

Change Amidst Tradition: The First Two Years of the Burruss Administration at VPI

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On May 25, 1921, Julian Ashby Burruss, president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute,¹ sat down to write Lawrence Price, president of the alumni association. The letter to Dr. Price was just one communication in a flurry of correspondence Burruss, the institution's first alumnus to hold the position, initiated during his first two years in office. In this letter, though, the usually ultra-professional and guarded Burruss wrote on a more personal level. In answering Dr. Price's assertion that some among the alumni thought that "a few things ... might be different," Burruss responded, "I have long ago learned that one cannot please everybody, so my policy is to go ahead and try to do what I believe and what my counselors and friends think is best and let it go at that."² This philosophy can be seen in his actions. Throughout the first two years of his administration, Burruss bucked tradition and worked tirelessly to implement his vision for the school, a vision that would bring radical change to the all-male agricultural and mechanical college known popularly as VPI. The changes he instituted reshaped the school's administration, expanded its curriculum offerings, changed its military requirements, and ultimately altered its relationship with women.

In pursuing his vision for the school, Burruss was an advocate, and first and foremost, he advocated for Virginia Polytechnic Institute. A perusal of his professional correspondence from 1919 to 1921 reveals a man deeply committed not only to the institution of VPI but also to its growth. It shows a man who, on the one hand, acted as fund-raiser and visionary but, on the other, as the settler-of-all-questions—from the types of table covers that should be used to which faculty members would live in which house and to who might be stealing the laundry.³ He seemed equally dedicated to communications with the Virginia governor's office as with interested parents and students.⁴

Histories recounting the years of the Burruss administration already exist, written by esteemed authors such as Duncan Lyle Kinnear, Peter Wallenstein, Harry Downing Temple, and Clara B. Cox; however, this article strives to provide a more nuanced look at the first two years of this dynamic educator's tenure at VPI.⁵ The picture that unfolds illuminates



Figure 1. Julian Burruss, photograph (1933-1934). Historical Photograph Collection, Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. https://imagebase.lib.vt.edu/view_record.php?URN=01TE0812030910&mode=popup

an administrator dedicated to a specific vision for the school. This vision centered on expanding and growing the school and in the process changing its designation from a military/technical school similar to VMI to a designation as a standard university. In the process of enacting his vision for VPI, Burruss called for reorganizing the school's structure, expanding its curriculum, and changing its military requirements. In his quest to execute his vision, he also facilitated the admission of women and the hiring of the first female instructor. Burruss worked to put his vision for the school in place amidst great change within America. So, this article also illustrates ways in which Burruss maneuvered in an early 1920s America to bring change to VPI against a backdrop of tradition as well as within a changing post-war America.

Beginning

On June 12, 1919, the VPI Board of Visitors unanimously elected Julian A. Burruss to succeed Joseph D. Eggleston as president of the Blacksburg, Virginia, institution.⁶ As Burruss began his tenure, veterans were returning from World War I, and America had begun to move toward a post-war world. Federal programs for veterans gained wide support. The Nineteenth Amendment, giving women suffrage, gained ratification, and progressive ideas concerning social hygiene and health continued to remain popular. And while more liberal ideas concerning education began to flourish in the North and Midwest, conservatism still reigned in the South.⁷ Within this

flux of change and tradition, Burruss entered a VPI world that was more in debt and more disorganized than he had initially thought.⁸

Although elected to the presidency on June 12, Burruss did not actually arrive in Blacksburg until the following September 1. Not knowing which way the board of visitors would vote concerning his candidacy, he had decided to accept a summer instructorship at the University of Chicago, an appointment that both he and the board agreed should be kept.⁹ Regardless, throughout the summer of 1919, Burruss maintained a steady correspondence with Theodor P. Campbell, dean of the general faculty, who assumed the duties of “acting executive of the institution” for the summer.¹⁰ For the most part, Dean Campbell tried to defer decisions to Burruss. Campbell did, however, approve a \$.60 raise for three employees, who had stated, “[W]e can not live on what we are getting”; authorized a return to the “old uniform: the blue and gray”; told the Daughters of the Confederacy that he would like to grant their request to sell lunches on campus, but that he could not; and asked the mayor of Blacksburg to please control the town boys who were swimming in the quarry.¹¹

At the beginning of July, Campbell’s communications to Burruss seemed to center on such mundane questions as whether the mess hall should install “vitrolite” on the tops of the tables. Burruss’s responses, however, asked for things such as copies of allotments; enrollment numbers; and information on funding, faculty, and expenditures.¹² As July moved into August, Campbell’s letters grew longer and longer as he attempted to give the new president all the information he asked for. As September 1, 1919, approached, Campbell seemed more than willing to hand over the administration to Burruss. At one point during the summer, Campbell tried to warn the president-elect about his upcoming job, writing, “I’m sorry to have to tell you, since you necessarily inherit it, but scarcely a day passes that does not bring forth some new vexations and annoying problems.”¹³ If Burruss was moved in any respect by this declaration, he did not indicate it in his letters to Campbell.¹⁴

After arriving in Blacksburg, Burruss continued his fact-finding efforts. He examined the administrative structure, the curriculum, the physical plant, and faculty responsibilities. When he could not access information, he asked for it, officially, in writing.¹⁵ What the VPI Board of Visitors and others did not know was that Burruss was amassing information that would help him enact his vision for the school. He was gathering information to assess the present condition of the school and to determine the best course for initiating changes—changes he hoped would allow for growth and expansion and a different school-type designation for the small, rural military college.

