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Conflict at the College: William and Mary 1750-1776

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Bachelor of Arts, The College of William and Mary, 2012

**A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

Lyon Gardiner Tyler Department of History

**The College of William and Mary
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APPROVAL PAGE


This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of


Master of Arts


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Approved by the Committee, July 2013


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ABSTRACT

Located in the colonial capital of Virginia, The College of William & Mary was certain to have been affected by the rising political and social turbulence before the American Revolution; however, its location was not the major factor contributing to conflict at the College. The real source of tension was the difference in perspective between the Anglican clergymen serving as professors, and the Board of Visitor members who were gentry used to significant control over provincial affairs. From the 1750s to 1776, the Board of Visitors attempted to gain more local, secular control over the College, while faculty members used their connections in British administration to maintain their position in the face of Visitor opposition. This dynamic became apparent through the presidential elections, faculty dismissals and appointments, and statute revisions, in which faculty ties to Britain allowed them to counter Visitor efforts to establish increased power over the professors. The firm reliance of the Anglican faculty on their British superiors protected them from Visitor interference, but kept them from adapting to an institution in a colonial setting that functioned very differently than British universities. The sources most important to understanding this struggle are the William and Mary College Papers and the Fulham Palace papers, which include descriptions and meeting minutes providing the views of both parties. Using these documents, I will examine the motivations, networks of support and different perspectives that sparked conflict at the College.

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This thesis is dedicated to the professors, administrators and students who
make *The College of William & Mary* so very special.

Our hearts are with thee, dear William and Mary, however far we stray.

Introduction

Given the College of William and Mary's setting in the colonial capital of Virginia, it is no surprise that it was affected by the rising political and social turbulence in the decades before the American Revolution. Yet it was not only its location in Williamsburg that produced conflict at the College, but also the two opposing groups brought together in its administration. Fundamental differences between William and Mary faculty and Board of Visitor members from the 1750s through the early 1770s transformed the College into a place where tensions between British and colonial expectations of provincial administration were extended to an academic and religious setting. While the Visitors desired increased local secular control because their families funded and attended the College, the Society of Anglican faculty concentrated on the school's ecclesiastical origins and its connections to imperial organizations such as the Church of England. Deeply involved in colonial politics, faculty members applied their belief in the supremacy of imperial policy over that of local authority to the governance of William and Mary, often relying on British superiors for support. Political and religious ties to England held by the school's Masters and professors allowed them to hold their ground against Visitor encroachments into College affairs until the American Revolution, but prevented them from adapting to the peculiarities of an institution located in a colonial setting.¹

¹ The best sources for uncovering the local and imperial concerns of the Visitors and faculty members and how they affected the College are meeting minutes, statutes, and correspondence to British administrators detailing events at the College and asking for intervention. These documents can be found within the Fulham Palace Papers, which consist of colonial papers relevant to the Bishop of London, who often served as William and Mary's Chancellor. Not only do they provide insight into the vast differences between the two groups, but the papers also show how frequently the

This episode highlights the pulls of local and imperial forces on an educational institution founded on Anglican principles and funded by local elites. The historiography of colonial religion, society, and higher education is important to understanding this contest, and to revealing how religious and imperial connections affected the curriculum and focus of American colleges. Because the majority of professors at William and Mary were from Britain and remained loyal to the Crown throughout the Revolution, study of this conflict shows that many who became Loyalists during the war had been fighting a battle for imperial supremacy in areas outside of politics for decades before Americans declared independence. While most sources on William and Mary's history give a good account of important events during this period, few concentrate fully on the driving forces behind administrative and educational conflict at the College. This study focuses on the unique internal affairs of William and Mary that developed from emerging differences between American and British priorities.

The turbulent affairs at the College were influenced by the distinctive social, political and religious climate in Virginia prior to the American Revolution. In the wake of events such as the Parson's Cause, members of the gentry displayed a growing penchant for anticlericalism that negatively affected administrative relations at William and Mary. As a local institution, the College offered greater prestige for the Visitors and their families than it did for the faculty. The differing seriousness with which the two groups viewed the school created tensions that were recorded in Visitor and faculty

Anglican faculty turned to British administrators for aid in college affairs that the Visitors viewed as the domain of local authorities. Sources from the perspective of the Visitors can be found in the College Papers at William and Mary's Swem Library.

minutes. Each with their own network of imperial and local support, the professors and Board of Visitors advanced their agendas when possible, often encountering retaliation from the opposing group.

Coming to Virginia from British universities, the Anglican ministers who accepted positions at William and Mary found life at the parochial college much different than that to which they were accustomed. Though the gentry on the Board of Visitors thought of themselves as British, the distance separating them from the mother country had transformed them and their institutions into something uniquely American.² No one could see this more clearly than the Anglican faculty. Rather than adapting to their new situation, the clergymen at William and Mary sought to impose British practices on the College as much as possible. When the Visitors pushed for increased local control through presidential elections, professorial dismissals, statute revisions and educational reform, the ministers banked on their British connections to counteract the Visitors' efforts. Naturally, divisions existed within each group. However, the nature of the specific conflicts at William and Mary during this period demonstrates a power struggle between factions drawn along lines of laymen vs. clergymen, Visitors vs. professors.

Differences and Divisions

The personal histories and conflicts between College administrators outside of William and Mary had repercussions for the educational institution. Members of both the Visitors and the faculty were often similarly educated, and both perceived

² Robert Polk Thomson, "The Reform of the College of William & Mary, 1763-1780," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 115 (1971): 188, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.wm.edu/stable/985977>.

themselves as British citizens with all the rights and privileges associated with that status. The fundamental differences between the two came down to their outlooks and priorities on local and imperial levels. While the clergymen serving as professors retained strong personal ties to Britain and a commitment to the Anglican Church, the planter elites on the Board of Visitors were focused on their families' status in Virginia politics and society. William and Mary represented something very different to each group depending on whether they believed its purpose to be more important to the British Empire and Anglicanism or to the colony. The collective priorities of each group determined their vision of the College and their perception of each other, thus creating divisions that would ultimately lead to conflict both inside and outside of William and Mary's halls.

The men on the Board of Visitors represented the most elite and influential members of Virginia society. The surnames of the members—Randolph, Carter, Harrison, and Nelson, among others—read like a “who’s who” of Virginian patriots in the Revolution to come. The Visitors were men of local and regional importance who established kinship networks through marriage and reproduction. Between 1750 and 1776, thirty percent of known Visitors were direct descendants of one man, Robert “King” Carter, who was himself Rector of the Board during his lifetime.³ Many others were Randolph family members by descent or marriage, including 1758-1759 Rector Peyton Randolph, who ultimately chose to be laid to rest in the William and Mary

³ The sons and grandsons of Robert Carter on the Board of Visitors from 1750-1776 include Charles Carter, Thomas Nelson, William Nelson, Mann Page II, Robert Carter Nicholas, Charles Carter, John Page, John Page Jr., Carter Braxton, Thomas Nelson Jr., and Benjamin Harrison. Florence Tyler Carlton, *A Genealogy of the Known Descendants of Robert Carter of Corotoman* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1982).

chapel crypt.⁴ In colonial Virginia, personal relationships laid the foundation for social and political daily life.⁵ Although kinship ties did not automatically result in unanimity among the Visitors, they did impart a sense of social cohesion that facilitated opposition to British clergymen pushing for control over a local institution.

As members of families with a strong tradition of local and political involvement, the Visitors were accustomed to a large degree of mastery over Virginian institutions prior to the 1750s.⁶ Many served in the colonial legislature, giving them a great deal of authority over secular politics. In the colony's religious affairs, these men sat on the parish vestries that helped to administer local Anglican churches.⁷ Separated by such a great distance from the center of imperial politics, the gentry had enormous freedom to participate in and control local administration.

