

# beyond the Log

In a sequel of sorts to his definitive book *Mark Hopkins and the Log*, Frederick Rudolph '42 discusses Williams presidents at the turn of the 20th century and the rise and fall of the gentleman's college.



On a rainy morning last July, Dottie and Fred Rudolph '42 welcomed three Williams friends to their home in Williamstown. They had gathered with Fred—widely regarded as the dean of historians of American higher education and an authority on Williams history—to examine how the College changed in the years following Mark Hopkins' presidency. The insights Fred shared that day with John Chandler (Williams president from 1973 to 1985 and a former religion professor), John Hyde '52 (the Brown Professor of History, emeritus) and Bob Stegeman Jr. '60 (of the Williams Oral History Project) shed light not only on presidents past, but also on Williams today. Excerpts of that conversation follow.

**John Chandler:** Let's go way back to Mark Hopkins. You wrote your Ph.D. dissertation about him, and the Yale University Press published it as a book (*Mark Hopkins and the Log: Williams College 1836-1872*, in 1956) that received much attention and praise, and it's still widely read. What led you to write about Mark Hopkins?

**Fred Rudolph:** I learned that someone else was at work on the thesis topic I had chosen. So my adviser, Ralph Henry Gabriel, an eminent intellectual historian, said, "Fred, what really does it mean—Mark Hopkins on one end of the log and all that stuff? Do we really know? Why don't you take a look at it?"

**JC:** When Mark Hopkins retired in 1872 at the age of 70, he continued to teach for another 15 years, and he also was a member of the Board of Trustees, so he was still a formidable presence throughout the tenure of Paul Ansel Chadbourne, Class of 1848 (president from 1872-81) and well into the administration of Franklin Carter, Class of



Paul Ansel Chadbourne, president from 1872-81

1862 (president from 1881-1901). What difference did it make that Hopkins was an active presence?

**FR:** Chadbourne knew that Hopkins had picked him to be his successor. Still, any sign of disagreement with Hopkins was a cause of unpleasantness, and by the end of Chadbourne’s administration my sense is that he and Hopkins were barely speaking. It wasn’t possible to do anything at Williams without implying something must’ve been wrong before. Chadbourne’s tenure was not noted for much in the way of action. Part of the reason was that the Panic of 1873 meant there wasn’t much money. The three modest architectural gestures of the Chadbourne years were embarrassments. While College Hall for the housing and feeding of scholarship students proved that there were poor boys at Williams, the sumptuous fraternity houses that appeared in the Carter years were a stark reminder that the real Williams was being experienced elsewhere. Chadbourne’s frame gymnasium blew down in a gale in 1883, and the cast iron observatory of 1882 rattled to a degree that made accurate astronomical observations impossible. The one thing Chadbourne did to prove that he was his own man was invigorate the College’s discipline. Practically as soon as he arrived, he put up signs: “Keep Off the Grass.” It was an implicit commentary on the Hopkins administration. Chadbourne also helped run a mill on Water Street. The fact that he had time for outside business activity underscored that in the Hopkins era Williams had a teacher, but it didn’t really have a president. It’s not until Carter came that there was a president.

**JC:** I judge that professor of rhetoric John Bascom, Class of 1849, was one of the more prominent faculty members during Hopkins’ time and that he was still at Williams when Chadbourne arrived.

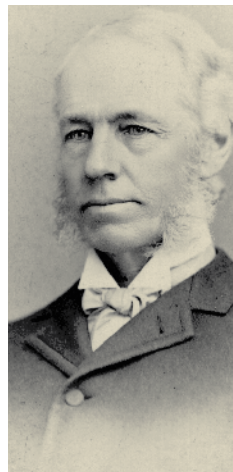
**FR:** James A. Garfield’s remark about Mark Hopkins and the log was in response to a speech that Bascom had just made to Williams alumni at Delmonico’s Restaurant in New York. That event in 1871 set the stage for the main story of the presidents in the era that we’re discussing. In effect, Bascom said to the alumni, “You may love the place, but it’s in a mess. It’s got a president who’s sitting on his ass. The place is too close to Pownal, Vt., too far from New York

and Boston, where the action is. There’s no library, there are no laboratories, the trustees are too old. The place really needs attention.” That upset Garfield, Class of 1856, and he got up and said, “Well, but the ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.” That was the beginning of the argument over whether the future of Williams lay with Bascom’s vision or Garfield’s aphorism. Chadbourne paid hardly any attention to Bascom, who soon left for the University of Wisconsin, where Chadbourne himself had been president before coming to Williams in 1872.

