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1976

## Class of 1976

William & Mary Law School

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## Old school & new traditions

**W**illiam and Mary became the first American school to offer instruction in law in 1779 when George Wythe, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was appointed Professor of Law. Obtaining its name from Wythe and one of his students who was to become Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, the school has expanded to include over 450 students. Distinguished graduates included Phillip Barbour, John Blair, and Bushrod Washington — all former members of the U.S. Supreme Court. The 1975-1976 session however, brought about many changes and problems with which the school had to contend.

The major cause of concern for all those involved with the law school was the American Bar Association's warning of accreditation withdrawal unless certain conditions were met. Pronouncing Marshall — Wythe as "possibly the most inadequate physical plant of any ABA approved law school in the country," the bar's major complaint concerned, not a fault in the quality of education, but a lack of sufficient space for students. This problem was not a new one. From the time the school was housed in the basement of Bryan Dormitory to the time of the ABA's statement, the administration was well aware of overly cramped rooms. In addition, library

facilities were cited as being inadequate and faculty salaries were said to be below the national medium.

A plea was made by President Graves to Governor Mills Godwin for a new law school building to be located next to the National Center for State Courts. Although in 1974 the General Assembly approved \$218,250 to draw up plans for the new school, no funds were provided for the actual construction. The projected cost of the building was \$5.5 million which was not available due to economic conditions. However, because Godwin appeared to be in favor of state support, and because few legislators publically opposed the funding, many were optimistic about a suitable remedy for the situation.

On November 22, 1975, the Board of Visitors appointed former U.S. Senator, William B. Spong, Jr., as the new Dean of the law school. Due to his vast amount of law and political experience, including service in the Virginia House of Delegates, the Virginia State Senate and the U.S. Senate, it was hoped that his rare abilities would aid Marshall-Wythe in combating its numerous problems and preserving the greatness of the third oldest law school in the English speaking countries.

**One of the oldest** buildings on campus, the Marshall-Wythe Law School is the center of controversy.