Bowdoin 
and
"The Common Good"

A. LEROY GREASON
"Were American Newcomen to do naught else, our work is well done if we succeed in sharing with America a strengthened inspiration to continue the struggle towards a nobler Civilization—through wider knowledge and understanding of the hopes, ambitions, and deeds of leaders in the past who have upheld Civilization's material progress. As we look backward, let us look forward."

—Charles Penrose

(1886-1958)
Senior Vice-President for North America
The Newcomen Society
for the study of the history of
Engineering and Technology
(1933-1957)
Chairman for North America
(1938)

This address, dealing with the history of Bowdoin College, was delivered at a "1985 Maine Meeting" of The Newcomen Society of the United States held in Brunswick, Maine, when Dr. A. LeRoy Greason was the guest of honor and speaker on August 23rd, 1985.

This statement, crystallizing a broad purpose of the Society, was first read at the Newcomen Meeting at New York World's Fair on August 5, 1939, when American Newcomen were guests of The British Government.

"Actœrum Memores simul affectamus Agenda"
“How does a college set about giving its students a sense of the role it envisions for them? . . . It can command the ear of its students only by realizing in its own policies the values it would have students realize in their lives.

—A. LeRoy Greason

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A. LeRoy Greason
Member of the Newcomen Society
President
Bowdoin College
Brunswick, Maine

The Newcomen Society of the United States
New York Exton Princeton Portland
1985
INTRODUCTION OF DR. GREASON IN BRUNSWICK, MAINE, ON AUGUST 23RD, 1985, BY MR. WIDGERY THOMAS, JR., PRESIDENT, CORPORATE FINANCE ASSOCIATES, INC., PORTLAND, AND VICE CHAIRMAN, MAINE COMMITTEE OF THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY

Fellow members of Newcomen and guests:

It is a pleasure for me to participate in today’s festivities honoring Bowdoin College. Not only did I graduate from Bowdoin College, but one of my ancestors, William Widgery, was one of the founding trustees of the college.

Mr. Widgery’s history is quite outstanding. He was sent to this country as an indentured debtor from Welsh coal mines in the mid-1700s and immigrated to Maine, where ultimately he became an owner of ships in the rum and molasses trade out of Portland. Widgery’s Wharf, which he established, is still in existence. In addition to that he served as a representative of the Maine District in the Massachusetts Legislature.

I find this history really quite fascinating, particularly relating to England.

With much of our early population made up of people deported from England who were either religious malcontents, indentured servants from debtors prisons, or fourth or fifth sons of large families with little opportunity at home, it is little wonder that the English had not taken their colonists very seriously regarding the possibility of a successful revolution.

In this context it is easy to understand why these colonists were not viewed by the English as their equal.

How unique it is that our founding fathers not only recognized the importance of formal education but did something about it when our country was so young and fragile. Bowdoin College is a great example of this foresight.

It is my pleasure to introduce to you today A. LeRoy Greason, the twelfth president of the college. Roy was elected to this responsibility by the Board of Trustees in 1981. He represents a tradition of leadership with many common factors which have been successful throughout the history of the college.
Educators, not administrators, have been the presidents.

A. LeRoy Greason has been a member of the Bowdoin College community since 1952 when he was appointed to the college’s faculty as an instructor in the Department of English. He became assistant professor in 1954, an associate professor in 1962, and a professor in 1966. During that period he directed the college’s freshman English program and served as the coordinator of summer programs. In 1962 he was named dean of students; four years later he became dean of the college, a position he held for nine years. He was appointed acting president on January 1, 1981, and elected the college’s twelfth president on July 24, 1981, becoming the fourth member of the Bowdoin faculty to be named to the office. Under his leadership, Bowdoin has strengthened its traditional liberal arts curriculum while expanding its offerings in environmental studies and computer science.

Born in Newport, Rhode Island, President Greason grew up in Wellesley, Massachusetts, where he attended Wellesley High School. After receiving his B.A. from Wesleyan University, he went to Harvard, where he earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees while serving as a teaching fellow in the Department of English and as a freshman advisor.

President Greason’s academic specialty is eighteenth-century English literature, and he has contributed to a number of scholarly journals. He has served the public in a variety of ways, including mediator in the Maine courts, chairman of the Brunswick School Board, president of the Brunswick United Way, president of the Bath-Brunswick Mental Health Association, and secretary-treasurer of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. He and his wife, Polly, are the parents of three children: Randall, Katherine and Douglas.

