

H. Lester Hooker

At ninety, Judge Hooker is one of the oldest persons interviewed for this project. His connection with William and Mary began when he arrived as a student in January 1905, and even though he left the college at the end of the 1905-1906 term to study law at Washington and Lee, he remained devoted to William and Mary. For many years a judge on the State Corporation Commission, he was active in alumni affairs and from 1955 to 1964 he was a prominent member of the Board of Visitors at the college.

The following transcript of the interview was edited at Judge Hooker's request.

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Interviewee H. Lester Harker

Date of interview March 7, 1975

Place 7203 Pinetree Street, Richmond, Va.

Interviewer Emily Williams

Session number 1

Length of tape 88 mins.

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H. Lester Hooker

March 7, 1975

Williams: Judge Hooker, back in '51 -- this was before you came on the board -- a faculty committee made a report on why it was that the faculty and the Board of Visitors had not gotten along, and they said part of the problem was that the faculty and the board were made up of different people: that the board members were Virginians; they were older; they were primarily political appointments. Was this true when you came onto the board in '55?

Hooker: Yes, I would say so. I don't want to call them political appointments, but the governor might call on men whom he knew well, who wanted to get on the board. If they hadn't been interested in William and Mary I don't think they would want to become board members. I don't know of any real prestige it would give them. One of the criticisms several years before I went on the board -- that I heard because of my activity in the alumni association -- was the complaint that the faculty was not taken into consideration, that they were just left outside and never knew what went on until they read it in the newspaper just like some other people. They wanted at least to know what was going on. And after I came on the board we frequently had some representatives present at the board meetings. That was changed to some extent, probably not as much as it should have been, but any member of the faculty who wanted to come came in and made any repre-

sentation he wanted. Prior to that, my recollection is that they had to go through the president; if he didn't want to put their recommendation forward, it didn't come before the board.

Williams: Do you think that helped relations?

Hooker: I'd say it helped a great deal. There's no reason why that shouldn't be done. Even if the president of the college and the board members don't agree, the faculty has a right to be heard. Give the other side the opportunity to say what they have to say, and chances are they'll understand if you decide against them.

We had another illustration that I don't know whether to tell or not. At the first meeting that I was a member of the board it came out that the Norfolk division was giving diplomas as though the graduate were from William and Mary College, and I kicked on this. I said, "That's a mistake, and it's not accurate. It's not fair to the public, because if a boy or girl applied for a position it might make some difference." Well, I got stepped on pretty heavily by the board. Lewis Webb was the one who was in that; he and I got right well acquainted there. So anyway they voted me down almost unanimously. At the next meeting I pulled the statute on them; they were wrong and I was right legally. That changed the whole situation. From then on diplomas were issued from the Norfolk division showing they were from the division.

There was another incident while I was a member of the

board that I had to take a position on. The administration recommended to bring in as vice-president the son of the president of another institution in Virginia. I opposed it. I told them it should be investigated. I would be against it anyway because I didn't think that the son of the president of another institution in Virginia should be in position to be president of William and Mary College. I felt that the other institution from which this young man came would get a lot of information from William and Mary that might not be best for the college. Anyway we had right much of a fight over it, and Jimmy Robertson of Norfolk, who was rector at that time, appointed a committee to investigate this young man, which I had suggested. All of the committee members had taken the opposite position from me in the matter, so of course, I thought the committee was stacked. I thought the next meeting it would be approved, but it never has come up since. The chairman of the committee had found out that the young man was at that time at another institution and that he was on the way out and was trying to save face, so to speak. Of course, this committee kept it out of the record; so they just never made any recommendation. That man told me, "It certainly is a good thing that you had it investigated." Otherwise we would have had a man on our hands that turned out to be in some respects not qualified.

Williams: You were telling me a few minutes ago about how it was that you came to be appointed to the board. Would you tell that

again -- how Governor Stanley appointed you?

Hooker: Yes. Of course, he had known me all his life. We were from the same section; he's from Henry County, and I'm from Patrick, just a few miles apart. I had voted for him, worked for him, of course, and our families were closely associated. That wasn't political. It was just that he wanted somebody that he knew well that he could count on to bring him the facts. Of course, he wanted to get the matter settled.* It was in the papers. He was hearing a lot of things, and he wanted to know if they were right or wrong. That's all he wanted, I think. I'm not certain -- somehow I got the impression that some delegation of the faculty had gone to talk to the governor. But anyway when he appointed me I suggested that he appoint Mr. Brooks George. He said, "No, Mr. George is a fine man, but he says he's busy, and you're right here with me, and you're with the state, and we can talk most any time. I want you to get down there and bring me the facts." I went down there before I qualified. Then I came back and told him what I had done. Of course I talked to him frequently about what went on down there. And of course I talked to Governor Harrison, too, about the separation of the Colleges. He made a recommendation: he recommended that they be separated. So I think that as a whole the board members were not appointed on a political basis, but their political standing may have had something to do with it. I know that the alumni association recommendations have been followed pretty strictly. I don't remember but a

*(see pages
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few occasions that the alumni's recommendation hasn't been followed. Governor Holton I don't think paid any attention to the alumni. But I may be mistaken about this; that's purely hearsay on my part.

