

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk UU
Television film "Dean Rusk Visit to Davidson College, 1962"

SIDE 1 of this recording is closed.

RICHARD RUSK: This recording is the soundtrack for a TV film. Rather, it's a movie/film produced on 16mm film. It's about Dean Rusk and his visit to Davidson College as Secretary of State in 1962. It was produced by a local [Davidson] TV station.

(Interviewer is unknown, hereinafter denoted as INTERVIEWER.)

INTERVIEWER: Those words from the Secretary of State of the United States, spoken during a visit to Davidson College. That visit and the man are the subject of tonight's assignment, Dean Rusk.

(musical interlude)

Every man who goes through college is marked by the experience. The mark is not always the same. In one man it may be formed by the inspiration of teachers and their teachings, another man may be marked by rebellion against them. But no man totally escapes the mark that comes with college education. And every once in a while almost every old grad yearns to get back to the scene of that experience. How great the yearning was in Secretary of State Dean Rusk, we cannot say. But, nonetheless, it is true that he returned to Davidson College today. Dean Rusk's ties with his college have been strong through the years. But of late, there has been another reason for him to have a more than average interest in Davidson. Two of his colleagues during his student days have gone on to head the college. One of these is Frontis [Withers] Johnston, now Dean of Faculty at Davidson.

INTERVIEWER: Dean Johnston, it has actually been thirty years or so since you all were students here, hasn't it?

FRONTIS JOHNSTON- I'm afraid you're right. I hate to admit it's been that far back. But here is the yearbook of Dean Rusk's senior year, and you'll notice the date is 1931, which is the year of his graduation. I first knew Dean Rusk when he was a freshman in the fall of 1927. He came here that year when I was a sophomore. I came to know him early in his career. He was elected president of the freshman class and began, I think, to take his place in the student body that he was afterward to fulfill so well.

INTERVIEWER: Well, in Washington he has been noted to be somewhat reticent. Perhaps this is true of all diplomats. But was this a characteristic of him at Davidson?

JOHNSTON: Well, I think only in a relative sense. I agree that he was, as a student, never a back-slapping, Joe College sort of a fellow who would talk imply for the sake of talking. But I would not agree that he did not know how to speak and speak well, I simply would say that, even in his student days, that when he had something to say he would say it, and that he could say it extremely well. I would not characterize him as so reticent that he never talked or never entered into the affairs of the college in this way.

INTERVIEWER: Well, actually, it was in a rather active phase that you were in closest contact with him, wasn't it?

JOHNSTON: Oh, yes, I knew him best, as you probably know, as a member of the basketball team. He and I played together for two years during his sophomore and junior year, and my junior and senior year. I think by present-day standards, or even maybe the standards of that time, I don't think you could say any of us were really great players. We were none of us subsidized, we just happened to show up here. But I always think of him as a fellow who got, physically speaking as well as intellectually speaking, all, got out of himself all there was there to contribute. I never cease to remember how he was put by the coach at the position of center. Now, I was taller than he by not very much, but a little, but he could out-jump me. And in those days, you know, we had to center-jump after every goal. We'd come back to center, and Dean was the center. I always used to contend that I could out-jump him under the backboard, if he got a little start, but, flat-footed, jumping center, he could always out-jump me and I always remember this with a little bit of—not exactly shame, but a little bit of surprise. He had a lot of springs in him.

INTERVIEWER: Rusk must have been pretty fair at basketball, for one of the teams on which he played piled up a string of eleven consecutive victories, a feat not equalled until the current season of 1962 when a Davidson team won twelve straight. Ironically, both teams finally fell to VMI [Virginia Military Institute]. The gymnasium in those days was across from the administrative building and a teammate on the Rusk teams was Greer Martin. Martin is now President of Davidson College. Well, Or. Martin, thirty years have brought a lot of changes both to the old basketball court, which now appears to be a student activities center, and, of course, to you and to Dean Rusk and the other basketball players of that day. Just what sort of ballplayer was Rusk?