Roy is currently president of The New England Colleges Fund, a non-profit organization with twenty-nine member colleges that raised $1,322,625 in 1984, primarily used by members for scholarship assistance.

Under Roy’s leadership, the college has launched a $56 million capital campaign and, less than a year later, the campaign has reached the $27 million level. The campaign will address needs for an increase in faculty positions, for the strengthening of financial aid endowment, and for facilities in the sciences, athletics and student life.

There have been curricular reforms and innovations, and Bowdoin has received national attention for its microscale organic chemistry project, its flexible payment plans and its first-rate financial aid program, and it optional S.A.T./A.C.T. admissions policy. It has received continued recognition by Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges as one of the eighteen “most competitive” liberal arts institutions in the country.
Barometers of Bowdoin’s strength under Roy Greason are not hard to find. The initial success of the capital campaign is matched by a record-breaking effort by the Alumni Fund (about $1.6 million for current purposes). Applications to Bowdoin have risen 25 percent over the last two years, while applicant quality has risen and yield (percentage of those who accept offer of admission) has held firm.

Roy probably cannot take credit for Joan Benoit’s Olympic marathon victory, but the college recognized her accomplishments appropriately when it awarded her the Bowdoin Prize on March 1, 1985.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a distinct honor to introduce the twelfth president of Bowdoin College, A. LeRoy Greason.

Fellow members of Newcomen and guests:

Good afternoon. Let me welcome you, too. Bowdoin is pleased to have you here on campus on this delightful occasion and proud to be honored by The Newcomen Society.

And thank you, Widgery, for your generous introduction. Widgery is, you should know, Bowdoin epitomized. He himself is a graduate of Bowdoin, and so were his father and his grandfather. In fact, almost every Bowdoin generation has had one of his ancestors in it all the way back to William Widgery, who helped to establish the college and who served as an overseer from 1794-1800.

In the presence of such a tradition, I feel my thirty-three years at Bowdoin shrinking to a fleeting moment. President Holyoke of Harvard in the eighteenth century remarked: “Any man who wished to be humble and mortified, let him become president of Harvard College.” The same, I think, may be said of Bowdoin. But I forgive you, Widge, for making me feel this way. I shall try to rise above it.

At the risk of appearing boastful—a risk I seem to take with increasing frequency of late, though always on behalf of Bowdoin—let me note that this is not the first time The Newcomen Society has recognized Bowdoin College. In 1945 you singled this institution out for special attention by inviting President Kenneth C. M. Sills to journey to Portland to speak at “The Maine Dinner” of the Society held in the Gold Room at the Hotel Lafayette. It is a far cry perhaps from the evening formality of the Gold Room to the comfort of this green and sunny space beneath the pines and a blue sky, but the message of President Sills continues to be the message of Bowdoin’s presidents, much as it was from the very beginning.

The subject of his talk was appropriately “Joseph McKeen and the Beginnings of Bowdoin College.” The narrative of his talk was fun. It could hardly be otherwise, for Bowdoin’s origin is an interesting story. The civic leaders of the District of Maine who sought to establish this college and find relief from sending their sons off to that distant Cambridge succeeded in 1793 in having a charter approved by both houses of the Massachusetts legislature, but Governor John Hancock, who knew full well that this school would be named in honor of his rival, the former Governor James Bowdoin, declined to sign the bill.
THE REV. JOSEPH MCKEEN, FIRST PRESIDENT OF BOWDOIN COLLEGE (1802-1807) CALLED FOR SERVICE TO THE "COMMON GOOD" IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS

We had to wait until the following year, 1794, when Samuel Adams was elected governor before the necessary signature could be obtained. And then there was a delay of eight years while money was raised, a plan approved, and Massachusetts Hall built. In the fall of 1802, eight students, Professor John Abbott, and President McKeen and his family—for the president’s house was not quite completed on time—all moved into Massachusetts Hall to open Bowdoin’s first academic

BOWDON’S FIRST CLASSES WERE HELD IN 1802 IN MASSACHUSETTS HALL, THE FIRST COLLEGE BUILDING, WITH A PRESIDENT, A FACULTY MEMBER, AND EIGHT STUDENTS
year. If that seems a modest beginning, you must remember, as President Sills pointed out, that this was 1822.

