

HOWARD M. SCAMMON

Howard Scammon came to William and Mary as a student in 1929 without the slightest intention of going into theatre work. During his four years, however, he was a student of Althea Hunt, the long-time director of the William and Mary Theatre. Scammon remained interested in drama, keeping in touch with Miss Hunt (whose papers are also in Special Collections), and in 1947 returned from graduate school in drama at Northwestern to assist in the production of The Common Glory. He has remained in Williamsburg since then, becoming director of the William and Mary Theatre and director of The Common Glory, in addition to directing the eighteenth-century plays for Colonial Williamsburg. He discusses each of these phases of his work in the following interview.

Only stylistic changes were made in the transcript. Mr. Scammon notes that he extends "sympathy to any person who wants to hear the tape or read the transcription-- such diarrhea of words and constipation of thought."

INDEX SHEET

Interviewee Howard Scammon

Date of interview November 12, 1975

Place Tucker - Coleman Room, Swann Library, W&M

Interviewer Emily Williams

Session number 1

Length of tape app. 110 mins.

Contents:	Approximate time:
description of Althea Hunt	2 mins.
Facilities - Washington 200	10 mins.
- old Phi Beta Kappa Hall	
- burning of old Phi Beta, consequences	5 mins.
- new Phi Beta Kappa Hall	5 mins.
selection of plays	10 mins.
theatre as department (English → fine arts → cum department)	8 mins.
Scammon's student days	1 min.
Backdrops Club	1 min.
war years	2 mins.
postwar period	2 mins.
theatre as educational tool	2 mins.
Hunt-Check clash	3 mins.
Player's Dell	3 mins.
Scammon's interest in theatre	2 mins.
Scammon's return to work on <u>Common Glory</u> , joining faculty	7 mins.
eighteenth-century plays for Colonial Williamsburg	6 mins.
W&M theatre tours	6 mins.
high school drama festivals	2 mins.
<u>The Common Glory</u>	15 mins.
See back of sheet for names and places mentioned in interview	5 mins.
Institute of Theatre	10 mins.
observations on W&M Theatre in general	

Howard Scammon

November 12, 1975

Williams: I wanted to start by asking you about this lady who was head  
of <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater when you arrived in 1929, Miss  
Althea Hunt. How would you describe her personality?

Scammon: A <sup>Really,</sup> dynamo. she was beautiful -- not physically, because I  
did not think her features were classic,  
but there was just that glow and that drive and that dynamism,  
if you can use that word. Just dynamic. Suddenly you found  
yourself, "Yes, yes." -- I mean she'd instill a confidence; she'd  
instill poise. She'd do all of these things, you know, you can  
just see how she was often times called the lady of the Wil-  
liam <sup>and Mary</sup> theater. ~~And not only outside of class.~~ She was cer-  
tainly very, very much interested in all of the students. She  
would have students down <sup>to her home;</sup> either they might be do-  
ing some kind of a program or it might be some kind of a day  
~~you know, and just come on down.~~ They'd work up a program ahead  
of time and then we'd go down to her house and after that, why,  
there would be refreshments, -- and food for  
a student is always welcome, you know, she be-  
came very, very much interested in doing theater. I think  
that Dr. Chandler, who was then president of the college, was cer-  
tainly a wise person to get her away from Richmond and bring  
her to William and Mary, ~~although it was~~ I think she was  
brought here with the idea of doing a William and Mary theater  
program under the English department. I forget

now whether that theater course she offered -- which was the  
 only theater course around -- and that was called, I think,  
 "Play Production." I don't know whether it had a theater  
 designation or not. My feeling would <sup>be</sup> that no, it was proba-  
 bly labeled as an English <sup>course.</sup> ~~something.~~ <sup>1</sup> ~~she~~ <sup>#</sup> would have  
 classes in Washington 200, and that inconvenient room is still  
 the same. ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> was in that room that we had all of our  
 rehearsals, all of our tryouts. If you wanted to try out for a  
 play for the William and Mary theater, you would go into a  
 room -- it would be to the right of Washington 200 <sup>as</sup> you're  
 going out of Washington 200 -- and you <sup>'d</sup> sit there and there <sup>was</sup>  
 the possibility that you might have a chance to look over a  
 play ~~or if you didn't, why you would go into 200 and~~ I can't  
 remember where Miss Hunt used to sit at that time, whether  
 she was down front or whether she was up back, ~~or whatever it~~  
~~was~~ but anyway you were aware that she was there. <sup>1</sup> you'd  
 get in and do whatever your reading was, or if you were doing  
 a scene with someone, you'd do it and then you would ~~leave~~ and  
 then if you wanted to read <sup>for</sup> another part, why, you would go  
 back to the room, and ~~then you'd back a little later and do the~~  
~~reading.~~ ~~That's where all the tryouts were held, then the re-~~  
~~hearsals were held in Washington 200 and many times it was a matter of~~  
 coming to rehearsal, (clear the tables, <sup>1</sup> clear all the regular  
 academic regalia, whatever you needed to teach), clear off that  
 little semi circle in front of the blackboards, and then you'd  
 block the play and walk through it. You'd just assume there was

a sofa here and a chair there -- there were all those damn pipes that always came up from the floor, ~~and you'd~~ you'd get so involved in being a character, and suddenly you start walking across and you keep thinking

] "well, it's an absolutely flat floor and you'd go tripping over those pipes. I guess <sup>well,</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> taught you patience. But that's where they were all rehearsed. ~~And then at the time when they were being done,~~ I guess Old Phi Beta Kappa had just been built. It was not an old building certainly, and the plays were put on in old Phi Beta (where Ewell is now) ~~and~~ <sup>strangely enough</sup> I think that theater productions were given one night for a dress rehearsal and one night for a performance, and by the following day everything had to be cleared out of the building, there should be no sign of the play ever having been given in old Phi Beta. That, I guess, was the way in which it was given to Miss Hunt. ~~You were told, "Yes, you may have a place to do it."~~ Well (now, old Phi Beta was <sup>no</sup> ~~a~~ gem as far as the theater was concerned. It really had nothing ~~except that it~~ -- and I'm not sure about ~~that~~ <sup>it</sup> architecturally or anything like that -- other than the fact that it was designed sort of like the idea of a New England town hall or meeting house. ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> had the lower floor and we had the balcony and galleries which ran along the sides of the balcony, so that all together I think the building seated about <sup>nine hundred</sup> ~~900~~ people, but only <sup>three hundred</sup> ~~300~~ seats were really so that you could see the stage. Now the stage was nothing more than a raised platform, maybe five feet tall, but the floor was

a level floor, so that people were sitting one behind the other;   
~~so it's almost like~~ <sup>were</sup> if you're sitting in the fourth row, you ~~were~~   
 looking through a lot of skulls in front of you, you know. You   
 had difficulty seeing what was on stage. On the main floor there   
 were four pillars which came up <sup>[and]</sup> cut off some of the best   
 seats, so that if you happened to draw a seat behind the pillar   
 you spent your life looking either left or right of the pillar   
 to see what was going on on the stage. If you were up in the   
 galleries <sup>to</sup> of the left and right of the building, <sup>---</sup> if you sat in   
 the front row, you leaned forward and you turned your head   
 almost at a 90-degree angle so that you could look at the   
 stage. <sup>o</sup> the people who were sitting in the second or third   
 row never could see over your head to see what was happening on   
 the stage. The sight lines were miserable from that point of   
 view. ~~I guess about the best seat in the gallery, what might~~   
~~be called the balcony, that was raked~~ <sup>o</sup> (it went up in   
 tiers). ~~All the seats in that place were very, very good for~~   
~~looking at the stage but~~ <sup>nine hundred</sup> out of those 900 seats that were there,   
<sup>three hundred</sup> about 300 were <sup>really</sup> good. It was a hard wood floor, and it   
 creaked <sup>o</sup> you came in from outside, ~~and the doors were noisy~~   
 and then there were swinging doors which went into the   
 auditorium, so that any kind of disturbance out in the lobby   
 could be heard right in the auditorium when anything was going   
 on. <sup>o</sup> if you arrived late and you were going up in the balcony,   
 you'd go clomping up all these flights of stairs, disturb what   
 was going on; <sup>o</sup> By the time you reached the top of the stairs you

were getting looks that could kill you, you know, and so the moral was, I guess, don't be late or else ~~you would be killed~~ ~~dead with looks~~. I think the first time I was aware of Phi Bete and plays being done was my freshman year. I happened to see that Phi Bete was open, and I didn't know <sup>what</sup> it was going on, so being snoopy and curious I went up, and I sort of peered through, and I saw that there were plays going on.