GREER MARTIN: Well, Rusk was an excellent basketball player; one of the best we had at Davidson while I was here. And he played well on this particular court that we are now standing on because I remember as a freshman, Dean Rusk and Frontis Johnston, and others defeated Duke University's basketball team on this court. And the boys almost tore up this building at that time. It's rather surprising that it's still here, I think.

INTERVIEWER: How would you sum up his playing qualities?

MARTIN: Well, Dean was not very fast, but he was extremely accurate. And, as I think everybody will recognize, he was extremely smart on the basketball court as well as in the classroom, which resulted in his winning Phi Beta Kappa and winning a Rhodes Scholarship, of course.

INTERVIEWER: And you worked with him not only as a team member, but also off the court, I believe.

MARTIN: Yes, we had a good many mutual associations. He came from Georgia and I did, too, and we both had to earn a considerable part of our expenses at Davidson. I think he did better and more than I did, because I think Dean Rusk paid his way through Davidson. He worked in a great many places. We worked at the same boarding house: worked both as waiters and later as managers. And, of course, Dean Rusk was manager of the student store which was a right important center at Davidson at that time. It was the only place the students had to go for recreation and for food: that is, outside the boarding house. And Dean also had time to work at the local bank in the afternoons. And he did so well that they wanted him back, and he worked here in the summer in that local bank. So, he did a great many things and he did them all well.

INTERVIEWER: The bank in which Rusk worked in Davidson has moved next door and changed its name. One of Rusk's coworkers on the job, James Lore, is now president of the bank. Well, Mr. Lore, there's not too much here in the Piedmont Bank that would look like home to the Dean Rusk who worked in the Bank of Davidson is there?

JAMES LORE: Very little. He would hardly recognize the old stand in which he used to work.

INTERVIEWER: He actually preceded you as far as coming to that job, didn't he?

LORE: Yes, he was here about a year before I was.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of worker was he when you knew him then?

LORE: Very good. He was excellent in the banking field. He'd had quite a lot of experience in summer work, and I think stayed out a year probably, worked in a bank in Atlanta and then Greensboro.

INTERVIEWER: So that he was a little more experienced at that time than you were?

LORE: Oh, yes, he taught me a good deal about the operations of a bank. I was green when I came in.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of hours did he put in here at the Bank of Davidson?

LORE: From about one o'clock until we got through, ordinarily about five, sometimes six.

INTERVIEWER: So, he actually, in the course of a week, put in a fair amount of time in addition to his schoolwork.

LORE: Yes, he would stay right with it until it was completed. Sometimes, of course, at the end of the month there, it was eight, ten, eleven o'clock sometimes.

INTERVIEWER: Actually, I suppose this job here in the bank put him very much in touch with the townspeople of Davidson, didn't it?

LORE: Very much. He was well-acquainted with the townspeople and associated with them quite a lot and everybody seemed to like him. He'd go to many of the town functions, and was very civic-minded.

INTERVIEWER: So that while he was here he was pretty much a part of the Davidson community?

LORE: Definitely.

INTERVIEWER: When a man lives in a community for four years, he settles on a few favorite haunts: a few stores and obviously a barber, even in Dean Rusk's case. Rusk's barber was Ralph Johnson, who is still cutting hair in Davidson. Mr. Johnson, what kind of person did you find Dean Rusk to be?

RALPH JOHNSON: Well, he was a quite pleasant young man, quite unassuming. And he seemed to have gotten along quite well with everyone in town. In fact, most people knew him as one of the favorite college boys here.

INTERVIEWER: Dean Rusk has now what might be called a high forehead, in due respect. Did he have as little hair back in 1930?

JOHNSON: Well, yes, he had hardly any then. And haircuts were twenty-five cents at that time, and I think sometimes he felt he didn't get his money's worth, even so.

