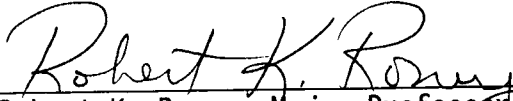
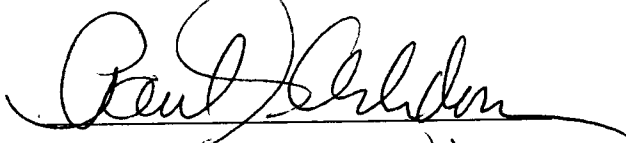


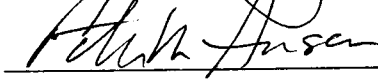
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by John A. Reaves entitled "The Influence of the Founder on the Webb School of Knoxville: An Application of Schein's Theory of Culture Creation." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.


Robert K. Roney, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:





Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FOUNDER ON THE WEBB SCHOOL OF KNOXVILLE:
AN APPLICATION OF SCHEIN'S THEORY OF CULTURE CREATION

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

John A. Reaves

August 1992

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of the founder, William Robert Webb III, in creating the organizational culture of the Webb School of Knoxville (Tennessee), using the work of E. H. Schein on the formation and transmission of culture as a theoretical framework. Data were gathered from 10 loosely structured interviews with the founder and similar interviews with 34 other members of the organization. Additional data were obtained from documents such as personal letters, newspaper accounts, newsletters, and internal reports. A narrative history of the school emphasizing critical incidents in the life of the organization was prepared. Data were also coded and arranged thematically, using ethnographic analysis techniques.

Robert Webb came from a family of distinguished school men, most notable among them his grandfather, "Sawney" Webb, the founder of the first Webb School in Bell Buckle, Tennessee. He attended the Webb School at Bell Buckle and The University of Tennessee, then taught at Bell Buckle and at the Webb School of California, founded by his uncle, Thompson Webb. In 1955 he returned to Knoxville and opened the Webb School of Knoxville in rented quarters with four male students enrolled. A parallel girls' school was added in 1957. The same year the first of many capital funds drives was launched. It resulted in construction of a permanent campus, which was occupied in time for the first graduation in June 1959. The boys' school and girls' school merged in 1968. During the 1970s, the school developed

an outstanding program that included college preparatory academics, fine arts, and athletics. Robert Webb retired in 1984 and devoted his retirement to community service.

The conclusions were that Robert Webb's role in creating the culture of the organization was central. He was an undisputed insider in two groups: the "school people" who ran the independent schools of this country and the "commercial elite" of the city of Knoxville. The beliefs, norms, and values of these two groups blended to form the culture of the Webb School of Knoxville. Robert Webb used four of five primary techniques of transmission identified by Schein and all five secondary techniques.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Webb School of Knoxville is an independent coeducational day school offering a traditional college preparatory curriculum to 735 students in grades 5 through 12.¹ On the 85-acre campus are four classroom buildings, five athletic fields, a swimming pool, tennis courts, two gymnasiums, a library of 16,000 volumes, a computer center, a cafeteria and a 600-seat auditorium. The buildings and grounds are valued at \$5.2 million; the endowment is \$1 million. The school is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and is a member of the College Entrance Examination Board, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, the National Association of Independent Schools, the Southern Association of College Admissions Counselors, the Cum Laude Society, and the Tennessee Association of Independent Schools. Seventy-one faculty, 48 of whom teach full-time, and 37 staff members are employed; salaries are competitive with the best-paying public school systems in the area. Virtually all graduates enroll in college. Members of the class of 1989 chose to attend dozens of different colleges and

¹The school is located in Knoxville, Tennessee; but "Tennessee" is not part of the name. This paragraph describes conditions in 1990.

universities, including such state universities as Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, and Florida; such private universities as Harvard, Emory, Northwestern, Vanderbilt, Washington, Notre Dame, Cornell, and Southern Methodist; and colleges such as Rhodes, Swathmore, Wellesley, and Smith. In 1989, Webb School seniors took 124 advanced placement tests and scored high enough to receive college credit on 75% of them. Webb offers every sport sanctioned by the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association plus swimming--a total of 19 varsity sports and 12 junior varsity/middle school sports (Pfeifer, 1989; "Webb School," 1989; Webb School, 1989).

In the summer of 1955, the Webb School of Knoxville existed only in the imagination of William Robert Webb III, a 35-year-old teacher of mathematics and Latin who had recently moved back to Tennessee from California with the intention of founding a school. Born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1919, Robert Webb came from a family of well-known school men. His grandfather, William Robert ("Sawney") Webb, founded the first Webb School at Culleoka, Tennessee, in 1870 and moved it some years later to its present location in Bell Buckle, Tennessee (McMillin, 1971). Sawney's brother John taught at the original Webb school for many years and became nationally known as a teacher and scholar (Mims, 1946). Sawney's son Will succeeded him as headmaster of the school in Bell Buckle, and another son, Thompson Webb, founded the Webb School of California at Claremont in 1922 (Lothrop, 1972). This was the school where Robert Webb was teaching

when he decided to move home to Knoxville and attempt to establish an independent preparatory school.

Robert Webb went to high school at the Webb School at Bell Buckle and to college at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT). He interrupted his work on a Master of Science degree in mathematics in order to serve in the army during World War II. When he returned from the army, he changed his major from math to education, took the courses necessary for certification in school administration, and in 1947 submitted a thesis entitled College Preparation in the Independent Boarding School (Webb, 1947). His formal education finished, he began his teaching career at the Webb School in Bell Buckle. In 1954, he moved to California to teach at his Uncle Thompson's school. At the end of the academic year, he returned to Knoxville, and on September 12, 1955, he opened the Webb School of Knoxville in temporary quarters at the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church. Four students were enrolled.

Between the summer of 1955, when he founded the school, and July 1984, when he retired, Robert Webb guided the growth and development of the young organization. In addition to phenomenal growth, the school experienced several momentous changes during those years. Originally a boys' school, it added a parallel girls' school in 1957. Land was obtained in what was then a rural area west of the city, and a building-fund drive was conducted in 1958. The school moved to its new campus in time to hold its first graduation in its own building on June 5, 1959. The administrative structure of the school was reorganized in 1966 and reorganized again a year later when the boys'

and girls' schools were combined to form coeducational upper and lower schools.

In several respects, Robert Webb allowed his original plan for the school to be altered. He was forced by circumstances to found the school a year earlier than planned. By interviewing families about the need for a private school in Knoxville and the feasibility of arranging financing and recruiting students, he discovered that parents were unwilling to commit to an abstraction--they needed to see the school in operation before they would agree to enroll their children in it (Lothrop, 1972). More important, Robert Webb's original plan was to establish a boys' boarding school, not the coeducational day school that exists today. He changed his mind about admitting girls when parents insisted that their girls should have the same high quality education the boys were getting. He dropped plans for dormitories after a team of consultants recommended that the school maintain itself permanently as a day school (Webb, 1988).

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man" (1841/1967, p. 1137). Robert Webb has quoted this line in order to make the point that his grandfather, Sawney Webb, is the guiding spirit behind all three Webb schools (Webb, 1989). However, there can be little doubt that the Webb School of Knoxville is the lengthened shadow of William Robert Webb III, the man who founded it, who led it during its first 29 years of existence, and who continued to articulate its underlying beliefs and values in his role as President Emeritus. Although he adapted his vision to fit

the circumstances he encountered, he was remarkably successful in turning his dream into a reality.

This dissertation explores the process by which Robert Webb's dream became a reality, and it examines the extent to which the original vision was altered in the process; but it focuses on Robert Webb's role in the creation of the culture of the Webb School of Knoxville, using the work of E. H. Schein (1983, 1985) on the creation and transmission of organizational culture as a theoretical framework. Perhaps it is best to define the scope of this research in negative terms: It is not a full-scale biography of Robert Webb, not a complete history of the Webb School of Knoxville, and not an ethnography of Webb School. It is rather the small area where the biography, the history, and the ethnography overlap. I have attempted to discover some of Robert Webb's fundamental assumptions about the nature of education, about the nature and functioning of organizations, and about the nature of human beings. I have also attempted to discover evidence that these fundamental assumptions of the founder are reflected in the organization as it exists today. Finally, I have tried to shed light on the process of transmission, the specific things that Robert Webb said and did in the course of a 29-year tenure as chief executive to make sure that his beliefs and values took root in the organization that bears his name.

In addition to the work of E. H. Schein, two other bodies of research literature influenced the study. Entrepreneurship research provides a systematic way of looking at founders and at new organizations. In particular, economists such as Schumpeter (1939)

and his followers have clarified the role of entrepreneurs in stimulating economic and other creative activity. Psychologists have expanded the work of McClelland (1961, 1971) on the personal characteristics and the motivations of entrepreneurs and have produced psychological profiles of successful business founders. In addition, several studies of organizational culture (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982) have documented the role of beliefs, values, and norms in determining the success or failure of organizations. Lightfoot (1983), Goodlad (1984), and Peters and Austin (1985) have applied the concept of organizational culture to schools.

Statement of the Problem

Little is known about the men and women who have created new educational organizations. The vast majority of studies of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship have focused on founders of profit-making businesses. While a few biographies of founders of schools (e.g. McMillin, 1971) or of other outstanding independent school administrators (e.g. McPhee, 1966) and histories of schools (e.g. Hitt, 1971) have been published, most of them are anecdotal in nature. Theoretically based studies of educational entrepreneurship are rare indeed.

A large number of ethnographic studies of schools and educators have been published in recent years, but few of these deal with the creation of culture in new organizations. E. H. Schein's theories concerning the creation and transmission of organizational culture

have been used as a theoretical framework for a study of school superintendents (Ortiz, 1986), and they have been used as the guiding concept behind the development of an instrument to assess school culture (Owens & Steinhoff, 1989). They have not been applied to an educational organization and its founder.

Several attempts have been made to preserve as much as possible of the history of the Webb School of Knoxville. For example, the Webb Remembered project involves students and faculty in gathering historical material about the school and publishes an annual journal. The administration, the faculty, and some of the students of the school have demonstrated a deep concern for the school's heritage, but the accounts they have produced thus far have been anecdotal rather than analytical. Certainly no theoretical study of the origins of the school or the role of its founder has been undertaken.

Given the widely held perception that American schools are in crisis and the growing realization among scholars and administrators that the crisis is at least in part theoretical and philosophical, the lack of a theoretical study of a highly successful and philosophically focused school such as Webb may be considered a problem. By showing how the beliefs and values of the founder informed the organization from its inception and guided it throughout its history, this study should prove useful to founders of new educational organizations and to scholars who study such organizations.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of William Robert Webb III in the creation and transmission of the organizational culture of the Webb School of Knoxville.

The Importance of the Study

The Webb School of Knoxville is a highly successful educational organization. Its graduates are in positions of leadership not only in Knoxville but in many other communities as well. Because the school is a success and has produced numerous distinguished alumni, a study of the origins of this school is worth undertaking for its own sake. However, the proposed study could have ramifications that go far beyond the one school under scrutiny. Many Americans believe that their educational system, public and private, is in crisis. Commission report after commission report has called for bold leadership, for creative solutions to intractable problems (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987; National Governor's Association, 1987; U. S. Department of Education, 1984, 1988). A recent Rand Corporation study called for the creation of "focus schools," public or private schools with clear identities and a strong sense of purpose (Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990). An obvious place to look for bold leadership is among the educational entrepreneurs of this country, the men and women who had the vision and courage to create new educational organizations. Although their achievements have rarely been studied and their counsel is rarely

sought, people like Robert Webb are as likely as anyone to have the answers to the nation's educational problems. A case study of one educational entrepreneur may make a contribution, however small, to a solution to the nation's educational problems.

Assumptions of the Study

1. E. H. Schein's theory is correct at least in broad outline: that is, groups that share a history have a culture; cultures consist primarily of shared assumptions, some of which are unconscious; group members may become conscious of their assumptions during times of crisis, when conflict between contradictory assumptions threatens the survival of the organization; founders create and transmit culture by paying attention to some behaviors and ignoring others and by rewarding some behaviors and punishing others (E. H. Schein, 1985).

2. The beliefs, values, norms, and assumptions of individuals and organizations can be discovered through interviewing.

3. The people who were available for interviews and willing to give information to the researcher were representative of the founding group and were not substantially different in any important way from the people who were not available due to death, disability, excessive distance from Knoxville, unwillingness to be interviewed, or some other reason.

4. Interview subjects for the most part told the truth as they perceived it and understood it; they did not deliberately mislead the researcher.

5. Selected documents from both the personal and school files would add to and verify data collected in the interviews.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was subject to certain limitations and delimitations. Two obvious limitations apply. First, the study was limited by the fact that I did not have unrestricted access to the files and archives of the school but had to ask that specific documents be made available as the need for them arose. Second, all desirable interview subjects were not available. Some had died, some were alive but incapacitated, and some were impossible to locate. The study is delimited by the fact that I did not have the time and money to travel long distances to interview people who live a long way from Knoxville. The people who lived far away but seemed to possess facts or insights that were critical to the study were interviewed by telephone. The ones who could not be interviewed by telephone were dropped from the list of interview subjects.

Definition of Terms

1. A critical incident is "any major event that threatened survival, or caused reexamination or reformulation of goals or ways of working, or involved membership or inclusion issues" (E. H. Schein, 1985, p. 120).

2. Culture is "a pattern of basic assumptions--invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration--that

has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems" (E. H. Schein, 1985, p. 9).

3. Entrepreneurship is the creation of new organizations (Gartner, cited in Low & MacMillan, 1988 and in Wortman, 1987).

4. Espoused values are the published or publicly stated values of an organization: "If those values are not based on prior cultural learning," they will "predict well enough what people will say in a variety of situations but . . . may be out of line with what people actually do . . . " (E. H. Schein, 1985, p. 17).

5. Webb, unless someone else is clearly indicated, refers to William Robert Webb III, the founder of the Webb School of Knoxville.

6. Webb School, unless one of the other schools is clearly indicated, refers to the Webb School of Knoxville.

Question Answered by the Study

What was the role of the founder, William Robert Webb III, in the creation of the organizational culture of the Webb School of Knoxville?

Subsidiary Questions

1. What were the fundamental beliefs and values of the founder?
2. In what ways does the present-day culture of the school reflect the beliefs and values of the founder?

3. What techniques of transmission did the founder employ in order to make sure that his beliefs and values became embedded in the organization?

Procedures

Most of the data were collected through open-ended, loosely structured interviews with Robert Webb and with family members, board members, administrators, secretaries, teachers, and former students who were in a position to observe the development of the organizational culture of the school. The founder's master's thesis (Webb, 1947), his correspondence file, and his wife's scrapbook provided invaluable documentary evidence. Data on espoused values were collected from newsletters, brochures, student and faculty handbooks, and other published materials. In addition to the facts supplied by interviewees, historical data were gathered from newspaper articles and other published sources. Permission to use documents from the Webb School files or archives was sought whenever the information contained in such documents was necessary to confirm other information.

A total of 35 people were interviewed, some of them more than once. The founder himself was interviewed ten times in the course of the study. Data obtained through interviews were compared to data contained in published and unpublished documents whenever possible.

Whenever the interview subjects were willing, the interviews were audiotaped and field notes produced later from the tapes. Two subjects objected to the use of a tape recorder, so handwritten notes

were taken during the interview and expanded later. Regardless of whether the interviews were taped or not, expanded field notes rather than verbatim transcripts were analyzed.

Data from all sources were subjected to thematic analysis. (For detailed discussions of thematic analysis of qualitative data, see Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; E. H. Schein, 1985; Spradley, 1979) This analysis began as soon as the first data were gathered and continued until the final report was finished. In the course of the study, hypotheses concerning core values and assumptions of the founder, shared values and assumptions of organization members, and transmission techniques used by the founder were formulated, tested, refined and reformulated, or abandoned altogether, depending on whether they were confirmed or disconfirmed by additional data.

Organization of the Study

Following this chapter, where the problem and purpose of the study was developed and the general procedures to be followed were explained, this study will be presented in five additional chapters. Chapter II provides the reader with a review of the relevant literature on this and related topics. A more complete outline of methodology is found in Chapter III. Chapter IV, which is subdivided into five sections, is a narrative presentation of the information collected. In Chapter V, I have undertaken an analysis of these data using Schein's theoretical framework. Finally, in Chapter VI, I have attempted to draw conclusions about Robert Webb's leadership and how

he transmitted a culture to Webb School. Implications of his leadership and experience are considered as well.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study drew insights and direction from a number of previous studies. Chief among these are the works of E. H. Schein (1983, 1985), which provide the theoretical base for the study. Schein's work is often cited by scholars in two fields, entrepreneurship and organizational culture. For this reason both entrepreneurship research and organizational culture research are reviewed.

The Theoretical Base

The work of Edgar H. Schein (1983, 1985) on the role of the founder in the creation and transmission of organizational culture served as a theoretical base for the study. Schein, a social psychologist, was a professor at the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Early in his career, a senior colleague of Schein's, Douglas McGregor, got him involved in implementing the ideas of Kurt Lewin, the pioneer of group dynamics research. As Schein worked with training groups, he noticed that groups that started in identical circumstances--that is, as a collection of strangers in a bare room with a non-directive "leader" and no instructions--quickly developed distinctively different ways of doing things. For example, some groups encouraged members to reveal intimate details of their personal lives; others forbade such revelations. Years later, when he was a consultant attempting to

help large corporations make fundamental changes in the way they did business, Schein was struck by the remarkably different organizational cultures he encountered. One company he worked with encouraged loud, open, and boisterous debate and tolerated insubordination. Another was strictly hierarchical; managers were considered experts in their own areas, were expected to make decisions without consultation, and were considered weak if they asked for assistance. Schein became convinced that these seemingly irrational cultural differences were rooted in the history of the companies. When he investigated the histories of the organizations he worked with, he was reminded of his earlier work in group dynamics. Fledgling organizations are, after all, small groups. Like the training groups, the founding groups of organizations proposed solutions to problems, adopted the solutions that worked, and abandoned the ones that did not. In time, the successful solutions were assumed to be the correct way to do things; eventually, some of these assumptions became so embedded that they dropped out of consciousness. Nobody in the organization questioned them because nobody even thought about them any more (E. H. Schein, 1985, 1987).

From theories of group dynamics (which Schein called "sociodynamic theory"), leadership theory, and learning theory, Schein formulated a theory of culture formation, which he summarized as follows:

Culture has been defined as the outcome of group learning. When a number of people simultaneously face a problematic situation and have to work out a solution together, we have

the basic situation for culture formation. The process involves a shared problem definition and a shared recognition that something invented actually works and continues to work. The initial ability to share does involve prior cultural learning and understanding, but the new shared experience begins the formation of a new culture, which then becomes a characteristic of that particular group of people. (E. H. Schein, 1985, pp. 183-84, emphasis in the original)

Schein defined "culture" as

A pattern of basic assumptions--invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration--that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (E. H. Schein, 1985, p. 9)

By defining culture as "a pattern of basic assumptions," Schein took issue with Deal and Kennedy (1982) and Ouchi (1981). He considered these earlier writers, who defined organizational culture in terms of values, beliefs, and norms, to be somewhat superficial. He insisted that an outsider cannot claim to understand the culture of an organization until he or she is able to uncover and describe the paradigm--the pattern of underlying, deeply embedded assumptions--that controls the behavior of the members of the organization.

These underlying assumptions often date from the earliest days of the organization, and many of them originate with the founder. As problems of external adaptation (such as how to deal with a new competitor) and problems of internal integration (such as how to manage communication among members) arise, it is the founder who is most likely to propose solutions. The solutions proposed are based on the founder's prior experience and on the assumptions that he or

she brings to the new enterprise. Thus the assumptions of the founder, to the extent that they produce solutions that work, become the assumptions of the organization and the foundation of its culture.

The process by which the founder embeds his or her own assumptions in the new organization usually contains unconscious as well as conscious elements. Schein distinguished between primary and secondary embedding mechanisms. The primary mechanisms are

(1) what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control; (2) leader reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises; (3) deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching by leaders; (4) criteria for allocation of rewards and status; (5) criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement, and excommunication. (E. H. Schein, 1985, pp. 224-25)

Secondary mechanisms are

(1) the organization's design and structure; (2) organizational systems and procedures; (3) design of physical space, facades, and buildings; (4) stories, legends, myths, and parables about important events and people; (5) formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds, and charters. (p. 237)

Secondary mechanisms, according to Schein, work only when they are consistent with the primary mechanisms. If the founder holds conflicting assumptions, or if his or her underlying assumptions are in conflict with the espoused values of the organization, that conflict will become part of the organizational culture.

One of Schein's criticisms of Deal and Kennedy as well as Ouchi is that these earlier scholars based too many of their statements about culture on the formal statements and structures of organizations and on stories that circulate widely within the

organizations. Schein believed that such data are more likely to demonstrate espoused values than to uncover the underlying assumptions that make up the true culture of the organization. Culture, according to Schein, can best be uncovered by interviewing key members of the organization and with their help identifying critical events in the life of the organization. The solutions that were proposed at those critical times, that were adopted, and that worked well enough to ensure the survival of the organization are most likely the bases for the underlying assumptions of the organization.

Entrepreneurship

The study of entrepreneurship began at least as early as the eighteenth century and possibly as early as the middle ages (Hebert & Link, 1988). Contributions to the literature have come from many disciplines, among them history, economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, business and education (Greenfield, et al., 1979; Low & MacMillan, 1988). Yet, in the opinion of at least one scholar, the field is in its infancy (Wortman, 1987). Max Weber (1930) was one of the first twentieth century scholars to contribute to the literature on entrepreneurship. Weber believed that the spread of Protestantism with its emphasis on personal responsibility for salvation, hard work, and material success made entrepreneurship respectable. Entrepreneurs had appeared in all kinds of societies throughout history, but when they appeared in Protestant countries, they were encouraged and treated with respect.

Weber believed that entrepreneurs (whom he called innovators) were motivated, in some instances unconsciously, by religious feelings.

Joseph A. Schumpeter (1934), an Austrian economist who later became a member of the faculty of Harvard University, is among the best known of twentieth century writers on entrepreneurship. Originally published in Austria in 1911, Schumpeter's Theory of Economic Development was translated into English and published in America in 1934. Schumpeter visualized the exchange economy as a "stream of goods" in "circular flow" from producer to consumer, a system somewhat analogous to the circulation of blood in an animal. Goods are produced by combining resources--land, labor, etc.--in predictable ways. But this state of equilibrium, while it may produce abundant goods and stable prices, does not produce economic development. A developing or expanding economy is produced by disequilibrium, which is the result of the activity of the entrepreneur, the creator of new combinations. Thus the entrepreneur is the catalyst that causes economic growth to occur. Schumpeter saw the entrepreneur primarily as an innovator and believed that the entrepreneur is motivated not by hedonism but by the "desire to build a private kingdom," "the will to conquer," and "the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply exercising one's energy and ingenuity" (Schumpeter, 1934, p. 93).

Macdonald (1971) wrote a detailed comparison of Weber's and Schumpeter's views of the role of the entrepreneur in capitalist societies. He concluded that the two scholars' descriptions of the

entrepreneurial phenomenon are quite similar, even though their terminology is different.

The psychologist David McClelland (1961), like Schumpeter, put the entrepreneur at the center of economic development, but he believed that he had isolated the single psychological trait--need for achievement--that motivates entrepreneurial behavior and thus economic growth. By analyzing the folk tales of ancient societies and the stories taught to school children in modern societies, McClelland and his colleagues were able to measure the average level of need for achievement (n Achievement or n-Ach) of the members of each society. They then compared the degree of n Achievement in a society with some measure of economic activity, such as per capita consumption of electrical current. They found high correlations between the n Achievement scores of the population and the economic activity of the country. Because Protestant countries scored significantly higher than Catholic countries on both n Achievement and economic activity, McClelland claimed that he had demonstrated empirically the truth of Max Weber's contention that the spread of the Protestant ethic was the driving force behind the development of capitalism (McClelland, 1961).

Schumpeter and McClelland distinguished entrepreneurs from managers and believed that entrepreneurs had personal characteristics that set them apart from other businessmen and from the general population. The scholars who followed Schumpeter and McClelland have attempted to identify the distinguishing personal characteristics of entrepreneurs, but their success has been limited.

Kilby (1971), Greenfield, Strickon, Aubey, and Rothstein (1979), Brockhaus (1982), Gasse (1982), Brockhaus and Horwitz (1986), Gartner (1985), Wortman (1987), and Low and MacMillan (1988) have reviewed the literature on personal characteristics of entrepreneurs. To summarize briefly, need for achievement, internal locus of control, moderate risk-taking, and tolerance for ambiguity have been suggested as distinguishing characteristics of entrepreneurs. Need for achievement has been for the most part discredited on the grounds that it fails to distinguish entrepreneurs from any other class of high achievers. (See Schatz, 1971, for a devastating critique of McClelland's Achieving Society.) Likewise, internal locus of control, the belief that a person's own behavior largely determines his or her circumstances, is a characteristic of many entrepreneurs but does not separate them from many other types of people. Entrepreneurs do seem to be drawn to situations with moderate risk. Unlike very low risk situations in which anyone could succeed or very high risk situations in which only a very lucky person could succeed, moderate risk situations provide opportunities to succeed through the exercise of personal intelligence and skill. Entrepreneurs also seem to have greater tolerance for ambiguity than do managers.

Low and MacMillan concluded their review of the literature on personal characteristics of entrepreneurs as follows:

Being innovators and idiosyncratic, entrepreneurs tend to defy aggregation. They tend to reside at the tails of the population distributions, and though they may be expected to differ from the mean, the nature of these differences are not predictable. It seems that any attempt to profile the typical entrepreneur is inherently futile. (1988, p. 148)

Futile or not, such attempts continue. A recent example (Solomon & Winslow, 1988; Winslow & Solomon, 1989) used psychological testing to construct a profile and concluded that entrepreneurs are mildly sociopathic.

A recent development in entrepreneurship research is the study of the interaction between the entrepreneur and the organization he or she founds. The work of E. H. Schein, discussed earlier as the theoretical base for the study, fits into that category. In addition to Schein, Kets De Vries and Miller (1984, 1986) explored this area, concentrating on dysfunctional individuals and organizations.

Organizational Culture

Although the concept of organizational culture has many antecedents in anthropology and in the literature on organizational climate (Denison, 1990), a review of the literature on the subject might properly begin with the work of Douglas McGregor. McGregor (1960) asserted that most firms are managed on the basis of Theory X, the assumption that human beings dislike work and will not perform unless they are threatened with punishment, but a few enlightened firms have discovered Theory Y, the notion that most people are hardworking and creative provided their personal goals are well-integrated with the goals of the organization that employs them. Although McGregor did not use the word "culture," his emphasis on the effects of managers' assumptions on the functioning of organizations anticipated the work of later writers, particularly Ouchi (1981), whose Theory Z expanded and refined McGregor's work.

Two books published in 1982 focused attention on the concept of organizational culture: Corporate Culture by Deal and Kennedy and In Search of Excellence by Peters and Waterman. As research in the area expanded, several scholars attempted to define and refine concepts in the field, in many instances drawing on the work of anthropologists.

Of the anthropologists whose theoretical work on the concept of culture has guided organizational researchers, Geertz (1973) is perhaps the one most often cited. Approaching the study of culture from a semiotic perspective, Geertz saw culture as an essential conceptual framework through which human beings perceive reality. Culture, mind, and Man developed simultaneously and interactively, according to Geertz; thus no generalized human point of view of anything is possible, only the point of view of a particular human being existing and perceiving within a particular cultural framework.

Smircich (1983) attempted to clarify the meaning of the concepts of organization and culture and to explain the intersection of the two. According to Smircich, organizational researchers have traditionally compared organizations to machines or to organisms. They have treated culture as either a critical variable or as a root metaphor. To take the latter position is, according to Smircich, to "leave behind the view that a culture is something an organization has, in favor of the view that culture is something an organization is" (p. 347, emphasis in the original).

Trice and Beyer (1984) attempted to steer organizational culture research along a more productive path than any of those

previously pursued. They prepared a glossary of key terms used in the study of organizational cultures and pointed out that some aspects of organizational culture are easier to study than others.

Erikson (1987) attempted to clarify the concept of culture as it has been used in research in schools. He described three distinct concepts of culture: 1) an analogy with bits in a computer or genetic information in a breeding population, 2) a conceptual structure that frames the knowledge of a group, and 3) the idea that social structure and culture are intertwined.

Although some of the underlying concepts have been controversial, researchers in organizational culture were in almost unanimous agreement about methodology until quite recently. No one disputed the idea that cultural studies required qualitative methods. Several writers pointed out particularly promising methods. Trice and Beyer (1984), for example, suggested that rites and ceremonials can unlock the underlying cultural elements in an organization and are relatively easy to study. E. H. Schein extolled the virtues of interactive interviewing (1985) and asserted that clinical methods are superior to ethnographic (1987). Two educational researchers (Owens & Steinhoff, 1989) suggested that culture can best be studied by asking insiders to identify the metaphors that describe the "history, stories, heroes and heroines, rituals, and behavioural norms of their schools" (p. 15). They have developed an instrument to help researchers ask the right questions (Steinhoff & Owens, 1989), which may signal a move in the direction of more quantitative

methodology. Denison (1990) used both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Much of the literature on organizational culture is based on the idea that organizations that have strong cultures are more effective than other organizations. Ouchi (1981), Deal and Kennedy (1982), and Peters and Waterman (1982) all made this point, but they offered little evidence that might be termed scientific. Denison (1990) attempted to demonstrate empirically the link between culture and effectiveness. Owens (1987) pointed out that the relationship between culture and effectiveness is harder to establish in educational than in corporate settings because effectiveness in education is more difficult to define.

A number of writers have addressed the relationship between organizational culture and change. Although research in school culture has generally lagged behind research in corporate culture, in the area of culture and change, an educator led the way. Sarason (1982) first published The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change in 1971. He saw school culture primarily as an obstacle to change, particularly to the top-down variety, such as the new math experiment. Tichy (1983) recognized the difficulty of changing culture and the near impossibility of changing an organization without changing its culture, but his emphasis was on change strategies. He believed that corporate leaders could change the culture of their organizations if they were aware of the content of the culture, if they could devise methods for shaping the culture, and if they made plans to deal with cultural uncertainty during the

period of change. Corbett, Firestone, and Rossman (1987) argued that all components of a given culture are not equally resistant to change. Certain norms are sacred, they reported, and efforts to change sacred norms will meet with immediate and determined resistance and will result in the creation of a culture of resistance. L. Schein (1989) insisted that culture can be changed and managed, and he suggested strategies for effecting cultural change.

Another issue in the study of organizational culture is the relationship between culture and leadership. Peters and Waterman (1982) began their research hoping that the notion of strong corporate cultures would replace, or at least compete with, the idea of dynamic leadership as the stock explanation for why some companies are so much more successful than others. They felt that the role of individual leaders had been overemphasized in the literature. But they were soon confronted with the role of leaders in creating and transmitting organizational culture. Many of the excellent companies they identified "seem to have taken on their basic character under the tutelage of a very special person. Moreover, they did it at a fairly early stage in their development" (p. 26).

One team of researchers (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984, 1986; Kets de Vries, 1989) concentrated on the dark side of culture and leadership. They reported that the neuroses of top managers are reflected in the pathology of the organizations these managers head. They identified five pathological leadership styles and five corresponding organizational cultures. According to Kets de Vries,

even great leaders may develop an F-dimension or failure factor that compels them to lead their organizations into dangerous, self-destructive ventures.

As mentioned earlier, E. H. Schein (1983, 1985) produced a theory of the role of the founder in creating and transmitting organizational culture. Although his work, like that of Kets de Vries, emphasized the link between culture and leadership, Schein viewed the relationship more positively.

Several writers have dealt with cultural issues in educational settings. Lightfoot (1983) explicitly discussed the cultures of her good high schools. Goodlad (1984) did not directly address the organizational cultures of the schools he studied, but his book dealt with such cultural issues as norms and values and is often cited as a cornerstone of the literature on school culture. Peters and Austin (1985) devoted a chapter to excellence in school leadership. Ortiz (1986) used the work of E. H. Schein as a theoretical framework and analyzed the role of three superintendents in changing the established organizational cultures of their school districts.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study examined the role of Robert Webb in creating the organizational culture of the Webb School of Knoxville, using the work of E. H. Schein on the creation and transmission of culture as a theoretical base. It attempted to answer questions concerning the founder's core beliefs and values, the organization's underlying assumptions, and the transmission techniques of the founder. All the research questions listed in Chapter I were answered through thematic analysis of data collected from loosely-structured interviews. However, the interview data were supplemented with data from documents. Some documentary data were used to confirm dates or to establish chronology; other documents were subjected to thematic analysis, and passages from them were quoted as evidence of the espoused values of the organization.

Interview subjects included Robert Webb and members of his family as well as present and former administrators, secretaries, teachers, and board members of Webb School. A few former students who are now adults were also interviewed. The first subjects to be interviewed were selected for their knowledge of the formative years of the founder or the early years of the school. Examples are the founder himself, his wife, their daughters, his brother, and his secretary. These original informants were asked to suggest other people who had a broad general knowledge of the founder or of the

school. As the study progressed and critical periods in the life of the organization were identified, interview subjects who had detailed knowledge of those periods were selected, and the questions were more narrowly focused. Interviewing was discontinued when several themes had been identified, no new themes appeared to be emerging, and little or no evidence that seemed to disconfirm the hypotheses developed in the course of the study was forthcoming. A total of 35 people were interviewed, some more than once. The founder himself was interviewed 10 times.

Many interview subjects had more than one role in the organization. For example, two subjects were Webb School graduates, former Webb School teachers, parents of Webb School students, and board members. Such people were invaluable because they knew the school over a good part of its history and could comment on events from several perspectives. Table 1 shows the roles represented by the 34 interview subjects other than the founder. These people were promised anonymity, and so their names do not appear anywhere in this report, not even in the Acknowledgements. Two of them are quoted by name because their anonymity would have been impossible to preserve in a particular context or because the comment gains considerable force and credibility by being attributed to the speaker. In those instances, permission was obtained for the quote, and that fact is noted in a footnote. It soon became obvious that it would be impossible to preserve the anonymity of the founder because so much of what he said could not have come from anyone but him. He

Table 1. Roles Represented by Interview Subjects.

Subject Number	Family Member	Faculty Member	Board Member	Admini- strator	Support Staff	Parent	Student
1	*	*	*			*	
2	*		*			*	
3		*	*			*	
4		*	*			*	
5							*
6			*			*	
7			*			*	*
8							*
9		*		*			
10		*		*			
11		*		*			
12					*		
13	*						*
14			*			*	
15			*			*	*
16			*			*	*
17		*					*
18		*		*			
19			*				
20			*			*	
21			*				*
22		*		*			
23		*					
24					*		
25		*	*			*	*
26		*		*			
27		*			*	*	
28		*	*			*	*
29					*	*	
30		*		*		*	
31		*		*			
32		*		*			
33		*				*	*
34	*						*

was quoted extensively in the first draft of the report. In order to obtain his permission (since he, like all the others, had been promised anonymity at the outset), I gave him a copy of every quote attributed directly to him plus enough context to make it clear how the quote was to be used. He gave approval to use these quotations without even reading them. He said, "If I said it, I'll stand by it." I did not give him a copy of the entire report, nor did he attempt to influence the contents of the report in any way.

Every reasonable effort to preserve the anonymity of interview subjects was made. Each subject was assigned a pseudonym. Tapes and notes were stored in a file cabinet in my home or office. Each subject was asked to sign a consent form which set forth the conditions of the interview and explained the methods used to maintain anonymity. See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form.

Reports of qualitative research typically use pseudonyms for site names and names of all informants. In this case, however, the school and the founder wished to be identified.

The work of E. H. Schein (1983, 1985, 1987) provided a model of methodology as well as a theoretical base. Schein emphasized the cooperation between the investigator and the informant that is necessary if an outsider hopes to understand an insider's view of an organization. He suggested opening an interview with a general question such as the following: "Let's go back over the history of your organization. Can you tell me when it was founded and describe the events that occurred at that time?" (1985, p. 119). Followup questions might be: "Who was involved? What were the critical

problems in getting started? Were there specific goals that emerged? Ways of working? Key values that emerged early?" (p. 120). When a critical incident is identified, Schein suggests the following line of questioning:

Tell me how people were feeling about what was happening. Were they anxious or angry or delighted or what? What was done? Who did anything? What was the meaning of the response? What goals, values, and assumptions were implied or explicitly stated in the response? Did the response work? How did people feel subsequently? Did the response continue? (p. 120).

In addition to the work by Schein, I read and made use of the work of several other writers on the art and science of interviewing. Among these were Gorden (1969), Spradley (1979), Patton (1980), and Merriam (1988). The work of Dexter (1970) on elite interviewing was particularly helpful. In elite interviewing, the interviewer assumes that the interview subject knows more about the topic of discussion than the interviewer does and thus allows the subject to define the situation under discussion, to structure the account of the situation, and to introduce "his notions of what is relevant, instead of relying upon the investigator's notions of relevance" (Dexter, 1970, p. 5).

Although Dexter suggests that interviewers of prominent people avoid the use of tape recorders because people in the public eye generally dislike having their comments recorded, an audiotape was made of all but two interviews. In those cases, the subjects objected to the use of a tape recorder. Two tape recorders were used whenever possible. By producing a backup tape, I avoided anxiety about equipment failure; thus, I was able to concentrate on the

interview subject and follow the twists and turns of the conversation without having to take extensive notes. The only notes that were taken were those necessary to formulate followup questions. When a person asked to be interviewed without tape recorders running, I took handwritten notes during the interview and expanded them at the first opportunity.

Audiotapes were not transcribed because transcription requires 3 to 12 hours of typing for each hour of recording (Gorden, 1969). Instead, I produced a log of each interview, following the procedure described below:

The researcher begins by identifying at the top of a legal-sized pad the name, date, and other necessary details of the interview. The interviewer/researcher then plays the tape and takes notes on important statements or ideas expressed by the informant. Words or phrases or entire sentences are quoted exactly. These notes are coded to the tape counter so the exact location of such words can be accessed quickly at a later time. Tape position is recorded to the left of the words or phrases the researcher deems important. In a column to the far right is space for the researcher to add his or her own observations about what was said. The data on the interview log can later be coded according to emerging themes or categories from the data analysis phase of the study. (Merriam, 1988, p. 84)

Another source of data was documents. Some of these, such as newspaper accounts of key events in the life of the school, were used primarily to supplement and confirm information obtained from interviews. Julie Webb's scrapbook, which she allowed me to borrow, contained not only newspaper clippings but also copies of announcements, programs for major events, and pictures. Robert Webb allowed me to use his correspondence file, which contains letters from three decades and numerous newspaper clippings. A compilation of the highlights of the minutes of board meetings proved helpful in

establishing a chronology of major events. Other documents were analyzed thematically much the same way that the interview logs were analyzed. Examples are school catalogs, newsletters, and published speeches. Documents of this type were useful primarily as evidence of the espoused values of the organization. Comparison of such public statements with statements made in interviews helped to reveal the degree to which the espoused values of the organization were culturally embedded.

An invaluable document was the founder's master's thesis, written at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 1947. Entitled College Preparation in the Independent Boarding School, it discussed in some detail the author's beliefs concerning the benefits of a boarding school as opposed to a day school education, the importance of religious training, the place of classical languages in the curriculum, and various other issues of importance to the independent schools of the day. A number of these concerns, most notably the boarding-versus-day issue, surfaced as policy questions in the early years of the Webb School of Knoxville.

In accordance with the standard practice in qualitative research, analysis and collection of data proceeded simultaneously. As each interview was completed and each document read, the contents of the interview or document were thematically analyzed. The method of coding and sorting the data was eclectic, drawing on the work of Spradley (1979), Patton (1980), Goetz and LeCompte (1984), and Merriam (1988). I was looking for core beliefs of the founder, underlying assumptions of the organization, and transition techniques

of the founder. Themes that were identified at the early stages of the investigation were considered very tentative, but they were useful in forming hypotheses concerning the answers to the research questions that guide the study. Once hypotheses were formulated, they were tested in subsequent interviews. Questions specifically designed to produce confirming or disconfirming evidence were asked. As new information was encountered, the hypotheses were confirmed, abandoned, or revised.

At the end of the data collection phase of the study, I arranged the notes chronologically with special attention to critical incidents. After the narrative portion of the report was written, I coded and resorted all the notes and produced a case record to be used in writing the analysis portion of the study. (See Merriam, 1988 and Patton, 1980 for discussions of case records). Although Schein's theory provided some categories, others were determined inductively by sorting and resorting the data until patterns emerged.

