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December 2, 1965

What Was It Like?

This afternoon a young man, Mr. Lampson, a sophomore, came by to leave a list of questions he wants to ask me tomorrow afternoon about what the college was like when I came here, in 1908. He did not have time for any questions today but was bowled over when I told him that I came when the school as a state school was only a year old and have hung around ever since. I am expecting some great times with him tomorrow, for he seems a bright boy and eager to know. This is part of a series of programs, which you know about, that is being worked out for the radio and television by Dr. Haas, of the English department. Naturally, I am very much interested in this, for everybody needs to know more about the backgrounds of our college.

A sense of history is sadly lacking in many people. Not long ago I was asked by some newcomer when the state took Western over from the Business University. It sounded like asking when a snake and a henegg merged, to use Dick Thomas's figure about the "merging" of Ogden and Western. Strange things are often in the air, but this seems about the strageⁿst one yet. Years ago, as I told about in an early diary entry, the Freshman Class had a program for which Mrs. H. R. Matthews and I were responsible, as helpers for Mr. George Page. Just for the fun of it, we worked out a series of questions about the college, and there were such prizes as ties, silk hose, scarfs, handkerchiefs, socks. Most students soon went down, but Martha Lindsey, the daughter of our Gertie Clemmons Lindsey, who for so long was a power in educational circles in the state, held on till the last, because her mother had drilled her on important things about Western and acquainted her with present and past personalities, too. You just should have heard Martha's pat answers and also seen the light in her face when she knew when everything happened, even the moving to the top of the

Hill on February 3, 1911. When someone asked her how she knew about the library, she said, "My mother-to-be was working in the library at that time and has told me all about it." I notice that one of the topics on the sheet of typed questions to be discussed tomorrow is this same moving to the hill and especially the library.

One of the fascinating things about having lived is to stand on a spot and say, "So and so happened here." All my boyhood I heard Uncle Carroll Robertson tell how he, along with the big army under General Simon Bolivar Buckner, surrendered at Fort Donelson on a very cold day in February, 1862. I was a mature man before I actually had a chance to see the battlefield, but I have haunted the place ever since. Somehow it never seemed strange to me, for my uncle had been there, a scared little fellow in his late teens. His memory was astonishingly accurate, for the many accounts I have read of the battle and its various regiments confirm his memories, even though he never took the trouble to revisit the site of his first great sorrow. Since January, 1917, the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE has come every month to our mailbox. Many of the places written about in that scientific and charming magazine have by degrees come to be a part of my own experience; again I somehow stepped right into them as an old-timer, for I had read about them in the GEOGRAPHIC. And next to being in a famous place is to have someone who writes well to tell about it. One of the best pictures I have heard in words about Fort Donelson consisted of a series of letters written from the fort by young boys from Nashville who were there; A. L. Crabb got a large bundle of them together and used that as the basis for a speech here some years after he went to Nashville and while he was writing some of his earliest novels.