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A History of a History of Haverford College

*Introduction*

This is probably just as awkward for the reader to read as it is for me to write, since this is more or less an epilogue for a book that I did not write. My research did not end with the writing of an expansive history of the college during its many eras. It did, however, begin before my Freshmen Year at Haverford during the Chesick Scholars Program when I first took a course on the history of the college. A year after my course in the history of Haverford College, I spent over two months searching archives and histories to develop a new course based on the redefining moments of this college. My venture into the history of Haverford College has not been the same as previous historical ventures undertaken by other Haverfordians before me. I do not have the same bond with the college that Rufus Jones had when he wrote his book on the history of the college. I certainly have not made lasting changes to the college’s future like Isaac Sharpless had by the time he wrote The Story of a Small College. Frankly, I will probably never accomplish either of these two things, or any of the many things that others have achieved during the course of this college’s existence. Many who wrote about Haverford already knew where the college had been and what it had gone through to get to where it was at the point when they wrote their histories. Sharpless had already spent three decades as President of the college and Jones had spent the majority of his life on this campus. For them, writing a history of the college seemed to be the way of honoring a long time love affair with Haverford. But while they were looking back at the events that had shaped their admiration of the college, its students, its faculty, its administration, I only have my research to work from. As I said at the start of this, I am essentially writing an epilogue for a history that I did not write, but I did create a course guide, and I did go through over 181 years of the college’s history to do so, so here is my epilogue.

*Thanks*

I would like to start off by naming a few names of the people who have helped me throughout the course of building this course. Professor Krippner, or Jim, for giving me the opportunity to look into the history of the college without being rushed or graded for what I did and did not find. His desire to introduce freshmen to what Haverford originally stood for and what it has come to stand for has been the focal point of my research. The OAR’s writing center staff were a great help to both myself and Jim, since neither of us had ever developed a freshman writing seminar. In particular Barbara Hall not only took the time to meet with me about writing seminar requirements, but also about her time at Bryn Mawr and her view of Haverford. For collecting materials, I have the library staff to thank for putting up with me for the two months I, sometimes literally, ran around the library looking for sources. I especially would like to thank Margaret Schaus for her advice on how to go about developing my course guide and on how to go about finding sources in general. I also need to thank Sarah Horowitz and Ann Upton for their patience and help for the hundreds of items I requested from Special Collections. It is because of their help that I was able to locate and compile the resources that I did. Lastly, I would like to thank President Dan Weiss for agreeing to an interview regarding the commencement speaker incident. Despite the recent and sensitive nature of the incident, he allowed me to record and use the interview for the course, further expanding the historical material of the college present in Special Collections.

*For Researchers*

For the last two months, I have spent most of my days in Magill searching, requesting, reading, scanning, uploading, and summarizing the sources I thought would be useful to those learning about the history of Haverford College. I did not set out to make a complete collection of every article, entry, or sentence ever written about or at Haverford. More than likely, I missed sources that others and I would have loved to see on the course guide. Even still, I may have found a source that others would have deemed a great necessity in learning of the college’s past and have chosen to omit it for a reason that I knew at the time but probably could not recall if asked today. It is important to note that the separate sections on the course guide I have built are not all inclusive. The fact that the section on the Cold War does not include sources on diversity issues does not mean that they were not connected or existed during that time, it means that I have chosen to place all sources on diversity, in the Diversity Issues section. My research, and subsequently my guide, is not the end all be all to the history of Haverford College, it is meant to be a starting point. My hope is that my guide will allow people looking into the history of Haverford to delve deeper because of what I have already gathered. Through every era I researched, I set out to find those moments in which the college showed its true character: the moments that made me proud to call myself a Haverfordian and aspire to one day resemble those who were Haverfordians before me. For that reason, my research was built heavily on materials that I personally find the most revealing about Haverford. But this college has never and will never be perfect and the sources were not chosen to purport otherwise. Therefore, I tried to be objective when it came to finding sources with varying perspectives; i.e. from the administration, from students, from families, etc.

