

EDUCATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

A History of Bard College —
the First 100 Years (1860-1960)

By Reamer Kline

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LD

331

B5637

K4

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Kline, Reamer.

Education for the common good: A history
of Bard College—the first 100 years, (1860-1960).

Bibliography. p.

Notes and references.

1. Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.—History

2. St. Stephen's College—History

3. Columbia University—History

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FOREWORD

At various times Bard has been seen as a pre-theological institution giving college training to future clergy; as a progressive or experimental college; as a campus specializing in creative writing and the creative and performing arts; and as an outpost of European and sophisticated American intellectualism.

One naturally wonders what all these emphases have in common and how one college with its continuing charter and self-perpetuating Board of Trustees, could successively put forth all these varying manifestations.

The answer is that all are expressions of the one continuing conviction that by education, by leadership, and by means of institutions formed for the purpose, it is possible mightily to improve the quality of life — and to build a better society.

In 19th century St. Stephen's College, this was to be done through the Episcopal Church, by providing for a better educated ministry. Warden Fairbairn saw the College doing for the Church what West Point did for the country — producing a better-trained future professional leadership. Dr. Rodgers in 1915 correctly perceived that the College's best claim for support lay in its influence through the Church upon the nation, through the high proportion of the total membership of the Episcopal Church that had come under the ministry of St. Stephen's graduates.

St. Stephen's of the 1920's was a widely known and respected institution, and B. I. Bell truly believed that it embodied a force that would change the whole structure of American higher education, and powerfully affect the whole society for the good.

Donald Tewksbury, whose previous studies had demonstrated how the Church-founded colleges had helped bring civilization to the American frontier, saw the Bard art program not as primarily a vehicle for self-expression on the part of the artist, but as an enterprise which “contributes its means of inspiration and achievement to the constructive forces at work in American life.”

And as the College was nearing the completion of its first century, its pioneering social scientist, Lyford Edwards, declared that “the college with the future before it is the college that can train men to guide their wills and emotions for the common welfare.”

And the liberalism (and sometimes even radicalism) of post-World-War-II-Bard had as its goal not just abolition of restraints upon individuals, but a new freedom and abundance for all mankind.

In short, classical St. Stephen's and progressive Bard — in all their changes along the way — shared the one common goal: to make a better world.

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .”

Education is for the common good.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wish to record my gratitude to the many people who have helped in gathering and preparing the material for this book.

Among others, these especially in personal interviews shared with me their memories of the life of the College: Mrs. B. I. Bell, Horace Donegan, Lyford Edwards, Edward Fuller, William Frauenfelder and Richard Rovere.

Others aided in special aspects of the investigation, particularly Richard Crowley, authority on the “20-mile strip” of the mid-Hudson; Ms. Judith Johnson of the Diocesan archives; Edward B. Ayers, alumni director at Choate School; — and at Columbia University Paul R. Palmer, curator of Columbiana, and Mrs. Sara Vos of Low Library.

The following read the manuscript at various stages of its preparation: Frank Caldiero, Richard H. Gummere, Jr., Felix Hirsch, Flint Kellogg, Leslie Lang, Elliott Lindsley, Herbert Millington and Peter Sourian. Their comments and suggestions greatly improved the text. They are not however to be held accountable for any errors; mistakes are my responsibility.

The history of Bard stretches back for over a century, and whoever seeks to write it finds himself the beneficiary of those who have preceded him in the task. By their timely work, records and memories which might otherwise have been lost have been saved from oblivion. I have been much helped by five writings: Henry Fairbairn's *The College Warden*; George Hopson's *Reminiscences*; Irville P. Davidson's *Manuscript History*; Charles S. Champlin's *Notes*; and Christopher W. Magee's Senior Project *History of St. Stephen's College*.

Five people had special roles in the preparation of this book:

Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, has been most generous and helpful in seeking that all possible materials were made available to me, and has supported the project with steady encouragement.

Julia T. O'Neill (secretary to the president during my 14 years at Bard) from long experience with my copy made an excellent typescript from my very poor typing and long-hand emendations.

Theodore H. Smyth has followed the work closely and given it his strong backing.

The late Frederick B. Cook, librarian of Bard College, through months of worsening illness, was indefatigable in assembling materials for my use.

My wife Louise helped and encouraged the author at every stage, and from her extensive knowledge of Bard's resources, both intellectual and material, helped make this book an inventory of the College's riches.

— Reamer Kline

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Introductory Note: When, after his retirement from the Presidency of Bard College in 1974, Reamer Kline undertook the writing of a history of Bard, it was assumed that he would bring the history current to the most recent time to which an historical voice could legitimately be applied. The appropriateness of Dr. Kline writing about some of the years in which he himself had been President was never seen as a problem. The pretenses of objectivity in history have been supplanted by a more subtle understanding of the relationship of the individual who constructs a narrative to the material he selects, to the manner in which it is organized, and to the choice and flow of words in which the story is cast. While the rendition of those years in which Reamer Kline was President might have assumed a different tone from the rest of his history of the College, that in itself would have been invaluable and necessary. Indeed, I hope that Reamer Kline will write a complete memoir of his years at Bard for the benefit of present readers and future historians.

However, soon after Reamer agreed to write the history, he approached me with the problem of how to deal with the years in which he had been President. In retrospect, it was entirely predictable and consistent with Reamer's character for him to step back from any act which might be viewed as self-promoting or self-congratulating. Modestly he asked whether the College would mind if he ended the history of Bard in 1960. After all, the time frame of a century was justification enough for ending his narrative there. As I reflected on this suggestion, it was clear that, despite the symmetry of a hundred years, writing a history of Bard which ended in 1960 would be like a performance of Mozart's Don Giovanni without the final scene. The year 1960 might provide a dramatic end to a narrative, but it would neither do justice to how the past reaches into the future through the present, nor would it provide any serious appreciation of Reamer Kline. President Kline, after Bernard Iddings Bell, was the most effective and visionary leader in the College's history. Reamer Kline graciously accepted the solution that I write a short introduction to his book which would deal with the fourteen years of his presidency. Such an introduction, we both thought, would be in keeping with the vantage point of his book: a perspective on the past offered by a past president of the College. What follows, therefore, at the end of the main body of the history, is a brief appreciation of Bard in the years during which the author of this fine history of the College was its leading spirit and guiding hand.

L.B.

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