Upholding the Fame
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September 11, 1955, was a warm, sunny fall day — much more pleasant than the clouds and showers that had been forecasted by the Utica *Observer-Dispatch*. On that Sunday 175 young men wended their way to Clinton. We came from 12 states, mostly in the Northeast. Four foreign countries were represented as well: Canada, Scotland, Denmark and Iceland. We obviously were not coming to the sunbelt. Most of us traveled by car, some on the newly completed New York State Thruway. Others came on the New York Central Railroad, and the very few who traveled by air did not have to remove their shoes before boarding their plane.

Most of us had been born in 1937, giving us a life expectancy at birth of 59 years. For all of my classmates who have returned this weekend, congratulations on beating those odds; you will be pleased to learn that your adjusted life expectancy is now 83 years. Born in 1937 we were raised during the Great Depression; you remember, that's the one before the current great depression. Our fantasies came from radio, not TV — who can forget Jack Armstrong, the Green Hornet or my favorite, the Lone Ranger and his great horse Silver. And perhaps because of the absence of TV, we were a generation of readers, something that would hold us in good stead during the next four years. We were bright, most of us having been at the top of our prep or high school class, and as we shall see, we brought many talents to the Hill. Fifty-four percent of us had attended a public high school, and 46 percent a prep school.

The College we came to in 1955 was very old, very small and breathtakingly beautiful — 500 scenic acres overlooking the Oriskany and Mohawk valleys. There were 18 buildings, most of locally quarried Herkimer dolomite. Two additional buildings, Dunham dormitory and the Health Center, would be constructed during our years. At the start of the 1955-56 academic year the student body numbered 633 men with a faculty of 60. There was a president, a single dean and only 35 additional administrative and support staff.

The education we were about to receive came at bargain-basement rates. For our four years at Hamilton the average annual cost of room, board, tuition and fees was $1,715. Compare that with the figure for next year's class — $49,860. Our investment in a Hamilton education has increased in value by a factor of 29. How many of your currently held equities can you say that about? Yes, Hamilton was a very good investment.

Of course what we were investing in was an education, so let's talk about academics. Traditionally class annalists compare and contrast academic requirements then and now — such things as credit hours, required courses and concentrations. I won't do that because, while the specifics may have changed, the goals of a Hamilton education have, thankfully, remained the same. Indeed the opening statement on Hamilton's current Web site nicely describes what we experienced: "A liberal arts college with an emphasis on individualized instruction ... effective writing and persuasive speaking." What I do want to talk about are our professors. Nicknames for them abounded and, I think, were in no way disrespectful but showed our affection for these dedicated teachers. "Swampy" Marsh, "Mumbles" Carson, "Spooley" Ellis, "Bobo" Rudd, "Daddy" Hess, "Digger" Graves, "Shifty" Gere and "Noah" Count. Our admiration for our professors was inclusive — indeed in the survey questionnaire I sent out asking who were your favorite teachers, almost every professor was named by at least one of you. Astounding. I think that reflects the intense interaction we had with the faculty and the fact that these men were, first and foremost, devoted to teaching.

I wish there was time to relate stories about all of our professors, but a few vignettes will have to suffice. Bill Wieting remembers English Professor Thomas McNaughton Johnston, a Lincolnesque man who wore an enormous raccoon overcoat in the winter. To quote Bill: "Professor Johnston knew every meretricious literary trick we might employ. He had seen it before, dealt with it before, explained, deflated, criticized, observed, disdained or encouraged it before. And always gently, firmly, collegially and above all humorously." Three of us — David Lyon, John Martin and I — remember psychology professor Bill Stebbins introducing us to modern research methods and shepherding us through the preparation and publication of our first scientific papers. Jim Fox recalls "Digger" Graves at the conclusion of his history classes stationed in the hallway outside the classroom engaging his students in informal conversation and providing encouragement. Several of us remembered that chemistry professor Dr. Lawrence Yourtee never marked on a curve. He felt that it was his job to teach us certain scientific facts, and if everyone got 100 on one of his tests he was pleased, for that meant he had done his job well. Of course sometimes we all got 50s — his tests were fair but hard. I remember one student writing in his blue book at the end of a particularly tough exam, "The answers to questions 7 and 3 are known only to God and the immortal Yourtee." Dr. Yourtee had a quiet sense of humor as well. Jay Pomerantz remembers leaving the chemistry lab with some 95 percent alcohol destined for the Squires Club punch bowl, and Dr. Yourtee cautioning him not to take too much "distilled water." Paul Bauer recalled Professor John Gambs, who enlivened every freshman economics class with the drama of whether his socks would disappear completely into his loafers, and after class whether he could successfully defend the honor of his dog from the amorous intentions of the quadrangle four-legged Lotharios.