The College was an important institution to Virginia society because it was a place where young members of the gentry could obtain an education. Many of the Visitors, Peyton Randolph and Benjamin Harrison for example, had themselves attended classes at William and Mary.⁸ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Swiss traveler Francis Louis Michel remarked, "Before [the establishment of William

⁴ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 130.

⁵ Isaac, *Transformation*, 105.

⁶ Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 36.

⁷ Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 13.

⁸ *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Randolph, Peyton," accessed November 18, 2012, <http://www.anb.org.proxy.wm.edu/articles/01/0100768.html?a=1&n=peyton%20randolph&d=10&ss=0&q=1>; *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Harrison, Benjamin," accessed November 18, 2012, <http://www.anb.org.proxy.wm.edu/articles/01/0100377.html?a=1&n=benjamin%20harrison&d=10&ss=1&q=4>.

and Mary] it was customary for wealthy parents, because of the lack of preceptors or teachers, to send their sons to England to study there. But experience showed that not many of them came back. Most of them died of small-pox, to which sickness the children in the West are subject.”⁹ The ultimate mark of educational prestige was study at a university overseas in England. For those who could not afford to travel abroad or who were concerned by the associated risks such as oceanic travel and disease, William and Mary was the next best thing. Many Visitors, such as Richard Bland II and Richard Corbin, learned academic basics at William and Mary, then continued on to education in England. Attending a university across the Atlantic may have looked better on paper, but study at William and Mary gave students local opportunities they could not experience abroad.

For the Virginia gentry, one of William and Mary’s most important functions was as a center for networking. Located in the capital, the College established strong connections with governors, burgesses and other government officials. For families that could afford it, special attention could be purchased to advance the political careers of their sons. A student before becoming a Visitor, John Page wrote about his experience at the College in his memoirs. He described in one entry how his father paid President Thomas Dawson “handsomely to be my private tutor.”¹⁰ Dawson introduced his new pupil to government actors including governors Dinwiddie and Fauquier. Although John Page did not receive the English education he initially desired, he reflected in his

⁹ William J. Hinke, trans., “Report of the Journey of Francis Louis Michel from Berne, Switzerland, to Virginia, October 2, 1701-December 1, 1702,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 24.1 (January 1916): 26.

¹⁰ John Page, “Governor Page,” *The Virginia Historical Register, and Literary Note Book*, Vol. 3, William Maxwell, ed. (Richmond: MacFarlane and Fergusson, 1850), 146.

memoirs, “These circumstances contributed to introduce me into public life, and added to my having been twice elected, by the President and Professors of Wm. And Mary College, to represent it in our general Assembly, and had been appointed by the Governor and visitors, a visitor of the College.”¹¹ Despite its lackluster educational reputation, William and Mary was a launching point for future colonial leaders. The Visitors and their families directly benefitted from the local institution and from their involvement in its administration. By striving to increase their control over collegiate affairs, the Visitors ensured that their families would continue to prosper from their association with William and Mary.

Many Board members had sons or family members at the College during the debates over faculty and Visitor powers, some of whom came to play a part in the disputes. To these men, William and Mary served an important academic function in the community, educating those who would eventually engage in Virginia society and politics. Board member William Nelson wrote in a 1772 letter, “my three younger Boys, Bob, Nat, & William, are at the College, where the Opportunities of improvement are very good.”¹² Sons of the gentry rarely pursued a degree to its completion at William and Mary, preferring to use the publicly maintained Grammar School and collegiate experience to build social ties and knowledge of political affairs.¹³ The College had a purpose at a local level beyond producing clergymen or perpetuating British traditions

¹¹ Page, “Governor Page,” 146-147.

¹² William Nelson, Letter from William Nelson to Samuel Martin, Esq., July 2, 1772, *William Nelson Letter-Book 1766-1775*, 245, quoted in Mary R.M. Goodwin’s Historical Notes, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections, 201.

¹³ Isaac, *Transformation*, 130.

of education. It was an institution that prepared local leaders for public service in the colony.

In the eyes of the local elites, the control they exercised over many colonial establishments logically extended to their role as Visitors at the College of William and Mary. The eighteen members of the Board of Visitors had the authority to confirm professorial appointments, to elect the Rector, Chancellor and President, and to make statutes that would define the institution. A self-sustaining body, they elected their own members, which allowed the same families to sit on the Visitation over generations.¹⁴ Their governance of the College aligned with the other political, social, and religious administrative powers that members of the gentry had accumulated in Virginia before the 1750s. Unlike the Visitors of universities in England who mainly stayed aloof from the activities of the school, the colonial board members played an active role in monitoring the actions of professors and revising statutes.¹⁵ The William and Mary Visitors viewed their intense supervision as an act protecting the public good, and complained about the professors, “Public interest they, being the greater part of them bred up in England, are unacquainted with; private interest is the only motive by which they are actuated.”¹⁶ The Visitors’ overbearing presence and constant efforts to claim more control over the College was a regular source of disturbance for the other group in the administrative dynamic, the faculty.

¹⁴ Thomson, “The Reform of the College,” 188.

¹⁵ Thomson, “The Reform of the College,” 188-189.

¹⁶ “To the honourable the VISITORS of WILLIAM and MARY college. Ego,” *The Virginia Gazette*, October 19, 1775, accessed June 26, 2013, Earl Gregg Swem Library Online Accessible Archives, <http://www.accessible.com.proxy.wm.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.1.1.1.1>.

Being an Anglican institution, William and Mary's professors were traditionally members of the clergy. Many ministers serving in Virginia parishes had been born in the colony, but that was not generally the case at William and Mary.¹⁷ The vast majority of professors at the College were born, raised, and educated in Britain, an upbringing that gave them a perspective of education and colonial administration very different from that of the Visitors. Though some professors eventually married into Virginia society, their concerns were not with local society and politics, but rather with the success of the College in its mission to train other Anglican clergymen. Their status, training, and oaths taken as ministers defined them as a separate group from the local gentry, with very different priorities. The faculty members were focused on the ties between the College and the British imperial system that stemmed from its strong connection to Anglicanism.

As ministers of the Anglican Church, the professors were immediately linked to Britain in the eyes of the Board of Visitors. Upon ordination, clergymen took oaths to the King as the head of the Church and promised to promote loyalty to the Crown.¹⁸ Their position in religion allowed them to rely on the support of their superiors in ecclesiastical hierarchy, solidifying the association between the clergy and the metropole.¹⁹ While many Visitors also had British political and economic connections, the imperial ties held by the clergymen at William and Mary were of direct significance to College administration. The Chancellor, an important authority figure within the

¹⁷ Nancy Rhoden places the number of Virginia-born ministers in the colony at 22.6 percent in 1744. This number rose to over 40 percent by 1775 as a result of a preference for native-born clergymen throughout the period. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism*, 19.

¹⁸ Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism*, 71.

¹⁹ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 79.

College hierarchy, was traditionally the Bishop of London or the Archbishop of Canterbury, which gave the professors a sympathetic ear and protection within the administration.²⁰ Such deeply personal connections to British tradition prevented the faculty from adjusting to William and Mary's colonial setting, driving them to emulate British practices as much as possible while rejecting local influences on the College.²¹

The faculty had an entirely different view of William and Mary's purpose, seeing the College not as a local institution, but as a means of strengthening the ties between mother country and colony, and for producing ministers for the benefit of the Anglican religion. The vast differences in experience and perspective between the faculty members and the Visitors resulted in the formation of two oppositional groups at the College. Those clergymen who were born across the Atlantic were unfamiliar with the local dominance of the gentry and found themselves "Stranger[s] to the kind of men, who form the Body of Visitors...."²² The gentry may have thought highly of their power in the Virginia Assembly, but the ministers emphasized that local government was subordinate to Parliament, the King, and his Privy Council, who protected the colony and deserved its inhabitants' obedience and loyalty.²³ Those faculty members who came into Virginia from England with the idea that local bodies owed allegiance and deference to imperial administration resented the Visitors' attempts to assert their

²⁰ Isaac, *Transformation*, 130.

