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Dartmouth tradition admired by 'those who love it'

by Benjamin B. Bolger



"Sir, you may destroy this little institution; it is weak; it is in your hands! I know it is one of the lesser lights on the literary horizon of this country. You may put it out. But if you do so, you must carry through with your work! You must extinguish, one after the other, all those great lights of which for more than a century have thrown their radiance over the land. It is, Sir, as I have said, a small college. And yet, there are those who love it."

Daniel Webster's closing remarks on February 2, 1819 in Woodward v. Dartmouth helped secure important legal precedent: that private institutions and contracts were inviolable by government. More specifically, the Supreme Court's ruling also resolved the fate of a place called Dartmouth.

Becoming Dartmouth

Without Webster's compelling words that helped win the case,



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Baker Library



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Dartmouth Hall

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students reading this article would now be attending a public, state run institution called Dartmouth University.

Happily, Webster's old house and the institution's traditional name, Dartmouth College, endure today. Webster's house is located adjacent to North Hall; Dartmouth College has international recognition as a place of superior scholastic excellence.

Dartmouth's original roots extend back to the Congregationalist minister Eleazar Wheelock. Wheelock established Dartmouth "for the education and instruction of Youth of the Indian Tribes in this Land in reading, writing, and all parts of Learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing and Christianizing Children of Pagans as well as in all liberal arts sciences and also of English Youth and any others."

Eleazar Wheelock expressed a life long career interest in bringing Christianity to Native Americans. His work began with the 1754 founding of Moor's Indian Charity School in Lebanon, Connecticut. Wheelock moved northward after an invitation from the New Hampshire Governor John Wentworth, which included an offer of land next to the Connecticut River for his school. Unsuccessful in the state of Connecticut, lacking a charter and facing declining enrollment, Wheelock seized upon the governor's generosity.

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New Trustee chairman reflects on his time at Dartmouth

Dartmouth tradition admired by 'those who love it'

On December 13, 1769, England's King George III signed a royal charter for the College. The King's support is owed to Wentworth's faith in the College.

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So it came to pass that the College, older than the foundation of the United States, grew from a humble log cabin to one of eight members of the Ivy League. Dartmouth is the ninth oldest college in America, and harbinger of the oldest college newspaper in North America. The Dartmouth, founded in 1799; now celebrates 200 years of editorial freedom and independent free speech.

Dartmouth's first undergraduate class graduated in 1771, with four students; today more than 4,000 students study in the town of Hanover. Apparently, the first Commencement ceremony included some pandemonium, with rounds of rum and roasted ox.

The College on the Hill

The fine rugged conditions of New Hampshire have long influenced the College and its students. The College's official color and the somewhat intangible mascot, the Big Green, come from the surrounding evergreen environment.

Until 1820, each class had the duty of uprooting one of the many tree stumps that adorned the Green. The Green, open to all residents of the Hanover community, has long been a centerpiece of the Dartmouth geography with many of the College's important buildings sprouting up around its periphery.

Dartmouth Hall, the building represented in the College's seal, has long adorned the edge of the Green. It has also played host for a number of pranks. For example, students who disliked the townspeople's cows grazing on the Green, once hid the four legged creatures in the basement of the hall. In another instance, student drove the cows across the river.

After various incidences involving students and cows, a fence was raised around the Green to restrict the cow's access. Except for seniors, students were restrained from sitting on the fence and it soon became known as Senior Fence. Freshman that ignored the norm were severely reprimanded. While most of the fence was disassembled in 1893, a portion can still be seen in front of the Collis Center.

After only four months at Dartmouth, John Ledyard embarked upon a trip among the Iroquois. In winter, he would set up camp by borrowing into the snow for warmth. In 1773, Ledyard departed Hanover by sail on the Connecticut River.

Ledyard's spirit of adventure has characterized many a student's love for outdoor enterprise and exploration. Both the local bridge that connects New Hampshire to

Vermont and the Hanover boat house bare his name.

A College and a University

While Dartmouth has proudly retained the strength of a strong liberal arts undergraduate education, the College has grown to include the might of a transcontinental research university. Dartmouth's oldest graduate school is the Medical School, founded by Dr. Nathan Smith in 1797.

