

William M. Tuck

Former governor William Munford Tuck (1946-1950) attended William and Mary in its pre-World War I, pre-coeducation days. He was a student at the William and Mary Academy from 1913 to 1915 preparatory to entering the college. Like so many boys of that era he received his teacher's certificate and left after two years to teach. Soon thereafter he went into politics, serving in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1924 to 1932 (he did not run in 1929) and the state senate from 1932 to 1942. He was elected lieutenant-governor in 1942, governor in 1946, and served as congressman from the fifth district from 1953 to 1968.

At eighty Governor Tuck remains in his law practice in South Boston, Virginia, where this interview was taped. The transcript is not a verbatim one, as we discussed various subjects and sometimes came back to them later. Therefore the transcript has been put into topical order and reviewed by both interviewer and interviewee. Governor Tuck compared the results to his years at the college: just passing.

INDEX SHEET

Interviewee William M. Tuck

Date of interview April 19, 1976

Place 401 Main Street, South Boston, VA

Interviewer Emily Williams

Session number 1

Length of tape 70 mins.

Contents:

Approximate time:

I	student years (1913-1917)	
	A) - associations	5 mins.
	B) - faculty	4 mins.
	C) - appearance of college & town before & after restoration	2 mins.
	D) - hazing	3 mins.
	E) - connection with W&M Academy, town	4 mins.
II	As governor, board member	5 mins.
>	Association with Dr. Pentret, Charlie Duke	8 mins.
= F)	student life (cont'd) assessment	9 mins.
= #)	Henry Billups	3 mins.
II	As state legislator during J.A.C. Chandler administration	4 mins.
	on <sup>his</sup> individual students	2 mins.
III	E) honors at W&M	2 mins.
=	governor's influence on state schools	2 mins.
=	F) honors (cont'd.)	2 mins.
III	Seven Wise Men, Tyler family	8 mins.
	on <sup>his</sup> miscellaneous	4 mins.

William M. Tuck

April 19, 1976

South Boston, Va.

Williams: In this first letter that I was just speaking about you said that <sup>in</sup> your time at William and Mary (1913 to 1917--~~am~~ I about right?) that you gained a number of <sup>#</sup> influences that helped you in later life, and I wonder what those influences were, Governor Tuck?

Tuck: Well, the associations were important, and of course, I learned something out of the books. I certainly was not a good student; I didn't study very hard. I think if I had applied myself--I didn't know how to study--never did know how until recent years. I didn't devote too much time to it, either, but I enjoyed life. I was a plain country youth, full of <sup>energy and</sup> fun and ambition, but I wasn't willing to do much work.

But the associations there undoubtedly helped me a whole lot. It was a small school--only about 125 men (or boys)--no girls there at all. I went for two years to the William and Mary Academy. At the time I went to school there were very few high schools in the state, and there were none available to me here. (My father sent me one year to Chatham School; it's now Hargrave Military Academy.) So the next year I went to William and Mary Academy.

# I didn't make very good grades in the academy, and I didn't make very good grades in the college. I made passing grades on everything, and I got what they called a teacher's diploma after two years in college. So I taught school one year--or rather I kept school; I wouldn't say that I taught. I was teaching everything from algebra to Latin, history, English, and everything else. I didn't know much about any of them, and some of them I didn't know anything about. That was a wonderful experience, and that was worth about as much to me as a year in college.

(Then I went in the marines, and I got right good instruction there; they taught you obedience, anyhow.)

But William and Mary was a great old place, and I loved it and loved those boys. My prospects didn't look too good at the time, and I didn't dream that I would achieve the position in life that I have achieved. I remember the first time I ran for statewide office I got up the names of all the boys that were at William and Mary when I was there--even those that were way senior to me. I won't say that I heard from all of them, but I never got a message from any of them that they weren't supporting me; some of them <sup>were</sup> very warmly. Even some of them that were seniors when I was in the academy remembered me. The associations were worth a lot in that way. They were loyal not so much to me as to William and Mary.

