

A CENTURY OF *Change*

The story of the evolution of the Williams community—as told in the pages of the *Alumni Review*

Compiled by Hugh Howard

Additional research provided by Williams Archives & Special Collections

One hundred years ago, the Williams College Alumni Athletic Association published the very first *Alumni Review*. Subscriptions were available to anyone connected to the College, but the audience was decidedly male.

Over time, the sons of Williams were joined by the daughters, the privately schooled made room for the publicly schooled, and—in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation—the College became a place notable for its inclusiveness.

The *Review* also evolved. In some cases—coeducation, say, or the Afro-American Society's occupation of Hopkins Hall—coverage of the changes was frank and extensive. In others, such as the abrupt resignation of President Tyler Dennett in 1937, it took decades for the story to unfold. (Dennett's call for a more diverse student body to avoid “provincialism and insularity” angered many alumni—something the *Review* addressed 40 years later.)

The pages that follow offer a look back at how far the College—and its alumni magazine—have come.

“There is hardly a phase of campus life left unpenetrated by the newcomers; many of the girls have even jumped headlong into extra-curricular activities.”

—Joan Jobson, wife of Edward R. Jobson Jr. '45, December 1946

As one of the first colleges in the country to provide campus housing to students returning from war and their families, Williams made national news for its “progressiveness.” Jobson's account of Williams wives participating in the life of the campus—taking courses, working in offices, writing for the *Record* and joining Cap &





Clockwise from top: The opening of the Jewish Religious Center gave members of Williams' Jewish community "their own place of worship with a clear Jewish identity," said Norman Redlich '47, who helped raise money for the building.

Boon Itt and Gaius Charles Bolin, both Class of 1889 and pictured here with sophomore members of the football team, were the first students of color to graduate from Williams.

The all-College picnic in 1979 reflected the growing racial diversity of the student body.

Bells—noted how married students were “absorbed” into the College as “an integrated part of the whole.”

“Just as the football coaches want boys who are willing to block and to tackle, the teachers want boys who will throw themselves at an idea and not merely slap it as it goes by.”

—President James Phinney Baxter 3rd '14, May 1950

Baxter answered the question posed in his *Review* essay “What Kind of Boy Does Williams Seek?” by stating: “The Admissions Committee at Williams does not confine its choice to boys in the top quarter of the rank list. We take many boys from the second quarter ... [but] we do want the boy to be in the top quarter of his school in force of character, capacity for leadership and willingness to work and to take responsibility.”

“Jewish Students ... [and] Negroes do not have an Equal Opportunity for membership in any Williams Fraternity.”

—Williams College Council Committee on Discrimination, led by Chairman David C. Phillips '58, July 1957

An 11-page reprint of the Phillips' Report shared the undergraduate committee's numerous recommendations. One was “to rid the fraternities of *unwritten agreements* ... with national groups [which] are just as effective in perpetuating discrimination ... as the *written clauses*.”

“[I]t is important to have variety in the student body, both geographically and in terms of school distribution.”

—Admission Director Frederick C. Copeland '35, February 1960

In one of his periodic *Review* updates, Copeland remarked: “The post-war population explosion now bedeviling secondary education and soon to be flooding the admissions offices ... has coincided with efforts on the part of higher education to achieve a broader geographical distribution and to take more boys from the public high schools, which now contain 97 percent of the students in secondary school.”

[The Angevine Report] has proved to be the biggest thing to hit the campus world since the invention of the alumni fund.

—Gannett News Service Special Correspondent David Beetle,
February 1963

A four-part Gannett series reprinted in the *Review* examined fraternities at upstate New York colleges and universities in the wake of Williams' 14-page Angevine Report, presented to trustees the previous year. The report concluded, Beetle wrote, "that Williams fraternities so dominated college life that they interfered with the educational process and that the college had no choice but to take over their rooming and dining operations." One fraternity member quoted by Beetle said, "We fought discrimination against Catholics in the '30s, Jews in the '40s and Negroes in the '50s." Meanwhile, in an attempt to minimize exclusionary practices, there "was born the phrase 'total opportunity,'" meaning that "the fraternities on a campus agree to divvy up everyone who wants to join. ... Under such a system no one can be a non-fraternity man except by choice."