INTERVIEWER: How well did you get to know him?

JOHNSON: Well, quite well. I considered him one of my good friends when he was in school here. As a matter of fact, when he graduated from school and was about to go to Oxford, he made me a present of the dictionary he had used in school here, which I kept until 1933 when my home was destroyed by fire. And of course the dictionary was destroyed along with the other things.

INTERVIEWER: But the town and its people were not Dean Rusk's only extracurricular interests at Davidson. Himself the son of a Presbyterian minister, Rusk was occupied with religious affairs. A colleague in his activities with the Young Men's Christian Association, was Albert Mclure: Mclure later to become a minister, himself. Mr. Mclure, you are a third Georgian in what seems to be a very dominant group of Georgians here at Davidson, at least in retrospect during the time of Dean Rusk's tenure at the college. Just how did Rusk impress you as a student and as a fellow Georgian?

ALBERT MCLURE: Well, of course, I had known Rusk's brother before I came to Davidson, and therefore was glad to get to know him because he was from Georgia. Now it's easy to say that we're from Georgia, since he is in the State Department. But, he was a clean-cut sort of a

fellow that was interested in the total program here, athletics, religious life, everything that was going, and was carrying a fine record in his classroom.

INTERVIEWER: Well, just how did he manage all this load?

MCLURE: I wished then that I knew, and I now don't understand. I do know that one night over in the Crow's Nest where he was staying we were looking at a book he had in his hand. He had been out on the road for over a week, and hadn't -- Well he said he hadn't seen the inside of it, and had an exam on it the next day. Came up with an "A" on it." And if I knew the secret of it I'd have copied it then. I'd say it was just pure intelligence, ability to organize his material quickly.

INTERVIEWER: Well you were both very active on the YMCA here at Davidson, were you not?

MCLURE: Well, of course, he was the chief figure, he was president of the student body and president of the Y were the two top offices within the student body. And he was president of the YMCA and I was a cabinet member. About fifteen of us boys gave him the training he needed to handle situations today. You know there's nothing smarter than a college boy, and particularly in that day. And when nearly ten of them were planning to go into the ministry they had not only wisdom but the sanction of the Almighty behind them. And if he can keep them together and work the thing out, he can certainly handle any five ministers today, which is little different aspect, but handling people.

INTERVIEWER: Well how about Rusk himself, would you describe him as a fairly religious person?

MCLURE: I would say very religious, but not the kind that's distasteful. No piousity [sic] at all. Very wholesome. Loved a good story. Bring some good ones back from the Board of Directors Meeting down at the bank. At the same time he was into everything here that was good and wholesome and I would say deeply religious through his whole being. He wasn't organizing prayer meetings as such on campus, but when it came time to choose the top man in a strong religious organization, they picked him. He was wholesome in his outlook and solid in his convictions and was the type of fellow that would impress you in what he believed and the reasons why he believed them. He made a good president of the Y.

INTERVIEWER- Despite all these activities and this work, Dean Rusk did have some spare time at Davidson College, and at least part of that time was spent on Fraternity Row. Fraternity Row, like many other things, in fact most other things, at Davidson has undergone changes. The fraternities have moved out to take new quarters, and this has been turned over to the faculty. But this was the old Kappa Alpha house and one of his fraternity brothers in this house was Dr. William McGovern. Dr. McGovern, just how much time did Dean Rusk have to spend here?

WILLIAM MCGOVERN: Well, of course, we didn't spend a great deal of time on the court, because we didn't eat here, nor did any of us sleep in the houses. So, they were mostly meeting places after the meals. But he spent certainly as much time as the rest of us: a normal amount of

the day's time. I would judge that he would drop by for perhaps a few minutes after each of the meals and come down for our meetings and this type of thing. This is about all any of us really did.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of person was Dean Rusk as he showed himself in the fraternity?

