

Williams College Oral History Project Interview with Samuel Matthews

February 5 & 7, 1991

Interview Length: 44 pages

Samuel Matthews (1902-1994) joined the biology faculty in 1937 and retired in 1970. After teaching for ten years, President Baxter appointed him chairman pro tempore of the faculty, a position he held for roughly twenty years.

In his interview with John Walsh, Matthews discusses the presidency of Phinney Baxter in great detail. He talks about what it was like to be one of Baxter's closest advisors and friends, discusses the inner workings of the administration, and asserts that Baxter's temper ran hot and that his decisions were not always well thought out.

Matthews also discusses Jack Sawyer's presidency, and the transition of power between Baxter and Sawyer, stating that he was completely surprised by Sawyer's election. Matthews also asserts that his admiration for Sawyer began at their first meeting and only grew from there.

Matthews mentions his role as advisor to the pre-medical students, saying that he had to fight a perception that pre-med students shouldn't focus too heavily on sciences. He touches on many other topics, including "town-gown" relationships; the transition from the Sawyer presidency to Chandler's, and the brief consideration of Hodge Markgraf for the position; the integration of more African-American students at the College; the beginnings of coeducation; and the importance of athletics.

The transcript of this interview and the accompanying audio file (if available) may be accessed only in the Archives/Chapin Reading Room.