

THE LIBRARY OF  
THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY  
IN VIRGINIA, 1693-1793

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in Virginia, 1693-1793

JOHN M. JENNINGS

Published for  
the Earl Gregg Swem Library of  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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## Acknowledgments

THE Earl Gregg Swem Library of The College of William and Mary in Virginia is pleased to publish this record of its beginnings in commemoration of the college's 275th year.

Two persons are primarily responsible for the publication. The project could not have been undertaken without the generous assistance of Frances Lois Willoughby, M.D. Dr. Willoughby's gift was made in memory of her brother, Edwin Elliott Willoughby, professor of library science at the college from 1932 to 1935 and then chief bibliographer at the Folger Shakespeare Library until his death in 1959. With typical graciousness, John Melville Jennings, Director of the Virginia Historical Society, permitted use of his manuscript and, moreover, devoted much time and thought to its preparation for publication. The Swem Library is deeply indebted to them both.

William C. Pollard  
Librarian

*Williamsburg, Virginia*  
*September 1968*

## Introduction

**T**HIS inquiry into the book collections, financing, and management of the library of the College of William and Mary during the first one hundred years of its existence was originally undertaken at the suggestion of a formidable mentor and beloved friend, the late Earl Gregg Swem, William and Mary's librarian from 1920 to 1944. His name is fittingly applied to the building that now houses the research collections of the college. The findings were organized in monographic form in 1948, at which time the author benefited greatly from suggestions made by Dr. Swem, who was then very much alive, and by Drs. Ernst Posner and Arthur A. Ekirch of American University, under whom the writer was engaged in graduate studies.

A copy of the typewritten monograph was duly filed in the William and Mary library. There it reposed until May 1968, when William C. Pollard, Librarian of the Earl Gregg Swem Library, resolved to usher the text into print in partial observance of the 275th anniversary of the founding of the college. Apprised of these plans, the author, though agreeable to Mr. Pollard's resolution, prudently scanned the monograph for the first time since he

had laid it to rest in 1948. He was gratified to discover that his critical faculties had improved during the intervening twenty years. But, in the light of that discovery, he was dismayed by the jejune aspects of many passages in the text and by the general awkwardness of its literary style. Five months out of the twelve allotted to the 275th anniversary observances had already elapsed, so only a limited amount of time was left for overhauling the manuscript if it were indeed to appear in print during the anniversary year. Armed, therefore, with scissors and paste, the author hurriedly attempted to stifle some of its dissertation aroma and to insert in the text certain bits of evidence touching the subject that had surfaced since 1948.

It is an inquiry, no more, no less, for disastrous conflagrations consumed the library collections on three different occasions, in 1705, 1859, and 1862. The same conflagrations decimated the college archives. In consequence, most of the evidence offered in these pages was necessarily gleaned from collateral sources of information. The lack of any consecutive eighteenth-century records relating to the library, moreover, has frequently called into play those un nourishing caveats "perhaps" and "probably" whenever conclusions have been in order. Even so, sufficient evidence has come to light to demonstrate that the library resources assembled by the college during its first century reflected the contemporary academic dignities of that second oldest seat of higher learning in the United States.

The titles of books known to have been owned by the library are cited in the text in abbreviated bibliographical form, without imprint dates or edition designations. In some instances, a specific work, to be sure, had gone

through only one edition, or else was available only in the first edition, at the time of its acquisition by the college. But in most cases the short titles or binder's titles favored in contemporary records mentioning the resources of the library are barren of clues as to which editions of those works were on the college shelves.

At least 90 per cent of the volumes that had been assembled in the library by 1793 are not known even by title. Was there a Caxton standing among the quartos? Or, shelved with the octavos, was there a copy of that slender journal, printed at Williamsburg in 1754, which was kept by a college-licensed surveyor turned soldier, Major Washington, who later became the college's first American-born chancellor? Even more haunting questions are stirred by the realization that a youthful Jefferson scanned those shelves, seeking and perhaps finding sources of enlightenment that molded his character and influenced his career. What sustenance, for that matter, was perhaps drawn from the accumulated volumes by other illustrious eighteenth-century matriculates at the college, Peyton Randolph, Edmund Randolph, James Monroe, or John Marshall? These questions, alas, will hover unsatisfied over any inquiry into the early history of the library.