²¹ Richard L. Morton, *Colonial Virginia*, vol. 2, *Westward Expansion and Prelude to Revolution 1710-1763* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 765.

²² James Horrocks to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 7 January, 1766, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Microfilm.

²³ Virginia Clergy to the Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 29 November, 1755, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

authority over the College and saw such efforts as local insubordination that detracted from William and Mary's success.

The College was a unique setting for Anglican clergymen in Virginia. At his parish church, each minister was in a position of weakness. If a British immigrant, the newly arrived parson had no official support or protection besides that of his title, and was subject to the power of the local vestrymen.²⁴ Twelve local leaders sat on the parish vestry, which elected its own members and was headed by the minister. Their powers included imposing taxes necessary for paying the clergyman's salary, overseeing costs of building and repair, and caring for the poor.²⁵ Although the minister was the official chair of the vestry, the de facto control rested in the hands of the wealthy planters on the board. Because there was no American bishop, and therefore less ecclesiastical hierarchical control over colonial Anglicanism, the social elites in the vestries took to handling church affairs.²⁶ In the absence of an established religious hierarchy, these colonial bodies had much more authority than their English counterparts.²⁷ Parish ministers found their hands tied by their parishioners "when instead of the Royal Authority, they were put under the power of the Vestry and made Subject to the humors of the Peoples."²⁸ The resentment English clergymen built up at their parish churches found an outlet at William and Mary, where they had the support of their colleagues to protect their interests.

²⁴ Isaac, *Transformation*, 144.

²⁵ Isaac, *Transformation*, 65.

²⁶ Wood, *Radicalism*, 89.

²⁷ Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism*, 13.

²⁸ Letter from T.L. to the Lords Commission of Trade, June 14, 1759, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

At the College, the Anglican Chancellor provided a legitimate source of assurance and an avenue for redress. In the academic setting, professors were able to form a Society for mutual support. Their prerogative to discipline students gave them authority within the institution other than their status as clergymen. With a faculty member serving as Commissary, the Anglican bishop's representative in Virginia, the College also served as a meeting place for clergymen to discuss colonial religious and political events. The local secular elites were not the only group with a claim to the College. These circumstances gave the professors power at William and Mary that would be targeted by Visitors in their efforts to diminish faculty control. While the Virginia ministers outside of the College may have discovered that British administrators had little control over political maneuvering in the colonial legislature that diminished clerical rights, William and Mary's professors benefitted from legitimate British authority over the royally chartered Anglican institution.

A number of factors incentivized ministers to take a position at William and Mary. For Virginians who graduated from the School of Divinity, the College was their alma mater, offering a familiar atmosphere and a local seat of prestige. Such men comprised only a small percentage of the faculty, as William and Mary was woefully unsuccessful in following its initiative to produce native clergymen.²⁹ The majority of the professors immigrated to Virginia from England, often as a last option when they could not find employment at home. They were frequently the least skilled in their graduating classes. Even the Chancellor did not take the College seriously as a valuable post for professors, as revealed in a letter by Dr. William Halyburton in which he stated,

²⁹ Isaac, *Transformation*, 130.

“His Lo.^p said that he believed [the professorship] a sine cure.”³⁰ William and Mary served these men either as an opportunity for colonial prestige or as a simple means of employment while dropping into obscurity.³¹ These attitudes presented different challenges to the Board of Visitors. Those clergymen seeking social and political influence, such as John Camm, tended to be the most outspoken in favor of British and clerical superiority over the Visitation in administration. Those who sought an easy pension while maintaining their mediocrity became the target of behavioral reform and tarnished the College’s reputation.

The motivation for increased regulation of William and Mary most frequently discussed by Visitors in their correspondence and diary entries related to the public behavior of faculty members. In 1760, professors Goronwy Owen and Jacob Rowe came under heavy scrutiny for their irreverent attitudes. Allegations against them included reports that they had “been often seen scandalously drunk in College, and in the public Streets of Williamsburg and York: That the said M.^r Rowe and M.^r Owen frequently utter horrid Oaths and Execrations in their common Conversation....”³² Official inquiry into their actions resulted only in probation, which Jacob Rowe flagrantly violated just two months later when he led the students in a skirmish against the Williamsburg apprentices involving a number of firearms. In the midst of the conflict, Rowe “insulted M.^r John Campbell by presenting a Pistol to his Breast, and

³⁰ At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governours of William and Mary College, held the 11th Day of June 1767, 12 of the Clock, College Papers, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections.

³¹ Thomson, “The Reform of the College,” 198.

³² At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, held the last Day of March 1760, College Papers, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections.

also Peyton Randolph Esq.^f one of the Visitors, who was interposing as a Magistrate and endeavoring to disperse the Combatants.”³³ Though a professed man of God, Rowe’s behavior suggested that he did not take his position seriously. With men of his ilk on the faculty, the Visitors felt entitled to intervene on behalf of the College and their sons attending.

The Visitors blamed the faculty for the declining reputation of William and Mary. The professors’ poor behavior was not only a sign of their lackadaisical attitudes toward teaching, but also stood as a terrible example to the student body. The entire community knew of the professors’ transgressions, including Governor Robert Dinwiddie, who wrote that the professors “have quite ruined this Seminary of Learning the people declaring they will not send their children to the College till there s a new Set of Professors & many of them have already sent their children to Philadelphia for Education, which is 300 miles from this, & attended with double the Charges for education, as that of the College of Wm & Mary....”³⁴ During his 1773-1774 residence at Nomini Hall, tutor Philip Vickers Fithian recorded Robert Carter III’s similar opinions on the College so closely tied to his family. Carter remarked how the reputation of William and Mary hinged on the public behavior of the professors, and as a result “he cannot send his Children with propriety there in Improvement & useful Education—That he has known the Professors to play all Night at Cards in publick

³³ At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, held the 14th Day of August 1760, College Papers, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections.

³⁴ Letter of Governor Robert Dinwiddie to the Bishop of London, in R.A. Brock ed., *The Dinwiddie Papers: The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, Vol. 2 (Virginia Historical Society, 1933), 697.

Houses in the City, and has often seen them drunken in the Street!”³⁵ This sort of behavior did not provide the instruction in morality and civic virtue the gentry hoped to instill in their sons attending the College. The Visitors recognized these failings in the faculty and sought to bring them under tighter control before their educational institution lost all respect.

Conflict at William and Mary took place within a wider context of discord between gentry and clergy in secular politics outside of the College, which influenced relations between the faculty and Visitors. The 1750s and 1760s were fraught with struggles in parish churches between lay vestrymen and Anglican ministers, as well as battles over legislation passed in the Assembly that clergymen found harmed them, but benefitted planters. Since members of both the faculty and the Visitors were directly involved in local politics, the increasing bitterness between the two groups outside of William and Mary bled into College affairs.

In correspondence sent to the Bishop of London reporting on the state of the Church in Virginia, the clergy repeatedly showed their concern over the growing power of the vestries in parish churches. In Virginia, it was customary for the royal governor to suggest a ministerial candidate to a vestry, which would consider other candidates before making its own decision.³⁶ Though this process was made legal by the General Assembly in 1748, clergymen disliked the degree of control over ministerial

³⁵ Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1943), 86-87.

