

Carl A. Fehr

"Pappy" Fehr, as he is known to most at William and Mary, came as choir director in 1945 and built that organization from a small, struggling group into an outstanding college choir, adding a women's chorus as well. The nickname is significant, for "Pappy," in his devotion to excellence and precision (words that appear often in these interviews) has made his students part of his family, and often at our session he would talk about various students to whom he remains close, even though he has been retired for almost two years now. He is obviously proud of his choir's reputation.

Even the choir director, Dr. Fehr went through something of a rehearsal before taping each of these sessions. At his request some stylistic changes were made in the draft transcript, and Dr. Fehr himself typed the final draft.

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Interviewee Carl A. Fehr
 Date of interview November 7, 1975
 Place 108 Spring Road, Williamsburg
 Interviewer Emily Williams
 Session number 1
 Length of tape 40 mins.

Contents:	Approximate time:
background	10 mins.
coming to William & Mary, 1945	3 mins.
state of music department, choir	
building up of choir in first year	7 mins.
music at William & Mary in general,	
relations with students	9 mins.
post-WWII living conditions	1 min.
educational value of choir	9 mins.
choir requirements	1

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Interviewee Carl A. FehrDate of interview November 17, 1975Place 108 Spring Road, WilliamsburgInterviewer Emily WilliamsSession number 2Length of tape 54 mins.

Contents:	Approximate time:
procedure for joining chorus and choir, expectations for	20 mins.
rewards from choir	5 mins.
standards	1 min.
tearing choir - selection of, standards for	17 mins.
support for choir	9 mins.
memory schedule	4 mins.

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Interviewee Carl A. Fehr

Date of interview December 5, 1975

Place Tucker-Clemson Room, Swem library, W&M

Interviewer Emily Williams

Session number 3

Length of tape 70 mins.

Contents:	Approximate time:
Student relationships in choir	10 mins.
concerts	
Music, stage arrangements	13 mins.
concern for choir members	3 mins.
concerts (cont'd.) - appeal of	11 mins.
Special concerts	
1957 Jamestown celebration	10 mins.
to Legion women's auxiliary	5 mins.
Freedom's Foundation dinner	4 mins.
D.A.A. convention	3 mins.
Christmas television programs	9 mins.
radio programs	2 mins.
other	3 mins.

Carl A. Fehr

November 7, 1975

Williams: Dr. Fehr, I wondered what your background was like prior to your coming to William and Mary.

Fehr: Many people have been interested in how I got into music. I guess I would say that one of the strongest influences was my grandfather, who immigrated to the United States from Germany for (purposes of) religious freedom in the latter part of the 1800s. He settled with a group of people in a small rural area in Texas and was a Lutheran parochial school teacher and church organist. As a little boy I would go to church with him and sit on the organ bench with him and watch him. I was very much impressed with his ability and his playing this one manual tracker action pipe organ. All my life I admired his ability and of course was very fond of my grandfather. My grandfather died when I was still a young boy. When I started going to the Lutheran parochial school in Austin, Texas, I studied piano and then pipe organ all the way through my school days. I started playing the pipe organ for church services when I was thirteen years old. I was quite short and had difficulty reaching the pedals, but I got the job done somehow or other. During high school I did church work and organ work and some choral work, but my ambition was to become a concert organist. Soon after I started studying pipe organ I realized that I could not reach that particular goal because I didn't think I was that talented and skilled. So I became very much interested in choral music. I attended the University of Texas in Austin, where we lived, and took music the first year in the department of music. Unfortunately, our governor, who was Mrs. "Ma" Ferguson, had a conflict with the head of the music department and therefore the next year cut the budget and did away with the department

of music, much to the regret of many of us who were working toward our music degrees. Well, there was no need to sit still. I couldn't go away; we were a poor family. We had the university there, and so we (my brothers and I) could go to school and so some odd jobs and help ourselves through the university. I changed my major -- German was my major and French was my minor. On the side I went to a private conservatory which had been established for music students at the university. In fact, the head of the music department and some of his associates formed this conservatory. I took piano and theory and other music courses along with my university work, so I had quite a heavy load. I continued along also with my church work and did some choir work all during my university days. After I received my bachelor of arts degree I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, so I went away to Concordia (Lutheran) Teachers College in River Forest, Illinois, and there I received my diploma in church music and became eligible to teach in the parochial schools. However, after my venture at River Forest I came back to the University of Texas for my master of arts degree -- still struggling, trying to find myself. I changed my major to psychology with a minor in sociology and received my masters' degree. Then, of course, it was time to find a job, and I took a teaching position in the Lutheran parochial school in Austin, where I played the pipe organ, did choir work, and all the other things that a person does when he works in the church.

After teaching there two years I decided that I would try for a better-paying job in the public schools. That was during the depression days. Those of us who recall 1933 and thereabouts know it was a hard time;

luckily I knew the superintendent of schools in Austin. He called me one day, and he told me that he had a job there. (He had over a hundred applicants for one job). I was just glad to get a job with a little bit better pay -- the pay was \$125 a month. I (had) applied for a music job in the schools, but he said the only place he had open was for me to teach history, so I took it. At that time people took a job and did anything they could. I started teaching history in the University Junior High School, which was connected with the University of Texas. (Practice teachers came and did their practice teaching, and so I did some supervisory work in that field.)

However, I did not lose contact with my music. Every occasion I had at the junior high school I would play accompaniments for the choral director; I kept in anything I could do musically as well as teaching my history courses. Then the German teacher left, and so I taught history and German and did some music on the side. I always had this drive to go into music, even when I went to University of Texas. -- I had an opportunity to get a fellowship in biology, one in mathematics -- and yet music was still my strongest urge. Since I had received my masters' degree in psychology I thought for awhile of working on my doctorate in educational psychology, and I had started on that, but I was never very content. I did much work during the summertime but kept my teaching job all along. Then finally the man who did the music work at the University Junior High School was promoted to supervisor of elementary music in the Austin public schools, and I received the appointment as choral director at the junior high school. For awhile I did a little history teaching and choral music, and then gradually the choral program grew to the extent that it was a fulltime position.

I worked there several years, and then I was transferred to the Austin High School, which is a senior high school. I taught there and had three girls' choruses and two boys' choruses and one mixed chorus. Fortunately, I enjoyed sports and happened to get the captain of the football team in my boys' chorus, and of course all the boys then flocked into that. (Discussion about the boys' chorus.) During the time I was working in Austin I went to the University of Michigan during the summers -- one summer I went to Northwestern and then transferred to the University of Michigan, from where I received my master of music in music education and choral music. Then in 1944 or thereabouts a friend of mine had observed the work that I was doing at Austin, and he said to me, "Fehr, you ought to teach in a college." I had no idea that I would teach in a college -- I was more or less set -- when the opportunity presented itself here at William and Mary. I came up for an interview and had no idea that I would be elected to the position as choral director. (The music department at that time was a part of the fine arts department.) Fortunately when I got back home in Austin I received the letter from the College of William and Mary stating that I had been elected as director of the choral group and assistant professor of music -- much to my happiness -- and I accepted it and came up here in September 1945.

Williams: How had you first heard about the job here? Had they contacted you?

Fehr: This friend of mine was sort of a go-between. William and Mary was looking for somebody in choral music. Being a hometown boy -- teaching in your hometown high school -- had presented no problems, but (there was) always the desire to go to a better job. And then this individual (one of my friends) telling me he thought that I had the ability to do college

work -- I was flattered. I didn't really know if I could, but I'd give it a shot if I had the opportunity, and the opportunity presented itself. There were quite a few candidates here for the position at the College of William and Mary, which is a fine college and people respect William and Mary. (Just in passing, I might say I've gone to many music conventions, and when I told people I was from the College of William and Mary, why, they'd just look at me in awe because we're the second oldest college in the United States.)

I came to William and Mary with great hopes and ambitions, but I would say I was a little bit startled the first time I met a choir. However, I was warned that the choir wasn't very large at that time, but that didn't bother me particularly. But when I did meet the choir for the first time (having left six large groups), meeting thirteens young ladies and four gentlemen, I thought, "Oh, oh, I've got some work ahead!" I was a little shocked, but I didn't let that deter me; I went to work. In the early days we had an opening convocation the first week, and we had to sing for that. I'm sure that the young ladies and gentlemen who were in that group remember how -- well, I hate to use the word pitiful, but it was a little bit wanting. But we were determined to go to work, and I tried to motivate my people and tell them, "We've got to get more troops in the ranks." So they went to work and I went to work, and at our next convocation in October or November we had close to sixty. So you see we worked pretty hard for a month or a month and a half. And another thing, we sang a number from memory, and that was a real novelty. When I told the choir that we were going to do this from memory they shuddered; they never had done anything from memory, as I expected of them. I tried to build confidence in them and tell them they could do the job, and they

did a very commendable job of their first memory work. (It didn't seem extraordinary to me because all the work that I had done in Austin was always done from memory.)

As time went along we started building. In 1947 we even had two choirs; we also had a men's glée club and a girls' chorus. It's always been a real problem to get young men to sing here. In high school you can participate in so many more things, and you've got to make a decision (in college). Many people didn't want to spend the time that was required for choir work. I always felt that if you're going to have a college choir it has to be as good as possible, and therefore we rehearsed quite diligently. The groups have simmered down in the last part of my career to a choir and a girls' chorus.

Williams: I wanted to ask you how that first fall, when you started out with (I guess) seventeen students and then by October or November you had sixty, how was it that the choir had caught on that fast?

Fehr: I told the students that were in the group to find anybody that they knew who liked to sing to come by to see me. Another thing: I was very understanding with anybody that wanted to sing; I always held onto the theory that you could sing if you worked. I had a lot of students tell me, "Oh, we can't sing. I can't carry a tune", and I would say in fun and jokingly, "You can carry a tune in a bucket". And to the young ladies I'd say, "You're pretty. That's all we need. We need a pretty girl up there. You can open your mouth." And when a fellow would come along, I'd say, "You're handsome. You can help us a lot." I think that one thing that helped us in the (first) choir -- there were three football boys that wanted to sing, and they came to see me after they'd heard that I was interested in the students. I said, "Well, you

can give up football practice and come to rehearsal" -- of course, that was all in jest. They said, "No, we can't do that." One of the fellows was a tenor and was quarterback on the team at that time -- a good fellow (and incidentally he's got a very job in Pittsburgh now as vice-president of some utility company). So I told them, "Okay, if you fellows want to sing, I'll come down at night and teach you the music." And so that's what I did. I came down several nights a week, and we practiced the music, and then we brought in some other people to help. We had a fine rapport and fine enthusiasm, and it was sort of contagious. It spread to the extent that we even started a women's group, and we had also a male group of around twenty-four men. It was really quite exciting to see all of this growth. Then when we gave our Christmas concert, that helped. At midterm we added a lot more people (and a few men) to our choir and to our chorus. There were fellows who didn't want to put in the time and couldn't because some were working their way through school and couldn't rehearse during the time, and of course I was very insistent that they come to rehearsals. I compared my choir and chorus and all my work pretty much to a football team: that if you don't have your men there when there's a game you're in a bad shape. If they said, "You won't miss me at a rehearsal," I would say, "Well, if you feel that way then you'd just as well quit right now," and that would change a lot of people's attitude because I was very insistent. I was criticized for this; I was criticized for many things at William and Mary. I would always say, "When you have a winner, you stay with the winning horse, and when something works you stay with that." Sure, there were sacrifices on the part of the students, but at the same time there were sacrifices on my part, which I didn't

mind. I'm not discrediting William and Mary because William and Mary's not aimed to have a big music school, and anybody who would major in music would probably go to another school. William and Mary's a fine liberal arts school. At the time when I came it was rated very highly. I think it only had 1300 students. We drew people who wanted to sing. They must have the desire, and they must be dependable. Ever since I taught, all the way through I preached to my people, "You must consider it a privilege to sing in a group, but at the same time you have responsibilities to carry out."

Williams: I think that you had said that you tried to use some of the key people from the old choir before you came to help out that first year.

Fehr: That's right. I didn't ask too many questions because that was past; I was always looking ahead. But some of the students that came and saw the enthusiasm that I tried to instill, my enthusiasm, the goals we had, the plans we had, and it seemed to be a selling point. In other words, I found in my work at William and Mary that you had to interest the student. After all, they came for a liberal arts education; they didn't come here to make music their profession. If you didn't make the program interesting for them, if it didn't bring them some relief from their hard studies, they just weren't going to participate. Just recently I saw a girl who I think graduated in the mid-50s or early '50s, and she said to me, "Pappy, I used to come over to rehearsal, and I'd just be cussing you. As soon as we got into rehearsal, we started singing, and I'd forget my problems and my worries and my studies, and there was something that made me very happy. The two-hour rehearsal went so fast, I didn't realize it was gone. I felt like studying after that." In other words, what I tried to do with the students -- I was always interested in them; I told them if they

had problems and had nobody to talk to, I told them, "Come on by and talk with me." I would have a lot of students come by and talk with me, even about their love problems and what not. I was always interested in students ever since I taught. One big factor was homesickness. I even had boys cry in my office; they were just giving other excuses, but I would look at them and say, "You're really missing mother and dad and your old environment, aren't you?" "I guess that's it." Well, you can expect that.

Williams: This might be a good place to ask you where did you get the name "Pappy"?

Fehr: Every time I gave a concert I had a little pep talk with my group before we went in to sing. I would call in my groups an hour or so before so that we could associate, sing a little bit, get the nervousness out of our system. We used to practice in the basement of the old Methodist church, which was on Duke of Gloucester Street. Just before we went over to our concert, (the first Christmas concert) these people were gathered around me, and I just gave them a little pep talk: "Now we know our music. We're all ready for this. We're going to give the people a good concert, and you're going to be happy, and I'm going to be happy, and we hope our customers will be happy." So this one boy (one of the football players) was a real big fellow -- he came and put his arm around me and said, "'Pappy', and all his children," and it just seemed to hang onto me ever since then.

Williams: You didn't much mind it?

Fehr: No, I didn't. I was really happy because whereas we have an awful lot of fun with our students and learn a lot, we always had the saying, "For everything there is a season." When we had to work, we had to work, and when we played, we played together. We just had a good time together.

When we'd go on tours, sometimes some of the older alumni particularly would come up to me and say, "Why don't they call you by your title -- either call you Professor or Dr. Fehr or show a little more respect?" And I said, "That doesn't even bother me. We feel like a big family; I feel like these students are my children. We've just had a good time together, and they don't mean it in any disrespectful way." It's a little bit astounding that there were just a few students who would never call me "Pappy."

I always liked to have time for my students and be very nice to them as best I could. There was always a mortality in personnel of the choir and the people who would be -- I don't like to use the word discipline, but who wouldn't go along with us in some of the things we stood for -- they would get angry and drop out, and that oftentimes pleased the other students because they knew we stood for something. Another expression we always used, "Don't just stand, but stand for something", and we developed a pride: everybody was very proud being in the group. They spoke in highest terms, and I just feel that if you have a good feeling and good rapport you can accomplish anything you want to. We did some very difficult music, and we did it from memory. For example, we were on tour and we did a real difficult work -- oh, the length of it was around thirty minutes. This lady came to me and said, "We've been working on this for two years using the music, and we still don't know the notes. We can't sing it, and you all get up there and you all sing it and just brush it off." I said, "Well, of course, there's a difference. We work three times a week; we work two hours on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and then we also have extra rehearsals. We have a feeling of working for perfection, for precision, artistry, and doing just as beautiful a job as we know how with the talent that we have." And as I said before,

I'm not discrediting the talent that comes to William and Mary because we have found some very fine voices, and we've found some that were not so fine that we had to build. We worked and worked and worked. I always said if anybody can do better they can come up on the stage and sing or they can direct; we did the best we could.

