THE COLONIAL COLLEGES

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It is a pleasure for me to participate in the annual Winter Court of The Society of Colonial Wars in The State of Ohio, for it provides me an opportunity to talk to you tonight about a subject which is close to my heart, "The Colonial Colleges," for I am an alumnus of three of them.

Just before the outbreak of the American Revolution, England's colonies in America were supporting no fewer than nine colleges, all nine reflecting to a greater or lesser degree the universities of the homeland, notably Oxford and Cambridge. These nine were the vanguard of the host of colleges and universities we have in America today, now nearly 2,800 in number!

The nine colonial colleges -Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth -reflected the certain conviction of Englishmen throughout time that, like four o'clock tea, cultural influences of the mother country must be perpetuated wherever they and their countrymen were to be found.

Certainly foremost among the cultural influences inherited from the mother country was the religious impulse. The medieval union of education and religion was not dis- solved when the colonies were founded. To the clergy of the thirteen colonies, more than to any other group, was assigned the task of preserving and encouraging learning in the wilderness of the New World. Most colonists subscribed to the belief that an educated ministry was necessary if the scriptures were to be fully understood by men who must be competent to read the original records in Hebrew and Greek. Addition- ally, they felt it necessary that the clergy master the mysteries of nature that the ways of God might be made known to man. As a consequence, with but one exception, all of the colonial colleges were founded primarily to provide an educated and informed clergy.

HARVARD 1636

According to an early history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, *New England's First Fruits,* "After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided nessaries for our lievelihood, reaered convenient places for God's worship and settled the Civil Government, one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity, dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches when our present ministers shall lie in the dust."

In 1636, the general court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony voted 400 to establish a school or college in the likeness of Cambridge, the English university where some seventy of the leading men of the Colony had been educated; the

township (Newtown) where the college was to be founded was thus renamed Cambridge in 1638. That same year, a young thirty-one-year-old Puritan minister, John Harvard, on his deathbed in Charlestown, Massachusetts, left to the new college half his estate, nearly £800, as well as his library of 260 books. The college was then named Harvard in his honor in 1639.

The new school almost did not survive its beginning. Its first professor, Nathaniel Eaton, was dismissed in disgrace when it developed that his predilection for flogging extended not only to his scholars but to his assistant as well, making him, as one observed, "fitter to have been master of a house of correction than an instructor of Christian youth." For nearly a year after this false start, Harvard had neither faculty nor students. Fortunately, in 1640 Henry Dunster, a recently arrived Cambridge graduate, was named president and the college began to function properly. Its first class was graduated in 1642.

Dedicated both to "the advancement of all good literature, arts, and sciences" and "the education of the English and Indian youth in knowledge and godliness," Harvard accepted a number of Indians as students, but the record reveals that only one received a bachelor's degree, one Caleb Cheeshahteammuck. Nonetheless, one of the first two campus buildings, constructed in 1654, was called the "Indian College." A third building, constructed in 1720, was called Massachusetts Hall and is still in use as a dormitory.

WILLIAM AND MARY 1693

Although the idea of a college under Church of England auspices had been under discussion in Virginia since the earliest days of that colony, and a subscription had actually been taken as early as 1619 to establish one until an Indian attack had removed most of the subscribers from the scene, it was not until 1693 that James Blair obtained a charter for an institution to be named William and Mary in honor of the reigning monarchs of that day. Blair brought back to Virginia not only a charter but also an order for £2,000 and plans drawn by the celebrated architect, Christopher Wren, for a fine academic building in the Renaissance style. To support the venture, both the British and Virginia governments assigned modest tax revenues to the school. Though in its initial years it was more an academy than a college, by 1729 there were six professors giving a variety of courses to some forty students, most of them of collegiate grade.

William and Mary achieved a high point of influence during the generation preceding the American Revolution. Advantageously located at the end of the Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg, the colonial capital of Virginia, the college was the focal point of a highly cultured community. A significant number of its graduates became prominent Anglican ministers, lawyers (it had the colonies' first law school), and plantation aristocrats, including such great Virginians as Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and John Marshall.