In those days as the nineteenth century was dawning, Bowdoin, the most easterly of our American colleges, as the seal with the rising sun attests, seemed almost literally to be at the end of the earth. The District of Maine had then a total population of about 150,000. Portland was a town of 4,000 or 5,000. Bath a small village, Wiscasset a flourishing little seaport, Gardiner and Augusta just emerging from the wilderness, Bangor a mere hamlet, and at Lewiston there was only a sawmill with a single house.

In just twenty-three years Bowdoin would graduate that remarkable class of 1825 which included both Hawthorne and Longfellow. The story of Bowdoin's beginnings under President McKeen is a good story.

But what really interested President Sills about Joseph McKeen were the qualities of his mind and character. They are seen together in McKeen's inaugural address. President Sills quoted from it a passage that is the cornerstone of this institution. I suspect no Bowdoin president has failed to quote it on all appropriate occasions—and you are destined to hear it now:

It ought always to be remembered that literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education. It is not that they may be able to pass through life in an easy or reputable manner, but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society. If it be true that no man should live for himself alone, we may safely assert that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education and to qualify himself for usefulness [Mr. Newcomen would have appreciated that word] is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the common good.

Bowdoin, of course, is not a public institution in the sense that a state university is, and President McKeen knew that very well. He simply meant to suggest that Bowdoin, a college chartered by the state and in time to be assisted by tax exemption and by grants of land, was indebted to the public and in turn had a responsibility to the public or common good. It fulfilled its role, though, as an independent college—a status Mr. Newcomen would also have appreciated.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, President William Hyde was to express another and more generally recognized goal of colleges today. He expressed it in what he called "The Offer of the College." It is short; it is good; it has had national attention; and I am going to read it. You, however, must hear it as an historian would and recognize that women as well as men attend Bowdoin today and that not all our college members are Christian—and we count ourselves richer for the diversity.

To be at home in all lands and all ages;
To count nature a familiar acquaintance, and art an intimate friend;
To gain a standard for the appreciation of other men's work and the criticism of one's own;
To carry the keys of the world's library
That statement differs from McKeen's, of course, in that not only is it more rhetorical—almost a poem—but instead of stressing service, it stresses individual fulfillment and enrichment. It is about realizing one's potential as a human being. It is very romantic. And one would be foolish to deny that a good college provides both individual development and preparation for serving the common good—provided one does not become obsessed with self in the process—my future, my career, my goals, my style, my thing. We hear a lot of that these days. That is why I periodically mount the stump on behalf of the common good. I'm just old fashioned enough not to see self-enrichment as an end in itself. Its final perfection is realized only in the service of some ennobling goal larger than itself. And that is the end of my sermonizing, I promise you—but not the end of my remarks.

How does a college set about giving its students a sense of the role it envisions for them? How does it inspire concern for the "Common Good?" Certainly not by the president pontificating. It can command the ear of its students only by realizing in its own policies the values it would have students realize in their lives.
Let me give you an example. Bowdoin is a national college of 1,350 students. Over 3,500 students from across the country applied last year for 375 places. At the same time, we are also a Maine college with Maine roots and a Maine tradition. We feel a loyalty and an obligation to the state that helped to make this institution possible. We express that loyalty and obligation in what we call the Maine commitment for the “Common Good.” I wrote a piece on it last year. It goes in part like this:

Certainly an important part of the Maine commitment is our financial aid program. Bowdoin admits a very high percentage of Maine applicants, and does so knowing they require an extraordinary portion of available financial aid funds. For the last four years Maine students have made up almost 20 percent of each freshman class, but they are awarded over a third of our scholarship funds.

Our Maine commitment is also to non-Bowdoin students. The Bowdoin Upward Bound Program, one of the oldest and most highly regarded of these programs in the United States, enrolls during each summer 100 low-income students from high schools in the St. John Valley, Washington County, and southern Maine. The educational, personal, and financial resources available to these students are severely limited. No one in their families has ever attended college. Without the enrichment and encouragement provided by Upward Bound, many would be caught in the poverty which so terribly afflicts their communities and families. In some years, 100 percent of the participants go on to higher education; the average is over 90 percent. Bowdoin administrators, faculty and students are heavily involved in this program.

