

VMI Rats versus W&L Minks

BY LEGEND, Virginia Military Institute cadets gave the nickname “minks” to Washington and Lee University students in the early years of the 20th century. Here’s why.

Cadets were required to observe strict hours, and generally had to be back in the barracks at 10 p.m., even on big weekends. W&L students, however, had no curfew.

So some W&L men, instead of going to the trouble of arranging their own dates, would simply wait until the cadets had to return to post, and then take up where they had left off. The practice came to be known

as “late dating,” and the sputtering cadets labeled W&L men “minks,” suggesting scurrilous, low-life, unprincipled rodents.

Though it began as an epithet, W&L men were flattered by it and before long adopted it as their own nickname. In the 1920s, W&L students established a humor and commentary magazine, naming it *The Mink*.

In its inaugural issue, in fact, *The Mink* described a more flattering version of the name’s origin, “for the benefit of those who are behind the times or Freshmen.”

“‘Mink’ is a title that has long been applied to the men of Washington

and Lee,” the article said. “If, as rumor has it, the name was originated by our friends at the Institution across the way, we can readily understand why it should be so, for it is well and wisely known that the mink always gets ahead of the rat. The mink, moreover, is a wonderful animal. Taking his size into consideration, he is the greatest fighter on earth, and he fears no animal that walks the woods. Even big, strong men from THE UNIVERSITY give him a wide berth. He is also a very beautiful animal, keen, cute, cunning, quick and graceful, and ladies love to feel his skin around their necks.”

