

## Williams College Oral History Project with Fred Stocking

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Interview length: 83 pages

Fred Stocking (1915 - 2009), Morris Professor of Rhetoric, graduated from Williams in the class of 1936. He served as an instructor in English at Williams 1940-1944, just after completing his oral exams at the University of Michigan. In that time he taught in the V5 program, training navy cadets in flight navigation and Morse code, as well as in the V12 program, teaching naval officers a liberal arts curriculum. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1946, Stocking returned to Williams to teach in the English Department until his retirement in 1983. Stocking also served as Secretary of the Faculty from 1977 to 1982.

In his interview with Charles Alberti, Stocking discusses his childhood in Michigan and his early days at Williams. Stocking was a member of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity as a student, yet says he experienced a growing disillusionment with the fraternity system, both as a student, and later as a professor. Stocking describes his work teaching in the V5 and V12 programs, and says that when he returned to Michigan to finish his Ph.D., the War was at such an important crossroads that he insisted on leaving school to get a “war job,” which he did—in a paper factory.

Stocking discusses several important figures in the Williams English department, including Clay Hunt, Jack O’Neill, Luther Mansfield, and John Reichert. He talks about the courses he taught in Victorian and English literature, and departmental politics of the time. He mentions his position against the (attempted) introduction of a required “Great Books” course for first-year students, and talks at length about the College in the 1960s: the abolition of fraternities, the move to co-education, the African American student take-over of Hopkins Hall, protests over the war in Vietnam, and the relaxation of standards of dress among both the faculty and students.

Stocking tells several humorous anecdotes: his induction into Phi Beta Kappa at the home of a professor with hundreds of clocks that rang out at 5 o’clock, right in the middle of the induction; about Phinney Baxter and his wife Anne; about his colleagues on the faculty; and about his own experience appearing in court attempting to stop the ban of a book as pornographic. Stocking discusses Jack Sawyer in some detail, and ends the interview stating that all of his years at Williams have been fortunate, and asserting that he doesn’t just have “purple valley sentimentality.”

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