

H.I. WILLETT, Sr.

Henry I. Willett (known as "Hi") has had a long career in education in Virginia, beginning in 1925, the year he graduated from William and Mary. He taught for less than a year before he was made principal of a school in Norfolk County. Later he became assistant superintendent of schools in Augusta, superintendent in Norfolk County, and in 1946, superintendent of schools in Richmond. In the 1960s he was named state superintendent of public instruction. At Virginia Commonwealth University he has served in several posts, and at the time of this interview was consultant to the president at V.C.U.

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Interviewee H.I. Willett, Sr.

Date of interview May 27, 1976

Place 910 W. Franklin St., Richmond, Va. (V.C.U.)

Interviewer Emily Williams

Session number 1

Length of tape 92 mins.

Contents:

Approximate time:

coming to William & Mary (1921)	3 mins.
relations with and assessment of J.A.C. Chandler administration	8 mins.
student activities athletics, clubs, freshman customs, pastimes	17 mins.
special events - Harding's visit - mace	3 mins.
special associations - Billups, Hoke, Hodges, Krebs, Goodwin, Jacobs, Lindsay, Young, Swen	9 mins.
connection between W&M and teacher education	3 mins.
assessment of J.S. Bryan	2 mins.
role of Charlie Duke	10 mins.
changing role of college presidents	3 mins.
administrative of A.D. Chandler	7 mins.
Willett's experiences with R.P.I. and V.C.U.	8 mins.
goals of W&M - in 1960s - Willett's hopes for	12 mins.
current state level position of W&M	3 mins.
Carter howance's role	2 mins.
Richmond alumni influence	2 mins.

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H.I. Willett, Sr.

May 27, 1976

Richmond, Virginia

Williams: Dr. Willett, I like to ask people to begin with why it was that they came to William and Mary, so let me ask you why (it must have been in the fall of 1920), you, a young man from Gloucester, came to William and Mary?

Willett: It was 1921. That's not real easy to answer. My mother wanted me to attend the University of Richmond. She was of strong Baptist orientation, and I actually came up and visited Richmond. It was a small university at that time -- quite a rival of William and Mary's in those days. But maybe it was the perverseness of youth, I don't know. I had given some thought to V.P.I., but one of the motivating factors, I guess, ^{was that} my father was not in good health, and it ^[William and Mary] was rather close to home. I'm afraid it was probably more than any real strong appeal to the historical aspect, although I visited Williamsburg.)

So there was no lifelong desire to go there or there not any real history of family having attended there. It was more, I guess, the location and the circumstances.

Williams: Or the program?

Willett: Yes.

Williams: To use this term is a real anachronism, I know, but what was

the admissions process like; in other words to get in what did you have to do?

Willett: I Simply had the superintendent of schools (at that time rather than the principal) to fill out an application and send in a recommendation. I think it was the only place I really applied to. I did the checking earlier, and there was no problem of admission really.

Williams: Did you come here as a state student?

Willett: Yes. I came to --

Williams: ^{Pledged} to teach?

Willett: Yes, I came as a state student pledged to teach.

I really thought I'd be going into business rather than teaching. After I got into it, why, I was interested. You didn't have to have an apprenticeship before you became a principal, as I indicated to you earlier. I really got a principalship my first full year out.

Williams: Were most of the boys state students? I've talked to so many who were that it's led me to believe that.

Willett: A fair number were; of course you got a state scholarship which took care of your tuition. Also, interestingly enough, your board was \$2 cheaper if you ^{were a state student.} ~~went there~~. An interesting story that you might like me to tell---it relates to Dr. Chandler.

Williams: Please do.

Willett: My father died the first year -- in January ^{of} the first year that I was at William and Mary. And Dr. Chandler -- you may ask questions later, but he was quite a good administrator

what might be called "the old school;" he ruled with sort of an iron hand and probably was not as close to students in general as would be expected today. I think the story will give an illustration that will give a different perception from what some students have: after my father's death, I came back. I went to him ^[Chandler] to tell him my father had just died, and I felt that if I were to stay in college I had to have some help. I needed a job. There weren't too many scholarships available in those days; there were various jobs. He indicated that all jobs had been assigned, but that he would give me a job the next year and would lend me enough money to finish the year. Well, I indicated I appreciated that but I could finish the year all right; that wasn't my problem. And he did get me a job: I waited on tables and became a head waiter and later corrected papers and did a variety of things. But he was very human as far as I was concerned, very understanding.

Williams: Yes. Really willing to help someone who was in need of it.

Willett: In fact, it was the beginning of the great growth.--I mean his administration really was outstanding in terms of putting the university on the map, and of course, the expansion of the building program was under his administration.

Williams: Were the students conscious or were you conscious as a student that this was something of a new day for William and Mary with J.A.C. Chandler at the helm?

Willett: Yes, because things were beginning to develop. ^{of} course, we

didn't have many facilities. The gymnasium -- the boys
 played their games in the new Jefferson Hall,
 where there was located a girl's gymnasium. You see, this
 was ^{about} three years after the girls had been admitted to William
 and Mary (when I started as a freshman). In the boy's gym-
 nasium, for example, the outside line of the basketball court
 was right up against the wall, and you had to put pads on the
 wall so when you got to the line you wouldn't
 crash into an unprotected brick wall. Well, I think the
 students recognized that William and Mary was beginning to
 be on the move as evidenced by the new buildings and ^{as} the
 enrollment began to swell with the coming of the female
 segment of our society. We hadn't entered the days of women's
 lib and so forth then, but I think ~~most of the boys were glad~~ ^{to} see
 the girls come.

Williams: There was apparently some feeling among some of the boys at
 least ~~that they weren't glad to see them.~~ Did you find this?

Willet: There were some, yes. There were some.

It had been
 three years when I got there. There was pretty general
 acceptance. I think that feeling developed the first year or
 two, but it had pretty well disappeared when I arrived.

