

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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Andover Hill in the spring of 1778: This Great Quadrangle was rocky, wooded upland; the Great Lawn, a rough pasture, where cattle grazed. Where School Street crossed the hill to join Salem Street, just where the Memorial Bell tower now tolls, stood a training field for Andover's Minute Men.

That spring in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, as frozen earth turned to mud, George Washington camped with his troops, who had been devastated by hunger, cold, and disease over the previous winter. On April 21, Washington wrote a letter complaining that he had still not heard whether emissaries John Adams and Benjamin Franklin had enlisted France in the American cause. These were perilous times. Yet, in a house down the hill on Phillips Street – about where the JV baseball team plays, on that same day, April 21, 1778 – the Constitution of Phillips Academy was signed.

Four years later, with no peace treaty yet signed and sporadic fighting continuing on the frontier, the Andover Board of Trustees adopted the Academy seal – the subject of my talk today. The Phillips Academy Seal, symbol of the founding ideals of Andover, has remained a strong presence. In fact, you will find it on the cover of your Commencement program. The image is familiar: The banner across the bottom with the message “Finis Origine Pendet” (the end depends upon the beginning) – an apt message for an enterprise dedicated to teaching the young. Above, a sun with the words, Non Sibi (not for self), shines down upon a plant on the left and a beehive on the right. Between blossoms and hive, eight honey bees fly. What did the seal mean to the men who founded the Academy? What does it mean to us beyond seeing it as a familiar Andover symbol—like the flag with a giant “A” floating on a field of blue, or Gunga pacing the sidelines?

We know that the patriot silver smith, Paul Revere made the seal. The Phillips Academy founders – patriots as well – must have embraced its imagery, for in this time of war and peril, the beehive represented the high ideals of the American Revolution. The image appeared often in that era; it was found, for example, on the first paper currency printed by the Continental Congress. But the use of the beehive as symbol is much, much older. It came down to the American colonists from many sources, both religious and cultural—from Classical mythology through Stuart England, from which the Massachusetts Bay colony sprang.

From the first, humans had looked to nature for life lessons and found inspiration in the honeybee. The lessons were, overall, about three things: **Thrift, Industry;** and **Devotion to the Common Good** – three virtues for the revolutionary era and for our own.

Thrift

Bees waste nothing. The honey they make is carefully stored for the winter. Settlers on these North America shores also needed thrift to survive. Recall the fearful dying-off of settlers in the first English colony in Jamestown, Virginia, 400 years ago. Hunger and disease also devastated the earliest settlers of Massachusetts. But, by the time of the Revolution, 150 years later, thrift was a virtue under assault from a nascent consumerism. Perhaps the founders valued it all the more because it was under attack. Far better, the patriots thought, to live without British tea or textiles or finery of any kind from overseas. Benjamin Franklin, the oldest and surely the most entertaining of the Founding Fathers taught “A penny saved is a penny earned.” He was adamant in urging his almanac readers to save time, as well: “Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.” And, “Plough deep while sluggards sleep.”

Yet the word itself sounds so old fashioned: “Thrift.” What traction has it for our time? A lot, as it turns out. This nation is using natural resources out of all proportion to our population. Quite rightly, words like “conservation” and “sustainability” gain currency day by day. We could just as well use the word thrift. My parents did. They grew up during the Depression, and I remember feeling annoyed when they explained for the umpteenth time that wasting things was practically a crime. I came of age as planned obsolescence also came of age. Why fix something when you can throw it out and buy a new one more easily and more cheaply? Now my generation is learning from yours that our parents had it right. We do need to reuse, recycle, and save. We need, in short, to be thrifty!

At a recent symposium on the future of Andover’s endowment, experts debated what factors would drive investments in the next 5 to 10 years. One of the answers: Water. As this scarce commodity becomes scarcer by the day, technologies to conserve and transport it will become increasingly important. Ben Franklin would never have guessed that another of his aphorisms would prove to be true not only metaphorically, but literally: “When the well’s dry,” he wrote, “we know the worth of water.”

Troubling things are happening on our planet; we need to understand them and to take action soon. At Andover, we are doing more and more to respond to the challenge—from reenergizing our recycling efforts to conserving energy, to the use of green technologies in construction. Many of you have studied environmental science here and will go on to work in this area. With all our hearts, we wish you well.

