

LESLIE CHEEK, Jr.

Leslie Cheek, Jr., is best known in Virginia as the retired director of the Virginia Museum in Richmond. Previous to his appointment to that post in 1948, he edited an architectural magazine, headed the Baltimore Museum, and from 1935 to 1939 taught history of art and architecture at William and Mary. During that time he reinstated the fine arts department at the college (he had been appointed as a member of the history department), obtained and refurbished the old Taliaferro Hall, and served as department chairman. Also, he was responsible for much of the decorating for the legendary Christmas and June balls in the late 1930s. He describes all of these duties in the following interview, taped at his splendid home in Richmond.

Mr. Cheek made a number of additions (shown on the transcript in red) to smooth over what he felt to be "roughness." Actually the conversation with him was one of the most enjoyable of the series.



INDEX SHEET

Interviewee Leslie Cheek, Jr.

Date of interview May 11, 1976

Place 4703 Pocahontas Ave., Richmond, Va.

Interviewer Emily Williams

Session number 1

Length of tape 70 mins.

Contents:

Approximate time:

first encounter with Williamsburg	3 mins.
art and architectural training	1 min.
appointment to William and Mary	6 mins.
early teaching career	10 mins.
reinstating fine arts department	
- suggestion to J.S. Bryan	2 mins.
- plans for old Taliaferro Hall	2 mins.
- philosophy of	1 min.
- design of building (cont'd.)	2 mins.
- faculty for department	3 mins.
- renovation of Mr. Beta Kappa stage, other	3 mins.
charges in WPA Theatre	
- faculty (cont'd.)	1 min.
- departmental library	5 mins.
- financing	1 min.
- students	4 mins.
later history of fine arts department	2 mins.
art exhibitions in old Mr. Beta Kappa Hall	1 min.
appointment as director of Baltimore Museum	2 mins.
resignation of faculty to new fine arts dept.	
- to building	5 mins.
- to program	2 mins.
- to fine arts projects	7 mins.
(June Ball, Christmas party)	
(commencement)	
summary	4 mins.

See back of sheet for names and places mentioned in interview

Leslie Cheek, Jr.

May 11, 1976

Richmond, Virginia

Williams: Now I know that you were a young man out of Harvard and Yale. What was it that attracted you to William and Mary there in the mid-1930s?

Cheek: It was purely an accident. Actually I had seen William and Mary when I had come with my mother during spring vacation when I was in architectural school at Yale. to look at the Restoration, which was then en route. They had just restored the Wren Building (they being Colonial Williamsburg)--they had more or less put the Wren Building back as it appeared in a drawing or print. There weren't too many things to see in the Restoration in those days; the Palace wasn't even open. You could wander through the Capitol and George Wythe's house. The Raleigh Tavern was actually putting people up in it; there are now some bedrooms upstairs still (they are now shown messed up, as if they hadn't been^{*} made up during the day, which I think is taking realism a bit far). Anyway, the Raleigh Tavern was putting people up; you ate in a back room. It had a kitchen and functioned like a small hotel. The new Inn was just a field. The inn where most people stayed (the Raleigh Tavern had a very small capacity;

it was very hard to get to stay there) was where Chowning's Tavern is now. It was a white, wooden building, which ^[Colonial] Williamsburg just took over and ran.

To go back--I saw William and Mary for the first time as a part of this tour. I admired the President's House and the Brafferton and the Wren Building; I thought they were beautiful (they still are). I didn't have any idea I'd be employed there. So to answer your question how I got there: I had seen the college on this trip while I was in architectural school. I graduated first from Harvard in 1931 as a history of art major; (thank goodness I did that), never knowing I would be in the museum racket or teach history of art. Then I told my father I thought I wanted to become an architect. He investigated to find out what was the best architectural school, which his friends told him was Yale, so I went to Yale from 1931 to 1935.

By that time the depression had hit the building industry; it was a very bad time. 1929 was just the beginning of the depression. ^{Near the end of} So [^] my senior year at Yale (1935) I made the round of all the architects' offices in New York, and none of them had any jobs. So in the summer of '35, I took a tour through the South painting watercolors of historic buildings. ^{thought I} I was going to be a southern architect (I [^] was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee). I was

working my way up the coast; I began in South Carolina, and I'd gotten as far as Williamsburg, making watercolors. (I've given away most of those, but I still have some left)

One afternoon--it was in August, I guess-- I was making a watercolor at the Capitol. And the usual voice over your shoulder when you sit on a stool and paint watercolors said, "You do that very well. Where did you learn?" (Usually the questions were: "What are you doing now, and why are you making all those scratches with the pencil?" "When are you going to put the color on?") Anyway, I looked up to see whom ~~made~~ this intelligent ~~comment~~, and it turned out to be James Cogar, who was the first curator of the Restoration. He was in charge of furnishings and maintenance of the buildings; ^{later} ~~then~~ he was in charge of costumes when they first put everybody in costume (the hostesses weren't originally in costumes). Anyway, Cogar told me in the conversation that he had graduated from Yale Architectural School--no, he hadn't graduated; he had gotten within a year of graduating and had a bad case of t.b. and went out west to recover. He did recover, but the dean of the school said, "It's a little late for you to come back."

You couldn't get a job anyway. I'll recommend you as being well prepared for this curator's job in this new place called Williamsburg." So about two years prior to this Cogar had come ~~down~~ from Kentucky to become the first curator of Colonial Williamsburg. They gave him a house to live in that they had taken over; they hadn't restored it yet. He was unmarried-- still is unmarried, although my wife has worked very hard in trying to fix that; ~~it's hopeless~~. He brought a colored cook with him named Mary Eliza, and he was living in bachelor splendor (Mary Eliza was an excellent cook). He eventually ^{invited} ~~asked~~ me ^{to} ~~would~~ come have dinner with him that night. I said, "Sure."

