

Interview of John H. Willis, Jr. by Edward McCarthy

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Tape 1, Side A

I. Personal History

Edward McCarthy: This is an interview with Dr. John Willis at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg Virginia on July 26, 2006 with Edward McCarthy. Jack, tell us your full name and where and when you were born.

John H. Willis, Jr.: My full name is John Howard Willis, Jr. I was born in Brooklyn, New York of all places, when my father, who was a career naval officer, was on duty at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and therefore I was born in Brooklyn which over the years sometimes I've had to live down. At any rate that's where I was born.

EM: When was that?

JW: 1929. November 15, 1929.

EM: And where was your father from?

JW: My father was from Richmond and went to the Naval Academy during the end of World War I and graduated from the Naval Academy in 1921 and he had served many places by the time I came along in 1929 mostly on the Adriatic Station and the old Yangtze River Patrol, so he had had a considerable career even then. I was born when he was assigned to the Brooklyn Navy Yard briefly and that's when he married my mother in New York and then I came along nine months later.

EM: And your mother's name and where was she from?

JW: She was from South Dakota. Geraldine Henning and she met my father in New York through mutual friends and they were married and subsequently to that I came along. I am the only one in the family, no other brothers or sisters, and we followed my father's career through all the years until he retired in 1951.

EM: How long did you live in Brooklyn?

JW: Jus a few months as far as I know and after that he was assigned to Bremerton Navy Yard in Washington state and eventually on various ships. He was a seagoing officer and therefore had sea duty about every three years, two to three years, so my mother and I followed him, followed his ships, followed his shore duty. They would alternate between sea duty and shore duty in those days, usually about three years at sea and two to three years at shore in a various Navy yards or ship yards or whatever. So, in the 30s, just to sort of skip ahead a little bit, in the 30s we lived in a number of places. Most importantly

back in Annapolis in the early 30s where my father taught ordinance and gunnery to the midshipmen. He was a gunnery specialist. And then in the middle 30s, he went aboard a brand new heavy cruiser called the *Vincennes*, as the gunnery officer. The gunnery officer was the third in command, after the captain, the Exec. The gunnery officer being the third important officer, so it was a very important and very prestigious position for him as gunnery officer of a brand new heavy cruiser with all the technology and as a result of that we followed the ship from Massachusetts where he put it in commission in Boston, Massachusetts and eventually to Europe in 1937, and I'll say a brief thing about that in a little bit, and then out to Long Beach, California and then back to Norfolk and then back to Annapolis in the early 40s when he taught again at Annapolis. Then he taught at post graduate school ordinance and gunnery. The post graduate school was there in Annapolis before it moved subsequently to California. And so we were there for a wonderful year and then after that he was assigned to Portsmouth Shipyard here in Portsmouth, Virginia where we spent a good deal of time until he went to sea during World War II in which case we moved to, my mother and I moved back to Annapolis to be there during the war years while he was at sea. So we moved on the average of every two to three years and as a result I went through four different high schools, graduating finally from high school in Annapolis, Maryland in 1946. So it was a checkered career but one that we, Navy juniors as we call ourselves, got accustomed to and took considerable pride that we were able to do this.

EM: You were going to mention about his sea duty?

JW: Yes, his sea duty was interesting because he was on combat ships. He'd started out after the naval academy on old four stack destroyers out in China, China station, gun boats up and down the Yangtze River with those wonderful, incredible stories about all those years. The book Sand Pebbles reflects a lot on those years very similar to his experience. And after that he was on battleships, he was on the old *New York*, he was always in gunnery on *New York* and then the *Vincennes* when he was a gunnery officer and then during the war after his service here in Portsmouth at the shipyard during the early phases of the war he was in charge of ordinance here at the shipyard repairing ships, British ships particularly, that had been hit in the Battle of Malta. This is during the Lend Lease when we weren't in the war yet but we were repairing British ships and he was in charge of the gunnery side of that. But then he was given command of a brand new attack transport, called the *Henrico* appropriately, nobody realized it but the coincidence was that it was named after the county he was born in. He was the first commanding officer and he took the *Henrico*, it was attack transport, through the Normandy invasion, the southern France invasion, to Italy, and then out to the west coast and he was in the Okinawa invasion when the ship was hit by kamikaze and he just barely escaped with this life. The ship was badly damaged and that was his last sea duty. After that he was sent, after the command of the *Henrico* was so damaged he went to Guam where he was in charge of all the munition and armament that the US fleet needed in the Pacific. That point, unbeknownst to him, the atomic bomb went right through his hands, he didn't realize what it was, but (laughing) it came right through his command, parked out on the end of a runway in a big box and he didn't know what it was, but at any rate, after the Guam experience he was then given command of an ammunition depot in New Orleans

in the late 40s then command of an ammunition depot in Portsmouth here until he retired in 1951. So, my mother and I pretty much followed the ship and all of those exchanges except during the war years when he was at sea with the Henrico. We sort of holed up in Annapolis where a lot of Navy families did, either there or in Norfolk, or in San Diego Navy ports. So I really grew up in the Navy, going aboard his ships, imbibing all the tales, the stories, the cult of professional naval experience. And at one point I considered going to the Naval Academy, especially when we lived in Annapolis for so long, but then, my eyes were not quite strong enough and I decided I didn't want to do that anyway, so I went to the University of Virginia.

I would like to say something about the trip in 1937, which was very unusual. When he took the gunnery officer position on the *USS Vincennes*, in those days and still to a certain extent, Navy ships go through what they call a shake-down cruise or a shake-down period, when the Navy tests out everything before it officially accepts the ship. Well, in 1937, considering that the Spanish Civil War was going on and things were heating up in Europe, I suspect, although it was never made clear, that they sent the *Vincennes* on a goodwill tour, which was sort of a political goodwill tour, of the northern countries. So the ship went to England, went to Sweden, Denmark, France, and my mother and I with a couple of ladies whose husbands were on the ship as well, decided it was a wonderful adventure and so we went and I was at that point about 6 1/2, 7 years old, and we went through Germany. Of course the Navy could not send any officers, would not send any officers to Germany in 1937. After all World War II was just two years away, and there were a lot of immigrants coming back out of Czechoslovakia and Poland and from Nazi overrun, but my mother and I were able to go on a passport through Germany. So we spent about two weeks in Germany, which I remember very vividly, especially in Berlin because they were having torch lit parades in the Hitler youth unit, singing songs. The thing that impressed me the most was that in all of the store windows the mannequins were all dressed in uniforms and being raised as I was to love uniforms I think I would have been the first one to sign up for the Hitler youth, which (laughing) appalls me today, but I remember thinking what neat uniforms those kids my age had.

EM: How old were you?

JW: I was about 7, 6 1/2 to 7. And we had some various adventures over there, but it was a remarkable trip, it was about a two month trip, two to three months in the spring of 1937 and on the ship coming back, the Holland America line ship coming back, there were, I remember some immigrants, exiles fleeing from Nazi occupation that made an impression on me.

EM: During your high school years, did you, were you involved in any extra-curricular activities of any kind?

JW: No, because my high school years were during World War II, and almost all, the only thing high schools offered in those days were sort of pre-military physical training. I started off in Portsmouth, Virginia as a freshman and then my sophomore, junior, and

senior years in Annapolis, ending up Severn Prep School for one year. But because of the gas rationing, because of the severe rationing for everything in fact, we all had to have ration cards, we couldn't drive very much, all sorts of extracurricular activities in schools were cut, just eliminated. In Portsmouth, where I started as a freshman, the only activity for anybody were calisthenics, preparing kids for the army, and so it was pretty grim although we had a good time, but there weren't any activities. The most active I was (laughing) was on the dance committee (laughing) for the senior prom. (Interviewer laughing in background.) And so we had senior proms, junior proms, but at a reduced rate.

EM: Why did you go to the University of Virginia?

JW: Well, I entered Virginia in 1947. And it was before the Korean War, but at any rate, right after WWII there was a new program called the Holloway Plan in which, in 1947 it began as a program taking over the old, V12 programs for commissioning officers, and it was designed for increasing the number of officers in the Navy, devised by Admiral Holloway, very respected and renowned man, and a number of universities were included in this program. It was very competitive, you had to go through a physical and all that and then we had the equivalent of an SAT test, and it was before really the SAT were required by anybody and it was a rather rigorous exam. Fortunately I was able to be selected. And you were to list your top priorities of schools. I wanted to go to Princeton but unfortunately I didn't make the cut to Princeton so the Navy was going to send me out to Arizona someplace, and (laughing) I decided, my father and I decided I didn't want to go to Arizona so it turned out UVA had the program and so I entered from New Orleans where he was Commanding Officer of a Naval Ammunitions Depot in New Orleans and I entered in 1947 to UVA and had 4 wonderful years, the longest I'd ever been in one school in my life, from first year to graduation, which was quite remarkable.

EM: During the summertime, did you have any kind of work activity?

JW: Oh I always worked, in fact back in Annapolis when I was...

EM: Still in high school...

JW: Just in, still in high school, everybody worked in those days, and I did everything from washing cars to cutting grass to working for the county surveyor in Annapolis. And then when we were in New Orleans when I was between my first and second year I worked as a carpenter's apprentice on a housing project, so just automatically kids in those days, always worked over the summer. We didn't get paid very much the way kids do today but we did that, sometimes very hard work in fact.

EM: At UVA were in involved in any extracurricular activities?

JW: Yes, I went out for the glee club and I was in the glee club for a couple of years, trying to be a bass and I enjoyed that considerably, especially with the concerts at the various girls' colleges because UVA was not coed in those days, it was single sex. But

the most interesting thing I did was to join a fencing club, one of my fraternity, senior fraternity brothers who was actually in law school had been a fencer at Stanford and so he had been in the war and then after when he was in law school he started a fencing club and I got very interested in the fencing, fenced on the club, it was not a varsity sport, it was a club sport and fenced for a couple of years with a foil and that got me interested enough so that later, after college, when I was in France for a year, I took it up again and took fencing lessons, with the saber, from a master of arms in Paris, then in graduate school I fenced in various private clubs in New York, where I was at Columbia University. So when I came to William and Mary, after a couple of years I decided I wanted to continue that so I created for the first time the men's fencing club at William and Mary. Back in the 1930s William and Mary had an intercollegiate fencing team of some renown, but it had lapsed for all the war years. So when I came to William in 1959, or in the 60s actually, I picked up and started the William and Mary men's fencing club and eventually turned it into a varsity sport and was coaching it as a varsity sport for a couple of years until it got (laughing) too much for me to do. Now, fencing was a great deal of fun for me in college and in graduate school and later on.

EM: And you were good at it?

JW: Well, (laughing) officially adequate. I wasn't a star, but I was reasonably good, good enough to get by and enjoy it. But that was mostly it, I majored in English at UVA, and had the, joined the fraternity and had a good time. And, but I was in the NROTC program, which I had been accepted into, which meant that every summer we had a summer cruise, midshipmen cruise, and we had drill once a week and we always had to take a class in naval science of one sort or another.

EM: Were you commissioned at graduation?

JW: Well, on graduation I was commissioned and the interesting thing about this NROTC program, was that unlike previous programs when you got commissioned you were commissioned in the reserve. This program, which was unique, it was an attempt to parallel the Naval Academy with the option of going to a regular university. So I was commissioned as an ensign in the regular Navy, not in the reserves, and that was a very important distinction, at least in my family, where USN was better than USNR (laughing) but I never thought of myself as an equivalent of an academy graduate. We didn't have as much technical subjects as they did at the Academy, which was fine by me, being an English major. But any rate, so I was commissioned an ensign in the regular Navy.

EM: And then...

JW: 1951.

EM: Did you serve in the Navy?

JW: I served three years, and I was on a destroyer, ended up being gunnery officer on a destroyer during the Korean years, so I was in the service during the last part of Korea from 1951 to 54.

EM: Did you serve in Korea?

JW: We were out there briefly during, after the peace had been settled. Our ship was sent, our ship was a destroyer on the east coast, essentially an east coast destroyer. But they sent us out to the Pacific as so many ships were rotated out there, we went out to the Pacific and we were there for the demilitarized zone occupation when after the peace accord and they had split Korea then they airlifted British Sikh troops into the DMZ right after it had been established and so I was there to witness that but certainly never in combat. It was all over by the time I got out there but I did get a, ironically, a Korean service medal. (both men laughing) For my distinguished service.

EM: And then when your time was up you left the Navy?

JW: I left the Navy, I thought for a while that I might go in the submarines because at one point before I became gunnery officer on a destroyer I was anti-submarine warfare officer and had been sent to Key West to be trained in anti-submarine warfare and I was very much enamored of the submarines. I found it so difficult to hunt them down as an anti-submarine officer I thought better to be on the other side of that game. (chuckling) And so I applied to New London and was put on a waiting list, I wasn't accepted right away. That was in my second year at sea, and by the time I came up to be selected to go to New London, to sub school, I decided I didn't really want to do that, I wanted to get out of the Navy, didn't want to make it a career. So I got out of the Navy in '54.

EM: And then you went to graduate school?

JW: No, not right away. I got a job working at Natural Bridge, Virginia through the placement office at UVA, there were some UVA graduates who had bought Natural Bridge, the tourist spot in Virginia and they were looking for somebody who would do some public relations. Well I had no experience in that but thought it might be interesting to do it so I spent a year at Natural Bridge in a capacity of sort of director of public relations, whatever that was. Mostly promoted travel to Natural Bridge, but it was an interesting year. I did a lot of traveling around the state and up to Toronto to the annual tourist program. And it, it was an interesting year, it sort of gave me time to sort things out, I knew I didn't want to continue to do that sort of work and along the way one of my previous professors at University of Virginia was then head of the English department at W&L, Washington and Lee in Lexington. Natural Bridge is just down the road from Lexington. So I made contact again with Marvin Perry who was then head of the English department at W&L and through various conversations I realized, suddenly, that what I wanted to do was go to graduate school in English. But I realized, I soon found out that all the major schools; Harvard, and Columbia, and Yale, especially Columbia, required language facility. French, German, and Latin, reading abilities in French, German, and Latin and I had only studied Spanish at UVA. Nobody had ever told me that these other

languages were at all important. So in order to catch up I decided I would go and spend a year in Paris and study French, which I did mostly on my own savings, and actually spent about nine months in Paris at the Alliance Francaise and got my French up and at the same time tried to learn German which was a considerable barrier, but eventually when I came to William and Mary I had, well actually after that one year in Paris I went to Columbia, was admitted to Columbia to the graduate program. And, there I certainly passed the French reading exam, I started studying German seriously. It wasn't until I came to William and Mary in 1959 after my masters at Columbia, I came to William and Mary to get a job as an instructor in English, that I finished the, the German requirement. And then when we went back to Columbia to finish up the doctorate I memorized enough Latin (laughing) to get through the Latin exam, so at any rate, the upshot was that after Natural Bridge I went to Paris for about nine months and from there was admitted to Columbia and then spent the rest of the time in Columbia and here at William and Mary.

EM: Why did you decide on English as a major, even as an undergraduate?

