

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Walker Weed '40
By Mary Donin
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- DONIN: Now I'm curious from having read some of your profiles in your file here, where did you get the name Ike?
- WEED: My middle name is Ten Eyck, a Dutch name. So ever since high school and into college, but not since, so I can always identify where people come from when they call me Eyck. It's spelled Eyck.
- DONIN: Ah ha. I went to high school with a woman named Ten Eyck. Is it a big clan? Is that a common name?
- WEED: No. It's a New Amsterdam name. A lot of Dutch gathered up and down the Hudson Valley.
- DONIN: And you were born in New Jersey, is that right?
- WEED: I was born in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, 1918. About a month after the Armistice of World War I.
- DONIN: Yeah, World War I. And how is that you came to Dartmouth? Did you have family members who had been here ahead of you?
- WEED: Nobody in the family had gone... My father apparently had gone to MIT in the Navy, as Navy training, but nobody else in the family had been to college. And I had a track coach and a French teacher who both went to Dartmouth and a next-door neighbor who went to Dartmouth more recently. I had thought about Cornell but a bunch of my friends were going to Dartmouth and there were no SATs either [laughter]. And the outdoor aspect of the college attracted me because I had always done a lot of canoeing and mountain climbing.
- DONIN: So you had been in this part of the world before you came here to college?

- WEED: Yes. My family is mostly New England, so I knew... I had never visited Hanover before college time but I knew the mountains pretty well and New England in general.
- DONIN: So this was a familiar area to you even though you'd not been to Hanover before.
- WEED: Yes, I think it was, yes, because as it turned out, the Outing Club was my main area of interest during college. My freshman summer I worked with John Rand on the cabin maintenance crew for the DOC and then the following summer I worked on Moosilauke on a trail crew with Eddie Wells, class of '39 and Eddie Meservey, class of '38. We were the trail crew and that's when there was a summit camp on Moosilauke. It burned during the war but we lived up there and maintained the trails. That was the same summer, that was the summer of 1938 when the Ravine Lodge was being built. Ross McKinney was building that.
- DONIN: Ah hah.
- WEED: But the Outing Club was my principal extracurricular activity. That and the Canoe Club. I was president of the Canoe Club in '39. I majored in English, modern English literature.
- DONIN: Did you join a fraternity?
- WEED: Yes, I joined John Rand's fraternity. It was Gamma Delta Chi. I never was particularly enthusiastic about fraternities but he was a good friend of mine and he had some friends there.
- DONIN: But it sounds like your real focus was the Outing Club and the Canoe Club.
- WEED: Yes. It certainly was.
- DONIN: And you must have... That means you probably were a good athlete if you were climbing mountains and rowing canoes.
- WEED: I was never particularly... I ran track in high school, ran middle distance, but in college I wasn't really interested in competitive sports. I just liked the exercise.

- DONIN: Uh huh. And where did you discover your love of woodworking?
- WEED: Oh, when I was a kid I had my own shop when I was about 14 years old and just had a mechanical interest. So I've always worked a lot with my hands and in those days we had a woodworking shop in elementary school and I had that in sixth grade and seventh grade. Then after World War Two, I started building furniture for our own house and I decided to do that for a living.
- DONIN: Was there a woodshop here when you were an undergraduate?
- WEED: No the student workshop which is now in the Hopkins Center was founded in 1941 the year after I graduated.
- DONIN: Ah.
- WEED: Virgil Polling founded it and a number of people like Bob Strong, the dean of freshman and a number of other faculty people and administration people were interested in woodworking so they encouraged that. And it started then and it's gone right on through and went into the Hopkins Center when it was built.
- DONIN: How ironic that it was opened the year after you left.
- WEED: Well, I did quite a bit of woodworking, rough woodworking in the DOC – cabin and maintenance and stuff. And there was a small shop in the basement of Robinson Hall. Ross McKinney was here then and he said you could do anything with an ax and a knife so everything else was easy after that. [Laughter]
- DONIN: So that was... You were doing woodworking to repair and build cabins then?
- WEED: Yes, and things associated with that.
- DONIN: You said you worked... You had summer jobs here all three of your... the year between freshman and sophomore year and then...?

