

“James Bopp, Woody Lee, and the Afro-American Society”

Excerpt from the Mary Donin interview with Forrester (Woody) Lee, Class of 1968, for the Dartmouth Oral History Project., March 1, 2013

“A White student came by my room one day. His name was James Bopp—Jim Bopp.¹ I don’t know why I knew him, but I did know him, and I trusted him. He came by my room and said, “I’m organizing a meeting tomorrow evening, and I’d like you to come.” And I said, “Happy to be there. What’s it about, Jim?” And he said, you know, “Why don’t you just come tomorrow? I think you’ll enjoy the evening and the opportunity.” So, you know, I showed up.



Dr. Forrester (Woody) Lee

I’m pretty sure it was six o’clock over here at the, umm, where the Dartmouth Christian Union was—on the corner here in one of the upstairs rooms. I arrived the next day and got there a little bit early. There were two Black students already there. Over the next fifteen or so minutes, all the Black students on the campus came into the room. I was like: What’s going on here? And Jim Bopp was there. He’d convened the meeting.

He stood up and spoke for about fifteen seconds. He said, “Gentlemen,” roughly these words: “Gentlemen, I’ve asked you to come here together because I suspect you have a lot of things that you want to talk about. And I want to give you the opportunity to do that.” *And then he walked out.*

Mary Donin: Amazing!

¹ Mr. Bopp has been mentioned several times in “Narratives on Social Solidarity”. The range of his social justice engagements is so great, during and after his Dartmouth undergraduate years, that his journey is highly deserving of an oral history. As “Narratives” is conceived as a continuous project, Jim Bopp would be among the persons considered for such attention.

Woody Lee: Yeah. So it turned out Jim had been talking with some of the other Black students who were there. They were trying to figure out what to do. And he—they had—and because of those discussions—and for some reason, I don't know why, they knew him. Anyway, he was the convener of this meeting. *And that night we established the Afro-American Society of Dartmouth College.*²

² Woody Lee has created an extraordinary website in which former Dartmouth students of African ancestry are listed. Photographs and small bios are provided. As a consequence of this research, Lee and James S. Pringle, another Dartmouth alumnus, have identified Edward Mitchell as the first such individual to matriculate at the College, in 1824. Their fascinating account of his odyssey is related in *A Noble and Independent Course: The Life of the Reverend Edward Mitchell* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2018).