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1948–1962: Dudley W. Woodbridge (Acting Dean  
1948-1950)

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1996

## Remembering "The Eighth Wise Man"

Herb Kelly

Ernest Goodrich

Emeric Fischer

*William & Mary Law School*

John E. Donaldson

*William & Mary Law School*

Rodney Johnson

*See next page for additional authors*

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**Authors**

Herb Kelly, Ernest Goodrich, Emeric Fischer, John E. Donaldson, Rodney Johnson, R. Harvey Chappell Jr., James P. Whyte Jr., T. H. Spainhour, and Julia Woodbridge Oxreider

Dudley Warner Woodbridge (1896–1969),  
Dean Emeritus and Chancellor Professor of Law

# Remembering "The Eighth Wise Man"



On the 100th anniversary of his birth,  
alumni and friends gather to honor the late  
Dean Woodbridge

**F**or many Marshall-Wythe alumni, Dean Dudley Warner Woodbridge *was* the Law School. Few other people have had a greater impact on the growth and development of William and Mary's School of Law.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dean Woodbridge. Alumni and friends sent many letters in tribute, and this past February, a group of the Dean's former students met at the Law School for a special luncheon honoring their friend and mentor. Joining the group was Woodbridge's daughter, Julia Oxrieder, and his granddaughter.

We invite you to share in the reminiscences of those who best knew Dean Woodbridge. He was, by all accounts, a truly remarkable man whose legacy lives on as Marshall-Wythe continues to grow in national stature.



## Friends

### Reminisce at 100th Birthday Luncheon

*On Feb. 24, 1996—the 100th anniversary of the  
birthdate of Dudley Woodbridge—alumni,  
family members and others gathered for a luncheon at  
the Law School honoring the late Dean.*

*Here are excerpts from the group's  
conversation.*

Dean Woodbridge was one of the greatest guys I have ever known in the law. To me, when he opened his mouth, he didn't talk—the law fell out of his mouth. I'm serious, that's how I felt when he was teaching class. And he was such a gentleman.

...I don't mean to say there wasn't any humor in him, because there was humor in Woodbridge. I remember a specific experience. I read law to a guy named Louis Rives in law school. Louis lost his eyes when he was 2 years old. So we took all of our classes together, and I would read to him each night the cases that we were supposed study.

We went to one class, and Dr. Woodbridge asked me a question about a case, and I couldn't remember the answer. And, of course, he knew I read the case to Louis, so he asked Louis the question and he answered it. And Dr. Woodbridge's response was, "Now, gentlemen, here is an example of water rising higher than its source."

—Herb Kelly '43

We were close friends from '33 until he died. The things I remember most about him were: he was a man of great intelligence and a fantastic memory, and a great humanitarian.

I remember in 1941, when I was practicing law in Surry, I was sitting in my office one night about 10 o'clock working on a case involving a railroad right-of-way that had reverted to the subservient landowner.

... At 10 o'clock at night—that's how well I knew Dr. Woodbridge—I called him. He said, "Ernest, look in 115 Virginia Reports 292—there's a case right there that says that any building, equipment or railway right-of-way is personal property and doesn't go with the land." And he cited the case right out of the clear blue sky.

—Ernest Goodrich '35

The first way he caught my attention was his grading system. He had pop quizzes; remember that? And remember what the grades were?—minus five all the way to plus five. ... Those pop quizzes came up at the most unexpected times. "Okay, class, what's the answer to this one?" Just like that, no advance notice, no nothing. He kept us on our toes.

... You know we passed the bar exam on those questions, because no one came unprepared to his classes.

—Professor Emeritus Emeric Fischer '63,  
'64 MLT

I have two recollections about those pop quizzes. One is that I wore a Phi Beta Kappa key to class the first day. I took it off after that. And I didn't wear it again for a long time, because I got one of those minus three scores.

The other observation I have about those pop quizzes is that he would justify them in various ways, but the justification that I liked best was that he wanted all of his students to have an opportunity to make all of their mistakes in law school, so they wouldn't make any when they got out. He gave us every opportunity to do that.

—Professor John Donaldson '63

I was with him in his last year of teaching. I got to read those pop quizzes to him, because his eyesight had declined, and I got to read the final exams and the reporter and the case-book. It was a wonderful opportunity for someone who's going to be a teacher. ...

I think I am probably unique among this audience in that my contact was shorter. But the impact he has had on my life!

I'll be teaching the rule against perpetuities to a group of students be-



Julia Woodbridge Oxrieder sits below a portrait of her father at the Feb. 24, 1996 luncheon at the Law School honoring her father.



## A LIFE DEVOTED TO THE LAW SCHOOL

*Dudley Warner Woodbridge* was born in Ohio on Feb. 24, 1896. He received his B.A. and J.D. from the University of Illinois, and was a member of the Order of the Coif, Phi Beta Kappa and Omicron Delta Kappa.

In 1927, Woodbridge joined the faculty of Marshall-Wythe Law School, which at that time was known as the department of jurisprudence at the College of William and Mary. The department had only two professors and 2,000 law volumes, and was unaccredited.

Woodbridge rose quickly to the rank of associate professor in 1928, then to full professor in 1933. He was named dean of the department of jurisprudence in 1950, and dean of the newly named Marshall-Wythe Law School in 1953. An authority on the law of property, contracts, torts and negotiable instruments, Woodbridge was editor of the Virginia Bar Notes for more than 30 years.

