

**Eleazar Wheelock
and the
Adventurous Founding
of Dartmouth College**

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A problem that cost Wheelock much time and frustration was that of the availability of “Spirituous Liquors” at the College and nearby.

In May 1771 he took the initiative to have a tavern established in Hanover-with that move he hoped to control the choice of an innkeeper. For the post he chose Aaron Storrs of Lebanon, New Hampshire, who had come from Mansfield, Connecticut. After a license was obtained, Storrs soon established a tavern and store on two acres of land allotted to him by the college trustees, and located at the present site of the Casque and Gauntlet Senior Society.

All appeared to go to Wheelock’s satisfaction until a year or so later, when he had to report disconcerting news to the governor: “Y^s minute I am informed y^t my Neighb^r Mr. John Pain[e] has obtained a Licence to retail Spirituous liquors, w^{ch} I think to be a Step inconsistent wth y^e Health & Safety of y^e Indian School.” 45

Wheelock’s anger knew no bounds, more so because Paine’s public house was located only a short walk from the corner of present College and Elm Streets, to the north of Wheeler Hall. Paine became the president’s nemesis for years to come.

A letter to the Court of Quarter Sessions and other protestations failed to bring results, in fact only a month later the situation worsened when students began to frequent the tavern of John Sargent, who ran the ferry between Norwich and Hanover, which he leased from the College trustees. Wheelock wrote to Sargent: “I charitably hope ...y^t y^o will henceforth Sell no Rum nor any Spirits to any Stud^t ... belonging to y^s College or School or to any Cook, Serv^t or Laborer ... without a Written order und^r my hand or one of y^e Tutors-& pray sir, be so good as to signify to me by a Line ...your comply^{ce} with my Desire ...” 46

Sargent’s reply was short of a promise of total compliance-if students had been getting “to much Strong Liquor ... I should be very Sorry to be found guilty of Knowingly to deal out Liquor to y^e hurt of any person but S^t ... it is thought hard for any Landlord to deny a man: a Dram that perhaps Stands in need of it ... “ 47 Wheelock replied: “I assure y^t at this I am in Earnest & fix^d in my purpose ... effectually to suppress & prevent the threat^s Evil at its first appearance ...” 48

When Charles Hill of Lebanon was also licensed as a taverner, a minor consolation was that his tavern was located about eight miles from Hanover Plain. 49

Yet another problem Wheelock had to contend with was frequent drunkenness of the cook: “My College Kitchen has been thrown into y^e greatest Confusion.... The Scholars disapproved their food for several Meals....” 50 At the commencement exercises of 1773, “The chief Cook I had depended upon for the College was laid asleep (it was said) by making too free with the Bottle ... [causing] very Trying Circumstances....” 51

A student, who was punished, had to sign a confession, written by the president or a tutor. For example, a culprit acknowledged: “with Shame & Confusion of face [*Jeremiah*, vii, 19] ...that I have been heinously guilty of the Scandalous Sin of Drunkenness [and] wounded my own Conscience ... & greatly debased myself by the brutal Act....” This was followed by contrition for his action and a plea for forgiveness. 52

Another student had brought spirituous liquors into his room without permission. He had remonstrated “by uttering sundry expressions ... implying that the Law was unjust & unreasonable ... that I never would get a permit-that I knew where I could get as much as I would, without it....” 53

New Hampshire law prohibited “to sit Drinking or Tipling after Ten a Clock at Night or to continue [in a tavern] above the space of Two Hours ... [or] to Drink to Drunkenness or Excess....” Each town elected two or more tything-men to “Inspect all Licensed Houses, and to inform of all Disorders....”⁵⁴

The law was used to prosecute John Paine, when, according to the records of Justice of the Peace Bezaleel Woodward, on Friday the nineteenth of March 1775, Michel Duguet, the College cook, together with Joseph Verrieul, a French Canadian, and Lewis Vincent, a Huron of Lorette, Canada, both students at the Indian Charity School “went to the house of John Paine Innholder ...about nine or ten o’Clock in the morning and called for some Rum with which we made & drank some Egg Toddy....” This was followed by imbibing wine (for a total of at least seven bottles) during the rest of the morning and afternoon. The cook became thoroughly intoxicated, and the students were “but little better than the cook.”

A Hanover tythingman brought the trio into court. The two students pleaded not guilty, Lewis Vincent “being but late emergent from a State of Paganism & as yet unacquainted with the language, Laws & Customs of the English....” He threw himself at the mercy of the court and was acquitted, as was Joseph Verrieul on the same ground. The cook was fined five shillings plus two shillings for cost. John Paine himself was ordered to pay a fine of ten shillings.⁵⁵

In the years that followed Wheelock paid only perfunctory attention to the problem of spirituous liquor, although to this date it remains a concern of college administrators in Hanover and elsewhere.