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181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
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INTERVIEW WITH DR. HALSEY MAC PHEE
Newark, Delaware
August 19, 1972

INTERVIEWED BY: Myron Blackman

DMacPh: Dr. MacPhee
MB: M. Blackman

DMacPh: You asked me how I happen to be in Delaware and when I came. I came here in the fall of 1946, which of course is right after the end of World War II. I had come to Delaware from Bucknell where I had been prior to the war. I was in the Navy for three years during the war. I went back to Bucknell for one semester, I guess it was. And then I got a letter from Dean Squire ~~(?)~~ here at the University, asking me if I would be interested in being considered for the new head of the Psychology Department, and I looked into Delaware then. I didn't know much about it, and I found out that the department here wasn't much of a department, but I thought it was worth looking into. So I came down to talk with Dean Squire. I remember he said, "What do you know about our Psychology Department here at Delaware?" And I said, "Well, I don't know very much, but I gather it's not one of your strong departments." "Yeah, strong. It isn't really a department at all. It's so weak, and that's one thing that we want to do is to build up a Psychology Department that is comparable to some of our other departments which we think are quite good. So, you should know that if you were to come here, we will give you good support. But there's not much to build upon." He said that at that time there was only one room that was devoted to Psychology. That was a room on the third floor of Hallihen Hall. A very nice room, not too large. But that was all the Psychology Department had. And, he said, "If you were to come here, it would be this room and this room only. And you would share an office somewhere in this building probably with someone else from one of the floors below. Or you could have space in the building that we had started to tear down before the war and then

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

decided that maybe that wasn't a wise move so the demolition process was stopped. They boarded it up, took it off maintenance, and on came the war. And that building was Recitation Hall. Well, to start with the story, after thinking about things and being offered the position here, I accepted it. And I came down in the fall of '46. And my first job was to find another man. And that was very difficult to do in those days because psychology isn't any other area's academic concern. It had its greatest jumping growth immediately after World War II, and some say that World War II was the most important recent date at least in the development of psychology. Oh, for instance, the American Psychological Association prior to World War II would have had, oh, I would guess somewhere around 1200 or 1500 members. And now in 1972, I don't know how many there are, but it's somewhere between, oh, I would say roughly around 35,000 members which has been a tremendous growth. And the growth curve rose at a logarithmic rate from World War II on to the present. So that at World War II, psychology came to be recognized as, well, people learned to know what psychology was--what it was all about, to an extent that they hadn't before that. So the department here was to grow, and what I was promised would be given good growth. And so the first thing to do was to find another man, and that was very difficult because all the colleges and universities everywhere in the country were expecting the tremendous burgeoning in enrollment from the veterans coming back and the G.I. Bill making it possible for them to go to college. There just were not enough academic people of course in all areas to go around. Well, I did succeed, though, in finding a young man fresh out of the Army who would, had a master's degree from Penn State; and that was Walter Organist. And Organist came, and we started together that fall. Organist was an excellent man, did an excellent job, excellent to work with. He stayed, I think it was two years, and then left to continue work for his Ph.D., which he did get from North Carolina in two or three years. So, at any rate, Organist was the first. Also, I was told that I was to start looking for a third person to come the next fall, that would be the fall of '47. I heard from a friend of mine of a promising young psychologist that would be getting his degree at the end of the spring of '47, and I talked to him that very first fall

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about whether he'd be interested in being considered the next year. He said he would be; he came and was interested. We were interested in him so he was hired to join us the next fall, and that was Dr. Gorham Lane who became one of the best known and-- in the very best sense of the word--popular members of the faculty. He was the first one to receive the Teaching Award. Lane came and stayed with us until his very sad death as a result of an automobile accident two or three years ago. So it was Lane, Organist. . . . When Organist left, we replaced him with another young man who, at time just fresh out of John Hopkins, also out of the army. Also, from Oberlin was ~~Lawrence~~ Smith, Larry Smith; and he has been with us ever since and is still here and has become the, over the years, the virtual wheel horse of the Psychology Department. So we added from time to time. Another difficulty, by the second year, we still couldn't find enough people because the enrollment was growing so fast. So as a temporary expedient, Mrs. Lane joined as a part-time instructor; and my wife also joined as a part-time instructor. And for two or three years they taught until we could replace them with others. So the department continued to grow from two to three, to five, to six, to seven over the year. When I came I was told my primary job was to build up a strong undergraduate department and that I shouldn't worry at all about the graduate work, at least at this time--first things first. In fact, that was the attitude of the whole university at the time. Stressing undergraduate and secondary was the graduate training.

