

The Foundations of Phillips Academy, Andover

by William (Bill) Morehouse, Class of 1962 – September 1, 2019

Prologue

When I heard about our class plans for a 57th Reunion in Saratoga Springs this summer, I had a deep sense of encouragement that this would be a good time for my wife Susan and I to attend and participate. It was within hours of our home and a good time to gather with classmates after a time out in nature in our favorite Adirondack Mountains nearby. I'm 76 years old now, retired for the past year, and reflecting on the meaning of life and its end. As part of my reflections, I decided last fall to open a website devoted to articulating a Biblical worldview with the Kingdom of God as its theme. That work, now in advanced progress, is posted online at <http://hiskingdom.us>. Visitors are welcome.

This summer I was in the midst of developing pages in *His Kingdom and Us* having to do with world history and was just wrapping up a page on the Renaissance and Reformation period from 1500-1650 AD as our Reunion approached. Looking forward to the next time period coming up on my posting schedule, the time of Revival and Enlightenment from 1650-1800 AD, I decided to revisit my time at Andover and examine more closely its effects on the course of my life in the context of the principles our school was founded upon. What follows are some of my observations for your thoughtful consideration.

Pilgrims and Puritans

Standing at the juncture of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were some of Europe's most committed reformers, men and women of vital faith who challenged the orthodoxy of the established liturgical churches of their day with freshly rediscovered truths from both Old and New Testament writers. The Renaissance had looked back to rediscover truths that may have been lost from civilization's human glories in Greece prior to the time of Christ, while the Enlightenment sought to discover new truths in science and reason. In the midst of this, the reformers straddled the influences of their age by seeking to have the eternal truths in Scriptures, which had been long sequestered in Latin and doctrine by the Church, illuminated by inspiration and reason.



Henry VIII

During the height of the early Reformation in England, the Church had been wrested from Rome's control in 1534 by Henry VIII for rather specious and self-serving reasons. The result was the Church of England, now known as the Anglican Church or the Episcopal Church in America after 1776. However, little reformation other than changes in authority structure from Pope to King had taken place. When the spiritually lively teachings of Luther, Calvin, Knox, and other reformers began revealing the treasures of Heaven available through faith (trust) in the finished work of the Savior rather than through the Sacraments of the Church alone, a revival¹ of saving faith came to England, and many earnestly converted men and women sought to see their national Church come alive with the newly discovered truths of genuine faith. Unfortunately, their earnestness was often met with persecution.

There were two manifestations of the Reformation, those who thought the established Church could be reformed and those who deemed it to be irretrievably apostate. Both were persecuted. The latter group included the Pilgrims who began colonizing northern America when they landed in Plymouth harbor in 1620. The former were the Puritans ² who followed the Pilgrims to the New World in waves during the following decades, establishing communities of dedicated Christian believers throughout what became known as New England. During the same time period colonies of brave Englishmen seeking a new life were developed in Jamestown and the area surrounding what is now Virginia, sponsored by the King and carrying the institution of the Church of England to the New World. Sadly, the institution of slavery was carried along with colonization, both north and south.

As the years went by, the Reformed Protestant communities in New England spread out and enlarged the tents of their faith through the Second Great Awakening ⁷ to include variations on their original convictions. By the time Phillips Academy was founded in 1778, the colonies were prospering and in the midst of separating from the authority structures of the Old World. The Phillips family had, for generations, been a continuously committed part of the solid Puritan foundation that had established Massachusetts and the northern colonies. There was a deep concern that the living, born-again Christian faith which had sustained their colonies could be undermined and lost during the press for independence unless the continued favor of God could be secured in the generations to come.



Samuel Phillips, Jr.

From their very inception by founders Samuel Phillips ³ and his Uncle John Phillips 240 years ago, Phillips Academy Andover ⁴ and Exeter ⁶ were designed to be institutions that instilled and strengthened a life-long foundational faith in the lives of their students. An examination of the lives of the founders and the documents they produced to establish their academies, along with a review of the history of the two institutions and their current status, will reveal that over the years both schools have drifted significantly from the initial missions stated by their founders. This brief paper will focus on Andover's founding, history, and drift with questions at the end about the meaning of it all.