JW: I had been attracted, I always loved literature, always loved reading, always been enamored of language even as a little boy, The family myths, you know, the stories that are told about you by your parents that become reality, even though (laughing) they're probably all fictional, but apparently, according to my mother I loved big words and, used to peruse the dictionary out of (laughing) just interest, and when I was at, uh prep school in Annapolis. I had a wonderful English teacher, who had been a Marine at, in the Pacific and, he sort of awoke me, to the wonderful qualities of literature. He was a wonderful teacher, and for the first time I really became enamored of literature as a subject in prep school. When I got to Virginia, we had complete flexibility as to majors. We did have to take enough science, and physics particularly, and naval science to be commissioned, but we were free. That was a great advantage of the program, you could major in anything you wanted to, unlike the Naval Academy, where, essentially it's an engineering program, and so after as now, you only decide at the end of your sophomore year what subject you're going to major in. By that time I had two wonderful introductory British literature courses by my mentor Marvin Perry who was the chair at W&L that I met up with later and that convinced me, not knowing anything else that I wanted to do, knowing that I had to serve in the Navy on graduation, I was pretty much free of any kind of responsibility, I didn't have to take anything that would suit me for a job, knowing that I was going to go in the Navy for 2 to 3 years and possibly even make it a career. So I followed my heart, I followed my love of language and literature and majored in English, and never looked back.

EM: So you went to Columbia for your masters?

JW: Yes. Columbia was unusual...

EM: And why did you pick Columbia?

JW: Well, I applied from Paris actually, and it was a blind move, I knew Columbia was a very distinguished university. I applied to Harvard and Columbia, I can't remember if I applied to Yale now. Apparently what happened, in my application to Harvard, one of my professors who was to write a letter of recommendation for me, forgot to send the letter of recommendation to Harvard, so by the time I learned that my application was on hold at Harvard, Columbia had already accepted me. So fortunately he did send the letter to Columbia (laughing) and I was accepted, somewhat on a conditional basis. I had not been a great scholar as an undergraduate, and I had been out for several years, in fact it was five years before I actually got to Columbia, from graduation, didn't get there 'til '56. So they accepted me on a sort of conditional basis, but Columbia was at that point, I think, in retrospect, it was probably the greatest period at Columbia as far as many departments, it turned out that the Columbia in the middle to late 50s, early 60s was at sort of its peak, a number of absolutely world scholars were there, it turned out to be a very exciting place for me, and, I had to establish myself the first year to overcome the conditional admission, which I did. Columbia also was unique in its size, its sort of democratic admission policy, it was very tolerant of people like myself who were not particularly great scholars to begin with and, it had a terminal masters program which was unusual. Most universities, then, now its certainly true, to a greater extent, have just doctoral programs, you're admitted to a program, essentially to a doctoral program. At the end of the second year perhaps, sometimes the third year, there's a sort of screening process and if you're not capable of going on to the doctorate they sort of award you, de facto, a masters degree without any subsequent work, and you're off on your own. Columbia, in contrast to that, had a terminal, full-fledged masters program and...

EM: How long would that take?

JW: That took me two years, two and a half years. And that was perfect for me because I wasn't at all sure I wanted to go on to a Ph.D. And, the masters was quite a rigorous program, we had a lot of written work to do, and you had to pass your reading exam in at least one language, and so, but, I did that successfully and was strong enough to be admitted to candidacy for the doctorate and so I just went on with that. But, at the end of my masters degree, not having anything, I'd used up my GI Bill from Korea, from the Korean service, and there were no scholarship monies available in those days, you just went on your own. There was a little bit of money for doctoral candidates, but I was far from that, so I needed a job, I couldn't afford to continue at Columbia, and Anne and I were married. After that, after that masters degree I came, I found a job here at William and Mary, and I came down here in 1959 and started in as an instructor in English and taught here for two years. And Anne and I were married in the second year and then we went back up to Columbia to finish up the residency so I was able to earn enough money at William and Mary, plus the fact that Anne went to work in New York that we could manage to scrimp through for a year at Columbia and finish up my residency before in fact finding another opening at William and Mary and coming back to William and Mary in the early 1960s.

EM: During your, years at, Columbia, your first time there, were there any particular research activities you were involved in, or...?

JW: No, they didn't do that, now there's such marvelous emphasis on even undergraduate research, not to mention graduate research, but in those days, none of that was available, nobody thought that undergraduates or early graduate students would do any research, at least in the humanities, I'm sure it was different in the sciences, it always has been. But in the humanities there was nothing like that, and so there was no way really unless you drove a cab or waited on tables to make do, there was no source of income. There were no scholarship funds, there were no research funds and so you just applied yourself, day and night to your studies. It was very intense and, Columbia, since it's a major university in a huge city, what I liked about it was that it was impersonal, after my years in the Navy and, I was mature enough so I didn't need the support services of a confederation of graduate students. In fact, the opposite was true say of Princeton, where the graduate program was very small, very clique-ish, and in retrospect I've heard horror stories about how tough it was if you weren't on the right side of given professors. What I liked about Columbia in those days was its openness, in fact it was a meritocracy, you were accepted into the upper levels on your merit, not because of any personal dealings, so it was very impersonal, but I liked that, I was ready for that, and, so there was no social life. You could have tea once in the afternoon in the graduate lounge (laughing) every Wednesday afternoon, and that was it. But of course you had access to the theatre and the movies and that sort of thing. I had a wonderful time. It was just a real awakening for me, those years, before marriage and after.

EM: Did you have any jobs at all, or did you...?

JW: No jobs at all, now during the summer I would have to find some sort of employment and so in one summer, the summer of 1957 in fact, I came down, you see my father at that time was living in Portsmouth Virginia, and so it was close enough I could come home, and so one summer I worked for the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, helping write a newsletter and that sort of thing and the summer of 1957 I actually spent here at Jamestown for the first exposition, the 1957 celebration at Jamestown, and I worked a Virginia travel booth handing out (laughing) Virginia travel brochures and stirring up interest in travel in Virginia. None of these were very highly paid jobs, nor very distinguished, but they did give me a little income and, at the same time I was working on my masters thesis, which was unique to Columbia because it was a terminal program. You had to write a, in fact I wrote a 200 page thesis for my masters degree, so I was doing that in the summers partly, as well as working at odd jobs.

EM: What was the topic of the...?

JW: It was on Ulysses, strange to say since I've taught it so many times. It was on early symbolism in Ulysses. It was a wonderful experience for me, opening up the lights of literary research. I enjoyed it tremendously.

EM: Somewhere about this time you met your wife.

JW: I met Anne, whose father was in the Navy as well.

EM: And what is her name?

JW: Anne Romberg Willis now. Her father, Captain Romberg, was, at the same time my father commanded an ammunition depot in Portsmouth at St. Julian's Creek, now since closed. Her father was on duty in the Portsmouth shipyard, he was a naval architect and naval engineer. He had a very distinguished career at the Naval Academy and gone to MIT and being in ship design and he was in the repair facilities at the Portsmouth shipyard. So I actually met through my parents, her parents, before I met her and, got to know the Romberg family very well, and then met Anne and we fell in love subsequently and we're married.

EM: Where did you meet her?

JW: I met her in Portsmouth through her families and the Navy parties and that sort of thing.

EM: And when did you marry?

JW: We married in 1960 and we're coming up for our 46th anniversary here. In fact, we've had it, we just had it. We were married in 1960 out in California because by that time her father had left the Portsmouth shipyard and gone to the Naval Repair Facilities in San Diego, he was still on active duty. He was a much younger man than my father and my father had retired in '51. So at any rate we were married in San Diego.

EM: It sounded like a fairly long distance courtship.

JW: Well it was in a way, although we didn't get serious about it until 1959 when I was here at William and Mary and she was in California, but we met over that summer and she came back to the east coast to attend some friend's affairs and we met again and that led very quickly (laughing) to marriage and so were married in San Diego in 1960 and came back here to finish up my last of 2 years, '59/'60, '60/'61, we were married in '60, and in the summer of '61 we went back up to Columbia and spent a year there finishing up the residency requirement and then came back here in '62.

EM: As an instructor.

JW: As an instructor.

EM: And what were you teaching in those years?

JW: I was teaching all English, well, primarily freshman English and sophomore English and, as a result a freshman writing course. We were expected to do day labor work, nobody ever allowed an instructor, or even an assistant professor to teach upper level courses in those days. You had to sort of earn your way up the ladder. (laughing) So we

did all the scut work, we did the freshman courses and introductory literature courses, but it was great training, it was good. I still to this day teach almost any course.

EM: When you were considering going to Columbia to obtain a masters were you thinking of becoming a teacher at that time?

JW: I did...

EM: When did you...?

JW: I did, I was thinking of it, but of course as I've told so many friends since then, and a lot of students, in those days there was no preparation for teaching. Nowadays all the graduate programs incorporate practice teaching, in those days that was considered something you either learned on your own or inherited or inhaled or whatever, or fumbled through, so there was no pedagogical preparation whatsoever and I had no idea whether I would be good at it or would like it and, that's why my first year at William and Mary was such an important experiment. I had never been in a classroom before, to teach, I had just gotten my masters degree and was put right in, to full five course load teaching freshmen and sophomores. It was a very heady experience, I was nervous as heck the first couple of times. And then I realized that I could do it. I wasn't at all sure, it was a gamble. Absolute gamble in graduate school; that one, I would like graduate work, and two, that I would maybe want to teach, and three, a remote possibility that I would want to go on for a Ph.D. All of which worked out, positively.

EM: So your first teaching experience here was positive, you liked it?

JW: Oh I loved it, as soon as I got over my stage fright. (laughing) As soon as I realized that I could talk for 30 minutes or 40 minutes or whatever, I found that I really enjoyed it, loved working with the students and loved teaching, really made that my career. But, the first class (laughing), I had never been in a classroom before of course, had no experience, so I wrote out my first lecture very carefully and timed myself carefully, reading it slowly and pausing and figured that that was about, you know these were 50 minutes classes, and I felt like well while I'm at it I'll do my second lecture and I'll really be ahead of things so I wrote out my second lecture, and I may have told you this story, I got in there and was going along very smoothly and quietly and then looked at my watch and I'd already used up the first hour's work and I was only, not even halfway through so I plunged into my second hour's work, sweating terribly through the whole thing, barely finished, and then let them go early. So I worked through two hours, I thought, of work, god knows how fast I was talking, and that was a considerable sobering experience. I realized I had to slow down and maybe pace myself better.

EM: You didn't take any questions?

JW: (laughing) I didn't take any questions, no way was I going to let them question anything I said (laughing). But after a couple tries I, I guess I settled down enough to do reasonably well.

EM: So you did four years as an instructor here?

JW: Yes, well at least, two years. And then we went back up to Columbia and finished up there and came back. And, while I was here in '59/'60, '60/'61, finding something to do in the summer I taught some summer classes but we didn't have a lot of summer program in English, certainly not much available to an instructor, mostly upper, senior faculty taught the summer programs. So one summer I worked at helping to develop writers at Fort Eustis. There was an officer in command, Fort Eustis of course is the army transportation school and as a result they had a staff of professional writers who wrote instruction manuals for all of their equipment and the commanding colonel in charge of that program felt that the level of writing was too jargonistic, it wasn't clear enough and simple enough so he asked if there would be somebody here from William and Mary who could come down and work with their writers. So I was thrown in the gap and suddenly was confronting 40 and 50 year old professional writers (laughing) and trying to improve their writing levels for these manuals, it was another one of those learning experiences, it was better for me than for them, I learned much more than they did. But that was one summer. And the second summer, which led eventually to my returning to William and Mary. It was the year in which there was a, it was a primary year for the governorship of Virginia and it was a closely contested contest between two Democratic candidates. Senator Harry Byrd pretty much controlled politics in Virginia so the state at that point was totally democratic and was run by what skeptics call the Byrd machine, at any rate, so it was a foregone conclusion that the next governor would be a Democrat, but there was a rebel in the ranks so the contest in the primary was between the Byrd candidate and this offshoot maverick candidate and they decided they needed a speechwriter to help the Byrd candidate, so President Paschall, who was then president of William and Mary, had a lot of contacts in Richmond with the Byrd organization, and so he called over to the English department, said do you have anybody there who might do some speechwriting? Well it turned out I needed a job again for the summer so they sent me up to Richmond and never having written a speech before I had an amazing 3 months or 2 months experience commuting everyday to Richmond and working with the Byrd organization writing speeches for the candidate Albertus Harrison who became governor. Needless to say after that, not because of my skills but in spite of them, he became governor and, Mills Godwin, the subsequent governor, well known governor of Virginia, was running as Lieutenant Governor so I was sort of present at a really interesting turning point in Virginia political history, writing speeches to the best of my ability.

EM: Then you went to finish up at Columbia?

JW: We went back in '60/'61 academic year. I had to finish up a residency for the doctorate. I had taken all the courses for the doctorate before coming to William and Mary, after my masters degree, except for the final doctoral seminar, and a couple of residence requirements and then all the preliminary examinations, the orals and whatever. So I had to go back and we went back in the summer of '61 and spent the year. In the meantime Anne became pregnant and I had scheduled all my exams at Columbia for the early fall of '62 and, in the meantime realized that I didn't, we didn't want to spend the

rest of the time in New York, which was what conventionally happened to doctoral candidates. You passed your preliminary examinations and then you found a teaching job somewhere in the New York area while you worked on your dissertation. Well, we realized we didn't want to do that, we didn't want to raise a child in the New York area and it just happened that a job opened up here at William and Mary in the English department again and before I even accepted it, it turned out that Paschall, President Paschall wanted an assistant in his office. So what happened then was that I was able to come back to William and Mary, teaching in the English department and also acting as assistant to the president of the college which was ideal and it was a remarkably lucky stroke because we could come back here. We had some friends here and it was sort of a continuation after a year's absence, to come back and to teach again and with familiar friends and colleagues and then the unusual experience of being an assistant to the president for a while.

EM: What did you do in that capacity? And how much of the day's time would that take?

JW: Well, it was a full-time job. I started out being a full time teacher in English as an instructor, but then he wanted a full time administrative assistant so I took that, but I made sure that I continued to teach at least one course in the English department. So it was a full time job, and the advantage was that it covered my summer expenses 'cause in those days of course you only had a contract for the academic year, there was no pay during the summer. You either had to teach summer school or get a research grant which didn't pay very much, or in some way make up the difference for the year's salary, so it was lucky for me that, I could one, continue my teaching which I much preferred to do but also pick up the administrative side of it and get paid for the full year, so it was very useful for me, very enlightening, very educational I might say.

EM: How long did you work in the president's office?

JW: Well, I came back here in 1962 as I've said and continued as an instructor of English, but picked up the position in the president's office and worked there for three years, from 1962 to 1965, and in that time frame from '62 to '65 I finished up as an instructor and then was appointed as an assistant professor in 1964, so I was assistant professor for the last year that I worked for the president in his office. After that I went back to full-time teaching and in and out of administration areas that we'll cover in subsequent conversations.

EM: During your time in the president's office were you involved in any significant campus events, activities, or...?