J. M. J.

*Richmond, Virginia*  
*September 1968*

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THE LIBRARY OF  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Founding of the College

1617-1693

THE origins of the College of William and Mary and its library are imbedded in early seventeenth-century efforts to establish and maintain a seat of higher learning at Henrico, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> The impulse behind the initial but unsuccessful venture stemmed from a pious concern in England over the spiritual well-being of the American Indians. James I, in efforts to advance the Anglican faith, directed his clergy in 1617 to solicit funds for erecting a missionary college to propagate the gospel among the "savages." Fifteen hundred pounds collected under the royal auspices were turned over to the Virginia Company of London. The Virginia Company itself sought to promote the undertaking, ordering in 1618 that ten thousand acres of land within the Corporation of Henrico be set aside as an endowment for the proposed establishment.

The project, "being a waighty busines," was entrusted to a board on which the distinguished scholar and treasurer of the Virginia Company, Sir Edwin Sandys, served as an ex-officio member. On Sandys's recommendation, the board resolved to send tenants to cultivate the college lands and thus furnish the projected seat of learning with a regular income. Robert Rich, Puritan earl of Warwick,

also interested in the undertaking, suggested that one of his followers, Captain William Weldon, be appointed to supervise the tenants. In consequence, fifty men under Weldon's direction were dispatched to Virginia. But faulty management and a failure properly to seat the college lands led to controversy and general dissatisfaction. Sir Edwin Sandys therefore engaged George Thorpe, a gentleman of King James's Privy Chamber, to go to Virginia as the company's deputy in managing the property. Affronted by this reflection on his administrative capabilities, Captain Weldon returned to England, where he was subsequently prosecuted for his failure to augment "the sacred Treasure of the Colledge for wch the Companie are to be accountable."<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime Rev. Patrick Copeland, presumably at the instigation of Governor Sir Thomas Dale, grew interested in the establishment of a public free school for the colony.<sup>3</sup> A committee appointed by the Virginia Company to examine the proposition decided that

a Collegiate or free-school should have dependence upon the Colledge in Virginia wch should be made capable to receive Scholars from the Schoole into such Scollerships and fellowships as the said Colledge shalbe endowed withall for the advancement of Schollers as they arise by degres and deserts in learninge.<sup>4</sup>

The name East India was given to the school inasmuch as Copeland secured the original funds for the project from members of the East India Company. And a site near Henrico was selected in the Corporation of Charles City.

The East India School Committee, composed of shrewd businessmen, recommended that the Virginia planters

themselves be solicited for financial support, noting that the children of those adventurers would reap the greatest benefits from the undertaking. Indeed, a telling argument offered in favor of the school emphasized that the colonists had "been hitherto constrained to their great costs to send their children from thence hither [to England] to be taught."<sup>5</sup> The recommendations were accepted in 1621 when the Virginia Company confirmed the committee's report. The company agreed also to a proposal that one thousand acres of land be set aside as an endowment for the better maintenance of the schoolmaster and usher.

In short, the East India School in Charles City was conceived as a preparatory school for the youth of the colony and more especially for those anticipating advanced instruction at the Henrico establishment. This indicates that the university was planned not only as a missionary college for Indians but also as a seat of higher learning for the youth of the colony.

The Henrico project launched the first college library undertaken in British North America.<sup>6</sup> At a meeting of the quarter court of the Virginia Company held November 15, 1620 (old style),

a straunger stept in presentinge a Mapp of Sr Walter Rawlighes conteyninge a Descripcon of Guiana, and wth the same fower great books as the guifte of one vnto the Company that desyred his name might not be made knowne . . . wch books [were for] the Colledge in Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

The four great books were copies of William ("Painful") Perkins' newly corrected and amended *Workes*, in three volumes folio, and an English translation of St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. The same anonymous benefactor

subsequently donated "a large Church Bible, the Coñon prayer booke, Vrsinus Catichisme [that is, Zacharias Ursinus' *Summe of Christian religion*] and a smale Bible richly imbroydered."<sup>8</sup> He specified that the volumes were to be "sent to the Colledge in Virginia there to remaine in safftie to the vse of the Collegiates hereafter, and not suffered att any time to be sent abroade, or used in the meane while."<sup>9</sup>

Such a precedent perhaps inspired Rev. Thomas Bargrave, rector of Henrico parish, to leave his library to the proposed university upon his death in Virginia in 1621.<sup>10</sup> Bargrave, a nephew of the dean of Canterbury, was a Cambridge graduate, holding multiple degrees of bachelor of arts, master of arts, bachelor of divinity, and doctor of divinity.<sup>11</sup> His private library presumably reflected his scholarly training and pursuits. It was valued at one hundred marks, or roughly seventy pounds, which suggests that it was sizable. But the titles are not revealed in the surviving records. And, alas, the bequest failed to bring the donor that lasting fame and honor which a similar bequest, some eighteen years later, brought to John Harvard in New England. Bargrave nevertheless earned for himself the handsome distinction of being the first resident benefactor of an institutional library in British North America. The fact that the institution itself miscarried during the course of organization does not detract in the slightest from his high intentions.