WEED: My freshman summer, the summer of '37, I worked for the DOC as a man on the cabin crew, John Rand and the cabin crew. And then I worked on the Moosilauke summit as a trail crew in '38. Thirty-nine I worked for Eastman Kodak Company on a training job.

DONIN: Did you find that... Was it common that the undergraduates had summer jobs during their summers off?

WEED: I think so. Not many here because college... the campus was extremely quiet in the summer here. There was no summer term. It really was pretty dead around town in the summertime. Relatively few... The only people I knew that were working here in the summer were the DOC people. I don't know but what there might have been others but I wasn't conscious of it.

DONIN: All those undergrads were missing the nicest time of year here by not being here in the summer.

WEED: I don't know where they were but...

DONIN: Now how about during the school year? Did a lot of the undergraduates have part-time jobs during the school year when they were in classes?

WEED: Yes, well a lot of them had jobs like selling, distributing *New York Times* and stuff like that. I don't know how many remunerative jobs there were. I'm sure there were quite a few. I never had to work when college was in session.

DONIN: Uh huh. Now let's talk about the academic side of life here. English was your major.

WEED: Yes.

DONIN: Did you have any particular professors that were important to you?

WEED: Oh, yes. There was Sidney Cox I would put at the head of that. But I was thinking about all my English professors last night: Lambuth and Henderson, Robinson. They were really great. I had a kind of a minor in biology too and a lot of premed courses which I just was interested in and I

remember those professors very well too. In fact, I probably, my senior year I graded better in biology than I did in English I think. [Laughter] And sociology courses with Andy Truxal who went on to be president of Hood College. He taught a great course on marriage and the family and then Michael Choukas taught public opinion and propaganda. It was a very fine course.

DONIN: And how would you characterize the campus in terms of being conscious of the war building up?

WEED: Oh, we were very conscious. I think we sort of detached from it. When I... During my junior summer I was in Atlantic City working for Eastman Kodak when the Germans went into Poland and we could sort of see it coming. There was a lot of isolationist sentiment on campus at the time. But the draft didn't start until after I graduated.

DONIN: Was there any... Was President Hopkins taking a stand, either way, either being interventionist or isolationist?

WEED: I don't remember his position. I remember Lew Stilwell who was a history professor was very anti-war because he had been a medic in World War I, serving at Verdun and he was very bitter about the war experience. But he was probably the strongest and only isolationist on campus that I remember. But I don't remember the sense that most of us had about what was coming.

DONIN: Uh huh. Now several of your classmates remarked about some of the speakers that came on campus at that time, and one in particular was a journalist by the name of Dorothy Thompson and the impact she had on them. Specifically she urged the young men to go off and enlist in Canada and I gather a few of your classmates did go to Canada.

WEED: I can think of two or three who joined the British Army: Tom Braden and... his companion escapes me for the moment.

DONIN: Was it Ellsworth?

WEED: Ellsworth, yes. Ted Ellsworth. And they were both in the British Army and served in North Africa I believe and then Ellsworth of course wrote a very nice book that was

published after his death. He was a prisoner of war; had a horrendous experience and then Peter Glenn who was the class of '41 I believe was in that same group. Peter ended up in the Indian Army, in the fourth Indian division, I think it was. I remember him coming and joining us in Italy. When he was on leave he came up to see some of his old Dartmouth friends in Italy and was captured. But the Germans released him very shortly. I think there may have been more in that group but I don't remember who they were.

DONIN: Another name that comes up who I think was not in your class but maybe '41, a guy named Charles Bolté.

WEED: Oh yes, Charles Bolté. I would have thought of him in that connection.

DONIN: But generally the mood in your class was sort of wait and see.