He asked me during dinner what I was going to do, and I said I didn't know; I just hoped that somewhere I could get a job. The summer was coming to an end, and I was going on to paint in Maryland. I told him I didn't know what I was going to be doing the coming winter. "Well," he said, "we have a new president at William and Mary." (I'm not too sure how long Mr. Bryan had been here--six months, maybe a year.) "He's the publisher of the Richmond newspapers and was persuaded to become president against his own will. He's a very unusual man; he's well educated and hasn't risen

through the usual academic ranks to become president. He ~~just~~ brings us a fresh wind. He was saying to me the other night that the problem with going to William and Mary as ~~an~~ ^{stet} undergraduates ~~is that they~~ either think the Restoration is too wonderful, or they hate it, and that he wished some courses could be given ~~that~~ ^{which} could put the Restoration in perspective--where it came in American architecture and so on." So Cogar said to me, "Would you be interested in teaching that course?" And I said, "Sure, if they want to offer me the job. I never taught a course like that before, but I'll be delighted to try."

So I went on to Maryland, and Cogar spoke to Mr. Bryan, and in two or three weeks I got a letter saying Mr. Bryan wanted to see me and talk with me about this job if I would hurry back to Williamsburg. So I hurried back to Williamsburg to see Mr. Bryan. (Of course, he was a charming man; everyone loved Mr. Bryan. He had a great sense of humor.) He said just what I've said to you: "Would I be interested? And I said, "Certainly. Have you got any slides?" "Slides?" he said. And I said, "Yes, does the college have any collection of slides?at all?" Well, he had never heard of slides; of course; he was educated as a lawyer. So I said,

"I'll make the slides from things I take out of books."

(There was no source of slides in those days that you could write off to.) So eventually I was employed at a salary of \$1300 a year--called, I guess, an instructor in the history of architecture and assigned to the ~~History~~ Department. Soon after I arrived I became a paying guest of Cogar's--we had great fun. ^{Also,} ~~And~~ soon after I arrived I went to see Dr. Morton ^{, Head of the History Department,} to announce my presence. ~~As~~ ^{Li} ~~I told you,~~ Mr. Bryan had forgotten to tell Dr. Morton; gradually I realized this ^{by the way} Dr. Morton talked-- he didn't know anything about ^{the situation} ~~this~~. He must have wondered why in the world I showed up at all! I worked around to the subject (apparently Mr. Bryan had done this before; it wasn't the first time it had happened), and ~~as I~~ ~~told you,~~ Dr. Morton was kind and understanding and said what a capital idea, that history had always needed some talking about the visual side of it. He agreed with Mr. Bryan that students either tended to like too much or hate the Restoration, and he welcomed me into the ~~Department~~ and asked what could he do to help.

I said, "I don't have any slides, and it's almost impossible to talk about a visual subject without visual materials. I will need a camera that can photograph illustrations in books (it was probably against the copyright law, but who's going to care at William and Mary?). I won't make slides (because in those days it was more complicated). I will make opaque black and whites, and I will mount them on matte black cards of a standard size, which will go into (what they called in those days) a reflectorscope." (You put this picture in kind of a ~~slide~~ holder, and the light would be reflected on a mirror which ~~and~~ it threw images onto a screen. It was pale in comparison with today's slides, but you could teach with it.)

So Mr. Bryan found the money to buy the camera and the reflectorscope (and to modify it according to my designs because I designed the ~~slide~~ holder system). We then had to get one of the rooms in the history building; they didn't have any curtains--they didn't have anything, so it was impossible to darken the room. I didn't realize that until I got to the point that I was ready to give my first talk.

So we had to send to Richmond to get some opaque roll curtains (most curtains came translucent and didn't really darken rooms). But there was a place ^{in Richmond} ~~up here~~ that did make opaque curtains, which were very hard to get in those days. So the curtains came and were put in place, and my first lecture time ^{arrived} ~~came~~. I had about six weeks between being employed and beginning class. ^{My main problem the} ~~Most of my~~ first year was spent in keeping ahead of myself because I did all the darkroom work, ~~you see~~, I found the illustrations in books I could beg, borrow, or steal. I had to get many of the books myself, as a matter of fact. Dr. Swem in the library didn't have much of a collection on fine arts, you see--really, the college library in my field was practically nonexistent. I borrowed some books from the Restoration, which was about half-finished at that point, but ^{they} had started a library. With some hesitation they would lend me books for a night or two to photograph. I worked mainly at night because it was easy to get a dark place. I worked in my own room for awhile. Then I worked

in the Wren Building basement (there are some cavernous basements down there), photographing illustrations in books and washing the stuff and letting it dry and drymounting it. (You couldn't use regular glue because the heat of the reflectorscope would make ^{the photographs} ~~it~~ curl.) I didn't have a press. But the trouble with drymounting is that once you stick something down it's impossible to get it up. Some of my first slides were slightly cockeyed, which annoyed me, but to the students who had never seen illustrated lectures it was all new. It seems impossible to realize it--that students had never been to illustrated lectures of any type, anywhere, in their lives. It seems so obvious now, but it was very much of a new thing.

The first year I gave only this one course. Fortunately I ~~didn't have given~~ didn't have given any others because having to find the illustrations and photograph them and glue them down and so forth I really barely had time to keep ahead of myself. →

There were a few occasions where I purposely slowed down, ran a little bit longer, because I knew I didn't have the illustrations finished for the next *lecture* one. Anyway, the course went well. There were mostly history people in it, naturally, but gradually news of it spread around the college, and in the second half had considerably more people taking the course. (Also, the *College* catalog had come out, and they could read about it.) So towards the end of my first year there I was having dinner with Mr. Bryan; Mr. Bryan and I had become great friends. (As an aside, Mr. Bryan's wife came and went ^{mentally}. He was living in the President's House at William and Mary in those days, and Mrs. Bryan was in an asylum here in Richmond. She was alive and happy but not too clear some of the time. He knew she would be embarrassed to be down there, so she never came, and I never saw the lady until Mr. Bryan died.) So he was alone at night, and I often had dinner with him. I wasn't part of the faculty--well, I was part of the faculty, but I was so young and untrained; it was easier to have me in than some of the professors who had wives.

