FROM THE ARCHIVES...

HOPKINS IN 1660

The title for this season’s article from the archives could actually have two meanings: “Hopkins” the individual responsible for enabling the founding of the school, and “Hopkins” the school that was founded 350 years ago. The history of both is entwined in the history of two more: John Davenport and the founding of New Haven.

When Edward Hopkins was born in England, likely near Shrewsbury in 1600, his country was enjoying the reign of Elizabeth I and emerging from a period of religious, economic and military turmoil. It is likely that young Edward’s schooling was limited to a local grammar school, while his older brother was educated at Oxford. Edward was soon able to prosper in his father’s import/export business in association with the East India Company. By 1631, Edward Hopkins had moved to London and was attending a church presided over by a young Reverend John Davenport. He married Ann Yale (yes, that Yale) and had become convinced of the wisdom of the Puritan perspective. But Elizabeth I’s successor, James I, became more and more intolerant of Puritan beliefs, and so John Davenport found it in his interest to flee to Holland when he was officially declared “an enemy of the church.” By 1637, Edward Hopkins was feeling under similar pressure, and so with his wife, Reverend Davenport and other Puritans, he set sail upon the Hector bound for Boston in the New World.

Here the paths of Hopkins and Davenport parted, at least for a while. Hopkins moved on to Hartford, then a colony only three years old, where he was quickly recognized for his leadership abilities and financial resources and made a proprietor. Thus he was part of the Council that approved the Fundamental Orders, the basis for Connecticut’s claim as “the Constitution State” because it was a written document outlining the responsibilities of the various branches of government when three colonies agreed to unite to create Connecticut Colony. Hopkins was elected as the second governor of Connecticut, and because of term limits, served every other term for the next several years in that capacity. He was instrumental in negotiating with both the Dutch in New Amsterdam as well as the Native Americans in the region. Hopkins was also instrumental in the creation of the New England Confederation, a defensive alliance of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Plymouth and New Haven colonies seeking to deal with threats from either Native Americans or Europeans. Hopkins himself survived an assassination attempt by the Pequots who were not happy with the turn of affairs at the conclusion of the Pequot War.

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Reverend Davenport, on the other hand, sought his fortune in the establishment of a new colony at the mouth of the Quinnipiac River, first called “Quinnipiac,” but later changed to “New Haven.” It was to be a “new haven” for Puritans in the New World, and along with his friend and merchant Theophilus Eaton (Hopkins’ father-in-law), Davenport negotiated with the local Quinnipiac Indians for land in exchange for some cloth and metal goods along with a promise of protection against the stronger Pequot Indians.

New Haven began to prosper and its population grew. John Davenport longed for the legitimacy that a true institute of higher learning might provide his town, whose population had already grown to be greater than a thousand people by 1641. He also sought to provide young citizens the education they would need to carry on the tradition of Puritan ministers with a firm grounding in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The town’s first schoolmaster proved unequal to the task, and the town fathers lost interest in pursuing the effort further. But Davenport was determined, and he approached his friend and former parishioner Edward Hopkins to see if he might be able to help. Nothing was immediately forthcoming, but Davenport’s efforts would pay dividends shortly.

Edward Hopkins returned to his native land in 1652. Life in England had become more favorable for the Puritans. Part of the reason for the population surge in New Haven had been the English Civil War which had erupted fully by 1642. King Charles I had pushed Parliament too far, armed revolt had ravaged the country for several years, until finally in 1649, Charles I had been captured by Oliver Cromwell’s army, put on trial, and executed. A short-lived British Commonwealth gave way to Cromwell’s “Protectorate” in 1653. When Hopkins’ older brother died, Edward inherited the job as “Warden of the Fleet [Prison].” Hopkins income now was 850 pounds per year. (For comparison, the first head of school at Hopkins earned only 40 pounds). One last honor remained for Hopkins when he was elected to Parliament in 1656. But his health soon began to fail, and in 1657 he died of tuberculosis.

In a manner of speaking “Hopkins”’ loss was “Hopkins”’ gain. It was by the will of Edward Hopkins that the funds for Hopkins School finally became available to Reverend Davenport. Named as one of the executors of Hopkins’ will, John Davenport sought to put to use in his beloved New Haven at least a portion of the 1400 pounds Edward Hopkins had set aside “for the breeding up of hopeful youths both at Grammar Schoole and Colledge for the publique service of the Country in future Tymes.” Competing claims for the funds meant that it was not until May 30, 1660 that John Davenport was able to proclaim “Quod felix faustumque sit,” when he emerged from the Court with a successful settlement. Four hundred
pounds eventually came to New Haven, while the remainder was used to fund education in Hartford and to found a school in Hadley, Massachusetts (where Hopkins Academy still functions as a public school). The Committee of Trustees of Hopkins School was first established in 1660 and has been in continuous existence since then. This is the basis upon which Hopkins can justly claim to be the third oldest independent school in the nation. Collegiate School (NY) was founded in 1628, and Roxbury Latin (MA) was founded in 1645. Boston Latin (MA) was established as a public school in 1635. The first schoolhouse was a small structure constructed on the New Haven Green between the Meeting House (now Center Church) and College Street (near where Phelps Gate at Yale now stands). Who knows what the scholars thought in October, 1660 when their school was located right next to the town “gaol” [jail]. A replica of the structure was built, mostly by students, for the school’s 300th anniversary and currently stands on the Forest Road campus.

Davenport’s dream of a college in New Haven would have to wait. When the monarchy was restored in England in 1660, three of the judges who had sentenced Charles I to death sought refuge in New Haven. Davenport and others obliged, thus courting royal disfavor. When in 1662, John Winthrop, Jr. of Connecticut Colony returned from England with a royal charter, New Haven colony was forced to unite with its northern neighbor. John Davenport continued to act as a trustee of the fledgling grammar school in New Haven, but he became more and more disenchanted with his situation and sought to be called as rector of the First Church in Boston. His efforts finally succeeded in 1669, but like Edward Hopkins before him, he was not able to enjoy this success for long. With his health failing, he died in 1670. It was not until 1701 that New Haven finally got its college (Yale). Its first president, Abraham Pierson, was a Hopkins graduate, class of 1664.

*Quod felix faustumque sit,*
Thom Peters, Archivist