Well, I didn't have a quarter at the time -- money was hard to come by in those days and a quarter, really, you could live on that, <sup>[Pa]</sup> at least one meal -- but then I decided, "well, if I'm going to see those plays then I've got to get myself into them, <sup>" [when]</sup> so the next go-round came <sup>#</sup> I think I tried out for a play. I'm not sure that I was cast in all of the plays. I was always good as a warm body, ~~you know~~ I could fill up space, and that's how I got interested. Miss Hunt was very, very astute. Now the facilities as such were not the greatest, but that did not matter, I don't think, to any of the people who were performing on stage because Miss Hunt was right there, <sup>#</sup> she insisted on standards, ~~really~~ that were very, very high. I think that, ~~really~~ with all the facilities that we have in the present Phi Bete that sometimes we have so much now that maybe the students themselves don't appreciate all that they do have, <sup>[old]</sup> they should ~~get over and~~ realize what it is to work in such a building as Phi Bete and see how creative and ingenious a person can be when one is placed ~~sort of~~ with a lot of restrictions, ~~really because Phi Bete~~ -- I usually have to

Old Phi Beta did

~~call on Al Haak to remind me what the opening was. It was~~  
<sup>have</sup> not a great big opening, possibly thirty feet - (I may be  
 wrong on that.) As far as depth was concerned, it only went  
 back thirteen feet, and yet the shows that were done there were  
 absolutely incredible. And it's true that they changed the  
 theater after I left, and when I came back, why, ~~the theater~~  
~~seemed to be completely~~ it was still old Phi Beta, I mean  
 the seating arrangement in the auditorium was the same, but they  
 had raised and elevated the stage so that it made the sight  
 lines a little bit better for people on the orchestra floor.  
~~There still was such that~~ they raised some kind of a ceiling  
 (I don't know how they did it) you could have a grid, and you  
 could fly in some of the scenery, but the <sup>stage exit</sup> steps were still  
 treacherous. When you went off stage you were literally off  
 stage. If you went off stage over on stage left, why, you headed  
 downstairs that would go down underneath the stage <sup>where</sup> there  
 were dressing rooms and make-up place and rest rooms, if you  
 went off stage right there was just maybe about five feet that  
 you could stand in before you came to a stairway that would take  
 you downstairs again. But if people would look at some of the  
<sup>[of shows]</sup> pictures done in old Phi Beta -- absolutely ingenious some of the  
<sup>they</sup> settings, and just had a <sup>feeling of</sup> great, great space ~~that was done~~  
~~within that.~~ But that, I guess, was really the beginning ~~and it~~  
~~was largely Althea's~~ <sup>ed</sup> demanding that standards should be maintained  
 and that everything was really worth doing, <sup>o</sup> certainly I  
 think all the students, once they got involved with a play, were



~~they were really involved. And~~ involved to the point that  
 not only would we do the acting, say, but <sup>we</sup> would also help  
 out with the scenery, ~~or build the scenery of~~ we'd build  
 flats and we'd paint them <sup>have</sup> and a number of things that were  
~~going on, you know. They~~ <sup>That</sup> gave you a feel of really contrive  
 buting to the theater. There again, I think it's quite  
 possible <sup>that</sup> some of the students <sup>today</sup> ~~now were~~ (although hopefully  
 we've corrected it) <sup>have</sup> the feeling that, "all I have to do is  
 act. I don't have to know there's such a thing as a hammer,  
 and I don't have to know there's a set behind me." There  
 was a time when that was happening; I think we've remedied  
 that so now people have to be aware of what's going on <sup>in order</sup>  
 to put on a show -- which makes them a better theater person,  
 I think. But <sup>old</sup> Phi Bete still had sort of an aura about it, and  
 yet there were so many restrictions on the buildings;  
~~and I must admit~~ Miss Hunt certainly was right in there pitch-  
 ing, and she was the only designer unless someone happened to be  
 interested in art and would come up with something. Well, I  
~~could help out with this, but she would design the sets.~~ Of  
 course, the sets were largely just monk's cloth or some form of  
 hanging drapery in which you could insert a door or a fire-  
 place or something of that nature, hang a picture on top so that it  
 gave the effect of a wall. <sup>we</sup> then eventually went into build-  
 ing regular flats and regular sets <sup>and started</sup> after the depart-  
<sup>started</sup> ment, Well, <sup>becomes</sup> it didn't department, I guess, until

(1963) but people other than Miss Hunt were finally brought  
 in after we had the new fine arts department, why, then  
~~it became the department of fine arts and~~ that embraced archi-  
 tecture and sculpture and painting and music and theater, public  
 speaking eventually came under that. Then we all branched out  
 and got so big, <sup>that</sup> everyone went his own way, you know, and  
 that's the way it went. <sup>In</sup> 1953, I think it was, I was in New  
 York -- Althea and I had gone up for a theater convention and  
~~I was in New York~~ and I guess it must have been around 12:00  
<sup>at</sup> (night); my sister called <sup>and said,</sup> "Are you sitting down?" And I said,  
 "Why?" "Well, because Phi Beta burned down." I said, "Good.  
 I can't think of a better destructive force than fire to get rid  
 of the place <sup>and fortunately,</sup> Phi Beta Kappa national head-  
 quarters was there at the time, <sup>fortunately none</sup> of records <sup>were</sup> destroyed,  
 and the costume room which was located up above ~~from~~ the audi-  
 torium. -- That was not ruined. It was smoked up, but the whole  
 stage and everything, ~~it~~ was all gutted.

Williams: Were you the one who told Miss Hunt?

Scammon: Yes, I told her. I don't know whether I woke her up that time  
 or I just waited until morning. I mean there was nothing she  
 could do. ~~we were~~ <sup>we were</sup> not going back to Virginia to  
 see burning embers, ~~you know~~ and I think ~~partly~~, <sup>her first reaction</sup> the first  
 thing was, "Well, now what are we going to do? We're going to  
 do Hamlet. Now we've got to do something else." ~~And so we~~  
~~had to substitute something and so Colonial Williamsburg came~~  
~~to the rescue, in a way, in fact we were doing an eighteenth-~~

there -- when we went to Matthew Whaley, why we had to rig  
 lights to begin with and so there was a question of mounting  
 everything in the auditorium. When we performed in the gym  
 Al had to go across on that structure way up above, heavens,  
 way up -- I'd never do it -- and mount lights so that they  
 would shine down on the sets down below -- it really was a  
 building of a complete theater, just that which you ordinarily  
 take for granted, you know, but everything had to be built  
 for the gym or for the small gym or for Matthew Whaley and  
 there was a lot of work that went into that from '53 up until  
 about -- well, we moved into the present Phi Beta Kappa in ~~Memorial~~ *Memorial*  
 1957. That was Romeo and Juliet and that opened in March of  
 '57, I think it was, so <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater was really the  
 first one to put on a production in that building, and rightly  
 so, I think, the real reason for getting Phi Beta Kappa  
 Memorial Hall (as it should be so designated (and I don't know  
 when they're going to get around to recognizing that)) -- after  
 old Phi Bete burned there was an appeal to the various chapters  
 of the country to raise enough funds to restore old Phi  
 Bete. Well, while they were sending out all those letters -- and  
 monies certainly did come in -- they were aware that by the time with  
 1957 coming along that there would be a great festival year down  
 at Jamestown and they wanted a place where, you know, in case they could have  
 of having concerts or theater and the use of T.V. and radio, and  
 so the whole plan was changed and everything went into a big,  
 brand new building which would embrace all of those elements.

The architects came up with a plan which was not exactly what the theater department really wanted because again it was almost going back to the same folly as was in old Phi Beta Kappa Hall, a rectangle with a raised platform at the end of the hall. So Roger Sherman was appointed, ~~I think~~ by President Chandler (that was the son of the first President Chandler) ~~and Roger was appointed and~~ <sup>with</sup> the idea of ~~Command~~, <sup>Make</sup> "You're sure this building is going to last you twenty-five years because you're not going to get another one within that time." So all of the people in theater, I think, and also architects in fine arts had some kind of a say about what would be going into the theater. Roger, <sup>just</sup> trying to embrace it all under one building, <sup>just said,</sup> we need this; we need a shop; we need an auditorium; we need a costume room; we need a make-up room, a place where people can stay; we need this, that, and the other. Now, architects, you put it all together, and be sure that we have all these features." I think as a result we did get a very fine building, and certainly in 1957 when that was built, it was really one of the very, very finest theaters in the country, particularly <sup>for</sup> as far as a college. And <sup>as I notice</sup> the time from '57 up until 1975, almost twenty-five years have gone by ~~and with the activity and everything that's going on~~ in the present Phi Beta Kappa and recalling the words of President Chandler, "Don't come 'round looking for a new building for twenty-five years," it's now getting close to twenty-five years,