Mr. Bryan and I were talking one night in the spring of '36, and he asked me how I liked the work. I said, "Fine," Dr. Morton had been so nice to work for. But I said, "Mr. Bryan, you really should have a department of fine arts because you did have Jefferson as a former student, who is probably the greatest of the American people in the arts. You have a tradition here in Williamsburg because of the Restoration. Had you ever thought of setting up a separate department devoted just to architecture, painting, sculpture, drama, and music... all, the arts, you see, in one department?"

No, he said he hadn't, but it sounded like a very good idea. [¶] So I talked to him about it for two or three nights. "But," he said, "where are we going to put it?" I told him I didn't know; it would have to have a separate building because of the particular needs for all ^{the} ~~these~~ illustrated lectures. "Well," he said, "you look around and maybe we can take some old building and fix it up."

¶ So I cased the campus, and on the road to James-
 town was an old building that wasn't being used
 (it's now been torn down)--Taliaferro Hall. I
 said I could use it; I could fix it up. It was
 a Victorian structure; it was red brick with white
 trim. If I could take off the brackets and do
 a few other major interior changes, we could use
 it. It had a basement, a first floor, a second
 floor, and a third floor. I thought we could put
 the sculpture department ^{on} in the ^{first floor} ~~basement~~ (it was
~~kind of a subbasement~~), and where they made scenery
 and costumes could be on that same level. Then
 the second floor could be ^a lecture rooms; we could
 also have a faculty lunchroom and have students
 in (I'll tell you a little more about that in a
 minute), and my office could be on the second
 floor, along with the library. Then the third
 floor could be devoted to the painting studio~~s~~
 and the office for the man in charge of teaching
 history of ~~painting~~ and practice of painting.
 ¶
 ¶ The theory of the organization of the department was

We forgot to
 pick up on
 this. You
 can add this
 on the following
 page. Done →

Now, about the little faculty lunch room: all of the teachers donated a ~~modest~~ ^{small} sum for their noon-day meals - which were of the inexpensive ~~simple~~ "soup-salad-and dessert" type. This total also enabled us to employ + uniform a Negro cook-maid, who prepared the modest spread each day. There was a single round table with a few extra seats to be used by students invited as guests by their teachers - well ahead, so that there would be no ~~any~~ embarrassing situations. The extra seats also allowed the few who teachers to invite outsiders to meals, thus enhancing further the daily routine.

that each teacher would teach in the morning the theory of his particular field, then in the afternoons he would teach practical courses--how to paint, how to sculpt. There were no practical courses, and these ^{in architecture,} other practical courses did not carry any credit; if so, it was very little credit. The theory was that at the undergraduate level the best thing that we could do was to stay within the history of art framework. Though we would give courses to those who wanted to take them in painting and sculpture and scene design, they were ^{at most} ~~almost~~ amateurish. Now, ^{as you know} ~~you see~~, William and Mary is giving serious courses in drawing and painting, giving grades, and ^{one} you can graduate with a degree in art. In those days, ^{full practical} ~~this was~~ ^{we had} much more of an academic kind of an approach; although we had practical courses, they were in a sense thought of as a way for students ~~who wanted~~ to get their hands into a field to get the feel of it. You could not graduate in painting or sculpture; you had to graduate in history of a particular art.

\$ So that's the reason the building was organized both for studio work ^{with teach} and ~~for~~ professor's office, near where his particular studio was, but when he gave his lecture it was always an illustrated lecture, and he gave that up in the lecture room. ~~Now~~ The lecture room was completely blacked out; we didn't have air conditioning in those days, but we had fans that changed the air through louvers that kept the daylight out. We had a real projection room with two projectors by this time, so we didn't have to wait; we could put on one [slide] while we were changing the other one so that we could go much more quickly. The room was painted completely matte black, ^{and the floor} ~~it~~ was stepped up so one could see. All the chairs had arms upon which to write. There were down-lights in the ceiling so one could see to write, but the room was so dark that ~~we~~ ^{we} could also see the illustration on the screen. This was the first type of room ever done like that in the state. It was the first matte black room ever built at a college in Virginia -- and the first room that had little down lights that would light the ^{writing surface} ~~desks~~ but would not cast light on the screen. ^{It} By this time we began cutting up certain books ~~we~~ ^{we} ~~could buy books~~ that had beautiful color illustrations -- provided they weren't larger than 12" x 12" (that was our largest size). We would add more and more color as we could afford to buy, and more and more color illustrations were coming out. We were increasingly using color where we

could get it for these reflected images. ^{Adjacent to} ~~Beside~~ the library there was a separate room with huge shelves which had boxes on them that had these things in them with labels on them. Everything eventually had a number. ~~Everything~~ ^{as that} and was indexed, and one could look up what one wanted (for example, it was

indexed historically and one could look up Roman archi-
 tecture). ^{In instance,} There was a section on Greek architecture with which one could ^{put} a lecture (together) within that slide room. ^{Of course,} (There weren't any slides, but we called it the slide room.) The lecture, consisting of 50 slides, 50 pieces of ~~mat~~ ^{black} cardboard, ⁱⁿ would be this high, you see, because ~~there were~~ two sizes, 6" x 6" ~~size~~ and the 12" x 12", so we had two different sizes of drawers, and we had to look both in the big drawer and the little drawers. But we got around that. It was very well organized, and all the professors worked within the system very, ~~very~~ well. ^{For} ~~the~~ ^{Professors} mostly came from Yale, ^{who} I had known them at Yale. ^{one} The fellow that taught history of painting and how to draw and paint was named Leonard Haber, who has become quite a distinguished designer and now lives in New York. He came down, delighted to have the job, ^{in the Depression} and became the first head of that little section. He was his own boss, really; he was under me, but he didn't have anyone under him. The fellow who taught sculpture was named Edwin C. Rust, who later became the head of the Memphis Academy of Arts and made a tremendous success of that institution citywide. ^{He} and has just retired in ~~Memphis~~.