# We had a wonderful faculty there (of course, at that time I wasn't capable of judging it). Dr. Lyon Gardiner Tyler was the president. He was a <sup>very</sup> distinguished man and the son of President John Tyler and undoubtedly one of the great historians of Virginia. Then Dr. John Lesslie Hall was head of the English department; he was considered one of the finest English scholars in America. Dr. John C. Calhoun was head of the language department, and he was outstanding. Dr. Thomas Jefferson Stubbs was head of the department of mathematics; he died while I was there. (He looked like Thomas Jefferson, but I heard later that he was related to Robert E. Lee. He was a nice old gentleman--very stern and austere.) That wasn't the whole William and Mary "seven". They had the younger ones: Dr. George Oscar Ferguson, Dr. James Southall Wilson (who married Dr. Tyler's daughter--he taught English). I must have picked up a little something there, <sup>scholastically,</sup> but not very much. They had it--it wasn't their fault; I just didn't take on to it.

Williams: Did the boys know Dr. Tyler very well?

Tuck: Well, he was supposed to have had a very bad memory. I took some classes under him. I never <sup>did</sup> undertake to try to talk to him; I thought that would be inappropriate.

A man who was so distinguished and who headed the college-- I had nothing to say to him. I got to know him later on in life when I got to be a member of the legislature, and he remembered me then. I was a member of the Westmoreland Club, and he was either a member or a guest. That was a fashionable men's club on lower Grace Street in Richmond, along about <sup>opposite</sup> where Miller and Rhoads is now. That was back in the days of Prohibition, and the gentlemen would meet there to take a few libations. I would talk to him then; I thought he was rather elderly, but I don't guess he was any older than I am now, maybe not as old.

William and Mary was, and I'm sure is, a very fine place. It looked more historic to me then than it does now; the Rockefellers made it look so new! I hope I'm not name-dropping, but the Rockefellers invited Mrs. Tuck and me down to have lunch with them at Bassett Hall fifteen or more years ago. He was interested in making even more improvements, and there were certain ways that I could be of help. He made the statement voluntarily that the Sir Christopher Wren Building -- everything -- was done over exactly as it was. He went on to illustrate that the Wren Building was almost completed when they found some other plans, and at the expense of several hundred thousand dollars, they did it over.

I know they've done the very best job that they <sup>could,</sup> ~~can,~~ but it does look new rather than old. When I was there so many of the buildings that have been restored were not even there, and others were rundown, but it looked like an old historic place.

Williams: Did you live in one of the old dormitories when you were there?

Tuck: Yes, I first stayed in what they called the Taliaferro Dormitory--I think it's been torn down. Then I stayed in the Tyler building one year, and I stayed in the Brafferton building one year. When I first went there I got in some kind of trouble with the faculty, and they made me (and a few other boys) leave the dormitory--they didn't send us home. And I roomed for a few months in a man's house up there on Richmond Road.

Williams: You don't remember how ~~th~~serious the infraction was?

Tuck: Well, it was a hazing incident. I was brand new; I hadn't been there but a month. They were hazing me, too. And the faculty wanted us to tell who they were, and I wouldn't tell. Being the lawyer that I am today I could have talked myself out of that; I could have told them I hadn't been there but a month, that I didn't know all the boys. I could have said that I was ~~in~~<sup>#</sup>doubt as to who they were, and rather than do an injustice to anyone I would refuse to say anything about it.

*I just kept my silence as sort of 5th Amendment. I was only 17 years of age. I was only 17 years of age.*

They probably would have let me out. It was a question of whether I wanted to be in bad with the faculty or with the students, and I sided with the students; I wouldn't tell anything.

Williams: Did you have a lot of contact with the academy boys, and when you were an academy boy did you know all the boys at the college? Or were they two separate groups?

Tuck: You mixed together on the same campus. Of course, you didn't go to classes together. We knew each other.

It was all just one unit. They were the uppers, though, and we were the lowlies.

Williams: What about the people in town? Was there a lot of mixing with the people in town?

