Arthur W. Phelps

Having come to William and Mary in 1945 Mr. Phelps has been on the law faculty (at first the department of juris-prudence) longer than anyone in Williamsburg. At one time dean of the law school, he has observed its modern growth and tells of this in his interview. The transcript was approved (with a few additions) by Mr. Phelps.

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Arthur Phelps

May 15, 1975

Williams: You were talking about Dean Cox and the law school and that President Bryan gave him a great deal of responsibility.

When President Roosevelt came, he did that. He would do
the wonderful Christmas parties that Mr. Bryan had. And
also, I think he did the dances in the Sunken lawn and
Leslie Cheek did the decorating, but Dean Cox had headed
that open and well, he headed up all the special
functions for Mr. Bryan. the law students were Mr. Bryan's
aides -- Blake Newton and Cecil Harper and Pat Lyons, who is
now dead, Billy Roberts of Philadelphia.

Williams: This was sort of part of how the law students were a port of the college itself.

- V. Phelps: That's right. It was small; and there were just a few students in the law school, but the law school was very close to the main college.
- A. Phelps: A great many of the teachers in the law school were in the arts college proper, particularly business admisstration, fields of this kind, and government-related like labor law; fields of this type. We had a number of these people with with us at different times -- economists were working, -- so that some of the courses were designated in such a way that the arts college student could take them or that they would be a part of the law school program. And frankly, the arts

college students were excellent students, well capable of taking the course. Natter of fact, one of them took trusts and estates, which is a highly complicated legal course, but he was leading into insurance, and he did very well.

Williams: You thought this interdisciplinary approach was really beneficial to the law schools

A. Phelps: I think it was, and I think and hopefully it will get back to this to some degree, but as we moved into becoming a full-scale law school, it's been necessary to adhere more closely to the traditional concepts of a law school. And many of us feel, to some extent, that this is a mistake, and we hope some day we may get back to an interdisciplinary approach.

Williams: Because the school did start out as the school of dovernment and bitizenship and as I understand, Mr. Pollard and Dr. [] R C]

Chandler were really the ones who got it starteds

A. Phelps: That's my understanding, too, although I'm sure that -- I think Judge Shewmake was a little later, wasn't he? He was very active in pro
[(ow school];
moting the and I think he had this broad concept of teaching law and he gave a very good talk here many years ago
to a small group about his conception of a law school along
these lines, and I think he got it from the earlier ex-

Williams: When you came it was called the pepartment of Jurisprudence?

perience here with the law school.

A. Phelps: Right.

Williams: But it was part of the Marshall-Wythe School of Government and Citizenship?

A. Phelps: Right, and the higher/seleries for exactly the same as the professors' salaries on the academic side. And that remained for many years, true for many years. In other words, we were that much a part of the college, that we were really a department in the fallest sense.

Williams: Someone told me -- and this may be hearsay -- that the way the school came to be called a law school, no one really knew when it was that it sort of had to be done in a roundabout way. Do you know of this? (This could have been totally erroneous information.)

- A. Phelps: It was along about '47 or '48, I think, that we shifted from this over to the Marshall-Wyth School of Law. I think -- I"m trying to think now -- it probably was a little later than that, not that -- probably during Woodbridge's era or Curtis's -- I don't know which but I believe it was Woodbridge's.
- Williams: I think that was when this question came up. They were trying to date a portrait of Dean Woodbridge, and they were
 trying to figure out when he was dean, and they said, "Well,
 all of a sudden, after one summer, it was called the law
 school." So I wondered if there was.
- A. Phelps: You'll find that, I'm sure, along in there in the minutes of the board.

V. Phelps

A. Phelps: But that shift was a part and the law review was changed from a review of Virginia law, which I instituted and was very modestly successful but that was the start of the William and

Mary Law Review. (About the same time that the name of the law school, the name of the law review changed so it became the William and Mary Law Review. \ Part of the purpose of that was to gain more national recognition, frankly, by having a law review. I thought that was a good idea and that was our intention to lead into this, but I thought it was a little untimely. I thought we hadn't quite arrived at the point but it seems to me that it's worked pretty well but I was a little hesitant about moving that fast into this area because at that time we were just beginning &- you were asking what period we began -- we were beginning to attract students end of course, the ending of the war brought students in; This was what really gave us our first real boost. But somewhere around -- approximately, really it was a little after Mr. Woodbridge's tenure -- we began to attract a more broadly national group. We had always had some students from other states, but we began to attract them in larger numbers, and they were not dependent on this military bulge; They were dependent on the fact that the school was becoming recognized as a good school and I

AND TAXATION
think when we had established the chair of law this gave added interest to the development of the school and gained us a great deal of national recognition and reputation.