Well, what about the history of the Psychology Department here at Delaware? Had there been a department before I came? And the answer was yes. But to go back, the records show that psychology had been taught at Delaware. In fact, when the University was no longer. . . . When it wasn't a university, when Delaware College opened way back in 1830, the very, 1830, I've forgotten the date, there was a required course in Moral Philosophy that all students regardless of who they were or what their curriculum interests were, they all took that course. And back in those days, it was a common thing in all American universities, following the lead of

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some of the European universities, they did have this particular philosophy course, Moral Philosophy, which included a mixture of logic, ethics, psychology, and maybe a bit of economics. Probably there wasn't any sociology then. So that Moral Philosophy course came the closest to being the Psychology course, and that was taught from the very beginning. Many years later, I think maybe somewhere around in the Sixties or Seventies there was a course called Psychology taught in the Philosophy Department at that time. And from then on, psychology, at least a course in psychology, was taught from that time right down to the present, without I'm sure any interruption at all. But it was in the area of philosophy, and back in those days there was one man who was the professor of philosophy; and he taught all the courses and probably many others that didn't have the title of philosophy. As the years went on and the school grew, this became too much of a task for one man; and sometime around 1930 there were courses taught in philosophy, in psychology, in sociology, and one man taught them all. This was too much for one man so two new men were hired--two young men--were hired to join the Philosophy Department, one whose special area was sociology and another psychology. And later on there was a third one, philosophy. But this was the department of Philosophy. There was no department of Sociology, and no department of Psychology; although there were courses with a Philosophy number, the subject matter was psychology. The young man hired as the psychologist was a young ph.D. from Harvard. I never knew him; I've met him. I never knew him personally, but I've heard much of him from mutual friends of his and mine. Kermit Oberlin. And Oberlin came in the Philosophy Department, but his field was psychology. And Oberlin did an excellent job with the resources at hand in building up courses. Some--he was an experimental psychologist--some, a very small amount, of laboratory equipment that had survived until my arrival as I say in 1946. And this apparatus, these few things, were in this room that I mentioned in Hullyon (?) Hall. *Hollythe* Well, I decided that, if the department were to grow, it would have to have more space than the one room in Hullyon Hall, even though it was a nice room. So I elected to accept the opportunity to go into this old building--at that time it was an old building. Recitation Hall, which hadn't been on maintenance for some years, dirty, blackboards had been taken from the walls, the hardware had been taken from such things as door-knobs; things that could be salvaged, say for other building to be built. Well, it was put back on the maintenance list; and we started in that old building