Tuck: Yes, right much. There were not many girls in town according to the population of the students; in other words there were probably ten or twelve or fifteen young girls in town and about 125 or so students besides the town boys. (Discussion of Williamsburg boys in school at the time: H.M. Stryker, Vernon Geddy, Ed Spencer, John Warburton, the Brookses.)

Williams: Well, I had heard people comment that the town and the school were very close then, and I wondered if that was your experience, too?

Tuck: Well, that's true; it was very close. The townspeople seemed to appreciate the college, and the college appreciated the town. It was a very quaint and picturesque

place. Many's the times that I went down to the old  
Capitol--it was nothing but a field--<sup>though</sup> ~~and~~ you could  
see part of the foundations--and thought of the great  
men that had gone there. (I went there as a member of  
the General Assembly to the first meeting in the  
restored capitol; <sup>I went as lieutenant-governor and as governor, and</sup> I was invited to go down there this  
time when the president was there, but I declined to  
go. I just felt it would be too strenuous<sup>u</sup> ~~ha~~ trip for me.)

Tuck: When I went to school and you went to see a girl at a girl's school, they had a great big room where you'd meet them, and they had three or four chaperones. Now they visit in the bedrooms and live in the same dormitories until I just don't understand it.

Williams: You didn't have ~~gifts~~<sup>#</sup> to visit at William and Mary when you were there.

Tuck: No, we could visit other schools.

Williams: To have gone anywhere from Williamsburg you would have had to have gone by train, is that right?

Tuck: Yes, there were very few automobiles then and no roads.

Williams: What about football games--would you go by train to the football games?

Tuck: We didn't have many. We had them in Richmond or Newport News, (They had a stadium there called Wilson Field. It had a wooden grandstand that would hold three or four hundred people.

Williams: This was at William and <sup>S</sup>Mary?

Tuck: Yes, at William and Mary. It wasn't anything like the present stadium. It was out in that direction, though. William and Mary, Hampden-Sidney, Randolph-Macon, and Richmond College (now the University of Richmond) played each other; occasionally they <sup>played</sup> some other team.

(William and Mary and Richmond College)  
They were great rivals. The series was over

Thanksgiving Day; that was the last day of the season. If Richmond College played William and Mary they'd come down there. They came down in 1913--that was the first year I was there--and they had a stronger team than William and Mary had. William and Mary apparently hadn't won any games for a long time. <sup>They had a rally</sup> The night before when we got everything worked up to a high pitch.

A boy named Jack Wright from Richmond made an eighty-yard run for a touchdown, and the grandstand of William and Mary students just went wild!

The referee, who was Willis Robertson, later United States Senator, was a Richmond College man--I don't reckon he ought to have been a referee. I know he did what he thought was right (I'm sure he did); he declared him outside.

And of course that made us feel bad, and the Richmond College man brought his banner down in front of us, and our cheerleader hit the banner and knocked it down. When that happened bedlam broke loose!

Maybe I shouldn't have told this to be recorded, but <sup>it</sup> it's a fact--it broke up the game. I guess it was the only time in the history of the state

that a <sup>college</sup> game was broken up because of a fight.

Williams: Would the students come down <sup>from Richmond</sup> and paint Lord Botetourt, or was that a later thing?

Tuck: That was later. They couldn't have done it because they wouldn't have <sup>had</sup> any way to travel.

Williams: Did the boys at William and Mary have to pay <sup>as freshmen</sup> homage to Lord Botetourt when you were there?

Tuck: No, that was later.

Williams: Were there any fraternities there when you were a student?

Tuck: Yes, there were five: Kappa Sigma, Pi Kappa Alpha, Theta Delta Chi, Kappa Alpha, and S.P.E. (Sigma Phi Epsilon).  
I was a member of the last one (S.P.E.).

Williams: Would you say the fraternities were strong at the time?

Tuck: Yes, they were right strong. Most of the boys that could get a bid joined. The fraternity I belonged to lived at that time in an old stone house not far from the Williamsburg Female Institute, not too far from the old Governor's Palace.

Could you include here some of the things fraternities did?

