

Session 2

October 8, 1975

Williamsburg, Virginia

Williams: I had another question on the separation I wanted to ask you: before the Colleges of William and Mary had been set up, Dr. Oliver, whom we had talked about last time, was made coordinator of the branches. But one of the things that occurred to me as I was reading on this period was how did his position as coordinator of the branches differ from the chancellorship that Chandler held from 1960 to 1962?

Webb: Actually, a great deal. The chancellorship set up for Mr. Chandler was not at all like the one George Oliver was filling. George Oliver was supposed to work very closely with the different divisions on matters such as preparing their budgets, bringing up material that needed to be worked on, say, in a new course or in a new program, and the two of us (in the case of the Norfolk division) would go to Mr. Chandler, who was then president, to defend or put forth the changes we wanted. So, Dr. Oliver, then, really worked very closely with these divisions in that way. He was sympathetic to them. Later on when he took over the work of R.P.I. he was in the same position of being one of the presidents of a division. But Admiral Chandler's was more of a glorified step up to open up the presidency than

Dr. Oliver's. Dr. Oliver was the coordinator, whereas the chancellor then was supposed to be over William and Mary's president, which Dr. Oliver was not because Chandler was president of William and Mary. So it made a difference in that way; it was a different level. In other words, the new chancellorship was, I'd say, more of an honorary type of thing, although he [Chandler] did, for quite a while, exercise considerable control over William and Mary, as well as the divisions--until the breakup came and then he continued as chancellor, which was totally honorary at that point. But in the in-between step he was the czar of the system as well, and Dr. Oliver was never in that position. Do you see the difference I'm trying to make?

Williams: He had more authority than Dr. Oliver?

Webb: Yes, indeed he was above the five presidents (Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg, Newport News and Williamsburg) until he got to the second level of chancellorship, which was then an honorary title entirely.

Williams: Yes, I was focusing on this two-year period to see how this was different.

Webb: One thing I just wanted to get into the record is that I'm talking from memory. I don't have any notes with me, and it's purely memory, so you'll have to check out dates with board minutes and things like that. We can get into the general period of when things happened and

what happened I'm very clear on, but to pin it down to a year, I can't do it. Now we were talking about the breakup that came at the Norfolk division; we separated. We talked about the second attempt, the first attempt was 1955--maybe it was '52.

Williams: '52, I think it was (1951).

Webb: '52--I lost track of that date, too. But we were talking about the second one when it did go to the legislature, and after Governor Harrison jumped over to the side of separation the whole legislature went pretty solidly to separate. Again, you can look that up, but I think it was a very heavy majority--something like 97 to 3 for breaking up the system. But a part of that goes back to Mr. Chandler's development of this whole system. He had the Petersburg division, Richmond division, Norfolk division, Newport News division, and Williamsburg. In developing this as a university here in Williamsburg, he received a great deal of opposition. Not all of it was surfaceable--I mean, it was under the surface rather than in view. The faculty had no desire to see this develop into a large university.

Williams: The faculty in Williamsburg?

Webb: The faculty in Williamsburg wanted to keep this a small liberal arts college. They had no desire to see sudden expansion to four to five to ten thousand students here.

And ultimately this led to difficulty in the VARC situation.

Before VARC was even in the minds of anyone, NASA came to William and Mary and to Mr. Chandler to talk about some way to upgrade the level of employees at NASA. NASA back in the old days was a testing center, [with] some developmental work, but basically not highly scientific. The science level was low, and NASA knew that they had to improve the level of the scientists if they were going to get the new space vehicles and all of that. So in order to be able to do that, NASA had to attract employees to the Newport News area. These people coming in wanted additional work in their field, wanted to associate with scientists in their field. There was no facility for this type training in the Norfolk-Newport News area, so NASA had to develop something that would attract these men. So they came up to William and Mary and offered a sum of money for the development of the physics department here. Again, I think if you look in the minutes of the board, you'll see the amount, but it was a considerable amount. We'll just say for example, \$100,000 a year for a period of five years. But with \$100,000--and come to think of it it was more than that--William and Mary was to bring in some top-flight scientists, mainly physicists, and these men would then set up a program here on the doctorate level, and the NASA people could get additional training