It would be a disservice to enroll a Negro student here who does not have the qualifications to succeed in earning a degree.

—Admission Director Frederick C. Copeland '35, May 1967

Having "admitted more than half of the living students and alumni" at the time, according to the *Review*, Copeland shared the challenges of shaping his 21st class. As the magazine pointed out: "In the past several years Williams has made advances in contributing to the education of minority groups. This is especially true of Negro students, where the proportion who are qualified is now small and the number who are aware of Williams perhaps even smaller."

With most of our boys coming from coeducational high schools, with many of them leaving home for the first time and coming to us from all parts of the country, our single-sex identity seems to many an anachronism.

—Trustee John E. Lockwood '25, August 1968

In 1967, the trustees created a special committee, led by Lockwood, to "study ways of fusing new strengths to old and to answer the questions raised by rising costs, co-education and urbanization." In this interim report, described by Lockwood as "a personal statement," he wrote, "If we should welcome women at Williams it is fundamental that we do so with quality, style and distinction. Our purpose must be to enhance the total educational experience for all—not just to improve and diversify our recreational opportunities."

From top: An iconic 1960 faculty meeting photo.

One student's opinion about the decision to admit women in the fall of 1970.

[A]ctivities of the College should be open to all members of the undergraduate community on the basis of their interest, talents and capacity to contribute as individuals, not reserved to any closed national or local self-perpetuating social organizations.

—Board of Trustees, November 1968

With a new residential life system in place, the trustees issued a statement requesting that the six fraternities remaining on campus discontinue rushing and phase out other activities upon the graduation of the Class of 1970. The statement, printed in the *Review* with a student reaction by Robert Whitton '69, read, in part: "In times changing as rapidly as ours, and in years when young people should be reaching out for the fullest exposure and response to all that a modern college offers, the preconceptions and restrictions of such societies have come to seem anachronistic on this campus."

We gathered not as professors and students but as concerned human beings, talking with each other about tough problems: how can Afro-Americans, proud of being black, also be proud of being at Williams? What part should Williams play in the racial revolution that is sweeping the country? How deep are white prejudices and has this been a racial college?

—History Chair Robert G.L. Waite, spring 1969

Extensive coverage of the Afro-American Society's peaceful four-day occupation of Hopkins Hall in April and the campus-wide discussions about race that imme-



diately followed offered a frank look at an important moment in Williams history with photographs, a time line, excerpts of newspaper articles and statements from the Afro-American Society and College administrators.

“In the 10 years since President John E. Sawyer ’39 was inducted ... Williams College has undergone more major changes and seen greater growth than ever before in its 178-year history. ... The decade was climaxed this fall with the advent of coeducation in the 470-member Class of 1975.”

—News Director William H. Tague and Review editor Thomas W. Bleezarde, fall 1971

A survey of “The Sawyer Years” highlighted the president’s role in implementing a new housing system, welcoming women to Williams, introducing a new academic calendar, creating area studies programs, overseeing 17 major building projects and developing a new admission program in which “10 percent of each entering class is made up of students demonstrating exceptional promise in some area but who ... have not scored well enough in some part of their paper record to have overcome the competitive hurdle. ... Some have been near the top of their classes and many have contributed significantly in leadership and a wide range of activities.”

“It’s hard to be Wendy to all the guys.”

—Assistant Dean Nancy J. McIntire, quoting a female student, fall 1971

In her essay on “The Rationale of Educating Women at Williams,” McIntire wrote of the challenges posed by the arrival of the fully co-educational freshman class: “Frequently women have been expected to be sisterly, motherly, charming, friendly, at times frivolous, at other times competent, but never threatening. And any one woman cannot provide such a variety of responses.”

“The 15 percent elitist minority who once went to college has grown to more than 50 percent of secondary school graduates.”