The original building of William and Mary, the Wren Building constructed in 1695, still stands in Williamsburg as America's oldest remaining college building.

YALE 1701

Yale was chartered in 1701 partly as a protest against the growing religious liberalism of Harvard, partly to meet the demands of the wealthy citizens of Connecticut for a college of their own. Supported by ten prominent Congregational ministers of the Colony, it soon became the stronghold of orthodox Calvinism.

Though classes were held initially at Killingsworth, Connecticut, from 1702 to 1707, they were conducted thereafter in several other nearby towns by local tutors until 1717, when consolidation was effected in a move to New Haven, the principal settlement of the colony of Connecticut.

In 1718, Elihu Yale, a Bostonian then living in London who had once been governor of Ft. St. George, Madras, India, donated personal books and goods worth 562.12s to the school, as a consequence of which the trustees voted to name it for him.

Connecticut Hall, built in 1756, is still in use as the oldest of Yale's present buildings.

PENNSYLVANIA 1740

A non-denominational meeting house and "charity school" was chartered in 1740 in Philadelphia, with a board of trustees which included Benjamin Franklin. In 1749, Franklin published a celebrated pamphlet entitled "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," which led directly to the designation of the "charity school" as "the Public Academy in the City of Philadelphia," with Franklin as president of the board of trustees.

The academy opened in January, 1751, after the city had appropriated £200 for completion of its building.

In 1755, the charter was changed to permit the instruction of college students as well. Two years later, the first college class was graduated.

In 1791, the name was changed to the University of Pennsylvania.

PRINCETON 1746

The College of New Jersey was founded by "New School" Presbyterians in 1746. It was housed initially in the home of its first president, Jonathan Dickinson, in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. After Dickinson's death, it moved to Newark, where its second president, Aaron Burr, was serving as a minister. In 1752, it became permanently established at Princeton and eventually (1896) became known by that name.

More evangelical than either Harvard or Yale, it drew students from all parts of the colonies.

Work was begun in 1754 on the first building, Nassau Hall, which became the largest academic building in the colonies and which still stands; it was named in honor of William of Nassau, William III of England.

COLUMBIA 1754

This institution was founded as King's College in New York City in 1754. Though founded by Anglicans, the charter granted by King George in 1754 made possible the service of ministers of no less than five different denominations as governors ex officio.

During the revolution, the college suspended operations. After the war, it resumed under the name of Columbia, inasmuch as it would never do to perpetuate the name of the King.

BROWN 1764

This institution was founded in 1764 in the town of Warren, Rhode Island, as "Rhode Island College" by a group of Baptists of Philadelphia, who wished to establish a college where no student would be excluded on religious grounds. The colony of Rhode Island, founded by Baptist Roger Williams a century earlier, seemed to them the best site for such a college. In 1769, the first class of seven students was graduated. A year later, the college moved to Providence and the cornerstone of its principal building, University Hall, was laid. Closed from 1776 until 1783 because of the Revolutionary War, Rhode Island College was subsequently renamed Brown University in 1804 in honor of Nicholas Brown, a leading citizen of Providence, who had contributed significant sums to its early development.

RUTGERS 1766

If the Baptists could establish a college in Rhode Island, the Anglicans colleges in Virginia and New York, and the Congregationalists colleges in Massachusetts and Connecticut, then the Dutch Reformed could see no reason why they could not have a college in New Jersey. Thus, Queen's College at New Brunswick came into being in 1766.

DARTMOUTH 1769

The ninth and last of the colonial colleges was founded in 1769, when Dartmouth College was chartered as yet another Congregational Church venture.

Named after the Earl of Dartmouth, who had served as president of the board of trustees of a fund of £10,000 raised in England and Scotland for the education of Indians, the college evolved from an Indian charity school founded by one Eleazar Wheelock in 1750 at Lebanon, Connecticut. After it was moved to Hanover, New Hampshire, and there endowed as a collegiate-level school,

ostensibly still for Indians, its mission was soon diverted to the education of colonists' sons. Its original building -- Dartmouth Hall -- was twice destroyed by fire and rebuilt.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

A Harvard record dating from 1643 set forth the admission requirements of that institution quite succinctly: "When any scholar is able to understand Tully or such like classical Latin authors extempore and make and speak true Latin in verse and prose...and decline perfectly the paradigms of nouns and verbs in the Greek tongue, let him then, and not before, be capable of admission into the college."