When Dr. J. A. C. Chandler was president he was most active in alumni affairs. Also, the students just worshipped him. He was just with the students; he went with the football team wherever they went and sat on the bench. They always used to call him assistant coach. But things have changed. The school is so much larger now. Dr. J. A. C. Chandler really started the school on the upgrade. He was a really go-getter. He had a lot of foresight in buying land around William and Mary College. When I was president of the alumni association, he came up to the Richmond office one day and said, "I want you to sign this note" for some money. I hesitated. I said, "My word is not any good. I'm not worth anything like that." He said, "All I want is the paper." I've got some land back there I want to buy. It will be worth half a million dollars to the college in a few years, and the college is going to have to have it. Other people are going to get it if I don't get it right away, and then the college will never get it, and if they do they will have to pay a terrific price for it." Anyway, I signed it as president of the alumni association. Chandler was foresighted; he looked out for the future of the college. He killed himself for it. You'd see him in that little house behind the Brafferton building with

the lights on till twelve, one o'clock every night. His wife was dead, so he worked to keep himself from thinking of her. He worked himself to death, but he was a great man, and he had a lot to do with the progress of William and Mary.

I've often thought about the things that went on there when I was a student. In those days the big contestants in football were Randolph-Macon, Richmond, and Hampden-Sidney. Richmond still is, but not the others. One time when William and Mary defeated Randolph-Macon, I believe it was, the next morning I went into the chapel and there was a cow in the chapel! The students had put a cow in the chapel overnight. I never will forget this: Dr. Tyler said, "You boys' parents made a mistake. They didn't know they were sending you to William and Mary College. They thought they were sending you to Eastern State Hospital." Everbody laughed; of course he knew they would laugh.

Another funny thing I remember concerned Lord Botetourt. One night there was a big celebration and somebody took a bed chamber pot and put it on Botetourt's head. They had it painted red. So Dr. Tyler came out that morning to chapel, and he said, "Someone sure disgraced Botetourt. Who would want to do that?" Well, students had a lot of innocent fun then.

They could fool Dr. Tyler, too. Dr. Tyler was very absent-minded. I don't know if he could see too well or not, but he

couldn't remember all the students, anyway. He taught history -- he knew so much Virginia history. He was born there with it. It was most interesting to hear him tell it. We would go in class, and he'd call the roll, and we'd all say, "Here." In the spring of the year, when the baseball season was starting, frequently boys would come up and say, "Hooker, when he calls my name, say 'here.'" If I wanted to get out, why, they'd call my name. Very seldom did he catch anybody. He'd never know the difference. I remember they used to say that so many of the history class passed one year and so many the next. I know my first year there they said that nobody had a chance beyond a "K," I believe it was -- half of the alphabet, anyway. There was a boy named Young, and he flunked. Dr. Tyler said, "Of course, with a name 'Young.' Next year you'll pass." He'd get the "Ys" next year. He always believed that. We had a lot of things that went on. The boys enjoyed it. We had that kind of fun. We had to have in those days.

Williams: There wasn't much else to do in Williamsburg otherwise.

Hooker: That's right.

There were a lot of tricks they[#] played on Dr. Hall, especially. Dr. Hall was in his class two or three days before Thanksgiving (We never went home but once -- that was Christmas.). So he said, "You all will be sitting over here in the dormitory eating hardtack, and I'll be eating turkey." So the boys stole his turkey, and he didn't have any turkey at

all. He was mad. He tried to find out who it was. Of course, he never did, but they had a lot of fun like that. Another time some of the other boys (friends of mine) stole Dr. Tyler's pigeons and took them down to a restaurant to a boy named Galt, and he cooked them for them.

Williams: Were there fraternities back then? Did they have tricks?

Hooker: Yes, they had fraternities. Kappa Alpha was living in a house. They had a house right next to where I stayed (I stayed at Mrs. Luck's on Scotland Street. I went in after Christmas, and there was no more dormitory space.). I belonged to Sigma Nu. I never did get to attend it much. I was a very poor fraternityman; I had too much else to do.

