

Final Dinner

January 17, 1981

MAJOR GENERAL RICHARD E. McLAUGHLIN

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Your Honor, Mayor Duehay; Reverend Clergy;
Madam Chairlady Roosevelt; 350th Committee; Distinguished Guests
and Friends, all, of our beloved Cambridge

Woodrow Wilson once observed that "Where all think alike, nobody thinks very much." Surely, the good President must have heartily approved of our Cambridge where, from Day One, few Cantabrigians have ever agreed about anything. When Governor Winthrop designated the New Town as Seat of Government he encountered heated dissent from his Assistants or Councillors. Then when the town had been settled, Winthrop changed his mind again, dismantled his Cambridge house (Jerry-built to begin with) in the dark of night and moved it back to Charlestown and plotted unceasingly to establish Charlestown, later Watertown and finally Boston as the Colonial capital. Deputy Governor Dudley never forgave him for this.

The New Town was tossed the consolation prize of the newly voted College shortly thereafter to be named "Harvard" in honor of its first great benefactor, the reverend John Harvard of Charlestown who bequeathed his library and half of his estate to the infant College. This bequest, interestingly enough, was an oral deathbed will disposing of a very substantial estate. The record tells not of witnesses - if any - and one speculates how the Harvard Law Faculty of today would view this extraordinary procedure - particularly where the then first Master of the College happened to be John Harvard's closest friend, Nathaniel Eaton.

Was John Harvard, on his deathbed, truly soundly disposed of mind and memory? Did Mrs. John Harvard warmly applaud this princely largesse from the family assets? Alas, the archives are sepulchurally silent on these points, as well. This is an unusual void for the Cambridge of that era when all were in constant disagreement and maintaining the most prolix detailed diaries, journals and correspondence in support of their own particular contentions. Indeed, perusing these hundreds of pages of manuscript and considering 30 hours per week listening to the preaching of the Revs. Cotton and Mather, it is something of a miracle that any shelter got built - or crops planted and cultivated or fish caught.

The answer is, of course, that the aristocracy had the leisure for these pursuits whilst the servants, indentured and otherwise, did all the dirty work. The early Colony was no democracy. Governor Winthrop said he found no mention of democratic government in the Scriptures and said, "Among most civil nations democracy was accounted the meanest and worst of all forms of government." His was the view of the Lord of the Manor: "In any population the best part is always the least and of the better part the wiser part is always the lesser." So much for democracy in the Cambridge of 1630.

Getting back to John Harvard's friend, Nathaniel Eaton, first Master of Harvard, he nearly destroyed the fledgling institution, brutalizing and starving his scholars, nearly killed his Assistant and finally fled the Colony taking with him a substantial part of the John Harvard legacy, leaving 1,000 pounds of debts and returning to England for a career of swindling and embezzlement, finally dying in Debtors' Prison. Subsequently, all but one of John Harvard's book bequest of 400 volumes was destroyed by fire. Fires were endemic in those days because of the colonists' abiding affection for thatched rooves and wooden chimneys. They seemingly had no "Do It Yourself" Manuals or "Popular Mechanics" - or common sense, either.

I dwell on these seminal days of Cambridge and Harvard because, in truth, all which later developed and transpired here came from those very beginnings. Harvard - and Cambridge because of Harvard College - became the preeminent center of learning and erudition in all of British America. Without Harvard, we might have become a Bridgeport or a Portsmouth or, heaven forfend, a New Haven. More than a generation would pass before there was any printing press outside of Cambridge; more than a half century would elapse before the second College was founded in Virginia. Harvard and Cambridge attained a lead and a momentum which, to this day, has not been overtaken. You might occasionally hear some whining dissent to this opinion from lesser places to the South or West of us - but you should ignore this. The jackals bark - but the Caravan moves on!

The early Puritan Ministers of Cambridge must be accorded much credit for the almost explosively swift settlement of New England's outermost reaches. So zealous were these Divines with hours of preaching every day of the week, so closely did they scrutinize every detail of personal life in the Colony to insure that no trace of gaiety or laughter survived, so rigidly did they enforce class distinctions that no one dared to have more windows in his dwellings or more chimneys or too many candles or more buttons in his coat or lace on her costume than that social level assigned them by the Ministers would entitle them under pain of fine, the lash, the stocks or jail.....small wonder that hundreds of the settlers voted with their feet and relocated in northernmost, westernmost and southernmost New England. The wilds might contain savage Indians, wild animals and unknown dangers but, Thank God, the wilderness contained none of the seven Puritan Ministers. To the fleeing free spirits, this truly constituted Paradise Enow.

And, over all these generations, the Cambridge tradition of controversy and dissent has lived on relentlessly. The row as to whether New Town should be called "Cambridge" or "Oxford" raged for nearly 5 years.

Governor Stoughton, successor to Governor Winthrop, said of Winthrop, "He has lost much of the applause he was accustomed to (for, indeed, he was highly magnified) and I heard some say they cast blank votes because they would admonish him." There were bitter recriminations as to location and the cost of the Town palisade, the windmills, the grazing of livestock, the laying out of roads, the location of ferries - and, later, bridges, the size and location of the Meeting House and even where the Town Gallows should be erected. Again, it is remarkable that enough energy remained after these pitched battles to accomplish the tasks which ignited the controversies in the first place. In more recent years we clashed over the 1st Charles River Dam, Plan E Charter, old subway, new subway, the 2nd Charles River Dam, sycamores on Memorial Drive, school districts, the Kennedy Library, zoning laws, South Africa, Vietnam and, to be sure, every war including the American Revolution, Watergate and, of course, the renewed Draft.