³⁶ Morton, *Colonial Virginia*, 756.

appointments that this act gave to provincial laymen.³⁷ Anglican ministers with a British background like Reverend John Camm saw the increased influence of laymen over ecclesiastical affairs as dangerous to the Church, and argued that such laws encouraged the gentry to seek even more power.³⁸ Ministers at the College observed connections between these efforts by the gentry to control ministerial appointments in parish churches and later attempts by Board of Visitor members at William and Mary to extend their powers over professorial dismissals and appointments.

An overwhelming feeling of anticlericalism in colonial Virginia influenced relations between the Visitors and faculty at the College. Outside of William and Mary, opposition to clergymen manifested in the parish church, in the courtroom and in the homes of wealthy planters. Already exercising significant control over the parish church through the vestries, the gentry also moved important family ceremonies away from the church and into their households. Domestic baptism was just one example of this practice investing secular families with control over religious proceedings.³⁹ Wealthy families also began burying deceased relatives at home rather than at the church, physically moving a sacred space into their own backyards.⁴⁰ These actions divested parish ministers of their authority, which was assumed instead by the same sort of men who comprised the William and Mary Board of Visitors. Most professors at the College

³⁷ Thomas Dawson to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 23 June, 1753, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

³⁸ John Camm to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 4 June, 1752 in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

³⁹ Lauren F. Winner, "With Cold Water and Silver Bowls: Becoming an Anglican in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 36.

⁴⁰ Isaac, *Transformation*, 266.

held positions as parish ministers in addition to their educational vocations. They observed the gentry's desire to take personal control of religious ceremonies that gave ministers special power. In the eyes of the faculty, the Visitors attempted to do the same at the College when they pushed for control over discipline, the personal lives of the professors and the course of academics.

Anticlericalism took place in political and legal arenas as well. The Parson's Cause, or the discord between Virginia clergy and gentry following the Two Penny Acts in 1755 and 1758, pervaded all aspects of interaction between the two groups, including College administration. In a year of tobacco shortage, the Two Penny Act allowed vestries and county courts to pay the salaries of ministers at the regular price of tobacco, rather than at the inflated price caused by crop failure.⁴¹ If the act had not gone into effect, the salary of Anglican ministers would have seen a significant increase to around twice that of their normal annual pay.⁴² In the wake of its passage, conflict exploded between lawmakers and ministers, once again the very people presiding over the College.

Though clergymen all over Virginia protested this legislation, the faculty at William and Mary took a leading role in the Parson's Cause. Reverend John Camm, Professor of Divinity at the College, actually travelled to England to represent the

⁴¹ *Encyclopedia Virginia*, s.v. "Two Penny Acts (1755, 1758)," by J. Kukla, accessed November 15, 2012,

http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Two_Penny_Acts_1755_1758.

⁴² Susan H. Godson, Ludwell H. Johnson, Richard B. Sherman, Thad W. Tate, and Helen C. Walker, *The College of William and Mary: A History* (Williamsburg, VA: King and Queen, Society of the Alumni, College of William and Mary in Virginia, 1993), 90.

clerical opposition and to bring suits against the vestries for lost income.⁴³ Certain Visitors also played a significant role, with members like Peyton Randolph emerging as strong proponents of the act designed for the protection of local planters. In a letter to the bishop, Virginia clergymen expressed their concerns for the future of the College in the wake of such legislation, stating that the Two Penny Act

...must also have a threatening Aspect upon all usefull Seminaries of Learning particularly the College of William and Mary in this Colony, founded by Royal Charter; in which seminary our Youth are educated in several usefull branches of Learning & some trained up for the Ministry. For, in our opinion, no man will give his Son a Liberal Education or bring him up for the Ministry under such discouraging circumstances. And no Clergy-man of worth & learning will ever come from Britain to settle here, where he will be so far from meeting with due protection, that he runs the risque [sic] of being denied the rights & privileges of a free born Subject.⁴⁴

They considered the fate of the College to be strongly connected to the fate of the clergy and the state of the Anglican Church in the colony. Under such circumstances, the ministers feared that an institution established by monarchs for religious purposes would be unable to continue.

The burgesses who secured the passage of the Two Penny Act were unimpressed by the clergy's reaction. They believed the ministers were demanding benefits while doing nothing to earn them at their parish churches or at William and Mary.⁴⁵ As Anglican clergymen became increasingly vocal in their opposition to the act, the gentry became more resentful toward them and more critical of their failures. The added publicity of a pamphlet war made many of the ministers, some with posts at William

⁴³ *American National Biography*, s.v. "John Camm," by Thad Tate, accessed November 18, 2012, <http://www.anb.org.proxy.wm.edu/articles/01/0100137.html?a=1&n=john%20camm&d=10&ss=0&q=1>.

⁴⁴ Letter from the Clergy to the Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 25 February, 1756 in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

⁴⁵ Isaac, *Transformation*, 157.

and Mary, incredibly unpopular in Virginia.⁴⁶ The anticlericalism generated by these debates coincided with growing tensions at the College, further hindering understanding between the professors and Visitors.

The actions of both parties throughout this conflict were consistent with their behavior at William and Mary. Ministers viewed the Two Penny Act as an attempt by the local gentry to infringe on the rights of the clergy, just as professors at William and Mary saw the actions of Visitors as an attempt to undermine the Anglican presence at the College.⁴⁷ The clergy succeeded in getting the acts repealed through appeal to the Privy Council, just as the faculty would appeal to the Privy Council and their ecclesiastical superiors for support in battles over the College statutes. The similarities in their actions inside and outside of William and Mary boiled down to their perspectives on the role of local government, whether or not they believed that British administrators should be involved in colonial affairs, and the degree of support they had outside of provincial government. Political events in Virginia drew divisions between ministers and laymen outside of William and Mary that also solidified differences between the two groups at the College.

The faculty and Visitors maintained very different lifestyles and values that created disagreements over the administration and educational focus of William and Mary. The language in letters and diaries written by each group reflected those different priorities. Board members viewed the institution as a networking and proving ground for their sons, where they would learn civic duty in preparation for political life.

⁴⁶ Jurgen Herbst, *From Crisis to Crisis: American College Government 1636-1819* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 55.

⁴⁷ Thomas Dawson to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 25 February, 1756, in *Fulham Palace Papers* vol. 13.

Descriptions of the College written by these men focuses on morality, an essential quality necessary for each student to learn before coming into his own as a local community leader. “Moral duty” makes frequent appearance in Visitor letters, especially when criticizing the professors for their behavior, as does the desire for “useful” education.⁴⁸ The William and Mary clergymen, on the other hand, used language saturated with hierarchy and religion in their writing. In reference to the purpose and success of the College, Thomas Dawson reported to the Bishop of London, “we now have four students in Divinity, and some promising Youths high advanced in the Grammar School: Pray God increase the Number, and grant that we may train up many fit to serve him both in Church and State.”⁴⁹ Dawson hoped that religious instruction would stay with his students even as they went into secular politics and planting. The emphasis on religion, accompanied by a deferential tone used in letters to the Bishop of London, gives insight to the regimen of learning and respect the professors enacted at the College. Their hopes for high graduation rates and serious study of the Anglican religion were not matched by the Visitors and their sons, who attended the College to acquire local status.

When clergymen whose allegiances and experiences led them to believe in the supremacy of Britain over its colonies lived and worked alongside the colonial social elite of Virginia, tensions developed over questions of authority and power in a local setting. Though struggles between the two existed throughout the colony in the decades

⁴⁸ At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, held the last Day of March 1760, College Papers, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections.