By 1622 the projected seat of higher learning seemed headed for success. It possessed, among other endowments, the nucleus of a library. But in 1622 the venture suffered a catastrophic reverse. On Good Friday morning, March 22,

the Indians, unimpressed by the spiritual vine planted in their midst, executed a skillfully conceived attack on the English settlements and completely wiped out the town of Henrico. Virtually all of the tenants on the college lands were massacred, including Deputy Thorpe.<sup>12</sup> Steps were immediately taken by the Virginia Company to resuscitate the project. But a more lethal blow was dealt in 1624 with the revocation of the charter of the Virginia Company. The colony thereupon became a royal province, and the Henrico plans were permitted to collapse.

The fate of the Henrico library collections cannot be ascertained. Lady Yeardley, widow of the earlier governor, delivered to the governor and Council in 1627 certain of the books that had been donated in 1619 by the anonymous English friend of the project.<sup>13</sup> The surviving records do not report the final disposition of those materials. The Bargrave collection was destroyed, in all probability, when the Indians fired the plantations.

In 1624 Edward Palmer, uncle of the unfortunate poet Sir Thomas Overbury, left all his lands and tenements in Virginia and New England for "the foundinge of maintenance of a universitie, and such schooles in Virginia as shall there be erected and shall be called *Academia Virginiensis et Oxoniensis*."<sup>14</sup> The bequest was conditioned on a failure of heirs in a line of descent within Palmer's family. Under the somewhat strange notion that Indian depredations might thereby be avoided, a site for the projected institution was actually purchased on an obscure island in the Susquehanna River. The ambitious Maecenas also outlined a curriculum for his *academia* that included instruction in the fine arts. But the anticipated failure of heirs reckoned

without the fertility of Palmer's line, so *Academia Virginiana et Oxoniensis* collapsed within the framework of his will.

Virginians eventually concluded that a seat of higher learning could best be secured through their own efforts. During the first half of the seventeenth century impetus had been mainly supplied by various pious, philanthropic, and evangelical individuals in England. During the latter half of the century the movement began to draw support from the settlers themselves.

That this favorable attitude on their part failed to develop earlier can be ascribed to several factors.<sup>15</sup> In the first place, the planters possessed insufficient means to underwrite such costly ventures. Great wealth concentrated in the hands of an enlightened segment of the colonial population materialized only in the latter part of the century. A large percentage of the earlier colonists, moreover, regarded England as home: Virginia was merely a fabled El Dorado in which financial betterment could be sought. These hopeful transients entertained little concern for the intellectual or cultural requirements of the colony and thus lent no support to any efforts aimed at creating a provincial seat of higher learning. Others who had become more firmly rooted were anxious to achieve a pattern of life that had fired their aspirations in England. A vital aspect of the tradition they hoped to perpetuate was an English university education for their sons. Many a tender youth was dispatched on a perilous Atlantic voyage to uphold this genteel pretension.

The colony, as a matter of fact, was still in a frontier status, its population sparse and widely dispersed. The cen-

sus of 1635 listed fewer than 5,000 inhabitants; in 1649 the number had risen only to 15,000.<sup>16</sup> Related to this was an agricultural economy that discouraged the growth of cities and towns. Had urban centers developed, educational ventures would doubtless have received earlier and more active provincial support.

The colonial government itself showed scant official interest in the problem. Office was regarded mainly as a means for personal advancement. The Virginia Company, especially under the farsighted leadership of Sir Edwin Sandys, had pursued a liberal and enlightened policy in colonial administration. But the reactionary disposition of the Stuarts was frequently reflected in the policies pursued by their Virginia appointees after the colony became a royal province in 1624. The fact that royal support and backing for a college obtained only after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 is significant.

By the middle of the century other influences began to counteract these retarding factors. The population of the colony rose to a substantial 40,000 persons in 1666.<sup>17</sup> English university graduates among the planters and within the professional classes increased, strengthening public sentiment in favor of the establishment of schools and colleges. A failure to attract an adequate supply of clergymen from England disturbed the pious, who began to direct their attention toward the possibility of founding a provincial seminary for training ministers of the gospel. Great wealth began to accumulate in the hands of the planter class, producing an aristocracy of greater and lesser landowners whose ideal was rapidly becoming a colonial modification of the English aristocratic tradition. And the dangers and

perils of the voyage abroad began to stir the compassion of parents formerly bent on educating their heirs in English schools and colleges.

Private libraries of considerable size, moreover, were beginning to take shape. These collections were being assembled not only by members of the planter aristocracy but also by representatives of the middle class.<sup>18</sup> Their interest in books was indicative of a concern for higher education and for intellectual ideals. To be sure, a growing pride in Virginia also began to permeate the colonial mind.