WEED: Yes. It was. We had no idea what it was like. And I suppose the majority of us were kind of in the Republican side and against Roosevelt and there was a great turnover in the course of the years on that.

DONIN: Right.

WEED: My family was staunchly Republican and I have been voting Democratic for a long time myself.

DONIN: So do you have any memories specifically of any interactions with President Hopkins when you were here?

WEED: Well, I think he was a great guy. I remember we felt very close to him as far as... The college was somehow much smaller and... No, I've not thought about that.

DONIN: Uh huh. Well some people thought he was sort of up on a pedestal and they didn't actually interact with him all that much.

WEED: Well, it wasn't a very chummy relationship. We knew all about him and felt like he was on our side but I never had

any, except for interviews, you know, I didn't have any close contact with him.

DONIN: So your career that you had in mind when you were an English major, what were you thinking about doing after?

WEED: I thought I would like to be in a writing career initially. That's what I talked to Sidney Cox a lot about. Because my family had been all literary people and my grandfather was editor of the old *Life Magazine* and then became a *New York Times* editor and wrote a lot of books and stuff.

DONIN: Oh.

WEED: And so I was interested in that but I really didn't know... When I got out of college I didn't really know where I was going and I went down and took a job at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in the gear factory.

DONIN: Ah ha.

WEED: And then I moved on to Washington DC, working for a friend of mine after that, as a manufacturer's representative. And then came the war.

DONIN: And how much contact did you have with Dartmouth once you had graduated? I mean, were you an active alum, shall we say?

WEED: Reasonably. We had a Dartmouth Club in Washington DC that was... So we had a number of friends there. And I worked for the father of a Dartmouth alum who also worked at the same firm and I roomed with another Dartmouth guy. So we had kind of a nucleus of people down there who were very interested in the college. But I don't know when I first got back to Hanover after graduating. It was quite a while. Probably after the war. I guess it was right at the end of the war.

DONIN: And at that point there was still rationing going on, wasn't there? Was there gas rationing and food rationing when you got back?

WEED: During the war, yes. But I was in 58 months and by the time I got out that had all lifted. I can remember there was price fixing and whatnot when I was in Washington and we were negotiating a lot of that. Adjusting prices. My consciousness of gasoline rationing was mostly during the war when I was in the service.

DONIN: So you didn't get involved while you were here so much in organized sports.

WEED: No. I quickly discovered that in track there were a lot of guys who were an awful lot better than I was. And I really enjoyed non-competitive sports. Skiing I... I learned to ski here.

DONIN: Oh, did you?

WEED: But I never was good enough to compete or anything. I had a lot of friends that competed. But my... My son learned to ski of course in the family and then he was in the Olympics in '72.

DONIN: Was he? Your son?

WEED: Yes. He was a Nordic combined skier. He was captain of the Dartmouth team for two years and then he was on the national team and was national champion in Nordic combined in '73, I think it was. But I couldn't keep up with him. [Laughter]

DONIN: So by the time he got to Dartmouth he was already a good skier. He didn't learn to ski here.

WEED: Yes. He skied too much probably. He didn't get as much education as he might have. [Laughter]

DONIN: Was it sort of assumed that he was going to go to Dartmouth?

WEED: No, he was offered early admission at Williams but he... I guess I sort of wanted him to go to Dartmouth and he lived in Hanover. He sort of knew the ropes.

DONIN: Was he raised in Hanover?

WEED: No, we lived in Guilford for 17 years – Guilford, New Hampshire. And he came over here I guess when he was a sophomore in high school.

DONIN: Went to Hanover High School?

WEED: Yes. He skied here of course.

DONIN: And by then he was already a good skier.

WEED: Yes. Because we lived in Norway for a year and he really learned to ski over there.

DONIN: I am cheating and reading this chronology that was in the Hood catalogue when they did your exhibit. So you studied architecture with Hugh Morrison and modern art with Churchill Lathrop. Is that right?