Reorganization and Curriculum Expansion

When Burruss finished gathering information, he converted his findings into a multi-page document that turned the college structure on its head. This report called for a fundamental reorganization of the school's leadership, for military changes, and for a curriculum expansion. It proved to be thorough and extensive. Burruss's attention to detail and the professionalism and the speed with which he amassed such a report allowed him to persuade the board to pass his extensive reorganization plan without much opposition or change.

In the report, Burruss proposed changes to the administrative structure of the college. He called for eliminating three of six deanships and setting the rest of the college under the leadership of the commandant, a health officer, and a business manager. According to Burruss's reasoning, this plan streamlined the number of people who reported directly to the president and more evenly distributed responsibilities.¹⁶

By declaring that "progress almost invariably means change," Burruss also called for revisions to the curriculum. He believed that since VPI now existed in a post-World War I world, the college needed to adapt to the changing times.¹⁷ In his curriculum plan, Burruss proposed eliminating courses that underperformed (persistent low enrollment) as well as restructuring and revising courses not well adapted to new technologies developed during the war. He called for the elimination of political science and economic courses, which would be replaced with courses in social science to address the "social unrest" of post-war American society.¹⁸

Significantly, in order to push forward the growth of the college, which was one of Burruss's primary objectives in his vision to produce change, he called for the addition of courses to train teachers for vocational education. Specifically, he called for "a course (or courses) in: Education in Trades and Industries."¹⁹ In adding this curriculum line, Burruss could take advantage of federal funding for colleges via the Smith-Hughes Act.²⁰ Burruss also proposed new curricula in agronomy and in animal and dairy husbandry.²¹ Also, in order to increase VPI's standing amongst colleges and increase its academic status, Burruss extensively researched and asked for an increase in the admission requirements to the college: no less than 15 units of high school work in particular courses.²² These additions to the curriculum and structural changes laid the foundation Burruss felt was needed to grow VPI and make it relevant in a post-war America. The growth he called for, however, came with a price.

Perhaps the bane of every college or university president's existence is the need for money. Colleges cannot grow and cannot conduct classes

without money. Julian Burruss's records show that he spent much time constructing letters to various people about funding. Money was important and Burruss knew it. He also knew that one of his first tasks in implementing his vision for the school would be to increase the amount of money the school was awarded from the state legislature, its main source for monies.

Primary funding for VPI, a land-grant school, came from the Virginia General Assembly. In order to get this funding, Burruss needed to prepare and submit a budget to the governor's office. In 1919, the governor's office in Richmond announced a new set of guidelines for budget requests that every public college in Virginia had to follow. Therefore, Julian Burruss's very first budget request needed to follow a different structure than any previous VPI budget. In the 1920 request, Burruss asked for large increases in the school's funding and explained in detail his reasoning for these increases. He prepared the documents meticulously, rolled them, placed them in tubes (he was not supposed to fold them), and then sent them to Richmond.²³ He instructed VPI alumni in the legislature to quietly look out for the budget but not to lobby strongly for the school.²⁴ His strategy worked and the legislature approved large increases for VPI.²⁵

Julian Burruss, however, did not depend solely on the legislature for more money in growing the institution. He realized that he would need to look at many different ways in which he could finance the curricula at VPI and thus expand the school's offerings. One such way was to look at federal programs for which VPI might qualify. The Smith-Hughes funds mentioned above proved to be one such program.²⁶ In the early years of Burruss's administration, he wrote often to the state superintendent of education in Richmond, Harris Hart, concerning VPI's use of Smith-Hughes funds.²⁷ Burruss also became aware of other funding available on the national level, funding arising from national concerns surrounding the end of World War I. This search for funding brought another, different, radical change to the institution by altering its relationship with women.

Curriculum Expansion Leads to First Woman Instructor

Culture, trends, and movements in America of the late 1919s and early 1920s dictated much of the national policy created for federal funding opportunities for colleges. World War I veterans returned home from the front in France ready to restart or rebuild their lives. And Progressive Era America was ready to help. In 1918, Congress passed the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which established the Federal Board for Vocational Education. Under this act, returning honorably discharged soldiers qualified for vocational rehabilitation training. Also under this act, President Burruss



Figure 2. Anna Campbell photograph (undated). Historical Photograph Collection, Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. https://imagebase.lib.vt.edu/view_record.php?URN=VT0604041102&mode=popup.

secured funding to expand VPI's offerings to include a course that prepared returning disabled servicemen for college vocational training, an action that brought the first female instructor to the VPI campus.

Anna Campbell, Dean Theodoric Campbell's daughter, agreed in the spring of 1920 to undertake the education of disabled returning servicemen in "elementary subjects."²⁸ The classes were to be taught on the campus of VPI and would work in tandem with VPI courses such as "Drafting, Blue Print Reading and shop knowledge."²⁹ In a letter to the federal vocational director, Burruss stated, "I think we were quite fortunate in being able to get Miss Campbell to undertake the work"; however, he also lamented, "I have felt at times that it might have been better to have a man as a teacher rather than a young woman." He ends the letter by describing the agreement to have Anna Campbell teach returning veterans elementary subjects on the campus "as quite agreeable to us."³⁰