~~century show down in Colonial Williamsburg and so we asked~~  
~~the people if they would take that as a substitute in terms~~  
~~of and then we did Hamlet, I think, a little later. But that~~  
<sup>The</sup>  
<sup>1</sup> set we built and spent a \$1,000 on -- that was the Elizabethan  
 set -- that went up in smoke. I think that had been used  
 twice. We used it for Much Ado About Nothing and then during  
 the summer we used it for Doctor Faustus and that was the  
 end of it; <sup>there went</sup> \$1,000. Well, I suppose we got \$500 for  
 each of those two shows and that was pretty good -- in these  
 days, but in those days, no. it was built as a permanent  
 set so that when Shakespeare was done we would go back and  
 capture some of the essence of the Globe Theater. ~~So that~~  
~~went.~~ And then came hard times from the point of view of putting  
 on a play. after '53 and that fire, why, then we started go-  
 ing from pillar to post. Not that the standards were let down  
 (they weren't), and not that the plays were chosen just to accom-  
 modate us, they weren't. we worked in the small gym of Blow  
 Gym; We worked in the big gym of Blow Gym; We worked in Matthew  
 Whaley School; We also performed in that lobby between the  
 president's office and the dean of admission's office in Ewell  
 Hall ~~and we just went from pillar to post, that's all but~~  
 nevertheless all the performances were very well done ~~except~~  
 as Al Haak says, every time we <sup>went elsewhere</sup> go we had to <sup>build</sup> go to a theater.  
 They're not equipped with lights, They're not <sup>with</sup> equipped this; they're  
 not equipped with that. True, Phi Beta had them, not on a  
 great, great, grand scale or anything like that, but they were

there. when we went to Matthew Whaley, why we had to rig  
 lights to begin with and so there was a question of mounting  
 everything in the auditorium. When we performed in the gym  
 Al had to go across on that structure way up above, heavens,  
 way up -- I'd never do it -- and mount lights so that they  
 would shine down on the sets down below. it really was a  
 building of a complete theater, just that which you ordinarily  
 take for granted, you know, but everything had to be built  
 for the gym or for the small gym or for Matthew Whaley and  
 there was a lot of work that went into that from '53 up until  
 about -- well, we moved into the present Phi Beta Kappa in  
 1957. That was Romeo and Juliet and that opened in March of  
 '57, I think it was, so <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater was really the  
 first one to put on a production in that building, and rightly  
 so, I think, the real reason for getting Phi Beta Kappa  
 Memorial Hall (as it should be so designated (and I don't know  
 when they're going to get around to recognizing that)) -- after  
 old Phi Beta burned there was an appeal to the various chapters  
 of the country to raise enough funds to restore old Phi  
 Beta. Well, while they were sending out all those letters -- and  
 monies certainly did come in -- they were aware that by the time with  
 1957 coming along that there would be a great festival year down  
 at Jamestown and they wanted a place where, you know, in case they could have  
 of having concerts or theater and the use of T.V. and radio, and  
 so the whole plan was changed and everything went into a big,  
 brand new building which would embrace all of those elements.

The architects came up with a plan which was not exactly what the theater department really wanted because again it was almost going back to the same folly as was in old Phi Beta Kappa Hall, a rectangle with a raised platform at the end of the hall. So Roger Sherman was appointed, ~~I think~~ by President Chandler <sup>and</sup> (that was the son of the first President Chandler) ~~and Roger was appointed and~~ <sup>with</sup> the idea of ~~Command~~ <sup>Command</sup>, "Make <sup>Make</sup> sure this building is going to last you twenty-five years because you're not going to get another one within that time." So all of the people in theater, I think, and also architects in fine arts had some kind of a say about what would be going into the theater. Roger, just trying to embrace it all under one building, <sup>just said,</sup> we need this; we need a shop; we need an auditorium; we need a costume room; we need a make-up room, a place where people can stay; we need this, that, and the other. Now, architects, you put it all together, and be sure that we have all these features." I think as a result we did get a very fine building, and certainly in 1957 when that was built, it was really one of the very, very finest theaters in the country, particularly <sup>for</sup> as far as a college. And <sup>as I notice</sup> the time from '57 up until 1975, almost twenty-five years have gone by ~~and with the activity and everything that's going on~~ in the present Phi Beta Kappa and recalling the words of President Chandler, "Don't come 'round looking for a new building for twenty-five years," it's now getting close to twenty-five years,

and maybe something should be done relative to more space for the theater department, because they can use it.

Williams: Has the building proved good for its purpose?

Scammon: Oh, yes. It's been a joy to work in, it really has.

I think that in considering Phi Beta Kappa back in those days (153), we were looking at it from the point of view it should also house convocations, it should house the concert series, it should house the William and Mary theater, it should house <sup>the</sup> music department programs, it should house the Backdrop Club shows, it should house bringing in professional companies and other entertainment. I think that <sup>[they]</sup> probably at that time figured maybe on a house that seated about <sup>eight hundred.</sup> 800. I don't know. -- I would have preferred one that seated around <sup>five hundred,</sup> 500, I think, and figuring, well, we could run one more night and <sup>with five hundred</sup> 500, you're closer to filling than you are <sup>at eight hundred.</sup> 800 and ~~it would give a filling that the house was a big, filled house, you know.~~ You could always sell sort of standing room only. Well, you couldn't, <sup>[there's]</sup> not in this present building, no place to stand but we could at least advertise that it was a sell-out with <sup>the</sup> certain charm or aura of theatrical mystery or mystique about that phrase, you know. But now, as it is -- <sup>of</sup> course when <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater went there we were performing two nights, and we went to three nights, and now we're into four nights, and when we come to a musical, we do it for six nights, ~~and just an expansion from that point of view.~~ Convocations -- there're too many people really around to ~~to~~. You can't have commencements. They used to have



commencements in old Phi Beta. That's where they were before they moved outside in front of the Wren Building. (I don't know why they want to go out in front of the Wren Building. It's hot, sticky, no air conditioning, the sun's at the wrong angle for every one.) The new Phi Beta isn't big enough to accommodate all the thousands of people who come to commencement. But at that time, that was -- again the convocations, that 800 would probably be about enough to handle that. If you went over

if you got around to seat 2,000 people, then proportionately <sup>in</sup> <sup>land</sup> architecturally, your stage would have to get bigger. Heavens, at times, the present stage seems enormously big, you have fill it somehow, either with scenery or people to make it look right. So, I would have preferred about 500, five hundred.

Williams: You spoke a minute ago of some of the plays chosen. As long as Miss Hunt was in charge of <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater, was there any sort of guiding philosophy that governed her choice of plays? I noticed a lot of Shakespeare was done for a time, and then there was a time when there was no Shakespeare <sup>done</sup>.

Scammon: Isn't that incredible? I could not believe -- I was looking over things and I said, "Althea, you didn't do Shakespeare for about eight years here." She said, "I know." I said, "Well, how did you live?" She said, "Well, I did other things, I guess." One of the reasons I think was and I'm not quite sure how it all happened but it was not her wish and I'm not quite sure <sup>sometime</sup> after we became members of the department of fine arts that Shakespeare was not particularly the likes of some people, and

so Shakespeare was not done. But, no, Miss Hunt was really  
 an avid Shakespeare <sup>[fan],</sup> and she brought so much to a Shakespearean<sup>e</sup>  
 production, ~~knowledge of and everything that~~ was so great.  
 It really was; it was very exciting. Isn't it strange when  
 the new building opened in '57--March of '57, I think it was --  
 there was Romeo and Juliet Althea had started all of the  
 blocking and had most of it all done, and we rehearsed in the  
 foyer of the -- I guess that's what it's called -- in the main  
 lobby of Ewell Hall, and then she had a heart attack, so  
 she never did even see a performance of it, everything was  
 just about done, and I had been going along to the rehearsals ~~and everything~~  
 all the time, so I took over. All I think she ever saw was just a  
 few pictures of <sup>the sets</sup> I'm sure it must have been one of the  
 disappointing moments in her life, but she <sup>had the</sup> stamina,  
 "Well, all right. That's the way it is, but I'm sure I'll keep  
 going."

Williams: But over and above that, was there a way that she chose plays  
 saying, "Oh, Shaw would be challenging to students" -- something  
 of that nature?