DMacPh: Cont'd

in the fall of '46, and we shared the building with Physics. So it was Physics and Psychology, and Physics was in much the same position as Psychology was at that time. Physics had never been a strong department, although it had certainly been stronger than Psychology. So the two of us, Physics and Psychology, shared the building which was in pretty bad shape. In fact, I can still remember in the basement--and that's not the right word, the word was cellar--because of some parts of the cellar was still dirt floor, dirt. Well, eventually the floor, a new floor was laid. Other things were done to make the building somewhat better than it was. Psychology had two or three rooms, a sort of office/laboratory rooms. The attic of the building was a great barn of a place, used for essentially nothing except storage. There was a considerable amount of furniture, I remember, stored up there for want of somewhere else to put it. There were some tax records that had been stored up there by the Economics Department, and Physics had one small room which they used for a sort of additional laboratory space. Well, I had my eye on that attic; and I finally convinced the administration there was a better use for the attic. So we drew some plans for temporary, inexpensive partitions and doors for that attic. And it was granted to us, and that's where the Department really developed, was in that attic space up over Recitation Hall. And we continued in Recitation Hall, and again I must say that the administration kept their promise. They gave us good support--financial support, support in terms of space. And shortly after I came, one of the first things to do was to set up a major in Psychology. There had never been one. At the same time, Dr. [Frederick] Parker, who was also new in Sociology, set up a major in Sociology. And this, of course, had to have approval of the faculty. It was submitted to the faculty to have a Department of Sociology with a major and Psychology with a major. The faculty approved so there was a major in Psychology for the first time. This was in the fall of '46. And, prior to this, there had been a major, a combined major, of Philosophy, Sociology, and Psychology. And a student in this major had to divide his, whatever it was, 30 hours among these three fields. He could take more of one than another, so it would be dominantly Philosophy, domi-

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

nantly Psychology, or dominantly Sociology. But it was a three-way major. That was no longer continued since we had a major in Philosophy, and in Psychology, and in Sociology. But we're talking about Psychology. At first we had, oh, very few majors. Five, six, then the next year it was ten or eleven; then it moved up toward twenty. And the growth, again, was phenomenal. I don't know how many majors there are today in 1972, but it's in terms of hundreds. Also, very early, even though I'd been told clearly that the first thing was undergraduate work, there were students asking for the possibilities of some graduate credit. And some wanted to get a master's degree. Well, there was no master's degree in psychology. But soon we succeeded in setting up a master's in psychology; and within, I think our first, I'm not certain of this--the records would show it--I think it was in 1948 that we gave the first two master's degrees. And then every year we would have three or four, five or six. So we've had students taking graduate work in psychology from certainly as early as '47 until today. Of course we have in the department not only master's programs but a Ph.D. program which we've had for some years. But back in those early days the emphasis was on building the department in an academic fashion. Emphasis on sound experimental psychology was the basis; it's always been an experimentally oriented department. Laboratories being very important. And of course that called for space and apparatus. I do remember when I said that we would move up to Hull⁴⁵ Hall, I mean from Hull⁴⁵ Hall where the one room was and what apparatus there was, up to Recitation Hall, would they please see that the material was moved up there. So when I arrived in the fall of '46, the whole material department was awaiting me in a baseboard box at the top of the head of the stairs with everything in it. And that was the whole department. Well, things have changed considerably since then. Well, Recitation Hall was the place the department really started its growth, at least from the time I got here. And we were up there about four or five years. At that time, they had built a new building down below the campus. And that was the new agricultural building, down there where the stadium is now. And the new agricultural building down there was built. . . There were good reasons for building it down there, but I won't talk about those. Well, agriculture had been quartered in Wolf⁴ Hall along with--there was no Biology Department as such--there was a Department of Physiology, I believe, of Botany. I guess Zoology, but they were

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

separate. And they were to be combined into one department. And Agriculture was to move from Wolfe Hall down to the new building which left space in Wolfe Hall where Agriculture had moved out. And that space, the whole building, was to be shared by Biology, Sociology, Psychology, and Mathematics. So we moved from Recitation Hall down to Wolfe Hall. And Psychology had all of the second floor and one or two, two or three other rooms, actually. So the department continued to grow in space down there. Soon Sociology was to leave. Then the new Physics Building was built; Physics and Math, and Math left. And the space vacated by Sociology and Mathematics was divided between Biology and Psychology. The attic was virtually useless in Wolfe Hall, but space always runs out. And soon Wolfe Hall wasn't large enough for Biology and Psychology, and in fairly recent years an annex has been built which of course has actually more space in it than the original Wolfe Hall. And it is shared by Psychology and Biology and not enough space; there's never enough space. But in terms of actual footage, the growth has been dramatic. At least we start with that baseboard box containing the whole materials of the department to what it is now.