Colin Miller, Chapel dean and professor of philosophy and religion, began his Hamilton tenure with our class and was an instant favorite. An imposing Scot, his readings of Robert Burns in this Chapel drew standing-room-only crowds. Professor Miller's seminars stretched our minds and made us think about the very most consequential issues of life. These discussions were so riveting that we didn't want them to end — and often, when the bell rang, they didn't. The group would simply adjourn to the Commons snack bar, or on Friday afternoons to a watering hole in Clinton, to continue the probing discussion with Professor Miller as the facilitator. A 1955 *Alumni Review* reported that, on a shopping trip Professor Miller's burring tones caught the ear of a Utica grocer, who inquired if he was not a foreigner. Professor Miller explained that he was a Scot and newly emigrated to the United States. "Well," said the grocer admiringly, "you've learned the language quickly."

An iconic figure during our days at Hamilton was English Professor Robert Barnes Rudd. "Bobo's" extracurricular escapades were legendary, and he relished making the most outrageous statements to shock the establishment or our houseparty dates. His speech at Class & Charter Day, May 16, 1956, was one of the most memorable presentations in Hamilton's long history and, as he predicted, here we are this weekend, ". . . mere children of 72, 'hoping among the grass to find the golden dice with which we used to play.'" Professor Rudd taught his last class on Saturday, May 24, 1958. A *Spectator* editorial noted: He taught us an appreciation of English literature's beauty and an appreciation of the joys of living. Few men other than the fictional Falstaff could more truthfully say, "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow."

In July of 1957 a young economics professor was appointed associate dean of the College. Sid Wertimer and his wife Ellie went on to become legends at Hamilton and continued teaching, advising and entertaining us, and later our children, throughout the next 50 years. But we knew Sid as a man, not much older than we were, who was an outstanding teacher with an engaging manner and a sharp wit. John Crosier remembers Sid telling his accounting classes, "My goal is to teach you enough that should you ever be faced with an accounting problem you will hire an

accountant." Sid was the enthusiastic leader of the Hamilton volunteer fire department, a post mainly requiring skill at double-clutching the ancient fire truck donated to Hamilton by the Village of Clinton.

In this community of talented and dedicated educators, one man was the acknowledged leader — Dean Winton Tolles. He came straight out of central casting, a large individual with a gravelly voice and a commanding presence. The outfit was always the same, a rumpled dark suit, wrinkled white shirt, black necktie, battered fedora and a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. If he was in the midst of shutting down a water fight the cigarette might be wet, but it would be there. The dean always wore these clothes. For the faculty-student softball game on Class & Charter Day, he simply removed the hat and suit coat and rolled up his pant legs — the necktie and cigarette stayed. We guessed he wore the same outfit to bed at night, and the wrinkles tended to support that theory. We assumed he had only one set of duds, but Dick Flanagan recalls a time in our senior year when Win stood up in front of Tuesday morning assembly wearing a brand new suit. He was given the congratulatory finger snaps and could hardly go on from embarrassment.

The fire hoses in South Dorm were utilized by most freshman classes for water fights, thence bringing out the dean. Don Kittell remembers the Class of '59 being considerably more innovative. Jack Letzelter's building and grounds crew had placed panels in all of the fireplaces in an attempt to prevent heat loss. Using these panels to dam up the shower stalls, then simultaneously releasing them, created an impressive waterfall down the stairs of South. Don remembers the classic picture of the dean standing in the first floor flood with his trousers rolled up, directing the clean-up. And I'll bet he had a smile on his face. For all of his gruffness and unquestioned authority, he never took himself too seriously. He used to say, "A dean is to a college as a fire hydrant is to a dog." Well, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, some fire hydrant! Dean Tolles was mother, father, counselor, judge and jury to us; he arbitrated and resolved all issues without extraneous help. Parents weren't called; the local and state police were never involved. Whatever the issue, from poor grades to pranks gone bad, you and the dean worked it out. It was the best kind of tough love. If you needed a kick in the pants you got it, and if your dad had just lost his job, the dean found a way to get you a part-time job on the Hill and a scholarship. Virtually every alumnus speaks of Winton Tolles in reverent tones. Behind the gruff exterior he cared deeply about each of us, and we loved him because of that.