MCGOVERN: Well, of course Dean was a person who was sincere in everything he did. We all realized this. I think I might indicate something of an answer to this by saying that those of us who were juniors, rising seniors, were pretty much afraid that when time for elections for next year rolled around, that he as a sophomore would be elected number one in front of any of us. We were very delighted the chaps had decided to wait for this honor for another year for him. He was a natural leader, of course, there's no doubt about this.

INTERVIEWER: Well it's been noted that Rusk even in his college days was tactful and somewhat diplomatic, did this always hold true?

MCGOVERN: Well, I think this is probably true. I know he always knew what to do in a touchy situation. I don't know whether I ought to tell this little incident or not, because he of course is a man of great authority now. But one evening we were going to Charlotte, bumming as we did back in those days, and he and I were on our way over there to a picture show. And we caught a ride on the bumming corner and it happened to be with a couple of drunks, and they stopped about a mile and a half the other side of Cornelius and got out to take a drink. And they invited us to get out, which we did and offered us one, which we of course refused. And then they began to insist and get a little touchy about this and edge towards us. And Dean kind of gave me the eye and we started inching down the road and first thing you knew we were running full tilt down the road with these two characters chasing us. We were both out for football, and basketball and we managed to outrun them and get back to Cornelius safely.

INTERVIEWER: Well now, it's always handy and seldom turns out that you know people are going to be famous in their younger days. Was there any inkling of any indication that Rusk might go as far as he has gone?

MCGOVERN: Well, of course, that's a very difficult question to even try to answer. I will say this, however, that I have remarked on several occasions prior to his elevation to Secretary of State that this was the, perhaps the one man I have known personally whom I thought would be an excellent President of the United States, or would be qualified to hold any other high office in this country. He was a man who impressed you, of course, with his great sincerity and ability. A man that you felt could, with the integrity that he has, handle any job that was given to him in the kind of way that you'd like to see it handled. He's a great man, there's no question about it in the minds of any of us who knew him back in those days.

INTERVIEWER: How much idea did Rusk, himself, have of what he was going to do after he left college? We turn for that answer to one man who knew him, Professor Louis Schenk. Well, Dr. Schenk, just how did you happen to know Dean Rusk as a student here at Davidson?

LOUIS SCHENK: Well, when I came to Davidson to teach, Dean Rusk was an upperclassman and he was the student assistant for my classes. I was an assistant at that time, which meant that he helped us grade papers. Really, to grade papers without the pleasure of teaching was enough to really cure him from ever wanting to teach at the college. But as you know he later became professor in Mills College.

INTERVIEWER: You say he did want to go into teaching. Was that his goal in life at that time?

SCHENK: I think I can tell you about that in recording one occasion particularly, when he came to talk over his application for a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford. He'd always definitely had in mind the motive for service, which possibly could have led to the ministry. His point was, would not this same motive be true if he applied for a Rhodes Scholarship? [He s]aid, "What I'd really like to do would be to finish my graduate preparation, and then I'd like to come back to the United States and teach in college." And then he said, "Finally I'd like to go into government service." This, his hope, and the motive back of it to me nearly always characterized Dean Rusk. I'll always think of him in that way.

INTERVIEWER: This then the picture, if a sketchy one, of Dean Rusk at Davidson in his student days. But what did Rusk himself feel about Davidson? First of all, Mr. Secretary, what brought you to the college?

DEAN RUSK - Well I think it was inevitable that I would come to Davidson College in my family circumstance. My father had come to Davidson in the class of 1894, and from earliest childhood I had an intimate picture of Davidson College and always wanted to come. My father came here to study for the ministry. He left the ministry before I was born because of health reasons, but nevertheless, Davidson was very much a part of him and became very much a part of me. So, I was a Davidson man from the beginning.

INTERVIEWER: Just what do you feel was the greatest role of the college in shaping your attitudes at that time? Did you come here pretty much decided as to what was ahead in life for you, or did that idea change as you went through the college?