It seems appropriate to close this discussion of methodology with a statement of personal bias. I did my internship in school administration at the Webb School of Knoxville and taught there one summer. Both experiences were enjoyable, and I was struck by the hard work, dedication, and seriousness of purpose of the administrators and faculty. During my first meeting with Robert Webb, I was impressed by his gentlemanly demeanor and by his efforts to make me feel at ease. My research has done nothing to diminish my positive first impressions; in fact, the more I learned about the man, the more I admired him. I have tried to conduct a scholarly

study of the man and the organization he founded, not to compose a panegyric; but I must confess that I have nothing to gain and quite a lot to lose by offending Robert Webb or any of his many admirers, which include the present administration of Webb School. I have done my best to avoid doing so.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE

1. FAMILY HISTORY AND FORMATIVE YEARS OF THE FOUNDER: 1870 - 1955

Family History

Although the Webb School of Knoxville was chartered on September 8, 1955, and held its first classes four days later, its story actually began in Culleoka, Tennessee, in 1870. During the summer of that year, the board of trustees of "Culleoka University" appointed a new principal: William Robert (Sawney) Webb, the grandfather of William Robert Webb III, the founder of the Webb School of Knoxville.² The school at Culleoka had neither teachers nor pupils. In essence the trustees were giving Sawney Webb permission to found a school in the community. They allowed him to use a damp basement schoolroom and authorized him to charge students up to 25 cents per week tuition. Sawney hired a female teacher and sent announcements to nearby newspapers and churches. In August, Culleoka Institute, the school that eventually became the Webb School at Bell Buckle, opened its doors (McMillin, 1971).

At 27 Sawney Webb was an experienced schoolmaster with AB and AM degrees from the University of North Carolina. He had been a captain of cavalry in the Confederate army, and his right arm was permanently

²McMillin gives no explanation for the grandiose name of the school.

damaged by a bullet wound. He became a conspicuous and controversial member of the Culleoka community, and in spite of smallpox and cholera scares that temporarily closed the school, the Culleoka Institute prospered. In January 1873, with more than 100 pupils enrolled, Sawney felt secure enough to invite his brother, John Maurice Webb, to join him as associate principal (McMillin, 1971).

Much has been made (by Rice, 1942, among others) of the contrast between the two men. Sawney was the entrepreneur, the man of action, and at school the disciplinarian. John was the scholar--brilliant, mild-mannered, absent-minded, and prone to mumble to himself in several languages. In 1876, three years after Vanderbilt University was founded, both men were offered positions on the faculty; but they valued their independence, and John resisted the idea of having to specialize. They continued their careers as school men, eventually becoming known as "Old Sawney" and "Old Jack," legendary figures in the folklore of school people nationwide (McMillin, 1971; Rice, 1942)

Although the school grew and prospered, Sawney Webb's relations with the Culleoka community became complicated. He had powerful and vocal friends, but he also had enemies, among them moonshiners who resented his outspoken advocacy of prohibition and his insistence on expelling any student caught drinking. He fought incorporation of Culleoka because an incorporated town could legally allow a saloon to locate near a school; and in 1886, when the wets won the incorporation vote, he moved the school 35 miles east to Bell Buckle, Tennessee (McMillin, 1971).

The school at Bell Buckle was unusual in many ways. It was a boarding school without dormitories. The boys lived in rooming houses in the village, and they had a great deal of freedom to come and go as they pleased. An honor code, based on the one in use at the University of North Carolina when Sawney Webb was a student there, guided their conduct. It was a boys' school that seemed always to have a few female students. It employed as its primary teaching method "trapping," a sort of contest much like a spelling bee. The emphasis was on "short lessons thoroughly learned." Study halls were held outdoors under the trees. During its first 50 years of existence, it produced more Rhodes scholars than any other school in the country (McMillin, 1971).

Sawney Webb became known for a number of favorite sayings and pithy remarks that summed up his philosophy of life and of education. "Don't do things on the sly" and "Don't do anything you have to hide," he said again and again in his daily chapel talks. Soon after he opened the school at Culleoka, parents complained that he allowed the pupils who were not reciting to study under the trees instead of sitting quietly indoors on half-log benches. He replied, "Before I would imprison innocent children, I would quit the profession of teaching" (p. 61). Many years later, having listened to a lecture on the virtues of vocational education in general and milking in particular, Sawney told the speaker that he had taught all his sons to milk, but he wanted every son of his to learn Latin so that he would be expert at "something a calf can't beat him at" (McMillin, 1971, p. 169).

In his later years, Sawney Webb became increasingly involved in politics and public issues. He traveled extensively, speaking in favor of the gold standard, prohibition, and the establishment of public high schools. "The public and private high schools 'are to each other supplementary,'" he said (McMillin, 1971, p. 146). In 1904 he declined the presidency of The University of Tennessee. At the age of 70, he was appointed by the Tennessee legislature to serve out the remainder of the term of a United States senator who had died in office. Through Webb School graduates who had gone to Princeton University, Sawney had become acquainted with the president of that institution, Woodrow Wilson, who has been quoted as saying that the Webb School of Bell Buckle, Tennessee, was the best college preparatory school in the country. When Wilson was sworn in as President of the United States, he invited Senator Sawney Webb to share the platform with him (McMillin, 1971).

John Webb kept the school going when Sawney was away, but he also had other interests. One of his hobbies was playing the stock market, and his skill at investments led to his being named president of the Bell Buckle bank. He was also a charter member of the board of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the Webb School was one of the first two secondary schools recognized by that association. Later Webb School dropped its accreditation by SACS because the Webb brothers believed the accrediting agency was fostering too much standardization. John Webb was particularly distressed about the adoption of the Carnegie unit as the measure of

progress toward graduation. After John and Sawney were dead, the Webb School was once again accredited by SACS (McMillin, 1971).

William Robert Webb, Jr., sometimes called "Son Will," became associated with the school in 1897. He became a principal in 1908; and so until 1916, when John Webb died, the school had three principals.

For years a dispute had been brewing between Sawney and John Webb's wife, Lily. John's death brought the dispute to a head. John's son Albert wanted to succeed his father as principal, but Sawney was opposed to the idea. Money was also an issue--Lily claimed Sawney had not adequately compensated her for John's financial interest in the school. A bitter court battle seemed imminent; but Sawney's lawyer son Clary, Robert Webb's father, managed to settle the case out of court. Albert and Lily left Bell Buckle. Sawney died in 1926, and Will Webb became the undisputed head of the school until the 1950s, when another bitter battle for succession occurred, a battle that would profoundly affect the future of Sawney's grandson Robert.

Thompson Webb, Sawney's youngest son, taught at the school in Bell Buckle for four years around the time of World War I, when many of the teachers were in the army and the school was shorthanded. But his first love was farming. When the teachers returned, Thompson moved to the Imperial Valley of California. He lost money farming and decided to start a boarding school for boys. He was offered the use of some buildings, and he borrowed more than \$120,000, an enormous sum in those days. The first year, 1922, he had 14

students. The second year, he had 28 and soon expelled 12 of them. He had to refund the boys' tuition, but he said they were juvenile delinquents and he had no intention of running a reform school. He also fired two teachers who he said were "the abettors" of the delinquent boys (Leap, 1960).

Thompson Webb's school, the Webb School of California at Claremont, prospered. In 1960, it had 165 students, 80 acres of land, 30 buildings, and a reputation for turning out graduates who were well-prepared for college (Leap, 1960).

Thompson Webb, like his father and uncle, had interests outside the confines of his own school. In the 1930s, he became involved in organizing independent schools in California. This movement eventually became national and led to the establishment of the National Association of Independent Schools (McMillin, 1971).

By the time Robert Webb was a teenager, two of his uncles were heads of well-established, highly regarded independent schools, and members of the Webb family had helped to establish two important organizations, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). These two schools and these two organizations would figure prominently in Robert Webb's career.

Formative Years of the Founder

An Ideal Childhood

Robert Webb's father, Daniel Clary Webb, went to college at Vanderbilt and to law school at the University of Chicago. As he was finishing his law degree, he was offered a job in Knoxville by a cousin, John Green. He accepted and spent his entire career in the same office. His first wife died in childbirth. Robert Webb was born February 8, 1919, the first child of the second wife. A half-brother, Daniel Clary Webb, Jr., was about four years old when Robert was born. Brother George was born a year and a half later, and sister Margaret followed George.

When Robert was a year or two old, his father took up real estate development as a sideline. The family moved from Clinch Avenue to an area west of the city later named Westmoreland Heights. Clary Webb had purchased 60 acres, and he and some partners owned additional acreage in the area, which they hoped to develop. They were ahead of their time. Nobody wanted to build or buy a house that far from town. Consequently, Clary Webb carried a substantial burden of debt until after World War II when the area began to catch on, and his family did not live as well as the family of a successful attorney might be expected to live. As Robert Webb explained:

We were not in any sense deprived. We always had food, clothing, and shelter, a vacation trip each summer, a lot of family outings, but there was not a lot of ready cash.

If Clary Webb's real estate ventures did not pay off in ready cash, they did secure for his children an idyllic childhood home.

The Webbs lived in a big old house at the top of a hill with a spectacular view of the surrounding woods and farmland. Because no neighbors lived close by, the children had a difficult time finding playmates, but they had 60 acres--a beautiful wooded hillside with a creek at the bottom--to roam.

Religion was an important part of the life of the family. Clary Webb was a ruling elder of the First Presbyterian Church for thirty years. His wife taught Bible classes. The family had daily devotions and a blessing before every meal. "Religion was a natural, normal thing for us," Robert Webb's brother George said in an interview. "I don't think any of us were in conflict with it. Some folks are rebellious about it. We were not."³

In an interview, Robert Webb said:

I was very fortunate in the family I had. My parents were loving and caring and interested in their children and their welfare, and did everything in the world they could for them. . . I don't know anybody who could have had a happier childhood, with one exception, I guess. When I was eight years old, I contracted polio.

He was sick for weeks, and after the crisis was over, his legs remained weak. In those days, poliomyelitis was difficult to diagnose. Approximately two years passed before the doctors were sure what was wrong with the boy. He was hospitalized in Knoxville and in Atlanta and finally spent a month in a hospital in Memphis, where a doctor operated on his Achilles tendons. He was in a cast for some time, and then he had to wear a heavy metal brace on one foot. "My mother in particular was just wonderful in the time she

³Source identified by permission.

devoted to me and cared for me and nursed me," he said. "I'm sure I was a concern to [my parents] for a long time." His right foot never totally recovered, and he was left with a slight limp.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the experience for a boy who loved sports was the realization that he would never be able to play football or run track or play basketball--any sport that required running was out of the question. He could swim, however; and at Camp LeConte one summer, he discovered that he could swim faster than the other boys.

Another tragedy struck the family when Robert was 12. His 16-year-old half-brother Clary, a student at the Webb School in Bell Buckle, contracted pneumonia and died.

In spite of his own illness and his brother's death, Robert Webb said that he had a very happy childhood. "I feel very fortunate about that and very thankful to my parents," he said.

Education

Because the Webb family lived in the country, the Webb children were supposed to go to school at Bearden, a county school; but their parents considered the city schools superior to the county schools. Clary Webb arranged for his children to go to school in the city and transported them there. Robert Webb went from kindergarten through ninth grade in the Knoxville city schools. In the sixth grade, he was a "charter student" at the Sequoyah Hills Elementary School. His teacher, Mary Dowell, did not forget him. Fifty-five years later,

when he retired, she wrote him a letter. It began, "Dear Robert" and said in part:

I have watched your growth since you were a 5th grader (?) in my room at Sequoyah--in 1929 or 1930. There hasn't been a time I wasn't happy to say, "He is one of my boys."

Your Mother would be so happy, as she always was, when her children did well. (The question mark is in the original.)

From Sequoyah, he went to Boyd's Junior High, which was downtown in the old city hall building.

When it was time for him to enter ninth grade, Robert Webb expected to go away to Bell Buckle. His father, however, had other plans. He felt his son was too immature, had been too protected, to be able to adjust to boarding school. He wanted him to spend another year at home. On the other hand, he did not want him to take college preparatory subjects in public school. Clary Webb arranged for his son to go to ninth grade and take vocational courses. Then the following year he would go to Bell Buckle and take ninth grade again, this time taking Latin, English, and other subjects in the college preparatory curriculum.

"I was quite upset with my dad at this time," Robert Webb said. He wanted to be with his friends and do what his friends were doing. But his father was adamant. Webb explained:

There's a certain streak of stubbornness that has run in our family. If it's right, that's what we're going to do, no ifs and buts about it. I never shook my dad in his determination to do that.

Later he came to see the wisdom of his father's decision, and as a result of having gone through the ninth grade twice, he could type, do simple carpentry, and perform other practical tasks he would never

have learned to do at Bell Buckle. Years later when he discussed the relative merits of vocational and liberal arts education in his master's thesis, he knew what he was talking about--he had experienced both.

The next year he went to school at Bell Buckle. His Uncle Will was the headmaster. His grandfather Sawney was dead, but the school was much the same as it had been during Sawney's lifetime. At Will Webb's insistence, dormitories had been added a few years before Sawney died, but once his father was gone, Will made it his mission in life to see to it that Sawney's school was preserved intact. The curriculum remained classical. Robert Webb assessed his experience there as follows:

I came out of there feeling very confident in English, math, and Latin. I had a little Greek the last two years, but no art, no music, no science, and very little history. I look back on it today as not being well-rounded. But it was those things that were considered important in those days. And it was very thorough. I felt well-grounded.

The trapping method was still in use. Students sat on a bench that ran around the wall of the classroom. When a boy answered a question correctly, he got to move past or "trap" all the students who had missed it. The object was to wind up near the head of the class at the end of the period. Trapping made learning a kind of game, and it encouraged the good students to memorize every minute detail of their lessons. But it discouraged any meaningful discussion, and it terrified the less able students. Robert Webb enjoyed it.

He also enjoyed living in the dormitory. He said that he does not recall a single student taking a drink. Occasionally someone

smoked a cigarette. There was a lot of rough sexual talk among the boys but nothing worse.

At that time the Webb School at Bell Buckle had no interscholastic sports and few intramurals. Afternoons were pretty much free. Students went into the village to check at the post office for mail and to get an ice cream cone or a milk shake at the store. They could fish in nearby streams. They were even allowed to keep shotguns at school as long as they did not keep them in their rooms. During his free time a boy could check out his gun and go hunting for small game in the woods and fields that surrounded the school.

Robert Webb graduated from the Webb School at Bell Buckle in 1937 and enrolled in The University of Tennessee in the fall. He never really considered going anywhere else. He knew his father was having financial difficulties, and besides, after having been away for four years, it was good to be back in Knoxville. He soon discovered that his years at Bell Buckle had more than adequately prepared him academically--he was able to more or less coast through his entire freshman year--but they had not prepared him at all for the social life of a college student. He had gone to Webb School during the short time in that school's history when no females at all were enrolled. He had attended a few well-chaperoned parties, but he had never had a real date nor been to a dance.

At the university, free of academic worries because of his Webb School background, he made up for lost time. He went through rush and pledged Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. He was still shy with

girls. "I remember it scared me to death to call a girl on the telephone and ask her for a date," he said. "It was almost impossible for me to do." But he did go out with girls and go to dances, and in general he had a good time. During his sophomore year, his inattention to academics began to catch up with him, and he had to study more.

He also joined the swimming team that year. In those days swimming was not a high priority sport at The University of Tennessee. It was in the Physical Education department, not even officially part of the athletic program. But Robert Webb wanted to be an athlete, and swimming was his sport. He went to see the coach and told him he would like to try out for the team. The coach hardly looked up from his desk. "Go down to the pool and swim a mile," he said. Webb tried, but he couldn't swim a mile the first day. He stuck with it, however, and swimming became an important part of his college career. He was high point man and captain of the team his senior year. And his experience as a swimmer became a sort of metaphor for his other endeavors. As he explained it:

I have accomplished more through perseverance and sticking to things than through any other characteristic. I was never very good as a sprinter. I couldn't ever seem to get a fast start. But by being in distance events and sticking with it, I won my share of races.

He was president of his fraternity during his senior year. He did his practice teaching at Knoxville High School. He graduated in 1941 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He majored in mathematics, minored in Latin, and earned a teaching certificate. His grades, he said, were "respectable but not real good, about a 3.1 average." He

graduated in the spring of 1941, and in September of that year, he enrolled in a master's program in mathematics.

His aim was to teach at the Webb School in Bell Buckle. He said in an interview that he never really considered anything else:

As far as selecting a career is concerned, I don't know that I ever did. I think the fact that I was named for my grandfather, the fact that teaching and school work were so much a part of the family experience and so much a part of dinner table conversation and that sort of thing--I don't know that I ever thought seriously about anything other than teaching and school work.

He thought a master's degree would be an asset, and so he set out to get one.

In the fall of 1941, the country was obsessed with war. The United States was not yet a combatant, but the lend-lease program was in operation, and Americans expected to be drawn into the hostilities. A number of Robert Webb's friends had already joined the military.

He worked on his master's during the 1941-42 school year. He was student coach of the swimming team. The coach did not attend practices regularly, and Webb found himself doing much of the coaching. In the summer of 1942, he was waterfront director at Camp LeConte. He wanted to return to the university in the fall, but by that time the United States was in the war, and his Uncle Will was losing teachers to the draft. His uncle wanted him to postpone completing the master's degree and start teaching immediately. He agreed, thinking that he didn't have to worry about the draft because the lingering effects of the polio would prevent him from passing the physical examination.

He began his teaching career in the fall of 1942, but after one month, he was drafted. "I'll say in retrospect that that one month was about the toughest month I ever had in my life," he said. He was teaching a full load, coaching intramural football in the afternoons, and running a dormitory at night. The dormitory was a seven-day-a-week job. After a month at an understaffed boarding school, boot camp was a relief.

Military Service

Because he had had polio, he was put on "limited service," which meant that he would not be sent overseas or sent into combat. He was sent to Miami Beach, Florida, for basic training. He was assigned to the Air Corps, which was part of the Army. The Air Corps had taken over several beach front hotels. Webb spent his first four weeks in the service in a hotel with a view of the Atlantic. After drilling for a few weeks and learning the military way of life, he was assigned to a personnel processing station. His new quarters were only a few blocks away. His job was to interview recruits concerning their education and work experience and then classify them according to civilian occupation, using the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. Once they were classified, he was supposed to route them toward military occupations that had something to do with their civilian experience. The process was imperfect. It was often impossible to match a man with a job he was suited to do. Webb and his coworkers said jokingly that they were turning a lot of good cooks into terrible tailgunners. After doing that job in Florida for a few

weeks, he was transferred to Greensboro, North Carolina, and did the same job there.

After one full year as an enlisted man, he applied for Officer Candidate School, was accepted, and was sent back to Miami Beach for training. "There was a distinct question in my mind and the minds of a lot of other people as to whether I could hack the physical requirements," he said. For the first several weeks, he was not given any relief except that he was allowed to wear light shoes during physical training. Near the end of the training program, the officer candidates were required to hike 14 miles under full field conditions. Webb was afraid he could not do it, but when the time came, he hiked the full 14 miles. A few days later, he went to a doctor for treatment of some minor ailment. The doctor examined him and said, "You can't do all this stuff!" After that, Webb was excused from the most strenuous physical training, but by then, the worst was over. He finished the program and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant.

During his entire career as an officer, he was stationed in Tampa, Florida. He was still in personnel processing, but as an officer he classified officers instead of enlisted men. He was sent to the Pentagon for a few weeks to help update the records of some of the top men in the Air Force and as a result got to meet a number of men who later became famous. After the war was over, he helped process the separation of officers from the service. In this job, he was subjected to enormous pressure. Once he was urged by various people to help a football star at the University of Georgia get out

of the Army before the start of football season. The star did not meet the criteria for release, and Webb refused to release him until a telegram from the War Department in Washington ordered him to do so. He learned later that one of the United States senators from Georgia had intervened.

Finally after months of arranging the separation of other people from the service, he was separated himself in the spring of 1946. Reflecting on his military experience, Robert Webb said in an interview that he is glad that he was able to participate in World War II. He spent the entire time in an office and never heard a shot fired in anger. But, he explained, the experience was important:

To have missed out on that experience would have been bad. World War II was just something our age group did, just part of us. Very few people didn't go into the service, and they've had a left-out feeling all their lives."

Early Career of the Founder

Robert Webb went back to Bell Buckle and "walked into a hornet's nest." His Uncle Will had just expelled a group of seniors, and tensions were high. For the few weeks left in the school year, Robert Webb taught mathematics and Latin and supervised a dormitory. In spite of a tense beginning, the spring semester ended well. When summer came, he returned to The University of Tennessee to finish his master's degree.

Soon after resuming graduate work, he decided to change his major. He had been away from the study of higher mathematics for four years, and he had a hard time recalling some of the concepts he had learned before he went into the service. Also, his goals had

changed. It was becoming clear to him that his future was in administration. So he changed from mathematics to education and took the courses required for certification as a school administrator. The mathematics courses he had already taken were enough for a strong minor.

That fall he went back to Bell Buckle for his first full year of teaching. The year went well. He did not have the kind of problems first year teachers often encounter because he had already had some experience. When summer came, he returned to Knoxville and finished his master's degree.

His master's thesis is entitled College Preparation in the Independent Boarding School. In the space of 115 typewritten pages, Robert Webb laid out a comprehensive plan for the operation of a boarding school. He began with a discussion of the purposes of education and then tackled the problem of general or liberal arts versus special or vocational education.⁴ He did not pretend to be objective. He was for the liberal arts. He did not quote his grandfather's remark about teaching boys to milk, but his attitude toward vocational training was similar to the one his grandfather expressed.

The tricks of any trade cannot be taught in a school because they get out of date and new tricks take their place, because tricks can be learned only in the actual situation in which they can be employed, and because too often the teacher cannot keep up with the latest tricks. . . .

⁴The term "special education" has taken on a completely different meaning since 1947. As used in the thesis, it means simply vocational education and has nothing to do with education for the handicapped.

All that can be learned in a school is the general principles, the fundamental propositions, the theory of any discipline. The practices of the profession change so rapidly--indeed the professions themselves change so rapidly in this day of swift scientific achievement--that an effort to inculcate them may succeed in teaching the student habits that will be a disservice to him when he graduates. Consider the student who patiently learned to disassemble and repair a gasoline motor in physics class, only to find a job in jet propulsion. What should he have learned? He should have learned the theory of force, the proposition of combustion, and the general principles of all motors. (Webb, 1947, p. 14-15)

In addition to strongly advocating general or liberal arts education, he made a strong case for character training. He advocated an honor system, religious training, and a broad exposure to cultural experiences as the essential ingredients of a program of character development. In this context, he stated a principle that would guide him later as he developed his own program for college preparation:

The factors that make for success in college are very much the same as those that make for successful living. There is very little difference between the two, hence, preparation for college may also be thought of as preparation for life. (Webb, 1947, p. 47)

He was quite clear about what kind of people an independent school should be preparing for college and for life: leaders, not ordinary people. He discussed training for leadership at some length and stated that such training is the ultimate justification of independent schooling.

There are also hints in the master's thesis that Robert Webb was already thinking about founding a school. At one point he paid tribute to two educators, both founders--his grandfather, Sawney Webb, and Endicott Peabody, the founder of Groton. He

quoted from an article about Peabody in the New York Herald Tribune a line that in retrospect looks prophetic: "Beyond question, the essence of his spirit has passed into the institution." (Webb, 1947, p. 49)

Courtship and Marriage

That summer of 1947, while he was finishing his master's degree, one of the most important events of Robert Webb's life occurred. One evening on the walk in front of the library he met Julie Dossett.

Julie was a senior home economics major. Home economics required a few extra courses for graduation, and so she was going to school in the summer in order to finish her degree. She had not met Robert Webb before, but she had heard of him. Her brother, Burgin Dossett, Jr., had a friend who was in school at the Webb School in Bell Buckle. This friend had written to Burgin, telling him that he had a math teacher that he was certain Julie would like. After the encounter in front of the library, Julie wrote to Burgin and told him to tell his friend that she had met his math teacher. He did, and the friend replied, "I bet they get married."

The friend's prediction came true but not right away. In the fall, Robert went back to Bell Buckle. Julie accepted a position as a teacher of home economics in the public schools of Murfreesboro, only 23 miles from Bell Buckle. Whenever he got a chance, Webb went to Murfreesboro to see her or drove to Nashville to visit her at her parents' home. (At that time Julie's father, Burgin Dossett, was Commissioner of Education of the State of Tennessee. Later he became

president of East Tennessee State College, and the family moved to Johnson City.) Opportunities to visit were infrequent, however. Webb was teaching full time and supervising a dormitory. He was lucky to get away two or three weekends a month.

Julie Dossett did not like teaching home economics, and after one year, she left teaching for good. However, during her time in Murfreesboro, she became involved with the local radio station and through contacts there learned that NBC was offering summer courses in Chicago for people who were interested in going into broadcasting. She spent the summer of 1948 in Chicago taking the NBC courses and at the end of the summer decided she was not going to pursue a broadcasting career but she did want to stay in Chicago. She got a job managing the training program for a large department store.

The romance continued by long distance, and in the spring of 1949, Julie and Robert decided to get married. The wedding took place in Nashville on July 28. Robert was working as a recruiter for the Webb School that summer. He took a couple of weeks off for a honeymoon. They went to New Orleans and to Florida. There was no air conditioning in those days, and some of their friends thought they were a little odd to go south in the middle of the summer, but they had the Florida beaches to themselves. After the honeymoon, they returned to Tennessee and began their married life in a small apartment in one of the dormitories at Bell Buckle. Their living conditions were, as Robert Webb described them, "not much above the primitive level." For example, the kitchen consisted of a hot plate and a contraption over the bathtub for washing dishes.

Of all the people interviewed for this study, not one said a negative word about Julie Webb. Everyone who had occasion to mention her at all spoke of her with respect and affection. "Gracious" and "lady-like" were the words most often used to describe her. One former student said that he fell madly in love with her when he was in the ninth grade and he has never gotten over his infatuation. Teachers--even those who expressed some ambivalence or ill feelings toward Robert Webb--said that they considered Julie an ally and a friend. Asked about her role in founding the Webb School of Knoxville, Julie Webb replied: "I cooked his breakfast" (McMillan, 1989, p. 9). In fact, she did a great deal more than cook for her husband. She was a charter member of the board and served for 29 years. She chaperoned parties and dances and was hostess for social and fund-raising events. Particularly during the early years, she was a presence at the school, rarely serving in any official capacity but always available to help out. Two of the people interviewed referred to her as "co-founder," and a number of others expressed the opinion that her role--particularly her ability to "smooth feathers" and make people feel appreciated--was critical. A person who has known the Webbs since the late 1950s and has been involved with Webb School in several different capacities described Julie Webb as follows:

She was the epitome of what you would hope someone in his position's spouse would be like. Just totally supportive. Involved in her own way, in the places where she could contribute the most. She always brought some grace and a little softness to it all. Whether it was the flowers on the table--her own personal input embellished what was already good. . . . Lord knows how many football games, basketball games, graduations, honor banquets, then ultimately weddings,

funerals, whatever else that came up--how many of those things those poor people have been to. Mind boggling. It defies computation. But she always seemed like there was not one place on earth she'd rather be than right where she was. I look at it over the long haul, and it has served him, personally, and that school--I think it would have been much more difficult for him to do what he did had she not been what she was.

Plan A and Plan B

At the beginning of the 1950s, the Webb School at Bell Buckle was at a low point in its history. Will Webb was in his mid-seventies. He had been associated with the school for more than 50 years and head of it for 25. He was alert and capable, though set in his ways; and he resisted the idea of retirement. Yet he had not had a new idea in a generation, and the school was stagnating under his leadership. The buildings constructed in 1886 were still in use. Robert Webb's classroom was a one-room building, heated by a potbellied stove. Enrollment was down, and so classes were small, though not by choice. The trapping method was gone because its chief justification, the fact that it allowed one teacher to keep as many as 75 students attentive single-handedly, was gone. The faculty shrank with the student body, and teachers were asked to teach subjects they were not well qualified to teach. Robert Webb taught English in addition to mathematics and Latin.

Webb Follin¹ was assistant principal, and he made no secret of the fact that he wanted to be head of the school. As year after year passed without any sign that Will Webb intended to retire, Follin

¹The first name is a coincidence. Webb Follin was not a relative of the Webbs.

must have seen his chance to run the school slipping away. He could not have been pleased about the presence on campus of a young heir apparent, a third-generation Webb whose thesis title indicated that he planned some day to run a boarding school. A picture that accompanied an article on the school in the Nashville Tennessean Magazine in 1951 strongly suggested that Robert Webb would be the successor. Will and Robert are posed in front of a portrait of Sawney, and the caption reads: "W. R. Webb Jr., and W. R. Webb 3rd carry on the ancestor's teaching tradition" (Everett, 1951, p. 29). According to a member of the Webb family, Webb Follin decided to act. He broached the subject of retirement to Will Webb, and when Will reacted with anger, he began to make the alliances and gather the information he would need in order to become headmaster without Will's blessing. Ironically, Will, when he was a young co-principal, had created the tool that his assistant would use to bring him down.

Sawney Webb did not believe in investing in buildings. He remembered what had happened to him at Culleoka, and he insisted on keeping the school as portable as possible so that it could be moved if Bell Buckle did something stupid like legalizing alcohol. He built the minimum and made do. One of the tales most often told about him concerns \$1200 he had budgeted for a library: he spent \$800 for books and only \$400 for a building to house them.² By 1920, however, the boarding house system was no longer working, and Will

²Several versions of this story are in print. The numbers here are the ones in McMillin, which match the ones Robert Webb told me.

Webb convinced his father that the school had to build dormitories if it hoped to survive. The school was proprietary at that time-- Sawney owned it. But he did not have enough money to build dormitories. The money was raised by soliciting donations, and a board was formed to manage the buildings and look out for the interests of the donors. The school thus became a hybrid, part proprietary and part nonprofit. Webb Follin apparently decided to use this board, which for almost 30 years had done next to nothing, to unseat Will Webb. He cultivated the friendship of the board members and encouraged them to take a more active role in running the school. The board then persuaded Will Webb to make the entire school nonprofit. The agreement guaranteed Will the headmaster's job for as long as he wanted it, provided he remained mentally and physically capable of performing his duties. Will Webb remained vigorous, but like many younger men, he tended to be forgetful at times and somewhat arbitrary or petulant in the way he conducted the affairs of the school. Either Webb Follin or his supporters began to keep a record of these lapses in order to prove to the board that Will had grown senile. As the succession battle built toward a climax, Webb School became an unpleasant place to be. People were taking sides. At one point Robert Webb offered to leave, hoping that his departure would reduce tensions, but his Uncle Will became extremely upset at the idea and talked him into staying.

The board eventually removed Will and made Follin headmaster. Will sued and lost. The court order confirmed Follin's position as headmaster, although it restored some powers to Will Webb. Will

appealed, but Follin was in control. Sometime around the first of August 1954, Follin made a trip to Knoxville to talk to Robert Webb, who was visiting his family. He told him he wanted him to resign.³ "I did resign," Robert Webb said in an interview, "but not very gracefully. I wrote a letter to all the members of the board outlining my grievances and telling them what a bum [Webb Follin] was."

In an interview Robert's brother George emphasized the gravity of Webb Follin's action:

Number one, of course, Bob lost his job. But what people might not see, he lost his future. He was supposed to be the next headmaster of Webb School, and he lost that whole future for which he had lived up until that day.⁴

A more immediate concern was the fact that school was about to start, and he had no job for the fall. By this time he had two small daughters, Julia and Susie. He had to have an income. His first move was to call his friend William L. Pressly, president of the Westminster Schools in Atlanta.

Robert Webb's friendship with Bill Pressly was one of the few positive results of the Bell Buckle years. It came about as a result of the fact that the Webb School at Bell Buckle did not have interscholastic athletics. The Mid-South Association of Independent Schools (MAIS) wanted an athletic commissioner to settle disputes among member schools about eligibility of athletes, rules for athletic events, and so forth. Since Webb School was the only member

³Only one other Webb was on the staff of the Webb School at that time: Arthur Webb, who worked in the library. Follin fired him, too.

⁴Source identified by permission.

school that did not participate, it was presumed to be unbiased. Robert Webb became the MAIS athletic commissioner. As such, he attended meetings only school heads ordinarily attended. He also became acquainted with the McCallie family of Chattanooga. The McCallie School had solved its succession problems by instituting a committee of headmasters with the chairmanship of the committee and thus the right to run the school rotating at intervals. The heads were the two McCallie brothers and their brother-in-law, Bill Pressly. The committee system soon proved unworkable, and Pressly left McCallie. He was asked by a group in Atlanta to form a school there. Two girls' schools were combined, and a parallel boys' school was added. In 1951 the Westminster Schools opened with Bill Pressly as president. Unfortunately, in August 1954, when Robert Webb called him and asked for a job, he did not have any openings.

Webb's next move was to call his Uncle Thompson in California. Thompson Webb had followed the situation in Bell Buckle closely; in fact, years before, when he taught there, he warned the family to watch out for Webb Follin. He immediately offered Robert Webb a position on the faculty of the Webb School at Claremont. Later Robert learned that Thompson did not have an opening either, but after they had agreed that Robert would come to California, the Webb School of California experienced a surge in enrollment. By the time he arrived, he was needed. Ironically, the departure for California was delayed for one day because one of the babies was sick. During that time Bill Pressly called and said he needed an English teacher he had not expected to need, and he wanted Webb to take the job. But

by this time the car was packed and the commitment had been made. Robert, Julie, Julia, and Susie set off for California. Friends predicted they would decide to stay once they had experienced the West Coast way of life, but Robert and Julie said no, they were going for one year, and after that they would come back to the Southeast.

The Webb School of California was very different from the Webb School of Bell Buckle, Tennessee. It was 32 years old. The buildings were not all new, but they were serviceable and well-kept, and the grounds were beautifully landscaped. But more important, the school was a pleasant place to work. The bickering and back-biting that had been so much a part of the climate at Bell Buckle were not in evidence at Claremont. For years Robert Webb had been making mental notes about how he would do things differently if he were running the school at Bell Buckle. At Claremont, he found his Uncle Thompson doing very much what he himself had hoped to do. Interscholastic sports were an important part of the program. The decision-making process, which at Bell Buckle had resided entirely with Uncle Will, was at Claremont decentralized. An unofficial council of senior faculty made most of the day-to-day decisions. Discipline at Bell Buckle had been harsh and occasionally capricious. Here it was firm but fair. The food was good. Everywhere Webb looked, he saw evidence of enlightened school administration, and quickly his Uncle Thompson became a sort of hero to him. "He was just an outstanding school man," Robert Webb said. "I'll say without any hesitation at all, when I came back to Knoxville and started a school, a lot of Thompson Webb went into this school."

The year in California was educational in other ways. The school had daily chapel services, held in a chapel Thompson Webb had built with his own hands, but the services and the attitude of the school toward religion were much more ecumenical than anything Robert Webb had ever experienced before. Raised a Presbyterian, he had become a Methodist during the Bell Buckle years because Bell Buckle did not have a Presbyterian Church. In Claremont, neither Presbyterian nor Methodist churches were available, and so Robert and Julie attended a Congregational church whenever they went to services off campus. Both the religious and political views they were exposed to were very new to them. In an interview, Robert Webb explained:

I had grown up in the South with all the southern traditions and feelings and biases and prejudices--I just had 'em all. It was something of an eye-opener to go into an atmosphere where, as far as human relations was concerned, it was a liberalism that was different from my own personal experience. And this moved into politics. I remember going to a panel discussion at this Congregational church, and people were speaking in favor of recognizing Red China. This was a radical thought to me. I'd never heard of anything like that.

Although Robert and Julie Webb were happy in California, they never seriously considered staying more than one year. The idea of returning to Knoxville and starting a school began to evolve shortly after they arrived in California. Observing the way his Uncle Thompson managed the school encouraged Robert Webb to think seriously about school administration as a career. He realized he would enjoy running a school, and Thompson Webb encouraged him. When he mentioned the idea of starting a school of his own, Thompson encouraged that idea as well.

Starting a school had been a frequent topic of conversation at the Webb family dinner table when Robert Webb was growing up. The family was well aware that Knoxville was growing and no high quality college preparatory school comparable to the Webb Schools at Bell Buckle and Claremont was available to Knoxville families. In order to get that kind of education, boys were going away, mostly to Chattanooga to attend McCallie or Baylor. In 1954, approximately 30 Knoxville boys were enrolled in boarding schools in Chattanooga.

His mother had frequently voiced the opinion that Robert Webb should consider starting a school in Knoxville, but he dismissed the idea, assuming it was motivated by his mother's desire to keep her children and grandchildren close by. As the situation in Bell Buckle grew increasingly unpleasant, however, Mrs. Webb made the suggestion more forcefully, asking Robert why he did not just walk away from the mess down there and start a school in Knoxville.

By spring, 1955, the decision was made. Robert Webb finished the year at Claremont, he and Julie loaded their possessions into a U-haul trailer, and the family made the return trip to Knoxville. During the entire nine months that they had lived in California, they had read about and heard people talking about the fact that Disney Land was going to open in June. Julie wanted to stay a week longer and go to the opening, but Webb insisted that they leave as soon as school was out. He had a plan, a goal, a job to do; and attending the opening of the nation's first theme park did not fit into the plan.

Robert Webb is known for careful planning, and for that reason a remark that George Webb made during an interview seems particularly resonant:

As I like to put it, the Webb School of Knoxville is not Plan A; it's Plan B. Plan A is the assumption we had in the family that Bob would go and teach at the Webb School at Bell Buckle and he would become the headmaster following our uncle, who followed our grandfather, Sawney Webb, the founder.⁵

By the time Robert Webb arrived in Knoxville in June 1955, he had put Plan A behind him forever; and he was ready to pursue Plan B with single-minded devotion.

2. THE SCHOOL IN A CHURCH

The First Year

Knoxville Circa 1955

In his "Reflections" column in the spring, 1984, Webb School Newsletter, Robert Webb wrote:

The original purpose for founding the Webb School of Knoxville was fairly easy to say. I wanted my hometown to have a school that presented a high quality educational program which would stand as a beacon for educational excellence.

A number of people have remarked that Robert Webb was wise to locate his school in Knoxville. There was no competition. No private preparatory school had operated in the city since the Baker-Himel School closed around the time of World War I (Lothrop 1972).

⁵Source identified by permission.

Like the residents of other southern cities, Knoxvilleians were concerned about the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States outlawing segregation in public schools. Private schools were a frequent topic of conversation.⁶ There was a group of young businessmen and community leaders who were interested in improving the city; they were aware that other, more progressive cities such as Atlanta had high quality private schools, and they wanted Knoxville to have one. Both local daily newspapers were supportive of the idea and, as it turned out, gave Webb School first rate publicity from the start. In many ways Knoxville seemed ideal.

But in other ways, Knoxville in the 1950s was not even a good place to live, much less an ideal place to launch a daring new enterprise. It was dirty. Smoke-stack industries, many of them coal-fired, polluted the air, and soot settled on the city, turning it gray. Coal cars rattled along the railways, shaking off coal dust that blackened nearby buildings. Knoxville was also politically and economically backward, according to McDonald and Wheeler, authors of Knoxville, Tennessee: An Appalachian City Comes of Age, who described the situation as follows:

Knoxville during the 1950s was obviously a city in trouble. Never having participated fully in the nation's postwar economic recovery, Knoxville was now battered by developments over which it seemed to have little control: decline in

⁶ As will be discussed in detail later, the Webb School of Knoxville was never promoted as a segregated alternative to desegregated public schools. Concern about the fate of public schools in the wake of the Brown decision was, however, an aspect of the climate Robert Webb encountered when he returned to Knoxville from California--a favorable aspect, most observers would agree.

manufacturing, rapid deterioration of its downtown core, suburbanization, and the impact of the automobile culture. While some attempted to reverse those trends, their attempts were frustrated by a badly fragmented political structure that lacked the will or power to effect profound changes. (p. 93)

True to its Appalachian heritage, Knoxville was a socially standoffish city, wary of strangers. Fortunately Robert Webb could claim insider status by virtue of his parents' position in the community even though he had not actually lived in the city since his college days. And the Webb name was associated with independent preparatory schools in the minds of many Knoxvilleians. It is interesting to note that Webb originally planned to name his school something other than Webb School on the grounds that two Webb Schools were enough. When he realized how difficult it was going to be to get his project off the ground, he reconsidered, thinking he needed all the help he could get. "If he had been Mr. Smith coming in here to start a school, it might have turned out really different," a former student remarked. Certainly his parents' reputation, the family's identification with the school business, and his ties to The University of Tennessee were all assets, which, taken together, may have rendered an impossible task merely very difficult.