No president since 1872 has been free from the questions raised by that evenings’ contest between Bascom and Garfield over just how much and in what ways an old New England liberal arts college should accommodate itself to challenging developments in society and learning.

**JC:** What was going on in higher education nationally during that period? I’m referring to movements and trends that you’ve written a lot about—the creation of the land-grant colleges, the development of research universities, debates about whether the Oxbridge classical model was still relevant and growing interest in German higher education, with its emphasis on research and publication. Were these matters being discussed at Williams?

**FR:** That kind of discussion did go on at Williams, but Chadbourne did not encourage it. In fact, one of the remarkable statements Chadbourne made was, “You know, I could teach every subject in the curriculum.” When Ira Remsen, a newly appointed professor of chemistry and physics, asked if he could have some space for a laboratory, Chadbourne cautioned, “You must remember that this is a college and not a technical institute.” Four years later Remsen was on his way to a distinguished career as a chemist and later president at the new Johns Hopkins



John Haskell Hewitt, president from 1901-02

University. Specialization was the new order, but at Williams deciding how to deal with it was pushed forward into the 20th century. John Haskell Hewitt was named temporary president (1901-1902), and the trustees brought Mark Hopkins’ son Henry, Class of 1858, out of a Kansas City pastorate to be president (1902-1908). Williams became a wealthy college in the 1880s during Carter’s administration,

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but the Hewitt and Henry Hopkins appointments suggest that the trustees did not yet know in what direction they wanted to go.

**JC:** You developed some stages to explain the historical movement of Williams through its first two centuries.

**FR:** I divided the history of the College into three eras: the Christian Era, the Gentleman’s Era and then what I consider the most recent era, the Consumer Era.

**John Hyde:** So the gentleman’s college really emerged in the 1880s?

**FR:** It started even under Mark Hopkins. Whatever you think of fraternities, they were intended to be instruments for fostering gentlemanly conduct. The Mark Hopkins era was still principally about students becoming good Christians. There was always an internal war at the College over the question “What are we here for?” The students answered the question by building a program of extracurricular activities, which the presidents and the faculty largely ignored. The extracurricular activities during the Mark Hopkins era loomed so large that the students defined and shaped the College with their fraternities, athletics, mountain climbing and many other things outside the classroom. By the time of Harry Garfield, Class of 1885 (president from 1908 to 1934), the *extracurriculum* was so vast that the students began setting limits on how many activities they could get into, in a sense acknowledging that we must be here for some other reason—like classes.

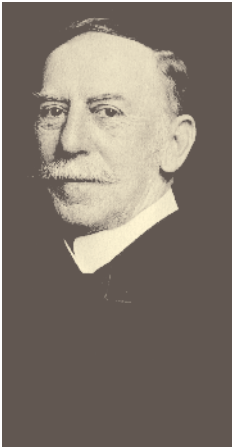
**JC:** In the transition from the Christian college to the college for gentlemen, did Carter see what was going on? And did he approve?



JOHN REGENER

**FR:** My impression is that the College has always had somebody who would get up and, referring to scholarship students, say, “This is not a rich man’s college.” And then proceed to do what he could to make sure that it was. Carter at one point said, “Williams College is not a resort for rich men’s sons.” But it was Carter who persuaded Gov. Edwin Morgan of New York to give the money to build Morgan Hall (1882), the poshest college dormitory in the country. It was the first building at Williams with running water. How did a student get a room in Morgan? He bid for it; the rooms went to the students with the most money. Soon after Morgan was built, Lasell Gymnasium

Fred Rudolph '42 in his Williamstown home



Henry Hopkins,  
president from 1902-08

went up across the street. And soon thereafter the fraternities started scrapping their little hovels to erect significant buildings. In 1885 the Delta Psi fraternity (St. Anthony) moved into a Stanford White house with a John La Farge stained-glass window and a sculptured likeness of its donor, Frederick Ferris Thompson, Class of 1856, by Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