Williams: You mentioned Mrs. Fehr. I have said to you that I found when the two of you moved to Williamsburg, you had to live in old Phi Beta. Why was this?

Fehr: We came at the time when living conditions were very tight in Williamsburg. In fact, when we arrived we didn't know where in the world we were going to stay. The first thing we had to do was move most of our junk up to the third floor in Brafferton for about a week, and then finally we were able to get a place in Ewell Hall (which was old Phi Beta). Dormitory space was so tight also that we had six girls in our dormitory, so my wife was housemother and I was housefather. We had these girls to check in at 11:00 and all the other college rules. We had a lot of fun together, and when they had problems (if they got sick or anything) we took care of them. One of the funniest incidents was one night when a mouse was running in their room. They hollered and they called for me, and the girls were on top of their beds, and I set up a trap, and I caught the mouse. Really, six fine girls we had up there with us.

Williams: Then when you first came -- I think you alluded to this while ago -- the music department was part of the fine arts department.

Fehr: That's right. I think it was around '51 (or) '52 when the music department became independent of the fine arts department. The course we offered was a bachelor of arts in fine arts with emphasis in music,

but now it's a bachelor of arts in music; the college doesn't give a bachelor of music. We don't teach enough music courses to meet the requirements for a bachelor of music (degree) here.

Williams: Did having independent department status affect the choir in any way or is it mainly an extracurricular activity?

Fehr: It's mainly an extracurricular activity. You can take choir for credit, but you have to have a prerequisite -- Music 101, which is an elementary theory course -- in order to give it some academic status, I suppose. At first when I came they gave one-fourth credit per semester, and later on they gave one-half credit per semester, and now they give one credit per semester, but you can't earn more than four hours of credit in choir toward your degree. I was always a little bit provoked and unhappy when people would tell me that choir was an easy credit. I've told many of my professor friends, "I wish you could follow me just one semester, and come and see how hard these students work for that one credit. They put in time." The choir serves so many functions at the college. We have the pride about ourselves that we're going to do our jobs as well as possible. Therefore we had to rehearse extra; they memorized all the music, and we learned good literature. We learned sort of a varied library because with the general type of student we were working with, they enjoyed something relaxing, too, and to sing some of the lighter numbers takes skill, also. We found that some of those -- to put them over -- would sometimes take more skill than some of the harder numbers that we were doing.

Williams: Then, Dr. Fehr, what educational values were you able to teach in choir?

Fehr: As I was saying a moment ago, Miss Williams, not many, but several, of my colleagues and friends think that there's not an awful lot of value

to choral singing (to receive academic credit). We don't just sing; we work on tone; we work on diction; we work on theory. We learn to live together, to work together. We learn to give and take. In other words, we try to develop a certain new outlook on life. We try to take a positive outlook on life. We would talk about what a piece of music tries to do and whether or not the composer has fitted the music to the text. We paid great attention to detail. We weren't satisfied with any sloppiness; we wanted to have precision. After got through hearing the number we sang, we didn't want them to clap because the number was over, but because they enjoyed it. And you can pretty much tell when people clap that way; so many places we would get standing ovations for our performances. Other things that the students learned in their choral work: we weren't just satisfied in singing a number, but singing it excellently, and when we went out or when we performed, there was always a dignity about the group as a whole. Whereas we were amateurs, I always told them, "Let's be as professional about things as possible." To give you an example of the impression that our choir made, particularly when we went away: when we went on tour we expected our ladies to dress up like young ladies -- either dresses or nice pantsuits, and the gentlemen would wear coats and ties and have nice haircuts. When we'd get off the bus, people would just stop and look at us. The thing that was sort of a crowning jewel for me: always when we came back from our tour from the northern part of Virginia we stopped at Jarrell's Truckstop. We took pictures there for years; it would just give us a break from being on the bus so long. On our last tour it just happened that another group came along. All these people came off of the bus with blue jeans and shirts hanging

out and their hair disshevelled and so on, and some of my students came to me and said, "We see now what you mean." And also, our sponsors would come to me and say, "Why, you have some of the finest students that we've ever seen." Another thing that we always told them: we're going out to represent the college, and we're representing the choir, and we represent the director, and most of all we represent each individual. We want to be courteous and understanding and very pleasant to our hosts. People were really amazed. One rather touching thing happened when we were in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We gave a concert, and after the concert our sponsors gave us a reception, which they did at most places where we sang. And here was this old lady -- she must have been in her eighties, and she was in a wheelchair -- and three of my boys went over to talk to her. Later on in the evening I walked by her, and tears were just rolling down her cheeks. She said, "Dr. Fehr, I have never had this experience in my life of young men coming and sitting down by my side and one even kneeling next to my wheelchair talking to me. It was the most moving experience." I told them, "At the reception, don't just talk to each other. You all see each other enough. You go around and talk to different people. If you have anything against William and Mary, you don't talk about it on tour; you praise William and Mary or otherwise withdraw and go to the University of Toano." And so, in other words, if people say there is no educational value to choral work I think they've got more thinking to do because we have so many, many things that we try to instill in our students in the choral program.

Williams: In what way were you able to build these groups, the William and Mary Choir and Chorus -- into the quality organizations they became? What did you demand of them? You've mentioned some things as we went along:

the haircuts, the dress.

Fehr: I don't like to say "demand" so much. What we did in the years ever since I've been here, starting in 1945, the students and I would sit down and we would draw up rules and regulations, but really we didn't call them rules and regulations. We said, "What is expected of a member of the William and Mary Choir or the William and Mary Chorus," and people could take it or leave it.

Session 2

November 17, 1975

Williams: How was it that a William and Mary student got into first of all the chorus, and then the choir, and then the touring choir?

Fehr: We'll start with the chorus. We always had so many young ladies who wanted to sing that we had a chorus which was made up entirely of young ladies, and the choir was made up of ladies and gentlemen, and the touring choir was taken from the choir (which was a mixed group). First in the chorus: I would take any girl who expressed an interest in singing. She would have to go through an audition. The audition was very simple, and really I never did call it an audition. I called it a "get-acquainted session" because so many people would come in nervous and shaking, and some of them couldn't even sing at times. I even asked some girls and some boys to come back again when they were a little bit more relaxed. The first thing I would do -- I had an information sheet which I would give them to fill out so that I would have something in hand that I could talk to them about. "Oh, I see you're from Greensboro, North Carolina. How'd you get to William and Mary?" And I had a little conversation with the person who was auditioning to ease him/her and get over any kind of nervousness. We at William and Mary (being a liberal arts school) had lots of people who loved to sing but never felt they could. My theory was that anybody could sing if she or he would try. I would discuss with a student a few items on this sheet, and then I had a very simple audition in which I had the student to sing something very simple, like "America" or "America the Beautiful," so that the student could feel free to sing out. Then I

would check the range -- how high or how low. I'd ask what he/she had sung in school. Many girls had never sung before they came to college, which was quite interesting. Sometimes it's better to work with people that haven't had very much vocal training because then you can build the kind of tone and do the things that you particularly want to build. I would check the singer's pitch. Then finally I would check his/her sight-reading. Now some people put an awful lot of stress on sight-reading. The main thing that I wanted a student to do was to be aware of when a note goes up or down. I have some friends in the field who reject a person who cannot sight-read, and I think that's wrong. I think that you learn to read by reading. In other words, if you and I have never had a chance to read a paper or a book or something and then all of a sudden try to read, we couldn't, and the same thing is true in music. So I would be very liberal with the people who would come into the chorus just to give them an opportunity to sing and let them get some joy out of this.

Anybody who was selected then had certain requirements that had to be met. Some people think that they were severe. In the case of the girls' (chorus), I was not as severe with them as I was with members of the choir because the choir really was our public relations group that went out of the city. We sang for a lot of things, whereas the girls -- their main activities were on campus. In the early days they would sing in chapel, and they would sing for convocation once in awhile, or sometimes they would participate in the Christmas and in the spring concerts along with the choir. The one thing that I expected of the young ladies was that they be dependable, that they come to rehearsals, and if they had to be absent that they clear their absence beforehand.

Just because they wanted to have a date with their boyfriend or just sit out in the Sunken Garden in the springtime at rehearsal time was no excuse. I was very severe about attendance because nobody really did much practicing outside rehearsal time, and the only way that you can really get a group together is by working together. We did an awful lot of work -- lots of tone work, diction, and interpretation; there were many aspects that you had to take into consideration in learning the music. I expected the girls to be dependable. I always said, "We put a trust in you and just the same way you trust us." I didn't ask for a pledge, but I asked for more or less their word that they would stick for the whole year because I always planned my programs for the entire year, and if I had a large mortality it could wreck our program. Usually at midterm we found people that dropped out, particularly in the chorus. One reason was that some of them had academic problems, and then some people didn't want to work that hard. That's another thing I stressed: I said, "We're going to have fun, but we're going to work hard," and we did work hard because some people were not as talented as others. Another thing I had to get across: we had mainly freshmen girls and some upper-class girls in the chorus, and as I'll tell you in a moment, in the last twenty-five years or more in my career we had no freshmen girls in the choir because you go into the choir through the chorus. We had quite a heterogeneous group in the chorus. Some girls who came from fine high schools felt they should go right into the choir, but I found that girls from high school -- and this is no criticism, this is just observation and a fact -- they hadn't matured enough vocally to do what we needed in the choir, because we had sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the choir whose voices were much

more mature than you find in high school, and it was awfully hard sometimes to explain. I lost quite a few girls that way. I said, "I'm sorry, it's just not right for me to take a freshman girl who doesn't know my way of working;" these girls who worked in the chorus with me one year fitted into the choir beautifully because they had gotten the training, they knew what I was working for, and their voices developed very well. It was interesting to see these freshmen girls -- how the tone and strength in their voices that we expected in the chorus wasn't there in the beginning, but around Christmastime when we were ready to perform they had developed and grown quite a bit. It was really quite a joy to see a lot of the girls grow vocally and tone-wise. Many freshmen, both girls and boys, who would come for auditions were bigshots in high school, but all of a sudden they get in college and they were knocked down. They went down to the bottom of the totem pole and had to start the climb again, and that was quite a shock. It really was a shock! I always had my office open for any student who needed some shoulder to cry on. They would come in with their problems. In high school they could go to their instructors, and they'd tell them, "Come in after school." But I told them a lot of instructors here at the college won't ever say anything. If you don't do the work, you just get an "F". Amen. And so all of this worked out pretty well. I expected cooperation, loyalty, enthusiasm. Nobody bats 100 percent. There were some girls that didn't like what we were doing or what I was doing or the way I was rehearsing with them. So many come from high schools where they get very devoted to their choral director -- I can understand that -- and they think that's the only way to do. When we started out I always told them,

"There's going to be something different here. This is part of education. You get another viewpoint. And try it, you might like it." But there were some of them that quit, and that was, I guess, par for the course. I never did bat 1000 percent holding people in chorus or in choir. And sometimes, some of it was good riddance. Some girls would come to me with a list of how they were soloists and what all they did. I used to see that and I'd say, "Oh, man, I'm really finding a terrific voice," and I'd sit down and listen to her, and I'd say to myself, "I wonder how in the world this girl ever stayed in a high school group" because she just didn't show anything vocally that we needed for college.

Williams: What would you say to a person like this?

Fehr: I would just say -- I'd always take up for them and say, "You were probably scared; you work a little while," and I'd call some people back for another audition, say, after a month of participation in the group. Sometimes it was difficult to let a person know. I would have many girls who would quit after the freshman year and some even after the sophomore year because they would try out for the choir and wouldn't get in. But I did have some girls who were really persevering to get into the choir who stayed in the chorus as much as four semesters -- that's two years -- and I even had very few that stayed in six semesters. I was rather hesitant to put a girl in the choir after her junior year for just one year. I know that some people have criticized me for that, too, but I always had a building program. I always had to keep my groups so that I knew I'd have enough people to keep the choir going. Some of the people in the college liked for our choir to do some public relations work -- in particular Dr. Paschall was very good to us and very fond of

the choir. So I knew that I had to keep a good choir, and this gave me a lot of concern. I'd say, "What's going to happen when we have a big graduation class?" Whereas I believe in all of this, we always said, "Well, one of the last things we can always do is pray!" We always hoped that we would get replacements. Well, now I think that sort of covers the chorus.

I liked to have fun in my work. We had time to laugh, and we had times when we were very serious. To throw in a little fun and have a little sense of humor really meant a lot to these girls just constantly going to classes and digging away (and some of them not very successfully). They'd come to chorus, and I'd see someone with a long face, and I'd say, "Didn't your boyfriend write to you?" or "Has your best friend forgotten you?" I said, "I'll be your boyfriend." "I'll write you a letter" and things like that -- and then finally they'd be a little happier and they'd work. I expected hard work. Most of the results we got really were just through some hard work on their part and on my part.

Williams: The choir -- how did you get into it?

Fehr: In the choir -- we had no place to put the freshmen boys, so any of the freshmen boys that showed any sign of possibilities of potentialities or whatever you want to call it, I told them that they could come in to the choir and that I'd give them a try at it. I said, "It's going to be a little tough for you," because I had seniors and juniors and sophomores in the choir, and we worked awfully fast. I would sometimes just go to the piano and strike a chord, and we'd start singing a cappella. They had to learn how to take hold of the music, and if they didn't they were lost. And I warned them, "Don't give up. You're going to get

awfully discouraged because you're going to have your difficulties." The young ladies came from the chorus, and they knew a little bit more what to expect, and so I had freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior boys, but I had only sophomore, junior, senior girls in the choir. We were a little bit more selective in the choir. I don't like to say that we felt that the choir was more important than the chorus, but we had to put a little more premium on a choir because we carried the choir out of the city. We went out-of-state. We sang at the World's Fair in '65 at the invitation of the Commonwealth of Virginia and things as that. You had to have a pretty good group to take out so that people didn't laugh at you but that they clap because they enjoyed what they heard.

After a person would pass an audition -- each went through an audition, too -- a little bit tougher and a little more exacting than the one for the chorus -- then I would explain to the student that this is a selected group and that we would expect him/her to consider it an honor and privilege to sing in the choir. At the same time, whenever you're in a selected group you must assume certain responsibilities, and you had to parallel both the privilege and the responsibilities. Incidentally I always let each person know that he/she didn't want to go along he/she should say so, that anyone would be wasting his/her time and would be wasting other members of the choir's time and my time. So I would let each student know really what he/she was getting into. We expected each member to put forth concentrated effort. The person elected must be willing to dedicate himself/herself to maintaining the image, reputation, and respect which the choir had won throughout the years; I always pointed out to every applicant that it was the

choirs that came before them that really established the reputation, and they were maintaining it and strengthening it. This was not just a fly-by-night idea; it wasn't just a gimmick. (We had some people that really enjoyed our choir. There were others that didn't, and that was all right, too. Some people don't enjoy Robert Shaw or Roger Wagner's chorale, but they're pretty good choirs.) Also we told anybody that would come into the choir that we expected him/her to accept the governing principles, standards, rules, regulations which governed the group. Anytime that you work with a large group you're going to have to have some sort of an organization; otherwise you're going to have just a holy mess, and we weren't going to have that. We asked that a choir member be loyal, trustworthy, dependable, and devoted, enthusiastic, dedicated -- a big order, I know; but the thing is you get somebody in there with a rather "blah" attitude -- and that's another thing. We asked each member to have a wholesome attitude. Once in awhile a member would have to make some personal sacrifices from some of his/her pleasures, rearrange his/her social life a little bit. I always told the members that they had a schedule to meet with the choir and then they could also work up their social calendar in some way. We asked everybody to be present for all rehearsals and all performances and anything for which the choir would commit itself. We always issued a bulletin; they always knew what was going to happen. I never came in and said, "You're going to rehearse tomorrow night." I always gave them at least two weeks notice so that they could adjust. Another thing we said -- anybody that comes into the choir should give us their word of honor that they would stay throughout the year so that the person would not let down his fellow students and the director. I

said, "The choir is important to the college. The college always gives you a lot and so in turn, give back something -- it's more blessed to give than to receive." I preached that quite a bit; I would sermonize to them once in awhile. They got the point. Well, we went through this to let them know.

