this class because they took this course. And he would turn this class period over to the Director of Alumni Affairs or the representative from the office, and we would talk about the activities, the relationship and the privileges as well as the responsibilities of being an alumnus, and we would have an open discussion period. And even though I can't say he was there, from personal knowledge, he had to be there because if he weren't, he had to attend other classes to make it up. [Laughter] I'm pretty sure he was there. I'm just assuming that is true, but I am pretty certain that he was there.

ARENA: Was there any indication--this might be putting it in a negative way--that where there were responsibilities, such as where students were supposed to show up for special classes or where there would be a record of a student being absent, is there any indication from your personal experience that he was remiss in missing classes?

DUKES: No.

ARENA: Or not attending things like that. You have no personal knowledge of it.

DUKES: No. As far as I know, I have the impression, and I have this impression as a group, not as an individual, but I have the impression that that particular group of students along in those years was a very responsible group of people.

ARENA: You're saying by those years, we're talking about the depression students?

DUKES: That's right.

ARENA: And they do stand out in your mind and you have the advantage of being able to look back over a long span here. What other general comments like that--thinking of different periods--could you make, and go into more detail if you will, about the nature of the depression students?



DUKES: Well, you see, the depression--let me say it this way: Most of us are afraid of the unknown. This seems to be a human trait. Well, the depression brought a situation of lack of knowledge on the part of the individual as to what he could expect in years ahead. He had a feeling that somewhere during his lifetime he was going to hit some adverse circumstances, and that group of students seemed to feel very keenly that they needed to be prepared to meet the future and that they had limited background or financial resources on which to fall back. Therefore, they had to depend on what they themselves could produce, so to speak, from scratch. And they were pretty serious about things. They were getting ready to meet the world on its own terms and they were perfectly willing to give the other fellow the benefit of the doubt, but they expected everybody else to be equally straightforward and responsible, just as they were.

ARENA: Would this be a pertinent statement, tying in with this idea of how the times, in a way, can affect the personality of groups as well as the students? As a matter of fact, are there more graduate students today, including Duke--and of course you would know more about Duke? But, I know you have been on other campuses, as I have. As a matter of fact, are the graduate students, including the law students who are graduate students, more ill-kempt, less better-dressed, more disheveled today than they were in the President's time? Or is that just a matter of fact, without going into the whys and wherefores?

DUKES: This question is very interesting to me for this reason  
. . .

ARENA: I won't mention the school, but I have seen this in some top graduate schools in the country, and I was amazed to see the appearance of graduate students, life style, and so forth. But I was just amazed at the appearance of these students.

DUKES: Well, you see, it's a part of the times, and I think you have to remember this, that in those days a fellow was coming to school here and he was not only coming, often on scholarship, but he was also working part of the time to get additional funds, and therefore he had to apply not only all of his own talents and resources but every dime he could scrape to receive an education. Therefore, he felt he had to apply himself to a greater degree to take advantage of it. At the present time there is no great need for a person to do this, because up until the last couple of years we have been in a very lush period and the students have not had to worry too much about finances. And I think a part of the dress, the neatness and all of the other signs of conformity you saw in '37, '36, '35 and '34 was in relationship to the economics, the social and the materialistic attitude.

The students today can afford to be casual. They are casual in their attitudes, they're casual in their courses many of them--with all due respect--they're casual in their respect for tradition, they're casual in their dress. That doesn't mean that the student today isn't just as intelligent. He just doesn't have the fear of insecurity to motivate him in the same degree. He doesn't feel he's got to conform. Students forty years ago almost had to conform in order to survive or get ahead in the commercial, political, economic, religious or the social world. Young people today do not have to conform, neither do the adults.

ARENA: Would that tie in with this question? What were the relations with the community itself, with Durham, as compared to today, in light of this question about the times? In other words, did you find that relations between students and the community were better then than they are today?

DUKES: I don't think so. There is always a small element. . . . Back in that period we had a group of pretty rough folks who took things in their stride. Maybe they indulged a little too much, in one way or another. There's also a small group now that indulges too much, but if you take the majority of the students, I think it's pretty much leveled off. The pendulum is swinging back. If you take into consideration the casualness of the town in regard to its living and its responsibilities and all of its social activities, you will find that they relate pretty well. The campus and the town are not far apart in its thinking and every day living.

ARENA: By the idea of the casualness of the town, as a matter of information, does the town depend income-wise on the economic activity generated by the university--the money that comes in from the faculty, the students as customers, and so forth? Is that the main source of income for Durham or is it the cigarette industry?

DUKES: Oh, no. There was a time when Duke University and the cigarette industry and textiles were the main support. I think you have to remember at that time we were just beginning to come out of the depression, and during the depression Duke University and the tobacco companies were probably the only source of money in this immediate area. You see, we had a number of North Carolina towns that had been on script and we had banks everywhere closed.