RUSK: Well, I can say quite honestly that many things that life turned out to hold for me I did not imagine by any stretch of the imagination when I was at Davidson. But, I do think that Davidson College was the place where I first became seriously interested in international affairs, largely under the leadership of Professor Archibald Currie who was here at that time. I think also, that there was and is an atmosphere at Davidson that made a difference. Davidson expected men to try to meet high standards of performance and I think the student body encouraged this attitude. In other words, it wasn't looked down upon to do reasonably good work in classrooms. One was expected to do one's best and there was an underlying sense of concern, as our friends the Quakers put it, that there are basic differences between right and wrong, that there are many things that are better than others, and that this aspiration toward doing something a little better than one did before is a part of this campus environment. I won't say that I have filled those standards in any sense, but this was the idea that was deeply implanted here when you and I were students here.

MARTIN: Dean you were a most active man in my student days. You have said, I believe, that you ran from one position to another in the many things that you did. And we're criticized frequently now for providing too many activities for our students. They say we busy them too much. Would you have any comment on whether the fact that you ran all the time, that is you never had really as much revocation from—That's the wrong word, perhaps—but much relief from doing things. Would you rather have it that way if you had to start over or would you rather have more solitude and more quietness: in other words, eliminate some of those activities?

RUSK: Well in my own particular case at Davidson, this was not a matter of choice, but a matter of necessity.

MARTIN: I know that.

RUSK: There's a certain time that is available to college students, back in our day, as in the present. Davidson had very high standards. In fact, you and I recall that we passed our courses in the last three weeks of the course by intensive study and that we, of course, went to classes and lectures and did some work along the way. But we really knew the theory of vitality of young and growing men at concentrated periods. There was time in between for some of the other things, but I don't regret that schedule at all.

MARTIN: Did you find even the chores that you had to do outside of some value to you in developing as a person?

RUSK: Well, I think in terms of the accidents of history and personal experience along the way. I would say that my interest in ROTC here at Davidson coupled with my interest in international relations turned out to be the thing which influenced my later life more than anything else. I was a reserve officer and was drawn into the war, and during the war served on the general staff on these matters involving foreign policy as well as military policy. Served directly under General Marshall when he was Chief of Staff. He was the one who brought me to the State Department when he became Secretary of State. I think this linkage turned out to be a very important linkage. I have called attention to the fact that the American eagle has an olive branch in one claw and arrows in the other. This combined interest in my student days in military preparedness and strength on the one side, and our great effort for peace in international relations on the other, has been a fairly consistent tune all the way through.

MARTIN: Looking back, would you have any idea to give us of things that you deem should have been changed, and that perhaps we might profit from a look back on your part in our program today as to what we could do?

RUSK: Well Greer, I suppose this is a vocational prejudice that I have at the moment, but I'm a little reluctant as someone who is not responsible for a situation, to give advice to those who are responsible. However, I do think that much is going to depend in the future upon the adaptability and the capability of individual people. We're going to be moving to a decade of extraordinary change in the period immediately ahead. The world is in revolutionary foment in many ways, and I think our young people are going to have to be prepared to examine change and adjust their own lives to it and help direct change. And this is going to be a matter of high individual

responsibility. Anything that can be done in our college work to put more and more responsibility upon the individual himself for his performance, for his various academic crises as he meets them rather than to let him feel that he is a part of a routine parade of young people where the individual doesn't make much difference, so much the better. I think that Davidson's new movement to emphasize the individual is the wave of the future in education.

INTERVIEWER: Dean Rusk's words, it would seem, summarize the mission of a college: a mission in the present Secretary of State's case, amply fulfilled. But the challenge remains for all those who go to Davidson today and to the nation's other colleges, indeed for all those who truly care about the world they live in. And for those who do care and who work at it, the possibilities for service are virtually without limit. And that, as much as anything, is the essence of America.

(music)

END OF SIDE 2