Scammon: No, ~~I think a lot of them considered both~~ <sup>The choice of plays</sup> -- it considered the  
 audience, <sup>The choice</sup> ~~they~~ also considered the actor, <sup>or</sup> what could be done,  
 and do I have the people to do it, <sup>or</sup> you always do that. I  
 mean I think you choose a play thinking, "Well, at least I have  
 people to do it." And if a person comes in who's better than  
 the one that I <sup>have -- fine;</sup> it's encouraging other people, I think that  
 it was trying to get a bill of fare that would be interesting  
 and exciting, entertaining, educational to both the student and  
 the audience. I know that she certainly was not <sup>averse</sup> to doing

new plays. I can remember one we did, The Trojan War Will Not Take Place. I don't remember whether it was Althea or who had written to Madame Giradou<sup>x</sup>, asking if we could have permission to do that over here. Marcel Reboussin, who was on the faculty at the time in the French department, did the translation and it was, I gather, about the first production of Giradou's play in this country. Later it was to come to this country in a very, very successful production in Tiger at the Gates. Christopher Frye did the adaptation from the French. But we really had the first whack at it, and that was performed in old Phi Beta. And there are other plays. Now Willie Leech<sup>leach</sup>, who graduated from here and <sup>[was]</sup> very, very much interested in play-writing. Willie's gone on to much finer things, I guess-- Sarah Lawrence in New York, and he's also the sort of artistic director for the off-Broadway La Ma Ma theater, and I think Mama just recently there's a new show that he's doing, directing there right now. And he had written a play and sent it to Miss Hunt, and Althea liked it, so we did that play. She was not adverse to doing modern plays as well as the classic, and I think she really enjoyed a good rousing melodrama. It seems to me that in a number of times that we'd do them. O'Neill -- I know <sup>when</sup> she did Anna Christie. She was taken to task by some of the administration for doing such a daring play because, of course, Anna Christie is a whore and prostitute, and when she comes on she uses some strong four-letter language, but

that's the way the play went, and that's how she did it and she was, I think, trying to get performance from the student that would be what the playwright had in mind when that was being done. And certainly Althea was very, very much alert to trends (what was going on and what was happening) and she tried to bring it onto the campus to let people know about it. But it's easy to fall into sort of a pattern, I think, as far as selecting plays when I look back since we've been in new Phi Beta, it always seems to me that there was an American and there was an English and there was a French and there was Shakespeare. Or there would be an American, there would be French, there would be a musical, and then there'd be a classic, either Shakespeare or a Greek play, or out of that period, Thomas Decker so that -- and it seems to prove successful, people seem to enjoy it, and yet you realize that you can't get into a rut, and so you have to shake yourself and do something completely different, you know, just to get out of the rut.

This being a bicentennial year, I think the William and Mary theater bill is absolutely un-bicentennial. If you look at the bill, why there's not that much. I mean, there's nothing. Oh, you can use your imagination, I guess, and stretch it around and figure "well, this is in celebration of. . ." but just looking at it, it has nothing to do really with the bicentennial and I don't think it was even chosen with that idea.

Althea usually would choose the shows that she would like to do,

And I can't blame her. If a director's going to do all four shows, which she did when she was here, ~~that~~ you want to do the shows you want to do, you know, ~~and it is not that~~ Roger Sherman and Al Haak were not called in relative to the technical side -- is it possible, is it feasible, can you get this on ~~--discussion~~, and I think that Althea was not necessarily sticking for one favorite ~~thing~~ there were various plays that were being considered; everyone had a chance to read them ~~and thinking about it and is it possible.~~ Romeo and Juliet, for example, <sup>Althea</sup> never would do in old Phi Beta Kappa hall because there was not enough aesthetic distance, ~~if you want to call it,~~ not enough physical distance between the tomb, <sup>#</sup> what took <sup>place</sup> out in front of the tomb, and the audience ~~that~~ that was one of the reasons, I'm sure, why she decided that she would do Romeo and Juliet because she could get that full, lovely kind of a quality, ~~that this was the tomb and the people outside the tomb and a entry on down and~~ the new theater offered <sup>2</sup> really <sup>1</sup> great, great deal of flexibility. It was marvelous to have such a facility. But when I look back on it <sup>[she was]</sup> not only teaching all of her regular classes <sup>but doing</sup> plus four plays plus doing numbers of plays that would come out in ~~terms of~~ playwriting class -- ~~that~~ (many times in Glenwood Clark's English class and <sup>there were</sup> then plays that students perhaps themselves might do) <sup>a number</sup> an incredible amount of plays ~~that~~ were going on for an ~~area~~, a liberal arts college where <sup>was</sup> there's not even a degree given in theater ~~until~~ until we became a department in 1963, <sup>the date</sup> I think ~~that there was~~. The degree was always granted

in fine arts but with concentration in theater. I mean I ~~don't know whether it was stated on the degree or diploma or what.~~ Now, it's recognized, You can get your A.B. in theater here.

Williams: As the theater moved from the English department to fine arts to its own department, did this in any way effect the William and Mary theater?

Scammon: Well, ~~it~~ being in the fine arts department I think probably we could call on more of the facilities, say, on the other part of the people in the fine arts department. In other words, I know that looking over some of the programs that, for example, when Althea might be doing a play I ~~could see where~~ music was composed by ~~and it was~~ someone in the music department ~~who had done it or paintings.~~ When she did Kind Lady, oh heavens, they went over and took the Goyas and all the regular paintings and just copied them so that they really looked like the originals, you know, and ~~there they were all hanging on the wall within the set itself and many times the designer, Leslie Cheek, who was certainly in the department and was head of the department, would often do the sets for the plays, and Carl Roseberg certainly did a number of sculptures and work. I think when they did Noah, I mean some of the masks representing some of the animals and things like that, why he had created for them.~~ And so that here they were all working right within that department, you see. You had art and architecture and sculpture and painting

*I guess  
fine Arts  
should have  
1<sup>st</sup> letter in  
caps.  
Fine Arts*

*He didn't*

and drawing and music and all those things -- that all being in the department of fine arts, they were all working together on it. Now, I think that if people were to go around and ask you know, would you help out with, yes, they probably would but <sup>help,</sup> <sub>1</sub> ordinarily, I guess, each one now has become a department in its own right, (say the music department, theater department) and I'm not quite sure, I mean about the fine arts whether they're <sup>off on its bent</sup> ~~all art and architecture's going out from the bend and painting and its bend, sculpture and its bend~~ whether or not they're getting to <sup>+</sup> <sub>1</sub> compartmentalized in their own fields <sub>1</sub> and forget there are art works that are going on. I think that, really, if we need something like that they would rally <sub>1</sub> right around and do with us, but <sup>it's</sup> <sub>1</sub> strange isn't it? And I guess each one gets involved with his own thing. ~~When theater was set up as a department~~

Williams: When theater was set up as a department was there any opposition to this from the faculty?

Scammon: Oh, yes, I think there was. I don't know. -- I never know whether that's the function of the faculty to raise and ask all the wrong questions, you know, just to make a person come up and defend whatever it is that he is for. And of course, theater <sup>and</sup> in speech in terms of other departments, really is not that disciplined, (I'm being really snide and sarcastic about it) they just figured, well, this is just not my field, and I just don't see what it is. It's not studying out of a test tube, it's not annotating all these papers, it's not doing a lot of things that go with a

certain discipline,<sup>1)</sup> but believe me, there is discipline in a theater program all the way through.) And as far as work is concerned, there is not one field in all the departments in the college that is not cut across by theater, either in terms of subject matter or in terms of understanding or ~~in~~ (for example, in terms of psychology, in terms of anthropology). I don't care what you name it, you can relate <sup>it</sup> in terms of theater somehow. ~~And I think that if a department recognized the theater department as such, that's a plume in the cap.~~ I remember very distinctly Dr. Guy, <sup>was</sup> who <sup>was</sup> head of the chemistry department at that time, used to be a very avid theater goer, and at one time, I said, "Dr. Guy, you certainly amaze me because your field is chemistry." (He had me in chemistry, and I was a wretched chemistry student; I was dreadful. How <sup>I</sup> ever passed it, I have no idea. I'd hate to take it now; I'd never pass it.) And I asked him, "How come you're so interested?" And he said, "Well, I would not be a good scientist if I were not." I guess that's the answer, really. If you're going to be good in your field, you've got to be aware of other fields, too. ~~They're going to cut across and show something and do something.~~ I guess that man does not live alone.

Williams: When ~~did~~ the department really <sup>take</sup> ~~take~~ off ~~in the~~ department, when did the theater area take off in growth? Now <sup>in</sup> looking back at it, it seemed to me it was right after World War II. Is this an accurate statement?

Scammon: Well, let's see. When I was here -- to go back to the dim days --



and that was around -- gosh, I've even forgotten when I graduated. I guess it was '34, somewhere around then. It seemed to me that we had a really very, very active theater group. ~~We had a theater group who were interested in performing.~~ We had a group that was interested in building things, because it was sort of a challenge. We were still working in old Phi Beta Kappa hall. It was also the fact that, well, people were taking other courses: ~~than~~ theater. ~~It was the fact that people could write them and get them produced and I don't know. It seemed to me as though there were a very, very active kind of theater and then that was sort of an extra curricular kind of activity. We could take courses in theater, but they were not in any concentration. They didn't count for any concentration.~~ I think it must have been somewhere between '34 and '40 probably when the department of fine arts came and then, ~~like~~ theater, ~~like~~ music, all of that was lumped together under the fine arts department, ~~because there were art courses and there were the theater courses and there were the music courses and there were the glee club and vocal lessons. So it all came under the theater department. Well, now that is getting close to the time of the war and I remember Althea saying that as far as men were concerned, that they were quite scarce during the war years, but I think that the basic foundation really was established all during those times because it just seems to me that it was really very, very active. And then I think~~