Industry

Never idle, bees forage for nectar, build honey combs, and protect the hive. The virtue of industry sprang straight from the Puritan work ethic our founders embraced. One needed to work ceaselessly in this world to demonstrate fitness for the next. And, although Andover has deliberately turned away from narrow religious dogma, we continue to believe in hard work.

Phillips Academy is known as a place where the work is very challenging. Why do we believe in hard work? Because nothing truly important was ever achieved without it. This is not a place where things necessarily come easily; but when you have achieved something, you know its worth. Having worked hard at Andover will help you to deal with all kinds of challenges in your life.

And it's important to remember that often hard work can be very satisfying and joyful. Your teachers have chosen a vocation that gives them deep satisfaction and, on days like today, great joy. We hope that you, too, will find not only challenge, but pleasure in the work you choose to do in the future, just as you have done here. In contrast, early students described their lives at the Academy as mostly grinding toil—exactly in line with the Puritan tradition. After all, Puritanism was once described by H.L. Mencken as the haunting fear that someone somewhere might be happy. The founders' bees were definitely not meant to enjoy the flight from blossom to hive. We hope that our bees will.

Most important, though, in this matter of industry, one must ask: What is it we are trying to achieve? We work hard not for the sake of hard work, not to go through the motions, and most importantly, not only for our own benefit.

And so, on to our final lesson from the seal:

Devotion to the Common Good

Bees are social insects. Each has a role in supporting the welfare of the hive. The image of a beehive, coupled with the words “Non Sibi,” made clear that the Academy was a communal enterprise and, by extension, that it was part of a larger world. The new Academy's graduates were meant to serve and to lead in the young republic.

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his classic and still timely 1835 book *Democracy in America*, wrote of a nation filled with promise and open to repairing its flaws. And flaws he certainly found. He feared the individualism and raw materialism he observed in Americans as he traveled through the country. On the other hand, he applauded their willingness to work

together for the benefit of neighbors in need. Everywhere, he found an eagerness to form associations for the benefit of others. We call this community involvement or volunteerism. Recently, critics of American society have bemoaned the lack of such a spirit. And this brings me to you.

Many pundits would have us believe that yours is a generation so focused on the race to get into the right college that you have lost sight of all else. I beg to differ. As I have told you, your resilience, your care for one another and for the greater world have amazed us all. Recently, in the editorial pages of the *New York Times*, I found an advocate for my point of view. The headline of a Thomas Friedman column caught my eye: “The Can-Do, Will-Do Spirit of the Class of 2007,” it read. Friedman writes, “I’m not sure what they call this generation. Is it generation “X” or “Y” or “Zero” or “Me”? He rejects all of these and calls you the “Quiet Americans” for the way you go about facing a troubled world with quiet hope and resolution. He applauds your generation for a remarkable involvement in community service.

In Andover’s own version of *The New York Times* – our student newspaper, *The Phillipian* – a recent letter to the editor was addressed not just to any class of 2007, but to your class. The writer extolled your community involvement in these words: “...I marvel at the idealism, joy in learning, and spirit of generosity you bring to your lives here. I marvel at the degree to which you mostly avoid cynicism. Maybe, just maybe, service (*non sibi*) keeps idealism from souring into cynicism. Think about it.” That writer was, of course, your faithful head of school, who stands here today with the very same message.

I hope that these lessons from Andover’s seal will abide with you. The purpose of a seal, after all, is to make an impression, and the imprint of this place is strong on each of us. We are made more knowledgeable, more appreciative of the beauty around us, whether natural or made by human minds and hearts, more open, more caring, better able to judge what is right and what is wrong, and stronger so that we can choose to do what is right.

You are about to scatter in many directions. We hope you will come back often. But no matter where you are, you can always travel back to Andover in your mind and heart’s eye. Walk, as you did this morning, under the sheltering green beauty of the Giant Elm by the library. Walk again to the site of the diploma circle we are about to form on the Great Lawn. Take in the lush green stretch from Chapel to Bell Tower. Then glance towards Main Street. Along the wall stands a row of young elms, planted just a few years ago. They are a new breed – strongly resistant to the Dutch Elm beetle that has devastated elms across America. Named Valley Forge Elms for their strength and resilience, they grow taller and more beautiful every day here on the site of a school founded at the same time Washington’s troops persevered at Valley Forge. Like those

young elms, you have grown strong and resilient and beautiful on this same hill. We are proud of you; we are confident that you are ready for the next chapter of your life.

Dear friends of the class of 2007, we have come to the moment of parting.

Take our blessing as you go.

Go in peace.

Go with our love.

Godspeed.