Williams: Was this taxation degree also part of thish of building up the attracting program and therefore trying to get better students?

A. Phelps: Oh, yes. We felt that tax law was an important area and one

that we could concentrate in. That we could develope a good tax program -- which we did, we developed an excellent tax program -- and Mr. Atkinson came in to establish the program and he had a national reputation and many of his students are well placed over the country at the present time. I had a little to do with expressing the desired lity of this and pushing it. Also Judge Shewmake was very much interested in it; and Judge Hooker was very much interested in having taxation established as one of the areas of study and a good deal of interest developed immediately for this, and it was intentionally done to give us a little area of specialty above and beyond the normal tax courses that byou have in law school.

- Williams: You mentioned Judge Shewmake -- now neither Judge Shewmake nor Judge Hooker graduated with a law degree from here; but they were both interested for a long time in the law school.
- A. Phelps: Yes, strangely -- I think Judge Shewmake was a Surrey County boy and he did have an intense interest in the law school.
 - Williams: I think he had been one of the first teachers when it was first formed.
- A. Phelps: Yes, he was. And I'mfairly certain he was a graduate of the University of Virginia but in spite of that he was always representing the best interests, I think, of the law school at William and Mary. Strangely, we've had several Virginia people who have been interested in the law school.

Williams: Over the years it seems the law school has gotten a great deal of alumni support, even though up until recently there weren't all that many alumni that were influential. Is this not true?

- A. Phelps: Yes. After we began to enlarge a little bit we got excel
 [Harvey]

 lent students, like Chappell, who is now a member of the board,

 We had Foster, who is now a judge. When these young men graduated,

 the total class took an interest in the development of the

 law school and had maintained basically that interest al
 thigh they aren't quite as represented in the associations
 - formally, they played a very important part in the development of the law school and that solid interest and in the case of the law review, it was a student development. In other words, the faculty— I was advisor for many years, and I on its being a student effort, and they did all the business work and planning. They did all the work with the state agencies—and this was what helped to make them the students that they were, actually handling the full responsibility. A course, I advised them—with respect to certain policy matters and things of this kind, but I've always felt and many law reviews do feel it's true that you get much better results this way. Those people really wrote the articles except of course with some and

there); also many of us gave them subjects to write on and so forth. Some of it was the product of classroom work, so it was in part supervised but in general it was almost totally inde-

pendent and those people contributed immeasureably to the development of the law school.

Williams: This is a "which came first, the chicken or the egg"-type question: Have the standards been raised from getting better students or were the programs, the mass courses introduced -- were they the cause for better students coming?

A. Phelps: Well, we've always had a core of excellent students. We might have had less students but we always had a core of very solid students. Frankly, in the earlier days there were marginal students, but we gradually moved to the point where we had the no problem with respect to quality of students. In other words, politically we turn away hundreds of students who are well qualified to have in the law school. Fif we get this new law school building, of course, we'll be able to take larger. To some degree, we don't want the to enlargement. It would be too large a law school in comparison with the rest of the college.

Williams: I would think having the quarters and having your own building, rather than being basement in Bryan Hall, would have been a
factor, too.

A. Phelps: You know, I'm a great believer in the fact that you can have education anywhere. The buildings help but there are plenty of buildings around the country where law is not very well taught. They have fine facilities and fine buildings. We conducted a vigorous program of solid student interest in what they were doing, the classes were small enough to really

bring out the students, and it was a very happy time to be teaching, really—And a very fine group of young men and the quality was, yes, good at the top. I'd say more than half of the students were highly qualified. Many of them have proved it since in their accomplishments. So, yes, we get good students.

Williams: Let me ask you a little bit about administrative attitudes.

When you came here did you feel that from the president on down there was a real interest in making this a quality program?