it was around '42 -- it might have been a little earlier than  
 that -- <sup>when</sup> ~~the~~ the Backdrop Club was formed. The Backdrop Club, I  
 guess, really wanted to get out and do its own thing. <sup>we've</sup>  
 got protests now, but during those days, why, they would protest  
 through a musical. <sup>at</sup> at first it started out with some series  
 of skits <sup>and</sup> "I don't like this at the College of William and  
 Mary," <sup>so</sup> it was poked fun at. It was sort of, ~~I guess, well,~~  
 aristophanic in nature. There was a message that was behind  
 the comedy, and that seemed to be a very, very popular thing,  
~~if~~ the students liked it which ~~seemed to me~~ because it was a  
 release. They could at least blow their stacks, you know, and  
 it was a marvelous way of doing it. <sup>They</sup> ~~Paid admissions and the audi-~~  
~~ence enjoyed it and they laughed and they supported~~ <sup>the</sup> Backdrop <sup>Club,</sup> and  
 it was a very, very healthy group at that time, it seems to me, be-  
 cause they were doing their own, <sup>[plays].</sup> They'd write their own  
 shows; they'd write their own music. They'd get the whole orches-  
 tra (wherever they scooped them up from) and they would do the  
 whole production. <sup>on</sup> "hands off faculty, we don't need you,"  
~~you know, and it~~ gave a sort of independence about them, but  
 all of the people in the Backdrop Club were probably people who  
 had worked in theater, ~~and~~ it was not a separate organization ~~kind~~  
~~of a thing~~ that was fighting the theater because they realized  
 what they were getting in theater, <sup>allowed</sup> them to go ahead ~~and~~  
~~on their own, since they'd been getting all these courses~~  
~~and having instruction and seeing how various people worked.~~ And  
 so, let's see, now the Backdrop Club, yes, that was going and it

was around '42. <sup>#</sup> Now <sup>the</sup> war, ~~that was just about~~ -- around that time, '43, '44, <sup>^</sup> when people, ~~I guess,~~ were being called up <sup>o</sup>

Althea was saying that during that time she was sort of scarce for men to the point -- and I know that she had done something that she rarely <sup>#</sup> would have done ~~except that, I guess,~~ she was told that this person who was stationed at Fort Eustis would not be ~~doing this and not~~ be moved out, ~~and this, that, and the other.~~ Well, the army moves in mysterious ways, and lo and behold just before almost opening night that man was gone. So some <sup>one on the</sup> faculty had to step <sup>in</sup> ~~on,~~ and take over the part, ~~learn the part, and go~~ <sup>#</sup> And I think it's strange, too, <sup>o</sup> because at that particular time I <sup>#</sup> asked Althea about pictures <sup>of William</sup> during those years, and she said film was so hard to come by, <sup>and</sup> well, I just take it for granted. I mean it was hard to come by and I never really followed it up why it was hard to come by and I'm not sure whether some of the pictures of the William and Mary theater are <sup>war</sup> missing during those years because of lack of film. I don't know. <sup>#</sup> That I'll have to check out. But I think that really it was always a very, very good foundation <sup>that</sup> had been established by Althea <sup>#</sup> I'm not sure that it really got started after the war years or not. I think that people coming back -- yes, they were very, very much interested in doing something in that field <sup>o</sup> and ~~that they wanted to and that they were very, very much interested in and they wanted to contribute.~~ And of course, by that time, I guess, it was very, very firmly established under the department of fine arts <sup>o</sup>

~~the William and Mary theater, I think, by that time was --~~ It's  
 interesting how the name changed -- the William and Mary  
 Players and this, that, and the other, and finally settled  
 on William and Mary Theater. ~~... there was a technical direc-~~  
 tor, There was a designer. All the departments, say, that  
 would be necessary to put on a production were all within the  
 department of fine arts. Courses were being offered in those  
 various fields: scene design, technical theater, directing,  
 acting, history of the theater, And I think they had a great  
 appeal. The people took them, And a number of people, certainly,  
 participated who were not necessarily concentrating in theater.  
 Business administration, yes. There were people appearing on  
 stage <sup>from</sup> in business administration, chemistry, biology, and I  
 think that was great. I think that's one of the reasons why we  
 maintained that, although ~~as a department I don't think~~ with the  
 number of people in the department <sup>I don't think</sup> we could do a show per se with ~~just~~  
 theater people, theater concentrators. We're not that many  
 yet. But having it open to ~~other people, open to~~ the entire  
 campus brings in other people who are interested in, you know,  
 and they've a great deal to contribute, too, and ~~I think that's~~  
~~one of the strong features of~~ <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater -- that  
 there are new people who are just not engrained, you know, into  
 theater, and ~~that~~ they present another point of view. I don't  
 know; does that answer the question?

No, I don't think you can isolate. ~~I know -- now, let me~~  
~~see. When would that have been? Well, it was before '53 because~~

~~it was before the building burned.~~ But it seemed to me <sup>at one time</sup> that the  
 same people were being used over and over and over again so that  
~~must have meant that there were not a lot of new people who were~~  
~~interested or people would assume that, "well these people casted~~  
~~last time played; they'll probably be cast in this play so there's~~  
~~no point in my trying out for."~~ And I don't think that has ever  
 been the policy of <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater. And many times ~~my~~  
 feeling is ~~like~~ when you've just had a part in a play, I'm  
 giving <sup>it</sup> to someone else, ~~was my feeling.~~ And I like getting new  
 faces. It's a little more difficult to work with because they  
 don't understand you and you don't understand them, but at  
 least you're going <sup>out</sup> and getting other people in-  
 terested in theater rather than sticking just to one group.  
 I like it very, very much and I think ~~at one time -- I'm not~~  
~~sure what I'd change my mind now or now; I probably would --~~  
~~but that~~ doing a big cast show <sup>for</sup> the opening show is very  
 good because <sup>e</sup> the freshman, you know, having come from high  
<sup>are</sup> school very, very much interested in theater, and if you've got  
 a big show you can always cast freshmen in very minor roles.  
 But, <sup>re</sup> the thing is they wetting their feet. They're getting into  
 the theater, they're doing something, and yet it's not that demand-  
 ing that they have to take three hours out of their orientating  
 lives, you know, to get themselves adjusted to college living,  
~~and getting the work done on their own~~ and so you get them for  
 a half hour in the evening, and that's not going to kill them.  
 And yet ~~there~~ there are other times when freshmen are coming in, and

they walk right off with the leading role (and they've still graduated, you know, I think it's rather healthy in the fact that it's just not a unit in itself out of the whole campus. I think it would be a shame if <sup>the head of the</sup> you had ~~a~~ William and Mary theater <sup>said</sup> that the entire campus couldn't try out or feel free to try out for a play, because if you cut it down then you are forced to work with just regular people, and I think audiences like to see new faces, you know. They get tired of *old faces*, them. And heaven knows, as far as educational theater is concerned, you would never have a theater if you took just all the seniors, ~~just used seniors~~. What are you going to do with all the freshmen? How will they ever get to be -- you know, work with them <sup>and</sup> that's educational theater. Start with freshmen, and as the freshmen keep coming in, start feeding them in so that you can develop <sup>an</sup> educational theater.

Williams: You spoke a moment ago of someone I wanted to ask you about, and that's Leslie Cheek. I understand that at one time he and Miss Hunt did not see eye-to-eye.

Scammon: No, they did not. They did not see eye-to-eye at all. And I think that Shakespeare was one of the points <sup>where</sup> they ~~were~~ differed, ~~ference~~. I think -- I'm not sure -- I'd have to go back and look at <sup>the</sup> programs, but it seems to me that they were ~~much~~ going into the eighteenth century as far as plays were concerned <sup>and</sup> I recall The Lying Valet, Trip to Scarborough, <sup>going back</sup> to Moliere, and I'm not sure whether Leslie felt more <sup>that</sup> inclined or not. I think that <sup>that</sup> really was a very interesting

study, and I'm sorry I wasn't here to be in on it. But each recognized the ability of the other and had great respect, you know, for what each person could do. But put them together and there were clashes, you know, and they would not agree ~~that won't do and I don't know. I guess I would have to go back and read Althea's book on the chronicle about~~ and I think it is mentioned in that ~~that~~ Althea just said, "Well, it was all ready promised to the audience that this play was going to be done," and she was going to see that it ~~is going to~~ get done and she knew some costumers and she arranged to get costumes for this particular show and as far as the set was concerned, she knew that she could get it ~~she could do it and she was going to do it.~~

Williams: Because Mr. Cheek would have been, for a time, the scenery designer, is that right?

Scammon: Yes, right. And he was not particularly interested, I guess; I don't know. And Leslie certainly -- well, he's retired now -- but he certainly was quite a force ~~at the~~ at the Virginia Museum <sup>in</sup> wanting to get the theater there, he was there at that time and he ~~was~~ very, very much wanted the theater. As a matter of fact, the Virginia Museum theater got built before our theater got built, and several of us (and specifically Roger Sherman) had gone up to look that theater over, as well as many other theaters, ~~as far as Roger was concerned,~~ of picking out all the good parts, you know, and so when people come into Phi Beta Kappa they say, "It reminds me something of

Virginia Museum theater." I say, "Well, I can understand why."