A Deadline of Sorts

Robert Webb's original plan--a plan he later characterized as naive--was to spend 15 months organizing the school and then begin operations in September 1956. He believed that he could present his idea to key people in the community and that they would see the

wisdom of his plan, get excited about it, and respond with moral and financial support. He began by doing market research. He talked to every businessman he had access to or could arrange to get access to as well to the families of boys who might be potential students. He did not ask any of these people to contribute money. Instead, he asked them if they thought a college preparatory school for boys would be a good idea, if they thought the community would support such a school, and if, when the school got started, they would be willing to enroll their own sons. The response to the first question was overwhelmingly positive, to the second, somewhat equivocal, and to the third, mostly noncommittal.

At the end of the first month, he had conducted approximately 100 interviews and had collected a mass of data.⁷ At this point, he paused to consider the situation he was in and to decide what he should do about it. He had not received any promises of financial support, probably because he had not asked for any. He was living on the money he had been able to put aside from a teacher's salary and receiving some financial help from his mother. (His father had died in the spring of 1954.) He was acutely aware of the fact that he did not have a job, and he began to worry about feeding his children. Living off his mother was "unthinkable." He decided he had to move quickly to get the school started or give up the idea altogether.

⁷In an October 1990 interview, Robert Webb said, "Surely not that many!" when I mentioned 100 interviews. However, the figure is from his first annual report to the board of trustees, which was written in the spring of 1956. A contemporaneous document can be assumed to be more accurate than a person's memory of events that occurred more than 30 years in the past.

The reluctance of parents to commit themselves to enroll their sons also influenced his decision to move up the opening of the school. Some of the parents he interviewed were familiar with McCallie, Baylor, the Webb School at Bell Buckle, or other private schools for boys, but others had direct experience with public schools only. He explained that the school he hoped to start would emphasize academics, would have small classes where each boy would get individual attention, would give every student an opportunity to participate in athletics, and would offer character training in the form of daily religious activities, required Bible classes, and an honor code. But some parents needed to see the school in action before they would feel comfortable with the concept.

He decided the school would start in mid-September 1955. August 15 became "a deadline of sorts." If he was confident by that date that he could make a go of it, he would put an announcement in the paper. If not, he would give up his project and look for a job.

Would This Place Do?

The next major task was to find a suitable location for the school. Although the parents of only ten boys had said they would be willing to enroll their children, he believed he could "throw together a school of 30 students" when the time came. He began looking for a building that would accommodate that number. The Fulton estate was for sale at that time, and Webb became enamored with it, but the price was too high. He looked at every old house for sale in the UT area. He looked at the Sunday School rooms at St.

John's Episcopal Church, but he knew he needed an athletic program and there was no space for athletics at St. John's. His spirits rose when he discovered that one of the churches in the area owned a large vacant house that was just what he was looking for. He asked about renting it. Church officials said they would think about it and let him know. On August 15, his deadline for a decision, they told him no. At this point Robert Webb, a man who is often characterized by family and friends as lacking mood swings, was in his own words "despondent."

He was working at Lake Forest Presbyterian Church on Chapman Highway, in a room he had borrowed from his brother George, the pastor. The morning after the refusal, he sat down with his notes and his thoughts and tried to figure out what pieces of his dream were left. How would he feed his children? What was the sensible thing to do? According to his own time table, the time had come to give up. While he was wrestling with the decision, the phone rang. George was away from his desk, and so Robert Webb answered the phone. The caller was Julian Spitzer, pastor of the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church, someone Webb knew fairly well. He asked Webb what he was doing in town. Webb explained that he had been in Knoxville since June, trying to organize a prep school, but now he was about to give up because he could not find a suitable building. "What do you need?" Spitzer asked. "Would this place do?"

"Of course it will do," Webb told him, and immediately the plan was back on track.

Julian Spitzer told Webb that the session, the governing body of the church, would meet the following Sunday afternoon and that he would put the matter on the agenda. Webb got a list of the session members, 15 or 20 of them, and called each member prior to the meeting. He explained who he was and what he was trying to do, and he emphasized the fact that he had to have a clear-cut decision. "If you put it off," he told them, "that's the same thing as saying no."

He met with the session on Sunday afternoon, August 21, 1955. The members of the session questioned him at length. One man remarked, "This is not a school for poor people. It won't be any star in our crown." Webb explained that the school would, however, be nonprofit. He was not trying to make money from it but rather was offering to perform a service for the community. He left the meeting with no idea what the decision would be. Julian Spitzer called him that evening and told him the answer was yes.

Ironically, Webb got a call that same evening from someone at St. John's Episcopal Church, who said that the decision-makers at St. John's had thought it over and decided that Webb could use their building to start his school. In an interview, Robert Webb said: "I have believed all along and still do that there was Providence at work here. Something was happening that I had very little to do with."

The previous week, Webb had written a brochure and taken it to a printer. He explained that he might not need it, that he would have to call later with instructions to print it or scrap it, but the printer offered to go ahead and set it in type. On Monday, Webb

called and said, "Print it." Entitled "The Webb School of Knoxville--Its Aims, Its Program," the brochure contains the following statement:

The aim of the Webb School of Knoxville is to turn out young men who are thoroughly prepared to undertake a college career; who have strength of character based on Christian teachings; and who desire to participate actively in the life of their community, their nation, and their world.

In brief, the objective of the school is to train for intelligent Christian leadership.

The brochure also contains a section entitled: "The Future of the Webb School of Knoxville," which includes the following statement:

The trustees, administration, and faculty will never rest until the Webb School of Knoxville proudly takes its place among the leading secondary schools of the nation.

Apparently Robert Webb also sent a press release to area newspapers. On August 22 and 23, articles about the new school appeared in The Knoxville Journal, The Knoxville News-Sentinel, The Nashville Banner, The Nashville Tennessean, and the Shelbyville Times-Gazette.

A note in the bulletin of the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church dated August 28, 1955, informed church members of the decision of the session. Key words in the announcement are "emergency" and "temporary." The announcement mentioned the fact that the school was nonprofit, and it closed with the statement of purpose from the brochure.

Pioneers

With a place secure, the next major problem was recruiting students. First Webb went back to the ten parents who had said they

would be interested in enrolling their boys and told them it was time to sign up. The first father on the list asked, "Who else do you have?" Told that he was the first, he said, "Come back when you have a few." This conversation or something very much like it occurred again and again--nobody wanted to be first. When the list was exhausted, two boys were enrolled, and one of them was an eighth-grader. Webb's plan all along had been to have only the ninth grade the first year and then to add a grade each year until the school offered grades nine through 12. Faced with the loss of 50 percent of his potential student body, he decided to have an eighth grade as well as a ninth.

Webb's next move was to run an announcement in one of the local newspapers, thinking that parents he had not yet approached would see it and approach him. In an interview Robert Webb said that at this point he was still extremely naive: "I thought I would put a little ad in the paper and the people would start flocking, and of course they didn't. That was crazy."

The announcement said that classes would begin on September 12, a Monday. Furniture had been bought, books had been ordered, speakers had been invited to participate in the opening ceremonies, but by Friday, September 9, there were still only two students. Robert Webb summarized the situation as follows: "I thought I needed 30; I was sure I had ten--well, I had two."

Faced with one of the most difficult decisions of his life, Robert Webb called his Uncle Thompson in California and told him the entire story. He told about the weeks of interviewing and the

encouragement he felt when practically everyone he talked to agreed that Knoxville would benefit by having a preparatory school for boys. He told about his concern when he realized that the support he was receiving was all moral rather than financial. He explained his decision to start the school immediately instead of waiting a year as he had originally planned. He told his uncle how despondent he had felt when he couldn't find a suitable building and how providential Julian Spitzer's phone call had seemed. Finally, he told about the frustration he had experienced in trying to recruit students, and he ended by asking, "What do you think I should do?" As Robert Webb has told several people over the years, he had more or less decided what he wanted his uncle to say. In the back of his mind was the hope that Thompson Webb would listen to the story, congratulate him on a good try, agree that the odds of success were just too long to keep on trying, and then tell him to give up and come on back to Claremont for another year. But instead his uncle encouraged him to continue. "Take those two boys," he said, "and give them the best education anybody ever had. I predict things will look up for next year."⁸

⁸It is interesting to speculate about the career Robert Webb might have had if Thompson Webb's advice had been different. A clue is contained in a letter dated 12/5/55 from a woman in Redlands, California, inviting Webb to come to Redlands and start a country day school. A letter from Thompson Webb dated 6/14/58 contains the following: ". . . I am very proud of what you have attained there, and have used it in many conversations with people who know you. I told Mrs. Shirk about it yesterday at the Scripps Board meeting. You know she was the one who wanted you to come to Redlands. I told her about your phoning me when you had only two students the first day. She said, 'Well, why didn't you tell him to close it and come out to Redlands?'"

In fact, things looked a little better almost immediately. Before the weekend was over, two more boys, an eighth-grader and a ninth-grader, signed up, increasing the enrollment in each grade 100 percent. John Dean and Bill Sansom were the eighth grade; Ed Hilliard and Hugh Faust were the ninth. A week later, Jim Hart and Bill Curtis enrolled. These six were the total student body for the first semester, but over the Christmas holidays five more joined them. The first year ended with all 11 still in attendance.

Robert and Julie Webb have often expressed their fondness for those first few boys and their gratitude to the parents. Robert Webb said in an interview:

People sometimes cite me as a pioneer. I say always I think the parents who enrolled their children the first year were the real pioneers. They were the ones who were going out into the unknown.

Opening ceremonies were held on Monday morning, September 12, 1955. Some time earlier, Robert Webb had asked his Uncle Will to come over from Bell Buckle to give the opening address. Since his brother George had provided him with office space all summer, he wanted him to participate, so he asked him to give the benediction. Julian Spitzer had saved the project at a critical moment and was the pastor of the church in which the ceremony was taking place, so Webb asked him to give the invocation. All of these arrangements had been made when it was still assumed that a room full of boys would be in attendance. In fact, four men on the speaker's platform looked down on four boys in the audience. Robert Webb, in his welcoming remarks, told them:

Your teachers will try to teach you to build strong bodies . . . train your intelligence . . . give you a strong sense of values so you will always know right from wrong. They will try very hard to teach you how to study, and last but not least, they will try to teach you how to think." ("Webb School to open," 1955, p. 2)

Robert Webb's mother, the person who more than anyone else had insisted that this event should one day take place, was not present. Webb had learned that the textbooks he ordered were in town at the trucker's depot but could not be delivered to the church until midweek. Mrs. Webb went to pick them up and thus missed the opening ceremonies.

A Gentleman of the Old School

When Robert Webb talked about teachers in the plural, he was waxing a little bit hyperbolic. In fact he was the only full-time faculty member at that point. George Webb, who had agreed to teach a Bible class one day a week, was the only part-time instructor. But Webb no doubt already knew something that had not yet been announced: another full-time teacher would be joining the faculty the following Monday.

The advertisement that appeared in the newspaper at the end of August had not brought in the hordes of eager applicants Robert Webb had hoped it would, but it did have one serendipitous effect. It was seen by a retired math teacher named George Turley, who responded to it by getting in touch with Webb and expressing his approval of the idea of a high quality prep school for Knoxville. Webb invited him

to lunch, and during their conversation the two men decided that Mr. Turley would join the faculty of the new school.⁹

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of George Turley's contribution to Webb School. A University of Tennessee graduate, Mr. Turley had retired after 30 years in the Knoxville City Schools. For 20 years he was head of the math department at Knoxville High School. He left there to teach at Fulton, then retired to go into business. At the new Webb School he was not only capable of working without supervision, freeing Webb to teach his own classes and to tend to administrative matters without interruption, he gave the school a degree of credibility it would not otherwise have had. He had taught a substantial portion of two generations of Knoxvilleans, and he had an astonishing ability to remember the names of his former students and to recall details about them. Parents who were anxious about enrolling their children in a new unproven private school were reassured by his presence. He became a sort of informal admissions department. Webb would tell him a certain child had applied, and Turley would supply information about the family. When the school grew large enough, he became the head of the math department. He retired for the second time in 1967 and for years afterward tutored math students in his home. He died in 1985.

When George Turley's name is mentioned in the presence of people who knew him, the responses are surprisingly uniform. Typically a

⁹This meeting probably occurred during the first week in September, after Robert Webb received a letter from his friend Bill Blackman declining an offer to teach at the new school. Blackman's letter is dated August 26, 1955.

respondent nods and smiles and says something like, "Oh yes, Mr. Turley, the math teacher," then follows up with words of extravagant praise: "Truly a Christian gentleman"; "a gentleman of the old school--literally"; "a prince of a guy"; "a great, genial person with a wonderful sense of humor"; "just a honey." Two students said that his eyes literally sparkled when he talked about mathematics. "He loved his subject and he wanted us to love it," one of them added. "He could make it come alive and dance," said the other. Students said that Mr. Turley could look directly at young people who were misbehaving in minor ways and simply not see anything amiss, but "if someone got rowdy or out of hand, George Turley would be the first to come down on them." A retired teacher who was close to Mr. Turley told a story about a chance encounter with his widow that occurred a year or so after he died. Mrs. Turley mentioned that she had been to the dentist, and the teacher, making conversation, said something about the high cost of dental care. The remark embarrassed Mrs. Turley. She explained shyly that she did not know what dental care cost, nor visits to a doctor's office, for that matter. "I go to George's students for such things," she said, "and they won't charge me."

The Best Education Anybody Ever Had

The opening of the school did not relieve Robert Webb of any organizational chores. He continued to work day and night to get the school on a solid footing. One goal was to get the enrollment to 30. He spoke at every civic organization that would invite him. He wrote

brochures and other promotional materials and mailed them to families he thought might be prospects. He continued to interview parents. Another goal was to find a permanent location, and he began very early to look around for one. In general, relations with the church were good, but the boys were causing occasional minor damage and some church members were complaining. There was the nagging concern that the school might wear out its welcome before he was in a position to move it. Money was a constant worry. He was operating the school on \$10,000 he had borrowed from his Uncle Will, money that he considered his personal debt. If the school failed, he would have to pay off that loan himself. Even with the borrowed money and the \$290 a semester tuition, the school was always on the brink of financial disaster. As headmaster of a new school, Robert Webb had a demanding, full-time job.

But he had another job as well, a job he considered more important than his administrative duties and entrepreneurial activities. "I couldn't turn my back on the classroom," he explained. "The classroom was the most important thing." He might not be able to carry out his Uncle Thompson's instructions to give those boys the best education anybody ever had, but he had to give them an excellent education. The parents had to be convinced that the Webb School was better than the public schools or else there would be no reason for them to pay tuition. The ones who were committed to a private school education for their boys had to be convinced that the Webb School was returning good value for the dollars they were investing in it; otherwise, they might take their

boys out and send them to Baylor or McCallie. Webb had confidence in George Turley--math, history, and remedial reading would be taught well. The danger was that he might get so caught up in administrative matters that his own classes would suffer. In addition to Latin, he was teaching general science, a subject he had never taught before, and English, which he had not taught in years.¹⁰ But difficult as it was, he had to maintain his own excellence as a teacher. As he explained in an interview, the survival of the school depended on it:

This was what we were going to stand or fall on. If these 11 kids had a good experience, then we had a foundation to work from. If they didn't, it was all over forever. So the main thrust was to operate a good school, good classes.

The fact that the school survived and grew is proof that he was able to teach well even as he struggled constantly with matters that had only a slight connection to classroom teaching.

Another concern during the first year was to begin to develop some traditions and school spirit. The boys chose green and white as their school colors. One former student who was interviewed for this study said that he had always believed that the boys also chose the school crest and the motto Principes Non Homines (Leaders, Not Men). There is even a tradition, according to this student, that the four birds underneath the eagle represent the four original students. Robert Webb, however, said that he chose the crest and motto without consulting the boys. It is the Webb family crest, and the motto has

¹⁰Robert Webb deferred to George Turley as the more experienced math teacher even though he considered mathematics his own strongest teaching field.

been the family motto for centuries. A slightly different version is the crest of the Webb School of California. Webb said that he is not certain what the motto was originally intended to mean. He may have distorted the meaning somewhat, but to him it means that the Webbs--and the faculty, staff, and students of Webb School--will always strive to be leaders, not ordinary people. They will participate actively in the affairs of their communities and will not be passive followers or bystanders.

Another tradition was instituted that first year. Judge John W. Green¹¹, the cousin who originally brought the Webbs to Knoxville by making Clary Webb his law partner, donated \$400 to the school in order to establish awards for scholarship and promptness. The first Green Awards were presented at the closing day ceremonies.

From the beginning, every day began with a chapel service. This ceremony, which in later years became almost completely secular, was originally a religious exercise. Julie Webb came over every morning to play the piano. While she played, Julia and Susie, clad in pajamas, sat on the back pew. The service consisted of a hymn, a scripture reading, a short talk "along some uplifting lines," and a prayer. Each student gave one talk per year, Mr. Turley spoke once a week, and occasionally a guest speaker was invited. But the bulk of the chapel talks fell to Webb. Over time, he ran out of original ideas and began to read to the students during chapel. A tradition quickly developed that Friday chapel was a time for humorous but worthwhile readings--mostly from the works of James Thurber and E. B.

¹¹The W stands for Webb.

White. This tradition lasted until the school outgrew it. After a few years the student body had grown so large that the yearly talks by students and faculty more than filled the available time. The students who were interviewed for this study could not recall any details of Mr. Webb's chapel talks, but one of them remembered that an underground newspaper that was circulated among the students during the third or fourth year of the school's existence offered for sale "1000 twice-told chapel talks by Robert Webb--cheap."

The principle of broad participation in athletics was established early. In his first annual report to the trustees, Robert Webb wrote: "I have long felt that an athletic program should be for the benefit of all and not just the gifted." There was a short ball game after lunch every day and a longer one during the last period. A student recalls that some of the first ball games were played in the driveway. Rules had to be altered because of the small number of players, but during the first year the boys played some version of touch football, basketball, soccer, and softball.

The faculty also took the boys on field trips. They visited a tobacco auction and the city water plant. They went on a trip guided by the state geologist. They searched for Indian relics. (Told by Robert Webb to put his glasses on during class, Hugh Faust once retorted: "I only wear them for important things like hunting arrow heads.")

Tender As A Mother's Love

An attractive feature of the church was its kitchen and dining room, which were more than adequate for the school. Hot lunches were served from the very beginning. But more fortunate yet was the fact that the church's part-time assistant cook was Anetha Totten, who had been a kitchen manager for the Knoxville public school system for many years. In those days, the Knoxville schools had a policy that any employee who became pregnant had to take a year off. Mrs. Totten was working for the church during her maternity leave, and she was willing to work for the new school as well. When the time came for her to return to her job with the city, she chose to stay with Webb School instead. When the school moved downtown after two years at Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church, she moved with it. The next move, to the permanent campus in what was then a rural area near the western boundary of the county, might have ended her employment with the school, but Robert Webb arranged transportation for her so that she could continue. When the school grew large enough to need more than one cook, Anetha Totten became the food service manager, a position she held until her retirement in 1983.

In addition to feeding an ever increasing number of students and staff, Mrs. Totten planned the menus and supervised the preparations for countless banquets and special events. For many of these occasions, she brought flowers from her own garden. Good food was not good enough for Anetha Totten. She demanded excellence from herself and her staff. "Make those chicken breasts as tender as a mother's love," she would instruct her cooks, and according to

several people who commented on the quality of food during Mrs. Totten's tenure, they did.

Six Inspectors for Six Students

Robert Webb, like his grandfather Sawney Webb before him, was an outspoken advocate of public education.¹² He has said on many occasions that he never intended his school to be in competition with the public schools. Public school personnel did not always share his point of view, however, and some of them made disparaging remarks about Webb School. The fact that George Turley and later a few other retired teachers were on the faculty led some people to comment that the new school was staffed by worn-out old men. There were, perhaps inevitably, accusations of elitism and snobbery, and on the other side of that issue, insinuations that Webb was a school for undesirables. Most of these comments that Robert Webb heard, he ignored, but one scornful remark spurred him to action. A public school teacher ridiculed his whole project, told him she thought the very idea of trying to start a private school in Knoxville was silly, and besides, she concluded, "You won't even be accredited."

¹²Evidence for this statement abounds. Robert Webb's correspondence file contains several letters from Mildred Doyle, legendary superintendent of Knox County Schools, and many letters from other public school administrators. A letter from Andy Holt, president of The University of Tennessee, dated May 22, 1962, congratulating Webb on a speech he gave at the Rotary Club, contains the following statement: "I have never heard a stronger appeal made for support of our public schools, and it was doubly impressive because it was made by the headmaster of one of our finest private schools."

Webb told her that he was certain the school would be accredited. In fact, he had not had time to think about accreditation, and he was not absolutely sure what accreditation meant. But after thinking about it, he realized that the parents who had enrolled their sons in the school were taking a terrible risk. If the school were forced to close and the boys had to go to another school, there was no guarantee that the credits they had earned at Webb would go with them: each school would have the right to accept or reject the credits as it saw fit. If, on the other hand, Webb School were accredited, the credits would transfer automatically. He decided he had better look into accreditation right away.

From the beginning he had assumed that the school would eventually be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the regional agency that accredited the Webb School at Bell Buckle and other high quality independent schools in the area. He began his investigation of SACS accreditation by calling his friend Spencer McCallie at the McCallie School in Chattanooga and asking him what a new school had to do to be accredited by SACS. McCallie told him that the first requirement was that the school be in existence for three years. Webb was not willing to wait that long. In addition, he discovered that SACS would confer only provisional accreditation as long as the school continued to add grades. If he followed his plan of adding one or two grades each year, the school would have to be evaluated each year, and as he explained in his first annual report to the board of trustees, a SACS

evaluation requires months of preparation and places an enormous strain on the faculty.

He decided to try to get accreditation from the state of Tennessee. From his days at Bell Buckle, he knew the man who supervised secondary schools for the state department of education, "a wonderful old gentleman by the name of Roy Vance." He called Mr. Vance and asked if he could apply to the state of Tennessee for accreditation. The request caught the old gentleman by surprise. He told Webb that he never had accredited a private school, but he did not know of any reason why it could not be done. He asked Webb to let him think about it for a while. A week or so later, he wrote Webb a letter informing him that a committee of six inspectors had been appointed to visit the school and decide if it was worthy of accreditation. Webb thought six inspectors might be more than enough, considering that the school still had only six students. He wrote Mr. Vance and suggested he scale down his committee. Eventually Mr. Vance made the trip from Nashville to Knoxville by himself and inspected the school. It turned out that Mr. Vance and George Turley were close friends, which certainly did not hurt the school's chances of being accredited, but approval was almost assured anyway. The two things the state was interested in were the quality of the building and the credentials of the teachers. The building, though rented, was first rate, and both teachers had Tennessee teaching certificates. In addition, Webb had a master's degree in educational administration and thus was fully qualified to run a school.

The Knoxville News-Sentinel of December 15, 1955, ran the headline: "Webb School Here Approved by State." By securing accreditation before the end of the first semester, Robert Webb had made sure that no student would ever earn nontransferable credit from the Webb School of Knoxville. The article in the paper was good publicity, and the state's approval was without a doubt reassuring to parents who were considering Webb School. It boosted Robert Webb's confidence as well. In the same article, he announced that the school would add a seventh and a tenth grade in the fall of 1956.¹³

The People You Turn Away

Although one of his primary goals was to boost enrollment to the point that tuition payments would cover operating costs, Robert Webb was acutely aware that the school he had in mind was not for everybody. Soon he was getting applications from boys who were not capable of preparing for first-rate colleges, who had been expelled from other schools, or for some other reason were not suitable candidates. Admissions policy became a critical concern. "We were looking at moral character as well as academic standards," he said in an interview. "We wanted both."

In his first annual report to the board of trustees, he explained:

Another major problem was the wide-spread local opinion that a private school was a haven for retarded or problem children. Few people seemed cognizant of the fact that the

¹³The terminology used by the state department of education has changed since 1955. Private schools are no longer "accredited" by the state: they are "approved." Only public schools are accredited.

Webb School was being organized for the benefit of the superior boy. To a certain extent the problem was overcome by advertising matter sent through the mails and by talks by the headmaster to service clubs. It soon became apparent, however, that a type of entrance test would be necessary to screen out applicants who could not meet our standards.

This was inaugurated in January, 1956. Since that time three applicants have been turned down as a result of these tests and others have been discouraged from applying.

In an interview, Robert Webb emphasized the point that the entrance exam had two purposes. One was to assure that the school admitted only students who could benefit from its program. The other was to shape public perception. "I learned," he said, "that a school of this kind is judged, partly, or is publicly perceived as to the kind of school it is, by the people you turn away."

The entrance exam was also ammunition for critics who accused the new school and its supporters of snobbery and elitism. Asked how he responds to such criticism, Robert Webb first talked about the scholarship program that was instituted early in the school's history. As soon as the school was financially able, it began to accept some students who were not able to pay the full tuition, and a few got "a full ride--people who came out of poverty but were bright enough and could profit from the kind of education we offered." He then voiced the second part of his defense against charges of elitism, which follows:

The school stands for excellence and for leadership training, and if things like that have to be associated with the word "elitism," well, so be it. I don't think of ourselves as elitist, but I know some people do, and I know some of the students do, and that's most unfortunate. We've worked, I think consistently, against any feeling of snobbery, but I have to say that's just built into that kind of school. Even though you resist and work against it, it's still there, from the students' point of view. I don't think the faculty ever

holds that view. The faculty has pretty much worked against the feeling of elitism.

A Rare Thing

Since there was not yet any need for a graduation, the first year ended with closing day exercises on June 7, 1956. The invited speaker was John McKinnon, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. Robert Webb also gave an address, and George Webb gave the invocation and benediction. The headline in the Knoxville News-Sentinel read: "Ed Hilliard Wins Green Award." The article explains that Ed won the award for scholarship and Jim Hart the award for punctuality.

Robert Webb had just reason to be proud. He had gotten the school started and steered it through its first academic year. The school had operated at a deficit for the first year, about \$8000, but it had also received \$2500 in unrestricted gifts in addition to the gift from Judge Green. By the end of the first year, it was already obvious that the enrollment was likely to increase by fall.

Friends, family, and various other supporters wrote or telephoned their congratulations. A letter from Julie Webb's father, Burgin E. Dossett, president of East Tennessee State College, is particularly memorable. Dated June 12, 1956, it reads in part: "Frankly, it seemed dark to me in the beginning, but now I have no doubt that you are firmly established and that your dream will be completely realized." President Dossett went on to apologize for not being able to contribute anything more substantial than moral support and in that context added: "It is a rare thing that a school man gets beyond the status of dreams and visions."

The Second Year

The second year began with 45 students enrolled and ended with 47. The enrollment was not as stable as those figures might suggest: several boys left during the year and were replaced.

The size of the faculty approximately tripled. George Turley stopped teaching history and concentrated on arithmetic, algebra, and remedial reading. Over the summer George Webb had accepted the call of a church in North Carolina. He was replaced as chaplain and Bible instructor by Arthur Field, pastor of the Eastminster Presbyterian Church. Frank Spigener, a retired headmaster of a midwestern school, taught public speaking and assisted the headmaster with guidance and counseling. Fred Elmore, a friend of Webb's from college days, taught physical education, geography, science, and biology.

At this point the documentary record gets confusing. The 1989 edition of Webb Remembered contains a list of teachers and their assignments reproduced from Robert Webb's handwritten teacher agreements. This list, undated, includes all the men mentioned above and adds Bill Archer, English and history. The first annual headmaster's report, dated October 1956, lists the same group of teachers except that Jacobs Hosse rather than Bill Archer is assigned to teach English and history. A Knoxville News-Sentinel article from September 1956 announces the hiring of Field, Spigener, and Elmore but does not mention Hosse or Archer.

The Green and White, a student newspaper, was organized the second year and began sporadic publication. Its first issue came out on December 6, 1956.

With more students and with Fred Elmore as coach, the athletic program began to develop. Volleyball and field hockey were added to the intramural offerings, and interscholastic basketball began. The Webb teams played B and C teams from nearby schools. Even so, their debut was unimpressive. The Green and White of February 18, 1957, chronicles their humiliation:

Maryville Wins, 68-21

Maryville Wins Again, 56-21

Friendsville Beats Webb, 70-26

Alcoa Clobbers Webb, 61-19

Christenberry Wins, 45-7

Webb Loses to Alcoa, 72-30

One part of the program that had been conspicuously missing during the first year was instituted during the second. From the first, Robert Webb had stressed the fact that his school would have an honor code. He mentioned it in his initial interviews with parents. He included it in his program description in the first brochure. But when the school actually began operations, he realized that having an honor code was not as simple as it might at first appear to be.

Both the Webb School at Bell Buckle and the Webb School of California had honor codes, but they were established schools with fairly large student bodies and long-standing traditions. New students coming into those schools found the honor code in place. It was a given. In a new school, there were no givens, and with a student body of six or even 11, there simply was not enough esprit de

corps to sustain an honor code. Webb realized that an honor code was not something that could be constructed in the headmaster's office and handed down from on high. The faculty and students had to want it. Webb began a process of selling the idea that lasted for months. At every opportunity, he talked about the code, about its importance to the students at the other Webb schools, about its place in the memory of graduates. Finally, the matter was put to a vote of the student body, and the students voluntarily accepted it. They agreed to pledge themselves not to lie, cheat, or steal. One of the key components of the Webb School program--character building--was finally completely in place.

In discussing the honor code, Robert Webb stated:

Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. As people in a free society, we can't be totally concerned with number one: we've got to be responsible for other people and their rights, and yet one doesn't learn this unless he has certain freedoms and even the freedom to make mistakes from time to time.

The underlying idea is that good behavior is fairly meaningless as long as it is imposed from outside. It only becomes a sign of strong character when the individual has the opportunity to misbehave but freely chooses not to. To develop character, young people must have freedom. They must be allowed to make mistakes and learn from them. Freedom does not mean license, and students should never be turned completely loose to do as they please. Corporal punishment continued at Webb School for several years after the honor code was instituted, and the demerit system is still in effect. But the honor code gives students an opportunity to earn the trust of the faculty and

administration and then to function with a minimum of external controls.

The one event everybody seems to remember from that second year was the flood. The Sunday School rooms that the school occupied were partially underground. After days of heavy rain, the students and faculty came to school one morning to find the floor of their school rooms under several inches of water. For all that day (some say all the next day as well), barefoot boys with rolled up pants legs dipped up and swept out water, which kept seeping back in almost as fast as they got rid of it.

A fact of life for as long as the school was at Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church was the necessity of moving all the furniture twice a week. The first 30 minutes of every Monday was devoted to taking the classroom furniture out of storage and putting the Sunday School furniture into storage. During the last 30 minutes of every Friday, the process was reversed.

The use of the facilities at Sequoyah Presbyterian was never intended to be anything but temporary. Early in the second year of the school's existence, the need to move became apparent. Webb stepped up his search for a suitable site, and after considering several alternatives, he decided to rent an abandoned public school building adjacent to The University of Tennessee campus called the old Staub School.¹⁴ The building seemed huge in comparison to the Sunday School rooms the school had been using, but Webb knew he would

¹⁴ The University later acquired the Staub School building and tore it down to make way for a swimming complex.

soon need the space. He was expecting the number of boys to increase again in the fall, if for no other reason because he was adding an 11th grade. But the fact that made the move truly urgent was the decision to start a parallel school for girls.

3. THE STAUB SCHOOL YEARS: 1957 - 1959

The Girls' School

A Pink Bus and a Blue Bus

In the fall of 1956 a group of women came to the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church to talk with Robert Webb. They said that they were pleased with what they were hearing about the school for boys and they wanted Webb to consider developing a similar program for girls. He told them he would think it over and let them know.

The suggestion took him by surprise, and he was at a loss what to do about it. On the one hand, he was flattered. The endorsement of the existing program and a request for an additional one were the most concrete sign he had yet seen that the school was gaining acceptance in the community. On the other hand, he was reluctant to start a girls' school. His entire career was in all-male schools. He had not taught a female student since he did his practice teaching at Knoxville High School. He was a firm believer in single-sex secondary education. So he was pulled both ways.

At this time he was involved in expanding the board of trustees. The original board that had chartered the school as a nonprofit welfare corporation on September 8, 1955, had five members, the minimum required by the state. It was composed of family members with one exception, his father's law partner, Herbert McCampbell. The other members were his wife Julie, his brother George, his uncle Will, and himself. During the course of the first year, the idea occurred to Robert Webb that the board should be expanded to include people who could help take news of the school and its program to the community and who could assist in fund raising. He brought this idea to the attention of the board, and at the suggestion of Herbert McCampbell they decided to make themselves permanent members and to add five more members, who would serve terms of limited duration. This decision was made in October 1956. When the women visited him to suggest a girls' school, he was probably still in the process of recruiting new board members.¹⁵ At any rate, he decided to allow the board to decide whether or not the Webb School would admit girls.

He did, however, present the board with a model to consider-- the Westminster Schools of Atlanta. At Westminster his old friend Bill Pressly was president of an organization that offered coeducation in kindergarten through eighth grade but switched to coordinate education for the high school years. In other words, Westminster had two high schools, a boys' school and a girls' school.

¹⁵ I was unable to ascertain the date of Robert Webb's meeting with the delegation of women. It probably occurred in late October or early November.

They were in separate buildings, each had its own head, but Pressly was president of both.

The board decided to gather information by holding a meeting where everyone who had an opinion on the subject was free to speak. Invited speakers were Bill Pressly, who would explain the concept of coordinate education, and Mary Tucker, the headmistress of the Girls' Preparatory School in Chattanooga, who would discuss the peculiarities of girls' schools. The meeting took place on December 10, 1956, at the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church and was attended by 150 to 250 people, mostly parents.¹⁶ According to people who were there, the discussion became quite heated. One of them related the following anecdote:

There were some pretty raw feelings at that meeting about having both sexes at the school and how they were going to have separate but parallel education, and right at the height, when feelings were running pretty strong, with all the mothers and daddies there, Sam Minsky, who has long since passed on, he said, "Well, we'll just have to have a pink bus and a blue bus!" Well, everybody realized it was the silliest argument we ever heard, and that just made everything fit after that, but he broke the logjam."

Whether Sam Minsky deserves the credit or not, the meeting did end in something approaching consensus, and two days later, on December 12, the board passed a resolution to add a parallel girls' school. The next day, the story made the front page of the Knoxville Journal, the first time the school had ever been on page one. The headline read: "Girls School Will Open Here In '57."

¹⁶The first figure is the Knoxville News-Sentinel's estimate, the second the Knoxville Journal's.

According to one person involved, the decision to start a girls' school had already been made before the public meeting was held. At a private meeting in a board member's home, supporters of Webb School drew up a list of people who might be expected to contribute money when the time came for a serious fund raising effort. Someone pointed out that many of the most well-to-do and reputedly generous potential donors were the parents of girls rather than boys. "Right then Webb School became a girls' school," he said.

Julie Webb was the only woman on the board at the time the decision to admit girls was made. Soon afterward, at Robert Webb's insistence, five more women were added. These were Mrs. Robert H. Allen, Mrs. Robert L. Ashe, Mrs. Harry M. Nacey, Jr., Mrs. Cowan Rodgers, Jr., and Mrs. Shirley C. Spence. Robert Webb said in an interview that this was approximately the group of women who approached him about a girls' school in the first place. There may have been others that were not appointed to the board, and some of those appointed may not have been part of the original delegation.¹⁷

We Thought We Had a Jewel

Once the decision to start a girls' school had been made, the next problem was to find a headmistress. Robert Webb called friends at The University of Tennessee and at independent schools around the country. His Uncle Thompson told him that Genevieve Hudson, who at that time was headmistress of the Girls' Collegiate School in

¹⁷ All newspaper articles and all publications of Webb School from this period identify married women by their husband's names. No document in my possession gives the first names of these women.

Claremont, California, was interested in making a change. Webb arranged for her to come to Knoxville for an interview, and on April 24, 1957, the board voted to offer her the position. She was the only candidate they considered.

The daughter of a wealthy and eccentric rancher, Genevieve Hudson was born in St. Angelo, Texas, on July 9, 1906. She graduated from the Hockaday School in Dallas at the age of 15. Then she spent a year at the St. Paul's Girls' School in London, England, and followed that with a year of study in France. She returned to the United States to attend Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, from which she graduated with honors in 1928. She became an English teacher at Miss Mitchell's School for Girls in Pittsburgh, then returned to Dallas to pursue a Master's Degree in English at Southern Methodist University. In 1929 she joined the faculty of Hockaday, where she remained until 1955. She next became the headmistress of the Girls' Collegiate School in Claremont, California. She was the only headmistress of the Webb School for Girls, holding that position from 1957 when the girls' school was organized until 1967 when the boys' and girls' schools merged. Following the merger, she stayed on at Webb. She taught 7th-grade English for one year, then taught English and served as college counselor in the upper school. She retired in 1971 and devoted the rest of her life to hobbies such as sewing, gardening, and travel, to volunteer work at the Helen Ross McNabb Mental Health Center, and to various activities of the Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan. She died on June 5, 1985, following surgery for a brain tumor.

The word most often used to describe Miss Hudson is "controversial." People who freely admit they despised her are quick to laud her competence and efficiency, her great learning, and her devotion to the school. People who loved her are quick to point out her faults.

According to an article by Ruth Graf in the 1989 edition of Webb Remembered, Miss Hudson had very definite ideas about the way a girls' school should be run.¹⁸ Girls wore uniforms, and teachers were expected to be vigilant in their attention to dress code infractions. Girls stood at attention before each class until the teacher entered the room and invited them to be seated. Every day began with chapel, and chapel began with "an hymn." The school was always shipshape--no litter, no open lockers with contents spilling out, not even any untidy girls with untied or unpolished saddle oxfords.

Miss Hudson had very high expectations of herself and of her faculty. She practiced what later came to be called clinical supervision; that is, she knew what was going on inside every classroom and freely intervened to help out, to encourage, or if necessary to correct. She was particularly attentive to inexperienced teachers and carefully nurtured them in order to help each one develop into the most effective teacher she was capable of becoming. She could substitute for any teacher and actually teach, not just baby sit. She required her teachers to write at least a

¹⁸ The discussion that follows draws heavily on Mrs. Graf's article but also includes material from interviews with former teachers and students.

paragraph about each student at the end of each 12-week grading period and then checked these comments for grammar, spelling, and tact before she allowed them to be mailed to parents. In addition, she personally wrote comments on every girl in the school. There is little doubt that the Webb School for Girls was "a well-oiled machine" (Graf, 1989, p. 15).

But as most people who knew her would agree, there was another side to Miss Hudson. Although many of her students came to admire her once they were safely graduated, few had positive feelings toward her while they were under her authority. "Many of the teenagers in her care rebelled, venting their frustrations and unhappiness on her and figuratively sticking pins in her as with a voodoo doll" (Graf, 1989, p. 19). A teacher remembered Miss Hudson confiding in her that the reason she left Girls' Collegiate was that the students there were on the verge of insurrection. "She was really almost a broken woman when she came to Knoxville," the teacher added. She may have monitored teacher comments for tact, but she was sometimes far from tactful herself. One teacher recalls watching one of the younger girls sob through an entire class because of something Miss Hudson said about the girl's father. Miss Hudson frequently clashed with parents, particularly those who thought all the spit and polish and finishing school touches she was so proud of were nonsense. She prided herself on being even handed and refusing to show favoritism, but according to two teachers and one former student, she seemed at times to go out of her way to make life difficult for the girls whose

parents had done the most for the school.¹⁹ A frequent target of her scornful remarks was Robert Webb.

Part of Miss Hudson's problems with students and parents reflected the fact that she was a product of a private school tradition that was unfamiliar to many Knoxvilleians. A trustee explained the situation as follows:

She came in and she did quite a job here. . . . She made the path easier for all those who followed behind her because she plowed some fresh ground here in Knoxville. . . . She had a tough time, and I guess her job was as much educating parents of children as educating children because I know I got a few calls from mamas who were unhappy about their daughters having to go back to Saturday School when they hadn't gotten their homework up and so forth. She made them toe the mark. I was used to that sort of thing at McCallie, and most of the guys who went to Baylor were used to it, but it was a new shoe to wear for some of the parents around here.

