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Gerry Boyle
Colby College

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HISTORY

with a Twist

EARL SMITH BRINGS A NEW PERSPECTIVE TO THE LIFE OF THE COLLEGE

By Gerry Boyle '78

Earl Smith doesn't know how his new history of Colby will be received. The emeritus dean of the College, Smith does know that he never intended to write a complete chronology filled with the names of all of those who have come and gone. What he delivered, after four years' work ("eighty percent research, twenty percent writing") is a book that begins 10,000 years ago, when Native Americans plied Maine's rivers, and that sees the College and others like it as being at the forefront of social change.

In other words, *Mayflower Hill: A History of Colby College* is not a continuation of the venerable history of Colby written by Dean Ernest Cummings Marriner, published in 1963.

"Would Marriner have had a chapter with a title, 'Shake Your Booty?'" Smith asked. "I don't think so."

Mayflower Hill does indeed open with the native tribes who first populated what is now central Maine. But it quickly moves through the early years of the College before Smith focuses on decade-long defining periods: The move to Mayflower Hill, the sexual revolution, the anti-Vietnam War years.

Yes, there are names. Yes, there is new information (Smith makes a strong argument that President Frank Johnson never intended to move Colby to Augusta, but skillfully used the specter of a move there as leverage in negotiations with Waterville). And, yes, there is an abundance of Smith's dry and understated humor. The section on changes in sexual mores in the 1960s begins, "The Sexual Revolution was un-

der way and students were well pleased to be a part of it."

If Smith's wry humor colors the text, his fascination with history—both long past and relatively recent—shapes *Mayflower Hill*. In fact, he says, it is the only way he could approach such a project. "Left to your own devices, you probably wouldn't write a college history, because it's too narrow," he said. "If you can wrap enough stuff into it, you've got something."

"Review the history of Colby and other places and you're struck by the fact that colleges are in the vanguard of social change. From the Fifties through the Eighties, [there was] enormous social change, almost all of which was led by the colleges. The sexual revolution, the feminist movement, [opposition to] the war in Vietnam. It's little wonder that some things fell by the wayside, from panty raids to fraternities.

"Students were empowered because there was such division between the young and the old. The young felt they could change the world—and they did."

As the world changed, so did Colby, Smith writes. Faculty who for decades had taught the same material in the same way were replaced by professors who actually encouraged students to question authority. Rules and customs that included women students shouting "man on the floor" when a member of the opposite sex ventured into a women's dormitory fell to coed dorms and actual coed education. Students struck in protest of the Vietnam

War, occupied Lorimer Chapel to demand redress for inequities for minority students, and began to shape the curriculum in ways unheard of just 20 years before.

Joining the Colby administration in 1962, Smith witnessed some but not all of these happenings. But still he spent months poring over old files, eventually amassing a database with more than 2,000 entries, he said. He called alumni who played pivotal roles and found them glad to help, Smith said. "Inevitably they'll tell you something you don't know."

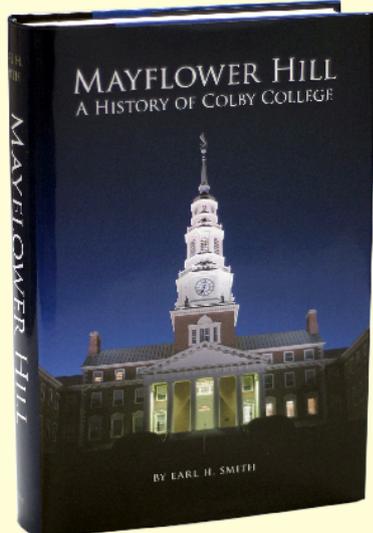
The result is a portrait of a time, made more vivid by telling detail:

- The *Waterville Morning Sentinel* crusading to keep Colby in Waterville while its publisher, William H. Gannett, offered land for a new campus in Augusta.
- The city celebrating when it raised enough money to buy Mayflower Hill for Colby. Fire alarms were sounded, bringing fire trucks roaring up from the South End, where firefighters hadn't been informed of the party.
- Senator Margaret Chase Smith speaking to a group of anti-Vietnam War protesters on campus, confronted by a veteran who debunked her account of how and where the war was being fought.

And other smaller anecdotes that Smith would read with a chuckle.