JW: Yes, it was a very dynamic time in William and Mary because President Paschall had become president in 1961 and, the previous president Admiral Chandler had, well it's a more elaborate story than I think I want to get into next time, but any rate, it was a transitional period for William and Mary. It was a time when the branch colleges were created and the College of William and Mary was going through a period of growth and development under first Chandler and then under President Paschall. And so it was a very

exciting time, my responsibilities were fairly minimal, I mean, I traveled with him a good bit, I helped you know ordinary kind of administrative things, with mails, with various committee work and things of that sort, but mostly it was really a learning experience, I got to understand the operation of the college in a way I never would have as a faculty member and had some responsibility. Nothing of any great significance, but I was on a lot of committees just because I was de facto representing the president on certain committees, and ex officio, and so that, that gave me a great deal of understanding, and I liked it, I liked working in the president's office, but I realized I didn't want to continue that, I did not want to go into administration. I was always pulled back to the teaching so after three years I realized I'd had enough of that, had enough of that experience and I was tired of it, frankly a little bored after three years. I was not meant to be a full time administrator. And so I was taken back in the English department, much to my pleasure, and then devoted myself to full time teaching for the next two years.

II. Teaching Experience

EM: This is the end of tape 1, side A. (flip tape) This is an interview with Dr. John Willis, at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia, on August 2, 2006, by Edward McCarthy. You began your teaching career as an assistant professor in 1964. And could you comment on, how you were hired and what you were hired to teach at that time, what particular areas of, to cover for the English department?

JW: Well first a correction Ed, you have me as an assistant professor in '64, actually I was hired in 1959 as an instructor in English, then an opening here and I applied from Columbia where I was doing graduate work and I was hired in 1959 to teach 15 semester hours, that is 5 courses in a semester, five three hour courses, and at the princely salary of \$4,400, and if you were good, and good behavior, you got an annual merit increase of \$200, which of course was pretty good money then because it was 1959 and I hadn't earned anything at Columbia. But I was just an instructor, there were, it was a time when the English department was beginning to expand a little bit, there were two of us who were hired as instructors that year, the first time new faculty had come in the English department in some time and one assistant professor was hired at that time, and we were expected to teach, as I said, five courses. It's unthinkable now because we, at most, teach three courses a semester and often only two courses a semester for various reasons. And at that point in 1959 all students had to take a full year of freshman writing courses and a full year of introduction to English literature, English 101 and 102 the freshman writing course, there was a little more advanced level if they had had really good high school experience, and introduction to literature, 201 and 202, they were continuous courses and so they had to take 12 hours of English as their requirements. They could substitute for the English survey of literature, 201 and 202, they could take a course in the humanities which we offered then, and/or fine arts, but most students took the full year survey course in English literature and as I remember as an instructor I taught 2 or 3 sections of freshman writing and 2 maybe 3 of the introduction to literature, I can't remember the balance, but probably 2 of freshman and uh 3 of the sophomore survey course in English literature.

EM: And this was a requirement of all entering students, regardless of what they would be majoring in later?

JW: Absolutely, that was required of all students. The only thing they could substitute was for the second, or for the first, for the two semesters of English literature, 201 and 202, they could substitute either a humanities course or I think they could substitute a philosophy or a fine arts course. But that was it, there were degree requirements that they had to fulfill, of course they had to take a math or science and that sort of thing, and they had language requirements, but in humanities they had to have two full years of English. Now the freshman course in those days we would teach grammar for six weeks in the first semester, six weeks of grammar which I think I hated as much as they did and nobody had ever taught me to teach grammar, I had to do some hard studying, and six weeks of grammar and then writing freshman papers. In the second semester of the freshman writing, the 102, we would introduce them to literary types so we would read some great books and they would write papers on them.

EM: In those days, in terms of teaching college students grammar, do you feel they really needed that, were they ill-prepared coming out of high school?

JW: No they weren't, and it wasn't long before universities nationwide dropped that, it was very common in the 1950s to teach some grammar along the way, and what we recognized, that is what professors of English and the humanities realized, was that excellence in grammar did not necessarily produce excellence in writing, and of course the object was to make them good writers and what you sometimes found were students who had memorized all the rules of grammar, they could diagram sentences until the sun went down, and couldn't write a decent sentence and couldn't put together a structured paper. So I can't remember when we dropped the six weeks grammar requirement, but probably sometime in the early to middle sixties, with great relief by all, although the old timers used to object that we were making it too easy, they should have grammar, grammar, grammar! And that's a myth long since dispelled.

EM: When they dropped the grammar did they intensify the writing aspect?

JW: Yes we did, and we just filled those first six up with introduction to writing various kinds of papers, you know, argument, description, process, the typical rhetorical types of writing and so, one advantage, even though we were teaching an incredible load of five courses, and in fact, my first year we had Saturday classes until noon Saturday to fill out that rigorous schedule of five courses. But, the advantage was they were small, I don't think I ever had more than 20 to 23 students in one section, so actually if you figure it that way the total enrollment that we were teaching, the total number of students we were teaching, with a five course load wasn't that heavy compared to nowadays when you customarily teach three sections a semester of maybe 35 students. So actually it was a fairly decent load, but it gave you no time to do anything. We were like high school teachers. You couldn't do any research, you couldn't do any scholarship of any amount, and you were just glued to papers, you just read papers and graded papers all day long.

And we had very heavy writing assignments; they had a theme a week, in the freshmen writing courses, and uh...

EM: And you had to correct all these?

JW: I had to correct hem all, it was very intensive.

EM: In those days was there, much emphasis or pressure to do research on the faculty?

JW: No. At William and Mary there was no pressure whatsoever. In fact, there were only two members, senior members, of the English department when I entered it that had ever published any sort of scholarship. The other senior members were hired, as we all were, to teach. The emphasis was on undergraduate teaching and there was no, there was no graduate program at that point, and uh, you were not, if you did the research and published something then that was marvelous, everybody was very pleased that you were doing it, but none of us had the time to do it. In fact the problem was that most of us, that is the instructors like myself who came in, came in with a masters degree and most of the hours toward a Ph.D., but came in without their dissertation, and so once, I finally, went back to Columbia after my first two years, and then returned in '64 I had my dissertation to write, and to squeeze that in on top of the regular teaching load was a bit tough, and it took therefore summers and holidays as much time as I could get to write my dissertation in absentia, and that was fairly characteristic in those days, instructors were always hired with a masters, but without a Ph.D. If you were, if you had your Ph.D., generally you were hired as an assistant professor.

EM: About your writing the dissertation, was that done mostly here in Williamsburg?

JW: It was done all in Williamsburg. I had my topic approved in Columbia before I returned here and as I said I passed my preliminary examinations for the Ph.D., my orals and so forth, and so I had my topic and then I had to do my research here in absentia and uh, fortunately it was on William Empson's Collected Poetry and I had the text there, I didn't have to do much Inter-Library Loan work to bulk up the scholarship, but I wrote it all in absentia, on weekends, on holidays, in the summer, and it was not easy. (chuckles) Put it that way, but the teaching was of course, always been my most, the great love of my life I suppose, and although I moved in and out of administration which we may talk about in another session, teaching was always my main interest, and I thought just for the record it might be interesting to compare the English department and the college in 1959 when I entered and the English department and the college in 2002 when I retired. And the difference is startling but I suppose understandable. We had a little over 2000 undergraduates in 1959, we had only 61 graduate students, they were MA students in history or in the school of education, and 49 students in the law school for a total 2, 261 students and when I retired in 2002 we had almost 6,000 undergraduates, we had almost 1200, or over 1300 graduates, and the law school had moved from 49 to 554 for a total of 7,500. So the increased enrollment was one that we naturally evolved over 40-some years. The miracle was that it wasn't greater, because the administration always, and the faculty supporting it, always worked to keep the enrollment small at William and Mary.

So you had this intense faculty/student relationship and when I entered here you got to know all your students and all the faculty on a very personal basis. But interestingly enough we had a total of 176 faculty in 1959, when I retired we had 608 faculty, but the faculty/student ratio was actually better; it was 1:13 in 1959 and it was 1:12 in 2002. So you can see that even though everything grew dramatically it was kept in bounds.

EM: Was there pressure, as there is today, back then to increase the student size?

JW: Not until the '60s. I'd say it was pretty dormant here until maybe the middle to late '60s, and that's when the burgeoning undergraduate population throughout the state, it was sort of an early baby boom and there was pressure to expand and so reluctantly and slowly we did, protesting most of the way, and building dorms very slowly. Of course the General Assembly would have loved to have had us fill the place with dormitories and pack it, but uh, President Paschall and the subsequent presidents were all, uh very discriminating about that and held it down. In the English department we had only 18 faculty members, taught 41 courses in 1959, so the 18 faculty members had increased to 40 when I retired, and the 41 courses had increased to 72 so again, there was expansion but not a wild proliferation. I think the most interesting thing to me, in looking back to 1959 was we had a department of home economics and a department of secretarial science (laughing) which seems, as it was then, it was seen as anachronistic even in 1959, but it was part of the old teacher college mentality that was here at William and Mary. So many students came here and got their degrees in education and went on to teach. And these were hold outs, there was just one woman in home economics and one woman in secretarial science and they were elderly and when they retired of course that was the end of it.

EM: They were THE faculty?

JW: They were the faculty in those two departments, one each, and, but I remember the secretarial science, I had an office in the Wren Building on the ground floor and Edral Lott who was the professor of secretarial science taught typing right above my head (laughing) in the second floor and she used a metronome to give them the rhythm (laughing) and...

EM: There was a whole class of typists above you?

JW: Well, probably 5 or 6, not very many. And it would go on every afternoon, you would hear them pounding away on the typewriters and the metronome ticking back and forth. And we had departments of men's physical education and women's physical education so they were separate areas, and there was business administration but it was not yet a school, and sociology and anthropology were together in one department. We had ROTC and marine science. But of course all that moved tremendously over the 40-some years that I taught. I taught for 43 years here. And when I retired we had four schools as we do today, the law school, the school of education, the school of marine science, and the school of business administration. And they all grew tremendously, of course law and business especially now are very large schools, but more interesting to me

at any rate is the proliferation or at the growth of specialized programs. We had none of them in 1959. Now we have programs in American studies, in other words these are degree programs but not departments. You can major in the subject but, it's not a full-fledged department. Your courses are taught on a cooperative basis by faculty in other departments. So we have a program in American studies, in fact a Ph.D. program in American studies, Applied Science, Computer Science, Public Policy, International Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, Black Studies, Women's Studies, Environmental Science, Geography, and Literary and Cultural Studies. And, the English department contributes heavily to American Studies, to Interdisciplinary Studies, Black Studies, Women's Studies, Literary and Cultural Studies, so the opportunity for faculty members in English now is much greater than when I was here when we only taught freshman and sophomore literature until you were a senior member and you might teach an upper level course in Shakespeare or Milton or whatever.

EM: A senior member of the English department faculty?

JW: Yes, they were, those were plums. (laughing) And of course, I came in trained to teach everything including American literature, in those days we were all generalists. Now as you mentioned once before we hire specifically for a Shakespearean scholar, a Renaissance scholar, or whatever, but we were expected to be able to teach anything. Now if you were lucky by your third or fourth year you might get a chance to teach an upper level course in literature. My field being modern literature, modern poetry, I think I had to wait five or six years before I got to teach the field in which I had specialized on my dissertation, simply because the teacher in that field was also the Dean of the Faculty (laughing) of Arts and Sciences, and he was holding on with a death grip (laughing) and wouldn't let it go for any of us younger members.

EM: Now this is teaching juniors and seniors...?

JW: Juniors and seniors, yes.

EM: There, there was no, you mentioned, graduate program in English at this time?

JW: There had been an aborted one and it had folded and then back then we recreated it, in the late '60s, early '70s I think, and it took quite a number of years for it to develop, slowly as a terminal degree. We never did want or aspire to a Ph.D. program, although several times we had departmental examinations by outside experts to come in and evaluate the English department and our programs and our faculty and our students, the way all departments go through that. Periodically you have sort of an internal/external evaluation of your department and we had over, the time I was in there, we had at least two times, maybe three times, and every time the experts from other places would come in there they would marvel that we didn't offer a Ph.D. because we had the faculty to do it and we had the students qualified, but we recognized that since we had all come from top universities we knew what a graduate in English, a Ph.D. program, would require. And Swem Library, although excellent, just wasn't up to that level of research facility. So we never aspired to that, but we did have a very excellent terminal masters program. It

was rewarding both to us and to the students I think. But it took a while for us to get the name, our name out there, and compete with Ph.D. universities who offer the masters generally after a certain number of years. But we finally did, when we finally started the master's program our graduate students were not as good as our undergraduates, and over the years finally they began to equal them and at the end I'd say that as our very best graduate students were every bit as good as our very best undergraduates. And that's saying something because our best undergraduates go on to Columbia, Chicago, Stanford, Berkeley, Harvard, the best graduate programs in the country.

EM: So that would be the measure of their level of ability as to where they could...

JW: Absolutely.

EM: ...continue to study?

JW: Absolutely, absolutely. We were able to place them at very good places. We had trouble for a while getting them in the University of Virginia, but I think they just resisted for a while the idea that (laughing) William and Mary could compete with them as with our students and our faculty, and then begrudgingly they admitted that we produced some excellent students and some went on there. But I was looking back and one of the things I thought I would sort of do is to give you an idea of, the sorts of things that I taught. I taught everything as I say from freshman writing up through the graduate courses, and that included honor's courses and independent study courses. Our honor's program which we installed somewhere in the '60s or '70s, meant that students would be selected, the top students who applied for it, would be selected for honors work in their junior year and would take a junior honors seminar which would be intensive preparation for literary research and study on some general topic taught by a senior member of the faculty. And then in the late spring, early summer of their junior year they would choose a topic for their honor's thesis and line up a faculty member to supervise it, and generally you would start working with your student in the summer, guiding them into their basic reading. The honor's program then went on for their whole senior year and you would meet probably every week with your student all through the fall and into the spring and the result would be about a 30 or 40 page honor's thesis, of considerable sophistication and merit, and culminating in an oral examination at the end. And so it meant, it was a wonderful experience to teach students for those honor's theses because they were very bright and they were doing topics they liked and you worked with them on a very collegial basis.

EM: Their reason for choosing to do the honor's thesis, is that because they intended to go on to graduate school, or...?