Carter did a magnificent job of defining the College as an academic institution. On the other hand, he also facilitated the College as a rich man's institution. Thompson also paid for the new science buildings. And then there's Thompson Memorial Chapel (1905), given by his widow. The gift for the chapel was announced just as Henry Hopkins was appointed president. To appreciate what's most interesting about the Gothic chapel is to see it in the light of the construction of Jesup Hall in 1899 because of student initiative. A student, Philip Marshall Brown, Class of 1898, later a Princeton professor, approached Morris Jesup, who was a generous contributor to the

of the American academy, being elected the president of the Modern Language Association the year he returned to Williams as its president.

In 1882 he began issuing an annual president's report. In subsequent years he had plenty to report—appointment of the first full-time librarian, the first dean of the College, the first registrar, a professor to teach composition to freshmen and sophomores, a college pastor (Mark Hopkins' son-in-law John H. Denison, Class of 1862).

The Thompson Labs were built in 1893. Greek was dropped as an admission requirement, and that added to the intellectual life of the place because it enlarged the pool of students. Although he was careful to maintain most of the religious traditions, Carter abolished compulsory evening chapel. Toward the end of his administration a number of student initiatives—the honor system, the founding of Gargoyle (1895-1896), an athletic council (1897), and Jesup Hall—demonstrated that the students were trying to deal with the growth of the College and change.

**“Williams was no longer telling students that they needed a dramatic conversion experience and then go out and become preachers. It was telling them to go out and be public servants and responsible citizens.”**

YMCA movement, and convinced him to give the money. It was the headquarters for the Williams Christian Association. Its officers had a suite on the top floor. Jesup Hall was a student center with a theater, billiards tables and offices for student organizations and activities. Here was what the students meant as being a Christian. The Christian was worldly. He believed in physical fitness, recreation, wholesome entertainment, social graces. By contrast with Jesup, Thompson Chapel was vaneer. It said to the world, Williams is a college for fine gentlemen.

**JH:** You said earlier that Carter brought about important academic changes.

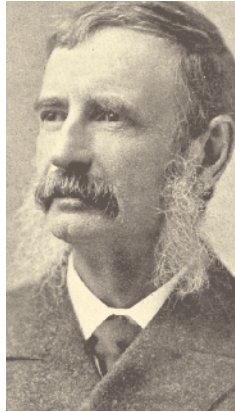
**FR:** As professor of German at Yale, Carter was deeply involved in the efforts to transform a traditional liberal arts college into a research university. He was at the forefront of the professionalization

**JC:** How did Carter and his successors respond to the growing influence of fraternities?

**FR:** Throughout this whole period there was a growing concern about the relationships between fraternity and non-fraternity students. Henry Hopkins was troubled that the large fraternity houses were designed not only to house large numbers of the fraternity members but also to feed them. Garfield shared those concerns as he watched the widening chasm between the fraternity haves and the non-affiliated have-nots. Garfield tried to redress the imbalance by assigning Currier Hall for use by members of the Commons Club, the social organization for non-fraternity students. Over more than 50 years the various fixes that were designed to bridge over the chasm only exacerbated the problem. The trustees with whom Carter, Henry Hopkins and Harry Garfield worked were among the staunchest supporters of fraternities, and their gifts helped build those splendid houses.

**JC:** Take us back to the period right after Carter's 20-year tenure ended and the trustees apparently were having difficulty appointing a successor. That's when Hewitt became acting president. And then Henry Hopkins was chosen at the age of 64, which even today would be extraordinary. What was going on that they apparently were having such a hard time agreeing upon Carter's successor?

**FR:** My guess is that the trustees had to decide whether they wanted another Carter or needed breathing time while they decided how they were going to deal with the clear ascendancy of the American university. During that period Dartmouth, under the leadership of William Jewett Tucker (president from 1893-1909), decided it was not going to be a small college any more. Williams, by contrast, decided that it was going to be a good, small, Christian college. Nothing much happened during the Henry Hopkins era. The speeches at his 1902 induction made clear that the College was sensitive to the challenges it was being asked to meet. Henry Hopkins himself came down on the side of “the well-rounded man,” on the side of athletics and Christianity.