A. Phelps: There's always been an interest, except possibly during one period and I don't like to pinpoint any one individual but I think THE LAW SCHTOL although I'm not too sure that Dr. Pomfret was solidly -- oh, he did back the law school I've always wondered. And some people like Bob Land who was librarian made no bones about the fact that he didn't think there should be a law school here. So there was a certain amount of opposition, but I would say overall we've always had the highest cooperation from the administration from all the people have been working the with some than others but even Dr. Pomfret, I think, recognized that the law school was going to be here, and he was a part of the effort. I really don't know much there was there.

Am I accurate there Wirginia?

V. Phelps: Yes, I think you're very accurate.

A. Phelps: Right I think if I picked one administrator, he was much less interested in the law school and I think his natural interests were different, but we did have solid support and I think he

recognized the fact that we had , for the law school but there's always been a great deal of interest but then this period came when there was this discussion of duplicating facilities in the state and I suggested to you that I had heard -- but I could not state it positively -- that Dr. Southall Freeman had a great deal of interest in this concept and was applying it objectively, broadly across the state, and therefore, would affect our school (it was very small at that time). You see they were feeling with the matter of efficiency and income, and we were spending a little more money than we were making. Now, of course, we help the college proper much more than they help us at the present time. So Nait was completely turned around that flow of income so that we were really having a big fight to get what we considered a fair proportion of the income that we generate. But the picture was exactly opposite in those days. So Dr. Freeman or whoever it was (or a group of people undoubtedly) established a state policy of doing away with duplicating facilities. As a matter of fact, we lost our library science program here; other programs were lost as a result of this, and we were slated for this. There was a good deal, there

who wanted the law school and I think very substantial interests.

and there were other people who wanted to apply this
theory of objects vely and we got in a lot of solid newspaper support and so forth and all of a sudden it was

was quite a tug-of-war and there were substantial interests (I think very substantial

The word cannot be understood on tape. Can you think what it might have been?

DECIDED .

But there were two periods -- one before I came here in which the law school was almost abolished and then the period when I was dean during which there was M -- well, as a matter of fact, I was told that the law school was being abolished and that we were going to be transferred to the University of Virginia faculty. We wouldn't lose our jobs but we would be given opportunities at the University of Virginia but this never eventuated because all of the school, apparently, got up in arms -all the alumni and so forth -- and it became settled them and then we moved into this rather inadequate situation in the basement of Bryan Hall and then we gradually developed to the point where we justified our new building -- that!s right, development of the library building as the law building which many of us thought we recognized that the time was a factor there was also the need for other academic buildings, and frankly, I think, if we'd fought tooth and nail for a building then, we would have gotten it, but it would have been at the sacrifice of the college proper. We have acted in a restrained manner in pushing for a law school

building and I think at the time the approval was made wit was thought - the building is so built that it can Could

be fairly easily established into another type of operation it was thought that for other purposes, Eventually we will get another law school building so I don't think are hopefully we are

in the process of getting that which I think we're entitled to because frankly I know we acted in a very restrained manner, and I know that we got up a good deal of support from the college proper as a result of it. And Dr. Guy was very helpful to us in getting the building we have at the present time because he recognized the restraint which we exercised and I think the chemistry building was attributed to some extent to us because felt the same way: that but he helped us and so we should help somewhere.

Williams: What capacity was he acting in?

A. Phelps: He was the head of the chemistry department.

V. Phelps: I thought he was dean of the faculty at that time.

A. Phelps: He was very responsible, the was in the inner councils, as you might say. Very quiet operator, though. Not ostentatious at all, but his judgment was well recognized. Well, he certainly was a very influential person. (Discussion on whether or not Mr. Guy was ever dean of the faculty.)

Williams: Did this move to abolish -- you're taking about now in the late I think it was '39 In. Bryan introduced to the Board of Visitors and in fact the Board of Visitors, I think, voted to abolish it then and as I've been told, a week later they had to meet again because of the uproar there was over this. Did the this get any farther than just sort of rumor or talk stage?

I know the board never acted on it, but I'm probably thinking more of in Richmond.

A. Phelps: You're talking about which time?

Williams: Here in the late '40s when you were dean.

When I was dean

Florida.