I told them also before they made their final decision that there were a lot of rewards that they would get out of the choir. They got rewards out of the chorus also, but the point is this: the choir had three rehearsals a week, two hours each, plus extra rehearsals, whereas the chorus only met twice a week, and we had the brunt of the performing to do in the choir. Therefore we had to expect more from them. When I said, "You're going to reap quite a few rewards," for example, there's really a tremendous personal satisfaction of a job well done as the result of hard work and wholesome discipline. (We still called it discipline. I guess the word is passe now. I didn't mean discipline in the sense that we were going to take a club and hammer your head or something like that, but I told people that you had to have a certain discipline in your own life, even to an extent of writing an English theme. If you don't discipline yourself in working on it you'll never get it written.) So this is what I meant. I've been at many concerts with my group when you see tears run down the students' cheeks -- boys, big boys -- when the music moves them. Then I think you know that you've done something for them. The girls are a bit softer about all this. More girls get themselves a little emotionally wrought up about the music because it really touches them, but so did the boys, too.

I told the members another reward: that every member would develop an appreciation of good music which would go with him and her

throughout their entire lifetime. I said that the music you had sung can be a constant source of inspiration, enjoyment, enrichment of life, and comfort. One of my former students was in the war in Korea (I think it was there where he was) and his particular group of men -- I don't know that they're called, company -- was supposed to make an attack on the enemy. He got lost in no-man's-land, and he said the thing that really kept him going was that through his thoughts went a lot of the songs we'd learned in the choir. He was wounded, but he did get back to his company after, he said, one of the most horrifying experiences he'd ever had. But the music that he learned in the choir was a source that kept him going during this time when he didn't know if he was going to make it or not. But this is the type of thing I try to tell my students: you never know when a text that you had sung in your choir will come back and really be something to give you a boost.

Another thing I told them: "You're going to learn much about technique of singing and how to sing better; your voice is going to be developed, and you're going to learn a lot of choral literature. You're going to learn a varied choral literature, things from the very best to some novelty numbers." This was sort of a relief for them, too, because you get awfully tired of just singing heavy music all the time, particularly these people who were not majoring in music. They were doing this as a diversion from their regular school work and college work. And the one thing I told them, too -- it was to tell them when they were coming in: I said, "You're going to make good and lasting friendships, and these friendships will last throughout a lifetime." You would not be surprised, Miss Williams, because you've been in choral groups, but a lot of fine friendships and a lot of boys and girls met their husbands and wives in

these groups. And it was interesting to see how these love affairs would become very, very intense, and then some of them would burn to a crisp like a piece of toast. These friendships that were made -- many of them I know will go on forever. We've had several reunions of the choir, and it's just like one big homecoming for them. In fact, some of the people told me they'd rather come to a choir reunion than come to a homecoming. (The only thing about a choir reunion is that it just limits itself to the people who are in music, whereas at homecoming that they have here every year you see other classmates that did not participate in the choir or the chorus.)

Williams: About how many couples do you think met in the choir, just out of curiosity?

Fehr: I don't know -- quite a few. One place where the romances really got started was when we went on tour. We only carried around forty people on tour. They'd sit down on the bus next to each other, and they'd start talking, and we saw a lot of romances that bloomed there that went into marriage. Maybe I can do a little tabulation for you before we're through with all our recording and give you some sort of estimation of how many we had. For example, Mr. Cogle and his wife met in the choir, and Dean Sadler and his wife met in the choir. Those are just a couple of examples. Very interesting to see this young life grow.

We maintained a high standard with respect to appearance and personal grooming and deportment, and anybody that sort of cast a "questionable reputation" on our choir -- we had a little talk with people like that. It was really quite something -- the pride that these people had. They wanted to be respected and thought of well; whenever we would go anywhere we wouldn't be rowdy or noisy or anything like that.

This brings us into the (subject of the) tour choir. We limited our tour choir to just about forty people that we could carry on one bus for financial reasons. We would have choirs from seventy up to ninety, and out of that number we would have auditions for the tour choir. Well now, this all has two sides. It's unfortunate maybe that the whole group didn't make a tour, but then you have auditions and limit the number, weed out some of these people who were sort of gold-bricking. Not very many people gold-bricked in the choir because if they didn't know their music they heard from the director in a very, very nice way. I let them know they'd better learn their music. I brought in people for extra work with me personally to learn their music or had them go out and work in quartets.

Now going to the selection of the touring choir. As I said, from our choir, which would be from seventy to ninety voices, we would select only around forty or forty-two. I always selected equal number of ladies and men. I thought that was very convenient that you have the same number. Some choir directors -- I don't know how they go about it, but I always had a theory that I wanted to have a good solid bass and a good solid alto, whereas the soprano and tenor are frequencies that cut through more than the thick frequencies of the bass and alto. Therefore I would carry a few more basses and a few more altos -- more than sopranos and tenors. We would do quite a bit of eight-part singing, so I would have first and second of each voice part. Sometimes we had some music where we'd have divide those. So in selecting the touring choir I would tell the members that there were quite a few items that I looked for, and if you don't mind, I'm going to mention some: tone quality and blend. Sometimes I found a voice that was very hard to blend. I worked very

hard with them; we would try to get a pretty homogeneous tone. Sometimes when a person sings in a large group, if he or she has any particular problem, that's covered up, but in a small group that sort of shows up. Strength of voice -- since we didn't carry too many people the voice had to have pretty good strength and pretty good quality. It's not necessarily quantity always; we never did want to sacrifice quality. Before I go on further on this, I want to say I started studying my students the first day they came into rehearsal in September, not only for the tour choir, but just to see how they got along. I had a real personal interest in every single one of my students, and I wanted to see that they got something; otherwise they were wasting their time. So I always watched the vocal growth and development, and I had some real wonderful pleasures in my career at William and Mary to see some of these people grow vocally. I judged them on the independence of singing one's part correctly against other parts and see that they could handle a part without leaning on somebody. And leadership -- ability to ^{take} hold of one's part. Intonation, accuracy of pitch, singing in tune, memorization, keeping up with the memory schedule, and conduct. I know that maybe sounds funny that we talk about that with college students, but we did. I said you must pay attention to instructions and the attitude in rehearsals and performances. Be on time to rehearsals and performances and remain at rehearsals and performances until complete. Some people have never been taught to be on time, and that's one thing they learned in the choir. When I started rehearsal I started on time, and most of our concerts were started on time. Also ability to cooperate and be dependable; that was very important. When you go into a smaller group

people really have to learn to be able to cooperate. (We stressed) giving attention to and carrying out on time various details and instructions and being capable of acting as a mature and respectable person. In the early days when we went on tour we had several people that got very -- ~~I~~ hate to use the word "high schoolish" but they would open up the bus window and yell out to people, and some boys would whistle at girls and things like that. I just didn't have any time for that kind of thing in college age, you see. Another thing that was taken into consideration was the number of absences. Anybody who was ill a lot -- a sick person on tour doesn't do you any good because you've got to keep going. You have a concert night after night, and you just can't say, "I'm feeling bad. I can't sing today." And I'd say, "Well, you just better stay home." It's very important -- your physical condition, and I used to preach before tour that people start going to bed at 9:00 and getting into condition, because I'll tell you, a tour really saps you physically. Another thing that I judged them on -- remember I'm judging this all the way from September on, and we'd go on tour in April -- (was) the ability to assume and carry out responsibilities satisfactorily and adjust to pressures of concentrated rehearsals (and) the concert tour; (each one had to) participate enthusiastically in rehearsals and performances and be a congenial participant and part of the group. Talking about this adjusting to pressures -- I had one young lady (who had a) beautiful voice, and just before a concert her voice would give away. So I did a little inquiring about it and found out she'd transferred here from another school, and it had happened there, too. It was the excitement; it looked like it went to her throat, and she just couldn't sing.

So there was no need to take a person like that along. Another thing I said: participation in and performance and singing of the music as instructed. Sometimes some people wouldn't like a number; they would change the words. I was really mean about that. I also judged them on their neat appearance and personal grooming and excellent deportment, (on) satisfactory midterm grades, (on) demonstration of a feeling of the importance of the choir and a personal pride in being a member of the choir. If you have no pride in what you're doing I think you're wasting your time; you ought to do something else. And they must demonstrate a desire to maintain the high standards, reputation, and artistry established by the choir of the College of William and Mary. And here was a very important one: a desire to be a constant credit to the College of William and Mary, a willingness to honor the rules and regulations of the choir and the policy established by the choir, officers, and director. Then the final point was the cumulative estimate of the work during the entire year, not just the intensive effort at the moment, but consistency and being dependable. I found a lot of students who would try to do their job the month before tour. Man, they would come by my office, they'd want to know if they could "shine my shoes;" they wanted to know if they could do all kinds of things. Some girls would like to bakesome[#] cookies for me and things like that. But I had some very quiet students, both boys and girls, but as constant as a piece of rock. They were steady, and you could always count on them. I also told them that every choir member had to remember that there was competition within each section, you understand, because I could take only so many from each section. All right, let's take for example: I used to limit my numbers so that I wouldn't have,

say, a big soprano section (and a) small alto section. I would try to level out all my sections. For example, you will find probably fewest number of voices in the tenor section. If I was fortunate to have twenty tenors that ^{were} ~~was~~ very good, but maybe I would only take five in each section, so there'd be a few left. One of the hardest things -- one time I had seven tenors, but I was only going to take four, so then three of them were left. You had some hot competition there to see who was going to get a place. I made all of this clear to them, and I talked to them about all of these things right at the beginning of the semester. I told them, "We're going to come to the time when we select the tour group, and the best lady or best man is going to win out," and they're going to have to be good sports about this, and if they didn't want to, they better get out right now." I was always very much interested in all my students, but when we had to make a decision I looked at them a whole lot -- listening to them as an instrument -- also by what they had done all the way through. I also told them it is assumed that every member in the choir is capable of doing the job in the choir, otherwise the individual would not be in the choir. You see, in other words, some people were eliminated because they just couldn't meet the standards of singing and other aspects of the touring choir. Then, the last thing I would tell them: that the final selection of the members for the touring choir was the result of careful consideration and study of qualifications that each person demonstrated. And this was a real job for me to select the tour choir; I lost many nights of sleep. I would call people in; we would have auditions[#] for the touring choir in quartets and octets. You would really find out if people knew their music. I had so many pleasant

surprises because as I was working along I would sort of think, "How would this person do and how would that person do?" and some people who I didn't think were learning their music had learned the music. During the year we would sing music in the round. We'd use Ewell Hall, and I'd make a big circle and put all of them in quartets, and I would walk around and find out how people were progressing, if they were getting along well. After all, the moment of truth comes when you get ready for the final product that you want to present to your audiences.

Williams: At one point I think you said to me that it was important that a touring choir member be "a part of a team."

Fehr: That's right. You had to be a part of the team. I often talked to them in terms of a football team or baseball team, and I said, "You've got to forget -- sure you're going to like some people better than others, be fonder of a certain person than another, but you've got to learn to get along together." I usually was pretty fortunate. I just didn't tolerate this kind of thing: when we were choosing a touring choir sometimes people would come in and intercede for different students, and some would come in also and be very critical of another person. I'd always have an answer for that: "Well, if you feel that you can't get along with her or with him, maybe it's not their fault. Maybe it's your fault. Maybe we ought not to consider you." And that would put a damper on them, and they'd learn to get along with each other. Every personality is different, and they've got to learn to adjust. There're certain people I got along with a lot easier than with others. However, I didn't pamper anybody if they didn't want to do the job. I told them that if they were so good that they weren't going to make a mistake, I'd

help buy them a ticket to the Metropolitan Opera so they could get in there. It was sort of nasty, I know, but sometimes you had to do that. I was very careful with sarcasm, but sometimes you had to (use it). (I had one mother once call me; she just couldn't understand why I wouldn't let her daughter sing this solo, and she said that she had sung all the solos in the community, and I said, "Well, I just had somebody do it better." Oh, she was going to call the president and have me fired, and I said, "That's all right." I just held my ground. The only way I got fired was that I got too old, and I had to retire.)

Williams: Generally how would you rate the support that the choir has gotten over the thirty years that you were choir director?

Fehr: I was always wanting more, but I never really complained too much about that. When I came to William and Mary I inherited a \$50 debt that the choir somehow or other had accumulated. Even in my high school days I tried to make our choir pretty much self-supporting through its concerts and various contributions. However, the college was very nice to us. They gave us money for music and so on and helped us along with our tours, but we did an awful lot ourselves. I didn't ask the college for any help excepting when we got in really tight places. We bought the risers we have, which cost thousands of dollars. The apparel that the girls wore -- the black skirts and white blouses and different things -- we bought ourselves. We bought a lot of music for ourselves and a lot of items that there's no budget for, that the state wouldn't give us money for -- we realized that. We found that the choir enjoyed getting together and having little refreshments, like punch and cookies. We had no money, so they decided we'll have a dues system. Right at the beginning of each year every-

body paid their dues for the whole year through, and then we wrote into our rules and regulations that a person who leaves the choir just contributes those dues to the choir. They had made a little investment, so they thought this over sometimes before they left the choir. Not that the dues were very much. I think it was \$2 or \$3 a semester, around \$5 to \$8 year, but you see when you have sixty or seventy members you have around \$350 or more. Then you have to watch it. Some years we had bigger spenders than other years, and so we always had a secretary-treasurer. Some of the secretary-treasurers were really very fine and said, "Well, wait a minute, we can't spend any more!" We used to pass a hat around in the early days before we got this dues system, but it was sort of like going to church -- half the people don't put anything into the collection plate, so we decided to have a dues system, and it worked very well. People really didn't gripe about it. One thing we did: we had banquets they didn't have to pay for and things as that when we made (money) through different little projects.

