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COLLECTION OF PETTY, AUTONOMOUS Pseudo-KINGDOMS, WHOSE EDUCATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUE AS COMPONENTS OF THE WHEEL IS LOST IN A RAGE OF JURISDICTIONAL JEALOUSY, ADMINISTRATIVE HAGGLING AND PETTY SICKERING.

IN CLOSING, I WOULD VENTURE TO SAY THAT 100 YEARS FROM NOW, ALL THAT HAS BEEN SAID AND DONE HERE TODAY WILL NOT RETAIN ONE PARTICLE OF IMPORTANCE. WHAT WILL BE IMPORTANT, AND WHAT WILL MATTER, HOWEVER, IS TO WHAT EXTENT, WE AS INSTITUTIONS AND AS PERSONS, HAVE TAUGHT, LEARNED AND APPLIED THESE VERY BASIC LESSONS THAT CONSTITUTE OUR PURPOSE UPON THIS EARTH.

AS WE LEAVE, PERHAPS YOU SHOULD LOOK UPON US WELL, OUR RESPECTED ELDERLY AND TEACHERS, FOR IF, INDEED, THERE EVEN IS A POSTERITY, AND IT SHOULD, BY GRACE, CONSIDER US WORTHY OF ITS JUDGMENT: THEN AS POSTERITY JUDGES US FOR WHAT WE HAVE, OR HAVE NOT ACCOMPLISHED AS RELATIONAL CREATURES IN APPLYING THE LESSONS WE HAVE LEARNED, SO WILL POSTERITY JUDGE YOU, WHO HAVE TAUGHT US.

HALL AND FARRIS

*Charles W. Sydnor, Jr.*



Charles Sydnor, former president of Emory and Henry College and a 1965 graduate, is shown at left giving the senior address to his graduating class. In the middle is a signed copy of his speech, (Clicking on that speech will produce a readable copy in a new window.) At right is a recent photo of Sydnor.

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## Alumni

### Former president Sydnor one of E&H top grads

**Summary:** Charles Sydnor, a 1965 graduate, is president of Commonwealth Public Broadcasting in Richmond, but the road to his present job has been long and winding -- and has taken him back through Emory.

**By Robert J. Vejnar II**  
**Archivist and adjunct professor of history**  
**September 12, 2005**

One of Emory & Henry's most accomplished graduates of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Charles W. Sydnor, Jr.

Born in Jefferson City, Tennessee on 26 August 1943, he attended schools in the Richmond area before enrolling at Emory & Henry College in the fall

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of 1961. During his first year he became fascinated with the history classes offered and ultimately chose it as his major.

He graduated from E&H in the spring of 1965. With the advice and encouragement of his undergraduate major professor, the late Dr. George Stevenson, Charlie Sydnor enrolled in the graduate program in history at Vanderbilt University in the fall of 1965, intent on pursuing history as a career. Sydnor excelled at Vanderbilt and earned his master's degree there in 1967.

In preparation for his doctoral dissertation, Sydnor applied for and won a coveted Fulbright Scholarship in 1968 to study at the University of Freiburg in Germany. Vanderbilt University awarded him a Ph.D. (with "distinction" – a rarity there) in 1971.

In 1977 Princeton University Press published his dissertation under the rubric *Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death's Head Division, 1933-1945*. The book has sold tens of thousands of copies in its English, Polish, and German editions, and is still in print today.

He spent his early career in the academic world, holding faculty positions at Ohio State, Vanderbilt, and Longwood University. But it was while he was at Longwood (1972-1980) that his career would take a change.

With his reputation as a scholar established, the regional PBS station in nearby Richmond, WCVE, hired him in 1979 to do the introduction and commentary (called "wrap-arounds" in the business) for the 36-part Thames Television of London series entitled *The World at War*, scheduled for broadcast by WCVE. For the next two years he appeared almost weekly on the station, thus gaining wide exposure in Virginia.

In 1980 he left Longwood to work as the Assistant to the President of Hampden-Sydney College. Sydnor's polished on-camera commentaries for the *World at War* series caught the eye of Governor Charles Robb, and in 1982 he hired Sydnor to write speeches for him.

The experienced forty-year old Sydnor came to the attention of the board of trustees of Emory & Henry College, and on 1 July 1984 – just nineteen years after he graduated – he assumed its presidency. During his nearly eight years at the helm of E&H he worked to triple the college's

endowment, "increase . . . the quality and diversity of the faculty and student body," worked to revise the curriculum and academic calendar, and also created the plan to re-configure the board of trustees, thus modernizing it. While doing all of these things he still found the time to teach his "advanced seminar in the history of the Holocaust."

In fact it was his interest and scholarship in the Holocaust that led the United States Department of Justice (D.O.J.) and its Office of Special Investigations to use Sydnor as an expert witness in twenty-one court cases involving "former SS concentration camp guards and Nazi death camp collaborators who managed to enter the United States illegally." His testimony led to the deportation from the United States of these former Nazis. For his work with the D.O.J., the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution awarded him the National Medal of Honor. It presented the award to him in a formal ceremony at Constitution Hall in Washington on 17 April 2001.

In 1992 Sydnor left Emory & Henry College to become President and Chief Executive Officer of Commonwealth Public Broadcasting in Richmond, which operates "five public television stations and one public radio station in central and northern Virginia," reaching several million homes throughout the Commonwealth. In addition to managing these public broadcasting stations, Sydnor continues to work in front of the camera providing commentary for World War II related subjects for the A&E Television Network's *The History Channel*. Along with writing and producing numerous history-related television programs for WCVB in Richmond, he currently hosts "the weekly public affairs series *For the Record*."

Among the many nationally known personalities he has interviewed for that program include "White House press corps veteran Helen Thomas, PBS' Jim Lehrer, Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward, former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, [and] historian Arthur Schlesinger . . . ." For his work in broadcasting he will be inducted into the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame on 21 April 2005. For all of the contributions he has made to society, the Virginia General Assembly passed a joint resolution on 19 January 2005 commending him "for his outstanding leadership and invaluable service to the Commonwealth . . . ."

In the spring of 1965 the graduating class of Emory & Henry selected Charlie Sydnor to give the

senior class oration. Near the end of the speech he said the following: ". . . whatever a church-related college does or does not accomplish, it should never cease striving to accomplish one very important thing. Within the context of its educational responsibility, it should never cease trying to instill in each of its students a desire to contribute something to life, rather than leaving them as graduates wishing merely to gain something from life. By all odds this is a hopeless task, but your generation, our generation, and generations to come can ill afford its abandonment now."

Most would agree that Charles Wright Sydnor, Jr., has fulfilled this admonition admirably, and is one of Emory & Henry's finest products.

This article was written by [Robert J. Vejnar, II](#), Archivist and Adjunct Instructor of History

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Today's date: **Tuesday, August 01, 2006**