Before leaving academics, I'd like to say something about the honor system. Established 47 years before we arrived, it was a critical piece of our education. In these sad days of Ponzi schemes and sub-prime mortgage chicanery, it is refreshing to think that we were taught and trusted to be on our honor never to cheat. No proctors for exams, no computer scans for papers. It was your own work, attested to by your signed statement. Many of you have mentioned what an impact the honor system has had on shaping your life values. I think we are all proud to have grown up under this system. In keeping with these thoughts let me state that, for this annalist's letter, I cannot sign the pledge. I definitely have received aid from many individuals including Frank Lorenz and Don Challenger, editors of the *Alumni Review*; LaurieAnn Russell, associate director of alumni relations; Katherine Collett, assistant archivist of the Daniel Burke Library; Steve Bellona, associate vice president of facilities and planning; Jen Bradford '89, my grammar consultant; Tim Freeman, reference room clerk of the Utica Public Library; my wonderful wife Ann, who spent two long days with me reviewing old issues of the *Spectator*; and three previous class annalists, Jim Nickel '52, Jay Williams '54 and Bill Yeomans '55. And special thanks to my '59 classmates who so graciously shared their remembrances with me. I have shamelessly used their exact words, written by each of them in the effective way they were taught to write 50 years ago.

Now let's turn to student life 50 years ago, for as President McEwen pointed out at our first assembly, there is more to college than "book learning." Rushing for the one local and 10 national fraternities occurred during our first week on the Hill. Seventy-four percent of our class joined one of these societies, with an additional 13 men joining Squires Club. Partaking in old traditions, our class won the tug-of-war but lost the flag rush, thereby condemning us to wear our hated beanies until Thanksgiving.

The first big social event was the annual Wells College exchange dance. To sign up you needed to leave your name, height and fraternity in the Social Committee Box in Root Hall. Admission was 60 cents for freshman and one dollar for upperclassmen. The women arrived by bus in front of the gym at halftime of the Hamilton-Wagner football game. This was such a popular event that the Wells freshman class had to be supplemented with 67 freshmen from Elmira College. After the football game our dates were entertained with cocktails and dinner at the fraternities and then on to the all-college dance. Although I don't remember any of the buses turning into pumpkins, promptly at midnight, like Cinderella, the women disappeared back into the buses and we were left alone, with the dawning recognition that we were in for four years of isolated celibacy. We tried to overcome this with varying degrees of success. Three times a year houseparties were eagerly anticipated and enthusiastically enjoyed.

A second tactic was the road trip, at least when we were not snowed in. Heroic runs were made to Wells, Elmira, Skidmore, Vassar, Connecticut College, Holyoke, Cazenovia, Smith, Syracuse, Oneonta and Cornell. Hans Solmssen and Craig Pritchard probably set the record for the most visits to Vassar, and their best time for the 162-mile trip was two hours and 10 minutes, an impressive average of 75 mph, all done on back roads. Try as we might, we never really solved the problem of our isolation from the fair sex. In those days I often thought Hamilton would be perfect if only there were an equal number of women here — so now I guess the place is perfect.

Making music, not just listening, was a popular activity during our years on the Hill. Singing was very prevalent. We participated in the interfraternity sing. We all sang informally at dinner, at College events and at parties. We sang Hamilton songs, College fight songs, popular songs and risqué ditties about such characters as The Tatooed Lady or Sister Lucy or that anatomically unique Young Man from Martha's Vineyard (or one of those islands off the Massachusetts coast).

The Buffers entertained us with a more professional voice, and '59ers Kip Webster, Tim Scholl, John Griffin and Bill Wieting provided half the membership of that talented octet.