Tuck: I remeber <sup>m</sup> one little interesting incident there. They had a bulletin board in front of the Wren Building, and the boys would put up a notice that someone had lost a pencil or somebody had found this. Dr. Stubbs had a note put up there saying, "Owing to illness I will not meet with my classes today, but I will meet them tomorrow, Deo valenti," which means in Latin (I think) "God being with you." Some fellow said, "Deo valenti, Deo valenti. What does that mean?" One of the boys said, "In spite of hell."

sayi

Then I remember one time we had a very garrulous boy. (They didn't have compulsory chapel services, but they would have chapel services every morning or two mornings a week in the old Wren Building.) This one very garrulous fellow always wanted to get up and make a speech. Finally he had exhausted all the subjects, and he got up and said, "What am I to speak about today?" And someone said, "Speak about a minute, brother." We had all kinds of fun like that going on down there.

It's been sixty years! <sup>Now it is</sup> difficult <sup>to remember</sup> many of these incidents

Tuck: I'm very proud of William and Mary, and I do feel that while I haven't accomplished so awful much, what little good I may have done in life is due to my having had the privilege of attending there. I enjoyed those associations and what studying I was able to do. I never have pretended then or since then to be any kind of a scholar; I think most of the newspaper people referred to me as the most unlearned of the governors we've had in recent years--scholastically, anyhow. The Lord has greatly blessed and greatly honored and to some extent <sup>small</sup> greatly prospered my hand; I've gotten along in some kind of way, ~~extent~~ though I didn't learn much out of the books. But they were all mighty nice to me--students and faculty. [Discussion of recommendations for flying school given Governor Tuck by William and Mary professors.]

Williams: You know, there's one character that you haven't mentioned that all the boys seemed to have known and that's Henry Billups. Do you know any <sup>good</sup> Henry Billups stories?

Tuck: Oh yes! I remember Henry Billups; he was the old bellringer. We called him "Dr. Billups." He rang the bell on time; he was as proud of his job--or more so--than President Tyler or any member of the faculty--and took as much pride in the college as anybody. He was connected with the college a long time. His life was remarkable in that it demonstrates the loyalty and sincerity or some of our very best colored people and should serve as an example to others. He was always ready, willing, and able to be of assistance to the students in any way that he could, even beyond his regular college duties. I think he was liked by all the students.

Williams: What sorts of things would he do for the students?

Tuck: Oh, run errands of various kinds, maybe run downtown for something. I think his duties were over when he finished bellringing--maybe he was janitor, too. I think they may have had other people to do the janitorial work; he surely couldn't have done it all. He may have had a few duties along that line.

B

Williams: I think you can safely say what he was supposed to be doctor of.

Tuck: Boozology--and I think he was. I came through there many years later--at the time I had no idea that he drank. I don't remember him drinking around the students. But when I came through there many years later one Sunday, I was so glad to see him, and he seemed to be so glad to see me. We decided to take a little drive up and down Duke of Gloucester Street; as soon as I got in the car I realized that he was greatly under the influence of his product. And I had quite a difficult time in getting out of that car alive; we went from one side of the street to the other! (That was back before they had laws against driving under the influence-- in the late '20s or early '30s.)

Williams: I know that between the time you were a student and governor you were in the state legislature, as you said a little earlier. As I figure it, you were in the state legislature when Dr. J.A.C. Chandler was building up William and Mary.

Tuck: That's right.

Williams: I wondered what was the appeal <sup>that Dr. Chandler</sup> could put to the General Assembly that influenced it to give him so much to build up William and Mary?

Tuck: <sup>It was the historic part of it and the fact that a</sup> great many teachers were being turned out there, and there was a great need for an addition to the teaching force of the state. I believe the people of Virginia generally and certainly the members of the General Assembly have been interested in enhancing education <sup>theme</sup> in Virginia. I think that was the <sup>one</sup> that he relied on mostly: the history of the college and the contribution it had made and was making to public education in Virginia. Then he was a driver--a very attractive man who knew his way and knew who had the power and who could influence others. If he couldn't influence someone directly he knew someone who could. He knew how to operate, in

other words. He was <sup>not well</sup> a very fine man <sup>who</sup> understood <sup>people and knew the approach.</sup> ~~understood people and knew the approach.~~  
~~was for the people and knew the approach.~~  
~~was a member of the~~  
~~committee of the~~

Yes, I was in the legislature; I was elected in 1924. Then I was elected to the state senate in 1931 and went on the finance committee; I was on the committee that made up these appropriations. I remember seeing him come before our committee many times. He had an appeal that you just couldn't turn down. It turned out to be the right thing to do to develop the college.