Williams: Why was it, Judge Hooker, that you came to William and Mary rather than, say, going up to Charlottesville to the University?

Hooker: I'm glad you asked that. My brother, J. Murray Hooker, went to William and Mary College. He was a classmate of J. A. C. Chandler's, who became president afterwards. Chandler had him down there once after that to make a speech to the alumni association. They were great friends. He had a room with Chandler in the Brafferton building with Senator Mapp and I've forgotten who else -- there were four of them.

Williams: To get back to when you were appointed to the board -- the students at William and Mary were protesting. What was the situation down there in 1955?

Hooker: The students wanted more voice; they wanted to be heard, to get into things a little more. They wanted to know what was going

on. They were being pushed back a bit. They wanted to be a part of the college.

Williams: They weren't just protesting about drinking beer? Would you say it was a bigger issue than just drinking beer?

Hooker: Oh, yes. The beer was just brought into it because a boy was selling beer to the students. That was a part of it. I'd say that was an offshoot of it. It all just happened to be going on about the same time. But that wasn't what Abdulla, the president of the student ~~body~~, and the vice-president were talking about. They wanted to come before the board. They and the faculty had somewhat similar views about having more to say about what was going on.

Williams: Well, now, when these strikes were going on down in Williamsburg, there were some calls in the General Assembly for the governor to investigate the situation in Williamsburg. Why didn't Governor Stanley want to investigate this?

Hooker: Well, I don't know. I assume . . .

Williams: What would you guess?

Hooker: My guess would be that he felt it would make matters worse. He wanted to keep it out of the press. He took the same position I did: let's get it out of the newspapers because those things hurt the college. What you want is to have as little adverse publicity as possible in any institution you run.

Williams: How was it that the situation down there did work out? How was it that it calmed down?

Hooker: Well, they all got together. They [the faculty] got so they

could come before the board. And then some of these salaries were adjusted, which meant that the president and the faculty got along better after that.

Williams: I've heard -- I don't know if this is true or not -- but I've been told that there was a chance in 1955 that Admiral Chandler was losing his support with the board. You were a new member at the time -- would you say this was a possibility?

Hooker: I couldn't confirm that because he had right much influence with the board on most things as long as I was on it; he had the majority of the board with him, I'd say. He didn't have too much trouble after 1955. The last thing I recall was the separation of the Colleges.

Williams: You said that you felt that William and Mary and the divisions should be separated, but in 1960 something was set up called the Colleges of William and Mary that was to make Chandler chancellor over the entire system.

Hooker: I nominated Chandler for that.

Williams: How was it that this had all come about?

Hooker: Well, we had a chancellor, former governor Darden of Norfolk. After he became University of Virginia president, of course, that ended. We had no chancellor at that time, so we revived it and made Admiral Chandler the chancellor. We wanted to revive it, and I knew he wanted it. So I placed his name before the board. And of course, he got it.

Williams: He was the logical candidate, wasn't he?

Hooker: Yes, he was the logical one to have it.

Williams: Now when Dr. Paschall was made president of William and Mary back in 1960, you said that Admiral Chandler wanted him as president and that you agreed with him that he was the best man for the job. What particularly fitted Dr. Paschall for the job of the president of William and Mary?

Hooker: Well, he had been in school work all his life and of course was a graduate of William and Mary College and was devoted to the institution was an alumnus. He was very popular state-wide, and in the position to get more money probably than anybody we could think of. In addition to his background and his excellent qualifications was his popularity with the General Assembly. We couldn't think of anybody to get any more money for William and Mary College than Dr. Paschall, and I think we were right.

Williams: Was the board agreeable to this?

Hooker: On, unanimous. There wasn't any trouble at all.

Williams: Back in '51, when Admiral Chandler had been selected, there had been a big uproar, and the faculty felt it should have been consulted. Well, here a new president, Dr. Paschall, was being selected and the faculty wasn't being consulted. Was there any opposition expected from then?

Hooker: No. We didn't hear a word from any faculty member.

Williams: You felt that they, too, would agree that Dr. Paschall was best?

Hooker: They knew him well. Of course, he had been associated with a lot of them before. So there wasn't any dissent from the faculty

as far as I knew.

Williams: Now this setup made Dr. Paschall president in Williamsburg, Mr. Webb president in Norfolk, and Dr. Oliver president here in Richmond, then they all reported to Admiral Chandler as the chancellor for this short period of time.

Hooker: Until they were separated.

Williams: That's right, until they were separated. How did this work out?

Hooker: They had to go through Chandler. They didn't appear before the board or the legislature for any money or anything except through Chandler.

Williams: Do you think this was difficult for them?