WEED: Yes. Jerry Lathrop came from my hometown I discovered later and Hugh Morrison was really great. I only took one course with him and that was medieval architecture, Gothic architecture, but he made a lasting impression on me.

DONIN: In what sense?

WEED: Oh, appreciation of the Gothic cathedrals and the development of any art form from primitive to flamboyant. And of course, I had to visit a lot of them. When I was in Europe I visited a number of cathedrals that I had studied under him. That was great.

DONIN: So do you feel like you were able to nurture this growing interest in the many crafts that you've created, all the furniture making. You nurtured that here a little bit with your art courses?

WEED: Well, I started back in '48 professionally and there is an organization – The League of New Hampshire Craftsmen – which I have belonged to since then and of course through them I have known an awful lot of craftsmen and I was, through the national organization too. So I knew a great many furniture people but also people in all the crafts and a great interaction and trading of work and stuff. Very much immersed in the crafts movement. And then that was

instrumental I think in getting me here to Dartmouth when I worked here because I was a good friend of Aileen Vanderbilt Webb who was one of the people who was consulted about the Hopkins Center, the development of the Hopkins Center. So I came when the Center opened.

DONIN: So that was in the '60s.

WEED: Sixty-two. I was working part time here then just for a couple of years. I used to come over a couple of days a week and work in the shops. But then when Virgil Polling retired essentially, he went back to Africa on some kind of a mission and I took over the job then and was there from '64 until '81 when I retired.

DONIN: Uh huh.

WEED: Of course, we had several shops there. We had a machine shop and woodworking and jewelry and then we started the pottery. So I had that experience.

DONIN: So the four-year experience you had here from '36 to '40, being the last sort of peacetime class before World War II, did you feel sort of protected from what was going in Europe?

WEED: Oh yes, I'm sure. Because I never went to Europe like some of my classmates did to see what was going on.

DONIN: Yes, Ned Jacoby mentioned that.

WEED: Yes, I think we were very much... we were in a shell. I was at least. I don't know why we weren't more conscious of international affairs. Probably because it just wasn't of great interest. I know I had one classmate, Howard Wriggins, who was very much into it and he was Ambassador to Sri Lanka. He died here at Kendal a year or two ago. He was a conscientious objector. He was a Quaker. But he did a tremendous job with helping refugees after World War II. He had a really great career and then he taught international relations at Columbia later. But he, I would say, he knew very much what was going on during those years whereas I was not.

- DONIN: That's true of any group of students at any time in history; there are those who are engaged by what's going on in the world and those who are focused on their education.
- WEED: We were just happy with the way it was right here.
- DONIN: What dormitories did you live in while you were here?
- WEED: I lived in Ripley for three years with Bill Halsey and then I roomed off campus at 8 School Street with a whole bunch of guys senior year.
- DONIN: Uh huh.
- WEED: Can't think of any special comments to make about dormitory life.
- DONIN: It is what it is. And you took all your meals in, they called it what? The Commons? Is that what they called it?
- WEED: Freshman Commons and then Thayer Hall was built during those years and we ate there and we ate a lot... There were eating clubs too, like Ma Smalley's down there on one of the streets that no longer exists behind the Wigwam. I don't know what the name of that street was but we used to eat over there.
- DONIN: Was it the kind of club you had to join or was it just the kind of place you go and take your meals.
- WEED: We just paid by the week and we all ate there and the same people ate there all the time.
- DONIN: Uh huh.
- WEED: It was just kind of a restaurant sort of thing I guess. I think there were a number of those around but I'm not sure.
- DONIN: And some people say they actually had jobs bussing dishes in some of these places so that they could get their meals for free.
- WEED: I think some of them worked in Thayer Hall and stuff too.

DONIN: Right. And at the hospital as well. I think there must have been a cafeteria for the nurses. OK, well, unless you have other comments, other thoughts.

WEED: No, it just seems like the college experience was just preliminary to the real thing and it was a rather rude awakening afterwards with the war coming so soon.

[End of Interview]