MB: (question is inaudible)

DMacPh: I remember the first day of class in the fall of 1946 in Recitation Hall. And by this time the students, that fall of '46, the jolt in student body was tremendous. During the war years, of course, it was small. And then when the war was over, students were coming back. And I remember school opened on a beautiful day in September. Our first Psychology class was to meet in one of the rooms on the second floor of Recitation Hall. And, oh, about an hour before class, someone entered the classroom and realized that there were no chairs. They were going to get chairs, but there were no chairs; and there had to be chairs. So I remember calling--I don't remember maintenance or who I called and said "There are no chairs. Why aren't there any chairs?" "Well, we'll have them there." So the trucks came and unloaded chairs, and the chairs were set up just actually before the students got there for class. And the students came, about equally divided between males and females. It was a hot fall day, and I remember the girls coming in

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

with light-colored summer dresses, finding chairs and sitting down and the class starting. Well, I can remember more clearly when the class was over and they got up to leave. They found it out before the class was over. Those chairs had been stored for some five or six years I remember in some place, and they had never been washed and cleaned; and they were just virtually black. And there were lots of dirty clothes by the end of that first class. But eventually the chairs were cleaned up and the rooms were cleaned up. That was one of our early problems, the problem of maintenance, of getting some of the dirt cleaned up. But that was solved.

MB: _____ (inaudible) _____

DMacPh: Well, something else I remember. When World War II was over, there were great masses of materiel of one kind or another that was being released because the military no longer needed it. So those days were known as war assets. And colleges and universities were vying for war assets, and Delaware was among them. There were warehouses of war assets extending all the way from, oh, some in Philadelphia down through Marcus Hook. I don't remember exactly where, but I can remember going with some of the people, particularly from the Physics Department, also some from Engineering, pouring through these piles of material to see if there were things that might be of value to us as we tried to build our departments. And I can remember a truck unloading in back of Recitation Hall; and the lawn out there was piled with, it looked like junk. Some of it was junk, but some of it was very impressive junk. Electronic gear, wire, oh, I can't remember all the things. I remember we got two or three good amplifiers, power amplifiers. Another thing we got were some tape pullers, they were called. They had been used in the armed services for teaching code. And these tape recorders had electric motors in them that wound the tape, and the tape was punched; and the punched tape activated a code sender. And those tape recorders we adapted to all sorts of uses. In fact a few of them are still around the Department, used in various ways. So we had apparatus that we constructed out of whatever we had to construct it with. It served very well. Times have changed, of course; it seems as though these days everything must be brand new and made to special

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

order. But we were our own technicians and our own carpenters and our own gadgeteer. And it worked out very well. Oh, something else that we did. We started a rat laboratory. And at one time, I think we must have had, oh, somewhere around 200 or more rats. And this was up on the top floor of Recitation Hall. And there was considerable rat research in those days. And that was continued on; it has been continued right to the present. We've always had animals, particularly rats, but other animals were used too. I can remember hamsters, rats, I think some work with guinea pigs, but it was mostly rats during those years. I continued as chairman until the spring of 1961; that was 15 years. And at that time, Dr. Lanzetta took over. During those years the Fels Foundation had been moved from, I can't remember. I believe it was Temple here to Delaware. A center for group dynamics, and they had some psychologists in that group. And this was quite separate from the Psychology Department. There was no tie at all between the two. But, as the years went on, there was an increasing tie in between the Group Dynamics Center, as it was called, and the Fels Center. Eventually Fels left, and the University took over the Dynamics Center as it was called. By this time Dr. Lanzetta had come, John Lanzetta. He had originally come as director of research in the Fels Center. Then he took over the directorship of it. Then, sometime, oh I don't remember, maybe 1959, around there, there was one or two joint appointments between the Fels Center and the Psychology Department. Dr. Pruitt, the first one I remember, had a joint appointment between Fels and the Psychology Department. Well, when I left the chairmanship, Dr. Lanzetta took it over; and the Dynamics Center and the Psychology Department became one. The staff of the Center became part of the Psychology Department's staff. Lanzetta came in as chairman the second year. He had a leave of absence to work on a project in Europe. Dr. Lane took over temporary chairmanship, or acting chairmanship, for a year. _____, when he came back, had decided he didn't want to be chairman. And so then Dr. Gulick, who had been one of our own master's students. Gulick got his master's with us; his undergraduate work had been at Hamilton. He worked for Du Pont for a time in Delaware and decided he wanted more, he thought he wanted more _____ graduate