The longest part of my career was under Dr. Paschall's administration. Dr. Paschall did many things for us: he helped give us money to go to the World's Fair and for the Freedom's Foundation memorial for General Eisenhower. Whenever we needed some money and had a logical reason for it we were rewarded, but as I said before I went very seldom to the administration for help because I instilled in my students that the college is giving us something, let's give something back. Let's work for it, and we really did work. We sold tickets to our concerts, and we used the gate receipts of that for a lot of things that we did -- oh, just many, many things that we took care of that we didn't have to

bother . . . Mr. Nunn, who was treasurer-auditor during my work at the college, often said to me, "If everybody would support their organization as you and the choir do, we wouldn't have any trouble at all." He was really a fine source of encouragement; he was really wonderful, too. As time went along we just had things pretty well organized. We had our budget from the music department, and we tried to live within that. We knew what we could spend. In the last few years the tours took a little bit more money because of rising prices. You couldn't give a student and say, "Here's \$2.00; now eat on that a day." You can barely buy a coke and hamburger nowadays. The one thing that I told my touring choir was that they had to eat right. For example, I said to everybody, "We get up and eat breakfast," because if they didn't eat they would tend to get sick on the bus. And then before a concert, around 5:00, we'd eat a good solid meal because we'd be on our feet for over two hours singing, and that took a lot of energy. After a concert, people would give us receptions, and oh, these students would dig into the food. They always liked something salty, sandwiches and something like that. Concertizing -- it's hard work! I was very insistent that the students stand up straight and that they made a good appearance -- and well, it takes energy!

Williams: About how long would you give your students to learn their music? I know you always sang from memory.

Fehr: Okay. We would have two big concerts on campus a year, the Christmas concert and the spring concert. The first day we would come into rehearsal everything was more or less outlined. I had given them a schedule, and our first day we'd go right to work on the Christmas music. As soon as we got our Christmas music pretty well underway, I'd start filtering in

some music for the spring. But we really had to do almost everything within each semester because we had so much that we learned. We did some tough music. I'll tell you, sometimes I was wondering whether we were going to learn it, but they always came through. Well, we'd start in September; they would have to have everything memorized before they went home for Thanksgiving, and then when we came back after Thanksgiving we'd polish and then give our concerts. The second semester would never start until the end of January (or) early February, and then we'd have a Charter Day convocation. We always had to prepare for that during the first semester because we had only about a week to get ready for that. Then we had February, March -- we had about, I would say, about eight weeks. Everything was worked out in schedules, and we had so many rehearsals -- as I remember it must have been around twenty-five rehearsals. I gave them a memory schedule. They knew just exactly what they had to do. In order to see that they learned it I would have "memory time around the piano," and all eyes would go down on the floor because nobody wanted to get called on. It was sort of mean, but the thing is, they really appreciated it, though. Some people criticized us for singing everything from memory, but the one good thing about singing from memory: if you have it up here in the head you know the music; then all the eyes are focused, and you work together in fine team work. I didn't have to beat the air for direction; I could just barely move my finger, and sometimes I would just wiggle my ears -- which I can do -- and the audience would never know. We worked hard! You might be surprised -- the time that we enjoyed best for extra rehearsals was Sunday night around 7:00 because many students would either go away or study, and then Sunday night they just felt like singing. We had some of the most

wonderful rehearsals on Sunday nights because it seemed to give them a kick to go to classes on Monday.

Session 3

December 5, 1975

Williams: Dr. Fehr, last time we were talking about the numerous couples that met in the choir, and you said you'd get a rough estimate of how many couples you think did meet in the choir who were eventually married. I believe you've done so this time.

Fehr: Yes, I was looking at that. I went through the programs very hastily, and I found that the actual number I was sure of was forty-one couples, but I'm positive there were more than that. In the twenty-nine years that I was associated with students I remember quite a few of them, but some of them I don't. The worst thing that happens to me is when they come back, and they'll walk up to me: "You don't remember me." Yes, I do remember their faces, and the first thing I'll say is, "What is your name?" Also, I told the young ladies, after they get married don't send us a Christmas card and sign it "Emily" or "Jean" or "Elizabeth" or something as that. I said, "By all means, put down your maiden name so that we know who you are." We really do have a problem at Christmastime because we get cards like that -- sometimes I remember their handwriting. At Christmastime we get quite a few cards; the students all write on their cards that at Christmastime they cannot help but think of the Christmas programs we gave here, and they will long for programs we had.

Going back now to couples, some people may wonder how in the world these students got to know each other so well. For one thing, our choirs always were a big happy family, and we would not only sing and work, but we would associate with each other. We'd find students a lot of times

would come an hour or half an hour before rehearsals just to socialize and get to know each other. It's very interesting how these students would start to be interested in each other. They had mutual interests, majoring in similar subjects -- or opposite subjects -- but they were fascinated with what the other was doing. Also, one of the chief places where students would get to know each other was on tour. We'd get into the bus and a boy and girl would sit down next to each other, and they'd get to know each other. It was very interesting to see how these love affairs would bloom, and I was sort of a father confessor, I guess. They would come in often and ask me, "What do you think of so-and-so? Do you think she's a fine girl or he is a fine young man?" Of course, all the students with whom I worked I always thought were fine people -- and they were. I had much faith in every student with whom I worked. I found that people that didn't want to work and didn't want to go through a certain discipline, those are the ones that eliminated themselves from our choir, which was all right. As I believe I mentioned before in one of our conversations, I wanted these people to try to establish along with their music a good way of living. These four years at the college were certainly formative years for going out into the world. After you go to graduate school -- students who have come back to me say it's altogether different than undergraduate study, and it certainly is. I realized that students were young and in their formative years, and I often gave them fatherly advice. I felt that they needed some guidance. You just can't give a project to a student and say, "You get this done." I've run into many problems: we had a student business manager for our tour one year, and that was a total flop because

the sponsors would say, "I don't want to deal with this young student. I want to deal with you because we want to be sure this is going to happen." In other words, what I'm trying to say is that some people have accused me of being a dictator. That was not really true because I was giving guidance in what we were doing, and I don't think that we could have worked as efficiently as we did (otherwise). For example, here's just a real minor point: one of my really fine students who was very artistic came by to visit with me a couple of weeks ago -- his name is Kevin Walters from Salem, Virginia. He is very artistic, and he did a lot of posters. He told me he remembers how we talked the first week in September about our posters for Christmas and spring and the tour and (how) we would work on them. He laughed; he said, "Pappy, I'd bring you a sketch, and you'd look at it, and I'd look at it, and we'd start laughing, and then we'd sit down very seriously and throw our ideas together." Then we would test some of our other students, some of the officers as well as just the general students in the choir -- any of them that had any artistic inclinations. We would pool our thoughts and come up with a real fine poster, and I think this is the only way a good choir can function. I grant you that students are very talented and very creative and all that, but they still need a little help from their elders. Sometimes some of my students would come in and complain about their parents, which would really upset me; they would talk about their fathers as "old man" and their mothers as an "old lady" -- I'd stop them. "Just a minute. Let's back up here. Let's play this tape back and erase that. Your father is your father and your mother is your mother who have sacrificed to bring you to school." And I used to preach to them, and I always finished up

by saying, "We won't have an offertory today." A lot of students, of course, got to know each other quite well because we felt as if we were just a big family.

Williams: We figured out a minute ago that the choir must have performed about 1,000 concerts. What was the appeal that you felt that the William and Mary Choir did have?

Fehr: First let me tell you about the various concerts we had, and then I'll tell you what our appeal was. We had formal concerts on campus, such as the Christmas concerts, which we usually gave two or three nights in a week, and the spring concerts the same way. And then once in awhile we would have other formal events for which we had to perform. We had tour concerts, and on tours not only did we give formal concerts at night, but we would go to high schools and sing for assembly programs. We thought that this was good public relations work for the college. In fact, I remember this one girl was going to go to Duke University, but she had heard us, and so she applied to William and Mary. She really came to be a member of the choir. She worked awfully hard, and for awhile she wasn't sure she was going to make it. She comes back and she always tells me that that was one of the happiest moments of her life because of the music that we sang and the training she got other than the music.

Also in the early days when I came to William and Mary we had chapel services every Wednesday night, and the choir had to sing for that. That got to be sort of a burden for the students because the general student didn't attend chapel. Many times we had more people in the choir than students attending the chapel; so several years ago, before I retired, I went to Dean Lambert and told him that we didn't

mind singing at the chapel if other students would attend. He said he would study it, and he said that he didn't think that the choir should be forced or required to go to chapel. This was several years ago before we had this expression of, shall I say, "personal rights," individual rights and so on. My students in the days that they were required to go to chapel never really did object to anything like that because they knew that this was part of their duty as a member of the choir. We had convocations and chapel services and special events. Graduation -- students were required to sing for that. We never knew from time to time what we would have to sing for, but the administration would inform me, and then we would get ready for it. In the twenty-nine years that I was at William and Mary we -- I'm sure -- performed close to 1,000 formal concerts and special events and tour concerts.

In a college such as this, when most students in the choir did this as an extracurricular activity and as a relief from their study, I always planned my programs a little differently than if I were teaching at a conservatory or school of music. There were people who criticized me and our choir for the type of program that I presented to the audiences. I always told my students that we sort of built our program as a meal; we had the main course and the side dishes and finally we had the dessert -- not that the lighter numbers were the dessert -- but the point I want to make is that you have a full, rounded program. We did some of the finest choral literature that was ever written. We did some with the orchestra, and we did some with various instrumental groups. Mr. Stewart and Mr. Varner were always very fine in helping us where we needed an orchestra or just an instrumental group. The amazing

thing about this whole business was that our choral groups always memorized everything, and people would just stand in amazement that they would learn some of these difficult things that we did. We did Monteverdi's "Magnificat," and we did the "Messiah." We did Durufle's "Requiem." We did "Stabat Mater" and "Gloria" by Poulenc, and we did the "Laud to the Nativity" by Respighi. We did "To St. Cecilia" by Dello Joio, "Schicksalslied" by Brahms. We sang good solid music. We did shorter motets and things as that, and then we did folk songs of various types. Then we did some light numbers, and I want to say right here: to do some of these light numbers we didn't spend the amount of time in learning them as we did some of the heavier numbers, but still they had to be done with some spark. One of the hardest things in my career really was to find library, a library that students would like, the audience would like, and also be an educational experience. I don't care what these high-browed critics would say about us -- you teach something in anything that you give your students, and nothing is wasted time because I think you learn from every experience that you have. (As I used to tell my students, "Don't gripe about a certain professor. You may learn something you shouldn't do after you get out." And I in my own experiences found so many things that I would not do to my students or require of my students by having had a professor who was unreasonable.) So many times to find good arrangements I would work summers. (During the time I wasn't paid I'd be at the office anyway. I worked for the college twelve months a year; it was on a ten-month salary basis. I didn't gripe about it; I enjoyed this, and I was always thinking of my students and what I could do.) I would plan ahead for what we would have for the entire year. In fact, I had sort of a five-year plan. I'd

look through music; it depends on the type of voices that you have. Some years you were blessed with more men students. Always we were very fortunate and had some very fine ladies, and they sang very well. Whereas we weren't the best choir in the world, we worked hard and tried to do the best we could.

Now, also what we did in our presentations -- I called it working out the logistics for a presentation. That's the setting up of the physical appearance of the stage and also working out the appearance of the students. I would always say, "If they don't like the music that we sing, they can always say, 'Well, they did look pretty.'" I'll never forget, we sang in Petersburg, Virginia, one night, and this man came to me after the concert, and he said, "Dr. Fehr, I was dragged to this. I didn't want to go to this, but my wife said I had to go." (And I'm not sure whether or not his daughter or son was in the group; I think they were friends.) For an encore we sang a really quite difficult version of "St. Louis Blues," and I know that some people (again the high-browed musicians) would holler about that, but we improved on this number. What I mean by that -- we used the arrangement and sort of added some of our own creativity. If students learned nothing else -- after all, Handy was an American composer. There were a lot of rhythmic problems in there and little nuances that we put in there. In other words, it was really an educational experience for them. I just feel that some of these people should know all types of literature. If you're going to get so picayunish about your music, I think that's pretty bad. I know that people said all we did was put on a show, but the thing that we always stressed: first, we must sing well; we must sing the music to the best of our ability. With tongue in cheek, when we'd have a bad

rehearsal, I'd often say to them, "Ladies and gentlemen, why did you come to William and Mary? Do you remember you came first to sing in the choir and second to study." But really we didn't mean that. They should do their college work and then sing in the choir. To show you how interested I was in these students I would ask them for their grades. I told the students that I would go back to their records and look at them -- because after all, as I mentioned a few moments ago, dad and mother are spending a lot of money on you to come to college, and you've got to do your job in your classes. Oftentimes I wouldn't take people on tour because they didn't have strong enough grades. A lot of times tour helped people's grades, and several students told me that their grades improved as a result of their going on tour. They would take the books along and do some studying on the tour.

To show you that people were interested in our concerts: there was a travel bureau in Dayton, Ohio, that wrote to Colonial Williamsburg saying that a group of tourists were coming to Williamsburg. They were bringing two busloads of people, and they asked whether or not there was anything interesting happening -- and this was around Christmastime. So they wrote back and sent them "This Week in Williamsburg" brochure, and then they mentioned also that around Christmastime the William and Mary Choir and Chorus would give the Christmas concert. Well, they decided that they would buy one hundred tickets, and they came expecting an ordinary Christmas concert with the usual procedure. The people came to us after the concert and told us they were just overwhelmed at the Christmas concert that they had experienced, and they said as far as they were concerned, their Christmas was over now because they'd had it here. The students and I, of course, felt very happy about that. And then the

next year one busload came, and they were very appreciative of the efforts of our students. We had parents who would come for a distance. It was always amazing to me what parents would do for their sons and daughters. We had people even fly in from California for a concert and from the New England states and Pennsylvania and Florida -- it was just amazing. I just could not get over that. The fine, rewarding comments that some of the people made to both the students and me -- they would often go to the students and speak to them after the concert. This one man came to me after one of the concerts and said that he didn't know me; he didn't know about this choir before, but he noted the dignity, the discipline, the precision, the beauty of singing, the accuracy, and the appearance. He said he sat there with the greatest amazement; when the concert was over he would have liked to sit there another hour or two to listen to some more. This always, of course, was a big shot in the arm for our students because they felt like working hard was worth it; we strove for as much excellence as we possibly could get. We decided that the people who were jealous of us would be our worst critics. We were never critical of other people. We would observe them, and we'd say, "We wouldn't do that." It was no unchristianlike attitude that we had. But we tried to do something that had appeal and also was a musical and educational experience for the students as well as for those people who listened to us.

Williams: And you yourself spent a lot of time working out these logistics of the stage directions, I know.

Fehr: Oh, yes. I know for the 1972 Christmas concert, one night after dinner I told my wife, "I don't want to be bothered. I don't even want to be called to the phone." I sat down at 7:00, and I didn't move out of my

chair until 12:00 midnight because I had close to two hundred people to get in a procession. I worked and worked. It sounds stupid, I'm sure, to people who have never done this, but to make the thing click -- you see, the thing is this: I always told my students that the audience will notice any mistake you make. I said it's the same way when you do something bad at home, your mother and dad will scold you, and when you do something good very seldom will they praise you. And I said the same thing is true in our concerts. I said if we do something sloppy and inaccurate and sing poorly people are going to talk about it, but I told them I just liked to have the audience to sit back and be relaxed. Sing with some confidence and put across the number as beautifully and artistically as possible.

Williams: How was it that you hit upon starting your concerts by singing "American the Beautiful?"

