

History of Hampden-Sydney College

Hampden-Sydney began as the southernmost representative of the "Log College" form of higher education established by the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in America, whose academic ideal was the University of Edinburgh, seat of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The first president, at the suggestion of Dr. John Witherspoon, the Scottish president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), chose the name Hampden-Sydney to symbolize devotion to the principles of representative government and full civil and religious freedom which John Hampden (1594-1643) and Algernon Sydney (1622-1683) had outspokenly supported, and for which they had given their lives, in England's two great constitutional crises of the previous century. They were widely invoked as hero-martyrs by American colonial patriots, and their names immediately associated the College with the cause of independence championed by James Madison, Patrick Henry, and other less well-known but equally vigorous patriots who composed the College's first Board of Trustees. Indeed, the original students eagerly committed themselves to the revolutionary effort, organized a militia-company, drilled regularly, and went off to the defenses of Williamsburg, and of Petersburg, in 1777 and 1778 respectively. Their uniform of hunting-shirts - dyed purple with the juice of pokeberries - and grey trousers justifies the College's traditional colors, garnet and grey.

The College, first proposed in 1771, was formally organized in February 1775, when the Presbytery of Hanover, meeting at Nathaniel Venable's Slate Hill plantation (about two miles south of the present campus), accepted a gift of one hundred acres for the College, elected Trustees (most of whom were Episcopalian), and named as Rector (later President) the Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith, valedictorian of the Princeton class of 1769, who had been actively promoting the idea of establishing a college in the heavily Scotch-Irish area of south-central Virginia since he began his ministry there in 1774. Within only ten months, Smith secured an adequate subscription of funds and an enrollment of 110 students. Intending to model the new college after his own alma mater, he journeyed to Princeton to secure the founding faculty, which included his younger brother, John Blair Smith. On that 1775 trip he also visited Philadelphia to enlist support and to purchase a library and scientific apparatus. Students and faculty gathered for the opening of the first winter term on 10 November 1775. The College has never suspended operations.

Early fund-raising efforts were varied (they included a state-sanctioned lottery) and vigorous; despite war-time inflation and other economic dislocations, financial support of and general interest in the College were sufficient guarantees of its viability that in 1783 the General Assembly granted by statute a charter of incorporation, partly written by Patrick Henry.

In its first fifty years the College prospered and gained the respect of the public and of the educational world. As early as the 1790s its influence was being felt elsewhere, as alumni and former presidents and faculty members began founding or organizing other institutions, including Union College, New York (1795), by ex-President J.B. Smith; Princeton Seminary (1812), by ex-President Archibald Alexander and the University of Virginia (1819), by Joseph Carrington Cabell, class of 1800. The Medical College of Virginia was established (1838) at Richmond as the medical department of Hampden-Sydney; Union Theological Seminary in

Virginia (1822) was founded at Hampden-Sydney and occupied the south end of the present campus for some seventy-five years before its relocation in Richmond.

The College matured physically and academically through the first half of the nineteenth century, enjoying the services of some remarkably gifted leaders. Jonathan P. Cushing, a Dartmouth man and the first layman and first non-Presbyterian to be president, oversaw during his fourteen-year tenure (1821-1835) the abandonment of the College's original buildings in favor of the handsome Federal architecture which still distinguishes the campus; his greatest physical monument, Cushing Hall, which once housed the entire College operation, has recently undergone renovations. The world-renowned chemist, Dr. John W. Draper, who built the first camera to photograph a living person, was professor at Hampden-Sydney from 1836 to 1839.

Religious controversy, the nation's and Virginia's economic troubles, and the Civil War and its aftermath were for two generations the testing-fires of Hampden-Sydney as a stronghold of academic quality. Fortunately for the College, the longest-tenured of its presidents, the able and dedicated J.M.P. Atkinson, served from before the War through Reconstruction (1857-1883); he performed the remarkable feat of keeping the College solvent, while insistently upholding both disciplinary and academic standards. Once again, at the outset of war the student body organized a company, with the president as captain. These men, officially mustered as Company G, 20th Virginia Regiment, "The Hampden-Sydney Boys," saw action in the disaster of Rich Mountain (July 9-10, 1861), were captured, and were paroled by General George B. McClellan on the condition that they return to their studies.