Another trustee, thinking back to the time when the board voted to hire Miss Hudson and reflecting on his later experience with her, remarked: "We thought we had a jewel, and I think she was, except she was abrasive at times and couldn't handle the kids."

A Structural Mistake

Some of the problems that are sometimes blamed on Genevieve Hudson's personality may have been created or at least aggravated by an administrative mistake on the part of Robert Webb and the board. They were using the Westminster Schools as a model, but they failed

¹⁹ Not one of the negative comments about Genevieve Hudson came from Robert Webb. The only thing he said about her that could conceivably be construed as negative was that she sometimes allowed parents and others to think she had final authority when she did not. (More on this later.) Although the relationship between the two was undoubtedly "strained" as one person described it, it is also true, as a trustee said, that "Bob was all the time defending her."

to copy the model exactly. Bill Pressly's title was president, and the headmaster of the boys' school and the headmistress of the girls' school clearly reported to him. At the Webb School, however, Robert Webb continued to be called headmaster. In a sense he had two jobs--headmaster of the boys' school and headmaster of the combined schools. As he explained the situation in an interview:

We did not make our administrative arrangements as clear as we might have or should have. There was a feeling on the part of the board all the way through that I was head of the school and that the girls' school was under my supervision. That was the concept we followed, but that wasn't always spelled out as clearly as it really should have been. And there were times when the people involved in the girls' school came to think of themselves as a separate institution. It caused some problems from time to time. I look back on that with some chagrin. . . . I don't think [that Genevieve Hudson was confused by the arrangement.] She recognized that I was her superior at all times. She knew she could come to me for major decisions. I think in her conversations with parents and students and teachers she didn't always make that clear. She was quite willing to let people believe she had final authority when she didn't.

Apparently at this point in the school's history, the board did not feel rich enough to hire a headmaster for the boys' school or even to hire a teacher to relieve Webb of some of his teaching. In a very real sense he had three jobs: he was teaching a full load, running the boys' school on a day-to-day basis, and doing all the things the president of a small private school might be expected to do--raising money, speaking at service clubs, recruiting students, dealing with the state department of education and various other regulatory agencies, making the budget, keeping the books, and so on. He did not even have a full-time secretary.

Some Undisputed Jewels

Most of the people interviewed for this study expressed some ambivalence about Genevieve Hudson, but they were surprisingly unanimous on the subject of the faculty of the girls' school. Asked who the most memorable faculty members were, they all said Emily Anne Fisher and Ruth Graf. Several added "Girly" Snyder, who, although she was never a full-time faculty member, was director of physical education for the girls' school and thus had contact with every girl. Mrs. Snyder was hired the same day as Miss Hudson and resigned when the girls' and boys' schools merged.

Mrs. Fisher was the first female faculty member of the Webb School of Knoxville, having been hired to teach Latin and French even before Genevieve Hudson was appointed headmistress. She was at that time Mrs. Colville, a young widow. She had hoped to send her son to the Webb School at Bell Buckle, but in the process of making the arrangements, she learned that Robert Webb was starting a school in Knoxville, so she met with him to discuss enrolling her son. He not only agreed to accept her son, he informed her that a girls' school was being organized and offered her a position on the faculty. She accepted and remained with the school until her retirement in 1977.

"Miss Hudson's right hand man, so to speak, was Emily Fisher," said a colleague. "I've always thought of Emily as the perfect lady." A student said that Mrs. Fisher "was so genteel and ladylike and loved Latin." Several people commented on her lovely southern accent. A male colleague became quite agitated when he was told that Mrs. Fisher had not consented to be tape recorded for this study or

for the Webb Remembered project. "That wonderful voice must be preserved!" he said.

Ruth Graf joined the faculty in 1960 and retired in 1981. "She worked them hard, but they came out of there knowing grammar," a colleague said. Another teacher, asked to identify important events in the history of Webb School, replied without hesitation, "The hiring of Ruth Graf." Students commented on her energy and enthusiasm and lasting influence. The remarks that follow are typical:

Mrs. Graf was just sharp, stimulating, exacting. Such a dynamic teacher. Energetic. I hear her voice in my mind all the time. When I hear someone else make a grammatical mistake, I think, "Boy, they didn't have Mrs. Graf!"²⁰

Physical Facilities

During its first year of operation, the girls' school was located on the ground floor of the old Staub School building. The boys were on the second floor. The school outgrew those facilities after one year, however, and the girls moved downtown to the Congregational Church building, formerly occupied by the Second Presbyterian Church, which had moved to Kingston Pike.²¹ An advantage of the site was its proximity to the YWCA, which the girls used for physical education classes. A disadvantage was the difficulty of providing food service to the girls. After an attempt

²⁰ Mrs. Graf would probably notice that the student used the plural pronoun they to refer to the singular antecedent someone.

²¹ The building was later torn down and replaced by the Lawson-McGhee Library.

at transporting food from the Staub School kitchen, Anetha Totten hired an assistant to cook for the girls at the Congregational Church. After the permanent campus was built, the girls' school moved to its own building, which proved immediately to be too small. After the merger of the boys' and girls' schools, this building became the lower school, then the middle school.

The Boys' School Continues

Both Scholarly and Manly

In the brochure published at the end of the summer of 1955, Robert Webb wrote: "The school pledges to parents that it will always strive to provide instructors who are both scholarly and manly and who will provide inspiring leadership for their students." At the time this statement was written, only a boys' school with all male instructors was planned. In practice, the male teachers hired during the first four years of the school's existence were not consistently scholarly and manly. Some were one or the other, some were neither, and a few, like George Turley, were both. Students who were interviewed for this study remember several of these men with affection. As one of them put it: "We were blessed with wonderful faculty that had personalities, that had differing backgrounds, [that knew] lots of things to be learned."

Fred Elmore was originally hired to teach physical education, biology, and science. Later he was a basketball coach and social studies teacher. When the school grew large enough, he became the

first athletic director. "Mr. Elmore was just the dearest and kindest soul," one student said. "He was a marvelous fellow," said another. "I enjoyed our relationship." Tragically, Fred Elmore died following surgery for a brain tumor in 1968.

Almost every student interviewed had a story about Joe Jacobs. Students called him "Mr. Wizard" because his chemistry experiments sometimes failed to work out as planned. Students also speculated that Jacob's mind might be slipping because they could occasionally make him believe that he had forgotten to announce a test, but boys and girls reported pleasant memories of him.²² The following reminiscence is representative:

Mr. Jacobs taught chemistry and maybe physics--I don't remember--and we, ah, we loved him. He was this large, older gentleman, easy to talk to, a very agreeable teacher with a bit of reserve and dignity that was partly age and partly just him, and when you could get him to talk about things, it was just wonderful because he'd grown up in Pennsylvania. We learned that the beer wagons came along as frequently as the milk wagons, and that was just part of the culture, and we thought that was wonderful.

I'll never forget one day in the Staub School playground, we were kicking a football . . . and [it] went a little too far and bounced up to him. Now here was this gentleman we thought must have been 100, and in fact he probably was in his early 70s, and he picked it up, looked at it, took two steps, and punted it. . . . We were just astounded, number one that he would do it, and number two that it was a magnificent punt. Well, it turns out . . . he had been on a football team at the beginning of time, and he did in fact know what a football was all about. So it was kind of exciting.

After Joe Jacobs left Webb School, he returned to Pennsylvania where he taught prisoners at the state correctional institution almost until his death in 1974.

²² Jacobs was one of the few teachers who taught both sexes prior to the merger. Emily Anne Fisher was another.

Bernie Overton, a Presbyterian minister, taught Bible classes.

A student remembered this about him:

He had a great sense of humor, personality, and a fondness for his subject as a subject, not necessarily as religion, and that enthusiasm rubbed off on us. He taught us all how to tie ties. He taught us about a half windsor, a full windsor, and four-in-hand--see there were a lot of things to be learned in that context.

Fred Donahoo was a young history teacher who came to Webb School

after finishing a master's degree at UT. According to one student:

He was headstrong and demanding, an excellent teacher. He passed on the importance of history. He focused on dates, but he was more interested in the significance of events, so that thought process was ingrained within. He made us take notes on the lecture with carbon paper. We had boxes in class to put the original in and take the copy home. He'd grade the notes each day.

Another student remembered:

He had us making our own magazine. He would assign us a political figure and we would write a story about them. We ran off copies and sold them to the students. I think he was a very controversial figure but I liked him a lot.

Still another student said: "Mr. Donahoo was a very demanding teacher but full of wonderful stories. Probably all of us found when we went to college we had already done freshman work." And somewhat ironic, given Donahoo's reputation for toughness, is this statement from a student who had mentioned earlier in the interview that he was scared at first that he would not be able to do the work at Webb School: "He was strange but a fine man and gave me a lot of comfort when I was in the ninth grade and so afraid."

Ted Bruning taught English. According to one student, "He was different because he was from somewhere up north, a prep school up there, and he talked a little funny, and he was the one able to teach

fencing, and gosh, who had ever heard of that?" He was also the sponsor of the outdoor club and took the boys on a number of hikes. On at least one occasion, he took some of the boys duck hunting.

In June 1958, Webb School scored something of a coup by hiring locally famous Fulton High School track coach B. E. Sharp. Like George Turley, Sharp was retiring after 30 years in the city school system. As head football coach at Webb, he soon gave the young school something it was not used to--winning teams. One former student raked a tear from his eye with a knuckle as he talked about his old coach. The following is an edited version of what he said:

B. E. Sharp was a coach who taught math and passed every one of us who played ball. . . . He was . . . a truly exceptional human being. [He could] convey a caring and an interest in you as an individual that transcended his inability to speak English--he was an old country guy--and the fact that he had forgotten every piece of math he ever learned. . . . There was a group of us in my class--and hell, they're all doctors; it's not like they failed in life--but we didn't learn [much math].

Everybody who ever played ball for B. E. loved him. He was the worst disciplinarian you'll ever meet in your life. He had a great sense for where you should play in a particular sport. . . [but] we were never in shape. He wouldn't run us. He'd sit there, and he'd talk. . . . He'd start talking, and you'd take your helmet off and sit on [it]--I mean he's talking so long. . . . [But] we won. His talent was in saying, "Jones, you're going to play linebacker, and Smith, you're going to play quarterback." We'd practice enough, but you never knew . . . what you were going to do that day because I'm not sure B. E. knew, and it was a kind of laid back approach to practicing. . . .

He was a character, a gifted teacher in the athletic sense, very much a father figure. I guess the reason I have such strong feelings for him--and there are other people I played ball with who feel the same way--he was there for you in so many ways. What a character!

After the merger of the boys' and girls' schools, Coach Sharp taught coed geometry classes. A female student remembered a favorite saying

of his: "Anybody can learn geometry, but it's like sports. You've got to have the DEE-sire."

Robert Webb's own teaching got mixed reviews from the students. One said: "Bob Webb himself was a good educator. Boring as hell in class but a good educator nonetheless. . . . I think I took Latin from him for about 15 years." "His tone was always just the same," said another. "No mood swings." But others sharply disagreed. One said: "I was very impressed with him as a teacher. Latin is not a very exciting subject, but he made it exciting." Another agreed, saying: "I enjoyed Mr. Webb's classes. He was an outstanding scholar but an outstanding gentleman, too. I just thought the world of him." Later in the interview, the same student added: "He was a good teacher. If he were teaching something today, I would be delighted to go to his class."

Pranks

The incident students and faculty seem to remember from the Staub School days involved a small foreign car owned by a faculty member. The front steps of the school were wide at the bottom and tapered to a narrow landing at the top. The boys decided to see if the car would fit into the space at the top of the steps in front of the door. It did fit, but as soon as one of the faculty members saw it there, the boys had to carry it down the stairs again and put it back where they got it. None of the boys who recalled this caper could remember being punished for it.

Another prank was hiding the cow bell that Jo Markelonis, the school secretary, used to signal the beginning and end of classes. It disappeared one morning and remained lost until noon the next day when Anetha Totten opened the freezer to get out ice cream for lunch. The bell was in the ice cream.

Once some boys made a smudge pot, hid it, and lit it, smoking up a substantial part of the building. The fire department was called. The faculty never figured out who was responsible, but the former student who told the story was "99 percent certain" that Jo Markelonis knew.

A slightly more serious incident occurred when several boys went off campus to smoke. They managed somehow to set the roof of a garage on fire. The next morning in chapel, Robert Webb told all the boys what had happened and said that he wanted the ones who were involved to come to his office. All of them did, even though he did not call any names and they had no way of knowing for sure whether or not he knew who they were. He told them to take all of their belongings with them when they went home that afternoon, and they all had to come to school with their parents to discuss the matter. But none of them were expelled. They were restricted for a time at school, they had to pay for the garage with their own money, and they had to work out additional punishment with their parents. The student who told this story offered it as an example of Robert Webb's "imminent fairness."

Most students agree that the misbehavior they engaged in was mild by the standards of the generation that followed them. Yet, as

one student observed, "You can't take a group of young men--and later young women--who are that intelligent and not have an undercurrent [of mischief] going on all the time."

The Campaign for a Permanent Campus

I've Seen It and to Hell With It

When Bill Pressly spoke to the group at Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church on December 10, 1956, his remarks had two themes--the desirability of starting a parallel program for girls and the necessity of undertaking a capital funds drive to build a permanent campus for the school. According to Robert Webb, Pressly was "very dynamic, enthusiastic. He built a fire under them." Several board members and other concerned Knoxvilleans were eager to get started raising money, but the campaign did not actually begin until the following April.

Two events occurred in April 1957 that profoundly affected the immediate future as well as the long-term prospects for the school. First, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) responded to Robert Webb's request for a ruling. Contributions to Webb School would be 100 percent tax deductible. Second, Stewart Henslee, a board member, offered to give the school 20 acres of land.

Since the December meeting, Robert Webb, James Talley, Herbert Slatery, Martha Ashe, Marjorie Nacey, and several other members of the board had been actively looking for a suitable site for the school. They wanted to locate it in West Knoxville or in the

countryside west of the city. (At that time everything west of Deane Hill Country Club was woods and pasture land.) They were not having any luck. Every piece of property they looked at was too expensive or was unsuitable for some other reason. Finally they took a 30-day option on a piece of land on Kingston Pike. Before the option expired, Stewart Henslee, president of Fowler Furniture Company, offered to donate 20 acres of a large tract of land he owned west of Cedar Bluff Road. It was farther out than they had wanted, but they knew that the land was near the projected route of the new interstate highway. Interchanges were planned for Cedar Bluff Road and Mabry Hood Road, and the land lay between them. Robert Webb called a quick board meeting, and the board voted to accept Stewart Henslee's offer.

Then, a small group at a time, several board members went out to look at the property they had accepted, and their initial elation began to fade. It was heavily wooded, unlevel, dotted with sinkholes and outcroppings of rock. Robert Webb took an architect to the property, and the two of them walked over it. The architect said he did not believe that a school could be built on the site.

Shortly before the land was donated, Stewart Henslee had recommended his friend Alfred F. (Teeny) Sanford II for a position on the board. A board member who was involved in the search for a site remembers asking Alfred Sanford if he had been out to look at the land his friend Stewart Henslee had donated. "I've seen it and to hell with it," Sanford replied. "I'm going to see Stewart this afternoon." After Sanford talked with him, Henslee withdrew his

initial offer and replaced it with 20 or 30²³ acres of good land overlooking Andrew Jackson or Dead Horse Lake.²⁴ Later Sanford and Cowan Rodgers bought some adjacent land and donated it to the school.²⁵

Kind of Like Eating Raw Oysters

Cowan Rodgers and Howard Preston volunteered to chair the campaign to raise money to build on the site. Neither was a board member. Rodger's wife, Nancy, was on the board and was one of the most outspoken advocates of the girls' school. Preston had no direct connection to the school. He undertook the drive as a matter of civic responsibility.

Soon after the campaign started, the board decided to hire a temporary secretary to help with mailings and other paper work. They ran an ad in the newspaper offering six week's work at an attractive salary. Jo Markelonis got the job. Before the temporary job ran out, Robert Webb hired her to be his secretary, a position she held except for a maternity leave until his retirement. She continued as the president's secretary after Webb retired, serving each of his successors in turn.

²³The people involved remember 20 acres, but newspaper accounts say 30.

²⁴ Both names are used. The school seems to prefer to call the lake Andrew Jackson, for some reason.

²⁵ According to Webb School publications and newspaper accounts, several parcels of land have been bought or received as gifts over the years. If all these parcels are added up, the total is well over 100 acres. Yet the campus is only 85 acres. I do not know how to account for this discrepancy.

The immediate goal was between \$170 thousand and \$200 thousand and the long-range goal between \$400 thousand and \$460 thousand. Several newspaper articles about the drive appeared in May 1957, and each one gave a slightly different figure. A Knoxville Journal article of May 26 said that the short-range goal was \$170 thousand--\$95 thousand for a boys' school building, \$45 thousand for a girls' school building, and \$30 thousand for roads and athletic fields. The May 12 article in the Knoxville News-Sentinel that announced the hiring of Genevieve Hudson implied that the new buildings would be ready by fall. On June 4, the News-Sentinel ran an editorial urging people to contribute to the fund. It set the goal at \$175 thousand. A Journal article of July 11 said: "Webb School . . . hopes to have buildings ready in the fall on a site just acquired." One of the people who worked on the campaign remembered asking Herbert McCampbell, the attorney for the school and a permanent board member, how much he thought they really could raise. McCampbell said they would do well to raise between \$75 thousand and \$100 thousand.

Another participant summarized his recollections as follows:

It was the funniest campaign I ever worked on in my life. Kind of like eating raw oysters. There was no half way. You were all for private schools or all against it, and those that were against it were as violently opposed as those who were for it were for it. There was very little middle ground. . . . When you went to see somebody about a donation, it didn't take two minutes to find out whether you were going to get one."

Funny or not, the campaign started off with a bang. On July 13, the Journal ran the headline: "Immediate Goal of Webb Half Completed." The article said that 50 percent of the goal of \$175 thousand was pledged. On October 14, the News-Sentinel headlined

"Webb School Nears Goal for Building" and followed up with the statement that 70 percent of \$170 thousand had been reached. A participant recalled showing off the pledge cards to Charles Preston, a bank president. "We were so proud of ourselves," he said. But Preston was not impressed. As he flipped through the cards, he tossed out more than half of them. "This one won't pay," he said again and again. "This one won't pay." In spite of discouraging words from their elders, the board members, most of whom were Robert Webb's contemporaries, must have felt confident. In January 1958, they voted to build a gymnasium in addition to the boys' school and girls' school already planned.

Unfortunately, at about that time, with \$129 thousand pledged, the campaign stalled, and none of the participants knew how to get it going again. For the most part, they were new at fund raising. Some of them had had experience raising money for churches, but none of them had ever participated in a campaign of this size. They realized they would have to have the help of a professional fund raiser if they hoped to reach their goal.

Someone recommended Ketchum, Inc., of Charlotte, North Carolina. Robert Webb got in touch with Ketchum and arranged for the firm to take over the campaign. Ketchum sent a fund raiser named Ed Dotts to direct the drive. Dotts was a true professional with an enthusiastic personality, Robert Webb said in an interview. Webb continued:

He became accepted by our school community very quickly. He came back and did all the things we should have done in the first place: organizing committees, solicitors, printing materials--all the things that are so familiar to us nowadays but at that time were new. Ed told us, of course--protecting himself--that what we had done with our original

efforts was take the cream off the top and leave him the hard part, but I learned a lot from him, which I've used ever since.

The first move of the rejuvenated campaign was to hold a meeting to rekindle enthusiasm and set new goals. This meeting was held on May 21, 1958, at the Andrew Johnson Hotel. Herbert Slatery was master of ceremonies. Ed Hilliard's mother spoke on "What Webb School Has Meant to Our Children."²⁶ Joe Sullivan explained "Why A New School Is Needed." Alfred Sanford gave a talk entitled "The New Look," presumably a description of the latest plan for the buildings. Robert Webb spoke about "What the New Facilities Will Mean to Us." James Talley explained "What Is Needed and How We Expect to Get the Job Done." In addition to the local speakers, Bill Pressly came up from Atlanta again. In his speech, entitled "The Values of the Independent School," he explained that the greatest strength of the private school was its ability to select its students, to keep its classes small, and to offer individualized rather than mass-produced instruction.

The board decided to try to raise \$220 thousand in addition to the \$129 thousand already raised. Cowan Rodgers and Howard Preston continued as chairmen of the drive, but with the guidance of Ed Dotts, the campaign became more systematic. The new approach soon paid off. On May 30, 1958, the Knoxville Journal ran the headline: "Webb School Nets \$82,115." On June 6, the Knoxville News-Sentinel endorsed the drive in an editorial, and on June 11, it reported that \$194,775 or 88.1 percent of the goal had been raised. The Journal

²⁶ Ed was one of the four original students.

headlined on June 13: "Webb Fund Hits \$234,734." A News-Sentinel headline of the same day read: "Webb School Pledge \$14,734 Over Goal." The second phase of the campaign had surpassed its goal in just over three weeks. Bill Pressly telegraphed Robert Webb: "Congratulations I am delighted with your success." A victory celebration was held at the Cherokee Country Club. The campaign was a milestone for the city as well as for the school. It was, except for the fund drives of churches, the first public subscription campaign in the community. Incidentally, the bank president's prediction that most of the pledges would prove worthless did not come true. The vast majority of people who made pledges paid them in full.

The New Campus

A ground-breaking ceremony was held on the site of the new campus on August 6, 1958, and the contract with Emory and Richards for the construction of the three buildings was signed on August 11. Construction began a few days later. Soon Robert Webb mailed a printed progress report to contributors, which said that the water pipes, power lines, and foundations were in, and the projected completion date was March 1959. The September 12 issue of the Green and White contained the headline: "Buildings Boom Upward."

On December 21, 1958, the News-Sentinel announced: "Webb School Buildings Ready Soon." Most of the information for the article was supplied by A. F. Sanford II, chairman of the building committee. He said that the site was eight miles west of the city. The boys'

building would contain six classrooms, a science lab, a dining hall, a study hall, and offices. The girls' building would contain five classrooms, a library, and offices. Bauman and Bauman were the architects.

The March completion date turned out to be too optimistic. The buildings were finished in May. According to a News-Sentinel article of May 24, 1959, the buildings and the purchased land cost \$400 thousand in addition to the 30 acres of land donated by Stewart Henslee. Not a cent of that was borrowed. The operating deficit of the first year had been paid off during the third. At the end of just four years, the school was fully established with brand new buildings of its own and absolutely no debt. More important, perhaps, was the feeling of permanency the new buildings engendered. As Robert Webb put it: "It had taken four years, but we had finally reached the point where we knew where we would be two weeks later."

Like the fund raising campaign that preceded it, the construction of the new campus added a permanent staff member to the young organization. Hicks Morton was a member of the construction crew. After the job was finished, he stayed on as the school's first maintenance director. He lived in a little house on the campus, and he knew where all the pipes were located because he had helped put them there.

As soon as the buildings were ready for occupancy, the urge to move in right away was irresistible. Some of the older people on the board counseled caution. They said if the buildings were occupied before grass was established, mud would be tracked over the new

floors, ruining them. They wanted to wait until fall. The students, most of the faculty, and--most important--Robert Webb wanted to move in immediately. In an interview, Webb explained why it seemed so important to occupy the buildings in time for the first graduation, which would take place in June:

We had lived a hand-to-mouth existence for four years, just scraped along, and the graduating class and [the other students who had been at the school for a while] were looking forward to something more than what they'd been given. They'd had a pretty Spartan existence-- which, incidentally, is how we acquired our nickname, the Spartans--during those years. They were eager to have a memory they could look back on, something more than going to school in an old abandoned public school building. So there was a lot of sentiment for having our graduation in the new building.

Moving day was set for May 29. Trucks were rented, and students and faculty were drafted as laborers. Students who could drive were encouraged to bring vehicles from home. One student remembered using his parents' convertible as a makeshift truck. The entire move was made in one day--everything from the girls' school downtown and from the boys' school at the Staub building was transported to the new campus. A student who participated remarked: "This was an exciting event--very exciting."

The excitement was magnified by the approaching graduation, the first prom, and the seniors' plans for the future. One of the first graduates told a story about the peculiarities of being part of a class of four. In filling out a college application, he came to the question: In what quarter of your graduating class does your grade point average place you? He went to Robert Webb for advice. Webb said, "Well, let's just ignore the question and write in that you are the third person from the top."

An open house was held at the new campus on May 31. All the donors and parents were invited to join the students, faculty, and board members in looking over the facilities. According to the News-Sentinel, 2000 people attended. The students took their exams in the new classrooms during the following week.

A combination dedication and commencement was held on June 6. George Webb officiated at the dedication. William Griffith, president of Bauman and Bauman, Architects, presented the keys to the buildings to Alfred F. Sandford II, chairman of the building committee, and Charles A. Wallace, chairman of the board of trustees. Robert Webb expressed his gratitude to the donors. At the graduation, Robert Webb presented awards to the boys, and Genevieve Hudson presented awards to the girls. Herbert H. McCampbell, Jr., gave the commencement address. Finally the diplomas were presented to the four graduates: Kenneth Christenberry, Miles Crowder, Robert Godwin, and Edward Hilliard. Robert Webb continued a tradition begun by his grandfather Sawney Webb. Instead of printed diplomas, the graduates were given Bibles with the information concerning their graduation handwritten on the fly leaf²⁷. Of the four boys who had sat in the chapel of Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church looking up at four men on the speaker's platform, three were present, but only one was graduating. The names of the four graduates were listed on the program in alphabetical order, but Robert Webb called the last

²⁷ This tradition has continued, but it has been adapted to fit a more diverse student body. For the past several years, seniors have been allowed to choose their own sacred texts. Copies of the Koran and the Jewish Bible along with various versions of the Christian Bible have been presented at graduation.

student on the list first so that Ed Hilliard, the only graduate who had been at the school since opening day, would be the first to walk across the stage and receive a diploma from the Webb School of Knoxville.

Over the summer, the enrollment increased from 61 girls and 110 boys to 83 girls and 133 boys. The new campus was already inadequate before it was ever really put to use.

4. TWO WEBB SCHOOLS BECOME ONE: 1959 - 1968

Events Leading To the Merger

Growth and Development

During its third year of existence, with a permanent campus built and the grades to be offered established, the Webb School of Knoxville was at last ready to apply to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for accreditation. The school was evaluated by SACS and approved for accreditation during the 1959-60 academic year.

Several other significant events occurred that year. A swimming pool was built. The school's first football team won two games and lost five. The basketball and track teams had winning seasons. The summer day camp began. The Pierian Spring, a literary magazine, was started. The student newspaper, the Green and White, became the Spartan Spirit, adopting the name of the underground newspaper that had surfaced briefly the previous year. Most important, the girls' school received a badly needed expansion.

The funds for the expansion were raised in a small local drive headed by Kent Withers, a board member and later board chairman. The goal of \$60 thousand was reached fairly quickly. Perhaps the expansion of the girls' school was the occasion that another board member of the time had in mind when he recounted the following anecdote:

Kent Withers was a dedicated supporter of Webb School. Kent Withers is a tremendous stockholder in the aluminum company, and when the first Webb School borrowing came about, I was up at the Hamilton Bank, and the loan officer up there that handled the mechanics of lending Webb School its first money [said that] Kent Withers drove by his home one day, and there was talk of some collateral to secure the loan, and Kent Withers opened the trunk of his car, which was full of Alcoa stock, and he said, "Now you reach in there and help yourself and get all you need, and when you're through, I'll lock the trunk back up." But the trunk was full of certificates of Alcoa stock. That is a true story.²⁸

The following year, 1960-61, the athletic program came of age. The football team won the Knoxville Interscholastic League (KIL) "A" Division championship. Construction of a football field and a track began. Hugh Faust, Jr., a trustee and the father of one of the first four students, took a personal interest in this construction and almost single-handedly built the track, using laborers from his business and coming to the construction site in the evenings so that he could work on the project himself. The football field and the track surrounding it were completed in September 1963 and were named Faust Field in his honor.

²⁸I was unable to confirm this story. At the time I was doing the research for this study, Kent Withers was suffering from the effects of a stroke and was not able to participate.

Other milestones were reached during this period. The first graduating class of girls--nine of them--received diplomas in 1961. The school got its first glee club and dramatics club in 1960-61 and its first formal student government in 1961-62. A few seniors began to take advanced placement tests although formal advanced placement classes were still in the future.

The Central Building

Almost as soon as the drive for funds to expand the girls' school was completed, the board found itself contemplating another fund raising campaign. The boys' school, too, was becoming overcrowded, and the girls were inconvenienced by having to come up the hill to the boys' school for lunch. In response to a recommendation in Robert Webb's annual report for 1960, the board began to discuss building an academic and administration building between the two schools. It would include a library, a cafeteria and dining room, administrative offices, language and science labs, and an auditorium. Board members, however, were far from enthusiastic. They had grown tired of asking people to donate money. They recognized the need, but they were not ready for another campaign.

The impetus for action came in November 1962 in the form of a \$25 thousand gift from Mrs. William J. Donaldson in memory of her husband. The board agreed that the school's most pressing need was a library. They decided to use the Donaldson gift as a starting point and try to raise enough money to construct a building that would include a library. They mounted a full-scale drive, once again

employing Ketchum, Inc., as consultants. A pamphlet describing the proposed building and the fund drive lists a total of 19 chairmen, counting the general chairman, the committee chairmen, and the ex officio chairmen. The goal of \$350 thousand was not reached, however. When the time came for the consultant to leave, only \$275 thousand had been pledged. A month later, \$281 thousand was available. The board decided to build the library, administrative offices, and the cafeteria and dining room but delay the construction of the proposed 500-seat auditorium until more money could be raised. Without the auditorium, the building would cost \$290,500. This money was raised plus a small surplus which was used to renovate the gymnasium and add bleachers so that school-wide assemblies could be held there. Ground for the new construction was broken in the spring of 1963, and the Central Building, as it is called, was occupied in December of the same year.

Robert Webb moved his office from the boys' school to the new building. At last, as he said in an interview, the Webb School of Knoxville "felt like a real school." It had a good athletic program, a good faculty, a good academic program, and fairly good facilities. Webb's enrollment goal of 200 boys and 200 girls had not yet been reached, but those figures seemed easily achievable. For the first time since the summer of 1955, Robert Webb felt that he could relax. "At this point," he said, "I felt we had it made, . . . [but] I learned in just a few months that there's no such thing. There will never be a time when a person can take it easy."

A Dynamo

Alfred F. (Teeny) Sanford II was the son of a successful industrialist who owned and operated an ironworks in Knoxville. Alfred Sanford attended the Asheville School for Boys in North Carolina and Yale University. He worked in the family business and became a student of business management, in particular the works of Peter Drucker. As mentioned earlier, he became a member of the board of the Webb School of Knoxville in 1957 and was instrumental in securing the site for the school and in supervising the construction of the buildings. He served two terms as chairman of the board of trustees, 1959 to 1961 and 1967 to 1969. He died in 1980, the 25th anniversary of the founding of Webb School. Robert Webb wrote a tribute to him that was published in the school newsletter.

"If there was one person responsible--one lay person responsible--for Webb School, it was Teeny," a former board member said. "He, like Bob Webb, had that vision." Another board member said:

Teeny was a dynamo. To my knowledge, this was the most involved he'd ever gotten in a civic venture around Knoxville. I don't mean to imply he hadn't been a helpful and good citizen . . . but he really took the bit in his teeth on this school. Webb School hit Mr. Sanford's hot button. . . . This became a crusade with Teeny, and he was tireless. And he came up with such good ideas and was such a moving influence. He was ready to meet on a moment's notice to talk about Webb School.

Asked to identify critical events in the history of the school,

Robert Webb said:

For my own growth and development the term of Alfred Sanford on the board of trustees was very important to me. He gave me insights into management techniques I never would have

gotten otherwise. I learned to think more as a businessman does instead of as a strict academician does.

On another occasion, Webb said: "I look back on him as a mentor. . . . I consider Teeny Sanford as one of the really important influences in my life, one I learned from enormously."

There can be little doubt, based on the statements above and others like them, that Alfred Sanford deliberately set out to teach Robert Webb how to manage a large, complex organization. There is also little doubt that he sometimes became exasperated with his pupil. He was not, by all accounts, a patient man. But he persisted, and his efforts paid off. The school moved in the direction he wanted it to move. And, as a former student observed, "Bob Webb grew up with the school." At each stage of the school's growth, he changed and adapted his methods to meet new challenges without ever losing sight of his original goal of providing leadership training and educational excellence to the city of Knoxville. Different as they were, Robert Webb and Alfred Sanford could work together because Sanford shared Webb's basic understanding of what the Webb School of Knoxville was supposed to do. They agreed on ends, and over time, they came to agree on the means to those ends.

Formalizing the Organization

It can hardly be coincidental that the biggest changes in the administrative structure of the school occurred during Alfred Sanford's two terms as board chairman. During his first term, 1959 to 1961, the school added a business manager, adopted a statement of

purpose, and drew up its first formal organizational chart. During his second term, 1967 to 1969, the school reorganized (for the second time in a year), and the boys' school and girls' school merged.

Hiring a business manager was, according to Robert Webb, the board's idea. The school had a part-time bookkeeper, but Webb and Genevieve Hudson were the only administrators of a school that had approximately 25 full-time faculty members and an enrollment of 294 students. With fund drives in progress and new buildings to maintain, the business affairs of the school had become much more complex than they had been a year or two before. Webb simply did not have time to do everything that had to be done. The obvious question, however, given the fact that Webb was still the head of the boys' school as well as head of the combined schools, is why the board wanted to hire a business manager rather than a headmaster of the boys' school. Webb answered the question as follows:

I think it is probably true that the board looked at my strengths. There were certain things I didn't want to give up. I didn't completely give up teaching. I kept the boys' religion class. I hated to give up the day-to-day administration of the school. I know I held on to that longer than I should have.

Since Webb wanted to continue supervising the academic side of the operation, the board decided to hire someone to take over the duties he was willing to relinquish.

The first business manager was Charles Crump, a retired accountant who had worked in the Sanford family steel business. He did not interfere with the academic program but concentrated entirely on keeping the school financially sound. Gradually his duties expanded to include supervision of nonprofessional employees. His

greatest contribution, in the opinion of Robert Webb and a board member who discussed the role of the business manager, was organizing the budget and the bookkeeping practices so that the financial condition of the school could be easily monitored. Appointed in June 1960, he served until 1968. The next business manager was Doug Lothrop, whose strength, according to the same sources, was supervising building construction. In addition, Lothrop "made the simplest budget you ever saw," the board member said. "You could tell at a glance where we stood financially."

After the business manager was added, the board adopted the first formal organizational chart. Though it may have accurately reflected the division of responsibilities in effect at the time, the chart (Figure 1) is puzzling to an outsider. The headmaster, quite appropriately, reports to the board of trustees. The business manager reports to the headmaster, but the placement of this position on the chart seems to indicate that the business manager and the headmaster are equals. At the next level down are the boys' school headmaster, the girls' school headmistress, the summer school principal, and the summer camp director. There is nothing to alert the uninitiated to the fact that the same person--Robert Webb--held both headmaster positions. The bookkeeper and the maintenance, kitchen, and transportation staff report to the business manager, and the girls' faculty report to the headmistress. The boys' faculty report to the headmaster--the boys' school headmaster, that is, not the headmaster of the whole school. Beneath and between the two

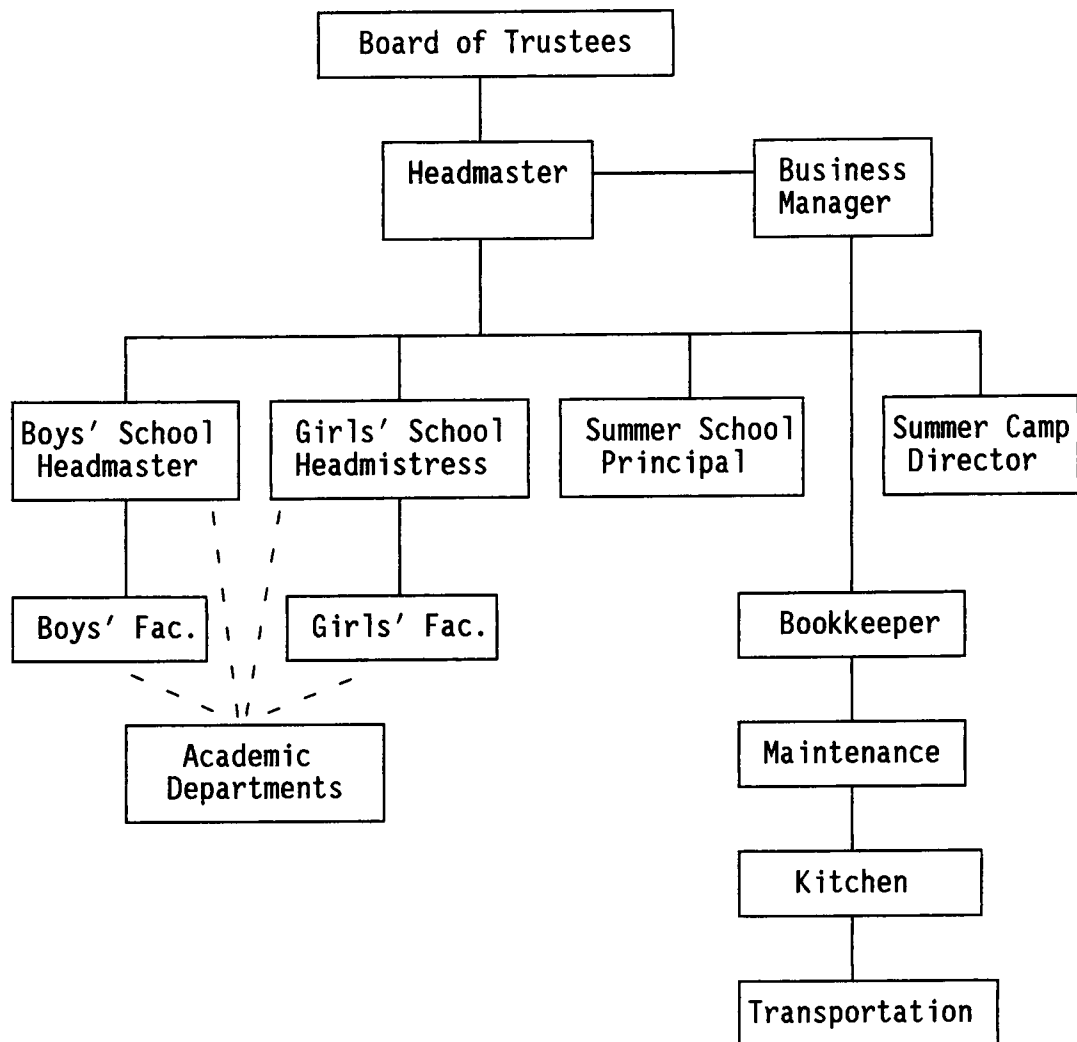


Figure 1. Plan of Organization 1960 to 1966.

Source: Lothrop, L. E. (1972). A history of the Webb School of Knoxville. Unpublished master's thesis. The University of Tennessee, p. 30.

faculties is a box labeled "Academic Departments," which is attached to the heads and the faculties by four dotted lines. These lines mean that male and female faculty members who taught the same subject were considered members of the same department. In other words, there were two schools but only one English department, one math department, one Latin department, and so forth. The department heads, who were responsible for both male and female teachers, apparently reported to both the headmaster and the headmistress, at least in theory. In fact these dotted lines may have meant very little. One of the department heads of the period said in an interview that he was hired with the understanding that he was responsible for his subject in both schools but the girls' faculty and Miss Hudson sometimes made decisions about his subject without consulting him. According to Lothrop (1972), the SACS accreditation report recommended giving more authority to the academic departments. The inclusion of the departments on this chart may have been an attempt to comply with this recommendation. A question the chart raises is who drew it and why. Was it the work of a harried headmaster who was not particularly interested in administrative structures and did not take the time to think through all the implications of the various boxes and lines? Or was it drawn by a frustrated board chairman who was trying to demonstrate graphically the confusion he encountered when he attempted to figure out how the organization worked? Whatever its origin, it was the official organizational plan for the next six years.

