

H. MASON SIZEMORE

Now assistant managing editor of the Seattle Times, H. Mason Sizemore was involved in a journalistic tempest known as "the Blue Room incident" while editor of the college's student newspaper, the Flat Hat, his senior year (1962-1963). In question was an editorial taking then president Davis Y. Paschall to task for his refusal to allow a communist speaker on campus. President Paschall reacted to the editorial by convening the staff in the Blue Room of the Wren Building, and Mr. Sizemore's view of the situation is contained in the following pages. (For additional information see the October 1962 and the November 15, 1963, Flat Hats.)

Because of the travel distance involved questions were mailed to Mr. Sizemore, and he returned the typed answers with the provision that they will not be opened during Dr. Paschall's lifetime so as to spare him any embarrassment.

- 1 What would you say was the main concern of W&M students in the early '60s? Jobs after graduation? Social life? Grades?
- 2 How involved or interested were students in national issues such as the 1960 election, civil rights, the Cuban missile crisis?
- 3 What kind of attitude did the students have about W&M and their role here?
- 4 In 1960, how did students receive the new president?
 - Was there an observable change from Chandler?
 - Was Dr. Paschall accessible to students in early years?
 - Did you see any change in the student attitude toward Paschall by 1963?
- 5 Did the system of the Colleges of William and Mary (either the establishment or the separation) have any bearing on the students at W&M, and if so, in what ways?

Were the students of the early '60s at all upset over social restrictions the way the students would be in the later '60s? What were the "oppressive policies toward student activities and self-expression" that were creating the "stultified, apathetic atmosphere which hangs over the campus," as charged by the 1962 Flat Hat?
- 7 How deep was the feeling among the students about expansion? This shows up frequently in the FH.
- 8 What made the Flat Hat the good paper it was in the early '60s?
- 9 Was the FH leading or was it reflecting student opinion in the early '60s?
- 10 Prior to the Blue Room incident was there any administrative control of the paper?
 - What was the role of faculty advisors? How active were they?
 - Would your answer to the previous two questions be the same for the period after the Blue Room?
- 11 Did the students see the communist speaker issue as a real issue of academic freedom or was it something deeper?
- 12 Was there disagreement on the editorial board about the editorial? If so, on what grounds?

- 13 Was there any thought of not running the editorial after the conversation with Paschall and Lambert?
- 14 Was there pressure to retract the editorial in the next issue?
- 15 Was Paschall's reaction typical? Did he see it simply as a challenge to his authority? What did he object to: the speaker or the questioning of the administration? What was his explanation in the Blue Room?
- 16 Did many students know of the incident?
- 17 What was there in the nature of the Blue Room incident that blew it out of proportion, as you have indicated was the case?
- 18 Had there not been a communist speaker issue, would there have been another catalyst?
- 19 Was this the end of Paschall's honeymoon with the students?
- 20 Do you view the whole situation differently now than you did in the fall of 1962?
- 21 As a result of the Blue Room or perhaps other factors was the accessibility of the administration (and the president specifically) to the students as a whole or to the FH changed?
-Were students' attitudes changed?
- 22 What effect did the Blue Room incident have on the editorials or the staff of the FH as long as you were on it? Did it have an effect on the paper in succeeding years?
- 23 Was it true, as the Nov. 15, 1963, FH said in an editorial note to the article by Bruce Potter, that failure to understand the academic freedom controversy was failure to understand William and Mary? Why or why not?

1. I don't recall an overriding concern in the early '60s. Jobs were easy to get. Grades, while a concern, didn't mean too much since anyone could get a good job with a diploma. There was, however, the beginning of a social-issues awareness. The students were very concerned over the racial clashes at Ole Miss. There was interest in being informed on many issues, including controversial issues.

2. As on any campus, the level of interest in outside events varied. However, I detected much interest in the civil-rights movement and the unrest that it was bringing. It was in the commenting on civil rights, politics and other major issues that The Flat Hat had its rocky time with the college administration. If the issues had been just on a theory level, all would have been peachy, I suspect. But when the civil-rights and free-speech issues were discussed in light on local conditions, the administration heat on the newspaper increased.