In 1660 the Virginia General Assembly gave expression to these underlying sentiments by passing at least three different acts aimed at establishing a public free school and college. One of the measures provided

for the advance of learning, education of youth, supply of the ministry, and promotion of piety, [that] there be land taken upon purchases for a Colledge and free schoole, and that there be, with as much speed as may be convenient, housing erected thereon for entertainment of students and schollers.<sup>19</sup>

Another statute referred to the projected institution as "a college of students of the liberal arts."<sup>20</sup>

It was proposed that the requisite funds be raised through personal subscriptions on the part of the colonists. Such a subscription was made. Despite his despotic disposition, Governor Sir William Berkeley, together with the members of his Council, contributed to the project. The justices of the county courts, the next wealthiest group in the colony, were urged to follow suit. And a memorial, submitted to Berkeley, suggested that the king be peti-

tioned for letters patent authorizing collections from "well-disposed people in England."<sup>21</sup>

But the promised subscriptions were difficult to collect, plantations and settlements remained widely scattered, and, indeed, the public mind was diverted from college plans by the discord and poverty that culminated in 1676 in Bacon's Rebellion. Financial backing, as a matter of fact, was not forthcoming until 1688-89, when "a Small Remnant of Men of Better Spirit, who had either had the benefit of better Education themselves in their Mother-Country, or at least had heard of it from others," subscribed £2,500 to endow an institution of higher learning.<sup>22</sup> This encouragement enabled the active promoters of the venture to proceed with the undertaking. James Blair, commissary of the bishop of London, and Francis Nicholson, lieutenant-governor of the colony, were the principal movers.

Blair, born in Scotland in 1655, was a product of Marischal College, Aberdeen, an institution endowed, it might be noted, with a chair of divinity that had been established by Rev. Patrick Copeland of East India School memory.<sup>23</sup> Blair also held a master of arts degree from the University of Edinburgh. Fortified with Anglican orders, he removed to England, where, from 1682 to 1685, he was employed in the office of the master of rolls at London. While in London he became acquainted with the bishop of the diocese, Henry Compton, who persuaded him to go to Virginia as a missionary. Blair reached the colony in 1685 and assumed the living of Varina parish. Varina parish, significantly enough, embraced the site of the 1617-22 abortive attempt to establish a university and college at Henrico.

Evidences of the ill-fated venture may have survived in the locality, reproachful reminders of miscarried plans and thwarted hopes. Blair's outstanding abilities led in 1689 to his appointment as commissary, or deputy, to the bishop of London, whose episcopal jurisdiction extended to Virginia. Blair, in his new capacity, inaugurated the policy of holding occasional convocations of the Virginia clergy. In 1690, at the first of these conventions, he urged the clergy to take the initiative in founding a free school and college.

The same year that marked the appointment of Blair as commissary also saw the arrival in Virginia of Colonel Francis Nicholson, newly appointed lieutenant-governor of the colony.<sup>24</sup> Nicholson, a professional colonial administrator, had previously served as lieutenant-governor of the short-lived Dominion of New England. Like Blair, he was a man of determined character and sanguine temperament. In 1690, during the absence of Governor Lord Howard of Effingham, Nicholson proposed to the Virginia Council that the "design of a free school and college," already projected by some "pious men," be revived and urged that subscriptions be solicited for its support.<sup>25</sup> The Council, pleased with the proposal, called upon the county justices to submit returns listing the names of planters within their respective localities who might assist the project. The response was heartening.

In consequence, the House of Burgesses in May 1691 directed Blair to proceed to England for the purpose of submitting a memorial to the king and queen, William and Mary, on behalf of the projected establishment.

The mission was in capable hands. Blair reached London

on September 1, 1691, and promptly sought the advice and assistance of the Anglican hierarchy. Bishop Compton, on whose shoulders rested the burden of Virginia's spiritual needs, displayed great interest; other prelates—Stillingfleet, bishop of Worcester; Burnet, bishop of Salisbury; Tillotson, archbishop of Canterbury—were equally enthusiastic.<sup>26</sup> The influence of these powerful churchmen, combined with the liberal disposition of the newly installed royal authorities, paved the way for Blair's success.

