

# AMERICA

Great Crises In Our History  
Told by Its Makers

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## THE FOUNDING OF HARVARD COLLEGE

*THIS is the oldest printed account of Harvard University still in existence. It is evidently an anonymous letter, dated from Boston, September 26, 1642, and entitled "New England's First Fruits in Respect to the Progress of Learning in the College at Cambridge, in Massachusetts Bay."*

*It was published in London in 1643, a year after the graduation of Harvard's first class of nine members. The letter gives a graphic account of conditions in and around the future university, and shows the optimism with which the Puritans regarded the future "amid the stumps of their clearing in the wilderness."*

*Until recently the ancestry and early life of John Harvard was lost in obscurity. We now know that he was born in Southwark, London, in November, 1607. He was ordained as a dissenting clergyman at 30 years of age, and crossed the Atlantic to become minister in Charlestown, Mass., where he died a year later.*

Mr. Harvard (a godly gentleman and a lover of learning, there living among us) to give the one half of his estate (it being in all about 1700 pounds) towards the erecting of a college, and all his library: after him another gave 300 pounds, others after them cast

**A**FTER God had carried us safe to New England, and we had built our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared 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. And as we were thinking and consulting how to effect this great work, it pleased God to stir up the heart of one

in more, and the public hand of the State added the rest: the college was, by common consent, appointed to be at Cambridge, a place very pleasant and accommodating and is called (according to the name of the first founder) Harvard College.

The edifice is very fair and comely within and without, having in it a spacious hall; (where they daily meet at commons, lectures, exercises) and a large library with some books to it, the gifts of diverse of our friends, their chambers and studies also fitted for, and possessed by the students, and all other rooms of office necessary and convenient, with all needful offices thereto belonging: And by the side of the college a fair Grammar School, for the training up of young scholars, and fitting of them for academical learning, that still as they are judged ripe, they may be received into the college of this school. Master Corlet is the master, who has very well approved himself for his abilities, dexterity and painfulness in teaching and education of the youth under him.

Over the college is master Dunser placed, as President, a learned conscionable and industrious man, who has so trained up his pupils in the tongues and arts, and so seasoned them with the principles of divinity and Christianity that we have to our great comfort, (and in truth) beyond our hopes, beheld their progress in learning and godliness also; the former of these has appeared in their public declamations in Latin and Greek, and disputations logical and philosophical, which they have been wonted (besides their

ordinary exercises in the college-hall) in the audience of the magistrates, ministers and other scholars, for the probation of their growth in learning, upon set days, constantly once every month to make and uphold: The latter has been manifested in sundry of them by the savory breathings of their spirits in their godly conversation. Insomuch that we are confident, if these early blossoms may be cherished and warmed with the influence of the friends of learning, and lovers of this pious work, they will by the help of God, come to happy maturity in a short time.

Over the college are twelve overseers chosen by the general court, six of them are of the magistrates, the other six of the ministers, who are to promote the best good of it, and (having a power of influence into all persons in it) are to see that every one be diligent and proficient in his proper place.

Rules, and precepts that are observed in the college.

1. When any scholar is able to understand Tully, or such like classical Latin author 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.

2. Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, John 17. 3. and therefore to lay

Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.

And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek it of him Prov. 2, 3.

3. Every one shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day, that he shall be ready to give such an account of his proficiency therein, both in theoretical observations of the language, and logic, and in practical and spiritual truths, as his tutor shall require, according to his ability; seeing the entrance of the word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple, Psalm. 119. 130.

4. That they eschewing all profanation of God's name, attributes, word, ordinance, and times of worship, do study with good conscience, carefully to retain God, and the love of his truth in their minds else let them know, that (notwithstanding their learning) God may give them up to strong delusions, and in the end to a reprobate mind, 2 Thes. 2. 11, 12. Rom. 1. 28.

5. That they studiously redeem the time; observe the general hours appointed for all the students, and the special hours for their own classes: and then diligently attend the lectures without any disturbance by word or gesture. And if in any thing they doubt, they shall inquire as of their fellows, so, (in case of non satisfaction) modestly of their tutors.

6. None shall under any pretense whatsoever, frequent the company and society of such men as lead

an unfit, and desolate life. Nor shall any without his tutor's leave, or (in his absence) the call of parents or guardians, go abroad to other towns.

7. Every scholar shall be present in his tutor's chamber at the seventh hour in the morning, immediately after the sound of the bell, at his opening the Scripture and prayer, so also at the fifth hour at night, and then give account of his own private reading, as aforesaid in particular the third, and constantly attend lectures in the hall at the hours appointed. But if any (without necessary impediment) shall absent himself from prayer or lectures, he shall be liable to admonition, if he offend above once a week.

8. If any scholar shall be found to transgress any of the laws of God, or the school, after twice admonition, he shall be liable, if not adultus, to correction, if adultus, his name shall be given up to the overseers of the college, that he may be admonished at the public monthly act. . . .

The manner of the late commencement, expressed in a letter sent over from the Governor, and diverse of the ministers, their own words these:

The students of the first class that have been these four years trained up in university learning (for their ripening in the knowledge of the tongues and arts) and are approved for their manners as they have kept their public acts in former years, ourselves being present, at them; so have they lately kept two solemn acts

for their commencement, when the Governor, magistrates, and the ministers from all parts, with all sorts of scholars, and others in great numbers were present, and did hear their exercises; which were Latin and Greek orations, and declamations and Hebrew analysis grammatical, logical and rhetorical of the Psalms: And their answers and disputations in logical, ethical, physical and metaphysical questions; and so were found worthy of the first degree, (commonly called bachelor) *pro more academiarum in Anglia*: Being first presented by the President to the magistrates and ministers, and by him, upon their approbation, solemnly admitted unto the same degree, and a book of arts delivered into each of their hands, and power given them to read lectures in the hall upon any of the arts, when they shall be thereunto called, and a liberty of studying in the library.

All things in the college are at present, like to proceed even as we can with, may it but please the Lord to go on with his blessing in Christ, and stir up the hearts of his faithful, and able servants in our own native country, and here, (as he has graciously begun) to advance this honorable and most hopeful work. The beginnings whereof and progress hitherto (generally) do fill our hearts with comfort, and raise them up to much more expectation, of the Lord's goodness for hereafter, for the good of posterity, and the churches of Christ Jesus.