

A FOUNDERS DAY MESSAGE TO THE HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE COMMUNITY

November 10, 2020

To the Hampden-Sydney College Community:

Two hundred forty-five years ago today, Hampden-Sydney opened its doors and began offering instruction to its students. Less than eight months prior, at St. John's Church in Richmond and in the company of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, Patrick Henry helped to convince the Second Virginia Convention to deliver Virginian troops for the Revolutionary War with his famous words, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" A few weeks later, the American Revolution ignites in bloodshed at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. George Washington is soon named commander of the Continental Army, King George issues a Proclamation of Rebellion against the American colonies, the Continental Congress establishes the Continental Navy and the Continental Marines (who share our founding day), and Hampden-Sydney College begins forming good men and good citizens who will be equipped to lead an emerging nation.

By 1775, American patriots, increasingly frustrated by British tyranny, had formed Hampden-Sydney societies named for two martyrs, John Hampden (1595-1643) and Algernon Sidney (1623-1683), who had been members of the British Parliament and who had fought and died for their beliefs in representative government and limits on the monarchy's power. The College's founders, who included Patrick Henry and James Madison, were seeking an educational alternative to the royalist College of William and Mary, and their naming of our College had great significance.

Preoccupied with virtue and the role of education in instilling virtue in young men, the country's and our College's founders understood that rule by a monarch required only that citizens be followers, while, as the writer Andrea Wulf notes, a republic requires much more of its citizens: "self-control, moral integrity and industry." So it isn't surprising that Benjamin Franklin wrote: "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom," or that John Adams urged his son, John Quincy, to "ever remember that the End of study is to make you a good Man and a useful Citizen."

This is our legacy. This perspective on our mission underscores why our College remains so committed to the simultaneous development of intellect and character. We want students to acquire the wisdom of the ages, the ideals of the Enlightenment, and the knowledge and insights that have been developed since, but we also know that good men and good citizens have the essential responsibilities of ensuring that knowledge is used to advance our society, to improve the lives of others, and to help us live freely and more fully into our College's and our nation's ideals.

As we reflect on our Founders Day anniversary and as we are rushing toward the Thanksgiving holiday, even in the midst of a pandemic we have much to be thankful for. We have the love and support of family and friends. We have just exercised the most important privilege and responsibility of living in a republic: the right to participate in choosing those who will govern us. And, we are especially grateful for our College—for those who have established and stewarded it, for the mentoring of its dedicated faculty and staff, for the traditions that are rooted in virtue and civility, for the brotherhood that unites our students and alumni, and for an important and timeless mission that guides us in all that we do.