

Maurice Hall

The 12th Chairman of the Board discusses The Millsaps Difference



Millsaps Magazine: What have been the biggest and most significant changes at Millsaps since you were a student? What has remained a constant in your opinion?

Maurice Hall: It's been 40 years since I enrolled at Millsaps, and the amazing thing is that "the more things change, the more they remain the same." The student body and the faculty have grown by more than 20 percent, and at least half of the buildings on campus were built since my time as a student. The most significant changes seem to be the physical improvements on the campus and the technological advances. I am not sure there was a computer on campus in 1963, and the availability of intellectual resources and instant communication through computers has changed the whole dynamic of college life. Possibly the strangest difference to me is that today the food in the cafeteria is actually *good*.

However, it is the things that have not changed, the things that made my experience at Millsaps such a fulfilling one, that are the most important: the one-on-one relationships between students and professors, the fact that you can still know the name of almost anyone you see on campus, the curiosity and intellectual drive visible on almost every

face on campus, and the feeling of absolute terror that the word "comps" puts in every heart.

You and the President of the College, Frances Lucas, are lifelong Methodists. Do you think this has a special significance in terms of the relations between the College and the Church?

I think it is positive that the Board Chair and the President share a lifelong commitment to Methodism. Many Methodists who have no direct relationship with Millsaps comment that they are pleased that both the President and the Board Chair share the Methodist heritage. Today the relationship between the Church and the College is more positive than it has been in many years, but that positive relationship has been growing since long before Frances became President and I became Board Chair. For example, the creation of the Center for Ministry as a cooperative effort between The United Methodist Church and Millsaps was conceived and implemented before either of us occupied our positions.

There has always been what I consider a vibrant and

appropriate tension between those who see the role of a great liberal arts college in terms of the academic freedom to question everything and those who would prefer to see a church-related college implement a particular doctrine or theology. I find that tension both healthy and stimulating. I was taught by some great Methodist scholars at Millsaps that an unquestioned faith is a shallow faith, much like the biblical house built on sand, lacking a strong foundation.

Why is a liberal arts education relevant for today's and tomorrow's students?

The goal of a liberal arts education is not to produce a person who has memorized the answers to a limited number of questions, but a person with the knowledge and resources to find the answer to most any question, to understand that answer, and to express that answer clearly, concisely, and simply enough that it makes sense to one who might not have the benefits of a liberal arts education. At Millsaps, our goal is not to teach people what to think, but to teach them how to think.

Can you get a Millsaps quality education elsewhere in the state?

Mississippi is blessed with a multitude of institutions of higher learning where an individual can obtain a good education in any number of fields. What you cannot find at any other institution in the state is the quality of the Millsaps experience. There are highly qualified teachers at other institutions in Mississippi, but there are no other institutions in Mississippi where a student can experience the quality of close student-faculty relationships to be had at Millsaps. In Mississippi and elsewhere, we are seeing large state universities attempt to emulate the Millsaps experience through the establishment of "honor colleges." However, a limited enrollment class in English composition taught by a graduate student to freshmen living in a high-rise dormitory that holds more students than the entire Millsaps campus is not the same thing as having that same class taught

by the chair of the department of English literature, being invited to dinner at the professor's home, and living on a campus where almost everybody knows your name.

Millsaps emphasizes close student-faculty relations. Why is that important?

The intellectual and personal satisfaction a student gains from knowing a professor who is willing to listen to a student and challenge the student's thoughts in personal conversation is immensely significant to the quality of the educational experience. Some of the warmest, most rewarding and intellectually stimulating memories I have of Millsaps are of discussions with my teachers over a cup of coffee at the Grill or leaning against a tree in the Bowl. I know the same atmosphere exists today at Millsaps because my daughter graduated just a few years ago, and the excitement and pleasure I see in her description of the Millsaps experience reflect the experience I had so long ago.

You have traveled to the Yucatán with Millsaps. What makes the College's multidisciplinary program there special in your eyes?