Hooker: Of course, naturally, as I formerly stated, I think it was against their colleges' growth and advancement. They couldn't get enough money, for one reason.

Williams: You were saying that a big chunk of money was to go to William and Mary, and people didn't realize they had to go five different ways.

Hooker: That's right. That kept William and Mary from getting as much money as they should have. Then, of course, they had a lot of courses that they wanted to give at R.P.I. and at Norfolk. They couldn't get them unless William and Mary gave them. They weren't going to have any courses to contradict William and Mary. There were a lot of sound reasons for separating them. I knew that, and I think I remarked once before the General Assembly at a hearing (I'm not certain) that the assembly was treating them as a red-headed stepchild. It had been on my

mind, but there wasn't anything that I could have done if the State Council of Higher Education hadn't brought it up; it would've been that way yet, I guess. You had to have a recommendation from somebody. Of course, a member of the board couldn't very well start a recommendation to investigate himself. Anyway, it turned out fine. In my opinion, I think the separation has confirmed our judgment.

Williams: Did the Board of Visitors know that the state council was investigating until it hit the papers?

Hooker: I don't recall. Probably Chandler did, but I don't recall.

Williams: Chandler, then, fought this separation.

Hooker: That's right. He was against it.

Williams: And he had a good bit of the board behind him.

Hooker: All but four -- three more and myself. He had all the others. But we had the legislature -- that's what counted. As I told you I appeared before the legislature. We didn't have much trouble; they went right along with us. Of course we had some good help from the Norfolk delegation. Naturally with Norfolk separating they couldn't be for Norfolk separating without being for Richmond separating because it would be inconsistent. We had some solid support there. I recall at a senate session, where I appeared we had some member of the board to talk for the other side. Several of them took a different position from mine; one of them was Andrews of Roanoke. Jimmy Robertson was rector. In fact, I think Jimmy was in sympathy with us, but being rector -- sometimes he felt like he had to

go along with us.

Williams: Now when the state council had made their report, it was just a recommendation from the governor, right?

Hooker: And the governor submitted his recommendation to the General Assembly.

Williams: And his recommendation was to separate.

Hooker: He followed their recommendation. Of course, that was a tremendous help to us.

Williams: Did Chandler go to the General Assembly, also?

Hooker: Oh, yes. He was president at the time I'm talking about. He was there and heard everything we said. I liked Chandler personally and Mrs. Chandler, too. I told him why I had to be in opposition. There was nothing personal in it at all, just my interest in the college. [It was] what I thought was best for all three institutions, and I think the future growth and progress has proven it beyond question-that we were right in separation.

Paschall was very popular with the governors always. And most anything he wanted he was able to get. In fact, I don't know of anything he wanted and didn't get before the General Assembly. He was very pushy. He worked hard to get all those things and to give William and Mary a status of a university. Those doctoral degrees -- I know how hard he worked to get those. Of course, he worked hard to get William and Mary Hall and the library and the girls' gymnasium, which was a very fine thing. (I think you'll find my name on that building.) Paschall did a

lot in physical growth and in promotion of programs.

Williams: Now a lot of these had been planned during Chandler's administration, but Paschall was the one that got them accomplished. What would you attribute this to?

Hooker: Well, I'd say that Paschall -- as I said, I just don't know of anyone who was more popular with the General Assembly at that time than Dr. Paschall. Anything that he pushed he generally got. That's why he was an advantage as a college president because of his popularity as superintendent of schools. Of course, all the members of the General Assembly knew him personally. He had probably been in half of their homes when he was superintendent of schools.

Williams: Did he maintain this popularity throughout his presidency, or isn't it natural to have a falling off of popularity?

Hooker: Well, I know he retained it. Of course, after awhile he had attained about all he could hope for. The only thing I know of that didn't progress (although I don't know that that it could have progressed any more) was the law school. Of course, being a lawyer myself I've always thought William and Mary should have the greatest law school in the country. I think there is going to be more progress now since they are going to have that judicial facility there. That's going to put William and Mary law school on the map, and we are going to find out that students are going to flock there from all over the United States. It's going to be a tremendous asset to William and Mary College because those people will go back and be judges

and prominent politically and otherwise.

Williams: In what ways have the alumni been a help to William and Mary and what more could they do, would you say?

Hooker: Well, the biggest help, of course, I think is to raise money. If they could raise a good endowment would be one of the material ways they could help William and Mary. Of course, they could recommend good students.

Williams: Now you've lived in Richmond all these years. Have you felt that William and Mary got short shrift when it came to appropriations for higher education in Virginia?