3. Generally, W&M students were proud to be attending the college. But most of us felt that our role was rather passive. Davis Paschall appeared to be a very gentle, loving man. But it was rather clear that he was a product of a racist upbringing and he wasn't about to let any student unrest on the racial issue or any other issue upset the college's source of money--the State Legislature.

4. Yes, Paschall was a pleasant change from Chandler. Chandler had been withdrawn and unavailable to students. Paschall made a big effort to be open to students. But that openness changed dramatically whenever Paschall disagreed with a student or a group of students. I felt there was a very definite mean streak in the man--he did not forgive or forget any student who disagreed with him.

5. I'm sure many students were unaware or only vaguely aware that there were other parts to the W&M system. I never saw how the other parts had any effect on the Williamsburg campus except when Paschall was able to move some administrator out of the main campus and into one of the smaller institutions.

6. I don't have a set of 1962 Flat Hats available, so I don't know ^{what} the quote refers to. Most students pretty well accepted the social restrictions. The restrictions were on the women, not the men.

7. I had the impression that those students who cared at all about the future of the college preferred that the college remain small. Many of us were there because it was a small college, where one did not get lost in the masses. I can't gauge how deeply the feeling was held generally. It was a popular cause among Flat Hat-types.

8. The Flat Hat was a good paper for several reasons. It covered the news of the college thoroughly, serving as an effective means of keeping the college community informed. It was run by people who were dedicated to putting out a good paper. We spent countless hours each week on the paper. Those of us involved on the paper were generally aware of the broader problems of the day--that was reflected in articles on the Ole Miss riots, the controversial speakers on other state campuses, etc. And those of us on the paper had a conscience which was much more up to date than that held by the ~~presidents~~ presidents of the college, particularly Davis Y. Paschall, whose red-neck upbringing did not leave him in his later years. It was that conscience which brought us ~~in~~ in conflict with Paschall and which helped to make the paper significant.

9. I think the Flat Hat was leading student opinion on the William and Mary campus. On other campuses in the country, student opinion was much more up to date than it was at W&M. Many of our students were of the same background as Paschall. Hence, we were not the most open, informed, forward-looking student body around.

10. No. We had an English professor who supposedly was the Flat Hat adviser. He did very ~~little~~ little. Sometimes he would critique the paper after it had been published. The students ran the paper themselves--we knew more about journalism than anyone who attempted to advise us. The only administrative check was on the money end--we had to account for funds in an orderly fashion. But that was never any problem. Yes, the answers would be basically same after the Blue Room incident. The financial advice stayed the same. We did not get a faculty adviser. And Paschall could not control the newspaper himself--all he got out of the Blue Room affair was ~~an insincere retraction~~ an insincere retraction of sorts. He also showed his true colors to many on the staff for the first time. None of it came as a ~~great~~ great surprise to me. I had sat in his office while he had complained to me about a young professor who had said things with which Paschall did not agree. Paschall stroked his chin and told me, in reference to Peter Derkes, "See that beard? The man is a nut! The man is a nut!" Paschall equated one's grooming somehow to intelligence. He could not tolerate a difference of opinion.

11. I don't know. There were some who saw the communist-speaker dispute as a matter of academic freedom. There were others who saw it ~~as~~ as a typical move by Paschall to shield the college from anything adverse which might be used against him when he sought money at the next session of the General Assembly. I'm sure there were many who ^{were} glad that a communist had been denied a forum on the campus.

12. I don't recall disagreement within the staff over the editorial. If there had been any before it was written, there was none after Paschall did his childish act in the Blue Room. That incident united the staff. There was a rededication.

13. This question confuses me. I assume you ~~refer~~ refer to the editorial accusing Paschall of abridging academic freedom. That ran without any consultation with Paschall or Lambert. I ran it without any reservations. The conversations with Paschall and Lambert came after the editorial was printed and Paschall went into a rage.