⁴⁹ Thomas Dawson to the Bishop of London, August 13, 1755, in *Fulham Palace Papers* vol. 13.

before the Revolution, the situation was particularly volatile at the College of William and Mary, where the two groups fought over an institution they each viewed very differently. Conflict outside of the College affected the dynamic between the professors and Visitors and reverberated in administrative affairs, but local and imperial prerogatives and perspectives were the main fuel for discord.

Local and Imperial Power Dynamics in Presidential Elections

In their attempts to exert more local control over William and Mary, the Visitors used their administrative power to elect College officials sympathetic to their goals. Though there was little the faculty could do about elections that were the prerogative of the Visitors, the professors used their connections to British authorities such as the Bishop of London to counterbalance the Visitors' victories. The divides between local and imperial, American and British, were apparent in the elections and appointments made during this period. As would be the case until the American Revolution, British authorities within William and Mary's administrative hierarchy routinely sided with the faculty, allowing them to maintain their grasp over the direction of the College.

The first episode revealing clear differences between the interests of the Anglican faculty and the local planters was a College presidential election directly tied to external political events. On April 22, 1752, the newly arrived Governor Robert Dinwiddie and his Council imposed a tax of one pistole on each land grant that bore the royal governor's seal.⁵⁰ The Pistole Fee Controversy pitted gentry interested in land speculation against Dinwiddie, who they believed had required the tax purely for his personal gain. William Stith, supported by the local elite, quickly became identified as

⁵⁰ Morton, *Colonial Virginia*, 622.

the most outspoken opponent of the pistole fee.⁵¹ When College President William Dawson died on July 20th, Stith and the former president's brother, Thomas Dawson, ran to fill the position. Stith's willingness to support the gentry against the British governor in local politics became an important factor in the election's outcome.

The president of the College was required to be a member of the clergy, described in the 1736 college statutes as "a Man of Gravity, that is in Holy Orders, of an unblemished Life, and good Reputation...."⁵² With no option to select a layman, the Board of Visitors looked to elect the man who would be most likely to ally with them, or who would be the most pliable candidate. Unlike the majority of professors at William and Mary, Stith was born in Virginia. His mother was a Randolph, a member of one of the most socially and politically well-connected families in the colony. Stith's cousins were Peyton Randolph and Richard Bland, both avid enemies of the pistole fee (and future members of the Board of Visitors). Though educated at Oxford, he had been master of the William and Mary Grammar School long enough to have former students on the Board of Visitors.⁵³ According to Governor Dinwiddie, the deciding votes in the election were those of Stith's friends and former pupils.⁵⁴ His local connections and willingness to support the gentry in Virginia politics made him an ideal candidate for the presidency.

⁵¹ John Blair to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 15 August, 1752, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

⁵² James Blair and Stephen Fouace, "The Statutes of the College of William and Mary, Codified in 1736," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, First Series, 22, no. 4 (April, 1914): 290. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.wm.edu/stable/1914824>.

⁵³ Morton, *Colonial Virginia*, 623-624.

⁵⁴ Robert Dinwiddie to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 15 August, 1752, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

Robert Dinwiddie, enraged by the outcome of the election, used his British connections and position as royal governor to salvage what victory he could. The same man who was President of the College had traditionally filled the position of Commissary. Dinwiddie and his supporters wrote to the Bishop of London, accusing Stith of unorthodox Anglican practices and emphasizing his role in the Pistole Fee Controversy, while at the same time praising Thomas Dawson's abilities and urging that the latter be made Commissary.⁵⁵ Not only did Bishop Thomas Sherlock confirm Dawson as Commissary, but he also sent a letter to Stith chastising him for his behavior in opposition to the royal governor's pistole fee.⁵⁶ In giving the position to Dawson, thereby dividing the offices of College President and Commissary between two men, the Bishop of London sided with the clergy rather than the Visitors who supported Stith. Once again, British connections proved valuable to those who wished to thwart the involvement of the local elite.

After a president had been elected, the Visitors continued to monitor him and to influence his performance. President Stith died on September 10, 1755. Due to the scarcity of qualified candidates to be drawn from the ranks of the faculty, his former opponent Thomas Dawson was elected to fill the position. Administering during the Parson's Cause, Dawson was ill equipped to handle such controversy. When he began drinking heavily in public, the Visitors seized the opportunity to make him formally acknowledge his actions, and insisted that he only be allowed to continue as president with their consent contingent upon his reformed behavior. By doing so, they effectively

⁵⁵ John Blair to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 15 August, 1752; John Blair to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 25 July, 1752, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

⁵⁶ William Stith to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 21 April, 1753, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

controlled his future at the College. Faculty observers saw this as a power play, and insisted that Dawson had been compromised, as “his dependance [sic] is so great on the College, being President, and the great ones here being Visitors, that they make him Act as they please, not only as President, but as Commissary too.”⁵⁷ The Anglican ministers at William and Mary showed their concern over the possibility that their leader, the president, could be placed under the thumbs of the Visitors, distracting him from his allegiances to the Church at the College.

The Visitors’ attempts to elect presidential candidates who were not the most adamant about the importance of the clergy or their ties to Britain continued into the 1760s. In 1764, the Visitors chose the young Grammar School Master, James Horrocks, over the more experienced Richard Graham, who had previously come into conflict with the Board. Though less practiced than Graham, Horrocks won the election by agreeing to swear an oath of obedience to a controversial statute passed by the Visitors that gave them increased power over the faculty. Another faculty member, William Robinson, expressed his concern to the Chancellor, remarking that “M.^r Horrocks has obtained a profitable & hon.^{ble} Post by favour granted to Compliance, but if by violating his own Sentiments and reducing the Authority of the President & Masters to a mere Shadow, he has laid a foundation for his own Peace and future Security or for any good

⁵⁷ William Robinson to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 20 November, 1760. Reverend William Robinson was born in Middlesex County, Virginia, but resided in England from 1726-1744 while he attended Oxford. His great-uncle, John Robinson, was a former Bishop of London, demonstrating the family’s strong ties to the Anglican Church. William Robinson joined Reverend John Camm as one of the leading opponents of the Two Penny Act, and was appointed as Virginia Commissary in 1761.

to the College as a Seminary of Education, I am much mistaken.”⁵⁸ Horrocks eventually showed himself to be less easily manipulated than the Visitors might have hoped, but in the immediate aftermath of the election, other professors worried that he had sold out his own beliefs and the welfare of the faculty for a prominent position at the College. Robinson’s distress over the potential for increased Visitor control at the expense of William and Mary’s success showed that the division between gentry and clergy continued to foster different concepts of how the College should be run.

The Visitors consistently used their authority over presidential elections to improve their chances of establishing more secular control over the Anglican faculty. As a result, the presidents from the 1750s through the 1770s proved to be weak administrative figures without the full trust of either group at the College.⁵⁹ Faculty members were especially distressed by these elections, and wrote letters back to England expressing their dismay that those professors chosen for the presidency would no longer be willing or able to protect the Anglican educational values at William and Mary. The presidency was only one position, however. Further lines were drawn between the Visitors and faculty over professorial appointments and the election of the Chancellor that would promote the faculty to rely ever more heavily on British support, which also served to antagonize the Visitors who wished to take the College in a more local direction.

⁵⁸ William Robinson to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 12 August, 1765, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

⁵⁹ Godson, *William and Mary: A History*, 85-86.