JW: Most of them did, I think, although it was just clearly intellectually and independently a wonderful thing to do. They got full credit of course for the two, actually the junior seminar and then the full year of honors and it allowed your best and brightest students to pursue some interest they had, and I think many of them did just for the sheer pleasure and challenge of it. Many probably did go on to graduate studies. It was excellent preparation for that and they knew that, but I had several who had no intention

of going on to graduate studies but just did it as a challenge. But that was a full year program; then we had independent studies, which was very similar but only one semester in length. And they would chose a topic, you would agree to supervise them, and you would meet with them for just one semester and the end result was a significant paper, and no tests or exams, but a significant paper. So those who either couldn't get into the honor's program or didn't want to commit themselves to a full year would take independent studies and we still do that today. And then of course we had the master's program and you would supervise a master's student writing their thesis for generally about a year. They would usually pick a topic in the, one summer, at the end of, of the master's seminar, and then you would work with them however long it took. I had some master's students who took as long as 3 or 4 years to write, because they would leave here and go out and teach or do something and then as I did, in writing my dissertation in absentia, they were writing it in absentia, which meant you had a lot of mail, a lot of letters back and forth before email. But to give a sort of idea of what I did, I was looking at my periodic evaluation, and one of the things the faculty instituted was this evaluation of tenured faculty, so that about every five years every tenured faculty member was to go through this extensive evaluation, because the opponents of tenure always argued that it was just a license to steal, you didn't have to do anything once you had tenure, and to counter that and for our own professional excellence and advancement we instituted a periodic evaluation that was college wide for everybody. What that meant was that every five years you had to go through an evaluation process in which your courses that you taught over that period were examined, the student responses to those courses, they'd look at your syllabi, they would maybe have somebody respond to whatever published research you had published in the meantime, and then they would evaluate you for continuation, you of course couldn't fire anybody if they were tenured unless it was malfeasance or some terrible reason, but you could certainly cut back on whatever merit increases they might get, and so there was a financial element to it, and if you didn't live up to some sort of standard you could be, you know, censored as it were by the department. But looking at my evaluation from the years 1987-'97, that's a ten year period, from '87-'97, in ten years, I supervised ten MA theses, five honor's theses, five independent studies, and I was on nine master's examining committees. So it's almost one a year of the masters, and a considerable number of honors and independent studies. And I don't think I was terribly unusual in that. I think to certain extent I probably did more than some members of the department and not as much as others, but I'd say that was a little above average in the amount of outside work in a sense, that is beyond, the courses you were teaching. My 10 MA theses of course grew out of my graduate seminars, and I noticed that, in that period of ten years I designed three new courses and re-designed two more and expanded the department's offerings in modern Irish literature so that during that ten year period I taught over 47 courses. So and that's on a three course load. Of course I loved every minute of it, I mean it was just a fabulous experience to be engaged in all levels from freshman to graduate students, kept you on your toes and productive, so it was wonderful.

EM: Is there any danger that a faculty member might overdo it in the extra-, or outside activities as you say, and maybe their teaching would suffer or, or if there, let's say reviewing master's thesis or supervising the writing thereof, is it, is it a temptation maybe

not to spend so much time in correcting papers from you know regular exams or regular assignments?

JW: You know, that's a good question and it applies more to big universities where of course it's infamous for having senior faculty members never teaching freshman and seldom teaching sophomores, and you know mostly teaching graduate students and seniors. And one of the great qualities I think of William and Mary is that we've never gone in that direction, even those teaching in the Ph.D. programs, physics, math, computer science, whatever, manage to teach on a fairly regular basis the undergraduates, sometimes even freshman seminars, freshman colloquiums. So no there wasn't any danger of that, the problem with our commitment to teaching you didn't have as much time for research and publication as you would have at a large university where you're only teaching a couple of courses and where you had graduate assistants to do the grading. We never, even when we had our master's program which has been terminated for some years now, we never used graduate students for anything. We always did all of our own grading. So it was never a question of being pulled away from your teaching aspects, although of course since I was trained classically as a generalist I could teach a wider range of courses than a lot of subsequent faculty, who came in as specialists and were recruited as specialists. You know now, as I said, we would go out and hire a Shakespearean scholar, a Milton scholar, or an American literature scholar, and they would be unusual for them to teach a freshmen course, um or a sophomore survey course. They would usually teach upper levels, they would teach maybe a freshman colloquium, but that would be a specially designed course that they designed themselves that cut into their field of expertise. So even when I retired I was still teaching freshmen and liked it and teaching introductory courses as well as the upper level ones. The main problem here was the lack of research time, lack of scholarly time. And I said when I came here there was no expectation that you would do anything but teach and teach undergraduates. As we developed our graduate program it was clear to everyone that we needed to have a productive scholarly faculty as well, and you can't teach graduate courses unless you're engaged in some kind of serious scholarship. So, but the problem was finding the time to do that and so that's when we dropped from the five course load in my first few years here to a four course load, and then finally we couldn't go to a three course load until we had developed out master's program, and that sort of gave us the green light as far as the state was concerned. The state was always very careful to see that the faculties of various institutions were teaching, seriously teaching undergraduates. And so you couldn't justify on a state level, you couldn't justify a reduction from the fifteen to the twelve to the, finally to the nine hour course load, three courses, until you had a graduate program, and the Ph.D. program would allow you to go down to two courses a semester. But it was considered then that you would be doing scholarship, but again, because of our commitment to undergraduate writing, and uh serious evaluation of their work, you very seldom had time to do any of your own work. We used to figure, even in the year that I retired, we used to figure that you could work on whatever project you had been working on over the summer, you could keep it going until about mid-semester, and then at mid-semester the mid-semester papers would come in, the tests would come in, and from then until the Christmas break you couldn't do any work. The Christmas break you'd have about two weeks in there that you would frantically try to pick up your research and then

again, until when the second semester started you could keep it going a little bit until about mid-semester, and then the sheer bulk of paperwork and whatever, committee work, would overwhelm you and you couldn't do anything more (laughing) until the summer. And the summer, for a long time, because the salaries were only on a nine month basis you had no summer income, and so one of the things you had to do was get a summer research grant, which paid hardly enough to put bread on the table, and either that or teach in summer school, which I did for years, taught in summer school and got summer research grants. And that's one reason I went into administration every now and then, it was just to get the extra income when the children were coming along, and of course there was the challenge and interest of doing it as well. I don't mean it was just monetarily advantageous, but it was of course, but it was exciting to do that, to move in and out of administration which we'll maybe talk about another time.

EM: Let me ask you a question in regards to trying to do research. Would a faculty member here feel, in looking at some of their colleague or peers in other universities, that they're maybe falling behind in their, well prestige, or could someone who hadn't done any research here be as competitive, for jobs elsewhere as many people from elsewhere who were doing re- or had the time to do research, and anybody feel that way here?

JW: Oh yes, I think definitely, but I think you have to remember that, William and Mary is attractive I think to special kinds of people, I mean you came, because I came (laughing) because it was the only job I could find, and then loved it, and it changed over the years. When I came it was a very provincial little college. There were always two or three very good faculty members, but by and large, I mean we had secretarial science for heaven's sakes, and it was so much a paternalistic school and no research, but at any rate over the years of course that changed, but I think still today when we go on the market we have to recognize that we are at a considerable disadvantage at hiring top notch faculty, one our salaries are not completely competitive, they're not really competitive with the best, and we don't have a mid-tenure or pre-tenure relief policy. Most universities when you're into three years of your tenure track, it's a five to six year ruling process when you come in to get your tenure it comes in your fifth year, most universities give you a semester or sometimes even a year off, in the middle of that process to get your research published. You have to get something published to get tenure nowadays, and we don't have that policy, at best we can say to a young faculty member we'll give you, some summer research time, but that's even, that isn't guaranteed because it's a competitive and there's not enough research money. So you have to find faculty who are engaged and interested and stimulated by what we have to offer, and that is excellent colleagues, excellent students, wonderful facilities with an emphasis on very bright undergraduates and that's what sells the place. Our salaries are not completely competitive, we don't have the research advantages of a large university, we don't have the relief time for research, but, at the same time we do have expectations of scholarly publication, very nearly those of the major universities and that just is dumbfounding to a lot of colleagues when they come in, um, because we do have very high standards, we expect you, if you're coming in in a tenure position with a Ph.D. in hand we expect you to get that dissertation published, or if that's already published which it sometimes is, we expect you to get something else published in the five years you're here before tenure,

and sometimes it comes down to the last few months waiting to get a contract, a book contract from a scholarly press. That's really tough, we had several really close calls, excellent faculty members who just haven't been able to get that book contract in time and it comes down to the wire. So those are disadvantages. But we only lose a very few faculty members if they're in a tenure track slot. We lost, well I'd say in the last five years before I retired we probably only lost two, one went to British Columbia where his father and family were and that was of course a move up for him but also a move for home and we lost one to somewhere up in the northeast, I can't remember where now and that a much bigger job, much greater pay and more advantages. But usually we're pretty good, if we get them in here and they're here for a while, they really become devoted to William and Mary and most of them will stay on even though there are great advantages outside. [pause] But there are disadvantages from the scholarly point of view.

EM: What were the favorite subjects or areas that you uh enjoyed most teaching?

JW: Well, I came in with a dissertation in modern British poetry and a master's thesis in Joyce so my field has really been modern poetry and modern British literature primarily. Those have been my favorite subjects. So, over the years, my survey course in modern British literature, my graduate courses in various aspects of literary modernism, my graduate and senior courses, senior seminar courses in Joyce and Yeats and Virginia Woolf, and writers of the modern movement have always been my favorite subjects. But on the other hand, I must say that one of my favorite subjects has been teaching Chaucer in an introductory course to sophomores. The great pleasure, the great pleasure when I came here, and it still was for me for many years, was to teach the survey course in English literature starting with Beowulf and Chaucer coming up the first semester through Milton. And the second semester, starting in the 18th century coming on up into T.S. Eliot and the moderns. And those of us who came in as generalists could do that, and did it for years, and now there are only a couple of us who can do that any more because of specialization. But the great rewarding aspect was, imagine, you resurveyed the whole sweep of English literature, from the beginnings to 20th century. And we did it every year, year in, year out. So, the fall was Chaucer, and the spring was Eliot.

EM: So it was a year long course?

JW: [talking over EM] Yeah. Well, they didn't have to take the full year, but that was the requirement to start with. But now we have a two semester course that you take one semester and not the other, but as faculty members I would teach both semesters, and what a great pleasure that that is to do and was to do.

EM: Do they offer similar course today?

JW: Yes, but they're not continuous courses. We've refined the Freshman writing to only one semester of writing, and with no grammar of course, and then we have advance level of writing, which I've taught many times, to those who've satisfied Freshman writing or come in with considerable experience. The other thing to recognize is that the quality of our students is so much better now. When I'd say three or four or five times better than

when I entered here in 59. So, we're getting students now, we're competing with the best colleges in the country for students, and they come in, most of them, with excellent academic preparation. Now that doesn't mean that they are uh intellectually mature, or that they are able to write very clear and concise analytical papers, but by and large, the level of their writing is much better, and of course they know a great deal more about the world and literature than they did when I began teaching in 59. So our course levels are much more sophisticated. When I look back at some of my reading requirements say for that survey course in literature, and look at the way the *Norton Anthology* has increased in size and sophistication. *Norton Anthology of the English Literature* is what we used, still do to this day for these survey courses, new writers have been discovered, the emphasis has shifted here and there, the depth of the material you have to work with has increased probably four or five or fold. What used to be a very easily handled one volume survey of the English literature, the *Norton Anthology* now weighs about ten pounds [laughs] and is about six inches thick. I'm exaggerating, but it's hugely different, and they now include critical articles and some scholarly paraphernalia. So, your course levels are much more sophisticated. I was teaching upper level courses that probably would have been sufficient for graduate level when I entered here in 59. Big difference.

EM: This is probably not a fair question, from your prospective, do you have any explanation to why the uh ability of students has increased uh—

JW: [talking over EM] It's selection, it's competition. We, I mean, William and Mary was always fairly selective, but in the early 60s, our best students were all women. We could fill the college with very bright young women from northern Virginia, and from the Eastern seaboard, New York, New Jersey, whatever, Connecticut. Our Virginia students were adequate, but not as qualified as our out-of-state students. And our men were very uneven, we didn't attract a high level of men students. Our turning point came in the 60s when, I think I mentioned before, we linked up with the research center, we got a high energy nuclear faculty, I don't know whether I mentioned this before. Well, in the 60s there was a development of the Virginia Associated Research Center, it's now called the Jefferson Lab, and the state got into high energy nuclear physics, and had an accelerator built down there on the peninsula. And it was to be a tri-part operation between William and Mary, University of Virginia, and VPI. Our physics department in those days, like all of our departments, were mostly service departments. In other words, our math department serviced teacher education. We didn't have math majors, or very seldom. Physics, chemistry, the sciences were all more or less service courses. And so we suddenly had to compete, or at least be equal partners, with UVa and VPI, and they had doctoral programs in Physics. And so we went on the market, and recruited top notch nuclear physicists who came in. And that was a turning point in so many ways at William and Mary. Because what that meant was that we were suddenly in serious Ph.D. programs. The physics did it, and then we had to have math that would come up to the physics level of high energy nuclear physics, and so the math department got serious. Chemistry got serious, biology had always been really strong, but everything then began to develop in a serious way, and we became in effect a small university. That was the turning point. And as a result of that, the quality of our men applicants jumped considerably. The best men in the state usually went to UVa or say, Washington and Lee,

or VPI. And our women were always as good as anywhere. But that allowed us to bring in some very good men, young men, and changed the nature of the institution considerably. We then became, gradually increasing over the years, as we developed our schools, developed our graduate programs, uh we became and as we are today, I think, a top notch small university. So, that that made a huge difference, and that meant that suddenly we were getting some very bright young men who were English majors. Before that, they had all been young women mostly, and very excellent students, from Northern Virginia, or whatever. And the whole quality of the undergraduates improved once we became sort of competitive with UVa and VPI and Washington and Lee, and so forth. And so now, it's that you have to be very bright, and have very good grades, and have done some interesting things to get admitted to William and Mary. So the quality of the students is much better than it used to be.

EM: You mentioned that the first five years working toward tenure can be rather difficult. What was your experience with getting tenure here?

JW: [laughing] The answer's gotta be amusing, I think, at any rate, and appalling to anyone who listens to this and reads it in the future. When I had been here for about five or six years, I was asked did I want to become tenured, and I said Yes, I thought I would. And so the-

EM: [interrupting] So you had thought about this before?

JW: Not terribly! [laughing]

EM: Or had mentioned it?

JW: Nobody! It wasn't on the top of my list, it just seemed to sort of occur, as it did. And I think the chair of the department, actually the head of the department, they were all heads of departments in those days, which meant a lifetime tenure. They were appointed to be head of the department, and they would be head of a department until they resigned, died, or went somewhere else. Now we have rotating chairs. You're chair for three years or four years, and you rotate. But any rate, the then head of the department got together with two or three of the senior members, and I guess they met in secret, and they said "should we give Jack Willis tenure?" And fortunately they all said yes. And so the next morning, I was told I had tenure. [laughing] I didn't have to do anything, nobody examined anything that I can remember, then after I'd been tenured, I happened to be sitting in on these tenure evaluations for a colleague I will not name, very good friend. And they said, "should we tenure him?," and they said he's not doing very much and will probably never will do any serious scholarship, but one of them said "oh, but his wife is such a lovely person, let's give him tenure. We can't do without her in the department." [laughing] And he was given tenure! And now of course, it's a very serious, very rigorous enterprise where you get five or six outside examiners, looking at their scholarship, a very rigorous examination of their teaching qualities, their student evaluations, their syllabi. And we now have faculty sit in on their courses occasionally and observe them in teaching. Again, the emphasis is on teaching still, but you can't get

tenure without publication, but if you're a poor teacher, you'll never get tenure no matter what you publish. Several departments have done that. We've always been very lucky in getting very good tenure track people. I don't know if we've ever lost any of them because of failure to teach well or to publish, although it's been very close sometimes on the publications.

