

July 2001

## The Last Page

Earl Smith  
*Colby College*

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Earl (2001) "The Last Page," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 90: Iss. 3, Article 12.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol90/iss3/12>

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## a good place to begin

By Earl Smith

I didn't really intend to stay this long. Still, in 1962 Colby seemed like a good place to begin. The lure of hometown had something to do with it. So did the handsome annual salary of \$5,000. Happily, it was not simple inertia that kept me. Instead, the real magnetism has come from the excitement of being associated with a gritty College that, for all this time, has been steadily rising in the constellation of the nation's best colleges.

In fact, the excitement began my first month of work—June, 1962. I had no more than settled at my refinished WPA desk when President Bob Strider called faculty and staff into Lovejoy 100 for an "important announcement." What he had to say was certainly important and—to a 23-year-old new hire—somewhat stunning. The Ford Foundation, he said, had chosen Colby as a national "center of excellence" and had awarded the College an astonishing \$1.8 million challenge grant. That same summer, the museum's show, *Art in Maine*, was credited as one of the finest new exhibitions in the world. I was hooked, not only on a career that would take me through 11 jobs in 40 years at the same place but also on the rich and fascinating story of Colby.

In the 1960s, job descriptions for many administrative appointments included the ending phrase "and other duties as assigned." Officially a photographer and tub-thumper, I very often worked under the rubric of "other duties." My fascination with Colby history began in that offbeat way, an attraction I attribute mostly to two men: Dick Dyer and Ernest Marriner, Class of 1913.

Dyer, my first boss and assistant to the president, was an exacting and demanding man (he had 23 secretaries in the seven years I worked for him). He often bemoaned the fact that Colby was in such haste to move to Mayflower Hill that it left behind too many artifacts of the old campus. He once dragged me with him to follow a Colby truck to the local dump. There we pawed through a deposit of materials rejected by the College librarian and brought much of it back to campus. Dyer taught me precision—and skills as a pack rat.

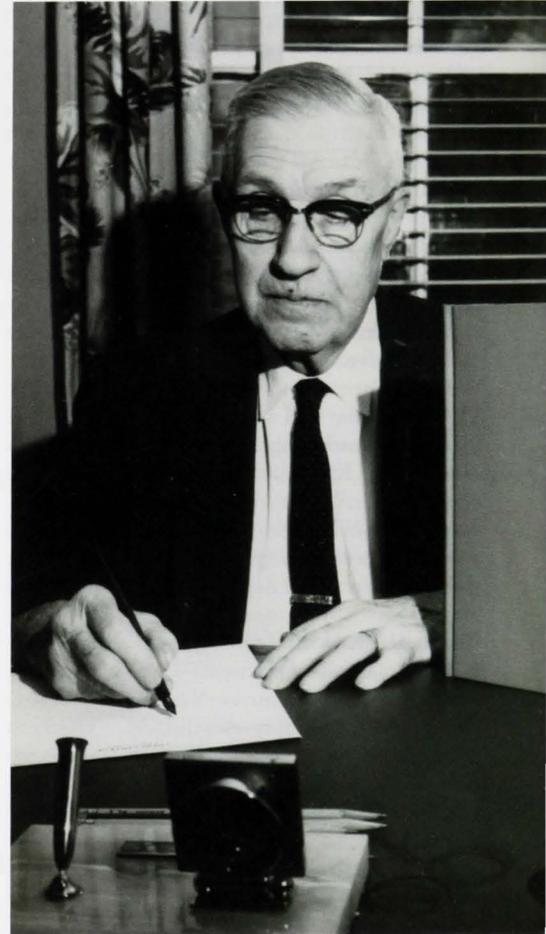
As a Waterville boy, I knew of Ernest Marriner even before I came to Colby. His popular local radio program, *Little Talks on Common Things* on WTVL, was a Sunday staple. His career had

included stints as dean of men (1929-1947) and dean of faculty (1947-1957). He "retired" in 1957 but continued as College historian. In this role, he held in his head or on his bookshelves all that anybody would ever want to know about Colby. By 1962, his definitive *History of Colby College* was nearly finished. He was past 70 and his friends (especially his neighbors) were beginning to worry about his driving—a broad-beamed 1950s Oldsmobile as I recall. Dyer would ferret out the dean's travel plans, whereupon I would be assigned to *offer services* as a chauffeur. It was a delicate matter. One look would tell you he was every inch a proud man.

These were wonderful assignments, tooling the dean around the state in search of bits of information for his radio program or the history. Along the way he would infect me with a love of Maine and Colby lore. On one of these trips we went to the cemetery at Bean's Corner (near Jay) to find the headstone of President Franklin Johnson's mother. The quest led us stumbling in and around the neglected ancient graveyard overgrown with weeds and vines. He found the stone. I photographed it. He would not have been more pleased if he had found the Holy Grail. On the way home we stopped for ice cream.

Now it is my turn to gather facts and write a story of Colby. I will pick up the story in 1950, near the end of any use of the old campus, and continue through to the end of the century—the story of Mayflower Hill. I will endeavor to place the College and its people in the social, cultural and historical context of these decades, which saw so many changes in the world, in this country, in Waterville and at Colby. In this somewhat daunting task I plan to seek out and talk with many alumni and other Colby friends. At the same time, I will welcome any and all reflections and recollections of this period, solicited or not. Indeed, your help is invited.

*Earl Smith will leave the post of dean of the College in July and will serve during the next academic year as executive assistant to President Adams. Thereafter, he will "retire" but continue on as College historian and begin his work on the new Colby history. Write to him in the President's Office or e-mail [ehsmith@colby.edu](mailto:ehsmith@colby.edu).*



Dean Ernest Marriner '13