**Franklin Carter,**  
president from 1881-1901

**JC:** Harry Garfield was president from 1908 to 1934, a remarkably long tenure—second only to Mark Hopkins’. It encompassed World War I and a big chunk of the Great Depression.

**FR:** Garfield was known far beyond Williams, both nationally and then abroad after he founded the Institute of Politics. Meanwhile, he accomplished a lot at Williams. Like Woodrow Wilson, Garfield was a progressive politician. During his administration his concern was for good government and young men taking up lives of public service. Williams was no longer telling students that they needed a dramatic conversion experience and then go out and become preachers. It was telling them to go out and be public servants and responsible citizens.

**JC:** Given that Garfield went to Washington for a couple of years as fuel administrator and then later devoted a lot of time to the Institute of Politics, is there any evidence that he was bored by his routine presidential duties at the College?

**FR:** A case can be made that Garfield’s style was to delegate. When he went to Washington he turned the running of the College over to Professor Carroll Maxcy. The 1911 curriculum that Garfield and history professor T.C. Smith created was a significant moment in the history of higher education, because it packaged subject matter into divisions, it created the requisites and sequences and made room for new subjects without obliterating the

old ones. The departmental major of sequence courses was topped with a unique double-credit senior seminar.

The Garfield curriculum was an effort to make clear that if you came to Williams you could get an education. In conjunction with the new curriculum was an honors program, so the best students could define themselves on a higher level of intellectual activity than had been true earlier.

Despite its historic importance, the new curriculum didn’t please everybody. Some faculty members in Latin, Greek and English didn’t like the sequence concept, and they continued to give gut courses. There were a lot of “gentlemen C students” at Williams, but there were also serious ones who took advantage of that curriculum.

**JC:** Dennett’s presidency from 1934 to 1937 was stormy and brief. What happened?

**FR:** In 1937 Dennett gave a speech to the Boston alumni saying there were too many “nice boys” at Williams. My sense is that he meant there were just too many graduates of private schools and not enough diversity. Williams had the highest percent of private school graduates of any college in the country. A big reason was the four-year Latin admission requirement. But by the time Dennett was made president, even in the prep schools there were many students who did not take four years of Latin. And Harvard, Yale and Dartmouth were also competing for the prep school graduates. The result was that the Williams applicant pool was damn small. Williams was probably taking one out of every two applicants, and it was accepting applications from weak students, just as long as they’d taken four years of Latin. (Interestingly, the trustees reduced the Latin requirement to three years just as Garfield left and Dennett arrived.)

There’s no question about what Dennett didn’t like about the place. In a 1975 honors thesis on the gentleman’s Williams, Guy Creese ’75 documented the background of the student body: In the Class of 1929, 36 percent had traveled in Europe; 1930, 29 percent; 1931, 36 percent. That’s a pretty fancy group. In 1930 there was a Chapin Library exhibit of rare books to which 17 students contributed. In 1935, 37 percent of the upperclassmen had cars. In 1938, almost 80 percent of the freshmen families had servants, only 25 percent of the students had summer jobs, 55 percent came



**Harry Augustus Garfield,**  
president from 1908-34

from families with two or more cars. In 1934, 44 of the 775 students were in the New York Social Register and four in the Boston Social Register. The *Williams Record* had fashion issues dealing with men's clothing. There were three men's clothing stores on Spring Street for a student body of less than 800. The Stork Club ran ads in the *Williams Record*.

When Dennett arrived as president, Lehman Hall had just been built. It had beautiful pine paneling and big fireplaces. And the top floor had modest little rooms for scholarship students. The other student rooms—handsome and spacious—commanded the highest rents on campus. At the end of Dennett's administration, the squash courts were built. I don't know how many colleges in the U.S. had squash courts in 1938, in the midst of the most serious economic depression in history. Dennett knew that Williams didn't need them,

but the people who gave them insisted. That's the environment that Dennett hoped to do something about, the environment that he perceived as having little connection with the real America.