It was, no doubt, "quite agreeable" because the Federal Board for Vocational Education would pay \$150 per month to the college for conducting the program. They also agreed to pay other expenses incurred by the veterans, such as books and supplies, as well as Anna Campbell's salary.³¹ This cooperation between the Federal Board for Vocational Education and VPI allowed Burruss to expand the work of the college while covering the

expense. With this program, he brought change to the curriculum, but he also initiated radical change in the college's relationship with women by adding its first female instructor. Anna Campbell was listed as "Instructor in Education" along with other faculty members for the 1920–1921 school year in the "President's Report to the Board."³²

Correspondence found in the Burruss records indicates that Ms. Campbell took her work very seriously. In a letter to Burruss in 1921, she tells the president, "Mother says I stay from breakfast till supper everyday, but that is an exaggeration." She wrote Burruss at the time to express her need for more light in her classroom "as a good many of the soldiers, especially those who were gassed, complain constantly of their eyes."³³ She was not, however, sure who should pay for the bulbs, VPI or the Federal Board; she suggested the government pay for them. Alas, after this letter, the light bulb trail goes cold, but the records of Anna Campbell as an instructor at VPI do not.³⁴

The college reorganization and curriculum changes introduced by Burruss changed the way VPI operated; however, little evidence exists within Burruss's correspondence that the faculty objected much to the changes. Theodoric Campbell's son, the college registrar, did resign and leave before the board meeting that eliminated his job. When asked to help with registration, his father readily agreed to pitch in until the new organization was in place, especially since it was his son who was leaving before the end of the term.³⁵ Campbell also resigned as dean, only to be reinstated by the board.³⁶ In *The First 100 Years: A History of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*, Kinnear claimed that Burruss's reorganization of the college "was so successful in effecting financial savings that he soon paid off all old debts and embarked on an extensive program of repairs and improvements to the entire physical plant."³⁷

Military Changes

Hand-in-hand with structural changes, curriculum expansion, and securing federal funds for specific lines of instruction was Julian Burruss's vision to change the college designation of VPI. Correspondence found in his records points to his desire to move VPI away from a more restricted designation as a military/technical school, similar to VMI, and move it into a designation as a standard college.³⁸ So in Burruss's 1920 "Report to the Board of Visitors," the VPI president did not just call for modifications to academic courses, he also called for a change in military requirements. He wanted to alter the structure of and reduce the time spent in military training.

According to Burruss, in 1920, no other college in America required as much military training as VPI. Burruss believed that the amount of time spent

in military/physical training and theoretical military instruction reduced the quality of students' academic work. This may have been true since reports on the graduation standards of VPI graduates did not parallel standards of similar colleges.³⁹ So, as a part of the sweeping reforms passed by the board of visitors in 1920, the time spent in military training and instruction was reduced, and ROTC became an elective that juniors and seniors could choose.

These military changes did not come without some criticism. Despite the fact that VPI required more military training than any other college in America, the presiding military officer at VPI at the time, Commandant Clifford Carson, vehemently opposed the reduction of hours. Part of this opposition may have come from the commandant's misunderstanding of "each credit-hour being equal to **three** time hours [emphasis added by Burruss]."⁴⁰ Misunderstanding or not, Carson moved quickly to alert the country's War Department of the changes at VPI that he felt were "likely to take us off the list of Distinguished Colleges, which will be a great loss to the prestige of the institution."⁴¹

Carson's criticisms made to Burruss and his communication of those criticisms to the War Department produced a three and one-half page, point-by-point response to the commandant from the VPI president. In the letter, Burruss did not mince words. To the assertion that VPI would lose its status on the Distinguished College list, Burruss asked Carson why he felt that VPI needed "50% more time than other colleges for military theory and practice" in order to qualify when other colleges were qualifying with much less time.⁴² Burruss also countered Carson's claims that he was not informed of the decisions regarding the corps. Burruss asserted that he did confer with Carson and that changes were discussed and disseminated in faculty meetings. In regard to Carson's communication with the War Department, Burruss wrote that if Carson had conferred with "the immediately accessible college chief" first and verified his assumptions, his letter to Washington could be "more clearly justified by fact."⁴³

Burruss called upon Carson to immediately write the War Department to "correct any erroneous or misleading impressions which his communication transmitted."⁴⁴ Carson did tell Burruss that he communicated to the War Department his misunderstanding as to "the time allowance for advanced ROTC."⁴⁵ And as for Burruss, a footnote to a letter addressed to his secretary, Jean Glassett, and referring to the "Commandant matter" stated that he now had things in "splendid shape" with the "Washington authorities."⁴⁶ Commandant Carson's orders for the next school year took him away from VPI, which was not unusual. Commandants often served a year at a time. In a last letter to Burruss, there was no overt mention of the difficulties between the two men. Carson did write, however, that "it was a source of great gratification to me

to see the college on the distinguished list again” and that he felt the year had been successful. Instead of mentioning the differences he had with Burruss as the most difficult part of the year, Carson posited, “The unusual supply of corn whiskey was the worst feature.” He understood, however, that “VMI had the same trouble.”⁴⁷ The consumption of whiskey by cadets may have truly been a very serious problem. A year later, in the yearbook, cadets bemoaned the raid on a nearby still, which had supplied them with the drink that made “the silvery moon look green, or pink, as we let the world go by.”⁴⁸

Despite Commandant Carson’s objections, military requirements at VPI were altered, a move that helped situate VPI closer to a designation of a standard university (a central goal in Burruss’s vision) and paved the way for further changes in ensuing years. In 1924, military policy changed again, allowing cadets to opt out of the military requirement entirely during their junior and senior years.⁴⁹

Search for Further Curriculum Expansion and the Admission of Women

As 1920 rolled into 1921, Julian Burruss continued his quest to grow VPI. In the fall of 1920, his fact-finding missions extended beyond the campus at Blacksburg. Indeed, between November 8 and November 20, Burruss visited ten midwestern land-grant colleges. On this trip, he travelled to Ohio State University; Purdue University; and Michigan, Kansas, and Iowa agricultural colleges, as well as to the universities of Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Missouri.⁵⁰ Before leaving Blacksburg, however, he asked his newly hired health officer, Dr. W. A. Brumfield, to look into the possibility that VPI might qualify for funds under another federal program: the United States Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board. This particular search for funding from the Social Hygiene Board proved pivotal in another of VPI’s major changes in the first two years of the Burruss administration: the admittance of women to the school.