Appointments, Dismissals and Restrictions

One of the ways in which the Visitors asserted their authority was by attempting to dismiss faculty members who opposed them and to replace them with new professors, preferably laymen who were not so devoted to the Anglican Church and its British affiliations. The reasons Visitors gave for such dismissals were their disgust with the behavior of faculty members and their belief that the clergymen did not devote enough time to the College while also serving as ministers to parish churches outside of Williamsburg.⁶⁰ The professors were more highly regulated in Virginia than they would have been at the British universities in which they had been educated, where College masters would not have been required to attend to school on a daily basis.⁶¹ William and Mary's colonial setting and the involvement of the Visitors in professorial affairs angered the faculty. When they observed the Visitors attempting to laicize the College, removing its connection to the Church that was largely responsible for its founding, the professors looked to Britain for aid, and met with success that allowed them to halt the encroachment of the local gentry.

The most blatant instance in which the Visitors tried to secularize William and Mary was the dispute over the position of Grammar School Master in 1757. In a letter to the Bishop of London, the Visitors expressed their belief that Thomas Robinson was physically incapable of carrying out his duties as Master of the Grammar School, and asked that the Chancellor might suggest a replacement for him. They added to their epistle,

⁶⁰ At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, the 20th of May 1757, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

⁶¹ Thomson, "The Reform of the College," 189.

because the Visitors have observed that the appointing a Clergyman to be Master of this Grammar-School, has often proved a Means of the School's being neglected, In Regard of his frequent Associations as Minister, That therefore his Lordship will be pleased that the Person to be sent over be a LayMan, if such a one may be procured; but if not, a Clergyman.⁶²

This request sent a wave of outrage through the faculty, and provoked a quick response from Robinson addressing not only the Visitors' concerns over his performance, but also his assessment of their motivations.

In his own letter to the Bishop of London, Robinson, supported by other professors, directly accused the Visitors of vying for more control over the College and undermining its Anglican affiliation. Robinson denied that the Visitors had included him in their decision to replace him, denied that he had infirmities that affected his performance, and denied that any Master of the Grammar School had neglected the College for ministry in parish churches. Most importantly, he expressed his inability to see why the Visitors wanted a layman, "except it be, that they may have him more under their Thumbs, and make him as supple as a Slave, For should such a one give the least Offence to any of them, or indeed any of their Children or Relations...out he must go, and then he is not on the same Footing as a Clergyman, who may stand a Chance to find Refuge in a Parish..."⁶³ The Anglican clergy saw the Visitors' efforts to break precedence by instating a layman professor as a clear attempt to construct a faculty without ties to the Church, one that would be more easily controlled by the local gentry without interference from British authority.

⁶² At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, the 20th of May 1757.

⁶³ Thomas Robinson to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 30 June, 1757, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

Visitor attempts to laicize the College extended to other offices as well. Since William and Mary was an Anglican institution, the Chancellor was traditionally either the Bishop of London or the Archbishop of Canterbury. These officials had the essential connections in the British government needed to plead for assistance before the Crown if necessary.⁶⁴ In 1762, the Visitors broke precedent and elected a layman as Chancellor, Charles Wyndham, Earl of Egremont. When Wyndham died after serving for only a year and making no real impact upon the College, the Visitors elected yet another layman, Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke. Unfortunately for the Board, Hardwicke died a few months after his appointment without even knowing that he had become the new Chancellor. With few candidates left and having failed with two laymen in a row, the Visitors elected Bishop of London Richard Terrick, who would staunchly support the faculty until American Independence severed his ties with the College.⁶⁵ Though ultimately unsuccessful, the Visitors pursued a Chancellor whose political connections did not stem from ecclesiastical hierarchy and who would perhaps be more inclined to support the Board of Visitors over the faculty in administrative disputes. With a layman as Chancellor, the faculty would have had a more difficult time appealing their concerns to a British administrator who would be invested in their success at the College.

In the autumn of 1757, a dispute over the dismissal of a student usher resulted in a struggle between the Visitors and the clergy that prompted even further appeals to British authority from professors. When the faculty dismissed Cole Digges and Matthew Hubbard, student ushers at the College related to some of the most powerful

⁶⁴ Thomson, "The Reform of the College," 188.

⁶⁵ Godson, *William and Mary: A History*, 99.

families in Virginia, for disrespectful behavior, the Board of Visitors appointed a committee to investigate the incident. Strongly believing it was solely the professors' prerogative to discipline student behavior, certain faculty members resisted the investigation.⁶⁶ In retaliation, the Visitors held a meeting in which "the Power of this Visitation of enquiring into the Conduct of the President and Masters in the ordinary Government of the College was considered, and after a Debate, the Question was put Whether the Visitors have the Power by the Charter and Statutes, and it was determined in the Affirmative."⁶⁷ They then went on to remove John Camm, Richard Graham, and Emmanuel Jones from their positions on the faculty.

Most of the professors were outraged by the presumption of the Visitors that College statutes gave them the right to review and dismiss faculty members as they pleased. In order to keep his position, Emmanuel Jones admitted that the Visitors had a right to enquire into faculty conduct. The Visitors therefore allowed him to continue as the Master of the Brafferton School.⁶⁸ Graham and Camm, however, refused to leave their rooms even when housekeepers were instructed to deny them provisions.⁶⁹ Once they were finally forced out of the College, they took their plight directly to the Privy Council, one of Britain's highest authorities. Continuing the trend of British administration siding with professors who were subject to the Visitation, the Privy

⁶⁶ At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, held the 1st Day of November 1757, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13

⁶⁷ At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, held the 11th Day of November 1757, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

⁶⁸ At a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, held the 14th Day of December, 1757, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

⁶⁹ Godson, *William and Mary: A History*, 94.

Council ruled in favor of the clergymen, and they were reinstated in 1763.⁷⁰ The restoration of these faculty members was a severe blow for the Visitors. Their attempts to make professors accountable to their review were thwarted by distant powers siding with the men who represented imperial influence over the local College.

While the Anglican faculty feared for their own positions at the College if the Visitors established their right to remove faculty, they also showed concern for the reputation and success of the College. In a letter to the Visitors, the Bishop of London revealed that in his efforts to find ministers willing to take up a post at William and Mary, “from the Disagreements, which you have had in the College, and the Power which the Visitors seem’d desirous of exerting in displacing at their Pleasure the Professors and Masters, it was no easy Matter to prevail upon any Person to enter upon so precarious a Situation.”⁷¹ Even newly appointed professors who had not seen the previous conflict between the faculty and Visitors were made uncomfortable and wary of the situation.⁷² The gentry on the Board may not have had great success in actual dismissals and laicization of the College, but their efforts to establish more local control had repercussions for William and Mary’s reputation in Britain. As a result, fewer qualified Anglican ministers were willing to accept a professorial position. With current faculty opposed to laymen acting as professors, but fewer Anglican clergymen disposed to work there, the College declined in respectability throughout the 1760s.

⁷⁰ *American National Biography*, s.v. “John Camm.”

⁷¹ Bishop of London Richard Terrick to the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary, quoted in a Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, held the 11th Day of June 1767, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

⁷² Edward Hawtrey to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 2 October 1765, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

Continuing to seek opportunities to rein in those faculty members who proved most troublesome, the Visitors targeted the personal lives of the professors. The families who had sons at the College were the original helicopter parents, constantly concerning themselves with the academic atmosphere at the expense of the professors' happiness. By 1769, Reverends John Camm and Josiah Johnson married young ladies in Virginia and moved their residences out of William and Mary to be with their new brides, leaving just one professor behind to supervise the students outside of class. Viewing this as a distraction to their academic duties and as neglect of their pupils, the Visitation resolved that "the Professors and Masters, their engaging in marriage and the concerns of a private family and shifting their residence to any place without the College, is contrary to the principles on which the College was founded and their duty as Professors."⁷³ They went on to conclude that all professors must reside in the College building at all times, and would be dismissed upon their marriage.⁷⁴

Even some of the local gentry viewed the Visitors' condemnation of faculty marriages as excessive. William Nelson, not yet appointed to the Board, wrote to his friends, "The Visitors want Complaiance, or are so old or so cold as to have lost the Feelings of the tender Passion."⁷⁵ Eventually Camm and Johnson were exempted from the new resolution simply because the College could not function with such a small

⁷³ At a Meeting of the Visitors of the College of William and Mary, September 1, 1769, quoted in Mary R.M. Goodwin's *Historical Notes, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections*, 194-195.