EM: You didn't have to publish to get your tenure?

JW: [talking over EM] No, no, didn't have to do a thing. It was only later, when we began to emphasize the scholarly aspect of it, and I was looking to be promoted to full professor, that it was considered that if you didn't publish, you might not become full professor, and that still holds today. We have some lifetime associate professors, who will never be full professors, because they have never published anything. And we have one of my dearest friends, and one of the most intellectual members of our department, who has remained an associate professor until retirement. It's just a shame, because he is just brilliant, gifted, wonderful teacher, but he's never published anything, not even his dissertation. He came in when it was not expected, and the expectations have changed. So that's what got me going, finally. I mean, I had done some small things, I'd had a summer research grant, I would write a paper or something like that, get some small things done. I wrote one small book for Columbia Press, that grew out of my dissertation, I broadened it into a popular format, but the serious work on my book on the Hogarth Press, came about because I was inspired by the our five year evaluations, and by the fact that I didn't want to be left behind with my colleagues who were doing a lot of publishing, so it got me out there, and got me going, and uh I was very lucky to be able to do it, and I got a pretty good book out of it, got it published. But I must say that I was encouraged to do that by the increased emphasis on scholarship. Never would have come about before. So you wonder to your self "what if I had gone to a larger university, with greater expectations and greater resources, would I have been more of a publishing scholar?" I don't know, it's just speculation. But, at William and Mary, the emphasis was always on teaching, if you did anything else, it was fine. And then in the 70s and 80s, it became apparent, 80s and 90s particularly, that it was disgraceful somehow if you didn't. If you were a full professor and weren't publishing, you were on shaky ground. So that's what stirred me to do more publishing and scholarship, and I'm glad I did.

EM: Does research or publishing, as a result of it, make one a better teacher?

JW: Well, we argue that it should, it doesn't necessarily work that way. In fact, there were several colleagues over the years, who would never publish anything, like this one I talked about, yet would read everything. Would set themselves a reading program over the summer say, would create a new course, and would read up on it. Would do the best kind of scholarship without writing or publishing, and I always felt that we ought to have a way of recognizing that, but the problem is that it's not quantifiable very easily, and yet it's the best kind of scholarship. You do it on your own, and we all are professional enough to know what that means, and it's you know- I used to do it long before I did any published scholarship. You'd set aside your summer and say well, this summer, I'm going to do some in depth reading on the authors X, Y, and Z or a period of whatever.

But there's no way of evaluating it, and we we recognize its usefulness, and that does add directly to your teaching, because usually you do that on your own in areas that you're going to be teaching. Whenever I offered a new course, a new graduate seminar, I would spend a lot of time reading up, and getting the scholarship up to date. Published scholarship, I think is debatable. We always like to say that published scholars are the good teachers, or the better teachers, but it doesn't necessarily work that way. That's a convenient academic myth, I think. In some cases it does, but I had some of the most brilliant faculty, brilliant scholars in America when I went to Columbia, and a couple of them were just lousy teachers! I mean [laughing] they were so bad, you just went because they were great men, and what they had to say, if you could understand them was excellent, and what you did was to read their books. You know, and therefore it was appropriate at graduate level Ph.D. programs, you read their books, you read their articles. But they were not good lecturers. And so, that's you know, doesn't necessarily translate. I think some of our very good scholars have been very good teachers, and of course, at William and Mary, we've always emphasized the teaching, so we expect them to publish and do fine scholarship, but we mostly expect them to be good teachers. So, in our case, I think, you could say, that keeping up to date in your field, or at least advancing scholarly knowledge probably does help in your teaching, but it would help more if we were still offering graduate courses. It helps for senior seminars. But for example, I never, only once I think, ever taught the poet I did my doctoral dissertation.

EM: [tries to talk over JW] Who was-?

JW: William Epsom. It was a good dissertation topic, but he's a craggy, peculiar kind of poet. [laughs] And I could never quite fit him into the modern poetry course, where you had Yeats and Joyce and others, and that not uncommon. You do your dissertation on a very refined, focused field, a very specialized field, and that may or may not ever translate into anything in the classroom. Now, your published scholarship, on the other hand, could well do that, it doesn't necessarily have to, but I think the main thing about published scholarship is it shows you're active, it shows you have not gone to sleep, like Rip Van Winkle. You know what's going on in the fields, and you're out there meeting colleagues, and talking about things. And that should translate into the teaching, it doesn't necessarily do that, but it should.

EM: You progressed through uh ah as assistant professor, associate professor, and finally full professor. Ah, were you pretty much, do you feel you were pretty much on track doing that? On schedule, on your own personal schedule, or-?

JW: Yes, that's a good question Ed, because William and Mary has always been cautious and traditional about that. You noticed that I was instructor for several years, and then I was assistant for three years, and associate for ten, before becoming professor. And those are pretty much standards. We could be, as I say, in those days, we only hired instructors, very seldom anybody above that. Nowadays, we frequently hire assistant professors, that is somebody who has finished their Ph.D., but hasn't published anything. And uh, the three years there could well be four or five, it depends, at one point, generally your promotion from assistant to associate professor comes with tenure. I don't know of any

assistant professor who is not tenured. So, that's sort of evolved over time, so the length of time you're an assistant professor probably depends on your tenure movement, and whatever publications you get. And then once you're associate, it's very traditional at William and Mary to have a ten year period. There are exceptions, and the exceptions. I knew one particularly, I was on the faculty committee that evaluates tenure, and we had a brilliant young physics professor who was being wooed by another institution. There was no question that he would be tenured and be full professor, but it came up two years early, and we had to make an exception for him, because we would have lost him. And we tenured him early, he made a special plea to be tenured early, it was instigated by him and by the department, and then the faculty tenure, promotion, tenure committee had to make the exception, tenured him, and he stayed at William and Mary. But usually it's about eight to ten years, even today. Now at bigger universities, umm, the scandals are at Harvard and Yale, where they never tenure anybody. I mean, they just chew up associate professors and spit them out. You go there, because it's a great honor to say that you're a professor at Harvard or Yale or whatever, but it's rare that they tenure you. And, that would be extraordinary to do that. So, eight to ten years, for me ten years was right on target, but also because I began to get into serious scholarship. I wouldn't have, the head of the department was cautious about it, kept encouraging me to do some scholarship, and he didn't hold it out, saying, well in fact he did, he said I don't think you're going to be promoted unless you get some scholarship. I think he was unique in that regard. We were not on the closest of collegial relationships. Other senior faculty wouldn't have waited a minute to promote me to full professor when the time came. But at any rate, it was good, it did get me going, and I did some good scholarship. So that was generally the pattern. That's a good question.

EM: What did you do in terms of scholarship or research or writing?

JW: Well again, I worked on a field I knew best, modern poetry. I wrote some articles, I wrote a book on Epsom, finally, little book, I did some articles- I never published very much, actually. Wrote some articles on T.S. Eliot. I gave some talks here and there, which is considered not quite like publication, but close to it, giving your paper somewhere.

EM: This is a continuation from the previous tape, number 1 side B. This is tape number 2 side A.

JW: Talking about the scholarship, one of the things that grew out of my scholarship was my service on the editorial board of the University Press of Virginia. The Press of Virginia, the University Press of Virginia was interested in the book I was writing, and they in fact ended up publishing it, on the Hogarth Press, and as an outgrowth of that, I was privileged to serve on the editorial board of the University Press of Virginia from 92 to 95, for a three year term, in which I helped evaluate all book proposals, manuscript proposals at the press. It was then the University Press of Virginia, which mandate was supposedly or at least open to all universities in the state, although it was completely subsidized by UVa. Now, they've dropped that pretense, and now it's just University of Virginia Press. But at any rate, that was, and that's the sort of thing that happens.

Through public scholarship, you were invited to be on various boards, and uh various committees in your field. I never did that beyond the editorial board of the press, but many faculty members do that, and they end up in various fields. The two things I'm most proud of, I think, in my teaching career, is that I got the Thomas Jefferson award in 97. We have two Thomas Jefferson awards, one for junior faculty for their level of teaching, and then a senior award for sort of total experience of teaching and governance and sort of citizenship, involvement in faculty and university affairs. And so, I got the senior award in 97. When the junior was made, was created here, I was in administration, and was ineligible for it, but I did get the alumni teaching award in 1981, and I've always been sorry that I couldn't be a contestant for the teaching, Thomas Jefferson teaching award, but I must say, I was greatly honored by the senior Jefferson award. But even more important, I think, is the Thomas Ashley Graves award, which I got in 2001, created by Tom Graves, a former president of the college, who wanted to recognized serious and continued teaching. And so he endowed the award with a nice monetary remuneration, and a beautiful bronze plaque, and it's called the master teaching award, it's for sort of a lifetime commitment to excellence in teaching. And I was very honored to receive that in 2001, the year before I retired. It's sort of a recognition of a long term commitment to teaching.

EM: Are those fairly competitive?

JW: Very competitive. Only one a year, and now open to all the schools. And so, it's a great honor to be chosen for that, and for the Thomas Jefferson award as well. But I always got pretty good reports on my teaching, pretty good evaluations from the students, so, it's what kept me going, but I was lucky to do that, and I was really honored by the Graves award. The other thing I wanted to mention in the teaching, is that because I was practically here when Thomas Jefferson himself was a student, I taught so many students over the years, but I was here when the first three black students came in. Now actually-

EM: [interrupts] When was that?

JW: This was in the 60s, and I wish I could put a date on it, but it was in the early 60s, and at that point, we were lily white. But, in fact, one of the previous presidents, the one I came in under, was rather hostile to the idea of having any black students. We had no black faculty of course.

EM: And what president was this?

JW: Alvin Chandler. Alvin Duke Chandler. Though he was a former Navy officer, he was not encouraging of having minority students.

EM: Was there pressure from the state?

JW: There was no press- Oh no, there was no, because we were segregated, we were a segregated state, and we still had black and white waiting rooms at the railroad station, black and white water fountains. It's hard to believe, remember that. I do believe we had

one black football player before the three students that I taught. And also a couple of black graduate students but no undergraduates. But then we had three young women from Hampton that were new, and uh-

EM: Black women?

JW: Black women, not men. They broke the color barrier. They had their problems, it was difficult for them to come into an all white college. But they were, I liked all three of them. I taught all three of them in a freshman seminar. Where Binns is now, was the old Methodist church. The church had moved, but the building was there, and we needed extra classroom space. And so I taught them, I can still envision the room we were in, and on the corner of Duke of Gloucester Street. And they were just marvelous young women, they were average students, but they graduated in four years. They were the first students to really go through here. They stuck together, the three of them. One of them was so light skinned that she told me that she could have passed, she could have gone as a white person, but her pride wouldn't let her. Her grandmother, she told me, wanted her to pass as a white person, and go to a white college. It's hard to remember days like that, but at any rate, her name was Janet Brown. She stuck to her black heritage, and she went through, the first member of her generation, her family, ever to go to college. And they made it, but it wasn't easy for them. And then, gradually, over the years, we set out to recruit minorities, and now we have a fair number, but it's still not easy for us to recruit good minority students.

EM: Why do you think that is?

JW: I think it's because it's so competitive, I mean everybody wants them. Again, we have only so much scholarship money, and it's on a need basis primarily, and uh you know, the independently wealthy, the Ivy leagues, for example, can almost recruit any top level minority student they want. I mean, if you're a minority student in a public high school, and Princeton, Yale, or Harvard want you, they can offer your full four year scholarships. So it's very hard for us to compete, because our field of competition for students are those of the Ivies and the other big universities, and so it's hard for us, but we do pretty well, I think. We've got some very good minority students, of course the Asian students are quite remarkable, and we get a lot of them in our graduate programs in the sciences. But over the years, we've finally increased our minority students. The problem with William and Mary always is to get diversity, because we are so attractive to northern Virginia and out of state students. It's very hard for us to find any kind of social, economic, intellectual balance to recruit minority students from deep southern Virginia, for example, it's very hard to do that. They don't want to get too far from home, and if they're the first generation of students, then they're cautious, they want a support system. So that's why I think the first three young women who came here, blacks, came from Newport News, Hampton, they would go home on the weekends. They were not terribly comfortable in the dorm. They roomed together, which helped, and I think most of the young women were pretty good with them. They welcomed them, but there were some who were objected to their presence, they were not made to feel welcome. But being close to home helped, you know, and we still find that in a lot of our minority students

don't want to go too far away from home. So our range now has increased, we can recruit minorities from everywhere, anywhere in the country I guess, but that has been a transition over the years. The only one other thing I want to add is fencing. I just wanted to say that at one point, while I was in administration, I was teaching in the English department part time, editing the college catalogue for extra money, I then created the fencing club, and moved that up to varsity level fencing. And that was my recreation, and that was a lot of fun, because in those days, and probably still, fencers are a little different. And so I got, in the 1960s, during the height of the student uprisings, I got some very quirky, marvelous kids in my fencing club and then the fencing team. And that was a different experience to be a coach. It's a different experience from being an instructor. It's totally different experience, and very rewarding.

EM: How many years did you keep that up?

JW: Four or five years, then it got to be too much for me, and by that time it was a varsity sport, and we got a full time varsity coach for that. Thinking of the sixties, and this will be my last anecdote, during the student uprisings of the Vietnam War, it was a very interesting time here at William and Mary. We never had the sit ins, the protests, the demonstrations that a number of universities did. We did have brief take over of a one academic building, just briefly. They sat in the Dean of Students office for a couple of hours, and then left quietly. We did have some peace marches down the Duke of Gloucester Street, with FBI agents on the street corners filming us as we walked down, faculty and students together.

EM: Were you walking?

JW: Oh yes, we were walking, faculty, and the students, some faculty members pushing baby carriages, and we were all [chuckling] oh it was a great time with big placards, and these dark suited gentlemen on the street corners with their little cameras, and in the end it was just appalling to film that, but they did. [laughing] So somewhere, the shot of my face is in some archive somewhere.

EM: The files of the FBI...

JW: [laughing] yes, as a nihilistic troublemaker. We had sit-ins, a couple of sit-ins, but nothing very serious. The only potentially dangerous thing was we had a fire set in Swem in a wastepaper basket, somebody lit the paper alight, and it set off a fire alarm, it was quickly put out, so there was no damage, thank god. So, we had none of the serious damage that took place on other campuses. We did have a very moving memorial to those students that were killed at, what the hell was the name of that school...

EM: Kent State?

