

**Williams College Oral History Project Interview with Margaret Altmann**  
March 10, 2009

Interview Length: 32 pages

Margaret Neyland Altmann (b. 1926) was the administrative assistant to Williams President Phinney Baxter, part-time while she was in high school, and full-time from 1947 to 1953.

In her interview with Charles Alberti and Robert Stegeman, Altmann discusses the V-5 and V-12 program, which she explains were training programs for Navy officers. She also talks about the skeleton faculty during WWII who taught in those programs. She speaks in depth about Kay O'Connell, agreeing with the story that she ran the college on a day-to-day basis; and Phinney Baxter, asserting that though he had a very loud voice, he was always kind, and was a great defender of academic freedom. She discusses Prof. Fred Schuman, with whom she took a class, describing him as a gentleman, and asserting that he never espoused communist ideas.

Altmann explains leaving her position to go to the University of Wisconsin, which several faculty recommended to her. She expresses her surprise that Wisconsin accepted credits for the courses she took at Williams, allowing her to graduate in just two years. She describes attending North Adams State Teachers College, and becoming an elementary school teacher for several years, before going to Germany on a Department of Defense contract for teachers. She talks about meeting her husband there, and living in Germany for twelve years before they returned to the U.S., and moved to Vermont.

Altmann talks about the Williamstown social scene in the 1950s, Oz Wyckoff, Robert Brooks, James McGregor Burns, and Fred Copeland and Dave Pynchon in Admissions. Towards the end of her interview, she recalls the experience of taking a course at Williams with Joe Johnson, and traveling to the United Nations and meeting Eleanor Roosevelt, who, she asserts, spotted her within the larger group of male students.

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