Williams: How about most of the student s' feelings about Dr. Chandler?
 Did they get to know him in the human way that you've illustrat-
 ed that you did?

Willet: No, I think that Dr. Chandler ate in the dining room; he had a table in the center part of the dining room -- he and the boys. His wife was not living, so they ate their meals three times a day in the dining room. He got around the campus and people had a great deal of respect for him, bordering sometimes on fear. I don't think with too many people there was that closeness. I don't think a lot of them had the close experiences I had with him, because I admired him a great deal. So I think it was more one of respect and admiration for his ability, but not that closeness. He was a very dignified person, not much small talk. There was not the kind of rapport that perhaps many presidents would attempt to establish today, but a great deal of respect for him. And I think certainly looking back on it now his contribution to William and Mary and its development would be hard to overemphasize, in my opinion.

Williams: And as you said his accomplishments really were remarkable. To what would you attribute that, looking back? I know at the time you were in no position to assess it.

Willet: No. Well, he was a man of a great deal of ability, quite persuasive in the question of getting money. He was superintendent of schools in Richmond, ^{he had the} his ability to be convincing in his presentation. He was very thorough, and I think he was able to bring that kind of support to William and Mary because of the ^[he earned] respect, and just outstanding ability and a high degree of dedication. ^{of} Course, bear in mind the

expectation of administration at that time. It was quite different from what it is today. The expectation was not that the president of the college would be a ~~hail-fellow-well-met~~. It was not expected that he have quite the association or the type of problems -- he had problems in those days ~~with~~ the students, ^[but] you know, it was a different type of problem. There would be plenty of things that are not to be commended, but ~~[there was]~~ not the kind of ~~confrontation~~ or not the expectation on the part of students to play the role that we have today. So the type of administration that he gave was not too different from what we expected of a college president in those days. But I think he had outstanding ability, outstanding dedication, and if he made a presentation I think his credibility of the facts and so forth were of such a level that people believed him.

Williams: You have mentioned students and student activities in the sense of employment. I've often wondered (and again this is the sort of thing that you wonder from the point of view of today looking back) once you got to Williamsburg, you were there, ~~by that time~~. There were no cars (or not many, I wouldn't think) by that time. What was there then for you to do?

Willett: Well, I was interested in athletics and I was interested in the Flat Hat.

Williams: You were on the Flat Hat, weren't you?

Willett:

I was not editor, but I was on the circulation staff, I think it was. We did a lot of things, of course, I worked.

Williams: Right.

Willett: So that took a certain amount of time. I was also interested in athletics -- played baseball and a little basketball.

I also was interested in church activities. I was president at one time of the Baptist Young People's Union at the Baptist Church there, and we used to take a lot of hikes around through the country. The dining hall people were very nice to us. They'd make things available to us, and we'd take steaks and walk to Jamestown, for example, and sit in the woods and cook them over the fire -- do that sort of thing. So there were a lot of things to do. Time did not hang heavily. Of course, we had ^{our} full sessions, which is part of the educational experience.

Williams: At that time I kept finding in the yearbook pictures of regional clubs, like the "Northern Lights". What were the functions of the regional clubs and what did they do?

Willett: I never did identify with any of them, ^{but I} ^[them] remember as you said.

I don't think they played a very great role. It was to establish identity, I think, with the people from the same area, if that were desirable. It may have had something to do with the recruitment of students, I'm not sure.

Williams: I was wondering.

Willet: I think that was to give some association. In that day and time from the rural areas, there weren't a great many people that were going to college. For example, in my graduating class from high school, so far as I can recall now, there were only two of us who went on to college; the third one came later to college. There weren't a great many people in Gloucester County that were going to college in those days, ^[alubs gave] so some association or identification with people in the area, I guess it ^{served} was some social adjustment purpose and probably some ~~recruitment~~ purpose, but I was not identified with one of them, so I can only conjecture.

Williams: This may seem to you a peculiar thing to ask, but I'll tell you the reason I ask it. I interviewed a man who was from Surry. (He had been there a couple of years before you.) He was telling me in order to get from Williamsburg to Surry, he had to take the boat as it went out the river, and then it would come back, like a week later, and dock at Surry. He had to leave four days* ahead of time from Williamsburg to get to Surry by a certain day. So was there anything like this to get to Gloucester?

Willet: Not quite that bad, but you know where Gloucester is, of course?

Williams: I know where it is, yes.

Willet: All right. To get to Gloucester -- I lived down ^{the road to} what was called Sadler's Neck. It would have been about six or seven miles from Gloucester Point. Then

*I think I overestimated the number of days.

from Yorktown to Williamsburg is about twelve miles, so I lived then a distance, let's say ^{of} less than twenty miles -- counting the river, maybe twenty miles from Williamsburg. Allright, to get to Williamsburg you either drove, rode, or walked to Gloucester Point, or you could go to Ordinary (three or four miles) and catch a bus to Gloucester Point, catch a ferry to Yorktown, catch another bus to Lee Hall, and catch a train at Lee Hall into Williamsburg.

Williams: And how long would it take you to accomplish that?

Willett: Oh, ^a good part of a day.

Williams: I started to say -- about an all-day trip.

Willett: Good part of a day. I don't know how much you want reminiscing.

Williams: I'd like for you to, yes.

Willett: I remember a few occasions, for example, I remember my parents weren't expecting me; we had an unexpected holiday, and I went home one weekend. I got to Gloucester Point at night, and it was cold and wet, and I couldn't find anybody, so I walked to my home, which meant walking through a ~~part~~ a swamp. You couldn't see your hand before you. And so I walked that six miles or whatever it was at night. You couldn't even see in the swamp area -- of course, there was a little dirt road through there, but you plodded through the water. I remember another occasion of being home and we had a heavy snow storm. My family had, among other things on the farm, a contract for a mail route from Glass to Ordinary. Well, everything

was snowed in; the snow had drifted and ~~the~~ ^{and} was over the fence, ^{and} over the road. I wanted to get back, so I took a horse, ~~and~~ went down and got the first class mail and ^[with it] on one side and my bag on the other ~~and~~ rode up to Ordinary because the roads were open there. I left my horse there for my dad to pick up two or three days later or whenever he could get there, ~~and~~ and then got back to Williamsburg by catching that bus and crossing the ferry and then another bus and then a train to Williamsburg-- for a distance of twenty miles.