The jewel in the crown of Hamilton was the College Choir, directed by the dynamic John Low Baldwin. The choir performed joint concerts with Wells, Vassar, Smith and Radcliffe, toured the Northeast, sang at Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo, St. Thomas' Church on 5th Avenue in New York and the National Gallery in Washington, and recorded two long-playing records. They sang the timeless favorites: Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Bach's *Magnificat* and *Mass in B Minor*, and Tye's *Laudate Nomen Domini*, and they sang them beautifully, for John Baldwin demanded perfection, often leading his singers beyond what they had considered their vocal and musical limits. John was, perhaps, the most enthusiastic individual I have ever known, and when he led the choir with that wonderful intense smile, bright-red face and passionate look, they knew they could sing anything. John was a consummate musician in his own right, and his informal concerts after chapel on Sunday nights and after College assemblies were some of the most exciting music I have ever heard. He devoted his entire existence to music, and experienced the world through the eyes and ears of a musician. Once in the National Gallery he suddenly exclaimed, "Great acoustics; you could blow your nose in here and it would sound like a French horn!" Our classmate Richard Storm, manager of the choir our senior year, recently commented he found it

amazing that the men of the choir were able to meet John's stringent musical requirements, including singing weekly in chapel and preparing for concerts, tours and recording sessions, in a College that did not have a full music curriculum. John Baldwin taught professionalism, perseverance and discipline as well as music.

On June 23, 1956, the *S.S. Waterman* sailed for Europe from Pier 5 in Hoboken, N.J., carrying a full complement of raucous U.S. college students. And aboard to entertain them was the Catatonic 5, Hamilton's own Dixieland band. One of the premier college jazz groups of the day, the band was busy most weekends playing at colleges throughout the Northeast. But their most memorable gig occurred on Saturday, Nov. 24, 1956, when they were the featured band at a Carnegie Hall midnight jazz concert. Hearing Jack Crystal, comedian Billy Crystal's father, introduce Hamilton's Catatonic 5 to the Carnegie Hall audience was a thrill I shall never forget.

Athletics. Our class was blessed with a large contingent of talented athletes, and during our four years Hamilton had winning teams in most sports. A few stories and noteworthy examples: Fifty-niners Ward Wettlaufer, Paul Kremer, Bob Mongeau, Kim Levene and Dick Jackson provided the backbone for four years of outstanding golf teams. Wettlaufer was truly world-class. To quote from the May 22, 1959, *Spectator*, "Walker Cup competitor Ward Wettlaufer was victorious last weekend, as was the eight-man U.S. team of which he is a member. Wettlaufer and Jack Nicklaus of Ohio State defeated a British team 2 and 1 in the foursomes last Friday, and Wettlaufer alone won 6 and 5 Saturday." Wow!

During our time on the Hill Hamilton played big-time hockey, scheduling such nationally ranked powers as New Hampshire, RPI, Northeastern and Army, and they acquitted themselves well under the coaching of ex-Clinton Comets star Greg Batt. Hans Solmssen recalls that Coach Batt always smoked a large cigar during games, and as the players came off the ice after a shift gasping for breath, he would impart words of wisdom to them while exhaling cigar smoke in their faces. Now here is a remarkable story: In our time, hockey players wore headgear, but no facemasks, and, amazingly, that was true for goaltenders as well. After requiring 50 stitches in his face, '59er Don Spencer, captain and goalie of the hockey team, asked track coach and trainer Gene Long to invent some sort of facial protection. Gene fashioned a plastic, form-fitting mask using a design he had learned about for protecting the heels of high jumpers. Don wrote a letter describing Gene's mask to famed Montreal Canadiens goalie Jacques Plante, who had been looking for such an item, and in 1959 Plante was the first NHL goaltender to use a mask in actual games, a copy of the mask first requested by Don Spencer, the prototype of which was designed and built by Gene Long.

Our senior year the track team had one of its finest seasons ever, winning all four dual meets and placing second to Alfred by only 1/7 of a point in the state championship meet. Outstanding '59 cinder men included Dave Ostrom in the hurdles and high jump, Jim Bonbright in the pole vault, John Stevens in the high jump, Terry Eld in the hurdles, and Bill Poole, Barclay Ward and Bob Patton in the distance events. Poole, Ward and Patton anchored one of the finest cross country teams Hamilton has ever produced. The Hamilton harriers were undefeated each of our last two years, winning the New York State conference championship in both 1957 and 1958 — a feat never repeated.

In tennis, '59ers Phil Lord, Gerry Dirvin and Don Kittell helped Mox Weber's Continentals continue a tremendous run, losing only six matches over a period of eight years.