The Yucatán project at Kiuc opens doors to our students that no one could have imagined a few years ago: a buried Maya city dating as far back as 600 B.C. surrounded by 4,000 acres of dry tropical forest owned by Millsaps College! Our students are participating in hands-on excavation and reconstruction with researchers from Millsaps and other colleges to study Maya archeology, culture, art, and architecture. Imagine the challenge of conducting archeological research while we find ways to protect the current ecosystems and create innovative community partnerships with people in local villages.

Our students are not just digging up rocks and pottery; they are developing a new model of research, analyzing the data, working side-by-side with people from local communities, and developing plans to manage the environmental and cultural resources of the Yucatán. I can see opportunities for students of language, political science, economics, biology, chemistry, sociology, anthropology, physics, philosophy, religion, and almost every academic field to engage in important research that will create new ways to look at conservation, opportunities for ecotourism, and economic development for local communities. We are looking at restoring species of plant and animal life lost from this tropical forest for 200 years. We have only begun to explore the opportunities for Millsaps in the Yucatán.

Why, given the other Boards you serve on, would you be willing to accept this time-consuming position?

Millsaps College gave me an education that has made every day of my life an adventure of exploring, learning, questioning, and finding satisfaction. A better question would be, "What can I possibly offer to Millsaps as an appropriate response to the gift of a lifetime filled with wonder?"



Hall with his wife Cathy, daughter Catherine, and son David.

When I was a child growing up in Shubuta, Mississippi, on Sunday mornings we walked from our house across the railroad, down the long block through downtown, across the highway and into the Shubuta Methodist Church. Just before we began that walk, my father would give me five dimes. He would say, "Remember, this has to last until next Sunday." His instructions were that the first dime was to go into the collection plate at Sunday school. The last dime was to be saved for the future. Two of the remaining dimes were mine for all the things a 5-year-old could buy in Shubuta, Mississippi. But one of the dimes was to be given to someone in need or used to support a worthwhile cause.

At the age of 5, I am sure I didn't really understand why the church should get the first dime or why I should give away one of the other dimes, but I did get the message that God is first. Everything comes from God, and we give to show our thanks. My favorite Bible verse contains the principles by which my parents lived and the greatest gift they left for me. It also summarizes my answer to your question: "Let each one serve one another to the measure of his endowment, as good stewards of God's richly varied grace" (I Peter 4:10).

What do you think the priorities of Millsaps College should be at this point in its history, and how could the College better address them?

The first priority for Millsaps is to continue doing what we are doing,

offering the finest education available in the state of Mississippi, and continue to improve the way we do that. Our next priorities are the same as my wishes for Millsaps College in the future; that we can offer every deserving student the finest education possible at the lowest possible cost, and that we can continue to have the finest faculty and staff available, paying them what they really deserve. Beyond that, we have a new campus master plan that will create a more beautiful and efficient campus environment. We have in place an excellent faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees who continually impress me with new ideas and ways to improve the College.

What do you foresee as Millsaps' greatest challenge under your tenure as Chairman of the Board?

At the moment, our greatest challenge is financial. Like everyone else, Millsaps has been buffeted by economic uncertainty for the last two years. We must increase our endowment so that we can meet the goals I just mentioned. We are at the beginning of the process to determine what we must do over the next few years to raise the necessary funds for endowment, student scholarships, faculty and staff salaries, and capital improvements.

At a time when U.S. colleges and universities are facing financial challenges, what particular strengths can Millsaps draw on to help it compete?

I believe that our history and our reputation as the premier liberal arts college in Mississippi will continue to

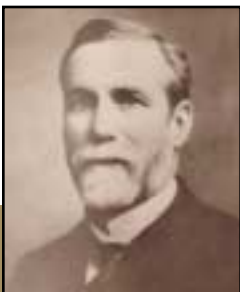


distinguish Millsaps from other colleges and universities. Our ranking among national liberal arts colleges, our efforts to recruit qualified and deserving students from throughout the nation, unique opportunities like our Yucatán project, the loyalty of our alumni, the strength of our relationship with The United Methodist Church, and the quality of the people who are our students, faculty, staff, and Board are all sources of immense strength for Millsaps.

In 10 years, in 20 years, what do you wish for Millsaps College?