The United States Interdepartmental Hygiene Board arose from ideas and movements of the Progressive Era, specifically the Social Hygiene Movement, which was characterized by a scientific approach to the control of venereal disease, the regulation of prostitution and vice, and sex education. Social hygienists found a reason for requesting federal money: rising rates of venereal disease among soldiers. This “danger” to America’s soldiers provided the impetus for establishing federal policy regarding social hygiene.

In the fall of 1920, after hiring Dr. Brumfield, Burruss asked the doctor to examine a pamphlet from the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board on applying for financial assistance in the training of teachers in social

hygiene. After reviewing the information, Dr. Brumfield replied to Burruss that he was “of the opinion that it is worth while for us to apply for financial assistance.”⁵¹ Burruss then wrote to T. A. Storey, executive secretary of the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board; obtained the forms to apply for the funding; and learned from Storey that the forms would also need to be signed by the Virginia superintendent for education, Harris Hart.⁵²

Burruss initiated all of this correspondence about funding from the Social Hygiene Board in the weeks just before January 13, 1921. On this date, Burruss met with the VPI Board of Visitors and asked the board to approve the admission of women. He also asked the board to approve the application for funding through the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board. It becomes apparent in his correspondence after the board of visitors meeting that Burruss believed the admission of women would increase VPI’s chances to receive these monies.

Before the January 13 meeting, Burruss prepared a lengthy thirteen-plank document outlining the reasons VPI should admit women. According to Burruss’s enumerated justifications, women, who having been granted the right to vote were now full citizens, desired to come to VPI as it was the only Virginia school for whites offering agricultural classes, and besides agricultural classes, women would also be interested in science and technical classes. Burruss pointed to the need for women in home demonstration work and noted that VPI was the only Virginia school that could provide white women with such training. He advised the board that there were no distinctions as to gender in the guidelines for land-grant colleges. He also stated that VPI could lose federal funding pending in Congress under the Smoot bill if the college did not add a home economics department.⁵³ Additionally, he purported that the admission of women would be an inducement for professors to come to VPI since their daughters could attend the school. He assured the board that they indeed possessed the authority to admit women without going through the state legislature and even offered his house as a housing option.⁵⁴ (He also probably told them, off the record, that not many women would attend, something he wrote in letters to assure worried alumni.⁵⁵) The board voted unanimously to admit women.

The board also voted to apply for funds available through the Social Hygiene Board, although Burruss says nothing about this decision in his official “General Report.” A few days after the board meeting, on January 17, Burruss sent the application for funding to Harris Hart, asking for his signature on the application. Two days later, Burruss wrote T. A. Storey, Social Hygiene Board executive secretary, to inform him that the application had been sent to Superintendent Hart, who, Burruss believed, would soon

forward it to Storey. In this letter to Storey, Burruss explained the “slight delay in completing” the application:

I was waiting for our trustees to meet to pass on the matter and also to authorize the admission of women to this college. The trustees decided to admit women to all courses beginning in September of this year, and they authorized me to make application for help in developing the department of physical training and hygiene with the assurance that this college is prepared to fully comply with the requirements of the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board in this connection.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, on the same day that Burruss wrote the above letter, Superintendent Hart declined to sign VPI’s application because he had already signed the application of William and Mary for the funding.

This refusal prompted a flurry of letters between Hart, Storey, and Burruss. Burruss continued to make the case for funding for VPI. In a final correspondence from Burruss to Storey, dated February 11, 1921, the president indicated that his understanding of the situation at “present” was that if more funds were to become available, VPI’s application would be “duly considered.” Burruss then again made the case for funding for VPI. In summing up his appeal, he wrote:

Again, I may call attention to the fact that it has been decided to admit women to this institution, and it is desirable for such instruction for them. I presume that both men and women students will go into teaching from this institution and more largely in the future than in the past, and this together with the extension feature referred to above, it seems to me, makes this a good center for your work in Virginia.⁵⁷

The last year Congress appropriated funding for colleges through the Social Hygiene Board was 1921. VPI never received any money from the program, but it did receive five full-time and seven part-time regularly enrolled women students.

More than likely, Burruss believed in his thirteen points for the admission of women, but he also had a let’s-do-it-now reason for approaching the board on January 13, 1921. He wanted money that would add yet another program to VPI’s curriculum and thus continue to grow the college and enact his vision. His correspondence shows that he believed that the admittance of women would help VPI qualify for that funding.