I taught the history of architecture, ^{but} and made no attempt
 to teach drawing ^{freehand} ~~and~~ ^{or} mechanical drawing because it was
 just too complicated for an undergraduate, I thought. It
 takes at least three years to learn to draw well from an
 architectural point of view; by that time ^{the students were} they ~~were~~ ready to
 graduate, ^{but} so they wouldn't have enough education to go out
 and get a job as an architect, ^{technical} so we decided long ago that
 we would not attempt any professional degrees -- it was all
^{of art} just history, as I said before.

Then, with the theatre, we already had on the campus Miss
 Althea Hunt, who is now dead. She had run what was called
 the William and Mary Theatre for years before I got there.
 Miss Hunt was a famous character on campus. ^{though really very kind, she} ~~she~~ looked like
 the Witch of Endor ^{with a specially} ~~she had a very~~ big nose. All the
 students were terrified of her, and I was slightly terrified
 of her at first.

I proposed to her that she become
 part of ^{our} this department ^{and give} by giving courses ~~over~~ in our Lec-
 ture Room. ^{also, was to continue to} She coached the plays; ^{not anything} she had about three
 or four productions per year. At first she didn't like the
 idea at all. I said that theatre is one of the arts, and we
 would be more powerful if we all worked together, because
 we hoped to bring in ^{one} some who would design scenery and cos-
 tumes and lighting. For the first time she would have
 scenery. ^{where she had} She had to do her own ^{setting previously} scenery. ^{with scenery} It was just ter-
 rible ~~what she used to do on~~ the old Phi Beta Kappa stage.

^{for a} had gotten a custom to

[That Phi Beta Kappa ^[building] burned down. It was ~~just an~~ ^{really only an} old platform stage, just a speaker's platform originally. ^{while} But I've only digressed on that?

about the second year of ~~this~~ ^{Department's existence,} thing I persuaded Mr. Bryan to allow

knock the ceiling ~~out~~ of the Phi Beta Kappa hall stage, which just had a plaster ceiling over ~~where~~ ^{to be knocked out, and} the speakers ~~were,~~ ^{were,} but

I discovered there was a lot of space ^{about} up in there, enough

to lift a whole set ^{somewhat} in the usual theatrical ~~manner,~~ ^{not}

the ~~usual,~~ ^{but somewhat} ~~usual,~~ but ^{truly} it wasn't really ~~like~~ ^{like} a ~~great~~ stage, but

not really like the Phi Beta Kappa stage ~~was~~. We got a semi-

stage ~~outs of this thing~~ by just knocking the plaster down

and putting ^{also} pulleys and counterweights ^{up} so we could lift ^{every} ~~props~~ ^{also} ~~somewhat up~~

We knocked down the side walls of this ^{Area} ~~speakers~~ ~~stage~~ ^{to conceal} thing so we had some off stage space, where we hung our drapes

~~so when we used it for speakers they could not stare into the~~

wings, ^{area,} We had the usual beige stuff then; we eventually

had blacks and other things. Then some foundation gave us

the money to buy lighting equipment, ^{really} quite good lighting

with dimmers

equipment, ^{\$} I hired from Yale a fellow to come down to

be the chief technician ^{to instruct in} ~~how to~~ build scenery and ^{using} lighting ^{by the name}

of ~~named~~ Harold Ross. Then I ^{employed} hired a young girl named Margo

Frankel who had ^{also} graduated from the Yale School of Drama, ~~as~~

had ~~ross~~. She was a specialist in costume design, ^{to teach} she ~~do~~

~~designed~~ ^{to design} costumes and ^{colleg} taught girls how to make them. I or

Haber designed most of the scenery, and it was built by Ross

and his gang. Overnight almost, what had been this hopeless

^{with costumes by Frankel}

^{platform stage} ^{became}
 kind of little ~~building theatre~~ ^{theatre} ~~had~~ what actually was a
 pretty good ~~stage~~, ^{as the} pretty good lighting equipment, with
 some pretty good scenery, and some pretty good costumes. Miss
 Hunt was ~~just~~ overwhelmed that ~~almost overnight~~, after years
 of just eking out ^{a life of} ~~this meagre~~ ^{factual} existence, here she was a
 kind of a Ziegfeld herself. She never really broke down
 and thanked me for having persuaded her to join the Department,
 but I heard that she told other people that it was a
 great turning point in her life. The theatre then
 boomed. She always had a small following, but the
 theatre of the college ^{now} became very popular and many ^{students} people
 went out for it. We had big crowds, etc., etc. So that
 brings in the theatre end.

In music, there was a Dr. Small who was head of music when
 I arrived. He was just himself. He was head of music; he
 got people to play in the band; ~~he~~ ^{he} led the small chamber
 ensemble. All of them played miserably. It was ~~just~~ excru-
 ciating to listen to the band. Nevertheless, Dr. Small re-
 presented one of the arts, so I persuaded ^{him} Small to join
 our faculty. He came over and gave his lectures on the
 history of music in our ~~lecture rooms~~. Our ~~lecture rooms~~ ^{as a consequence,}
^{was} were very busy. Something was going on every hour. For
 the first time on the campus there was an ~~art~~ Department;
 not only was there an ~~art~~ Department, but it included all
 (or more or less all) of the arts, which was an unusual idea
 at that time in Virginia or anywhere else in the South.

add
 for
 page 19

^{of history.}
 The University of Virginia had nothing comparable to this. Once we got really going we were head and shoulders above any other ~~Department~~ ^{the} of history of art in the state or any of the Southern states because they weren't organized as we ^{didn't have} were or ~~had~~ ^{we had} the equipment we had.

Going back to libraries, since Dr. Swem had such a poor collection of fine arts books, I persuaded the Carnegie Foundation ~~now I remember:~~ the General Education Board, a part of the Rockefeller Foundation, now gone out of business, gave the money for the stage, the lighting, and numerous things like that. ^{in fact,} The General Education Board helped with all of the theatre work. ~~The Carnegie Foundation~~ was still giving

away books and helping people with libraries and things like that. They don't do things like that anymore ~~either~~, but I got there just in time for a pretty good grant for buying books on the history of art. ^{so} I made out my own list of books on the history of art from ~~existing~~ ^{various} lists, and the Carnegie Foundation presented ~~quite~~ a considerable amount of money, and ^{quite a number of} ~~an enormous number~~ of books came down.

