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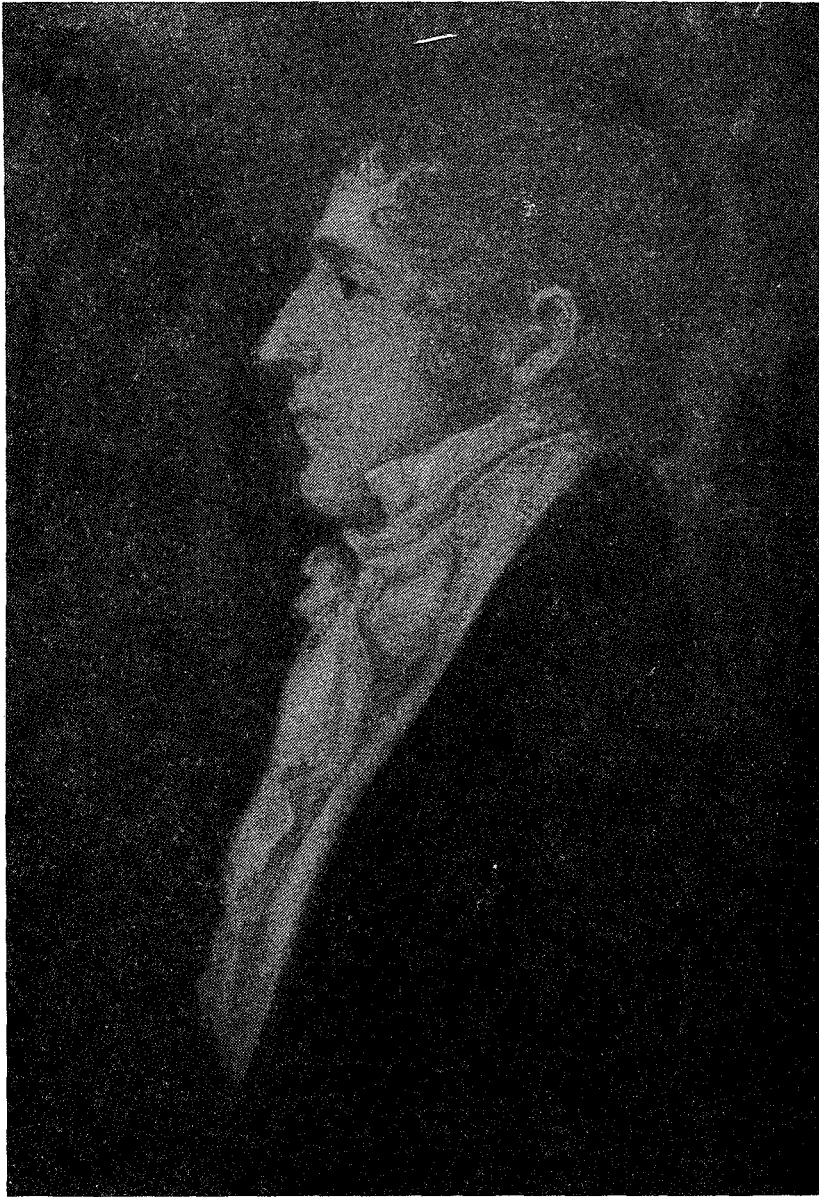
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WILLIAM H. CABELL
artist unknown

Muscarella Museum of Art, College of William and Mary; Gift of Mrs. William Ruffin Cox

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COMMEMORATION

WILLIAM H. CABELL

William & Mary LB
1793*

*In Celebration of the Bicentennial of America's First
Bachelor of Law Degree Recipient*

In 1993, the College of William & Mary will celebrate the 300th anniversary of its founding. The year 1993 will also mark another important milestone in the history of the College, the Law School, and the legal profession. In 1793, the College awarded to William H. Cabell the first bachelor of law degree in the United States. Thus, during the tercentenary celebration of the founding of the College, William & Mary will also celebrate the bicentennial of the awarding of America's first bachelor of law degree.

Although formal legal education was being introduced during this period, the concept was not widely accepted or enthusiastically embraced. During the eighteenth century, most aspiring lawyers apprenticed for several years under a well-respected attorney. In contrast, according to the College statutes of 1792, William &

* Excerpted from Susan L. Trask, *In Celebration of the Bicentennial of America's First Bachelor of Law Degree Recipient, William Cabell, William & Mary LB, 1793*, which appeared in the 1992 Annual Report of the Marshall-Wythe School of Law.

Mary required a student seeking a Bachelor of Law degree to satisfy the requirements for an academic Bachelor of Arts degree as well as demonstrate a solid acquaintance with "Civil History, both Ancient and Modern and particularly with Municipal law and police."

William Cabell was born on December 16, 1772 at his maternal grandfather's home, Boston Hill, in Cumberland County, Virginia. His education began with private tutors in English and Latin. His public education commenced in 1785 when he enrolled at Hampden-Sydney College, where he studied until September 1789. The next February, Cabell entered William & Mary to further his education in the area of law.

In 1779 William & Mary established the first chair of law in the United States. While Governor of Virginia and a member of the Board of Visitors at William & Mary, Thomas Jefferson changed the College's organizational structure to include a Professorship of Law and Police; he envisioned the curriculum providing training for lawyers as well as preparing future participants in state and federal government. Jefferson appointed his friend and former mentor, George Wythe, to the newly appointed chair.

After Wythe left the College, St. George Tucker assumed the Professorship of Law. It was under Tucker's guidance and tutelage that William Cabell received his formal legal training. In teaching his students, Tucker endeavored to produce both scholars and practitioners. He taught his students in his home, surrounded by his books, and arranged his teaching schedule around his riding circuit as a District Judge. William Blackstone's *Commentaries* served as the foundation for the lessons, but Tucker also included supplementary material about the United States Constitution, public morality, and the political system.

After Cabell left William & Mary in July 1793, he went to Richmond, where he was licensed as an attorney; he began the practice of law in 1794. In the spring of 1796, Cabell was elected to the General Assembly, where he served until 1805. In 1805, the Virginia legislature elected Cabell Governor, a position he held for three years, the maximum amount of time under the Virginia Constitution.

In December 1808, Cabell was elected by the legislature to be a Judge of the General Court. He served in that capacity until April

1811, when he was appointed to the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia, the highest court in the Commonwealth at that time.

William Cabell spent his later years quietly in Richmond. He retired from the Court in 1851 and died at the age of eighty-one in 1853.