During the presidencies of Dr. Atkinson and his eminent successor, Dr. Richard McIlwaine, many features of current student life were introduced - social fraternities, sports, and student government, for example; other student activities flourished at their highest level, such as the literary, or debating, societies and musical clubs. In addition, in 1898 the Seminary moved to Richmond and a most generous alumnus, Major R.M. Venable, class of 1857, bought its buildings and gave them to the College, doubling the physical plant. The curriculum was expanded, strengthening the coherent tradition of liberal education which had become the hallmark of the College.

Through the twentieth century, faced with increasing competition for students and with declining general respect for the liberal arts, the College cautiously and deliberately pursued the aim of honoring the demands of its well-defined heritage. Aably led through the Depression and World War II and their aftermath by Presidents Joseph D. Eggleston (1919-1939) and Edgar G. Gammon (1939-1955), the College expanded massively in size, strength, and stature. In the last half of the century new dimensions of commitment to old principles were opened, and all areas of the College's operation saw improvements: for example, under President W. Taylor Reveley II (1963-1977), Hundley Stadium (1963) and a new science building (Gilmer Hall, 1968) were built, the first computer center was established (1970), and Eggleston Library was more than doubled in size; under President Josiah Bunting III (1977-1987), a comprehensive program of refurbishment of campus structures was started, and the Kirby Fieldhouse (1980), the Crawley Forum, and six residence halls were built. Also under President Bunting, the academic program was significantly enriched: in a reassertion of the first President Smith's 1775 promise to pay "a more particular Attention . . . to the Cultivation of the English Language than is usually done in

Places of public Education," the Rhetoric Program was instituted in 1978, with the clear purpose of ensuring that graduates "write clearly, cogently, and grammatically." The Honors Program, which has doubled the number of its participants in the last twenty-five years, has attracted students from across the country. President Samuel V. Wilson (1992-2000), a direct descendant of founding Trustee Nathaniel Venable, oversaw the continued expansion of the faculty, the completion of the renovation and reconstruction program (including all fraternity houses), and the addition of Settle Hall, the first building intended originally and exclusively as a dining hall in the College's history. Under President Wilson Fine Arts became a full department with programs for majors; the Center for Leadership in the Public Interest was established and was named for him upon his retirement; a wide-ranging series of symposia involving prominent authorities on subjects from the Trojan War to the Vietnam War and from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* to the Human Genome Project began to attract considerable attention to and interest in the College's para-curricular intellectual life.

The administration of President Walter M. Bortz III saw the expansion of the campus store and a new fitness center, both completed in 2004; the renovation of Johns Auditorium and the Fuqua Computing Center, completed in 2005; and the construction of the new library and the Lewis C. Everett Football Stadium, both completed in 2007.

President Christopher Howard served from 2010 through 2016, seeing the College through the construction of the Ty Cobb baseball stadium and an expansion and renovation of the Wilson Center for Leadership in the Public Interest. In Dr. Howard's final year, ground was broken on the Brown Student Center. By the end of Dr. Howard's tenure in 2016, enrollment, endowment, and fundraising had returned to or near their pre-recession levels.

Dr. John Lawrence "Larry" Stimpert was inaugurated in April of 2017 after assuming the presidency in July of 2016. The Brown Student Center was completed in the spring of 2017, as was the renovation of Brinkley Hall, featuring the Viar-Christ Center for the Arts.

The academic, social, and cultural life of the College continues to be enriched, and Hampden-Sydney looks ahead with a wholesome optimism, bred of a sober integrity of mission coupled with a history of prudent development, and made possible by an extraordinary succession of leaders and benefactors of rare ability, commitment, and vision.

Through recent capital projects, the College enjoys a modern campus that combines the beauty of its rural setting and the Federal architectural style with up-to-date technology; the result is an ideal living and learning environment for young men in the 21st century.