Dr. Swem said, of course, they would be in the College Library. I said ~~no~~ I didn't think so; ^{that} we had planned ^{special} a room for them. ~~that~~ and I thought it would be much better to have them as a departmental library, ^{since} they would be more effective than if they ~~just~~ got lost among all the other ^{college} books. I said, "you ^{to} (Dr. Swem) ^{large request} can have cards made, of course, so that ^{Department} anybody will find our books listed in your library, but ~~the~~ will have

~~these~~ ^{interesting} persons

to walk across the campus (the library was diagonally
 across from Taliaferro Hall) to look at the books, be-
 cause we don't ~~lend books out~~ " At that point we
^{lend books} never did but sometime later we did to students overnight, ^{handwritten}
^{we were} not officially a lending service. Dr. Swem didn't
^{all this} take ~~that~~ very well.

He was then quite an important person on
 campus, and ~~even then~~ he was getting along in years, but ^{he was}
 a brilliant man and a wonderful librarian. He did a lot for
 the library, ^{and} The new ^{College} library is named for him, ^{properly,} Anyway, he
 didn't like this and said so. "Well," I said, "I got the books,
 and it's going to be between you and me, and I don't want
 them to come over to the library." Then he went to see Mr.
 Bryan. ~~It's the only real run-in I've ever had at all.~~ He
 went to see Mr. Bryan, and Mr. Bryan ~~told him the same thing.~~
 (~~I didn't know he was going to see Mr. Bryan.~~) Mr. Bryan said,
 "Well, now, Mr. Cheek went to New York and got those books.
 He wants to put them over there, ^{in the renovated Fine Arts Building, which is} ~~He has~~ a nice place to
 handle them. He's made a good proposition to you, ~~(because~~
~~Dr. Swem told him the truth apparently).~~ He said, "If I were
 you I would just relax. Someday they'll get so many fine
 arts books that they will have to come over to the library,
 but for the time being they fit very nicely in this little
 room. If I were you I just wouldn't make any scene over it
 right now." So Dr. Swem gave up, and as long as I was at
 William and Mary the Fine Arts library was in Taliaferro

Hall on the second floor. It was quite a handsome room, with special furniture and special tables. (~~It was a room about as big as that one and this one, too.~~) It was very popular with the students because it had personality, ~~it had a~~ ^{and} carpet on the floor and had all kinds of things ~~they~~ ^{students} had never seen before. We ~~had~~ ^{made} fresh flowers by the windows in ~~window~~ boxes and a lot of new things from the point of view of ~~organizing~~ ^{organizing} a teaching facility ~~that~~ ^{which} had a ~~such~~ ^{more} homelike elegance about it. ~~It had~~ ^{special} lighting, ~~etc.~~ ^{fine books} So the library was ^{muchly} used. Of course, ~~The children~~ ^{students} were assigned homework in those books to study, and since ~~the books~~ ^{to them} they couldn't ~~take them out~~ ^{students} they ended up studying there, ~~with the result~~ ^{that} so almost every night and every afternoon the library was jammed with people studying, reading, and keeping up with their courses. ~~the Fine Arts Department~~ ^{Not only was} an unusual thing to have from the beginning, but it ~~took itself seriously.~~ ^{The} courses were not the "pipe courses", so-called; they weren't easy, ^{and} every now and then somebody did flunk. ^{Then} We gradually gained the respect, I think, of the rest of the faculty.

[#] To digress a little bit on the faculty while all this was happening: To some extent, Mr. Bryan and I started ~~this~~ ^{the Fine Arts Dept.} ~~whole thing.~~ Mr. Bryan dipped into his own pocket, I'm sure, to help ~~fix~~ ^{uncover} the building, ^{or} I never knew where the money came from. I suppose we spent twenty to twenty-five thousand dollars on fixing up the ~~building~~ ^{structure}, which in those days you

could do ^{though} you couldn't do anything ^{like it} today for twenty-five thousand dollars. Everybody was out of work; you could get carpenters for nothing; anybody would build anything. ~~For~~ ^{then who}

~~had~~ people begging for jobs. The college had a good building superintendent who was kind of a semi contractor himself.

He superintended the work, ^{and} I did all of the designing. I ~~think~~

Mr. Bryan quietly put the ~~twenty-five thousand dollars in~~. I

have never known, but I think that is where the money came

from because I ~~would~~ ^{had to} go personally to the bursar named Duke -

Charlie Duke, a great big, frightening man. I ~~had to~~ ^{to} go ask

~~Duke~~ for the money. Duke would then disappear, and I think ^{he} ~~went~~

~~off~~ into Mr. Bryan's office ^{and} ask him where the money was to

come from. Mr. Bryan would probably tell him he would supply

it. ^{But} The money came to do ^{the work} ~~that~~, unbeknownst to everybody, ac-

tually--even to me. I think it was due to Mr. Bryan. ^{the} ^{For his report} Anyway,

within two years we had ~~this whole thing~~ ^{on in} going with what had

been just an old, decrepit building before, with plenty of

students, ^{and} bright students ^{there were really no} ~~they weren't~~ the dull ones.

The girls were the smartest girls on the campus, and the

prettiest, I always thought), and

we ~~got~~ ^{got a chance to}

more and more football players because we had such pretty

girls. When our first football player showed up I told

him that I was glad he could take some courses in the his-

tory of art but not to labor under the idea that it was

easy. ^{But} Even though he was the captain of the team he would

be treated like everybody else, ^{but} and if he failed he would just

be failed, and I did not want any coaches coming over and crying on my shoulder. He said he thoroughly understood, and he did very well. In fact, the boys did remarkably well, considering their backgrounds.

To digress a little bit: ^[on the students] William and Mary at that time had a great difference (in my estimation) between the character of the boys on the campus and the character of the girls.