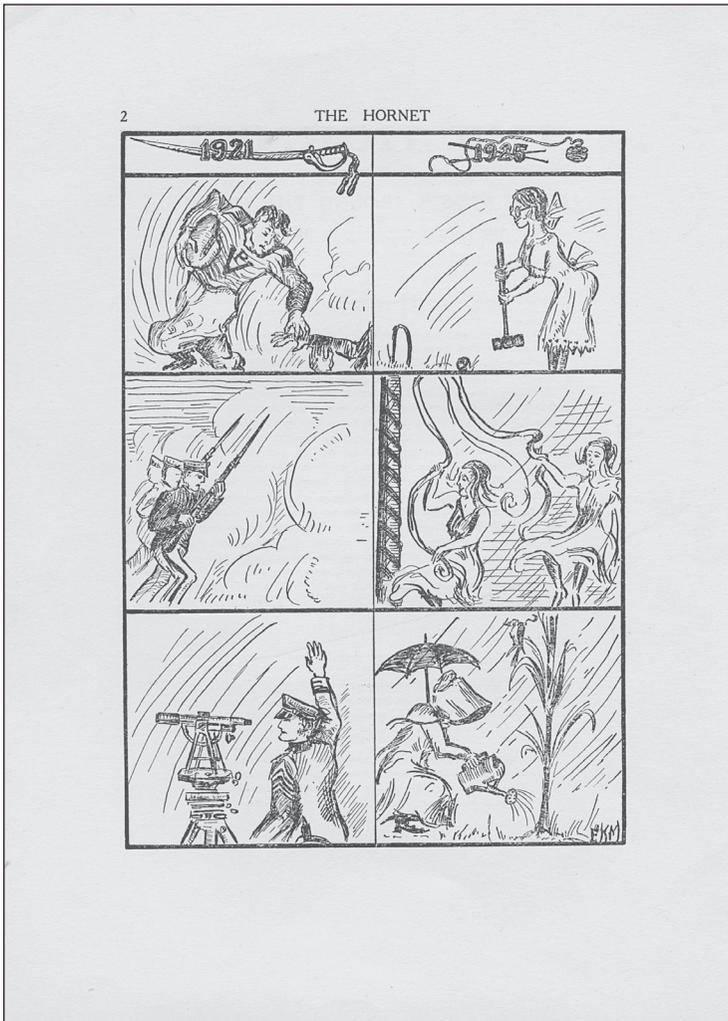
While Burruss received limited disapproval for his reorganizational and military changes, the decision to admit women exacted more widespread

criticism. This criticism manifested in an incident during the summer school session of 1921. In a letter from the summer school director, J. W. Watson, to Burruss in order to inform the president “of everything,” Watson related events that “constitute[d] the shady side of the Summer School Session.” According to Watson, on the night of July 25, just after the students arrived, “various things appeared written on certain of the walks and on the roof of one of the barracks, in a general way derogatory of the coming of the girls.” Watson told Burruss that the students as a majority disapproved of the graffiti and that “we thought it would be more effective to get the students themselves to handle it.” Apparently, after the students’ denouncement of the event, the rest of the summer session went smoothly.⁵⁸

Another source critical of the admittance of women was the corps of cadets. The 1921 yearbook, *The Bugle*, gives good insight into the reaction of the cadets to the coming of the “co-eds.” In a section of the yearbook entitled the “Class History,” a fictionalized story appears of a future cadet asking the VPI barber about the class of ’21. In the story, the barber explained the end of hazing at the school during the tenure of the ’21 class and the beginning of “rules” for the “rats” instead. The “barber” though, in ending his story, lamented a change that did not affect the class of ’21 but nevertheless was instituted during 1921, the admission of women. In talking to the future cadet about the “past” class of ’21, the fictional barber explained that the ’21 boys should “thank their lucky stars that they graduated before the Co-eds changed the school.” He continued, “Jest seems like VPI hasn’t been the same since. Things are jest not like they used to be, and that’s why I can’t help ‘membering that lucky bunch.” The story is “signed” by “E. L. A. *Historian*.”⁵⁹

E. L. A. (most probably Ernest Lynwood Andrews Jr., associate editor-in-chief of the *Bugle*) was indeed a historian.⁶⁰ His story gave insight not only into the history of hazing at VPI, but also to the reaction of the corps to the admission of women. E. L. A.’s story was not the only evidence in the 1921 *Bugle* of the cadet reaction to the admission of women.

A section of the book called “The Hornet,” which appeared at the end of the yearbook, proved to be especially helpful in gauging the reaction of VPI students to the admission of women. This section detailed graphically the feelings of the corps toward “co-eds.” On page 2, a cartoon depicted 1921 activities at VPI as including football, war game practice, and artillery sighting exercises, while 1925 activities changed to playing croquet, dancing around the maypole, and a woman watering corn with a watering can.⁶¹ A story entitled “The Ballad of ‘Growley’ Shultz” accompanied the cartoon, which, among other lines, included the following:



Cartoon. “The Hornet” in *The Bugle*, 1921, *The Bugle Archive*, 15, spec.lib.vt.edu/archives/bugle/.

Now listen girls, Old “Growley” said, “I’ll tell you of the time
When V.P.I. was a he-man’s school, and coeds were a crime...

We didn’t have a crowd of women forever shedding tears,
Instead of female farmerettes, we turned out engineers...