Fehr: One thing that we believed in in our concerts was being "O. T." -- on time -- because so many times people would go to concerts, and they'd sit there and wait and wait and wait, and then it would start maybe fifteen, twenty minutes late. I guess that's fashionable, but I told my people that if we're going to say that we're going to start at 8:15, let's start at 8:15. So we were pretty much on time with most of our concerts, excepting when the box office would call back, "Hold it a couple of minutes. Some people are straggling in." I for a long time wanted to get something -- some musical selection -- to start our concerts, particularly our spring concerts. We started our Christmas concerts many times with a procession, and that made these people who came in late stand back there and miss all the procession. The procession really was quite beautiful because it was very well timed and

again, some people say, "You all look just like a military group." It was really very, very beautifully done with a lot of precision. We tried to find something where we could sing to open up the (spring) concert and then stop and let the stragglers get to their places. I thought of using "The Star Spangled Banner." I have made quite a few arrangements for the choir which aren't very useful to anybody else; nobody would want to use them. I had worked out sort of a preamble going into "The Star Spangled Banner," but that didn't really prove satisfactory, so we hit on "America the Beautiful," -- I made an arrangement of that. You would be surprised how the audience immediately felt part of us. In other words, there was a rapport between the choir and the audience, and after we'd sing "America the Beautiful" I'd turn around and just look at the audience until everybody was seated, and then we would go on with our formal program. So it worked very well and people enjoyed it because, as I say, somebody who would come to the program because he or she was dragged there could go back and say, "Well, I did know 'America the Beautiful.'" It's funny, people do like to hear a few things that they know; they really do, and I don't think that's bad because at that same concert you can introduce them to some other things. My wife often said that it's too bad that the people couldn't hear our concerts two or three times. (She would go along on tour as chaperone and also hear the concerts here; she went to all of them. And so one time I said to her, "Well, we gave three concerts here and we gave six or seven concerts on the road. What's that? Nine? Haven't you gotten enough?" She said, "No! Every concert I hear something new," and that's really true.) Also the students really learned their music well; that way it's not a forgotten event. (One of my students graduated

in 1968 came by to see me recently, and he started singing his part in "Schicksalslied" by Brahms. He didn't know any German. I said, "Bill, you still remember that?" He said, "I'll never forget it. How could I forget it? We learned it so well." (Incidentally, a student came by to see me and she said to me -- oh, she would get so mad at me because I would say, "Barbara, go back and do this again. Go from the standpoint of presentation and also from the standpoint of singing the music." And she said, "But now, I don't know why I got mad because I see how much I learned and much I retained." And since she's graduated she's tried various church choirs. She said she went to a church choir just recently in which they were doing the "Hallelujah Chorus" from the "Mount of Olives" by Beethoven and which is not really too hard, but it still has to be done with precision and accuracy. She left that church choir, and now she's looking for another one because the choir director said, "Well, after we sing this number we'll go back again to some of these good ol' gospel songs -- really good music." And that killed her, too, because -- I'm not criticizing gospel songs, but I think that in churches you should have high standards of literature also.)

Williams: We've been talking some of the concerts that you've done, but I know you also did a number of special concerts, too.

Fehr: Well, Miss Williams, we didn't have any particular level of "this is better than this," because I had instilled in my students that anything we do is special, whether or not it's just singing for ten or fifteen people (and we have done that -- been invited to some small gathering where we did sing for a small audience.) But I suppose what you had in mind -- such as when we did the "Ode to the Virginian Voyage," composed by Randall Thompson in 1957. This particular event ~~really~~ was sort of

special for us because this was a premiere performance. We did this performance along with the Norfolk Symphony under the direction of Edgar Schenkman and the Norfolk Civic Chorus. There were some 250 singers, and Randall Thompson himself was here for the performance. We did the performance on the campus in Phi Beta on April 1, 1957, and then we went to Norfolk on April 7. What was interesting about the "Ode to the Virginian Voyage" -- there are seven movements, as I recall, in the work, and Mr. Thompson composed a movement or two, and he'd send them to us. Then we'd be sitting and waiting for the next movement to come. We had a lot of fun because we were always sitting in anticipation of what the next movement was going to be like. The movement that has a fugue in it is very, very difficult, and many choruses when they sing this work omit that; it's very challenging. But the interesting thing that we enjoyed so much was that Mr. Thompson came down to hear us rehearse his music, and he stood in back of the rehearsal room -- we were rehearsing in Ewell 100 at that time -- and he stood back there with his arms folded, and once in awhile he'd scowl, and then all of a sudden he'd smile. When we finished with the singing I said, "Mr. Thompson, did we do something wrong?" He said, "Well, no. I didn't mean this to be like this. I heard it another way when I was writing it." (You see, he'd never heard it when he was writing this. The students were amazed that a composer can do that.) He said other things that he thought would sound differently just sounded so beautiful to him. He said he didn't really scowl because we did it badly. He said he blamed himself. We made a few changes in the score, not many. It was very interesting to have him "on the reservation" to hear us work on it. Then Mr. Schenkman came up to listen to our choir

to see how we were getting along. One interesting little sidelight of this was that when we sang it in performance in Williamsburg, we had memorized the whole work, and the Norfolk chorus hadn't. This was a huge group because we had the orchestra and we had the singers (on the stage). Since our young ladies all had black skirts and white blouses and red sashes and looked very formal, and since his singers were pretty much dressed alike except they weren't all the same as our choir, he asked all the William and Mary Choir girls to be on the front row. All the men wore tuxes and made a nice picture. After the overture[#] when we started the second movement -- the overture going into the movement where the choirs start singing with the orchestra -- he gave a signal to open the books, and my girls had the books in their hands, but they never opened them. I forgot to tell him that we had memorized it, that we weren't going to use the books. He came to me after the first performance and said, "My, I was worried. I didn't know what was going to happen. Those girls didn't open up the books. But I watched them for a few measures, and they were singing with all the enthusiasm possible." Then he decided we had it memorized, which we did. We had a laugh out of that because when he came up to rehearse with us we had the books in front of us. He pointed out things; he'd say, "Let's sing this," and after each movement he'd say, "Dr. Fehr, there's nothing I can say to you. You people have this down." We tried to learn it as accurately as possible and sing it just as well as we possibly could. So that[#] was one of our special concerts.

Another special event for which we performed was for the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion (I think it was in February of 1969), and our touring choir did that. This was the time when we had a semester

break, and the touring choir had come back a little earlier; they didn't mind. They enjoyed doing this because we stayed at the Sheraton Park Hotel in Washington -- I think that's the place we were. The way this came about: when I was in Austin, Texas, I taught a student piano, and after I left Austin in 1945 to come to William and Mary I hadn't heard from her. One day she called me long distance, and I was so surprised. She told me that she now lived in Indianapolis and was executive secretary for the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion. She said that they wanted some good music and asked us if we would sing at their convention of the auxiliary, and I said I always checked with my students if they wanted to accept an invitation. I told them about it: that all our expenses would be paid, and we didn't have to miss any college classes because it was in-between semesters, and so we went up and gave a performance (February 3, 1969). They gave us a standing ovation at the end of the performance. At that time there were some members of the Freedom's Foundation of Valley Forge there, so about a month or a little bit later I got this long-distance call from them, and they said that they'd heard our program and were very much impressed with the William and Mary Choir and would like to have us sing. They were going to have a special occasion in which they honored the late General Dwight D. Eisenhower at a memorial at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C. (May 8, 1969). They asked for a patriotic program. I set to work with my students, and we came up with the idea of tying together with narration a patriotic program, which really was received very, very well by the Freedom's Foundation and the other people who were there. It was a narration mainly written by one of our students, Larry Rakin, who incidentally now is working

in New York with some light opera company doing particularly Gilbert and Sullivan. One incident that really amused my students was that I had worked out a medley of the patriotic songs of the various branches of the armed forces, like the merchant marine, army, navy, and air force. Everytime we'd get to that particular branch's song they'd all rise and clap, and the students in the choir were not ready for that. They didn't know it was going to happen, but they got the biggest bang out of that. Then -- I know it was a little sentimental, but we had the young men do an arrangement of "Taps". Since this occasion was honoring the late General Eisenhower we all seemed to think also that (this was for) the men who gave their lives for the service. That was really a very, very touching moment. We didn't really mean it to be as sentimental as it turned out to be; there were some parents there whose sons were killed in Vietnam, and it really was quite touching. I remember it was very, very quiet. From "Taps" the young men sang "Eternal Father", and that was beautifully done. However, we picked up the tempo by singing "Stars and Stripes." It was really a very exciting program for the audience.

Williams: And you were saying to me that your performance at this Freedom's Foundation dinner made quite an impact on the audience.

Fehr: Yes. Let me tell you. This was very interesting: the students always sensed the attitude and tempo of the people there. When we walked into this huge auditorium of the Mayflower Hotel in Washington to give our performance, people were noisy, and some didn't even pay attention. As we went on our risers we got a small polite welcome with some applause. I realized when we were going to go there that we were going to have something like that, so I wrote a prologue that started on a unison note,

which was very strong. We did this a cappella. It was really amazing how noisy the audience was, and as soon as we hit the first note and sang, "We the people of the United States of America," you could almost cut the silence. We did that and went from the prologue into "The Star Spangled Banner." After we sang that we just received a hardy applause; immediately we won the audience, and then we went on with our patriotic program. (Incidentally, this program was also in honor of some retiring generals and admirals and a chaplain who had given the invocation at the various senate sessions.)

Then another event which we thought was very special and which was an outgrowth of our performances for the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion and Freedom's Foundation: we were contacted by the D. A. R. for one of their national conventions (April 21, 1971), and that brought people from all over the United States. We sang in Constitution Hall, and I'll tell you right now we had one of the most beautiful settings; it was one of the most beautiful places to sing. We were overwhelmingly received there, and there were between three to four thousand people there. It was quite a thrill for our students. We started with either "America the Beautiful" or this arrangement I had of "The Star Spangled Banner" -- I don't recall at the moment. It was very interesting: at each one of our performances at these big events we received standing ovations with huge applause, which the students did not expect. The people came to us, and for example, you asked a moment ago about the impact they had at the Freedom's Foundation. People would come to me, just jump up after we finished our program and they'd say, "I came from this university or that university, and I thought that we had a fine choir. Why isn't this choir better known in the United

States?" I said, "I don't know. We just sing, and try to give a good performance when we go out." It was quite satisfying to the choir members and myself that we had made a favorable impression for the College of William and Mary in Virginia and also for ourselves. People commented on the fine performance that those students gave. I don't say they were perfect, and unfortunately I was never^ssatisfied. I always told them, "We can do better." I said to my students many a time, "Well, when I get through here on earth and when I get to heaven, they're going to ask me to be a choir director; I'm going to say no. I'll polish their harps and flirt with the angels, because I'll tell you I really worked here on earth."

Williams: One way that the choir did become known, though, was through the Christmas television programs they did. How was it that it came the William and Mary Choir was put on national television?

Fehr: Again, somebody had heard our choir -- one of the television stations. I'm not sure if it was WVEC, Channel 13, but we were on television in 1964, '65, '66, '67, and '68. We always worked out a very -- we think -- good program that would hold the attention of the television audience as well. We didn't give up the quality and singing just because we wanted to please somebody. The television stations insisted that we give the audience something that would make people feel as if it's Christmas. I can understand that. I think there's a place for everything, and at Christmastime^A let's face it, it's a joyous time, and the music should also give some elation to people. What has really interested us was the program that we made in 1968 -- a station in Los Angeles still carries it, prime time; on December 24 and December 25 they show it. For '68 and '69 and '70 and '71 they always called for our tape, and of course

we were very happy to let them have it, and so in '72 the program manager of the Los Angeles station called me long-distance and asked whether or not I would allow them to make a copy of it. It didn't make any difference to me. In fact, I was kind of honored that they wanted our program. They show it every year, and I still get letters from people in that area about our program. The only thing I told them was they should say this is a repeat, because some of the students now look very young in their haircuts, and the fashions are just a little bit different than what they're wearing in present times. I did get a letter from the television station; they said that this program had the most interest at Christmastime of any program that they'd ever shown. It was really coordinated. We had a fine man -- Mr. Lindsay Tucker from WVEC-TV -- he really enjoyed the students and they enjoyed him. We worked together and we made things click. We would make the audio first, and he would come up and listen to it. We'd make the audio fairly early and show him what we had worked out. We started working on those television programs the year ahead. He and I would have conferences together -- how're we going to do this and so on. In 1968 it was really a hard moment there for awhile because we had some good music, and Mr. Tucker said, "'Pappy,' this is not going to go over. You do this beautifully, but this is not what we have in mind. We'd like to have this and this." So we had to sit down within two or three weeks -- at least we had three weeks -- to learn a couple of things that they wanted. It really worked out very beautifully, and the students were quite excited about it, too. But the point I'm trying to make is sure, you can give them Bach and Beethoven and Brahms and all of that, but let's face it, they still want to hear

some Christmasy things, so we had quite a few old tunes. Then we ended the program with carols. The way we ended the 1968 program was that they made a big bonfire outside and the choir members had candles -- and we did this at night -- and they shot these students through the fire. You could see them through the shimmering flame with the Wren Building in the back with candles in the windows, and then as we left the scene, we hummed "Silent Night." It was really quite effective. I know it was a little bit on the showmanship side. These television programs took a terrific amount of work. We would start at 10:00 in the morning, for example, shooting, and we'd finish up at 8:00 or 9:00 at night for a half-hour program. We'd go through a segment and then stop, and a lot of times we'd get just about at the end of this little segment (which is maybe three or four minutes), and they'd say, "Cut. Go back," and the students would go, "Ooooooh!" The thing I always did -- I always warned my students, "Ladies and gentlemen, you've got one of the hardest things in the world to do in making this television tape. We're not going to put this on sloppily. We're not going to say, 'That's good enough.'" My choirs never said, "Oh, that's good enough." And they got this idea, too, that things had to be done with much excellence and perfection. Always, always I pointed out to them, "Remember the audiences are thinking of the College of William and Mary in Virginia, and also they're thinking of you as a choir and the choir director and so on." A choir's a whole lot like a football team. When the football team wins, "Oh man, isn't the football team great!" But as soon as they start losing, "Kill the coach!" Same thing is true with the choir. If the choir doesn't really do a good job, a sloppy job, and things that don't interest people, they'll say,

"Why don't they get a new choir director?" That's the way life is; let's face it. Another thing that we felt quite honored about was that we were on the radio series -- I don't know whether or not it's as popular now or not as it was several years ago -- "Great College Choirs in America." That was a radio program, and we did some recording for that and it was sent all over the United States. Then we were asked to make a program for overseas radio to the armed forces. There was one former William and Mary student, (never in the choir) who was in his bunk over in Germany. He was listening to the radio, and all of a sudden he heard, "The Choir of the College of William and Mary in Virginia will now present a Christmas concert." He said it really meant a lot to him that Christmas to hear our choir from the college. You never know where you reach. So many people hear you and never react to it, but some people do take the time to write to you, and that is always very stimulating and encouraging to the students who really have spent hours and hours of learning the music.

Williams: I believe you even said that one time your choir sang at a wedding for some fellow choir members.

Fehr: Oh, yes. In 1972 this young lady and young gentleman were married in the latter part of May, just before graduation. They were seniors and good choir people. I don't remember how it came about. I think in jest I said, "Why don't you have the choir to sing for your wedding?" So, they took me up on it. I worked out with the minister out there at the Walnut Hills Baptist Church, the Reverend Jerry Haywood, an order of service for the wedding, and then we got with the couple and showed what we had worked out, and they approved everything. It was a very beautiful wedding -- anyway, we think so because we were part of it.