A. Phelps: It never got to the point of action as far as I know except for actions of committees which were appointed by the legislature and were working on this duplicating facility. As I told you, I was informed that the law school would be abolished and that we would be transferred to the University of Virginia. Now certainly some rather political decision had been made with respect to this but that got to the newspapers again and the agitation of the alumni developed strongly, quickly. But by that time I was in

Williams: Now, on the state level the objection would have been duplication of facilities but you hinted that not everyone at William and Mary was convinced that the law school should have been here. What would have been their arguments why it should not be -- would it be that the college's character was liberal arts and not professional?

A. Phelps: Yes, I think that had something to do with it. There's always been thought that maybe the overtones of Colonial Williamsburg and their desire and more to have a small arts college here, rather than one which they realized might develop too broadly. AFFECTED But, frankly, we haven't felt any major opposition to the law school from that sector. But I think from time to time there has been thought that a small liberal arts college here has been thought that a small liberal arts college here as MALL LIBERAL ARTS and of course, in terms of state money this might well be a COLLEGE factor, too. As I had told you, some of the people in the school

itself felt that it should be oriented to a liberal arts college, not having other departments at all.

Williams: In connection with this attitude of various people, what was the interest of Alvin Duke Chandler in the law school?

Do you think that since his father had been the one who started the school of government and citizenship that he was conscious of, shall we say, to building upon his father's work?

- A. Phelps: Oh, I think he was very much so. And we've never had any better support -- Dr. Graves, right now, is supporting us very well -- but certainly that was the high point in the support and he went on a real drive to help the law school. And if I'm not very much mistaken it was during his period that this separation between salary scales which of course was recognized over the country occurred and we started getting better salaries than the other parts of the college.
- V. Phelps: It was he who brought in Dr. Atkinson who started the taxation program.
- A. Phelps: That's right. He started the taxation program, and he had quite an interest in the law school in pushing the law school and then getting the law school building. The money was appropriated for designing that, I think, during his period. Yes, he was very much interested in the law school.

Williams: This Marshall-Wythe-Blackstone celebration that came during his administration -- did it have any effect on the law school or was it just a celebration of the accomplishments?

BUILDING

A. Phelps: No, that definitely was a part of the development of interest.

Williams: Calling attention?to it?

A. Phelps: Oh, yes. And the taxation, you remember, was established as a part of that program. That was where Mel Jones really got his start was in that event or what ever you call that year and he did a very fine job and he developed a interest in the law school which was quite helpful to us during the period of our development under Dr. Chandler because he got it from the top to some extent, but he also maintained his own interest because we had sort of participated in his development as well.

Williams: Wasn't it at one time proposed that this law school be tied to a new program at the Norfolk division?

A. Phelps: There's been discussion from time to time about a law school in Norfolk. And no one could quite decide whether the thought was originally that it might be established as a night law school and as sort of a adjunct to our law school, but plans of course, running a full-time law school, as we are -- a full-time day law school -- we really don't have the desire of really the situation is very difficult for the development of a night program in our situation not in others.

perhaps a city situation although they have the same problem in many the city. But there has been some discussion it, but it never has materialized and I'm sure there's substantial interest in development of a law school there but I think it'll probably take the form of a night law school which'll be

on its own, associated with Old Dominion University. But some of those people down there had a vision of this suddenly blossoming out as a complete university they moved a little too fast but they've done a beautiful job with the school but it's grown so fast that they really haven't taken time to MATURE to the medical program is another aspect of it, you see, in this area -- and I think, now, they've gotten to the point where they may well be able to develop a program, but I don't think fat the present time f that it'll develop in connection with William and Mary although fif we go into a new building and so forth there may be professors that want to work at night program. Most of the time day professors don't like to take part of a night program. So what happens is you gradually develop a night law school? and most of the time they arenot on the same quality as the day law schools. It's a funny thing. From a service standpoint, there are a lot of people who ought to have their oppor-

tunities to study law and the only opportunity

(Mr. Atkinson, a lot of his study, coursehe snot a lawyer but has studied a lot of law. Missinger to done a lot of his work, has including his Ph.D. west hight in and just this kind of situation.) A lot of these people, the opportunity -- highly what is our duty to the entire community. We recognize it; we haven't been able to solve it.

Williams: Moving from that Chandlers

Was Dr. Paschall

as interested in the law school as Admiral Chandler?

A. Pheles: Oh, yes. I was very surprised in a way because I thought

BE ALL FOR THE ARTS

the was going to definitely -- he was very much interested

in the law school.