In 1961, the board adopted its first official policy statement. According to Lothrop (1972), the statement was entitled "What Is Webb School Supposed to Be?" and included the following points:

1. The primary mission of the school is to train for acceptance to and satisfactory performance in the better colleges of our country.
2. Admissions should be limited to those students capable of and willing to do quality work.
3. The school is not remedial or tutorial in nature.
4. The school should give individual attention to all students, but responsibility for learning rests cooperatively between student and teacher.
5. Spiritual training and character development are important parts of the school program.
6. Physical fitness is important. (p. 48)²⁹

One question that was generating a great deal of discussion at the time was not addressed by the policy statement. People were divided over whether or not The University of Tennessee qualified as one of the "better colleges of our country." Some parents, faculty, and board members obviously did not think so. "Bob Webb realized early on that he had to forge an almost peculiar alliance with UT," a former board member said. "He almost discouraged kids from the school from going to UT." One of the early students said in an interview that the entire faculty refused to consider UT as an option for him and became annoyed when he insisted on going there. Several students said that they were reminded by Webb School faculty that the

²⁹Laura Egerton Lothrop, the author of the master's thesis quoted here, is the wife of Doug Lothrop, the business manager mentioned earlier. In 1972 she was a social studies teacher at Webb School. She was later department head.

status of the school would be enhanced if they went away to prestigious colleges and might be diminished if they stayed home and attended UT. On the other hand, many if not most of the faculty and board members were UT graduates--Robert Webb, George Webb, Julie Webb, Herbert Slatery, George Turley, Emily Anne Fisher, Fred Elmore, and several others. Furthermore, in the early 1960s, when the school was still unable to pay competitive salaries, Robert Webb deliberately recruited the wives of UT faculty and graduate students because they were often quite talented and well educated but unable to find satisfactory work in Knoxville. Ruth Graf, the wife of a UT history professor, was one of these. Through the years, far more Webb School graduates have attended UT than any other college or university. Dozens of UT professors have served on the board, and Robert Webb had a cordial relationship with Andy Holt, who was president of the university during much of the school's history. Perhaps a former staff member was right when she said in an interview: "We weren't against UT at all. We did feel that every child needs to get away from their parents. They need some time to be on their own before they go out into the world." She went on to explain that Webb School students, by attending a day school, had forfeited the boarding school experience and would miss out on going away to school entirely if they attended UT. The question has never been put to rest, and the debate will no doubt continue.

Reorganization

When Robert Webb moved his office to the new Central Building in December 1963, he left the boys' school without an administrator in the building. This problem was solved three months later when Edwin Cox was appointed assistant headmaster. Cox, who had an independent school background, was hired with the understanding that he would be an assistant for an unspecified period of time and then would become headmaster of the boys' school. For the time being, however, the administrative structure was not altered. Robert Webb retained all the duties he had before; Cox simply helped him perform them.

When school opened in September 1964, the total enrollment was down for the first time ever. (In 1962, the boys' school enrollment had dipped slightly, but an increase in the number of girls more than offset the decline.) The drop was not precipitous--the girls' school went from 133 in 1963-64 to 124 in 1964-65, the boys' school from 161 to 153. But budgeting was so tight at the time that reducing the total enrollment by 17 students resulted in a deficit for the year of more than \$17 thousand.³⁰ The deficit cast a pall over the 10th anniversary celebrations that occurred in the spring of 1965. There was a party, and the school was the subject of a long feature article in the Knoxville News-Sentinel, but a number of key supporters of the school were concerned about the future. The advocates of fundamental change saw the drop in enrollment as a vindication of their position. Discussions at board meetings and executive committee meetings were

³⁰This was one of only two deficits in Robert Webb's 29-year tenure as head of the school. The other one was the first year.

sometimes heated. "We'd be screaming at each other," a board member said.

Asked if the board blamed him for the drop in enrollment, Robert Webb said, "I thought they should have, but they didn't. They did make it clear that we couldn't have another year like that." As he saw the situation, the drop occurred because he "got lazy" and spent less time recruiting students than he had done in the past. Some key board members, however, saw the situation very differently. To them it was evidence that the chief executive of the school was spread too thin. A person who at that time was in contact with several trustees and thus was very much aware of what was going on said in an interview:

There was a tremendous amount of pressure put on him by the board, particularly Teeny Sanford. That's how the position of president was created. They were trying to get him out of doing so much. He was even setting the damned bus schedules.

Although Sanford and others continued to push for a president-headmaster organizational plan with the president setting broad policy and relating to external constituencies and the headmaster running day-to-day operations, the change to such a system did not occur until April 1966.

The boys' school finally got a headmaster when Ed Cox accepted an opportunity to return to Randolph-Macon College, his alma mater, as director of admissions. James Snodgrass replaced Cox as assistant headmaster and held the position for a few days, until the executive committee of the board decided that the time had come to alter the basic administrative structure of the school. Robert Webb became president, and Snodgrass became headmaster of the boys' school. A

committee of the board was charged with determining exactly what the duties of the headmaster would be, but it was generally assumed that Snodgrass's position would parallel Genevieve Hudson's.

Jim Snodgrass had been with Webb School since 1960. A graduate of Lincoln Memorial University, he was finishing a master's in history at UT when he received a call from Robert Webb asking him to come to the school for an interview. As Webb recalled the situation, he had been told by a friend at UT that a really outstanding graduate student was finishing his degree and would be looking for a job. He did not take the news very seriously until a week or so later when someone else made the same remark and urged him to get in touch with Jim Snodgrass. He did, and Snodgrass became a history teacher at Webb School. He was by all accounts a dynamic teacher who managed to kindle an enthusiasm for history in his students. Robert Webb said that several boys came by his office the first year that Snodgrass taught at Webb to tell him they had decided to major in history in college. After a year or two, Snodgrass became head of the social studies department, a position he continued to hold after he was appointed headmaster. When the boys' school and the girls' school merged, he resigned as headmaster of the boys' school, a position that was being eliminated in any case, and applied for the position of headmaster of the coeducational upper school. He was quickly appointed to the new position and has continued in it.

At the September 1966 board meeting, Alfred Sanford urged the board to employ a team of management consultants to study the school and make recommendations for change. He was so enthusiastic about

the idea he offered to pay part of the consultant fee himself. In November 1966 the board voted to hire a Chicago firm, Cresap, Paget, and McCormick, to do the job. The consultants began their study soon afterward and submitted their report in February 1967.

The study was very thorough. The consultants began by learning the history of the school and compiling a description of the administration, faculty, and student body. Then they analyzed the market for the school's services. This analysis dealt with the local economy, the public school systems, the private schools readily available to Knoxville residents, and the demographics of Knox County and surrounding areas. They surveyed the parents. They studied the physical facilities and attempted to discover how adequately the plant supported the program. They analyzed both capital and operating budgets. In their report, the consultants pointed out several alternatives available to the school, recommended objectives that they thought the school should pursue, and made several specific recommendations.

The recommended basic objectives for the school were as follows:

- . The Webb School of Knoxville should provide a first-rate preparatory education which will ensure the admittance of its better students to top colleges and universities.

- . The Webb School should also provide an opportunity for less gifted students, or those who have not developed their potential, to obtain a good preparation for college.

- . The Webb School should deliberately cultivate an intellectual atmosphere that would attract a broader spectrum of students, parents and teachers than at present, and that would give the School a far stronger image and reputation in the community as a first-rate institution of learning than it now commands. (Cresap, Paget & McCormick, p. VI-1)

In order to achieve these objectives, the consultants recommended that the school change its administrative structure, increase its enrollment to 450, increase teachers' salaries, increase offerings in art and music, merge the boys' school and the girls' school, give more authority to department chairmen, take immediate action to improve the math and science programs of the girls' school, improve the library collection, promote the summer camp and the summer school, "avail itself of periodic dietetic counsel," and improve its physical plant. Among the least controversial of these was the recommended increase in teachers' salaries (Cresap, Paget, & McCormick, pp. VI-1 to VI-6).

The problem the consultants were addressing by recommending a raise for teachers was faculty turnover. The report pointed out that only eight of 21 faculty employed by the school in 1959 were still employed in 1967, and of the 56 teachers hired since 1959, only 25 remained. Low pay was part of the explanation. The average salary--\$5383 for the girls' school and \$6133 for the boys' school--was lower than the average for public schools in the area. The consultants suggested that teacher raises could be financed by increases in enrollment, in faculty/student ratio (from 1:12 to 1:15), or in tuition or by a combination of such increases.³¹

³¹The consultants seemed to assume that the low salaries caused the turnover, and certainly there was a connection. But Robert Webb, in an interview, discussed the problem in some detail. He said the school was relying too heavily on wives of UT graduate students, who tended to leave when their husbands finished their degrees; on retired teachers, who retired again after a few years; and on academic nomads recruited through teachers' agencies, who had beautiful resumes but never intended to stay anywhere for more than two or three years.

The most controversial recommendation was the merger of the two schools. The report offered four reasons for the change:

- * Potentially higher utilization of existing and planned facilities by being able to schedule classes in all three buildings.
- * Potential for capitalizing on the major strengths of various teachers and making them available to all students.
- * The knitting of the faculty into a more cohesive group to ensure the development of better and more uniform curriculums and of a "one-School" outlook.
- * Improvements in student morale and the development of stronger school spirit. (p. VI-4)

These were the positive arguments. The negative argument was never explicitly stated, but it was clearly implied throughout the report: the girls' school was in trouble. It was having to contend with "a negative image of a few years ago." Moreover, "this year, the Boys' School had openings in 7th grade only, whereas the Girls' School had vacancies in all grades" (p. II-4). But more important, the girls' school was not matching the boys' school academically. It was not even matching the public schools, if the figures compiled by the consultants were to be believed.

In order to compare Webb School to its competitors, the consultants obtained American College Test (ACT) scores for University of Tennessee students who had graduated from Webb or from competing schools in 1966. The University of Tennessee was selected because it had a higher concentration of Webb graduates than any other college or university. The comparison schools were the ones Webb students might be most likely to attend if they had not gone to Webb. Since at that time 70 percent of Webb students were from west

Knoxville, two west Knoxville public schools, West High School and Bearden, were selected. Private schools selected were McCallie, Baylor, and Girls' Preparatory School, all of Chattanooga. Table 2 shows the mean ACT scores for UT students who graduated from the six high schools. According to the report, a composite ACT of 22 would place a student in the upper 40 percent of American college-bound high school students, and a composite of 25 would place a student in the upper 20 percent.

This portion of the study is open to criticism on several fronts. First, the report states that the comparison of ACT scores should "be considered only an indicator of relative academic strengths and weaknesses because of small sample size involved" (Cresap, Paget, & McCormick, p. II-6). It does not say exactly how small the sample was. A good guess would be 15 to 20 Webb students, but there is no way to estimate how many students there were from the other schools. Second, ACT scores are not designed to measure the performance of secondary schools. Third, many factors other than the school a student attends may be assumed to affect ACT scores. Finally, there is no reason to believe that the students who enrolled in UT were typical of Webb School graduates.

Still, the use of ACT scores allowed the consultants to make a comparison that was at least numerical and presumably objective. Accepted at face value, the table of average scores makes the girls' school look bad. Webb graduates appear to have performed reasonably well in comparison to the competition until the scores for the two

Table 2. COMPARISON OF AVERAGE "ACT" SCORES ACHIEVED BY
WEBB STUDENTS ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE WITH THOSE OF OTHER SCHOOLS

Fall of 1966

A - Summary

<u>Category</u>	<u>Webb School</u>	<u>Bearden High School</u>	<u>West High School</u>
English	22.8	21.0	21.0
Mathematics	23.5	19.7	21.2
Social Science	24.4	23.4	22.3
Natural Science	22.5	22.1	21.4
Composite	23.5	21.8	21.8

B - Girls Only

<u>Category</u>	<u>Webb School</u>	<u>Bearden High School</u>	<u>West High School</u>	<u>Girls' Preparatory School</u>
English	23.3	22.0	22.2	23.7
Mathematics	16.7	19.1	20.0	24.5
Social Science	22.8	23.4	21.7	24.0
Natural Science	18.7	21.6	19.4	22.5
Composite	20.6	21.5	20.8	23.8

C - Boys Only

<u>Category</u>	<u>Webb School</u>	<u>Bearden High School</u>	<u>West High School</u>	<u>Baylor School</u>	<u>McCallie School</u>
English	22.5	20.0	20.0	22.5	21.2
Mathematics	27.0	20.2	22.2	25.5	26.9
Social Science	25.2	23.1	23.2	24.3	24.2
Natural Science	24.5	22.9	22.9	24.4	24.4
Composite	25.0	21.6	22.2	24.5	24.3

Source: Cresap, Paget, and McCormick. (1967). Webb School of Knoxville: A study of long-term objectives.

Webb Schools are separated. Then it seems clear that the boys were doing much better than the competition and the girls were doing worse. In other words, the girls were dragging the boys down. The report summarizes the findings as follows:

The average composite score for Webb graduates was 23.5 versus 21.8 for graduates from both Bearden and West High Schools. The composite average for the Girls' School was 20.6; for the Boys' School it was 25.0. The Girls' School score was lower than scores achieved by girls graduating from the Bearden and West High Schools and the Girls' Preparatory School, chiefly because of weaknesses in mathematics and natural science. The Boys School score was higher than the composite scores achieved by boys graduating from Bearden and West High Schools, and the Baylor and McCallie Schools as well. (p. II-6)

If the figures are considered valid, the conclusion that the two schools should be merged so that the girls would get the same education the boys were getting seems reasonable.

It also seems reasonable to conclude that, if the two schools were to be one, the organizational structure would have to be changed. In the arrangement recommended by the consultants, the committees of the board were reduced from nine to six. A development council and a director of development were added. The headmaster and headmistress were replaced by a dean of students and a dean of instruction. As was explained in the report, the primary idea behind the plan was to eliminate overlaps in assignment of responsibilities. According to the consultants, several duties--faculty evaluation, for example--were shared by the president, the headmaster, and the headmistress. The board was too actively involved in matters that were properly the responsibility of the administration. The new plan would clearly delineate who was responsible for what and would

presumably discourage the incumbents in various positions from interfering in the bailiwicks of the others. As will be discussed in more detail later, the merger did take place, but the recommended administrative structure was never adopted.

Another recommendation of the consultants was that the school maintain itself indefinitely as a day school and cease to consider adding dormitories and becoming a boarding school. The primary reason the consultants gave was that the school had ample demand for its services locally and thus had no need to recruit students from outside the greater Knoxville area. In an interview Robert Webb said that the consultants' recommendation was "welcome news" and added several other reasons. First, he knew quite well what boarding schools were like, specifically how confining it was to work at one, and he did not relish the idea of taking on all the special problems that boarding schools have. Second, the school did not have the financing for dormitories, and Webb had become convinced that raising the money would be "a tough sell." The board members were all local residents who did not have any interest in a boarding school and thus could not be expected to work enthusiastically to raise the necessary capital. Finally, after 12 years as head of a day school, Webb himself had "come around" to a new way of thinking. He said, "I came to realize that for the benefit of the child, the best possible environment is a good school in the daytime and a good home at night."

The Merger

In the Fall 1968 Webb School Newsletter, Robert Webb wrote:
"Webb School opened its doors on a co-educational basis in September, and, contrary to popular opinion, the earth did not wobble on its axis." He went on to explain how the transition had been accomplished:

An elaborate system of committees and subcommittees was organized to smooth the way for this development. Altogether, some eleven teachers and nearly fifty students were involved in planning and discussions for a period of four months. This effort provided an evaluation and reappraisal of every facet of campus life. They reexamined everything from table manners to the Honor System and back again and did an outstanding job of keeping the strongest features of the two schools so that the merged one would be even stronger. The fact that this fall's experience has been so smooth and so successful is a tribute to the fine work done by this group last spring.

Several people who were a part of the organization at the time of the merger suggested that the smooth transition was a tribute to Robert Webb's ability to anticipate problems and deal with them before they got out of hand. It is astonishing how little most people seem to remember about the actual process. One faculty member said, "I was chairman of one of those committees, but I'm damned if I can remember what it was all about." A male faculty member claims to remember sitting in a committee meeting in which female faculty members spent hours discussing whether or not girls should be allowed to wear hair ribbons of some color other than green, white, or their own hair color.

Of the people interviewed for this study, only two--one teacher and one student--were opposed to the merger. These two seemed to think that opposition was widespread, but none of the other

respondents agreed with them. The primary concern of the opponents was the loss of leadership opportunities for the girls, a concern shared by several other women who nevertheless felt the merger was on balance a good idea. This loss was particularly significant because a primary aim of the school was to train the students to be leaders. The student who opposed the merger explained her position as follows:

I loved having the structure the school had [before the merger]. There was a boys' school and a girls' school. Girls could develop their own leadership, their own traditions, their own bonding in a female environment, which is different from a coed environment. We had some of the languages [with the boys]. We were in the library at the same time. Some of the A.P. classes were mixed. And it was really the best of both worlds, and our class particularly I think was resentful we were having to go coed because we gave up--we had 20 girls in our class and I think there were 40 boys, so we were immediately outnumbered--but there are so many traditions you can carry off in a girls' school that you cannot have in a boys', ah, a coed school.

The slip of the tongue at the end of the preceding quotation is indicative of the attitude that several people, including some who supported the merger, expressed about what happened. The idea was that merger was not precisely the right word. Absorption, ingestion, or take-over might be more descriptive. A board member referred to "the time when the girls' school was eliminated." According to this view, the administration did not blend two schools but instead simply started sending the girls to the boys' school. Asked to comment on this idea, several respondents said that it was ridiculous, that the two schools definitely merged and that the strongest points of each school were retained. They were then asked to give a specific example of a tradition or practice or ceremony that originated in the

girls' school and survived into the merged schools. Not one of them could think of an example other than uniforms.

There were no uniforms during the first two years when Webb was exclusively a boys' school. Pictures from that period show the boys dressed much as they probably would have dressed for public school--blue jeans, T-shirts or sports shirts, sneakers. During the second year, jackets with the school crest on the front were ordered, but wearing them was optional. The Green and White of February 18, 1957, described the jacket and then added: "Mr. Webb has stated that it could be worn to class. (Ed. note: Ye Gods!)" On September 1, 1957, the Knoxville News-Sentinel ran a picture of a boy and a girl wearing blazers and the headline: "Webb School Students Sport Blue Blazers." The article said that the blazers were "required school wear for girls but optional for boys" (p. A10). Uniforms were Genevieve Hudson's idea. She insisted from the first that the girls wear them, and so there never was a time when Webb School girls did not have uniforms. The boys' school developed a dress code, but no one interviewed for this study could remember any details. It seems clear, however, that at the time of the merger the boys still did not have any required mode of dress that could properly be called a uniform. As a part of the planning process, a strict dress code that amounted to uniforms for both sexes was adopted, but one of the decisions made at that time was that strict equity of treatment of boys and girls was probably not possible and perhaps not even desirable. Probably the main reason that the uniforms were retained is that they were popular with parents. They drastically simplified

the process of shopping for school clothes and sharply reduced the expense. As one parent said:

The girls wouldn't have been normal if they liked uniforms [but] as a mother, I thought it was delightful. We used to fight before [my daughters went to Webb]. They wanted to wear patent shoes and petticoats, which look ridiculous at school. After the uniforms, we didn't have the problem. It is so much cheaper to clothe them. A good uniform wears.

Another change that occurred as a result of the merger was the abolition of corporal punishment. The girls' school had never used it, but it had been an option for boys. Both schools ran on demerit systems. On Thursdays the demerits were added up and punishment was meted out. One demerit was forgiven, but starting with the second one, a boy had a choice between 30 minutes of detention and one lick with the paddle for each demerit he had accumulated. Girls had no choice--they went to detention. After the merger, the choice was no longer available to boys either.

Perhaps the most sensitive issue related to the merger was the fate of Genevieve Hudson. The position of headmistress was eliminated. Miss Hudson was, as a female teacher said, "displaced." Apparently there was no discussion of her becoming the head of the lower school or assuming any other administrative position in the coeducational organization. According to two women who knew Miss Hudson well, she may not have been physically or emotionally capable of taking on new responsibilities even if they had been offered. The year of planning was apparently quite difficult for her. During the Christmas holidays she fell and broke her shoulder. "She went to pieces," according to a colleague. "She couldn't make a decision. She would just burst into tears." Her secretary, Barbara Trent, took

over many of her duties. Miss Hudson would attend planning committee meetings at the Central Building and then come back to the girls' school and cry. She would say things like: "Nobody cares about my concerns." Apparently only a few members of the girls' school faculty knew about Miss Hudson's condition. None of the boys' school faculty interviewed could remember seeing any evidence that Miss Hudson was not doing well. One male faculty member said that he did wonder from time to time how she was holding up, but "I didn't have to worry about what's right, what's wrong. I knew Mr. Webb was dealing with her and he was not going to be cruel." In February 1968, the board of trustees offered Miss Hudson a \$1500 gift as a sort of consolation prize and suggested she use the money to make a trip to Europe. She refused the money and asked that it be used to fund an annual award for a girl who had made an outstanding contribution to the school. This became known as the Serendipity Award. The source of the funds for the award was kept secret until after Miss Hudson's death. Perhaps the ultimate blow to Miss Hudson's sensibilities occurred in September 1968 when the school opened as a coeducational institution. Miss Hudson walked into the office of the lower school, the office that had been hers since the building was constructed, and found John Mackay, the new lower school principal, sitting at the desk smoking a pipe. She burst into tears and ran out the door.

By the time of the merger, single-sex education was in decline. Girls' schools were admitting boys, boys' schools were admitting girls, and mergers similar to the one that occurred in Knoxville were

taking place all over the nation. In the 1960s, when informality was in vogue and traditionalism was not, the Webb School for Girls seemed particularly anachronistic. A graduate of the girls' school expressed her feelings about the merger as follows: "It was just the right time. [The girls' school] would not have made it through the '70s. It was a Bengal tiger, an endangered species, almost extinct."

5. GROWTH AND MATURITY: 1969 - 1985

We Who Are Supposed To Lead

In 1954 the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that racially segregated schools were inherently unequal, setting the stage for widespread desegregation of public schools; one year later the Webb School of Knoxville, the first high quality private school in the Knoxville metropolitan area, was founded. Skeptics might find it hard to believe that there was no connection between the two events. In fact no evidence of a connection exists. Robert Webb left his job as a teacher at the Webb School in Bell Buckle involuntarily, and after teaching in California one year, returned to Knoxville to found a school. The events in his own life seem to provide sufficient motivation for his actions, and his stated goals--to provide excellence in education and leadership training for the young men and later the young women of Knoxville--were not disputed or questioned by anyone interviewed for this study. Not one of the respondents even hinted that Robert Webb might have seen the specter of racial integration on the horizon and decided to

provide his home town with a means of escape. No one suggested that he used the approach of desegregation to solicit contributions or to recruit students. In fact, two former board members who were actively involved in early recruiting and fund raising efforts specifically denied that the racial issue was used. One said: "Bob specifically said, 'Don't mention [integration] at all.' . . . Bob was very strong on that. He said, 'Don't ever sell Webb School for that reason.'" The other board member said:

I can honestly say it was never, ever brought up as an issue to encourage people to get involved with the Webb School; in fact, whenever we would meet about this thing, it was always brought up that this is something you not only don't want to mention but you don't need to mention. At that time the problems were going on around the country, and I can honestly say nobody ever sold a person on Webb School with race as an issue. I'm sure it was in the background of a lot of people's minds, but it was never used as a selling point, never used as a sales tool. It didn't have to be.

Asked about the coincidence of the school's having been founded so soon after the Brown decision, Robert Webb replied very forcefully:

I can say--I'm happy to say--that the Webb School was never thought of as a dodge for racial reasons. It was never presented as a segregated school. It was never talked about as a haven for white flight. I would be untruthful if I did not say that private schools were very much in the minds of people in those days, and I felt that this would be a help. . . [but] never at any time was the claim made for the Webb School of Knoxville that it was a haven for those trying to avoid desegregation. . . . I wanted the school to stand as a serious center of learning, an academic institution. I didn't want it to catch on for some spurious reason.

In 1959 a front-page story in the Wall Street Journal discussed the plight of the nation's private schools and said that concern about desegregation was boosting the enrollments of some of them, particularly in the South:

Webb School, for example, was opened in Knoxville, Tenn., in 1955 with only four pupils; last year enrollment reached 123. This year it's at 167. "The integration angle had nothing to do with our establishment, but I'm sure it has helped our enrollment," admits William Robert Webb, III, the founder. (Williams, p. 1)

Lothrop (1972) pointed out a fact that helps to illuminate the relationship between Webb School and desegregation. The school had a drop in enrollment during only one academic year, 1964-65. That was the year that the Knoxville city schools were desegregated.

Although the school was not established to combat desegregation, it did not have any black students during its first decade of existence. There was no policy written or otherwise that excluded blacks. None had applied, and the matter had not been discussed. But some time around 1965 Alfred Sanford and Robert Webb began to have conversations about the desirability of a formal statement of nondiscrimination. Webb explained the situation as follows:

Teeny Sanford gets a lot of credit for this. I . . . wanted to open enrollment, and I think Bill Pressly was partly responsible for my feeling. He had done this at Westminster School. And there were a lot of schools in the South where the headmasters who had the same kind of feelings were thwarted by their boards. I think it's safe to say heads of schools were a little bit ahead. But in our situation, Teeny Sanford was very much in favor of abolishing any form of discrimination and completely integrating the school, and I was, too. That made it easy for us. The matter was brought up and discussed briefly at one board meeting in just a casual way, and at a subsequent board meeting was brought up in a formal way and the policy statement was passed with hardly any discussion at all, without any dissenting vote, and I attribute that to Teeny Sanford's leadership.

The statement, passed February 17, 1966, said that the school would accept all qualified applicants based on their academic achievement and moral character. At chapel the next day, Robert Webb read the statement to the faculty and students and explained how it

had come to be passed. There was very little reaction. Over the next few weeks, Webb wrote to his fellow headmasters around the country and told them what Webb School had done.

It was no doubt a surprise to many people that no blacks applied for admission to Webb School immediately after the policy was announced. This was, as Robert Webb pointed out in an interview, "a pretty typical pattern. Most schools and churches and whites-only organizations that open their doors expect to be inundated with blacks, and nothing happens." The same thing happened when the Westminster Schools announced their open admissions policy. Apparently because black Americans were at that time demonstrating for admission to segregated public schools and other public accommodations, whites assumed that they wanted to enter any institution that had a history of excluding them. That turned out not to be the case. The staff of Webb School had to engage in active recruiting of qualified black students before the first black, Nick Wynn, was admitted. A sophomore, Wynn was accepted for admission in April 1967 and entered the school in September.

Active recruiting of blacks continued for the next few years. No special scholarship funds were set aside for blacks, but several black students qualified for scholarships under existing criteria. According to one former faculty member, one black student was given a scholarship by the faculty, who contributed \$100 each per year to keep the student enrolled.

Robert Webb's most public stand on the race issue occurred at the annual conference of the Mid-South Association of Independent

Schools in Chattanooga on March 14, 1969. In a key-note speech entitled "The Challenges of Tomorrow," Webb discussed the coming of computer-assisted instruction and other classroom technologies, the opportunities for experimentation that independent schools provide, the importance of teacher training, the need to treat students as individuals, and other concerns. But the part of the speech that is remembered and quoted read as follows:

And certainly it is time that we in the South face squarely the matter of mixing the races in our schools. Our record in this area is far from proud. We who are supposed to lead have turned our backs on the biggest social revolution our country has known.

It is time we face up to the moral implications of what we are doing to both races by excluding members of the minority race.

It is time we realize that by standing as the last stronghold of segregation we are NOT doing our students a favor--we are not preparing them for the realities of their lives ahead, much less a position of leadership.

You will recognize in hearing these words from my lips that no saint sings louder than the reformed sinner. (Webb, 1990, p. 42)

The speech generated a vocal reaction. A former faculty member who was present said, "I'm sure there were people walking out."

Reporters from several papers called the school to see if they could entice Robert Webb to say more along the same lines, but he had said what he had to say. Most of the school heads and others who commented publicly on the speech were congratulatory. Robert Webb's correspondence file contains, however, a letter from one anonymous individual whose reaction was extremely unfavorable. Dated March 15, 1969, and scrawled on the stationery of a Chattanooga hotel, the letter reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Webb -

It seems that the Mid South Asso. of Independent Schools seldom fails to come up with a Socialist - Communist agitator who is ashamed of his own race and whines for mongrelization.

Indeed the private schools do have a chance! A chance to teach against the definite evils of race mixing which already has ruined the heritage of millions. Unfortunately we have to contend with such scum as yourself who have no morals at all.

You sir, are a black mark against private education and I do not believe that those who pay much to provide their children with good private education will long tolerate your sorry lot.

In 1973, the Webb School of Knoxville employed its first black faculty member, Dianne Morrow, the wife of a UT professor. She was, in the words of a colleague, a "super-brain." She was a graduate of Swathmore and had earned a master's degree at UT where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She taught at Webb until 1977 when she and her husband left Knoxville.

The events described here are recounted in somewhat less detail in a book by Zebulon Vance Wilson (1983) entitled They Took Their Stands: The Integration of Southern Private Schools. Wilson also discussed the role of the Lyndhurst Foundation in providing minority scholarships to independent schools in the late 1970s and had this to say about Robert Webb's role in a critical meeting where the scholarship program was put into final form:

Bob Webb's presence at that meeting was extremely important because of his astonishing reputation among school people in the South. The Mid-South was in effect bringing its ranking school head before the foundation as an endorsement of the proposal from the people within the schools, not simply association officers. And Bob Webb was particularly connected with this issue of minority participation because of his conference speech in 1975 and his work with his own school in Knoxville. (p. 31)

One person interviewed for this study insinuated that Robert Webb's role in helping to desegregate private schools may have been exaggerated, and two others suggested that more could have and perhaps should have been done to recruit blacks at Webb School and to make them welcome. It seems clear that the Webb School did not, at least in the 1960s and early 1970s, engage in any activity that might be called affirmative action. Black students took the same admissions test as white students, and they had to make the same scores to be considered for admission. Black faculty members were expected to meet the same standards as other teachers. There was some active recruiting of black students, mostly by staff members who felt strongly about the issue, but scholarship money, except for the one faculty-sponsored scholarship mentioned earlier, was not set aside for blacks. Financial assistance was awarded on the basis of need, and the same standard was applied to students of all races.

Organization

When Jim Snodgrass became headmaster of the boys' school in 1966, the organization of the school did not change dramatically. Robert Webb became president, and the position of assistant headmaster was eliminated, but in a sense the changes in titles were more a recognition of the situation that had evolved during Ed Cox's tenure as assistant headmaster than a drastic restructuring. Lothrop (1972) does not include an organizational chart for this period, which was, after all, only 28 months in duration. Cresap, Paget, and McCormick (1967) drew a chart of the organization as they found it

(Figure 2) and contrasted it with the organizational scheme that they recommended (Figure 3).

The consultants' primary concern about the organizational structure of Webb School was the degree to which the duties of the headmaster, headmistress, and president overlapped. The duplication of duty assignments was most obvious in academic policy development, curriculum development, faculty performance evaluation, parent contact, and admissions. All of these duties were at least to some degree the responsibility of all three administrators. The headmaster and headmistress had identical duties, according to "The Present Plan of Organization" (Figure 2). This arrangement may have been inefficient but probably caused little confusion because it was clearly understood that the boys' school and the girls' school operated as separate entities. The dotted lines connecting the two schools and indicating that the department heads were responsible for their subjects in both schools do not appear on Figure 2 (as they do on Figure 1, p. 131), and their omission can be assumed to reflect accurately a state of affairs in which little coordination of the curriculum between schools took place. The arrangement that seems to have had enormous potential for confusion was the overlap between the president's duties and the duties of the headmaster of the boys' school and the headmistress of the girls' school. If both the president and the headmistress were in charge of parent contact, for example, parents might be confused about whom to get in touch with to discuss their child's problems or progress. They might be tempted to

Webb School of Knoxville
PRESENT PLAN OF ORGANIZATION
April 1967

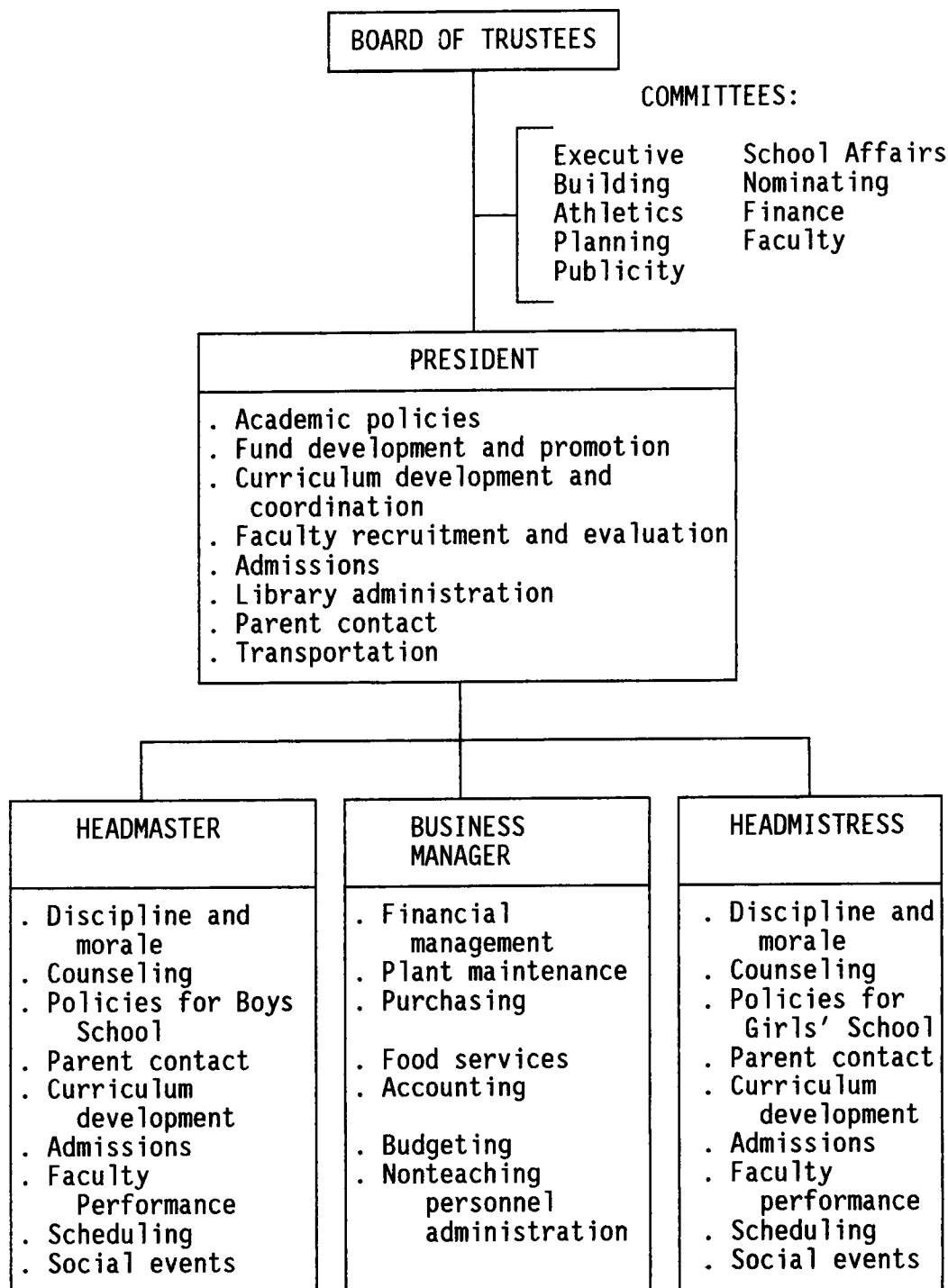


Figure 2. Organizational Plan 1966 to 1968.
Source: Cresap, Paget, and McCormick. (1967). Webb School of Knoxville: A study of long-term objectives.

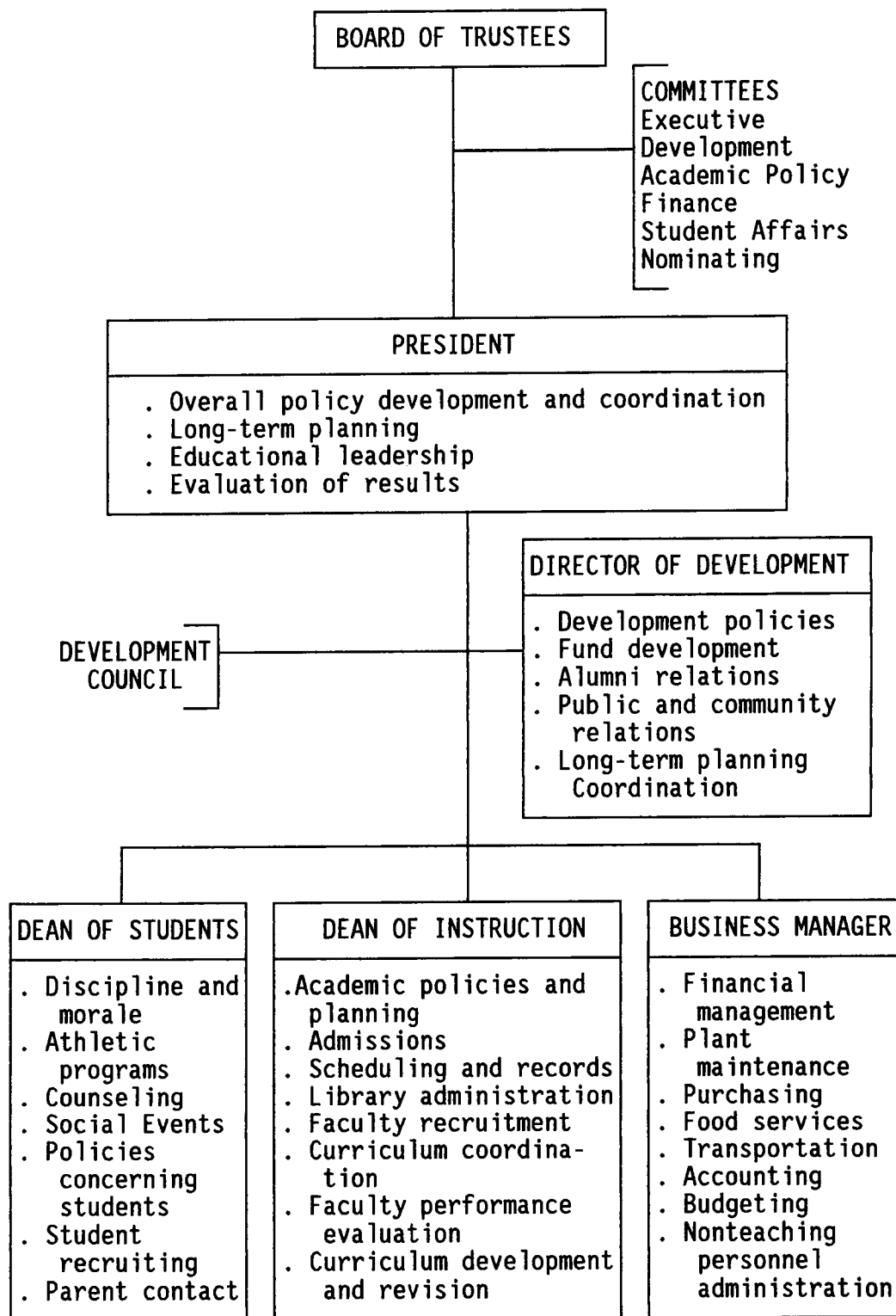


Figure 3. Proposed Plan of Organization.
Source: Cresap, Paget, and McCormick. (1967). Webb School of Knoxville: A study of long-term objectives.

choose the administrator they felt more comfortable talking with, and that administrator would then have to relay information to the other administrator, and so on. The time and energy wasted by this type of overlap and the confusion it could cause seem obvious. A similar problem the consultants identified was the overlap between some committees of the board and the administration of the school. The building committee, for example, had been deeply involved in consulting with contractors on the original buildings as well as on later projects. Members of the athletics committee talked directly with coaches, bypassing and in some instances contradicting the administration. The consultants pointed out that this kind of direct involvement in administrative matters was inappropriate. The board should limit itself to policy matters and allow the administration to execute policy.