The order of the service ran like this -- there was some prenuptial music, and then the choir went into the loft and sang three prenuptial numbers. Really they did it quite beautifully. Then the organist continued playing prenuptial music, and the choir retired to the back of the church and then sang the processional, and the wedding party followed. During the services one of the members, Suzanne McSmith, sang "The Lord's Prayer" because that was requested by the family, and at the end when the couple was kneeling the choir sang "The Lord Bless You and Keep You," which really brought tears to a lot of the people in the audience. Then the choir stayed in the choir loft and sang the recessional. For the processional we sang "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" and for the recessional we sang "Now Thank We All Our God." It really was a beautiful occasion. These two students I see every now and then, and they always mention how much it meant to them in their lives.

INDEX SHEET

Interviewee Carl A. Fehr

Date of interview December 10, 1975

Place Truckee - Coleman Room, Sierra Library, N.E.M.

Interviewer Emily Williams

Session number 4

Length of tape 65 mins.

Contents:

Approximate time:

special concerts (cont'd)	1 min.
facilities - rehearsal	4 mins.
- accident	3 mins.
- tour	7 mins.
- in general	5 mins.
auxiliary helpers of choir	10 mins.
formation work	2 mins.
choir repertoire	10 mins.
moves to change alma mater	5 mins.
<u>Common Glory</u> choir, 1947-1967	9 mins.
"Fehr-well Fest," Fehr Choral Library	10 mins.
miscellaneous	4 mins.
December 17 - Fehr scholarship	4 mins.

Session 4

December 10, 1975

Williams: There was one more special event, Dr. Fehr, you said you wanted to include that the choir sang for, and what was that?

Fehr: We sang at the First Baptist Church, which is a black church. At that time it was located on Nassau Street in Williamsburg. It was in the early 1950s when we gave those people one of our programs. They asked us to come down, and we sang for them several times. We presented our entire program, and then once toward the end we sang a spiritual. Much to the amazement of my choir members, all of a sudden the whole congregation started to sing with us. It was a very delightful surprise. These black people really had the rhythm and inspired us to have that rhythm. It was a real educational experience for us.

Williams: Now, we wanted today to talk about the facilities the choir worked with, the rehearsal and auditorium facilities that you found in the twenty-nine years you were director of the William and Mary Choir.

Fehr: When I came to William and Mary in 1945 space was sort of limited for rehearsal. The head of the department at that time suggested that we practice in the Wren Chapel. (At that time the Wren Building was not on the visitor's list as much as it is now.) But I didn't particularly like the rehearsal facilities in the Wren Chapel, so I asked him for some other rehearsal room, and we did rehearse in the basement of the Methodist church. At that time the choir met on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and the band met on Tuesday and Thursday, so we shared the Methodist church, which was then on Duke of Gloucester Street. (Now the Methodist church has moved out on Jamestown Road, and the (old) Methodist church is being used for other matters.) It was enjoyable to practice

there: people would come and sit in the windows and listen to us, and the students would get a big bang out of that; we think we made a beautiful sound. Particularly around the Christmas season when we were singing Christmas music people would listen to us -- not only that but also all seasons when the windows were open. From the Methodist Church we moved over to what is now the president's office and admissions office in Ewell Hall, and we practiced in those three rooms. That was a little bit difficult because the rooms were so live. However, it was nice because that was the old Phi Beta Kappa Building, and we could go in and use the stage sometimes when the theatre wasn't practicing. However, the stage on old Phi Beta Kappa was almost impossible for us to get our group on, and they had to build a substage a few feet lower than the main stage, so we were able to expand ourselves over the front part of old Phi Beta. Then after the old Phi Beta burned in 1953 and Ewell Hall was built we were assigned to Ewell 100, which is a nice, large room. We were on the first floor and the band on the second floor. However, we had our problems because the band started practicing on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and we had some strange harmonies going on with the band practicing upstairs and the choir downstairs, so we tried to change our times of rehearsal. We did have some overlapping. One of the worst things was the heavy drumbeat coming through the heating or ventilating ducts, and sometimes when we'd sing very softly all of a sudden you'd have this big blast coming from the band. I'm not criticizing them; it's just one of those things we had to deal with. Oftentimes when we would make recordings I would adjust our times with Mr. Varner so that we wouldn't have a background of band music in with our choral music.

When old Phi Beta burned, we had no auditorium. We sang our concerts in the Blow Gymnasium, and that was something because we had to construct our stage. We even had some students from the theatre who were very kind to us build some flats and paint them, and we gave our Christmas program in Blow Gym -- people sitting on bleachers, and we put some chairs down also. We did a little showmanship with the concerts there. We started out our Christmas concert with a fanfare from the balcony (and everybody enjoyed that), and then we did a procession going on the stage and had some sort of intricate movements which were very effective. People came to me and told me how beautiful they looked. We used candles and various lights at Christmas -- a little sentimental probably; however, I think if you don't bring joy to people with the music, you're losing your big point in music. You don't just sing things always that people like, but you give a big variety of music. We gave concerts in the Methodist church, and the Williamsburg Baptist Church was very nice; we did some recording and some practicing with the organ at the Baptist church. Since I was the choir director and organist at the Baptist church, the minister and congregation were very kind to let us practice there. The Methodist church was very good to us to let us come in there and give some of our programs and cooperate with the college.

On tour we really had some unusual experiences. We always tried to sing in a high school auditorium or in an auditorium with a stage, but that wasn't always possible, so we had the most unusual places where we had to set up. We set up our choir much differently than some people; we built up our choir sometimes eight, nine rows high, and we had to have people who were not scared to stand on the upper levels. We used

to have a standing joke among ourselves that we were going to put parachutes on people in case they fall. We had one or two kind of close calls with some people. One young man, a real healthy, strong-looking young fellow, just about fainted and fell from the top as we were singing a number. We kept on singing; we never stopped, but I got word just talking with my lips, and they caught the message and I said, "Catch this fellow. He's going to fall." And they just did catch this fellow; otherwise he would have fallen seven or eight feet, and that could have been really tragic. But the rest of the choir didn't know about it because they were paying attention to me; they didn't look around. The audience was more excited than we were. They were amazed: they took the boy out, and we kept on going with our number. I had told the group that if any time anything like that happened that somebody would take care of it. We had another incident -- we were lucky -- this young fellow was on the front row -- it seems auditorium stages are the hottest places that you can possibly sing in; as I said, "It's hotter than Baptist hell." A lot of times the singers would be soaking wet after a concert because of the auditoriums where we'd sing -- I don't know why architects have designed auditoriums that way. Anyway, we were singing this concert and this boy -- boom, he fell. We were doing a number where part of the choir would do an echo chorus, and the people who did the echo chorus didn't know what happened -- there was a terrific bang -- so I just signalled to some of my boys to take this young man off the stage. There happened to be a doctor in the auditorium, and he went around and came to see this boy. We got a big bang out of this because the doctor told these two boys who carried him out, "I can't feel his pulse," and this boy who had fainted popped up,

and he said, "Doctor, am I dead?" We had more fun out of teasing this young man with affection about that, but everything was all right. He had just gotten warm and keeled over. In many places we'd sing in churches and the churches would say, "Now this sanctuary becomes an auditorium. If people want to applaud, they should." They felt free to do so. A lot of times we'd have to take out benches in the front because we spread our choir out. I had taught all my people to sing independently on tour and of course here on campus, too; however, on tour, when we carried only forty people, they had to know their music backwards and forwards and sing anywhere they were located. I always had boys that really knew what to do in setting up the risers. I would help them. We'd arrange this and work together; the young ladies would always help. We came to one of the places in Philadelphia area, and one man came to me and said, "This is just like Barnum and Bailey coming in," because we brought in quite a bit of equipment. We always carried our risers and all the accessories, and it was quite a job to get things set up and really looking nice. We had people assigned to do certain things. In other words, it was just a big family affair where everybody felt that they had to do something. They would sweep and dust and clean up the piano -- everything had to be just so. We weren't satisfied with a half-baked job. We wanted to do it as fine as possible, and we got quite a bit of favorable comment. I always let my people know that they had to adjust, and I wouldn't take any griping from them. I said, "When you leave home and come to college, the cooking of your mother and the cooking of the cafeteria will be different. Your bed here at college may not be the same. But you have to learn this is part of your growing up and becoming educated," so we didn't hear very much.

In fact, when we ran into a problem we laughed about it instead of griping because I just didn't put up with people always being constant grippers. What can you do about it? Well, you make the best of the situation.

Williams: Going back to the facilities, I think you had said that you had planned everything so well in rehearsal in miniature -- what was it you were saying about that?

Fehr: That's right. Let's take my first years at William and Mary. We knew that we couldn't get into the Phi Beta state excepting maybe for one rehearsal before our concert. Luckily we had been on tour so much that we were used to situation like that. However, when we gave our concerts at home here in Williamsburg we were a little bit more elaborate in our presentation because we had excellent facilities at Phi Beta. The only objection we had was the rig, which is some sixty feet high, and when we stand back of the curtain the sound will go up, so we had to do something. We had sound board built so that it would carry the sound out. I would work out in miniature what we were to do in Phi Beta. It'd be just like having a skull session. I'd go to the blackboard and show them exactly where everybody is going to stand, what they're going to do. We'd put it in miniature, and when we got into Phi Beta we'd just open it up like a rose. It was just wonderful how these students would adjust. It would be a terrific job. I spent a long time figuring out just what they'd do and how to explain to these people, and you always have a few people that are a little slower in catching on. But we would walk through things and show them exactly what they were supposed to do because there were some new people who had never been in Phi Beta before, and some of us had been, and therefore we made the thing work. On other words, I'm

sure some choir directors would really have caused a big howl not being about to practice in Phi Beta. I wasn't very happy about it because it's so much better to practice in the auditorium before a concert -- every auditorium has a little different sound also, and the only reason we liked to rehearse a couple of days in there was so they became accustomed to the sound. Going to tour again, every place we would go, as soon as we would land, the first thing we would do -- even before we checked into our motel or our housing assignments -- we would go to the auditorium and set up, sing a little bit, so they'd get a feel of the auditorium. I suppose one of the most trying situations I had was nobody's fault. We were delayed in getting to Boston for a concert, and we simply had to let the young ladies go to their housing assignments, and the young men went to set up the stage. Luckily the young men did a little singing, and when we had the warmup -- we always had a warm-up session before our concerts -- these young men told the girls -- and I told the young ladies, too -- that this is a dead auditorium; you're going to have a hard time hearing and so on. We (tried to) set our risers in a way that the students could hear each other, but all of them couldn't. I will never forget the first number we sang -- it was sort of like a football team getting the kickoff and fumbling on the two-yard line and having ninety-eight yards to go for a touchdown. In this Boston concert after we sang that first number I walked around the group, and I told them, "You see what kind of auditorium we have? We've got a real problem. Now let's rise to this. We can make it go." And the next number got better, and as the concert went along things got better. In other words, instead of letting them all freeze and wilt, we just had a little pep talk among ourselves. At

intermission, we exchanged ideas about how we were going to do this and that, and we improved all the way through the concert. What I'm trying to tell you is -- everybody who's done anything in choir knows you've got to learn to adapt, just like you have to learn to adapt to anything that you do in your life. So going on tour we would usually ask the sponsors to send us the dimensions of the auditorium or the place that we sang or wherever we would be placed.

One very delightful -- well, several delightful things that we had our tour. We sang at the Lewinsville Presbyterian Church in McLean, Virginia. We sang one number, the "Te Deum" by Verdi, which is (for) a double choir, and we had the organist of the church to play the accompaniment for that. Just to show you how well everybody was trained -- we sent the score to the organist, who worked on it, worked out his registrations. The choir knew the music very well. We landed there in the early[#]afternoon and went through the number one time with the organist, and we sang it at the concert, and they did a very fine job. I had to discuss it with the organist just what we'd do and went through the score with him. When we sang in Ridgewood, New Jersey, we had a guest organist who did the "Gloria" by Poulenc. (Unfortunately we didn't get a recording of that in Ridgewood, New Jersey, but we did get one of the "Te Deum" by Verdi in McLean.) So the students have had a wide variety of experiences in singing in various places. They were instructed that they were going to run into unusual situations. You don't always have a set-up as you have at Phi Beta in Williamsburg.

Williams: I believe you mentioned that there have been a number of people who helped the choir out over the years who aren't choir-connected exactly.

Fehr: Yes. When I came here in 1945 -- the first concert we gave we really had

quite a problem. We had no risers, so I asked some of the young men if they knew any places where we could buy any kind of benches or anything. Well, a few football[#]boys in our choir said, "You know, we have some kind of[#]boxes out there in Cary Field." And they went out, and we built up our risers. Eventually we got enough money so we could buy ourselves a few risers, and then -- I think it was in 1947 -- Mr. Albert Haak came to the college. He is a true friend of our choir and chorus, and he just contributed immeasurably to our staging and the lighting and also recording. He was very generous and very willing to help. When we moved into the new Phi Beta in 1957 he helped us again; he really was the one who suggested we fix the sound boards. They have been just invaluable to us. I remember the first time we sang in Phi Beta -- just to rehearse -- the students said, "We can't hear each other," because the sound went up to the rig, and so Al said, "Let's build some of these moveable sound boards," and they have worked wonderfully. Also we would do a few little showmanship jobs, and we just asked Al (we always tried to give him as much help as possible, and he had some of his students that would help. It was very interesting to work on some of these projects). Even though as time went on Al's load was getting heavier and heavier in the theatre department, we would ask him how to do this and that. He knew how to do everything. He'd always know what to do and would have everything ready on time. We'd spend hours and hours preparing things because we would try to be as professional as we possibly could. We were a bunch of amateurs, but the thing is if you don't have a high goal that you set for yourself you're never going to hit the mark. Mr. Haak was very much interested in our success, and we attributed a lot of our success in staging to all he did. The last few

years Mr. (Roger) Sherman had charge of Phi Beta, and he would assign people to our concerts in lighting and as stage managers in addition to our own stage manager. Then in the last few years of my work there was Mr. Chris Boll, and he was really a fine young man and did an awful lot. He was so willing to help us. The last few concerts we gave, Mr. Boll had Susan Dandridge and David Douglas, and those two people contributed an awful lot to the success. We'd work out our lighting and our staging and appearance and so forth -- it's just wonderful to work with people who are interested in what we're doing and who are willing to help make a thing just as beautiful as possible, both to the eye and to the ear.

I'll never forget: one day I was walking across the campus and a young man stopped me, and he said, "I'm from Charlotte, North Carolina. I was home for Christmas and saw your television performance." I didn't know him from Adam, and I said, "Who are you?" And he introduced himself, and I forgot his name. Then a little later in the year I saw him again, and I found out it was Wilford Kale; whereas Wilford never did sing with us, he was very much interested in the choir, and he did quite a bit for us. He helped us with writing (he writes very well and is connected with the Richmond Times-Dispatch), and he helped us with brochures and narrations; he was always willing to lend a hand. He even once in awhile helped us put up risers and sweep the floor. He was interested in our students, and students got to know him and got to like him, and so we had people like that. And then sometimes some young men and also girls who would -- young ladies, I should say -- who would help us along with different things. We had a young man by the name of Willie Jones who wanted to sing with us, but he said he didn't know whether or

not he could afford the time, but he would come over and help us with the risers. We had the young ladies from the various sororities, as Alpha Chi Omega and the Kappa Alpha Theta and different sororities, who would serve as box office people and ushers. And so in other words we had quite a few people who were very, very generous in giving us help and encouraging us and of course clapping for us and all of that. We used to have a lot of fun together, and we enjoyed them, and we think that they enjoyed us. There were so many people who would help with the little details.