I reckon that William and Mary's had as much to do with the enhancement of education in Virginia--if not more so--than any other college in Virginia.

Williams: I'm still wondering about Dr. Chandler. Would he come to Richmond and talk to the legislators he knew or the William and Mary men in the legislature. . .

Tuck: Well, my recollection is that we would have a formal hearing before the committee, and he would of course talk to individuals if he knew them.

Williams: Of course, he had been Richmond superintendent of schools, so he knew his way around Richmond, probably.

Tuck: That's right. In fact, he taught school for a year or two over in Halifax, <sup>about the turn of the century,</sup> He was a mighty fine man. I was in school with his son, Herbert.

Tuck: If I had stayed there a hundred years I don't think I could have gotten a degree. There were certain things I just couldn't learn. I heard later on (when I was governor) that someone proposed me for <sup>Democrat</sup> Phi Beta Kappa; they looked up my records and decided that just wouldn't do at all. They did give me an honorary doctorate.

I think they have a program down there of giving honorary degrees to all the <sup>[Virginia]</sup> governors. The day I got mine I was in rather distinguished--or undistinguished--company (I don't know which). <sup>They had President Truman and</sup> Prime Minister Mackenzie King of Canada, General Montgomery, head of the army in England, and <sup>me to</sup> get our degrees. I'm proud of it. If I did earn it, <sup>^ which I don't</sup> it was after I left there; I never would have gotten one through my accomplishments <sup>#</sup>scholastically.

During my term as governor I tried to do everything I could to help William and Mary; of course, I had to bear in mind the needs of other schools, such as the University of Virginia, Mary Washington College, V.P.I., V.M.I., and not show too much partiality to William and Mary just because I went there. But I tried to help (as much as I could honorably do so), to look out for their needs, to meet their requests and requirements.

I'm a great admirer of Dr. Paschall; I'm acquainted slightly with Dr. Graves. Dr. Paschall added as his vice-president Carter Lowance, who was brought into state service in the governor's office during my term. He and I are bosom friends, and I'm very close to Carter Lowance.

One of Dr. Paschall's predecessors was Dr. Pomfret. When I came into office in January 1946, the boys <sup>coming back from military service</sup> didn't have anywhere to go to ~~school~~ <sup>College</sup>. Everybody was dying of what I call the "cants!" So I sent for Dr. Pomfret and Charlie Duke, and they came up there, and I said, "Now you gentlemen are educators; what can you do about this? We've got to let these soldiers go to school." They said, "We can take them all <sup>#</sup> if we can have the naval barracks down there in Norfolk [St. Helena's]."

We'll make that an extension of William and Mary."

And they did. We just advertised that anybody that wanted to go to college and couldn't get into the college of their choice <sup>could go there,</sup> ~~that they'd take them.~~

I was particularly impressed with Dr. Pomfret and Charlie Duke at their ability to open up this new college. They must have had 6,000 students there.

Then they got other colleges to agree to accept them <sup>they'd been there</sup> after one or two years. In that way I became quite impressed with William and Mary and their ability to get things done.

Williams: Had this been an idea of Charlie Duke's and Dr.

Pomfret's?

Tuck: Well, I think they were the ones that <sup>had</sup> the idea about what to do. I called <sup>on</sup> them because <sup>I</sup> knew they had the ability to do whatever was necessary to be done. I've forgotten how the details were worked out, but it worked out like a charm for everybody. It was what was needed at the time and satisfied the need. People quit squawking, anyhow.