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

work so he came here to Delaware to try it and decided that's what he wanted. He stayed with us and got a master's degree, left with his master's degree for Princeton, and two years later he had a Ph.D. from Princeton in experimental psychology, particularly in physiological psychology. And we were fortunate to get him back here as an assistant professor as soon as he got his degree from Princeton. And he moved up rapidly in terms of promotion, and he took over the chairmanship from Lanzetta; and he was chairman for two or three years, I've forgotten. And he left for Dartmouth, and when he left, Dr. Hauty came as chairman. And Hauty is still chairman here now. So that covers pretty much the growth of the place up to date.

MB: How did the department grow in terms of course work?

DMacPh: I'm asked the question, "How did the department grow in terms of course work?" Well, we started out with this major in psychology. My philosophy was that, when a student had a major in psychology, he wasn't to consider himself a psychologist. He had a background of psychology, and it should be as broad as possible. So, out of the 30 required hours, actually, I believe, there were 24 of them that were prescribed. Among the prescriptions was a course in statistics. He must have that course in statistics to complete his major. And the course of statistics had a prerequisite of one course in college mathematics which didn't count towards his major, but it was required for the statistics. And he required 30 hours as all arts and sciences majors were at that time. So he had two electives. And we had, oh, I suppose, a selection of five or six different elective courses that he could choose. But as time went on, of course, more and more courses were added. The orientation has always been basically experimental. That's in the broadest sense of experimental. Every master's thesis that was done was some sort of an experimental problem. Data had to be collected, analyzed, not a literary thesis, an experimental research kind of thesis. And such, of course, is still the case in the department. Then, with the growth of the graduate program, again, it was a general, although experimentally oriented graduate program for a master's degree. And that continued on. Now, in more recent years, there has been an increased specialization. But there's always been the core of, just call it general psychology, required for every body.

MB: (Inaudible - a couple words were distinguishable but not enough to form a question.)

DMacPh: Of course, psychology, as I've said many times, the student takes his first course in chemistry, he would be the first one to admit that he doesn't know anything about chemistry. And that's why he's taking the course, to learn the A,B,C's of chemistry. Or, if he's to take calculus, he hasn't the slightest idea of what calculus is; and he is completely in the hands of the instructor whom he considers the expert. But the psychology student, the psychology student I've found, he knows pretty well what psychology is when he starts in. And, in the course of a week, he begins to wonder if the instructor knows as much about it as he does. Because everybody knows what psychology is all about. Of course, that's one of the tasks of the psychologist, to convince the student that maybe he doesn't know as much about psychology as he thinks he does. That attitude of course has been changing. And the dramatic change again goes back, way back to World War II. And this is due particularly to the growth of clinical psychology. There had been clinical psychology (?) for a good number of years. I'm speaking about clinical psychology, not psychiatry. But this branch of applied psychology. . . But clinical psychology had been thought of pretty much as a matter of an intelligence testing. And what does a psychologist do? Why everybody knows a psychologist measures IQ's. What else does he do? Well, is there anything else for him to do? Isn't that all? And so clinical psychology was thought to be. . . The clinical psychologist was an intelligence tester. World War II, there were simply not enough psychiatrists to go around; and psychologists worked in cooperation with psychiatrists. And the psychologists were found capable of doing things that they hadn't been recognized as being capable of doing, so the whole field of clinical psychology grew. And particularly by way of the military people, they had more and more contact with the general area of neuropsychiatry, psycho-psychotherapy, psychiatric fitness, psychological examination. And so there was an interest in psychology that had been generated particularly during the war years. And so from the very beginning, after World War II, psychology classes grew, grew, grew at a rate that seemed unbelievable. And that has continued to be the case. And students became more and more knowledgeable that psychology was not the same thing as psychiatry. That it was a subject matter in its own right, and it was not just a matter of Freud and intelligence testing. So students became increasingly sophisticated. We used to. . . Students would say they wanted to major in psychology. We'd question them and say, "Why do you want to major in