from the William and Mary faculty. And they did. They built that physics department up very quickly with some top-flight physicists. Most of them were high-energy physicists because NASA was to build--and this came out very shortly after William and Mary was given this grant--a cyclotron. They were going to spend some \$15,000,000 on the cyclotron in the Hampton area; again they wanted the cyclotron to be operated not by their own personnel but by some other agency. They had in mind--and they worked with Admiral Chandler--that this agency would be William and Mary, who would be the operator of the cyclotron, hire the people necessary to run the cyclotron: the technicians, the sweepers, everything that went along with it once it was built. They had to get permission from the legislature to do this because this was accepting \$15,000,000 worth of plant, and they had to get enabling legislation to allow them to do that, to operate the facility, to pay salaries which, in many cases, were above the level of salaries that they were paying here. And this was rather complicated. In addition to the cyclotron, there was need for another facility, which was VARC. SREL is the cyclotron. VARC would be within reasonable distance of SREL and would have office spaces, laboratories, classrooms, and a library that would work very closely with SREL giving the scientists a place to teach and a place to study and to do some basic

research that was not directly concerned with the cyclotron. A cyclotron is a very expensive thing; you can't go in there and operate it for a little \$50 project. So then they had to get the legislature to build VARC. All of this, you see, was being done-- it soon became quite evident that William and Mary was changing its complexion of a liberal arts college to a university with a very strong science emphasis, which didn't sit too well with many of the faculty. They saw the dominance of science rising, so they tipped off the University of Virginia that this contract was about to be negotiated with NASA for operating these facilities.

The University of Virginia (the president and his science dean) immediately went to the governor and said, "Governor, we want to be a part of the operation of the center. It should not be William and Mary; William and Mary's not strong enough in science. The University of Virginia is the strong man in sciences, especially in physics. William and Mary's just getting underway. They can't operate this. Our faculty and our students should be a part of it." And immediately the word got out that the University of Virginia was trying to get into the William and Mary act; of course, William and Mary was violently opposed to it. V.P.I. also heard of it and it said, "Well, if we bring in the University of Virginia, there's no reason not to

coming into this thing, no reason why Norfolk College of William and Mary shouldn't be a part, as well."

Williams: This is at the very beginning.

Webb: Very beginning when they started putting it all together. He said, "No, I don't think that would work. I'd like to get you in because it would give me one more vote when we went to the council; you and I at least could stick together, and in most cases we could pick up either V.P.I., University of Virginia, somebody to go with us and get things moving." But when it was presented the governor said, "no." At that point the Norfolk College of William and Mary did not have doctorate level programs in science. We were just getting into the master's level program, and so they said no, only those schools having graduate students and graduate faculty would be a part of it. So William and Mary at Norfolk was eliminated from the original group, but it was quite something. In fact, the records show when they proposed to build this cyclotron that really top-flight scientists knew that it was not the thing to do, that the thing was outmoded before it was built. There were already two or three of the same type that were available for experimentation and could be used, and to dump \$15,000,000 into something that by the time it was built was obsolete didn't make sense--except NASA had a lot of money and they wanted to spend it and this was

one way they did. As you know, that thing has just about closed down now. They came up with a proposal to spend some \$20,000,000 more to bring it up to higher standards, but the work being done in that field has also dropped off considerably. High-energy physics is long past its peak and there's no great demand for it, so they didn't get the money to bring that up to standards. Frankly, I don't know what it's doing now, whether it's just sitting there gathering dust or what, but it was a mistake to have built it when that type of machine was long since past its prime. New machines, new types--smaller, more effective, stronger--are already designed. But we have it. We're using VARC a great deal from Norfolk; we're sending our engineers over to teach classes at VARC, and I think even possibly some other courses that we're teaching for the peninsula--Newport News--Hampton area are being taught at VARC. But the original concept and expectations for VARC did not materialize. That's about all I know about VARC.

Williams: Would you say that it was mainly because there were "too many cooks in the stew" so to speak?

Webb: No only too many cooks in the stew kept it initially from being successful, yes, but it was never the proper thing to put there in the first place. The idea was poor to start with. It probably provided some incentive for NASA to bring in people with master's degrees,

promising scientists here and in Norfolk, that they could get the education extended into the doctorate level. It was helpful to NASA that way, but as far as SREL goes I'd say it was an ill-conceived project to start with.