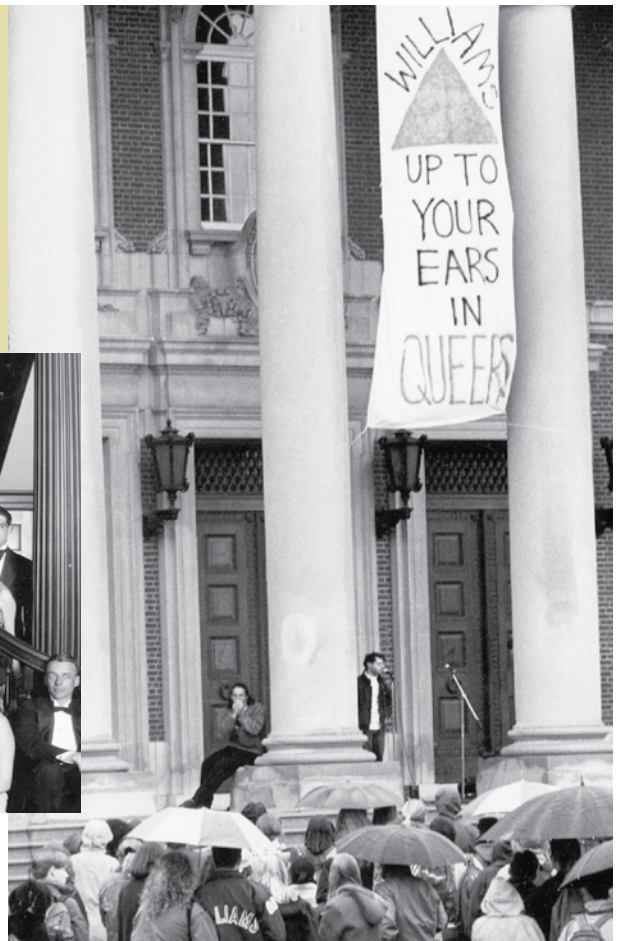
—President John W. Chandler, fall 1973

In his induction address, printed in the *Review*, Chandler stated: “Williams and similar colleges have played a major role in the growth and democratizing of higher education by supplying a disproportionately

From left: Black Student Union coordinator Gregory Witcher ’80 spoke at a rally after a cross was burned in front of Perry House—the first of several race-related incidents that led to an all-campus forum.

Mid-winter and year-end fraternity parties like this one at Sigma Phi in 1929 drew as many as 200 “fair visitors” to campus, according to the *Record*, which for several years ran lists of guests’ hometowns, which often were more diverse than those of the incoming freshman class.

A 1993 rally for queer students on the front porch of Chapin lawn was a far cry from the clandestine meetings held in the 1970s by the founding members of the College’s first gay and lesbian group.





From left: Provost Stephen R. Lewis Jr. '60 addressed the media after the Afro-American Society occupied Hopkins Hall.

Despite his short term as president (1934-37), Tyler Dennett, Class of 1904, is credited with "liberalizing" Williams.

Following World War II, professors like Frederick L. Schuman welcomed returning soldiers and their wives. (Sixty-nine of the 1,060 Ephs enrolled in the fall of 1946 were married.)

Today women make up 51 percent of the student body, compared with 8 percent in 1969 and 1970, when Williams began accepting female exchange and transfer students. Seven women graduated in 1971, a few months before the first four-year coeducational class arrived.

large percentage of the teachers and research scholars who have met the college enrollment demands."

"Who knows all about blacks in predominantly white colleges? Unfortunately, no one does. Comprehensive national data ... never has been gathered."

—William Boyd '63, executive director, Educational Policy Center, spring 1974

An EPC survey of black college students at largely white institutions found that "racial discrimination has not been a part of the experience of 51 percent of the [black] students. Fifty-three percent have no concerns about their 'ability to meet the costs of ... college education.'"

"Nearly \$1.7 million will be spent this academic year to help a great diversity of Williams students who couldn't otherwise afford to be here."

—Financial Aid Director Henry N. Flynt Jr. '44, spring 1976

Highlights of "today's program for making Williams accessible to young men and women from all segments of society" included budgeting for "enough funds for



the equivalent of full tuition assistance for 30 percent of our students."

"A perfect condition in college would be a community in which there would be lacking none of the constituents of the American people."

—President Tyler Dennett, Class of 1904, quoted by former history professor Philip L. Cantelon, fall 1977

Dennett's "stormy" three-year term ended with his resignation in 1937, with little explanation in the *Review*. Forty years later, Cantelon endeavored to "peel back a bit of the mystery" surrounding the details, including how the president, who once charged that there were "too many nice boys at Williams," "cleared out faculty deadwood and drove Williams toward a more diverse student body, laying the groundwork for today's college."