Excerpts from the Constitution of Phillips Academy ⁵ – 1778

*A SHORT reflection upon the grand design of the great **PARENT OF THE UNIVERSE** in the creation of mankind, and the improvements, of which the mind is capable, both in knowledge and virtue as well, as upon the prevalence of ignorance and vice, disorder and wickedness, and upon the direct tendency and certain issue of such a course of things, must occasion, in a thoughtful mind, an earnest solicitude to find the source of these evils and their remedy; and a small acquaintance with the qualities of young minds,—how susceptible and tenacious they are of impressions, evidences that **YOUTH** is the important period, on the improvement or neglect of which depend the most important consequences to individuals themselves and the community.*

*A serious consideration of the premises and an observation of the growing neglect of youth, have excited in us a painful anxiety for the event, and determined us to make, in the following Conveyance, a humble dedication to our **HEAVENLY BENEFactor** of the ability, wherewith he hath blessed us, to lay the foundation of a public free **SCHOOL** or **ACADEMY** for the purpose of instructing **YOUTH**, not only in English and Latin Grammar, Writing, Arithmetic, and those Sciences, wherein*

*they are commonly taught; but more especially to learn them the **GREAT END AND REAL BUSINESS OF LIVING.***

*Earnestly wishing that this Institution may grow and flourish; that the advantages of it may be extensive and lasting; that its usefulness may be so manifest, as to lead the way to other establishments on the same principles; and that it may finally prove an eminent means of advancing the Interest of the great **REDEEMER**, to His patronage and blessing we humbly commit it...*

*No person shall be chosen, as a principal Instructor, unless a professor of the **CHRISTIAN RELIGION**, of exemplary manners, of good natural abilities and literary acquirements, of a good acquaintance with human nature, of a natural aptitude for instruction and government; and, in the appointment of any Instructor, regard shall be had to qualifications only, without preference of kindred or friend, place of birth, education, or residence...*

It shall be ever considered, as the first and principal duty of the Master, to regulate the tempers, to enlarge the minds, and form the Morals of the Youth, committed to his care.

*There shall be taught in this Seminary the English, Latin, and Greek Languages, Writing, Arithmetic, Music, and the Art of Speaking; also practical Geometry, Logic, and any other of the liberal Arts and Sciences, or Languages, as opportunity and ability may hereafter admit, and as the **TRUSTEES** shall direct...*

But, above all, it is expected, that the Master's attention to the disposition of the Minds and Morals of the Youth, under his charge, will exceed every other care; well considering that, though goodness without knowledge (as it respects others) is weak and feeble; yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous; and that both united form the noblest character, and lay the surest foundation of usefulness to mankind...

*And, whereas many of the Students in this Seminary may be devoted to the sacred work of the gospel ministry; that the true and fundamental principles of the Christian Religion may be cultivated, established, and perpetuated in the Christian Church, so far, as this Institution may have influence; it shall be the duty of the Master, as the age and capacities of the Scholars will admit, not only to instruct and establish them in the truth of Christianity; but also early and diligently to inculcate upon them the great and important scripture doctrines of the existence of One true **GOD**, the **FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST**; of the fall of man, the depravity of human nature; the necessity of an atonement, and of our being renewed in the spirit of our minds; the doctrines of repentance toward God and of faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and of justification by the free grace of God, through the redemption, that is in Jesus Christ, (in opposition to the erroneous and dangerous doctrine of justification by our own merit, or a dependence on self-righteousness,) together with the other important doctrines and duties of our **HOLY CHRISTIAN RELIGION.***

And, whereas the most wholesome precepts, without frequent repetition, may prove ineffectual ; it is farther required of the Master, that he not only urge and reurge; but continue from day to day, to impress these instructions.

And let him ever remember that the design of this Institution can never be answered, without his persevering, incessant attention to this duty...