"The homecoming queen getting a carton of cigarettes," he said, smiling. "Chessterfields. I think it's funny as hell."

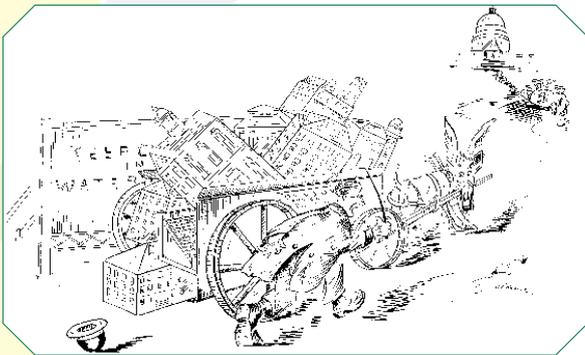
Some alumni will be relieved to hear that Smith, though he mentions his own role in some events in passing, does not dwell on one role he had as dean of students—College disciplinarian. "That's another book," he said, grinning. "That's the one they're paying me *not* to write."



ON THE MOVE *from downtown Waterville 1930-1940s*

“... [President Franklin Johnson] was pleased by the attempt to lure Colby downriver. Talk of the offer would affirm that the College was serious about moving, and it might provoke a counter-offer in Waterville, where Johnson wanted the College to stay. [In Augusta, newspaper publisher William H.] Gannett made his offer official on June 9, 1930. The College could have the [Augusta] land provided it raised \$3.5 million in moving money in three years. The publisher hinted he would help with the matching money as well. It was a magnificent gesture, and one that could not be taken lightly. Four days later, the trustees met and unanimously approved the special committee’s recommendation with a terse resolution: “it is the sense of this meeting that the College, as soon as means can be obtained and it is feasible, be moved to a new and more adequate location.”

News of the trustee decision and the Gannett offer hit at the same time, and the reaction was powerful. Around town people quickly tied the Colby president to a conspiracy with the Augusta publisher. The *Sentinel* cried out: “Keep Colby, Move Johnson,” and among alumni and in the local homes, shops, and mills the very idea of moving the College at all – never mind out of town – seemed utter nonsense. They called it “Johnson’s folly.”



The president’s silence and his determination to keep the Gannett offer on the table had the predictable effect. Within days a Waterville citizens’ committee was formed to see what could be done to keep Colby. J. F. Hill and Herbert Emery were leaders, as was a man with great credibility both in town and at the College, Herbert C. Libby ’02. A Waterville native, Libby had served as the city’s mayor, taught public speaking, and had been Prexy Roberts’s assistant. He was now editor of the College alumni magazine, the *Alumnus*, which he unabashedly used to trumpet the Waterville case: “The immediately important step is for Waterville to organize her citizens into a large group of Friends of Colby,” he wrote, “and for each to pledge so generously as to convince the governing body of the College and its 4,000 graduates

that the home folks deeply desire to keep Colby within its sacred walls.”

Between June and September the Citizens Committee held fifteen meetings, and pledged to raise \$100,000 and give it to the College if it would stay in town. In the meantime, the College launched its own \$500,000 campaign for the development of a new campus, wherever it was going to be. General Herbert M. Lord ’84, director of the U.S. Bureau of the Budget, was general chairman. (His selection by Wadsworth was regarded as a prediction of success, given that he had “more experience than any other man in the country in handling huge sums of money.”)

With the time for a location decision drawing near, the committee called for a final meeting of citizens and took a full-page advertisement in the *Sentinel*. “Make this the largest meeting ever held in Waterville,” the ad said. “Don’t depend on the other fellow, do it yourself. Sickness is the only excuse any citizen of Waterville should have not to attend.” The paper’s editorial page picked up the cry: “For a city of the size and resources of Waterville this is really a tremendous task and so it’s well that every effort is being made to make it possible. It will need everything every citizen can do and is a real test of mettle and loyalty. There’s no place for slackers or whiners in this situation.”

Above, an editorial cartoon in the Waterville Sentinel shows Colby buildings being carted off to Augusta, where a new campus site was proposed. Right, the presentation of the deed to Mayflower Hill to Colby by city officials, April 1931. Front, left to right, are Professor Julian Taylor, President Franklin Johnson, Herbert Wadsworth, chairman of the Colby board of trustees, and Waterville Mayor F. Harold Dubord ’03.