Williams: Yes, that was the reason I asked that because now we think, you know, well, just to get to Gloucester takes a half hour.

Willett: It did ^{not} take me three or four days, but usually it took the better part of a day.

Williams: So you're talking about different expectations: it would be different to think that it would take you most of the day to get from Gloucester. That was why I wanted to ask that. Well, in asking about extra-curricular activities, let me ask you -- were you in one of the literary societies?

Willett: Phoenix Literary Society.

Williams: Phoenix Literary Society. What did they do? How active were they?

Willett: Well, they were fairly active. The thing I was interested in ~~was~~ ^{was} debates more than anything else. There might be a reading, there might be an oration, ^{as} we used to call them in those days. We met

monthly, I believe. -- maybe every two weeks; I'm not sure.

Williams: Did faculty members train you?

Willett: Well, you got some training there if you had a sponsor for it, but it was pretty much on your own. There were two societies, and there was a lot of competition between the two.

Williams: At this point were they still having the big debate at finals between the two literary societies?

Willett: Not as a part of finals. That was earlier.

Williams: You mentioned athletics. Now I understand that in this period that the baseball team[^], which you said you were on, was really stronger and more avidly followed by the students than the football team, which today is the thing we think of that the students go out and cheer for.

Willett: Baseball was quite popular there.

Williams: And what about basketball?

Willett: Yes, basketball, too. I played freshman ball on the second varsity. I followed baseball more than I did the basketball. You didn't have the big audiences for basketball that you have today. Baseball was really the most popular sport. ~~baseball~~ basketball - I played some[^] in high school, ~~but~~ ^{basketball} really we played baseball the year around. We had some outside goals in high school, but during the normal time for the basketball season, there were very few indoor courts, for example. And back in the gymnasium, even with the new gymnasium that was in the girl's dormitory, ^[there was] ~~^~~ very little room for spectators -- just the equivalent of a balcony with the equivalent of a wide hall

around it. That was the spectator space. There was no provision really to take care of spectators. Basketball began to get more popular and it developed in the high schools at a later date, but not much when I was there.

Williams: Before the football game with Richmond, by that time, were the students coming down and painting Lord Botetourt (students coming down from Richmond) ?

Willett: Oh, yes, yes. That was a big event. We came in great droves to Richmond ~~at the~~ game ^{was} being played here. I guess this was a period of ^{as} intense ^a rivalry between the two schools as was experienced at most any time. And football had gained in popularity. We had bigger crowds ~~at~~ football games then, than we did in baseball, but baseball was still much more popular than it is now.

Williams: Were there already freshman customs? You must have been ⁱⁿ one of the early classes to wear duc caps.

Willett: Duc caps -- and we used to have to march by the statue of Lord Botetourt. Every freshman when he ~~or she~~ (or she for that matter) walked by Lord Botetourt had to yell, "Come on Richmond!" That was a real tradition. We also had court in which the freshman were tried; and the upper classmen set up a regular court procedure, and those freshmen who had been identified because of any eccentricity or any aggressive-

ness or anything that brought them to the attention of the rest of the students were brought before the court and tried. The sentences could be a great variety of things. To try to do that today would be quite different. That went on into the wee hours of the morning. You had a prosecutor and a defendant, and the court listened and handed down a verdict. Some of it was mockery, of course, but there was a certain amount of fear and trepidation related to it. Oh, I guess some of it would be called hazing today. I was lucky enough, I guess, not to have any special trial, but after the trial was over, those of us that hadn't been up before the court and the rest of them were required to "run the gauntlet."

The trial was held in the chapel, which is in the Wren Building. You lined up and you ran the gauntlet through the hallway, down beyond the statue of Botetourt. And lined up on each side of the gauntlet were upper classmen with paddles, and they proceeded to wield them with all the vigor they had as you ran down the gauntlet.

Williams: Did you go all the way to the street?

Willett: Down to the end to Duke of Gloucester Street. It wasn't too bad. I figured what I was going to do on it, and I got very few licks. You see, if you went right down the middle you would get the paddles from both sides. So I just went right down by one line so close to them that they couldn't wield the paddle and the others couldn't reach me. So if

the paddle hit at all it would be just almost at their hand, you see, by running right closely down the line. Some of us had already figured out how we would operate.

I don't know of anybody being hurt during that period. You would have a few upper classmen that would try to make it tough on freshmen, would have them to do tasks for them and things of that sort, but I didn't experience any unusual situation. And in a sense I guess there was a feeling in that day that you know, after you went through it you looked forward to what you were going to do next year.

Williams: Probably.

Willett: And there was no real resistance to it. Occasionally something would happen that went too far. Of course the administration didn't condone it but really didn't try to break it up. Later on, of course, it was abolished. I don't even remember now whether it was abolished by administrative edict or whether it just died out; I really don't know.

Williams: I think it more or less died out, but maybe it was being encouraged to die out by the administration. I don't really know. I'll have to ask Dean Lambert on that. He probably could tell me.

Willett: I'm sure there were more tricks that were carried on during that time, for example, one of the boys used to live down at the Institute. "Tootly, tootly, tootly, toot, we're the boys from the Institute" -- it almost developed a fratern-

nity spirit. It was off-campus. And I remember one group--
 They played more tricks and pranks, I suspect, than they do today. There was one young man that happened to be from Gloucester, and he was considered by the other students to be something of a braggart and always talking, ^{telling} tall tales of how brave he was and so forth. So they framed up on him and decided they were going out to steal watermelons one night.