*And, in order to prevent the smallest perversion of the true intent of this Foundation, it is again declared, that the first and principal object of this Institution is the promotion of true **PIETY** and **VIRTUE**; the second, instruction in the English, Latin, and Greek Languages, together with Writing, Arithmetic, Music, and the Art of Speaking; the third, practical Geometry, Logic, and Geography; and the fourth, such other of the liberal Arts and Sciences or Languages, as opportunity and ability may hereafter admit, and as the **TRUSTEES** shall direct. And these Regulations shall be read by the President, at the annual meetings of the **TRUSTEES**.*

History of Phillips Academy since its founding

Phillips Academy clearly maintained the Christian convictions outlined by its founder into the 19th century when other institutions were wavering. In particular, in spite of the strong contemporary cultural influences active in the Second Great Awakening ⁷ Harvard College, which had been founded on similar evangelical reformation principles, had essentially drifted by the turn of the 19th century into Unitarianism, an interpretation of religious faith deeply influenced and watered down by the more generalized deist Enlightenment perceptions favored by some of the founders of the American Revolution, most notably Thomas Jefferson. The seminary on campus at Harvard was profoundly alarmed by this drift and chose to move to a separate location rather than stay in disunity with the Unitarian leadership that had become established. They located a kindred home at Phillips Academy and moved their entire program onto the Andover campus in 1807 where it became the Andover Theological Seminary⁸ and remained in harmony and unity into the early 20th century.

From 1873 to 1901 Phillips Academy's Principal (Headmaster) was Dr. Cecil Bancroft, a sturdy advocate for orthodox Christian faith who had graduated from Dartmouth in 1860, served as a principal at a school in New Hampshire, taken classes at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City during the 1864-65 academic year, graduated from Andover Theological Seminary in 1867, and then served as principal of another school in Tennessee until 1872. When he assumed leadership of Andover in 1873 the school was in decline, but under his leadership it turned around and grew over the next two decades through its centennial celebration in 1878 from a faculty of 8 and student body of 237 to a faculty of 22 with over 400 students. Toward the end of Dr. Bancroft's term as Principal he developed health issues that led to his death in office in 1901. It was during this time that he met and mentored the man who would become his successor, Alfred E. Stearns.

Professor Stearns was an 1890 graduate of PA who had followed up as an honors student at Amherst with a BA in 1894, taught for three years, and then entered the Andover Theological Seminary where he graduated in 1900. While back on campus at Andover at the Seminary, Stearns became a trustworthy assistant to Dr. Bancroft, becoming very familiar with all of the affairs of the school. After Bancroft's death in the fall of 1901, Stearns was appointed, even though he was only 30 years old at the time, to the new position of Vice Principal where he functioned as an interim Principal while a search was underway for Bancroft's permanent replacement. He performed so well and won the confidence of his academic peers and students so thoroughly that the search culminated in his appointment as the school's 9th Principal in 1903, a place of responsibility that he fulfilled for three decades with



Alfred E. Stearns ⁹

admiration, enthusiasm, esteem, and honor. During Stearns' tenure the school grew remarkably, oversaw the move of the Andover Theological Seminary ⁸ back to the Boston area where it had been one century before, and reintegrated Christian education into the daily life and teachings of Phillips Academy.

The following quote from a peer at the academy about Alfred Stearns while he was serving as the vice principal at Andover in 1902 summarizes the qualifications his contemporaries felt that he had to assume leadership of the school:

“His own personal force of character, after all, constitutes the best equipment of Mr. Stearns. While he has as yet made no special mark as a scholar, he has the scholarly instinct and judgment, and has already shown his ability to master present and solve the new problems which the challenging conditions of preparatory school work are bringing to the front... As a moral force, and a friend and guide of boys, and as a sincere and devoted Christian, Mr. Stearns is a rare man. He combines a firm hand, a warm heart, sincerity, tact, and finality of moral decision in an unusual degree. The more he rules, the better his students like to have him rule. He has a personal magnetism that wins and holds. The older men feel that, and the boys yield to it. It is a power born of truth to himself, and thus to his own experiences and convictions.”

Along these same lines, here is one student's later recollection of his Headmaster: ¹⁰

“Stearns' particular gift was his capacity for moral leadership, which was aided by a commanding presence and one of the most beautiful speaking voices I have ever heard, deep and resonant as a perfectly tuned bell. He worked closely with the wise treasurer, James Sawyer, whose simplicity of manner charmed and disarmed even the most tight-fisted prospective donor. Al Stearns seemed to personify the school. He was then at the height of his powers, and when he preached at vespers even the mavericks among us felt the radiance of that personality. Perhaps most of us looked at him too uncritically, but it is well for a school to have its headmaster for a hero.

“The early going, as I say, was rough and formative. One Sunday, Al Stearns bounded down from the chapel pulpit and grabbed my arm in a grip of steel. He'd been watching my work throughout the services. "Spit out that gum!" he shouted, his eyes flashing. It was something like Jehovah intervening in a dime-limit stud game.