JW: Kent State. Kent State shooting. We had crosses erected in the Sunken Garden and all night vigil and prayer session for the students who were killed at Kent State. But the main thing was we had faculty counseling of students who were about to be drafted. And

they set up counseling booths in front of the Campus Center. We didn't have William and Mary Hall then, we had the Campus Center, and I never manned one, because I was too busy doing other things, and I'm not sure I wanted to anyway, but a number of faculty did, and I had many students who came to me for counseling on what they should do, should they go to Canada, should they become exiles, should they try to be a conscientious objector, what should they do. I think it was one of the most deeply troubling times to have been a student and a faculty member, because you certainly didn't want them to ever be in harm's way. Since I had grown up in the military, and served three years myself, I could only say to them that if I was in their position, I would go, I would hear the call, and I would go serve. That was just my background and my training, but I understood completely why they didn't want to do that, but on the other hand, I would tell them, I can't advise you to go to Canada. That was a very popular thing for awhile, was to exile to Canada. I did have some who tried to become conscientious objectors, but the standards were pretty high. You had to have been engaged or involved in the Quakers or one of the other religious movements that were pacifist for some time, you just couldn't show up, and say "I'm a conscientious objector." But at any rate, it was a very stirring, difficult time. Some of the best students I ever had as people were in those 60s. They weren't, as I said, they weren't as sophisticated as our students today perhaps, but they were engaging. They felt everything so deeply, they were such marvelous students, and it was heartache to know what to do with them, how to help them, what to tell them, not being professional counselors. They would come to us, you know, and it was very difficult what to tell them to do, or to advise them to do.

EM: Did the college lose many men?

JW: I have no way of knowing. I do know the administration was furious with the faculty members for having those counseling booths, and in fact, the president at the time held up the faculty contracts-

EM: [interrupts JW] Who wa-

JW: [interrupts EM] Paschall, President Paschall. Held up the annual contract for a couple of members in the Philosophy Department who were very active in the counseling. He was so outraged that the idea that the faculty would be engaged in this. It was very test, tough times, testing times you might say. With the administration, of course, was very unsympathetic with the students.

EM: Did they feel the faculty was unpatriotic.

JW: Well, of course. [laughing] Of course, it's not much different from today, if you protest President Bush's actions in whatever, Iraq and Vietnam there, you're accused of being unpatriotic. It's just ridiculous. It's incredible to see the same kind of thing developing as our students protest our activities in the Arab world, they're sometimes being accused of lacking patriotism, that sort of thing.

EM: By the administration here?

JW: No, not by our administration. Oh no, no. I mean by the national.

EM: [interrupting JW] Oh yes.

JW: The hawks.

EM: But I think today the college, college's administrations are far different from the Vietnam era.

JW: Very much different, very much different. Absolutely, much more understanding, much more liberal, much more in tune with student interests and concerns. Oh yes, that would have never had happened in today's world if students were protesting, as they sometimes do. You find them very much welcomed to have their protest marches, to have their meetings in whatever facilities we have. But then it was very different. The administration was very-

EM: [interrupting JW] The administration here was hostile to that

JW: Oh absolutely it was, yes it was. I mean not all members of the administration, in fact the Dean of Students was quite, you know, good about that. Even though they took over his office, he was amused by it, not offended, they didn't stay long. And of course, the Librarian was very concerned when the trashcan was set afire, but fortunately that was the only thing. There weren't any offices broken into, nothing was trashed or stolen, the, it was the token fire in Swem, but that didn't make it any less serious, it just was easily put out. But it was a different attitude. Faculty was very much in support of the students, very opposed to Vietnam. There were some faculty members who were quite conservative, but most of us were very much opposed to Vietnam. And that was the dilemma. On the one hand, we were opposed to Vietnam, on the other hand, you had to think about the best welfare for your students, and you were in a sort of in loco parentis situation, where you wanted to give them the best advice you could, and you didn't know what that was yourself. I've really been very lucky in my life and my career to have been here from 1959 to 2002, a period of real transition, real development, and to see the changes that happen with students and with the faculty and with the institution itself.

EM: This is the end of this session of the interview.

EM: This is an interview with John Willis at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia on August the 9th, 2006, by Edward McCarthy.

III. Scholarship and Administrative Experience

EM: Jack, would you comment on the books you've written, and those particular topics?

JW: Well, I've written two Ed. One, actually, it's sort of a booklet, a small book on William Epsom, published by Columbia, University Press, 1969. And that grew out of

my doctoral dissertation, which went pretty well at Columbia, and I was asked by the editor of the series to include my dissertation into a more extensive analysis of William Empson. He was a brilliant young poet in the 1930s, and had a particular comeback, and sort of second career as a poet-

EM: [interrupting JW] American?

JW: English

EM: English

JW: In the 1950s, and so it was an interesting topic to do, and it was a page limit on it, and so it was a nice little challenge. But the serious book that I wrote, I mean, not that that wasn't serious, but a more extensive book I published in 1993 with University Press of Virginia on Leonard and Virginia Woolf as publishers, a history of the Hogarth Press, from 1917-1941. That grew out of my long term interest in Leonard and Virginia Woolf, and the fact I knew some of the works that the Hogarth Press had published on their own, the Woolfs' own private press, and it had published an important collection of 1930s poets back then, and I was aware of that, because of the English poets I was studying at the time, including Empson. So, I had always been interested in the Hogarth Press, and as far as I knew there was nothing published about it. And when Nigel Nickelson was over here, giving a lecture, I asked him about it. Nigel Nickelson was the son of Vita Sackfield West, who was a very close friend of Virginia Woolf's. And I knew that Nigel was working on the collected letters of Virginia Woolf, so I thought he'd be a good one to talk to, and in fact he was, and encouraged me to take on the project. He thought he knew where the archival records of the press were, and put me onto it, and turned out to be a marvelous project for me. It took me a long time to do it, because I was teaching full time, or administrating, and I only had my summers free, but in the process, I guess it took me about eight to ten years to do the book, but at any rate, it was a great project. I had to go to England several times, and found the archival records, and worked through all of that material, a lot of it now at University of Sussex Library in England. But at any rate, that was the project, and came out, I think, quite well, and got some pretty good reviews in the *Washington Post* and *LA Times*. Couldn't make the *New York Times*, that's almost impossible to do. At any rate, but it was a good project, and I was glad to do it. Over the course of the time here, I wrote a number of short articles, and gave a number of lectures on various aspects of the 1930s poets, William Empson was a 1930s poet, so that's where my main interest came out of my dissertation and so forth, and that was good for me, at any rate.

EM: In addition to your teaching assignments, you were also involved during most of your years here at the college in a variety of committee assignments and administrative duties. Could you tell us something about the committees you served on?

JW: Yes, I began, I suppose, way back, shortly after I got here, and moved up. In those days, the college faculty was small, and young members of the faculty, as I was then, were able to be appointed to various committees earlier in their career, and it was a great

experience because what that did was to solidify your commitment to the college in an early stage of your career, and you were involved in various aspects of college administration, faculty college administration. And, it was extremely useful as I developed my career here, and lead off and on into administration. Which we'll talk about in a little bit, in a moment.

EM: [interrupting JW] Most of the faculty members in those days, were they engaged in committee duties?

JW: Yes, I think most of us were. There are two types of committees, one is your departmental committee structure, and that goes, almost everybody in a department serves on those in one way or another. There are personnel committees, there are library committees, there recruitment committees, and that sort of thing, personnel committees. And every now and then, a curriculum revision committee, if the department goes through that. So, most people in a committee, in a department serve on those committees. College-wide committees, or Arts and Sciences committees, there, there two different aspects there. Come to those who really, I guess, enjoy doing it, or get involved in it. There are colleagues who never served on any of them, and keep themselves distant from it, but if you show your willingness to serve, and if you don't foul the nest when you're on the committee, you get asked back. Most of them are appointed committees, a lot of them, the important ones are elected committees. And so I started off with admissions, admissions committee in the mid-60s, and went to a whole series of various committees, in fact by the end of the 43 years, I think I've served on almost every Arts and Sciences committee there was. It's a checkered career. But over the years, these were important ones. We had a major curriculum revision in 1969, we had a second one later on, which I didn't serve on, but was active in the debating on it. So, in my 43 years, the curriculum and the degree requirements of the Arts and Sciences faculty has undergone two major changes. The first one was in 1969, and the later one was in 1980s, early 90s. These were important moments, and I was involved in several of those. We have, over the years, we had several self studies, this was for accreditation in the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities. Every ten years you're supposed to go through a self study, and a re-accreditation, and I was active in that for a number of years in the 70s. But I think one of the most significant ones, as far as involving the whole community, was the special committee to review athletic policies in 1974 and 75. I had been on the Athletic Policy Committee of the Faculty of the Arts and Sciences, and I had been chair of that in the middle 70s, and so under President Tom Graves, there was a decision to completely review athletic policy. There was a movement by some members of the Board of Visitors to expand the football stadium, and to elevate ourselves to class 1A in the football and athletic circles. The faculty were strongly opposed to it, the alumni were somewhat split over it, so it was a very hot button topic. And we labored on it, the committee on which I was chair, for a full year, interviewing everybody we could talk to, students, faculty, alumni, administrators, Board of Visitors, townspeople. And the result was a very controversial report, which I helped write with members of the committee. We made two proposals. One, we saw the drifting professionalism of athletics, and so we decided that, why not, if that's the way the Board wanted to go, and we thought it probably did, we proposed, rather boldly, an extreme version of that. That is, we proposed, that in fact the

college recognize the semi-professional elements in the football program, increase the stipends to them, forget about too much emphasis on the scholarship aspect of it, expand the stadium, and go big time. That's clearly what some of them wanted, but when they saw it in bold type, they backed away from it. The other alternative was –

EM: [interrupting JW] Was that the intent of that recommendation, to rigger their backpedaling?

JW: Well, it was interesting. We had a very difficult time deciding how to prepare a report that would cover all sides of the argument. We had faculty members on it, we also had the Director of Athletics on it, we had other people from athletics on it, so it was very ticklish. We couldn't come to any agreement on a single proposal, so my way was to decidedly submit two proposals. One going sort of to big time athletics, and the other one reducing us to class three, the third level, which would have done away with, the model there would have been some of these colleges which do not give any scholarships. We would withdraw our scholarship funds, we would go back to walk-ons, we would reduce the program considerably. That was very popular among the faculty, and very popular among a lot of students, but it brought great hostility from the Board of Visitors. Our intent was to stir up some real serious conversation about it, and to show the two extremes. One, to go big time athletics, and the other one to go small time athletics. The result was that the Board was furious with me and the committee, it wasn't at all what they wanted to hear, they wanted to hear something in between, mostly in the direction of big time athletics. And so I was called on the carpet, one unforgettable Sunday morning by the Board of Visitor's chair, and they dressed me up one side and down the other and they wondered who I was, and who I was doing this. I had to quote from the appointment letter from the President to establish my position, but it was very uncomfortable. The result, of course, was some leaky compromise in between. We decided, or the Board decided, not to expand the stadium, not to go to big time, but to continue pretty much what we have today. Which, I think, is a very solid and good athletic program, which keeps basically scholarly credentials, and integrity of the educational program. But that was a full year of meetings and writings and discussions I will never forget, and now when athletic policy comes back, everybody has forgotten about that report, except for a few faculty friends, who every now and then want to see the copy of the original, and I dig it out of my files. But that was, that engaged the entire community in very heated debate. The other committees I've been on, the most important faculty committee is the Faculty Affairs Committee.

EM: What exactly is its charge?

JW: It is an elected committee. It is the most prestigious committee on the faculty of Arts and Sciences. You are, representative from each of the three areas of the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences, two from each, and then it elects its own chair. It is advisory to the Dean, the Dean of Arts and Sciences. And unlike most committees, even college wide, or faculty of Arts and Sciences committees, it meets once a week. It's a very demanding, very grueling, committee, but extremely rewarding, because you're there with the Dean, once a week, for an hour or more, helping him plan the year, helping

him set up priorities, advising him on faculty ideas and priorities, and so it's, it's the single most powerful faculty committee. I was honored to be elected to it twice, and I was chair of it at least one time, in 78 and 79, and both times I was chair at a time when we had a new dean coming in, so that was especially interesting. And the last time was when our now provost, Geoff Feiss, was in, came in as the new Dean of Arts and Sciences, so I was lucky to work very closely with him, as I had with the previous Dean when I was there, who was David Luxor, of the mathematics department, I was chair when he came in as a new Dean. And so it's very important, and very interesting work, Not only to do the daily or weekly advice to the Dean, but every now and then we would launch into our own studies. We did one on admissions while I was there, one of the times. The other time we looked into promotional and the retention guidelines. There's a separate committee for that, and I served on that too, but um, this is sort of the committee of committees, and so it takes on certain projects that the Deans are interested in, and wants some, an equivalent of a white paper produced on it. We usually don't write anything formally, but we engage sometimes a six month examination of various faculty policies, and help him decide how to develop. The last time I was on it, I was put in charge of writing a faculty handbook. There had never been a faculty handbook before that laid out all the sorts of privileges and obligations of a faculty member of Arts and Sciences. Everything from class attendance to office hours, to the nuts and bolts, but there are also such things as privacy, political correctness if you will, not exactly that, but advice to faculty members not to bring politics into the classroom, things of that sort, and I was chair of that sort of ad hoc committee to write that pamphlet, and to take it through the faculty, debating each of the new regulations governing the faculty. So that's the sort of thing we did on the Faculty Affairs Committee, very interesting, but very time consuming, and at the same time I when was on it, I was also Chair of the English Department, so it made it, sort of a double duty there. I was very busy with faculty administration. Ah, beyond that –

EM: [interrupting JW] Let me ask you another question-

JW: Sure

EM: Your department chairmanship. How demanding is that, and what are some of its duties?

JW: Well, that's when I came to William and Mary, we had department heads, I think I told that to you once before, they were sort of appointed for life. They were recruited, usually a senior member of a department of a discipline, brought in to be the head, and there was no stepping down other than resignation, or I suppose if the head had been unsuitable, then the provost or the dean could release them.

EM: But there-

JW: [interrupting EM] But then

EM: [talking over JW] But in those days, there was no working up towards that, this person just came in at the top?

JW: Right, or sometimes promoted from within. If a very senior faculty member was promoted to head, that happened in our department, the English department several times. But then, I can't remember when it was, probably in the 1970s, there was a recognition that that system was antiquated, and did not allow enough turn over in a department. And so the faculty of Arts and Sciences set up a chairmanship development in which instead of a permanent head, you would have a rotating chair of a department, and originally it was for three years, a tenure of three years, with one renewal, so you might end up be a chair for six years, but then you had to step down, and when I came in, it was three years, and I came in in 1985, and my three years would have been up in 1988, but they wanted me, I didn't want to stay on for a second term, but they asked me to stay on for at least for one more year, until we could get someone to take it over. So, I was chair for four years. And that's a very crucial administrative position within a department because you preside over the monthly meetings, you help recruit new faculty, you have to supervise the curriculum and make sure things are going properly, you have to watch your departmental budget, you have to plan for research travel and leave policies, and the most demanding part of it is staffing your department offerings in the curriculum with people going on leave or leaving the department or new people coming in, if you have newly authorized positions within the department, you have to go out and recruit. And again, I had this amazing lucky career, because while I was chair, we were almost remaking the department, we had a number of retirees, we had, because of the expansion of enrollment, we were authorized a couple of new positions, so recruitment was very crucial. And the same time, we were at the point where we were trying to get more women in the faculty, and we were very lucky in the English department, because there are always many very talented young women, with excellent degrees, in the humanities. Very different in the sciences, where finding a young woman physicist is extraordinarily difficult. Any rate, we were very lucky, and I was lucky to be chair at the time, and once I went to Chicago for the Modern Languages Association meeting, which is sort of a job fair, and spent two or three days, almost 12 hours a day, interviewing candidates, but the result was we were able to hire a fresh group of very young women, very talented, and they have stayed at the college, and gone on to distinguish themselves. It was a great experience for me to be part of that development, of really sort of remaking the department with new appointments, and especially with women.

