

13 At Bucknell Help To Enroll Virginia Voters

During the recent spring vacation 13 Bucknellians, including two professors, went to Petersburg, Va., to work on a voter registration project sponsored by the national student YWCA.

The 13 from the University at Lewisburg who took part included Dr. William Becker, Dr. David Martin, Nancy Fenton, Betty Neary, Amy Treston, Joey Provan, Diane Richters, Susan Case, Douglas Sholl, Harriet Parker, Bruce McGraw, Diane Milder and John Pagano.

The students reported that the results of the project are not yet known since the deadline for paying the poll tax is May 1. However, during two and a half days of canvassing, more than 2,000 persons were contacted. Of this number, less than 250 either could not or would not go down to register.

Petersburg is in a poverty stricken area and many people could not afford to pay the poll tax. There were also some people who were illiterate. A citizenship school will be formed for them so that they can learn

to read and write and vote in the future.

Petersburg, it was said, is the largest city in southern Virginia, "where the south begins." In this conservative community, it was reported, a strong civil rights program has been developing in the past few years, but there is still much work to be done. There is only token integration in many downtown stores and the churches and YMCA and hospital are still segregated.

It was said that nearly 50 per cent of the city's population is Negro, but only 35 per cent of the eligible Negroes are registered to vote. Voter registration is extremely important because the large number of Negroes can gain housing, schooling and employment benefits most effectively only if the political candidates realize the potential voting power.

The voter registration project lasted for one week. Students from other colleges besides Bucknell participated too. The northern students were assisted by Negro high school students and also by students of Virginia State College, a Negro college in Petersburg.

The work consisted of door-to-door canvassing. At each house, the people were asked whether they were registered to vote and

if they had paid their poll tax. If they had not registered or paid their poll tax before, they would have to pay \$5 in poll taxes before they could register. This must be paid by May 1, hence the urgency of the voter registration project, it was pointed out.

If the people were interested in registering to vote, the registration procedure was explained to them. A sample registration form was given to them to make sure they had no questions or problems with it. Transportation down to city hall was provided on request.

There was a great deal of opportunity for the workers in the voter registration project to become acquainted with the Negro community in Petersburg, it was stated by Harriet Parker of Bucknell. Most of the canvassing was done by integrated teams.

Housing for the week was provided in Negro homes. Meals and free time were at Virginia State College. In addition, of course, she said, there were contacts with many Negroes in the houses canvassed. All of these contacts made the week in Petersburg an educational as well as a working experience for the participants, she commented.

The reception of the white group from the north was, on the whole, one of surprise and pleasure that people from "outside" should care enough to come to

Petersburg and work. Some people, it was added, even became encouraged to participate in the civil rights work themselves.

The group of Bucknellians came back with a feeling of having accomplished something, but at the same time a much stronger feeling that there is a tremendous amount yet to be accomplished in the civil rights movement until there is true equality in the United States, she concluded.