They got into the watermelon patch, and one of the boys had a gun, a shotgun, and just shot a shot, and the other one yelled, "I'm shot, I'm shot!" ^[the boy from Gloucester] And he started running and ran back to the dormitory. He was in a pasture, and he fell down once in the pasture, which didn't do much for him and scared him half to death. He just ran back and tried to get somebody because one of the boys had been shot. We had more pranks and that sort of thing going on than we do today. But it had a purpose; it was the way in which a group of students were saying, "We don't like the way that you are operating, or you're not sincere, you're a braggart, so we'll take you down." But you wouldn't get by with that sort of thing today.

Williams: Well, we're also talking about a smaller group of people than we know now.

Willett: Much smaller, much smaller group. Not defending it even then, but I'm saying it was in a different day, a different environment than what we have now. Of course, there was a

feeling in those days, you remember, that ~~was~~ you developed school spirit, really by more rigorous experiences, even though some of them were out of line. And part of the joy you would get, ^[was to] even in my day, ~~we~~ hear the old timers come back and talk about when they used to put cows up in the bell tower and that sort of thing, which were maybe a little wilder than the things we did in '25, for example. So that was a part of sort of ^a tradition that was passed on from one generation of students to another.

Williams: The year you were a senior I found in the Flat Hat -- do you remember this -- that the seniors decided so ^{that would} they have a symbol of their elevated importance they were going to have walking canes. Do you remember that?

Willett: Just faintly, Yes, I do remember something about it. I'm not sure whether this was a coordinated thing, ^[or] whether we had a few students that would put on a derby hat and would walk around just as sort of a showpiece. I don't remember the seniors doing it as a unified activity.

Williams: Do you remember anything special about President Harding's visit? As I was going through trying to find special events, this was one of them.

Willett: I remember President Harding's ^{visit} ~~event~~ very specifically. This is going to sound unkind: I believe it was the first time I had ever seen a president of the United States face-to-face, and I remember how disappointed I was in his speech, partly because he read it, and he didn't read it particularly

well. So he was quite a disappointment and sort of a disillusionment, in what I expected of the President. Later we had a visit from Mr. Roosevelt (Franklin), and that sort of restored my faith because he was quite dynamic and went over quite well with the students. But Mr. Harding didn't go over very well; you know, his speech may have been fine, but it didn't seem appropriate or appeal to my interest at that particular time. But of course, it was a big occasion because the President of the United States was visiting William and Mary. We had a lot of pomp and circumstance.

Williams: Did you serve him in the dining hall?

Willett: I think we did. There probably wasn't any other place

to serve him.

Williams: We used to serve a great number of people in the dining hall. I waited ^{Etables} in the dining hall. It was one of the jobs I had.

And we served a great many banquets because there wasn't anywhere else to go. I remember one unusual situation. They were serving I think it was a crab flake cocktail with a lot of red sauce on it, and one of the waiters upset a tray of those. I remember that that red sauce hit one of the guests with slicked-down black hair parted in the middle, and it hit him right in the center there. Now I haven't thought of that for fifty years, but it seemed awfully funny at the time.

Williams: I'm sure, I'm sure.

I'm sure it wasn't funny to the man who received it or
the man --

Williams: --who did it.

Willett: Who did it, no!

Williams: I'm sure not.

Do you remember when the mace was purchased? Was this a
big event?

Willett: Yes. I don't remember the efforts
to purchase it, but I remember it was quite an occasion when
it was first used to lead marches and that sort of thing.

Williams: In talking about special people that you remember, one that
we probably should include and one that boys (and women as
well) from that period always remember is Henry Billups.

Willett: Oh, yes.

Williams: What are your memories of Henry Billups?

Willett: Well, he was always there ringing the bell. ^[I remember] his association
with the bell and his friendliness with the students. Even
then he was quite an institution, and I don't recall anyone
ever trying to play a trick or do anything disrespectful to
Henry Billups.

There are several people -- I don't know whether you would
like to pick up any people of my association.

Williams: I would.

Willett: Of course, Dean Hoke, at that period of time -- again was an
individual that I had a closer association with than some,
partly because I took a course or two ^{under} him. He was

interested in education. I took a course in statistics under him and used to go on evaluation. I went out with him on evaluation teams and so forth; that was memorable. There was Dr. Hodges. I don't know if you've had anyone who remembered him or not. He was really in his relationship with students one of the finest influences. On the other hand he was a very poor lecturer; he could really put you to sleep. But you know, you thought so much of him that you were glad to take his classes, and you got something out of them. But he would do this sort of thing: you would meet him on campus, and he'd say, "Willett, have you read Main Street by Sinclair Lewis?" "No sir." "You ought to read it. Come by my office and get a copy. I want you to read it and tell me what you think of it." So I went by his office (it's the library now) and got a copy of Main Street, which I probably wouldn't have waded through at that time. Sinclair Lewis was a good writer, but he wasn't writing to appeal to that age group. [Hodges] But he had a personal interest in you, a question of job or what you were doing; he knew a lot about the students. He was quite a wholesome influence, I thought, on the campus. There was Dr. Krebs, who taught education. He had a way of getting next to students, and his expectations of a student was high. Now for instance, in most classes we had a rule that if a professor didn't show within ten minutes we could leave. I never saw a class leave Dr. Krebs. He delib-

