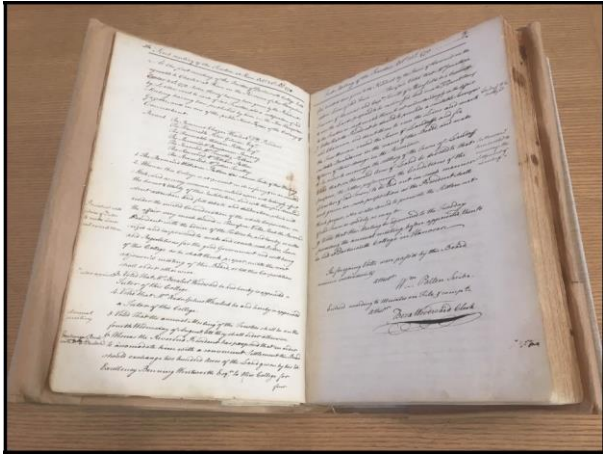


Dartmouth College History Was Created 250 Years Ago at the Wyman Tavern

Rick Swanson '79

Two hundred fifty years ago, on October 22, 1770, the Wyman Tavern played an important role in Dartmouth College's history. The Dartmouth Trustees held their first meeting in the parlor of the Wyman Tavern. Six of the trustees at the meeting in 1770 traveled to Keene from Connecticut and one of the trustees traveled from Exeter. At their first meeting, the trustees authorized the Reverend Eleazar Wheelock to run the college, and they approved a land exchange resulting in a 400 acre donation for the college in Hanover, New Hampshire.



The minutes from the first meeting of the Dartmouth Trustees, October 22, 1770 (Dartmouth College Archives, Rauner Special Collections Library, Hanover, NH).

The minutes from that first meeting are reported to have been written on a table that is now part of the Historical Society's collection. The table was donated to the Historical Society by Dartmouth College and is on display in the parlor of the Wyman Tavern.

The seed money for Dartmouth College came in large part from a group of Englishmen who were interested in supporting the education of Native Americans. The English Trust contributed a sum of £12,000 which today would equate to \$2 million.

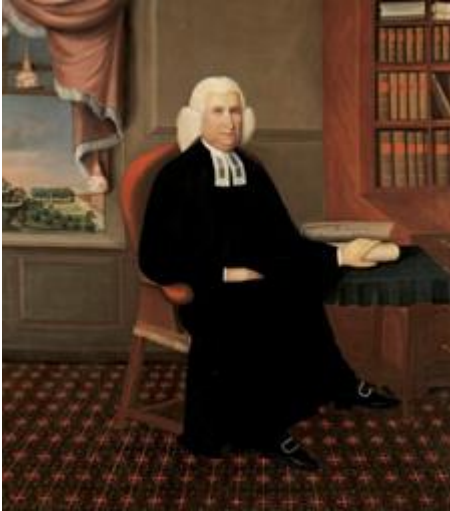
It should be noted that Wheelock's purpose had a great deal to do with the assimilation of Native Americans into European culture and their conversion to Christianity, as well as the education of white missionaries. The Charter of

Dartmouth as drafted by Wheelock stated the purpose as follows: "for the education and instruction of Youth of the Indian Tribes in this Land in reading, writing & all parts of Learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing and Christianizing Children of Pagans as well as in all liberal Arts and Sciences; and also of English Youth and any others."

American culture and society have changed since that time and over the next 250 years, Dartmouth has had a complicated relationship with Native Americans. In 1971, the college's thirteenth president, John G. Kemeny rededicated Dartmouth to the education of Native American youth.

By the fall of 1770, Hanover had been chosen as the site for the college. When the first meeting of the trustees was called, Wheelock's wife was already on her way from Connecticut to Hanover with about thirty students.

But why did Reverend Wheelock choose Keene as the location for the first meeting? Jere R. Daniell, Professor Emeritus of History at Dartmouth, has suggested that the Keene location was one of several shrewd maneuvers by Wheelock to set up the college in a way that suited his purposes.



Portrait of the Reverend Eleazar Wheelock
(1711-1779)

First, several of the original trustees were Connecticut clergymen from the same Congregationalist sect as Reverend Wheelock – an evangelical movement called New Light. The English funders were Anglicans, and Wheelock wanted to load the board with as many New Light members as he could.

Second, Wheelock persuaded John Wentworth, the governor of New Hampshire, to establish the charter of the college in New Hampshire. Wentworth was eager to have the college located in New Hampshire because it would bring economic development and a civilizing influence to the remote western region of the province. The English Trust was led to believe that the charter would allow for good management of its finances without giving the Trust legal responsibility for the school. A charter in America meant that the English funders would not have control over the decision making.

As a concession to Governor Wentworth, Reverend Wheelock agreed that several of the trustees would be from New Hampshire. The board was to include the Governor and several leading Portsmouth citizens. To this day, the Governor of New Hampshire has a seat on the Dartmouth College board of trustees.

On October 11, 1770, a notice appeared in the *Hartford Courant* announcing that a meeting of the Dartmouth Trustees would be held at the house of Isaac Wyman, inn holder in Keene, on October 22. In the notice, Eleazar Wheelock acknowledged that an advertisement for the meeting had been sent to the *New Hampshire Gazette* in Portsmouth, but it had “miscarried.”



Table on which the charter for Dartmouth College
was signed.

The first meeting of the board had been called on very short notice in such a way that it was much easier for the trustees from Connecticut to get there than it was for the trustees from Portsmouth. When the first meeting was convened at the Wyman Tavern, there were six trustees from Connecticut in attendance and there was one trustee from New Hampshire in attendance.

Nonetheless, it was enough to make up a quorum, and the business of the Dartmouth Trustees that October day at the Wyman Tavern turned out favorably for Reverend Wheelock.