Sylvanus Thayer, Class of 1807, provided funds for the 1871 creation of the Thayer School of Engineering. In 1851, the Chandler School of Science was integrated into the College. An agricultural school, that no longer thrives, was planted in 1868. Edward Tuck, Class of 1862, helped create the acclaimed Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, the oldest business school anywhere.

The Presence of the Presidents

Appointed in 1826, Nathan Lord was the Dartmouth President who believed that the Bible supported slavery. When U.S. President Abraham Lincoln was slated for an honorary degree, the Dartmouth President obstructed matters. Finally, in 1863, Lord resigned.

Another Dartmouth president, Samuel Concord Bartlett believed strongly in Bible centered study and used his theological convictions to undermine the Chandler Scientific School and end the Agricultural School at Dartmouth. In the end, the Agricultural School was transplanted to Durham, New Hampshire where it created the fertile ground for the development of the University of New Hampshire.

Dartmouth's ninth president, William Jewett Tucker used his background as a preacher for different ends than his forebearers who helmed the pilot seat of the College. He ended the College's mandatory chapel policy, asserting it not to be the place of the College to convert students. Instead, he provided the Dartmouth community with inspirational speeches that encouraged personal spiritual development.

Tucker expanded the curriculum beyond the classics and entrusted students with greater academic self-determination. Before Tucker, students were required to take the same classes in the same sequence. In similar ways to how he built up the conceptual community, Tucker expanded the physical surroundings.

Thirteen dormitories were either built or remodeled, along with a number of science buildings and Webster Hall. The addition of a heating plant meant that students would no longer need to tend their wood stoves.

Ernest Martin Hopkins, Class of 1901, Dartmouth's 11th president beginning in 1916, rivaled Tucker for popularity. The Baker Library, a classic hallmark of the College and a defining building setup on the Green, was built under Hopkins watch. John Sloan

Dickey, Class of 1929, took over as President in 1945 and established the Great Issues Course that brought renowned speakers to Hanover as part of an interdisciplinary course for seniors. Today, the Master of Liberal Studies (MALS) programs continues the fine tradition of interdisciplinary study at the College.

In 1970, Dickey was succeeded by the mathematician John Kemeny, who helped create the important BASIC computer program language and worked to fortify the mathematics department.

In 1972, Dartmouth was the last of the Ivy League to go coeducational. The change came about after long and controversial debate. The transformation helped give rise to the creation of the Dartmouth Plan, which turned the College into a year-round quarter system. The D-plan assisted in preventing a reduction in male enrollment when women finally came into the Dartmouth scene. The Class of 1999 was the first class to enroll more women than men.

During James Freedman's 11 years at the head of Dartmouth, there was a renewed interest in intellectualism on campus. His call for "creative loners" in his inaugural speech, effectively captured many qualities of his presidency.

The new leadership of President James Wright will undoubtedly witness many important debates in the Dartmouth community as the College readies itself to meet the challenges and demands of delivering a good 21st century undergraduate education.

Fraternalities, that at first more resembled secret societies than anything else, emerged in the 1840s. The early organizations first centered around weekly debates on history and literature. In 1849, the Trustees voted to abolish fraternalities. However, the prohibition on fraternalities was ignored. Today, fraternalities and sororities have a visible presence in the Dartmouth community.

The Road Ahead

Dartmouth's great ethos has endured history's test of time. Sanborn's four p.m. tea is one of the many traditions that still survive today. Students gather there, and in many other places on campus, to breathe in Dartmouth's rich saga and reflect on a diverse heritage. Like many of the 20th century's leading figures, from Robert Frost to Nelson Rockefeller, Dartmouth alumni will surely influence the future's agenda.

While many great issues remain in the province of debate, it is clear that Dartmouth's qualities of excellence will continue to adapt to the rigors of an uncertain globalizing culture. However, one thing is rarely debated in Hanover: Webster's famous closing line. "It is, Sir, as I have said, a small college. And yet, there are those who love it." On that issue, there is complete unity.

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