⁷⁴ At a Meeting of the Visitors of the College of William and Mary, December 14, 1769, quoted in Mary R.M. Goodwin's *Historical Notes, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections*, 195.

⁷⁵ William Nelson, Letter from William Nelson to Edw & Saml Athawes Esqrs, August 12, 1767, *William Nelson Letter-Book 1766-1775*, 245, quoted in Mary R.M. Goodwin's *Historical Notes, The College of William and Mary Swem Library Special Collections*, 189.

faculty in their absence.⁷⁶ With so few men to fill their positions, the professors had a sort of job security that often left the Visitors with more bark than bite.

The Visitors' actions toward laicizing the College and establishing more local control over the faculty ultimately led professors to seek increased intervention from British authorities such as the Chancellor and the Privy Council. The clergymen were aware that they ran the risk of "being condemn'd by many here, as guilty of great presumption; when it shall come to be known, that we have dared to seek for shelter against the heat and severity of the Climate under the umbrage of [British administration]."⁷⁷ Nevertheless, they did make these appeals, confirming the Visitors' view that the professors were more concerned with British custom and precedent than adjusting to the colonial setting of William and Mary and the different administrative practices that setting might require.

The Statute of 1763

Upon receiving the Privy Council's verdict that the Visitation did not have the right to dismiss the professors under the charter, the Board members embarked on a renewed quest to alter the College statutes and formally establish that power. Using the vagueness of the original charter concerning the delineation of power between the faculty and the Board of Visitors, they maintained that the new Statute of 1763 was not designed to invest the Visitors with any administrative abilities they did not already possess.⁷⁸ The faculty saw the statute differently, of course, and turned once again to

⁷⁶ Godson, *William and Mary: A History*, 115.

⁷⁷ Letter from the Virginia Clergy to Bishop of London Thomas Sherlock, 29 November 1755, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 13.

⁷⁸ James Horrocks to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 10 February, 1776, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14; Thomson, "Reform," 190.

British authority to prevent the Visitors from “depriving any of the President and Masters at pleasure.”⁷⁹ In the debate over the Statute of 1763, the faculty’s arguments against the powers of the Visitation showed how deeply they believed in the superiority of imperial administration over local governance, and the extent to which British authorities would support clergymen over provincial elites.

The language of the statute passed on September 14, 1763 demonstrated the Visitors’ belief that William and Mary was primarily indebted to local support for its success. The document begins with the words,

this College hath been founded and largely endowed by private Persons and still continued (among other Benefactions) to be greatly supported thereby and by this Colony; and Experience hath shewn that the pious and noble Purposes intended by the Founders and Benefactors of it will be frustrated without a due Subordination of the President and Masters or Professors and the other Officers employed therein to the Visitors and Governors, upon which the well-being if not even the actual Existence of the College depends....⁸⁰

It is clear from this introduction that the Visitors credited the local gentry with the founding, continuation and achievement of the College. Indeed, they believed that in order to make William and Mary flourish, they needed increased regulation of the Anglican clergymen on the faculty who neglected their positions. Part of the Statute disallowed professors from holding any positions outside of William and Mary, and required them to reside at the College constantly, upon consequence of immediate termination. If enacted, these measures would have been devastating for the ministers, who counted on an additional parish salary. The degree to which the Visitors attributed

⁷⁹ William Robinson to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 12 August, 1765, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

⁸⁰ A Statute for the better Government of the College, ordained in a meeting of the Visitors and Governors on September 14, 1763, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

the College's success to local contributions demonstrated the vast divide between the Visitors and the Anglican faculty.

Immediately upon reading the Statute of 1763, faculty members, including President James Horrocks, reacted against the new measures imposed by the Visitation by reporting them to Chancellor Terrick. Their contrary assessment of the College's educational needs, as well as their belief that William and Mary should follow British rather than local standards, was evident in this correspondence. Horrocks denied the authority of the Visitors to alter the Statutes independently, and stated,

If it is right that the Visitors shou'd have the sole Power to make Statutes for the College (tho' there seems to be an evident Impropriety that Men whose Profession in general is unconnected with the Interest of learning shou'd prescribe Rules for the conduct of those whose Lives & Studies have been totally addicted to it, as Example of which in England I am not acquainted with) it still wou'd be extremely just & proper that some Restraint shou'd be laid in order to prevent too licentious & wanton a Use of such a Power.⁸¹

Here another distinction was drawn between the Visitors and the clergymen, naming faculty members as men of learning whose positions at an educational institute should not depend on the whims of non-academics. Horrocks also noted that there was no precedent for such kind of power given to the Visitors in British universities. Why then should the colonial gentry have the ability to dismiss professors? The divide between the Visitors and the Anglican faculty widened in the wake of such arguments over local and imperial contributions to William and Mary's existence.

Reverend John Camm, ever the Loyalist, presented the most blatant statements concerning the necessary role of British administration at the College. It was his opinion that, like the Board of Visitors, the Society of faculty should be a self-sustaining body,

⁸¹ James Horrocks to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 10 February 1766, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

appointing and dismissing its own members.⁸² When brought before the Visitors, Camm “concluded with an Appeal to the King as Supreme Visitor of a College founded by the Crown.”⁸³ As a royally chartered institution, William and Mary’s ties to the Crown and to British authority could not be denied. By citing the King as Supreme Visitor, Camm reminded the local gentry that their power as a governing body was derived from royal assent. There could be no clearer statement observing imperial superiority over College affairs.

Conflict over the Statute of 1763 subsided when the Chancellor took the side of the faculty against increased Visitor power.⁸⁴ His letter to the Board gave his full support to the clergymen of the College. In order to have some semblance of control, the Visitation again revised the statute to allow professors to hold positions outside of the College, but only once they had gained the approval of the Visitors.⁸⁵ In this last major battle for power over the faculty, the Visitors failed when imperial authority interceded on behalf of the clergymen who were still so deeply tied to Britain. With the faculty having proven that their connections gave them an advantage at the College, the fight for administrative supremacy subsided over the rest of the decade into the 1770s. However, a discussion over the educational priorities of William and Mary was just beginning.

⁸² Thomson, “The Reform of the College,” 195.

⁸³ William Robinson to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 6 June, 1766, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

⁸⁴ William Robinson to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 6 June 1766, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

⁸⁵ A Statute for amending a late Statute made for the better Government of the College, in *Fulham Palace Papers*, vol. 14.

Debates over Educational Curriculum and Direction

Just as local and imperial perspectives served as a source of tension in College administration, so too did they cause conflict over William and Mary's educational direction. The faculty members were determined to emulate British academic practices as much as possible, refusing to acknowledge that the College's place in Virginia might require different educational standards. The Visitors, on the other hand, wanted to borrow ideas from other colleges in America that were founded later, and on difference principles than William and Mary. Debates over what students needed to learn at William and Mary took place in the late 1760s and early 1770s, and culminated in post-Revolutionary reforms after the ties between the College and British influence were severed.