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

psychology?" One of the answers was, "Well, I want to major in psychology because I like people." Well, that's laudable. "I like people." "Well, what do you think about science? Do you like science?" "Oh, no, I don't like science." "Well, why do you want to take psychology?" "Well, I want to take psychology; I don't want to major in a science like physics or chemistry or anything with mathematics." "Well, I'd say, "Don't you know that psychology is a science?" "Oh, is it, is it? Well, I didn't know that." "And you have to have some math; you have to have some statistics." "Well, maybe I don't want to major in psychology." And we tried to scare them out as a kindness to them because it wasn't fair to let a student get in and flounder around and find that psychology was not what he thought it was going to be. But students have become more knowledgeable. Today you ask them "Why do you want to take psychology?" They'll give you an answer. "Well, are you interested in science?" "Well, psychology is a science, isn't it?" "You know you have to take some statistics and math." "Oh, I know that. I expect that. I don't worry about that." "Do you like math?" "No, I don't like math," some say, "But I don't mind it; I can do it all right." The whole attitude has changed, and this has changed particularly of course since the middle fifties. Sputnik is usually given as the dating incident that changed the whole attitude towards things academic. And certainly it's been reflected in psychology as well as it has in other areas.

MB:

(Question inaudible)

DMacPh: Why did the popularity of psychology increase after the war? Because it was realized that psychology had so many different facets that hadn't been utilized. Certainly one of the appeals was the applied interest. It was realized that psychologists could make a living. Not all psychologists were just teachers in colleges. There were psychologists in industry; there were psychologists in hospitals; there were psychologists in schools. Psychologists were going into advertising. There were psychologists going into so many areas. The government had so many positions for psychologists. Research, much of it, military sponsored, put psycholo-

DMacPh: (Cont'd)

gists in great demand. And, well, this must be something with so many jobs in psychology. And so part of the appeal was the job opportunity. And, of course, that has continued right to the present. There are many jobs open in psychology that haven't been filled even though we hear about a lot of Ph.D.'s. There are a lot of jobs that are unfilled either because they haven't paid enough salaries or because some of the locations. . . Geographically people don't want to into a hospital located in some backwater place when they want a job in a part of the country that appeals to them more. So the field of psychology has broadened. The literature is so much broader and also specialized. As is the case in all academic fields.

MB: In general, have the students changed over the years?

DMacPh: Have the students changed over the years? I don't think basically they've changed very much. In terms of their basic human nature, I don't think there's been much change in the last 5,000 years. I don't think many new neurones have been added by the process of evolution. Changes, yes. One of the most marked changes, of course, was again back right after World War II, particularly when the veterans came back. I can remember from my own experience having students in my psychology classes at Bucknell before the war and got to know them quite well. And the war came, and off we went to war. And some three or three and a half years later I can well remember my first class coming back from the war. I was out of uniform myself, and I can remember the first class that I taught when I came back out of the service. And in that class were some of the students that had been in the last class that I'd taught in the same room before the war. And I've never forgotten, those young kids three and a half years before, some of them sitting in the same room in the same seats, they were _____. Their whole outlook, and some of them had been through some pretty strenuous times. And the whole atmosphere of the classroom changed so dramatically from before the war to after the war. And they wanted to catch up on lost time. They were more serious. The motivation was extremely intense. And that lasted for quite a while. Then the passage from the veterans got (?) out. There was an increasing unconcern, not apathy. And the next change came in the middle fifties with the Sputnik. And of course the things that have happened in the last three or four years; I won't even comment on those except I feel so completely out of touch with the younger generation now. It's a good thing that I'm retired.

(End of Interview)