On November 12, 1691, under the auspices of an introduction by Archbishop Tillotson, Blair laid his memorial before William III. Graciously received, the memorial was referred to the proper officials for further consideration. Two years elapsed, however, while it wended its way through the intricacies of Whitehall's administrative maze. Finally, on February 8, 1693, a royal charter authorizing a college in Virginia was placed in the supplicant's hands. Blair was designated its first president "during his natural life," and the institution, the second seat of higher learning founded in British North America, was "called and denominated, for ever, the College of William and Mary, in Virginia."<sup>27</sup> The charter specified that the college was authorized in order that "the Church of Virginia may be furnished with a Seminary of Ministers of the Gospel, and that the Youth may be piously educated in good Letters and Manners, and that the Christian Faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians."<sup>28</sup>

While awaiting the outcome of his mission, Blair, a practical man, devoted considerable time to the problem of securing financial support for the proposed seat of learn-

ing. Through the good offices of Bishop Burnet a sizable segment of a bequest left by Hon. Robert Boyle for "charitable and pious uses" was obtained.<sup>29</sup> That sum, earmarked for the education of Indians, was subsequently invested in Brafferton Manor, Yorkshire; it furnished the college with regular revenues until the American revolution. Blair also secured the passage of an order-in-council enabling certain former pirates to regain portions of their seized property by contributing £300 to the college coffers.<sup>30</sup> The king and queen confirmed their benevolence by subscribing £2,000 out of the Virginia quitrents toward the erection of the necessary academic buildings.<sup>31</sup> Their government made an exceedingly handsome settlement by levying a tax for the support of the college of one penny on every pound of tobacco exported from Virginia and Maryland and by granting the college all profits and fees deriving from the office of the Virginia surveyor-general.<sup>32</sup> The college was even more closely allied to the colonial economy when the Virginia General Assembly in 1693 levied for its maintenance a permanent export duty on skins and furs.<sup>33</sup> These financial arrangements integrated the destiny of the college with that of the colony. Virginia on the threshold of her golden age offered brilliant prospects indeed.

Blair, during his English sojourn, also occupied himself with the development of plans for the administration, organization, and curriculum of the projected seat of learning. Problems touching these points were discussed frequently in letters directed to Colonel Nicholson.<sup>34</sup> Blair was conscious, for example, of "the vast difference there is between the contrivance of our Virginia college & all the

Colleges I can hear of here in England."<sup>35</sup> To be sure, he and his associates did not slavishly strive to model the Virginia institution on the pattern of its English counterparts. A realistic appreciation of colonial needs led at the outset to modifications of English university practice and precedent. Blair distrusted in particular the lecture system employed in English universities. Professors in the Virginia college, he decided, "must daily examine their Scholars, prescribe them tasks, hear them dispute, try them in all manner of exercises & wait upon them as punctually as a School Mast'r."<sup>36</sup>

Blair envisioned and in the due course of time organized a college having three grades of instruction. The first grade was to consist of a grammar school, where Latin and Greek would be taught. The second was to consist of two schools, one of moral philosophy, the other of natural philosophy and mathematics. The third, designed to qualify young men for the church, was to consist of a school of divinity and a school of oriental languages.<sup>37</sup> In general, a youth was expected to complete his grammar school work at the age of sixteen and then be examined by the college president and masters. If he survived that ordeal, he could be admitted to one of the two philosophical schools. In the school of natural philosophy he could turn to rhetoric, logic, ethics, and natural and civil law. Four years were to be required for a bachelor's degree and seven for a master of arts. If he elected the ministry for a career, the student might enter either of the two divinity schools: one for the study of Hebrew and the Bible, the other for investigating "the common Places of Divinity, and the Controversies with Hereticks."<sup>38</sup>

The power to establish and maintain this "Place of universal study, or perpetual College for Divinity, Philosophy, Languages, and other good Arts and Sciences" was entrusted to a self-perpetuating board of trustees, or visitors, all resident in the colony.<sup>39</sup> The trustees or visitors were authorized annually to elect from their number a rector for the college and every seven years to choose some "eminent and discreet person" as chancellor.<sup>40</sup> Blair, named president in the charter, was, in the same instrument, designated rector. Henry Compton, bishop of London, agreed to serve as the first chancellor. After somewhat heated debate, the trustees decided on Middle Plantation, a small settlement some six miles from the colonial capital at Jamestown, as a site for the institution.<sup>41</sup> Middle Plantation was shortly thereafter renamed Williamsburg in honor of William III. Thus organized, the college authorities turned their attention to plans for erecting a building and for securing the appurtenances essential to a seat of higher learning.