“Al Stearns came into our lives at 7:45, and he mattered, too. From Al Stearns in daily chapel I learned to respect and fear authority, and to accept my elders' simple and emphatic ethical discriminations of black from white, wrong from right, the "vile" from the "manly." This, it developed, was a useful enough guide for running one's life so long as the Word came thundering down every morning at 7:45, but it was of decreasing use later on, when one was out of range and beyond recollection of Al Stearns's piercing eye and prophetic presence.“

I don't know how much of a youth empowerment model Stearns followed or how liberal or strict his theology was, but the tombstone erected over his grave less than 3 generations ago has only one content-based inscription on it:



“THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET
AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH”

Mission Drift



Claude Fuess

When Stearns retired from his post as Headmaster in 1933, his successor was Dr. Claude Fuess, a man who had been an English teacher at Andover since 1908 and had written a history of the school in 1917.¹¹ After being tapped to follow Dr. Stearns as Andover's 10th Headmaster, Dr. Fuess held the position until 1948. The current Andover website summarizes his contributions in these terms: "Under the administration of Claude M. Fuess... the faculty was greatly enlarged and strengthened, the curriculum was revised, a number of buildings were added, and (in 1942) the Andover Summer Session began. In World War II, Andover men served in each of the services, and 143 gave their lives. During much of the war, Henry L. Stimson served as president of the Trustees as well as Secretary of War."

The following quote from Gordon Hall's account¹³ gives an idea of what happened with Samuel Phillips' foundational understandings under the leadership of Claude Fuess: "There is another similarity [in the Constitutions of the two Phillips Academies] worth mentioning, which was made famous by Claude Fuess, Andover's popular headmaster in the mid-twentieth century. Sam [Phillips], hoping some of his pupils would enter the ministry, and very concerned about sinful conduct, added this guidance to the Andover Constitution: '*...to inculcate upon them the great and important scripture doctrines of the existence of One true GOD, the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST; of the fall of man, the depravity of human nature ; the necessity of an atonement, and of our being renewed in the spirit of our minds.*' On this paragraph, Fuess wryly remarked that although he doubted that any of his faculty believed in the 'depravity of human nature' or the 'necessity of atonement,' they were all, nevertheless, excellent teachers."

According to Wikipedia "In 1957 he spoke at the 150th anniversary celebration of the Andover Newton Theological School, formerly known as the Andover Theological Seminary before moving to a campus in Newton in the early twentieth century. Phillips Academy and the Seminary had shared a long history together in Andover.

In his speech titled 'Escape from the Dead Hand', Fuess believed in a bright future for the school, in part because it had moved on from its rigid past. He declared that 'Andover Seminary is no longer the Citadel of Orthodoxy but the Home of Protestant Freedom,' concluding "the cherished orthodoxies of one age are rightly rejected by the next."

Dr. Fuess was apparently as unimpressed by the truths of "the Citadel of Orthodoxy" as he was impressed, along with the rest of mid-century America, with the military ideals of male character expressed through the example of Henry Stimson, his Board of Trustees president during and following World War II. He affirmed the selection of a professional soldier, Dr. John M. Kemper, as Andover's 11th Headmaster and his successor in 1948. Kemper was a disciplined but rather stern man who served throughout our stay as students in the 1960s until his untimely death of cancer at age 59 in 1971.



John M. Kemper¹⁴

I arrived at Andover in 1960 as an active youth group leader in my home church and sought out a church where I could serve while at school. I found one in walking distance down School Street past Abbot Academy. It was South Church, whose founding pastor in 1711 was, I discover now, the Rev. Samuel Phillips, father of John Phillips founder of Exeter, and grandfather of Samuel Phillips, Jr. founder of Andover. There was no evidence of a connection between the church and its theology then that would have suggested a relationship between either Samuel Phillips, Jr. or the school he founded.

I remember going to required interdenominational Cochran Chapel services and being bored nearly to tears by the vapid messages we were subjected to. In retrospect, I would have been far more edified by our Founder and probably all of his successors through Albert Stearns. And I would probably have been patriotically engaged by Claude Fuess during Depression and WWII times, but I honestly can't say that I received any spiritual enlightenment while I was at Andover, either from faculty or chapel staff. By that time, Andover's mission had drifted ¹⁵ far from its appointed destination.