Now, hear me out; I’m really sick of all this feminine rot,
We used to drink “corn licker” here, but where’s your feminine sot?...
Near the end of the poem, the author begins his final lament and in the
process takes Burruss to task:

Oh! Bring me back those good old days, those grand old days of yore,
When “George” and “Phil,” and “Bolvimk” Kent hung round the old
bookstore,

They wore the good old Blue and Gray and not those gingham dresses,
And they were full-fledged engineers when they got their B.S.’s.
Where once our halls resounded with old “Tech Triumph’s” refrain,
Or the thrilling words of old “Play Ball” rang out again and again,
You holler now: “Oh rooti-ti-toot for Burruss Normal Institute!
We hope we win, we surely do,” and a lot of other mush to boot.⁶²

The poem was signed “E. H. H. ’21,” and the author was most probably Ernest Hampton Hornbarger, who was described as the “poet laureate of the Class of 1921” on his senior page in the yearbook.⁶³ Other poems and stories in “The Hornet” section showed the disdain of the students for incoming coeds. An “ad” at the end of the section declared, “LADIES, A Golden Opportunity Awaits You, The Class of ’21 is about to enter the matrimonial arena, Get them before they lose the notion. *Applications Now Being Received.* NO CO-EDS NEED APPLY.”⁶⁴ The yearbook contained many pictures of women as “sponsors,” and the language of the copy spoke often of women as objects of affection; women could be the objects of a cadet’s desire and affection; however, cadets were not yet ready for women to be their classmates.⁶⁵

While alumni criticism most likely existed in these early years, not many graduates voiced their reservations in letters to Burruss. However, one alumnus did: Walter Priddy. Walter was the brother of Lawrence Priddy, head of the VPI Alumni Association. In writing Burruss, Priddy expressed his thoughts on admitting women:

I believe it would be far better for the Institution to confine it to young men, and that the presence of young ladies as students on the campus and in the class room will in many respects be objectionable to the young men who are now attending the Institution, or who may hereafter consider attending. I hope you will not consider putting in any domestic science or any other special work for young ladies which might attract them there.⁶⁶

In addressing Priddy’s concerns, Burruss wrote: “There are ... absolutely no sound reasons against [admitting women],” but assured him that “there will only be a very few women in attendance, and they will not be noticed.”⁶⁷ Although Walter Priddy opposed the admission of women to VPI, it should

be noted that a scholarship exists in his name today, one that can be earned by Charlotte County students, male or female and of any race.⁶⁸

In examining reactions to the admission of women to VPI, it should be noted that not all of those reactions were negative. Many voiced support. In fact, most of the letters that reached Burruss's office, at least in the months immediately following the decision, supported women students, although the letters came from off campus. For example, a letter from a local female high school principal as well as a letter from a University of Wisconsin alumnus voiced support.⁶⁹ Additionally, the Virginia League of Women Voters passed a resolution in favor of VPI's decision to admit women.⁷⁰

Ella Graham Agnew also sent Burruss a letter, stating that she was "delighted to see from the papers ... and to hear from friends ... that VPI will open its doors to women next September."⁷¹ Agnew, for whom Agnew Hall on Virginia Tech's campus is named, was the first woman appointed as a home demonstration agent in the country. During her tenure as an agent, she worked in conjunction with and later for VPI.⁷²

Of especial note in connection with the admittance of women are letters between Burruss and Mrs. M. M. Davis of the Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics for the State of Virginia. In a letter dated October 22, 1920, Mrs. Davis told Burruss that she did not believe Home Demonstration Work in Virginia could progress until women could receive training in a local institution.⁷³ It seems that Burruss agreed. Writing on January 17, 1921, Burruss told Mrs. Davis that the board had voted to admit women and in the process of securing that vote that he "took occasion to call attention of the Board to your letter of October 22nd." He went on to say that Mrs. Davis therefore had "some part of the credit for securing this action."⁷⁴ On January 11, 1921, Mrs. Davis had pushed her point on the admittance of women with Burruss by sending him a short, curt note asking for him to "put in writing your attitude towards having women admitted to the classes at Virginia Polytechnic Institute."⁷⁵ After hearing, just days later, of the admittance of women, another short note relayed: "I am so pleased that V.P.I. has opened her doors to women. Just as soon as it is possible ... I will go over with Mr. Hutcheson the matter of courses we should like offered."⁷⁶ Mrs. Davis was not just happy to see women admitted, she was also ready to suggest curricula for them.

Results of a Radical Vision for Change

Undoubtedly, the first two years of the Burruss administration brought radical change to VPI. In those two years, the organization of the college completely changed. Faculty members needed to adjust to fewer deans,

more programs, and tighter budgets. Little evidence exists, however, that they objected. The military segment of the college adjusted to less time in military training and instruction and continued to earn a place on the “distinguished college” list published by the War Department.⁷⁷

Also, in these two years, VPI radically changed its relationship with women. And while Burruss undoubtedly had a “get it done now” reason for admitting women in January of 1921, the admission of women also dovetailed with his vision to move VPI towards a more inclusive standard university designation. It remains, though, that few women came to the school in those first years, and they faced considerable challenges.

Nevertheless, women did come. In fact, in the first year that women were eligible for admittance, twelve braved the overwhelmingly male atmosphere of the campus and began classes, five as full-time and seven as part-time students. Of the five full-time students, none chose the curriculum developed for home demonstration work. Mary E. Brumfield, Carrie T. Sibold, and Lucy Lee Lancaster chose applied biology; Billie Kent Kabrich selected applied chemistry; and Ruth Louise Terrett chose civil engineering.⁷⁸ In light of an earlier change VPI had made in its relationship with women, when those first co-eds arrived on campus in the fall of 1921, the first female instructor, Anna Campbell, was working steadily in her classroom.