## CHAPTER TWO

## The First Book Collection

1693-1705

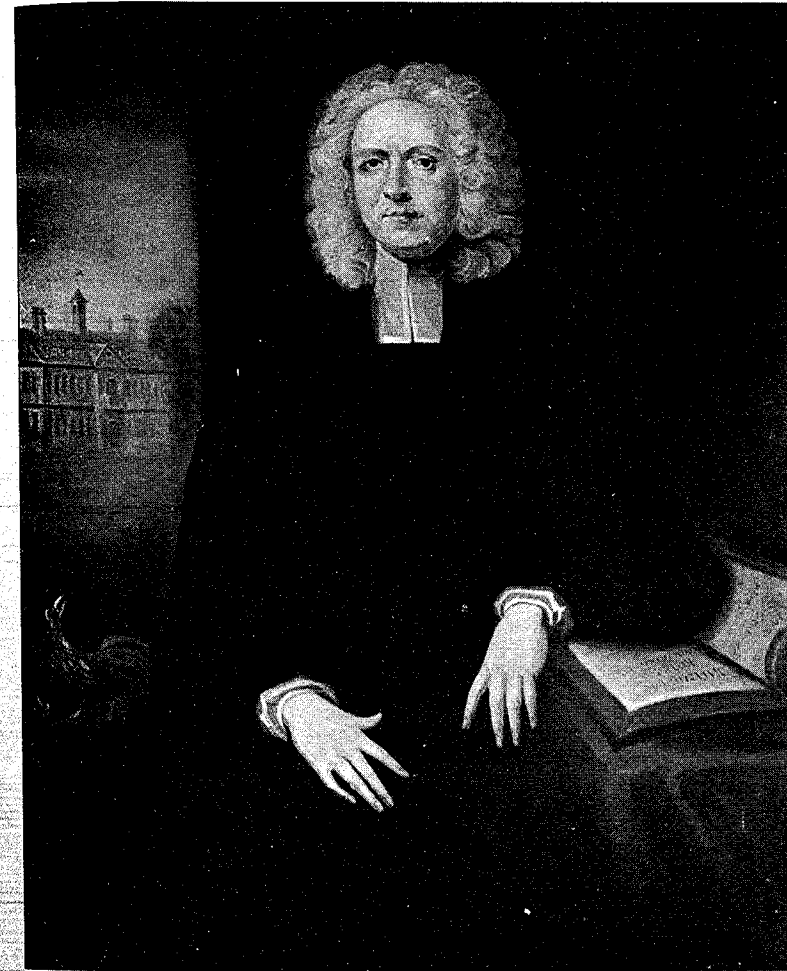
JAMES BLAIR, shortly after arriving in London in 1691 on his mission to secure a charter for the college, wrote to Francis Nicholson in Virginia urging agreement on the early appointment of a president for the projected seat of learning. One of Blair's arguments in favor of the move stressed the need for "overseeing of the . . . Library."<sup>1</sup> Such concern perhaps indicates that Blair sought to collect books for the projected library during the course of his two-year stay in England. Many of the dignitaries whose patronage was solicited—John Tillotson, Gilbert Burnet, Anthony Horneck, Henry Compton, Edward Stillingfleet—were distinguished men of letters. It is unlikely that a man as enterprising as Blair would have failed to mention the desirability of including the printed works of those eminent divines in the college collection. That form of flattery, as a matter of fact, would have been a means of ingratiating himself, as well as the college project, into their favor and esteem. It is also reasonable to assume that Blair made efforts to obtain the printed works of Robert Boyle, whose eleemosynary bequest helped finance the academic venture. Blair negotiated the Boyle transaction with the philosopher's nephew, Richard Boyle,



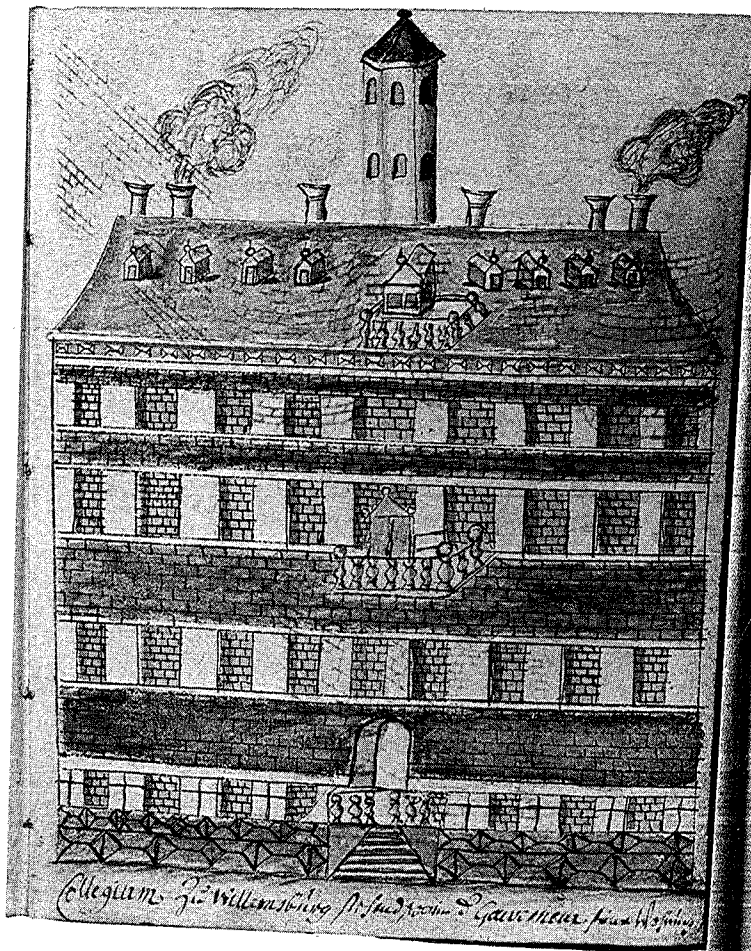
first earl of Burlington.<sup>2</sup> Because Blair resorted principally to personal interviews in seeking support for the project, he left sparse documentation of his activities. This complicates the problem of determining whether he made efforts to acquire books and, if so, whether his efforts met with success. The detailed expense accounts that Blair kept for the mission fail to show that he returned to Virginia in 1693 with crates of books.<sup>3</sup> This, of course, is not conclusive proof that none were obtained, for the transportation of such materials would have been handled by the college's London agent, Micajah Perry.<sup>4</sup>