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partly because I took a course or two ^{under} him. He was

erately was late sometimes. He also had us organized to the point that if he didn't come we picked up and carried on. ~~If~~ he came in ten minutes late, the class was already proceeding. Again it was what his expectations were. ~~Another~~ person who had great influence was Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin. I took one or two courses under him which were most enjoyable and of course his influence on the ~~college~~ ^{college} university
 coming being he used to do . . . He was an interesting lecturer; he ~~carried~~ on an interesting discussion. In his efforts to be fair in grading papers he had his secretary to read the essay questions
 to him, ^[he would] and give it a mark without knowing who it was. He said he couldn't divorce himself from what he knew about the individual. Of course, there again, ^{there were} ~~there were~~ small classes. But he was quite an interesting influence. ~~And~~ And there was Dr. Cary F. Jacobs, one of the most precise people. He was an enigma in some ways. He had been a lightweight boxing champion when he was a student at the University of Virginia, and you just couldn't imagine him putting on boxing gloves in that period. He was the most precise person. You've seen some people in speaking who enunciated every syllable; if it's possible to enunciate every letter he could come closer to doing it than anybody I ever knew. ^{Woolley's Handbook} ~~Willetts Handbook~~ ^{was used as a text}
~~sort of shocked me one day in class.~~ He was talking about a test and he said, "You'd better know what's in this book. As Mr. Willett says it's my Bible and you'd better know it."

He was a very precise teacher, but he was a very good teacher with very, very high expectations. I think ~~the freshman year~~ at William and Mary in his classes he failed nearly fifty per cent of the freshman class. So the University of Virginia was talking about how hard he was. I remember I met him on campus one day, and he said, "What did you think of the examination?" I said, "Well I made it!" He said, "Well, I knew you did, that's why I asked you." But they were some of the interesting ^{people} -- not all of them by any means. I did a lot of work in chemistry, for example, and met some very interesting people in that. One class I joined was called chemical microscopy. Dr. Lindsay had developed the course, and he had developed only one other course in the country, and he had developed that for Columbia University. Primarily the technique was to precipitate solids in a solution -- to precipitate from the solution the solids that were in it and then to identify them by looking under a microscope. It had some commercial value. For example, we used to test pepper. You were buying it from the islands, and you might find the pepper that came in had about twenty-five percent hemp rope that had been ground up in the pepper. So you could identify it on a slide and tell what the percentage was. It was quite an interesting course. Then I remember there was Dr. Young. I've forgotten the exact title of the course, but it had some relation to that because the whole course ^{nearly} -- well,

it was eight hours lab and only one hour lecture, and it was based on precipitating crystals and identifying some of the crystals on slides and so forth. I finished it early, and he'd say to me, "Willett, what ^{are} you going to do today?" That was in the middle of course. He had set up a program, and you could go fast or slow. But I finished the course in about half the time. I was interested in chemistry and he'd say, "Willett, what are you going to do today?" "I'll be over at the lab." And he'd say, "Well, I'm not going to be there, you take care of things." Of course, I was acting like instructor and some of the girls in the class, of course, were not as interested in chemistry. So I was having a chance to really show off a little bit, which in that period of life most males enjoyed before the fair sex.

Williams: What about Dr. Swem? He would have been a new person on the campus at that time.

Willett: Yes, yes. Well, Dr. Swem was very quiet, very meticulous, friendly in a very quiet sort of way with the students. But he created a very fine, studious atmosphere. He was highly respected. I think in later years he became closer to students, of course he had just come there when I was there. But there was a great deal of respect for him, and he ^{certainly} started moving towards correcting some of the deficiencies in the library.

Williams: As you mentioned earlier, you were a state student pledged to teach, and you went on and taught and became a principal your first year. And then you became a school superintendent?

Willet: Assistant superintendent -- ~~director~~ of instruction was the title, but after ^{the} principalship, assistant superintendent, ~~then~~ superintendent.

Williams: I have wondered and I've asked this question of several people with either greater emphasis elsewhere or relatively less emphasis at William and Mary on teacher training, has William and Mary lost a base of support among the educators of Virginia? Because some people have said they did have this. Did you find this true in your career?

Willet: Well, the fact that more and more people are required to get their doctorate, and ~~the University of Virginia~~ for those people going ^{to the University of Virginia} for graduate work, they've got more and more ^[on education] to fill that role and place more emphasis. Also, in later years more and more people tended to go out of the state, to Columbia as I did, for example. William and Mary had some interesting people there, but there was never any ~~really~~ great attempt to ^{really} build the department of education to compete, say, with the University of Virginia. And when I say compete with the University of Virginia I don't think that the University of Virginia attempted to really develop a national program in education. I think that's part of the reason so many people have gone out for their doctorate in the field of education, for example. Some very interesting people -- Helen Foss Weeks, for example, was quite an outstanding woman that was in that field. And Dean Hoke, himself ~~really headed the~~ -- he was ~~the~~ Dean of the College, but he

also was the head of the education department. It wasn't a school really, it was just a department of education.

I don't think there had been any conscious attempt on the part of William and Mary to be ^{that} outstanding in the training of teachers. And of course, we had ^[in Virginia] for the teachers themselves what used to be the ~~four~~ ^{Teacher Training} institutions. So the role of actually preparing teachers I think lessened, partly because of the competition, partly because there was no great attempt to ^[do so.] Then we went through a period, of course, not while I was there particularly, but following that ~~it was a period~~ in which departments and even schools of education did not gain favor ^{with} over the other schools and departments in colleges and universities. So, I think there were a number of factors related to that. But of course, when I was there ^{and} earlier, if you wanted to be a principal in Virginia, then William and Mary was a good place to go. ^{you} see, you didn't have to have a masters' to be ^a principal. When the advanced degrees became a requirement, then William and Mary did not try to keep pace. I think ^{that} is really what happened.

Williams: You mentioned how schools and departments of education lost favor; I think it would be fair to say at William and Mary that one of the people who felt this way was John Stewart Bryan.

Willett: Yes, I think that would be true.

Williams: On a state level -- now I know Mr. Bryan was publisher of the Richmond newspaper, which would have given him a rather powerful position, but on the state level, say vis-a-vis the General Assembly, was he as strong a character as J.A.C. Chandler was, do you think?