He was in office for only three years and gave the "nice boys" speech toward the end. He gained a reputation for being sort of a son of a bitch because of the way he reacted to a lot of things he didn't like about Williams, including a faculty that distressed him. He insulted one tenured faculty member so brutally that the fellow resigned. Garfield had reduced salaries by 10 percent. Dennett came in and selectively raised salaries, favoring those he approved of. During those three years he handled some campus tragedies with great sensitivity—a part of the Dennett story that you don't hear about. In his first year a student in Lehman Hall murdered another student and then killed himself. That led Dennett to bring in Austen

Rudolph (at right) with John Chandler, Williams president from 1973 to 1985



Riggs from Stockbridge to begin a psychiatric service on campus.

**JH:** Is the story of his resignation pretty straightforward?

**FR:** As I've heard it, it was an argument with the board about who had the final word on, let's say, a decision such as the buying of real estate. The board wanted to buy the old Greylock Hotel on the corner where the Greylock Quad is now, to protect a prime piece of real estate from inappropriate use, i.e., a gas station. Dennett thought it was wrong to buy real estate at a time when faculty salaries were languishing. Apparently some members of the board said, "We'll pay for it, the College doesn't have to." So Dennett proposed, as I understand it, that trustee decisions be subject to a presidential veto or deferral. At that point, the board said, "Look, we're in charge, you're not." And he submitted his resignation.

**JH:** Did Dennett make any progress on changing the mix of students at Williams?

**FR:** Dennett had no problem with upper-class kids. He just wanted a better mix. And with the Latin admission requirement you could not get a mix. Still, he refused federal scholarship money—money intended for poor kids. In addition, he told his admission officer not to accept blacks and Jews because they were not treated fairly here. There was no synagogue for the Jewish students, and black students were treated as second-class citizens. Stopping the admission of Jewish and black applicants was a dramatic step. Since the late 19th century the small but steady stream of black and Jewish students who came to Williams supplied a disproportionate number of academic stars and distinguished alumni. What Dennett was essentially saying was that there were too many nice white boys, and he wanted some white boys that weren't so nice.

Dennett's three years have always seemed to me to have shaped everything that's happened since. The presidents who have succeeded him have had the job of fixing the problem that Dennett identified. In other words, the period that we're talking about brought about all of the things that helped to define Williams as a rich man's college. But Williams College is no longer a rich man's college.

**JC:** It's often remarked that Dennett enlivened the faculty with new appointments.

**"We found Chadbourne holding the future at bay, Carter transforming Williams into a gentleman's college that Harry Garfield would clarify and rationalize and that Tyler Dennett would challenge and rethink."**

**FR:** In 1938 Howard Mumford Jones in the *Atlantic Monthly* referred to the Williams faculty as the liveliest in New England. Dennett recruited to the faculty people who were being kicked out of other places because of their politics. Among that group: labor economist Bob Brooks from Yale, economist Robert Lamb from Harvard and political scientist Fred Schuman from the University of Chicago. Max Lerner was a well-known liberal and a contributor to the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. At the same time Dennett was trying to get rid of deadwood.

**JC:** Fred, you have the final words in this conversation if there is anything else you want to say.

**FR:** Let's go back to that evening at Delmonico's in 1871. Both John Bascom and James A. Garfield were charting the future course of the College. Bascom, alert to developments in higher education, knew that the Williams of Mark Hopkins was going to have to meet the challenges posed by the new president of Harvard, Charles W. Eliot, who was using electives to open up the curriculum to new learning, and to the opening of Cornell in 1867, whose founder Ezra Cornell had announced: "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study." Garfield, while not denying Bascom's challenges, reminded his audience that the center of an institution of learning was the relationship between a talented teacher and a willing student. And he gave the College an aphorism with which to remind itself across the years when it grappled with the realities represented by Eliot and Cornell.

In the presidents we've considered we found Chadbourne holding the future at bay, Carter transforming Williams into a gentleman's college that Harry Garfield would clarify and rationalize and that Tyler Dennett would challenge and rethink. ■

*For Fred's full interview, published in the booklet Beyond the Log: Williams Presidents in the Gentleman's Era, contact [alumni.relations@williams.edu](mailto:alumni.relations@williams.edu). Or visit [tinyurl.com/beyondthelog](http://tinyurl.com/beyondthelog).*



Tyler Dennett,  
president from 1934-37