I wish that we could make Millsaps so secure financially that in 10 years, no student would miss the opportunity of a Millsaps education because of financial considerations and no member of our faculty or staff would consider teaching and working elsewhere for financial reasons. Most of all, I hope that the same quality of students and professors will still be enjoying the finest collegiate experience to be had in Mississippi. **MM**

Past Chairmen



C. B. Galloway
1890-1909



W. B. Murrah
1910-24



A. F. Watkins
1924-29



M. L. Burton
1930-34



J. T. Calhoun
1935-38

Robinson leaves a legacy of growth

He helped rebuild the Millsaps campus, he helped enlarge and improve the Millsaps faculty, and he worked on fund-raising campaigns that broke records not only for the College but also for the entire state of Mississippi. Indeed, E. B. (Bud) Robinson Jr., who joined the Millsaps Board in 1981, became chairman in 1992, and served until this past October, leaves behind a bountiful legacy of improvements and expansion at Millsaps.

A chairman emeritus of Deposit Guaranty National Bank, Robinson has also served as president of the Federal Reserve Bank's Federal Advisory Council and on the boards of the United Way of the Capital Area and St. Andrew's Episcopal School. "Because of his position in the community, Bud knew where to tap resources and open doors, and whom in the community to call," said George Harmon, former president of Millsaps. "Bud was a Davidson graduate — why, he's even a Presbyterian. But he saw the value of Millsaps and contributed tremendously."

And heading the list of those contributions is fund-raising. Robinson assisted in the Centennial Development Fund Campaign, Phase One, which from 1979 to '84 generated more than \$14 million — with a goal of only \$7 million. He also assisted in Phase Two of that campaign, which amassed \$33 million. The goal then was \$30 million. "It was the largest goal ever adopted in Mississippi at that time," Harmon said. "He was sharp on the investment side, too, with how we managed the endowment."

Robinson assumed the chairmanship during the early stages of the New

Century of Light Campaign, which ultimately brought in more than \$95 million against a goal of \$80 million. "He was the logical person to take over because he had been involved in fund raising for so long," Harmon said.

The money raised during Robinson's tenure on the Board resulted in the extensive renovations of seven buildings and construction of three new residence halls, the Olin Hall of Science, the bell tower, the Campus Life Complex, and playing fields. "First, as chairman of the business affairs committee of the Board, later as chairman of the Board, he provided critical expertise in the process of completing these ventures, as well as in overseeing the growth and management of the endowment from \$5 million to \$95 million, and growth in the student body from approximately 800 to its present level of almost 50 percent higher," Harmon said.

Furthermore, "because of the success we had in fund-raising, we were able to nearly double our faculty," Harmon said. "We were rated by *U.S. News & World Report* as the No. 1 College in the Southern Region in its first survey in 1984. A year or so later we were elevated and included among the top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges in the nation. In 1988 Millsaps received the first chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in Mississippi. In 1990, the Else School of Management received accreditation by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business at both the graduate and undergraduate level, and in 1991, our teacher program received accreditation by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. All this, and much more, occurred during



E. B. Robinson

Bud's tenure on the Board."

Robinson said that he had decided to step down because "after over a decade as chairman, it was time for a new chair." He said that each leader could "bring unique gifts to the position and the College could be enriched by the periodic rotation of chairs."

Meanwhile, Harmon said he hoped that Robinson's successor, Maurice Hall, would serve for many years. "He's dedicated, capable, committed to Millsaps, and an alumnus. As for training, Maurice has served either as member or chairman on every standing committee of the Board, as well as on a number of important ad hoc committees. He has contributed significantly to the work of each."

Hall will provide stellar leadership for the Board, Robinson predicted. "I don't really think Maurice needs advice," he said. "He is a great leader and is the person I had hoped would be the next chair. But if I must give advice to Maurice, it is just to follow his instincts as he helps President Lucas guide Millsaps to even greater heights."

— John Webb



J. L. Decell
1938-45



R. L. Ezelle
1946-54



M. A. Franklin
1954-64



N. S. Rogers
1964-68



J. B. Campbell
1969-92