Is Andover's original mission relevant to today's world? I believe the school has drifted far further than it had when it stepped off the track during Claude Fuess' tenure in leadership. No longer adherent to or even interested in Christian faith, Andover seems increasingly wedded to secular political views – which are being interpreted as moral guidelines and imperatives – that are more characteristic of today's "woke" secular progressive left than anything rooted in any ground of Biblical or eternal morality. Is this what Andover was designed and established to be? What would Samuel Phillips, Cecil Bancroft, Albert Stearns, and all those who went before them say today as we pick and choose and decide for ourselves which of their words we would like to keep and how to reinterpret them in language that is pleasing to us in today's politically correct climate?

To rephrase my query in the words of one of Claude Fuess' contemporaries, Dr. Karl Menninger, "Whatever Became of Sin?"

Questions for Further Discussion

"It is not enough for me to ask the question; I want to know how to answer the one question that seems to encompass everything I face: What am I here for?" – Abraham Joshua-Heschel

1. What is "*the grand design of the great **PARENT OF THE UNIVERSE** in the creation of mankind*" spoken of in the Andover Constitution?
2. Similarly, what are "*the improvements, of which the mind is capable, both in knowledge and virtue as well, as upon the prevalence of ignorance and vice, disorder and wickedness*"?
3. Where can we go "*to find the source of these evils and their remedy*"?
4. Who can be found in today's world who possesses "*a small acquaintance with the qualities of young minds,—how susceptible and tenacious they are of impressions*"?
5. Can we agree with Samuel and John Phillips that there are "*evidences that **YOUTH** is the important period, on the improvement or neglect of which depend the most important consequences to individuals themselves and the community*"?
6. Who is "*our **HEAVENLY BENEFACTOR***"? Has this entity changed since 1778?

7. When Samuel and John Phillips set out “*to lay the foundation of a public free **SCHOOL** or **ACADEMY** for the purpose of instructing **YOUTH**, not only in English and Latin Grammar, Writing, Arithmetic, and those Sciences, wherein they are commonly taught; but more especially to learn them the **GREAT END AND REAL BUSINESS OF LIVING**” what did they indicate was their primary purpose?*
8. The Founders expressed four earnest wishes for their new school when they humbly committed it “*to His patronage and blessing*” at the end of the prologue, as follows:
 - a. “*that this Institution may grow and flourish;*
 - b. “*that the advantages of it may be extensive and lasting;*
 - c. “*that its usefulness may be so manifest, as to lead the way to other establishments on the same principles;*
 - d. “*and that it may finally prove an eminent means of advancing the Interest of the great **REDEEMER**...*”

Which of these have come to pass?

9. Who is this “*great **REDEEMER***” to whom Samuel and John Phillips committed their school? Has “*the great **REDEEMER***” changed since 1778 or has Phillips Academy changed. If so, when?
10. What did you learn about the “**GREAT END AND REAL BUSINESS OF LIVING**” while you were at Andover? Having been involved in the “*real business of living*” for the first seven generations of your life, what are your views about life’s “*great end*” as it approaches? Have you ever thought of Pascal’s Wager and wondered how to touch into the humble reality behind it?
11. What is salvation? How would you go about making a concise presentation of the **gospel** message in simple terms and describing in a classical “conversion narrative” how it applies to your life?
12. What did the Puritans believe? What were the founding values that established the United States as the predominant power in the world that it is today? ¹⁶ Did they have anything to do with the **principles and realities** that Samuel and John Phillips laid out when they wrote the Constitution of Phillips Academy? If current moral, political, and social trends continue, what will our national condition become? If a Fourth Great Awakening were to visit America, how would we relate to it? What can we learn from our past? Should these concerns be part of Andover’s search for its new Headmaster?

Postscript

I know that what I’ve written and the questions I’ve just asked may be challenging to some of you, but I hope and trust you can recognize my earnestness in reaching out at this time in our lives. It’s sobering for young people like us to read words like these from Psalm 90: “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.” I think we all want to finish strong. Please contact me with any comments, constructive thoughts, or questions you might have. I genuinely welcome dialogue of any kind, even confrontational, at this time in my life.

Your classmate,
Bill

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