Other summer activities include playing host to the Maine Festival and numerous professional conferences. In recent years, Bowdoin faculty members have assisted in organizing and conducting special humanities programs for Maine teachers and high school students. These have been offered in association with the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and are intended to improve the teaching of the humanities in a number of Maine high schools.

Each year the college encourages and supports a student-run
volunteer service program that places 250 to 300 student volunteers in service positions in local communities. Students work with elementary school youngsters as Big Brothers or Big Sisters, tutor in the public schools, and organize activities for the elderly, the handicapped and the mentally retarded. A number of students travel weekly to the Sweetser Children’s Home in Saco. Two Bowdoin students have citations from Governor Brennan for their work with the Bath Children’s Home and Pineland.

The Bowdoin College Museum of Art and the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum are both important cultural and educational resources. Admission to both is free, and thousands of school children visit each year. The Hawthorne-Longfellow Library, the largest library in Maine, is used extensively, and without restriction, by students and scholars from throughout the state.

Finally, individual members of the faculty have been active with commissions, research projects and organizations that serve Maine in numerous ways. The Maine Mediation Program, an attempt to develop a non-confrontational way for the courts to resolve disputes, has involved several Bowdoin faculty members. I have participated as a mediator in this program and have written about Maine’s leadership role in The Journal of the American Bar Association. The Bowdoin Hydrocarbon Research Center has always analyzed petroleum and toxic wastes at cost for the Department of Environmental Protection. The work of the Bowdoin team on the Tamano Spill in Portland harbor in 1972—work undertaken without contract in the critical first hours of the spill—was instrumental in establishing culpability, assessing biological effects, and ultimately enabling the state to receive a $1.5 million award for damages. In the years since, this team has undertaken other investigations and research projects for the state, and it is now beginning to develop a computerized model for predicting the effects and recommending the control of any oil spill on the Maine coast.

I could cite numerous other examples, but while our past “Maine commitments” are noteworthy, I believe they only point the way to future contributions. In serving Maine, Bowdoin has been serving the common good.

If there were not an afternoon with other things ahead of us, I could talk about more general ways by which this private college tries to serve this nation. We are revolutionizing the teaching of organic chemistry through our “microscale” laboratory techniques that improve safety, teach greater accuracy, and generate economies in experiments and in laboratory design. The New York Times has written about it. The Los Angeles Times has editorialized about it. A number of colleges and universities are following suit, using the text and manual written by members of our chemistry department. It should be no surprise that Bowdoin ranked second in the nation in the number of chemistry majors last year among undergraduate educational institutions not offering a Ph.D. We think that part of our success in science is owing to a problem-solving approach in which faculty and students do research together and not infrequently publish their results jointly.

I’d like to tell you some of the honors that members of my department—English—have received, about a recent Oxford University

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PAUL SCHAFFNER WORKS WITH A STUDENT AT A RECENT WORD-PROCESSING FAIR INTRODUCING THE CAMPUS TO VARIOUS TYPES OF EQUIPMENT.
Press book that devotes a chapter to the successful teaching techniques of Bill Barker in our math department, about our newly appointed assistant dean of the faculty who has been cited in a national magazine as one of the young men and women changing the face of America. But the instances are too plentiful. Bowdoin, by its policies and by the practices of the members of this college, still seeks to serve the common good and to instill in its students a similar desire to serve. And I think we succeed, too. We know what some 10,000 of our 15,000 alumni do with their lives. About 1,500 teach, some 1,200 work in finance, almost 1,000 are in medicine or related areas, nearly 1,000 more are in law. Although Bowdoin is a liberal arts college, it can please the shade of Thomas Newcomen by claiming over 200 engineers among its alumni. But that British inventor and industrialist would have been pleased with those other figures, too, for he would have recognized those fields as serving and advancing the progress of humankind. I can only add that the class notes of our alumni magazine attest to service in many ways as alumni involve themselves in the affairs and concerns of their communities.

Now, lest you leave this luncheon overwhelmed with awe that we are such a noble and serious place, let me assure you that the lighter touch—so necessary for all the rest to prevail—does exist. Each day a student-edited—freely edited—calendar of events appears on the bulletin boards. It often begins with a quotation for the day. “Do you mean,” asks a member of a male singing group to the leader, “we’re going to Wellesley just to sing?” Or a resident of Hyde Hall is overheard saying: “My parents told me not to spend over $100 this month. Either the stereo speakers or the organic chemistry book had to go. . . . Could you turn up the music please?” Even the notices are edited: “7:30 p.m. Cycling Club meeting in Lancaster Lounge to discuss trip to Nova Scotia. Bring warm clothes.”

