Students swamping W&L with inquiries

LEXINGTON (AP) — High school students from as far as Colorado and Nebraska are swamping the Washington and Lee University admissions office with inquiries, hoping to become part of history when the 235-year-old school turns coeducational in fall 1985.

At least 138 interested high school students have phoned the university since its board of trustees voted in mid-July to admit undergraduate women, associate Admissions Director Van Pate said.

"The day after the decision was made, a young lady visiting the state heard the news, telephoned and was here two hours later for an interview," Pate said.

"We've had calls from Minneapolis and New Orleans, Colorado and Nebraska, from small towns and major cities," Pate said. "We've even had people just dropping in for interviews after hearing the news."

Sutton Redding, 17, a Florence, Ala., student, was visiting several of Virginia's women's colleges last week when she learned that W&L was opening its doors to women.

"Initially, I was inclined to go to a women's school," Redding said. "But the minute I heard (W&L) went coed, I was definitely interested. Now, after seeing the school, it's my first choice."

The announcement that the liberal arts school will break its all-male tradition has also brought an increase in inquiries from some men.

One Californian, Pate said, "initially hadn't applied after visiting here because he wasn't wild about attending an all-male college. After he read the (news) article, he called and told us to send an application."

Even some students and alumni who initially opposed the change have contacted the admissions office.

One recent graduate quickly switched his position on admitting women by encouraging his younger sister to apply, Pate said. Older alumni "also have called to say their daughter or their niece is interested."

About 100 women are expected to be admitted in 1985, Pate said. While that is a fairly small group, compared with the 270 men likely to join the freshman class, Pate said the school prefers this "conservative approach" to prevent a drain on facilities and possible problems of over-enrollment.

Although sexual integration is a year away, school officials are already laying the groundwork for the groundbreaking event.

Dormitories will be divided to house men and women separately. Similarly, gymnasium facilities will be adapted and athletic programs added. But these problems — once used as an excuse for not admitting women — are minor, Pate said.