You see, William and Mary at that time was ^{then} one of the few ^{in the South} ~~colleged~~ colleges of any distinction at all, and the burgeoning Restoration made it seem a nice place for a girl to live -- a lovely little town, much more charming than it is now. In those days it was a small town and the Restoration hadn't become so enormous. There wasn't any beer factory nearby,

~~or all this other stuff that's happening.~~ Girls coming from good families in the ^{to small} South were encouraged by their families ~~to go to William and Mary.~~ ^{There} There were many, many more men's colleges in the South than there were girl's colleges, so what naturally happened was that the admissions people took the best they could get. They had ~~much~~ better girls applying with background -- educational and cultural background -- than they had boys, so they would take the best they could get. ~~So gradually~~ ^{real} There was a ~~great~~ difference that I noticed (but I didn't talk about it, naturally) between the character of the average girl at the college and the character of the average man. Some of the girls had some family background in art, so they naturally gravitated our way. The

boys were attracted to the ~~art~~ ^{fine arts} Department, not at all because they thought of art, but because they knew that these very good-looking, smart girls were majoring in the history of art. (Our brightest students were certainly the girls always, this difference worried

Mr. Bryan, the president, incidentally, ^{He} used to talk about ^{to me} this problem ~~and~~ it was hard to talk about -- of how to

upgrade the character of the men and take them up to the standard of the women. ^{at Yonkers, in 1939, after four years,} I left in 1939. ~~I did all this in~~

~~four years.~~ I went on and became director of the Baltimore Museum in ~~1939~~ and ~~left~~ the whole faculty ^{of the Fine Arts Department remained} there, and Ted Rust, who ~~was~~ head of sculpture, became head of the Department and

ran it for a long, long time in the same way right up until World War II. Then after World War II the Department grew

and moved to other quarters and ~~is~~ ^{to become} what it is now. ~~It goes with another~~ right back to us. ^{structure for the Fine Arts -} they have a building of their own now,

a huge, kind of characterless building (in my estimation). ~~Is Thorne~~ Thorne still there? ^{still there?}

Williams: He retired last year.

Cheek: Thorne was head of the ^{played} Department for years and golf regularly and taught occasionally, I got the impression. Anyway, the faculty has grown, and it's become rather academic,

the kind of zip and polish, ~~kind of the pizzazz that~~ ^{which naturally} came, with something new has naturally faded. ^{has} It's become like every other ~~art~~ Department in the State now, and in the ^S south, ^{to} The old character has somewhat faded.

How did he propose to do it?

to a certain extent the present ~~art~~ department is a vague
 copy, you might say, of the original. I haven't kept up
 too thoroughly but they all admit that ^{sense} ~~this~~ was the be-
 ginning of the ~~Department~~. Then, as I said, our the-
 atre productions became the thing for everybody to see and ^{for}
 everybody ^{to try} ~~tried~~ to get in, ~~that could get in~~. We did Gilbert
 and Sullivan every year, wonderful productions. Some of our
 actors went off to become ~~good~~ actors elsewhere in the pro-
 fessional world. Then we did exhibitions. next to it
~~You see, the Old Phi Beta Kappa Hall had this~~
 auditorium which was level, unfortunately. ~~The seats were~~
~~screwed down, but the floor was level. The stage was quite~~
~~high, and you could see fairly well. Next to it was a series~~
 of reception rooms which were designed originally for parties
 for Phi Beta Kappas to congratulate each other on being Phi
 Beta Kappa, I imagine. Anyway, I began using those rooms
 for ~~exhibitions, loan exhibitions, for the benefit of the~~
~~Fine Arts Department, but the exhibitions~~ ^{through the display} were open to the
 entire student body. At that time ^{you} ~~you~~ could borrow from
 the Museum of Modern Art loan shows, ~~or things from the~~
~~the American Federation of Arts. There were a good many~~
~~sources to borrow loan art exhibitions from. I would~~
 mount them more carefully than most. We had little spot-
~~lights put up, and we had pedestals that~~ ^{used screens} ~~divided~~ ^{up} some of
 the spaces. Our little loan shows became quite
 popular. When a tour group would come to the ~~restoration~~

they would come to see the loan shows in the Phi Beta Kappa ~~Hall~~, ^{too},
~~section there.~~ So that's, in a sense, how I got into the
the museum racket.) The president of the Baltimore Museum
of Art was visiting in Williamsburg and happened to see one
of these exhibitions. He said, "Who put this exhibition up?"
And somebody told him I did. ^{so} He came over (it was just across
the street). His name was Henry ^{Tride} ~~Trigg~~. He said their director
had left them to go out to California and had I ever thought
about being a museum director? I ~~assured~~ ^{told} him, ^{that} No, I didn't
know anything about being a museum director, and I didn't
like museums very much, which was true. Well, he went back
to Baltimore and began telephoning me, which was very unusual
in those days because it cost so much to telephone. About
once a week ~~this was in the spring of '19~~ it was
^{during} midwinter of 1938, ~~just before 1939~~ I kept getting telephone
calls ~~about once a week~~ from this fellow in Baltimore saying
wouldn't I just come up and look the place over? At this
point I had employed as our ^{Departmental} librarian and ^{sec} secretary the
Department could afford only a combination librarian and sec-
retary) a girl named Mary Tyler Freeman, who decided ~~that~~ ^{to} ~~apparently~~
^{asked herself} why shouldn't I work for her instead of she work for me. So
after she worked for me about three months, our engagement
was announced, and in ^{June} ~~the spring~~ of '39 we were married. In
the fall of '39 I became director of the Baltimore Museum of
Art, she having convinced me of the fact that I was foolish ^{to decline}.

~~Without the turn of events,~~

I would have stayed right on in Williamsburg, ^{for} I was perfectly happy ^{then,} in Williamsburg. I often wonder what would have happened had I stayed ~~there.~~ I went up to become director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, and ~~that's a whole~~ ^{then saw some very serious} ~~other story from there.~~ ^{was II, my money to work in New York, + eventually my return to Virginia, etc, etc.}

Now, I think I've talked quite enough to give you a picture of how ~~it all grew.~~ ^{the Fine Arts Department grew up at Williams and how}

Williams: You have indeed, ^{given that picture.} A minute ago you started to say how the rest of the faculty felt about this suddenly burgeoning department.

