September 2012

From the President

William D. Adams
Colby College

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Recommended Citation
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In the Moment, Consider Colby’s Two Centuries

For some strange reason, I can’t shake the notion that with these words I am speaking to you from the past. Perhaps that’s because of my recent preoccupation with history—justifiable, I should think, in this, the College’s 200th year.

This connection to our predecessors comes to me at odd moments: when it takes a computer more than a minute to boot up or when spotty network service makes it frustrating to get e-mail on a phone or laptop precisely when I’m ready to receive it. In this age of instantly gratifying communication, the thought embedded in every text we receive arrives just moments after it crossed the sender’s mind, and it seems to demand an equally swift response.

And so today, when 200 seconds can seem like an eternity, it’s hard to know what to make of 200 years. Yet that is exactly what I’m hoping you will do in this, our bicentennial year—consider what 200 years in the life of this College means to you and to us, to our past and to our future.

As I’ve pored over official and unofficial versions of the College’s history, I’ve discovered that, unlike us, most of the important figures in Colby’s past were, in fact, exceedingly patient. In order to assume his post as the institution’s first professor, Jeremiah Chaplin, who would later become our first president, traveled to Maine aboard the sloop Hero. The four-day passage up the Kennebec River included slow progress in small boats pulled toward Waterville by men and oxen. With thoughtful and patient leaders at the helm, the College survived the Civil War, two world wars, financial peril, the relocation of campus, and seismic changes in our societal landscape that opened the doors to women, to African Americans, as well as to other underrepresented populations. Little of this would have come to pass without a deep and abiding patience.

Of course, in some important ways, little has changed over these two centuries. We remain committed to the notion that teaching and learning—and the special bond formed between students and faculty that they create—is at the very core of what we do and who we are. And now, as always, we seek to attract and enroll those who will both benefit from the Colby experience and enrich that same experience—regardless of what obstacles must be overcome to make that happen. And we continue to honor those who have helped shaped this remarkable institution as well as those who affirm our success by living productive, honorable, and noteworthy lives in communities around the world. This, too, can be credited to patience borne of an unwavering faith in the purpose and mission of our enterprise.

So I’m encouraging you to pause from time to time in the year ahead to think about what 200 years of history means. We’ll do our part to provide you with the tools and prompts to guide your reflections. For example, in this magazine you’ll find a special section designed to help bring back voices and emotions from the College’s first 50 years. In issues to come, you’ll find similar sections covering subsequent 50-year periods.

There are more tools at www.colby.edu/colbyhistory, where you’ll find a rich, interactive experience that will give you opportunities to learn more about our history as well as to contribute your own voice to our historical narrative. And throughout the year, both here on campus and in cities across the country, we’ll be celebrating in a series of events designed to bring us closer together and to rally us around this proud moment in time.

But no matter how you choose to mark this occasion or how often you do, please know that you are an important part of who we are and who we will become. And I am both humbled and proud to join you as a part of this remarkable narrative as we stand on the threshold of our third century.

William D. Adams
President