~~You know, some of the elements, perhaps might make them feel~~

~~that because we did. That's how we got such a good building.~~

We <sup>d</sup> steal the good features out of other buildings, you know,

~~incorporated it.~~ But I don't know. I guess that's a case of

two forces meeting each other, neither really willing to give

way ~~and that's what happened.~~ I'm not sure whether sides were

chosen or what during the whole thing, but <sup>the</sup> William and Mary

theater weathered it.

Williams: Yes, obviously it survived.

Scammon: Yes, it <sup>d</sup> did.

Williams: When we were talking about buildings and facilities, one that we didn't talk about was Player's Dell.

Scammon: Yes, now the Player's Dell was built, I guess, during the C.C.C. days. Is that right? ~~And I remembered Althea asking because the~~

~~The C.C.C. would keep the thing up and maintain it; otherwise, without~~

~~the maintenance and after all of the crews or whatever they~~

were called left, why then, it just went down and just

became overgrowth <sup>n</sup> and it was no longer used. ~~And I've forgotten~~

how many plays Althea had down there, but I know that it was a

really charming, sylvan spot. ~~It was really beautiful and the~~

pictures of Twelfth Night <sup>having</sup> ~~hadn't~~ been performed there in the

afternoon. I didn't see that production, but it must have been

really very, very charming what with all outdoors <sup>above --</sup> ~~and~~

~~you know, really a feel for Shakespeare. And just being done in~~

~~broad sunlight and sitting up at the back of the thing and looking~~



~~down and seeing it~~ and it was really a lovely, lovely theater  
 in itself. ~~to approach it~~ you would enter just about where  
 the steps are now going up to Millington and you'd walk around.  
~~And I remember Althea asking someone "where would the sylvan,~~  
~~where would the dell be?"~~ And it's just about where the library  
 is now, so <sup>the</sup> theater gave way to the library, but I think that's  
 where it was. I can remember my father coming up there one time  
 and going to the dell ~~it~~ it was all lined, in one respect, with  
 great, huge evergreens, firs (or whatever they are that grow  
 around here, pines or what have you) and ~~you just had the feeling~~  
~~that it just reminded you of walking down some kind of cathedral~~  
 because they were all so beautiful ~~pine trees, fir trees, ever-~~  
~~greens, whatever they were.~~ And it had a very nice approach to  
 it, but there wasn't enough maintenance for it, <sup>it</sup> just became over-  
 run and that was the end of it. But it was quite rustic and  
 very, very lovely. ~~I'm just trying to think what it was,~~ other  
 than the fact of just having gone around and seeing it, I don't  
 recall ever seeing a production. (Now, wouldn't it be ironic if  
 I happened to be in one; I don't think so.)

Williams: You said you didn't come here with any kind of drama background or  
 interest, but gained it here. Is that correct?

Scammon: Oh, I guess I'd always been interested in the theater, but living  
 in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and being brought up there, I'm sure  
 the Puritan influence was strong somewhere along the line, other  
 than whatever might have happened like pageants on Thanksgiving  
 day, that was about the extent of theater in Gloucester,

Massachusetts. And then when we came to Newport News, why, they had regular courses in theater. Dorothy Crane was teaching. I just became very, very much interested in it. I guess I just liked ~~either~~ losing myself and becoming someone else, you know, on stage. So I tried out with various plays in high school and really enjoyed it very, very much, and then when I came to William and Mary, why, I certainly was delighted to find out all the theater activities going on. And at that time, there was not enough offered in terms of getting a degree in theater, so I concentrated in English. (Let's see. - At that time you had to have a concentration in one field and two minors. So I had English and there was a minor in education and history, and then I took as much theater as I could.) ~~The fact that I did have it in English and then when I went out and started teaching, the fact that I'd done theater work -- so I always did the theater things. I'd do the plays and things like that, and I'm sure that that probably weaned me from English, and I just got more interested in theater, and so when I had a chance to go on to graduate study, why, I was interested in doing theater. But I guess I've always been interested in theater. I liked "play-acting" as the phrase went, you know, and dramatize this and dramatize that. I don't know where I got it from, but I was interested in it.~~

Williams: What was it that brought you back to William and Mary as a faculty member and what kept you here?

Scammon: Well, I was going to Northwestern at the time ~~and~~ that was in '47 <sup>and</sup> that I heard they were going to open up The Common Glory and

~~there was going to be a drama here.~~ So I wrote Miss Hunt be-  
 cause -- well, I guess it was largely the fact that having  
 been in the army and away from family and everything for so  
 long a time, I just thought I'd like to spend the summer in  
 Virginia, if I <sup>could</sup> find work, great. So I wrote and  
 asked if she needed a spear carrier ~~for~~ for The Common  
Glory; I'd be more than interested in doing it. And so I  
 didn't hear for a long time, and I thought, "I guess not." Then  
 a little later, she wrote a letter saying that the reason she'd  
 delayed was that she wanted me to be one of her assistants, ~~and~~  
 so I was more than happy at that ~~and that was in '47 when we~~  
~~came and started the Glory at that time.~~ I was her assistant  
 director, as was Tony Manzi, another person who had been here  
 at William and Mary, very much a fireball in terms of  
 theater, and he went on to Yale and he got his degree in the  
 Yale Drama School, since then Tony has been stage managing  
 on Broadway and a very, very interesting, exciting life --  
 Broadway, commercial theater. And so that's what got me back  
 here. Well, then I went back to Northwestern, and I finished  
 what I was doing, ~~and everything and then, at the time, why~~ Miss  
 Hunt wrote and wanted to know if I would be considering a posi-  
 tion on the faculty here because her work was getting heavier  
 with theater, and would I be interested in doing anything in the  
 way of speech, <sup>oral interp,</sup> voice, and diction and public speak-  
 ing? And I wrote back and said, "Yes, I would." So I came,  
 had an interview, got a fabulous sum. I forget what it was

in those days; wasn't much looking at it today. I suppose today people would say it wasn't much; well, it isn't much even today. <sup>The</sup> Story of life at <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater, William and Mary. You know, prestige. Oh, dear, what was the phrase Dr. Pomfret used? As I recall in the first convocation of the year -- we met in old Phi Beta, and he was making some kind of a comment about the fact that people were called "Mr." and "Mrs." or "Miss", not necessarily holding onto rank of "Doctor" -- and another reference that we were really not over paid but -- what was the phrase? I'm not sure he said "enjoyed" or "put up with" or "sustained" but the exact words were "genteel poverty." I think that probably was quite true in those days. And so that's how I came, since 1948, why I've been on the faculty.

Williams: Has anything in particular kept you here, because I'm sure you've had offers to go somewhere else.

Scammon: Well, I just like it and <sup>have</sup> had a chance to do whatever it is I would like to do. For a while I was probably champing at the bit. It was largely because Althea would direct four plays, and I always wanted to direct a play myself ~~and then~~ during the summers, why I would do the summer plays, and then when we were running around from pillar to post -- it wasn't as though I was not working in theater because I'd go to all the rehearsals, you know, and sit there and take notes and help out and substitute for Althea and work on people as far as diction and interpretation and things of that nature. But I guess it was close to ten

years before I really actually got up and directed a play on the regular William and Mary theater schedule.

Williams: Was Romeo and Juliet your first?

Scammon: Let's see. -- No, I had done before then, I think it was after the fire, it was -- I did Village Wooing and Althea did The Highbrow Young Ladies. It was a double bill and ~~that was in preparation prior to -- what was it we were going into? Could it have been Hamlet we were going into? '53? Yes, I guess it was. No, I was in Hamlet; we did that in <sup>the</sup> gym. And as the Village Wooing was done. Yes, that was around '56, I guess it was. Yes, it was about '48 to '56 before I directed <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater per se. During the summertime, yes; I directed <sup>#</sup> shows then. And it was challenging working with new people, <sup>e</sup> doing things. It's always been that way it seems to me, really.~~

Williams: One of the things you came to do was the eighteenth-century plays, ~~I don't mean arrived here to do that. I mean one of the things that you have done~~

Scammon: Yes, that's true. It all started I think somewhere around 1948 <sup>Schoelman</sup> actually the year I arrived. Dick Sherman who was at Colonial Williamsburg at the time <sup>Sturbridge</sup> (then he went over to Stockbridge) called and wanted to know if I would be interested in doing an eighteenth-century play. "Yeah." And so we had a luncheon down at the lodge. I think Tom McCaskey was there, Tom Thorne was there, Althea was there, I was there, <sup>Schoelman</sup> Dick Sherman was there, And I've forgotten whether anyone else was there.

