**Reflections on Co-Education**  
_by Meaghan Morgan '17_

I write this as I sit on the Sunken Garden during my final weeks as a William & Mary student. Resting on the hub of Old Campus, my mind drifts to the spaces around me, as I feel a familiar mix of wonder and nostalgia. I reminisce on my time here, as well as think of the memories those created on this campus many years before me. As a result of my role as Alumnae Initiatives Intern and research about women on this campus, I see the campus through three different lenses: as a woman student, as a soon-to-be alumna, and as someone who, 100 years ago, would not have had the opportunity to be here. I think about the diverse student body that surrounds me, and how that did not exist in 1918. It was not until 1933 when Hatsuye Yamasaki, the first Asian-American woman student, was admitted, or until 1967 when, Lynn Briley, Karen Ely, and Janet Brown, the first three residential African American students were admitted. The institution existed for hundreds of years before those other than upper-class white men were allowed to enroll.

The purpose of this blog is for me to discuss a timeline of moments from my research about the history of women at this campus, and reflect on those moments as a woman student. These are some, but by no means all, of the events that I believe have impacted my experience.

**September 19, 1918: The First Day**  
This date was known to the men of William & Mary as “Black Thursday”. Both the state and William & Mary were resisting to make any men’s universities co-educational. As more men went to fight in World War I, however, William & Mary needed to maintain enrollment, and therefore became the first Virginia public school to become co-educational. While this was a progressive, albeit reluctant, step, only white women with the financial means to attend could become William & Mary educated, as the cost of room and board for men was only $18, but the same room and board for women was $35. Additionally, women could only major in one of two things: physical education and home economics. Pioneering women, such as Martha Barksdale, made the most of these limiting opportunities, and used her role as a woman student to become more involved in physical education programs at William & Mary and continued to advance women’s athletics.

As a student 100 years later, I am very grateful that my educational opportunities are no longer limited to Physical Education or Home Economics, as I probably would not have excelled in either regard. Unlike the 24 women who stepped foot on this campus in 1918, I had no restrictions on what I could pursue as my major. Men at William & Mary in 1918 did not warmly welcome women. On my freshman convocation, however, I walked through the doors of the Wren building in the pouring rain, and looked out to see a mass of William & Mary students cheering and welcoming all students to the Class of 2017 on our first day.
May 30, 1921: Sorority Life Established
The birth of Fraternity life was at William & Mary in 1776 with the creation of Phi Beta Kappa. It was a social community for men of the college at the time, but has since evolved into a prestigious honors fraternity with many chapters around the country. Sorority life came about differently at William & Mary. Before Chi Omega was the first national sorority established on campus in 1921, women of the College formed several local sororities. Sororities became an opportunity for women to create a social sphere outside of one run by men. It gave these women a forum to discuss their life on campus and pursue leadership.

Now, as a Sorority woman at William & Mary, I am happy to have been part of an organization that has given me a sisterhood of strong and empowering women. Now, Sorority Life is governed by an appointed council, which I served on my junior year. In the early years of sorority life, women did not have the opportunity for such leadership, as these councils did not exist. Additionally, our community has grown tremendously. We have 15 fraternities overseen by the Interfraternity Council, 10 sororities overseen by the National Panhellenic Council, six historically African American fraternities and sororities overseen by the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and, as of recently, we have added a fourth governing council, the Multicultural Greek Council, governing Delta Phi Omega Sorority, Inc. and Hermandad de Sigma Iota Alpha, Inc. All of these councils are student-run, allowing the members of these organizations self-governance and the chance to shape their fraternity and sorority experience.

October 25, 1970: Student Assembly Dorm-In Occurs
Since their arrival at William & Mary, women had far more rules to abide by than men. Women had dorm mothers, curfews, and needed permission from deans for things we do every day, such as riding in cars or attending a dance. The most abrupt change in these rules wasn’t until late 1970s, when the Student Assembly sponsored a dorm-in, where women students hung out in men’s dorms past their designated curfew as a means of protesting. The administration was not supportive of this endeavor, and some students got suspended for participating in this protest. These protests were effective, however, in presenting a conversation about these rules for women, and prompted what were then separate men and women’s honor councils to meet together for the first time.

Now, as a current woman student at William & Mary, I am not restricted by rules that only applied to me because of my gender. The rules have been replaced with a process of self-determination; during freshman orientation, you sit down with your resident assistant and create the rules for your hall. There is no more monitoring or forbidding of when women students come and go. In addition, all dorm buildings at William & Mary are now co-ed, and we have introduced gender-neutral housing for both upperclassmen and freshman. This is a necessary step to ensure that students are comfortable in their living environment at William & Mary.

In closing, William & Mary has come a long way since women first stepped on this campus in 1918, but we have by no means achieved perfection. The commemoration of 50 years of African American residential students and 100 years of women is a wonderful way to highlight the progress we have made as an institution, but we must
use what we learn from our past to keep moving forward. As a soon-to-be alumna, I hope to remain involved, and continue to support efforts to make William & Mary a better place for all students.