Washington and Lee to admit female undergraduates

LEXINGTON, Va. — Washington and Lee University trustees voted over the weekend to end the school's 235-year-old tradition of admitting only male undergraduates.

The 1,350-student school, which has operated a co-educational law school since 1972, was founded in 1749 as Liberty Hall Academy. George Washington made a substantial financial contribution to the college before the end of the 18th century, and Robert E. Lee was president of the school from 1865 to 1870.

The 24 trustees voted 17-7 in favor of the move to co-education. College officials say the shrinking pool of college applicants, the preference of both males and females for co-ed schools and the widening responsibilities of women in society were the major factors in the move.

Twice before in the past 15 years trustees rejected the proposal. Surveys of faculty, alumni and students revealed substantial opposition to the move, with 58 percent of alumni who responded opposing a change and 53 percent of the undergraduates opposed. Among the faculty, 80 percent favored co-education.

I.N. Smith Jr., president of Kanawha Banking and Trust Co. in Charleston and a 1957 graduate of W&L, is a member of the board of trustees.