Since the 1960s each May 4th dawns to a newly-constructed student project on campus—an elegant outhouse for the deans (Model #35-79 according to the sign), a graveyard for the many students who failed a famous physics course one year (“Professor Hughes’ Pre-med Memorial Cemetery”), and, as a final example, “The Dining Service’s Auxiliary Warehouse and Stockyards,” which kept the dean busy all day returning chickens and ducks and turkeys, and, as I recall, one slightly annoyed goat.
The original project occurred the year the road behind the museum was paved. All the granite curbing had been laid along the edges ready to put in place, but the next morning there was the most elegant granite pyramid on the mall you ever saw—with a red lantern on top. That year also began the practice of this so-called Green Hornet Construction Company sending its bill—always outrageous—to the dean. I know—I was the dean then. Fifty-thousand dollars for union fees; $200,000 for Nubian slaves; $500,000 for dancing girls; $500 for a TV to bribe the night watchman. And on and on. But then, as though to prove that the Green Hornet could be reasonable, opposite “a red lantern,” there appeared, “No charge. Compliments of the town of Bath.”

Hardly “the Common Good,” I grant, but hardly very destructive of it either. Just students kicking up their heels for the kind of relaxation and escape we all need from time to time simply so we can go on giving ourselves to the greater concerns of our lives. Not unlike, perhaps, our gathering here to enjoy a social hour and a luncheon “under the pines.” We may do it with a little more decorum, but I suspect we envy the youthful strength that threw those granite blocks around.

I do hope your visit has been enjoyable. I urge you to visit our Arctic Museum in Hubbard Hall and our Art Museum if you have not seen them recently. We are justifiably proud of the special exhibits at both as well as the general exhibits. I thank all the members of The Newcomen Society for creating this occasion, and I wish you and your guests well as you resume those roles you have chosen for furthering the end of this society—the cultural and useful progress of human kind. That is, of course, another way of saying “the Common Good,” of expressing the common bond that brings us together—today and always. Thank you very much.

THE END

"Actorem Memores simul affectamus Agenda!"

THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

In April 1923, the late L. F. Loree (1858-1940) of New York, then dean of American railroad presidents, established a group known as “American Newcomen” and interested in Business History, as distinguished from political history. Its objectives center in the beginnings, growth, development, contributions, and influence of Industry, Transportation, Communication, the Utilities, Mining, Agriculture, Banking, Finance, Economics, Insurance, Education, Invention, and the Law—these and correlated historical fields. In short, the background of those factors which have contributed or are contributing to the progress of Mankind.

The Newcomen Society of the United States is a nonprofit membership corporation chartered in 1961 under the Charitable Law of the State of Maine, with headquarters at 412 Newcomen Road, Exton, Pennsylvania 19341, some five miles east of Downingtown, Pennsylvania, and 30 miles west of the City of Philadelphia. Here also is located The Thomas Newcomen Memorial Library and Museum in Steam Technology and Industrial History, a reference collection, including microfilm, open to the public for research and dealing with the subjects to which The Society devotes attention.

Meetings are held throughout the United States of America and across Canada at which Newcomen Addresses are presented by leaders in their respective fields.

The approach in most cases has been a life-story of corporate organizations, interpreted through the ambitions, the successes and failures, and the ultimate achievements of those pioneers whose efforts laid the foundations of the particular enterprise.

The Society’s name perpetuates the life and work of Thomas Newcomen (1663-1729), the British pioneer, whose valuable contributions in improvements to the newly invented Steam Engine brought him lasting fame in the field of the Mechanic Arts. The Newcomen Engines, whose period of use was from 1712 to 1775, paved a way for the Industrial Revolution, Newcomen’s inventive genius preceded by more than 50 years the brilliant work in Steam by the world-famous James Watt.


Members of American Newcomen, when in Europe, are invited to visit the home of Thomas Newcomen at Dartmouth in South Devonshire, England, and to see the Dartmouth Newcomen Engine working.
"The roads you travel so briskly lead out of dim antiquity, and you study the past chiefly because of its bearing on the living present and its promise for the future."


Late American Member of Council at London
The Newcomen Society
for the study of the history of Engineering and Technology