A close examination of the chart entitled "The Present Plan of Organization" in the Cresap, Paget, and McCormick report (Figure 2) gives the impression that the organization of the school was a muddle. In fact, the school probably operated much more smoothly than the organizational chart would suggest. Robert Webb, Jim Snodgrass, and Genevieve Hudson were accustomed to sharing duties, and the overlap between the duties of the president and those of the boys' school and girls' school heads probably caused them less confusion than a similar arrangement would cause elsewhere. Moreover, the involvement of the board in administrative matters had evolved over the history of the school as a response to the fact that the administrators had more than they could do. The organization was

bottom heavy from the beginning, when Robert Webb did all the administrative work after a full day of teaching, and was still bottom heavy at the time of the study, when four administrators, three of whom taught classes, were entirely responsible for an organization with 359 students and 26 full-time teachers. Naturally, the board stepped in and tried to help. Robert Webb asked his friends to serve on the board with the understanding that they would participate actively in raising funds, recruiting students, and whatever else needed to be done that they were qualified to do. By deploring the overlap of responsibilities and duplication of duties that existed, Cresap, Paget, and McCormick were responding as management consultants of the 1960s would be expected to respond. At that time conventional wisdom dictated clearly defined areas of authority and responsibility and considered an organization that allowed two administrators to operate in the same area to be deeply flawed. But it is interesting to note that the conventional wisdom changed or at least was challenged during the 1970s and 1980s. The Webb School of Knoxville was, in a sense, anticipating the philosophy expressed by a number of management experts of the 1980s (Peters & Waterman, 1982, for example) who said that the neat boxes of organizational charts were unrealistic abstractions, that traditional schemes of organization did not take into consideration the way actual human beings in actual organizations operate, and that a certain amount of overlap, redundancy, and duplication tended to invigorate organizations.

As they would be expected to do, Cresap, Paget, and McCormick offered an alternative plan of organization (Figure 3). All the duties and responsibilities of the organization were divided into four areas: development, academic policy, finance, and student affairs. The committees of the board were reduced from nine to six, one for each of the four areas plus an executive and a nominating committee. In addition, an administrator was assigned responsibility for each area: a director of development, a dean of students, a dean of instruction, and a business manager. Only the business manager was an existing position. According to the consultants' plan, this administrator took over transportation, a duty formerly performed by the president, but otherwise retained the same duties as before. The others were completely new positions. The director of development would work with an advisory group called the development council and would assume responsibility for all fund raising, community relations, and alumni relations activities. The dean of students would be responsible for all school activities that directly affected student life but were not academic in nature--recruiting, athletics, discipline, social events, etc. The dean of instruction would take responsibility for all academic endeavors, including admissions--presumably because it involved testing and making judgments about the prospective students' ability to perform academically--and library administration, which had formerly been a duty of the president. The president's duties were reduced to four: overall policy development and coordination, long-term planning, educational leadership, and evaluation of results.

The lines of responsibility and authority were very clearly drawn, and there were no overlaps. Perhaps more important, Webb School under this plan would be one school, completely administered from the Central Building. The former boys' school building and the former girls' school building would each be assigned a senior faculty member to coordinate activities at the building level, but all authority would be centralized. The dean of instruction was to be responsible for curriculum for the whole school, the dean of students responsible for social events for the whole school, and so on. Had the plan been adopted, the Webb School would have become truly one school for the first time since the girls' school was created. The plan, however, was never adopted.

Instead a new organizational plan was implemented which contained elements of the existing organizational structure, elements of the Cresap, Paget, and McCormick proposal, and some new elements. According to this plan (Figure 4), the business manager and the director of development had precisely the duties and responsibilities that the consultants' plan suggested they have. The president had the duties the consultants suggested plus faculty recruitment. It is in the areas of student affairs and academic affairs that the plan that was actually adopted was drastically different from the consultants' plan.

Instead of the one-school concept proposed by the consultants, the actual plan retained the two-schools idea that had been in place since 1957. The major difference was that the schools were to be

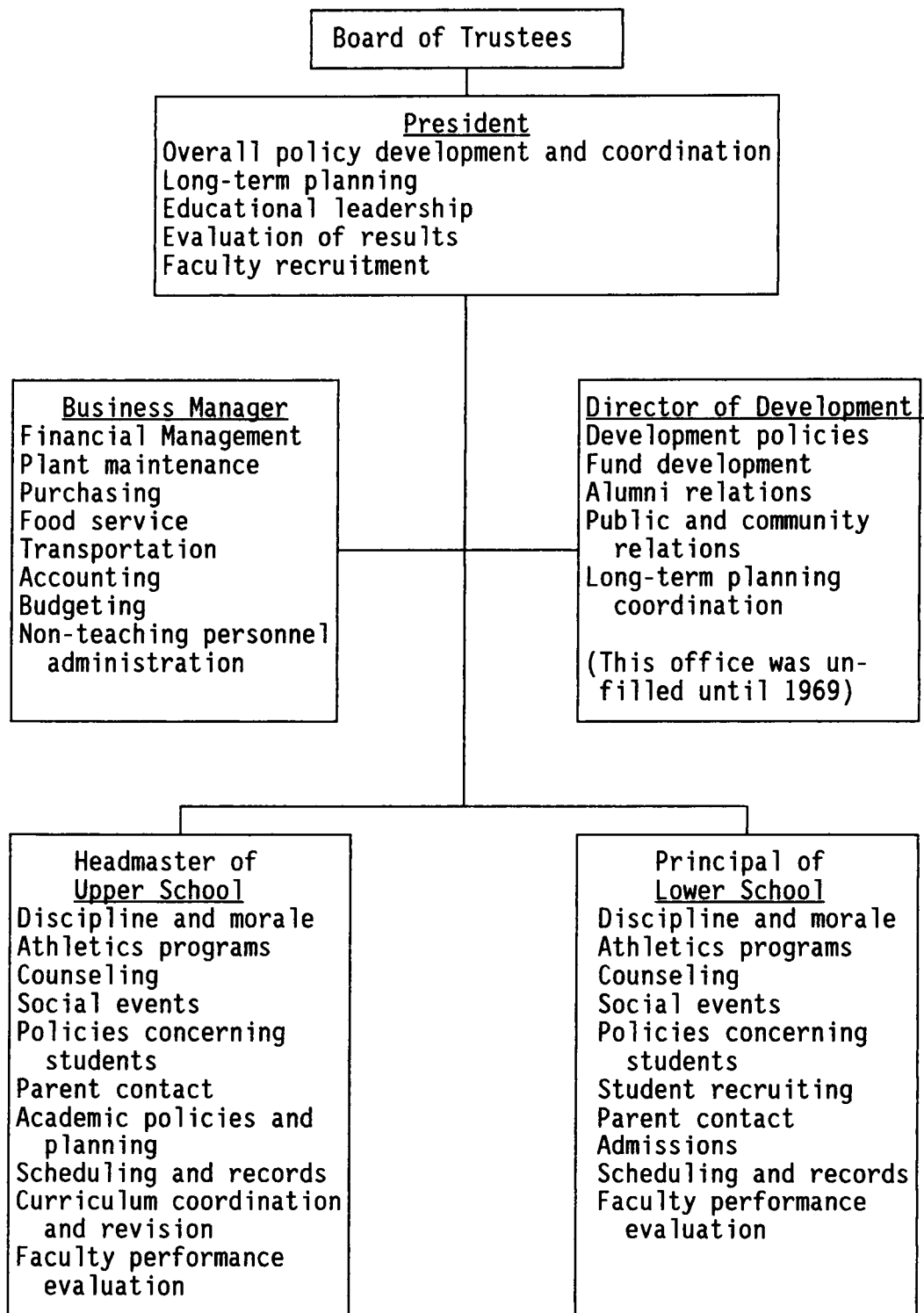


Figure 4. Plan of Organization 1968 to 1974.
 Source: Lothrop, L. E. (1972). A history of the Webb School of Knoxville. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.

differentiated on the basis of the students' age rather than their sex. An upper school would comprise grades 10 through 12, and a lower school would comprise grades 7 through 9. The upper school would be administered by a headmaster, who would be responsible for all the duties that Cresap, Paget, and McCormick assigned to the dean of students except student recruiting and all the duties assigned to the dean of instruction except admissions, library administration, and faculty recruitment. The lower school would be administered by a principal, who would be responsible for all the duties that the consultants assigned to the dean of students plus three they assigned to the dean of instruction: admissions, scheduling and records, and faculty performance evaluation. In other words, each school head would be broadly responsible for academics and student affairs within his school, but in addition the headmaster of the upper school would be responsible for academic policies and planning and for curriculum coordination and revision for the entire school while the principal of the lower school would be responsible for student recruiting and admissions for the entire school. Library administration was not assigned to anyone on this organizational chart, but in fact it was shared by the president and the headmaster of the upper school.

This was by far the most confusing organizational structure that the school had ever adopted, but it became more confusing in practice than it appeared to be on the chart. The chart suggests that Jim Snodgrass, as headmaster of the upper school, was the equal of John Mackay, the man who was brought in from Ohio to be principal of the lower school; yet, according to Lothrop (1972), there was some

misunderstanding about Mackay's role, and some faculty members apparently assumed that Mackay reported to Snodgrass instead of to Robert Webb, as the chart would suggest. It is easy to see how this misunderstanding arose. The department heads did report to Snodgrass, and they were responsible for their subjects in both schools; in fact, at least one of them taught a class in the lower school. On purely curricular matters, teachers were expected to report to their department heads. Mackay, as a part-time social studies teacher, would thus report to Jeff Chapman, who in turn would report to Jim Snodgrass. Teachers may have had trouble distinguishing between problems that should be discussed with the department head and those that should be discussed with the principal. A person who was in a position to know how the system actually worked said in an interview that Snodgrass did in fact have veto power over Mackay's decisions and that the assignment of duties and responsibilities was "deliberately muddled."

This organizational plan was in effect from 1968 to 1974, when the school added grades five and six and reorganized into a middle school with 240 students in 5th through 8th grades and an upper school with 300 students in 9th through 12th grades. John Mackay had left in 1972 and had been replaced by Ralph Gillette, who became the first principal of the middle school. According to a colleague who knew him well, Gillette had strong feelings about the way a middle school should be run, and he did not believe that department heads could supervise curriculum for both high school and middle school students. Partly at his insistence, the department heads became

attached to the upper school and no longer had responsibility for the younger students. Furthermore, Gillette did not want middle school faculty to teach in the upper school or upper school faculty to teach in the middle school, and he insisted that each teacher choose one school or the other. The teachers of major academic subjects did become attached to one school, but the schools continued to share art and music faculty for several more years. In addition to the head, each school had a dean of students, who served as an assistant to the head and was primarily responsible for discipline. Frank Lee was the first dean of the upper school, and Ken Brewster was the first dean of the middle school. This basic design, which eliminated much of the confusion of the previous plan, has remained in place. Other positions, such as admissions director and director of public relations, were added whenever the school grew to the point that the need for another administrator became obvious.

Asked in an interview why the consultants' plan was not adopted, Robert Webb said that he was simply unable to figure out how two buildings could operate as one school. He recalled having put a good deal of effort into trying to make the plan work. He finally gave up on working out the details. A key element in the plan was the appointment of a senior faculty member as building coordinator. One person interviewed for this study said that the faculty coordinator idea was tried and found to be unsatisfactory during the three months between Robert Webb's moving his office to the Central Building and Ed Cox's appointment as assistant headmaster. Webb said that he did

not remember having tried that part of the plan. He remembered trying to work out the details and being unable to do so.

It is perhaps fortunate that the consultants' plan was not implemented. Although it might have been possible for the school to operate as a single unit at the time, the plan would probably have proved less and less workable as the school grew larger. And once the middle school was created, it would have proved difficult for one person to manage instruction or student affairs for both schools, because the needs of 5th-graders and seniors are quite different and because middle schools and high schools operate very differently.

The Academic Program Comes of Age

A first-rate academic program was Robert Webb's first priority when he founded Webb School, and it continued to be the top priority as other programs such as athletics and fine arts were added. However, by the end of the 1960s the school had in a sense outgrown its academic program. There was no written curriculum. Each teacher decided what should be taught in each course. As one administrator put it, "If you were hired to teach English, we assumed you knew what English was." That approach worked well enough as long as only one or two teachers taught each subject, but when the faculty grew to the point that there were five or six English teachers, five or six mathematics teachers, and so forth, coordination of the curriculum became a major concern. Another concern was faculty development. Many teachers worked in virtual isolation from their professional

colleagues in other schools. Opportunities to learn new techniques were rare, and innovation was not especially encouraged.

This state of affairs began to change in 1967 while the merger of the boys' and girls' schools was in the planning stage. Three young, dynamic, well-educated department heads were hired that year: Bill Tadler in English, Kelton Tidwell in science, and Frank Lee in mathematics. These three plus Jim Snodgrass, who officially took charge of the curriculum in the fall of 1968, formed a committee that set out to transform the academic program from a very traditional, individualistic, some would say old-fashioned model to a modern, well-coordinated program on the cutting edge of educational theory and practice. In September 1968, the committee got a new member when Jeff Chapman returned from a one-year leave of absence at Brown University with a new Master of Arts in Teaching and became the chairman of the social studies department. The committee met for at least two hours per week for several years. Whenever he was free to do so, Robert Webb attended these meetings.

In a 1970 Webb School Newsletter, Jeff Chapman wrote:

The next ten years will be characterized by change, experimentation, and new approaches to education. Already a spirit of innovation pervades the school. There is excitement and expectation among students and faculty alike. Meetings of committees discussing innovation (sic) courses and approaches to material foreshadow a curriculum that by mid-decade will be in the forefront of secondary education. In keeping with this spirit is a willingness and a desire to change among all involved.

The first task was to write behavioral objectives for every course offered by the school. These objectives were not necessarily the ones that individual teachers had developed for their own courses

nor did they necessarily conform to any standard curriculum available anywhere. The committee began at the beginning, with fundamental questions such as "What should a well-educated person know about science or history or art?" Once the committee had reached some consensus on questions of that type, the specialists in each area could determine what knowledge and skills should be acquired at each phase of the program so that the student could reach the desired level by the end of the senior year.

Another task was to define the purpose and scope of the summer reading list. The committee decided that it should include history and biography as well as works of literature.

One of the most innovative projects was the rotating schedule. By this time Robert Webb was deeply involved in national and regional organizations, and he frequently visited other schools and met with other educators. Often he heard about innovative ideas that were being tried elsewhere and brought them back to Webb School. The rotating schedule, or rather the general concept of a rotating schedule, was one of those ideas. A faculty committee worked out the details and created a system that was unique to Webb. The plan was approved by the whole faculty in January 1970 and was put into effect in September of that year. The original plan called for each major subject to meet for four 55-minute sessions per week with each of these class meetings occurring at a different period. Two free periods would be available each week for special assemblies, visiting speakers, feature length films, field trips, faculty workshops, and so forth. The original plan, however, was never fully implemented,

and although the rotating schedule remains in place, the details have been changed from time to time.

Another innovation was a published pay scale for faculty, something few private schools had at that time. The system, which was approved by the board in December 1975, was patterned after the academic ranks at colleges and universities. Faculty members were assigned to one of four ranks based on their degrees, experience, and performance. The ranks were Instructor, Assistant Master, Associate Master, and Master. The first two ranks required a bachelor's degree, the last two a master's. The idea was to provide an opportunity for faculty to be promoted without having to leave the classroom. One faculty member interviewed for this study was frankly hostile to the plan, and another expressed approval but remembered some heated discussion at the time the plan was adopted. He said that the original idea was to publish the rank of every faculty member but that idea was dropped when people expressed concern that it would be equivalent to publishing each teacher's salary. Some of the faculty were under the impression that publishing each person's rank caused a good deal of controversy and hard feelings at The University of Tennessee, which had hundreds of faculty members, and so they were afraid it would destroy morale at a much smaller institution that had only dozens. The decision was made to implement the ranking system but to keep the assignment of ranks confidential. There are also pay differentials within the ranks, which makes a faculty member's salary somewhat difficult to guess even if the rank is known.

It was also during the early 1970s that the school drastically expanded professional development opportunities available to faculty members. Faculty members were encouraged, sometimes with tuition grants or scholarships, to pursue advanced degrees or to take courses that would enhance their professional preparation. The school began to actively encourage membership in professional organizations and to make money and released time available to teachers who wanted to attend conferences. Several faculty members became officers in regional associations. As one administrator put it:

A lot of schools had the theory that [participation in professional organizations] was a waste of time. Because of our isolation [from other independent schools], we had to make these links. Mr. Webb's name and history made it easy in Tennessee. The Bell Buckle name made it possible nationally.

Expansion of the Physical Plant

Cresap, Paget, and McCormick recommended that the school enlarge the gymnasium and construct an auditorium and a building to house the science and art programs. The board decided soon after it received the consultants' recommendations to do the necessary work on the gym before the beginning of the 1968-69 academic year. Bids were accepted in March 1968, and the construction was done in April. In June the board decided to undertake another capital funds drive and in November set a goal of \$350 thousand to retire the debt for the gym construction and to build a Science and Art Building. Again Ketchum, Inc., was employed as a consultant. The campaign director arrived in January 1969. By April \$170,450 had been pledged. By May the figure was \$260 thousand. Bids were opened in September, and in

October, with \$328 thousand pledged, the board authorized the beginning of construction. The building, which was quite innovative in design, was dedicated on April 18, 1971, and named the Sanford Science-Art Building in honor of Alfred F. Sanford II. Costs outran collections, however, and the building opened with a \$280 thousand debt, which was finally retired in January 1973. In February 1974, the board approved a contract for \$332 thousand to build the auditorium, expand the library, and air condition the cafeteria. The auditorium, which had been on the school's wish list for more than ten years, was finally completed in February 1975.

Athletic facilities were also expanded during this period. Faust Field, named for Hugh Faust, Jr., was dedicated in May 1972. A gift of \$20 thousand from Dr. Robert Morris made the baseball field possible. But by far the biggest project was the middle school gymnasium. This gym was part of larger building and fund raising effort headed by James Haslam, founder of the Pilot Oil Company. Approved by the board in September 1975 and officially launched in March 1976, the drive had a goal of \$695 thousand, the highest figure ever attempted in one drive at Webb School. By the beginning of the summer, the campaign was over its goal with \$727,203 pledged. According to the summer 1976 Newsletter, the drive involved more than 122 volunteers and approximately 350 donors. Some people involved in the campaign pledged more than once in order to make sure the goal was reached. In July the board approved a plan that would include expansion of classroom space and outdoor athletic facilities as well as the middle school gym. By January 1977, the gym was in use, and

the official dedication was held on April 23 at the same time as Spring Fling.

The next major capital funds drive was not undertaken in order to raise money for a particular building. The money would be used to expand and remodel existing buildings as necessary, but more important, it would establish a substantial endowment for the school. In April 1981 the board discussed a campaign with a goal of \$1.2 million to be launched within the next year or two. Ketchum, Inc., did a feasibility study and recommended a smaller campaign with a goal of \$850 thousand, which would not include money for the endowment. On Robert Webb's recommendation, the board decided to wait a year and then go ahead with the larger drive. The campaign began in October 1982 and ended in November 1983 with the goal of \$1.2 million reached. As a result of this campaign, the school's endowment was raised to \$1 million.

Robert Webb's Volunteer Work

During the first few years of the school's existence, Robert Webb had little or no time to devote to community service or professional associations. Almost all his time went into teaching and into administrative and fund raising activities for the school. He was an active member of the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church, a commitment that was, according to a family member, made stronger by his gratitude to the membership for allowing him to start the school there. Soon after he returned to Knoxville, he joined the Rotary Club, but his duties at the school made it impossible for him to

attend every meeting. In the early 1970s, because his increasing involvement in professional associations and the new rotating schedule at Webb School made attending Rotary Club meetings even more difficult, he discontinued his membership. Although he was never a particularly active participant in civic clubs, he became a familiar face at club meetings because he accepted every invitation he possibly could to discuss Webb School or to speak on educational topics.

Robert Webb has been interested in politics all his life, but his direct involvement was limited. In 1960, he ran for Democratic precinct chairman, opposing Bobby Toole, the son of a longtime, and allegedly corrupt, political operative. It was believed at the time that the Tooles controlled about 400 votes in the Bearden Precinct, enough to allow them to run the precinct pretty much as they pleased. When Bobby Toole announced his candidacy for precinct chairman, a group of concerned party members held a meeting to discuss the situation and, they hoped, to rally around an alternative candidate. When the time came to select a candidate, no one in the room would agree to run. Finally, after a good deal of coaxing, and after it became clear that nobody else was willing to oppose Bobby Toole, Webb agreed to be the candidate.

The election was held at a public meeting that became so boisterous that no clear winner emerged. It was decided that the election would be certified at the courthouse. Some members of the courthouse establishment who despised Bobby Toole did whatever they had to do to make sure that he did not win. Thus Robert Webb became

Chairman of the Democratic Party in the Bearden Precinct of Knox County, Tennessee.

It soon became obvious to him that it was a post he did not particularly want. The precinct chairman was essentially a conduit for patronage--as Webb put it, "one of the seamier sides of politics." It also became clear that his political activities might conflict with his role as head of Webb School. Political friends might want favors such as admission of their children regardless of qualification, and political enemies might be able to hurt fund raising efforts. After a year or two, having helped to break the Tooles' grip on the precinct, he relinquished the job.

That was the extent of Robert Webb's direct involvement in politics. In his correspondence file is a letter dated October 20, 1972, from Senator Howard Baker, a Republican, thanking Webb for accepting a leadership position in Democrats for Baker, but the only other political activity he mentioned in interviews was membership in a group of businessmen who worked behind the scenes to neutralize the influence of Knoxville politician and sometime mayor Cas Walker.

McDonald and Wheeler (1983) described Walker as follows:

Cas Walker (1903-) . . . was a master of East Tennessee political style and was what one writer has called the "latest in a line of hillbilly politicians," one of the practitioners of an East Tennessee mountain politics described as "highly personal, bitter, at times disrespectful of the truth of the matter and flamboyant." Born in neighboring Sevier County, Cas Walker came to Knoxville in the spring of 1924, via the coalfields of Kentucky. This self-styled "po'boy," who would come to glory in the media's image of him as a redneck, a "barefooted bootlegger," and a humble coal miner, publicly posed, as he puts it, "as a kinder idiot" and underdog battling the reformist elites of the city's politics whom he called the "silk-stocking crowd." (p. 82)

Walker's brand of leadership was precisely the kind that Robert Webb, with his commitment to leadership training, deplored and opposed. The group Webb eventually joined had been formed in 1946, when Cas Walker first became mayor. The specific issue that brought it into being, according to McDonald and Wheeler (1983), was Walker's falling out with a progressive city manager. The following is the authors' description of the conflict:

The new city manager, Paul Morton, refused to give way to Walker on political appointments, spot rezoning, or the city budget, which included funds for Morton's ambitious plans to get Knoxville moving again. By February 1946 the break was open, with Morton politicking for his program before civic clubs and Walker harassing the city manager before council and his constituents. As expected, Walker won, slashing Morton's budget and smilingly cutting taxes.

In March the civic-commercial elite was finally sufficiently aroused to form what it called the Good Government Group, an ill-disguised organization to back Morton. Boasting a distinguished roster of officers and directors, the group took as its charge the "encouragement of qualified candidates for office," a thinly veiled warning to the boisterous mayor. (p. 87)

The Good Government Group continued because, in spite of occasional setbacks, Cas Walker's demagoguery continued. As McDonald and Wheeler (1983) put it:

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Cas Walker continued to win office and to oppose virtually every idea or move advocated by the elite, usually on the grounds that it would raise the working man's taxes. . . . Walker's style and name made him virtually invincible in the city. Indeed, as the economic woes of the 1950s crept across the troubled city, Walker's power increased almost in direct proportion to the increase in levels of unemployment and economic suffering in black and poor white neighborhoods. So it had always been with Walker. (p. 89)

Robert Webb said in an interview that during the time he was involved in it, the Good Government Group did not try to defeat

Walker but merely attempted to neutralize his influence by helping his opponents get elected to the city council. The group raised money for candidates and encouraged people who shared their views to run. Webb said in an interview that he was concerned that newcomers to Knoxville might get the impression that Cas Walker was some kind of harmless clown, a colorful and basically innocuous figure from the city's past. "I consider him a vicious person," he said.

It would be misleading to end a discussion of Robert Webb's political involvement without mentioning that he eventually changed, or at least ceased to be steadfast in, his party affiliation. He said in an interview that he had in recent years voted for more Republican than Democratic candidates. He continued: "I suppose today I am a Republican. I never think of it that way. If I were pinned to the wall, I guess I would say, 'Yes, I guess I'm a Republican.'"

Politics, though a life-long interest, played a minor role in Robert Webb's career. Much more important was his participation in various associations of schools.

As mentioned earlier, Robert Webb became Commissioner of Athletics for the Mid-South Association of Independent Schools (MAIS) while he was still a teacher at Bell Buckle. At that time, MAIS was primarily an athletic association. Eventually most independent school administrators came to agree that the athletic programs of their schools would be better served by membership in the state associations that included the public schools, and MAIS shifted its focus. It held several teachers' conferences, which were, at that

only professional development opportunities available to Webb School teachers. Webb School became a member of MAIS in 1958. Robert Webb was quite active in MAIS, and from March 1962 to March 1963, he served as its president. In time the teachers' conferences were discontinued, and MAIS went out of business. It was replaced by state associations.

For some years independent school administrators had been discussing the need for state associations that would keep an eye on state legislatures and alert the association's members when legislation that was potentially detrimental to private schools was being considered. Robert Webb and three other men met in a hotel room in Nashville and spent a long day drawing up bylaws for such an association. The "Highlights of Board Decisions" of the Webb School of Knoxville says that the Tennessee Association of Independent Schools (TAIS) was organized in 1974 with Robert Webb as president, but that is not accurate. He was in fact the second president. The confusion probably stems from the fact that he was the first president who did very much. The four founders of TAIS, once they were confident a workable state association existed on paper, named one of their number president and told him to call a meeting whenever he felt the need. He called the first meeting eight years later when the Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletic Association (TSSAA) began to grumble ominously about private school athletes who were on scholarship, threatening to outlaw all scholarships or even to drop the private schools from membership in TSSAA.

With this crisis to contend with, TAIS became active, and eventually it began to hold teachers' conferences as MAIS had done. Robert Webb became president during the association's second active year. A compromise was worked out with TSSAA, and the two associations have had a good relationship since that time. One former Webb School coach and administrator said in an interview that he considered the working out of this compromise one of Robert Webb's most outstanding accomplishments, one that was possible only because Webb had good personal relationships with many public school administrators and was known to be a friend of public schools.

Robert Webb was also extensively involved with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). Webb School became a member of NAIS in 1961. In the early 1970s, Robert Webb was elected to a four-year term on the board. Before his term ended, he was elected secretary of the board, and so he served on the board a fifth year in order to complete his term as secretary. After he rotated off the board, he was asked by the president of NAIS to serve on a coordinating committee that was charged with working out the tangled relationships between the national association and the various state and regional associations. When this group met and became organized, Robert Webb was named chairman. During the next year, the group held a meeting a month, each in a different city. It took a careful look at the whole notion of school associations and tried to determine what the goals of such organizations should be and how the delivery of their basic services should be organized. It worked out an elaborate plan of governance that would connect the national,

regional, and state associations. It recommended that the national headquarters be moved from Boston to Washington, D.C.

The report was completed in June 1977, but several years passed before decisions were made concerning the committee's recommendations. Only about one-third of the resolutions of the coordinating committee were adopted. The plan of governance was not implemented, in part because it was seen as a threat by some regional directors. But in the years since then, several additional resolutions of the coordinating committee have been put into effect, and the national headquarters finally moved to Washington in 1991.

Another association that Robert Webb was deeply involved in was the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), which is primarily an accrediting agency. The Webb School of Knoxville applied for accreditation by SACS during its third year of existence. It did its first self-study and was evaluated by SACS the following year. In the process of getting the Webb School accredited, Robert Webb met and got to know a number of key figures in the SACS organization. When other schools in the Knoxville area were due for evaluation (SACS accreditation must be renewed at ten-year intervals), Webb was asked to serve on the visiting committees. These experiences enhanced both his contacts inside SACS and his relations with other school administrators in the area, particularly public school superintendents and principals with whom he might otherwise have had little contact. Robert Webb's correspondence file contains numerous letters from public and private school officials thanking him for his help in securing accreditation or telling him

how much the writers enjoyed working on committees with him or, later, when he began to head these visiting teams, praising his leadership and organizational skills.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Robert Webb developed a reputation as an authority on school evaluation, and his services were very much in demand. Although his evaluation work took him away from Webb, he was convinced that the school benefited from his involvement with other schools. "I never went to a school that I didn't pick up something I could take back to Webb School," he said in an interview. "Even the schools that might not be thought of as outstanding--they had something, somewhere. . . . I shamelessly stole from them."

In addition to the contacts with public and private school administrators that came about through evaluations, Webb met people through two subdivisions of SACS. One was the Commission on Secondary Schools, on which he served in the 1970s. The other was the Southern Association of Independent Schools, which met once a year and provided an opportunity for networking with other headmasters around the South. Robert Webb served as president of SAIS from 1971 to 1972. He also served a term on the governing board of SACS.

SACS is one of six regional accrediting associations that divide the nation among them. Occasionally they cooperate on projects that affect the entire country. One such endeavor was the National Study of School Evaluation. Its primary task was to rewrite the books that schools use to guide their self-studies. The best known of these

books is Evaluative Criteria, which consists of hundreds of standards for various aspects of a school's program. In the early 1970s, Robert Webb was appointed to represent SACS on the General Committee of the National Study of School Evaluation, and he served on the committee throughout most of the decade. The General Committee had 25 members. Webb was one of five representatives of SACS and one of three independent school educators on the committee. He was also a member of the smaller Revision Committee. As he said in an interview, the work of the National Study was significant, and the chance to work closely with outstanding educators from around the country was without parallel, but one of the most pleasant aspects of service on the committee was the fact that the meetings were held in far away places that Webb might otherwise never have gotten to visit: Hawaii, Bermuda, Montreal, Salt Lake City, and Reno, among others.

Among all Robert Webb's association memberships, one stands out. It is the one that, in his words, "I cherish." In 1965, he was elected to membership in the prestigious Headmaster's Association. Active membership is limited to 75 private school heads and 25 public school principals. Membership is for life although active membership terminates at retirement. Robert Webb was sponsored for membership by Thompson Webb and William Pressly. He was the fourth Webb to become a member. Sawney, Will, and Thompson had preceded him.

Robert Webb has won numerous awards over the years, but one is worth mentioning here, if only because the citation is so quotable. On May 30, 1981, Webb traveled to Asheville, North Carolina, to speak at commencement and to receive the Asheville School Award of Merit, a

"tribute to individuals who have distinguished themselves through service to Asheville School and to education in the Southeast." The citation reads as follows:

Bob Webb is the past president of the Tennessee, Mid-South, and Southern Associations of Independent Schools, and he has served as a board member and officer of the National Study of School Evaluation, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the National Association of Independent Schools.

It is not enough to list his honors: it must also be said that when reason and moderation, clear thinking and tact are required, Bob Webb is sent for. He has done more than any other independent school person to create understanding and harmony between the private and public sectors of education, especially in the South.

Robert Webb's Retirement

Robert Webb was a careful and systematic planner, and the operation of Webb School reflects commitment to planning. During the first few years, the school's existence was so precarious that long-range planning would have been presumptuous, but beginning with the first SACS self-study in 1960, the school has always operated under a more or less formal plan. A plan has been developed during each SACS evaluation, and whenever the school faced specific difficult decisions, a formal planning process involving faculty committees and trustee committees has been activated. Examples that have already been discussed are the year of planning that preceded the merger of the girls' school and the boys' school, which was guided by the Cresap, Paget, and McCormick report, and the in-house feasibility study that preceded the decision to reorganize as an upper school and a middle school. In January 1978, at Robert Webb's request, a consultant named Rod Snelling, a former headmaster and founder of Independent School Management, Inc., visited Webb School and offered

a number of recommendations, chief among them an improvement in the fringe benefits offered to faculty. As a result of his visit, the board decided to employ Snelling as a consultant and have him direct a study that would be completed in 1979 and that would produce a plan for the next five years. Webb School was Snelling's first major consulting job. He put a great deal of time and energy into the project and helped to produce a detailed five-year plan that included the means of funding every recommendation. In discussing the Snelling study with the board, Robert Webb mentioned for the first time that he would turn 65 in February 1984 and that he expected the plan to include provisions for having a new president in place soon afterward.

In a sense the 25th anniversary celebration of 1980 was the culmination of Robert Webb's career. In contrast to the 10th anniversary, which had come at a time of crisis and concern for the future, the 25th was the occasion for unequivocal celebration and a look back at the school's accomplishments. The enrollment had reached 730, and for the first time, there was no talk of an increase. The curriculum was in place, and a first-rate faculty was employed. The fund drives of the late 1970s had resulted in several building projects, all completed by the time of the anniversary. The Webb School of Knoxville had grown up. "I've never used the word 'completed,'" Robert Webb said in an interview. "I don't think a school has any business getting complete because there are always new things and new needs coming up." Still, he said that he thinks of the development of the school as a 25-year experience. "If anyone

asks me, 'How long does it take to build a school?' my answer is 'Twenty-five years.'

There were major tasks left to be done. One was the fund drive that would result in a \$1 million endowment. Another was negotiating a workable agreement between TAIS and TSSAA. But after the 25th anniversary, Robert Webb's most important remaining task was to arrange for Webb School to go on without him.

An obvious question is why he felt he had to go. The policy at that time was based on the understanding that 65 was the normal retirement age and 70 was the mandatory retirement age. He had never had more than a one-year contract with the school, and all that would have been required for him to stay on another five years would have been a majority vote of the board, a vote he could almost take for granted. He was in good health, and his mind was as sharp as ever. Thus his intention to retire took a number of people by surprise. In an interview, he explained in some detail why he decided to retire when he did:

I had been aware from the experience I had had before, especially at Bell Buckle, that a school could be damaged by a person staying on too long. I had been conscious of the fact that somewhere around the age of 65 there is a subtle difference in the relationship between a teacher and a student. You know, in the world of a school like that, the students are the same age year after year, but the faculty is a year older. When I started . . . teaching, I was only two or three years older than some of my students, but by the time I retired, I was 50 years older than most of them. . . .

And I had pretty well forced a couple of retirements along the way, and there were people I knew were watching me to see

what would happen when I got to 65.³²

And I frankly was tired. I remember thinking, "If I have to orient one more class of incoming trustees, I'll be climbing up the wall!" There were some things I had done year after year I had gotten a little tired of.

Also a thought--I guess strange, even weird: I wanted to do something different before my time ran out, do something I'd never done before, learn something new. . . . I just wanted a total break

Deep underneath I had a fear of staying too long I wanted to leave while people were saying, "Don't leave," instead of waiting until they said, "Well, are you going to leave?"

When the announcement was made that Robert Webb was retiring, dozens of colleagues, former students, teachers, and friends wrote to him to express dismay, congratulations, good wishes, or admiration. By far the best written of these letters is the one quoted almost in its entirety below:

July 9, 1984

Dear Bob,

I was much impressed by your modesty in writing your "Reflections" in the Spring 1984 Webb Newsletter. Your accomplishments and courage have indeed been remarkable. Did you dream that your Webb would become so great a school? It is indeed a terrific monument to your efforts of twenty-nine years. How proud you must be of your school, and what courage it takes now to surrender your "son" to someone else. I used to think of the Girls' School as my "daughter," in a sense. Certainly Webb School of Knoxville is your child.

Apparently you are turning over the reins with a minimum of distress and a maximum of confidence in the future. Having seen most painfully the traumatic circumstances of Miss Hockaday's retirement, I congratulate you on the grace with which you are accomplishing this step in your career. . . .

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you from 1957 to 1971 in the early days of your dream. It was the best time of my life, and I wouldn't have missed the early days for anything. Of course,

³²Once Webb School joined TIAA-CREF, a teacher had to have the board's approval to work past 65. These forced retirements probably consisted of a refusal to submit the request for approval to the board.

I knew you would succeed and never had a moment's doubt. The school had comparatively little to offer but academics in those early days, but I have sometimes felt they were the richest days. Every person's contribution was of great importance, from the uncertain seventh grader to the first seniors and the faculty. And we could know each other so well.

Congratulations on a great life, career, and accomplishment.

With love,

Genevieve

If Robert Webb had any urge to groom a successor, he resisted it. He did not anoint any employee of the school or recruit a candidate from among his many contacts with school people around the nation. He never urged either of his daughters or any of his nieces or nephews to go into education or hinted that he would like for any of them to take over after he retired. It seems clear that his experiences at Bell Buckle and his observation of succession battles at other schools had left him with a fear of disorderly transitions that overpowered any desire he might have had to shape the future of the school by choosing the next president.

What he attempted to do instead was to groom the board and train key board members to conduct a nationwide search and to be assertive in their dealings with the new president. He was concerned that the board had become too docile in recent years, too willing to go along with almost anything he proposed. He knew a new president, no matter how competent and experienced, would require more oversight than the board was accustomed to exercising. The chairman of the board at that time was Jack Brennan. Webb spent many hours with Brennan, discussing various aspects of the school's program, making sure that Brennan understood what had to be done to maintain continuity and what

problems he needed to guard against. However, between the time the new president, Douglas Peterson, was hired and the time he reported for duty, Jack Brennan accepted a job in another city and moved away from Knoxville.

Warren Neel, the vice-chairman, moved up to chairman. Neel was the Dean of the College of Business at UT, and he simply did not have time to become as deeply involved in the affairs of the school as a board chairman needed to be at this critical time in the school's history. After a few months, he passed the job along to Jeff Chapman, who, given his lifelong association with the school and his profound understanding of its goals and values, must have seemed the perfect choice to steer the school through the transition. But tragically, Chapman's wife was dying of cancer. He did not have time to do all that needed to be done.

Doug Peterson never established a successful relationship with the board or with key financial supporters of the school. He managed to antagonize several board members, almost certainly without being aware that he had done so. After two years, he resigned, and after another year, he left. An interim president, Mark Ebersole, was appointed, and finally, William Pfeifer became president in 1988. Pfeifer appears to have achieved the relationship with the board and the Knoxville community that eluded Peterson, and under his leadership the school has prospered.

Compared to countless other organizations, the Webb School of Knoxville went through the retirement of its founder with a minimum of pain. Yet the fact remains that the smooth transition Robert Webb

had so fervently hoped for and tried so hard to provide for did not occur. Where was Robert Webb while Douglas Peterson's presidency was floundering? He was deliberately staying out of the way. He and his wife resigned from the board before Peterson took office because "I didn't want to be his boss." He described his role as follows:

I said to Doug Peterson and Bill Pfeifer, "Any time you want me, I'm available. But you're going to have to ask. I won't volunteer." I've stuck to that. I wish Doug Peterson had asked more questions. He didn't see fit to. I didn't nose into it.

Robert Webb's retirement was quite active, and, as he hoped, he was able to engage in a number of activities that bore little resemblance to school work. As a retirement gift, the faculty and students gave Robert and Julie Webb a pass that allowed them to fly to any city a major airline served for one year. They visited New Orleans, Boston, New York, San Francisco, Dallas, Savannah, Charleston, Disneyland, Washington, and the Caribbean.

They made a point of being out of town when school opened in September of 1984. Julie Webb later reported that the only time her husband seemed to be conscious that his school was going on without him was at 8:30 the day classes began. "They're going into the chapel now," he said (McMillan, p. 9).

Between trips, Robert Webb set up an office at home, and he soon became involved in several volunteer projects in the Knoxville area. During his years at Webb School, his volunteer work was almost entirely with associations outside Knoxville. After his retirement, he was active in raising money for the Knoxville Museum of Art, the Bijou Theatre, and the Tennessee Historical Society Museum. Art, a

subject he missed out on in school, became a major interest. He studied painting and took an art history course at UT. He helped with fund raising for Webb School when he was asked to do so, and he sometimes gave speeches on special occasions. One connection with Webb School that he never severed, not even temporarily, was his position as a loyal fan of Webb School sports. He rarely missed a home football game and regularly attended other athletic events. A number of people interviewed for this study commented on how much Robert Webb seemed to enjoy retirement. One of the early teachers said, "I really think Bob enjoys the role of elder statesman more than he enjoyed running the school."

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

What was the role of the founder, William Robert Webb III, in the creation of the organizational culture of the Webb School of Knoxville? That general question is answered in the concluding section of this chapter. Three subsidiary questions were posed in the introduction: 1) What were the fundamental beliefs and values of the founder? 2) In what ways does the present-day culture of the school reflect the beliefs and values of the founder? 3) What techniques of transmission did the founder employ in order to make sure that his beliefs and values became embedded in the organization? These questions are answered in the first three sections of this chapter. The answers depend heavily on references to events recounted in Chapter 4 and on quotes from interviews.

Fundamental Beliefs and Values of the Founder

Asked what was important to Robert Webb, a long-time employee of Webb School replied: "This school, his family, his church." That pretty well sums up the basic values of the founder. The discussion that follows goes into more detail and adds a few additional categories and subcategories, but it does not depart in any significant way from that summation.