the whole subject was <sup>b</sup> proached about doing <sup>on</sup> eighteenth-century play ~~and everything~~ and Althea said that she was not interested in doing it, and I'd ~~already~~ <sup>already</sup> professed my interest in doing it and so ~~largely~~, I think it was <sup>Schoenman's Showman's</sup> Dick ~~man's~~ point of view that Colonial Williamsburg really should <sup>rebuild</sup> the first theater in America since it was located here. ~~That was one way of getting, say, a foot into the door of getting the theater here but I'd hate to be hanging from that date until now, waiting for that first theater to get built.~~ So it was in '49, I think, ~~I brought this list of things being done and it was in the spring of 1949~~ that we opened with a play called The Cheats of Scapin by Thomas Otway ~~and it was a farce.~~ Cheats of Scapin is nothing more than Otway's going to Molière ~~Scapin and taking the whole thing and scooping all the funny parts out of it,~~ he put it all together, then signed his name, and he got credit for it. Well, that was presented at the old information center. (My heavens, it's always the story of the old or the new, isn't it? Old Phi Bete and now Ewell and new Phi Bete is Phi Bete.) Old information center was -- if you can believe it -- where the pool is for the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. It didn't go back as far as the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum. It was literally from the street to what would be the back of the Abby Aldrich. That was the information center. It was just about as wide as that rose garden plot that's there. That was the information center in 1948 as I viewed it. ~~they~~ showed filmstrip on artifacts and the work that was taking place

relative to Colonial Williamsburg, zeroing in and brainwashing  
 the people of <sup>n</sup> what to expect when they went through Williams-  
 burg. They wanted to do the plays there because that was about  
 the only place where Colonial Williamsburg had some form of an  
 auditorium. You'd go down ~~the~~ side steps -- ~~the steps~~  
<sup>in the area</sup> is still there, as if you were going down to  
 that rose garden -- and you'd go into a large antiroom. <sup>e</sup> It  
 was done in sort of a dreadful green <sup>with</sup> ivory walls, and  
 there was a desk at the far end of that -- ~~men's room, left~~  
~~and right of the desk~~ -- and a mural <sup>↑</sup> and that was the main  
 desk where you could find out about things <sup>⊙</sup> then you'd go  
 through a door into the theater where you could see this  
<sup>auditorium</sup> filmstrip. That theater was much better, really, than old Phi  
 Bete because it was raked <sup>⊙</sup> ~~as far as the auditorium was con-~~  
~~cerned~~ and the projectionist's booth was right at the back of  
 the theater and they'd show the films. Well, they wanted to  
 do the plays there <sup>⊙</sup> the stage was raised up enough and that  
 was about it. Well, there was nothing that reminded one of  
 anything that was eighteenth century, so I asked Roger Sherman  
 if he'd design something that would suggest an eighteenth-cen-  
 tury theater. So we built false <sup>proscenium</sup> doors, and we had  
 sort of an area which could be curtained off so that you could  
 play in front of the curtain, and you could open the curtain, and you could  
 play behind the curtain, you could do a scene out in front,  
 and you could set the stage for the next scene, and you could open  
 the curtain and close the curtain and manipulate very well <sup>⊙</sup>

there was a crossover behind the screen which made it very, very  
 convenient and that's where we put on these first plays. The  
 dressing rooms were just to the left and right of the stage and  
 if you had -- well, literally, if you had five women, you never  
 would be able to get them all in the dressing room (which might  
 give you some idea of the size of it) because by the time they  
 got costumed and put on big dresses and everything, someone  
 would be bulging out the door. But that's where those plays  
 were done for a long time, and they seemed to be quite, quite  
 popular. Audiences seemed to enjoy them, Students certainly  
 enjoyed them, and it gave them another kind of experience as far  
 as doing theater work, not that it was completely eighteenth  
 century because <sup>the</sup> eighteenth century made use of lovely perspective  
 scenery. Until they get that theater <sup>down</sup> in Colonial Wil-  
 liamsburg, it seems to me that it's still going to be  
 moving around from pillar to post after the old  
 information <sup>center</sup> left we would go into the bldg, and we would  
 perform in the lodge; we'd perform in the Tidewater Room. And  
 then when they built the new Conference Center why we'd do <sup>it</sup> in the  
 north ballroom, or we'd do <sup>it</sup> in the auditorium, or we would go over  
 to the motor house and would perform in the lobby of the motor  
 house. I guess those were all the places we hit. For a while  
 the old information center still did a number of shows and I  
 guess it wasn't really -- oh, yes, the Virginia Room. When they  
 were building the Virginia Room they wanted us to do eighteenth-  
 century plays in the round there. I said, "Sure." We did one



play and that was it.

Williams: These were William and Mary students.

Scammon: Right, William and Mary students were the ones. It was "Colonial Williamsburg Presents" but it was really <sup>all</sup> members of the William and Mary theater who were performing. Well, they've done a play ever since 1949, every year. And sometimes the play would get rehearsed in the fall so that it opened and ran in spring and fall, or sometimes it gets rehearsed in the spring and then it opens in the fall. ~~So it's either spring-fall would be a new play or fall-spring would be a new play.~~ And students themselves, I think, enjoyed it very, very much. Then there have been other occasions, certainly when they've been asked to perform for the Antiques Forum or on special occasions. I think most of the time they've enjoyed it.

Williams: And when you were a student here, there was no such thing as the information <sup>center</sup> to have a play in, but the William and Mary theater, or players as they were then called, went on tour at that time.

Scammon: Yes, they did. That's right. One year they went up to Schenectady; some women's club, I think, up there wanted them and it was through the mother of one of the students here at school that was brought about. Another year, I remember because I was in the show -- we went up to Wellesley and we performed -- I don't know what the Wellesley theater group called themselves but they wanted to have a southern play, and so at the time, why, <sup>we</sup> picked up Just Suppose the whole idea of it was

that suppose the Prince of Wales -- something happened to him and he was anchored somewhere along the Potomac or Chesapeake Bay someplace, and he landed in Virginia, and he went to an old plantation, and he met this lovely girl, fell in love with her -- what's going to happen? And I think this came much, much ahead of Wallis Warfield, ~~but it was just that element of things~~ and so we took that show -- well, I know we took it to Wellesley, and I think we took that to one other place. I'm not sure if it was West Point or where. And then I think that we've taken some other plays. -- Yes, I'm sure we've taken some plays over to West Point.

Williams: West Point, Virginia.

Scammon: Yes, West Point, Virginia, right. Then we've also taken a play to Mary Washington College, taken it down to Fort Eustis. But after we got into the new building (the new Phi Beta Kappa Hall), the settings and everything were designed specifically for Phi Beta, and to take a show and find a place that would be comparable to Phi Beta was difficult, so I don't think that we have really toured any show that has been done in Phi Beta since we've opened. And that is one of the big problems. It's very, very difficult to cart and to mount all that is required if you're going to do a show. But prior to that time, what with doing shows either in the pillar-to-post period or in old Phi Beta, the setting really was not that -- well, I can't say that it wasn't that good; it was -- but it was not that difficult to transport and it was easier to fit on some of the stages where we would be playing. I

don't know whether our touring days are over or not, but I know that it's a great big hassle if you are going to tour, along with all the regular work and everything else that's going on. And if you do a show ~~and you don't do it~~ and it's not going to be done for another month or so, why, people get out of it, and then you have to go back and start rehearsing. Then some of those people are already ready cast in another play, and so that means that play has to suffer while the other people are off rehearsing and all going on tour and traveling. But I don't think it's wrong. I think it gives other people an opportunity to see what <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater is doing, <sup>#</sup> that was what was nice about the college drama festivals that we had here with ~~where~~ largely organizations made up of the various colleges in Virginia ~~and~~ <sup>to</sup> we'd go different spots and different places each year. For a while we went up <sup>to</sup> the Virginia Museum, and <sup>there</sup> we would <sup>be</sup> do three shows in the morning, three in the afternoon, three in the evening and ~~there would be~~ someone of theater fame <sup>come</sup> down and <sup>criticized</sup> the plays as they were done. There'd be a critique <sup>session</sup> after the morning, after the afternoon, after the evening, <sup>[sessions]</sup> And then at the dinner there would be another person from the theater who would give some kind of a speech <sup>on</sup> <sup>an</sup> aspect of theater ~~at that particular time and that~~ was great, ~~particularly if you were performing because then you could see eight other schools or if you were just going up, to see nine different schools, what they were doing.~~ The students valued it because they could see either you're going along well or

you're not going along at all or you better get on your stick and move, ~~you know~~, or at least give them some sense of pride that what they were doing here was certainly equal to what other things were being done. ~~And I think that~~ <sup>In</sup> travelling shows like that, ~~largely~~ <sup>s</sup> the place <sup>^</sup> where we were would generally furnish us with basic furniture or props ~~or something~~. If it was unusual, why, we'd take it with us, but set-wise we didn't bother about that. <sup>o</sup> Lights were all just uniform, so that you really had a chance to see directing and acting more than anything else. But then that seems to have fallen by the wayside. ~~It~~ ~~finally ended where we would make a different -- one year we were in Hollins, one year at the University of Richmond, they've been here.~~ So we sort of moved around from place to place so that we could also see the facilities of other places, and most of the students came back ~~blessing, you know~~ <sup>#</sup> thinking they were working in a very, very good theater.

Williams: You've also had the high school drama festival here. Why was that begun?