ON THE NEW *Views of Sex* 1960s

The sexual revolution was underway and students were well pleased to be a part of it. At Colby the revolt came on the same tide with the residential mixing of the sexes and true coeducation. Students eagerly took up arms against institutional regulations that no longer reflected their social attitudes – or their behavior. The itch should not have surprised anyone. Students were only mimicking their elders who, from the president’s office to the shared office of the newest instructor, were doing a good bit of tinkering with the old order of things themselves. Indeed, when the time came to tackle a general revision of the Student Handbook, members of the faculty gleefully joined in. It was never a question of whether new freedoms were needed. There was some agreement on that. The questions were about where to draw the lines.

Many single-sex institutions were talking about coeducation. It took another decade, but when they made the shift they did it in the safety of numbers. Women entered Williams and Wesleyan in 1970; Bowdoin, 1971; Dartmouth, 1972; Amherst, 1974. Men broke into Connecticut College in 1968 and Vassar, a year later. Harvard had been engaged to women since 1943 when Radcliffe women first came to class. They were officially married in 1972. In the meantime, Harvard’s president, Nathan Pusey, liked to say the old college was not coeducational at all, “except in fact.” By the 1960s, women had been enrolled at Colby for nearly a century, but Colby was a little like Pusey’s Harvard. Strider and others aimed to take the next steps, to eschew the strange system of coordination and make Colby coeducational – in law and in fact. At a place everyone already thought was coed, the switch was harder than it looked.

Except for the forces of culture in the self-selection of courses (fewer women in the sciences, fewer men in the humanities) classroom mixing was taken for granted. Outside of class, authorities worked hard to keep the sexes apart. Library stacks were closed at night to prevent necking. Women’s dormitories were locked at 10:30 p.m. on weekdays and the residents were carefully counted. Student guards staffed entryways to women’s dorms; bells and loudspeakers announced a “man on the floor!” Hoping for safety in numbers, officials designated a “coed room” (201 Runnals) as a place for couples to meet. Students called it a “mass necking room,” but it never was. As quickly as a single couple commandeered one of the couches, others respectfully declined to enter. A good deal of the overflow “making out” went on in automobiles. Watching the movies was a secondary matter at the Augusta Road Drive-In Theater, and parkers regularly lined bumper-to-bumper along the road by Johnson Pond.

High schoolers and other local lovers caught on fast, competing for pond-side parking spaces. Boys from town would sometimes stalk the parkers at night, beaming flashlights into the darkened, fogged-up cars for eye-popping glimpses of what was going on inside.

Even as students looked for rules to delete, someone was always adding more. When fraternities began adopting canine mascots, Dean of Men George Nickerson banished dogs. After a rash of accidents, Strider declared the campus off-limits to motorcycles. Student apartment renters in town were given the same rules for visitations as the dormitory dwellers. The faculty limited class cuts to two per semester, and imposed a \$25 fine for missing the last class before vacation.

Those who argued the College could not move to true coeducation without plenty of rules, or thought students should not write them, did not lack supporting evidence. When the Class of 1964 arrived, Henry “Hank” Gemery, assistant director of admissions, announced that the women came from the top 10 percent of their high school classes; the men, from the top 20 percent. Despite an edge in the classroom, the “girls” on the south end of campus were still having a fine time hazing new classmates, getting them out of bed at odd hours, making them sing the alma mater. (The men had about given up the hazing of freshmen. Their hands were full with fraternity pledges.) And even as the *Echo* complained of a “paternalistic” administration and a “Victorian” social code, it advertised a 1961 protest favoring Johnson Day as a “panty raid.” The event in fact featured loud chanting: “We want Johnson Day!” and (although it was unclear what they intended to do with him) “We want Strider!”

Despite occasional lapses, men and women students were changing their views of each other. The Kinsey reports on *what* was going on in human sexuality had been well digested. By the mid-1960s, William Masters and Virginia Johnson were detailing the *how*, and Betty Friedan gave light to the question of *why* women were victims of a system of false values debasing them in their various roles in the workplace and at home. Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* was already a best seller when students (mostly women) jammed Averill Auditorium to hear her warn that the insecurity of young women made them vulnerable to brainwashing. Her message set a buzz. Panty raids were nearly

ON THE *Vietnam War* 1970s

Sunday, May 10 [1970], was a bright, spring day, and Colby was, for the moment, the center of Maine's antiwar universe. It was [Steve] Orlov's twenty-first birthday and he had inadvertently arranged a whopping party. By early afternoon the central mall – from the Eustis Building to the science buildings and from the library to Mayflower Hill Drive – teemed with some three thousand people, most of them students. From a distance the scene resembled a county fair. Up close the mood was somber.