"At 10:20 p.m. on Saturday of Halloween weekend, as many homecoming parties were in progress, a 2-foot cross was set on fire on the lawn of Perry House. Next door ... the members of the Black Student Union were to gather at 11 p.m. for a party."

—*Review*, fall 1980

Details of the incident were still unfolding as the *Review* went to press, but the magazine provided a detailed chronology, extensively quoting President John Chandler on the campus response: "The Williams community has been unified rather than polarized as a result of



Above: Alpha Delta Phi fraternity in the 1950s.

these distressing incidents. ... On the campus there is an overwhelming sense that ... Williams will emerge as a stronger and better college than it was before."

"More black alumni of Williams College than had ever before gathered in one place were on campus for Reunion Weekend 1989 ... to mark the anniversary of the graduation of a man only one of them had ever known."

—Review, summer 1989

Reunion coverage highlighted the climax of the year-long centennial of Williams' first black graduate, Gaius Charles Bolin. His grandson Lionel Bolin '48 spoke to trustees about "the courage [Gaius] showed in following the advice of a high school principal and alumnus of Williams to come here to school. This despite the fact that no black had ever gone here before and no one else in his family had even gone to college."

"Our reasons for celebrating are clear enough: the dedication of this synagogue which responds to the growth of religious observance among our Jewish students, which does so by the provision of a setting for worship that is not only adequate and appropriate but also beautiful and inspiring."

—President Francis C. Oakley, winter 1991

The *Review* captured the weekend-long celebration in photographs and words—including those of Dara R. Eizenman '93: "Judaism means different things to every person at Williams, and the Jewish Religious Center is a tangible expression of that diversity."

"The fact that we are now able to fill one-quarter of our classes with minority students who are among the most talented students in the country results from clear and unambiguous ... institutional commitment."

—President Francis C. Oakley, winter 1993

Prior to his resignation as president and the start of the College's third century, Oakley granted the *Review* a wide-ranging interview delving into topics such as changing demographics, curricular reform and how Williams was faring amid gloomy reports on the future of higher education.

"Members of the audience remarked on how the situation for lesbian and gay students had improved over the years. Alumni noted the contrast between the clandestine meetings of the College's first gay and lesbian group (founded in the early '70s) and the inclusion of lesbians and gay men as part of a celebration of diversity at the College."

—Review, fall 1993

The College's bicentennial included a weekend celebration focused on Williams' "history of multiculturalism and ... gains in cultural, social and economic diversity." The Williams College Gay and Lesbian Alumni Group, founded a few years earlier, worked to bring back members of the classes of '41 to '93 for a panel discussion on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues at Williams.

"The spring of 1947 had brought with it several problems that the college community never before had to contend with. But these were issues that would soon thrust the campus into the throes of the racial conflicts that were sweeping the nation."

—Toni-Ann Thomas '03, summer 2004

Publication of *Black Williams: A Written History*, a 79-page document by 13 members of the Black Student Union, gave the *Review* an opportunity to cover historical moments that previously hadn't been mentioned in its pages. One example was the "Barber Shop Incident" of 1947, when a black student and a white student exposed a Spring Street barbershop's practice of charging blacks three times more than whites for a haircut.

"Selective schools are selective in order to produce a better education."

—Economics Professor Gordon Winston, summer 2005

About his study of how students' academic performance is affected by the qualities of their peers, Winston, director of the Williams Project on the Economics of Higher Education, wrote in the *Review* that "there are socially valuable benefits of that selectivity—the improvement of education ... [and] schools are being selective in admissions in recognition of the role that student peer quality plays in producing educational quality, a role like that of good faculty and facilities and lab equipment."

"Today, Williams faculty and staff are single, are single parents, are dual-career couples, are commuting couples, are gay and lesbian partners."

—Assistant to the President for Affirmative Action and Government Relations Nancy McIntire, June 2006

When McIntire first arrived at Williams in 1970, "Most of the faculty were men, and they were married to very talented women who also stayed home and raised the family." Thirty-six years later, as she prepared to retire, McIntire told the *Review* that the change in faculty composition was "exhilarating, but it is also challenging." ■

Hugh Howard's latest book is *The Painter's Chair*.