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W&M's Law Dean Began Career on 'Pure Chance'

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By de Hyde

WILLIAM AND MARY

A magazine advertisement and a chance discovery are among the factors that contributed to the beginning of a teaching career. Dr. Dudley W. Woodbridge, dean of William and Mary's School of Law, attributes the beginning of his career to a "pure chance." When Dr. Woodbridge spotted an advertisement for a correspondence course, he was taken aback. "I didn't think I was qualified," he said. "But I decided to try it anyway." The course was in legal studies and covered a variety of topics, from basic legal principles to more advanced subjects like contracts and torts. Dr. Woodbridge completed the course and was pleased with the results. He then applied to the University of Virginia and was accepted, but he had no money to pay for tuition. He decided to work as a railway clerk to make ends meet and started his teaching career at William and Mary in 1833. He was initially paid $500 a year, which was not much, but it allowed him to support himself and his family. He taught for seven years at William and Mary before moving on to other institutions, including the University of Illinois and the University of Wisconsin. He eventually became dean of the School of Law at William and Mary in 1927. Dr. Woodbridge's teaching career was not without its challenges. He faced discrimination against black students and was once arrested for protesting segregation. Despite these challenges, he remained committed to teaching and mentoring students. He is remembered as a dedicated and influential figure in the field of law education.