Additional evidence that the founders contemplated library needs even before the college was formally organized can be seen in the terms of the charter. It specifically enjoined the trustees to employ the initial funds "only for defraying the Charges that shall be laid out in Erecting and Fitting the Edifices of the said intended College, and furnishing them with books and other utensils."<sup>5</sup> The declaration of academic aims set forth in the preamble to the charter would presumably have governed the formulation of plans for the organized acquisition of library materials. But more likely than not plans of this nature existed only in the mind of President Blair. Upon returning to Virginia in 1693, he assumed active control of the project.

Both Blair and his principal assistant, Headmaster Mungo Ingles of the grammar school, held degrees as masters of arts from Edinburgh. Recollections of Edinburgh may have come to mind when the two set about forming a library for William and Mary. Neither Blair nor any of his colleagues in the undertaking were well acquainted with



1. James Blair (1655-1743), first president of the College of William and Mary. From a portrait attributed to Charles Bridges. The east front of the college, as reconstructed after the fire of 1705, is shown in the background, rising above the legendary phoenix. (Courtesy of College of William and Mary)



2. East front of the College of William and Mary in 1702. From a drawing by Franz Ludwig Michel. (Courtesy of College of William and Mary)

Harvard College in New England, which then supported the only other college library in the colonies.

The Edinburgh library, as recalled by Blair and Ingles, served merely as a reading room.<sup>6</sup> Its volumes did not circulate and, indeed, many were still firmly attached to the bookcases by medieval chains. Not until 1688 was a visitor able to commend Edinburgh's librarian for having bookcases enclosed with wire. Strict regulations were in effect, moreover, to prevent damage to and destruction of the books. William Henderson, "who showed great zeal and fidelity in his office," was Edinburgh's librarian during Blair's student days. And Henderson's son, Robert, who achieved distinction by introducing *bibliothekswissenschaft* into the management of the Edinburgh library, held the post when Ingles was in residence.

Blair was also able to recall—not from firsthand experience, perhaps, for undergraduate use of college libraries was a much later development—the library of Marischal College, Aberdeen, where he had secured his bachelor's degree. It is doubtful that his three years' experience in the office of the master of rolls at London served any useful purpose in setting up the William and Mary collection of printed books.

Library plans could not be pursued aggressively at William and Mary until suitable accommodations were available for housing books. The main college building, "adapted to the Nature of the Country" from drawings attributed to Sir Christopher Wren, Surveyor-General of the King's Works, was begun in 1694 and was first occupied in 1697.<sup>7</sup> It was the most ambitious collegiate edifice

erected during the colonial period of American history. It is certain that the plans included accommodations for the library. Since 1380, when William of Wykeham founded New College, Oxford, the plans for every English college had provided space for an institutional book collection.<sup>8</sup>

Wren, who is credited with the plans for the first building at William and Mary, was keenly interested in library planning. His work on the Lincoln Cathedral library in 1674, his celebrated design in 1676 for the New Library at Trinity College, Cambridge, and his St. Paul's Cathedral library at London, all antedated the drafting of plans for the collegiate structure in Virginia.<sup>9</sup> Wren, moreover, greatly influenced his successors in library planning, for though he did not actually introduce the wall system of shelf arrangement into England, he developed and successfully adapted it to English requirements.