*For Students*

There is something inherently unnerving about writing to students with the intention that they hold my words in enough esteem to try and find value in what I say, especially when I only have a year at Haverford under my belt. During this summer, I have found information that has made me feel deeply in a variety of ways and I expect it do the same for students taking the course. I want to share something I have learned about research in history this summer, and that is that what we choose to focus on is largely responsible for what we choose to think really happened and why. As students, we understandably tend to think as students, focus on students’ priorities and on students’ best interests. Personally, as a minority student, it is difficult to read of the hardships of minority students at Haverford and not feel anger toward the administration of the time. Even then however, I cannot say that I do not admire the same administration for defending its student’s right to protest and creating an environment in which they could do so freely. My reason for bringing this up is to show that there are two sides to every coin; and the history of this college is a dodecahedron. We, as students, often forget that the administration too has their own issues and priorities, but I have come to think that we also underestimate our administration. Students often cite that a reason they love Haverford is because the administration cares for us and gets to know us as people. But when we critique them for handling a situation contrary to our tastes, we forget that our administration is not just any administration, it is one that strives to work for its students. So while it pains me to read about the administration’s inefficiency in the accommodation of minorities, the acceptance of women, and trying to protect students’ right to protest; my research has taught me that an administration handling all three issues on top of a disappearing endowment deserved understanding and respect. So I ask that students reading this, especially students taking Jim’s course, keep in mind that Haverford is an institution that has evolved for almost two centuries from its start as a guarded Quaker school for white, wealthy, Philadelphian boys to what it is today.

*For Haverfordians*

I write this under the assumption that students in my own class year, those directly above and below, and even some outside of these categories regard me as their peer. For this message I will focus on the most recent section of my research, subsequently the one I have most involvement in, the Birgeneau Affair. This incident is important for me on two fronts, one being that I am a Californian, the other being that I am a Haverfordian. I could try and explain why I believe that Birgeneau did not deserve the backlash, both back then and recently, he has received for the events at UC Berkeley in November of 2011; but it would be a moot point. Instead I will express what I expected from those that I consider my peers. The fact that I was unaware of the controversy until after it occurred is because of my own ignorance, but also the timing of the incident. While I feel this may be true for many students, I can only speak for myself in saying that I wish this controversy were discussed more openly before the letter was sent. For example, the community forum was seen as very helpful by those involved, but came after the incident had occurred. During the discussion on the GoBoards, some things were said that I took personally because they were directed towards the community that I consider myself to be a part of. One of those things was the idea that Haverford, in our Haverfordian ways, cannot handle issues of a serious magnitude and we were therefore unprepared to deal with controversy surrounding Dr. Birgeneau. On the contrary, it is my belief that the students who accused Haverford of this are those who were not prepared to properly deal with the controversy, or perhaps were not willing to do so. In my research, including an interview with President Weiss, it became evident to me that the administration was not the limiting factor it was accused of being in this case. The administration did what Stephen Cary did back when students wished to protest David Rockefeller because his company invested in South Africa during apartheid, it attempted to guide the students through the proper channels of protest so that their concerns were heard.[[1]](#footnote-1) Therefore the comments regarding the inadequacy of the Haverfordian manner of approaching issues seem unfounded to me given that it is a long standing tradition of this college to protect the political and intellectual freedoms of its students. In this, I hope that it is evident that my expectations of both the administration and my fellow students are high. This is not a hidden attack on any of the signatories, nor is it an overt attempt at praising the administration, this is an expectation. That expectation is that Haverford administration and students alike share a responsibility to an entity larger than themselves, and that responsibility was forgotten during this incident. Parts of this community were at odds with one another, not because our methods failed, but because we failed to respect and communicate with each other. If there is one thing I can impart on the community from my research this summer, it is that Haverford has successfully moved forward throughout the decades because it is willing to change. In the end, I hope that my research reminds my peers and the community of what it has meant to be a Haverfordian to those who came before us so that we may strive not only to carry on those values, but to build from them.

1. Stephen. G. Cary, *The Intrepid Quaker* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 2003), 206-208. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)