

Williams College Oral History Project Interview with Katharine Berry
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Interview length: 27 pages

Katharine Berry (b. 1935) was the first woman to graduate from Williams College, although she did not receive her degree officially recognizing her as a member of the class of 1957 until 1975. She was also the first women president of the Society of Alumni.

In her interview with Charles Alberi and Robert Stegeman, Berry talks about attending the Emma Willard School and beginning her undergraduate career at Vassar College. She asserts that she met and married a Williams student the summer after their sophomore year, and when Bennington College didn't suit her academically, Dean Brooks suggested she attend Williams. She took two years of courses at Williams, wanting to continue her major in American history and literature, but because Clay Hunt refused to allow a woman in his class—a requirement for the major—she majored in economics. After her husband's graduation from Williams, Berry explains that the couple moved to Chicago, where she continued her education at the University of Chicago, courses which Williams reviewed and approved, in order to award her a certificate of completion. In 1975, Berry asserts she received a letter from Williams stating that women with certificates of completion would be granted diplomas from the College, now that the College was co-educational.

Berry discusses her husband's fraternity, Delta Upsilon, and how at home the couple felt there; Dean Brooks's personal attention to her education; and the career counseling services offered to her husband upon his graduation. She describes her later relationship with the College, including helping to organize their 25th reunion, as parents of a 1982 graduate, and eventually serving as president of the Society of Alumni. She states that during her time as president, the College remodeled the Williams Club in New York at great expense, and launched the Third Century Campaign. She talks about presidents Chandler and Oakley, working with the Board of Trustees, and ends her interview wondering if her next role at the College might be as grandparent of a student.

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