Cheek: ~~Yes,~~ Well, naturally they were startled. ~~No one had ever~~ ~~taken over~~ ~~they didn't want the building; the building~~ ~~was just standing there.~~ ^{the old Tallapoosa building} ~~They didn't think~~ ~~it had any use~~ at all. So they were amazed at what could be done with ~~the structure~~ ~~the building.~~ ^{in fact} The building was attractive -- I've talked about the library and the slide room. Each office had a little character about it. ^(gestures to his study) ~~That desk in there I designed~~ ~~for my original office.~~ See that big, old comfortable thing? ~~That was built by Williamsburg Mill.~~ I designed all my own office equipment; chairs, the shelf system, the desk, and ~~a few~~ other things. The others ^{in fact} had nice offices, ^{too,} you might say, ^{by} for college standards. ~~But then~~ ~~the stairway went up one end of the building.~~ We left the stairway where it was, but we faced the banisters with plywood ~~(I think),~~ ^{so} we created a kind of a shaft which went

up three stories, ^{one wall of ~~is~~} ~~down~~ which we built a fountain ~~which~~
~~was~~ designed by ^{The Department} this sculptor, Ted Rust ~~it~~
 was my idea, but he executed it. It was a series of waterfalls
 which fell from one level to another in front of low reliefs
 of swimming mermaids. ^{The} Water ^{actually} ran down behind glass so it
 wouldn't splash all ^{out for fear} over everything, but you got ^{the} this feel-
 ing of water coming down ^{and} you could look through it
 (~~there were lights under each of these levels~~) and see these
 swimming mermaids. It ended up in a nice pool at the bottom,
 where it splashed, ^{with} ~~and we had~~ a nice big goldfish ~~that swam in it~~
~~in it.~~ ~~It was all lit up;~~ ^{the stairway} you wound around this
 fountain; ^{at} ~~after~~ each level you came out and looked at it,
 and then you went behind it, ^{and} and then you came out and looked
 at it again at the upper level. There were three levels --
 the level you came in on where you could look up and see the
 whole thing; then you ^d go around behind it, and at the se-
 cond level there was a railing where you could look down and
 up; you went around, and at the third level you could look
 down only. The space wasn't much deeper than ^{four feet} this or much
 wider than six feet here, ~~but~~ this fountain not only sounded
 nicely but was interesting to look at. It gave the whole
 entrance ~~suddenly~~ a certain character. ~~Everybody came~~
~~in to see the fountain and began feeding the fish so we had~~ ^{as it soon became a local talking point}
 to say: "Do not feed the fish." We lost a few fish due to
 overeating. I got them in Richmond, ^{of course} just plain
 little old 10¢ goldfish. They grew to be big fish. The

~~fountain was a talking point.~~

When we opened the building we invited the entire faculty and their wives, and had a big reception. We had everybody dressed up in black tie and the girls in the Department dressed up in pretty evening dresses to explain how each thing worked. The faculty came, and they were absolutely ^{amazed} ga-ga. They had never seen the whole thing lit up before and were a little bit

~~bashful about coming in.~~ We had this ~~opening~~ ^{about} opening in November (1937, I think) after everything was finished. Mr. Bryan came in

in white tie and tails, ^{and} it was a gala evening on the campus. We served ^{very good} refreshments, ^{and the Fine Arts Department was} That kind of launched

~~us with a great, glamorous bang.~~ So jealousy immediately

broke out. It wasn't openly displayed, but there were all

kinds of cracks about the way in Fine Arts you can

do anything, etc. ^{But} Gradually, as I said, we overcame it. ~~We~~

~~(the faculty, we, my gang) overcame it~~ by taking ourselves

seriously from the point of view of ^{our} ~~the~~ academic work. Our

students had to work hard, harder than many of the other

students in order to get their degrees. ^{And} Many of ~~our~~ ^{the} things ~~in the way of~~

~~in our~~ theatre were open to everybody on the campus. ^{and we had many of} ~~our~~ ^{we staged a} ex-

hibitions, ~~so that~~ ^{showed that we} we became not only working within our

~~Department~~ but we did ^{all kinds of} things for the campus as a

whole, ~~which I was delighted to~~ ^{do} ~~(it was my~~ idea, really.) We re-

designed the college stationery, for instance. We did the

major posters around the college and did a lot of things in

the visual arts field that were kind of community projects

constant
variety

~~What that~~ ~~we~~ ~~were~~ ~~glad~~ ~~to~~ ~~do~~. The fact was that the Fine arts Department was not only teaching the history of art, but they were practicing it in a small way, too. If we had talented students we could get them to make posters and things like that. We became mixed up in the general life of the college.

One other thing I must tell you: Mr. Bryan decided that at the end of the year there should be a great ^{garden} party so that students who were graduating would always have wonderful memories of the college. And then just before they went home at Christmas time, he thought there should be another big party so that everybody would go home with sugar plums dancing in their ^{heads} eyes. The Fine Arts Department ~~was~~ was asked to design and superintend the installation of these enormous parties to which the entire college was invited. The Christmas party was really terrific. It was in Phi Beta Kappa Hall. We took up all of the seats. ^{for dancing.} Mr.

^{At midnight,} Bryan and chief members of the faculty ~~sat on~~ ^{perched} on the stage and witnessed a floor show that ~~was~~ put on at ~~midnight~~ ^{by} ~~everybody else~~ ^{was} ~~pushed back to the side~~. Various fraternities and sororities ~~competed~~ ^{performed} as to the kind of show they would put on. Each ~~one~~ ^{performance} could last only about seven minutes, ~~I think,~~ ^{to} ~~it~~ ^{all} all had to be over within ^{an} the hour. There was a prize given ~~for~~ medals, great refreshments ^{was} served in the other rooms ^{at the end} ~~and that~~ ^{not}. It was a costume party, too. Those parties given by Mr. Bryan before Christmas were absolutely fabulous! The

place was all lit by candles, and why in the world it didn't burn down, I don't know. It was very glamorous, and anyone who was ever present at one of these parties ~~that you in~~ ^{with} ~~interview~~ ~~there aren't many left~~ ~~now~~ they'll tell you about ~~to them~~.