By the time of Woodbridge's retirement in 1962 as Dean Emeritus and Chancellor Professor, the Law School was fully accredited, had a law library with 26,000 volumes, had added a graduate program in tax law and had eight faculty members.

Woodbridge earned a reputation as an exemplary teacher, believing that "law schools are as much a part of our administration of justice as are the judges and attorneys. ... law schools should not merely teach technical rules of law, but should encourage the students to evaluate them on their own after research and analysis."

In 1950, the international edition of *Life* magazine recognized Woodbridge as one America's eight "Great Teachers." The magazine citation read in part: "In the coldest weather he never wears a coat or hat. One student contends that he doesn't need them; almost reverentially, he insists Professor Woodbridge is cloaked with a special warmth that springs from his humility and greatness."

Woodbridge displayed that special warmth in many large and small ways: teaching neighborhood children how to ride a bicycle and ice skate; giving special tutoring sessions to students; being a devoted husband to his wife, Ruby, and his three children.

Dudley Woodbridge died in October 1969 at the age of 73. The *Daily Press* eulogized him in an editorial: "Dean Woodbridge truly ranks with William and Mary's famed 'seven wise men,' the seven professors who by their sacrifice and inspiration held the college together during the years of austerity. ... In fact, a statement on the bulletin board of the law school appropriately calls Dean Woodbridge 'the eighth wise man.'"

Howard Spainhour '56 (left), as a student, receiving the Law School Book Prize from Dean Woodbridge and Chester Baker '49



ginning the week after next. These are mostly seniors, a few second-year students, and I am going to be using the perpetuities material that the Dean used in Property I for beginning freshmen—which again shows the worth of those materials, his wisdom in putting them together, and how hard he made us work. But that's how we learned what we were capable of, wasn't it?

—Rodney Johnson '67

He was so gentle that he really would go out of his way to avoid anything that smacked of a conflict, unless it was a matter of principle.

F. E. Clark had tried to start the law review—he graduated midyear, and we had to do something with all the materials that had accumulated. So Woody (all of us called him Woody, but not to his face) asked me if I would pick it up and try to get the first edition out. Well, we didn't have any money, and so the first issue of the law review was mimeographed. It bugged me that it was mimeographed, so I went to Woody and said that we have to print, literally print, the next one.

He said to me, "Harvey, the College just doesn't have money for things like that." And I said, "Dr. Woodbridge, can't we at least go and talk to President Pomfret?"

"I know he'll turn us down."

"What would we lose? Would you walk with me?" And he said yes. So we walked down to Dr. Pomfret's office, which was on the ground floor of what we used to call Marshall Wythe. We walked in there, I made the pitch, and Dr. Pomfret said, "Well, I can let you have \$250."

That was the first printing of the *William and Mary Law Review*. He really had to screw up his courage to impose on Dr. Pomfret, he would never impose on anyone. A great man.

—Harvey Chappell '50



I have not been surprised at any of the things that people have said today, except for Harvey Chappell. It never would have dawned on me that anyone would have called Dr. Woodbridge “Woody” behind his back!

—John Donaldson

When I was hired in '58 to come here, the first thing I was told when I arrived on campus was what a great teacher Dr. Woodbridge was. And I said to myself, “Nobody can really be that good.” Then I remembered that one of the worst courses I ever went through was negotiable instruments, so I said to him, “May I audit your class?” I wanted to find out how to teach from this man.

He said, “No, I don’t think that is a good idea, but I will give you my class notes and you can look them over.” This was in negotiable instruments—a horrible course! I went through them, and I discovered that the man was a genius. He could translate legal gobbledegook into plain English, and he got it over. That is something that is a mark of genius in my estimation.

—Dean Emeritus Jim Whyte

I remember Dr. Woodbridge coming to me one day and saying, “Mr. Spainhour, would you like a scholarship?” I said, “Of course.”

## Words of Wisdom From the Source

*An audiotape of a lecture given by Dean Woodbridge in 1967 has been rediscovered by Professor John Donaldson.*

*The Law School has sent a copy of the tape to all alumni from the Classes of '67 and before.*

*Other interested alumni should call the*

*Office of Development and  
Alumni Affairs, (757)  
221-3795.*

“Well,” he said, “it isn’t very large.” I said, “If there is someone who really needs it, I don’t really have to have it. But it would be nice if I did.” He said, “Well, you may have it.”

The next year, or maybe the next semester, he came to me again and said, “Mr.

Spainhour, if you want a scholarship this year, you have to apply for it.”

That was the condition—I had to ask for it. That indicated to me how much interest he had in his students in the school.

—Howard Spainhour '56

I have a real short story I’d like to tell. This, by the way, is a Jewish folk tale—I collect folk tales.

There was once a man who had 10 sons, and he told his sons that when he died he was going to leave each one of them 100 gold pieces. But after that, he had some financial reverses and discovered he was only going to have 950 after all. Well, he was practically on his

deathbed, when he called his youngest son, his favorite son, and he said, “I can only give you 50 gold pieces instead of 100. But I’m leaving you my friends.”

Like this young man, I have inherited my father’s friends. I thank you so much for coming and sharing today.

—Julia Woodbridge Oxrieder



May 1996: President Sullivan and Dean Krattenmaker honor the Law School’s Woodbridge Associates—named to honor Dean Dudley Warner Woodbridge—for their lifetime service and generosity: (from left to right) Ned Ferguson '41, Nick St. George '65, Judge Robert Simpson '68, Robert Stackhouse '51, Bob Boyd '52, Lacey Compton '65 and Bill Harman '56.