When James Blair founded the College in 1693, he hoped that a colonial institution with an associated divinity school would attract members of the gentry to a ministerial occupation.⁸⁶ The faculty continued to concentrate on "the Ends the Founder propos'd, the Advancement of Religion and Learning" throughout the eighteenth century.⁸⁷ They also hoped to replicate British academic standards in Virginia. This meant instructing the youth in classical studies, natural and moral philosophy, and practical sciences, as would have been done at Cambridge or Oxford.⁸⁸ By working to imitate British education in the colony of Virginia, the faculty demonstrated how close-minded they were about adapting to local circumstances.

⁸⁶ Rhoden, *Colonial Church of England Clergy*, 5.

⁸⁷ Letter from James Horrocks to Bishop of London Richard Terrick, 7 January, 1766.

⁸⁸ Thomson, "The Reform of the College," 201-202.

Blair took the provincial nature of William and Mary into account when he organized its administrative structure. He observed that the flexibility of Oxford and Cambridge, where students came and went as they pleased and professors were mainly responsible for simple lecturing, would not work in a colonial setting. In Virginia, professors and masters were expected to act as tutors in the grammar school before the real course of study could begin. Blair therefore modeled William and Mary after Scottish colleges, keeping the traditionally British curriculum, but giving local community leaders a larger role in administration than the Visitors would have had in England.⁸⁹ The professors at William and Mary, accustomed to the curriculum but not to the increased power of the Visitation, protested the Board of Visitors' efforts to change the educational direction they believed in from their own experiences.

Many of the Visitors were dissatisfied with the traditional English model of education applied to the College. They saw other American colleges to the north such as the College of New Jersey making huge contributions to the advancement of scientific knowledge in the colonies, and wanted to adjust the curriculum at William and Mary to adopt some of their academic practices.⁹⁰ Critics of William and Mary academics called for medical and legal education to be added to the College's core curriculum.⁹¹ Others simply accused the College of having low standards that were too selfishly centered on the production of Anglican ministers rather than what might have been practical for young men growing up in a colonial society.⁹² The gentry's vision of what their sons should be learning at the College was vastly different from the plans of the faculty, and

⁸⁹ Herbst, *Crisis to Crisis*, 31-36.

⁹⁰ Thomson, "The Reform of the College," 203.

⁹¹ Thomson, "The Reform of the College," 204.

⁹² Goodson, *William and Mary: A History*, 117.

was oriented around knowledge that could be used in a provincial setting rather than the lofty educational principles of British universities.

The faculty defended their method of instruction at a 1770 meeting of the President and Masters. With the grammar school under attack, they emphasized the importance of classical study to advance learning in the colony. These protests were not without ulterior motive, however. The grammar school was an easy moneymaker for the professors, whose salaries depended on the income it generated from enrollment. Instruction and observation of the younger students was simple compared to the effort required to teach the higher, more complex academic schools.⁹³ The faculty also took the opportunity to remind the Visitors that professors knew the best curriculum for the students by stating that parents and guardians “can not become the Conductors of Education in a College without throwing it into Confusion.”⁹⁴ Education at William and Mary was yet another catalyst for battle between faculty and Visitors that fed off a basic disagreement over provincial concerns.

The debate over curriculum became public in 1774 when an anonymous writer under the pseudonym “Academicus” published his suggestions for change in the Virginia Gazette. Academicus resurrected complaints about the grammar school, which he believed did not make a clear distinction between the boys in attendance and the older students involved in more advanced pursuits in the Schools of Philosophy and

⁹³ Herbst, *Crisis to Crisis*, 163.

⁹⁴ “Journal of the Meetings of Presidents and Masters of William and Mary College,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, First Series, 13, no. 3 (January, 1905): 154. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1916082>.

Divinity.⁹⁵ He argued that any classical education should be completed at a grammar school detached from the College grounds, where the boys would not grow to think too highly of themselves before going on to loftier degrees. An anonymous respondent under the name “A.B.” published in defense of the College, calling Academicus mistaken in his understanding of William and Mary. The public ideological dispute demonstrated the importance of the College to the entire community, which was aware of the conflict between Visitors and faculty. Ultimately, the squabbling between the two sides detracted from the institution’s respectability, with the newspaper airing the dispute for all to see.

The move for reformation of the College’s academic standards gained rapid ground when America was declared independent from Britain. Until that point, however, the debates over local and imperial aims divided the faculty just as much as administrative powers had in the 1750s and 1760s. While Visitors wished to incorporate ideas already successful at other American colleges, the Anglican faculty clung to the original purposes of a school founded nearly a century in the past. As a result, the academic reputation of the College continued to decline. Even George Washington, the first American Chancellor of William and Mary after the Revolution, was less than enamored with its course of study. After questioning local residents about the College, Washington wrote, “I cannot think William and Mary College a desirable place to send Jack Custis to; the Intention of the Masters, added to the number of Hollidays, is the Subject of general complaint; and affords no pleasing prospect to a youth who has a

⁹⁵ “William and Mary College in 1774: Letters in Rind’s Virginia Gazette,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Second Series, 2, no. 2 (April, 1922): 101. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921440>.

good deal to attain, and but a short while to do it in.”⁹⁶ The professors’ personal British affiliations would not allow them to recognize the potential for advancement and reform that would make William and Mary more successful in a provincial locale. In response, the local gentry advanced reforms in structure and curriculum to make the College more practical for the next generation.

Conclusion

With American independence, William and Mary’s connections to the British Empire were completely severed, and only the local control advocated for so long by the Visitors remained. Faculty members who had demonstrated strong British sentiments before the war continued to support the Crown during the Revolution, and were eventually expelled from the College. While they had retained their power in William and Mary’s administration through their British connections during the 1750s and 1760s, there was no longer a place at the College for professors whose focus was not on the local community, but on practices across the Atlantic.

As a provincial institution, the College had different needs and functions from British universities. The Visitors who sent their own children and their relatives to William and Mary were attuned to the College’s purpose in the society they controlled. The kinship networks they built over generations allowed them to maintain power in Virginia that extended to William and Mary, where they were major players in all decisions and controversies. Coming to the College with an entirely different perspective, the faculty members expected to be treated with deference and thought the

⁹⁶ Letter from George Washington to the Rev. Jonathan Boucher, January 17, 1773, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources* Vol. 37, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/WasFi37.html>.

Visitors had little claim to control over academic affairs. The relationship between the two groups suffered from their different perspectives on the College's purpose and from the climate of anticlericalism in Virginia politics and religion.

The William and Mary professors derived their power through the College's establishment as a royally chartered Anglican institution. Their support from the Chancellor, their ability to cite the authority of the Privy Council and Crown over the Board of Visitors, and the advantages of mutual support allowed them to maintain a position of power rivaling that of the Visitation. The Visitors attempted to wear away at these advantages, first by laicizing the College faculty and Chancellor, then by revising statutes to give themselves definitive formal control over the professors. These actions were meant to break the imperial connections inspired by the ministerial status of the faculty in order to give provincial elites more control over what they perceived to be a local academic establishment.

Uniquely brought together at an institution important to both parties for different reasons, the gentry on the Board of Visitors and the Anglican clergymen on the faculty could not see eye to eye on the purpose and direction of the College. While the Visitors were accustomed to a lifestyle of provincial control, the faculty believed that ultimate authority rested in the British organizations that founded the college, namely the Anglican Church and the monarchy. Their quarrels manifested in a struggle between provincial and imperial methods of administration that would not be resolved until a war was fought to end British authority across all thirteen colonies. Ultimately, with a tarnished reputation and declining enrollment, the true loser in the battle between the Visitors and the faculty was William and Mary itself.

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