Religion

When people who knew him well were asked to explain what kind of person Robert Webb was, they typically said that he was a quiet person, a gentleman, a man of integrity, and so on. Few mentioned religion until they are prompted; then they seemed embarrassed that they did not mention it first. "He is quiet in his religion--devout," said a family member. Another family member said, "It's a matter of conviction with him, but if you're around him, you wouldn't say, 'This guy is hyper-religious.'" Yet another family member said, "Sometimes when you say someone is a religious person, that will cast an image of a proselytizer. He is anything but."

When Robert Webb moved his office from the boys' school to the new Central Building, he reduced his teaching load to a single class, the senior religion class that studied the letters of Paul. A former student described his experience in Robert Webb's religion class as follows:

I frankly thought he was a terrible teacher. The reason was he believed it so strongly, the flexibility he showed on other things, he did not show that flexibility. I think that was to his credit. I think that's where he gained his strength to persevere when things didn't go too well. . . .

I think one reason Mr. Webb was attracted to Paul was because Paul was spreading and setting up a religion . . . and you can see a lot of that in setting up a school. I think he could identify with that. . . . I think he found a lot of answers in Paul's letters to the problems of people working together.

An administrator made a similar observation: "His role model, the best I can determine, was Paul, the writings of Paul. I think he used them to a great extent and emulated them."

Family Tradition

When Robert Webb spoke of his grandfather, Sawney Webb, his facial expression softened and his voice took on a reverential tone. In speeches he listed Sawney Webb among the legendary headmasters of all time, and in an interview he put him at the top of a short list of personal heroes. He also expressed great respect and affection for his uncles Will and Thompson. It is quite clear that Robert Webb saw himself as a part of a long family tradition and that his views of life and of education were to a great extent shaped by family attitudes of long standing.

Hard Work

Robert Webb believed in and valued hard work, and his own capacity for work is almost legendary. In the early days of the school, he literally worked day and night. A family member recalled that he would frequently come home for dinner and then go back to the school. Another family member told about an occasion when the entire family was invited to go to Sicily for a winter vacation. Although he was technically free during the Christmas holidays, Robert Webb said that he had too much work to do, and the family stayed at home. "He took vacations in the summer, two or three weeks, but other than that, he worked at that thing day and night," the family member said.

On one occasion he got sick at work and had to go to a doctor. The diagnosis was exhaustion.

Planning

It may seem odd to list "planning" as a basic belief or value, but in the case of Robert Webb, it is appropriate. His devotion to planning has been discussed in various contexts throughout this report. As might be expected of a dedicated planner, he did not like surprises. An administrator recounted several incidents that made the point. An example is an occasion when a former head of the lower school announced a policy change to his faculty without consulting with Robert Webb first. Webb immediately rescinded the policy, causing a good deal of embarrassment for the person who announced it. The administrator who told the story speculated that it was the surprise, not the policy, that was the problem. As an administrator, Robert Webb liked to work from a plan, and he liked an orderly decision-making process. He was unlikely to tolerate any other way of doing business.

Love of Learning

Robert Webb loved and respected learning, and he loved to learn. A family member said in an interview that Robert Webb "has the ability to pick up a book and tune out the world." After his retirement, he took art courses as a means of filling what he perceived to be a gap in his own education. He and Mrs. Webb

traveled extensively, and they were involved with cultural activities in Knoxville.

A former student said in an interview that Robert Webb's enthusiasm was contagious. He continued:

He was always good at love of learning. He always rallied the students around the school. Something I think we've gotten away from is feeling like we were all on a mission, that we were privileged to be there, to be in such a school and exposed to the faculty--not in a snobbish way, but privileged to experience this. We had a sense of mission that the school would get bigger and better.

Robert Webb believed that the top priority in any school ought to be academics, and that the core of the academic program ought to be liberal arts. In his valedictory address to the Southern Association of Independent Schools, he said:

I believe . . . that the boys and girls of America have an enormous potential. They will rise to unbelievable heights if they are expected to and supported in their efforts to reach those heights.

My experience is that the traditional liberal arts curriculum is still the best vehicle for reaching these young people and setting these expectations. Large doses of English, mathematics, science, social studies and at least one foreign language still form the core for a sound educational experience. However, our times also demand that we add in a lively program in the fine and performing arts and the use of computers as a valuable tool. (Webb, 1983)

Athletics

"Bob Webb loved athletics. He still comes to ball games and cheers," said a former coach. A former student agreed:

I also remember him going to an inordinate amount of athletic events. We would travel to some schools for the weekend. It would seem that Mr. Webb and often Mrs. Webb would be at most of these events. Now, as a teacher myself, this is amazing that he and other teachers traveled to these faraway events when they really didn't need to. I took it for granted then.

Dozens of other respondents commented on Robert Webb's love of athletics, but only one of them suggested that the athletic program of Webb School in any way interfered with the academic program. On the contrary, students, teachers, and especially coaches told stories about Webb's insistence that academics come first. A former coach said that until Webb School joined the TSSAA, no night games were played Monday through Thursday, and on Fridays, the athletes were not excused from afternoon classes. Many times they had to travel to the games, get off the bus, and immediately try to play ball. The former coach explained:

That was Bob Webb's philosophy and belief. He believed that education was first. Athletics were fine as long as they fit into the realm of academics. I didn't like the philosophy at the time, but it was a sound principle to base the school on.

Another former coach said that Robert Webb made this philosophy clear during his employment interview. He said:

I got the distinct impression from talking to him that athletics was an important part of the school, but this was not a school for athletic pursuits that would preempt academic pursuits. At the time I was in somewhat of a wrong mind set about what the role of athletics ought to be in any school. I guess I was thinking athletics were a little more important

An administrator said that Robert Webb wanted a good athletic program but wanted to keep the budget as low as possible. One of the former coaches quoted above made the same point:

We had some old uniforms, like from Noah's ark. I wanted to buy new uniforms. Bob Webb didn't. Then I wanted to put "Webb" on the uniforms. He said, "Everyone knows we're green and white." I told him some other schools were green and white, too. He let me buy the uniforms and put "Webb School" on them. His philosophy was to be frugal.

Robert Webb's beliefs about the value and the relative importance of athletics were well known. One of the first graduates summed them up as follows: "He was always encouraging in athletics. He wanted us to be well-rounded. In the university, the tail wags the dog. But he saw that to be fulfilled, you had to be everything."

Character Building

Robert Webb had a strong commitment to teaching moral values. He was convinced that right and wrong were teachable concepts and that the way to teach them was through religious training and an honor code. He explained in an interview that these notions were a part of the family tradition:

There was a definite point of view in the other [Webb] schools and one I adopted here that people could and should be taught what's right and what's wrong. They should develop a sense of self-discipline, be able to govern themselves, be able to do the right thing even when they're not being supervised.

While discipline imposed by the faculty is necessary in order to have an orderly school, students must have enough freedom to learn self-discipline. In another interview, he elaborated as follows:

I think that part of my philosophy is that character building goes hand in hand with self-discipline. Any discipline program at a school might start out as discipline from outside, but if it's worth anything, will become self-discipline. Self-discipline and freedom go hand in hand. A person can earn and enjoy as much freedom as he is disciplined to. Freedom would never mean license to run wild. It is the freedom to [function] within a disciplined framework. . . . The honor system was designed to develop self-discipline.

Community Service

"Mr. Webb was always service-to-community oriented," a former student said. "I remember he always stressed that in his classes." To Robert Webb, a commitment to community service was part of being a good citizen and an essential part of the life of a leader. He did not have a lot of time to devote to his own community until after his retirement, when he became involved in a number of volunteer projects. A former board chairman remarked:

You see him today, he's very active in civic work. He doesn't duck any issues. He'll take the hard ones along with the easy ones. He's very interested in seeing Knoxville be a better community.

Present-Day Culture of Webb School

Religion

The Webb School of Knoxville is not affiliated with any church or religious denomination, but it has as many religious elements in its program as many schools that are church-related. The mission statement mentions Judeo-Christian beliefs and values. Religion is a required course. There is a full-time chaplain. Assembly is still called chapel even though it has for the most part lost its religious nature. As the student body has become more diverse, the religious aspect of the program has become even less sectarian than it was at first. For example, seniors still get their diplomas inside a sacred book as Sawney Webb's first graduates did; but whereas Sawney Webb gave out only King James Bibles, the present-day administration of Webb School allows each graduate to choose his or her own sacred

text. As a board member put it, "This school has a commitment to the Judeo-Christian philosophy."

Webb Family Tradition

The Webb family tradition, particularly the family's leadership role in independent education, is important to Robert Webb; consequently, it is important to the school. The school crest is the Webb family crest, and the motto is the Webb family motto. Almost every publication of the school mentions the fact that the school is built on a family tradition that goes back to 1870. The founder and his family are honored yearly at Webb Day ceremonies. Students are surprisingly knowledgeable about the family history and the relationship between the Webb School of Knoxville and the other two Webb schools.

Hard Work

The work ethic is alive and well at Webb School. Principes Non Homines is an appropriate motto for the school, but Labor Omnia Vincit would be equally appropriate. "The efficacy of hard work" is mentioned in the school philosophy. The administrators and faculty members set the tone, and most of the students imitate the work habits of their elders. "The downside, and it always was an issue, is a lot of people react to the pressure," a former student observed.

"I remember pressure, but that's just part of it." A person who has been associated with the school in several capacities said:

There is an ongoing debate. Is there too much stress? Yes. Do the kids create the stress? Maybe. Do the parents put it on the kids? Yes, some do. It is just a collection of highly motivated people. It is just too much for some kids. Some kids who don't do well then will do well later.

The debate will no doubt continue. The point that is hardly debatable is that the founder's belief in hard work and the example he set have become an integral part of the institution.

Planning

The founder's commitment to planning is reflected in the school primarily through an elaborate committee structure. Committees of the faculty and of the board are constantly looking ahead, examining programs, anticipating future needs, and making recommendations.

One former student remarked in an interview that he felt that one of Robert Webb's personal characteristics that teachers try to instill in the students is an ability to make a plan and persevere in the pursuit of it. "I think that's a real tenet of Webb School that Mr. Webb brought--being stubborn but stubborn for the right reasons."

Love of Learning

Asked in an interview to characterize Webb School, a former board member said, "It's college preparatory. Also, fundamentals. They've never varied. While other schools have gone many ways, they've stuck to the fundamentals."

A long-time employee of the school, when asked the same question, responded: "This is a prep school. That's why we are here. If we don't do our job preparing that child for college, we're no better than the public schools. We've got to do better." Later in their interviews, both of these respondents pointed out that there is more to college preparation than academics and stressed the importance of athletics and other extracurricular activities. A core of liberal arts courses is still at the center of the Webb School program, and the faculty continues to emphasize mastery of basic subject matter, but love of learning as a basic value of the school may be more clearly in evidence outside the classroom than inside it.

It is possible that the Webb School of Knoxville best demonstrates its true nature in the afternoons after the purely academic portion of the school day is over. Groups of students are scattered about the campus engaged in various activities. On the playing fields several different athletic teams are practicing. In the auditorium the cast of a play is rehearsing. The newspaper staff is laying out pages, and staff of the literary magazine is reviewing manuscripts. A string quartet practices in the music room. In the hallways of the Central Building, students who are between activities sit along the walls and talk quietly or read or study. Adults are around and in some cases are actively engaged with the students, but there is little sense of supervision in the usual sense of the word. The atmosphere is relaxed but purposeful.

A person who has been a student, teacher, parent, and board member said:

The music, the athletics--there are so many ways for an individual to express their excellence. That is something I love about Webb School. Not only is it academically very challenging and very demanding for most kids. It really affords kids the opportunity to pursue their interests in a very supportive environment.

The faculty and administration of Webb School have created an atmosphere in which mastery of subject matter and personal initiative in pursuit of individual interests are the norm, where a high level of achievement is expected. This atmosphere is of course well suited for highly intelligent, highly motivated students, but it can also motivate students who might not have developed an interest in learning in a different environment. A former student and teacher said:

I've always viewed it as an opportunity for the less gifted, not the most gifted. It's acceptable to excel at Webb School. . . . Your peers are trying to do well in school--that's a hell of an incentive. And I think it's for those kids who would otherwise not value that. . . . [The purists on the faculty] rave, "These kids should never have gotten into this school!" The truth is some did damned well.

Athletics

During the 1990-91 school year, the Webb School boys and girls won the Pepsi Cup (the Tennessee Outstanding Athletics Award) for best all-around athletic program. "We are not a program that has to make it on the gate," an administrator remarked. "We are in the budget just like the science department or any other program." There is no doubt that the founder's love of athletics is still reflected in the school in the 1990s.

A more difficult question is whether or not Robert Webb's ability to keep the athletic program in perspective, to balance

athletics and academics, has continued. Most of the coaches and former coaches interviewed said that the changes since Webb's retirement have been minimal. Webb School athletes still manage to excel in the classroom.

The debate over participation continues. The school is committed to broad participation in athletics, but that does not mean that every student can play every sport that he or she wants to play. An administrator said, "We still have teams that cut. Bob Webb hated that. He would tell us to do everything not to cut people." That attitude is still very much a part of the debate. Asked if the emphasis has shifted away from participation and toward winning, a coach said:

I'm not sure I would agree. There's a certain perception. If you've got a kid who plays, you want to win. If you have a kid that's not at that level, you want everyone to participate. I'm not sure we have changed that much. We offer more sports. . . . I know there has been some concern that students spread themselves too thin. . . . It goes back and forth year to year about how many of our students are participating.

Character Building

Character building is still a part of Webb School. The honor system has been modified somewhat in recent years, but it is still basically the same system that has been in place since the second year of the school's existence. Its effectiveness is somewhat controversial. "We have an honor system that works," said one long-time employee. But another person with almost as many years of experience with the school said:

The honor system itself does not totally work because the students don't make it work. There were times when the teachers would turn things in and the review board would turn it around. So the teachers quit turning things in.

Whether the honor system, which is the primary institutional manifestation of the school's commitment to character building, is totally successful or not, the commitment is still a part of the culture of the organization. An administrator, discussing the alumni, remarked:

You've got all these wonderful, successful people. But I worry about that, too. They can be wonderfully successful doctors and lawyers, but if they go home and beat their wives and children, then we haven't been successful as far as I'm concerned.

Community Service

The school's commitment to community service became institutionalized after Robert Webb retired, during the presidency of Douglas Peterson. Students are required to perform 30 hours of community service per year. A prominent Knoxvillean who attended Webb School and served on the board explained:

They have a program where students are required to do so much public service work, anything from working in a government office to a hospital, anything out of the normal school activity, which I think is good. It is something a lot of private schools don't do.

A former board chairman, commenting on the school's commitment to community service, said: "The difference between Webb School and an elitist school is that it turns out people that are dedicated to their community. This makes Knoxville a better place." A board member who is also a former student said, "I think the motto is very

much central. It is also carried out because I look around and I see that the people I graduated with are the leaders of this community."

Transmission Techniques

What the Founder Paid Attention To, Measured, and Controlled

Above all, Robert Webb paid attention to the image of the school. This is not to suggest that he elevated style over substance. In fact, he wanted an image that was based on substance. He wanted the school to have a reputation for academic excellence, for superior college preparation, for competitive but sportsmanlike athletic teams; but he wanted to earn that reputation by providing outstanding academic and extracurricular programs, not by employing public relations gimmicks. Especially in the early days of the school, he allowed teachers to run their classrooms as they liked, but he paid close attention to outcomes. He monitored the students' performance on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT). He wanted to know what colleges the students were admitted to and how they performed when they got to college. He was very proud of the fact that all Webb School graduates were admitted to four-year colleges during his tenure as head of the school, but he was unwilling to over-recommend students in order to help them get admitted. He was impressed by awards and was very happy when individual students and faculty members or groups of students were recognized. He paid attention to participation in

extracurricular activities, particularly team sports; and he was constant in his advocacy of broad participation. He clipped and saved articles about the school that appeared in the press. It was very important to him that the Knoxville community understand what kind of school the Webb School was.

In order to assure that the school enjoyed a reputation for excellence, Robert Webb was determined to control the admission, expulsion, and graduation of students. In later years he delegated most of these decisions to the headmaster of the upper school and the head of the middle school, but it was understood that ultimately the president would decide who got into Webb School, who was allowed to stay, and who was awarded a diploma. He was well aware that the power to control membership in the student body was the power to determine the nature of the school.

Like any independent school head, Robert Webb paid attention to money. He was proud that the school operated in the black during 27 of his 29 years as head. He was frugal, and he expected other employees of the school to be frugal. He tried to keep tuition relatively low and faculty salaries high in comparison to those of other independent schools in the Southeast. He was, of course, interested in raising money, and he deliberately cultivated wealthy people who might become donors.

Inevitably some people accused Robert Webb of making decisions about admissions, expulsions, and graduations for political or financial rather than purely academic reasons. Teachers complained that students were admitted who were clearly unable to do the work at

Webb School and lacked the potential to succeed in college. These unqualified students allegedly were the sons and daughters of major donors, board members, or friends of the Webb family. Similarly, some teachers charged that students with connections were allowed to break rules with impunity or allowed to graduate in spite of having failed required courses. Some of these charges were made during the interviews conducted for this study. A former administrator said that Robert Webb did not like to handle discipline cases but "would become involved depending on who it was."

A number of people interviewed for this study were major donors, past board chairmen, and friends of the Webbs or members of their family. In other words, they were the kinds of people who supposedly got special privileges. A surprisingly large number of them had stories to tell that made the opposite point; that is, they told about trying to get special consideration for their own sons and daughters or for the children of friends and being turned down cold. One former board chairman who admitted that his child barely graduated said that Jim Snodgrass approached him after the graduation ceremony and said, "You know, the thing I always appreciated about you is you never came to me to want any help on the side." The board chairman replied, "Hell, I would have if I had thought it would do any good." To further illustrate the point, he recounted the following anecdote about the daughter of another board chairman, fundraiser, and major donor:

If [Bob played favorites] he never did show it. Might be one case there. I would say he was a stickler about that. If there was a thread to hang on, he'd probably hang on that thread, but if it wasn't right, it wasn't right. He later

told me about [the daughter of the board chairman] that he sat up till after midnight going over everything she'd done and finally decided she'd done enough [to graduate].

Another board chairman said:

One time someone who had been a good contributor had a daughter who really wanted in. I was pushing Bob to let her in. He said that we could let her in but she wouldn't pass. She is not a person who could go to UT. . . . Bob was good at keeping the school a prep school.

With one or two exceptions, the administrators interviewed confirmed the point of view of the board chairmen--they were convinced that little or no favoritism was shown. One of them remarked:

Some people thought board members kids got special treatment. No! As a matter of fact, it seemed sometimes that board members kids had to be a little cut above. [Mr. Webb] couldn't handle it if it appeared that way. He gave even the roughest kids an even chance. There's always a group of kids you want to get rid of. We have faculty members who believe that there was a red check mark on the applications of board members and their families. There was no such thing.

Another administrator agreed that Robert Webb believed in giving a child a chance if at all possible. "Quite often when I would go to him at the end of the year, I might not feel a child should be given a readmittance contract. He would most often err on the side of the child." Asked if Webb was partial to donors and board members, this administrator said, "I think for private schools he was fair."

An incident that occurred early in the history of the school illustrates very vividly that money donated and services rendered to the school would not buy exemptions from academic requirements. When Robert Webb was still teaching academic courses, he failed one of the school's first pupils, forcing him to repeat the 12th grade. This young man was the son not just of a board member but of one of the

but those attributes were not enough to buy his son a passing grade he did not deserve.

While the children of board members, family friends, and other privileged people apparently were not given special favors in admissions, retention, and graduation decisions, they probably did get the personal attention of the president in such matters. Some former employees of the school suggested in interviews that there was something sinister about this personal attention. That seems unlikely. People who had worked closely with Robert Webb on fund raising campaigns or other endeavors or people who had grown up with him and knew him well were naturally reluctant to deal with anyone else when their children got into disciplinary or academic trouble. This was particularly true in the lower or middle school, where there was considerable turnover among the heads. Many parents of upper school students knew Jim Snodgrass and were willing to deal with him, but parents of lower school or middle school children were understandably hesitant to deal with a head that they might have known for only a few weeks or months.

The Founder's Reaction to Critical Incidents

Critical incidents in the history of Webb School are difficult to isolate because Robert Webb planned so carefully and moved toward his goals with such resolution that potentially critical situations never became truly critical. The history of the school is remarkably free of episodes of upheaval. Even the late 1960s, when several important changes occurred in a short time, are remembered by the

never became truly critical. The history of the school is remarkably free of episodes of upheaval. Even the late 1960s, when several important changes occurred in a short time, are remembered by the people who lived through them as reasonably calm. After the first year, there were no incidents that threatened the survival of the organization; however, several situations threatened the identity of the school.

The first critical incident occurred when the school was still in its embryonic stage. The story is a centerpiece of the school's mythology. Faced with a deadline and no place to start the school, Robert Webb received a telephone call from Julian Spitzer; and in the course of the call, Spitzer offered the Sunday School rooms of the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church, provided the session of the church would approve the arrangement. Three aspects of the situation are instructive. First, Julian Spitzer, though not a close personal friend of Robert Webb, was a part of the network of family and friends and friends of family that Webb was able to turn to for support. Second, Robert Webb did not leave anything to chance. He called the members of the session of the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church and explained his situation before the critical meeting. When he presented his case at the meeting, the members already understood who he was and what he was trying to do. This is an early example of the thoughtful, systematic approach to problem solving that would serve him well in future crises. Third, and most important, is the use Robert Webb made of the incident once it was over. He told the story again and again, and each time the point was the same--he

believed that Providence had intervened to save the school. As the organization grew and its folklore developed, Julian Spitzer's phone call took on enormous symbolic significance. It was the sign that God had blessed the enterprise and ordained that it should go forward, and as such it helped to justify the school's sense of mission and its seriousness of purpose.

The next critical incident occurred later that first summer when the time came to open the school and only two boys were enrolled. Robert Webb called his Uncle Thompson, who advised him to open the school. The significance of this event, other than its obvious importance as the point at which the school truly began, is the decision-making process employed. Robert Webb had tremendous respect for expert opinion. Given a problem to solve, he might confer with several people, but he was likely to base his decision on the advice of an expert. In this case, his uncle was the person he knew who was best able to understand the situation and offer an informed opinion. Robert Webb, instead of deciding the issue directly, decided how he would go about deciding--he would explain the situation to his uncle and do what Thompson Webb said to do. In a sense Thompson Webb was the first of a long series of consultants. This pattern of dealing with difficult situations by calling in experts was repeated many times--when the first fund raising drive stalled and when the enrollment dropped, to name two.

The next critical incident was the realization during the first year that the school was in danger of becoming a training school for problem children rather than for future leaders. Robert Webb saw the

problem as one of education and public relations. The Knoxville community had to be shown what kind of school the new Webb School was going to be. He set out to educate them by speaking to civic clubs; he made sure that all the school's printed matter contained references to leadership training and high academic standards; but, most importantly, he instituted an admissions exam. The test was valuable as much for its symbolic value as for its real usefulness in screening out undesirable applicants. It made the same point that Thompson Webb had made years earlier by expelling a third of his students for being juvenile delinquents. It just made the point more quietly, in a manner more suited to Robert Webb's low-key style.

The next critical incident occurred during the second year when a group of women met with Robert Webb and asked him to admit girls. What Webb had done on a small scale when he had to decide whether or not to open the school with only two boys, he did on a larger scale in reference to this decision. Instead of resolving the issue himself, he set up a process. He decided who would decide. In this case, he expanded the board of the school and asked the board to make the decision.

Another incident, while perhaps not critical in Schein's sense of the word, had enormous symbolic significance for the future of the school. This was the decision to hold the first graduation in the new buildings. Nothing Robert Webb could have said or done would have proclaimed quite so eloquently that the Webb School of Knoxville was permanently established. It was an opportunity to exhibit symbolic leadership, and he seized the opportunity.

The next critical incident occurred in 1965, during the school's 10th anniversary year. The signal that something was wrong was a drop in enrollment and an accompanying deficit in the operating budget. The discussions that followed revealed a number of structural problems, the administrative structure and the separate boys' and girls' schools being the most obvious. This period in the school's history was significant also for the emergence of Alfred Sanford as a major force in the organization. Robert Webb's reaction to these events was to stay very calm and purposeful and to set up orderly processes for dealing with the problems. His primary concern was for preserving the fundamental nature of the school. Instead of clashing openly with Sanford as he so easily could have done, he worked with him; and together the two men steered the organization through the crisis and into a period of exciting growth and maturation during which the academic program came of age. Sanford's suggestion that they bring in a team of management consultants was very consistent with Webb's management style. In a difficult situation, he was inclined to identify an expert on the major issue or issues involved and to go to that person for advice. It had worked for him before, and it worked again. A former board chairman said in an interview:

The thing to understand about Bob Webb is he's a visionary guy. He seems so conservative, but he's always been on the leading edge of the wave. He merged those schools. He brought in the middle school when it was a new idea.

In this case he demonstrated a willingness to look at every aspect of the organization he had created and to institute sweeping changes. What he was not willing to do was tolerate chaos. The process had to

be orderly. He proceeded on the assumption that change was not only inevitable but desirable. The only stipulation was that the essential nature of the school, its commitment to leadership training and academic excellence, be preserved.

The next truly critical incident in the life of the school was the founder's retirement. Once again, Robert Webb emphasized planning and orderly process. He set out to train the board to pick a successor and to be assertive in dealing with the new president. The fact that the successor's presidency was not altogether successful does not invalidate the process--as discussed in the previous chapter, a number of circumstances intervened. The point is that the personal qualities and ways of doing things that had served him well in the past served the school again. His commitment to dramatic but orderly change and his willingness to move on to the next stage in the life of the school rather than to cling to the past helped to assure that the school would go on without him but would for the foreseeable future continue to operate in a manner he could support and approve.

Role Modeling, Teaching, and Coaching

From the beginning, Robert Webb was surrounded by people who shared his vision of the future of the Webb School and worked very hard to make that vision a reality. For the most part they accepted the founder's beliefs and values and worked toward goals he set. But paradoxically, the students, teachers, and administrators interviewed for this study were unanimous in declaring that Webb rarely talked

about his vision. He rarely told employees of the school how he felt about their performance. Asked how they knew what he wanted them to do, some of them were frankly puzzled by the question and answered, in effect, "We just knew." Others pointed out that Webb was an easy role model to emulate because he was extremely consistent. He had a very strong sense of direction, and he did not deviate from the course he had set for the school. People knew where he stood, and in most cases the ones who wanted to follow his lead were able to do so without a great deal of verbal direction from him.

The one criticism of Robert Webb voiced by the vast majority of interview subjects, especially by teachers and former students, was that he seldom spoke any words of praise. Asked how he let people know he was pleased with their performance, person after person gave the identical answer: "He didn't." Some found this lack of verbal recognition intolerable; others accepted it without question or even liked it. A former teacher whom colleagues described as an extremely valuable member of the faculty, said:

One of the reasons I left was that Bob Webb did not have a way to express appreciation for what a person was doing. I was responsible for a lot of extracurricular activities. That will wear you out. I began to lose enthusiasm for the school. I often felt that was a shortcoming Bob Webb had. I've heard other people express this. It was a failure to show appreciation for the guys in the trenches.

Some employees learned to look upon the absence of overt criticism as a sort of oblique praise. One administrator recounted a conversation with Jim Snodgrass:

I said, "Jim, I don't think I know what Mr. Webb thinks of me." Jim said, "Well, if you haven't heard to the contrary, he thinks you're doing a good job." I said, "Okay, I can live with that."

The administrator went on to explain why he liked Webb's style:

I don't want to imply that he did not acknowledge good work--he did. But some leaders [think] it's best to be enthusiastic and very positive every day . . . , but he wasn't that way. . . . That's probably one of the reasons I . . . trust him so highly. People who use the style of upbeat, positive all the time every day--sometimes I tend not to trust those folks because I don't think they're being honest or realistic. . . . His style didn't upset me though I know it did some others I guess it was just another aspect of my personality that clicked with his.

Because he gave out so little of it, praise from Robert Webb was valued. An administrator said:

If you pleased him on a certain issue, he would say something like, "Good job." And that, coming from him, was about as gratifying as a long letter of commendation and an official ceremony that you would get from somebody else.

Several people told stories about small gestures of appreciation that they had remembered and cherished for years. A coach who was criticized in writing by an official recalled the letter Webb wrote in his defense. One former teacher remembered a few words of praise following a chapel talk, and another reported with pride that Webb had once said "Good program" in response to an event she had spent weeks planning and implementing.

Inevitably people speculated about the reasons for Robert Webb's reticence. Family members and several employees used the word "reserved." Several people suggested that he did not like to get personal with anyone. One family member said:

I do think it would not come easily for him to tell people they are doing a great job. That kind of language has never come easily for him. To do a good job was expected of you. If you were doing a good job, that was what you were supposed to do.

One former teacher insisted that "anything missing" in Robert Webb was the result of shyness. She went on to reveal one of the reasons that teachers felt appreciated even though the president of the school almost never praised them.

Bob's secret weapon in that regard was Julie. Secret perhaps even from him--I don't know that he knew what she was doing. But those words of encouragement and praise that he found almost impossible to say sprang to her lips as easily as "Good morning." "Oh," she would say, "Bob appreciates you so much. He's so glad you came to work at the school. He was saying just the other night how fortunate the students are to have you as a teacher." Well, maybe Bob was saying those things and maybe he wasn't, but we believed her.

Very few of the people interviewed could recall any examples of Robert Webb telling employees that he was displeased with their performance. The ones who reported such incidents agreed that he was very controlled and matter-of-fact, even when he was visibly angry.

One long-time staff member said:

He would bring you in and talk and not pull any punches. He would go directly to what he had to say. You would just know if he didn't like what you were doing. He might say, "Let's try to do this a little differently."

A person who worked for Webb School for more than 20 years said:

The whole time I was there I never heard him raise his voice. I know there were times when he was provoked with some of us. I have heard him scold students but never raise his voice. I never did the whole time.

A former administrator told what happened when he returned 30 minutes late from a trip with a bus load of students. It was not the first time he had been late. When he got back to the school, he found out that Robert Webb had held all the buses until the students got back from the trip. Webb asked why the students were late; and when the administrator explained that he had simply lost track of the time, he

said, "You don't need to take these trips again." That was all that was said, but, the administrator explained, "For him to say that, he was hacked!"

People who knew him well agreed that Robert Webb did occasionally get angry, but he was much more likely to communicate his displeasure nonverbally than verbally. "He was slow to anger," an administrator said. "I think in that he emulated Paul." But occasionally something would make him mad. "I can see the look on his face now," another administrator said. "If you did [something he disapproved of] when he was around, that head would go back, his eyes came together. He told you nonverbally. Other times he would call you in and talk with you." A former administrator said, "Those blue eyes can get hard when he's fired up. He and I have leaned across that desk and looked each other deep in the eyes a couple of times."

Since verbal praise and criticism were rare, employees and students learned to pay attention to Robert Webb's nonverbal communication. A former student remarked that he could always tell if he had pleased Mr. Webb because when he had "there was a sense of a job well done, and the atmosphere was better." He continued:

We always knew what to expect of him, and his consistency was evident at all times. I don't think I ever saw him mad, like some people. He never ranted and raved. If he was disappointed, you knew it.

A former teacher said, "Mr. Webb is no back-slapper. His approval was low-key, and you knew where he stood. You knew that whatever his limits were not to cross them." Later in the interview, the same teacher added, "I always knew I was appreciated when they renewed my contract." An administrator remarked, "People always seemed to know

what he expected of them. [He was] always very consistent." A staff member who worked closely with Robert Webb for many years said that he was very goal-oriented but did not discuss goals with the staff. "You sensed it more than having it spelled out to you." She gave a specific example of his ability to communicate what he wanted to staff members without actually saying anything. She said that he never nagged the employees about conserving supplies, but everyone was very careful to avoid waste. The staff knew what the enrollment was, how much the tuition was, and roughly what the expenses were. They could do the arithmetic. They knew if they ran out of supplies, they might have to wait until the next fiscal year to get more. But such matters were never discussed. People simply knew that conservation was necessary, and they conserved.

Robert Webb showed employees of the school that he had confidence in them by leaving them alone. Some people complained that he meddled in minute details of the operation that should have been delegated to someone else while others voiced the opposite opinion that he was too distant and did not know what was going on. The fact seems to be that he did become involved in certain details that interested him or seemed vital to him, but in most cases he allowed the employees he trusted to operate with astonishing autonomy. The employees who were closely supervised did not have his confidence. "Maybe he did have confidence in me," a former administrator said after noting that Robert Webb rarely reviewed his decisions. "But I would have liked to talk about it." Another

administrator observed, "Mr. Webb is basically one who says, 'Okay, you have the job. Check with me when you need to.'"

Although a few people interviewed for this study complained that Robert Webb was indecisive and sometimes put off decisions until the need for a decision went away, the majority--and the ones who were in the best positions to observe decision making--sharply disagreed. Most people praised his vision, his sense of direction, his stubbornness in the face of opposition or disappointment, and his calmness in times of crisis. They agreed that he took time to deliberate about important decisions if circumstances allowed but made minor decisions pragmatically and almost instantly. Two former employees said that they believed that he deliberately cultivated an image of steadfastness and even of rigidity. An administrator explained in the following quote why Webb's style of decision making inspired confidence:

I don't think he had a ready decision about everything. He deliberated long and hard. I don't think he made decisions until he was comfortable with what he knew about the issue. I don't call that indecision. I just call it wisdom and planning. As far as indecision, he must have felt on some issues, "I'm not sure this is the right thing to do." But it was never an aspect of his style that showed the kind of doubt and indecision that tended to erode confidence in him.

Once a decision was made, Robert Webb was notorious for pursuing his objectives relentlessly. Two former students used the same image to make this point. "He's like an old Scottish bulldog," one said. "When he grabs ahold of something, he won't let go." "Once Bob Webb gets his teeth into something, you just can't shake him loose," said the other. A former staff member said, "He's not the pushy type. When he decides something and stands for it, he's adamant about it.

There's usually no reason to discuss it. It's usually the right decision." Although some people found this quality annoying, especially if the decision Webb was resolved to carry out was one they disliked, others found Webb's persistence and commitment to a course of action inspiring. They could get behind him with confidence, knowing he would not abruptly change course or easily give up.

Clearly Robert Webb's primary method of teaching the people around him what he expected of them--in fact, his primary transmission technique of any kind--was modeling. He was the kind of person he wanted the students of Webb School to become. He went about his day-to-day tasks in the way he wanted students, faculty, and staff to go about theirs. He was a model of clarity of purpose, of decisiveness, of self-discipline, of hard work, of commitment to excellence. His beliefs and values were so well-known, and he lived them with such consistency, that he found it unnecessary to talk about them very much. People watched and learned, and the ones who were committed to the school and its mission saw what he did and did likewise. "What he said was always accurate and in line with what he did," an administrator observed. "So there were never any conflicting or confusing signals from Bob Webb."

Criteria for Allocation of Rewards and Status

Praise was in short supply at the Webb School, particularly in the early days. Similarly, few opportunities were available for faculty and staff to be recognized formally for their achievements.

When faculty members or their students won awards outside the school, they were congratulated in chapel and mentioned in the next newsletter; but, as one former teacher said, "We were expected to win awards and to be elected to offices. We were noticed when we didn't."

Rewards came in the form of pay raises, which were a very private matter between Robert Webb and the employee. More than one person interviewed for this study recalled pay conferences with the president in which he opened his desk drawer just enough to read the figures he had prepared and then told the employee what the salary for the following year would be. No criteria for raises were published; and Webb became "furious," in the words of one administrator, when he discovered that employees were comparing notes. Several employees agreed that "negotiation" was the wrong word for pay conferences. Some discussion might take place, but the final figure was the one Webb had calculated in advance. One former employee told about a bitter verbal confrontation that resulted when he asked Webb for a raise. Because of the secrecy that surrounded the process, it is really impossible to determine what the criteria for determining salaries were.

Criteria for Recruitment, Selection, Promotion,

Retirement, and Excommunication

In the early days of the school, opportunities for recruitment were limited. Salaries were low, the future of the school was uncertain, and no money was available for advertising positions or

paying the travel expenses of applicants. Thus the pool of potential candidates was small, and the people hired tended to be retirees (such as George Turley), personal friends of Robert Webb's (such as Fred Elmore), or recent graduates of UT (such as Fred Donahoo). When the school became somewhat better off financially, Webb began to recruit through teacher agencies. However, as he explained in an interview, "I learned that in these teacher agencies there are a lot of people who just float from school to school. And they all have good-looking dossiers." When these recruits floated along to the next school, Webb had to go through the recruitment and orientation process again, which was expensive and time-consuming. Another source of talent was the wives of UT professors and graduate students, but these people tended to move on when their husbands finished school or took positions elsewhere. So they were not the best pool from which to draw the kind of stable, committed faculty that Webb had in mind. Once the school was able to afford to advertise and pay travel expenses, Webb began to recruit nationally. He said that he "got to the point that for most positions I would interview several people--fly them in from out of town. It seemed that the number 6 got to be the magic number. The decisions I was most happy with, I interviewed six."

Even Robert Webb's severest critics agreed that he was able to attract and hold talented people. A former teacher said, "One of Mr. Webb's keys to success was that he surrounded himself with quality people--people who loved kids." Another former teacher said, "One of the things that Mr. Webb seemed to have was an uncanny ability to

attract people--if you look at that faculty, there were some truly outstanding people." A long-time staff member said that Webb had "the vision and ability to stick with that, but he also had the ability to make other people want to be in it. He attracted good people, gained their support, and got them caught up in his vision, too." A family member agreed: "People came on and wanted to be part of it--fabulous people."

The interviews with prospective faculty focused on philosophy. Robert Webb discussed the aims and objectives of the school and tried to make sure that the prospective employee accepted the school's philosophy. If not, the hire was not made. A surprisingly large number of the people interviewed for this study remembered details of their interviews with Robert Webb. Coaches, in particular, came away with the understanding that athletics were important, but academics came first. One former administrator remembered that Robert Webb talked a great deal about his reasons for founding the school. Asked if he remembered what those reasons were, he said, "To carry on the family tradition, I guess. I remember he was real proud of his grandfather."

In the final analysis, the selection criteria were quite simple. Robert Webb explained them as follows:

I was looking for competence in the area they teach; I was looking for enthusiasm for their subject matter; and I was looking for a love of children. I gradually . . . developed a feeling that if a prospective teacher was enthusiastic about his or her teaching field and really loved young people, then the rest of it would take care of itself. All the things you learn or are supposed to learn in colleges of education are of secondary importance. I don't mean to oversimplify this--I didn't--but those are the two things I

looked for, among other things--someone with a sparkle of enthusiasm and a love for young people.

Promotions occurred with some frequency. Teachers were promoted to department head or dean, coaches became athletic directors, deans became principals, and so on. After the ranking system for faculty was instituted, promotions occurred within the teaching faculty; in fact, one of the reasons for the system was to make sure faculty members had the opportunity for promotion without leaving the classroom. As was the case with raises, criteria for promotion were somewhat vague; but because it was public knowledge who got promoted and who did not, it is possible to speculate with some confidence about the kind of people who were promoted. The first characteristic that most of the people who were promoted had in common was loyalty to Robert Webb personally and commitment to the mission of the school. As a former teacher said about Jim Snodgrass, "He and Mr. Webb looked at the world the same way." An administrator, trying to explain why he supported Robert Webb in one of his most rigid displays of moral rectitude, said, "I guess he picked people like him, honest like him." Another characteristic most of them had was a reputation for good teaching, and a final characteristic was a commitment to hard work. Because these qualities are much more easily assessed on the job than in interviews, the administrators who were promoted from within the organization were on the average much more successful than the ones who were brought in from outside.

Retirement was based almost entirely on age. As discussed in a previous chapter, several of the early teachers had already retired from the public schools. Robert Webb was sensitive to the criticism

that the school was staffed by elderly people, and he encouraged people to retire when they reached 65. The board could have kept any of them on the faculty until age 70 if it had so chosen, but Webb did not ask the board to pass the necessary resolutions.

Very few people were actually dismissed, but several were not reappointed when their contracts expired. Asked to discuss his reasons for letting people go, Robert Webb explained:

We had some teachers who just didn't work very hard, weren't energetic, came to class poorly prepared, weren't willing to discipline students when discipline was called for. They were just not the caliber of teacher that we need at Webb.