Julian Burruss was indeed a visionary. He had a vision for change at VPI, and he worked tirelessly to realize that vision for the school. Perhaps ironically, beyond his desire to bring about structural change, curriculum change, and military change—changes that did radically alter the future course of the school—what Burruss is most remembered for are not these changes. His enduring legacy is the admission of women.

Endnotes

1. The school’s official name at that time was Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute, but most people shortened it to Virginia Polytechnic Institute or, simply, VPI.
2. Lawrence T. Price to Dr. Julian A. Burruss, May 23, 1921, and Julian A. Burruss to Dr. Lawrence Price, May 25, 1921, Records of Julian A. Burruss, President, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1906–1946, RG 2/8 folder 163, Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va. Unless cited otherwise, all records can be found in Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
3. For discussion on vitrolite see Theodoric Campbell to Dr. Julian Burruss, July 22, 1919, and Julian Burruss to Dean T. P. Campbell, July 23, 1919, RG 2/8 folder 81. For discussion on housing, among others, see Julian Burruss to Mrs. F.S. Glassett, August 29, 1920, and Julian Burruss to Mrs. Glassett, August 9, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 102. For the lost laundry see “Memorandum for President Burruss” from the Commandant, May 27, 1920, folder 84.
4. For correspondence with the governor and other high-ranking state officials, see “A–D Correspondence, 1919–1920”, RG 2/8 folder 163. Correspondence with parents can be found in many miscellaneous folders in RG 2/8.

5. Duncan Lyle Kinnear, *The First 100 Years: A History of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University* (Blacksburg, Va.: VPI Educational Foundation, 1972); Peter Wallenstein, *Virginia Tech, Land-Grant University, 1872–1997: History of a School, a State, a Nation* (Blacksburg, Va.: Pocahontas Press, 1997); Harry Downing Temple, *The Bugle's Echo* 3, 4 (6 vols., Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Corps of Cadets, Inc., 1998, 1999); Clara B. Cox, *Generations of Women Leaders at Virginia Tech* (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1996).
6. Temple, *The Bugle's Echo* 3, 2242.
7. See Wallenstein, *Virginia Tech, Land-Grant University*, chapter 8, for a discussion on land-grant colleges during these years.
8. Kinnear, *The First 100 Years*, 255, and letter from Julian Burruss to Dr. Dodd, March 1, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 5. Lamenting the structure and program at VPI to his mentor at the University of Chicago, Burruss states: "I cannot imagine a more unsatisfactory program than our students are required to follow here."
9. Kinnear, *The First 100 Years*, 254.
10. At times, when his correspondence was more executive in nature, Dean Campbell signed his title as "Acting Executive of the Institution," RG 2/8 folder 81.
11. On asking for a raise, see handwritten document asking for a raise. On changing the uniforms back to the blue and gray, see Dean of the General Faculty to The Zone Supply officer, Coca Cola Building Baltimore, Md., July 16, 1919. On selling lunches, see Dean of the Faculty to Mrs. Minnie E. Woolwine, July 25, 1919. On boys swimming in the quarry, see Dean of the General Faculty to Mr. David Stanger, Mayor, Town of Blacksburg, Va., July 15, 1919, RG 2/8 folder 81.
12. See correspondence between Burruss and Campbell, Records of Julian A. Burruss, RG 2/8 folder 81.
13. Theodoric P. Campbell to Julian A. Burruss, August 8, 1919, RG 2/8 folder 81.
14. As a matter of fact, Burruss tells Campbell that when he arrives, he will "relieve you of a part of your burdens." Julian Burruss to Theodoric Campbell, August 23, 1919, RG 2/8 folder 81.
15. For example, in a letter addressed to "Dear Sir," found in folder 97, Burruss asks for a "written statement setting forth what you consider to be the duties of your office," which may be a general letter to members of the faculty. Julian Burruss to "Dear Sir," RG 2/8 Box 3 folder 97.
16. "Special Report on Organization: 1919–1920 Report," *Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute: Reports of the President* (Blacksburg, Va.: Bulletin of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1920), 109.
17. "Introduction to 1919–1920 Report," *Reports of the President*, 1920, 9. He considered this so important that it was the first plank in his goal statement under a heading he entitled "proximate objectives."
18. *Reports of the President*, 1920, 28–127.
19. "Special Report on Instruction: 1919–1920 Report," *Reports of the President*, 1920, 77.
20. "Smith-Hughes Act (Vocational Act of 1917)" (Public Law 37, 64th Congress, 2nd session, 1917).
21. "Special Report on Instruction," *Reports of the President*, 1920, 77.
22. *Reports of the President*, 1920, 28–127. His correspondence also includes letters to presidents of other institutions asking for their opinion on admission requirements.
23. Governor Westmoreland Davis to Julian Burruss, July 15, 1919, RG 2/8 folder 81. In the letter from the governor's office, Burruss was instructed not to fold the documents but to roll them and send them back in the tubes in which the forms were sent to Burruss.
24. Correspondence to state officials about the budget can be found in folder "A–D correspondence, 1919–1920," RG 2/8 folder 163; for a specific example, see Dr. Lawrence T. Price to the Chairman of the Welfare Committee, April 27, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 163.
25. "1919–1920 Second General Report," *Reports of the President*, 1920, 41–43.
26. For a discussion on Smith-Hughes funds and the admission of women, see Leslie Ogg Williams, "Access and Inclusion: Women Students at VPI, 1914–1964" (master's thesis, Virginia Tech, 2006).
27. See Harris Hart folder, RG 2/8 folder 58.
28. Julian Burruss to Mr. W. H. Magee, District Vocational Officer, May 6, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 165.
29. W. H. Magee to Mr. Myriong C. Kibler, November 16, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 165.

