

A Very Good Read

Arthur V. Williams. *Tales of Clemson 1936-1940*. Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2002. Pp. viii + 96. \$15 paper.

[The following is a transcript of Alan Schaffer's book review, broadcast on the *Your Day* radio program, Clemson University Radio Productions, National Public Radio, on Thursday, Dec. 12, 2002. Schaffer was interviewed by Charlotte Holt in the "Books as Gifts" portion of the program.]

AS: The second on the list is a much smaller book...

CH: And more close to home...

AS: It's ninety-six pages, and it's called *Tales of Clemson: 1936-1940*, written by Arthur Williams--Dr. Arthur Williams, a physician down in Charleston who was a student at Clemson from 1936-1940, the last years of the depression and just going into the Second World War--and it is really interesting. I produced a picture history of Clemson for the centennial, and I knew a lot about the school and its history, but this is a history from the point of view of a student.

CH: This is a cadet?

AS: He was a cadet. He was in the corps of cadets. He had his head shaved--he went through the whole thing, was paddled, hated the military all the time he was here, and he has some wonderful stories to tell about himself. He was in charge of a regiment that charged up the wrong hill during maneuvers. He says that's why he never made it into the officer class.

It's a very honest book by a man who has written several books. He has written *Tales of Charleston*, about the place where he grew up, and that deals with other kinds of stuff. But *this* book is strictly about Clemson, and if you have any interest in the University, any interest in the Upstate really, or any interest just in what it was like being a student in a school during the Depression and just before the Second World War, this is a really good read. I've got some criticisms which we'll talk about, but some of the stories in here are just wonderful.

It's a pretty raunchy book--you've got to be prepared for some salty language . . . [H]e talks about going on maneuvers, for example, in the 1930's. When the corps of cadets went on maneuvers, they all went down to Fort McClellan in Anniston, Alabama, and Anniston, Alabama, by his accounting of it, was the center of prostitution in the United States. So he talks about the importance of the girls, how they were important for some of the men. Not to him--he didn't go in for that kind of thing . . . [H]e was worried about infection and disease and other such things. But he talks about some of the sadistic practices at Clemson in terms of the corps of cadets, the paddling in particular--which he didn't like.

There's a lot in here that depends on his memory. He reconstructs conversations that took place 60 years ago, and you've got to be suspicious of some of it, but he's sure he's giving the flavor of the place. These cadets--some of them were very bright, some of them not so bright. He was pretty intellectual himself--didn't always get the best grades but loved some of the teachers, talked about John Lane (Professor of English) and Bill Lippincott (Professor of Chemistry). L. D. Huff was a professor of Physics and, according to Dr. Williams, was a kind of borderline genius. He talks a lot about his classmates. He talks about going down to the Clemson-Carolina game in Columbia, and how, as he says, the coeds down there hurled girlie curses at them.

It's a funny book; it's an important book because he was Jewish, and he was one of very few Jews up here at the time, and of course this is 1936-1940. There was a lot of concern in his family about the Jews in Germany. They didn't know exactly what was going on, but they knew that not a lot of good was going on, and he's got some discussions here among the cadets about Germany, about Hitler, about the coming of the Second World War. Really very interesting stuff to read.

CH: It's *Tales of Clemson*.

AS: *Tales of Clemson: 1936-1940*. It's published by the Clemson University Digital Press. Now why they call it a digital press I'm not sure because this is a nice paperback book. It's probably produced digitally; that's all I can think of. I don't have a price on it as there's no price on the book, but this can't be very expensive, and if you're interested in the history of the University, as I said, or of student life in the 30s, this is a very good read. I couldn't put this down. I was surprised; I didn't expect much when I got it, but it really was good stuff, and it would make a really good gift for somebody.

[Editor's note: *Tales of Clemson 1936-1940* is available for reading on-line on the "Publications" page of the digital press Web site. Just go to www.clemson.edu/caah/cedp and click "Regional and Local Interests." The broadcast is archived at the *Your Day* Web site, where the digital state of the book is also linked, as well as an order form for use in obtaining a copy of the paperback book.]