Williams: From a physics point of view, you say?

Webb: Right.

Williams: You said that NASA came to William and Mary and offered the money (which is known) to build up their physics department. Was it ever considered that instead of that, they might come to your college and build up your physics department instead?

Webb: No, it wasn't, simply because at that time we had only an undergraduate program leading to the bachelor's degree, which would mean building it up very much faster. Also, the water barrier seems to be a great barrier between that area and Norfolk, the tunnel and so on being expensive. That'll be wiped out in a few years, and it's just as close to come to O.D.U. from NASA as it is to come from William and Mary to NASA, equal distance either way. So I think both will be serving NASA from now on, but at that time Mr. Chandler was in charge of what is now O.D.U. as well as William and Mary. He was not about to give too much strength to the Norfolk branch of William and Mary when he had the chance to bring it here (Williamsburg). His idea

was to develop a strong university at William and Mary with satellite feeds from the other areas. I don't think he ever really envisioned getting doctorate level programs on these outlying campuses. He sought to improve and enlarge William and Mary to that point. And as I say, this was one of the reasons that some of the faculty here tipped off the University of Virginia and said, "Look into this situation, because if William and Mary develops their science program strong, it's going to affect the University of Virginia," and it would.

Williams: Dissatisfaction over this burgeoning science program tied in with VARC and SREL: how was it tied in with the separation of the colleges--or was it?

Webb: It was all a part because the separation had to come; it had to get the strength to break it apart from some sources. The people in Norfolk wanted to be separate. The people in Richmond could care less; there was no real push from Richmond to separate R.P.I., although many knew the ultimate thing was to separate, but there was no real push there. The only push to separate was from Norfolk, plus the fact that V.P.I. and the university were getting quite uneasy about the development of William and Mary. Now the legislature, as anyone can tell you, is controlled by the lawyers mainly from the University of Virginia, and this group is a group that could really bring about the breakup. We didn't have

any strength in Norfolk to force any breakup in the system at all. The breakup came--of course, I worked very hard to persuade the governor that this thing should be done, but there were other people working on the governor just as hard to say, "No, it shouldn't be done." But there were lots of people working on the University of Virginia legislators to say, "Look, open your eyes and see what's happening. See what this system is that's being developed. They're going to siphon off everything from Richmond east and have their university. And the University of Virginia's going to be a little cow pasture up there in the hills, and that shouldn't be. The university is sacred." Lawyers from the University of Virginia in the legislature worked hard to break this thing up--don't you think they didn't. It's easily documented. It couldn't be Norfolk; it didn't have the power to break that thing up, but the entire state had the power and did it.

Williams: When VARC was split, why was it then that Old Dominion was added? Did you want it at that time?

Webb: Well, we were then part of William and Mary and we were willing to help so it wouldn't fall down on its face. We were willing to put some manpower in with William and Mary to get our foot in the door because, you see, I'd just gotten approval to put on a four-year engineering program, which was not easy in itself because the University of Virginia and V.P.I. both beat me to a pulp

before I could get any approval (for a four-year program in engineering). I wanted that engineering school not to remain a four-year engineering school but to develop into a Ph.D. program. The only way it could be done was to get some teaching load by increasing the number of students who wanted to go into Ph.D. level and that meant people at NASA, so we had quite a battle to convince the legislature and the governor and the State Council of Higher Education, all of them in the act, that it didn't make sense to send faculty down here from V.P.I. and down here from the University of Virginia to teach these engineering courses, that Old Dominion should be. We were able to back off the university and V.P.I. and keep them from setting up their engineering program at VARC. Both of them when they found out we were pushing to get in agreed to set up programs that would be programs that could be counted for a degree. Resident credit would be offered at NASA; although the student never attended the University of Virginia he would be given a degree from the University of Virginia, and this was quite a change. The University of Virginia always said, "You must attend our ivy walls because you can't be a University of Virginia graduate without coming to the University of Virginia."

Williams: And this was a William and Mary objection, too.

Webb: Yes, that's right. The same for William and Mary. Both

of them said, "You must get the feeling of our institutions."

Williams: But Old Dominion did not insist upon this?