30. Burruss to Magee, May 6, 1920.
31. "Contract for Special Instruction in Institutions," May 20, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 165.
32. "1920–1921 General Report for the Year," *Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute: Reports of the President* (Blacksburg, Va: Bulletin of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1921), 129.
33. Anna Campbell to Julian Burruss, November 7, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 182.
34. *Annual Catalog of the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute, 1920–1921, 1921–1922, 1922–1923*, on pages 18, 17, and 17, respectively. Anna Campbell is listed as an instructor in education at VPI through the 1922–1923 school year. Preliminary research points to her leaving the school at this time to pursue more education and planning to return and resume teaching.
35. Theo[doric P.] Campbell to Julian Burruss, April 6, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 82.
36. Theo[doric] P. Campbell to Julian Burruss, May 10, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 163.
37. Kinnear, *The First 100 Years*, 261.
38. Julian Burruss to Superintendent Harris Hart, March 31, 1922, RG 2/8 folder 58; Superintendent Harris Hart to Julian Burruss, January 21, 1924, RG 2/8 folder 59.
39. *Reports of the President*, 1920, 28–127; see page 68.
40. Julian Burruss to The Professor of Military Science and Tactism, May 18, 1920, RG2/8, folder 84.
41. Burruss to The Professor of Military Science and Tactism.
42. Burruss to The Professor of Military Science and Tactism.
43. Burruss to The Professor of Military Science and Tactism.
44. Burruss to The Professor of Military Science and Tactism.
45. [Commandant C.] Carson to The President, Va. Poly. Inst., May 18, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 163.
46. Julian Burruss to Mrs. Glassett, July 31, 1920, RG2/8 folder 102.
47. Clifford Carson to Julian Burruss, June 21, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 84.
48. "The Hornet" in *The Bugle, 1921*, *The Bugle Archive*, 15, spec.lib.vt.edu/archives/bugle/. Whiskey very well may have been a problem. In a poem in the 1921 yearbook, the talents of a "Moonshine Bill" are extolled. In the poem, the author claims that:
 Now, Moonshine Bill ran a private still,
 And he catered to VPI, We had only to wink when we wanted a drink
 For Bill kept a large supply.

 He plied his trade, till a plot was laid,
 By a traitor and a spy.
 Poor Bill they slayed in the raid they made.
49. Temple, *The Bugle's Echo* 4, 2954.
50. "Itinerary For Western Trip," found in the Jean Glassett folder, secretary to Julian Burruss, RG 2/8 folder 102.
51. W. A. Brumfield to Julian Burruss, November 10, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 78.
52. T. A. Storey to Julian A. Burruss, November 29, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 58.
53. Ultimately, the Smoot bill did not pass Congress.
54. "General Report 1919–1920", *Reports of the President*, 1920, 142–145.
55. As an example, see letter to Mr. W.M. Priddy from Julian Burruss, August 4, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 256.
56. Julian Burruss to T. A. Storey, January 19, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 58.
57. Burruss to Storey, February 11, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 58.
58. J. W. Watson to President Julian Burruss, August 3, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 160.
59. *The Bugle 1921*, 49.
60. The only senior who was a member of the *Bugle* staff with the initials E.L.A. was Ernest Lynwood Andrews Jr.
61. "The Hornet," in *The Bugle 1921*, 2.
62. "The Ballad of 'Growley' Shultz," "The Hornet," in *The Bugle 1921*, 3.
63. "Senior Class: Ernest Hampton Hornbarger," *The Bugle 1921*, 66.

64. "The Hornet," in *The Bugle* 1921, 16.
65. There are numerous references to women as desired objects of affection, and every class, club, and team includes the picture of a female "sponsor."
66. W. M. Priddy to Mr. Julian Burruss, Pres., July 8, 1921, RG2/8, folder 256.
67. Julian Burruss to Mr. W. M. Priddy, August 4, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 256.
68. *Impact*, a publication of the Virginia Tech Office of University Development (Blacksburg, Va.: Office of University Relations for University Development, 2012), 18–19.
69. Mrs. F. C. Beverley, Principal, to Pres. Julian Burruss, February 27, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 172; Dole P. Mason '20 to Dr. J. A. Burruss, January 24, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 165.
70. Edith Clark Cowles to Dr. Julian A. Burruss, February 17, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 180.
71. Ella Agnew to My Dear Mr. Burruss, April 6, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 169.
72. "Ella Graham Agnew (1871–1958)," vtpp.ext.vt.edu/about/ella-graham-agnew-1871-1958.
73. (Mrs.) M. M. Davis to Mr. J. A. Burruss, President, October 22, 1920, RG 2/8 folder 188.
74. Julian Burruss to Mrs. M. M. Davis, January 17, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 188.
75. Mrs. M. M. Davis to President Julian A. Burruss, January 11, 1921, RG 2/8 folder 188.
76. (Mrs.) M. M. Davis to Mr. Julian A. Burruss, President, January 25, 1921.
77. "General Report for the Year 1921–1922," *Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute: Reports of the President* (Blacksburg, Va.: Bulletin of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1922), 164.
78. Cox, *Generations of Women Leaders at Virginia Tech*, 7–9.
