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November 2, 1982

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Dr. John D. Wilson  
President  
Washington & Lee University  
Lexington, Virginia 24450



Dear Dr. Wilson:

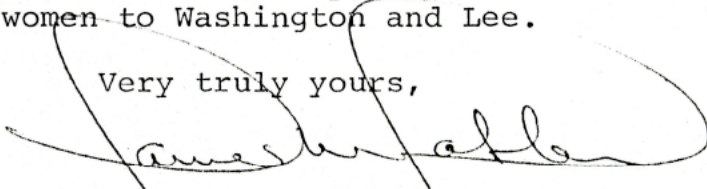
As a graduate of the Class of 1953 (College) and of the Class of 1955 (Law), I send you my hardest congratulations on your election as President of Washington and Lee.

Since we have never met (I certainly hope to meet you soon) it is perhaps presumptuous of me to ask a favor of you, but my request is not just for me but for your daughter, Sara, and my daughter, Morgan, and all the other bright young women in this world. My request is that when you next meet with the Board of Trustees, ask them why Washington and Lee discriminates against the admission of women to Washington and Lee. Ask them why your daughter, Sara, is not eligible for admission to Washington and Lee. Ask them why their daughters, granddaughters and nieces are not eligible for admission to Washington and Lee.

Fortunately, our daughters, if qualified, can attend Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Michigan State, West Point, Annapolis and every other college and university in the United States except for Washington and Lee, V.M.I. and, I am told, only three other colleges.

By now, you have probably heard a great deal about the character of Robert E. Lee. By all accounts, he was intelligent, compassionate and endowed with a mind that was willing to adjust to changing situations. Ask the Washington and Lee Board whether they think that General Lee, if alive today, would discriminate against the admission of women to Washington and Lee.

Very truly yours,

  
James M. Gabler

JMG:bl



## VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 - 0075

OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY PROVOST (703) 961-6122

December 30, 1982

Mr. James M. Gabler  
 Smith, Somerville & Case  
 Attorneys at Law

████████████████████  
 Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Mr. Gabler:

You mustn't think that your very thoughtful letter has gone unattended these past several weeks. I received many letters and notes from alumni across the country and most of these were easily acknowledged. But the difficult ones, the ones that went beyond congratulations to invite thought on significant issues, I put to one side until I could find some time to think about the issues raised in more than a perfunctory way. The litany of your proposed questions to the Board made me put your letter in the 'difficult' file and now, over the holiday and on the eve of my move to Lexington, I take it up again.

You fully anticipate, I'm sure, my unwillingness to speak clearly on the issue of co-education at Washington and Lee before I've had a chance to live and work in the community for awhile. There are things about the experience of the University that cannot merely be read about or talked about. One must try to get a feel for these things, the valuable ones and the less useful ones, too. And this is not likely to come fully to me until I am in office and meet more people and sense something of the rhythm of the place. But I will say these preliminary things at this stage, as much to clarify my own perceptions as for any other reason.

- 1) I admire the earlier decisions of the Board of Trustees mainly on the ground that co-education conversions were being shabbily rationalized all over the land in the early seventies (on the specious grounds of 'naturalism' or because of ill-thought-through notions about the psychology of learning). To have declared that the University had not done badly by its students over the past two centuries was very much worth doing. I also admire a Board willing to risk running against the tide...and it was most certainly a tide!
- 2) That having been said, I must also say that the assumption that co-education was a fad and would be one day written off as a temporary aberration, no longer looks very good. The demise of the single-sex college for men is now a given. VMI and the Citadel are special cases. Wabash, Hampden-Sydney, and Washington and Lee may be, but I do not now know that, i.e. I don't know how each is special and whether they are alike or different in being special. I intend to do what I can to find this out. But when my Oxford College (est. 1314) began admitting women in the late seventies, it became clear to me that something very important had happened in the Western World.



- 3) The college for men did not arise from any special theory of pedagogy. It assumed its character from the dominant shape and mores of the society. It was, as we know, a society that did not universally believe in the importance of educating women. Why should it have been otherwise? Women did not vote (i.e. were not truly citizens) and did not enter the learned professions. When the women's colleges came along in the nineteenth century, most of them rationalized their foundations on the ground that educated men needed equally well educated wives as helpmates. Citizenship and the professions came later still. Today our society, and all western societies, see the matter very differently. This does not negate the value of the very good and very interesting institutions that arose under the old dispensation. But it does impose upon them the burden of rationalizing their single-sex character when the social props have been kicked out from under them.
- 4) It is probably true to say that Washington and Lee is only half-hearted in its devotion to its single-sex character. I discover no militancy on the question. The most thoughtful simply say that the advocates of change of this sort should carry the burden of predicting how the change will make the University better. This is a good and hard position, for it uncovers the truth about change: in fact, we cannot accurately predict the future, though we can make good guesses. My sense is that you would reply that the issue has a moral overtone and that it won't do to ask only whether the change would make the institution better in its academic program but whether it would make the institution better in the moral sense as well. And you may well have a point, though it is probably a ponderous one.
- 5) Washington and Lee's lack of militancy on the question can be discovered in the number of women currently enrolled, full-time, in the University. I refer not only to the Law School where there are many female candidates for the University's degree, but also to the undergraduate programs where many special students are enrolled for periods as long as a full academic year. They are denied candidacy for the baccalaureate degree, the only explicit discouragement to their presence I can point to. Their presence in the University's classrooms and on the playing fields, however, makes more difficult the defense of the practice of denying them candidacy for the baccalaureate degree. Or so it seems to me at the moment.
- 6) The practical questions associated with co-education are not trivial ones and warrant careful thought. I do not believe a decision to admit women would necessarily involve enlarging the size of the University. But it most certainly would entail residence hall space and athletic accommodations and additions or changes in staff (in the Dean of Students' Office, in the Infirmary, in the coaching staff, etc., etc.) These are not impediments, mind you, but necessities that would require planning and explicit funding.

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There are, I am sure, dozens of things I've not thought of or have chosen not to mention. I do believe the Washington and Lee community is currently willing and able to take up a significant question of this sort without chasing false rabbits (e.g.

Mr. James M. Gabler  
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will women graduates support the annual fund?) and without all the posturing that occurred elsewhere back in the seventies. It can do so because it has the confidence that comes from centuries of successful service and because the place is healthy and under no current pressure from admissions or OCR to 'do something.' I'm also pretty confident that the alumni loyalty is so deeply grounded that one would not have to worry about widespread alienation. These are the qualities that attracted me in the first place and I look forward, more than I can say, to my move, in January, to Lee House.

Perhaps we can meet sometime fairly soon to discuss these matters further. It would be nice if Morgan and Sara could meet at the same time!

Most sincerely,

John D. Wilson  
Provost

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