(N.B. As recently as 1940, when the writer applied to Harvard and Yale for admission, he had to present competency in Latin -- three years of it -- evidence of the stubborn endurance of this particular requirement.}

STUDENT BODY

All were male. Most were quite young -- boys were often admitted between 11and 14 years of age.

Because of their youth, discipline was a real problem in the colonial colleges and was necessarily handled at a more juvenile level than would be the case today.

DISCIPLINE

As far as the colonists were concerned, the nurture of intellect required the strictest of discipline, which at Harvard until 1718 meant the flogging of wrongdoers. Flogging was displaced in that year by the more genteel practice of "boxing," in which an erring student was made to kneel at the feet of his tutor, who then proceeded to cuff him sharply on the ears. This custom happily was finally suspended at Harvard in 1755 and omitted from the college laws altogether in 1767.

FACULTY

Since only Pennsylvania was non-denominational, most of the faculty were drawn from the clergy for the colonial colleges.

Typically, faculty were paid in produce plus a monetary pittance.

CURRICULUM

The course of instruction in the colonial colleges did not differ basically from that of the medieval universities. Although subjects such as arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy were included in the curriculum, the chief emphasis was placed upon the classics, including Hebrew. At Harvard, a degree requirement was

the ability to translate both the Old and New Testaments from the original Hebrew into Latin, and to "resolve them logically."

At Harvard as well as elsewhere, all instruction was in Latin. Indeed, most textbooks were written in Latin. All lectures were delivered in Latin.

The subjects in the curriculum included:

1. Greek and Hebrew grammar
2. Rhetoric
3. Logic
4. Divinity
5. Aristotelian physics

Despite this predominance of the classical tradition, the environment of the New World inevitably strengthened the practical, secular, utilitarian influence in thought at the expense of the spiritual. Concern with the physical aspects of survival in a new world was imperative. Moreover, the strange aspects of life in America intensified the curiosity of men about the natural world. It was inevitable that a school would be established which would depart at least to a degree from the traditional. Ben Franklin was its mentor, Philadelphia its locale.

Only the Philadelphia Academy (Pennsylvania) paid any marked attention to English and the sciences, including social sciences, because of Franklin's insistence. Franklin argued that any man who wanted to prepare for other than the ministry should know science, history, literature, geography, and political economy. His was a voice in the wilderness. All the other colleges with rare exception followed the classical tradition until the Revolution.

LIBRARIES

Most of the colonial colleges had small libraries of a few thousand volumes, most of these written in Latin. Books as well as money were included in the college endowments, for many of the earliest settlers brought their libraries with them.

By 1750, colonial book dealers were advertising in the public press; the first public library was in Philadelphia in 173i.

TYPICAL DAY IN THE LIFE OF A COLONIAL COLLEGE

5:00 a.m.	all students arise
5:00 8:00 a.m.	study hours
7:00 8:00 a.m.	first recitation
8:00 9:00 a.m.	breakfast
9:00 a.m.	prayer
After prayer until 12:00 noon	second recitation
12:00 noon 1:00 p.m.	lunch

1:00 2:00 p.m.	recreation
2:00 5:00 p.m.	study hours
5:00 6:00 p.m.	dinner
6:00 8:00 p.m.	study hours
8:00 9:00 p.m.	prayer
9:00 p.m.	lights out -- to bed

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It has been estimated that, as of 1775, probably no more than one out of every one thousand colonists had been to college, aggregating at that time a total of perhaps 3,000 living graduates of all nine American colleges in all thirteen colonies! Yet, the colleges were significant far beyond the small numbers of their students as molders of thought and educators of men, men who would provide political, religious, and social leadership.

It would be the legacy of the American Revolution to expand the outreach and with it the influence of the American colleges through liberalization of the curriculum and a broadening of educational opportunity. But that is a subject for another time and another day.

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