When we didn't have somebody we tried to train them to do the job. I would talk over our needs, and they'd have ideas, and I'd have ideas and we'd pool them. We would try to make our settings as beautiful as we knew how. One young man, Thomas Madson, '58, made a miniature of Phi Beta stage for me and a miniature of my risers and individuals. I was teased that I was playing with my dolls all the time. Well, that's all right. People can say whatever they want to, but this way we knew what to do. I would work out a formation, as we called them, and then write the names in, and I'd mimeograph these sheets and give them to students, and we'd learn very quickly where we'd be placed. I can't remember if I mentioned this before -- we sang what we called "formation singing." This had many values: for one thing, it gave the audience a relief from seeing the same picture all the time. It also changed the students from always standing next to the same person. It required the student to really know his part, that they didn't lean on somebody. It was really quite invaluable to do this. As I have always mentioned in our conversations, there were some people who always criticized us, and I got so that I didn't care. After all, I always told my students

when they went on stage, "Do the best you can, and if anybody can do any better, we'll let them have our places." And that's what I felt about what I was doing as a director. We didn't try to take away from the music. That was our prime interest: to do the music just as beautifully and sing just as well as we knew how with the talent we had and also the talent of the director.

Now, I mentioned the other day that we always tried to give a very solid program. We did music from the masters, sacred and secular. We always tried to include, particularly in the last years of my work here, a large work so that the students would get a knowledge of some of the fine longer works. However, we tried to limit the longer works to not more than thirty minutes because a lot of the people in the audience would get restless. The only real long work that we did that occupied the whole night was the "Messiah." I would just like to mention some of the larger works that we did, and these are not listed in any chronological order -- just a few of them that I noted down:

Two Spanish numbers: Misa Criolla by Ramirez
 Navidad Nuestra by Ramirez
 Magnificat - for Women's Voices - by Porpora
 Missa Brevis by Britten - for Women's Voices
 The Peaceable Kingdom by Thompson
 Be Not Afraid for Double Choir by Bach
 Come, Jesu, Come for Double Choir by Bach
 God's Time Is Best - Cantata - by Bach
 Liebeslieder by Brahms
 For Everything There Is A Season by Rozsa
 Mass in G by Schubert
 I Wrestle and Pray for Double Choir by Bach
 Gott Ist Mein Koenig - Cantata - by Bach
 Te Deum for Double Choir by Verdi
 Dettingen Te Deum by Handel
 In The Beginning by Copland
 Four Choruses from Catulli Carmina by Orff
 The Chichester Psalms by Bernstein
 Sea Charm by Picket
 Amahl and the Night Visitors by Menotti (this was staged)
 Ceremony of Carols by Britten - both by Women's Voices and Mixed Voices

Rejoice, Beloved Christians by Buxtehude
 A Canticle of Christmas by Giannini
 Magnificat by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
 Midnight Mass for Christmas by Charpentier
 Magnificat by J. S. Bach
 Magnificat by Monteverdi
 Magnificat in C by Pachelbel
 Christmas Cantata by Pinkham
 Down In The Valley by Weill (this was staged)
 Jesu, Priceless Treasure by J. S. Bach
 Gloria by Vivaldi
 God's Trombones by Ringwald
 Ode to the Virginian Voyage by Thompson (Premier Performance in 1957)
 Regina Coeli by Mozart
 Stabat Mater for Women's Voices by Dohmany
 Come Ye Sons of Art for Women's Voices by Purcell
 Polovetzian Dance and Chorus from "Prince Igor" by Borodin
 March and Chorus from "Carmen" by Bizet
 Regina Coeli from "Cavalleria Rusticana" by Mascagni
 Coronation Scene from "Boris Godounov" by Moussorgsky
 Gloria by Poulenc
 Stabat Mater by Poulenc
 Requiem by Durufle

This list is not complete, but it will give you an idea about some of the larger works we did. You may check our programs and note other numbers we sang. The amazing thing was that all of these works were done from memory!

Williams: I think you said this -- sometimes it was more difficult to sing a well-known number than to learn some of this more difficult classical music, which is less familiar.

Fehr: Yes, that's true, but there really was nothing the student couldn't conquer. I had this theory about my work, too: anything that I could do the students would be able to do. In other words, -- and this is no criticism of other directors -- I know exactly how a director feels. They look at a piece of music -- for example, I looked at the "Chichester Psalms," and at first it sort of scared me. It was very difficult. The second movement -- I just felt sometimes that we would never get it. But the thing is that the motivation we had among those students -- they

were not going to give up; come hell or high water they were going to learn it. They did it from memory, and they did a fine job. There were two numbers that the Common Glory choir did that our William and Mary choir never did because the Common Glory choir was really a semi-professional group; they were more highly trained than the ones we had at William and Mary. The "Mass in G" by Poulenc and then the "Te Deum" by Kodaly really are quite difficult to do. I almost gave up on the "Mass in G" with my Common Glory choir, but they were determined. (They did it also from memory.) We only had thirty voices, and the spread of the chords, the dissonances and other aspects were just absolutely difficult -- sometimes we just didn't think that we would get it, but just through determination and hard work we did it. Sure, you have to have talent with which to work, but you still have to have a desire and a willingness to work. If you do that, I don't think you're going to have too much trouble doing anything, really. There are some things that persons just do not have the skill or the talent or whatever you want to call it (to do), but usually people who work in music are willing to go after it. I had so many students tell me, "Oh, I can't sing." Well, one reason they do this is maybe they've never been challenged and never been encouraged. I think one thing that has pleased me so much -- I don't remember if I said this in previous conversations -- but I had a young lady who came to William and Mary that had never sung much in high school, but she wanted to sing. So she went into the chorus, where we started all our young ladies, and she did quite well. She took voice work, and when she got in her junior and senior years she was in the choir. She came out and soloed, and it was wonderful to see this young lady's voice grow (to) become a soloist. The audiences were

really amazed.

Williams: When we were mentioning auxiliary helpers of the choir -- I believe there was a gentleman who composed some special music for your choir.

Fehr: Yes, When I was going to Columbia, working on my doctor's degree, my advisor was Dr. Harry Robert Wilson, and he was very much impressed with the William and Mary Choir. In fact, he had come down here and visited us and directed the group. Often in some of the classes at Columbia he would mention about some things that our choir would do and how well our choir was trained; he was very proud of the group. And so he told me in 1950 (when I received my degree) that he was going to compose a song and dedicate it to us, and he did, a Christmas song called "The Children of God." Then in the later years, in 1966, he said he'd like to do another song for us, and it was called "The Heart Replies." These were composed and dedicated to the choir and to me. We were glad that somebody liked us that much.

Williams: Now over the years there had been several movements to change the William and Mary alma mater. Why have there been these movements?

Fehr: The latter part of the '50s and early '60s I think was the biggest movement on that. It seemed that some of the alumni didn't like the present alma mater, which is used by so many other colleges and high schools and just almost everybody (that is, the melody or tune), but they write different words (which are appropriate for their school.) There was a serious movement by the student association (or somebody), and so every person on the music faculty tried his hand at writing an alma mater. In Norfolk, (when a branch of William and Mary still existed there), there was one man who wrote an alma mater. We handed them around, played them for each other; we didn't say who had written this

or that. Just for experimentation, the one I wrote we took out on tour one time, and we'd end the program that way. I'd ask the William and Mary alumni who were in the audience, "How'd you like that?" Well, they said, "It's all right, but . . ." I think what finally happened -- so many of the alumni liked the "William and Mary Hymn" better than the alma mater, yet those people who had graduated had with this particular alma mater, I just don't think they'll ever let it go. So this whole movement just died away. What we did after this (right at the time when they decided, "Well, we'll hang on") we always ended our concerts with the "William and Mary Hymn" with a transition into the alma mater, and that seems to satisfy all the alumni. I wrote a brief introduction that goes into the hymn, and then we made a modulation and transition to the alma mater, and there's been no more disturbance about it. I suppose it's very, very difficult to change an alma mater. I know that in my high school days we ran into the same problem. The alma mater which the high school had was almost unsingable because of the range and other problems, and the school did go into a campaign to write a new alma mater. The man who directed the band in my high school wrote one, and the students accepted it and all the former students. That's sort of unusual. You hardly hear of anybody changing the alma mater. (Discussion about Texas alma mater.) It's just something you get used to. It's just like a dress or suit you like to wear. You don't care how ragged it looks, you still want to wear it, and I think this is the problem. I doubt if William and Mary will ever change its alma mater.

Williams: You had spoken of involvement in The Common Glory. How long were you director of the Common Glory choir?

Fehr: Well, The Common Glory started in 1947, and I stayed with The Common Glory

through 1967. This was very interesting -- the beginning of The Common Glory. Paul Green wrote the script for the show. The first years the Common Glory choir was mainly composed of William and Mary students from the William and Mary Choir. We had a most delightful experience in the early years because we were working together and the choir was open to anybody. We didn't have as many people trying out for the Common Glory choir. These people were paid, and the good thing about the Common Glory choir was the students who were in the choir could also take some summer courses. In 1947 and thereabouts we had a lot of men returning from their duty in the services; they were older men, and this would give them a little money -- they didn't get paid very much -- but at the same time we'd have our singing group. We had 33 singers in the early days, and they reduced the number to 30, and I think there are about 20 now in the Common Glory choir. And as time went on the personnel was drawn from various colleges, like Madison, Mary Baldwin, Randolph-Macon, University of Richmond, Westhampton, and even from the Carolinas, and some people would come from a far distance. In my days when I was choir director we always had choir rehearsals and tried to make this sort of a choral school, but that aspect and idea unfortunately has disappeared now. As the show went on, the members of the choir were also put on stage. In the early days, the choir was just choir, that's all, but as they had financial difficulties they gave people double duty. When they signed the contract for working in The Common Glory they knew they had to move scenery or they had to do some acting -- and also it gave them a little more to do. In the early days the choir would be on stage for awhile, but then they'd have nothing to do. The girls would knit and sew and gossip, I guess. The fellows would

play a lot of pinochle and things like that. So they just might as well be useful. We even had as many as between 150 to 200 people trying out for the choir of 30, and so you had quite a bit of talent from which to choose.

As I said, we had a choral school. We'd rehearse every day for two hours in the afternoon, and the students really learned a lot. A lot of people would come to work in The Common Glory to get this choral experience. It's not maybe very nice to say -- but when you took that aspect away a lot of students who were interested in music didn't care to come to sing in The Common Glory because it gets pretty drab to sing the same music for sixty nights without having a change. In my day we would always have a warm-up in which we would talk over the show. And I would tell these students, "Here people are paying their hard earned money (\$3, \$4, \$5) to see the show. I want to put on a professional job. I don't care if you feel badly; you forget it and you get on the stage and put this thing across." It's sort of like on Broadway where they give a show for years. Every night those people have to be sparked and do it, particularly when people are paying their money. I would spark them by giving them music other than just the same songs as they sang in The Common Glory so that they wouldn't get tired. I would be very picky and find some little things wrong with the songs used in The Common Glory to pep them up instead of being like a phonograph record going over it and doing it sloppily or inadequately. We had some experimentation in The Common Glory. For awhile we had recorded choral music and live organ. Later on we had live choir and recorded organ -- and that's difficult to sing that way! Whenever you have anything recorded, it's set. Some of the highlights of my Common Glory work were when we

had live organ and live choir working together, and we had some fine organists. One of the best ones we ever had was Mr. William Waters. He was with The Common Glory about ten years. In the early days we had people in the choir as much as ten years, and that's giving up ten summers. I was there twenty-one years; I just never had any vacation because after Common Glory, the college started. In recent years because of financial problems that The Common Glory had, a different point of view of the importance of the choir has arisen. Naturally things changed a lot, and quite a bit of interest in choir as such has changed. Adjustments had to be made to keep the show going and include the music. The emphasis on doing the choral music just as fine as possible probably has changed some. Every director has his ideas how the music should be done. This is not a criticism; this is actually the fact. As I said, we had fine organists, and for several years we had an orchestra. The organist and the choir would do some music other than Common Glory music; we'd give concerts (and they would memorize all the music), and we would have a -- what you call it -- streetcar conductor's holiday: on our night off we would give our concert. The people that were singing in The Common Glory choir knew they were going to do this, and so we didn't have anybody that was griping about it; they were required to do it, and all this was made clear to them. Like a good football team -- a person can't say. "I'm going to come in and play if I want to," and this is the same attitude we had about our choir. But The Common Glory was quite an experience. We made some records, and we've got some good recordings of the music. They sang some very fine music, and we had some really wonderful, really fine voices. So that was one big highlight in my life: The Common Glory.

Williams: Can I ask you some questions now about The Fehr-Well Fest?

Fehr: Yes.

Williams: Let me ask first: whose idea was the "Fehr-Well Fest?" Do you know?

Fehr: I'm not quite sure. Ever since I've been here, since 1945, we've had many choir alumni to come back to see us (my wife and me). I suppose when people knew I was going to retire -- well, one young man who graduated in 1957, Mr. Agamemnon Vassos, thought it would be nice if we had some sort of choir reunion. We had several choir reunions, but they really wanted to have a choir reunion at the time of this exit that I was making from the college. They thought it would be a good time for them to get together and do a little singing, and also it afforded a time where many former students could get together and see each other again that hadn't seen each other for years. It was very interesting. So a committee was formed, particularly of people who were in this area. And there were several people, as Mrs. Harcum and Joe Phillips, Nancy Stanton, and Mr. and Mrs. Cogle (who met in the choir). Then we took three people from the present-day (1974) choir: Ann Spielman, Tom Terry, and Keith Savage. I think that's the entire committee; I hope I haven't missed anybody. But those people got together and did the planning. The young man that really did the most work was Tom Terry; he was our alumni secretary. Ann Spielman was secretary of the choir and Keith Savage was president of the present-day choir. They really did work, but Tom Terry spent hours and nights and had worlds of correspondence. The committee met, and they worked out the entire festival. And it was a most delightful and memorable occasion for my wife and me. There were close to two hundred alumni who came. The choir and chorus gave their concert -- we didn't give a full concert. We also had the alumni choir (who) came in on Saturday morning, May 4, 1974, for rehearsal, and they

had some activities in the afternoon. There was a banquet; then we had our concert, and after the concert some more activity -- a few speeches in connection with my retirement. It was quite a red-letter day for my wife and me, and for our students. It was a difficult time because of the attachment that I had with my students; we didn't want it to be a sob affair because after all, people do come to the end of the line. We kept it that way. I hadn't seen one student in twenty-seven years. It was interesting for these people to come back; some of them brought their children along, and it really was^a very, very delightful occasion. We had one young man who was my accompanist in 1960, Tracy Russell. He presented a piano number. He's quite an artist, plays very beautifully at the piano. In 1960 we did "To Saint Cecilia" by Dello Joio (and he was the accompanist), and when he left in 1960, he said to me, "Pappy, when you retire, let's try to do this together, and I'll play the accompaniment." So we had sort of a long standing date, and I decided I'd like to sing that. It's a very moving number, and the students got a big charge out of it; we all got a charge out of having Tracy play our accompaniment. So that was a big day: May 4, 1974.

Williams: Was there any thought of keeping the alumni choir together the way the alumni band comes back at homecoming every year?