Willett: No, Mr. Bryan was a very outstanding gentleman; ^{he was} an outstanding businessman; he was typical of the image of the gracious southern gentleman. I think some of us felt that the presidency of William and Mary to him was a very interesting experience. As far as the impact that he had -- I think he brought a certain amount of prestige, ~~he~~ dealt very well with the General Assembly -- we didn't lose ground particularly on that, but the momentum had been set up by Dr. Chandler. I don't think it ~~was~~ ever held a consuming place in his life that it did for Chandler, for example, because it was, oh how shall I say it? -- almost like a hobby.

Williams: Yes, that's been said.

Willett: That's not to denigrate his contribution. I think he did more for the college than a lot of people expected him to do. I think he was interested in it. I don't mean to say by hobby ~~it was a question of~~ ^{regret} but it was something new like a new interest. I think he was sincere and dedicated to what he did, but he didn't have the background ~~and so forth~~ in long term planning, ~~I would think to go ahead and do that.~~ Of course, he couldn't

Can't understand word on tape could you make a guess?

suddenly loose his interest ~~and so forth that he had~~ in the newspapers here. He entertained most graciously and that sort of thing. I wouldn't say that the college lost ground under him, and certainly his rapport with the General Assembly and the business leadership of the state was outstanding, but partly from length of time (Of course, he was not a young man when he went there) it was sort of a nice climax to a great career in ~~many~~ different field from what had been his interests and outstanding efforts.

Williams: Did you then know Charlie Duke? What did you find to be his role?

Willett: Well, of course, I had known him a long time before he went to William and Mary.

Williams: He was from Norfolk County.

Willett: ~~He was~~ from Norfolk County. He had three sisters. All of them taught for me. I knew his father; his father was an outstanding behind-the-scenes political influence -- Charles Duke, Sr. In fact, I knew his grandfather, -- Joe Duke, who was a magistrate ~~in his office as~~ (I got taken before him once, caught ^{for} speeding). Outstanding family -- his father and mother were both very outstanding people, ~~and so~~

I remember one occasion when Mr. Byrd ^[Mr. Charles Duke, Sr.] was governor, his father ^{came} to me. I was principal at Churchland. He came to me and said, "Willett, would you like to have the governor to come down and speak to your student assembly?" I said, "Sure, it would be fine." He had the governor to come down and speak. Charlie

Duke was a student at William and Mary during part of the time I was there. I guess when I was a freshman he was a senior. He was a nephew of Dr. Chandler, and he sat at ^[Dr. Chandler's table in the dining hall] the table, a good part of the time as a student. Of course, I knew him in that role, not when he came back as -- I've forgotten just what his title was.

Williams: Bursar.

Willett: Bursar, yes. Apparently he exercised a considerable influence. I guess probably there was some resentment to him that started when he was a student there. I think there was some feeling that he threw his weight around.

Williams: I ^{have} heard that.

Willett: I got to know him very well. I think that he was dedicated to the college. I guess it was his second wife that I knew quite well, ^{she's} still living, she's remarried I believe.

Williams: Yes.

Willett: My first wife's family and their family were very close. But Charlie Duke never quite had the esteem, ^{in other words,} I think people felt there was a degree of expediency perhaps there. His sisters were all very dedicated. I think that during the period he was bursar there that he had perhaps played an important role in filling some gaps in terms of leadership. I think he had the interest of William and Mary at heart, but in the process of doing it he didn't have the kind of charisma that tended to attract people to him.

Perhaps ^{it} was underappreciated. . . . what he did for the college. I think part of it may have stemmed from his role when he was there as a student in which ^{people} they felt, you know, that he almost thought he was playing a more important role and that he overdid that role to some extent. Is that in line with what you have?

Williams: Bits and pieces from various places. I knew that some of the alumni from that period were resentful of him. Apparently he did come back to the college and exercise a great deal of power.

Willet: He exercised a great deal of power. And I guess there was some feeling that he was exercising it more as power than persuasion -- ^[that] would be one way of putting it. ^{of} course again for that day ^{that} was more the accepted role of administration. I guess in some ways he may have been imitating his uncle, but in a different day and with different talents. It didn't go over quite as well as he wanted it. I never thought of it in that way before, but that could have been an influence because he wanted people to know of his relationship to the president when he was there as a student. The role that he played at William and Mary when he was there ^I I'm not as close to it because I knew him really better as a citizen in the community when he was in the real estate business in Portsmouth and I was principal of the school in that area. We used to go ^{out} together socially -- I mean ^{I was} not his bosom friend, but when you went

to a dance at the country club, for example, why, we went around with pretty much the same general social group. I guess I had a feeling in some ways there was a certain amount of tragedy in his life. ^{he} maybe was caught in a series of circumstances, maybe was never fully appreciated; I don't know. I don't know quite how to analyze it.

Williams: Did he have or exercise ^{the} ~~A~~ kind of power here in Richmond that his uncle apparently ^{had} with the General Assembly? If Mr. Bryan wasn't exactly in that role, was Charlie Duke filling that role?

Willett: To some extent. Charlie had access. He knew a great many people, and he certainly had access to them. And I think that Mr. Bryan -- somebody had to run the institution, and in other words, Mr. Bryan was up here^{*}, and the nitty gritty ~~it~~ had to be done. And I'll say I ~~rather~~ suspect because of previous things that Charlie Duke's contribution to William and Mary at that period is not fully appreciated. I think he played an important role at the college. Somebody had to do it, and I think he really ran the college to a great extent during that period. Somebody had to do it. And that's not an easy role to play. I think maybe my relationships and memories, along with others, ^{are} ~~is~~ colored maybe unfairly by attitudes developed when he was a student and not being that close to it when he was there later. So I would have a general feeling that perhaps he was underappreciated in terms of actual role. It was fairly well

* Gestures to indicate an elevated position.

recognized that he was ^{the} power in many ways during that period. ~~Mr. Pomfret~~ ~~as the~~ ~~fulfill~~ the role. Mr. Bryan was a very appropriate figurehead in the process. I don't mean that Mr. Bryan couldn't be positive. He had a great deal of confidence in Charlie Duke, and he wanted somebody to play that role. My guess would be that he had that understanding with the Board of Visitors when he went there. My guess is that the Board of Visitors felt that here an outstanding Virginian will bring prestige to the college. And I think he did. He was quite a stately gentleman and a man with a great deal of ability. His son here now -- I just don't know of any more charming ^a person to give you the concept of being a southern gentleman than Tennant Bryan. But again, Tennant Bryan ~~for example~~ has wanted a strong leader under him to really run the newspaper, which he has in *Man Donahoe*.