The 1955-58 football seasons were a period of unmatched glory for Hamilton, and '59ers made their impact from the start of the 1955 season. Three straight 5 and 2 records set the stage for

senior year. On successive Saturdays that fall, King's Point went down to defeat 25 to 6, RPI 34 to 13, Wagner 20 to 13, Swarthmore 34 to 8, and Haverford 20 to 6. In the Haverford game, tied in the fourth quarter, Earl Rickerson carried the ball around right end for a 68-yard go-ahead touchdown run. On November 8, in a game dominated for three quarters by the Continentals, Hobart squeaked out a 12 to 12 tie. So it came down to the final Saturday of the season when we played archrival Union, and the undefeated season was on the line. Union was always tough, having beaten Hamilton two of the last three games. But not this year. A stout defense and Mike Slattery's three touchdown runs crushed Union 18 to 0. There it was, Hamilton's first — and to this date, only — undefeated football team. Or put another way, the best season in 118 years of recorded Hamilton football. Bill Hoyt and Bob Mongeau were co-captains. Tight end John Stevens' eight pass receptions in one game and three touchdown catches in a game were both new Hamilton records. John was selected as a Little All-American. He and Mike Slattery were named to the ECAC All-East honorable mention team. Fifty-niners Hoyt, Mongeau, Stevens, Slattery, Rickerson, Joe Nicolette, Scott Finegan, Carl Hakanson and John McNamara share the distinction of having been teammates on the best football team Hamilton ever fielded.

In 1958 a new student government, the Student Senate, came into being, replacing the old Student Council and Interfraternity Council. In March of that year the Student Senate committee on deferred rushing presented a plan for 100 percent opportunity rushing, which was approved by the full senate but tabled by the administration. Surprising, because the booklet given to all entering freshmen describing the fraternity system contained the statement "... the chief trouble with the fraternity system is that there is not enough of it, and the approaching time when every student may become a member if he wants to will see the system operating at its best." In April of 1959 the Student Senate again voted for 100 percent opportunity rushing to begin the following year. This time it was accepted and implemented, along with deferred rushing, and in February of 1960, 221 of 230 freshmen were matched, with nine choosing not to participate. Unfortunately this change was too late to benefit members of our class, but it attempted to right a wrong that had concerned many of us.

And then, 1,365 days after we had first arrived, graduation day was upon us. It surely didn't seem that we had been on the Hill that long. On that Sunday, June 7, 1959, 152 of us converged on the Sage Building to receive our A.B. degrees at the 149th Commencement of the College. We had gained 19 and lost 42 of the 175 we entered with.

Our classmate Dick Flanagan gave the commencement address. As expected it was thoughtful and beautifully delivered. He noted that we "... were born in the middle of a depression; began school in the middle of a war; entered high school in the middle of another war; and graduated from high school contemporaneously with the perfecting of the hydrogen bomb." He urged us to question the status quo and take responsibility for righting the inequities of the world.

Longtime U.S. Ambassador George V. Allen gave the charge to our graduating class. He made three points: 1) We would not remember what he was about to say. Well, he got that one right. 2) The key issue of the day, Communism vs. the free world, would not prove to be an insurmountable problem, and would resolve itself in our lifetime. Got that right, too. 3) The most important task facing this country was to develop a better understanding between the United States and the other peoples of the world. Good advice then and good advice now. We trooped up on the stage and received our diplomas, and then it was over and we left to begin the next chapter of our lives.

As I prepared this presentation, I felt an enormous sense of pride in the Class of '59. A group of diligent young men who liked and respected one another; a College Choir that was unexcelled;

the only undefeated football team in the College's history; two undefeated cross country seasons; a golf team captained by a Walker Cup champion; a Dixieland band that toured Europe and played at Carnegie Hall; a Student Senate that successfully fought for 100 percent opportunity rushing; and even a goaltender who paved the way for facemasks in the NHL. Obviously we didn't accomplish these things all by ourselves. These were teams and bands and choirs composed of students from the Classes of 1956-1962. These fellow students and our professors and coaches deserve much of the credit for our successes. But it all happened on our watch, and I will always be tremendously proud of our class.

Gather Close was a favorite Hamilton song of our era. It concludes:

On the day our Alma Mater calls us,
We'll fight on no matter what befalls us,
We pledge our name to uphold the fame of Hamilton.

During our four years on the Hill the Class of 1959 tried its best to meet this challenge, and I think we did uphold the fame of our beloved Hamilton in a remarkable way. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to tell the story of this great class.