Fehr: After the "Fehr-Well Fest," several students had written me, and said it's too bad we had it only one day, that we should really have it three days. What they really wanted is that they could visit together. Of course, they'd like to rehearse. The thing is, we really should have had a couple of days together to rehearse, (but) it was really amazing how well they sang. We had an average of twenty minutes per number, and we sang five numbers, and with all the other things that went on, you

don't have much time to polish and to really perfect, but they did sing very well. But the satisfying thing was that so many of them said to me they remembered all the little thing I had taught them: how to pay attention, and other details; and therefore, we worked together very, very quickly. Many of these people are now choir directors in their community, in their churches, or in other community choruses, so that they felt that their training was worthwhile. That makes me feel good. I don't know whether they learned so much. Some things people do learn and pick up, just associating with music and how it's supposed to be done.

Also, I guess I should mention this: the alumni group contributed a fund to form the Carl A. Fehr Choral Library, and they've made arrangements with the audio-visual department to make copies of all the tapes that we have. It's not complete because evidently some tapes were misplaced, stolen, or some things we didn't record. So we are making up this library of the tapes we have. I'm sure not many people are ever going to listen to them, but in case anybody would want to I'm quite distressed that some tapes I just simply cannot find, and I thought I had them, but we have just worlds of tapes of our Christmas concerts, spring concerts, and other events and concerts. We just won't bat 1000 percent on this. I've even written to former students. You must remember in 1945 and the early '50s the taping wasn't as professional as it is now, and so some of the recordings aren't too good because of the technical pickup that we had. That was due to the fact that tape had just come along, and we didn't have the equipment either. We made some early recordings on wire. We really had bad luck on some of that because the wire got loose at the spool, and we just had wire everywhere, so we couldn't preserve some of those. In the very early days they had these

soft wax records which after a couple of playings would be scratched and worn out. Some of the things we just don't have recorded; we just talk about them.

Williams: But you have all those recordings of all these 1,000 concerts you gave, and it doesn't even take into account all the rehearsals and all that we talked about in these four sessions that we've had.

Fehr: It's been real rewarding. Oh, I'll pick up a recording that was made in the '50s and play it, and it brings back so many memories. And the groups sang quite well, and every now and then a student would come by to see me, and they'd say, "I wonder, can I hear this particular recording of our concert?" And I'd get it out and you'd see them -- how they'd smile; they remembered things. One of the most difficult things I have is some people coming back, and they'll ask me about little incidents that happened that were very meaningful to them and were moments of pleasure to them in their particular year. The hard thing for my wife and me is to spot people who come in and we can't really say, "Now, were you here in 1947? Were you here in 1953? Were you here" So we always ask them when they were here -- the young men could be in there (the choir) four years and the young ladies were usually three years. They all have their little remembrances of where they had delightful experiences. We had our moments when everything wasn't just happy and rosy and delightful, but that's the way things go. Everything's not pleasant all the time. They weren't happy with the director all the time. Probably if the dormitories could speak, there'd be some very, very funny things that come out of the walls. I kidded some of my students that the reason that the various dormitories are being renovated is because some of the miserable things that were said about the choir and the choir director had cracked the foundation and the

walls, and they had to repair them again -- but all of this in jest. In general, we got along pretty well. People who didn't want to work and didn't want to live under fair (fehr) discipline just never found their place in the choir or chorus because I still maintain you cannot sing beautifully and put on a program with class and excellence and spark and enthusiasm and precision and so on unless you have a certain discipline and desire -- not just sing through a thing, but really cause a moving experience for the audience and the listener. Not everybody in any audience -- I don't care if they go to the Metropolitan or anywhere, they're not all going to come out elated. We just received a Christmas card from an elderly lady, and she said that the one thing that she regrets about my retirement is that the Christmas concert was always a prelude to her happy Christmas (I'm quoting her.) And this makes me feel awfully good that maybe I did contribute something to that lady's life. Also, many students on Christmas cards that we get say they always think of their Christmas concerts, and every year it inspired them for a happy Christmas. Well, I know that sounds like bragging, but the thing is -- my idea always was your music should be a happy moment for you and give you a lift, and if it didn't you shouldn't waste your time on it.

Williams: We've been talking about the contributions of the choir. I appreciate your contributing to this, and I'd like to come and look over your scrapbooks with you.

December 17, 1975. You were just now showing me a clipping about the Fehr Scholarship Fund. Now how did that come about?

Fehr: In 1966 the president of our choir was John Cole, and he had talked with Dr. Paschall about creating a choral scholarship in honor of me.

I was very flattered and honored that they thought of this. My wife said, "This is unusual. Usually they do this after somebody is dead and gone," and I told her I was happy that I could experience seeing some people receive this money. The initial corpus that we had was \$5,000. We'd take the interest and establish a scholarship from that. We established a \$200-a-year scholarship, or we could divide the money into two \$100. (It doesn't sound like much money, but every little bit helps a student). This fund has grown to the extent that we can give three scholarships of \$300 each. When the scholarship is not awarded, that interest goes into the corpus, so it'll build up. It's mainly designed to encourage people to be in the choral groups; we say that they must participate in the choral organizations. This was really quite exciting for us to have this established, and it's nice to see it go on now since 1966. So now -- 1975 -- that's nine years. We've helped some real worthy students, and they're very appreciative, even though it's not very much; it doesn't come into thousands of dollars, but it helps them with their books and with their fees.

Williams: Were the people who set it up members of the alumni choir?

Fehr: No, the ones who set it up were the choir members in 1966. Every now and then people send in a contribution to the fund, and I just think it's worthwhile, even though it doesn't yield an awful lot.

Williams: It's a very fine honor though.

Addenda
added by Dr. Fehr on March 3, 1976

There was one gentleman at the college for only a few years but who was very much interested in our choral groups, who gave us much encouragement, and who expressed his pride in our groups. This man was Mr. Carter O. Lowance. Mr. Lowance served for a few years in the administration of Dr. Davis Y. Paschall and became executive vice-president of the college. He served only for a short time in the administration of Dr. Graves, only to return to Richmond to serve under Governor Mills Godwin's administration. Mr. Lowance was a true friend of our choir and chorus and always spoke in highest terms about our performances: the dignity, the discipline, and the influence on the lives of the students.

I would like to say that Dr. Paschall always thought most highly of the choir and of the chorus. He was pleased that our choir brought most favorable comment from people for whom we performed. He was proud of the fine name we established for the college through our performances. Dr. Paschall supported us, encouraged us, and always had nothing but the best to say about our performances.

I was very distressed to see how inconsiderately and ungratefully Dr. Paschall was treated during the last few years of his administration. He was very much interested in the college, its students, and everyone connected with the college. He tried hard to maintain the fine image which had been established, but some people opposed his hard work and contributions. He wished to

maintain some order and sound principles under which the college should function. However, as time went on, I believe he felt that he had done his job, and it was the right time for him to retire. The announcement of his retirement as president of the college was a sad day for me. I will never forget what all he did for the choir, the chorus, and me. At our choir banquet on May 11, 1971, Dr. Paschall made a short speech, and here is what he said:

I simply want to repeat the appreciation I expressed to Dr. Fehr and the choir last Saturday night (May 8, 1971) in presenting Mrs. Paschall and myself with that very lovely gift which we shall cherish, and this honor tonight is one that I will cherish always. The choir, I don't need to tell you, has created an image for William and Mary through the past ten years that I know of that's unexcelled in what it means to the college and to the alumni and to so many friends. When you think about the many places that the choir has been, the many people who have heard the choir in the last ten-eleven years, plus the Christmas program on television from coast-to-coast -- there's just been a lot of joy brought to thousands and thousands of people in so many places, and it's meant something to the college that's everlasting. I know it's meant a lot to you because of those who have been in the choir and who come back and tell me

that while here they were exposed to several things that meant so very much to them. One was that they were exposed during the four years to some music that is for eternity, and they experienced it, and they will never forget it; that's one thing.

Another is that in the choir they enjoyed a spirit of family, a spirit of unity, a spirit of understanding that they doubt they will ever really find again in civic clubs or otherwise. And thirdly they have said that they have found in the choir performances an expectation of precision and of excellence unexcelled in expectation and that they performed at it and that they doubt they will ever have quite the same opportunity again in life to respond with such precision and in such unison and in such tone. Well, they are things that I'm sure you have experienced, and it's exemplified in your awards, in the friendliness that you have -- the wonderful group relationships -- and those are the things that I say we are so thankful for that we have the choir.

You build the memories of associations for former years that will mean so very, very much in retrospect -- right there not noticeable -- but so soon they will be, and those who come back at homecoming beat a path to "Pappy's" door, and they join again in memories of these at their particular time who were here, and through it all he had built the immortality in song and great music through the choirs of the years. Few people, few men are blessed in

this life with the ability while still living to build that type of immortality and to earn it as he has done, and it's in that sense that William and Mary is so deeply grateful to him. I have been able to do a few things here and there, but there have been so many others who have assisted. You were speaking about Dr. Jones. When I came here some nearly eleven years ago, it was Dr. Jones who told me for Dr. Truesdell that we didn't have but one piano, and the tuner was so hard to get to come for this, that, and the other, and we just needed some additional pianos. Well, sir, we bought more pianos than any other institution in America in the last ten years, and Dr. Truesdell has worked on Dr. Jones and Dr. Jones on me until pianos are in closets around here like skeletons! And the music department as a whole has come so far: our band, the various aspects of music at William and Mary have all come so far in that period of time. I'm so glad that you are at the particular peak that you are in that history of it, and there's so much more in the way of a challenge to live up to the high standard that you have set and the great level of performance that you have achieved. That's quite a task. You know, when one is building, that's something, but when one has arrived at the level you've arrived at (and the choir's achievement) it's quite a challenge to stay with it and to continue that standard. I

doubt that your performance and the concerts of this year can really be excelled; I'm just hopeful that those who follow you will be able to do as well, actually. And so I say about music like great poetry, the sheer beauty of it is something that touches us all and lives on, and as long as you have it in your heart, as you have exemplified it in your concerts, you will never be alone, whether you sing it or whether you think it, and it's wonderful in this day and time to be alone and not be alone. I think of such things when I hear great music as the poetry of Cervantes when he spelled the Yukon. I remember one passage from that, and he said: "I have stood in some mighty-mouthed hollow, plum full of hush to the brim, and watched the big, husky sun wallow in crimson and gold and grow dim until the moon set the pearly peaks a-gleaming and the stars tumbled out neck and crop, and I thought I surely was dreaming with the peace of the world piled on top." The beauty in poetry and the beauty in music are the things that this world most needs and closely akin to the arts because with all the natural sciences over here, man's relation to nature, and the social science of man's relation to man, the thing that bridges the gap with meaning are the arts: the music, the literature, and those things that give it life and meaning and form and challenge and inspiration. And you have exemplified that at its highest at William and Mary, and it's in

that spirit I salute you and wish for each of you seniors who are going on the very best; you'll always be at home at William and Mary. We're so glad we have the others for a longer period, and we hope we can keep "Pappy" for another fifty years.

Thank you.

The 1971 spring concerts were dedicated to:

DR. DAVIS Y. PASCHALL
 President of the College of William and Mary
 Administrator - Scholar - Educator - Benefactor - Friend

In deepest appreciation and gratefulness for his constant interest in, support of, and devotion to the advancement and success of the choral program at the College during his administration.

At the "Fehr-Well Fest" in May 1974, Wilford Kale and "Aggie" Vassos spoke about what the choir and chorus have meant to many people:

(Kale): "Pappy," I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the entire Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary to wish you and Mrs. Fehr well and Godspeed in your days and years ahead. This crowd of students and alumni gathered here this evening mean much within the greater alumni scene. It's groups like this with their own particular interest that draws William and Mary people together. These activities in their very special way share the relationship with the alumni at William and Mary, a relationship which we have not only with each other, but with the important elements of our school. The spirit that has brought more than 150 alumni choir members back to this campus is the same spirit

that brings together other people from various parts of the great William and Mary scene, and it is this unique spirit that serves William and Mary in which professors like "Pappy" have grown and have nurtured (in) students. Dr. Fehr to literally hundreds of students has made life at William and Mary more than just a learning experience. We know that "Pappy" has provided a special enrichment for the entire college community through the past nearly three decades. For this very, very special person, not only to those of us here tonight, but to hundreds of other students here at the college -- and it's for those students that I speak tonight, those students who did not have the opportunity to sing on the Phi Beta stage or to sing in Blow Gymnasium or to sing in old Phi Beta -- the students who have watched and come to these halls, applauded here, cried, and gone home wishing they had been a part of the William and Mary Choir. "Pappy," about six years ago I wrote in the Richmond Times-Dispatch some words, which although it may be vain for me to do, I'd like to repeat them tonight: "He's a musical perfectionist. He's a rigid disciplinarian. He's a humorist. He's a philosopher, a court jester, and director of one of the outstanding college choirs in America." "Pappy," I really came here tonight to represent a small group of people who really are a large group -- we're the friends of Carl Fehr and friends of the William and Mary choir. We have done our jobs through the years: we've taken down risers, swept floors; we have given out programs to your concerts, and we have stood in awe for a long, long time. We've never sung in your choir, but to us you are the spirit of William and Mary that will last, last, last like the ages, and it's that person, Carl Fehr,

and that spirit that we honor tonight. "Pappy," I would like on behalf of the friends of the William and Mary Choir all over the country who couldn't be with us tonight and who are not on the stage and have never been on one of your stages, thank you so much for being a part of William and Mary.

(Vassos): "Pappy" and Alice and special guests, young ladies of the girls' chorus, and fellow choir mates: you know, preparing for this event there was a feeling of "Pappy," of the steering committee that we'd really not have a lot of speeches (and so far only one and a half). But I'd be really remiss on this occasion if I did not act as the spokesman to really try to express our feelings on this occasion. But how does one really express feelings in a language that does not have words to describe the experiences that we have had? As I tried to stretch my limited vocabulary for words to try to convey a message, my eyes fell on a brochure that you received in the mail that was sent to you -- this one -- and also if you take a look this evening on your program. On the cover of the brochure appeared two words: "The Choir" and that was my message: "The Choir." Now what does this mean to me? Simply this: that we were no "a" choir but "the" choir, the best choir in existence; and it is true because you and I thought we were the best. And also the fact there a few thousand people who have heard us who will agree. Why were we the best choir? Because we had the best choir director, and we sang the best, and we did things no other choir had ever done. For those of us who really have been fortunate to come back and listen to "the" choir after graduation, tonight

we can recall how we sat enthralled, as we have done tonight, and we said to ourselves, "I thought that my choir was the best." You know, but then I think we had to silently concede that they were just as good as we were -- not better, but equal. So what I am trying to say is that from 1945 to 1974 William and Mary has not had many choirs, but one choir, "the" choir. "The" choir, which has stood the test of time and reached the heights of excellence, and tonight "the" choir meets for the last time under its creator and director, "Pappy" Fehr. And "Pappy," there really are no material gifts that I think we could give you because we have had so many priceless experiences, and this is hard to repay. But in exchange we would like to give him some priceless gifts. Would you please bring the tokens forward, Carolyn? Okay, what are these priceless gifts? Two books. One is a scrapbook, and in it are priceless written and photographic memories of the past. The other book is a bound volume of letters from your children who wanted to share their secrets and their priceless thoughts with you. And finally, "Pappy," I think that the greatest gift we can give you is our presence here today because it represents a sacrifice -- a sacrifice of being away from our homes and our loved ones to share with you this moment in time of love and devotion which will remain with us and which we hope with you always. And Alice, this occasion also belongs to you because we know that back of every great man there's a great woman.