Williams: Did you observe Mr. Duke continuing to play this role under Dr. Pomfret? Dr. Pomfret wouldn't have even had the state contact that Mr. Bryan had.

Willet: I would assume that Dr. Pomfret was -- and I wasn't close to the university (I mean to the college) during that period. I did become very active and was president of the alumni society and so forth during a later period. Dr. Pomfret, I think, was more the scholarly type and again I think was glad to have someone to handle the nitty gritty of running the university. That has developed

in many places to a pattern. The role of college presidents has been up and down. You see, there was a period in which the boards actually ran the colleges (of course, Dr. Chandler came in really as an example of a strong president.) I've been involved in working with the board here ^[at U.C.U.] in developing a new set of by laws and so forth in the last few months, and it was necessary to do some research in that. We almost forget that in an earlier period -- well, I remember one of the bits of information I picked up while I was working on that was ~~that~~ the first time that the University of California delegated any ^{real} responsibility to the president was in 1891, and they told the president he could select a janitor if he reported promptly back to the board. We moved from that into an era of very strong college presidents where they just about ran the show, and then we got into a period in which the boards began to take their responsibility a little more seriously. So we've had a series of cycles. The role that a person played was not only related just to the individual but partly to the expectation of the board and the climate that was prevailing at that particular time. We've had a series of cycles in that, and the college president or university president of today requires a different type of leadership from what was considered to be the most successful type of leadership, say, in Dr. J.A.C. Chandler's day. If anybody had gone in in his day and tried

to operate as you do today, it would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, that you didn't have the leadership. I mean the strong ^{notion} ~~figure~~ that the college or university is the shadow of the man who heads it was very, very prominent.

... then you see Even today you'll find a great many situations in which the president is brought in to give leadership, to set policy for the university. In fact, I think you would say it was a sign of weakness in a university today if the university couldn't run fairly well for awhile without the president if he's there as a capstone. Of course, in a private institution his role is controlled to a great degree by the time he has to spend money raising. Although they may have a very highly developed development program there, ⁱⁿ those that have been very successful, the president has to play a major role. You'll find that happening now at the University of Richmond, for example. ^{(Discussion of the situation at the University of Richmond, where} the president said he was brought to the university to raise money and therefore would have to have a program of strong leadership under him.) So in the leadership roles in a sense -- you've got pioneers that sort of strike out in that area, and I think Dr. J.A.C. Chandler was one of the pioneers; his concept of running a college was very similar to the concept that I followed in Norfolk County ^{(where} I was a superintendent) in running ^(Discussion of superintendency in Norfolk County.) a school system.

Williams: You said you were on the R.P.I. board for awhile, so you must have worked in some capacity or another with Admiral Chandler. Did you find that he was able to exercise the strong leadership role that his father had?

Willett: He exercised a strong leadership role, but in a different day. ~~Let me hasten to say that~~ my contacts with Admiral Chandler were quite good. This was a period ^{in which} I had gotten more interested and was establishing closer contact ~~as~~ ~~an~~ alumnus of the college. He was brought there to do a specific job. This was following a period in which there was a feeling that ^{the college} ~~you~~ needed strong leadership. And I think some of the board felt this was a leadership more ~~of~~ ^{of the type} of his father. I think one of the most difficult things that Admiral Chandler faced was that running a college was quite different from running a battleship. I would say despite that -- if I had been looking for a president at that time, I don't think Alvin Chandler's background ~~and~~ personality would have been what I would have been looking for. Having said that, however, I think Alvin Chandler's ^{was} ^{ed} dedication to the institution, and I think he took some necessary steps and made a real contribution to the college. ~~It was the kind of thing that~~ ^{perhaps --} I think his greatest difficulty ^{again} it's hard to come through and rise to an admiral in the navy, ~~where~~ you've

got quite different rules of dealing with people from what you have in a college and university.

I think he'd ^{been} more or less isolated. Of course, I remembered him as a little boy eating at the president's table -- not that there's that much difference in our ages. I say a little boy because there's a difference of five or six years -- was a big difference at that time.

4 I have a feeling that he was was fairly difficult maybe for people to know, but I think he had a strong dedication to the college. And I would say in his case maybe his contribution was not fully appreciated. He went in there at a difficult time. He went in at a time that they needed strong leadership, but

I think the greatest tragedy maybe in what happened to him ^{was} the process of not being appreciated and the manner in which ^{he's never} somebody else was brought in. He's never said this to me, but I don't think that could have been a happy experience for ^{him at} that period of time. I have a great deal of respect for the man and think that he was somewhat the victim of things that he couldn't control. He couldn't change his personality at that time nor his background and training, but I think his dedication to William and Mary was outstanding and I think he made a contribution which ^{perhaps} is not fully appreciated.

Williams: In view of his background, which was the navy -- his roots

were in Virginia, but he had not been a Virginian for some time -- could he work on the state level the way that, it seems to me, college presidents *even then* had to?