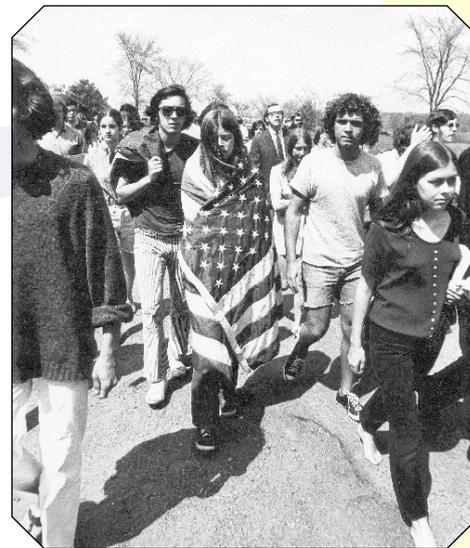
At 2:30, [U.S. Senator Edmund] Muskie walked out the front doors of the library to a podium on the steps. The crowd cheered when Orlov introduced him.¹ Muskie was already touted as a Democratic presidential candidate for the 1972 election (he announced in December of that year), and his opposition to Nixon's conduct of the war was well known. He spoke from an eight-page text and used the friendly forum to announce his intention to introduce a Senate resolution requiring the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Cambodia. He said the purpose of the war had been to buy time for the people of Vietnam to build a country, and it was not worth it "if the price is the destruction of fundamental values and relationships in our own country."

Some of the crowd had drifted away before [Senator Margaret Chase] Smith appeared at four. She was tiny and frail, and her gray head could barely be seen above the podium. Orlov loomed over her like a giant bodyguard. She had no prepared speech and immediately invited questions. She would have fared better had she read something. Asked about Cambodia, she defended Nixon's decision, adding she was confident he would keep his promise to withdraw troops by June. Students howled. Someone asked if the nation's youth had been consulted in the making of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. She said the question should be directed to former President Johnson. Asked to comment on the treatment of the Black Panthers, she said she didn't like the Black Panthers or the Minutemen. A black student responded: "I don't like you, or Nixon, or any of you, but I have to deal with you because you are the establishment."

The most stunning moment came when Smith was asked if there were American troops in Cambodia's neighbor country Laos. She turned to her aide, General William Lewis, and in a voice all could hear, repeated the question. He said no, and she turned back to the microphone and said she was not aware that there were any U.S. troops in Laos. Several in the crowd cursed, and some could be seen encouraging a young man as he made his way to the podium. He stood beside the senator, introduced himself as Brownie Carson, a Marine infantry platoon commander, and said he had recently been wounded in Laos. Turning to the senator, he asked how the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee could not know that Americans were fighting in Laos, "and if you do know," he said, "how could you lie to us?" That was enough for Smith. As the screaming got louder, she turned abruptly and skulked back into the library, the dutiful general close behind.

Carson was a twenty-two-year-old Bowdoin graduate. Two years after chastising Smith on the Colby stage, he made an unsuccessful bid to unseat Maine Congressman Peter Kyros (1967-75) in the Democratic primary. He became one of the state's leading environmentalists and executive director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine. On the day of the Colby strike rally, another Bowdoin graduate, G. Calvin Mackenzie, twenty-five, was with the U.S. First Cavalry as it invaded Cambodia. Parts of the division had been in that neutral country months before, and Mackenzie and his comrades were irritated to learn politicians back home were saying it wasn't so. Mackenzie subscribed to the Maine Times, and a week later when he received the issue carrying the story of the Colby rally, he read the account of the confrontation with Senator Smith to members of his platoon. They cheered for Brownie Carson. Mackenzie went on to earn a Harvard Ph.D. and joined the Colby faculty in 1978. He became a nationally recognized expert on the transition of power following U.S. presidential elections.

Above, somber students march across campus prior to an anti-Vietnam War strike rally in 1970.



¹ In January 1971, Orlov served as a student intern in Muskie's Washington office.