14. The whole purpose of the Blue ~~Room~~ Room meeting was to browbeat and threaten us to the point that we would apologize for the academic-freedom editorial. As I recall, we did run something which purported to be a retraction. But a careful reading of it would have revealed a sneering tone, I am sure.

15. Yes, Paschall did not tolerate disagreement. I know of other similar reactions. But none quite so public as the Blue Room affair. I can't read his mind about his real objection. There were, I believe, ~~several~~ several issues involved. He truly believed, I think, that bringing a communist onto the campus would taint the college. He also feared criticism from state legislators. He could not tolerate having been accused in print of abridging academic freedom. I don't ~~what his explanation~~ recall exactly what he said in the Blue Room. He told us that we had overstepped the bounds of good taste, that we had no right to print such things about the president of the college, that we had not acted like gentlemen.

16. I don't know how many students knew of the incident. I wasn't nearly as concerned about it as some of the others who had been present. I understood how Paschall's mind worked on such things, and I knew that I could get around him in the future. But some of the editors felt truly insulted by his treatment. In fact, several months later we had a "return to the Blue Room," in which Dean Lambert arranged to have all the original cast present in the Brafferton so we who had been "wronged" could have our day in court. I felt obligated to set the record straight with Paschall--in fact, Lambert congratulated me afterward on my presentation. One editor, Pete Crow, also responded to Paschall's attack. As I recall, we were the only ones who spoke at the Brafferton meeting. (A sidelight--Jerry Van Voorhis, who was a former Flat Hat editor and at that time the student-body president, had been present at the Blue Room meeting. Somehow, he failed to show up for the Brafferton meeting. We on the newspaper staff suspected that he had no stomach for seeing his sorry part in the dispute brought out before Paschall. Van Voorhis had supported us on the staff until Paschall came down on us. It was no surprise to me when Van Voorhis later became an assistant to the president of the college.)

17. What blew the Blue Room incident out of proportion? I tended to take it in stride. Paschall's actions didn't surprise me. But, as I have mentioned, others on the staff were truly offended by his actions. And they did not forgive the man. This group continually sought ways to bring the whole sorry mess out into the open. A check of the Flat Hat in late 1963 or early 1964 should show a full-page retelling of the Blue Room story from this group's point of view. It was this kind of feeling which lingered much past the incident itself.

18. Probably. I don't think the newspaper could have survived a year without somehow offending Paschall.

19. Paschall's honeymoon? I can't say when it really ended. I think this incident contributed to the ending of it. The following year the racial issue further strained his relationship with the students.

20. Not really. I still view the Blue Room incident as the irrational action of an enraged man. That was my view then. Another sidelight--my family and I were in Williamsburg this summer, and I took my two young kids by the Blue Room during a Wren Building tour. It was amusing to hear the guide tell how the college elders of old had disciplined students in the Blue Room. I guess Paschall was just trying to ~~follow~~ follow another of his cherished traditions. I was disappointed on my revisit to the Blue Room--the place is green.

21. Yes, Paschall cut me off, and most of the other newspaper staff members, after the Blue Room incident. Fortunately, Dean Lambert saw the folly of Paschall's actions and kept the avenues of communication open to the college administration. I don't know how Paschall's actions affected the attitudes of the students in general. I have already talked about how ~~those actions~~ affected the staff of the newspaper.

22. Paschall's actions caused an intensified effort on the part of the newspaper staff to show him that we were independent of his control. Later ~~editorials~~ editorials showed that. We even let that feeling creep into the news columns by featuring a series of articles on outstanding young professors, most of whom were on Paschall's dirt list. I know the next year's staff had much the same relationship with Paschall. I can't ~~say~~ say any other year's staff.

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23. The November 15, 1963, Flat Hat article you mention must be the rehash of the Blue Room incident I mentioned earlier. That was the article done after I had left the college. I don't know what Bruce meant in his editor's note. I never viewed the clash with ~~the~~ Paschall to be some big philosophical dispute involving the whole college. It was a clash between a newspaper staff and a reactionary college president. Of course, Paschall controlled much of the college community. But I never looked on him as the college. He was too narrow-minded to have been given that honor.