Of course, Cambridge and Harvard have always produced eccentric characters who left their mark on us - from the aristocratic Winthrops who bought half of Northeastern Massachusetts from the elderly widowed Indian squaw Sachem at Shawsheen for a few yards of wampum and the promise of a winter coat annually for 21 years. After the second year, Winthrop reneged on the winter coat. Not a bad price for all of southern Essex and eastern Middlesex Counties. Peter Stuyvesant's purchase of Manhattan Island for \$26 was, by comparison, the mad extravagance of a Dutch wastrel. And then, in the late 18th Century, we had Andrew Craigie, Apothecary General of the Continental Army, profiteer, wheeler-dealer and land pirate who looted the choicest real estate of the fleeing Royalist aristocrats including the Vassal, Lechmere and Brattle families. Virtue triumphed in the end and Craigie died in bankruptcy. The 19th Century gave us the cigar smoking poetess, Amy Lowell, Henry Longfellow, James Russell Lowell Louis Aggasiz - well, unless we are to remain all night, I simply must

refrain from listing our notables, quotables and immortals. I must confess to a reluctant admiration, however, for the flamboyant Feminist, Transcendentalist and Activist from Cambridgeport, Margaret Fuller, who cried, "I accept the Universe!"and equally, Thomas Carlyle who responded, "By God, she'd better!"

Harvard President Eliot (of 5 foot shelf fame) back in the 1890s had a flair for trenchant expression and did not shrink from value judgments when he declared that the Irish were proving less assimilable in America than the Chinese. And, in the early '30s of this century, our veteran local Congressman, Robert Luce, proved no slouch as a sociologist, either. When Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt deplored "One Third of our Nation ill fed, ill housed, ill clad", Congressman Luce promptly riposted, "They are that way because God made them unable to earn more." Case closed. And the Puritan tradition of divine interpretation yet lives in our century as manifested by the Cambridge Mayor, replying to criticism as to ineffectual snow removal, a generation ago (Nothing really changes in Cambridge - does it?) replied, "God Almighty sent the snow - and, in His own good time, He will take it away."

Early in this century, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology moved over from Boston to establish itself on the Charles River waterfront and the academic Acropolis stature of Cambridge was raised to a level of peerless supremacy. Once and for all, this small community, barely 100,000 in population and extending over just a few square miles took its place in the front rank of the most vital and vibrant cities on the face of the Earth. Other great cities of the world evolved over thousands of years while Cambridge attained its world position in less than a third of one millenium. Yet, within our small perimeters there dwell and work the academic elite of the world.

Advisors of Presidents, the councillors and shapers of World policy, the most brilliant scholars, scientists and technologists of our contemporary

world. Cambridge has more libraries, laboratories, museums, galleries, clinics, conservatories and observatories than Monterey has surf boards, more Nobel Laureates than Cleveland has bowling trophies or Milwaukee has breweries, more Pulitzer prizewinners than Los Angeles has freeways. Our Countway Medical Library is the World's most profound medical resource. In our day to day perambulations Cantabrigians have brushed shoulders with a Galbraith, a Frankfurter, a Roscoe Pound, a Conant, a Samuelson, a Reichsauer, a Weisner, Alexander Whitney, Samuel Morse, Eldridge Gerry, John F. Kennedy and George Washington - again, I must forbear trying to enumerate our Cambridge immortals.

The World War II aerial Battle of Britain was won beforehand by the brilliant joint electronic radar research of Harvard and MIT in the late '30s when those scientists fought fierce, simulated air warfare over the roof tops of sleeping Cambridge. Our Moon landings and our explorations of outer Space are directed and controlled by the Draper Laboratory scientists in Kendall Square. Truly ours is a small but wondrous place.

Truly, we should have a special sense of gratitude and pride in this place - even as Saint Paul took pride in his own home town, telling us that he was a citizen of Tarsus which, he proudly declared, was "no mean City."

Perhaps the essence of this little City on the Charles was best distilled in the words that the elder Oliver Wendell Holmes penned about a century ago. He wrote:

"Know old Cambridge? Hope you do.
Born there? Don't say! I was, too.
The nicest place that ever was seen,
Colleges red and Common green,
Sidewalks brownish with trees between."

John Winthrop wrote glowingly to his wife that we "are in Paradise here." Well, maybe not quite. St. Paul's words are probably nearer the mark. Cambridge is no Mean City, indeed.

Thank you.



City of Cambridge

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COUNCILLOR D. SULLIVAN

IN CITY COUNCIL
January 19, 1981

ORDERED:

That the speech delivered by General Richard E. McLaughlin at the 350th Anniversary Dinner on Saturday evening, January 17, 1981, at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, be made as part of the record of this City Council; and be it further

ORDERED:

That a copy of this speech be transmitted by the City Clerk to the 350th Committee with a request that it be made a part of the official records of the City's 350th Anniversary Proceedings.

In City Council January 19, 1981.
Adopted by the affirmative vote of 8 members.
Attest:- Paul E. Healy, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul E. Healy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P".

Order # 5

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C. D. Sullivan re: General Richard E.
McLaughlin speech at the 350th Anniversary
Dinner be made part of the record.

In City Council,

January 19, 1981