Webb: No, we said we will give credit because, after all, this is done all over the country by many, many schools that have good reputations. If the instruction is there and is proper and is part of the program, there's no gain in having them come to the university. If there are library facilities which you must have, research facilities which you must have, all right. But if they are available off campus then why make them come to the university? Anyway they finally agreed that Old Dominion would operate the engineering program there, which we did. Now, of course, we have a doctorate level program in engineering and William and Mary has the doctorate level in physics, mathematics, oceanography.

Williams: Marine science?

Webb: Yes.

Williams: After its rather unpleasant experience with joint ownership, did you find that William and Mary was amenable to run VARC jointly with Old Dominion?

Webb: Yes. As long as we were part of William and Mary, yes.

Williams: No, I'm talking about in the late '60s when Governor Godwin dissolved the U.V.A.-V.P.I.-William and Mary ownership of VARC.

Webb: Yes, but we were a part of William and Mary. When did we break lose from William and Mary?

Williams: No, the separation had already occurred in 1962.

Webb: So, you're talking about after '62?

Williams: I'm talking about after '62, actually the late '60's. '69, I think it was, when the first agreement with VARC was dissolved and Old Dominion and William and Mary were to--

Webb: That wasn't '69. It was back way before that. More like '59 than '69. '69 I gave up the presidency of Old Dominion.

Williams: It was 1967. I have down here: "VARC agreement between U. Va., V.P.I., and William and Mary dissolved by Governor Godwin." VARC was reorganized by order of Governor Godwin in August 1967. At this time Old Dominion was included in the institutions offering courses at VARC (see letter of Davis Y. Paschall to Lewis W. Webb, Aug. 23, 1967, in Board of Visitors' Minutes, Sept. 9, 1967).

Webb: We worked with them. You see, in spite of the fact that we are called Old Dominion, we still feel a close tie to William and Mary, naturally because from 1930 to when we separated there were very close ties in the administration, [although] not in the faculty. Also there was a feeling of the students that "we are a part of William and Mary." And I still feel at home when I come to William and Mary. I've studied here for a full year, and

I've been associated with it since 1932. I can't help but feel if I could help William and Mary in any way, I would help them--other than to keep Old Dominion a part of William and Mary, which was not for the good of the commonwealth, for the good of the student body, good for the localities. I couldn't go that far.

Williams: What had been the Norfolk division and the Norfolk College has grown a great deal since its independence. Was it a plus for it to be a part of William and Mary for so long and then has it been a plus, now, to be separated?

Webb: Yes, it was a plus for it for a long time. In the beginning you couldn't have attracted half the students that we attracted without the name of William and Mary to go with it. They felt, "Well, we're going to a reputable institution. It's part of William and Mary, and it carries the name," and it carried us through some hard times. But once we have passed a certain point--what I call the critical mass--when you have a certain amount, it operates as a critical mass; it just builds up--just continues to build. When we'd gotten to that point, we were being held back by William and Mary, actually prevented from moving at the rate that this mass could move, so there had to be an explosion, which took place and we broke lose. And since that point Old Dominion University has grown very rapidly and will continue until the brakes

are put on at some point, which it should be, whether it's 15,000 or 20,000 [students]--wherever it is--but there should be a brake put on its development. I think the State Council of Higher Education realizes that and is trying to control the growth beyond a certain point. Of course, one of the things you have to remember is that the state has put in a system of these community colleges, and where we used to feed from Newport News, Hampton, Princess Anne, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Suffolk, we have these community colleges which claim they're giving two years of college work at the same level, transferable to these other institutions. So the growth of O.D.U. was very much affected by Suffolk College, two Portsmouth colleges, a Virginia Beach college, Newport News College, and maybe others, but those five siphoned off some of the lower student body in the first two years. Actually, from this point on they're going to be feeding into the upper classes, which will be a healthy thing, and you'll see O.D.U. outgrow V.P.I. [and] the University of Virginia in a very short length of time. Right now it's being held back because of lack of money, lack of financing--but that won't be forever. There's no way you could possibly stop O.D.U. from being the largest university in the state. R.P.I., which is now part of the Medical College, together called Virginia Commonwealth University, is in a similar situation. But I don't

feel--and I'm sure I'm right--that that combination in Richmond is going to grow as much as Old Dominion University. There are several reasons that it won't. But you'll live to see it; I may not.