EM: Would you care to name any of those?

JW: Well, I think [of Deborah Morse in 19th Century English Literature,] of Susan Donaldson, in American Literature, one of our really outstanding ones, she comes to mind immediately because she has been so distinguished a scholar. But also at that time we recruited Henry Hart from the Citadel. Henry Hart has been one of our most productive faculty members. We also recruited Tolly Taylor in Linguistics, who was an intellectually recognized linguist. So it wasn't all just women, but we were able to bring the balance up, closer to parity with women at that time.

EM: So how do you feel the department compared with peer institutions?

JW: Well, We've always been told, because of performance with self studies a couple of times, with outside consultants to come in, and I think generally they've always been impressed by the quality of our faculty. I think we've had a remarkably good faculty, and as those things go, quite harmonious. Faculty [laughing], faculty are not easy to work with. They're, we're individualists, we're specialists at times, we have very strong opinions, we're very critical of everything, of our own discipline and each other. It's not like herding cats or anything of that sort, but departments can be very badly split, it can be, have a lot of animosity in departments. We've always been very lucky, and avoided most of that. We've always had some tension within the department, but by and large, a pretty congenial group. And it's been, I think I've said talking about recruiting faculty, our problem is we have very high standards, and very good taste, we know the best when we see it, and we compete with the best to get the best faculty, but as I said before, you have to have special person, I think, to fit in at William and Mary. Not only a devoted teacher of undergraduates, and a special call for that, but also a good, productive scholar. That's the change, the main change that's come in over the years. So that it's very hard to find that combination for the salary we offer, and for the lack of serious research benefits that we can give them. So, we've been very lucky, I think, we've had a very good faculty over the years.

EM: Does the department chair, or in your case, have you had the need to correct anyone or slap any wrists?

JW: Oh yes. [laughing] The least, the least desirable part of the chairman's duty, but we had a couple of controversies, which I won't go into, but yes, they were unpleasant and rather heated, several heated discussions in the hallways, and that sort of thing. But, by and large, the faculty in the department came together on these issues, and tended to isolate the one who was the most difficult there.

EM: What tends to cause the tension within a department?

JW: Personalities, I think.

EM: It's not curriculum decisions and whatnot?

JW: No, no. The only, I did have a very difficult situation, not in curriculum, but on an honors committee where two people in the same field who had been very close friends became very angry with each other over the honors project of the student. One of them was sponsoring the student, and the other felt the work wasn't sufficient. And they were both on the honors committee, and we were at loggerheads, they wouldn't agree on the final results, and I had a very difficult time negotiating that. But that's the only time that's ever been anything of that sort. Generally, it's a personality problem. Somebody who becomes very aggressive or hostile to others, or is hostile to the way the department is going, and presents a lot of obstructions and that sort of thing. Writes memos. You can't believe the number of memos written over such an issue as whether to require a

sophomore survey course in literature or not. I mean these are, sometimes they are curriculum, but they're always based on personality, almost always. And also you're chair during the summer, when you get a little bit of a stipend for that, but there's not enough to cover what you do during the summer, you're pretty busy during the summer. Especially if you have new faculty coming in, you have to see that they get in, find housing, you help do that. You help them get established, you help them get through the first week or so of classes, and that sort of thing. That's an important, it's the most important job within a department, and we rotated it. The problem is that not everybody is wanted by the others; the chair is an elected position. What happens is when there's a vacancy coming up, when a chair is about to step down, the Dean then solicits the department for their advice, and they send in confidential advice and recommendations to the Dean. The Dean then sees if there's any sort of agreement, and eventually meets with the candidates, the top candidates, usually there are two or three that are recommended, and then it's the Dean's choice as to who's going to be chair. And the Deans have always been pretty judicious in that matter, and been lucky that I think in almost all cases, the chairs have been good ones, myself, leaving myself out of it. We've had some very strong chairs, and some, as you can imagine, rather laid back chairs, as much as you'd like them to be.

EM: You say it was elected, but actually the Dean does selects the uh-

JW: [interrupting EM] Yeah, I meant recommended by the department.

EM: OK

JW: Yes, the Dean actually makes the decision, and the Dean always wants more than one candidate. The Dean then interviews them, and talks about them, and looks over the year to see how things have been going. Now, when Geoff Feiss came in, who is now provost, came in as Dean, he changed the pattern, and wanted a four year term instead of a three year, once renewable. And uh

EM: [interrupting JW] Four year period?

JW: Four year period, renewable for another four. In fact, he really wanted a five year tenure, and I think he has it now. And we were, I just think it's too much for most chairs to do that. The problem is in small department, where you have half a dozen faculty members, such as classics or in philosophy, although that's grown now. Big departments, like English, Modern languages, the sciences, it's no problem, you can find people coming along, and groom them internally to be ready to take over chairmanship. But small departments, it's harder. On the other hand, big departments you have more personality conflicts, so it's not easy. Personally, I think four years is maximum, I mean I was exhausted at the end of four years. And, uh I don't know how you'd go five years frankly, it's a really tough job.

EM: What other committees did you feel you made a contribution, probably all of them, I'm sure, but any particular significant issues that you were engaged in?

JW: Well, you asked once before, or I think you did, about the policy on promotion and tenure.

EM: Yes.

JW: And I was on that committee for three years in the 1980s, and interacted with it when I was on the faculty affairs committee several times. What happened during my 43 years was the standards for recruitment, and promotion and tenure increased substantially appropriately so. When I came in, as I told you, there was no expectation for scholarship. By the 1980s, we were clearly on our way to becoming a small university, with emphasis on graduate programs, the doctoral program in physics, as I said once before, was a sort of turning point. So, as expectations increased for productive scholarship, the standards increased. Which meant the tenure process became much more important and serious, and so that the tenure review process became much more elaborate, we went to outside evaluators, we examined the records of teaching and scholarship more thoroughly, and tenure as a result, has never been a given here, but certainly it's become increasingly more difficult and demanding to get tenure, and the same with promotion to professor. When you come in, generally nowadays as assistant professor, with your Ph.D. generally completed or about to be completed, then you go through the tenure process, which is about a five year process, and then you're supposed to publish some significant scholarship. And then you're tenured. And then we established, as I think I've mentioned once before, a five year review of your tenured activities, which was an important development that grew out of the faculty affairs committee and out of the promotion and tenure committee. So that we are always on top, we hope, on faculty productivity. We see somebody sliding, if it's just a matter of laziness or not being up to date on their field, then we begin to give them warnings and we can interact on their merit evaluation each year. So that was an important development, and, in the process of strengthening tenure, we also strengthened the requirements for promotion to full professor, which if you come in as an assistant professor, you get tenure, and automatically you're made an associate professor, and then it's usually maybe as long as ten years before you're really ready to come up for full professor, and at that point, with our new requirements, you have to have shown considerable development from the time you were tenured, you can't just rest on your laurels as it were. So, all of that, there again, is part of the fascinating evolution of William and Mary, from a fairly small college, when I came in 1959, with emphasis on teaching, and no requirements for scholarship, to a full fledged small university of great standing, and all that came through faculty, the faculty development went along with it, and as our faculty became more distinguished, and our students became better, that all added to the credit of the college as a whole.

EM: How is it determined that faculty member with tenure, coming up for this next five year review, perhaps is slacking off, or how does the committee find out or know what's going on in the classroom, so to speak?

JW: Well, a number of departments have classroom visitation. In the English department, we always had a couple of senior faculty members who resisted it, and did not want to have faculty, did not want to have classroom visitation. That-

EM: [interrupting JW] What does that consist of?

JW: Well classroom visitation works, well there are several different ways you can do it, but one way is to have a member of the faculty personnel committee, yeah, usually, every department has a personnel committee, and that committee supervises annual merit increases, and also works with any new faculty, and keeps a tab on the teaching elements and the student evaluation form. Every class, at the end of every semester, every student in the class is solicited for evaluation of that particular faculty member, and the information goes into the annual merit evaluation, and along with that goes the publication record. So when it comes up for either the five year review or promotion, the personnel committee then has a backlog of information gathered yearly on classroom teaching and on the public scholarship, and so it's a matter of reviewing that. And for a professor, we always go outside to get outside evaluation of the public scholarship, so it's a little bit like tenure in that regard, not as serious or thorough as tenure, but it's pretty thorough, because it's the last time that you have a chance of encouraging faculty or rewarding them for their excellence in productivity. So, it's a pretty thorough system, and the personnel committee makes recommendations then to the chair of the department, and then it's voted on by the peers within the department. So, in other words, if somebody is coming up for associate professor and tenure, then everybody who's an associate professor and above within the department can vote on that, make the recommendation for the department, that then goes to the Dean. The Dean makes the final decision on tenure, well actually the tenure committee for the Dean helps him do that. And for promotion, it's the same way. Then, in that case, it's only the full professors who vote on the person coming up for full professorship, and that departmental recommendation then goes to the Dean, and he decides whether he wants to promote that person to full professorship. Usually the Dean goes along with the departmental recommendation. So, you know, when the critics from the outside scoff at tenure, thinking it's a life time deal with no responsibilities, or they look at, and think everybody's a full professor and you don't have to do anything to become one, it's of course totally erroneous. You have to be within the system, you're working at it all the time. Every year, you go through this elaborate process for merit evaluation, and its significant whether you get a nice little raise, if there is any money for the raise, you go through so many lean years, when nobody got raises, but if there is money for raises, then the merit is very significant, you can make a big difference, over the years, in your salary. So, now if you see someone slacking, as you asked me, it means that they're not going to meetings, professional meetings, they're not working on any scholarship, they haven't gotten anything published, or they don't have anything in the process of being published, and maybe their teaching is slacking. For us, at William and Mary, the teaching is certainly, we weight the teaching more than we do the scholarship, they aren't even. We give, there are faculty members who think we should do it the other way around, but as far as I know we still weight teaching evaluation more heavily than scholarship. But it's pretty close. You can't just be a good teacher and not do anything. There are faculty members who were that

way from the old days, and we would just hold them back, and not give them enough merit increase, and that's the only way you can encourage them. Of course, then it's the chair's responsibility to sit down with those faculty members and talk to them and see if you can't develop some sort of systematic program whereby they reenergize themselves, get themselves back up to speed in their field, and maybe get themselves something going in scholarship and/or help them develop into better teachers. It's hard for somebody who's been at it for twenty years or so to finally get them to break the mould, and do something more interesting.

EM: In terms of students' evaluations, is there some danger that that might be a little too subjective?

JW: Well, of course, and that's why classroom visitation is desirable if you can get it. Like I said, we had we couldn't get it approved in the English department for many years. Now we have a system whereby it's voluntary, but the pressure is on the professor to volunteer, and uh what you do is to set it up so that the professor, or the candidate, chooses a class, a particular time, whatever, for the visitor to come. And the visitor goes in there, and sits and listens to the lecture and comes out and writes up a little evaluation of it. And of course, it's all subjective. And even the student evaluations are very subjective, you get the students who love you give you high grades, the students who don't like you give you poor grades, and somewhere in the middle, and the people who are just sort of in the middle don't say much of anything. So we have both numerical scorers and we have written evaluations. So, in other words, they'll say was the teacher effective in communicating the information in the course? Very effective is a score of five and not effective is a one, so you get a numerical grade like that in about eight or ten categories, and then on the back of our report there are places for them to write their comments so we get both numerical scores, whatever they mean, and written evaluations, whatever they mean. And you have to use some common sense judgment about that, because they vary widely in how serious the [tape cuts out]

EM: As far as the serving on committees, and I think you may have answered this, this is normal for most, if not all faculty members, but I think you did say that some did not serve on committees.

JW: Yes, it's you know, once you've served on a number of committees, your name is known, and you're sometimes asked for. The other thing to say is that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences now has a volunteer program so that every year when there are absences coming up on the various faculty committees, the Dean solicits, or, actually the Faculty Affairs Committee solicits, names of those who are interested in serving on various committees. So, if you are particularly interested in athletics and have never served on it, you can put your name down as being a candidate for that particular committee and that helps you get involved with it. The problem from the Arts and Sciences faculty is that with so much pressure on tenure for young members coming in, they resist doing anything at the college level. They feel they have to do something at the department level, on a committee, if they're asked, they don't want to do any service beyond that, because they're so busy trying to get their teaching and publishing up to speed, and the problem with that is, and it's certainly justifiable, the problem with that is they aren't

brought into the administration, the self administration of the faculty early enough. So by the time they get tenure they've been here probably eight years, or five years or something like that. They've established a pattern, they've seldom, if ever, have gone to a faculty meeting, and it's very difficult for the Dean and for the Faculty Affairs Committee to get those bright young people engaged in faculty administration. And over the years we've done all sorts of things, the Deans have with the Faculty Affairs Committee, to stimulate attendance at the faculty meetings, and we've sometimes just not even had a quorum, and had to cancel meetings, or they or you don't call a quorum because you know you won't get one, and need to get important administration accomplished at faculty meetings. So, it's a two edged sword as it were. You don't want to infringe on their research time, but you do want to get them involved. As I was saying, I was lucky because when I came here, without any pressure to publish, you devoted yourself to teaching, and were quickly pulled into faculty administration by senior members who saw you, and invited you in. So you got a very early, deep commitment to the ongoing self administration of the college, which has always been one of William and Mary's strong points. We, our faculty, are very much engaged in the administration of the college, through these faculty committees, and a lot of institutions have very little of that. It's done by the professional administrators and a handful of senior faculty. But we've always worked hard to get young faculty members in there and engaged early on. And I say, that was one of the great wonderful aspects of William and Mary when it was smaller. Now, it's much harder to do that, and you have to really have to entice the post tenure faculty in, and reward them for faculty service in some kind of administration so they get committed. Otherwise, they're more committed to their discipline than their institution, and they're quick to want to leave if things aren't going well, and they have their eye on publishing and scholarship somewhere else, and they don't have the kind of commitment to the ongoing development William and Mary that they used to have, which I think is very unfortunate, but I think if you pick your faculty carefully when you recruit them, and bring them along carefully and constantly encourage them to participate, at least go to the faculty meetings, then you can do that.

EM: In addition to all your committee work for the college in various committees, you were also engaged in a great deal of administrative service as well.