Then I served on the Board of Visitors at William and Mary for six months or a year after my term was over [as governor]. Governor Battle appointed me. It was about that time that I ran for congress, and I thought I ought to get off. But I enjoyed those meetings, going back to the old college. Of course, it was never the same as it was when I was there--I believe it was O. Henry who said there's no such thing as going back home.

Williams: You mentioned working with Dr. Pomfret. What kind of a person did you find Dr. Pomfret to be?

Tuck: He was a very nice, scholarly gentleman. I think Charlie Duke was his driving force to get things done. But there was never a nicer gentleman than Dr. Pomfret--or a man of great ability and dignity and character. But I doubt he was the doer that Charlie Duke was. Charlie Duke was the <sup>bursar or</sup> business manager of the college. He [Pomfret] was determined, I believe, to keep everything on a high plane. He made that impression on me.

Williams: Now, Charlie Duke came up and worked for the state government while you were governor, didn't he? You must have known Mr. Duke pretty well.

Tuck: Yes, I had known him for a good many years; I knew his father. (His father was treasurer of Norfolk County.) <sup>Charlie</sup> impressed me so with St. Helena's that when we reorganized the state government I got him to come up there and assist us in the reorganization. He did a fairly good job up there.

Williams: What did you see as Mr. Duke's particular strengths? He's a person who often comes up in conversations with people in this project.

Tuck: Well, he was a man of boundless energy and of superb intellect and <sup>with</sup> a good personality. He knew how to get things done and make things move. He was quite an attractive fellow.

Williams: He was at William and Mary for a very long time.

Tuck: I knew him only as bursar at William and Mary. If I knew him before that I don't remember it.

○ Any other questions?

Williams: Governor Darden told me to ask you (he was unclear on this) about one time when you got awfully upset about some sort of a rump faculty meeting at William and Mary and to ask you about that. That was all he could tell me. I think it was while you were governor.

Do you know what he was talking about?

Tuck: What I think <sup>what</sup> he was alluding to was during the Pomfret term, while my predecessor, Mr. Darden, was chancellor, the students organized a parade. What they were fussing about, I don't know. They had signs saying, "Darden's Garden." I read about it in the paper. Dr. Pomfret was out of town, I reckon. It just disturbed me to think of the students carrying on in any such fashion as that. It was Saturday morning, and I sat down and wrote a great long telegram in my own handwriting and sent it to Dr. Pomfret (I released it to the newspaper at the same time) in which I stated to him that I couldn't understand the students carrying on in any such fashion alien to anything that existed at William and Mary when I was there. It was a state college and belonged to the people of Virginia, and as chief executive I would insist that he break it up and restore order there. If there were any students there who were unwilling to obey the rules of the college, then he should send them on home. I stated in pretty plain language that if they stayed at William and Mary they'd have to cut that out.

If he needed help we'd give him the help. When that came out in the newspaper, it stopped. I imagine that was what it was <sup>[London was talking about]</sup>. What they were fussing about, I don't know, but they had pictures of them parading around the President's House like labor unions. I wrote that telegram over three or four times and gave it out to the press at the same time as I sent it, which is not exactly customary. I wanted it to reach the students as soon as possible and make it known that I was behind the president of the college and that we were going to keep order--it was a state college, and as chief executive of the state we ~~we~~ I demanded order there on the campus. Of course, now I don't guess you could do anything like that.

Tuck: I haven't given you much information today; I didn't have much to impart. But I can say this: it's a great honor to have sat at the knee of the five men-- Dr. Hall, Dr. Calhoun, Dr. Stubbs, Dr. Garrett, and Dr. Tyler. (There were two others from the old group who were dead or had moved away--I don't know. )

I cherish the privilege. One of them was the son of a president of the United States, He was proud of his father, as he should have been. The boys used to tease him; they'd say undoubtedly he was the best president. I didn't know enough about the presidents at that time to pass judgment on it, but I have concluded after reading about the pres-  
that  
idents before Nixon and Harding, two of the most  
^  
maligned presidents were John Tyler and Andrew Johnson. Both of them were firm believers in the Union, they had courage and stuck to their views --which is what we need today.