The June one was held out-of-doors in the sunken garden, right behind the Wren Building. ~~They had~~ ^{There was} boxes for all the faculty on the upper level so they could receive their students. ~~the~~

~~There was a huge dance floor, which we saved and used each year, and a tremendous, big urn, a white, plaster urn --~~ ^{along with} ~~in the middle that had magnolias in it.~~ ^{not filled with}

~~At that time of year~~ ^{At that time of} ~~(middle of)~~ ^{year} (early June) magnolias were in bloom, big,

huge flowers. ~~They came from Richmond. I sent up here to get them.~~ We had a frame of chicken wire over the top

of the urn in a curve so it would ^{look to support} ~~like~~ the magnolias, ~~that~~ we put in there ^{made out of} were big enough ~~in~~ ^{scale}.

The urn was lit from below with changing lights, and it would glow enough to light the whole dance floor. ~~We danced~~ ^{Dancing went on} around this tremendous urn, ^[which was] on a big stand in the middle.

There are pictures of it somewhere. We always had a very good orchestra, ^{and the party} ~~it~~ lasted until two or three in the morning.

Everybody came. Everybody dressed up. Everybody looked nice. It was long before the days when everybody looked sloppy. The poorer students in some way or another fixed themselves up and looked like ladies and gentlemen on this particular night.

Everybody knew that the ~~Fine Arts~~ Department had done this ;
 we got full credit for it, so, as I said we became in-
 tegrated into college life. As well as ~~giving~~^{teaching} our specialty,
 we were all mixed up in things that were happening in the
 college itself. We designed -- I think they still use
 it -- ~~do they have the commencement~~^{ceremony at the faculty} in the front of the
 Wren Building, facing the Duke of Gloucester Street, ~~on a~~
~~long platform?~~ Do they still use this platform?

Williams: Commencement is to be this Sunday (if it doesn't rain) out there, yes.

Cheek: We designed that original ~~platform~~^{design}. All the balusters, the
 lectern, ~~and all that was designed and built by~~^{was} the
 college, and it is still ~~used every year,~~^{used every year,} as far as I know, so we were
 tied into all kinds of things connected with the
 college itself and gradually I think overcame the envy,
 you might say, of the rest of the faculty because we obviously
 were out to help and not just to be pompous and to lord it
 over them. We had no ~~attempt~~ to interfere with their work,
 you see. At first there was a good deal of jealousy, but
 toward the end I think they forgave all of us and accepted it
 as a perfectly normal -- and perhaps wonderful -- thing that the
 college had.

Williams: Let me ask just one final question. For a gentleman who has had as exciting a career as yours, I thought it very interesting that you said to me in your first letter that the four years you stayed there at William and Mary were among

the most rewarding, most enjoyable and most glamorous of your life. What made it that way?

Cheek: First, when you are young things are glamorous. ~~It was~~ ^{The Fine Arts}
~~new~~ ~~The college~~ ^{But} was a new idea; it was fresh in every ^{Department}
 direction. ^{But} The restoration itself was a new thing ^{then} being →
 finished. I lived in a kitchen down on the Palace Green,
 which ^{longer has} ~~has~~ since been found to have been on the wrong founda-
 tions and torn down, ~~but it was supposed to have been on the~~
 original foundations. ^{paid to that I took my notes from my notes} I lived ~~for two years~~ with Cogger, ^{Curator of the Restoration}
 and then I had this little kitchen of my own, ^{James} so I lived in
 a very glamorous manner. It had a tremendous fireplace. It
 made no sense, but it was so glamorous! I had people in
 for cocktails, and ^{then took them to} ~~there was~~ an eatery run by the Restoration,
 now torn down, ^{Travis House} called the ~~not the Market Square Tavern~~ -- ^{opposite the Duke of Gloucester Street}
 but some other tavern used to be right opposite the place
 where the Silver maker's shop is. My kitchen, which belonged
 to the Restoration -- I rented it from the Restoration -- was
 part of that silver maker's complex. In fact, part of the
 kitchen is still there and is connected to the workshop at the
 back. That little building with the little high window and
 gable high up was part of the original kitchen. Right across
 the Duke of Gloucester Street was the eatery Travis House,
 long since come and gone. They moved it to the insane ^{Cold}
 asylum. I don't know how they got it there. Anyway, it was
 carried across that gulch on a high platform one day. Then
 it was run as an eatery. Having no cook, I ~~would~~ just

give cocktails to my gang, usually before a great roaring fire, and then take them across to Travis House. So it was

a very glamorous time down there. ^{to live} I had friends coming ~~to~~ ^{to Williamsburg}

all the time to see the Restoration.

And I liked the students so much. We had an interesting group of students, and I had ~~the~~ ^{the} little ^{Fine Arts} faculty that I told you about. They were all my friends. And gradually, as I said, all the other faculty that I came to know became my friends, too, so I was surrounded by friends. I had plenty

of hard work to do and ~~just~~ was busy night and day, so it was a ~~glamorous~~ busy period, without too much responsibility.

It was a lot of responsibility, but it wasn't like running a ~~huge~~ ^{large} museum. It was a combination of

background, of opportunity, and of pleasant people to work

with. Of course, the town itself was and still is, awfully pretty. I used to walk to work down the Duke of Gloucester

street every morning to ~~the~~ Taliaferro Hall. It was a pleasant walk; you just couldn't beat it. You can't think of

Williamsburg in those days anymore because it is just so

jammed now; ~~it~~ ^{it} was a quiet town in those days. So there are many reasons why it was a very glamorous portion of my life,

and I'll never forget it because it ~~just~~ happened at ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~bracket~~

the night particular time. And, ~~for~~ ^{for} certainly equal to all the other jobs, was the opportunity ~~afford~~ ^{afford} for me to meet, + later to ~~marry~~ ^{marry}, my wonderful wife.