JW: Yes, it all began rather remotely at the end of my first year here, 1959-1960, and when the president was asked by Fort Eustis to find a young writer who would help with the writing of technical manuals, so I got a summer job helping Fort Eustis write technical manuals, and the president I think then learned about me. The second summer was even more auspicious, because our President Paschall at the time was very politically minded and there was a very heated primary election for the gubernatorial election that would take place in November. And they wanted a speech writer, and so they contacted President Paschall, and he contacted the department, and I was, as I think I told you one time, set up to help write speeches for the man who became the governor of Virginia. Well, that relation, and I would come back and report to President Paschall who was always interested in the goings on in political world. He had been superintendent of education, so he had a very strong political background. And so, through those relationships, when I went back to Columbia at the end of 61 to finish up my doctoral

residency and get going on my dissertation, we realized we didn't want to spend the time in New York, so contacted the college and Paschall then offered me the position as his administrative assistant, in addition to teaching at least part time in the department. And so for three years, I did that, I was administrative assistant to President Paschall from 1962 to 65, which was an amazing experience. Not only because he was an amazing man, not completely admirable in all respects, [laughing] he was a Machiavellian if there ever was one, but it was fascinating because of all of his political contacts, and he was responsible for the so called "new campus" development over here. It was under him that Swem Library was built and a number of the new buildings, now no longer new, but he was very active in that. So after three years of that, I wanted to go back to full time teaching, which I did. Then a couple of years later, in 1967, I was asked by the then Dean of the College to be his Associate Dean, and I did that for a couple of years.

EM: Was that a full time job?

JW: No, again, it was full time, but I always insisted that I would be free to teach at least one class in the English department. And at the same time, I often did a couple of honors students, just to keep going. That was where my main commitment was, but the administration was interesting. And during that time, at one point, I was Acting Dean of Graduate Studies for a year, 67 to 68, but the most interesting aspect was the Branch College Liaison officer from 68 to 72. When that was under the Dean of the College. The Dean of the College title was finally abandoned in 1968 when the Dean became the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and we had a shift and title and a broadening of responsibility, because by that time we had several full scale schools going and so the idea of Dean of the College was not quite broad enough in title and requirements. Actually, I served from 67 to 72 in that office either as Associate Dean of the College or Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs. Very vital time in the college because of the expansion, in fact the School of Business was created in that time and the School of Education was expanded. We then took over the Virginia's Marine Studies Program, which became the School of Marine Science. We developed the high energy nuclear physics program at Virginia Associated Research Center, down where it's now called the Jefferson Lab, and the branch colleges came into existence. That had actually started under President Chandler in the 1950s. He had conceived of an ambitious program where he created the two branch colleges, one Christopher Newport College in Newport News, and Richard Bland College over in Petersburg, both of them as two year colleges. And he then, when that when he stepped down, and it's too complicated to go into that whole arrangement of how that came about, but at any rate, at that point we needed some sort of closer supervision of the branch colleges, so I being in the Dean of the College's office was asked to be Branch College Liaison officer, which I did for four years, and I would go down, sort of like a circuit rider preacher I would go do to Christopher Newport once a week at least, and talk to faculty and look over their arrangements and development, and then I would go over to Richard Bland in Petersburg and keep an eye on them. And when the Board of Visitors met, each of their presidents would make a presentation to the Board of Visitors, and I would always be present for that and had something to do with it.

EM: Let me interrupt you for a second and ask you what was the rationale for establishing branch colleges? Were these seen as feeder schools to William and Mary?

JW: No, they were never seen as feeder schools, I think it was the education ambition and political ambition of President Chandler to broaden the scope, because at that point University of Virginia had some branch colleges, and of course it became very common across the country for major universities to have related or branch colleges or secondary institutions within their system, and I think he aspired to have a kind of empire if you will, with these branch colleges. At the same time, we had an evening college, which taught classes at night, and we had an extension division, which taught some courses down on the peninsula with faculty who were either hired for that purpose I taught in the extension program, I taught in the evening college, I taught in the summer program. All of which tended to broaden our political base and provide educational opportunities for people who couldn't come to William and Mary or wouldn't have been admitted. So the idea that we could broaden the educational service and the both Newport News and Petersburg area with branch colleges certainly was part of what became a very active statewide program of branch colleges, or two year colleges.

EM: They were never seen as becoming four year...

JW: [interrupting] not at the beginning. So they were just two year programs, and we always of course would take some of their transfer students if they had finished up the two year program and had good grades. We would certainly look favorably on them if they wanted to transfer to William and Mary but many of them did not. But while I was doing this from 68 to 72, Christopher Newport decided it wanted to go four years. Now I must back up a minute and say that originally Old Dominion University in Norfolk was called the Norfolk Division of William and Mary and in Richmond there was Richmond Polytechnic Institute, RPI, which was affiliated with William and Mary. So, there was a long history of William and Mary having association with secondary educational institutions in Richmond and one in Norfolk. Long before I came aboard, the Norfolk Division of William and Mary became Old Dominion University and broke free, and RPI broke off and became independent up there and became Virginia Commonwealth University. So it was within that scope, I think that Chandler envisioned two more institutions. We'd sort of lost two, so I think he thought of having two more. I'm not sure how thoroughly he thought that through, but at any rate, they both started with practically nothing. The Richard Bland was particularly impoverished because it just took over a correctional institute over there, and its facilities were very meager and they had hard going for quite a long time. And again, Christopher Newport started in an old abandoned building, in sort of a post office building or something on Shoe Lane, and it gradually got its own buildings. But neither were thought to be ever residential institutions, they were all local people, commuter schools, and they never had any aspirations to become four years. But, as I said, somewhere there between 68 and 72, I think probably around 1970, Christopher Newport wanted to become a four year institution, and the Board of Visitors was very happy to see that develop. And so, one of my interesting jobs was to go down there and help them through the transition to four year institution, which meant a total

revision and expansion of their educational program and a recruitment of faculty and students to bring them up to speed for a four year institution.

EM: Would that also mean a separation from William and Mary at that point?

JW: No, it didn't at that point. It was still to be under the umbrella of William and Mary, but much more responsibility of course, self governments and that sort of thing. And they still reported to William and Mary, reported through the Dean of the College or then Vice President for Academic Affairs, and that was my function, to report on them at Board meetings and for the Vice President and to sort of help them through the process of expansion, which I did. I'm not sure I gave them very much help, but I certainly found it fascinating and very interesting experience to do that. And they became four years, and then eventually of course broke free and became their own four year institution with graduate courses, which is a newer development. But at any rate, during that period of time, in and out of administration, twice, and with other administrative, with various committees, I had an unusual opportunity to be active in the growth and development of William and Mary through some very crucial years. Looking back over those 43 years, and thinking of the early times with Admiral Chandler, President Chandler, I served actively under five different presidents.

EM: Would you name them?

JW: Chandler, Paschall who I worked very closely with, Tom Graves, Paul Verkuil, and Tim Sullivan. In fact, Tim Sullivan, who just retired a couple years ago as president, I knew as an undergraduate. He was the fair haired young man in the government department, and ah one of the professors there used to every now and then entertain outstanding students, and I remember meeting him at one of those little affairs and being impressed with him and he went on to great things of course. He became Dean of the Law School and then President of the College. So, I don't know that many faculty could say that they served that many years under five different presidents.

EM: Did you have a favorite that you'd want to comment on?

JW: Well, they were all interesting and different. I think that I personally liked Tom Graves extremely well, and I liked Paul Verkuil, who did not have the happiest period here for personal reasons, marital reasons, but I liked them, both of them, personally very much. But of course Tim Sullivan I knew, but didn't work very closely with him. And then over the years, I think I counted up at one point at least ten different deans and at least five vice presidents or provosts. So, what's been interesting to see the various men come in, of course with Gill Cell as Provost, the one woman we've had in that role. Wonderful person, who did a very fine job as Provost before Geoff Fiess took over. I got to know her quite well, and work with her on a number of committees in various aspects. It's been fascinating to watch the development. I think we've always been blessed with strong or solid administration, certainly academic administration, I can't speak for the plant department and the you know facilities management, and the rest of it, but I think from the academic side of it, we've always had pretty good support and pretty good

administration. But, as with everything else, I think it's gotten increasingly better. I think we're now, my sense is that we're very well administered with our new president, Gene Nichol, who I wish I knew him the way I knew the other presidents, but he seems very significant, and Geoff Fiess as Provost, and of course Connie McCarthy as Dean of Library, we really have a wonderful, and our Dean of Arts and Sciences. We have a very good administration, much stronger than our friends down the road, at Colonial Williamsburg. We've always been in sort of competition with them for administration, and I think we've long since outstripped them by quality, and by seriousness, and by commitment, and by development.

EM: You mean the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation?

JW: Yes, right, I mean of course they- When I first came here, they had a much stronger administration than we did I think, because they had Carl Humelsine who came out of the State Department. They had some very distinguished people that had, after World War II, had come out of the State Department and various places of that sort, and of course they always had much more money than we ever had, and they had quite an interesting group. That was one of the pleasures of being at William and Mary was to be able to associate with their historians, their archivists, their art historians, their archaeologists, you know the sort of academic side of it. But over the years, I think we've outstripped them. I think we have stronger archaeologists than they do, I think we have as fine art historians as they do, and you know, I think our administration, central administration, I think is far superior to theirs now. So that's one of the great things about William and Mary at the end.

EM: Looking back over your career, are there any things you have any regrets or things you prefer went in a different direction Or would you-?

JW: [laughing] Indeed I do! [laughing] I thought you'd never ask! [laughing] No. [laughing] We at one point had a very solid and good graduate program in English. At the master's level, terminal degree, it took us at least ten years or longer to build it up to the point, where I think I mentioned once before, our graduate students were at least as good as our best undergraduates, and maybe in some cases even better. We worked hard on that, we were beginning to make ties with the branch colleges, with the two year colleges, in which our master's candidates would do some teaching down there, and we were beginning to develop a real commitment to the community through our program, we were offering special courses for teachers, and it was a sound program. The one thing I hold against Gill Cell as Provost, is that she decided that it would be better, and I think Tim Sullivan as much as anything, I think he really decided he wanted to elevate the college up to a level of nationally recognized small universities. And he thought, and Gill Cell must have agreed, the way to do that was to put all the eggs in a few baskets, that is to really develop Ph.D. programs, and to do away with sort of terminal master's programs. It all came about through a committee that studied the issue for about a year, and made recommendations. The problem with that was that there wasn't anybody who had done any graduate work in humanities or even the social sciences. On the committee, they put people in from the sciences, and so the result was, the recommendation that one way or

another came out, that they would collapse the existing master's programs in English and Sociology and I forget now two or three other departments who had sort of slumbering programs, and put everything into a new Ph.D. programs and anthropology. At that point, the English department was at least several times stronger than anthropology. I feel very keenly about this, in fact even bitter you might say, because we fought very hard and long to convince the Provost and the President that our program should survive. We had the best master's program on campus, no questions about it. We had better students, we had good support, it was a contribution that we were making to the community, all of the reasons they said for changing the emphasis to doctoral programs. At any rate, after a long and very bitter argument over it, we lost, and they collapsed our master's program, presumably never to be revived. And I think it was a great loss, it was a great loss to the department, to the faculty who got the opportunity to teach some graduate courses, and they also built, at the same time they built up the American Studies program, which was a natural one. That history had been at the Ph.D. level for some time, American studies then went up to the Ph.D. level, and the support, they said, the support for the programs like ours, for graduate students, would go naturally into those programs, those doctoral programs, and strengthen them. Anthropology had never had a graduate program, and they did have archaeological interests, but that, we felt, was quite unusual. And so psychology went up to a clinical program, in connection with Eastern Virginia Medical School. But at any rate, that's, of all the things I was engaged in during my time here, that was the bitterest pill, because we had built that carefully, and I think with considerable integrity, and we just lost it. We did everything we could to fight it, to present arguments we thought were compelling, but I think the decision had been made before the committee ever got to work, I think it was a fait accompli. And we've still, I'm still, several of us are still quite bitter about it. I think that was a mistake, and a great loss to us, but you know, that's the way those things happen. You win a lot of battles, but you lose some, and you lose some that really hurt years later, and that was one of them. That's the only one I'd say I have any regrets about whatsoever.

EM: On the other side of that, is there something you feel uh most uh satisfied or proud of during your time here?

JW: Well, I think I've said it too many times already! [laughing] And that is the development of the college. I just think it has been remarkable. I've been so fortunate to be involved in it, and to serve here in various capacities when the college has really remade itself from a reasonably good, but rather provincial, small college, with mostly young women in 1959, to now what I think everybody recognizes as a first rate, small public university. And it's been the increase in faculty quality, the increase in student quality, and administrative quality, and although we've fought the losing battle with Richmond over support, which that's another disappoint I might say, that Richmond has not supported the college the way they should have, and we've had to go increasingly to private funds, but maybe things will turn around with the new president and the new governing body in Richmond, but that's been difficult. But in spite of all of that, I think we've really developed remarkably well over those years, and I think any of us connected with the college must feel a great deal of pride in the quality of the institution now in 2006.

EM: So you feel fairly positive of the college's future at this point?

JW: I do indeed, I think if we can ever break the log jam in Richmond, and get a more far sighted and committed General Assembly and Governor to commit to higher education, but we have everything in place. We have, I think, excellent leadership at the top, administration, we have superb faculty, just terrific students, and our physical plant is coming along nicely. I'm not happy with the new dorms [laughing] out on Jamestown Road. It's too bad they had to take over the playing field there. But our facilities are fine. They are remodeling the older buildings, they're bringing them up to speed, even the English department will get a face lift in old Tucker Hall. So, I think everything's in place. We just need now to crack that nut in Richmond, and get some better fiscal support. Of course, Swem Library, can't say enough about that. It's just fabulous now, the whole new development of it, the expansion of it, and when we can really be proud of the library now. We always felt good about it, but I think now we really have a library that is the equal of the rest of the institution, maybe better than it is, and that's just terrific, we can look to that with great pride. So, I'm very positive about the future.

EM: So how are you enjoying retirement?

JW: I like it. [laughing] I miss teaching the students. Of course, I just love our students. Bright, funny, quirky, irreverent, lazy [laughing], but just marvelous, marvelous students. I miss them, but I made up for my love of teaching with the Christopher Wren classes, so that's been a great relief. I don't know if I could get along very well without doing some teaching, so the Christopher Wren courses have been great for me to do that, and I've enjoyed that very much. And then I'm also active in a couple of other things. I'm now chair of the Board of Trustees of the Williamsburg James-City County Public Library and I'm doing some things with that, and doing some other things, but mostly it's the Christopher Wren that keeps me going.

EM: So you want to stay in the classroom?

JW: I want to stay in the classroom for as long as they'll have me, yes. [laughing] They might have to drag me out by the heels one of these days, but you can probably tell from this recording I must like to hear my own voice, I talk too much. [laughing]

EM: Well, you've talked awhile yes. Given us, I think, some fine facts and insights into the evolution of the college over the forty some years that you've been here. And I want to thank you for your time and all you've had to tell us.

JW: You're certainly welcome Ed, thank you.

EM: This is the end of the interview with John Willis.