Some people "gave lip service" to the school philosophy, but "when it came to really producing, they didn't." In the early years, one or two faculty members were fired "on what I considered moral charges."³³

Organization's Design and Structure

Organizational structures were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Here it is sufficient to say that Robert Webb did not seem to think they were particularly important. He had two models to base them on--Bell Buckle and Claremont. The Webb School at Bell Buckle, for a substantial portion of its history, had three principals, at least on paper. In fact Sawney Webb was the dominant figure during his lifetime, and Will Webb became dominant after

³³As presented here, this discussion sounds vague. In the interview Robert Webb did not name names but was quite specific about the incidents that resulted in firings. I have chosen not to give details because of the sensitive nature of the subject. The reader may be assured that the specifics support the generalizations reported here.

Sawney's death. At the Webb School of California, according to Robert Webb, major decisions were made by an informal council of senior faculty members. It was this structure that he tried to duplicate at the Webb School of Knoxville. The operative word is "informal." Formal structures changed several times in the course of the school's history, but the informal decision-making process did not necessarily change when they did. Similarly, according to an administrator, the duties and responsibilities of the school's administrators have changed considerably over the years, but the formal job descriptions have not changed since 1974, when the middle school was established.

Robert Webb's approach to administrative structure seems to have been based on the assumption that the business of a school is teaching, and so teachers ought to run the school. He insisted that everybody who supervised teachers continue to teach. He taught at least one class throughout his career. He said in an interview that he was deeply troubled by the thought that administrators might spend too much time in their offices and lose touch with what was going on in the classrooms. In practice, the requirement that administrators teach classes did not work very well, and it was abandoned after Webb retired. Its value was primarily symbolic--it proclaimed in a dramatic way that the Webb School was a community of teachers. It seems ironic that Robert Webb, who was extremely systematic and process-oriented in other matters, was willing to let the administrative structures of the school evolve. There is no evidence that he thought ahead to what positions would be necessary when the

enrollment of the school reached a certain level. Positions were created ad hoc. The only plausible explanation is that he did not consider such matters important.

Organizational Systems and Procedures

This topic also has been discussed elsewhere. An important theme that has not yet been explicitly discussed is faculty involvement. During every major turning point in the school's history, faculty members were involved in the transition process through committees. It was very important to Robert Webb that the faculty participate in decisions that affected them. This approach was not universally popular--some faculty complained that they were "committeed to death." Others complained that their work was not always appreciated or put to use. "Over there in the Central Building, buried in some bottom drawer, are hundreds of great ideas," a former teacher said.

An administrator told a story to illustrate the point that Robert Webb was sincere about his desire for faculty participation in decisions. In the 1960s, when the enrollment was small and every tuition check critical, Webb asked the faculty to make recommendations concerning readmission contracts. At the end of the meeting, one faculty member mentioned the name of a boy who had been causing some trouble, and a consensus quickly developed that the boy should not be readmitted. Webb honored their decision even though the administrators agreed that the boy had not done anything that would justify denying him readmittance. He explained that he wanted

to let the faculty know that he would not ask for their advice and then ignore it.

Design of Physical Space, Facades, and Buildings

The buildings on the campus of the Webb School of Knoxville are utilitarian rather than aesthetic. They are attractive enough, but they are rather plain and almost devoid of ornaments. They were planned and constructed with a program in mind, and most of them have been expanded at least once. Nothing on the campus, with the possible exception of the grounds, could reasonably be called luxurious. The buildings are well-maintained, and the grounds and playing fields are lovingly tended, but it is obvious that the people who built this campus were concerned with the activities that would take place on it rather than its looks. On a typical day when school is in session, every square inch of space seems to be in use.

An unintentional statement about the values of the founder is contained in the first Webb Remembered (1989, p. 5). It is a picture of Robert Webb at the height of his career, sitting in his office talking on the telephone. Behind him--the picture would suggest only two or three feet behind him--is a cinder block wall. The office looks cramped, and it is in fact very modest in size. What the picture says about the founder is that he was not interested in the trappings of success. Here was a man who had built a school from nothing to 735 students, from obscurity to national recognition, who was himself a national figure; and he had not seen fit to panel or wallpaper his office.

Stories, Legends, Myths, and Parables

As was mentioned in the discussion of critical incidents, Robert Webb was conscious of the value of symbolism and employed it skillfully. His stories about his struggles to start the school are part of the folklore of the organization, known to practically all the employees and even to large numbers of the students. He seems particularly fond of stories about the small numbers of students during the first year--the one about four students in the audience on the first day looking up at four men on the speaker's platform and the one about the official from the state department of education appointing six inspectors to evaluate a school with six students.

As would be expected, people who know Robert Webb tell stories about him. Most of them have a similar point--he knew what he stood for and was unwilling to compromise on basic values. The one that seems to be in widest circulation--at least six of the people interviewed for this study either told it or alluded to it--has to do with four (or two, three, or five--depending on whose version is believed) seniors who brought beer to the prom. They were all scheduled to graduate that week; they were all from prominent families who were in a position to help the school. But they knew the rule--no alcohol on campus, no alcohol at school functions. They deliberately violated the rule, and they got caught. Robert Webb expelled them. "It could have destroyed Webb School," one person who told the story said. Another person said:

People at Webb still talk about the four seniors who were expelled. It goes between "Can you believe that all they did was get drunk, and Mr. Webb threw them out of school" and people applauding. They try to explain that this was a

different time, and this was not acceptable, and the boys knew what they were doing.

Another recurrent story--or perhaps the word is motif--concerns Robert Webb's insistence that Webb School basketball teams keep their score under 100 points no matter how poorly their opponents played. Two coaches and two former players told similar stories, but in each case a different opponent and a slightly different set of circumstances were involved. In all the stories Webb was beating an opposing team by a wide margin and the score was approaching the 100 mark. The coach felt a hand gently shaking his elbow and looked around. Robert Webb, having gotten the coach's attention, whispered, "Don't go over 100." It is impossible to be sure how many times this actually happened, and the point of the story varies depending on who tells it. The most plausible one is that Robert Webb remembered the humiliation that the Webb School teams suffered in their early years, and he could not stand the thought of doing the same thing to an opponent.

Another story that is widely told has to do with a clandestine student newspaper that surfaced during the school's third year. An editorial ridiculed Genevieve Hudson and compared her to Hitler. Robert Webb found out who the publishers were and called them into his office. He gave them a choice of apologizing to Miss Hudson or being expelled. They apologized. One of the boys involved explained in an interview that Webb was ordinarily fairly tolerant of adolescent behavior. This time, however, somebody got hurt; and he was not willing to tolerate deliberate unkindness and disrespect to a

faculty member, even if his efforts to eliminate such behavior put the school in jeopardy. The former student said:

If he had kicked out everybody that was in on that, the school would have been in danger. He could have looked the other way. I thought he handled it well, but I didn't realize what he had on the line. If we had all run home to our parents and all pulled out, it would have been a real strike against the school at that vulnerable time.

Later that year, the students voted to change the name of the official student newspaper from the Green and White to the Spartan Spirit, thus preserving the name of the short-lived and ill-fated clandestine rival. Robert Webb approved the change.

Apparently freedom of the student press--within reasonable limits, of course--was something Robert Webb valued. A teacher told about the events surrounding the discovery that some of the older buildings at Webb contained asbestos. This was at the time when asbestos removal was on the agenda of schools all over the country, and it had become a public relations nightmare for many school administrators. The Webb School administration was conducting its investigation and making its plans quietly, not wanting to alarm parents or get into the papers. Somehow the editor of the student newspaper found out what was going on. He told the faculty sponsor, insisting that he had to break the story. She suggested that he write the news story plus an editorial praising the administration for its efforts to solve the problem and take both pieces to Webb for approval. When the editor brought in his stories, Webb quickly looked them over and said, "Sure, go ahead." Thus the story of the Webb School's asbestos problems was broken in the student newspaper.

Ron Gratz, athletic director of Webb School, told a story that may not be widely circulated but deserves to be.

We were playing in a region championship baseball game Boy, we were a good team. . . . But we had a player who had broken a rule and played in a rec league game, which made him ineligible for high school. . . . The coach played him that afternoon. . . .

Mr. Webb, Mr. Snodgrass, and I were on the fence. We saw the kid go in. We'd already warned the coach. We all three knew we had broken the rule. We were ahead 10 to nothing. The kid played one part of one inning. . . . [Mr. Webb] said, "Ron, you call TSSAA. I'll talk to the parents and the coach."

We turned ourselves in. We lost the region; we didn't get to go to state. No one would have known. . . . But we knew.

The other team sent us the plaque back [with a note saying] "Even though we're going on [to compete for the state championship], you all won this fair and square."³⁴

Formal Statements of Organizational Philosophy

The following is the board-approved statement of philosophy for the Webb School of Knoxville:

Education is the life-long process that opens the mind and the spirit to the surrounding world. Webb School of Knoxville, an independent college preparatory school, is a part of that continuum. Its primary aim is to assist young men and women in developing their full potential as human beings. In two ways Webb seeks to fulfill this mission by preparing students for:

1. acceptance and then effective performance in institutions of higher learning;
2. responsible citizenship and leadership in their communities.

Webb School embodies the liberal arts tradition and inculcates such habits of mind as a love of learning, the necessity for critical observation, a respect for the ability to digest and interpret evidence, a preference for clear and logical processes of thought, faith in the power of the imagination, and an enhanced capacity for developing one's

³⁴Source identified by permission.

own personal qualities. Webb's school motto, "Principes non homines," affirms the school's commitment to developing such qualities of leadership as vision, a sympathetic understanding of others, a desire to be of service, a sense of duty, and the belief in the efficacy of hard work.

To accomplish these aims, Webb School has the advantages of the independent school--the freedom to select from its applicants, without regard to race, creed, national origin, or sex, those who might benefit from the school's program; the freedom to select its teachers; the freedom to plan its curriculum; the freedom to experiment and innovate; and the freedom to limit the size of its classes. (Parent-Student Handbook, 1988-1989)

Although it is considerably longer, this statement resembles the statement of purpose that Robert Webb wrote during the summer of 1955. The aims of the school have changed very little since then. The philosophy, which is of course a statement of espoused values, is remarkably consistent with the actual values of the organization that can be inferred by examining the way the school operates. An administrator made the point that the philosophy was not just for show but was an actual guide to practice.

[Mr. Webb] was consistent with his actions and words, and everything he did correlated very nicely. He was a major drafter of the school philosophy, and you seemed to know what the school philosophy was because you were expected to read it and work it into our faculty meetings on occasion.

This close correspondence between stated philosophy and actual philosophy is probably the primary reason that the Webb School of Knoxville has been successful.

The Role of the Founder in Creating the Organizational Culture of the Webb School of Knoxville

Robert Webb was a man with a mission. He seems to believe that he was put on this Earth to train leaders. He seems to have come to

this conclusion quite early; certainly by the time he wrote his master's thesis and probably much earlier. As a child he worshipped his grandfather, and as he grew older, he began to understand that what his grandfather had done with his life was to influence several generations of "old boys," men who had been through the school at Bell Buckle at a formative time in their lives and who carried Sawney Webb's values and precepts out into the world, where they became a force for good. As a member of Sawney Webb's extended family and as a student at the school in Bell Buckle, Robert Webb heard countless stories about men in high places who did the right thing, who refused to compromise their values, who put the well-being of their communities or their country above their own selfish interests because they remembered at a critical moment the lessons that Sawney's school had taught them. Without ever making a conscious decision, the young Robert Webb came to understand that he was the member of his generation who would carry on Sawney's work. He bore his grandfather's name. He would catch the mantle when Will Webb dropped it.

Thus it was a devastating setback when he was fired from Sawney's school by Webb Follin. The obvious route to his goals in life was blocked. The year in California was a period of healing, renewal, and recommitment to his mission--a forty days in wilderness that allowed him to see clearly again what he must do. He learned from his Uncle Thompson that the essence of Sawney's school--self-discipline, love of learning, and service to community and country--could be transplanted, that leaders could be trained anywhere. He

decided to carry on his life's work in his home town, where he would have the support of friends and family. Fortunately for him, Knoxville did not have an independent school.

Still, his vision at this point was of a boarding school, very much like the ones in Bell Buckle and Claremont. To the extent that he was able, he simply replicated the models he knew best. He assumed that the Webb School of Knoxville would be very much like the other Webb Schools, and it was indeed like them in the sense that it was committed to leadership training as its primary reason for existence. The first real test of that commitment came in the first year when parents of boys who lacked the potential for leadership tried to get their sons admitted to the school. Robert Webb's response was to adopt an admissions test, as much for its symbolic value as for its real value in screening applicants, and to concentrate on educating the community about the type of school he intended to build. Another test came when a group of prominent women asked him to admit girls. This incident caused a profound but not quite fundamental shift in Robert Webb's thinking. The "old boys" who had made his grandfather's school famous were, of course, men. America in the 1950s, especially the South, was a man's world. People with Robert Webb's background and training might be willing to concede that women were capable of becoming leaders of a sort; but when they heard the word "leader," they thought of a man. Thus Robert Webb at first saw the girls' school as a distraction, almost an annoyance, an additional responsibility that slowed down his efforts to train real--that is, male--leaders. He was willing enough

to turn it over to Genevieve Hudson and let her run it. Gradually, however, he came to see that the leaders of the next generation would include females as well as males. Once that notion began to sink in, he merged the schools. Similarly, the "old boys" of Sawney's day were all white, but when it became clear to Robert Webb that the leaders of the future would include blacks, he became active in getting blacks admitted to his own school and to other independent schools in the South. Board chairman Alfred F. Sanford II was instrumental in helping Robert Webb shift his focus from the past to the future.

A more subtle change in the vision occurred because the Webb School of Knoxville was a day school rather than a boarding school and nonprofit rather than proprietary. Robert Webb started a nonprofit day school for financial rather than philosophical reasons--he simply did not have the money to build dormitories. But it soon became apparent that the Webb School of Knoxville was dependent on the community for support in a way that the other Webb Schools were not. Because nearly all its students came from the same area and a large percentage of them settled in that area after college, the leaders trained at the Webb School of Knoxville were overwhelmingly concentrated in Knoxville. Some were scattered around the country but certainly not to the same extent as graduates of Bell Buckle or Claremont or any other boarding school. Thus Robert Webb began to see his role as a little different from Sawney's. His vision became more than a vision of a school. It became a vision of a school informing and eventually transforming a community. The

graduates would be concentrated in one place, and as they moved into positions of leadership, the values they learned in school would come to dominate the community. Knoxville would be led by people who had been taught at an early age not to lie, cheat, or steal, who were trained to be leaders and thus could be counted on to put the interest of the community ahead of their own selfish interests. Knoxville would become a wonderful place to live.

An interesting way of thinking about leadership is provided by the economist Lester Thurow (1989), who distinguished between an establishment and an oligarchy. "Both," he wrote, "are groups of well-connected well-educated rich people who go to the same schools, marry each other, and run their countries." The difference is that

an establishment is self-confident that if the system works and if their country does well, they will personally do well. Being self-confident they don't have to make their own immediate self-interest paramount when they influence public decisions.

In contrast an oligarchy is a group of insecure individuals who amass funds in secret Swiss bank accounts. Because they think they must always look out for their own self-interest, they aren't interested in taking time and effort to improve their country's long-run prospects. (p. 405)

In a sense Robert Webb's life's work has been to increase the likelihood that America, or at least the Knoxville area, will have an establishment rather than an oligarchy. But there is a third possibility Thurow did not mention--demagoguery, rule by unprincipled and uneducated opportunists. It is no coincidence that Webb's brief excursions into politics were intended to frustrate the ambitions of demagogues. Cas Walker was the epitome of the type of leadership Robert Webb deplored and actively opposed.

The interaction between school and community explains the unique culture of the Webb School of Knoxville. More specifically, Robert Webb's management of the interaction explains it. The culture of the Webb School of Knoxville is an extension of Robert Webb. It embodies his basic beliefs and values. To a large degree, it has institutionalized his ways of doing things.

Robert Webb enjoyed undisputed insider status in two quite different groups of people, each of which had its own distinct culture. One group was the "school people" who operated the independent schools of this country. Their culture, rooted in the "public" schools of Great Britain, developed independently after it was transplanted to this continent more than 200 years ago. Among the folk heroes of the school people were "Old Sawney," "Old Jack," and "Son Will" Webb. As the heir of these famous Webbs, Robert Webb was automatically accepted by people like Thompson Webb, Spencer McCallie, and William Pressly; but to keep their respect and good will, he had to build a school that was not radically different from other mainstream independent preparatory schools. The purest example of the school person at Webb School, the person who could be counted on to speak up for the values and mores of independent education, was Genevieve Hudson, headmistress of the girls' school. The second group was the business and professional leaders of Knoxville, the people McDonald and Wheeler (1983) called the Knoxville "commercial elite." Judge Clary Webb and his wife, Julia McCulley Webb, were members of this group; as their son, Robert Webb was automatically a member. This group included practically all the school's board

members, parents, and donors. It was the sons and daughters of these people that the Webb School of Knoxville was committed to educate, and it was on this group that the school depended for financial support. Some members of the commercial elite had attended private schools and thus were familiar with the norms and values of the school people, but the majority were products of the local public schools. They found such things as daily chapel services, uniforms, and Saturday School very strange. The presence of George Turley, a veteran public school teacher who had taught many of them, must have been reassuring to Webb School parents who had no private school background.

Conflicts between the two cultures were inevitable. While the groups generally agreed about the value of hard work, self-discipline, and Judeo-Christian principles, they differed sharply about particulars. For example, the school people believed strongly in classical languages. They insisted on teaching Latin and would have liked to offer Greek. The Knoxvilleians were likely to question the value of Latin and to insist that their children be taught modern languages instead. The school people valued sports for their own sakes and emphasized broad participation; for the most part, intramurals were fine with them. The Knoxvilleians wanted to play other schools, and they wanted to win. The school people wanted to send the school's graduates to the Ivy League. The Knoxvilleians were happy for them to go to UT.

Just as two languages that exist side by side will blend and form a creole, the culture of the independent school and the culture

of the Knoxville commercial elite blended to form something new and unique--the culture of the Webb School of Knoxville. Neither culture dominated and forced out the other because Robert Webb did not allow that to happen. Both a school person and a Knoxvilleian by birthright, Robert Webb shared the viewpoint of both groups; and he understood what was going on when the school people and the Knoxvilleians saw matters differently. He made sure both groups were represented. He deliberately recruited a few people with independent school backgrounds for positions on the board and the faculty, but school people never dominated. When he realized that teachers recruited through teacher agencies were likely to move on after a year or two, he quit using teacher agencies, sacrificing the independent school viewpoint the academic nomads brought with them to more important values--stability and roots in the community. When the values of the school people and those of the Knoxvilleians clashed, he was able to work out compromises that would assure that the school maintained national independent school standards but at the same time served the needs and aspirations of the community. The sports program is illustrative. At first it was intramural, then interscholastic but inept. Board members and parents let it be known that they wanted competitive teams. Robert Webb did not merely understand their point of view--he shared it. He was one of them. He wanted to play other schools, and he wanted to win. By recruiting veteran track coach B. E. Sharp, he let the community know that the new Webb School was going to be serious about athletics. But he was not willing to undermine the academic program in any way in order to

field winning teams. Some slight compromises were made, enough to appall somebody like Genevieve Hudson, but not many. Athletes took the same admissions test that all other applicants took; their applications for scholarships were judged on the same criteria as anybody else's; and when they got into trouble, they were suspended or expelled. Until the decision to join TSSAA forced a change in policy, all athletic events were scheduled so as not to interfere with classes. Coaches were told when they were hired that their classroom teaching was more important than their coaching and that they would not be evaluated on their won-loss ratios but on the number of students who were able to participate. A tradition developed that Webb School was a place where a student could excel in sports and in academics at the same time.

A particular focus of this study was the transmission techniques used by the founder to make sure that his beliefs and values took root in the organization he founded. How did Robert Webb let the people around him know what the organization was all about and how they were supposed to behave in relation to the organization? The answer, in a word, is modeling. Robert Webb was the kind of person he wanted Webb School graduates to be. He went about his daily tasks in the way he wanted the students, teachers, and administrators to go about theirs. "Do as I say, not as I do" was anathema to him. Not one of the people I asked about this in interviews could imagine him saying such a thing.

When people who knew him well set about describing him, the word they most often used was "integrity." It is an interesting word that

combines the notions of honesty and sincerity with the idea of wholeness or completeness. And Robert Webb was a whole person, or, as a psychologist might say, a fully integrated personality. If he had inner conflicts, they did not show. Certainly there were times when he agonized over decisions, as he did when he decided to expel four seniors, for example, or when he stayed at the office past midnight trying to decide whether or not to graduate the board chairman's child. But nobody I talked with recalled a time when he appeared irresolute, or got flustered or upset in public, or appeared to question his own goals or values or those of the school.

Because of his integrity, his wholeness, he was easy to read. People who had known him for a while no longer needed to ask where he stood on various issues--they could guess. He wrote a philosophy for the school during the first year, and he set down his beliefs about education in a few other documents. Throughout his career he referred frequently to the philosophy of the school or to its motto, Principes Non Homines, but that was the extent of his exhortations to the troops. He did not mouth slogans. He did not talk very much. He simply went about his business with such consistency that he was predictable. Being predictable, he developed a great reputation for fairness because fairness is, after all, directly related to predictability. The seniors expelled for bringing beer to the prom were treated fairly because they knew the rule, knew the consequences, and knew that Robert Webb was extremely unlikely to bend the rule if they got caught.

The one area where his personal style failed him was in evaluating the performance of the employees of the school. His philosophy was well known, and his own work habits were the model for other employees. Teachers, administrators, and support staff who realized that they did not agree with his principles or that they did not want to work as hard as he did simply found other jobs and moved on. A few who were clearly out of line were fired. But dozens of others worked at the school for years without a word of encouragement or reprimand. Some of them came to accept the idea that they were doing fine as long as they did not hear anything to the contrary. They assumed if their contracts were renewed, the president was pleased. Others grew tired of waiting to be told they were appreciated and moved on for that reason. Everyone interviewed for this study agreed that Robert Webb had high expectations for himself, the employees of the school, and the students. Most also agreed that they were unlikely to be recognized for meeting or even exceeding those expectations. Some came to believe that they were expected to win awards and honors and enhance the reputation of the school and that they were noticed only when they failed to do so.

Robert Webb's reluctance to tell employees how he felt about their performance may have been a serious weakness, but it was far from fatal. He was able to attract and inspire a diverse group of people who understood the mission of the school and wanted to be a part of it. A surprisingly large number of the people interviewed spoke of the school as "theirs." Some of them said that Robert Webb was the Webb School of Knoxville or that Webb School belonged to

Robert Webb, but then they used words like "we" and "us" and "our" when they talked about the school. When they talked about the administration, they said "they," never "he." Former students, even ones who were there the first year when Robert Webb was half the faculty and all of the administration, referred to the faculty and administration as "they." Early board members in particular made it clear by the way they phrased their comments that they felt a sense of ownership. The model most of them seemed to have in mind was a church, which belongs to its congregation, not to its pastor. Robert Webb was the leader, and they were willing to defer to him in purely academic matters. But the school belonged to the community.

It seems clear that Robert Webb consciously or unconsciously encouraged the people who were involved with the school to feel that it belonged to them. He certainly saw the school as a group effort. The first time I met him, we walked from Jim Snodgrass's office in the Upper School to the cafeteria in the Central Building. It was a sunny day in April, and the campus was particularly pretty, with acres of neatly cut grass and flowers blooming everywhere. Students and faculty were walking briskly from one building to another, talking and gesturing as they walked, intensely involved in the activities of the day. I remarked that he must feel a great sense of accomplishment when he looks out over the campus. "You can look around and see what you did with your career," I said.

"Oh, but that's not true!" he said very quickly. "I didn't build this place. There were many, many people involved. I was just one of many."

And of course that is true, but only to a point. He was the one of many who put his stamp on the organization. It was his assumptions about human beings and learning that became the assumptions of the organization. It was his personal commitment to leadership training and superior college preparation that kept the organization on course and made sure that it did not lose its essential character as it grew and changed.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Many Americans believe their schools are in deep trouble. The problem goes deeper than low test scores and high dropout rates. It is, many believe, a failure of leadership. Few educational leaders can explain the mission of their organizations in terms that students, parents, and teachers can understand. Few see the true potential of their schools and communicate that vision to the people who can make it a reality. Few can explain clearly what kind of students the school is designed to serve and exactly how that particular population should be educated. Yet it is precisely that kind of visionary, clear-sighted, and articulate leadership that is often proposed as a solution to the problems of America's schools. A Rand Corporation study (Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990), for example, called for the creation of "focus schools," public or private schools with a strong sense of identity and mission. Magnet schools, alternative schools for dropouts or students with special problems, and independent schools of various kinds are all attempts to create schools with a clear sense of purpose. Obviously schools with a mission must be created by leaders with a mission.

Two types of research literature that address the problem of leadership are studies of entrepreneurship and studies of organizational culture. Entrepreneurship research offers insights

into new organizations and the people who start them. Organizational culture research addresses, among other things, organizational effectiveness. Strong culture organizations are generally believed to be more effective than weak culture organizations (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Denison, 1990; Ouchi, 1981; Owens, 1987; Peters & Waterman, 1982). E. H. Schein (1983, 1985) studied the role of founders in creating organizational culture, thus combining entrepreneurship research and organizational culture research.

This study examined the career of one educational entrepreneur, William Robert Webb III, the founder of the Webb School of Knoxville, a highly successful independent college preparatory day school located in Knoxville, Tennessee. E. H. Schein's work provided the theoretical framework.

Schein defined culture as "a pattern of basic assumptions" shared by the members of an organization (1985, p. 9). He believed that culture is created by founding groups as group members work together to solve problems. The founder's role is central because, when problems arise, the founder is the group member most likely to suggest solutions. If the solutions work, they become embedded in the organization; that is, they are assumed to be the correct way of doing things, and they are taught to new members. In this way the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the founder form the core of the culture of the organization.

Schein believed that the way to uncover underlying assumptions was to conduct loosely structured interviews with key members of the organization and to ask them to help the researcher identify critical

incidents in the organization's history. A critical incident is "any major event that threatened survival, or caused reexamination or reformulation of goals or ways of working, or involved membership or inclusion issues" (1985, p. 120). The founder's response to such incidents is a primary transmission technique, one of five that Schein identified. In addition, he listed five secondary techniques.

This study attempted to answer the following question: What was the role of the founder, William Robert Webb III, in the creation of the organizational culture of the Webb School of Knoxville? It addressed that question by first attempting to answer three subsidiary questions: 1) What were the fundamental beliefs and values of the founder? 2) In what ways does the present-day culture of the school reflect the beliefs and values of the founder? 3) What techniques of transmission did the founder employ in order to make sure that his beliefs and values became embedded in the organization?

In order to answer these questions, I interviewed the founder, Robert Webb, 10 times. I also interviewed 34 other people--members of the founder's family, former students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and board members. One goal of these interviews was to identify critical incidents in the history of the school. In addition to the interviews, I gathered information from various documents.

I analyzed the data from the interviews and documents, using mostly ethnographic methods (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1980; Spradley, 1979). Eventually I presented the data in two ways--chronologically (Chapter IV) and thematically (Chapter V).

I found that Robert Webb, the founder of the Webb School of Knoxville, was a member of a family that included several distinguished school men, most prominent among them his grandfather, Sawney Webb, the founder of the first Webb School at Bell Buckle, Tennessee. Robert Webb was a graduate of the school at Bell Buckle and of The University of Tennessee, where he earned a master's degree in education in 1947. He taught at Bell Buckle and at the Webb School of California, which was founded by his uncle, Thompson Webb. In 1955, he started the Webb School of Knoxville in rented facilities with four boys enrolled.

The school grew very rapidly. A girls' school was added in 1957. Land was obtained in a rural area west of the city, and after a successful fund-raising effort, a permanent campus was built and occupied in time for the first graduation ceremony in June 1959. During the 1960s, the athletic program developed. In 1968, the boys' school and the girls' school merged. During the 1970s, the academic program was restructured and modernized, and a fine arts program was added. By the 25th anniversary in 1980, the school had an enrollment of 735, an outstanding program of academics, athletics, and fine arts, and a physical plant that adequately supported the program.

Robert Webb retired in July 1984. In addition to leading the school, he also held leadership positions in several associations and professional organizations. He devoted his retirement to community service.

Conclusions

The Role of the Founder

As E. H. Schein's theory predicted, Robert Webb's role in creating the organizational culture of the Webb School of Knoxville was central. By birthright, Webb enjoyed insider status in two groups--the school people who ran the independent schools of this country, and the "commercial elite" of Knoxville. (The term is from McDonald & Wheeler, 1983.) Each group had a distinct culture, and the two cultures blended to form the culture of the school. During his 29 years as head of the school, Robert Webb made sure that neither group became dominant. As a member in good standing of both groups, he was able to see that the school developed along lines that would be satisfactory to both.

Fundamental Beliefs and Values of the Founder

Based on my analysis of the data, I identified eight fundamental beliefs and values of the founder that affected his leadership of the school. He was religious in a quiet way. He was proud of his family, particularly his grandfather and uncles; and he was committed to carrying on family traditions. He believed in hard work. He was particularly committed to planning, and he did not like the kind of surprises that result from poor planning. He loved learning and tried to instill a love of learning in his students. He loved athletics but was unwilling to let the school's athletic program interfere with its academic program. He was committed to character

building as an essential part of education, and he believed that religious training and an honor code were important components of a character building program. Finally, he believed in community service and actively encouraged students to assume leadership roles in their communities.

Present-Day Culture of the School

As expected, the present-day culture of the school reflects the beliefs and values of the founder. Although the school is not affiliated with any denomination, it is committed to Judeo-Christian beliefs and values. It has a full-time chaplain and required religion courses. The Webb family traditions are very much a part of the school. The school crest is the Webb family crest, and the school motto, "Leaders, not men," is the family motto. Students are knowledgeable about the history of the Webb family. Hard work is valued. Faculty and administrators model diligence, and most students imitate the work habits of their elders. The founder's commitment to planning is reflected in the school primarily through an elaborate committee structure. Love of learning is evident in the wide range of educational opportunities afforded Webb School students and in the faculty's commitment to help each student find an appropriate mix of activities. Athletics are a prominent and successful part of the school's program; but in keeping with the values of the founder, the athletic program has not been allowed to overshadow the academic programs. The primary means of character building is the honor code. Community service was institutionalized

at the school after the retirement of the founder in the form of a community service requirement for graduation.

Transmission Techniques of the Founder

Schein identified five primary transmission techniques used by founders to make sure that their beliefs and values became embedded in the organizations they founded. Robert Webb employed four of the five.

First, he paid attention to, measured, and controlled those aspects of the school that affected its mission and its image. He wanted Webb School to be an excellent college preparatory school and also to be perceived by the community as excellent. Thus he paid attention to student performance, and he personally controlled admission, expulsion, and graduation.

Second, he reacted to critical incidents in a manner that showed other members of the organization how such incidents should be handled. By careful planning, he prevented many potentially critical incidents from becoming truly critical. He believed in expert advice and routinely called in consultants when the organization approached a major turning point. He always remained calm and insisted on an orderly decision-making process.

Third, he used role modeling, teaching, and coaching to show other members of the organization how he wanted them to behave. His primary transmission technique was modeling. He was the kind of person he wanted his students to become; he went about his daily tasks in the way he wanted other employees of the school to go about

theirs. A weakness of his was his inability to tell people that he appreciated the job they were doing. Students and employees pretty much had to assume that they were pleasing him as long as they did not hear anything to the contrary.

Schein's fourth primary transmission technique was the criteria for allocation of rewards and status. I concluded that Robert Webb did not use this technique to promote his own beliefs and values. The primary reward available to faculty and staff was pay raises, and Webb believed that pay was a very private matter. Thus it is impossible to say what the criteria for determining salaries were. Since people did not know what the criteria were, they could hardly have been influenced by them.

Schein's fifth technique is the criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement, and excommunication. Webb tried to recruit teachers who loved their subjects and loved young people. He promoted people who worked hard and shared his view of the organization and its mission. Retirement was determined by age. Webb forced some retirements, and he himself retired when he reached 65. He fired people who did not work hard, who gave only lip service to the values of the organization, and who did not meet his standards of morality.

Schein also identified five secondary transmission techniques. All five of these have obvious application to Webb School.

First, the design and structure of the organization reflected the values of the founder. Webb viewed a school as a community of teachers, so for his entire tenure as head of the school, every

person who supervised teachers also taught classes. Beyond that, however, he seemed willing to let the administrative structures of the school evolve.

Second, the organizational systems and procedures were designed to assure broad participation in decision-making. Through committees, the faculty was involved in most major decisions. Major events in the history of the school were marked by use of consultants and an elaborate planning process.

Third, the design of physical space, facades, and buildings was functional. The campus was obviously designed to serve the program rather than to bolster the ego of the founder, who worked out of a modest office with cinder block walls.

Fourth, the stories, legends, myths, and parables circulated at Webb School emphasize the organization's seriousness of purpose and the founder's honesty and integrity. The story with the widest circulation involves the expulsion of four seniors for bringing beer to the prom. The point of the story is that Robert Webb knew what he stood for and was willing to risk harming the school rather than bend a rule he knew was right.

Fifth, the formal statements of organizational philosophy are remarkably consistent with the values of the organization as they are reflected in the way the school operates. According to Schein, all secondary transmission techniques are indicative of espoused values. They will work only if they are consistent with actual values. In the case of Webb School, espoused values and actual values seem almost identical.

Implications

Several lessons can be learned from an examination of Robert Webb's career. In addition to obvious implications for founders or potential founders of independent schools, there are more general implications that apply to all leaders.

Many private schools are initiated by groups of parents who are dissatisfied with their children's education. They make some preliminary preparations such as securing a building and raising some funds, and then they recruit an educator to organize the school along the lines they have in mind. Other schools start with, or soon acquire, one or two donors who more or less guarantee the financial viability of the school. In such cases the founder of the school begins with exactly those resources Robert Webb did not have. He had to find a building, raise money, and--more important--persuade parents to entrust him with the education of their children. In spite of deep roots in the community, a name that was identified with independent education, and a personality that inspired confidence, he found these initial tasks difficult. In interviews, Webb characterized his approach to these tasks as "naive," which implies that they turned out to be much more difficult than he anticipated. The implication for founders of schools is clear. They should begin with a clear-eyed, hard-headed assessment of the resources available to them. In particular, they should be realistic about the reluctance of parents to place their children in a new and untried educational environment. Unless they have definite commitments from parents and donors (or investors, if they are going the proprietary

route), they may expect some very lean times at the beginning. One thing Webb did to reassure parents was to hire as his first faculty member a veteran teacher whom many parents knew and trusted. Would-be founders should consider a comparable strategy.

New schools, indeed new organizations of any kind, begin with an idea, with what Schumpeter (1934) called a new combination. Robert Webb combined the type of school he knew and understood with his home town, a community that did not have a school of that type. The great difficulty faced by all entrepreneurs is to bring the idea to fruition without losing sight of it in the process. Inevitably the search for customers or students and for acceptance by the community will result in compromises and adaptations. Webb allowed his original plan to be altered in several ways. Most notably, the 200-student boys' boarding school he planned became a 735-student coeducational day school. But he did not let the essence of the idea slip away. He set out to found a school that would stand for academic excellence and leadership training, and he never deviated from that goal. Occasionally he was forced to compromise but never enough to cause the essential nature of the school to change. In this regard, his stubbornness was his greatest asset. The lesson for other entrepreneurs is the necessity of deciding at an early stage in the life of the organization what is secular and what is sacred. Once sacred values are identified, they must be preserved at all cost. Otherwise the idea that gave birth to the organization in the first place will be lost.

The idea need not be particularly original. Robert Webb's idea was not. He modeled his school on the other Webb schools. And the organization, in order to succeed and achieve excellence, need not be particularly innovative. Peters and Waterman (1982) discovered that excellent companies tended to let other companies try out new technology and to adopt only those ideas that had worked elsewhere. Hill, Foster, and Gendler (1990) made a similar discovery about schools. Webb School instituted several ideas, such as the middle school and the rotating schedule, that could be considered innovative at the time they were adopted; but none of these ideas originated with Robert Webb. He was not an especially original thinker. His talent was in evaluating the ideas he encountered in his reading, in his travels to conferences and to other schools, and in his conversations with other educators. He was very good at selecting ideas that had merit and at recognizing and rejecting fads.

Two themes that run through Robert Webb's career are networking and use of consultants. Instead of relying on his own ingenuity to solve every problem, Webb routinely sought advice and assistance from family, friends, and colleagues. Although he solicited and attended to a broad range of advice, he typically approached problems by identifying an expert on the particular issue involved and following the advice of that expert.

Any organization needs a clear sense of its mission, but this is particularly true of new organizations. In order to involve and inspire other people, a founder has to be able to explain very clearly whom the organization intends to serve and exactly how it is

supposed to serve them. Robert Webb was able to articulate the mission of Webb School in a way that was comprehensible to students, employees, board members, and donors. The school would serve college-capable young people by preparing them for acceptance to and success in first-rate colleges and for positions of leadership in their communities. More succinctly, the school's mission was to train leaders. Webb's own clarity of purpose and his single-minded devotion to the mission of the school were a model for other members of the organization.

Peters and Waterman (1982) helped to perpetuate the stereotype of the entrepreneur as a swashbuckling supersalesman who constantly mouths slogans and homilies. Sawney Webb fit that stereotype to some degree, but his grandson did not. Robert Webb's personality supports the conclusion of Low and MacMillan (1988) that entrepreneurs are unusual people but not unusual in any predictable way. Robert Webb was a man of few words. Other than the motto of the school, he did not have any favorite sayings. Instead of backslapping and sloganeering, he quietly modeled hard work, clarity of purpose, and personal integrity. His quiet, self-effacing approach worked for him, and he built an enormously successful organization. The lesson for other leaders, particularly for other entrepreneurs, is that they need not try to conform to a stereotype. They can be themselves. If they have a strong sense of purpose and their organization has a clear sense of mission, people will want to be part of it. No particular type of personality is necessary.

Recommendations

It seems appropriate to begin this section with a brief critique of the theory that guided this study. The work of E. H. Schein (1983, 1985) on the creation and transmission of organizational culture proved to be a useful construct. It showed me what to look for and to some degree how to go about looking for it. I recommend it to any researcher who is considering a study of a founder, particularly if the study will focus on the relationship between the founder and the organization. It was not, however, perfectly matched to the case I studied. Schein's theory is largely a theory of critical incidents. A key component of Robert Webb's management style was his devotion to planning. He was quite successful at making sure that problems did not become critical. The theory would be easier to apply in a volatile organization with a mercurial founder.

Schein's methodology is well suited for what it was designed to do--expose the organizational culture of the large corporations in which he was a consultant. It relies heavily on multiple interviews with key members of the organization. I was not a consultant, and I was not asked by the administration of Webb School to help them understand the school's culture. I did not feel justified in asking administrators for many hours of their time. The only person I interviewed in the kind of depth Schein recommended was the founder. Consequently, I was never confident that I had uncovered the pattern of assumptions that composed the true culture of the organization.

Both organizational culture research and entrepreneurship research hold great promise for educational researchers. Education is an applied field, and the applications of both kinds of research are obvious. Organizational culture research helps to explain the futility of top-down reform, and it deals with institutional effectiveness. Entrepreneurship research is even more promising. There is no single answer to the problems of America's schools, but part of the answer is a move away from huge, bureaucratic systems toward small, entrepreneurial organizations. The schools of the future will be less like department stores and more like boutiques. Any research that expands our understanding of entrepreneurship and how it may be applied in educational settings should be welcome. Additional case studies of particular educational entrepreneurs in the public or private sector would be valuable.

I have not attempted to write a definitive biography of Robert Webb nor a definitive history of Webb School. Both remain to be written, and I encourage researchers who have an interest in the school to consider them. An interesting and manageable study would be an in-depth history of the girls' school, and it would be timely given the recent recurrence of interest in single-sex education, particularly for girls.

I commend the administration of the Webb School of Knoxville for its interest in preserving the heritage of the school and passing it along to the students and to new employees. I hope such efforts continue. But I would suggest a more fundamental means of preserving the identity of the school and making sure that the Robert Webb's

influence continues. What I have in mind is some deliberate inbreeding. When key members of the organization retire, I hope that the administration and the trustees will consider replacing some of them with Webb School graduates or with faculty members who worked under Robert Webb. That more than anything else would help to extend his influence into the next generation.

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