Willetts: No, no, I don't think his training or temperament was such to do that. Also, he had been isolated. Now he had a different type of personality. I think he suffered in part from the same things that Mr. Eisenhower suffered from when he became president. Now Mr. Eisenhower was a more outgoing person and his person-to-person relationships would be perhaps easier to establish than they were with Alvin C. Chandler. But I happened to be president of the American Association of School Administrators during the time that he was president of the United States (Mr. Eisenhower), and I had ^{to} spend a fair amount of time in Washington. ~~and~~ Some of us felt that Mr. Eisenhower was almost a prisoner to the people who were feeding him information, ^{that he} didn't know what was going on in the country. He was a good man, but his administration was effected adversely by the fact that he was so isolated from what was going on in the country, having been in Europe and so forth, that he wasn't able to give it the kind of leadership he ^{needed to,} had.

To some extent I think that may have been true of Admiral Chandler. He had been away from the state, away from the institution and that sort of thing, and to come right from one environment to another ^{-- it} would be almost expecting the impossible to make a quick adjustment to it. That helped to produce some of the friction between him and the faculty, for

example. And yet I think a positive leadership was needed at that time. Some of that answers your question.

Williams: Well, I can see how it is you're answering it. Is this perhaps a key to separation of the colleges? The Colleges of William and Mary, as I understand it, was Admiral Chandler's creation; he wanted it and he wanted it badly, and he got it through ^[the legislature] and then two years later, it was no more. If the Colleges' establishment was dependent on the personality of the Admiral -- which I'm not sure if that's true. You'll have to confirm or deny what you think of that.

Willett: No, no I really don't know that.

Williams: Do you think that that led to the separation, perhaps lack of contacts and his own training?

Willett: It could have, it could have. You're talking about separation of R.P.I.?

Williams: Right, R.P.I. and the Norfolk division.

Willett: Norfolk situation and so on. Well, I think there were a number of factors. I think that would have come regardless of him. I think it was a part of the tide. William and Mary I think in general over its destiny was not to become a great big university ~~or to become~~ -- you already had other institutions that would tend to compete with that. And of course, for a long time you had stronger community support at Old Dominion; they wanted a college or university there. They didn't have one and they were a big center. Richmond on the other hand had a number of institutions here,

so that Old Dominion in the early days got considerably more support from the local community than R.P.I. I mean R.P.I. ~~was~~ really ^{had} very much of a stepchild status. William and Mary really didn't have the funds or resources to give it the kind of backing that they wanted. I know when I first came here - to the university I'd go and look at the library over here and see the number of old books that look ^{ed} like discards that had come from the William and Mary library. You see, this institution ~~was already~~ under a new board - had started to blossom. In fact, it was a pretty strong board. I wasn't on the board at first. I went on first to fill the unexpired term of Cliff Dowdy, who resigned, and then was re-appointed to the board and served until the merger took place, - about five years, I guess. And under the new board there was a pretty strong leadership. I think regardless of who had been at William and Mary that this separation of Old Dominion and this institution ^[from W&M] would have taken place. You see, even before the Wayne Commission ^{there was} ~~back in~~ the Bird Commission, on which Dr. Temple served* (it was a forerunner of the Wayne Commission, on which I served). The Bird Commission had talked about the need for a state university in this Richmond area, and in many ways that was a forerunner ^{and} helped ~~pave~~ the way, I think, for the appointment of the Wayne Commission, appointed by Governor Godwin during his first term. So I think the factors that caused the separation of Old Dominion and R.P.I. were factors

*T. Edward Temple, now president of V.C.U.

How do you account for this change to strong leadership? When R.P.I. became independent, a strong board was appointed by the Governor.

related to things beyond the control of William and Mary or the president of William and Mary. It might have ^{been delayed,} but it almost had to take place.

Williams: Had the tie between William and Mary and R.P.I. been a close one, would you say, in the later years that it was still R.P.I. ^{and} tied to William and Mary? What degree of supervision, let me phrase it that way, would you say William and Mary exercised?

Willett: No, I don't think there was a high level of supervision, and I don't think that R.P.I. was getting a great deal of support

It was not a very essential appendage off here.

You see, we're

still fighting the image of R.P.I. now as Virginia Commonwealth University.

The image that developed -- now don't misunderstand me --

going back to Dr. Hibbs. I know of few cases in history where a man has shown ^{over more} more courage and persistence [^] obstacles to keep something going here than Dr. Hibbs did. Back in 1917

he opened up here with one or two rooms in one of these buildings a school of social welfare,

But all the way through that period R.P.I. had really been a step-child. The image was that you could come here if you couldn't go anywhere else, and anybody that came here must not be able

to get anywhere else. Part of that came through -- what Dr. Hibbs found it necessary to do to just keep enough money to keep going.

I happened to be chairman of the committee appointed by the governor to ^{explore} ^{Plans for} develop the need for a

Is this what you meant here?

technical school and location of schools in the area. I remember a session I had with Dr. Hibbs. In fact, I invited him to meet with the committee and help us come up with a recommendation. But ~~see, we were~~ ^{RPI was} really teaching courses that were not ^{of} college grade, and he was doing it just to get enough money to survive. He'd get some federal funds in the process of doing that.

- Dr. Hibbs ~~wrote~~ ^{wrote} a book (and hadn't been able to get it published) on the history of R.P.I.

I headed a committee that the ^{President of V.L.V.} had set up to get the money to get the book published, which we did. ^{The book outlines} and the struggle

that this institution went through just to stay alive! But in the process, it was not able to do ^{many} things, and the old image of that institution still haunts this university. I

mean it's quite a different institution, ^{but} and we have a problem of really getting visibility and getting people right here in Richmond to know what we have to offer on this campus because there's still that old image of R.P.I. So I can't feel that

William and Mary was unhappy with this, ^{William and Mary} not saying this to be critical because ^{but} went through a period when they ^{and Mary} didn't have enough resources.

They asked for a budget here and a budget there, and of course the General Assembly was much more likely to support the main college than it was to put anything unique ^[there was] here. Plus ^{the} fact, as I said earlier, that R.P.I. had very little backing from the business leadership, which Old Dominion