Williams: Because during his administration was when the graduate programs really began to take off at the college, and by this time the law program had become graduate (level]

- A, Phelps: We were beginning to tell pay our own way. That had something to do with it, too, I think.

 well, there was a substantial interest in the law school; at least I never felt any antipathy toward the law school.
 - Williams: We talked about various opponents and proponents of the law school. When this abolition attempt was made in '39, Dr.

 the
 Bryan was quoted as saying that law instruction was not a credit to William and Mary and how would you say this has changed now over the thirty-five years since he made this statement?
- A. Phelps: I think we have national standing as a law school. We still have salary problems we're still seeven though we've made very substantial increases recently we're still, to some extent marginal. In other words, the dean is not paid nearly the amount here that he'd be paid in a similar law school. But I would say as far as the standing of the school itself we are well recognized. Part of our ability in this area of recognition comes from the arts college, too, which is well recognized. But we have a fine reputation over the country.

the

Williams: What particular role can Marshall-Wythe School of Law fill in Virginia that no other law school can? Let me rephrase it -- what would you say is it s basic function, then?

A. Phelps: Part of its function, of course, is to train Virginia lawyers

because the University of Virginia can't possibly handle

the number of students who want to study law basically to

become Virginia lawyers. So we have an important place in

that area. We also has a national law school we also have

noted areas, in the development, bethe national courts matter

indicative of is indeed what may develop, and I think this is going to bring us closer to functioning in connection with the legi
slation in the state so whether this will become an adjunct of this other, I don't know but we've all ready been given

Would you like to

RESEARCH implementing and really need the new law school building to

move forward strongly in this area. I would say that we have a service possibility. We're using our students very well in the area of serving the Norfolk community in connection with legal aid. We have service committees with the legislature -- student aid and divorce law problems different areas of this kind. We have a distinct opportunity

because we're close to Richmond associations to d

great deal

et remains to be done because

Our legislation in Virginia is not what it should be. In other words, it's not carefully done. It used to be that it was never done and decently it's very poorly done, in my opinion --

just from a technical standpoint. So that we have a great opportunity here and I also think that as a first school that we have a place in the tradition of the country and I think that if we can develop these areas we can maintain that tradition, and not just in the sense of the dusty old book but as something important in terms of the active life of the state and the nation. I think we also have -- and we're working on this, too -- a beautiful opportunity to develop a program for lawyers who are going into government and this I have pushed. When I was at Columbia, out of a groupof 15I was the only person who would conceived of a law school in terms of training lawyers for government work; I mean I was the only one who put it down now maybe some of the others might have thought of it, When we were asked to outline what we thought, I was the only one that put it down so it shows it's a area of great deal importance and we have a real opportunity here for this and this would bring on back into play this governmentcitizenship thing you were talking about, because you're dealing here with the law plus, you see. Also bringing in economics, accounting -- all these other areas could play a very important role, and I do hope some day this very nebulous

TOTAL ______concept can be given some plan. I'm sure that -- again, I

______an admirer of Judge Shewmake's,

was not very but nevertheless that was one, concepts.

Williams: Does it await funding or support or both?

A. Phelps: Well, I think those will come hand-in-hand. I don't envision

any major difficulties with funding once the solid base is established for the operation(and that's been the experience, I understand, with some of the others) Funding / I don't think / will be a problem. You generate these things, you see you generate them and you don't have any trouble. It's strange how much money you can get for things that are worthless now. Things that really have a core of solid ACCOMPLISHED usefulness you don't have very much difficulty in getting

Can you think of anything else I should ask or he should Williams: add?

- No, I don't think so I just think it's important to make the oldest law school the best law school.
- We run a quality operation and we have gradually developed this A. Phelps: and we have some problems -- I would be the first to admit ith -- we have problems, but we have, again, a based law school and unfortunately, we've gotten tied into side issues at times over race problems and things of this kind, which I'm sure has diverted from interest from the law school but in toto, I don't think it's harmed the law school a great deal or stopped its progress. It certainly would have stopped its progress during my desirable if that had been a central policy of the state to do away with the law school being caused, you

cians at the time and then virginia politics an the final

wash wants the best man, the best buy, I think. Although THE

4 critisized very much, I think they really do try to develop

quality people. They bring in a great many people from outside the state for posts in order to keep it from being too inbred and so forth. I think Virginia's a great state and William and Mary's a great law school.