The long front or façade of the William and Mary structure faced due east, and virtually all of its major rooms, with the exception of the great hall and the chapel, which respectively were to form the north and south links of a projected quadrangle, enjoyed eastern exposures. This orientation enabled the builders, consciously or unconsciously, to follow the precept of Vitruvius that "libraries ought to have an eastern exposure because their purposes require the morning light and also because books in such libraries will not decay."<sup>10</sup> The precise location of the library room in the original structure is not revealed in the surviving records. But the most likely location would have been on the second floor.

The spacious basements and cellars of the building were given over to kitchens, storerooms, pantries, butteries, and

other housekeeping arrangements. On the main floor were quarters for the grammar school, rooms for advanced classes, a great hall, a wide covered piazza, and, after 1732, the chapel.<sup>11</sup> The second floor provided space for an impressive chamber—designated the "Blue Room"—in which the president and masters, as well as the board of visitors, could transact their official business, as well as more classrooms and living accommodations for students and masters. Additional living quarters for the students and masters were located on the third floor and in the attics.

The notion that a seat of higher learning ought to devote its own funds to acquiring library materials was virtually unknown in the seventeenth century. Professor Morrison reports that his examination of English college records for the period 1595–1640 failed to uncover a single instance of a college spending money on books.<sup>12</sup> It was generally believed that a college or university library could be developed solely on the basis of donations and bequests. This belief was given credence in the colonies by the fact that the library cart often preceded the college horse. At Yale, for example, each member of the body of ministers who met in 1700 to consider the advisability of an institution of higher learning for Connecticut agreed to give "books for the founding of a college."<sup>13</sup> The very name of Harvard College, moreover, perpetuates the generosity of a library benefactor. Thus, despite the authorization contained in their charter, little evidence survives to show that the officials at William and Mary earmarked any significant portion of their initial endowments for the development of a library. The magnificent building under

construction from 1694 to 1699 absorbed all the available funds.

Indeed, it is not surprising to discover that the first reference to library resources at the college occurs in connection with a donation. Francis Nicholson, "the Great Maecenas of the College," heads the list of known library benefactors. A catalogue of his private library, endorsed May 30, 1695, and now preserved in the Fulham Palace archives, is prefaced by a statement that Nicholson wished to leave the entire collection to William and Mary.<sup>14</sup> His generous disposition preceded the preparation of the catalogue, for contemporary annotations indicate that seven volumes from the collection had already been turned over to the college. The titles so marked were Robert South's *Animadversion upon Dr. Sherlock's book entituled A vindication of the holy and ever-blessed Trinity*; three works of Gilbert Burnet, *A discourse of the pastoral care*, *The life of William Bedell*, and *The life and death of Sir Matthew Hale*; an anonymous work entitled *The art of catechising: or, The compleat catechist*; Burnet's translation of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*; and, appropriately enough, John Locke's enlightened *Some thoughts concerning education*. No earlier evidence than the record of these accessions, received before May 30, 1695, remains to show that books were actually being assembled for the library.

The college did not have to wait for Nicholson's demise in order to obtain the rest of his books. They apparently were donated to the library when Nicholson returned to Virginia in 1698 to reassume the reins of government. This may have led the Virginia House of Burgesses to

affirm the following year that, after the king, Nicholson was "the most zealous patron of the New Seat of Learning."<sup>15</sup> Nicholson retained in his possession a copy of the catalogue receipted by College Clerk William Robertson. It was subsequently employed when he sought to vindicate the eccentric personal behavior that characterized his conduct during his second sojourn in the colony, 1698-1705.<sup>16</sup> The vindication, published in 1727, contained a rueful estimate that the books presented to the college cost a good fifty or sixty pounds sterling.<sup>17</sup>

The Nicholson catalogue covers a collection of well over two hundred volumes.<sup>18</sup> Of this number, 158 works were specifically listed by title. These titles are grouped according to the sizes of the respective volumes under three headings, (1) folios, (2) quartos, and (3) octavos and duodecimos. Valuations are supplied in most cases, affording a check on Nicholson's 1727 estimate of the total value of the collection. Positive identification of the listed works is occasionally complicated by the free rendition of a title or else by complete absence or incorrect spelling of an author's name. One entry under the quartos covers "thirty-nine books and pamphlets relating to the several sorts of trade and commerce." This is the only entry matching that favorite yet frustrating colonial cataloguing phrase, "a parcel of old books." Even here the cataloguer was thoughtful enough to indicate the subject nature of the volumes so lightly dismissed. A large percentage of the works were printed after 1690, which suggests that Nicholson formed the collection between 1692 and 1694 while in England awaiting a new colonial assignment. The donation provided a nucleus or core around which a li-