Scammon: Well, it all started, <sup>^</sup> really Miss Hunt started it years ago, <sup>In</sup> the '50s I would gather. <sup>o</sup> ~~Before~~ before they had the Virginia Drama League, which is now operated with the university <sup>[at Virginia]</sup> ~~but~~ it was starting <sup>ed</sup> more with the idea of inviting high schools ~~and having~~ sort of a festival kind of a thing. All the high schools would come in, bring their plays, and their critiques would be given afterwards. Those were held, as I recall, at Matthew Whaley. It was a time when Matthew Whaley really had a very, very nice

stage and it must have been -- I can't remember whether we ever had it in Phi Beta or not. But anyway that had started -- I don't remember the years. It must have been before '53. And then it just really became almost too much for such a small organization as <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater, and so the university took it over ~~and so now that whole system of regional plays and everything of coming -- like certain regions will come here and judge them. Okay, you go to the university. Sort of a weeding-out process to begin with and the fact that "well, no, you're just rated good but someone else got a superior, the superior will go to the university."~~ But it's still going on, though. I think that in looking back that probably <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater really first started that idea of the high school drama festivals. ~~And there it is. It's still going on.~~

Williams: You spoke of the summer program, while ago. Since the war Williamsburg in the summertime has been the site of a good bit of dramatic activity with The Common Glory and then for a few years there was an Institute of Theater as well.

Scammon: As far as The Common Glory was concerned, that was thought of long before it really opened. I think there was discussion of it around the early '40s, but then the war came on, and so plans were certainly wiped out. There was no point in even considering it, but the Jamestown Corporation was formed because it was <sup>thought</sup> ~~was~~ that it might be done down on Jamestown Island. Then after the war was over, why, again, people got more interested in it and kept bringing it up, and then we went down to Jamestown

to look at the site, and really it was almost below sea level, so you couldn't dig because you'd come up with water. And so then they decided to move it up here. They selected the current spot where the theater is, and Robert Edmund Jones, a very, very noted American designer and costume-scenery designer, saw it and thought it was one of the most beautiful spots in America as far as the location <sup>for it,</sup> so the amphitheater was built. I think it was July 17 that it opened the first year (1947). We had about a month's rehearsal. Paul Green was here; Althea directed it. She was assisted by Robert Boyle from the University of Virginia. Tom Thorne was ~~in one respect,~~ I think, sort of the business manager for it. And everyone seemed to be pitching in ~~to do, you know,~~ to get it done. Roger Sherman and Al Haak were certainly all on the technical force and designing. Roger was designing; Al was doing <sup>the</sup> technical. Convicts built the theater and put the bricks in place, and finally it opened on the 17th of July, and it's been going there ever since with the exception of two seasons. One was in '74 and nothing happened. There was no Common Glory. And there was another year at which time The Founders, also written by Paul Green, was given instead of The Common Glory. So this year, I ~~think~~ The Common Glory is in its <sup>twenty - eighth</sup> 28th season, I guess it is. But ~~since 1947 it has been presented, with the exception of those two years, every year.~~ And certainly after the first year, there were great modifications within the script, within the scene design; the whole concept and everything was changed. But since

Roger

that time I think it has ~~roughly~~ remained very, very much  
 the same story. ~~The years 1774 through 1781 at which time the~~  
~~British surrendered at Yorktown and with the exception of minor~~  
 changes relative to playwriting, <sup>it's</sup> it's still the same kind of  
 story of the establishment of the colonies, <sup>the</sup> writing the Declara-  
 tion of Independence, the refusal of the Americans to <sup>now</sup> catow  
 to British rule, and <sup>h</sup>opping the British in October 19, 1781, and  
 we <sup>had</sup> established our own independence. And I suppose this bicen-  
 tennial year that's coming up, ~~or this year as it is,~~ people are  
 thinking in terms of the nation, the country, and 1776 should  
 certainly be a banner year for The Common Glory. ~~It's~~ <sup>it's</sup> cer-  
 tainly held up over the years in that people certainly have  
 seen it. I must admit that ~~trade is~~ certainly around town, <sup>has</sup>  
 picked up, so that Common Glory is no longer the after-dark enter-  
 tainment that it was in 1947. In 1947-1948, those early years,  
 nothing happened. The streets were rolled up at <sup>9:00</sup> ~~midnight~~  
~~and if you wanted any kind of entertainment at all in Williams-~~  
~~burg,~~ <sup>the</sup> the thing was to go to The Common Glory and many, many  
 nights in that opening year, <sup>at the beginning,</sup> why, heavens, it  
 seated about 2500, and they would be selling even standing room.  
 People would be seated on the banks which sloped down toward the  
 amphitheater, and so that it was really very, very exciting, you  
 know, particularly playing to that large number of people, <sup>and</sup>  
~~that would not happen one night during the year but many nights~~  
~~during those early years.~~ But since that time, why, Colonial  
 Williamsburg has certainly come up with its after-dark entertain-

ment in <sup>the</sup> eighteenth-century form of some of the buildings being open; the Craft House being open. And certainly they had other theaters that were around here. I can think of Wedgewood, (now defunct) but that was also going. Now Busch Gardens coming in so that Williamsburg is no longer the "roll up the sidewalks at 9:00 in the evening." It's a metropolitan area, shall we say?

Williams: Has The Common Glory fitted into the educational theater idea, or is it enough apart from <sup>the</sup> William and Mary theater that ...

Scammon: Well, it is a part certainly as far as the William and Mary theater is concerned, but I think you <sup>must</sup> consider it a non-profit educational theater in the fact that there's always been a very, very close tie between the College of William and Mary and <sup>The</sup> Common Glory <sup>is</sup> certainly as far as The Common Glory is concerned ~~with~~ a number of the students <sup>can</sup> help themselves along in college by taking courses during the summer. I know that as far as the personnel is concerned that the students can take up to six hours, which would be at least two courses during the summer while The Common Glory is going on. The hardest time, of course, is when The Common Glory is in rehearsal and classes <sup>are going on.</sup> are beginning. There the student really has got to work quite hard because he has to go to rehearsals; he has to go to classes. And I think that as far as The Common Glory is concerned, that they would make concessions to the classes, and then after class is over why the person would report for the rehearsals. And certainly it has been educational in that field. It has been



educational from the point of view <sup>of</sup> <sub>1</sub> people themselves finding out what a long run might be. With the majority of students (and <sup>y</sup>they are either students or teachers who are the ones who carrying on as far as The Common Glory because they are the only people who would be available during the summertime) <sub>1</sub> it's educational from that point of view ~~which is also educational in the fact that a student or a performer down there realizes that there are other things than just acting~~ <sub>0</sub> The Common Glory is sort of a symphonic kind of drama, as Paul Green calls it. ~~Music and dance and singing and acting, sound, everything.~~ <sub>1</sub> there is more than just one art form which is involved. And some of us get hot at times, and people have to learn either discipline or patience or obedience or cooperation, and they begin to find out a whole lot about themselves, and for some it's an eye-opener and a realization that, "well, maybe I don't want to go <sub>0</sub> to theater after all," <sup>In order</sup> <sub>1</sub> or to break the monotony, I suppose, ~~The fact that we've been doing Shakespeare during some Sunday evenings, or that we're doing a dance concert, or~~ <sub>1</sub> there's <sup>been</sup> being a choir concert. Giving them an opportunity from, ~~say,~~ <sub>1</sub> ~~the regular eighteenth-century form or just doing~~ <sup>The</sup> <sub>1</sub> Common Glory all the time because it can be a bore and it can be a drag. And that's, I suppose, sort of the function of the director to make it all so scintillating and exciting that every night ~~is~~ <sub>1</sub> going to be a first performance, ~~you know, and~~ <sub>1</sub> that's difficult to do, too, because sometimes the weather's against you. It's

so hot, so humid, so when you put on a great big valour costume, this-is-not-the-first-time-I've-done-this attitude and you've got to overcome that <sup>e</sup> those are all the things a person learns, I suppose. He's got to if he's going to go into theater, keep it live, keep it fresh. And it is, I suppose, a great learning experience not only from the actor's point of view, but also in terms of the director's because ~~all the people who are in charge of areas that you're working with~~ new people, and they have new ideas, and you know, you sort of have to stay loose or stay flexible so that you can get things done. But certainly as far as the idea is concerned, I like the idea <sup>e</sup> sure it's flag-raising -- and I'm not sure whether you can call it a cornball or whether it's corny or what have you, but still there's something that is being said relative to this country that I think should be said, and it's being said in theatrical terms, <sup>e</sup> so that appeals to me, and that's why I'm really very, very much interested in seeing it done.

Williams: For several summers there near the beginning of The Common Glory there was this summer institute. Was it ever hoped that this would be a permanent adjunct?

Scammon: Yes, I think it was. I've forgotten how all the funding came. I'm sure the college did some and then from foundations and we had some really very, very exciting people here. Althea had organized that really at the very beginning of The Common Glory and we had very, very outstanding people in the theater world down here who would be here for -- it started out that they