Hooker: Well, it did, of course, for quite some time. The University of Virginia and V.P.I. used to get more in comparison with William and Mary. But after Mr. Bryan became president, William and Mary improved on that basis. Naturally with a school like the University of Virginia, with its prestige and so many graduates from there in the General Assembly, they had their influence felt, you see, and that helped them to get more money. That wasn't anything against William and Mary. People were thinking about and heard more about them. V.P.I. had an advantage in that their president, Dr. Hahn, was like J. A. C. Chandler. He was a go-getter, and he just came in there getting more money than any of them. Of course, he had a lot of connections--all the graduates V.P.I. had in every kind of business. Some are farmers, you know, and the General Assembly people come from the country. I doubt that they will ever have another man like Dr. Hahn.

Williams: Well, now you said that this expansion was J. A. C. Chandler's big contribution to William and Mary. Would you say that getting the money for expansion in the '60s was Paschall's contribution? What would you say was John Stewart Bryan's contribution to William and Mary?

Hooker: He just kept up what J. A. C. Chandler was doing to a reasonable extent. But he wasn't active to the extent that Chandler had been. He didn't live at the president's home. His wife was away in a hospital (Westbrook). Charlie Duke was credited with having a lot to do with the college in those days. It didn't progress as rapidly as it had. Mr. Bryan was an awfully fine person, most likeable, and did a lot of things for William and Mary in many ways. He had national prestige, of course. He gave a lot of personal money to William and Mary. I know he gave substantial contributions to athletics. I know that personally because I spent a lot of my time promoting athletics. I was chairman of the athletic committee for many years. Athletics had a lot to do with a college. It has a lot to do with bringing the alumni and the student body together.

Williams: You've seen William and Mary for many years. What have you seen to be the goal of the College of William and Mary?

Hooker: Well, it seems to me the goal is to educate the youth and give them an excellent education. In a broad sense the purpose of William and Mary College is to educate the public. It started as that, of course, -- to educate the boys from high schools, private schools.

Williams: To train teachers.

Hooker: Yes. That is what it really was. The paramount part for a long time was training the teachers and probably is yet. William and Mary in all its aspects I think ~~it~~ has done a good job. I think the law school is the only thing that could have been bigger than it is. But it's been hard for the law school to ~~get~~ money because the University of Virginia has such an outstanding law school and has so many of their graduates in the legislature. William and Mary had to get money for the law school. I don't think it's going to have any trouble in the future.

During the Administration of Dr. Bryan the Board of Visitors passed a resolution abolishing the Law School.

When this was found out some of us requested that we be given an opportunity to appear before the Board to express our dissatisfaction of the abolishment of the Law School. This request was granted, and we O.L. Shewmake, J.D. Carneal, Jr. Otto Lowe and Myself appeared and strongly protested the prior action of the Board, and asked that said resolution be rescinded and that the Administration use its influence to improve the Law School. The Board promptly revoked the resolution.

It is my recollection that William and Mary had only two alumni on the Board at that time. Walter G. Mapp of Accomac, Va. and Herbert H. Foreman of Norfolk, Va. for whom Foreman Field in Norfolk was named. Mr. Foreman was very active to do anything he could for his Alma Mater. He served for twenty six years, I think until law was changed by Governor Darden when Governor restricted the length of service to two terms.

The action of the Board of Visitors abolishing the Law School brought focused our attention on the need to have more Alumni on the Board. Some of us prepared and had introduced a law which required that all members of the Board be Virginia, and that at least two-thirds of the Board be Alumni. This bill was passed, and is essentially the law today. Some amendments have been made. I think one enlarging the Board so that Alumnae can serve, and that one or two non-Virginians could be appointed.

I would like to add that Dr. Bryan was very popular with Faculty and students.

Judge Hooker sent this memo adding to his recollections.

Received March 14, 1975.

Added by Judge Hooker 10/31/75 :

During the Presidency of Dr. Bryan the Board of Visitors passed a resolution abolishing the Law School. I was informed of this by an Alumnus, and I called Dr. Bryan on the phone requesting that He reconvene the Board that opposition to their action might have an opportunity be heard. He reconvened the Board very promptly, and Judge Shewmake, Otto Lowe, and My self appeared expressing our strong opposition to the previous action of the Board. The Board was composed largely of U.V.A. Alumni. Our protest was granted and the resolution was rescinded. But for this protest William and Mary would not have a Law School. What a calamity?

Added by Judge Hooker 3/14/75:

Dr. Lyon G. Tyler told me that my Brother, J. Murray ~~Hook~~ Hooker of Stuart, Virginia helped him get the General Assembly to appropriate ten thousand dollars to EWilliam and Mary. I have the recollection that this was the first money given the College by the State. The official records of the state will show if this was the first contribution.