

**Williams College Oral History Project Interview with Russell Bostert**  
March 27 & May 9, 1991

Interview Length: 48 pages

Russell Bostert (1921 – 2000) taught in the History department at Williams from 1948 until his retirement in 1991. He was the first faculty member to hold the Theodore Stanfield Professorship in History.

In his interview with John Walsh, Bostert discusses his childhood and education in the Midwest and tells the story of how he came to Williams. He talks about Baxter's presidency and his feelings about Sawyer succeeding him in that post. Bostert admits that he and many others on the faculty (and President Baxter) favored Vince Barnett for the position. Bostert goes on to discuss Sawyer's presidency in great detail, admitting how much he came to admire Sawyer's personal and professional qualities.

Bostert discusses several important issues from the Sawyer presidency, but he avoids discussing the much-covered abolition of fraternities and move to coeducation. Instead, Bostert discusses the attempted curricular change to the 4-2-4 program, asserting that, had it been approved, he would have looked for employment elsewhere. Bostert says that Sawyer's out-of-the-blue requirement that it pass by 60% was brilliant. He then discusses Sawyer's early realization that the curriculum's emphasis on western civilizations had to change, asserting that 'area studies' was Sawyer's creation. Bostert also tells the story of how Sawyer managed to remove Giles Playfair as the head of the Adams Memorial Theatre, using this as an example of Sawyer's attention to detail and his ability to do what is right for the College. Bostert also discusses the relationship between Sawyer and Ralph Renzi, editor of the *Alumni Review*.

Bostert admits his two main worries about Williams in the future: That it will become a small university, not a college; and that there will be more of an emphasis on lecturing, rather than discussion. He worries aloud that as the college grows in size, this shift is inevitable, and indeed, has already begun.

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